





## 2-3-0

## “Children” Overview

## Background to the theme

2006 saw the beginning of a culture of mobile phone being used by children, with child-friendly handsets such as NTT DoCoMo's “Kids' PHONE”, au's “Junior Phone” and WILLCOM's “papipo!”, all products designed by mobile network operators with children in mind, being launched in the same year.

Up until this point, certain types of mobile phones (prepaid phone that allowed limits on use, PHS units with locators such as “P-doco?” and handsets with GPS such as “COCO-SECOM”, which allowed for identification of the child's location) were considered “suitable for children”, but the “Child-friendly” products launched in 2006 offered not only talk and e-mailing options for communication, but also featuring security alarms and GPS functions, with the aim of protecting children, and also offering peace of mind to parents.

There has also been a widening of the debate within society relating to the safe ownership and use of mobile phone by children.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)'s Central Council for Education has produced a set of guidelines which include concepts such as a filtering function to be equipped with all mobile phone, in order to ensure that children using mobile phones are not able to connect to sites with potentially harmful content, and the need to ensure that parents' wishes are abided by when the mobile phone is being sold.

We would like to consider what changes are occurring in communication among children as a result of them being able to access mobile phone at a young age, and before they have genuinely developed social skills.

This chapter takes a look at mobile phone use among children from elementary through to high school, through an internet survey of children and their parents together, and an internet survey of school teachers, and subsequent consideration of some of the points considered problematic. With elementary schoolchildren, we looked particularly at the groups in 3rd and 4th grade and 5th and 6th grade separately, and analyzed some of the differences in behavior.

## Attributes of the theme, and specific topics

Topics particularly relevant to the current situation are the year-on-year increase in children's ownership of mobile phone, as well as the fact that communication is increasing not only between parents and children, but also between children themselves, and

that alongside the increasing number of functions available to children in their mobile phone handsets, the use of functions other than talk and mobile e-mail is on the rise.

In addition, with the diversification in functions in a mobile phone, there is an increasing gap in expectations between parents and children in terms of how a mobile phone would be used. Parents and other adults tend to feel that the highest priority should be to have measures in place that prevent children from accessing harmful internet sites, whereas children themselves are more concerned with issues relating to mobile e-mail, since this is the way that they communicate most often.

In mobile e-mail communication between children, it has become almost the rule that a mobile e-mail must be answered within 30 minutes. Children consider responding to a mobile e-mail an important activity, and as such, there seems to be, based on an educational perspective, a need for social care, such as cautioning about the use of e-mail and teaching the moral guidelines, which are of much significance as current education of good manners or restrictions on internet use.

## Future predictions

As more, and younger, children continue to take up the use of mobile phone, the phenomenon will continue to bring about further changes in the way children live, as well as in the environment surrounding them. In particular, the rise of mobile e-mail will surely expose significant changes in children's communication habits and how they recognize such habits. There are two issues that must be of concern in this area.

The first is the fact that a culture has arisen in which responding to mobile e-mails is considered imperative. The phenomenon which allows a child to feel “connected” by owning a mobile phone is gradually evolving into mobile phone dependency, and there is a concern that increasingly, children may experience stress in relationships caused by the perceived need to always respond immediately to mobile e-mails.

The second issue is that relating to the fact that children are increasingly seeing mobile e-mailing — a form of written communication — as a method of conveying their opinions and feelings. This leads to a lack of understanding of how another person might be hurt or pleased by actually having those opinions or feelings said to them face to face.

Children learn from face to face communication — from people's expressions and the pauses in conversation, among other

things — how the words they have said are being perceived, and as a result they learn to distinguish good and bad ways of communicating. With mobile e-mails, however, children communicate by entering text without ever seeing the response of the person who receives the e-mail. Mobile e-mails allow them to instantly communicate their feelings and thoughts. It is thought that the virtual environment provided by the medium of mobile e-mailing

could lead to an increase in irresponsible communication.

For both parents and educational institutions, it should be of great importance to be all aware of the current situation surrounding mobile e-mails from children's point of view, and children's mental issues which have actually arisen from mobile e-mail communication.

2-3-1	Mobile Phone Use of Children	Key Words
The use of mobile phone by children is increasing year on year, and in a survey carried out last year, about 20 to 30% of elementary schoolchildren, about half of junior high school students, and more than 90% of high school students had a mobile phone. The types of mobile phone owned by children, and the functions they use most often, differ widely with age. This section also features an introduction of new model “Child-friendly” mobile phone released at the same time by various companies last year, specifically targeting younger children, including safety / peace of mind features.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Percentage of children using mobile phone</li> <li>■ Child-friendly mobile phone ■ Mobile phone use</li> </ul>

2-3-2	Perception Gap on Mobile Phone Use between Parents and Children	Key Words
Parents tend to require safety and peace of mind in regard to younger children using mobile phone, while for older children they require restrictions on use (charges) and access to harmful internet sites. These concerns, however, are very different to those held by children themselves. In particular, high school students rarely use filtering functions on their mobile phones, but it appears that these children in fact restrict their own use of internet functions far more than parents are aware of. This was a significant result from among our surveys.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Safety ■ Peace of mind ■ Rules</li> <li>■ Internet access restrictions ■ Crime</li> <li>■ Dating sites ■ Family</li> </ul>

2-3-3	Mobile Messaging Community of Children	Key Words
Between 70 to 90% of junior high school and high school students say that the first thing they do on meeting a new friend is to tell their mobile phone number and mobile e-mail address. This shows how important a role mobile phones play in extending relationships between children. On the other hand, as children get older, the proportion of time they spend on the internet and using a mobile phone increases, showing that face-to-face communication is declining.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Portable game machine ■ Community</li> <li>■ Lifestyles ■ Personal media ■ “Real”</li> <li>■ Communication ■ Virtual ■ SNS</li> <li>■ Rule unique to Children</li> </ul>

2-3-4	Various Issues on Children with Mobile Phone	Key Words
The majority of children say that having a mobile phone is an enjoyable thing, but the level of bullying and other problems being caused by mobile phones is something that cannot be ignored. This section includes responses to a questionnaire carried out among elementary school, junior high school and high school teachers, indicating the specific problem areas and the issues that education as a whole needs to deal with. Teachers were given the opportunity to offer free opinions in this survey, and many of the opinions offered related to the need for greater education relating to moral issues, rather than mobile phone use and manners.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Children's point of view ■ School</li> <li>■ Bullying ■ Rules ■ Morals ■ Social care</li> </ul>

## Reference

- Naoaki Yano, Cyber Literacy Lab: “Cyber Literacy for Children, Parents and Teachers — A Correct Sense of Reason for the Internet Society” (Godo Shuppan, 2007)