

Mobile Phone Behavior in the College Classroom: Effects on Student Learning and Implications for Students and Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

By now, it has become obvious that using mobile phones to send and receive text messages is an essential communication channel for many mobile phone users. Data from the *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project* indicates that roughly 8 out of 10 American adults own a cell phone and 73% of them send/receive text messages. In particular, the college age demographic (18 to 24 year olds) appears to be the heaviest users of text messaging, with the average user of that age group sending/receiving nearly 110 messages in a normal day or the equivalent of over 3,000 messages in a month (Smith, 2011). While texting is very popular amongst a variety of age groups, we do find some problems developing due to the use of mobile phones in certain contexts, particularly the classroom. Polling data indicates that 71% of surveyed high school teachers noted that dealing with students' use of cell phones in class presented an issue for them (Purcell, Heaps, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013). Given the sheer popularity of texting, the fact that this behavior does not cease while in the classroom (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012), and the problems teachers face with this behavior, the focus of this chapter will primarily concentrate on classroom mobile phone behavior.

For the purpose of this chapter, classroom mobile phone behavior refers to student use of mobile phones during typical class instruction. This behavior includes students using their mobile phones to send or receive text messages, check

social network sites, or any other use that is non-classroom related; however, it is worth recognizing that mobile phones can, and are, used for legitimate instructional purposes. The implications of these behaviors are particularly salient for teachers and students, who often struggle, from two different perspectives, to navigate the tensions of using mobile devices in the classroom. For students, these implications typically relate to how this behavior impacts student learning, notetaking, and even class participation. For teachers, mobile phone behavior policies are beginning to appear on course syllabi and how teachers can effectively deal with student mobile phone usage is an ongoing question. Lastly, the more important question facing teachers is how to integrate mobile phones, and other technologies, into the classroom in meaningful ways to help enhance student learning.

OVERVIEW

In the communication discipline, mobile phone behavior in the college classroom has only recently been an area that has received scholarly attention. The earliest research in the discipline typically focused on perceptions of this behavior; with additional studies examining self-report data, and the most recent research has begun to use experimental design to measure the direct effects of mobile phone behaviors on student learning. Dr. Campbell (2006), at the University of Michigan, was perhaps one of the first communication

scholars to publish a study that focused exclusively on mobile phones in the college classroom. Other scholars have also contributed to this line of inquiry. Specifically, Dr.'s Wei, Wang, and Klausner (2012), at the University of Pittsburgh Bradford, examined the effect of student mobile phone usage on student learning. Although Wei et al. were some of the first scholars to examine this effect, their study relied on self-report data and measured perceived cognitive learning and did not measure actual cognitive learning.

Two of the current leaders in this area of research are Dr.'s Kuznekoff and Titsworth (2013), respectively from Miami University Middletown and Ohio University. They developed one of, if not the, first experimental study in communication to examine mobile phone usage during class lecture and the effect this behavior has on cognitive learning and student notetaking. Related to this research, Dr.'s Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2013), all from California State University Dominguez Hills, are prominent scholars in task-switching and multi-tasking in the classroom as it relates to student learning.

Related to research on mobile phone behavior in the college classroom, is the question of how instructors can best deal with this issue in their classes (i.e., implications for teachers). Current leaders in this particular area are Dr.'s Finn and Ledbetter, both from Texas Christian University. Finn and Ledbetter (2013) have published research on the influence of technology policies on teacher credibility, as well as the connection between these policies and learner empowerment (Ledbetter & Finn, 2013).

CURRENT SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ON MOBILE PHONES IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

As of 2014, research regarding mobile phone behaviors in the college classroom loosely corresponds to the following trends. First, initial research in this area focused on either self-report

data or measured perceptions of mobile phones in the classroom. This research track also includes articles that provide pedagogical advice for instructors or offer ways of integrating mobile phones into the classroom. Next, and perhaps the area with the greatest potential for contributing to our understanding of this subject, is research measuring the effects of mobile phone usage on student learning. Lastly, scholars have begun to connect theory with praxis by examining how instructor technology policies influence student perceptions of instructors. The following sections of this chapter will help to explain these three areas by highlighting leading researchers, or research teams, in their respective research areas.

Perceptions of Mobile Phone Behavior in the College Classroom and Pedagogical Uses for Mobile Phones

It was not until the mid 2000's that communication scholars began publishing work that focused specifically on mobile phone behaviors in the college classroom. This initial research tended to include self-report data and focused exclusively on perceptions of mobile phone use in the college classroom. One of the first scholars to engage in this research area was Campbell (2006), who noted that the college classroom was "a setting that has received relatively little attention from mobile communication researchers" (p. 281). Indeed, the little research that did exist generally focused on perceptions of using mobile phones in public spaces and highlighted parallels between public spaces and the classroom (Campbell, 2008; Wei & Leung, 1999). In addition, this research typically focused on making/receiving mobile phone calls and did not place as much emphasis on sending/receiving text messages, something that was relatively new at the time and had yet to reach mass usage. Lastly, research at this time did not account for the use of mobile phones to access social network sites, which were still in their infancy. Thus, past research is generally helpful

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