Leveraging Mobile Devices in Education

Using cell phones for good instead of evil.

It can be distracting for students and faculty alike when mobile devices are used in the classroom. Asking students to use them for guided educational purposes can turn an otherwise rude distraction into an effective disruption of routine learning experiences. Here are a few ideas for how to guide your students to use their phones for good:

TEXTING

There are a number of free services out there like **Remind101**[1], **ClassPager**[2], or **GroupMe**[3] that allow you and your students to text one another without divulging personal phone numbers. With ClassPager, you can create polls for your students to answer in or out of class and even broadcast reminders or course changes on the fly.

BACKCHANNEL INTERACTION

You might be familiar with backchannel communication from its growing use at conferences, where attendees are asked to post questions and comments to a publicly displayed forum. Penn State researchers explored the technique using the **ClassCommon**[4] service, but Twitter and other similar platforms work as well.

Backchannel interaction is also a way to allow off-site students to interact if they cannot attend class due to illness or inclement weather. Although there has been some criticism of this technique as a learning method, there is much support for using it as a way to increase **a sense of community in the classroom.**[5]

PHOTOGRAPHY

Virtually all mobile devices come equipped with a camera these days. Asking students to document and share real-world examples of what you're studying is a great way to engage visual learners and create assignments that go beyond mere recall.

Flickr Groups, Picasa Web Albums, Pinterest, and class blogs can all be used to collect student photos.

Any time you find yourself asking students to "provide examples," think about asking them to do so via photography. Anything from plant identification, to advertising, to graphic design, to mathematical principles can be demonstrated visually. Consider the role that visual evidence plays in your own discipline and go from there!

GEOLOCATION

Geolocation capabilities are standard with most mobile devices. Although not all students may have access to this feature, it can be used in concert with photography and augmented reality activities to help students learn more about certain physical environments.

Biology students can be asked to photograph and geo-tag local plant or animal life on a collaborative map to help them understand data collection. Art students can document and geotag public art to get a feel for how art interacts with environment. There are numerous individual and **collaborative mapping sites and apps**[6] out there. Think about the way "location" plays a part in your discipline and come up with ways for students to better understand that relationship.

LEARN MORE

[1] https://www.remind101.com/
[2] https://www.classpager.com/
[3] https://groupme.com/
[4] http://classcommon.com/
[5] http://elearning.uaf.edu/g/7q
[6] http://mashable.com/2007/07/22/online-maps/

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