

## Chapter 5

# Mobile Learning, Digital Literacies, Information Habitus and At-Risk Social Groups

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### ABSTRACT

*Certain potentials of mobile devices seem predestined to connect those distanced from education with learning in the widest sense. To use these potentials requires a disposition of these 'learners-to-be' as able to assume responsibility for their learning. Characteristics of that disposition are identified, with requisite concepts: the information habitus; a pedagogy of social inclusion; in the frame of New Literacy Studies. The central element in the requisite information habitus is the action by an individual to get information via their own agency (Holschuld) contrasted with a reliance on others to bring information to them (Bringschuld). The role of institutional sites of learning are discussed, both for those categorized as 'at risk' and for the wider, new task of 'social learning', in which all come to see themselves as learners able to shape contexts for learning requisite to their needs.*

### INTRODUCTION AND QUESTIONS

Mobile devices, such as mobile phones and personal digital assistants, offer a range of potentials which, until now, no single communicational tool had combined. The possibilities for application

suggest—as indeed has been the case for very many innovational communicational technologies before this—that these can, could, should be used for the purposes of teaching and learning. An important first step in the direction of enabling learners to gain positive experiences of learning with such devices, to support them in their learning, requires, in my view, that the approach is not

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dominated by fascination with the technological affordances of the devices.

The core of a project to connect designs and scenarios for learning with those who will be the learners needs to lie in the connection to the characteristics of their life-worlds, their experiences and the challenges which they meet and need to face. That is one aspect. The other, is to connect all this to the aims both of the learners and those who are teachers. Without such a starting point it will be difficult even to begin the task of designing innovative pedagogic and didactic concepts. In Pachler, Bachmair, and Cook (2010) make the point very clearly that in the foreground of their investigations around mobile learning lie questions of a social kind about the actors / learners to be drawn into such projects.

*Mobile learning – as we understand it – is not about delivering content to mobile devices but, instead, about the processes of coming to know and being able to operate successfully in, and across, new and ever changing contexts and learning spaces. And, it is about understanding and knowing how to utilise our everyday life-worlds as learning spaces. Therefore, in case it needs to be stated explicitly, for us mobile learning is not primarily about technology (Pachler, Bachmair, & Cook, 2010, p. 6).*

The formulation of the hypothesis of the increasing knowledge gap (Tichenor, Donoue, & Olien, 1970) showed that a focus on media-technologies is far too narrow if the aim is to use such technological innovations to smooth a path inspired by democratic conceptions of access to knowledge. There had been hopes that the medium of TV, as a kind of pedagogic machine, might be used to even out the differences in levels of knowledge of distinct social groups. But the description of the links between socio-economic position and levels of education on the one hand and the uses of media on the other began to make it clear that no easy solution lay in that direction.

Even though further research showed that there were a wide range of variables that underpinned the phenomenon labelled as the hypothesis of the increasing knowledge gap (e.g., Bonfadelli, 2002; Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996), research around the notion of the digital divide made clear that the relation of social factors and media use is a highly complex one. In that respect, the significance of digital technologies has increased, because of the complex and mutually influencing relations of socio-culturally given position and the everyday uses of media of communication and information. Nor has it been possible to interrupt, unsettle or break that link through actions taken by the school, or socio-political measures, or strategies of a wider social-technological kind.

Two questions lie at the core of this paper. One is this: on different planes mobile devices—mobile phones and PDAs for instance—differ markedly from devices such as desk-top computers, note- and netbooks, as means for giving access to the internet and, more generally, to digitally-mediated communication. Is it possible that these technological devices could be used to open avenues—especially for groups somewhat distant to ‘mainstream society’ (in the following I shall call them ‘at-risk social groups’)—toward new strategies for learning and expand their strategies for learning and, in this way, explore and open up for themselves new forms of knowledge and competencies? The other question is: what dispositions are required on the part of these (new) users and learners to integrate these devices into their everyday practices, so that these learning potentials become available for them? In that I am less interested in kinds of concrete competencies of operation than the question how these learners-to-be might see and position themselves in relation to the engagement and use of the new—here new (forms of) learning—and what role they themselves take in relation to what is to be learned.

In this article I use data from qualitative studies in which situations of (informal as well as formal) learning are the focus of my interest with

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