

Chapter XXXIII

Mobile Learning in a Social, Ethical, and Legal Environment

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ABSTRACT

The increasing diversity, availability, and functionality of mobile and wireless technologies over the last 4 or 5 years has accelerated the proliferation of pilots and trials in mobile learning. But the evaluation of these has been methodologically and ethically flawed, and consequently substantial and sustained mobile learning has not happened. These technologies are also transforming many aspects of society including ideas of communication, discourse, community, culture, and ethics. Mobile learning is uniquely aligned to contribute to this transformed society but only once evaluators understand the ethical challenges. This chapter is important because it addresses the issue of the ethical evaluation of mobile learning.

INTRODUCTION

The *m-learning* project was one of the earliest large-scale mobile learning projects. It was a 3 year pan-European project, which began in October 2001 and finished in September 2004. The project was funded by the European Commission under the Education Area of the Information Society (IST) Programme. It was led by the UK's Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA). The Consortium was composed of the Consorzio Centro di Ricerca in Matematica Pura

ed Applicata (CRMPA) in Italy and Lecando AB in Sweden. Project partners in the UK were Cambridge Training and Development Limited (CTAD), a Learning Technology Research Centre based at Anglia Ruskin University. The project addressed three social/educational issues relating to many young adults aged 16-24 in the EU: Poor literacy/numeracy; non-participation in conventional education; lack of access creating ICT haves and have-nots.

The project was large and some 200 learners were involved in the final trials. There were several

different software deliverables, including a range of educational games, a micro-portal, and a learner management system. The impact of the project on its target group was positive and rewarding, and provided grounds for exploring the potential of mobile learning across a variety of socially disadvantaged groups including travellers and the homeless (Attewell & Savill-Smith, 2004). In the course of this project it became apparent that mobile learning presented unique ethical challenges if it was to be evaluated effectively and appropriately. A series of internal guidelines was developed that attempted to define and address these challenges before they were published to a wider audience (Traxler & Bridges, 2004). It has however subsequently become obvious that these issues are embedded in a wider and more profound social context, that mobile learning has moved on considerably in since the early days of *m-learning* and that the ethics of mobile learning evaluation can no longer be considered in isolation from wider social change driven by the increasing availability, functionality, and acceptance of mobile and wireless technologies.

A BACKGROUND TO MOBILE LEARNING

Mobile learning is a concept that is becoming increasingly familiar to researchers and practitioners in higher education. Over the last 4 or 5 years there have been a variety of pilots and projects that have explored the educational possibilities of using handheld computers, mobile phones, personal media players, and games consoles to deliver, support, and enhance learning, assessment, guidance and administration. It is now sufficiently mature and varied to have a major textbook (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler, 2005) and a number of prestigious international conferences. MLEARN in Birmingham 2003 was followed by MLEARN 2003 in London, attracting

more than 200 delegates from 13 countries. The series continued with Bracciano, Rome in July 2004, Cape Town in October 2005, Athabasca in November 2006, Melbourne in November 2007, and Wolverhampton in October 2008.

Mobile learning now has a wide-ranging literature (see for example reviews by Cobcroft, 2006, and Naismith et al., 2004)--but no dedicated journal--and a greater clarity about the significant issues (Sharples, 2006), defining the big issues, and a more sharply defined research agenda (Arnedillo-Sánchez et al., 2007). The mobile learning community is now theorising in its own right (Sharples et al., 2005) and challenging established theories of technology enhanced learning (Laurillard, 2002).

At the same time, recent publications (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2005; JISC, 2005), and conference proceedings (Attewell & Savill-Smith, 2004) have put a large number of case studies documenting trials, pilots, and their evaluations into the public domain. In looking at these, Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2007) found some emergent categories that characterise the current state of mobile learning:

- Technology-driven mobile learning in which some specific technological innovation is deployed to demonstrate technical feasibility and pedagogic possibility;
- Miniature but portable e-learning in which mobile, wireless and handheld technologies are used to re-enact approaches and solutions found in conventional e-learning;
- Connected classroom learning covers the same technologies as those used in classroom settings to support static collaborative learning;
- Informal, personalised, situated mobile learning contains the same core technologies that are enhanced with additional functionality, for example location-awareness or video-capture;

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