

# 7 ELEMATICS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES COMMISSION REPORT

## USING TEXTING IN THE CLASSROOM

*I was visiting my daughter's high school and decided to peek in on her Spanish class. From what was written on the blackboard, the class was working on an assignment translating a passage from English to Spanish—at least that's what they were supposed to be doing. I counted nearly half the students doing something else. They appeared dis-tracted. When I looked more carefully I discovered that many had their cell phones in their laps and were rapidly moving their fingers. After class, my daughter and her friends told me they were bored with the lesson and were texting each other across the room. Two of her friends bragged that they could text blindfolded (Rosen 2010).*

This scenario may seem familiar to many of us, although few of us may want to admit or see it. Our students may seem distracted and more interested in texting (let's hope not sexting) or socializing with peers than in our lessons. But is this desire to be connected really all that new? Socializing has probably always been and still is of primary concern for our students. It is just that in the past they could not do it as easily during class. What is new is the way students can socialize. With technology, students can connect to anyone at any time. Instead of a piece of paper discreetly passed between desks, students are sending messages through the phones hidden in their jeans, potentially to people across the world. What do we do? Is it our students, our teaching, the "world today?" Why isn't learning happening the way it did "when I was in school?" I propose that we embrace the technology of texting and turn to our advantage this behavior that even the most stringent schools have trouble eliminating. This column will briefly examine how this generation of learners is different, the benefits of embracing this technology, and then explain a lesson plan for how to use texting to enhance learning in a French classroom.

The National Science Foundation Task Force on Cyberlearning in 2008 discusses how our classrooms resemble those of our parents. Other scholars make comparisons to the nineteenth century. YouTube videos provide evidence of similarities: the one-room, fixed wooden desks and chairs [www.youtube.com/

watch?v=DTWTKDdw8f4] or [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o]. Admittedly, not all classrooms look like this. But has the educational setting changed as much as the world around it? We have many of the same tools, and we also have incredible changes. Are we using new innovations for maximum learning, or do we still want to use an academic model for learning that dates from the Middle Ages? I was reluctant to change my teaching for this new generation of learners and felt that they needed to come around to my way of seeing the world. After all, I was introducing them to this academic legacy and preparing them for the real world. But, what is the real world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Reading Marc Prensky's short article "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" helped me understand.

Here is the premise, supported by research: "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach" (Prensky, 2001). So, why should we use technology in our teaching? Because it is most effective for today's digital learners.

The real world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has connected citizens used to multimedia, multitasking, and immediate responses. Rosen explains that students hate school because education has not caught up with their tech-savvy. He explains that their minds have changed; they have been "rewired" (Rosen 2010). Many other researchers, such as Howe, Lavine, Prensky, and Small, explain the traits that describe this new generation, whether you call them Millennials, the Net Generation, or Digital Natives:

- Multi-tasking
- Parallel process (instead of linear process)
- Graphics before text
- Random access (hyperlinks, find their own order, choose what's important)
- Flexibility
- "Twitch" time
- Immediate feedback
- Choice
- Connected all the time (to family, friends)
- Networking
- Games
- Frequent rewards
- Like to see and be seen
- Want authority / control
- Instant gratification

- End result more important to them than the information
- Need real-world implications
- Community connections

Texting fits many of the characteristics just described, it's immediate, fun, connected, random, real world implications. CTIA explains more and shows an increasing trend towards texting in their executive summary of research conducted in 2008: [http://files.ctia.org/pdf/HI\_TeenMobileStudy\_ResearchReport.pdf].

Texting builds knowledge of phonetics and pronunciation because students have to work to figure out the texts. It increases knowledge of grammar because students have to figure out the proper French to understand the text in many cases (*ché pas*, for example). Students work on typing accents and learning the technology of texting in French. Texting has become a primary means of communication in France and the Francophone world, even among digital immigrants and in business contexts. Students need to know about this cultural aspect and be prepared to participate appropriately. Using texting may also increase motivation for learning because students are allowed and encouraged to use their cell phones, the forbidden fruit! Viann Pederson shares about using texting in her Spanish class:

*This assignment appeals to digital natives because (1) they learn by doing; (2) results and personalized learning experiences are more important than gathering knowledge; (3) they like experimentation and knowledge sharing; and (4) they thrive on rapid feedback at "twitch" speed. My students loved it and the motivation and enthusiasm carried over into other activities in class (Cited from course assignment in 2008).*

Also, while not all students might have easy access to a computer, nearly all students have access to cell phones. I ask each class who has them and who would like to use their phone to participate, and the response is almost always 100%. The few times it was not, it was at least 80% and we worked in pairs to solve that situation.

There is some controversy that this kind of exercise will fossilize errors in student writing. One research study suggests this, but many others have not proven this to be true. In fact, research by

Drouin and Davis (2009) and Plester, Wood, and Bell (2008) show either that students using texting showed higher scores on linguistics tasks or that texting does not have any adverse effects. In short, texting may actually HELP reading and writing.

Here are assignment details:

**How to organize the project** (entire project conducted in French)

### Before the project...

I put in the syllabus a "Texto" day (so all can see and look forward to it and ask about it).

A week ahead of time I tell students we will be texting in class on a certain day and ask who has a texting plan on their phone and would like to participate by bringing their phone (usually almost everyone.) If there are gaps, we work in pairs or with partners.

We pass around a paper and ask everyone to write down their phone number.

### The day of texting...

First, I tell them to get out their phones! They LOVE this.

I hand out the worksheet and explain that there are at least three kinds of texting. (10 min.)

- 1 Using abbreviations: ex. LOL in English, TLM in French
- 2 Phonetic spellings: ex. CU in English, OQP in French
- 3 Everything else that shortens makes it cool (using numbers, English, etc.)

With a partner, they go through the worksheet and try to see how many "textos" they can figure out (first in proper French, then by writing an English equivalent). (10 min.)

We now look at the answer sheet (5 min.). Laughter and jokes ensue. For the answers, I refer my students to the pages at [french.about.com] by Laura K. Lawless at [http://french.about.com/library/writing/bl-texting.htm]. She gives the French texto, what the texto means in French, and then an English equivalent. She even has French texting tips and some patterns to help.

### French Texting Rules

The basic rule of texting is to express yourself with the fewest number of characters possible. This is done in three ways:

- 1 Using abbreviations, like TLM for *Tout Le Monde*
- 2 Using letters that are pronounced like the desired sounds, like OQP for *occupé*,
- 3 Dropping silent letters, especially

at the end of a word, like parl for parole

### Patterns

C replaces C'EST, S'EST, SAIS, etc.

É replaces AI, AIS, and other spellings of similar sounds

K can replace QU (e.g., koi) or CA (kdo)

O replaces AU, EAU, AUX, etc.

T replaces T'ES and other spellings of the same sound

1 replaces UN, EN, or IN

2 replaces DE

### Tip

If all else fails, try reading the symbol out loud. :- ) (Lawless)

They are now asked to text each other.

We read aloud some of the texts.

Someone usually picks a funny / obscure one from the list (5 min.). The rest of the class is spent on our regularly scheduled work. BUT they are asked to text each other throughout the class to make comments, always in French. As people receive texts, they report on what was shared.

### Bonus

We have "texto" days on other days too, where students just bring their phones, now that they know the system. Also, I give extra credit if they text friends outside of class in French. Many do this automatically and love to show me the transcript of their texts.

### National Standards Addressed

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standards 1.2: Students understand and interpret written language on a variety of topics.

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.1: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Note: I also work to include culture (standard 2) in our discussions and we are often discussing content that spans and connects to other disciplines (standard 3).

### Learning Outcomes

Students report high satisfaction with this activity.

Students are able on tests to articulate why texting is important and how it fits in the French culture of today.

Students also retain well the specific

textos on tests.

EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, they LOVE it! When I do not do it in all classes, my other classes come to me and ask me why they can't use their cell phones, too. They BEG to do this activity!

### Ending thoughts

It's quick. It's easy. It's fun. It's pedagogically grounded. It accomplished grammar review, pronunciation practice, and cultural knowledge. Students love it. Try it today!

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### TEXTO WORKSHEET

Donnez l'équivalent de ce texto en français standard (et ensuite en «texto» anglais)

1. 6né
2. A+
3. ASV
4. bsr
5. CPG
6. DSL
7. G
8. J'vé
9. JMS
10. Kan
11. kestufou
12. Koi29
13. Lut
14. mr6
15. NSP
16. p2k
17. qqn
18. rdv
19. savapa
20. TLM
21. TOK
22. vazi
23. XLnt
24. VrMan
25. STP

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