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### Dial-a-Class

By ELIZABETH GREEN  
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For the past few years, Andreas Haralambou has performed the same ritual. "Can I have a cellphone?" he asks his dad. "When you're older," his dad says.



Tom Rowe

"Every year I ask him, because I get older every year," Andreas, now 11 and still cellphoneless, said the other day.

If Andreas had one, he could keep a virtual pet alien with the Furdiburb app, play the video game Doodle Jump and not get bored when his friends ignore him to watch videos on YouTube.

None of this persuades his father, George. "It's distracting; it's a diversion," Haralambou, a physician, said by land line, summing up the universal parent perspective. "He needs to be concentrating on his schoolwork."

But for one week this summer, at a free camp held at the New York Hall of Science in Queens, Andreas added an extra argument to his arsenal: maybe cellphones can be schoolwork. At the camp, Andreas and other children used

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Nexus One smartphones, and with the help of probes that zipped bluetooth signals to the phones, the children tested the air for carbon monoxide, particulate matter and noise pollution. Andreas's job was to use his phone to measure contaminants from idling buses and vans. (New York City requires drivers to turn off their engines when they stop for any significant period near a school.) Andreas and his team found buses idling for as long as 14 minutes.

The project was part of an experiment by the New Youth City Learning Network, which takes as a premise that most children already exist in a digital world. The network is strongly interested in mobile devices: "Anytime-anywhere-anyhow learning" is how its co-founder, Diana Rhoten, describes it. "You can't do that stuck to your desktop."

Other new mobile applications include a tool called NOAH that lets you take cellphone pictures of bugs and trees and then sends back an identification of the exact type in as little as 24 hours and one that provides a similar service for historical landmarks, a result of a partnership between the History Channel and Foursquare.

In a group of villages in rural India, meanwhile, the Digital Study Hall uses mobile phones to create a community among isolated schoolteachers. About three times a week, a group of 80 teachers checks in to a phone network to discuss everything from what to do with children who never speak to the challenge of young girls' dropping out when they are married off. The students sometimes use the network, too. They recently held a singing competition, a debate and an elocution contest. All on their cellphones.

*This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

#### Correction: September 20, 2010

An earlier version of this article misstated the substance that children were using their cellphones to test the air for. It was carbon monoxide, not dioxide.

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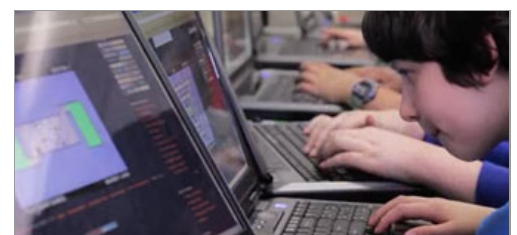
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