Chapter 20
Exploring the Use of Mobile Devices and Applications to Support Field Experience in Teacher Education Courses

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ABSTRACT
Field experience at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) is viewed as a central aspect to our programmes. The proposed chapter will discuss a project that aimed to enhance student teachers’ professional development in FE by adopting mobile technology and cloud services. Also, the use of digital forms of FE documents such as TP supervision forms, FE portfolios, and reflective journals enables student teachers and Institute supervisors to build their own e-portfolio for further sharing of their professional practices within and outside the Institute.

INTRODUCTION
As the largest teacher education (TE) institution in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) has always focused on meeting teacher competency standards and, in recent years, all the TE programmes were revamped under the outcome-based learning (OBL) approach to ensure
that the student learning outcomes were aligned with these competency standards. Field experience (FE) is a cornerstone of the TE programmes and allows student teachers to bridge theory and practice in order to achieve authentic and effective learning outcomes. A new outcome-based FE framework was developed at the HKIEd to actively engage students in FE learning activities and to meet the competency standards. Meanwhile, FE at the HKIEd is viewed as a central aspect of its programmes and FE serves several major purposes (HKIEd, School Partnership and Field Experience Office, 2015).

One of the major purposes is that it encourages student teachers to innovate and reflect on their practice, within a supportive environment, as part of their professional development process. It also facilitates the creation of a learning community in which student teachers, supporting teachers and Institute supervisors can learn together and thus mutually enhance their professional development. This study focused on these two aspects.

As tablet PCs (e.g. Apple iPads) become affordable for local educators, more and more people are aware of their great potential in education. The Institute should be more proactive in exploring the use of technology to enhance its TE courses.

Against this background, the project team has run an exploratory pilot project aimed at enhancing student teachers’ professional development in FE by adopting mobile technology and cloud services to help create a convenient and efficient environment for both student teachers and Institute supervisors during block practice periods. During these periods, student teachers were doing their teaching practice at their own school assigned by the Institute. It was anticipated that Institute supervisors could make use of tablet PCs and similar mobile devices to access cloud-based storage and services during school visits. Also, the use of digital forms of FE documents (such as TP supervision forms, FE portfolios and reflective journals) would enable student teachers and Institute supervisors to build their own e-portfolios for further sharing of their professional practices within and outside the Institute. More committed professional development in FE could then be promoted through the use of mobile technology and cloud services.

To maximise the impact of the project, the team comprised eight colleagues from five departments across three faculties, the School Partnership and Field Experience Office (SPFEO) and the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Technology (LTTC). The members had specific roles according to their expertise and positions in the Institute. At the Institute, the SPFEO serves as a central unit to support, co-ordinate and strengthen the policies and practices in school partnerships, mentoring and FE at the Institute level. The Office establishes and maintains mutually beneficial partnerships with schools by actively supporting them in building a mentoring force and enhancing teachers’ professional development. At the same time, the LTTC is one of the learning and teaching support units at the HKIEd. The LTTC aims to lead and support higher education learning, teaching and assessment innovations at the Institute in order to enhance student learning outcomes. During the project period, the Centre provided great assistance to the project team by organising professional development activities for other academic and teaching staff who showed interest in the project team’s work. In the following sections, the authors will review relevant literature first and then discuss the study design in details. The remaining sections will document the implementation of the three design cycles and discuss whether the project objectives can be achieved or not. The last section will point out some future research directions on using mobile technology and cloud services in higher education institutions.