

The tech divide between teachers and students

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Massey PhD student Kathryn Mac Callum.

New research by a Massey University PhD student has found that many educators feel out of their depth when adopting new technology for use in the classroom.

Kathryn Mac Callum, who will receive her [doctoral degree](#) at a Massey graduation ceremony this week, investigated the use of mobile technology in the tertiary education sector. She found some clear differences between the attitudes of teachers and students.

"Students are increasingly demanding mobile learning – they are very comfortable using smartphones and tablets and find the flexibility and the ability to share resources and collaborate on projects really engaging," she says.

"There is a clear generational shift with some teachers not comfortable using mobile technology at all, while many others are comfortable using it in their personal lives but not as a teaching tool."

Ms Mac Callum, who is currently undertaking further research into the use of tablets in primary schools, says in many ways the primary school sector is using mobile technology in more innovative ways.

"It is amazing to see how comfortable children are with this technology, and the novelty factor of using a [touchscreen](#) can really motivate them and make learning interesting and fun.

"Uneven access to mobile learning may become an issue if only some teachers are comfortable using [mobile technology](#), and of course, cost could also be a barrier for many schools, including those in low decile areas."

Ms Mac Callum says that no teacher wants to feel like their students know more than them, and that it is important that teachers go through their own [learning experience](#) before they are required to use new technology in the classroom.

"Educators can really clamp down on the use of technology as a learning tool if they haven't bought into its usefulness. They are the gatekeepers, so if they aren't comfortable they will just avoid using it and it will never gain traction."

Ms Mac Callum says she first became interested in the topic of mobile

learning in the context of her own job as a lecturer in Business Computing at the Eastern Institute of Technology.

"I'm an IT geek, and like all geeks I love my gadgets, as do most of my students. The impact of technology on education is such a dynamic field that I think most educators need support if they are to keep up with the constant changes in the way people share information out in the real world.

"My PhD thesis was really about understanding the factors that have an impact on the successful adoption of mobile learning, and to provide some practical recommendations for introducing it into the classroom."

Ms Mac Callum says the first step is to give teachers the chance to familiarise themselves with [new technology](#) before they have to use it with students. "Give them an iPad to play with – they have to be comfortable just using it before they can be comfortable teaching with it," she says.

"Then there has to be work done around how the devices can be used as an educational tool. Run workshops, but don't bombard teachers; keep it simple, and let them run trials in the classroom.

"The most important thing is to give [teachers](#) support as they build their comfort levels and show them how the technology can be useful for engaging students in their learning."

Provided by Massey University

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