Chapter 13

Mobile Web 2.0: New Spaces for Learning

Clara Pereira Coutinho
University of Minho, Portugal

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author reflects on the emergence of Mobile Web 2.0, a new paradigm for learning in the 21st century, made possible by the combination of a powerful generation of mobile devices with Internet access and the Web 2.0 technologies that allow collaboration, participation, knowledge sharing and construction. The author presents the theoretical framework which sustains learning with mobile devices, and reflects on the potential of Mobile Web 2.0 for the development of informal learning and the construction of personal learning environments. Finally, the chapter presents educational scenarios for the development of mobile learning using Web 2.0 tools, in particular, those made possible using Twitter and m-Flickr.

INTRODUCTION

In the global society of the XXI century, the Internet is not a simple communication technology, but the epicenter of many areas of the social, economic and political activity, becoming, as pointed out by Castells (2004), “as the technological instrument and the organizational means that distribute the power of information, the creation of knowledge and the ability to network in any of the human activity scope” (p. 311). In fact, the evolution of the scientific and technological knowledge have been, in the last decades, structural for new forms of work organization (telework, mobile work, blended work both present and at distance), production and consumption (e-business and e-commerce), communication, new relations with the information and knowledge construction (e-learning, m-learning, b-learning) (Coutinho & Bottentuit Junior, 2009a).
Mobile technologies did not emerge recently; it is an old concept, but it has been evolving constantly due to the huge possibilities that are being added to the devices. Nowadays, owning a mobile phone is no longer a luxury or fashion; it is a need. Another reason why mobility is very appealing is that these devices allow access to data and information in any given moment or place, becoming powerfully attractive to individuals and organizations (Bottentuit Junior & Coutinho, 2007).

Mobility, portability and ubiquitousness are the three main features of mobile technologies that make them unique for the promotion of effective and quality learning. The school needs to explore alternative classroom methodologies, in order to shorten the gap between the classroom and the real world while improving students’ motivation and learning outcomes. We need to open doors to new scenarios, in either formal or non formal education, provided by the mobility offered by a new generation of mobile devices that break time and space boundaries and allow learning to occur in accordance with each individual’s cognitive level, as well as any geographical place (Bottentuit Junior & Coutinho, 2008).

The emergence of the versatile, free, and easy to use open-source Web 2.0 applications opens additional reasons for the development of mobile learning. The review of the research by Coutinho & Bottentuit Junior (2009a) shows that Web 2.0 technologies facilitate the adoption of more learner centered pedagogies that allow the students to play a more active role in the educational scenario.

The marriage of the open source Web 2.0 technologies with mobile devices may determine a true revolution in education. Mobility and disruptive Web 2.0 tools democratize the learning environments, challenging the relations of power between teachers and students (Valentim, 2009). As long as more and more users have the Internet in their pockets, learning becomes more and more mobile and the future is mobile learning 2.0!

In this chapter, we reflect on the emergence of mobile learning 2.0, a new learning environment for the XXI century, made possible by the combination of a new generation of mobile devices with Internet access and the Web 2.0 technologies that allow collaboration, participation, knowledge sharing and construction. As stated by Milrad (2006), “the rapid development of these latest technologies combined with access to content almost from anywhere and every time, allows learners to experience new situations regarding learning in a variety of situations and not only in the school settings” (p. 28).

In this chapter, we will consider new educational scenarios for the development of m-learning 2.0, in particular those made possible with Twitter and m-Flickr.

CONCEPTUALIZING MOBILE LEARNING

The discussion around the establishment of a definition for mobile learning is still emerging and is far from being consensual. In fact, according to Winters (2006), the discussion on the concept of mobile learning can be organized around four broad categories of perspectives:

- the technocentric point of view, dominant in the literature that associates mobile learning to the use of mobile devices;
- the e-learning perspective that considers mobile learning as an extension of e-learning;
- the perspective that regards the place of mobile learning in relation to different forms of formal and informal education;
- the learner-centered approach that emphasizes the linkage between mobile learning and mobile devices to focus on the mobility of the learner.