

Foreword

Normally I'm an enthusiast and early adopter of new educational technologies, but for years after I first heard people talk about mobile learning, I didn't get it. Instead, I focused on the challenges of working with learning management systems on tiny screens, the cost to purchase and operate mobile devices, their large battery requirements, and the limited coverage footprints. Two things have changed my mind.

First was the purchase of an iPhone 3G. With easily available software add-ons, my "phone" can become a piano, a guitar, a drum machine, a level, a ruler, a bookshelf, a camera, a fake zippo lighter, a database, a web browser, an email client, a game machine, a "TV" (for watching YouTube), a voice recorder, a weather forecaster, and a GPS. As a Canadian, I need to know the location of the nearest Tim Horton's! Every day, the app store offers me yet more ways (including 75 applications categorized under "education") that this phone can morph itself into a universal and ubiquitous information, education, and entertainment portal.

The second came about after attending two e-learning conferences and reading books by innovative educators such as those in this volume. Editor Mohamed Ally has drawn together an eclectic selection of authors who show us that the power of context and the capacity to provide information where and when it can be used can overcome the challenges of small screens and limited (but ever-increasing) battery capacity.

This second book in AU Press's Issues in Distance Education Series offers both theoretical and very practical insights into the diverse uses of mobile devices for formal and informal learning. I am confident that every reader will find ideas and inspiration in the writings of these innovators and early adopters, who demonstrate and evaluate the emerging affordances and current practicability of mobile learning technologies and applications. More than any previous generation of technology, such applications demonstrate achievement of the often elusive goal of every distance educator – to support quality learning, anywhere/anytime.

Terry Anderson
Edmonton, Canada
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