

Promoting Responsibility of Using Hand Held Devices in Schools

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I work at [Martin Collegiate](#) in [Regina Public Schools](#) as a Construction and Mathematics teacher. I have taught at Martin since 2008 – 2009, in many subject areas, grade levels and roles from grade 9 Phys. Ed to Calculus 30. I have been a Core Leader since the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year with the task of overseeing one grade group of homeroom teachers each year helping to communicate and support school / division goals, engagement and personal PD, and student failure communications and supports. Our school has changed significantly over the years, from a Community school with 300 students and slated to close in June of 2013 to a growing high-school with continued increasing enrolment, currently around 750 students, including about 250 students being part of the Martin Academy Sports programs. It has been a building that has seen great changes in population, demographics, technology in the classroom, class / program offerings, administration and the largest change impacting us currently, handheld devices, specifically smartphones. In a classroom of 25 students it seems that approximately a third to a half of students decide to use their devices irresponsibly and consistently. Outside of class, the use of smartphones is endless and often leads to issues around addiction of screen time, bullying, lack of face - to – face social interaction and connectedness to personal surroundings.

PROBING DISCUSSION

Almost all students have a smartphone they bring to school daily (there is a few Grade 9's without). Based on my personal experience, about 60% of students use their devices mostly responsibly in the classroom, 25% are progressing to addictive behaviour ([CBC “Addicted to](#)

[your Smartphone.” Article](#)) and 10 to 15% are letting their devices truly hinder their learning, combined with other adolescent issues of mental health ([Global News “Smartphone Addiction more Common for People with Anxiety, Depression: study”](#)), substance abuse and learning challenges. I understand that addiction and students not working to their potential has been a long-standing problem in education, but never has the “fix” and the distraction from learning been so accessible and so acceptable within our social standards. Basically, there seems to be a great lack of [digital citizenship](#) (as promoted by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education in 2015) and responsibility with the youth in our schools and within our society as a whole. I can accept that smartphones and technology are going to be part of a culture for the foreseeable future, but I would like to see a much greater emphasis placed on educating people about how it should be used to promote the best results in developing your personal potential, in school and in the community. I feel this issue is much like seatbelts in cars, tobacco initiatives, don’t text and drive programs or drunk driving campaigns and laws, it is in informing young people about what is responsible, acceptable and for the greater benefit for all that we will be able to integrate technology into schools, work and our lives, safely and properly. It is important that we all, especially students, learn to use technology, specifically hand-held devices, for our benefit and convenience while still maintaining our mental capacities and attention spans, despite the best efforts of tech companies attempting to have us be “[Amused to Death](#).” (Roger Waters, *Amused to Death*, 1992).

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

The strength of students with devices is that they essentially all have access to a personal computer, camera, voice recorder, graphing calculator, encyclopedia, thesaurus and many other technological tools at any point in time in the school. They can research, send emails to teachers, communicate, take videos and photos, watch instructional videos, use graphing and educational apps, even do word-processing, voice recording or submit assignments all on their phones. The possibilities are really limitless when it comes to the potential for using technology to increase educational outcomes and learning. Every technology that ever existed in the last 40 years is pretty much contained within a single smartphone or tablet at this point. Even for students without a smartphone, the cost and accessibility for schools to provide tablets or chrome-books has become very affordable. And with all this access to information we can gain knowledge and as Dan Brown said “knowledge is a tool, and like all tools, its impact is in the hand of the user.” Furthermore, students may learn skills well beyond what is expected from them in classes, from video editing, informal journalism, coding, music, and a myriad of other technological skills that have evolved past what provincial curriculums are offering. Many students will need to learn and master skills not taught to them during their school years, as many working adults have done currently with computer and machine technology.

WEAKNESSES

In leaping from where we looked at the strengths of handheld devices in schools we also need to be aware that most students are not using this technology to their advantage, but merely as a means of trivial communication and entertainment. For as Rupert Hughes stated “a

determined soul will do more with a rusty monkey-wrench than a loafer will accomplish with all the tools in a machine shop.” There was a time in schools where being engaged in the classroom was really your only option for entertainment and information during class time. You could call your friends after-school or watch TV at home or play Nintendo all weekend if you chose to do so, but at school you were required to pay attention to pass the time, besides daydreaming, doodling or passing notes. Our grandparents had very few of these distractions even well into their adulthood and learned to work hard to develop their personalities, reputations and the skills they would require in their chosen career. It is the constant access to entertainment, endless social media, or communication with peers that is really undermining much of what classrooms are attempting to teach and having future citizens learn. We must not promote more screen-time but meaningful use of the time spent with technology, and an understanding of the limits we should place on ourselves for sedentary learning, entertainment and hands-on experiences and recreation.

Furthermore, the smartphones and similar devices (and the network or wifi necessary for them to function) are not always accessible to all students equally. So even if we could have students use their devices primarily for learning in the classroom and outside the school, this would support an educational disadvantage to those with no or less access to the technology. This is called the [digital divide](#) as some can afford to keep up with technology and others cannot. Schools however should be able to at least lessen this unfairness, by providing communal access to technology when needed and internet access for all.

OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunity for using handheld devices in high school, or BYOD as Alec Couros speaks of, has an infinite potential to increase student engagement, learning, skills (technological, academic, practical), inter-connectedness and ability to learn well beyond the classroom. Even just the ability to video record lessons and provide them to students away from class or in online environments is a significant change from the traditional classroom model. In the upside down classroom model “students gain content knowledge at home through audio, video and text, so that more class time can be devoted to discussion, exploration and experimentation.” (Edutopia.org “The Flipped Mobile Classroom: Learning "Upside Down"” By Beth Holland October 30, 2013). For what one desktop computer once cost, five students can now have access to technology, which can do more, faster and better than computers even a short time ago could. The ability to use phones strategically and meaningfully, would really be a positive influence in schools and classrooms, providing access to information (although it must be viewed through a critical lense of online media), many useful educational tools (photography, videography, graphing, assessment and feedback, etc.) and a high degree of teacher- student – classmate interconnectedness.

THREATS

The three largest threats to the positive influence of hand held device use in school, in my opinion, are the support of corporate interests, rampant un-adulterated student use for non-educational purposes and the effects of increased screen time. Students learning only what is provided through browsers (Google, Safari / Apple, Explorer, Yahoo etc.) or Social Media (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.) can lead to a very skewed view of information and what is

actually happening in society, as media has been consistently used over the years as a tool for propaganda, from Nazi Germany to modern speech and mannerisms or support of profits for companies. The sphere of influence of very large companies should not be under-estimated when promoting the use of devices in schools. Fortunately, students are already being exposed to these influences whether they understand this or not, so educating them to be critical of the underlying structure of profit and influence behind their digital lives will likely only be of benefit to their overall understanding of using personal devices responsibly.

Secondly, the problem the students using devices for non-school purposes is quite a real problem currently in the classroom. In educating students, teachers and administration about ways to curb this use to be more purposeful and educational we can hopefully confront the issue and start to improve the current state of affairs.

Lastly, the side effects of increased screen time seem to be very real in our society as we see an ever increasing addiction to use of devices, gaming, online media and streaming video. We must educate students and parents about the harmful effects of screen time before [human attention spans](#) , the [effects of technology on face-to-face communication](#), and [ability to problem-solve individually](#) decline significantly more than has already happened to many people. The real threat, in my opinion, is not confronting the issue of devices and technology at all and maintaining a “laissez faire” attitude to the changes that portable devices create. We must willfully harness the benefits of technology and educate youth (and even adults) on the negative effects of the same technology in our public institutions.

PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO IMPLEMENT

The change that I am proposing to implement is to develop an educational / interactive presentation to be presented to Advisory groups (large presentation to each grade in our school Auditorium and activities for Advisory Teachers to continue the discussion) in the form of one Google Slide presentation (for myself and Advisory teachers to use) with video links, interactive time calculations, probing discussions questions and insight into positive and negative effects of hand-held devices in the classroom, school and home. This presentation will be promoting responsible use of smartphones in classrooms and the school (to be presented in larger grade groups by myself). I would like to lead this change by developing the presentation, finding and creating resources, presenting to grade groups (4 groups – 9, 10, 11, 12 or 2 groups – 9's & 10's then 11's and 12's) in our Auditorium, and sharing the Google Slide presentation and materials with staff to promote thought and discussion in Advisory classes (occurring 15 minutes each school day). I will also make this resource available to the Division as a whole, if any other administrators or teachers are wishing to make use of them in their school with their student body.

Lastly, I will also be attempting to lead by example by implementing classroom strategies to curb use of smartphones in the classroom, especially focusing on students who are missing assignments or showing irresponsible use of their devices. I will be clearly outlining my expectations of phone use in my classes and woodshop and having tiered consequences for non-adherence to these expectations, from warnings, private discussions, a phone locker in the classroom and even confiscation if necessary. In the end I will provide all the resources I produce for my presentation and a detailed reflection of how the project went from a personal

standpoint, teacher feedback, student feedback, school wide influence and any larger arenas it may influence in the Division or other schools.

RATIONAL FOR CHANGE

My rationale for wanting to implement this change has to do with the fact that I feel it is one of the most significant factors influencing our students in and out of the classroom today. It seems that many families have not set specific boundaries or knowledge of the down-sides of using technology consistently. Therefore, I feel it is important for schools and teachers to work with youth to help them, help themselves in using their devices responsibly and to their educational benefit, as opposed to continued addictive behaviour in students using phones without pause or understanding. Lastly, as one of four Core Leaders in the school, I believe my influence in focussing on responsible smartphone use in the school will have an impact on all teachers and students. Many teachers are not happy with the status quo, and are looking for ways to confront this issue, this initiative will hopefully be a seed, for much larger growth and discussion in developing student engagement through responsible use and guidelines of personal devices in the classroom and school community. Much like the sexual health, drunk driving or anti-drug initiatives started many years ago and continuing today, that had a significant impact on the attitudes around these potential harmful activities, we, as educators, are responsible to confront this technological issue for the benefit of the larger society and the youth that embrace it to their benefit or detriment.