Chapter 15

mLearning Apps for Specialized Curriculum:
A Case Study on Film Noir

Jeanny Vaidya
General Assembly, USA

ABSTRACT

While there are many educational apps for traditionally taught subjects such as math and science, more specialized curriculum has largely been left unexplored in terms of mLearning. Film studies is one such subject, an academic discipline that deals with the theoretical, historical and critical underpinnings of film. This project explores what it means to create a mobile application to teach basic approaches to film interpretation. Benefits of mLearning include increased delivery options for multimedia, context-based learning support and the prospects of more fulfilling learning experiences (Medipour et al., 2013). In addition, learning film on mobile supports learning on the go and has further implications such as multimedia language learning and audio video usage. By providing direction for a prototype, implementation and evaluation techniques, the chapter explores the ways in which an introductory module for film studies can be integrated into a mobile format to render film theory more relevant and accessible.

MLEARNING APPLIED TO SPECIALIZED CURRICULUM

As a result of the rapid growth of educational technology, many apps now exist for core subjects like math and science, yet less traditional subjects (media studies, film studies, ceramics, anthropology, to name a few) have largely been left unexplored in terms of mLearning. Interestingly, literacy, despite being a core skill to modern society, is also considerably under-represented. A study on educational apps at Apple's App Store revealed that science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) rank as popular subjects while literacy and art/creativity rank fairly low (Shuler, 2012). The study likely considered literacy on the basis of core reading and writing skills, hence it alludes to an even greater lack of the aforementioned less traditional disciplines, which were not even categorically represented in the study. Furthermore, the Shuler study also reported that 80% of apps target children and found that while the percentage of apps

made for children were increasing, apps for adults have been in decline. Taken together, there exists a notable absence in apps geared towards less traditional subjects and adult learners. What follows is a preliminary investigation of these gaps in the mLearning community. In order to examine the potential of mLearning outside of traditional domains, we will investigate how it might be applied to teaching film studies. Emphasis will be given to demonstrating how mLearning contributes to the pedagogy of the contents and skills connected to film analysis.

In an attempt to make this inquiry more manageable, we will explore the ways in which an introductory module for film studies, specifically Film Noir, could be designed and integrated into a mobile format. However, it should be known that *film studies* is but one of countless disciplines and Film Noir merely a sample genre. The app, more broadly, teaches basic approaches to film interpretation, and our central aim is to incorporate mLearning affordances in order to render *film studies* more relevant and accessible. This feat could conceivably be achieved for any discipline. A secondary objective of this investigation presents film studies as a necessary part of reflective *media studies* skills.

BACKGROUND: MOBILE LEARNING

Mobile Learning or mLearning is a relatively new field that emerged as a result of many other technological and educational advancements. Crompton (2014) outlines these advancements by noting that the creation of the first web browser, digital camera and graphics calculator in the 1990s subsequently allowed for multimedia and portable digital devices (PDAs) to be utilized in educational settings. The introduction of web 2.0 in the new millennium, Crompton argues, represented an important shift in the Internet from "read-only" to innovative "read-write" web platforms (p.12). This birthed new forms of learning environments, sparking a revolution in communication and forever altering the way in which we engage with technology. Importantly, it gave users the opportunity to interact with and actively contribute to online content. Soon after came the development and rapid advancement of portable smartphones and tablets with unique capabilities. The infinite knowledge of the Internet and apps capable of seemingly anything one could think of became portable and contained in devices easily slipped into our pockets. The educational technology landscape was forever changed (Crompton, 2014).

Modern learning environments are highly digital, transformed as a direct result of developments in mobile technology, yet an underlying issue with mobile devices is that they are generally built for the mass consumer market. This makes it difficult to leverage such technology for teaching and learning purposes. Small screen sizes, assessment of learning outside of classrooms, support for learning across contexts, as well as, conceptual differences between e-learning and mLearning are just a few of the challenges (Medipour & Zerehkafi, 2013). However, research and implementation of mobile devices in classrooms and the workplace have shown success at various levels. Benefits of mLearning include increased delivery options for multimedia, context-based learning support and the prospects of more fulfilling learning experiences (Medipour et al., 2013).

It is important for mLearning advocates to identify mLearning's unique advantages over other types of technology enhanced learning. Many compare mLearning to eLearning and Mass Online Only Courses (MOOCs) because both can leverage collaborative and multimedia capabilities (Waard, Abajian, Gallagher, Hogue, Keskin, Koutropoulos and Rodriguez, 2011). MLearning is also seen as a "new stage" in the development of distance learning and e-learning (Georgiev, Smrikarov, Evgenia, 2004). However, what lends to the distinct nature of mobile technology is, not surprisingly, portability, which allows for

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