

Chapter 6

Mobile Learning in Action: Three Case Studies with the Net Generation

Andrew Kitchenham
University of Northern British Columbia, Canada

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents three m-learning case studies. The first is a school district in Northern Canada that uses one-to-one computing from intermediate to high school. The second case study is an auto-ethnographic approach to using m-learning in post-secondary education. The last deals with a United States school district that is planning to implement m-learning technologies across three schools in an attempt to address the needs of the Net Generation. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of the findings across the three case studies.

INTRODUCTION

As chapter authors in this book have demonstrated, mobile learning (hereafter, m-learning) is ubiquitous from kindergarten to graduate school from Northern Canada to Southern Queensland. The students in our schools come ready to learn in a fashion that accommodates their innate needs to discover answers to questions, to pose questions

to be discovered, to use technology and not have it perceived as an add-on. They are the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009) and the Digital Natives (Prensky, 2010) who are being taught by many teachers, instructors, trainers, and professors who are also members of that generation of learners. For those who are taught by the Digital Immigrants (Prensky, 2001) and the Digital Pilgrims (Kitchenham, 2009a), learning can be difficult and frustrating for them as their pedagogues and androgogues catch up and attempt to master the

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skills needed to address their needs. Of course, an average university classroom would be composed of Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, and Digital Pilgrims or Net Geners, XGeners, and baby boomers.

As Tapscott (2009) demonstrated when he and his colleagues interviewed young people from Canada and the United States ($n=1750$), Net Geners ($n=5935$) from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, China, Japan, and India ($n=5935$) and baby boomers and Gen Xers ($n=800$) from Canada and the United States, the needs of learners have fundamentally changed since the advent of the Internet, blended learning, and most recently, m-learning. They expect teachers to know the technology and to know that they learn differently than their teachers. These students “are bringing their demographic muscle, media smarts, purchasing power, new models of collaborating and parenting, entrepreneurship, and political power into the world” (p. 3). According to Tapscott, the Net Generation can be described typically by eight characteristics, or norms, that make them distinct from baby boomers, their parents: (1) they want freedom and freedom of choice to make their own decisions; (2) they desire customization so that they can make learning their own; (3) they collaborate naturally, without needed coercion from their teachers and fully enjoy a conversation or discussion more than a formal lecture; (4) they are apt to scrutinize the teacher and the school (and any other authority leader or organization); (5) they really honour and demand integrity for others; (6) they thrive on fun at school, work, and play; (7) they want speed and see it as a natural way to learn; and (8) they embrace innovation and change as natural parts of their lives. To be sure, the Net Generation is a force to be reckoned with and it will change the face of education for decades to come.

Similarly, Prensky (2010) argued that school teachers should consider the concept of partnering. That is, “letting students focus on the part of the

learning process that they can do best, and letting teachers focus on the part of the learning process that they can do best” (p. 13). Students would accept responsibility for discovering and pursuing topics about which they are passionate, utilizing available technologies, tracking down information on the topics, answering questions and presenting their own ideas and further questions, practising assigned and chosen tasks, and presenting their findings through writing and multimedia. The teacher’s responsibilities would include creating and presenting appropriate questions for discussion and research, providing guidance to the students, creating a context for the information, making time to explain ideas on a one-on-one basis, instilling rigour in the students, and ensuring that quality is paramount. He also makes the argument that critical to partnering through technology and m-learning is the distinction between verbs and nouns. Verbs are the skills that we want our students to acquire, practise, and master; they are constant and do not change or change very little over time. We strive for proficiency in such skills such as *thinking critically*, *presenting arguments*, *convincing others*, and *being open minded*. Verbs are, by their very nature, grounded in the subject areas and include general skills for achieving success. Nouns are the tools that the students use to master the verbs; they are ever-changing by necessity as they are task specific. Tools can include a textbook or a research essay but, with increasing frequency, are software and hardware. Such tools include interactive whiteboards and laptops, wikis and blogs, smartphones, iPhones, iPods, and iPads, and Facebook and MySpace. It is impossible to separate verbs and nouns, of course, but m-learning has revolutionized how the verbs can be addressed by the nouns.

When we consider Tapscott’s and Prensky’s sound arguments for addressing the needs of our students, it becomes apparent that we need to examine research that demonstrates m-learning in action so that we can better understand how the teaching and learning process can be changed

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