

Mobile makes learning free: Building conceptual, professional, and school capacity

By Boris Handal. 2016. Charlotte, NC, IAP-Information Age Publishing (IAP), 151 pp. Current Perspectives on Applied Information Technologies series. ISBN 978-1-68123-284-3 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-68123-283-6 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-68123-285-0 (e-book)

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Boris Handal, in contextualising the mobile learning movement, refers to it as the culmination of a dream and reminds us that one of its goals is to change the role of teachers by unburdening them from their place as sage on the stage. His book attempts to situate mobile learning within conceptual frameworks to guide future research and discussions of best practices.

Against the backdrop of the historical precedent of the printing press, we know we have entered a new era in learning by the tools through which we communicate. Handal points out that the sales of mobile devices, cell phones and tablet computers have exploded over the last three decades and, as a result, schools as buildings have dematerialised and so have the boundaries between home life and school life.

The author notes the historical changes in the popular view of education which resulted from the rapid spread of the printed word. He surmises that mobile learning is a natural evolution of the desire to attain a state of education for all. To develop the argument, the author flies past economic and psychological influences on the curriculum of schools to land the reader at his central premise, that we are now in a place where students are the centre of the curriculum and the agents of their own learning.

Handal introduces the potential for mobile learning through brief illustrations and an engaging style of presentation. However, he also carefully lays down the case for the phenomenal challenge to education that this form of learning will generate. He begins with an assessment of what he refers to as the *grasshopper* mind – as opposed to the *inchworm* mind which works on the presumption that curriculum must be linear and carefully sequenced. He notes that networked information technologies allow learners to dip in and out of stacks of texts. This, he suggests, is a direct response to an explosion of information. School culture, he adds, has a

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censoring effect on the chaotic realm of readily available information. The response to the grasshopper mind in the classroom will be a reconsideration of the role of the teacher and the expectations of the pathways that learners will take.

Just as the grasshopper minds of our students react to competing cries for attention, the field of mobile learning is similarly working under the strains of different stakeholders. Students want customisation and personalisation; manufacturers want branding and market share. At the same time, students, teachers and parents are not completely clear on the role mobile learning should play in education. What is emerging, suggests the author, are multiple literacies where one might adopt a single ready-to-use toolset which could serve to deskill teachers while another could adopt a more complex view of technology which requires teachers to adopt tools they could use with a more complex and independent curriculum.

So much of this book hangs on the concept of mobile learning strategies and how designers do not create applications with a particular learning context in mind. To make his point, the author touches on several models for describing technology integration available to teachers, including the Task Model of Curriculum Integration. The TMCI categorises applications for either exploration, productivity, information retrieval or instruction. The teacher must develop the skills of evaluating the pedagogical potential for applications. By examining pedagogical applications along nine dimensions, Handal elaborates on a concept he refers to as a *learning wrap* through which students are encouraged to produce their own knowledge and understanding. With this constructivist power, students have control over their own learning and teachers must redefine pedagogies and learning spaces for students. The author wraps up his charge to educators with a literary warning of the potential perils ahead. He juxtaposes the story of Victor Frankenstein, whose monster pursued him until the end of his life, with the threats of cyberbullying, online dangers and unchecked Internet falsehoods. The author believes these threats necessitate the teaching of digital citizenship and, to that end, he shares many resources, both online and those found in our school communities, to help us to develop responsible use of these mobile tools.

At the end of the book, it is clear that the author has produced a case for the teacher as a learning professional. The teacher who embraces mobile learning technologies must also be reflective and thoughtful about the integration of pedagogy with technology.