Excerpted from

Toys to Tools

Connecting Student Cell Phones to Education

Liz Kolb

Liz Kolb sees cell phones as powerful technology in the hands of students. Acknowledging the current reality—that many schools ban student cell phone use in the classroom—Kolb discusses a host of innovative and highly interesting uses for the technology that do not require using the phones in the classroom. She also addresses the issues that have caused the bans and provides guidelines for overcoming the problems.

Tapping into the ubiquitous power of modern communications technology and merging it with the flexibility and excitement of the Interactive Web (Web 2.0), Kolb provides a vision in which engaged students use the tools of their choice to enhance learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Mini lessons and powerful resources throughout the book are easily adaptable and appropriate for almost any grade level.

Introduction

There is a "digital disconnect" between how students use technology for their everyday communication and how they use technology in the classroom. Outside of school, students communicate through a variety of digital devices, such as cell phones, computers, BlackBerry devices, and iPods, to name just a few. Of these, cell phones are by far the most common and accessible devices. They are quickly becoming an integral part of students' social lives. Cell phones are not just toys; rather, they're essential tools students use to communicate with the world around them. Inside of school, learning is isolated from students' everyday technology culture because students use hardware and software developed specifically for educational purposes.

Many educators feel strongly that cell phones are not appropriate tools for the classroom. Some consider cell phones distracting and harmful to the classroom environment. School officials spend much time and energy developing policies and procedures to keep cell phones out of the classroom.

Of course, the use of cell phones in the classroom raises legitimate concerns. Unfortunate incidents have occurred, such as text messaging answers during tests, taking pictures of class activities and posting them without the subject's permission, and playing games. Cell phones, however, are becoming more popular with students, and anything that takes up so much student time and interest deserves scrutiny. I have been using cell phones as an instructional tool in a classroom setting with my university students for the past three years, and I have learned that cell phones, coupled with a few online resources, can be an engaging tool for learning.

In the 21st century, part of an educator's job is to help students navigate and stay safe in a world overflowing with technology and information. The convenience of cell phones makes them a natural for job interviews and other professional activities. Yet only 47% of teachers believe schools are doing an adequate job preparing students to compete in the modern job market (Project Tomorrow, 2006b). As of 2004, 45% of students ages 8–18 had their own cell phone (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). As of 2006, 73% of students in Grades 9–12 used a cell phone daily (Project Tomorrow, 2006a). These numbers will only increase as cell phones become more affordable and available to students.

Although 47% of teachers think it is acceptable for students to have cell phones in school for emergency situations, more than 25% of teachers do not believe cell

phones belong on a school campus at all (Project Tomorrow, 2006b). Instead of spending time, energy, and money creating policies to fight cell phone use in schools, educators could spend their time finding useful ways to integrate these devices as knowledge construction, data collection, and collaborative communication tools to help students become more competitive in the digital world. I have observed the controversy and decided to gather and present the resources I have found that provide examples for utilizing cell phones as classroom learning tools in hopes that other educators might find these resources useful and worth exploring.

This book is for K–12 classroom teachers and technology integration specialists who are interested in using cell phones as learning tools inside or outside of the classroom. Although readers should be familiar with various technologies, such as podcasting and blogging, they need not be experts. I have included step-by-step tutorials for using many of the resources described in this book.

As a former technology coordinator, I am well aware of the financial straits facing most schools; therefore, many of the Web resources I discuss in this book are inexpensive or free. I am also sensitive to educational policies that bar cell phones from schools; therefore, I describe cell phone learning activities that can be conducted outside of school. Most of the activities and lessons described in this book, in fact, allow for cell phone use only outside of school, such as on a field trip or for homework, and the work can be built on inside the classroom (without students needing to bring the cell phones onto school grounds). Because the majority of students who have cell phones are over the age of 12, this book emphasizes learning activities at the secondary level (Grades 6–12). However, there is good reason to consider how cell phones could be learning tools for younger students. Consequently, chapter 8 describes how PK–5 teachers could benefit from including cell phones in learning.

Recognizing that every educator has a different comfort level with technology, the learning activities I describe range from the intuitive (cell phone basics) to the more complex (downloading and editing cell phone audio or photo files to use with video-editing software). I also introduce ideas on how cell phones may be useful in helping teachers with their classroom and student management. This book also considers several issues involved with integrating cell phones into classroom learning, such as security, access, and finance. I address those concerns by providing potential solutions. Ultimately, the goal of this book is to encourage educators to introduce cell phones to students as potential learning tools and lifelong professional tools, rather than viewing them solely as a social toy.

Chapter 1

Cell Phones as Learning Tools

This chapter focuses on the potential benefits of using cell phones in learning. Although the media often emphasize the reasons why educators do not or should not consider cell phones as learning tools, it is important to contemplate the other side of the argument—why educators should consider cell phones as learning tools. This chapter briefly describes the research in literacy education, learning technologies, and youth studies that supports integrating cell phones into schools. At the same time, it is still important to explore the common concerns that educators have with integrating cell phones into their classrooms, and chapter 2 explores the many reasons why cell phones are controversial for classroom instruction.

Bringing Student Culture into the Classroom

Researchers who have studied the disconnect between the culture of student home life and student experiences in school believe that if the home culture of students is integrated into their classroom learning, they are more likely to be academically successful (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Jordan, 1985; Mohatt & Erikson, 1981). Experts in the field of literacy over the last decade focused on broadening the definition of literacy by studying student culture outside of school as a resource for adolescent literacy learning (Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Bean, Bean, & Bean, 1999; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Finders, 1996; Moje, 2002).

Today, technology is often a large part of the literacy practices of our youth outside of school and is considered one of the multiple literacies in today's society. Many researchers believe that multiple literacies provide a bridge between the real-life texts of the community and school learning. In addition, using a multiple literacy approach to classroom instruction enables students to understand, use, and critically evaluate the multimodal texts of the 21st century.

According to Elizabeth Moje (2000), in "'To Be Part of the Story': The Literacy Practices of Gangsta Adolescents":

> We can become more aware of what adolescents can do and of the power and sophistication of those practices that are so often dismissed as vandalism or laziness. If we reconceptualize our literacy theory, research, and pedagogy to acknowledge the tools at use for making meaning in unsanctioned practices, to work with the strengths that our students already possess, and to teach students how to navigate the many discursive spaces called for in new and complex times … then we may be able to teach students tools that provide them with opportunities to be part of and to construct multiple stories in many different social worlds. (p. 685)

The issues of youth literacy and everyday technology that Moje pinpoints are common concerns. Educators dismiss cell phones, instant messaging, and other popular technology communication tools as "distracting" to classroom learning. Yet if educational technology theory, research, and pedagogy are reconceptualized to include the tools and knowledge that students already possess, then students will have better opportunities to connect learning inside and outside of school.

Digital technology literacy is a form of cultural capital. Moje and Sutherland (2003) argue that students need to learn the tools and practices that have cultural capital in different communities, and how to effectively navigate those tools. Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) assert that classrooms that integrate technology-mediated literacy practices within everyday social learning communities have the potential to promote more academically related interests within the school than classrooms lacking such integration. Bruce (1997) goes further to suggest that we must embrace and acknowledge new technologies, rather than ignore or fear the new literacies that are part of these innovations. Often the literacy practices in today's communities and in traditional classrooms are radically different. For students to be successful in the future they must learn how to use different literacy tools in various knowledge-building communities.

Connecting Everyday Digital Culture with Classroom Learning

Although many classroom teachers use software created for educational purposes, teachers seem to draw the line at everyday technologies used by youth outside the classroom. This disconnect between how students communicate outside of school and how they learn and communicate inside the classroom is growing (Levin, Arafeh, Lenhart, & Rainie, 2002; Tell, 2000). Outside of school, students communicate through instant messaging, online chatting, cell phones, e-mail, BlackBerry devices, Web cams, video games, digital media players, and other network and digital technologies. The Kaiser Family Foundation (2005) named today's youth the M-generation because of the adolescents' ability to multitask with a variety of media devices at one time, such as talking on the cell phone, instant messaging, and writing an essay all at once. Yet teachers assume students are the same as they have always been, and the traditional methods that worked for teachers when they were students will work for students today (Prensky, 2001).

Students are aware of and sensitive to their teachers' dislike of their social "toys." Teachers have very little appreciation for these new devices and the communication and knowledge-building skills students have developed as a result of them (Levin et al., 2002). Instructors repeatedly let students know their everyday social toys are not acceptable in the learning environment. Some teachers see the technologies of youth as distracting, time consuming, wasteful, and even harmful. One of the most popular youth technologies is the cell phone. This technology, however, is not

popular with educators: 85% of professors surveyed stated that they wanted to ban cell phones from classrooms (Gilroy, 2004). Certainly educators have reasonable concerns about allowing cell phones in the classroom, such as cheating on tests with text messaging, accessing unfiltered Internet sites, text messaging during class instruction time, and secretly taking pictures or movies without permission ("Cell Phones," 2005).

Gilroy (2004) found that almost one-third of university students play video games or text message on their cell phones during class. Although Gilroy (2004) claims this is why we should be banning cell phones in educational environments, I disagree. Anything can be distracting in the classroom environment. For example, a piece of paper and pencil can be a distraction if they are used to pass notes or play games (tic-tac-toe). Even a window is a distraction to the unmotivated student. (It was for me.) Have you ever sat in on a boring faculty meeting when you were mentally somewhere else?

In 2007, a study of 1,500 students ages 10–17 found that during the summer they spend an average of 3 hours and 45 minutes using their cell phones each day (Disney Mobile Survey, 2007). Interestingly, one-third of them said they would rather give up video games, radio, or a trip to the mall before parting with their cell phones. One-fifth said they would rather give up television than their cell phones. This ubiquitous use of cell phones by youth is the exact reason why we should be using cell phones as a tool for learning in the classroom. Obviously students enjoy using their cell phones and they are highly motivated to interact with their cell phones during class. Additionally, most students have their cell phones with them at all times (unlike many other school tools); hence, the learning activities do not have to occur within the classroom walls. Teachers need to take advantage of this motivational tool and find methods to integrate it into the classroom.

The Web 2.0 Generation and Filters

Many new Web sites can be coupled with cell phones to create innovative learning opportunities. These Web sites are part of the Web 2.0 generation. Web 2.0 is often referred to as the read/write Web or social-networking sites. Some examples of read/write Web sites include Web logs (blogs), wikis, photo-sharing sites such as Flickr, MP3-sharing sites such as Napster, and many other Web sites where people can participate and interact (O'Reilly, 2005). Outside of school, students are immersed in these social-networking and collaborative Web sites. Lenhart,

Madden, and Hitlin (2005) found that 87% of youth ages 12–17 are online almost every day. Some of their popular online activities include blogging, chatting, and sharing music (Rainie, 2006). According to Rainie, the M-generation is the first that grew up with interactive media; they want to share knowledge with each other. A Pew Internet & American Life Project survey found that 64% of online teens are content creators. They have created or work on a blog or a Web page, share original content online, or remix content found online to make a new creation (Lenhart, Madden, Rankin, & Smith, 2007).

The M-generation has developed its own community of practice outside of school, using Web 2.0 sites to create, share, and foster knowledge together. According to NetDay's Speak Up 2006 national report on students (Project Tomorrow, 2006a), gaming, e-mailing, instant messaging, and accessing personal Web sites are the leading activities for students' nonschoolwork use of technology. Yet Internet filters in schools have widened the divide between students' digital media use inside and outside of school. According to the Children's Internet Protection Act (2001), public K–12 schools must have Internet filters. This came as a result of many educational administrators worrying about students accessing information that could be potentially harmful to minors. At the same time, a recent study (Rosen, 2006) found that the media have greatly overblown sexual predators and social-networking sites such as MySpace. Rosen found that only 7% of students who use MySpace were virtually approached by a stranger. Although I realize that 7% is not 0%, keep in mind that the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children reports that 797,500 children under the age of 18 are reported missing each year, which is an average of 2,185 children reported missing each day (Sedlak, Finkelhor, Hammer, & Schultz, 2002). Despite these statistics, we still allow our children to walk to and from school and ride buses; we simply educate them on what to do when a stranger approaches them or a dangerous situation arises.

Although the media may be overemphasizing the dangers of predators and online activity, and most Web 2.0 sites are not created to be harmful to minors (such as blogs or wikis), some school officials have chosen to install such restrictive Internet filters that students cannot access these sites. Instead of teaching students how to properly use these new collaborative Web sites, educators ignore them. This leaves students to figure out the nature of the sites—good or bad—on their own, outside of school.

Students are growing up in a technology-enhanced community outside of school. If students develop their own communication and community through their media

"toys," educators need to bring those "toys" into educational activities so students can learn to use them as tools of knowledge. The issue is not whether educators should use the media tools of the M-generation in the classroom; rather, the issue is how to help teachers learn to utilize the media tools effectively for knowledge construction.

Digital Etiquette

Another reason to consider introducing cell phones in learning is to promote digital etiquette, a concept foreign to most people. According to a recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, "How Americans Use Their Cell Phones":

> More than a quarter of cell phone owners (28%) admit they sometimes do not drive as safely as they should while they use their mobile devices.... Furthermore, 82% of all Americans and 86% of cell users report being irritated at least occasionally by loud and annoying cell users who conduct their calls in public places. Indeed, nearly one in ten cell phone owners (8%) admit they themselves have drawn criticism or irritated stares from others when they are using their cell phones in public. (Rainie & Keetyer, 2006, p. 1)

An educator's job is to help students navigate and stay safe in their media world. Students are often unaware of and indifferent to the consequences of their use and misuse of technology (Rainie, 2006). Currently, many students do not worry about protecting their own privacy or the privacy of others when using digital media. For example, 55% of students do not care whether the digital material they use is copyrighted (Rainie, 2006). Additionally, only 25% of students consider online safety and cost a concern when using the Internet (Project Tomorrow, 2006a). When it comes to etiquette, students ages 10–17 often do not seem to understand appropriate cell phone use. According to the Disney Mobile Survey (2007), while nine out of ten 10- to 17-year-olds believe they are polite on their cell phones, 52% admit to sending text messages at the movie theater, while 28% admit to sending text messages at the dinner table. These statistics demonstrate that teens and tweens are unaware of cell phone etiquette, and educators have an opportunity to teach them appropriate uses of this communication device.

Instead of spending time, energy, and money creating policies to fight cell phone use in schools, we are better served by directing our resources toward finding useful

ways to integrate these devices as knowledge construction, data collection, and collaborative communication tools, and toward teaching digital etiquette. Parents may appreciate the help. Rosen (2006) found that only one-third of parents have seen their children's MySpace page and only 16% of them check it on a regular basis. Although this does not relate directly to cell phones, it demonstrates that parents may need some assistance in monitoring their children and teaching them about digital etiquette.

Bottom-Up Approach to Technology in Schools

Historically, access to educational hardware and software in classrooms has not guaranteed that teachers will use the tools in an effective way (Cuban, 1986; Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001). During the last 10 years, K–12 schools and state and federal governments have spent around $6.9 billion on computer hardware, Internet access, wiring, software, servers, and other digital equipment to make today's technology available to students and teachers (Kleiman, 2000). Despite all the effort to give teachers and students access to technology, Cuban et al. (2001) found that access to educational software and hardware did not lead to its widespread use in classroom learning. The most creative and frequent uses of technology have not been linked to curricula (Becker, 2000). In addition, Becker (2000) argues that the most creative uses of computer technology were found in stand-alone computer classes rather than the mainstream core courses.

If there is so much access to technology in schools, why is it underused? Why aren't students more motivated to learn with the technology available in today's schools? Cuban (1986) argues one reason that technology integration has historically failed in schools is because the technology is initiated with a top-down approach, in which the administrators force certain technologies onto teachers, and teachers in turn force certain technologies onto students. In effect, educators are increasing the barrier between the technology tools students use in their everyday lives and the technology tools they interact with in school. Students want to use cell phone technology, and research has found that 97% of students would like a relaxation of the rules of cell phones in schools (Project Tomorrow, 2006a). Integrating cell phones constitutes a bottom-up approach to technology in the classroom, in which the students (not the teachers) are the community of learners who are "proposing" the technologies used in the classroom. Soloway, Guzdial, and Hay (1994) call

for more contextualized technologies in the classroom. Although they emphasize designing learner-centered software for the classroom, we rarely see widespread use of software designed for educational purposes.

Instead of designing new software, let's use the everyday software and hardware students already own (or are free to own or use) and are already motivated to interact with, such as their cell phones. By doing so, we may be able to create better learning opportunities and resources for our students that can easily extend beyond the classroom walls.

Although it is easy to theorize that cell phones may be a way to connect classroom learning with everyday youth culture, it is quite another to illustrate how cell phones can become instructional tools. The following chapters provide many examples of how cell phones can be used outside the classroom as a learning tool that connects to activities inside the classroom. In addition, I highlight cutting-edge teachers who have begun to tap in to the concept of using cell phones in learning. Also included are step-by-step tutorials of many Web 2.0 resources.

Chapter 2

Concerns with Cell Phones in the Classroom

Using cell phones for classroom learning raises legitimate concerns. Although there are currently no federal or state laws that prohibit using cell phones in the classroom or for learning, many schools have policies against even bringing cell phones to school. As a result, teachers often assume they cannot and should not consider the cell phone as a learning tool. As mentioned earlier, this book emphasizes learning activities using cell phones outside the classroom, therefore not violating any school rules against cell phones in the classroom. However, there are many other concerns besides bringing cell phones to class that educators and parents have with cell phones in learning.

This chapter discusses these many concerns of using cell phones as classroom learning tools: teachers having control over cell phones in the classroom, cell phone etiquette, student access to cell phones, the costs associated with cell phone use, advertising on cell phone–compatible Web 2.0 Web sites, students publishing from their cell phone to the Internet, and school security when cell phones are allowed to be used in the building. Although there is not one easy solution to these concerns, some potential solutions to all of these concerns are provided. It is important for teachers, administrators, and the community to decide if and how they would like to include cell phones as learning tools, but it is also important they make an informed decision based on more than media hype or an assumption that cell phones are purely the social toys of a younger generation. The topics presented in this chapter allow for an open discussion of both the concerns and the potential benefits of using cell phones as learning tools inside and outside of school.

Cell Phones in School

As mentioned earlier, many school districts have strong policies prohibiting students from bringing their cell phones into the school building. Because these policies may be difficult to change, cell phones do not have to be brought to school in order to be used for the learning activities in this book. Field trips and homework assignments are two ways that students can take advantage of their cell phones as learning tools without having to bring them to the classroom.

Students can take pictures, capture video, or record audio outside of school and post their data before coming to class to any of a number of Web 2.0 sites, such as Gcast, Gabcast, Hipcast, Blogger, Flickr, Photobucket, or Eyespot (these resources and associated cell phone activities will be discussed in upcoming chapters). The next day in class students can log on to their sites and download the data for class projects. They can also take advantage of the online editing and posting tools on Web 2.0 sites to further develop movies, create slideshows, design blogs, or perform other activities with their audio and image recordings without having a cell phone in the classroom. This way the students are learning how to use their social toy as a data collection tool and the school policy has not been violated. Once students are successful with using cell phones outside of school as a learning tool, teachers could approach their administrators about changing policy to allow cell phones in school for content-related learning opportunities.

Classroom Control

Although keeping students on task without cell phones in the classroom is hard enough, many teachers worry it will become increasingly difficult when students have cell phones at their desk. Teachers worry that the cell phone is simply another toy to distract students from the lesson. In addition, one major argument against allowing cell phones in the classroom is that camera and camcorder phones can be used to take inappropriate pictures, which can then be published to the Internet, unbeknownst to the teacher or the subject of the pictures. Although the easy solution is to stick with cell phone activities that occur outside the classroom, I'd like to propose solutions that allow constructive cell phone use inside the classroom.

One solution is for teachers to simply take control. Teachers can control when students bring in their cell phones and where they keep them during class (such as collecting them as the students enter the classroom and holding them until it is time to use them). Also, remember that any tool can be distracting and even harmful if used inappropriately in the classroom (students still pass notes and doodle on paper when they should be paying attention in class). The key is to structure and control when the cell phones are used and when they are not used.

Another solution is to set up a social contract with students before engaging in any cell phone activities. A social contract is an agreement between the teacher and students about how, when, why, and where cell phones will be used in the classroom. In the social contract you can set up regulations as well as consequences for not obeying the contract. For example, you could require that students leave their cell phones off in the front of the room until it is time to use them for the project. The consequence for noncompliance could be missing out on the cell phone project and doing an alternative assignment instead. Often when social contracts are set up with student input, they are more likely to "stick to their contract." In addition, it is important to provide parents with permission forms that state the nature of the activity and include the social contract. Through the permission forms you can let students and parents know that using cell phones in the classroom is a privilege and that there are consequences for violating the privilege.

Cell Phone Etiquette

Many educators worry about using cell phones as educational tools because they think that students misuse them as social toys. We often get annoyed when we are

sitting in a library and a student is talking loudly on a cell phone or we are in a movie theater and a child nearby is text messaging during the entire film. As irritated as we get, we don't take the time to talk with the person about why we are annoyed and why certain uses of a cell phone can be inappropriate. Since cell phones are becoming ubiquitous in our society, it is important to talk with students about cell phone etiquette inside and outside of school. Students consider their cell phones a fashion accessory (Selian & Srivastava, 2004). Our students need to understand when it is appropriate and when it is not appropriate to use cell phones. Students need to understand how text messaging and digital jargon (such as LOL) may not always be acceptable for their future professional lives. In addition, they should understand some simple etiquette of when to turn off cell phones and when not to answer the phone (it is shocking how many students will answer their cell phone in the middle of an important meeting).

Student Access

Educators often worry that because some students do not have their own cell phone (especially at the elementary level or in lower income areas), it may not be fair to have assignments that require a cell phone. Although not every student may have a cell phone, that is not necessarily a reason to exclude cell phones as learning tools. There is a very good chance that the students who do not have a cell phone eventually will have one, and will consider it an essential communication device in the near future. By not teaching these students how a cell phone can be a learning tool, they may never be educated on how this "toy" has the ability to help them professionally in their future.

Don't count yourself out if not all your students have cell phones. Many activities in this book require only one cell phone for the entire class. As a matter of fact, if only the teacher has a cell phone, students can still use it to do activities. For example, an entire radio broadcast can be created with one cell phone, with students taking turns doing their individual broadcasts. A virtual conference can be done with the entire class and one cell phone. In elementary school, the cell phone can be used for a "center" activity (see chapter 8 for more about center activities and cell phones). If asking students to use cell phones for their homework assignment, the teacher can allow students without cell phones to use a landline to call Gabcast or Gcast (which have toll-free numbers), so that no cell phone is necessary to complete the assignment. Teachers can also put students in groups so at least one group member has access to a cell phone. For picture and video assignments, students without a cell phone can

upload images and videos taken with regular digital cameras or camcorders. Just as many educators get by and are often very creative with only one computer in the classroom, they can also get by with only one cell phone in the classroom.

Financial Considerations

The financial angle is one of the most important factors to consider when using cell phones and Web 2.0 sites. Although most of the Web 2.0 sites are free to use, minor fees may be added to your students' (or their parents') cell phone bill. Gabcast, YouMail, and Gcast phone numbers are toll free, and as long as students stay within their calling minutes per month, there is no extra cell phone charge for using these audio-recoding sites. Although the online resources for photo, ringtone, wallpaper, and video storage are often free, the cell phone text message to "text" your photo, ringtone, or video to your online account may not be free. The cell phone provider may charge the student or teacher, depending on the individual cell phone plan.

This is a good time to talk with your students about being knowledgeable about their cell phone plans, and to help them realize that cell phone text messaging or calls are not always free, and they should be responsible cell phone users. This creates an opportunity for students to learn about their cell phone plan and avoid unnecessarily large bills associated with text messaging or Web surfing. Parents may also appreciate this! Another option can be writing a mini-grant for a classroom or school set of cell phones with a basic text messaging and calling plan. Some cell phone companies may be interested in teaming with schools to develop curriculum and activities in exchange for free or very inexpensive cell phones. Schools are often writing mini-grants for other PDA devices such as Palm Pilots, so why not cell phones? In addition, with a classroom set, the teacher can control when and how the cell phones are used.

Advertising

Although Web 2.0 is fast becoming a free and easy alternative to purchasing expensive software, some Web 2.0 sites for use with cell phones have advertisements. It is understandable that educators worry about the advertisements students are exposed to when surfing the Web. Although no inappropriate advertising was witnessed while researching this book, that does not mean students will never come

across something inappropriate while using the sites mentioned in this book. At the same time, it is not in our students' best interest to disallow them to use Web 2.0 sites or keep them from experiencing the many engaging learning activities mentioned in this book simply because of the advertising they might come across. As a matter of fact, in this day and age, it is vital that we talk with students about the power of advertising on the Internet and what to do when they come across something inappropriate (inform their teacher or parent immediately).

Teach a lesson about Internet safety before any cell phone or Web 2.0 activity occurs. Instructing students to be mindful and aware during Internet and cell phone use should be part of all classroom learning in the 21st century. Parents may appreciate that their children are learning how to use the Internet and their cell phones appropriately, since parents are often uncertain how to teach their kids to use these new resources. Additionally, some Web sites (such as Phonezoo) have "family filters" that can be used to eliminate inappropriate advertising for children.

Web Publishing

Probably one of the largest concerns with using the Internet in schools is keeping our students safe from predators and harmful information. While school administrators spend much time creating acceptable use policies designed to let students know what they cannot do on the Internet (such as sending instant messages or e-mail), the policies often do not describe why students should not be participating in those collaborative activities. Not enough time is devoted to teaching our students how to safely participate in collaborative communities and to safely post media and text online. Students need to become digitally literate citizens and learn how to safely navigate these new Web 2.0 resources. Many students participate in social-networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube outside of school, with very little instruction on how to appropriately communicate in these worlds. By using cell phones, blogs, and other Web 2.0 resources for learning, we have an opportunity to teach students about the difference between public and private spaces on the Web; how to register or sign up for accounts; what information is appropriate for a profile; what types of images, text, and video can be published; where to find and change default settings; and how and when to communicate with others.

Publishing on the Web need not be a safety issue, because cell phone uploads can be kept private. Most Web 2.0 resources have private space that you can download to directly from your cell phone. This means that the student's work can stay private.

Once the material is in the private space, the teacher can decide whether to publish the student's work to the Web or to keep it private for classroom use. At the same time, there are opportunities to publish work on almost every Web 2.0 site, and students should be aware of why they would or would not select to publish to the Internet. One solution, if you want to publish the classroom work to share with others, is to talk with students about using pseudonyms for their names and to focus on content rather than personal information. For example, instead of recording a personal reflection with details of the their life, students can record their findings from a scientific experiment or debate a controversial issue.

Whenever students publish to the Web (especially using Web 2.0 resources and cell phones), you should get permission from the building administrator (and possibly the technology coordinator), inform parents, and have students sign a special permission form (in addition to the regular school acceptable use policy).

Getting Permission from Administrators

Before beginning the assignment, inform your principal and technology coordinator about your project idea. Always start small when you want to use something controversial like cell phones, by creating a project that is simple and can be completed outside the classroom, so that you are not asking administrators to change school policies that might ban or restrict cell phones on campus. Demonstrate how students will use cell phones with the Web resource (create a podcast or text message using your own cell phone that depicts what students will actually be doing). Show explicitly how the activity will align with content standards and other classroom goals (you could, for instance, address ISTE's National Educational Technology Standards for Students, the NETS•S). Finally, explain that the students and their parents will be signing special permission forms in order to participate and that you have an alternative assignment for anyone who cannot comply with the regulations or whose parents have concerns.

Writing the Permission Form

You may want to ask the district technology coordinator to help you write the permission form for the parents. Once the form has been written, I would recommend showing it to the school principal. Include the following points in the permission letter (see Figure 2.1 for a sample):

- Your excitement for the assignment.
- The administration's support of the assignment.

- The purpose of the assignment and generally how it will meet classroom goals.
- ISTE's NETS•S to demonstrate how the assignment addresses technology standards.
- Your intention to include instruction on Internet safety, publishing online, and cell phone etiquette as part of the assignment.
- Any costs that might be involved (for example, if you want students to text message, they might have to pay text-messaging fees if they do not have an unlimited plan). You may also want to include that you will ask students to educate themselves on their cell phone plans.
- Alternative options for students who do not have access to a cell phone (for example, they could use their parents' cell phone, a landline if it is a toll-free number, or a computer with a microphone).
- The consequences for students who misuse cell phones or Web 2.0 resources.
- The consequences for students who do not comply with the rules of the assignment.
- How public or private the project will be (for example, if the goal is to create cell phone podcasts that are posted online, will they be posted publicly or privately?). Explain what you are going to do to help protect the privacy and identities of students if the space is public (such as monitoring before posting or posting information that is content-based instead of personal).
- Your enthusiasm for parental participation in some form in the project (such as viewing the student-created podcasts and commenting on them).
- The links to sites you will use and any login protocol or passwords that parents would need to access their child's information.
- Your reasoning for the particular sites you selected.
- Your contact information for questions or concerns (and the administrator's).
- Your viewpoint that the assignment be considered a privilege.

Figure 2.1 Sample permission form

Dear Parents and Guardians:

We have an exciting new project that we will be starting in class this term. We are going to be creating a Poetry Slam Podcast. (A podcast is an audio broadcast over the Internet that can be played on an iPod, but also on any computer.) The purpose of this project is to allow students to create, recite, and publish their original poetry. Students will be creating poetry based on different genres. This project uses cell phones to create the podcasts in order to demonstrate how these devices can be used as a learning tool. As homework, outside of class, students will use their cell phones to record the podcasts. Alternatives will be provided for students without cell phones.

This project will not only meet our district language arts standards for original poetry but also the National Educational Technology Standards for Students (developed by the International Society for Technology in Education).

The podcast will be created using a free Web service called Gcast (www.gcast.com). I will be creating the class blog for the podcast and monitoring the posts using a Web application called Blogger (www.blogger.com/start/). Because the purpose of the assignment is to allow students to publish their work and receive feedback, the blog will be public. Students will be taught how to appropriately publish online and ways to protect their privacy. For safety, students will be using pseudonyms (as many famous authors have done, including Mark Twain, whose real name was Samuel Clemens). Additionally, we will be going over Internet safety protocol in class, and students will have to pass a quiz before they can participate in the project. (A sample Internet safety quiz can be found here: www.safekids.com/quiz/.)

I worked with the district technology coordinator to decide on the podcasting resource that would best fit our needs. Gcast allows us to use the resource for no cost and has a toll-free phone number so that students who do not have cell phone access can use a landline to do their podcasting.

Continued

Figure 2.1, *Continued*

I would like you to be able to view and comment on the students' poetry. Here is the link to the Poetry Slam Podcast Blog: www.poetryslam987.blogspot.com/.

The opportunity to use these learning resources is a privilege, and students will be given instructions on how to use these resources appropriately. If they abuse this privilege, they will be given an alternative assignment that does not involve cell phones or the Internet. Since we will be publishing the poetry and using cell phones, we would like your permission to allow your child to participate. We also ask that your child sign the agreement.

I _____

agree to allow my child _____
to participate in the Poetry Slam Podcast project.

I _____ agree to follow the rules for the Poetry Slam Podcast project.

Parent's signature _____

Student's signature _____

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or our building principal (he has approved the project). We think this is a wonderful opportunity for students to learn how to use their cell phones as educational tools as well as to learn about Internet safety and publishing information online. We hope that you will also participate in our project by viewing and commenting on the original poems.

Sincerely,

Liz Kolb
Eighth-Grade Language Arts Teacher
Anyschool
Contact Information Here

Student Permission and Agreement

While you can write a separate student permission form for students to agree to, I recommend getting the students involved in the process. Ask students to develop an agreement with you concerning the guidelines for the assignment. Of course, as the teacher, you make the final decision, but if you create a social contract with students, they are more likely to take ownership of and responsibility for the project. Once an agreement is made, have all students sign the social contract along with the permission form sent home to parents. Also, have students take an Internet or cell phone safety quiz before they participate in the project. (A good example of an Internet safety quiz is available at SafeKids: www.safekids.com/quiz/.) Items to discuss with students could include:

- **Safety.** How are we going to stay safe with online resources?
- **Etiquette.** How are we going to make sure that the cell phone activity is appropriate?
- **Responsibility.** What are the consequences for not complying?
- **Opportunity.** If this project goes well, students may suggest future cell phone assignments.

Security

Many educators consider cell phones to be not only a distraction in an instructional environment, but a security risk to the school itself. The National School Safety and Security Services (2007) cites the following reasons for banning cell phones in schools:

1. Cell phones have been used for calling in bomb threats to schools and, in many communities, cell calls cannot be traced by public safety officials.
2. Student use of cell phones could potentially detonate a real bomb if one is actually on campus.
3. Cell phone use by students can hamper rumor control and, in doing so, disrupt and delay effective public safety personnel response.

4. Cell phone use by students can impede public safety response by accelerating parental response to the scene of an emergency during times when officials may be attempting to evacuate students to another site.
5. Cell phone systems typically overload during a major crisis (as they did during the Columbine tragedy, World Trade Center attacks, etc.), and usage by a large number of students at once could add to the overload and knock out cell phone systems quicker than may normally occur. Since cell phones may be a backup communications tool for school administrators and crisis teams, widespread student use in a crisis could eliminate crisis team emergency communications tools in a very short period of critical time. (n.p.)

Although these are obvious concerns for cell phones in schools, keep in mind that students do not have to bring their cell phones into school in order to use them for class assignments. At the same time, cell phones can also be very beneficial in a school-related emergency crisis. For example, if a classroom does not have an analog phone and a student needs emergency medical care, a cell phone can be used to alert the office. If a student brings a weapon to school and threatens others students, someone could use a silent feature on a cell phone to quietly text message the authorities. If there is a fire or weather emergency in the school and a teacher is missing a student, the teacher can use a cell phone to call the student's cell phone. Again, this is another reason it is so important to educate students on how to appropriately use their cell phones in emergency situations. Fire and tornado drills at school teach students proper evacuation procedures; cell phones can and should be integrated as a part of the necessary procedures.

Additionally, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has set up wireless Amber Alerts (www.wirelessamberalerts.org). When an alert occurs in the area code of the cell phone, the cell phone user will get a text message about the missing child. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2006), the first three hours that a child goes missing are critical to recovery of the child. Parents, teachers, and educators who are concerned about children's safety can sign up for free wireless Amber Alerts. Furthermore, schools can set up their own Amber Alert system for community members and parents if a student goes missing while walking to or from school or during recess.

Toys to Tools

Liz Kolb is an adjunct assistant professor at Madonna University in Livonia, Michigan. She taught high school and middle school social studies in Cincinnati, and she spent four years as a high school technology coordinator and teacher in Columbus, Ohio.

October 2008
240 pp. 7 x 9 ¼
b/w illustrations
Paper
Product code TOYTUL
978-1-56484-247-3

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