

Book Review: *Mobile learning: A handbook for educators and trainers* by Kukulska-Hulme A. & Traxler J. (eds.) 2005.

Mobile learning can be spontaneous, portable, personal, situated; it can be informal, unobtrusive, ubiquitous and disruptive. It takes us much nearer to 'anytime, anywhere' learning but it is still too early to predict how our understandings of learning and teaching will evolve as a consequence (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005: 42)

If mobile learning is defined as learning that is not restricted to a particular location and which can occur whilst 'on the move' then mobile learning is not a new phenomenon. For example, print based technologies and audiotapes have been used in both campus-based and distance learning for many years. These mobile technologies can be used beyond the classroom and whilst in transit whether that be on a bus, train or aircraft.

In a contemporary sense, the use of the term mobile learning is being applied to '...the possibilities opened up by portable, lightweight devices that are sometimes small enough to fit in a pocket or in the palm of one's hand' (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005:1). Examples of technologies that fall within the scope of mobile learning include mobile phones, smart phones, palmtops, and handheld computers (Personal Digital Assistants or PDAs); Tablet PCs, laptop computers and personal media players (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005). These devices provide facilities that include:

- communication (e.g. voice phone, short messaging service (SMS), multimedia messaging service (MMS))
- capturing and playing e-books, sound, still and video images, animations
- organising capabilities (e.g. clock, alarm, GPS, diary, contact details)
- access to the Internet
- word-processing, spreadsheet and database capabilities
- data entry through keypad, graffiti facility, audio capture, still and video photography, download of files.

Two characteristics distinguish this modern version of digital mobile learning from previous analog versions:

1. the capacity of devices to capture, store and share large volumes of data
2. the convergence of previously separate facilities.

So what are the implications of mobile learning for teaching practices? What are the possibilities, problems, barriers and institutional issues?

Mobile learning. A handbook for educators and trainers (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005) provides a useful introductory text that considers a range of technical and pedagogic issues associated with contemporary mobile learning. They also consider accessibility issues. The text provides 12 case studies that include the use of a range of mobile devices in the fields of Italian language, medical studies, music composition and student organisation across a range of contexts.

Reasons offered for using mobile devices relate to improved access, evaluation and enhancement of learning and teaching, exploration of learners' requirements and behaviours and alignment with institutional or business aims (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005). These reasons are remarkably similar to those that have been used to promote flexible learning, workplace learning, online learning and e-learning in earlier years. One might ask if these reasons have been justified by evaluation? Certainly the research into

'online learning' is, at best, ambiguous about such claims in respect to increased access, improved learning and reduced costs (Guthrie 2003).

Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler claim that '...[m]obile devices open up new opportunities for independent investigations, practical fieldwork, professional updating and on-the-spot knowledge. They can also provide opportunities for improved learner support and guidance, and for more efficient course administration and management' (2005:26). Such claims relate to the perspectives of learning, student support and administration. If the experience of non-mobile technology reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2005) is repeated then we may find that the benefits of mobile technologies relate more to increases in the efficiency and effectiveness of student support and administration than to changes in the design of teaching programs or learning practices in on-campus institutions.

In conclusion Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2005) note that

The success of mobile learning may well depend on the pedagogical tasks that the devices are used for, and on the integration of tasks within a well defined pedagogical approach. (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler 2005:192)

References

Guthrie, H. (ed.) 2003, *Online learning. Research findings*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. Leabrook.

Kukulska-Hulme, A. & Traxler, J. (eds.) 2005. *Mobile learning. A handbook for educators and trainers*. Open and flexible learning series, Routledge, London.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, *E-learning in tertiary education. Where do we stand?* OECD, Paris.