

# Help Your Child Learn with Mobile Phones and Web 2.0



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# Introduction

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In today's technological world, children communicate and interact with their teachers, peers and parents through a variety of digital devices, including mobile phones (feature phones and smartphones), computers, Windows 8 devices, tablets, e-readers, iPads and iPods, to name just a few. Of these, mobile phones are by far the most common and accessible devices. They are quickly becoming an integral part of a child's social life, and anything that takes up so much time and interest certainly deserves scrutiny.

In the 21st century, part of a parent's role is to help their child navigate and stay safe in a world overflowing with technology and information. This book is full of resources, tips and ideas on how to model effective, safe, productive and appropriate mobile phone use. The first mobile phone that children usually receive is a fairly basic phone (often called a feature phone) with limited features. This book focuses mostly on activities that can be done on any mobile phone (feature phone or smartphone). There are a few activities that do require a smartphone, but even most of those activities can be done with an iPod Touch or iPad (such as the QR code activities). If you are able to model and help your children understand mobile safety and appropriate use from the very first day they use a mobile phone, there is a better chance that they will view their phone as a productive and valuable tool in their life. In addition there is a greater chance that they will have fewer problems with mobile safety issues during their lifetime.

The convenience of mobile phones makes them a natural tool for professional activities. Finding useful ways to integrate these devices as tools for knowledge construction, data collection and collaborative communication provides opportunities for children to become more competitive in the digital world. In this book I have gathered and presented resources that provide examples for using mobile phones as learning tools in hopes that parents might find these resources useful and worth exploring.

Resources in this book that require a smartphone have this symbol:



Resources with  
age restrictions  
have this symbol:

AGE

This book emphasises learning activities for children ages 10–17. However, many of the ideas, activities and extension suggestions presented could easily be adapted as learning tools for younger children and those 18 and older.

This book is for parents or anyone interested in using mobile phones as learning tools. Although it is important to be familiar with various technologies, such as podcasting and blogging, parents don't need to be experts. Included are dozens of activities, along with ideas for extending or altering the activities to best match you and your child's interests and abilities.

This book incorporates materials from *Toys to Tools: Connecting Student Mobile Phones to Education* and *Mobile Phones in the Classroom: A Practical Guide for Educators*, both peer-reviewed books written for professional educators. In this book, I've modified the lessons into activities and presented the material in a simplified manner, appropriate for parents and others looking to help youth learn with tools that are part of their everyday lives.

Although the emphasis of the activities is on mobile phones and encouraging children to view and use them as learning tools, it is important to note that children should be allowed to choose and use a variety of tools. For many of the activities you'll set up, access to a home computer is also highly recommended. Likewise, children should also be encouraged to participate and complete the activities using their creativity. Don't worry if kids "do it wrong" – the idea is for them to learn and have fun!

You certainly can read this book from cover to cover, but it may be more useful to pick and choose activities or topics. Most of these activities can stand on their own and can easily be modified to suit your child's age and knowledge level. Some activities can also be modified to suit various learning topics. These activities are intended as a starting place for helping parents who want to help their children harness the power of their mobile phones.

It is extremely important to understand that you, as a parent, don't need to know everything! If your maths is a little rusty, you can grab your child's textbook or

maths workbook and “borrow” some problems to use in the activities. In fact, even if you’re a maths wiz, it is a good idea to make sure the challenges you set up in the activities are neither too hard nor too easy.






For other activities, such as setting up a scavenger hunt in your local community, you may find your local library, museum or other business invaluable in offering ideas. Of course, family, other parents and your child’s teacher can be great resources. Inevitably, in the process of helping your child, you’re sure to find yourself learning more than you expect!

Recognising that everyone has a different comfort level with technology, the learning activities range from the intuitive (mobile phone basics) to the more complex (downloading mobile phone audio or photo files to use with audio editors, image editors and video-editing software).

Although every effort has been made to ensure the links and resources mentioned are up to date, the Internet, and Web 2.0 tools in particular, are very volatile. If a website or application should close down or otherwise become unavailable, you can generally find a similar resource through a quick Internet search.

Web 2.0 is the read-and-write web. At Web 2.0 websites, a user can interact with and modify a web page, whereas a user can only read a Web 1.0 web page.

Here is a key to the Web 2.0 resource icons found in Chapters 3 and 4:

	Free
	Free and paid versions
	Paid version only
	Smartphone with Internet connectivity (wi-fi, 3G or 4G) in order to use this resource properly
	Age stipulations (for example, at least age 13 for a Facebook account)

Many of the web resources are inexpensive or free, and most of the activities don't require advanced smartphones or unlimited data plans. However, you'll want to ensure that the activities align with your specific phone capabilities and plans. There are usually alternatives to the methods and apps used in the activities that may fit your circumstances. Some resources have age stipulations. For instance, Facebook and Instagram specify users should be at least 13 years old to have an account and others will allow you, the adult, to agree to the terms of use but do not allow minors to do so. Please consult the terms of use of any resource you and your child use.

Ultimately, the goal of this book is to encourage you to introduce mobile phones to your children as potential learning tools and lifelong professional tools. Perhaps more importantly, the goal is to demonstrate that learning can be fun and is something children can do anywhere and at any time.

## CHAPTER

# 1

# Mobile Phones as Learning Tools

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Although the media often emphasise the reasons why educators do not or should not consider mobile phones as learning tools in the school environment, it is important to contemplate the other side of the argument, why educators (and parent-educators) *should* consider mobile phones as learning tools. This chapter focuses on the potential learning benefits of using mobile phones, as well as briefly describing the research in literacy education, learning technologies and youth studies that supports the use of mobile phones as learning tools. Concerns such as mobile phone etiquette, safety and appropriate use are also addressed in this chapter.



## Harnessing Youth Culture

Today's youth has been called the M-generation because of adolescents' ability to multi-task with a variety of media devices and communication methods at one time, such as talking on the mobile phone, instant messaging and writing an essay all at once. Today's youth are the first generation to grow up with interactive media; they want to share knowledge with each other. This M-generation has developed its own culture and society beyond school, often using Web 2.0 sites to create, share and foster knowledge together. Studies show that gaming, instant messaging, texting, emailing and accessing personal websites are the leading activities for children's non-schoolwork use of technology. In earlier writings (Kolb, 2009, *Toys to Tools*, and 2012, *Mobile Phones in the Classroom*), I pointed to some studies that show nearly two-thirds of today's youth have created content that they have posted online.

A study of 1500 students from ages 10 to 17 found that, during the summer, kids spend an average of 3 hours and 45 minutes using their mobile phones each day (Disney Mobile Survey, 2007). Interestingly, one-third of survey respondents said they would rather give up video games, radio or a trip to the shopping centre before parting with their mobile phone. One-fifth said they would rather give up television than their mobile phone. This ubiquitous use of mobile phones by youth is the exact reason why mobile phones are a great tool for learning – children enjoy using mobile phones and are highly motivated to interact with them. Additionally, most kids have their mobile phone with them at all times, which encourages opportunities for learning any time, at any place.

Children are growing up in a rapidly changing technology-driven society where they are developing their own methods for using mobile phones and the web as communication devices. As parents and educators we can adapt these everyday gadgets to create educational activities so children can learn to use them as technologies for knowledge construction. It is also critical that we recognise that these are their tools – we need to allow kids, with guidance, to use these digital devices in the manner and in the ways that work best for them.

## Outings and Assigned Activities

Assigning mobile phone activities for children to take part in while on outings (excursions) provides many opportunities for them to use their mobile phones as learning tools. Kids can take photos, capture video or record audio and post their data to any number of Web 2.0 sites, such as **Google Keep, ipadio, Yodio, Hipcast, Blogger, Flickr, Tumblr, Photobucket** or **Imgur**. Children can log on to their accounts for these websites and upload their data to use in projects. They can also take advantage of many online editing and posting tools on Web 2.0 sites to further develop videos, create slideshows, design blogs or perform other activities with their audio and image recordings.

What better way to document learning activities than to have kids create a podcast with ipadio about what they learned during a excursion? In addition, with the help of resources like **Pix2Fone**, kids can take photos of their excursion experiences or activities and create wallpaper that they send to other kids' mobile phones. Kids can also create and publish weekly broadcasts of their activities.

Parents (or instructors) could use web-based polling or survey tools, such as **Poll Everywhere, MobiOde** or **Celly** to create mobile polls that children participate in during excursions. For example, kids could search for answers to polling questions during the excursion, or they could ask experts for advice at the excursion destination (such as the museum tour guide), then text message their answer to the poll.

Children could also go on a scavenger hunt and answer questions by using mobile phone bar codes (also known as Quick Response codes, or QR codes). Parents can develop the questions by using a website such as **polltogo**, and children can take photos of various QR codes at the excursion site and do their best to find answers to the polling questions. (QR codes are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.) Another way for kids to document what they are learning on a excursion is to have them text message their new knowledge to a Poll Everywhere board, which can be shared online following the excursion.

A fun and educational excursion for younger-aged primary kids could be to visit a farm or zoo and observe as parents or instructors record animal sounds using Google Keep, Yodio or Hipcast. Parents should set up these accounts for children

under 13. When children return from the excursion, parents can download the audio and let kids try to identify the sounds they are hearing.

## KWLs

The KWL technique is a three-step learning method (what I *know*, what I *want* to know and what I *learned*) that fosters understanding, active participation, interest, and overall comprehension and retention. The technique involves asking learners to first consider what they already know about a subject before they read the material, followed by asking them to consider what they want to learn about the subject from the reading and then summarising what they learned from the reading. Typically, the KWL technique is used in pairs or small groups.

Parents can use Web 2.0 resources such as **Celly** to apply the KWL technique and find out what kids already know about a topic they are planning to cover. Parents can ask kids to text what they know about the upcoming area of study to a Celly CELL (that parents set up), then lead a discussion after the ideas have been posted. Parents can also use Web 2.0 polling resources such as **Poll Everywhere** to find out what children already know. For example, parents can set up a poll question about an upcoming topic, such as a multiple-choice question for the definition of gravity, and children could use their mobile phone to vote on which definition they think is correct. The instant voting results could then be projected in front of the group. Kids could turn to their neighbour and describe why they voted for their definition. After a few minutes of discussion, the kids could vote again with their mobile phone to see if anyone's answers had changed as a result of the discussion with their peers.

Another way to integrate KWL is for parents or instructors to send out a mass text alert (from **Celly**, **Sendhub** or **Pulse.to**) to many children and ask them some "What do you know?" questions. The answers kids post could be used to start a discussion the next day! After the activity parents could send another mass text message asking "What did you learn?" Using these features of mobile phones can help children feel part of a larger learning community, even if they are studying without other kids physically with them.