GOING MOBILE

Part A

The big picture ...

The big questions

The big issues

The big challenges

Part C

Going further ...

your ... es

In your institution

Part B

ands off!

ands on!

Text

Image

Audio

Video

Looking back ...

Looking forward ...

A

Going mobile

There is something truly inspiring and al... ...ionary about these scenarios:

- You are watching a group of learners tak... ...t th... mobile phones – and really put them to good use in the classroom.
- You are sitting down with your ... ...hey edit the video materials they gathered using tablet computers on a... ...town.
- You are listening to pairs of ...rners ...ng to each other – about their favourite photographs on their mob... ...nes.

It's the feeling you get, as a teacher, ...en an activity so engrosses a group of students that they almost forget th... ...re talking in English, sitting in a language class.

In many ways, the ... ...ol can pave the way for an increased commitment to – and interest in ... ...hing ... le... ...ge. And if learners can undertake part of their study time with their o... ...ice of t... ...l, the interest is often higher, or more sustained.

Mobile ... ...rning

O... ...te ... ...doesn't just refer to the tools themselves, but to the opportunity for study ... ...de the ... ...assroom – on the move. 'Learning on the go' is one of the educational b... ...wor... ...his decade, a follow-on from distance and online learning – something truly ... ...ands ... ...he learners, available anywhere and at any time.

... ...d-held learning is perhaps the first technology-based approach that has esc... ...ro... ...he fanciful dreams and desires of educators – to the realm of the possible, ...nd eve... ...arable, amongst learners.

W... ...ether it's on a mobile phone, a hand-held tablet computer or other portable gadget, more and more people are taking advantage of the technologies both inside and outside the classroom to extend their learning and find real opportunities to put it into practice. In *Going Mobile*:

- We look at what mobile and hand-held learning is.
- We explain how you can get started with it.
- We demonstrate how you can set about fully ensuring its principled and effective implementation in your own context.

So let's get going.

In Part A, we look at the 'big picture' of mobile and hand-held learning, and consider some of the major questions, issues and options – as well as looking at some sample case studies from around the world – before we investigate the kinds of challenges you are likely to meet, as you experiment with mobile learning in your own teaching or training.

The big questions

This overview will help you in your initial preparation, before you move on to [some] the activities in Part B. Our aim is to prepare the ground for your own experimentation [and] reflection, and to answer some of the key questions you may have about m[obile learning].

What is mobile learning?

Whilst mobile and hand-held learning are considered relatively new a[dditi]ons to the teacher's armoury, the use of mobile phones, at the very least, h[as been] [d]ating back over a decade now – a period of time that qualifies it as an old[er, em]b[edded] technology in teaching terms! As long ago as 2003, Hamish Norbrook ([... of the BBC) – writing in the Guardian newspaper[1] – was extolling the virtues of the tex[t messa]ge in class:

'Text messages offer opportunities for the English teache[r, becaus]e they provide a realistic basis for writing exercises. Fewer and fewer letters are being w[ritten – e]specially informal ones. Yet writing is as relevant as ever – and increasingly the [m]bil[ity can r]aise a variety of different registers, formal or informal, serious or light, is e[ssent]i[al.] Often the exercise need not be a long one. So, instead of saying "Write a letter", s[ay "Write a] text". With predictive texting the language can be as formal as you like – and [alt]hough cl[assi]c text messages have space for only 160 characters, with a multimedia messa[gin]g s[ervi]ce (MMS) you can write far more.'

It has, however, taken a lot longer fo[r m]any [instr]uct[ors] to notice the power of these mobile devices, and it often seems as if we [ha]ve mo[ved] very little from that period, with many people still looking on mobile and [han]d-held devices as primarily text-based platforms.

The truth, of course, is much more compl[ex] than this, and today's mobile devices (primarily smartphones and tablets) i[n]corporate a set of features which make them ideal for classroom use, and which replace a [f]e[w] o[ld] tools that we have been using for many years: the audio recorder and the video [came]ra, [to n]ame just two examples.

It is high time, th[en, th]at we re[ev]aluate these devices for their potential use in class.

Yet few people workin[g in the] field can agree on exactly what constitutes mobile learning, and definition[s (Kul]kuska-[H]ulme 2009[2]; Traxler 2009[3]) are notoriously hard to find – as 'mobil[e' itself] is a [prob]lematic concept, depending on where the focus of the word resides. When we t[hink] [ab]out mobility:

* Are [we t]alkin[g a]b[o]ut the mobility of the learners (in the 'anytime, anywhere' model of bl[ended] [or] online learning)?
* [A]re w[e re]f[erring] to the devices themselves, and their portability?
* A[re we] [refer]ring to the context in which the learning takes place – in formal classroom [se]ttings [or] i[n]formally, elsewhere (Sharples et al 2009[4]; Kulkuska-Hulme et al 2009[5])?

Thes[e are] the issues that are current in discussions of mobile and hand-held learning, and which are now beginning to be considered and addressed in research and in a new wave of [pub]lications in the area.

Mark Pegrum (2014)[6] divides these different areas into three categories for language learning, each with a different emphasis:

1 Learning that takes place when the **devices** are mobile.

2 Learning that takes place when the **learners** are mobile.

3 Learning that takes place when the **learning** is mobile.

The first category places the focus firmly on the *device* itself, not on the location or situation. In this mobile learning scenario, the learners will typically be engaging with content on mobile and hand-held devices, perhaps accessing online resou[rces o]r creating them, but will be in fixed locations such as a classroom, study room or even l[ibrary].

In this sense, they are not physically mobile, nor are they necessarily taking [adva]nta[ge of] some of the more revolutionary features of mobile devices, such as geoloca[tion. S]i[mi]lar ('geolocation' refers to a mobile device's ability to know where the us[er is phys]i[c]ally located at any given moment, and can be used by the device to deliv[er re]l[ev]ant information to the user, based on that location).

Thus the *learning* is not 'mobile', and corresponds more closely t[o t]he tr[a]ditional CALL-based activities and approaches.

The second category envisages *learners* on the move, a[s t]hey wor[k wi]th – or create – content. This may be moving round limited spaces, su[ch as] the classroom or institution, but may also encapsulate other spaces such as the home, [o]r [even] on the daily commute or similar.

In this case, they may be working with discrete c[ontent, su]ch [a]s flashcards or grammar exercises from major publishers and organi[sati]ons, [catch]i[n]g up with reading materials or listening to podcasts.
For example:
* Cambridge University Press – http[://www.cambri]dge[apps.org/](http://www.cambridgeapps.org/)
* The British Council – http://lear[n]e[ng]l[ish.]b[ritishcouncil.org/en/apps](http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/apps)

In any of the above cases, the le[arner is teth]er[ed] to more traditional approaches, the only difference being that the lear[ners, then,] thei[r devices] are on the move.

Pegrum's third category em[bodies] a tighter *integration* between what happens inside and outside the classroom, and a strong [l]ink between learning content and experiences and learning opportunitie[s] [o]utside the classroom. Learners will have opportunities to work with real-world co[ntex]t, t[o in]corporate parts of their normal lives and to interact with the environment arou[nd them].

In this kin[d of lea]rning, th[ey] [m]ay use a tool to record new vocabulary as they travel around their city, su[ch as] [or] [us]ing the tool for listening practice as they revisit each place.
For exam[ple:]
* [Woices –](http://www.woices.com/) [http://www.](http://www.woices.com/)[woices.com/](http://www.woices.com/)

Thes[e are us]eful d[ivi]sions – and ones that we feel allow for a comfortable development cycle fo[r tea]cher[s wis]hing to experiment with integrating mobile and hand-held learning into [their cu]rrent practice.

[We have based] the activities in Part B partially on this model – allowing for an on-going dev[elopment] [in] terms of complexity, and with a clear progression within each chapter [to]wards [the] kinds of activities envisaged in the third category of Pegrum's taxonomy.

Why is mobile learning important?

Few technologies have embedded themselves so firmly in the lives of people as the mobile phone. Indeed, mobile phones are almost everywhere you look, all around the world, and they are one of the everyday objects that most people aspire to own.

A simple look at per capita mobile phone penetration as far back as January 2012 (a survey by IndexMundi, from CIA World Factbook data[7]) shows 100 countries worldwide with greater than 100% mobile phone penetration, and many more countries below that index with a significant spread of mobile technologies.

There are many reasons for this, of course, but the principal ones are largely economic – from the cost of handsets to the end user, to the sums involved in extending the infrastructure throughout whole countries.

This is especially true of larger countries, or countries with complex geographies:
- Mobile phone signals reach further than other communications technologies.
- The devices needed to receive them cost less than many others.

Whilst you are highly likely to find more traditional technologies – such as desktop and laptop computers – in much of the world, you are increasingly likely to encounter countries and tiers of societies which have skipped this stage of technology development and moved straight to mobile and hand-held devices, for the reasons we have described.

And it is, as we note below, not simply a question of mobile phones, but of *mobile devices*: devices such as tablet computers and other tools that we can carry with us, and which provide us with some kind of link to the world beyond our regular space.

Also, these mobile devices have achieved something where most other technologies have failed, and that is to become ubiquitous, ever-present and almost invisible to the end user. In many ways, they have achieved a degree of normalisation that Bax (2003)[6] could only have dreamed of at the time.

Where Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs), computer labs, laptops and other technologies have only made relatively small inroads into education on a global scale, mobile devices are already present in a lot of our classes all around the world, are ready and waiting to be exploited by both teacher and learner.

Mobile learning, then, *is* important:
- It can take advantage of the most common global technology.
- It can help learners understand and appreciate the power of the everyday technologies they carry with them.
- It can open up a path between what happens in the classroom and what happens outside, in the real world.

It is also, in some ways, a great leveller – more of which below.

Who is mobile learning for?

The short answer to this question is that it's for everybody, everywhere – wherever there are sufficient devices around, and where there is interest from both the teacher and the learners to try it out.

The longer answer is a much more varied picture, in which many factors need to be evaluated and balanced out – to ensure that mobile learning implementation can be carried out successfully and with the involvement of the widest possible number of stakeholders.

There are also wider issues to consider with *any* technologies in education:
- Learners' attitudes to technologies in their education.
- Teachers' attitudes to technologies in teaching.
- Institutional regulations.
- Technical support.
- Infrastructure: hardware, internet access …

We will look more closely at some of the major challenges later in Part A of *Going Mobile*, and in greater depth at institutional implementation/planning in Part C.

What equipment is needed?

Although we will largely be concentrating on mobile phones and tablets, mobile learning can come in a variety of packages:
- From the humble 'dumb phone', through to feature phones and smartphones.
- From e-readers to games consoles.
- And a lot more!

Let's take a look at a few of these common devices:

Many of the devices in the diagram can be used for language practice 'on the go':

- **MP3 players** can give learners access – through tools such as podcasts – to authentic listening material of interest to them.
- **Digital cameras** can provide the learners with opportunities to take photos as prompts for producing language.
- **iPod touches** (basically smartphones without the phone part) can run apps and connect to the internet.
- **e-readers** can provide meaningful reading opportunities, from novels to blogs, newspapers and magazines.
- **Games consoles** can also provide language practice, both from the language of the game itself, to possibilities for connected chat with other players, or through word games and other language-related puzzles.

All these mobile devices provide opportunities, mainly, for learners to *consume* language of one form or another.

If, however, you are more interested in having learners *produce* language, then some of the other devices in our diagram may be more applicable:

- Even **low-end mobile phones** can capture data for language practice – notes, text messages, photographs and more.
- More modern devices such as **smartphones** and **tablets** package a wide variety of tools and features (or 'affordances' – as we will be referring to them) into one portable tool. The inbuilt camera is an excellent tool for capturing 'language in use' and working with that language back in the classroom – as is the audio recording function. And the note taking function can provide a rudimentary way of recording new language.

This 'convergence' is a feature of modern technologies, and one that works very much in the teacher's favour, combining, as it does, a set of tools which would have necessitated a suitcase just a decade ago.