



Why Wait for Superman?

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's—well, actually—why wait? Simply grab your cell and give him a call right now.

The latest documentary

to hit the theaters, *“Waiting for Superman,”* suggests that the public school system here in America is broken and it needs to change. Yet, there's an inherent assumption, or even a blatant suggestion almost—that we are or should be *waiting*. I'm not waiting. Why wait?

There's plenty that we ourselves can do.

According to Harris Interactive, four out of five teens (17 million) carry a wireless device (a 40 percent increase since 2004). Of all of those teens who are carrying a cell phone, by the end of next year, more than half of them will be carrying a smartphone. Nielsen also estimates that the amount of data usage by smartphone users has tripled in one year and the data usage is expected to go nowhere but up. Within the next year or so, these smartphones will include devices such as Apple's iPhone, iPad; Blackberry's Playbook, Dell's Streak, and the multiple phone makers



CREDIT: Paramount Vantage

who will run Google's Android or Symbian Foundation's Symbian operating systems.

In our schools, use of a cell phone is both unheard of and unwelcome. School policies are calling for complete bans of cell phones in school and for great reasons: texting, sexting, cheating, safety and distractions are all reasons officials cite for the need to block the use of cell phones in school. Increasingly, children these days are texting, sending pictures taken on phones and communicating with others in ways never done before. As with any new technology, the tool can be a distraction. Therefore, in an effort to avoid these distractions, many schools have added to their school policies that cell

phones are not allowed in school or that students need to be checking them in at the door. If this policy is not followed, students run the risk of having their cell phone taken away.

Imagine teaching a lesson, and a student has forgotten to shut off their ringer and the cell phone goes off. Or how about a fight occurring in school and students videoing it only to post it on YouTube seconds after it happens? Better yet, how about posting one student's transgressions of poor sexual behavior to broadcast not just around school—but for a worldwide audience and, depending if it's viral material, for a worldwide audience of hundreds of thousands, or

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even millions of viewers? Or more simply, how about the answers to a teacher's test being shared via text message with everyone else in the room? Students have been known to steal these devices in order to have the best "status symbol" as their possession. What about the dangers of an unforeseen school emergency where rescue efforts are hampered by students calling home or alerting loved one that they are okay, only to find out their cell phone use resulted in a networked so strained that

emergency calls were not able to go through? As some teachers will tell you, cell phones in the classroom are just plain distracting.

Let me tell you this, though: according to a poll conducted online at Helium, of the 8,259 people who voted when asked if students should have cell phones at school, 66 percent of them said yes. I am a teacher and I have seen these issues in my school—but, ironically, if I would have had an opportunity to vote, I'd have voted yes, too. Let me tell you why.

As I stated before, new technology can be intimidating and it can be distracting. We can either ask the student to put the distraction away—or we can address it and move on. Students are carrying around the technology which we the teachers are screaming to have in our classroom on a daily basis.

I argue, let's not ask them to put the cell phone away. Instead, let's ask them to take



it out. Let's ask them to call someone and get an answer to the question. Let's ask them to text someone in another country to learn more about that person and their culture. Let's let them use it to create a podcast of their field trip as they are on it. Let's ask them to send us a picture of something they are learning about. Ask them to text you what they think the answer to your question is. Wouldn't the cell phone make a great student response system? Why buy one for every student if more than half of them will have one in the next year? Forget about the possibility of using that cell phone for geocaching or surfing the net. Imagine the power of more than half of your students with their own computer in each of their hands. Folks, this isn't science fiction. It's a reality now.

We need to rethink education and learning all the way down to its core. Is it really cheating if a student doesn't know the answer but knows where to get it? Would I be a failure at my job if I didn't know the answer to something and just said, "Oh, well." Or, would I go ask

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someone who did know, and then look brilliant? Don't you think we can find ways to overcome all of the cons to using cell phones in the classroom and instead focus on the pros?

Let's not sit around and wait for Superman, let's pick up that cell phone and give him a call. How much could it hurt?

Greg Limperis is a Middle School Technology Facilitator in Lawrence, Mass., who founded the very popular Technology Integration in Education professional learning network, reaching thousands of educators worldwide. He has shared with others what he knows and they have joined him in sharing their insights as well. Join them in bringing about change using your 21st century skills.

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