

# The Midas Touch - A Golden Class Engagement with Screenagers



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*This article develops on the smart interaction and engagement experiences in a post graduate management school in Kerala. The paper reviews the qualitative experiences of integrating mobile phones to enhance active participation among MBA students in two different batches of a Consumer Behaviour course. The new intervention leverages the inherent curiosity of emerging adults and incorporates competitive elements to create a sense of urgency and excitement in completing tasks. This monograph examines the practitioner's experiences and the outcomes of these activities, providing insights into the benefits of mobile learning as an educational tool for heightened classroom engagement.*

**Keywords:** M-Learning, Collaborative Learning, Classroom Engagement, Technology in Pedagogy, Social Practices

## 1. Introduction

A paradigm shift is required among the community of educators. If we do not change proactively, change will swallow us leaving us bewildered. The arena of change for this paper is related to one aspect of technology for enhancing classroom engagement.

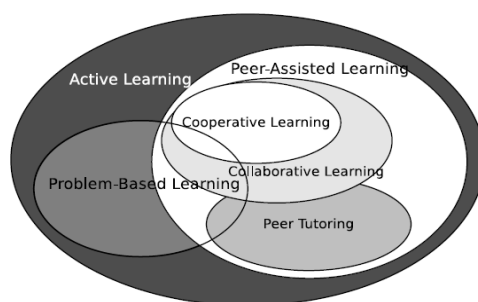
The literature related to the world of smart classrooms has been extensively reviewed by Mukesh Kumar Saini and Neeraj Goel wherein the themes researched have been listed under the following taxonomy: a) smart content presentation b) smart interaction and engagement c) smart assessment and d) smart physical environment.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of this paper is more on the smart interaction and engagement in particular.

The influence of a mobile on everyday life has been clustered for impact analysis in an article by Lucero that reflects on technology detox which touches upon four critical areas: social relationships, everyday work, research career, and location and security.<sup>2</sup>

The canvas of the student is a mix of social relationships and work in the classroom setting.

Broadly speaking one can refer to the following framework given in Figure-1 that aptly blends different student-centered learning theories that was covered in a robust survey of the literature available on the flipped classroom.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure-1** Venn Diagram of Several Student-Centered Learning Theories and Methods.

At different points in time, during the classroom sessions taken, the above theories were found to be applicable to students clustered as different groups.

Carol Cooper's reference to new technology related research speaks of the term 'domestication' to indicate the user's acceptance of the same after a period of settling or 'taming' it. The world today has reached a point of inflection where mobile smart phones have been partly tamed by the elderly, mostly tamed by the middle aged and fully conquered by the youthful and the digital natives.<sup>4</sup>

James Katz traces out how the early policies banning mobile phone usage in an educational ecosystem was based on an institutional priority for maintaining control and discipline born out a fear of the mobile's role in promoting juvenile delinquent behaviour. The technology usage itself was not subject to any kind of internal academic assessment or review.<sup>5</sup>

In the historical context of a control focused management viewpoint stressing restriction rather than collaboration with the tide of digital innovation, this paper advocates the relaxation of norms and allowing for integration of mobile technology in educational settings – especially in post graduate courses where the emotional maturity relates to young adults and not

children. The pedagogical experience narrated here has proved that it has helped to transform classroom dynamics, fostering new pathways to student engagement and participation in learning.

The subject of ‘Wireless and Mobile Technologies in Education’ - that was articulated by Hoppe et al - defines m-learning as “e-learning using mobile devices and wireless transmission...”. In the same article they mention that “The technology should be designed for and adapted to the learning needs with the hope that better technology should adapt and serve better.”<sup>6</sup>

Caroline et al have touched upon the “Prosthetic metaphors” that “abound in the literature on young people’s relationships with their phones” ... The concept of “intercorporeality” captures the “irreducible relation between technologies, embodiment, knowledge and perception.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Methodology

“Action research can be done by teachers in their own classrooms with the goal of improving pedagogy and student learning.”<sup>8</sup>

Stringer has shown the following model in his book that delineates teacher-student roles.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Action Research The Teacher Looks (Gathers information)</b> Observes student learning activity	↔	<b>Action Learning Students Look (Gathers information)</b> Acquire information by looking, listening and doing
<b>Thinks (Reflects, analyzes)</b> Assess student performance	↔	<b>Think (Reflect, analyze)</b> Process information-selecting, remembering, organizing
<b>Acts (Takes action)</b> Provides students with feedback	↔	<b>Act (Take action)</b> Perform an activity to demonstrate their understanding or competence

Figure 2 Stringer’s Model

It is the cycle of looking, thinking and acting shown in Figure-2 that forms the basis on which this paper has been curated.

The mobile phone, often viewed as a distraction in the classroom, has been reimagined as a ‘buddy space’ within the digital learning community. This intervention recounts the use of mobile phones as an integral component in engaging students through curriculum-based activities.

The methodology involved dividing 110 students into sixteen ‘mix-max’ groups in two different sections and assigning them tasks that required them to use their mobile phones to find legitimate commercial examples supporting the concepts taught in a consumer behaviour course. The same was repeated for the next batch of students after a year.

These tasks were designed to be competitive, with groups racing to complete them ahead of others, thereby fostering a healthy sense of urgency and engagement. The activities were followed by debriefing sessions to discuss outcomes and address any learning gaps.

## 3. Framework for Qualitative Data

The fact that technology allows for collaborative learning to happen has been well documented. The original form of Buschmann et al that was modified by Collaboration Design Patterns has been used as a useful framework for describing the classroom engagement intervention using mobile technology.<sup>10</sup>

The same template that covers nine headings has been used for capturing the experiences with smart phones in the classroom.

- **Name** – Whole activity pattern used for David Aaker’s Brand Personality Framework.<sup>11</sup>

The exercises were conducted in two separate years during the same term experimenting with 110 MBA students in each batch, specifically focusing on branding sessions to test students’ understanding of the application of David Aaker’s Brand Personality Framework in the field of television advertising as part of their Consumer Behaviour university course.

- **Problem** – Aaker’s framework has a lot of qualifying descriptors that helps one to conclude the personality dimension but students were not accustomed to real life application of these textbook concepts. They were used to looking at it from a perspective of how to answer the concept when it appears as a question in the university exam paper to score marks. They were deprived of building the skill to identify it as part of media critiquing.
- **Example** – After teaching them the different headings conceptually one example was cited by each group referring to a contemporary advertisement in tune with their generational preferences. The advertisement was played and elements within the same were discussed to help them discover the universality of the framework parameters.
- **Context** - The class was divided into multiple groups and each group was assigned one main personality trait and to identify new ads that conformed to its descriptive features. After discovering the same the ad had to be presented to the teacher by the group for validation and explanation of elements in the advertisement.
- **Solution** - Students were happy to collaborate within the group and among other groups discussing their findings and corroborating amongst themselves before presenting their conclusions to the teacher regarding the categorization of the advertisement as per the Aaker framework. In their search for apt examples and justification of the personality they collaborated to explain their point of view to the teacher. In this way they developed media literacy over a period of time in addition to honing their skills in applying correctly the brand classification for a particular television advertisement.

- **Implementation** – Groups were encouraged to find multiple ads that covered not only one trait but to identify ads that had a combination of traits and these were then celebrated as good examples for the rest of the class. Excitement to finish and present created a friendly competition among groups. Teacher would announce for appreciative applause for the groups with excellent elucidation.
- **Technological Assumptions** – Implementation of the same assumes wi-fi connectivity for the whole class in case they wish to use laptop in lieu of mobile. All students are expected to access a smart phone in each group for the exercise to be effective.
- **Variants** – The same exercise can have comparison of the same brand over the years and the changes in personality if any change in positioning or target segment that may have happened.
- **Consequences** - The competition among groups leads to an excitement and overall involvement that is not found in normal lecture classes. The use of a smart phone enables sharing of ads very quickly in the class after the teacher has validated the same as authentic in application.

### Originality and Value

This paper advocates for a shift in perspective regarding the usage of mobile phones in the classroom. Rather than viewing them as distractions, educators should leverage them as powerful tools for learning. The intervention demonstrates that when used effectively, mobile phones can enhance student engagement, participation, and understanding. This approach aligns with UNESCO's mandate of quality Education For All (EFA), emphasizing the role of technology in providing accessible and effective education.<sup>12</sup>

Working with two batches of MBA students gave an experience with two hundred and twenty students spread across two batches and four class sections. They were divided into thirty-two groups with an average of six to seven members per group. In making students to learn in groups they **enjoyed** dividing the work amongst themselves.

The key process in doing so was to allow them to form the group members themselves without the teacher's intervention.

The rules for group formation were told to them well in advance. Depending on the size of the class, their background qualifications, their aspirations for specialization, their internship experiences – all these were taken into account at the time of announcing the rules for group formation. Each teacher can customize to suit their particular circumstance to ensure a healthy diversity of talent exists in each group that is formed.

All presentations made by each group were conversations between the group and the teacher wherein involvement was one hundred percent and the teacher gets to know exactly where the student has a gap in understanding. Feedback was given on the spot to each student in the group.

Since the activity takes place during the class, each group comes for review at a personal level and thereafter, they share it with the other groups who are waiting to present. At the end of the class session eight groups get reviewed.

Ideally the teacher should incorporate two continuous classroom sessions in the timetable if the discussions need to be longer. The format of giving feedback to groups of six to seven is very effective as each one has a role to play within the group.

The planning of the mobile sessions happens after a previous class covered the concept theoretically. Thus, David Aaker's brand personality framework was first taught and in the next session available the application of the concepts using mobiles were executed.

## 4. Results and Discussions

The point to be noted is that the teacher no longer has to be in inspection mode mandating compliance with a 'no mobiles' policy diktat and adopting a confrontationist stance.

The pedagogical intervention discussed in this paper highlights the potential of mobile technology to transform classroom dynamics and enhance student engagement. While David Aaker's framework has been the concept that was tried with the class, the ability to relook at other course content for replication is the game changer.

It did not stop with just brand personality framework. The success in getting one hundred per cent engagement was replicated with other concepts as well. The teacher has to frame the search requirements to the classroom and facilitate the exploration using smart phones. A constant walk through the class is important to see if they are searching for the right kind of information and thereafter steer the discussions in the direction of the topic to be covered for the session if application is solicited.

Mobile searching was found to be superior to laptop searching since it was easier for the group to exchange devices and help each other and move across the room asking for help whenever required. The teacher has to facilitate movement within and across groups who desire to learn.

By incorporating competitive, curriculum-based activities that utilize mobile phones, educators can create a more interactive and participatory learning environment. The findings suggest that mobile phones, when used effectively, can serve as valuable educational tools, shifting from distractions to enhancers of learning.

Given the fact that the smart phones are getting smarter in embedding new functions the day is not far when singularity will happen as predicted by Ray Kurzweil who has been tracking technology upheavals and their trajectory.<sup>13</sup>

The point to be made is that the mobile will be a major stakeholder in the singularity era that will change the face of education and technological co-existence.

Embracing the future will be easier for all stakeholders only when we change our policy orientation from the current restrictive practices on mobile usage - that creates a fear ecosystem among students where teachers are expected to enforce a confiscation compliance - to a mindset where the smart phone is finally giving the Midas touch to curriculum delivery and taking its rightful place in pedagogical evolution.

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