Mobile Phone Polling

Ms. Gurney teaches in a middle school that recently began allowing students to use mobile phones in the classroom. She believes it is important for students to be able to discuss topics and ask questions openly. However, when her courses deal with sensitive topics, lessons can be inhibited by student anxiety about responses of peers or teachers to their comments or questions. Ms. Gurney has been exploring mobile phone polling as a strategy to bring anonymous open discourse into her lessons. The following example is from a 7th grade lesson on ethical use of social media sites.

Before beginning the lesson, Ms. Gurney outlines guidelines for making the mobile phone polling successful. Student responses will be completely anonymous. While Ms. Gurney can block inappropriate submissions, she reminds students to never use names and to be respectful of the discussion.

Ms. Gurney begins the lesson with a simple poll question, “Do you have a Facebook account?” Students use mobile phones to submit answers via a smartphone app or text messages. Because the responses are anonymous, she has faith in the validity of student responses. The results are displayed with a projector for the class to see.

Ms. Gurney then asks students an open-ended question about why students use social networking sites. Once again, students submit their answers using their mobile phones and responses are visible for the entire class to see. Many mention social media as being a natural and fun way to communicate with their peers anyplace and anytime. A few students even mention enjoying learning experiences from other classrooms that involved social media. Seeing the variety of responses appear on the screen encourages an oral discussion about the benefits of social media and how it should possibly be used more in education settings.

Ms. Gurney then asks students if they have ever seen examples of hurtful or inappropriate use of social media. The anonymity of mobile phone polling allows students to share anecdotal stories including some personal accounts of being the victims of cyber bullying. The technology teacher uses this response stream to demonstrate the importance of ethical use of social media to students. Seeing the viewpoints of their peers that may not have otherwise been shared makes online responsibility real to the class.

Ms. Gurney sees tremendous value in using mobile phones as polling tools. In the past, discussions in her classes involving sensitive content tended to be reserved and student participation was lower. With mobile phones, students are able to share and discuss their opinions about sensitive topics openly.

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