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Using Students' Smartphones for Collaborative Work

What is the teaching activity?

- Have students use their smartphones to complete collaborative written assignments and presentations in the classroom, outside of the classroom or in both settings

What are the advantages of using the smartphone?

- It can be challenging for students to find a common meeting time and ensure that each member contributes equally to the task. As well, it is organizationally cumbersome to send draft versions back and forth. By using Google Docs for written work and Google Slides for presentations, teachers can address these issues because (1) students can complete their work anytime from anywhere and (2) teachers can observe if everyone on the team is doing their assigned work and meeting deadlines (promotes accountability). In addition, (3) teachers can provide feedback to an entire team at once.
- Other advantages include (1) students can readily edit their own work as well as other team member's work and (2) teams can continue to be productive during class time, even if a team member is absent, because that member can 'attend class' using their phone. If this is not possible, (3) at least the absent team member can have access to a record of what has been done.
- Remember, Google Docs and Google Slides can be used as 'check in tools' because teachers and other team members can see what members are doing or not doing (promotes productivity).

How do students use their phones?

- Simply put, students can use their smartphones to complete collaborative tasks inside and outside class if they are signed into their Google account (or signed into another account that promotes collaboration, such as Microsoft Office 365 OneDrive) on their device.

What are some hot tips for teachers?

- Despite the many advantages of remote work using students' smartphones, provide face-to-face time in class during the initial stages of a project.
- In the case of a writing task, start by asking student teams to create a table of contents and/or an overall plan. For presentations, ask student teams to create a slide template, along with assigned slides.
- During the project, consider offering students the opportunity to work in their preferred setting: face-to-face in class with the teacher present versus a remote location.
- Have students send you the link to their work, so that you can monitor their progress and give feedback.
- Suggest that when a team member needs to communicate with only one other member, they use a different platform and communicate privately to avoid numerous notifications and unnecessary comments on the collaborative platform.

Keep in mind...

- If students do not have a Gmail account, they can download the Google Suite app on their phone and be able to use all its features for sharing ideas and giving feedback. But... the student must create a Google account; this can have a non-Gmail address.

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