

This week in the trends module we looked at m learning
Mobile learning what does it mean? While gathering my thoughts I decided to look at the various definitions of the word mobile.

The first definition is moving or capable of being moved from place to place. Well this certainly describes the devices that are used when we think about m learning. Mobile devices don't just consist of phones we have PDAs tablets and notebooks. We used to think of laptops as mobile devices but Traxler suggests that the lack of spontaneity in carrying them and starting them up means that they don't fall into the same category as phones and tablets. I came across an interesting description of successful technology while reading this week it suggested successful technology is disappearing. Devices are becoming smaller, flatter and slimmer. The result is that technology is constantly with us in a pocket or a handbag. We are or can choose to be constantly connected to the web. So the first definition of mobile provides us with the ability to access content through a variety of devices and gives rise to the phrase learning anytime, anyplace anywhere.

The second definition of mobile is something that is capable of changing rapidly or easily, as in response to different moods, feelings, conditions, needs, or influences; flexible, adaptable, etc. This definition can be applied to the uses that mobile learning can be put to. I've already mentioned that the devices give ready access but the devices themselves allow learners to receive content now in different formats. Text books could become a thing of the past with the advent of the e book. Access to multimedia means that lectures can be stored as podcasts or webinars and reviewed again later on the device. Wider web access makes it easier for students to access information, collaborate and share ideas both inside and outside the classroom.

The third definition of mobile is marked by the easy intermixing of different social groups: a mobile community and here I'm suggesting that this is mixing learning within the classroom with learning outside the classroom. Bringing mobile devices outside the class room to create content to take back to the classroom creates a more engaging and interactive experience for the student. It can help the student to prepare content in a real world context for review in class or the student can create content after class as an assignment. Either way the device supports what needs to be learnt in class.

It was mentioned in class today that the same content is being created and just made available on different platforms. In one sense that is one of our definitions of mobile in that we are accessing content on the go and in areas that we wouldn't normally be able to. However I can see the point being made. Surely the content being delivered should take into account the device that it will be viewed on and even take advantage of the features that some devices have as standard. It's something I hadn't thought of before now.

Steve made an interesting comment that books are mobile learning and it sparked a thought of my own experience of mobile learning in primary school where our teacher took us out for nature walks to gather leaves, identifying the trees they came from and to look at plants growing in their natural environment. So mobile learning has been around for a while.

From my own perspective the aspect of mobile learning I'm most interested in at the moment is mobile apps for just in time learning. Currently there are a number of employees who spend most of their time on the road travelling from one client to another. There are times when they find themselves in situations where they need access to specialised information. Although there are training manuals available it can be difficult to find the information required and we find that the manuals are not used as much as we would wish. For me a mobile app is the replacement to the manual. It's immediately available on the phone providing the appropriate information where and when required. Just in time learning at its best.