



# How Mobile Learning Devices and Learning Management Systems Change the Learning Flow in the Classroom

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## 1. Introduction

Given a chance to join the delegation group is such an honor. Being able to go into local schools during our visit to the States has been a very informative as well as exciting experience, for I was amazed by the level of student engagement and the self-devoting learning atmosphere in the local classroom practices we visited. Witnessing the real practice in person is much more valuable than just reading books or articles. That said, one gets to fully “experience and acknowledge” the entire learning environment via the interaction between students and teacher, student and their peers; the classroom setting; and the posters, signs and bulletin boards in the hallways. During our visits, I have noticed that using technology in the classrooms seems to be a norm in the districts we observed. That is, digital devices, such as iPads and laptops, are incorporated within the learning process of a student; and interestingly, these devices which—in the traditional mindset considered—would be a distraction to the learner are actually transformed into a learning tool that helps students navigate, manage, and boost their expedition to being a good learner.

In this essay, I will first give an overall summary of the school visits regarding the rationale and environment of implementing a Digital Learning Program in these schools. Secondly, I will critically examine the digital learning environment drawing upon relevant literature, facts, and practices. Further, some inspirations, as well as questions gained and aroused during this trip, will be addressed. Also, the main scope of this essay will focus on general education. The basis of my comparisons and examples will be the discussions and email conversations with local practitioners, online educational resources, and my experiences as an educator in Taiwan.

## **2. A Brief Summary of the School Visits**

From my observations, most of the schools (five out of eight) we visited incorporate digital devices in students' learning processes. This is a sign that the schools are embracing technology into their curriculum as students are living in a digital-driven society outside of school. Though different policies of using a mobile device within each school are applied, the rationale behind using the devices is the same: to broaden and augment students' learning. Moreover, there is a tendency that the educational policies are made continuously among different stages of a child's educational path. Take the Shrewsbury Public Schools District, for example; the iPad program is implemented from K3 throughout K12 (10 to 19 years old). An iPad is assigned to every student from the third grade, and they get to use the device to learn in and out of school until they graduate from high school. Also, the schools all use Schoology—an online learning management platform—as a management tool for teachers to monitor a child's learning, manage the storage of learning materials and assignments. Parents, on the other hand, are also involved, in that they are mandated to attend a workshop before an iPad is distributed to their child, and the teacher can also keep them updated on the learning progress via Schoology.



The continuity of harnessing a digital device to learn also changes the learning style in the classroom of Ramtown Elementary, Howell Middle School, and Freehold High school. By using a mobile device, students can curate, collaborate, and access information instantly, and with the help of an App, teachers also can monitor the learning process and progress of the students easily. With this in mind, how we used to define “learning” should, therefore, be viewed differently.

## **3. Mobile Learning (mLearning) in the Classroom**

As technology evolves, the advance of mobile technologies has significantly impacted the way users interact with information on a daily basis. In education, students are growing up in this entirely new world where technology is a component

of how they operate outside of school. As Grunwald noted, "Mobile learning is a hot topic right now, with great expectations from advocates that mobile devices could transform education, engage students and personalize learning" (Grunwald Associates LLC, 2013). In line with this idea, the notion of Digital Literacy is also brought up by scholars, such as Belshaw (Doug Belshaw in TEDxWarwick, 2012), which is the ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information. Acknowledging this phenomenon in the first decade of the 21st century, educators, schools, and governments in many countries around the world are nurturing their generations through this crucial ability in mLearning.

Mobile Learning in a classroom setting has been well researched, and it is considered to have advantages that change the flow of learning, namely (a) shifting learner profiles, (b) shifting learning patterns, (c) enabling collaborative learning, (d) driving higher student engagement, and, (e) providing a detailed learning path (Laskaris, 2014,



2015; Wylie, n.d.). These features can be noted during the classroom observations as well as in discussions with the teachers during the school visits. Regarding a shift in learning patterns, as Hannah (a teacher at Sherwood Middle School) shared that iPads are great for writing because students “are able to type and they also have a much easier time editing because they can go back in and change pieces without rewriting the entire thing.” She also addresses that “it helps students self-learn things and teach each other.” In my experience, using iPads in class can help to shift learning from a teacher-centered style to that of being student-centered. With the ability to use the device to navigate their learning, I have noticed that students with relatively lower achievement can learn more confidently and thoroughly. That is because they can access the resources we provide online with the device back and forth as many times as they want. Moreover, as for stimulating higher student engagement in learning, there are abundant Apps and websites that can help the teacher easily



achieve this goal. The program “Kahoot!” is a great example. It can be accessed online or via its App, and the greatest feature of it is the game-like interface with background music and sound effects that keep students focused. Online educational websites like “Kahoot!” can also help us to track students’ learning, as it can generate a detailed report with statistics such as the answer rates, the response of each student and the overall participation percentage. For this aspect, as Hannah denotes, using an online platform “also helps a lot with managing documents.” That is, mobile devices also change the teaching pattern as well. As described in the previous section, the schools use the learning management system, Schoology, to post homework and documents, for discussion boards, and as a place for students to turn in documents. One teacher at Ramtown Middle School also says that this “takes the pressure off of me and also makes students feel more responsible.” This is also an important element that mLearning can help alleviate the pressure from grading or collecting papers, which enables the teacher to focus on curriculum design and their students’ learning.

While investigating resources and literature, I came across the term “Digital Citizenship” which is “the norms of appropriate, responsible technology use” (Digital Citizenship Website, n.d.). As discussed above, mobile devices and learning management systems seem to have positive impacts which facilitate not only student’s learning but also teacher’s teaching. However, to make the positive outcomes happen, Hannah further puts “the most beneficial thing is having extremely clear and consistent guidelines and consequences so students know exactly how the devices should be used in class.” Because we all know that “kids are kids, no matter where they are in the world,” they have to be taught how to use the device before all the good things can happen. In my experience, having iPads on the table is a distraction to the kids when students are not taught the requirements of using them. Therefore, having students fully acknowledge the rules before they can use the devices is extremely important. Hannah has shared with me the iPad rules of her school (please see Appendix), and I think it is very clear, as well as smart, to

put it on the lock screen—I will probably do the same. By doing so, mLearning in the classrooms can truly reach its full potential in helping kids learn better.

#### **4. Some Reflection**

Apart from the ubiquitous nature of mLearning in the classrooms, there are aspects worth contemplating: the teaching style, learning content, and environment. Though using the Apps or online platforms can prompt learning interactively, the teaching style of a teacher and the learning content are additional keys. That said, as in Taiwan most teachers rely on textbooks and their teaching style is mostly passing knowledge to the student, I wonder whether this kind of learning would benefit from the use of technology. From the classroom observations, I have noticed that the teachers are not just teaching facts and knowledge to their students, they are guiding their pupils with strategies and allowing students "discover" the information and answers they need. I think this is where we, as teachers in Taiwan, should focus attention. As for the environment, I was surprised to see that students can sit quietly and stay focused; therefore, the teachers can speak in a gentle voice without using a microphone. I figure the reason could also refer to the teaching style and content because the students are not learning passively, the teachers pose open-ended questions that students have to think about and discuss with each other frequently. This is what we can also learn from.

#### **5. Conclusion**

We are saturated in the digital era where everyone can hardly live without using mobile devices in their day-to-day life. The notion of a digitally literate culture should be teaching its learners how to use the devices of choice to access, connect, communicate and gather information. Though there are disadvantages in using the devices, the beneficial effects that the mLearning classroom could have are surpassing its drawbacks. The flexibility to tailor learning needs and maintain a high motivation level of a learner are fascinating features, and not to mention the advantage of generating a report with a detailed learning profile of a student that helps the teacher understand their learners better. However, as discussed above,

the challenges to the predominated education system of Taiwan are something that needs thorough consideration by the authorities as well as educators. Yet, as Sir Ken Robinson reminds us in his TED talk (Robinson in TED Talks, 2013), the mechanism of an "organic" culture should allow time for the seeds to sprout and grow. Though there are changes that need to be made, we should not merely hope the "overnight miracle" happens, but that there is a gradual improvement which can serve as a firm base for the greater prosperity. As far as I am concerned, there are a bunch of teachers doing amazing things to elevate the level of a student's learning. They share teaching ideas in Facebook groups, online educational forums or their personal blogs, they go to school to do lectures, and they are invited as speakers at workshops. All of which are essential steps, as Robinson (ibid., 2013) puts it, the bubbles of a positive revolution. I would also expect myself to be one of the bubbles that constitutes the greater good.

Finally, I have to say that it was such a privilege for all the English teachers in New Taipei City to have the opportunity to visit schools overseas, allowing us to exchange ideas and discuss teaching approaches with local teachers. In my experience, compared with reading successful examples, documentaries or journal articles, doing classroom observations and having conversations with the practitioners is more efficient and effective when it comes to professional development. I believe that this educational trip has undoubtedly broadened our minds as well as perspective



towards teaching. Therefore, a very big thank you to those who have made this wonderful experience happen, namely the government officer, Angus Lu; Principal Lin and Chen; and, the project manager and director, Yvonne Li. Besides, my gratitude to my dearest partner, Mia and all the teachers in this group, for your kindness and thoughtful hearts in making this journey full of joy, laughter, and inspirational moments. I personally consider this training program to be such a good "tradition" that serves as an incentive for teachers to actively participate in workshops for professional development. It should

be continued to give more teachers the opportunity to elevate and refine their profession towards educating our young generations.

## References

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## Appendix

Regulations of Using iPads in Shrewsbury shared by Hannah



**SHREWSBURY**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



### iPad License

1. iPad license will be set as my lock screen at all times.
2. I will carry and use the iPad safely, responsibly, and with care. The school-issued case will be on the iPad at all times.
3. I will only use the iPad when directed by a teacher and never in the NO IPAD ZONES (gym, bus, hallways, cafeteria, bathroom, AM homeroom), unless approved by a teacher.
4. I will be the only one to use or handle my assigned iPad, unless directed by a teacher or a parent.
5. I will set up my apps as directed and, when given permission, play only academic games on my iPad in school.



### CAMERA ACCEPTABLE USE

1. I will use the camera for educationally relevant purposes only, both in and out of School and will only take pictures, videos, and audio recordings (or use those taken by others) when given permission from a teacher.
2. I will not photograph, video or make an audio recording of any teacher, student, or person without permission.
3. I will not create, or encourage others to create, discourteous or inappropriate content (photographs, videos, audio recordings).
4. I will promptly inform a teacher or parent if I receive any inappropriate pictures, videos or audio recordings.
5. I will immediately report students who are inappropriately using the camera/video/audio features (example: posting to social networking sites) on any mobile device to a parent, teacher or administrator.)
6. I understand that all images/videos/audio recordings on my iPad are not private.
7. I understand that my iPad may be selected at any time for inspection by teachers and/or administrators.
8. I understand that should I violate this contract, the consequences could be the removal of all network access, suspension from school, and legal action by the authorities.

**Unlock if you agree**