Chapter II
Transforming the Practice of Mobile Learning: Promoting Pedagogical Innovation through Educational Principles and Strategies that Work

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deploys Denning’s (2004) powerful assertion that “an innovation is a transformation of practice in a community” (p. 1) through the elaboration of three key educational principles: engagement; presence; and flexibility. Each principle is accompanied by an elicitation of practical strategies that have proved effective in implementing the principles sustainably within particular courses and programs of study, as well as factors that inhibit that implementation. The authors use these principles and strategies that work as an evaluative lens for examining the pedagogical innovativeness of mobile learning and teaching environments. The application of that lens highlights a set of challenges and opportunities facing those technologies and their proponents, specifically in the authors’ host institution and in higher education more broadly. Provided that those technologies can be used to engage with those challenges and opportunities, mobile learning can indeed contribute simultaneously to pedagogical innovation and to transformed practice in university learning and teaching.
INTRODUCTION

Mobile learning is increasingly associated with competing discourses about its relevance to and potential use in education. On the one hand, a celebratory discourse imagines mobile technologies revolutionizing how, when, where and by and with whom learning and teaching will take place (Goggin, 2005; Grohmann, Hofer & Martin, 2005). On the other hand, a resistant discourse positions many educators as skeptical of pedagogical claims made for new technologies and as seeking to preserve the centrality of the learner–educator relationship against perceived onslaughts from entrepreneurs and technophiles (Hodas, 1993).

It is therefore a complex and challenging terrain on which the promoters of mobile learning have to work to proseute their arguments about the educational potential of such technologies and at the same time to compete with conflicting pressures that push educational policy-making simultaneously in different directions in response to diverse interests. While this no doubt helps to maximize the clarity and to strengthen the resolve of mobile learning advocates, it also presents a risk that the message of those advocates might be reduced in volume or even silenced by more vociferous voices endorsing alternative priorities.

One among several possible ways forward that would reduce that risk and avoid that outcome is to focus attention squarely on the pedagogically innovative character of mobile learning and teaching environments. If educators are convinced that such environments enhance learner engagement and increase learning outcomes, they are more likely to include those environments in their armories of pedagogical techniques and tools. They are also more likely to invest the energy and time needed to explore and enact the educational applications of those environments and to consider how such applications could potentially revolutionize pedagogical practice.

The objective of this chapter is to contribute to the project of conceptualizing mobile learning as pedagogical innovation. That is, whilst the previous chapter (chapter I) defined mobile learning with different learning activities, this chapter focuses more on learning outcomes from the different mobile learning activities. While many definitions of innovation abound, the authors deploy Denning’s (2004) compelling notion of innovation as transformation of practice, which provides an opportunity to locate the interrogation of mobile learning and teaching environments foursquare within the situated learning of actual communities of practice in which those environments must function effectively, efficiently and equitably if they are to have any prospect of fulfilling their educational potential.

The authors approach the task of conceptualizing innovative mobile learning as transformation of pedagogical practice through their elaboration of three key educational principles: engagement; presence; and flexibility. These principles have been selected from several possible candidates as encompassing the key elements of the learner–educator relationship and as deriving from the authors’ separate and shared experiential knowledge as university educators, as well as from their respective and collaborative research into mobile learning in the fields of education and health (see for example Gururajan, Kerr, Moloney & Houghton, 2005; Hafeez-Baig & Danaher, 2007; Howard, Hafeez-Baig, Howard & Gururajan, 2006). Each principle is accompanied by an elicitation of practical strategies that on the basis of that knowledge have proved effective in implementing the principles sustainably within particular courses and programs of study, as well as factors that potentially inhibit the implementation of those principles.

The chapter consists of three sections:

- The background to the study, highlighting its conceptual framework, selected literature about mobile learning and teaching environ-