ASSESSMENT WITH MOBILE DEVICES: INTERACTIVE PODCASTING & FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT - TWO LOW THRESHOLD ACTIVITIES?

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The application of mobile technologies holds the potential for anytime, anyplace study at the convenience of the student. Information can now be separated from presentation of content using XML based solutions and delivered in many novel and interesting ways on various devices – each tailored to the preferences of the recipient and their device. However, delivery does not ensure engagement.

Learning and teaching practice frequently recognises the value of assessment as a driver (Brown and Glasner, 1999), both formative and summative, within the student learning path. Feedback is valuable to both student and tutor to reinforce learning or identify areas of concern as early as possible; quick diagnosis of preventable and treatable mis-conceptions serves to improve understanding and make better use of time for both staff and student. Learning materials, now available 24/7 online through campus networks or domestic broadband, can be supported by online formative testing and feedback, but students may have disconnected (i.e. offline materials) which would also benefit from this. Mobile and ubiquitous assessment should be available to support mobile and ubiquitous computing but mobile devices are networked through the commercial telecomunications networks, which charge for traffic in order to raise revenue. This contrasts with to the usual practice of 'free' computing resources provided to students within Higher Education Institutions. Until Higher Education provides equivalent services for student mobile devices we must acknowledge a potential role for commercially funded services within a service orientated architecture.

With the rise of 'new' technologies in recent years, students have new expectations (James *et al.* 2002) and are no longer risk-averse to the application of technology, but they are concerned that the frontier of 'official' communication environments (VLEs, Student Portals) can be blurred into the social networking environments they use to maintain effective social and study relationships. Recent developments in the 'blogspace' may either reenforce the 'us-and-them' division or help break it down. Mobile devices have been reported as devices which students are keen to keep separate from academic duties or used only when no other means are more suitable

(Tunstall, 2006). The increasing sophistication of mobile devices enables better feedback to be provided, giving a feed-forward outcome which can improve future student work.

Mobile devices may therefore have been under-exploited perhaps due to concerns over cost but nevertheless, opportunities exist to utilise commercial services which higher education does not currently provide. The Web has opened up academia i.e. provided it with a semi-permeable membrane where its products and requirements are visible off campus. Commerce inevitably is keen to exploit this domain. Web services which work with students' mobile devices are inevitably a boundary where co-operation and collaboration can provide a useful outcome. However, it is important to minimise or remove any additional financial burden upon the student. This does not mean that commercial services should be rejected but that they have a role to play in either a small or limited (testing) fashion. Academia can benefit from off-theshelf applications which may be far less expensive to bring into use than developing bespoke in-house solutions. They may also be more scaleable for widespread use. Once the value of a service has been established it may be that HE collaborations can find cheaper ways to provide a better solution but not this is not essential during the research and evaluation of small scale projects.

This presentation describes the ongoing work into supporting students using the mobile technologies already available in student mobile phones. Using both SMS (Short Message System) and techniques for the application of mini-Web Browsers (with existing or third party questionbanks) a comparative analysis of features is made to show advantages and disadvantages of each approach. A series of easy stages – so called LTAs or Low Threshold Activities (TLTGroup.org) - may be sufficient to engage tutors and students to improve the availability, value and frequency of formative assessment. Progress in small stages is easier to achieve and share practice with, rather than large scale projects in isolation with a long-term conclusion that may have to be diverted as technology develops during its lifetime.

Other Higher Education organisations (e.g. Assessment & Learning in Practice Settings CETL) are also keen to exploit the services offered through alliances with software companies and telecommunications providers in order to provide novel services for assessment in environments where no other mobility solution exists. An extension of their projects and interests has contributed to this study.

It is the intention of this presentation to demonstrate how these simple solutions can be applied with both print and audio, how engagement can be monitored and some of the issues raised. It is important that further investigation into the pedagogic value of mobile assessment develops, to demonstrate value avoid potentially expensive mistakes. Therefore, with the aid of Higher Education Academy Distributed e-Learning project funding, we are offering grants to fund projects to academics in Bioscience Subject disciplines. Further details of how to obtain funding to work in this exciting and innovative area will be presented in this paper.

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