

Cellular Phones in the Classroom

A White Paper



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What is a cellular phone?

A cellular phone is also known as a wireless phone or mobile phone. It is widely available from general retail environments, such as Cingular, Alltel, Nextel, and many more. It is a very common electronic device in the world.

Costs for a cellular phone vary among retail carriers. Cellular phones must be purchased individually, and then a usage plan should also be purchased. Plans vary among retail carriers as well. The prices of these plans are all different, and it depends on the amount of usage minutes and other features that the customer would like to include in the plan. Most of the time, if plans are purchased from carriers then consumers must sign an agreement, or contract, which may last for a set period of time. Consumers can also purchase pre-paid cellular phones, which means that they purchase a set amount of minutes that they need and they continue to pay for how many minutes that they purchase.


How Does It Work?

The cellular phone is a short-range electronic device that is used for mobile voice or data communication over a network of specialized base stations known as cell sites. Brian Marshall, Jeff Tyson, and Julia Layton describe the cellular phone as an "extremely sophisticated radio (2000)". Basically, it can be used as a telephone, for text messaging, connecting to the internet, gaming, still picture camera, video camera, and many other uses. All cell phones are powered by batteries; however, some phones may also include a small microchip, which is a Subscriber Identity Module, or SIM card, to allow it to function. Cellular phones that do not require a SIM card has the data programmed in the memory of the phone itself. For example, a Nextel cellular phone uses a SIM card but an Alltel cellular phone has the data programmed in the memory. Obviously cellular phones are mainly used for personal or business reasons; however, cellular phones can be used interactively in the classroom by students and teachers. There are many programs available for students to use in the classroom for learning purposes.

How Cell Phones Help To Diminish Learning Related Problems

Cellular phones have become more popular as years have passed. There are many ways to use cell phones in the classroom so that technology can be incorporated into lessons. Today's students need technology incorporated due to the fact that

their generation came into a world full of different types of technology. There are many ways to use a cell phone in the classroom, such as class projects, assignments, and discussions. They can also be used as an assistive technology to hearing-impaired or visually-impaired students. The following chart describes different programs that can be used via cell phones in the classroom:

Programs to use on Cell Phones in the Classroom	
ChaCha www.chacha.com	Text questions on your cell phone and the answer will be sent back to your cell phone.
Google www.google.com	Google offers many products for free to use on cell phones. See chart below.
Gabcast.com www.gabcast.com	Cell phones can be used to create podcasts for different types of assignments. Other websites can include gcast.com, hipcast.com, etc. that also allow you to create podcasts.
Poll Everywhere www.poll.everywhere.com	Poll Everywhere is a website that you can use in many situations, such as classrooms, etc. Once an account has been created, people can respond to questions by voting from cell phones or computers. Your students can turn their cell phones into a response system.
Talkshoe.com www.talkshoe.com	<p>A service that allows you to create, join, or listen to discussions, Podcasts, and Audioblogs.</p> 

 Programs	
<u>Google SMS</u> 	A short message service that allows you to text Google and search for different things by typing in a search query, such as weather 29720. This query will give me the current weather conditions in Lancaster, SC.
<u>Blogger</u>	A blog to post text and pictures from your cell phone or you can SMS them to go@blogger.com. You can also read other blogs or comment on other blogs.
<u>Google Notebook</u>	This program allows you to view and/or create notes on your cell phone. You can view this information later on your phone or home computer.
<u>Google Reader</u>	This program allows you to read your favorite newsfeeds and blogs on the go. You can share content with your friends or come back later to view it again.
<u>Google Docs</u>	You can view documents, spreadsheets, and presentations from your cell phone at any time.
<u>Google News</u>	You can view the latest news at anytime on your cell phone, and compare it with other sources.
<u>iGoogle</u>	This program allows you to create a personalized page giving you easy access to use information from Google and other websites.
<u>Google Calendar</u>	Allows you to keep track of your schedule on your cell phone. You can also set up notifications.

Learning Related Problems with Cell Phones in the Classroom

Of course, there are several issues that come to mind when thinking of using cell phones in the classroom. The biggest issue that most people will think of is that it can be a distraction and take away from authentic learning. Students may text message their friends and family while in class which can for sure take away from learning; however, if students are actively engaged in learning then the cell phone will most likely not be used. Teachers are also concerned with cheating with cell phones in the classroom. Students can text message answers to their friends on the other side of the room without the teacher knowing of anything. According to

the article "Cell Phones in the Classroom," teachers are concerned with new cell phones because they are so small and can be used without being visible (2006). These problems can definitely affect me as a teacher, as well as many other teachers. While we, as teachers, cannot physically see everything that goes on at all times there is an underlying fear of cell phones being out but not seen due to it being so small or the student being aware of his or her surroundings. I feel that cell phones can be a distraction if not being used for learning in the classroom. If students have the freedom to take cell phones out whenever they please to do whatever they would like, then they will more than likely not be engaged in learning. If we, as teachers, incorporate more ways of using cell phones in the classroom that directly relates to our curriculum then students will begin to understand the difference between a good time and bad time of taking out the cell phone. It is ultimately up to the teacher to set guidelines for cell phone usage in the classroom. These guidelines should definitely include the fact that they should be out when appropriate to the lesson as deemed by the teacher, but they should not be out when it is not being used in the lesson!

Addressing NETS Standards

The NETS Standards incorporated when using cell phones in the classroom:

- **Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.**
 - Incorporation with Cell Phones: Talkshoe.com can help you complete this standard because it allows you to create, join, or listen to discussions with others which involve working collaboratively with others.
- **Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources.**
 - Incorporation with Cell Phones: Google programs will meet this standard due to the fact that it involves using critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using cell phones. Students can use Google programs to find data or maintain data on their cell phones for assignments.

- **Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.**
 - Incorporation with Cell Phones: If cell phones are going to be used in the classroom, the teacher needs to instruct the students of cell phone etiquette. Students need to be aware of the issues that come along with using cell phones in the classroom, such as inappropriate use, technology issues, privacy issues, etc.
- **Students demonstrate a sound understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations.**
 - Incorporation with Cell Phones: If students use the programs listed in the above sections, they will have a clear understanding of how to use those programs to enhance learning in the classroom. They will learn how to incorporate those programs with assignments, projects, presentations, etc.

Environmental Factors with Cell Phones

Most people say that cell phones are a distraction because of texting, recording video and pictures, and other things that affect their concentration. There are many improper ways to use a cell phone. To avoid this problem, then teachers should clearly state an appropriate time to use cell phones in the classroom. Students should have a clear understanding of the appropriate and inappropriate uses of cell phones in the classroom. If teachers set clearly understood rules and stay consistent with the rules, then there should be very little or no problems of inappropriate use of cell phones.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Cell Phones in the Classroom

Benefits

There are many benefits of using cell phones in the classroom. The most beneficial reason for using cell phones would be that it solves unique problems. A majority of children own cell phones and they are fluent users of the devices; therefore, it would be wonderful if teachers would use them for educationally purposes. Students will begin to understand that cell phones have more benefits than just something that everyone has or a way to communicate with friends and family. They would see that cell phones can be used to enhance learning. Another benefit of using cell phones in the classroom for assignments and projects would be that it

would probably help quiet or shy students come out of their fear of speaking in public. Those students would be able to let their voice be heard in the classroom. For example, polleverywhere.com allows teachers to ask questions and students can respond with text messages or on the computer. Students' responses will then show on the results page and their name does not have to show so then they will feel more comfortable with participating in discussions.

Drawbacks

Obviously, there are always drawbacks to any type of technology used in the classroom. Cell phone usage can definitely bring many drawbacks. Many would argue that students would use cell phones inappropriately in the classroom, such as text messaging friends or using the camera inappropriately. Cell phones may also be a distraction which could cause inattentiveness in lessons. Another drawback would be that some students may not have cell phones which may cause some to feel left out when using cell phones in discussions, assignments, or projects.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many ways to use cell phones in the classroom. The benefits of cell phone usage can, in many ways, outweigh the drawbacks. Cell phones can encourage students, who are normally quiet, to participate in discussions or activities. For example, polleverywhere.com can turn cell phones into classroom response systems. Cell phones would obviously be the better choice financially for a school than other types of class response systems. There are so many more ways to use cell phones as a learning tool that are not included in this white paper. Anyone can find a great way to incorporate this easily accessible technology into the classroom with a little research. Students would get a great amount of enjoyment out of using something that they are already very good at using, and they will also understand that cell phones can be used as an effective learning tool.

References

Cell Phones in the Classroom. (2006, November). *Techniques: Connecting Education & Careers*, 81 (8), 8-9. Retrieved October 20, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.

Brian, Marshall, Jeff Tyson, and Julia Layton. (November 14, 2000). *How Cell Phones Work*. Retrieved October 14, 2008 online, from HowStuffWorks.com Web site:
<<http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/cellphone.htm>>

Resources

- www.chacha.com
- www.gabcast.com
- www.google.com
- www.polleverywhere.com
- www.talkshoe.com