Nicky Hockly: Mobile learning

Mobile learning, or mLearning, refers to any learning that takes place on a handheld (or 'mobile') device. Mobile learning is not just about mobile phones (or 'cellphones'). Tablet computers (such as the iPad), pocket computers (such as the Apple® iTouch), small laptops (often called netbooks), e-readers (devices which allow you to read electronic books), MP3 players (for audio) and MP4 players (for video) – even handheld gaming devices – are all potential mLearning devices.

Mobile learning outside the classroom

Mobile learning is often referred to as 'learning on the go'. Students can download learning materials onto their handheld devices, and access them while on the move, or during 'down time' – for example, while travelling on the train to work, while waiting for a bus or a dentist's appointment, even while lying on the sofa after work! Downloadable learning materials can be found on the internet, or may come with a course book. You'll have noticed that *Global* has a 'Listen on the Move' section, consisting of downloadable audio files, which students can put on their mobile devices and listen to outside of the classroom. *Global* also has a 'Watch' section, with downloadable videos for students. Organisations such as the British Council have downloadable podcasts and other learning materials for language learners on their respective websites. Some materials are specially created 'apps' (applications, or small programs) for smart phones such as the iPhone, Blackberry or Android phone. Typical English language learning apps include word, grammar and pronunciation games, or audio and video podcasts. Podcasts may be linked to social media sites where students can interact with podcast characters and practise their English. Tell your students what is available for their mobile devices, encourage them to experiment with using apps in their free time, and get them to report back to the class on what they have used and how useful they have found it. You might find it's contagious, and other students start to try out apps too!

Mobile learning inside the classroom

Learning with mobile devices does not have to take place exclusively outside the classroom. Some schools provide class sets of mobile devices, such as wi-fi enabled pocket computers or netbooks, which teachers can integrate into classroom work. For example, imagine that you are working with your students on creating a tourist guide to your city. The students use the class set of mobile devices to search the internet for information on different topics in small groups (sights, food, festivals and traditions, history, etc.). They can even interview and record tourists in the street with their devices, and take photos! The students then use the devices to create multimedia presentations of their topic, including video, audio, photos and text. All the topics are then collated into a multimedia guidebook, which is put online. The flexibility and portability of a mobile device makes it an excellent potential learning tool. Buying a class set of handheld devices is also much cheaper than equipping an entire computer lab for a school.

Sharing mobile learning resources with students

Nowadays many students have their own mobile devices, at least in the form of a mobile phone. Pointing your students to mobile resources encourages them to use their own devices for out of class language study. Although studying English on their mobile devices may not be every student's idea of a good time, it's about offering them choices. Mobile devices are here to stay. Mobile resources are available and increasingly ubiquitous, and as teachers, it's our job to let our students know about the options. It's up to us to help our students use them to support their own English language learning, whether inside the classroom or outside.

Nicky Hockly is Director of Pedagogy of The Consultants-E, an online teacher training and development consultancy. An EFL teacher and teacher trainer since 1987, she is author of numerous articles on teaching methodology and training. Her published books include *How to Teach English with Technology* (Pearson Longman), awarded the 2008 Ben Warren International House Trust Prize, and *English as a Foreign Language for Dummies* (John Wiley Publishing), both co-written with Gavin Dudeney. Her latest book, *Teaching Online* (Delta Publishing), was co-written with Lindsay Clandfield. She is currently working on books on digital literacy, and on mobile learning.