

News 14 - Phones Can Be Powerful Tools



by Alicia Lopez Oyhenart

Last month I had the opportunity to speak with colleagues interested in using cell phones to enhance teaching and learning in schools with a 21st century education focus. The question we discussed was, "**How can a school harness the power of tools that students already use and own (like cells)?**" This question is asked in the face of challenges including:

- Students are banned from bringing mobile devices to school
- Cells have a bad reputation as a distraction rather than an educational tool
- There are few well known and documented examples of cell phones being used to enhance teaching and learning
- Many teachers are not comfortable with classroom management issues that exist when students have cell phones in class

Despite the challenges, we came up with some smart ideas for beginning to incorporate these tools into teaching and learning in meaningful ways. The first thing to acknowledge is that while students in some schools are banned from using mobile technologies at school, teachers are not. This means that teachers have multiple opportunities to model and demonstrate best practices to students.

The next thing to acknowledge is that few teachers have ever used cell phones or other mobile technologies as instructional tools so they need to develop comfort and experience doing so before trying to do this with their students.

Next is that a great way to get students started in using cells as an educational tool can be by incorporating them into their homework.

This takes away two of the basic challenges: 1) Overcoming the ban obstacle. 2) Overcoming possible teacher discomfort with classroom management issues around cell phones.

I am planning to devote part of my next weeks to research and study the possibility of using these devices, to find out what experiences have already been carried out and to determine how possible it will be to implement the use of cell phones in the local school situation.

I plan to incorporate the subject to the TELL Section of the next 2010 PPD Programme to be held in Belgrano, CABA next April 9-10