**Cell Phones, Tools: Synonyms?**

**Ella Newcomb - 4th Hr**

Distractions, poor test grades, feeding teen cellphone addiction. These things supposedly result from cellphone use in and during school. Maybe the idea that keeping students away from these things is a good idea… is just an illusion. Could lifting the bans instead produce a positive outcome? Likely, the decision to make this change won’t be easily settled on. What if there are more things that could go *right,* rather than *wrong?* For example, better accessibility, productive use of common conveniences, improving students’ savviness with technology and resources they’ll be required to use later in life, and learning how to overcome problems that may arise from a day in our media-saturated society. These are just some of the reasons that cell phones should be allowed in schools.

For concerned parents, being able to access their children at any time of the day is important. Although there are what may seem like simple and easy alternatives to contactacting a student during the day, such as a teacher’s phone or general office phone that parents can call, these options may bring about some difficulties. For example, calling a teacher’s classroom phone or sending for a student over intercom can be easily disrupting and will most likely interrupt class until the student gets where they need to be. This wastes valuable learning time and may call unwanted attention or curiosity to whomever the issue concerns. Hypothetically, it may be that a situation is an urgent, personal issue that a student would want to deal with privately. They could do this, given they have their cell phone handy, avoiding the mess of interfering with class or a string of administrators hovering over everything. WebMD says, “If your child has a cell phone, you can call or text him to find out where he is and what he's doing and inform him of your own plans.” Parents more often than not provide their children with a cell phone so that they can communicate when they’re not together--isn’t school a perfect example of this? What purpose does this useful tool serve while it’s “turned off and put away in a locker”?

Cell phones in general have many uses, but especially smart phones. Developers install many features that are likely intended to be solutions to small problems throughout the day, or maybe as “life hacks” that just make things a little simpler. Probably the most commonly used feature is the camera app. During class, you could easily snap a picture of instructions or announcements on the board so you don’t forget, or record a lecture so that you can easily go back and listen to it at home in case you missed some points while you were taking notes in class. Students could easily use their calculator application for a simple math problem here and there (in math class or outside of it), or maybe utilize  a “reminder” app so they don’t forget to turn in an assignment or grab a certain textbook. An online dictionary/thesaurus would be helpful for checking a quick spelling or synonym when writing a paper or written response on a test. An encyclopedia could be easily accessed for brief research during a debate or discussion. WebMD later mentions, “You can’t beat the convenience.” Why have these conveniences of a smartphone without being able to use them? If students don’t know how to use their available resources, why have them? Without the knowledge of how to use their resources, students are left unaware of valuable skills.

Now more than ever, kids have a plethora of resources available to them through media and technology. While this can pose a potential risk, there are plenty of other constructive opportunities are likewise at stake. Keeping students “safe” by eliminating all chance of danger leaves them unprepared. No matter what, bad things are going to happen, regardless of the circumstance--that’s nature. For example, cyberbullying is a big risk factor for virtually any circumstance, and blocking off exposure to it during school is only making matters worse for when it happens to a child elsewhere. If schools think not allowing phones *prevents* cyberbullying, they’re wrong. It will still happen outside of school, and the difference is that students won’t expect it, and may not be capable of handling it well as a result. Here is an opportunity for them to learn problem-solving skills and good judgement. Some parents, teachers, or schools may think that not allowing phones will make it easier for students to avoid potential mistakes online. Again, if they are not exposed to it beforehand, how are they to know how to handle or properly deal with it should it ever actually come up? Instead of viewing all of these problems as a bad thing that everyone should avoid as much as possible, maybe they could be viewed as experience contingencies. Another concern may be that teachers don’t know how to respond to a cyberbullying incident during class. William Voors, licensed clinical social worker and director of Covington Creek Counseling and Wellness Services offers, “[Another] thing we must do is stop looking the other way.” Voors’s statement supports the idea that pretending it’s not happening by eliminating it in the classroom causes further damage. He continues in his steps for addressing the problem, “Look for it and confront it when you witness it--every time... Model good management skills.” To endorse the idea, bullying (in this case, particularly cyberbullying) will never end if teachers continue to push it away and avoid the problem altogether. So, if schools really do aim for eradicating bullying issues as one of their main goals, prohibiting cell phone use yet again fuels the fire.

     Technology opens a door for kids and teens everywhere to take a step into the unknown. It opens up the possibility for many advantageous things. As stated previously, it can be dangerous, but stepping out of your comfort zone or broadening your horizons isn't supposed to be safe... is it? Many times, people are afraid of the things they don't know much about or can't control. Understandably, allowing cell phones in school is a big step, because of this reason. Regardless, I definitely think opening up these experience opportunities is a good idea, given my reasoning.