

## Why Is Mobile Technology Different From Other Technology?

*Among many other reasons, students will be using their own devices.*

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Within five years, every student in every grade in every school will be using a mobile computing device for learning. (We consider cell phones, smartphones and netbooks to be mobile devices; we do not consider traditional, 5-to-7-pound laptop computers as mobile devices.) Why will these devices have a significant impact on teaching and learning even when laptops, electronic whiteboards and handheld clickers, online materials and online testing have had a very limited impact on teaching and learning?

### Reason #1

Adults brought in all those other technologies; it is the students themselves who are bringing in the mobile devices. With good intentions, we adults tried to apply technologies that are the hallmark of our generation to educating a completely different generation. The electronic whiteboard, quite frankly, is the quintessential example of our generation's technology. An electronic whiteboard is just a whiteboard—albeit an expensive one. Teachers have been using chalkboards and whiteboards for hundreds of years. Teachers are comfortable using their generation's technology. By and large, students don't see a significant difference between chalkboards, whiteboards and electronic whiteboards with respect to teaching and learning. Rather, they see teachers standing in front of these devices talking at them for large chunks of the day. You don't have to take our word. Just look around. What significant impact have all the electronic whiteboards in the classrooms made on teaching and learning?

By contrast, the cell phone is the quintessential technology of today's mobile generation. As reported in the CTIA's 2008 survey, "cell phones are essential to students' lives."

Unfortunately, schools are waging a battle—a battle they are losing and should lose—against cell phones. But as Berj Akian, CEO of ClassLink points out, we need to let the students "use their toolbox for teaching and learning." That adult observation echoes a student request: "Let me use my own devices and tools in the school day." We need to "meet ... learners in their own world." Turn off the voice and texting functions, and 95 percent of the school headaches go away.

Students can then use the cell phones as powerful computing devices. Mobile devices will do for student-centric K12 what desktops and laptops have done for adult-centric industries.

#### Reason #2

Over the next five years, Internet connected mobile computing devices will drop dramatically in price—and increase in functionality. One of the United Kingdom's telcos, O2, is charging British schools £7 per month per student/device for unlimited connectivity! Don't think about today's devices and today's prices. All things mobile are changing: We are currently seeing a 50 percent increase in mobile data traffic and an almost 50 percent increase in mobile advertising. Telcos will soon be introducing split billing—parents pay for the voice and texting while schools pay for the data plan.

Instead of providing 100 percent of the devices, schools may need to provide only 25 percent; the rest will use the ones they bring with them to school. One-to-one programs are no longer the provinces of technology-rich schools. One-to-one is as necessary as textbooks, as desks, as oxygen. The only way America's schools can afford one-to-one is by going mobile.

So we will say it again: Within five years, every student in every grade and in every school will be using a mobile computing device for learning. DA

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