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**Learning through Social Issues**

Many students have recently been using, and talking about, the most popular social media application designed for smartphones and tablets. The application has become very popular as it allows the users to text their friends and family, take and edit videos and photos as well as sharing them. The editor of the newspaper has asked you to write a report on this new application.

**WhatsApp: Social tool or school problem?**

Recent **surveys** suggest 90% of secondary school students in Hong Kong own at least a smartphone or tablet computer. If you are a secondary school student, it is very likely that you own one or the other, and if you are one of those students it is also very likely that you are using WhatsApp. However, is WhatsApp simply a great social tool that allows young people to connect with each other, or is it a problem for schools that gets in the way of classes?

WhatsApp is now one of the most popular **social networking tools** in the world. In fact, it was the most popular app that the young people use on their smartphones or tablets. WhatsApp is a social networking **application** that allows users to send messages over the Internet, much like SMS text messages, but without any **additional** **cost** to the user. It also has the advantage of easily allowing users to create groups and to send pictures, videos and voice messages. WhatsApp is popular with young people because it makes it very easy for them to **connect**, communicate and share things with each other. One Hong Kong secondary student said, ‘It’s really expensive to send photos through a text message, and I don’t have very much money, so I use WhatsApp,’ Also, young people like to share things, not only with one friend, but also with groups, to increase the **impact** of their comments, jokes and videos. Another student said, ‘It’s a lot easier to talk to your friends when you can talk to ten at the same time. It’s like you are all in the same room.’

However, there is no denying that schools don’t agree with these students. The principal of one school said, ‘Smartphones must be switched off during school hours, but in reality students use their phones throughout the school day, and social networking apps are **addictive** to young people.

One history teacher was more **specific**, ‘Since my students started using WhatsApp, many of them try to use their phones in class all the time. I tell them to put them away, but the moment my back is turned, all the phones come out again.’

One **statement** from a maths teacher summed up the **issue**, ‘It’s not the phone or the app that’s the problem, it’s the young person who brings the phone into school, and it’s our job, as teachers, to teach them the importance of not using them during lessons. ‘

So, as great as social networking apps can be, it is important for students to realize that there is an **appropriate** time and place to use these apps, and that is not during school hours or in the classroom.