

Tustin, CA
August 31, 2011
Online Circulation: 32,206 visitors/month



Mobile Learning | Q&A

QR Codes in the Classroom

Wyoming science teacher London Jenks not only allows mobile technologies in his classroom, but he's also learned how to maximize them as educational tools, tapping the devices for assessments, research, and even student scavenger hunts using QR codes.

By Bridget McCrea - 08/31/11

At a time when schools are banishing student-owned mobile devices from their classrooms--or, at least making sure the disruptive laptops, tablets, and phones are powered down class begins--London Jenks is taking a decidedly different tack.

A science teacher at **Hot Springs County High School** in Thermopolis, WY, Jenks welcomes iPhone- and Android-toting students into his classes. His reasoning is clear cut: Students need little or no training on their own devices, which allow them to quickly access to the Internet; interact with their instructor and other students; and use innovative tools like QR codes.

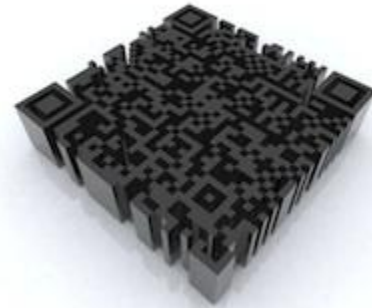
A Google-certified educator who teaches earth science, physics, chemistry, and astronomy, Jenks explained his reasons for letting down the walls that so many other instructors have erected during this "mobile" age and told us how the strategy has helped him be more effective as a teacher.

Bridget McCrea: What types of student-owned technology do you allow in your classroom?

London Jenks: The most common devices students bring are their cell phones, although they are also allowed to bring their own tablets or laptops into my science classes.

McCrea: How do you use them in class?

Jenks: Students respond to questions using their cell phones and services like **Poll Everywhere** (for classroom polling) and **Cha Cha** (for quick, fact-based research). I also use QR codes, which lend themselves to scavenger hunt activities very well. For example, students may spend the classroom period looking at various uses for water on campus. I also use QR codes when I want to provide students with the chance to check their answers at any time by encoding those answers in the QR code.



McCrea: Why are QR codes such an important part of your classes right now?

A 3D representation of a QR code. Jenks uses QR codes in his classrooms to engage students in classroom activities.

Jenks: I became interested in using QR codes early last year but didn't use them because I didn't want to separate my classes into those students who had smart phones and those who didn't. I eventually found a service called **Snap My Info** that allows QR codes to be available to anyone with a camera and picture messaging. This opened up the opportunity to nearly every one of my students. Implementing QR codes in class was fairly easy once I had a way for all students to use them. There was bit of training to do with the students, and then we were off and running.

McCrea: How do QR codes help you as a teacher?

Jenks: By creating immediate student engagement. Being able to use their own devices allows students a level of comfort and familiarity that they don't usually experience with technology at school. There is very little that they need to learn to use the technology. It also provides them with access to the same technologies outside of the classroom.

McCrea: Have you run into any challenges using mobile technology in the classroom?

Jenks: Dealing with out-of-date or problematic technology can be difficult. It's just the nature of the beast in educational technology, and it's something that everyone has to deal with. To overcome this issue I try to figure out what works well and what doesn't, and then I capitalize on those strengths. Another challenge I've seen is pushback from stakeholders, namely parents, administrators, students, or other educators. "What's wrong with the good old paper and pencil?" remains a common question in educational circles. My answer to that question is, "Nothing." However, there are some great things that technology can provide to enhance student learning.

McCrea: What would you say to K-12 teachers looking to integrate mobile technology into their classrooms?

Jenks: Don't wait. Technologies are constantly changing and keeping up can be overwhelming. Pick one new tool and start implementing it today. Mobile technologies don't have to be expensive; there are thousands of free tools out there. Also, find some way to connect with other educators who are using technology in their classrooms whether it is on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, blogs, or your face-to-face relationships. These connections will help motivate you to do more and will provide you with lots of ideas.

McCrea: What's on your IT agenda right now?

Jenks: To stay up to date and aware of what is new and to look for unique ways that it can enhance student learning and engagement in my classroom. I'll take what's good and leave the rest. I am specifically moving to a more paperless classroom in all of my subjects, while at the same time working on a broader scale to roll out some of the time saving tools that I'm already using to the rest of my district.