

Nielsen, Lisa & Webb, Willyn. *Teaching generation text. Using cell phones to enhance learning*. San Francisco, the USA: Jossey-Bass, 2011. 280pp.  
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How many students *without* a cell phone in their hands are you likely to see on a bus or subway or even a bicycle? Probably none. How many students *with* a cell phone in their hands are you likely to see in a classroom? Again, none! This kind of digital divide we, educators, encounter in our everyday life. Moreover, most of us are happy with it and reinforce it by our professional practices. On the other hand, there is a growing army of teachers and researchers who refuse to accept this divide and are ardently vocal about the need to bridge it. With some of them - such as Susan Brooks-Young (*Teaching with the Tools Kids Really Use*, 2010), Liz Kolb (*Cell Phones in the Classroom*, 2011), Will Richardson (*Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Tools for Classrooms*, 2010) - you may be familiar through my reviews in the earlier JLCC and JIS issues. Now, there is another valuable contribution to this bridging effort - a manuscript by Lisa Nielsen and Willyn Webb, *Teaching Generation Text. Using Cell Phones to Enhance Learning* (2011).

In a way, this book is similar to those mentioned above. Like them, it reminds us once again that the world today changes much faster than our institutions can keep up with. The number of people having cell phones is on a constant rise worldwide. Mobile technology is developing with huge strides, each day offering more powerful and affordable devices, while young people quickly learn to take maximum advantage of every new feature or application they offer. However, as Marc Prensky, a recognized authority in the CALL field has emphasized in his *Forward* to Nielson & Webb's book, "we are still a long way from cell phones being embraced by the majority of educators as an important learning tool in our schools" (p. xiii). And this happens in spite of the fact that the US Secretary of Education believes, as quoted in the book, that cell phones offer a new way to expand learning beyond the regular school day. Moreover, retrograde cell phone policies and practices keep on defying the growing understanding that competence in many forms of digital technology relates to twenty-first century skills, which will help students be competitive in the professional job market of the future.

At the same time, *Teaching Generation Text* takes the cell phone debate to a higher level, providing research-based instructional strategies, further expanding the wealth of innovative ideas and activities, and strengthening argumentation in favor of mobile technology integration in teaching and learning. One of its strengths is in forceful driving home of one particular understanding: educators who continue to fight something that their students value, namely cell phones, are not only missing the boat. Instead of bridging the digital divide, they actually broaden it, setting themselves against parents, who view these devices as a lifeline to their children, and, most importantly, damaging students, by banning in school the

use of the tools they exploit in the real world.

With this understanding, Nielsen and Webb set on providing thoughtful guidance on how to turn cell phone distraction into educational opportunity, how to turn the frustration with cell phones into a means of better communication, and, through this, how to enhance the educational experiences of students and create a more cooperative academic environment.

The book consists of introduction, seven chapters and an appendix. In the *Introduction*, besides the general outline of availability, accessibility and attraction of cell phones, the authors offer a five-step plan for teachers to initiate the use of mobile technology for educational purposes. These steps are: 1 ) use your cell phone for professional purposes; 2 ) model appropriate cell phone use for learning; 3 ) strengthen the home-school connection with cell phones; 4 ) have students use their cell phones for homework; and 5 ) have students collaborate on how cell phones might be used in the classroom for learning. For each step, the book provides three ideas of what can be done at this level. Like other chapters in the book, *Introduction* ends with a table of the discussed resources, their description and the URL addresses or text numbers, with which these tools can be accessed.

This plan is further expanded in the following chapters. Thus, Chapter One, *The Texting Teacher*, guides teachers in smart ways to get started using cell phones themselves, connect with others and engage learners. The purpose of the chapter is to show a tremendous potential that cell phones offer for organizing group texting and notification services, obtaining parent feedback with *Wiffiti* and audience response with *TextTheMob* provider, tapping into endless amount of information by texting *Google SMS*, or sharing information through *Twitter*, and so on.

Once teachers are comfortable with various uses of cell phones and texting functions, they are ready to begin using cell phones with their students as an extension of learning outside the classroom. Nielsen and Webb are aware that many schools and districts may have various barriers and restrictions on the use of this technology, so in Chapter Two, *The Texting Learner*, they suggest to start with incorporating cell phones into homework. In the authors' opinion, this will enable students to develop expertise in using their cell phones for learning and it also can set a stage for developing an acceptable use policy. One of the smart ways to begin may be student-teacher communication through texting. It is reasonable to anticipate that students may be much ahead of teachers in using this mode of communication, so to ensure that both parties can speak the same language the authors introduce some popular texting abbreviations and emoticons and provide the addresses of two online services, which can translate SMS lingo to regular phrases (or vice versa) or interpret mystifying "smileys". There may be issues of certain boundaries, privacy and safety, so the book suggests a plan for a proactive and informative workshop to set up certain rules of out-of-school communication. Further opportunities for communication can arise through group texting (one message sent to multiple recipients), and the authors suggest some creative ideas for using this function of cell phones. Similar suggestions are made for communication via *Google Voice*, *Twitter* and other services. The real forte of this chapter is the concept of expanding the limited time of teaching by using texting for prelesson, postlesson and hands-on lesson enhancements and assessments with diverse activities, some of which are suggested in the book.

The third chapter, *Supporting Research-Based Instructional Strategies Using Cell Phones*, discusses ways to adapt instructional strategies suggested in *Classroom Instruction That Works*, Second

Edition (Dean, Hubbel, Pitler & Stone, 2012) for cell phone use to enrich instruction and engage learners. This manuscript confirms the value of nine instructional strategies that, as proved by research, can enhance student achievement across all content areas and across all levels. In their turn, Nielsen and Webb suggest lessons and show ways how cell phone technologies might support and enhance each of the mentioned above strategies. Since the cell phone tools involved have been discussed in the previous chapters, in this one, the authors focus on each specific strategy and how it can be implemented through those tools. The following are just some suggestions on how to engage students in learning by doing what they really like to do, texting. For instance, students can post their personal learning objectives for a lesson and provide feedback by texting to a common class account, record a speech on a suggested topic as well as comments on peers' postings, provide instant answers for quizzes on the teacher's poll account, participate in cooperative learning through texting partners their ideas or reflections on the project, and so on.

A further step of ensuring effective learning with mobile technology is discussed in Chapter Four, *The Six Building Blocks for Success with Cell Phones in Education*. These blocks is a set of measures directed towards the following practical aims: securing school and parental permission on the use of cell phones, teaching students about cell phone safety and etiquette, developing acceptable use and classroom management procedures, and planning activities with students. The chapter comprises templates for agreement and permission letters, samples of lessons on safety, etiquette, discipline rules, acceptable use policies and management procedures - all done, of course, through texting on cell phones. Together with the Appendix, *Breaking the Ban with a Six-Part Plan*, six blocks and six steps outlined in the Plan guide through laying the groundwork and building a solid foundation for a decisive move from banning to embracing cell phones in the classroom.

Chapter Five, *Cell Phone-Enriched Lessons to Engage Learners*, gives ideas for incorporating cell phones into classroom instruction with a unit-planning guide and standards-aligned lessons. The standards referred to are the US educational regulations NETS\*S and NETS\*T (National Education Technology Standards for Students and Teachers, correspondingly). However, these standards are in no way nationally limited as they address learning outcomes related to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills pertinent to any spatial or subject area. As Nielsen and Webb emphasize, cell phone should not only engage learners but also enrich instruction, and in this respect learning outcomes as measured by standards or other assessment instrument are as valid for teaching with cell phones as they are for any other method of instruction.

Two more aspects of laying down the solid foundation of mobile technology inclusion in school practices are discussed in Chapter Six, *The Texting School Community*, and Chapter Seven, *How to Use "Teaching Generation Text" for Professional Development*. In Chapter Six, the authors address the ways that administrators, guidance counselors, librarians, parents, and others in the school community can assist and encourage texting teachers and learners and help build a school climate supportive of student achievement. The last Chapter Seven is for those educators who have already incorporated texting and cell phone in their instruction and want to help others who wish to join them. In a nutshell, this part comprises plans for various workshops a texting educator can offer her/his colleagues, which, with *Teaching Generation Text* and its wealth of resources, advice and guidance, is not such a difficult undertaking.

There is one more attraction of the book worth mentioning. Each chapter has a great quote serving as an inspiring epigraph, such as, for instance, the one by John Dewey: “If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow”. With this warning in mind, many educators should, probably, review their attitude towards mobile technology, and perusing *Teaching Generation Text* may become a very promising start in this process.