Chapter 7
M-Learning and Y Generation:
The Reality behind the Myth

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores "Y generation" students' attitudes to mobile technologies in the context of education, and use of podcasts on their handhelds in particular. The authors' intention is to investigate how students use mobile devices to support their formal and informal learning practices. One of the "Big Issues" in mobile learning that the authors address here is the co-existence of personal informal learning and traditional classroom education. After conducting two experiments and a survey, they conclude that the diversity of student attitudes towards using podcasts in education means that they are in the time of "in between years". Learning "anytime/anywhere" and "digital natives" prove as yet to be a myth for many. The current challenge for podcasting in education is to move from information transmission to knowledge construction and sharing within a formal setting.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile learning may be considered a natural progression from distance learning, which has existed for many years. One of the pioneers in distance learning, the Open University in the UK, delivered correspondence courses in the past using print with audio and videocassettes in various combinations. Now, computer mediated courses using Web 2.0 technologies (Wiki, blogs, social networking, etc.) offer additional interactivity and potentially more collaboration between peers, students and teachers. However, the appearance of mobile technologies and handheld devices such as

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the iPod, iPhone, Windows7 phone, Blackberry and diverse PDAs has highlighted inevitable challenges for the future of e-learning, now that "*the learning experience can take place in a variety of outdoor and indoor settings*" (Rogers, Price, Randell, Stanton, Weal & Fitzpatrick, 2005). Of course, this has always been true of the printed book, which is inexpensive, portable and free of technological hitches. However it lacks the dimension of interactivity, for example instantaneous comments shared with other (distant) readers.

For universities all over the world, podcasts have become an additional means of transferring information; one only has to look at iTunes U, YouTube or Microsoft Showcase to see the range and quantity of what is on offer. An example is iTunes U whose downloads in 2010 have topped 300 millions; it is now the world's most popular online educational catalog. More than 800 universities have active iTunes U sites. However, according to "off the record" discussions with conference colleagues, student uptake of podcasts may not even be as high as 5%. Is this because, despite the technology, the mode of delivery remains close to the traditional model of mere transmission of information? Or are there other factors to consider? Our intention in the research described in this chapter was to gather information about what would motivate students to spend more time learning from podcasts and what content would encourage them to learn both inside and outside school settings.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, we look at "Y generation" students' attitudes to mobile technologies in the context of education. How do they perceive course activities undertaken on their mobile device, and how do they differentiate between formal and informal learning? We were particularly interested to discover which characteristics of podcasts would motivate students to make more use of them outside class.

Secondly, we address the issue of the overlap between formal and informal learning. Although recent literature recognizes new possibilities of ubiquitous learning due to mobility between different physical and virtual spaces (Ogata & Yano, 2004; Ogata, 2009), little attention has been paid to the nature of this overlap, which brings to the fore the dichotomy between teacher control (of course content and evaluation) versus student control (of the device). One of the "*Big Issues in Mobile Learning*" is the co existence and conflict/tension between "*personal informal learning and traditional classroom education*" (Sharples, 2006, p.20-23).

In the following sections we describe the added value of mobile devices and look at formal and informal learning and students' motivation to learn using mobile devices.

THE ADDED VALUE OF MOBILE DEVICES

It is undeniable that mobile devices give added accessibility to resources. Information which once required access to a library, classroom or even an office with a computer, is now available in your hand anytime and anywhere you want it (McFarlane, 2009). Learning materials can now be constantly updated in real time. Students can access the latest version of these at the time and place relevant for them. Learning can even be delivered "just in time". Instead of preparing a complete set of knowledge (a book for example) and sending it only when the whole picture is set up, mobile technologies allow us to send small pieces of knowledge, as soon as it is available, as soon as the student needs it to progress. Does this herald a revolution in educational delivery analogous to that which the mobile phone brought to our idea of using the telephone?

Mobile devices also facilitate access to internet services and social networks, so they have the potential to increase our students' exposure to information about almost any topic under the sun. This could mean business topics, items of personal interest, or languages, where exposure