

Case 07



Cell Phones: A Tool for Cheating

Background Information

Cell Phones have become one of the fastest growing communication technologies (Campbell, 2006). Today, the average cell phone has the capacity of a mid-1990s PC (Prensky, 2004). Cell phones are useful for many different reasons including communication, organization, and internet access. These tools may be used to connect students, parents, and instructors (Campbell, 2006). “They are also particularly useful computers that fit in your pocket, are always with you, and are nearly always on” (Prensky, 2004, p.1). Often seen in high schools, cell phones are now making their way into elementary and middle schools with an estimated 200,000 children between ages 5 and 9 owning a cell phone (*Cell Phones and PDA’S Hit K-6*, 2005).

Cell phones are becoming more and more sophisticated, incorporating features students can use for work and play. According to Walker (2002), we may soon see students using their cell phones to search the web during an exam. “Having a browser in the cell phone puts a dictionary, thesaurus, and encyclopedia into the hands of every student” (Prensky, 2004, p.4). Students, now having access to search engines, can use their cell phone as a research tool.

Although once used for communication and pleasure, students are now using cell phones to cheat through using features such as the camera. Camera phone sales have grown from 4,000 in 2002 to 21.4 million in 2004 (Walker, 2004). Today, “...students have stopped hiding crib sheets and whispering to their neighbors – and started swapping test answers by cellphone, camera phone and PDA” (Etter, 2004, p. 17). Students are using the camera feature on their phones as a means of copying another student’s test paper or taking pictures of their notes to use during a test. Not long ago, cell phones were just an annoyance if they rang during class. “Today, it’s a matter of keeping students from taking pictures” (Gerard, 2006, p. 45). Text messaging is also used as a form of cheating during exams. Students have become sophisticated in their ability to send text messages. For example, many students are skilled enough to utilize text messaging with the phone hidden in a pocket. Some have sent exam answers to another student using this method. However, cell phones can be used for instruction. Cell phones now have many features that are similar to a computer. Prensky (2004) recommends that teachers stop fighting with students about cell phones, but rather use them for “their educational advantage” (p. 2).

Preview:

Over the years, cell phones have become increasingly popular. Cell phones are now equipped with text messaging, internet, camera features, etc. They are now making their way into the classroom. Because of the many benefits that cell phones offer, teachers could easily use them as a teaching tool. However, students are using them to cheat. Students can easily use text messaging to send and receive test answers. They are using the internet feature to locate exam information on the web. With the high rise in cell phone sales, more students now have access to this powerful technology.

Focus Questions:

As you study the following case, keep these questions in mind: (1) Should cell phones be allowed in school? (2) What are the consequences of students having cell phones in school? (3) Is there an educational impact in using cell phones in the classroom?

The Case

A New Trend

Laura was a new 10th grade student at Millport High School. Laura quickly became friends with her next door neighbor and classmate, Jessica. They lived in the same neighborhood and had all of the same classes. Because they looked similar, they shared everything; they even had the same type of cell phone. In the afternoons, they would play, study, and work on their homework together. As their friendship grew, their studying decreased and they began to talk during class.

Because of their incessant talking, they had to be separated in English class. This was a perfect classroom situation until one day they took a test. When the tests were graded, the teacher noticed a similarity between Laura and Jessica's answers. On all the correct answers they had the exact same explanation, and they missed all of the same questions. The teacher confronted Laura and Jessica about this phenomenon. They claimed that there was no way for them to cheat because they were sitting on opposite sides of the room.

The teacher believed them but decided to carefully monitor the class during each exam. For the first exam, she did not notice anything out of the ordinary however, Laura and Jessica's tests were exactly the same. On the next test, the teacher kept her eyes on Laura and Jessica. She noticed that both girls kept one hand on the desk and one hand in their lap. Walking quietly, she came up to Laura and discovered that she was using her cell phone. Jessica was using her cell phone as well. She immediately confiscated both cell phones and gave both girls a zero on the exam.

The teacher began to further investigate the use of the cell phones. She discovered that Laura and Jessica were sending the test answers through text messaging. This practice of sending answers through text messaging has become very common among teenagers. No sounds can be heard and teenagers can type without looking at the phone. The next day Laura also admitted to taking a picture of some of her test answers and sending it to Jessica.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you were the teacher, how would you handle this situation?
2. As a teacher, would you ban all cell phones in your classroom?
3. What should happen to Laura and Jessica?
4. Should cell phones be prohibited in schools? If so, how do you make parents feel that their kids are safe at school? And how can a policy be enforced?

Links

Students Using Cell Phones for High Tech Cheating -
<http://www.mobiledia.com/news/26810.html>

The latest school craze: Wireless Cheating
<http://cellphones.about.com/b/a/028571.htm>

Resources

Campbell, S (2006). Perceptions of mobile phones in college classrooms: ringing, cheating, and classroom policies. *Communication Education*. 55(3), 280-294.

(2005). Cell phones and pda's hit k-6. *Education Digest*. 70(8), 52-53.

Etter, L (2004, September 17). Technology (a special report); putting tech to the test: as students turn to high-tech gadgets to cheat, schools consider turning to high-tech gadgets to stop them. *The Wall Street Journal*, R17.

Gerard, V (2006). Updating policy on latest risks for students with cell phones in the school. *Education Digest*. 72(4), 43-45.

Prensky, M (2004). What can you learn from a cell phone? almost anything!. *Journal of Online Education*, Retrieved February, 17, 2007, from <http://www.elearningsource.info>

Walker, M (2004, September 10). High-tech cribbing: camera phones facilitate cheating. *The Wall Street Journal*, B 1.