Chapter 13

Mobile Technologies: Changing the Face of Education from Social Networking to E-Learning

Belinha S. De Abreu
Fairfield University, USA

ABSTRACT

Mobile technologies are influencing a generation of students and educators like never before. Schools are considering and learning how the cell phone, the tablet, and iPads are going to change the way in which teaching and learning is happening in the classroom. This chapter seeks to understand the influence of mobile technologies on a worldwide spectrum while also acknowledging that the work of learning in an online socially networked society is ongoing and will continue to change with new technological innovations.

INTRODUCTION

Attention is a skill that must be learned, shaped, practiced; this skill must evolve if we are to evolve. The technological extension of our minds and our brains by chips and nets has granted great power to billions of people, but even in the early years of always-on, it is clear to even technology enthusiasts like me that this power will certainly mislead, mesmerize and distract those who haven’t learned—were never taught—how to exert some degree of mental order over our use of the laptop, handheld, ear-budded media (Rheingold, 2009).

The new landscape of technology tools, which fall under the classification of mobile technologies, has changed our worldwide society. Since the early part of this decade, a transformation has taken place with the types of ways in which people are communicating via online and specifically with social media. No longer are people using their stand alone computers or laptops, instead their computing has shifted to the mobile device whether it is in the form of a tablet, an iPhone, or some new innovative tool—thus allowing them to engage in their social networks more readily and certainly faster. Communication which was
sometimes delayed and compromised has become wider and greater, while the mode of exchange has become smaller and faster. As a tool for education, Web 2.0, mobile technologies, or even the idea of e-learning is in a place of transition and is in fact still very much new, but engaging.

In the United States, cell phone use and tablets were not at their prime until the later part of 2010. Why this shift? Much can be attributed to the release of Apple’s iPad that year and the upgrades to the iPhone series that has continued to adapt and change. Yet, the first iPad did not cause the gravitational pull until we came upon the iPad 2 as it demonstrated itself as crisper, faster, and accessible via all cell phone companies in the United States. The phenomena took hold and the sales of this product skyrocketed making Apple stock one of the most expensive to buy (Sperling, 2010).

Educators in schools who were already experiencing their first taste of change with Web 2.0 technologies such as wikis, blogs, and other video conferencing programs such as Skype were shifting their thinking to how students could learn and process information from the computer to the cloud. Many questions are being asked and considered in education circles widely such as:

- What is the role of the teachers in mobile learning?
- How do students become collaborative learners using e-learning vs. the traditional technology environments?
- How do students learn within the context of mobile learning and then demonstrate their learning back to the teacher?
- How does mobile learning make today’s students truly global citizens?
- What types of professional development services are offered to teachers in order to bring about their own personal understanding of how a device such as this one can truly impact classroom learning?

These questions have become a part of a study to determine the value of 1-to-1 technology classrooms and the introduction to iPads and other tablets into schools. Furthering this discussion lends itself to how social media has helped to personalize learning in a way that contributes to the growth of the student in and outside of the classroom.

BACKGROUND

Social media is an ever-present aspect to teen lives and teens are some of the most active users of social media. In a study done by Common Sense Media, 90% of respondents from ages 13-17 years of age claimed use of any form of social media (Common Sense Media, 2012). Following this study was one done by the Pew Internet and American Life Project which emphasized that the internet and digital technologies were significantly impacting the way in which students conducted research (Purcell, Rainie, Heaps, Buchanan, Friedrich, Jacklin, Chen, and Zickuhr, 2012). These statistics are not surprising considering the amount and frequency in which teens and younger are using cell phones and the various social network sites in order to communicate. The increase of interest has promulgated a need for schools to consider how learning can happen and the rate in which it should happen.

Mobile devices offer an establishment for the concept of “anytime, anywhere” learning occasions. These new technologies are placing a reinforced opportunity for change within the context of today’s society. As David Warlick (2004) in his book Redefining Literacy for the 21st Century states that,

*Our job, as educators, is to prepare our students for their futures. This job, today, is especially challenging, because for the first time in history, we cannot clearly describe the future for which we are preparing our children. Our world and the