



Lift the Cell Phone Ban

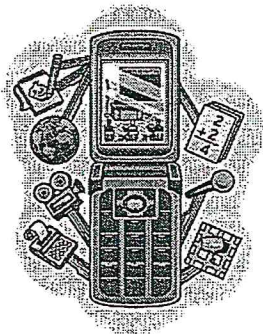
Stop thinking classroom disruption. Start thinking powerful (and free) teaching tool.

By David Rapp

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Cell phones could become the next big learning tool in the classroom. So why have schools been so slow to embrace them?

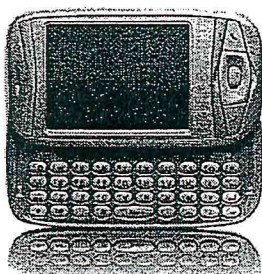


Without a doubt, cell phones can cause serious disruption in the classroom. From urgent text messages flying across the room to lessons interrupted by rap-song ringtones, these gadgets are responsible for nationwide frustration among educators. And, in extreme cases, students have used their cell phones to cheat on tests and harass other students, even during class time. While such disturbances are certainly a nuisance in school, not all teachers see cell phones as the enemy. In fact, for some, they've become a teaching solution.

Cell Phone Solution

Between the alarms, calls, and text-messaging, it's easy to see why some classrooms have implemented a no-cell phone policy. But educators know that with students, cell phone use is inevitable, so why not use the devices for good? Many schools in Asia and the United Kingdom—where they've been using high-speed 3G, or third-generation, cellular networks years longer than the United States—have already turned cell phones into teaching tools. Recently, several school districts in North America have done the same. At the Craik School in Saskatchewan, Canada, such an experiment turned into an integral part of the curriculum.

Craik's program started with a discussion in the staff room between the school's principal, Gord Taylor, and teacher Carla Dolman. Many of the children had received cell phones for Christmas, and the phones had become a distraction. "So we tossed out the idea of rather than looking at them as an evil thing," says Taylor, "that we look at them as a tool for learning." They realized that the text message and alarm functions would be useful for reminding students of homework assignments and tests, for example. They decided to run a pilot project with eighth and ninth graders.



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