

Book review:

The new landscape of mobile learning

(2014; Miller, C.M. & Doering, A. (Eds.); Routledge)

Melanie Gobert

Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE

The New Landscape of Mobile Learning (Routledge) comes to us from the American Midwest, the University of Minnesota. The book is not an easy read at 355 pages, but it is filled with information and ideas about the very new “landscape of mobile learning”. It is divided into five sections: *The Emerging Role of Mobile Learning*; *Mobile Learning Design Frameworks*; *Mobile Learning Design and Development Narratives*; *Mobile Learning Integration, Research and Evaluation*; and *the Future of Mobile Learning*, which is not really a section, but a four-page summary of anticipated future directions contributed by the editors. The sections are not evenly divided; for example, Section 1, *The Emerging Role of Mobile Learning*, contains five chapters; Section 2, *Mobile Learning Design Frameworks*, contains three; and Section 4, *Mobile Learning Integration, Research and Evaluation*, contains nine. From this, you can see which aspects of mobile learning are of the most interest, or perhaps indicate the forefront of avenues of inquiry, to the contributing authors and the wider educational community. As a front runner (the book was published in 2014, but the contributed articles were completed in 2012, and at that time the iPad was only 2 years old), its graphic design and layout is somewhat reminiscent of teachers’ early webpages, with white typeface on a dark background or black type on a colorfully patterned background: something that makes your eyes hurt and in hindsight makes you wonder why the makers of early website design software such as MSN’s Front Page would think that people would like to read white typeface on a dark background or dark typeface on a multi-colored, patterned, flashing background. And it’s on this very edge of newness (front-running, innovation) that the authors and editors of this book find themselves. For, while the pages between the sections (white typeface on dark background) can be hard on the eyes, the four-color printing of the images and screen captures in the book are very effective.



Figure 1. The forward to a section in the book

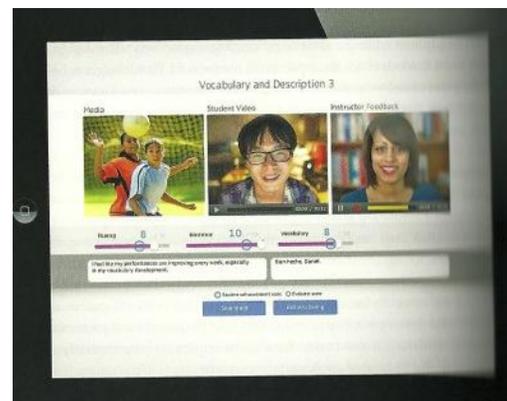


Figure 2. The four-color screencapture printing

Another nice feature of the book is that each chapter in the book contains an introduction with specific information about the relevance of the chapter to designers, teachers, and researchers.

This book also comes to the crux of the question: by mobile learning, do we mean *mobile* learning, learning while on the move, learning on your mobile phone, and/or learning on your iPad? For most of the authors and contributors to this volume, it means learning on your iPad, perhaps with some mobility but mostly inside the classroom. 18 of the 20 chapters are specifically about learning on the iPad, in all its forms and at all levels, but mostly K-12. Only two chapters, *Seven Design Considerations for Mobile Learning Applications*, and *The Future of Mobile Media for Learning* deal with the fact that you have to design multiple interfaces according to the size of the device and that when we are talking about “mobile” learning, we are talking about the potential to use that small, handheld, portable device that everyone has with them all the time and that can also make and receive phone calls, the “mobile,” also known as “cell” or “phone” in some contexts.

One of the best chapters in the book is *Rich Remote Learning and Cognition: Analog Methods as Models for Newer Technology*. In this chapter, Dr Brad Hokanson takes us on a metaphorical journey of an explorer, such as Wilfred Thesiger in his travels through the Arabian Peninsula and the Empty Quarter, using a notebook, his diary, sketching (a sketchbook), and taking photographs. As Thesiger used these technological tools (and certainly even the notebook was a technological tool in this region in the late 1940s when he made his explorations) to record his thoughts, map the region, and record the existing plants, animals, humans, and landscape of the area, so can our students use their technological devices to explore and record their world, displaying “focused cognition and synthesis”. In fact, our students are already using their mobile devices in this way; we teachers are just having problems tapping into it for educational purposes.

Some of the other best chapters in the book are the narrative ones, *The conceptualization, design, and development of a K-12 adventure learning app*, *Library technology leadership in the adoption of iPads in a high school*, *iPad-didactics: didactical designs for iPad-classrooms* (the only non-American contextualized chapter, which takes place in Danish schools and a Swedish university), and *Teacher Resiliency [Problem Solving] and Handheld Computing*. The book also includes the de rigueur chapters on ‘the best apps for teaching X’; these include ‘*Apping its way into the future? K-12 English education*; *Mobile data tools for teachers: a design-based research pilot study*; and *iTeach and iLearn with iPads in Secondary English Language Arts*. Most of the apps from the narrative app-designing chapters are not available (*Adventure Learning App*, *Nature Detective*, *DIY Democracy*, *HotSeat*) or are available at a cost (*Montessorium Intro to Letters* and *Intro to Math*).

One of the weaker chapters in the book is *The Logic of the ‘And’*, in which the designers of the Montessorium apps quote Steve Jobs extensively, but do not really convey much beyond that the Montessori method emphasizes collaboration, pre-K learners can compete against themselves using apps and this equals collaboration (the ‘and’). They wrote a subsequent chapter in more detail about the apps they have designed for pre-K learners, *Intro to Numbers* and *Intro to Letter*. This begs a couple of questions: Is the iPad really a kinesthetic learning device? Will there be a have/have not divide that will affect equal learning opportunity for all? And, are electronic learning tools used independently really the best way to learn new concepts?

One excellent chapter is *Accessibility Education of iOS Apps for Education*, which provides a testing framework to determine if an app meets a criteria standard for special needs students, an under-explored area that will surely have future repercussions both in the USA’s educational system and in the

UAE's new integrative model for students with special needs. While most of the book focuses on the integration of iPad technology into K-12 education and its advantages over laptops (cheaper, more portable, availability of apps), there is one chapter that deals exclusively with the integration of iPads in the undergraduate classroom: *iPad-enabled experiments in an undergraduate physics laboratory*. In this chapter, rather than using the traditional cumbersome oscilloscope "with its many knobs and switches", which led to many measurement errors and repetitions of the experiments, the "virtual" oscilloscope enabled non-engineering majors to quickly perform and understand the experiments without any errors – "substitution with some modification" (Augmentation) in Puentedura's (2011) SAMR model. This brings us back to the metaphor described above as when the explorer used tools with which he had to write and draw, and the connections that were made with his brain in this process. A key question, and one almost unexplored in this volume, is whether learning in a virtual world can replace learning in the real world.

Undoubtedly, since the iPad is here to stay and will eventually become the tool of choice in K-12 classrooms, and beyond K-12 in the UAE, this book is a must-have for every college library in the region and for teachers and researchers who are interested in mobile learning. I predict some of the theoretical chapters on app design will become primary sources in the new landscape of mobile learning in the years to come.

References

Puentedura, R. (2011): Thinking About Change in Learning and Technology. Presentation given September 25, 2012 at the *1st Global Mobile Learning Conference*, Al Ain, UAE. Retrieved from http://www.hippasus.com/rrpweblog/archives/2012/04/10/iPad_Intro.pdf.