

Student's Name

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Critical Essay: Having Cell Phones in Elementary School

Today's new generation is referred to as the iGeneration because of such technologies as the iPhone, iPad, iTouch, and so forth (Rosen 8). As recently as the past decade, schools have had to determine their stance on students with personal electronics in the school, from the use of storage devices such as the flash drive, to the use of iPods for listening to music and podcasts, to the use of cell phones. Many schools quickly developed policies against the use of any personal electronic devices. The policies were aimed mostly at the high school level but trickled down to the lower grades. Very recently, though, educators have come to realize that student use of personal electronics may alleviate the stress of not having available enough computers, tablets, and other electrons in a timely, readily accessible manner for individual student use. They also have come to realize that banning cell phones in school may be too difficult to enforce. Parents want immediate access to their children, for example. However, addressing cell phones in high school, or even junior high school, is somewhat different than addressing it for elementary-aged students.

A major concern for children's use of cell phones centers on the issue of electronic bullying. Students on all grade levels encounter bullying, whether they are witnesses to it, are victims of it, or are perpetrators of it. What makes electronic bullying even more of a concern is that children do not always know the identity of the

perpetrator, whether it is a single person or a group of people, and if the child knows the person (Kowalski & Limber 22). Because electronic bullying can be easily transmitted to others, the potential audience for electronic bullying is limitless. Schools are left to develop policies and procedures for dealing with electronic bullying, which includes educating their students, teachers, and parents regarding electronic bullying. Part of the debate on whether to allow student-owned cell phones into the elementary school, then, is the issue of student protection against electronic bullying and also issues of whether students will abuse the access to their cell phones with inappropriate text-messaging and gaming, for example.

On the other side of the coin, however, is looking at how often children use cell phones and for what purpose. Rosen found in his study that parents report that their elementary school-aged children are utilizing technology at a much younger age than their older brothers and sisters did (10). They are growing up in an environment where technology is ubiquitous in all areas of their lives. They have information and the means to learn at their fingertips. Five to eight year olds communicate electronically half an hour daily. Nine to twelve year olds communicate electronically 2.5 hours a day. Half of pre-teens have personal cell phones and iPads (Rosen 10). Rosen argues that educators might consider using various electronic devices for a means of delivering virtual content, having online class discussions, and having students to complete and submit assignments online.

Rosen's idea that educators utilize students' personally owned technology in the classroom brings one to the consideration of what today's students should be learning in

preparation for their future. Too often, our students are leaving school unprepared for the existing job market. They lack skills in critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Skills needed for 21st century living are different than what was needed for 20th century living. Our schools must shift from the mind-set of preparing students for the Industrial Age to preparing them for the 21st century. Heavy emphasis is on collaboration and communication skills. Among tools needed to support students in developing skills for 21st century learning and living include access to the Internet, educational games, and cell phones (Trilling 8).

Trilling argues that since technology has become an important part of children's lives, they should bring their technology from home rather than compete for limited technology at school (8). Indeed, that is exactly what is happening in many schools. They are slowly beginning to realize that students have the availability to direct their own learning through the use of electronic devices. Students use electronic devices for accessing factual information, delving deeper into areas of interest, playing games to develop skills and concepts, for communication, and for collaborative learning. Cell phones, especially smart phones, provide students with immediate access to tools and information that help them in their academic endeavors. Concerns like electronic bullying are valid, as are concerns for any kind of bullying. Students must be taught ethical practices in anything they do and use, but they must also be allowed to use tools at their disposal to help them to achieve or to attain goals, such as in learning.

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