Chapter 17

Social Implications of Mobile Learning in Global Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter critiques six example case studies of global mobile learning projects using social networking tools to discuss the social implications of mobile learning in global learning environments. The researcher argues that supporting global mobile learning projects via the establishment of the projects as collaborative communities of practice of lecturers and students provides a rich environment for fostering pedagogical transformation from a focus upon teacher-directed content to student-generated content and student-generated learning contexts. The collaborative and communicative affordances of mobile devices coupled with Web 2.0 social software provide powerful tools for nurturing and sustaining global learning environments across the boundaries of time and geography. Lessons learned from the six projects between 2008 and 2012 illustrate the potentially transformative impact upon pedagogy of mobile learning used within the context of global learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

The author’s interest in facilitating global collaborative student projects is to explore new pedagogies that transform teaching and learning from teacher-directed environments to student-directed projects guided and facilitated by expert lecturers. Global collaborative projects provide the context for powerful authentic learning experiences for students and provide a rich environment that can incorporate input from expert lecturers across the globe. The author has supported global collaborative projects by establishing and nurturing communities of practice of like-minded lecturers around the world who work together to co-create curricula that involve student-generated content.

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Social Implications of Mobile Learning and student-negotiated contexts within team projects. Mobile social media has been used as the catalyst (Kukulska-Hulme, 2010) and enabling technologies for exploring new pedagogies within global team projects. Mobile social media are the tools that our students already own and utilize—albeit within low-level social modes. Thus, mobile social media can act as a catalyst for transforming pedagogical approaches from teacher-directed pedagogies and teacher-generated content towards heutagogy or student-generated content and student-negotiated contexts.

To illustrate this, the chapter is based upon the author’s experience of coordinating six international mobile Web 2.0 projects from 2008 to 2012. The projects were based in a variety of higher education contexts, involving students and lecturers collaborating across international boundaries. These six projects represent significant iterations of the author’s over 35 collaborative participatory action research mlearning projects between 2006 and 2012 (Cochrane, 2011; Cochrane, Sissons, & Mulrennan, 2012).

There have been several key influences in the development of the pedagogical foundations for this research, including:

2. Constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003)
3. Diana Laurillard’s Conversational Framework (Laurillard, 2001)
4. Social Constructivism in its many emergent forms (Herrington & Herrington, 2006b; McLoughlin & Lee, 2008b)
5. Communities of Practice (Wenger, White, Smith, & Rowe, 2005)

These have resonated with the researcher’s experiences of teaching and learning, and from these the researcher has developed a synthesis that leverages mobile Web 2.0 technology to enhance learning environments for lecturers and students. The researcher’s experience of establishing a wireless laptop scheme for students in a previous role as Audio Engineering and Music Production lecturer (Cochrane, 2003; Webster, 2004) was foundational in conceptualizing the transformative impact of WMDs in education. The researcher’s experience of multimedia learning object development for a Masters Thesis illustrated the limitations of multimedia content delivery with its reliance upon specialised developer skills (Cochrane, 2005, 2007a). Therefore, the researcher favours a student-centred, interactive, collaborative approach to developing a unique learning community for each different group of learners, enhanced by collaborative communications made available by technology. Wireless mobile computing and social software are maturing into useful tools to facilitate this approach to learning communities within mainstream tertiary education.

However this is not the norm in tertiary education, as Herrington and Herrington (2006a) observe, behaviourism and content transmission are still the dominant paradigms, which is supported by my own observations in 2010. Good pedagogy, as defined by Dewald (1999) focuses upon enhancing the student experience and the desired graduate profiles. Graduate profiles include student capabilities and how they will be expected to engage in the workforce community (Allen Consulting Group, 2004). Today’s graduates need to be life-long learners, and capable of critical, reflective, and creative thinking, able to work in and contribute to teams (Hager & Holland, 2006). Behaviourism focuses upon teacher-centred approaches in higher education (Ally, 2008; Brown, 2006; Dewald, 1999), whereas social constructivism focuses upon learner-centred approaches that model and facilitate the type of graduate profiles described above (Bruns, 2007; McLoughlin & Lee, 2008b). For example, Herrington and Herrington (2006a) critique the predominant behaviourist, knowledge-transmission pedagogies found in higher education, and present authentic learning as an alternative:
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