

Surviving the Classroom

Benefits of cell phone use for educational purposes

Cell phones are becoming more and more prevalent in today's society. A survey conducted by PewResearch in 2015 reported that 88% of students aged 12-17 now have a cell phone, and 73% own smartphones.



Several years ago when schools first faced the reality that many students were carrying a cell phone, the device was found to be a nuisance and a distraction.

As a result, many schools implemented strict policies banning cell phone usage. But just as technology evolves and changes, so must our attitudes about cell phone usage. With easy internet access, education-friendly apps, and ease of use, smartphones have the capability to boost student learning and many teachers are now successfully integrating them into the classroom. As we look at some examples of how cell phones can be utilized, we will see that not only should these policies be changed, but teachers should be trained to integrate this technology.

In an article published by the National Education Association, Ken Halla, a 22-year history teacher, explains one of the ways he has successfully incorporated the use of cell phones. Halla emphasizes using the phones as an organizational tool for students. Apps such as Remind101 can text a reminder to students when an assignment is due. After introducing such apps into his classroom, he says, "I was stunned by how many more kids started doing the homework. I thought they didn't want to do the work, but they were unorganized and had forgotten to do it."

Another tech-savvy instructor, Gina Hartman, explains in an article published by the Teach Hub Website, that teachers can use websites

such as pollseverywhere.com to see if students are comprehending the material. On this site, teachers can set up questions based on what the students are learning, and then the students choose the correct answer choice on their mobile device. If a majority of students are answering incorrectly, the teacher will then know that the material may need to be reviewed.

Additional benefits of smartphone technology in the classroom:

- taking a picture of a homework assignment or notes written on a whiteboard
- recording a lecture
- eliminating distractions by listening to music on a mobile device

A major concern, however, is that students will be tempted by the non-educational games and websites. Ken Halla has addressed this issue by changing the classroom dynamic from lecturing at the front of the room to having no traditional front of the classroom at all. During class, he roams around the room helping students with their work and making sure they are staying on task.



Contrary to popular belief, cell phones can be of educational use in a classroom. To continue to tap the potential of the technology, schools should lift the bans on cell phones in the classroom and train our teachers to use these devices to boost student learning.