Texting: Leveraging the statistics to your advantage

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- 75 percent of all US teens now own a cell phone
- 88 percent of all US teens, and 72 percent of all US teen cell phone owners, are text-messagers
- 54 percent of all US teens texted daily in September 2009
- 83 percent of all US 17 year olds own a cell phone in 2009
- 32 percent of all US teens share videos on their cell phones (Lenhart et al.)

We all know that teens are constantly using their cell phone to text, and the findings from the latest Pew Research Center are only surprising because of how much teens text! One out of every three teens texts over 100 times a day, equating to about 3,000 texts a month! We now also know that there is a gender difference as well. Girls will send and receive 80 messages per day while boys will only send and receive 30.

The report also found that many schools and libraries are treating the phones as something that disrupts learning. Despite having cell phones banned in class, 58% of those teens who are in such schools have still reported that they've sent text messages while in class. Researchers are finding that by using cell phones in the classroom teens will be more engaged and learn more. Maybe this doesn't just apply to the classroom, though, because librarians could create new text message oriented library services.

Imagine what we teachers and librarians could do if we harnessed this resource! I like picturing really engaged teens all across the state who use their mobile phones in classrooms and libraries to learn.

Test message reference, or SMS reference, is somewhat new to the library scene, but can be implemented easily because of some free tools. The idea is that anyone could text a question to the library and the library can provide a quick 140 character answer. There are some other web services out there that will answer text questions, but they're not authoritative. New tools like Cha-Cha, Yahoo! Answers, (both free services answered by members of the public) and KGB (a fee based service where each "answer" costs $0.99) are very successful and currently dominate the text messaging information world. Why aren't more libraries in on the action? Using cell phones and text messaging will engage learners! Look below for tips and resources.

What We Can Do

- Consider offering SMS (short message service) reference or text message reference services. This service can cost nothing by using Google Voice, or next to nothing by using one of the fee services. SMS reference can be staffed easily, too. This could really make an impact with teens.
- Think about the cell phone like a calculator, says Barbara Schroeder of CoolTeachers.org, "Like in the traditional classroom, some students do not own one. In the same way teachers provide calculators for classroom use. Prepaid, limited use phones and mobile devices can be employed. A phone worth $80 could
supplement the instruction for a number of students while allowing them to participate and even take an active roll." (Schroeder)

- If you are the teacher or instructor you can set up a Google Voice number to communicate with your students! Allow students to text you with questions.
- As a teacher you can also create pop quizzes for students and have them text the answer! One assignment that I came up with asked students to go to a certain call number and tell me what the subject was. Students could send images of the books, text me the subject, email the subject, etc. They could also create mobile phone videos of themselves in that area for extra credit.
- Ask students to do booktalks via text! I've had a lot of success having them video each other on their phones and text me (to my Google Voice number of course) the video of them talking about their book. Giving them alternatives, that they can also write the book talk too, or use email or other methods is helpful for those students who are not interested in using phones for assignments.
- Have students work in teams with one mobile device to do assignments.
- Create assignments that rely on text messaging for the answers! Again the Coolteachers.org website has some amazing ideas such as having them text schools in another school, maybe in another country, to learn through socialization. These include:
  - Learning about time zones using the cell phone world clock
  - In an economics class checking stocks
  - Show and tell with the photo messaging capability, which can also be used via email, too since each phone has it's own unique email address
  - Translating Shakespeare into SMS shorthand (2 b or nt 2 b) (Schroeder)

What We Can’t Do

Many report that these kinds of services are blocked at their schools and libraries, but watch and listen to Glynda Pfleiger talk about her experiences changing these policies at the Melba School District to get inspired! Turn that "can’t" into a can"! [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSPf9oQ2go0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSPf9oQ2go0)

More Resources

- Google Voice [https://www.google.com/voice](https://www.google.com/voice)

Works Cited
