Blackburn College: The Fardella Flow

Summary

Joanne Fardella, Lecturer in Law at the University Centre at Blackburn College thinks that instead of banning personal devices in the classroom, teachers should be embracing them. This teaching method, ‘The Fardella Flow’ could help others solve the problem of what to do with mobile phones in the classroom.

About Blackburn College

Blackburn College has been providing education for over 120 years and is one of the largest colleges with a University Centre in the country. It currently has over 15,000 students of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and interests, studying on courses from Entry Level through to Masters Degrees.

The challenge

Joanne’s teaching method in the classroom setting uses the students’ own devices. It is a very flexible approach, often going with the ‘flow’ of the class, its progression of discussion and its group dynamic at any given time. She aims to offer ideas in order to utilise different techniques from a tutor’s point of view, such as formative assessment, independent study and classroom management. She also demonstrates the views of the students, giving them opportunity to demonstrate their own approaches and systems and express the effects of the use of their devices in class and their study overall. Kerry Narramore, student describes how she uses her Samsung Note to help her with her work: [link to video].

The activity

Joanne explains where her innovative ways of teaching law using iPads, mobile phones and other technology has come from: “I was always taught in a very traditional way, with little interaction with tutors and no control over study except for books. I have always aimed to vary my lectures to give the students more management and power in respect of how they learn and their varied learning styles, whilst being open to the progression of society and its tools. I use my experiences as both a learner and a tutor to try to listen to the students and their needs by attempting new things. If it gets them to learn and it works for them, then I’ve succeeded.”
She said: “When I was a newly qualified teacher I wanted to try out different ideas in the classroom. I didn’t want to shout: ‘Put away your phone or iPads’. I wanted to make use of them as I think we should embrace technology as it enhances learning. Rather than have scraps of paper everywhere or students fiddling on their phones texting, they can use their devices to share links, share their work and research, photograph work from the board and generally help with their education. Then they can never forget to bring examples in as they can get them off their iPads or phones. I was always the kind of student that lost interest if someone just talked at me – I am a visual person – and so that’s the way I want to develop with my students. I did think everyone let their students use iPads and mobile phones in the classroom and didn’t realise I was so unusual. I use a variety of different ways to engage my students; technology is just one of them. If it helps students to understand I don’t care how it is done or what I have got to do, if they walk out of my classroom understanding and they can then go and sit an exam then that is half the battle won.”

Tauseef Issa, student explains how he uses his mobile to make his life easier in lectures: http://youtu.be/wlb_EvrknFo.

The outcomes

The College has iPads and other technologies that can be used in lessons. But Joanne doesn’t use them as she goes with the flow of the lesson and finds that all the students have a smart phone anyway. If something comes up and she likes it she gets everybody to look up a particular resource or sends it to the board. She explains: “I don’t think that to do what I do you have to be massively into technology and be app techy it doesn’t have to be that way. I haven’t had anybody say to me ‘I can’t do that’ or ‘I don’t like using that’. It’s a choice, it enhances the teaching, it doesn’t replace.”

Tauseef Issa, student explains how he uses a video recorder on his phone to help him practice for presentations: http://youtu.be/axJjBoxKlRA

There is a noticeable difference between Joanne’s lessons and other more traditional lessons. She has only been teaching for the last three years but she teaches repeat lessons to different groups and ages so it is easy to make comparisons. She explains: “I try different things year on year and if something has worked I’ll repeat it, if it hasn’t I’ll drop it. I may think of doing something on a Thursday that I haven’t done on a Monday so then again I can compare. As a tutor you know when lights and bulbs are going on in your room and when they are not.”

In Joanne’s class she doesn’t have a problem with learners messing about on their phones. She says: “I would rather that they are not trying to send a text message or check Facebook on the sly. If they have their phone out on the desk, they know I am walking around and I am asking them to do something very specific and they have to get on with it. If I ask them a question at the end they need to have been doing what I have told them. If I expect them to just sit there and listen to me they are definitely going to be playing on their phone they have got no other use for it. I found that classroom management is better when I am getting them to use their phone at some point during the lesson. You can even in the middle of a lesson just give them five
Joanne Fardella shows students Russell Bury and Halima Sharif how gadgets can be used in the classroom.

There are challenges to keep in mind especially safeguarding the students. Joanne’s students are from the HE sector so they are adults and in charge of their own devices. When using their own devices in class they are on the university Wi-Fi which stops them from accessing certain things. So far she hasn’t encountered any problems. That is not to say that there aren’t various issues of legality but she doesn’t touch the devices or ask them to access anything that they shouldn’t be accessing.

**The impact**

One of the main reasons for first embracing the use of personal devices in the classroom was that Joanne was looking for a way to get her students to complete their prep work for her classes. She says: “Every time I asked them to go and look at a journal or to get them to bring in their own research they just weren’t doing it but if they have got it on their phone they find it easy to just get it on Google five minutes before the lesson or take a screenshot and they have it. They are much more likely to come prepared. I find that even if they have looked at it a little bit when I am talking around it they are connecting with me on a sub conscious level because they have looked at it in advance. It is easier because the internet and your phone and all these gadgets are designed to make your life easier. If I asked them to get a journal article
from the library, print it and bring it they wouldn't do. Plus they are now accessing a range of articles rather than just printing one off.”

The students’ say: “We can bring notes up on our devices whilst the tutor is talking, we can makes notes directly on them and then easily refer back later with a swipe or scroll rather than loads of paper.”

“If our classmates have missed a session, we can email each other the crucial work or notes immediately- we can help each other.”

“When we are given work to do or we are reading, we can take images of what we are confused about, and ask. That way, we don’t have to worry about finding it later.”

Haroon Khan, student explains why saving things on his phone helps him instead of using a USB stick: [http://youtu.be/cE7l3qAT0C4](http://youtu.be/cE7l3qAT0C4).

The lessons learned

Joanne say: “Set the ground rules out. The students know where they are with me - they know when there is a time to use their phones and when there is not. Give them their boundaries and guidance. Don’t give them a free rein as they will get side tracked. You must always bring them back to what is relevant and give them a time limit. If you are not using it for academic purposes just give them 5 minutes to reply to a message, this stops them from being constantly distracted. It is the students’ device and you have to remember that. They don’t have to share and just remember your boundaries in terms of touching their device or asking them to upload any content from their phone and make sure it is nothing private or personal. It doesn’t take hours of prep to do a five minute session. There are times where you’ll try
something like any teaching method and it goes wrong. Don't let it put you off. If I can do it anyone can!"

Useful links

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Blackburn College

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