



BYOD | Viewpoint

## 7 Myths About BYOD Debunked

Lisa Nielsen, the author of "Teaching Generation Text: Using Cell Phones to Enhance Learning" and "The Innovative Educator" blog, believes it is time to shatter a few myths about students bringing their own devices (BYOD) to school.

- By Lisa Nielsen
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More than a decade into the 21st century and we are still keeping learners and teachers prisoners of the analog past by enforcing outdated mandates that ban and block them from using the digital resources of their world.

Fortunately, [today's students are standing up, speaking out](#), and, in many cases, using the technology and websites they do not have access to in school to do so. It's time to listen to the students (and many of their parents and teachers) and shed light on misconceptions by dispelling common myths about bringing your own device (BYOD) to school. When we do, we can begin to move past the ignorance and toward breaking the ban.

### **Myth No. 1: BYOD deepens the digital divide.**

The digital divide exists whether we allow students to bring the devices they own to school or not. It is illogical to prohibit those students who have devices from using them in a desire to achieve a sense of equity rather than to [provide devices for those who need them](#). Tim Clark, district instructional technology specialist with **Forsyth County Schools** (GA), explains that [in his experience with BYOD](#), "Students who do not have personal technology devices have greater access to school-owned technology tools when students who bring their own devices to school are no longer competing for that access."

### **Myth No. 2: BYOD will result in lessons geared toward the weakest device.**

In his blog post, "[BYOD--The Worst Idea of the Century?](#)" Gary Stager asserts that BYOD diminishes the otherwise enormous potential of educational computing to the weakest "device" in the room. Teachers who have worked in successful BYOD environments know that Stager is wrong. While teachers may know that cell phones can be used as tools to read a book, write an article, or serve as a [free student response system](#), they may not realize they can be used as tools that enable students [to create podcasts](#) or [digital books](#). The shift in a BYOD school is for teachers and students to come together to discuss and discover the limitless possibilities that a tech-rich environment provides, and then work together to think about how to best pursue learning goals.

**Myth No. 3: BYOD will cause students to be distracted.**

Teachers across the globe are finding that with the right strategies and building blocks in place, learners are much more engaged in connected classrooms. [Strategies include incorporating technology](#) into learning plans and updating learning goals to meet the needs of today's students. [Building blocks](#) include working with students to determine responsible use policies, permissions, holding one another accountable for inappropriate use, and having clear consequences in place. Teachers that put the right strategies and building blocks in place report a dramatic decrease in discipline and behavior issues. As students discover how to learn with their devices, they are able to extend their learning beyond the school day and often choose to continue participating in online discussions and collaborative activities for academic purposes. This advantage encourages them to become more self-directed, motivated, and reflective about their learning.

**Myth No. 4: Teachers need to become experts in all the technology students own.**

Recently, in response to an [article describing ways to support students in BYOD](#), a reader who goes by [WAHS SBTS](#) made this comment: "I am a technology resource teacher. A lot of teachers are very nervous and technology resource teachers a little nervous about being expected to be literate in using a wide variety of platforms we have never even seen. To just say that students are expected to provide their own support is a little naive."

Clark explains how it works in his district and others. If teachers are introducing an activity with school software or hardware, then they are expected to know how everything works. Because of this learning curve, teachers resort to focusing on one process and one product. When the students bring in their own devices, then they are now the experts on the technology, and they can help each other. The teacher is then able to focus on the educational uses of the technology.

**Myth No. 5: BYOD will result in students engaging in dangerous activities.**

Our students are living in a digital world with ubiquitous access to technology. Not only is trying to ban kids from connecting digitally a futile effort, it also doesn't prepare them for the digital world in which they live. "Without BYOD, at the end of each school day, students leave school and immediately turn on their devices and explore the web, often unsupervised," explains Clark. "By banning devices, we close the door to authentic dialogue of how to use technology appropriately and prevent students from developing strategies for internet safety."

Instead of banning and blocking, schools need to work with students to create responsible digital citizens and have necessary consequences in place when there are violations, just as is the case in real life. When we address the problem, rather than blame the tools, we move toward creating responsible students.

**Myth No. 6: Cell phones are not that powerful, so we should not waste our time with them.**

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project's February 2010 study, "[Teens and Social Media](#)," 74 percent of American teens have a high-speed internet-connected computer at home, but 93 percent of American teens say they go online. That same report states that 41 percent of teens whose family income is less than \$30,000 go online using

their phones. That number drops to the 20-percent range for higher-income brackets.

Clearly, students are bridging the connectivity divide with portable devices like cell phones and MP3 players. Kids with computers at home are taught how to use them in school. Kids who connect to the internet on phones because they can't afford computers are not.

**Myth No. 7: BYOD will necessitate the standardization of apps and software across all devices.**

Students are not widgets and don't have to use the same tools and do things in the same way. When teachers work with students to understand learning goals, [they challenge students with ways to meet them](#), which enables real learning to take place. [Michelle Luhtala, a librarian at New Canaan High School](#) (CT) says [teachers at her school are often surprised by which devices kids choose](#) to use and how they use them. She explains that when they let them explore, discover, and create, they meet learning goals in ways that teachers and administrators never realized were possible. Students enjoy the opportunity to choose to use their own devices because they have customized them to their personalized needs and interests instead of being standardized.

Schools can no longer be the last place to catch up to the present. While policymakers debate if students deserve the right to learn with the very tools they rely on for success each day, our students are being left unprepared for their futures. It's time that students, their parents, and educators who know better, rise up and take a stand to ensure our students are armed with the tools they'll need to succeed in the modern workplace.

So how can schools get started? As the administration, staff, and, hopefully, parents consider BYOD, it is essential that they revisit the vision and core values of their schools and engage their faculty in discussions about how today's students learn and how the devices they own might support that learning. This should include discussions surrounding sound pedagogy that engages students, fosters creative thinking and problem solving, and honors personal passion.

Books like "[Teaching Generation Text](#)" provide a useful framework for schools with information, easy-to-follow professional development workshops, concrete advice (like its [seven building blocks for success](#) and [plan to break the ban](#)), and ideas for incorporating student-owned devices into research-based lessons that empower students to learn with their technology. Such resources provide the right support for school leaders, teachers, and parents to partner with students for successful learning outcomes.

#### About the Author

Lisa Nielsen is the author of [Teaching Generation Text: Using Cell Phones to Enhance Learning](#) and [The Innovative Educator blog](#).

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