

Appendix E: *Pocket-size teacher helps newcomers.* An article about the [eslau.ca](http://eslau.ca) site

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## Textbook texting







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Lisa Tu from China answers the text questions on her cellphone (inset). The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and Athabasca University are conducting a pilot project to teach English grammar to new immigrants using cellphones.

# Pocket-size teacher helps newcomers

## Cellphones deliver interactive English lessons

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Journal Staff Writer  
EDMONTON

"John a manager" is a sentence. True or false?

The question displayed on tiny cellphone screens to the class of 17 recent immigrants was not difficult.

And none of the engineers, teachers, architects and others at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers Thursday appeared challenged, even if English is not their first language.

But when they pressed their responses on their cellphone keypads, they

helped launch a new era in electronic learning in their new homeland.

The students are part of an Athabasca University pilot project, likely the first in Canada, that extends electronic learning to the increasingly common gadgets.

"If I have free time I would use this all the time, waiting for a bus, or on a break," said Tao Fang, an electrical engineer from China who has been in Canada three months.

"It is very easy to get a cellphone."

The online campus already offers hundreds of long-distance courses through everyday computer learning. By developing lessons for cellphones, it is ex-

tending its reach to a broader audience.

This kind of learning will be good for mobile people like truck drivers, says Tony Tin, the project co-ordinator.

"It is really difficult for them to carry laptops and find Wi-Fi access. Why shouldn't they be able to use their cellphones?"

After downloading a lesson into a cellphone's memory a student must read a short tutorial. Next there are questions designed to be tiny-button friendly, by being true and false or multiple choice.

"We promote cellphone literacy," Tin said. "It is part of information literacy."

[See CELLPHONE / A15](#)



## Interactive learning software works on common cellphones

CELLPHONE  
[Continued from A1](#)

A big advantage of Athabasca's software is that the lessons are easy to access on common \$50 cellphones. If a phone can handle text messaging it can handle the lessons.

The university has already developed cellphone access to its library and may someday extend cellphone learning to business or nursing programs, Tin said.

Courses can also be offered abroad.

"One of the things we are talking about is using this in different countries where

can access the Internet, but they can't afford a computer," said Colin Elliott, one of the project developers.

Students taking part in the pilot project will complete several lessons over the week and then be tested on how much they remember. The project includes similar studies with a church group in Edmonton and with a diverse group of younger students in Calgary.

Tao Fang, a teacher who came from China about six months ago, is impressed with the opportunity to learn English grammar on her cellphone.

"It will be very convenient to practice"

"I also think it is easy to control."

She looks down at her tiny screen to answer another question. She must put the words "is terrible," "the weather," and "today," in order to make a common English sentence. It takes her seconds to push the correct little buttons.

Like most of the class, she carried a cell long before she came to Canada.

"Cellphones have become a fashionable tool or equipment in China, especially for teenagers," she said.

"But if I am to improve my speaking ability or listening ability I need to talk with other people."