



MOBILE LEARNING: The Good The Bad and the Ugly

Mobile Learning has become a bit of a buzz word in education with the proliferation of mobile technology through our society in general, and being particularly noticeable amongst our tweens and teens. While academia is still struggling to define exactly what Mobile Learning (or MLearning) is and how it differs from e-Learning, those at the coalface of education are calling any learning through mobile technology MLearning, until better defined.



Other initiatives include HaDeDa, a spelling tutor, IGLOO, a tool to facilitate a learning environment and Dr Maths. The latter is a service that runs through MXit <<http://www.mxit.co.za/web/index.htm>> and is manned by students of the University of Pretoria. It can be added to your contacts on MXit at 079 992 3961 and it provides learners with mathematics homework help in real time.

The University of Cape Town has, under the leadership of Gary Marsden, been piloting locally relevant and internationally noted applications. Other local initiatives are not only truly inspiring but are also a tribute to our innovative teachers, as with the Grade 11 Life Science students at Cornwall Hill College who produced mobile videos of their dissections and made them available to learners who have not had the same opportunities. Some of these can be downloaded from <<http://www.thutong.org.za/LearningSpaces/MobileLearningSpace.aspx>>.

Despite the obvious potential that the use of personal mobile technology has for education in South Africa, there are some obstacles in the way of a smooth integration in the classroom. With the media hype about the dangers and vulnerability of our children exposed to an unscrupulous online society, it becomes imperative for schools to acknowledge that learners are proficient BUT rather naïve users. Taming this beast requires a two-pronged approach. Firstly, establishing clear guidelines to regulate the use of these potentially disruptive devices is a very important first step. An example of an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) is available on the Thutong Education portal <<http://www.thutong.org.za/ResourceFiles/37596/34988/34962/IT%20Policy%20CHC.pdf>>, also from Talk School <<http://www.talkschool.org.uk/downloads/policies/AcceptableUseofICTandMobilePhonesPolicy.doc>> They can be changed to suit your schools needs.

Writing an Acceptable Use Policy for a school or for that matter any institution, is not something that is done once and then shelved, it is an ongoing process of negotiation and, more times than we care to admit, a case of playing catch-up with new trends. The process should be continuous and should endeavour to provide guidelines about culturally embedded as well as emerging technologies. There is not a generic blanket policy for all schools as the needs of a school are unique and situated. Policies that govern ICT use in general and mobile technology specifically, all aim to establish a clear understanding of the responsibilities of all those involved and ultimately form the backbone of effective practice, balancing the potential advantages to be had from the use of the technology with the risks of unacceptable material and activities. It is vital to include all the stakeholders

in the process. The document should consider managerial needs, staff, parental and learner needs. Considerations around Mobile Technology should include the personal and often privately financed nature of the technology, its ubiquitous presence and the security risks associated with it. Secondly, we need to educate our learners to become digital citizens and tackle online bullying, netiquette (etiquette for the Internet), mobiquette (etiquette for the mobile phone) and online safety as part of our curriculum.

For some guidelines have a look at <<http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=25934&page=1835>> and <<http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=35446&page=1835>>.



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In a way, it is inevitable that education takes note of this "silent revolution of personally financed computing devices" as Joel Selanikio, the co-founder of DataDyne terms it. We have, however, the benefit of going through many technology revolutions and innovations that were poised to change the face of education forever... and didn't. We can reflect on the onset of this new wave of innovation, and choose to integrate the best of what the technology has to offer in ways that will enhance and support our quest to give our learners the best opportunities in a rapid changing world.

Some other interesting links:

- Create quizzes that can be downloaded onto mobile phones <<http://www.mobilestudy.org>>
- Browser for Mobile Phone, Opera mini browser <<http://www.operamini.com>>
- Mobile search engine, Find.mobi <<http://find.mobi>>
- Flickr mobile <<http://m.flickr.com>>
- Really easy to use mobile website creator <<http://www.wirenode.com/>>
- Graphing Calculator <<http://teavuihuang.com/tvh-72g/>>
- Graphing calculator and their other math midlets <<http://www.math4mobile.com/>>
- Create and send documents on the mobile phone in various electronic document formats <<http://teavuihuang.com/allformatwriter/>>
- Have to have Indian Ocean Tsunami Detector <<http://teavuihuang.com/tsunamidetector/>>

➤ **Guest author: Adele Botha**

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Most of the web space conversations taking place around the subject originate in the developed world, also some developing countries. MLearning, from their perspective, focuses on the enhancement of learning through the incorporation of mobility i.e. cell phones, PDA's, MP3 Players, iPods etc.



A few great examples of projects that are well worth looking at can be found on the website off Futurelab. Have a look at Mobimissions <<http://www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/mobimission>>

"The idea of the Mobimissions project is that the players set each other 'missions', leaving them in a particular cell. Players wandering into that particular cell are able to see any missions left there and decide whether to accept them". There is something similar at Create-a-Scape <http://www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/create_a_scape> using PDA's. These examples however, do not necessarily reflect the realities of South Africa given the expense of mobile technologies.

Mobile phones and other mobile technology can not only extend the borders of the formal classroom, but also provide access to the information society if made affordable.

Locally Meraka <<http://www.mobiled.org.za>>, a division of the CSIR, has been investigating how mobile technology can be used to support education. An application like the Audio wiki platform allows access to the Internet via a low level phone. This has been adopted by UNICET and is being used to provide access throughout the developing world <http://cmw.mepemepe.com/index.php/Main_Page>.