

Editorial : Portable Learning - Experiences with Mobile Devices

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Commentaries:

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This special issue of JIME brings together several papers that were produced following a symposium on *Portable Learning - Learner and Teacher Experiences with Mobile Devices* held in June 2005 at the UK Open University. There is considerable interest in how mobile devices of various kinds can support learning in different contexts ranging from their use in formal settings such as schools and universities through to more informal settings.

The area of mobile learning is a very busy one with a regular stream of conferences and workshops. However, as with all technologies in their early days, there is a real need to distinguish the hype and rhetoric from the empirical evidence and reality of use. The symposium papers were grounded in the developing literature and in empirical work. They focused on user experiences and often explored the potential in terms of scenarios of use.

The purpose of the symposium on *Portable Learning* was two-fold: to bring together research on mobile devices from different areas of the Open University, and to share experiences with researchers from elsewhere.

Open University work represented at the symposium included empirical studies on the use of Tablet PCs in Schools (Peter Twining *et al.*). Researchers from the university's Knowledge Media Institute (Paul Mulholland *et al.*) described how technology can link a museum visit to follow-up learning activities. Patrick McAndrew and Doug Clow presented a first-aider training scenario from the MOBILearn project. Eileen Scanlon gave an account of informal learning in science, while Agnes Kukulska-Hulme's talk explored the changing roles of teachers and learners, with reference to mobile foreign language learning.

Invited researchers included Rose Luckin from the Human Centred Technology group in Sussex, (now at the London Knowledge Lab) who emphasised the importance of learning context in educational applications of mobile technologies. Dan Sutch from Nesta FutureLab discussed learners as producers – a project that helps young people to engage creatively with their environment by getting them to contribute to resources in an ever-evolving tour of Deptford Creek in London. Virpi Oksman from the University of Tampere, Finland, provided a Scandinavian perspective and described ongoing research into the significance of the mobile phone in the social relationships of young people and seniors.

Abstracts for papers not represented in this special issue can be found on the symposium website – <http://kn.open.ac.uk/public/index.cfm?wpid=4379>

The symposium was co-sponsored by the Computers and Learning Research Group (CALRG) and Telelearning Research Group (TLRG): both are research groups in the Open University's Centre of Excellence for Educational and Educational Technology Research, established in 2004. The CALRG group was set up in 1978 to bring together researchers

involved in the University's pioneering work on using computers to support learners. The group's work soon expanded to include a wide variety of research interests and approaches to studying the use of technologies in education. Although there is a focus on higher and distance education, members of the CALRG group research the use of learning technologies across all sectors, with adults and children alike and also outside institutional learning. The TLRG research group developed alongside the growth of the Open University's Masters in Online and Distance Education with a particular focus on Online Learning. Many members of TLRG teach on the Masters programme and research aspects of course design and student experience. The two groups have many common interests and come together from time to time to work on projects. The *Portable Learning* symposium allowed us all to exchange perspectives on this fast developing field and we are very pleased to share the outcomes with the wide readership of JIME.