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C225

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Research Topic

The topic of my research is the use of cell phones in the classroom. I am curious to see whether the trend is more toward forbidding the use of phones or the encouragement of it for academic purposes.

Literature Search

For my literature search I began with the question of whether cell phone use in the classroom should be banned or accepted. I focused on ESL classrooms with adult learners where I could, given that this is the environment I am working in. I found there was not enough research in that area for a full treatment of the topic, so I later expanded the search to other classroom environments as well.

Key Words

The key words used in this search included:

Cell phone use in ESL classrooms, school cell phone policy, cell phone etiquette, student and teacher perceptions of cell phone use in the classroom, Adult learning, mobile learning.

Additional Key Words

e-learning, m-learning.

Useful Keywords

Cell phone use in the classroom, school cell phone policy, teaching of cell phone etiquette

Annotated Bibliography

Ali, A. I. (2013). Etiquette, E-Etiquette and Cell Phone Use in the Classroom. *Issues in Information Systems*, 14(2), 452.

In this paper published in the refereed journal *Issues in Information Systems* the author elaborates on the idea of teaching the etiquette of using cell phones in the classroom. In his words. “Initial efforts to deal with cell phone use in the classroom focused on banning their use all together. Subsequent surge in the use of cell phones made this proposal impractical and often impossible to enforce.” (Ali, 2013) He begins with a discussion of what appropriate and inappropriate use of cell phones in class is, followed by the expression of his belief that E-etiquette is something that must be taught and must exist if we are to expect students to adhere to cell phone usage policies. He also proposes presenting a clear indication to students of what is and isn’t appropriate use in your classroom. In other words, you might inform students that texting is not allowed, but research or Google searches are and that inappropriate use will not be tolerated.

I think this author’s approach is more in line with the “fairness” students have grown to expect, while keeping in mind the “rules” administrators want to see enforced. His idea of teaching cell phone etiquette seems like common sense to me. He didn’t however, make clear how well this practice has been working for him. Better examples of his success might have been a bit more convincing.

Baker, W. M., Lusk, E. J., & Neuhauser, K. L. (2012). On the Use of Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices in the Classroom: Evidence From a Survey of Faculty and Students. *Journal of Education for Business*, 87(5), 275–289.

This peer-reviewed study published in the *Journal of Education for Business* compared the perceptions of students and faculty concerning the use of electronic devices including computers, mp3 players, and cell phones. The authors started with a literature review and discussion of previous findings. This was followed by a study consisted of an eight-page survey consisting of 55 questions of which they received 978 responses from 882 students and 96 faculty members, the results of which were coded and reported on.

The findings of this study indicated that “In almost every instance, faculty perceptions differed from student perceptions, with students believing that use of electronic devices is more appropriate, and less disruptive, than did faculty members” and “strong behavioral differences exist between students and faculty.” (Baker, 2012) The Authors’ final conclusion was that the:

“baby-boomer professors of today must find a way to peacefully coexist with their millennial students who have fully embraced the technologies that boomers created for them. Therefore, it is incumbent on instructors, and designers of the classroom environment, to adapt to these technologies in so far as possible and to deliver courses in away that reflects these oftentimes conflicting views concerning the use and usefulness of these technologies.” (Baker, 2012)

In other words, the digital immigrants (teachers) just need to learn to deal with the fact that Millennials depend on their phones much more than we think they should. Quite a few of the papers I have read on this topic have proposed the same or similar ideas, but this study presents some pretty solid research and quantifiable numbers. I would say that

the problem has been identified, and as the authors of this study concluded it would be best if we find productive ways to use technology to our students' advantage.

Begum, R. (2011). Prospect for Cell Phones as Instructional Tools in the EFL Classroom: A Case Study of Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh. *English Language Teaching*, 4(1), 105–115.

This peer-reviewed case study published in the journal *English Language Teaching* investigated the potentiality of cell phone use in the EFL classroom of Bangladesh as an instructional tool. Their primary technique involved delivering content to 100 ESL students via cell phone SMS and then evaluating its effectiveness via questionnaires for students, teachers' interview and classroom observation.

The findings in this study were mixed, though generally positive. The benefits listed far outweighed the challenges. The authors recommendation was that certain barriers needed to be removed for more effectiveness including the cost of this type of delivery (both in phones and in teacher training), the small screen size and lack of a suitable keyboard on most phones, the need for a change in social value, implementing rules for mobile use in the classroom, necessity of charging batteries, and a need to update policy.

While this case study focused more on meeting the needs of an under-served population in Bangladesh, the study content could very easily be applied in classrooms world-wide. The authors expressed many of the same concerns that other literature I have reviewed here such as cell phone distraction and the possibility of cheating, but they seemed more optimistic especially where distance education and education delivery in

developing nations by cell phone might be beneficial. I could easily see myself quoting the list of benefits presented in this this paper in the future in my own organization.

Benham, H., & Carvalho, G. (2016). Faculty Perceptions on Student Use of Mobile Technology in the Classroom. *Issues in Information Systems*, 17(2), 82.

In this paper published in the refereed journal *Issues in Information Systems* the authors examined the factors underlying faculty adoption of student in-class use of mobile-computing technologies. In the study the faculty survey measured Perceived Usefulness, Enjoyment, Anxiety, Self-Efficacy, Tablet Playfulness, and Locus of Control as relevant to mobile devices. Perceived Usefulness and Enjoyment were found to have significant positive impacts on a faculty member's probability of allowing student in-class use of mobile devices. Faculty who scored higher on Tablet Playfulness and Locus of Control had lower probabilities of allowing student in-class use of mobile devices. The authors noted that when people use their own devices they tend to be happier and more productive. They went on to say that individuals tended to keep their own devices more up to date than the schools might and since they own the devices they are more likely to spend the time learning how to properly use them.

Despite the small sampling size and the authors' inability to prove some of their hypotheses due to insufficient data, the results were encouraging. Generally if educators perceived the use of technology as productive their students were successful in its use. "Students expressed the opinion that it was their instructors' attitudes that prevented their in-class use of mobile devices." (Benham, 2016) Perhaps the problem IS more a matter of difference in perception.

Berry, M. J., & Westfall, A. (2015). Dial D for Distraction: The Making and Breaking of Cell Phone Policies in the College Classroom. *College Teaching*, 63(2), 62–71.

This article published in the peer-reviewed journal *College Teaching* presented a study in which the authors researched the question “In what manner are students using their phones and how can faculty members minimize the potential for phone-related distractions?” (Berry, 2015) The study was carried out through analysis of original survey data from nearly 400 college students across multiple public and private universities and with survey data from close to 100 college faculty.

The two main conclusions of this study are that faculty are primarily concerned with the distraction caused by cell phones in class and to a lesser degree there is the fear that students may be using their phones to cheat. These conclusions are not unfounded as in these surveys students report checking their cell phones one or two times during an average class session (37.6%). An additional 23.8% check their phone between three and four times, and more than 20% of students check their cell phones more than five times. Most often these students were checking their social media sites, texts, or email, rather than focusing on class. A much smaller percentage reported using their phones to cheat in class, and their professors seemed less suspicious and concerned as well.

The authors started off their report discussing the many ways cell phones can be useful in a more student-centered classroom environment, but seemed to lean more toward the idea that they might not be worth the distractions they present. The evidence does seem to support their conclusion. The sample size certainly seems sufficient and the

number of students that agree with their conclusions was a bit surprising. It seems the temptation to use the phone for unrelated activities in class is just too great.

Brown, J. (2014). Teachers' Stances on Cell Phones in the ESL Classroom: Toward a "Theoretical" Framework. *TESL Canada Journal*, 31(2), 67–78.

In this article published in the refereed *TESL Canada Journal*, the author proposes a theoretical framework that ranges from the absolutist approach of prohibitionism at one end of a continuum to the contrasting absolutist approach of permissivism on the other. He posits that neither of these approaches is tenable because "to adopt an absolutist approach is to essentially deny that the use of cell phones needs to be dealt with in the classroom: the issue has been defused because phones have either been banished (prohibitionism) or embraced (permissivism)." (Brown, 2014) Instead Brown argues that a teacher's stance toward cell phones in the classroom is thus informed by their potential uses and that:

"Specific contextual factors will have an impact on the stance to which a teacher adheres. No learning environment is static or monolithic, and a teacher will adopt different stances—moving back and forth along the proposed continuum—within the same level and even with the same group of students as specific circumstances warrant." (Brown, 2104)

I'm not sure that his framework is specific enough for practical application. I do like some of the terminology he uses in his framework, for example the way he describes the approach most teachers take as *ostrichism*, meaning most teachers choose to ignore the cell phone problem entirely. Perhaps a more calculated analysis of when and where we allow cell phones in class is a

good idea, and such analysis might be left up to each teacher to apply in their own specific context.

Charles, A. S. . (2012). Cell Phones: Rule-Setting, Rule-Breaking, and Relationships in Classrooms. *American Secondary Education*, 40(3), 4–16.

This article published in the refereed journal *American Secondary Education* was based on the findings of a small qualitative study of seven high school students and three English teachers. In her study Dr. Charles completed eight classroom observations and seventeen interviews, interviewing each subject at least twice. The discussions focused on school cell phone policies, the enforcement of the rules for personal electronic devices, and student and teacher perception of the issue.

The author’s findings and conclusion centered around the idea that strict cell phone policies are not always enforced (or enforceable) and teachers and students “felt the need for a reasonable and balanced perspective on the issue of rules for new technologies” and that “students and teachers frequently negotiate the boundaries through relationships founded on trust and respect.” (Charles, 2012)

In the Implications section of her study Dr. Charles had three recommendations, to assist students to gain clear understanding of when and how cell phones might be appropriate or inappropriate, incorporate new media into pedagogical practices through mobile technologies, and develop meta-awareness of discourse use. She describes the latter of these as “relational neteracy,” or a shared articulation and negotiation of the intersections and boundaries of various discourse communities.

This article was insightful, though I would like to have seen a larger and possibly more diverse sampling. As it was all three teachers were said to have maintained a traditional teacher-centered classroom and all of the schools maintained a no cell phone policy. It would have been interesting to see a contrast between these schools and ones with more student-centered and smart phone friendly policies. The advise and conclusions reached in this study argue for a more democratic approach and building trust, which seems appropriate to me as well.

Maguth, B. M. (2013). The Educative Potential of Cell Phones in the Social Studies Classroom. *Social Studies*, 104(2), 87–91.

This peer-reviewed article published in *The Social Studies* “provides an overview of recent research in teen access and use of cell phones inside and outside of the social studies classroom. Furthermore, it provides social studies teachers, researchers, and community members with cell phone-based activities, resources, and strategies to advance student learning in the social studies.” (Maguth, 2013)

As with other articles I have reviewed, Maguth points out that cell phones are a classroom distraction, but “distractions in the social studies classroom have always existed” and “students have always tested the boundaries of classroom rules.” (Maguth, 2013) He also states that “when teachers incorporate new technologies into their instruction, they genuinely get students excited about learning and often tap into their culture and digital interests.” (Maguth, 2013) The author goes on to say “the integration of mobile devices in the social studies classroom can help students gain the skills and etiquette needed to use these technologies meaningfully.” (Maguth, 2013) In other words

students need to be taught how to use technology responsibly and it's our job to teach the this skill.

This article is not a research piece, but rather good advice on how to engage students in the Social Studies using the technology they bring to class with them. He aptly points out that students aren't too fond of Social Studies in the first place and most are turned off by the standard approach of classroom lecture and discussion. His argument is that the use of technology can make learning fun and engaging.

McClanahan, L. (2014). Training Using Technology in the Adult ESL Classroom. *MPAEA Journal of Adult Education*, 43(1), 22-27.

This article was published in the Colorado State University *Journal of Adult Education*, a refereed journal intended to service as a voice for the translation of theory into practice. In the article the author discusses the benefits of using technology in an adult ESL classroom in which he espouses briefly the benefits of smart phones as a learning tool for this group of learners.

The author brings up an interesting point relevant to my area of inquiry in saying, "The smartphone is an excellent digital tool for ESL learning because most learners are already familiar with it and it is always available to them." He further points out that the argument that many ESL learners are often less privileged adults who may not have access to technology and the Internet is not really a valid argument these days, citing a Pew Research study showing that "between June 2000 and August 2011 the overall percentage of Internet users in the U.S. made an astounding jump from 47 percent to 78

percent.” (McClanahan, 2014) While our students are not strictly an American audience, we have seen similar increases in Internet and smartphone use.

The author goes on to describe some practices using cell phones that translate to real-world application, such as calling and leaving a voicemail message, calling to obtain information, creating videos, and texting the instructor or another student. It is interesting to note that the other technologies he discusses pertain to the classroom, while the activities he prescribes for smart phones happen primarily outside the classroom.

Tessier, J., tessiejt@delhi.ed. (2013). Student Impressions of Academic Cell Phone Use in the Classroom. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 43(1), 25–29.

This study published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of College Science Teaching* was designed to assess the perspective of students regarding the use of cell phones as academic tools in the classroom. The instructor “encouraged students to use their cell phones in an environmental issues course to find data and other information, which they then shared with the class.” (Tessier, 2013) At the end of the semester, students voluntarily completed a survey detailing their perspectives. Students felt that cell phones helped their learning, encouraged their enjoyment of the class, improved their success in the course, marginally increased their attendance, and were not an important distraction. Data collected on student cell phone use, attendance, and success seemed to agree with student perceptions. While the students were working the teacher circulated around the classroom to “nudge” students back on task if they had strayed off to check messages or social media. He noted that “Surprisingly, few students needed these nudges because most were engaged in the content of the course.” (Tessier, 2013)

The author of this study reported that student perceptions of the use of cell phones in class as an academic tool were overwhelmingly positive and he feels more educators should investigate the utility of academic cell phone use. This was not a very large study (encompassing only 33 students) and was not as academic as other studies I have read, but it was encouraging nonetheless. If we use student engagement as a measurement of success, then it seems this approach was very successful.

Research Problem

My organization, the Defense Language Institute English Language Center, has a longstanding policy of not allowing cell phone use in the classroom due to the distractions they present. The purpose of my research is qualitative exploration of the practicality of such a ban versus the utility of allowing limited cell phone use in class for the purposes of our student population.

Relation of Problem to Professional Setting

Of course our students debate the ban on cell phone use, but more and more teachers are questioning it as well, especially given the number of applications available on smart phones these days that might prove useful in a language learning context.

There are valid arguments on both sides of this debate, both within our organization and in various professional journals. The obvious questions in our case are whether cell phones are too much of a distraction, whether they are a useful tool given the nature of our students' training here in the US after they leave our program, and whether we are prepared to use technology at a level that better represents our students' habits for information processing and study.

Older teachers and administration seem to take a hard stance on cell phone use, where younger teachers seem more sympathetic and more lenient. It would be interesting to query our staff to see which way we are leaning as a group.

Benefits of Literature Search

I must admit that my own ideas and perceptions surrounding the use of cell phones in the classroom have changed after having read for this literature review. Despite being a consummate technology geek myself, I went into this study with the perception that while I generally believe our organization needs to better utilize technology in the classroom my students use of cell phones is more of a distraction than a help in the classroom. On occasion I have my students use their phones to access specific information they need as pilots to plan a successful flight, but otherwise the phones go neatly back into their pockets and stay there. Students do indeed spend a lot of time attempting to surreptitiously check their texts and social media, but I can't really say this is always disruptive.

After having viewed opinions on both sides of the spectrum, I now think it would be better to dictate what is and isn't acceptable use of phones in class and trust students to adhere to the guidelines. Whether or not others in my organization agree or will allow that remains to be seen.