Chapter 27
Accessible Mobile Learning: Exploring the Concept of Mobile Learning for All

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores the use of mobile devices in supporting practice based learning for health and social care students and practitioners, against a background of current UK disability legislation. The authors present the ‘Mobile Enabled Disabled Students’ case study in depth, accounting for its methodology and discussing the outcomes and implications. They will demonstrate how the features of mobile devices can support the organisational, memory and writing needs of dyslexic students specifically and how they can add value generally to learning and assessment processes. They make recommendations for implementing mobile assessment for practice learning based on a theory of mobile learning designed for accessibility.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter will consider the role of mobile devices in supporting practice based learning for disabled health and social care practitioners, against a background of current UK disability legislation. We draw briefly on our work as partners in the ALPS CETL (Assessment & Learning in Practice Settings - Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning) but focus specifically on the Mobile Enabled Disabled Students (MEDS) case study, undertaken at the University of Bradford (funded by the ALPS CETL Research Capacity Investment Fund) between October 2007 and 2008. We will then share the outcomes of MEDS and make recommendations for future applications of mobile learning designed for accessibility.

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BACKGROUND

The ALPS CETL, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), is a collaborative programme between five UK Higher Education Institutions (Universities of Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan and York St John) and sixteen health and social care professions. Its overall aim is to improve the competence and confidence of health and social care students at the point of professional registration. To this end, the partners have been engaged in five years of collaborative activity to develop shared practice/work-based assessment processes. Distinctive elements of these processes are that they will be interprofessional and they will be delivered in electronic mobile format.

Interprofessional education (IPE) has been recognised internationally as an essential element of pre-registration health and social care provision. Colyer et al. (2005) report that this has required a paradigm shift in thinking about how learning is supported; it is no longer acceptable for students to be immersed in profession specific ideology without appreciation or examination of its origins, or how it relates to the beliefs, traditions and practices of other related professions. Today’s health service requires professionals to collaborate and work together. IPE supports this by providing opportunities for students from different professions to gain an appreciation of each other’s skills, values and knowledge base. Interprofessional assessment (IPA) of practice learning is perhaps the natural progression from IPE. IPA is not currently a requirement in many pre-registration professional programmes in the UK; its implementation however may potentially enhance the impact of IPE by requiring assessors to have a minimum understanding of the values and practices within the student’s profession. The ALPS CETL aimed to introduce IPA across the partner sites and professions.

The practice assessment tools developed by ALPS were to be delivered on mobile digital devices (T-Mobile MDA Vario 1), funded by the CETL, carried and maintained by students. These were loaded with ‘Intellisync’ and ‘Safeguard’ software, allowing assessments to be ‘pushed out’ to students remotely whilst ensuring confidentiality and data security. Full training was given to students on using the devices and the assessment tools. Training of assessors was more complex due to their huge numbers and the wide geographical spread and variety of placements involved (hospitals, clinics & community settings). University staff liaised intensively with practice staff, opportunities were sought for awareness raising and training materials were developed to support students, who were often required to teach their mentors what the devices were for and how to enter data.

Several studies have demonstrated how mobile devices can be used to enhance interaction and learning, in different contexts. Naismith et al. (2004) reviewed the literature related to mobile technologies and learning and reports that these technologies are now employed in a wide range of educational activities and are fundamentally changing the nature of learning. The changes to the nature of learning and perceived pedagogic benefits of delivering assessment documents on mobile devices extend well beyond the change in presentation from paper to electronic format. The ALPS assessment processes, for example, required students to undertake a wide range of formative, work-based mini-assessments, which could facilitate the collection of evidence for student electronic portfolios. Mobile devices allow students to collect evidence in a wide range of media, such as audio files, images, videos, and reflections written or recorded in action (Schon, 1983) rather than relying on memory after work or a long journey home. This fundamentally changes how students interact with each other, learning materials and learning processes.

The ALPS devices allowed 24 hour access to the internet, thereby facilitating access to information anytime, anyplace, anywhere; they allowed
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