Is Chatspeak Destroying English?

Yes

When students are thoroughly immersed in the culture of instant messaging, meaningful written expression may be hindered because their mindset is that of the shared culture of other students, and the common language is chatspeak, not traditional English. Chatspeak is destroying students' command of written English, in the sense that whatever we engage in for a long period of time will most likely become commonplace.

I am concerned whether students are learning the skills to fully express themselves through writing as they move toward adulthood. Every generation has something that is uniquely their own, and that is wonderful; however, a time comes when we all have to grow and evolve into our true character, and many young people will have a difficult time drawing the line between acceptable and unacceptable dialogue in everyday life, especially in written communications. Good writing skills are essential as high

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No

A student of mine recently asked via e-mail, "hey, i cant find hw n the conf can u help." I did. Shortly thereafter, she wrote a lovely paper devoid of chatspeak.

The kids know the difference. I strongly suspect, based on my experience at a laptop school where kids communicate with each other and with their teachers in chatspeak, that their subversion of standardized English has no appreciable effect on their command of written English. They codeswitch. Nor do I believe that their command of written English would *increase* appreciably if they would only *forego* chatspeak and strive to exhibit a command of written English at all times.

They know the difference. Indeed, I'd go so far as to say that their command of chatspeak is directly proportional to their awareness that the fashion of chatspeak subverts traditional rules of written English. They know the difference and it's fun for them when we get aggravated and act as if they *don't* know.

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school students go on to college in traditional settings or online, and they will need to fully express their opinions and expound on subject matter in a way that compels them to think and engage with others on a deeper level.

The shortcuts and acronyms that make instant messaging, text messaging, and online chatting so popular have no place in academic, business, and other formal writing settings where it is essential that all individuals involved are using language that is clear and concise. Students may very well become so familiar and comfortable with chatspeak that it will be difficult to switch gears and construct adequate, meaningful academic papers and other assignments. It is one thing to use the vernacular that is common to a particular micro society, but at some point, students must know when it is time to alter written communications so that their

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words are understood by all who read them. We may have different sets of linguistic conventions according to our ethnicity, family, friends, and our work and school communities, but at some point it is time to realize that the English language must be used effectively to understand and to be understood. When it comes to students and their use of chatspeak, it will be more difficult for many to switch gears to effective and meaningful writing. For most students, the reality of the larger society that they share with others may not come until they have had disappointments in higher education and job interviews. The shortcuts of

chatspeak are a welcome convenience when keying data into the cell phone or online chat rooms, but they have no place in the larger society, where effective writing skills are a must. My main concern is that students, especially those needing to polish their writing skills, will hinder their writing abilities to the point that they will be adversely affected when faced with the task of providing meaningful written elaboration.

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But we *should* know that they know. After all, we teach them different languages all the time. We don't fear that a Spanish class will diminish a student's command of English. And a teenager experimenting with a sprinkling of profanities in her conversation with peers will not suddenly forget how to converse properly with her grandmother.

The Urban School of San Francisco, where I work, is a laptop school. Every kid gets one upon enrolling at Urban. The entire community communicates through e-mail quite a bit. As an English teacher, I get homework questions and other concerns. These e-mails are often written in appalling chatspeak filled with shortcuts, neologisms, inelegance, and mistakes. But they are more than sufficiently communicative.

Do I find chatspeak inelegant, even annoying to the point of aggravation? Sure, sometimes, but that makes it all the more attractive to teens who,

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by any means at their disposal, will codeswitch to create a private language that excludes members of my generation who will most likely find their code aesthetically wanting. And to the extent that we rail against it, well, that makes it even more attractive to kids.

Yes, we've standardized grammar, spelling, and so on since Chaucer, but kids live to challenge standards. It doesn't mean that they don't know what the standards are. As in most things, they will drop their petty rebellions and attend to the standards in time. If we're lucky, they'll have provided a few sensible updates to the standards as they charmingly mature into adulthood.

If chatspeak is leeching into papers, it's probably due to a small bit of re-

belliousness as opposed to obliviousness. The kids want to see if they can get away with it and, perhaps, help to make a change in a something so drily traditional as spelling.

And for that matter, why shouldn't "you" be spelled "u"? We don't spell "I" "aye" or "eye," do we? We could also agree to spell "eye" "I." If you agree, you might say, "I I." And I know no reason why we don't spell "know" "no." Indeed, Word wouldn't let me spell "know" as "no" in the third word of the last sentence.

But yeah, substituting numbers 4 words is really annoying.

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