

# Mobile Technologies: Enhancing Teaching in Australian Literature

Lesley Ljungdahl, University of Technology Sydney, NSW, Australia

*Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore teaching practices which incorporate mobile learning technologies in order to improve learning in the delivery of subjects in the Humanities. The focus is an Australian literature subject offered to students enrolled in a Bachelor of Education. Many students of the 'Z' generation appreciate the style of learning and pattern of communication promoted by the use of mobile technologies (Green & Hannon, 2007). Podcasts and video podcasts have the potential to engage students' interests and enhance learning outcomes. Distinctive characteristics of mobile learning tasks relate to flexibility, autonomy, authenticity. Mobile technologies can facilitate conversations and social networking as well as individualise the access, production and exchange of information. The experience of the 'book' can be enriched through multi-modality. While examples are drawn from the field of literature, the strategies are relevant to various areas of study and have applications for primary, secondary and tertiary teachers.*

Keywords: Technology, Literature, Teaching

## Introduction

**T**HE ACT OF reading can take on new perspectives when combined with audio-books and iBooks/E-books. Teaching practices which incorporate mobile learning technologies have the potential to improve learning although more evidence-based research is still needed to show that 'deep' learning occurs. The focus of this study is an Australian literature subject offered to students enrolled in a Bachelor of Education course. These students are students of the 'Z' generation who usually appreciate the style of learning and pattern of communication promoted by the use of mobile technologies (Green & Hannon, 2007). Advantages of mobile learning relate to flexibility (anywhere, anytime), autonomy (in the access, production and exchange of information), and authenticity (facilitation of conversations and social networking). While examples are drawn from the field of Australian literature, the strategies are relevant to various fields of study. Mobile technologies afford new opportunities yet "it is still too early to predict how our understandings of learning and teaching will evolve as a consequence (Kukułska-Hulme & Traxler, 2005, p. 42). The technology does not replace the experience of the 'book' but can enrich it through multi-modality and the facilities of the Internet.

The use of mobile learning technologies can have a wide impact in the field of education as there is access to information and knowledge without the constraints of place or time. To take advantage of these attributes and to improve teaching practices and learning experiences, university teachers can embrace such technology but this is not without challenges. The engagement of students with books is crucial for successful completion of their studies. Understanding the content of texts is of great significance and this 'understanding' can be enhanced

by listening to podcasts and viewing still and video images as well as conventional reading habits. Mobile technologies can engage the senses in ways that are limited by text alone.

While there are generational stereotypes, the i-generation of students, born from 1995, is familiar with mobile technologies such as the iPod, the mobile phone and portable computer devices (Scornavacca et al.). Most students have lived with the computer technology of the World Wide Web and bear the apt title of 'digital natives' (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). This Internet generation is used to working individually and many prefer the personalised learning which is a hallmark of digital technology use. While many students of the Z generation easily engage with different technologies, not all students have access or show confidence in their use (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). There is also a significant difference between their expertise in handling technology and its creative application. As Loboda and Colter (2008) have found out, synchronous collaboration software can enhance students' learning experiences in their classes if there is asynchronous online training of staff and appropriate user support.

## **Background**

The pedagogical use of mobile technologies can still be regarded as being in its infancy as teachers examine the potential for their use in teaching and the possible obstacles they can present as they are introduced. Teachers try to take advantage of the ubiquitous of devices which their students are familiar (Aubusson et al., 2009). A community of learners can generate enthusiasm and interest in using mobile technologies. Access to learning is made simpler through the use of mobile technologies but there are significant issues to address such as the quality of learning that takes place. Because they are portable, students have many opportunities to access information and knowledge.

The future of mobile technology in education will lead to learning moving more outside the classroom and becoming personalised in the learner's own environment (Naismith et al., 2004). Students can take advantage of internet connectivity and the ability to collaborate with peers, sharing views and information in such a way that it is not recognised as conventional classroom learning.

Laurillard's (2002) framework for the design of learning environments which include teacher's concepts, teacher's constructed learning environment, student's concepts and student's specific actions (related to learning tasks) has relevance to this study. Discussion, adaptation, interaction and reflection were important components when students were utilising the mobile technologies in their literature subject. As Cope and Kalantzis (2000) point out, the design of teaching must take advantage of technology which can enhance learning and interactivity.

## **Context**

This paper presents the observed practice of using mobile technologies, in particular podcasting, in a literature-based subject titled 'Images of Australia', offered in the Bachelor of Education course at an Australian university. This is a one semester subject in which podcasting was used in 2009. The aim of the study was to assist students to engage more closely with the Australian literature texts so that the knowledge gained could result in deeper understanding and that the tutorial activities would become more fruitful learning experiences.

Since the students had a diverse range of experience with mobile technologies, significant preparation was needed (for some) to enhance their skills and confidence.

The teacher was a member of a group of academics for a community of learners striving to develop innovative digital ideas. Institutional and collegial support was crucial when introducing multimodal features such as animation, audio, colour, music, video and visual design into a subject that had formerly focussed on written texts.

## Texts

Australian literature texts offer a rich field to exploit the affordances of mobile technologies and thus, to engage students in learning. Texts from the genres of poetry, children's literature, short stories, drama and the novel are explored.

The enjoyment of poetry is enhanced by listening to audio recordings on iPods. 'Waltzing Matilda' is an iconic Australian poem. The bush poetry of 'Banjo' Paterson (2006) is heard in a strong voice with a rhythm conveying the meaning. Although 'Waltzing Matilda' has not become the national anthem it is a popular song (a song about a stockman stealing sheep (jumbuck) and being shot by *troopers* (police on horseback). International students can learn Australian idioms, colloquialisms and Australian slang (*billabong* = an Aboriginal word meaning waterhole, *tuckerbag* = a bag used to carry food, *waltzing matilda* = to wander as a tramp with a swag of belongings). The words spring from the page as the broad Australian accent conveys the story.

The experience of reading poetry can take on added significance if the poet's own interpretation is heard. Listening to an audio recording complemented the reading of 'My country' (Mackellar, 1985). Students could hear the authentic voice of the poet, Dorothea Mackellar, noting the emphasis on which she placed certain words and phrases:

*I love a sunburnt country, a land of jewelled plains  
Of rugged mountain ranges  
Of drought and flooding rains....*

Students were able to place her accent and English-born background and discuss why she might write a poem with heartfelt longing about Australia *an opal-hearted country. A wilful lavish land* whilst she was resident in England. The words, images and Mackellar's own voice conveyed a vision of place. In the poem 'My people' is heard the voice of an indigenous Australian, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1990), formerly known as Kath Walker, a Kamilaroi woman. Her poems reveal a dream of acceptance and the strong feelings she has for keeping her Aboriginal heritage. She reveals the visual richness of Australia as she describes how she belongs to the land and feels at one with it. Internet interconnectivity allows students to explore historical background which adds to the meaning of the poems.

The children's literature of Norman Lindsay's *The magic pudding: The adventures of Bunyip Bluegum* (2008) is a classic Australian story by a famed artist which tells the story of a magic pudding that renews itself when eaten. The characters of Bunyip Bluegum and Sam Sawnoff are revealed by Lindsay's artistic representation and by their distinctive language. "The fact is" said Bunyip, "I have decided to see the world, and I cannot make up my mind whether to be a Traveller or a Swagman. Which would you advise?" May Gibbs' *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* (2007), first published in 1918, is another classic tale with loveable,

hand painted fantasy 'gumnut babies' that live in the Australian bush and have adventures with bushland creatures such as the snake and the kookaburra. The visual imagery in both books gives the 'reader' a deeper appreciation of the writers' intentions.

Short stories are represented by the authors, Henry Lawson and Barbara Baynton in texts available from the Gutenberg Project and audio recordings. Henry Lawson is an iconic Australian author, renowned as a poet and a short story writer. 'The Drover's Wife' (Lawson, 1976) gives the viewpoint of a strong Australian woman of the outback, left at home to care for her family while her drover husband is absent. The crux of the story is the snake which may attack her children. Barbara Baynton's 'Squeaker's Mate' is a harrowing tale of colonial woman which confronts the stereotype of the heroic outback bushman. In this story he is shown as cowardly and lazy whilst his wife is shown as strong and forbearing (Baynton in Krimmer, 1980). When she has a serious accident, injuring her back, Squeaker leaves his wife in a dire situation.

Drama, like poetry, is best appreciated when it is performed, seen or heard. David Williamson's *The club* (1978) tells the story of an Australian football club and the machinations of the owners, managers and team as they manoeuvre for power and prestige. Williamson observes the society of the club which is a microcosm of life in the wider world.

*Seven little Australians* by Ethel Turner (1983), a 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, shows the travails of a large family, revealing children's experiences in a colonial society. The final death of a sister is portrayed with pathos. Miles Franklin's novel *My brilliant career* (1980) highlights the struggle of the young colonial girl who wants to escape from the constraints of a society which places women in an inferior position. Originally published in 1901, the title is ironic title as Sybylla's vision of wanting to be a writer is not accepted in 19<sup>th</sup> society which expects her to become a married woman whose duty is to take care of the home. Available on Project Gutenberg, students can access the text from 'anywhere' at 'anytime'. In addition, the film versions of these novels bring to life the manners and mores of Australian society.

Contemporary novels studied are Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991), Ruby Langford Ginibi's *My Bundjalung people* (1994) and Christos Tsiolkas' *The slap* (2008). In *Cloudstreet*, two families, the Pickles and the Lambs, are portrayed with great sensitivity as the novel traces their individual stories against a background of West Australian society. *Cloudstreet* has many examples of Australian idioms and language (e.g. *bonzer* = excellent) but the iPad allows students to find the meanings with ease:

*Lester rested the glowing end on the tail of a tick and watched it shunt out like a dog from a snake hole. You're gunna look like a flywire door when this is finished.*

*There's a big two-up game tomorrow (Winton, 1991, p. 250).*

*My Bundjalung people* conveys the attitudes of an Aboriginal woman to her past as she re-visits her homeland country. Ginibi expresses strong sentiments about her heritage and beliefs as she reviews her life as an urban Aboriginal woman and observes the deterioration of conditions for her people. In *The slap*, Christos Tsiolkas shows a variety of characters and eight different points of view are portrayed by representatives of Australia's multicultural society such as an elderly Greek man or a young homosexual. The experience of reading print was enhanced by the contrasting voices of the audio-recording as reactions are described about a young boy who is slapped at a barbecue:

*The slap seemed to echo. It cracked the twilight. The little boy looked up at the man in shock. There was a long silence. It was as if he could not comprehend what had just occurred, how the man's action and the pain he was beginning to feel coincided. The silence broke, the boy's face crumpled, and this time there was no wail; when the tears began to fall they fell silently* (Tsiolkas, 2008, pp. 40-41).

## Discussion

It is likely that there will be increased use of mobile technologies in higher education as trials gain positive feedback from students. However, as Traxler points out "the concept of mobile education or mobile learning is still emerging and still unclear" (2007, p. 2; Traxler, 2009) since different interpretations influence the definition of mobile learning: "For each learner, the nature of 'mobility' has a variety of connotations and these will colour conceptualisations of mobile education. It may mean learning whilst travelling, driving, sitting, or walking; it may be hands free or eyes-free learning" (Traxler, 2008, p. 3). The concepts will change as research-based evidence is examined and the nature of the 'learning' is revealed.

Some advantages of mobile technologies are flexibility (anywhere, anytime), autonomy (in the access, production and exchange of information), and authenticity (facilitation of conversations and social networking). Students appreciate the flexibility of accessing materials in different formats at a time and place of their choice. While the book is eminently portable, students can do multiple tasks with an iPod: listen to a poem or story and/or review as they are drive to university, travel on public transport, do household tasks or leisure activities. Mobile devices are smaller, "bringing the whole of the internet...to the palm of your hand" (Johnson et al., 2008). There is the flexibility of listening to a nine hour recording of a 'talking book' such as *Cloudstreet*; reading the book in the conventional manner; or doing both while taking notes.

The student has some autonomy in the choice of how and when he/she accesses a text. Free (or cheap) iBooks mean that students do not have to buy some texts, nor do they need to return books to the library within a limited time period. There is also the possibility of combining advice and guidance from the teaching staff to the student to assist with the 'reading' of the text, no matter whether the format is print, audio or film. Authenticity is added by the facility for students to communicate with others about the texts and to share information which they may not necessarily contribute in the classroom context. Learning experiences can go beyond the classroom and students can expand the time focussed on their studies. This is important in a subject which requires a significant amount of reading.

iBooks can facilitate the exchange of information. Readers can adjust font sizes, search for vocabulary in the built-in dictionary, rather than consulting a dictionary in book format, and locate words/phrases throughout the text (Trautschold & Mazo, 2010, p. 217). The latter function is useful for students when they want to follow the progress of a particular character or trace themes. A word or phrase can be typed in and the iBook will show a list of the chapters where it occurs. Students can use Google or Wikipedia if the text prompts them to seek additional information, for example, finding the meaning of *elated* or the location of *Zagreb* (Tsiolkas, 2008). Reading a book on the iPad or other device requires the reader to touch a screen to turn the page, scroll slowly or use the slider at the bottom of the page which will indicate the page number. This is a different experience to turning the pages of a conventional book but the function of 'rewinding' or 'rereading' is similar. The iPad can be

used to watch videos and video podcasts downloaded from iTunes, movies and iTube. While iPods are mainly manufactured for recreational purposes they have the potential to enhance learning previously delivered in a formal 'tethered' environment, assisting teachers to give interesting and multimodal information. As the functions of technologies are increasing, the devices include can include more innovative content and communication between the different forms of E-book readers (Warren, 2009). There is the potential to stimulate more engagement than with the printed text alone.

The move from the study of the printed text to the inclusion of multimedia/visual literacy can transform teaching practices. Researchers (Cole & Pullen, 2008) offer stimulating ideas to utilise technology in classrooms and to explore the field of multiliteracies but there are many challenges in designing activities to achieve learning outcomes and appropriate assessment practices (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007). While students had access to the technologies and could use them for reading the Australian texts, it was clear that for some students the eBook experience was not necessarily superior to that of a conventional reading experience. There is much to be done to evaluate and critique the use of mobile technologies, 'use' does not always translate to learning.

Constraints and challenges relate to issues of technical limitations, assessment, access and student/teacher training (Johnston et al., 2008). The pedagogical use of mobile technologies based on authentic learning is keenly debated: "It challenges what it means to teach and what it means to learn in higher education. It challenges the wisdom, timing and fixed spaces of established pedagogies and the usefulness of traditional tools and resources" (Herrington, A. & Herrington, J., 2007, p. 7). Mobile technologies depend on good quality broadband access and technical problems can seriously affect student satisfaction. Students can be excluded from activities if they do not possess or have limited access to devices such as iPods.

Assessment practices can often lag behind the adoption of technologies and/or limit experimentation. Supporting material for podcasts may be time-consuming for teachers to develop. Sutton-Brady et al. (2009) investigated the value of using short-form podcasts to support assessment for undergraduate and postgraduate students finding that the majority of students still favoured traditional study habits for the following reasons: time pressures, the level of English language skill and knowledge of the medium. Herrington et al. advocate using mobile technology devices "not as low level communication or recording devices, but as cognitive tools" (2009, p. 12) to enhance learning potential. The social aspects of learning and technology can assist students to engage more fully with the literature and the concepts which are taught and learnt. Students can be involved in locating resources; teachers can provide focussed questions for using these resources, concentrating more closely on features which deserve highlighting. Further research still needs to be carried out on the nature of the learning which actually takes place when mobile technologies are used (Herrington et al. 2009). From the observations made in this case, further data are needed to investigate whether the use of iPods and other devices enhance learning about Australian literature.

There may be a significant lack of familiarisation and skills with mobile technology devices which may discourage students and staff from experimenting with the emerging technologies. Green and Hannon (2007) suggest harnessing the technologies that students already use (such as iPods and Internet interconnectivity) but warn that teachers often do not feel confident or have the skills for using hardware or software. A "community of practice" in higher education institutions can clearly benefit members but, in many cases, staff development

and training is left to individual initiatives ). Two recommendations of the 'community of learners' group are particularly relevant to this study (Aubusson et al., 2009):

- \* To create sufficient time for community members to develop their awareness and personal skills with the technology and time to reflect on the use of the technology in their teaching.
- \* To immerse participants in the technology use, to provide opportunities to both familiarise themselves and critique the use of the technology.

## Conclusion

Further comparison research projects using mobile technologies are needed to address the assessment of learning outcomes as well as exploring issues associated with Laurillard's (2002) framework for the design of learning environments, i.e. the teacher's concepts, the constructed learning environment, student's concepts and their learning tasks. The Z generation does not always fit the stereotype of computer confidence and competency.

Web-based and mobile technologies have the potential to enhance learning and to encourage the development of new teaching resources. From observations in this modest study, the audio and visual content helped to stimulate interest and engage students in the content of books. However, these claims must be tested against more research studies which are needed to gauge if there is improved quality of learning and teaching. As Kukulsa-Hulme & Traxler (2005, p. 192) point out, "success...may well depend on the pedagogical tasks that the devices are used for, and on the integration of tasks within a well defined pedagogical approach." For this reason, mobile technologies may be less important than the pedagogic and learner aspects of this study. Teaching and learning within the university is evolving in the rapidly-changing context of new technologies.

Teachers can find inspiration to transform and/or enrich their teaching so that it meets the needs of their students who have grown up in a world of digital technology. Technology can bring to life the words of writers, complementing the reading experience. From the perspective of the teacher, drawing the reader into the world of books can entrance, entertain and, ultimately, educate students.

## References

- Aubusson, P., Schuck, A., Kearney, M. & Burden, K. (2009). Mobile learning for teacher professional learning: Benefits, obstacles and issues. *ALT-J*, 17(3), 233 – 247.
- Beetham, H. & Sharpe, R. (Eds) (2007). *Rethinking pedagogy for the digital age: Designing and delivering e-learning*. London: Routledge.
- Cole, D. R. & Pullen, D.L. (Eds). (2008). *Multiliteracies in motion: Current theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Franklin, M. (1980). *My brilliant career*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson. Orig. publ. 1901. [Available from Project Gutenberg]
- Gibbs, M. (2007). *The complete adventures of Snugglespot and Cuddlepup*. Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins.
- Ginibi, R.L. (1994). *My Bundjalung people*. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press.
- Green, H. & Hannon, C. (2007). *Their space: Education for a digital generation*. London: Demos.

- Herrington, J. & Herrington, A., Mantei, J., Olney, I. & Ferry, B. (2009). Using mobile technologies to develop new ways of teaching and learning in *New technologies, new pedagogies: Mobile learning in education*. University of Wollongong: Faculty of Education.
- Herrington, A. & Herrington, J. (2007). Authentic mobile learning in higher education. In *Proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education*, International Educational Research conference, ed. P.L. Jeffery. Fremantle, WA: University of Notre Dame.
- Johnson, L. Levine, A. & Smith, R. (2008). *The Horizon Report: 2008 Australia–New Zealand edition*. Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium.
- Krimmer, S. & Lawson, A. (Eds) (1980). *Portable Australian authors: Barbara Baynton* St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- Kukulska-Hulme, A. & Traxler, J. (Eds) (2005). *Mobile learning: A handbook for educators and trainers*. London: Routledge.
- Laurillard, D. (2002). Rethinking university teaching: A conversational framework for the effective use of learning technologies (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Lawson, H. (1976). 'The Drover's Wife' in *The portable Henry Lawson*. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press.
- Lindsay, N. (2008). *The magic pudding: The adventures of Bunyip Bluegum*. Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson.
- Loboda, I.P. & Colter, C. (2008). Asynchronous synchronicity: Assuaging the hordes! *Educause Quarterly* (ID: E08\_47631).
- Mackellar, D. (1985). *My country*. Richmond, Vic.: Greenhouse Publications.
- McCrindle, M. & Wolfinger, E. (2009). *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the generations*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Naismith, L., Lonsdale, P., Vavoula, G. & Sharples, M. (2004). *Report 11: Literature review of mobile technologies in learning: futurelab series*. Retrieved from <http://futurelab.org.uk/research/lit-reviews.htm>
- Noonucal, O. (1990). *My people*. Milton, Qld: Jacaranda Press.
- Palfrey, J. & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. New York: Basic Books.
- Paterson, A.B. (2006). *Waltzing Matilda*. Lindfield, NSW: Scholastic Press.
- Scornavacca, E., Huff, S. & Marshall, S. (2009). Mobile telephones in the classroom: If you can't beat them, join them. *Communications of the ACM*, 52(4).
- Sutton-Brady C., Scott, K.M., Carabatta, G. & Clark, S. (2009). The value of using short-format podcast to enhance learning and teaching, *ALT-J*, 17(3), 219-232.
- Trautschold, M. & Mazo, G. (2010). *iPad made simple*. New York: Apress.
- Traxler, J. (2007). Defining, discussing and evaluating mobile learning: The moving finger writes and having writ.... *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 8(2), 1-7.
- Traxler, J. (2008). Podcasting in context. In *Podcasting of learning in universities*, Ed. G. Salmon & P. Edirisingha, 12-19. Glasgow: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.
- Traxler, J. (2009). Students and mobile devices: Choosing which dream. *ALT-C Proceedings*.
- Tsiolkas, C. (2008). *The slap*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Turner, E. (1983). *Seven little Australians*. Sydney: Lansdowne. [Available from Project Gutenberg]
- Warren, J. W. (2009). Innovation and the future of e-Books. *The International Journal of the Book*, 6(1).
- Warren, J. (2010). The progression of digital publishing: Innovation and the E-volution of E-books. *The International Journal of the Book*, 7(4), pp.37-53.
- Williamson, D. (1978). *The club*. Sydney: Currency Press.
- Winton T. (1991). *Cloudstreet*. Camberwell, Vic.: Penguin Books.



**Asynchronous Synchronicity: Assuaging the Hordes!**

<b>Title:</b>	
<b>Author(s):</b>	Iryna P. Loboda (The University of Tennessee) and Shane Colter (The University of Tennessee)
<b>Topics:</b>	Collaboration, E-Learning, EDUC

**About the Author**

*Dr. Lesley Ljungdahl*

Dr. Lesley Ljungdahl is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her latest publication with Winch et al. is *Literacy: Reading, Writing and Children's Literature* (OUP). She has a keen interest in ESL education and overseas practicums.