A normal Learning Support Writing class at Walters State Community College consists of three major papers. The students have three chances to pass each paper with a grade of 75 or better. While the students are working on those papers, they are also working on grammar exercises and talking about things such as thesis statements, introductory paragraphs, conclusions, and transitions. It is rare that any two students are working on the same assignment at the same time after the first few weeks. Once the first paper has been turned in, some people are working on a new draft of paper one, some people have moved on to paper two, and some people are frazzled and have taken a few days to practice their grammar. It is imperative to keep the students on track so no one falls too far behind, and it is also necessary to know what all students are working on when they are in class.
For some current college instructors, cell phones are a notorious distraction. Instructors confiscate them during class as if their students are children, kick students out of class for using them in the classroom, ignore the students who use them, pretend it is not happening in front of them, see it as a reflection of their teaching and become disheartened, or even text in class themselves. In my classroom, I walk around and talk to each student during every class, and I often see students slip their cellphones back under a notebook or turn the phone onto its face when they see me coming.

Cell phones are merely a symptom of unengaged students, not a cause in and of itself. I know that talking about comma splices is not the most interesting thing that my students think that they could be doing with their time, but I also know that it is important for their grades in this and other classes and their future job prospects. Students who can write well do not have to worry about their writing when they are working on a paper – they only need to worry about the content of their paper. They also increase their job possibilities if they are able to articulate well on paper which leads to increased communication skills. If the students could link their cell phones to their grammar and writing practice, would it make them less reluctant to work on grammar? Would it even make them like it? Ok…tolerate it?
My goal with my mobile learning attempts was to have students carry out as many of the class activities as possible on their devices. As fate would have it, each of the students in my Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 had a smart device, that is a personal phone with wifi capabilities.

In the original plan for my mobile class, I decided that I was going to teach my students everything through apps. I had a plan for an ESL class that focused on four aspects – listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The apps that I planned to use were:

- Notes (for journaling)
- Calendar app (for scheduling)
- Youtube and Safari (for research, grammar videos, miscellaneous)
- Show me app (for creating presentations)
- ITunes and audible (for listening to grammar podcasts and an audiobook)
- NPR, Knoxville News Sentinel (for reading)
- Words with Friends, Quiz up (for grammar, spelling, and vocabulary practice)

I expected to use elearn, our course management system, very lightly, mostly for turning in screen shots of what the students were doing, so I could have a record of their work. What I immediately learned about mobile learning, though, which is true of all teaching at the community college level, was that it is imperative to have a backup plan. My ESL class did not make, and I had to modify Mobile Learning Fellows Plan for an 0803 Learning Support Writing class. This is a class that focuses on grammar and writing practices and which precedes an English 1010 Writing course.

When I modified the class, I found many things that I wanted to utilize in the app store and decided I was going to just throw everything at the students on the first day and see what stuck. This was a terrible idea. Why?
The data above is culled from discussions from students about what was most confusing about having all of the apps discussed on the first day.

I entered class on the first day and asked the students to download ten apps onto their phones. This is what the student’s smart devices looked like on the first day:
Calander app
• This is the basic calander app on every cell phone.
• Plan for use: The students were to add their assignments to their phone calander so that they were always aware of when their work was due.

Notes App
• This is the general notes app that comes on every smart phone.
• Plan for use: I asked the students to use the notes app to write ideas, brainstorm, journal, and take specific notes in class so they would have them ready.

Audio Recorder App
• Some phones come with a voice recorder and some students had to download this onto their device.
• Plan for use: I asked students to read each other’s papers into the author’s phone. This way the writer could hear their work coming from someone else’s voice. It would be easier for them to hear mistakes.

Elevate
• This app is a brain trainer and supposed to increase critical thinking -- particularly reading, listening, and writing.
• Plan for use: I asked the students to sign up for this and test it out. The app gives a writing exercise, a reading exercise, and a listening or speaking exercise every day. This was originally intended for the ESL class.

Podcast
• This app is for listening to podcasts -- in our case, Grammar Girl!
• Plan for use: listen to an assigned Grammar Girl podcast and write a response. What did you learn? Was the way this was explained helpful? Why / why not? How could you teach this differently?

Quizup
• This is a quiz game
• Plan for use: I asked the students to create accounts and to play specific games. I wanted them to learn while playing and to get competitive in order to push their learning further.
Needless to say, the students were overwhelmed. It was hard to talk them through what each app would be used for in a way that they could keep straight. Giving the students a list with the apps and noting what each app was for would have served them better.

For example:

**MP3 Recorder:** This is a voice recorder, and we will use it in class so you can read your paper into your phone. There are times that I will ask you to trade phones and papers with a peer and let someone else read your paper into your phone so you can listen to how your work sounds in someone else’s voice later. Please download any voice recorder that is pleasing to you. (Free is preferable!)

**Podcasts:** This semester, I will ask you to download a few specific episodes of the Grammar Girl podcast. Please download the podcast app, as it is much easier to get the podcast if you already have the app. Check out some of the other podcasts that are available to you!

Some of the apps I required focused on rules of grammar or writing. I asked that the students to download a game called **Quiz up.** The students were required to play ten grammar or English related games on this app between every class. **Quiz up** is an app that allows students to have timed challenges against either an
opponent of their choosing or a stranger relating to sentence structure, grammar, and missing words. The students would either show me their game log in class or would send a screenshot into the dropbox. The students would get competitive about how they were doing and would earn badges, such as Grammarian (if they started to do very well) or Lemon (if they lost three games in a row).

Some of the apps were good in theory, but not useful in action. For example, Goodreads proved to be better as a class discussion than as an app. The podcasts ended up being more beneficial than the Audiobook. I used the podcast as an assignment where the students listened to Grammar Girl and wrote a response about what they learned. They listened, read, and wrote. It was an assignment that fully engaged students. I asked them to choose their most consistent mistake. The majority of the class stopped making the mistake that they chose after this.

English Tutor, Elevate, and Kindle all fell to the wayside to make room for other assignments and apps we found along the way. The students became engaged in new ways. They decided to take charge of their learning experience and test out ways to bring games into the classroom. One student found an app called The Grading Game.

The Grading Game shows students that when they proofread, they can still miss a lot of mistakes. It times them, it’s fun, and they got hooked on it quickly. It actually measures their reading speed, but it proved most helpful in making the students more careful proofreaders and editors.
Students also started finding errors in the world around them. They used the cameras on their phones and the ability to screenshot to show that they were learning. They even had a contest to see who could find the most mistakes.

The student who took the picture above was surprised to see a missing apostrophe at their local Dunkin Donuts. They identified this as a look-alike/ sound alike mistake (or a homonym error) and sent this in over Thanksgiving break. This is a common error in student papers, and once the students started looking for errors with their cameras, they found that this was a common error in the world around them. It made them more comfortable looking for the error in their own work and admitting to making the mistake. Once they felt comfortable owning up to the error in their work, they started looking for the mistake specifically and finding it more often.
The student who took this screenshot was excited to find this comma error. The student who sent this in often had comma problems, and was proud to find that they could find the error in someone else’s post. Since they could figure out that the sentences should say, “Watch out, Tennessee, Florida is catching up! Let’s go, Florida!”; they realized that they were wrong to think that they would not be able to proofread their own paper for this error. As soon as they found this error and we talked about this in class together, they began to improve in proofreading their own work. They improved their confidence.

The Fall 2014 class consisted of minimal lecture, some discussion and writing assignments (the students were working on major papers throughout the semester), and then app work.

The typical class day in the Fall of 2014 was taken up with a lot of time working on apps, writing, and talking about the student work (in peer review and individually). Lecture was kept to a minimum.
Out of class time in the Fall of 2014 consisted of app assignments and writing projects.

In the spring of 2015, I took out a few apps and added a few different assignments. I added a daily journal for the students. The first fifteen minutes of the class consisted of journaling on a notes app for writing practice. Then the students used the cameras on their phones to find errors in the world around them, as did the Fall 2014 class. They also used The Grading Game and Quiz up as well as an audio recorder app. We tested out nearpod and when I lectured in class: I supported lectures with content and quizzes on nearpod. I gave exit quizzes and had class contests with the socrative app.

In Spring 2015, I had a chance to refine and make chances to my Mobile Fellows plan. In the Spring 2015 course, I was repeating my work with a similar set of students in the same course I had taught in the Fall, that is ENGL 0803. In Spring 2015, I basically taught again what worked from the Fall with some new twists.

In Spring 2015, I used webtools as well as apps. I asked the students to try out freerice.com and play the grammar game on that website. I also asked them to visit the chompchomp website (chompchomp.com) and practice specific grammar exercises during class time.

One thing that I do in my class is walk around the classroom and discuss each individual student’s work and progress with the student. I do not often have students who are at the same writing point, so it is imperative
to know what the students need to work on as a whole and where I can help the best. Meeting with every student individually during each class helps me to create lectures that can touch on things that each student needs help with. **Nearpod** was an app that helped me with this. Because **nearpod** is interactive, I was able to pull up answers that some of the students had to questions and have them help each other. They were able to input thesis statements into the app from their seats and I could push specific thesis statements out so we could all discuss them as a group.

**Socrative** helped me gauge my own progress and to see if I were meeting my students’ needs. I also was able to see if the students understood how the technical aspects of what we were talking about worked as well as how to apply to their own writing the rules and concepts we talked about and practiced with the apps and webtools. Could they identify what a comma splice was as well as fix it?

The deeper I fell into mobile learning, the better I was at finding my footing in checking and balancing myself as a college instructor of English.

The Spring 2015 class spent more time discussing and playing than the Fall 2014 class did. The class spent time learning together with games such as Socrative, and the games that the class participated in were grammar and writing based.
Because more writing took place inside the classroom in the Spring 2015, for homework, the students spent more time on their apps. For miscellaneous assignments, this would consist something like of finding an app they could use for writing practice.

The last place I was able to test my theory of mobile learning was in the summer of 2015. I was given the opportunity to work with ProjectGRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams). This program is in Knoxville, Tennessee, and it is for high school freshmen going into their sophomore year. The students who are given the opportunity to attend the program are from the two Knox County high schools that are the most at risk for not graduating high school or attending college. The program attempts to get the students to realize that they can make a difference in their community and that they can attend college. The opportunities are there for them, and this is one of the opportunities that will help them get to college. If the student completes the summer program (with grades above a C in every class), they receive a stipend of $150.00. If the student completes two years of the program, one at a commuter college and one at a sleep away college, getting good grades and graduating with a GPA of 2.5 or above from high school, they receive a $4000.00 scholarship for college.
Many of the students in ProjectGRAD are from low income families and do not have their own devices. One of the main components of the ENGL 0803 course has been having the students work on the apps on their own time. In this summer class, this could not happen.

In order to utilize this as a test class, I acquired iPads from the generosity of the chemistry department at Pellissippi State Community College, but was able to have only one app added to them -- quiz up. This had been one of my more successful apps so far and it is a free app. Since the students did not have their own smart devices and could not take the iPads home, my only choice was to make the class a game zone. It felt like a risky move. Was it going to be a wasted three weeks of instruction?

When the students entered the classroom, I had them take the Walters State Community College Pre Test for the Learning Support 0800 class. They averaged 30% compared to my 38% for my Spring 2015 students. I also asked them to write a paragraph in the first week so I could see how they wrote. This averaged a grade of 60% as compared to an average of 78% in my Spring 2015 0803 students.

In the first ten minutes of class, I would let the students ask me questions about anything that they wanted concerning the content of the course and the work they were doing. Whatever they had questions about, I answered. Then, we broke out the iPads. The students all created quizup accounts and added each other and me to that account. We challenged each other to grammar, spelling, and word games. I made sure to challenge each student in the classroom in every class to make sure that they were interacting and on task. The students took screenshots of questions that they found confusing and we talked about them as a class after the games were done. We left ten minutes at the end of class to talk about the confusing questions or any other writing and English questions that came up. The students wrote a paragraph a week, along with writing in their other classes totaling three paragraphs.

In the last week of the program, the students in ProjectGRAD wrote a paragraph with the average grade of 90% (as compared to the final paper for my Spring 2015 class, which was an average of 82%). Twenty one out of thirty students improved from their pretest to their posttest, with some improving by more than 30%.
The students in the summer program acted as a cohort and ended up having the most success in the shortest time span. They challenged each other, we talked about games they were playing with each other, and they knew the questions that they were getting stuck on. They also had fun while they were learning. It was a casual and engaging environment. This was more so because the students were challenging each other to quizup games during the class time and working on writing assignments in other classes. They were able to work on writing outside of class and ask about writing questions during class. In this way, I considered this course a “flipped” or “inverted” classroom. That is, the usual work inside the class (writing) was done at home, and the usual work done at home (“homework”) was done inside the classroom.

I learned a great deal from this experiment in mobile learning. The first thing that I realized is that instructors need to be flexible to changing our views about what the classroom can look like. The class environment that I was the most leery of (the summer model that was completely flipped) was the one felt the most successful. When it looked as if my students were not working, they were working the hardest and were the most engaged. They asked the most interesting questions at the end of our sessions (for example, what is
the difference between an oxford comma and a series comma? Why do they both need to exist?). They had the best answers. Their critical thinking excelled. When they were thinking about what to put in their paragraphs for support for their thesis statements, they gave supporting statements that were insightful and responsive. What I worked hard to push outside of my classroom throughout the school year, I watched happen organically inside of the classroom throughout three summer weeks.

Mobile learning can be tailored to the personality of each classroom and each instructor’s preferences to enhance the learning experience. There are a multitude of apps and webtools designed to help teach, not to the mention apps and webtools that are not designed to teach but that can be used in innovative ways to bring material and teaching into the classroom and to the work outside of class. Through apps and mobile learning, we can repave the path of instruction.