

Community and informal learning, and skills development

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The mobile learning community has the potential and responsibility to bring informal and community-based learning to the hard-to-reach and those experiencing socio-economic, cultural, and ecological uncertainty. The capabilities of mobile technologies, on their own or blended with other local and sustainable technologies, have opened up avenues for transformational change founded on personal, vocational, cultural, economic, social, and civic improvement of individuals and groups. The exponential growth in mobile penetration¹¹ and handset ownership across the globe coupled with expanding mobile network coverage, offered by competitive mobile network operators, creates an environment in which the immense potential of mobile learning in overcoming the global learning challenges can be realized.

Informal learning via mobile technologies creates a vehicle by which individuals and groups affected by natural disasters, warfare and conflict, economic shocks, ill health, discrimination, and violence can access information, ideas, opinions and knowledge. Mobile devices can thus open doors to equity and welfare by connecting people to aid, resources, advice, supports, and by giving them a voice. Moreover, handheld devices can become an

organized curriculum". Livingston refers to both self-directed and collective informal learning, as well as intentional and unintentional informal learning. Tacit learning is so integrated in other activities that it is impossible to distinguish it as an act of acquiring new understanding, knowledge, or skill, for instance when communicating via mobile in a rescue operation. This discussion of the role of mobile technologies in informal learning also includes incidental learning, which occurs unintentionally; however, eventually the learner becomes aware that learning has taken place. Livingston explains that much of the informal learning occurs at irregular times and spaces, and at moments of transitions as well as at other major influential events in life. While people commonly undertake informal learning to gain desired knowledge and skill, they also might engage in learning ad hoc in response to a crisis or in search for solutions to urgent issues or situational needs. All in all, learning "at any time and in any place, in everyday life"⁵ might arise from individual and collective goals, either explicit educational objectives or plain survival goals brought about by a random situation, when the aims and processes of learning might be not explicit. Unintentional mobile learning, from unanticipated learning opportunities or unforeseen events, can result in learning that is situated, contextual, and social.

The community learning process, with or without assistance of technology, is principally about people helping other people and connecting with them. Mobile devices provide an on-demand link to others within and outside our own communities. They enable exchange of information and conversation, which can mediate learning and skill acquisition effecting personal growth and social transformation. Freire⁶ posited that the powerless could accomplish freedom and change as a result of critical reflection and informed action. He postulated that by collaborating and sharing knowledge with the least powerful in society, they become more autonomous and empowered. From Freire's perspective, change toward greater equality and social justice presupposes community-based learning based on listening to the community and open dialogue. Community-based informal learning may enable people to transform

themselves by increasing the capacity of individuals and groups of all ages to improve their quality of life. The key to successful individual or community informal mobile learning is the ability to reach all community members and ensure their participation in the democratic processes of mobile content creation, selection, and delivery of life opportunities to people. A elite

Many of these communities have limited resources such as money and expertise, technical savvy,

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and education. It has been used to gather public health information for monitoring and assessment as well as to prepare communities for disease threats and prevent widespread epidemics. In the same vein, FrontlineSMS⁹ software, which collects and distributes information via text messages, has been used for monitoring national elections in Nigeria amongst other countries, to report emergency information in the 2010 Haitian earthquake, and for communication between beneficiaries and aid providers to deliver food to refugees in the Western Sahara, amongst plentiful other uses. Many mobile interventions address the needs of farmers to cooperatively enhance the information flow and knowledge management within their local and global community. One of such projects is the Commonsense net 2.0¹⁰ aiming to improve the livelihood of marginal farmers in India through a mobile application designed for both illiterate and literate farmers to share ideas and vital information about agriculture. Although not designed with explicit educational goals in mind, such M4D and rescue programs certainly contribute to knowledge and skill building. By interacting with content and people in a variety of life situations relevant to their survival and self-improvement, mobile users benefit from an unintentional informal learning process bringing about new knowledge and skills.

At the same time, numerous mobile interventions are aimed specifically at supporting informal and

community learning as well as skill development. A handful of these solutions are presented below with additional ones in Table 2.1. In

of poor families who, being at the bottom of the
"chain of command", are prevented from using

knowledge and global knowledge to provide

Reports of mobile learning initiatives demonstrate that people, even those living in extreme destitution, are willing to spend money on their mobile devices²¹. Users do not consider mobile phones a luxury but rather a necessity. The social

and technological capacity should be leveraged to provide community and informal learning to those who might otherwise remain at the margins of education.

Key Recommendations

- Focus on the needs of poor and marginalized communities, including people with disabilities as they have the most to gain from mobile learning.
- Maximize the impact of mobile learning interventions - customize and ground them in the needs and cultures of specific targeted groups rather than applying blanket solutions.
- Invest in sustainable educational goals rather than short-lived trendy approaches.
- Avoid the perpetual pilot syndrome by building solid long-term partnerships.
- Minimize the cost of interventions by utilizing the existing local expertise and human networks.
- Communicate and collaborate with potential learners; include them in design and development decisions to create meaningful solutions reflecting their current realities, long-term and immediate needs.



- 1 Mobile-cellular subscriptions penetration rates stand at 97% globally. The total number of mobile broadband subscriptions is expected to reach 3.6 billion by the end of 2016 (with the global penetration rate reaching 49.4%, a value that has increased 12 times since 2007). Mobile broadband subscriptions penetration rates: in developed countries – 90.3% and in developing countries- 40.9%. – ITU (2016). [u](#)
- 2 As per the goals of Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2010).
- 3 Tough A. (1979). *u*. Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- 4 Livingstone, D. (2006). Informal learning. In: Z. Bekerman, N.C. Burbules, and D. Silberman-Keller, eds., *O*, 1st ed. Peter Lang, pp. 203-227.
- 5 UNESCO. (2005). *V7- U@=*. Module 1. Paris: UNESCO, Division of Basic Education, p. 4.
- 6 Freire, P. (1972). *h*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- 7 Specific examples available at www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/
- 8 www.datadyne.org/magpi-mobile/
- 9 www.frontlinesms.com/
- 10 <http://wiki.epf.ch/csn2/description>
- 11 www.bbjanala.com/
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