

Bridging the gap? Mobile phones at the interface between informal and formal learning.

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Abstract/Description

This paper reports on a study of the use of high-end mobile phones for off-site and on-campus mobile learning. The aim of the study was to investigate how mobile devices are being integrated by learners in their informal-private 'space' and what use

they make of mobile devices in formal learning contexts. We view formal and informal learning as being part of a continuum of a multi-dimensional clustering of informal and formal learning activities rather than positioned in an either-or relationship. The methodology used for the study draws on narrative and case-based approaches underpinned by grounded theory. As part of their formal assessment, university students were given an assignment task which required them not only to gather data in the form of video clips and photos, but also to answer certain questions (i.e. fill knowledge gaps) that were posed by the events checklist (a mobile learning object). Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews which were analysed using a narrative case-study technique. Two dominant themes emerged from the cases: affective issues and phone usage in a learner's formal and informal practice. Furthermore, the data suggest that in certain contexts learner sensitive scaffolding from the tutor (e.g. via text messages to students) could provide a key in terms of bridging the gap between formal and informal learning.

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