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***Mobile Learning: Languages, Literacies and Cultures (New Language Learning and Teaching Environments) (2014)***

Mark Pegrum

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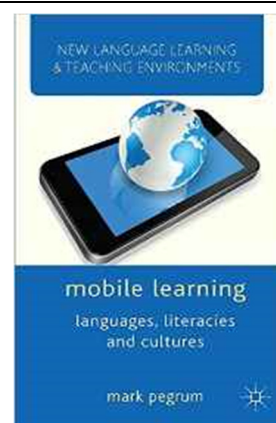
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Mark Pegrum's 2014 book, *Mobile Learning: Languages, Literacies and Cultures*, evaluates current mobile learning trends in the areas of languages and literacy, discusses the pedagogies upon which they are based, and evaluates which methods are conducive to global learning and which might clash with local cultures. The book begins with an overview of what mobile learning, or "m-learning", is and provides a comparison and contrast with e-learning. It then moves on to tackle issues of the promises and limits of technology in learning. From there, it focuses on the importance of digital technologies in the development of intercultural literacy across different cultural contexts. Finally, it suggests research and contributions that could lead to the realization of the full global potential of mobile education.

Having knowledge at our fingertips, anytime, anywhere is at the heart of m-learning. While e-learning has revolutionized how we learn—and how we think—it is not without its limits. e-learning takes place with fixed technology that we use in situations that are separated from our daily life. m-learning, on the other hand, allows the user/learner to capture, look up, and share information in real-life environments and situations. The notion of the user/learner being able not only to contribute to his own learning process, but also to share with other learners is central to constructivist theory. For many non-Western cultures, this post-behaviorist model might, however, be seen to impose foreign cultural values and pedagogical approaches that are not in-line with local cultural norms. Pegrum presents 18 case studies and 13 vignettes to provide a complete picture of the successes and shortcomings in current m-learning programs and methodologies.

The constructivist theory and communicative approach are compatible with m-learning and particularly suited to mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Central to constructivist

theory is the notion of the teacher serving not to lecture or direct, but rather to guide and *scaffold* learners to higher thinking and learning. One particularly interesting point that Pegrum highlights is that “technology is meant to be emancipatory” (p. 53); that is, its purpose is to free us from drudgery and unwanted, useless information and to deliver facility and ease. In the case of language learning, this could mean freeing learners from the classroom or from the structure and design of the teacher. However, what has been happening rather unexpectedly is the use of personal technology inside the language classroom. Students use mobile devices for translations, flashcard/vocabulary drills, and for verb forms/conjugations.

In teaching literacies through mobile devices, digital proficiency also results, which prepares users for a mobile future. While the primary concerns of this book are those of reading, writing, numeracy, and foreign language acquisition, m-learning also promotes digital literacy skills that are necessary for the developing world. That is, these technologies work beyond their immediate purpose of delivering educational content; they also move users/learners toward the development of intercultural literacy through constructive interactions with interlocutors across different cultural contexts. As mentioned above, the author is careful to point out that this sort of constructivist interaction might take time to gain acceptance in some developing countries, but he also stresses its importance in increasing employment opportunities and fostering social justice.

For all of its benefits, mobile technology still has its limitations. This is due mostly to the fact that “mobile hardware, networks and software were generally not designed with education in mind” (p. 83). In the case of literacy and language education, some areas where computer-assisted language learning (CALL) might supersede MALL are: screen sizes, input options, speed and capacity, storage, export options, battery life, and environmental adaptability (to lighting conditions, for example). Connectivity in mobile devices is also of concern, especially in rural areas of developing countries. Furthermore, there are health concerns associated with prolonged use of mobile devices—and environmental concerns surrounding their disposal. Still, as a matter of convenience and affordability, mobile devices are indispensable. Ideally, though, to achieve a balanced language and literacy education, traditional classroom instruction is used in conjunction with both CALL, and MALL, as there are benefits to each medium of delivery.

While this book has bountiful merit in pedagogy and technological delivery as pertains to literacy and language, that is not its sole purpose. The book’s grander endeavor is to reach out to those with limited access to education. Pegrum discusses at length the need for increased education for women in developing countries and fostering social justice through technological devices while also respecting cultural norms. He also advocates for mobile technology for those with cognitive and physical disabilities in developing countries, as some of those individuals do not have access to traditional education. All the while, he never loses sight of the issue of affordability, which often is at the root of lack of educational opportunities. In fact, the author remains realistic in his advocacy of mobile learning technologies in all regards; he frequently acknowledges the issues of limited connectivity, pedagogical and cultural incongruence, and even design limitations for mobile devices. Pegrum also takes into consideration the changing nature of language and the role of “text speak” in language learning in general and MALL in specific. One issue that was not decisively addressed is whether or not effective L2 acquisition can take place in an artificially restricted L2 cultural context; that is, can a non-native speaker of American English effectively learn the language if the country from which he studies it imposes

tight religious and cultural restrictions on its citizens? How can the essential linguistic component of L2 culture be incorporated sufficiently in MALL for the learner to acquire the content without overstepping the sociocultural boundaries put in place by the learner's native country? Perhaps these questions can be answered if educators and learners respond to Pegrum's call to action.

In the end, Pegrum reminds us that notion of technology-enhanced learning will soon be redundant; it will simply be referred to as 'learning'. Technology is an integral part of the global landscape that can guide us through the educational and social challenges that we must navigate henceforth. He implores teachers, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and national and international organizations to develop and disseminate educational policies and programs that will "support the spread of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills." (213) In order to do so, he suggests research which meets the following criteria: that it be theoretically framed or theoretically generative, that it be agenda-oriented, and that it be cumulative, building on past theories and empirical work.

## REFERENCES

Pegrum, Mark (2014). *Mobile Learning: Languages, Literacies and Cultures (New Language Learning and Teaching Environments)*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.