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MOBILE LEARNING FOR CIVIC FOOD LITERACY ENGAGEMENT

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To Betsy, Henrietta, Agatha and Punk for sowing the seeds of this work: To Jim for the nurturing necessary for its completion.

Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

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Acknowledgments

Writing a PhD is one thing, but describing how you did it is another. Within the graduate studies support literature, PhDs are routinely described as mountains, marathons, roller coasters, journeys and occasionally something to be ‘survived’. Though the odd person will tell you that it is ‘just a project’ and something to be scheduled and time-managed into submission (quite literally), there is a kernel of truth behind the metaphors. Like a marathon, PhDs are an endurance sport; like a roller coaster they are exciting, as well as unnerving, and characterized by highs and lows. However, my favourite of all they hackneyed doctoral journey stuff has to be the image of a mountain. When I was little I used to go hill walking with my family in the Lake District (UK). To this day I can remember my first hill – Old Dungeon Ghyll. I would have been about eight or nine when I walked up this with my mother. It was not, by any means, particularly high or difficult. But at the time it was challenging and, though certainly not mountainous, as the very first ‘peak’ it remains the most memorable achievement from that part of my life.



Old Dungeon Ghyll – Not Everest

I can still remember reaching the top and seeing a small flat tarn covered in mist. Standing there it was possible to see where you were. Looking down you could see the

Langdale valley. Looking up you could see higher peaks, crags and sky. There were many similarities between that first hill climb and this PhD – the excitement at the beginning, the moments of exhaustion, the potential to get lost, the joy at seeing the world from a different perspective, and the humbling feeling that comes with recognizing that your childhood mountain was, by even the best standards, very much a hill. However, the most striking parallel between hill climbing and thesis writing is that both are impossible for the single uninitiated person to achieve alone. I would like to thank the many people who, in one way or another, helped to write this thesis.

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Abstract

As escalating rates of dietary disease and environmental degradation are increasingly associated with the contemporary agro-food system, food literacy, that is the knowledge and skills that relate to food, is being recognized as of growing importance. However, such learning remains, for the most part, informally learnt and, to date, poorly understood. This thesis explores informal food literacy acquisition through the lens of mobile learning, which is both a way of learning and a field of inquiry. This perspective can inform the interpretation of existing phenomena, as well as aide in the design of educational initiatives to address new problems. Situated within an interpretivist research paradigm this research uses emergent, qualitative, multidimensional approaches within the context of a case study of a participatory food literacy project, Red Hen Recipes. This project allowed adult learners to explore food provenance by creating and sharing augmented recipes that trace ingredients from ‘farm to fork’ through text, image, video and GPS map data. The Red Hen Recipes project facilitated food literacy development through learner-centered approaches that were supported by conversational and participatory structures that privileged learner agency. The research used interview and survey methods to explore how people learnt and made meaning through praxis (what people did) and multimodal analysis to examine the semiotics of learner-generated content (what people created). Web and social network analytics data supplemented this and demonstrated wider engagement. Findings from this thesis characterize participants’ mobile food literacy learning as one that is situated and embedded within daily life and spans traditional and digital technologies. Mobile devices were critical for people in creating content for their recipe and typically functioned as a satellite to other devices in the individual’s wider ICT ecology. Mobile learning was found to be not ‘anytime anyplace’ but rather a specific time and a specific place within a learner-generated context. This interdisciplinary study contributes to existing mobile learning theory by extending this to new learner cohorts (adult informal learners outside the education system) and new learning problems (food literacy). Since no previous research into mobile learning and food literacy has been undertaken this can be considered a novel contribution. This study also demonstrates the value of slow philosophy within mobile learning, especially for fostering reflection on complex issues such as food provenance. Furthermore, the study develops the construct of a mobile continuum that enables researchers to articulate the ways that learners exercise agency through appropriating personal devices for different tasks in varied contexts.

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