John Traxler is Professor of Mobile Learning, probably the world's first and a full UK professor, and Director of the Learning Lab at the University of Wolverhampton. He is a Founding Director of the International Association for Mobile Learning, Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning* and of *Interactive Learning Environments*. He is on the Research Board of ALT, the Editorial Board of *Research in Learning Technology* and *IT in International Development*. He was Conference Chair of *mLearn2008*, the world's biggest and oldest mobile learning research conference. He has guest edited three special editions of peer-reviewed journals devoted to mobile learning including *Distance Education*. He is now editing an African edition of the *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning*.

John has co-written a guide to mobile learning in developing countries and is co-editor of the definitive book, *Mobile Learning: A Handbook for Educators and Trainers*, with Professor Agnes Kukulska-Hulme. They are working a second book together on contextual mobile learning. He has written more than 16 book chapters on mobile learning, and talks and writes frequently on the consequences of connectedness and mobility on learning, knowledge and societies.

In the autumn of 2011 he will be starting projects in Palestine and Gaza, and supporting the South African Department of Education, in both cases in the area of teacher training.

Circulated with this invitation:
Traxler, J., 2008. Mobility, Modernity, Development.
Mobile Communication Technology for Development (M4D 2008),
11–12 December 2008 Karlstad University, Sweden.
Available at: http://kau.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:201392/FULLTEXT01

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

The University Teaching & Learning Office
&
The School of Information Systems & Technology

Cordially invite you to a seminar
by

Professor John Traxler

Professor of Mobile Learning
Director of the Learning Lab
University of Wolverhampton, UK

Mobiles and Education in Africa – a Sustainable and Appropriate Ecology

DATE: Wednesday, 19 October 2011
TIME: 14h00 – 16h00
VENUE: Senate Chamber, Westville Campus
Tea/ coffee & muffins served on arrival

As John's time at UKZN is limited on this trip and he will not be available for individual appointments please feel free to bring a brochure or 1-pager and/ or business card to leave with him if you share his interests & recognise opportunities for collaboration.

RSVP necessary by midday Monday - 17 October 2011
To: Ms Nadia Ally
Tel: (031) 260 7264
Email: allyn1@ukzn.ac.za

Mobiles and Education in Africa – a Sustainable and Appropriate Ecology

Professor of Mobile Learning
Director of the Learning Lab
University of Wolverhampton, UK

Recently there has been a discernible increase and a discernible shift in interest in using mobiles to support and deliver learning in Africa amongst the wider world of agencies, corporates and ministries.

In October 2010, for example, the UNESCO chair in e-learning in Barcelona sponsored an international seminar that focused on mobiles, learning and development; at about the same time the GSMA Development Fund published its *mLearning: A Platform for Educational Opportunities at the Base of the Pyramid* (GSMA 2010) intended to give the network operators a sense of the business case, and subsequently, in June 2011, held a workshop in Cape Town. In February 2011, the *World Mobile Congress* in Barcelona sponsored its first awards for learning and attracted an impressive field from organisations working in development and in August 2011, USAID convened the first *m4Ed4Dev* symposium in Washington DC, as the prelude to establishing an *mEducation Alliance*. In November 2011 the WISE conference ion Qatar debates *mobiles, education and the hard-to-reach*.

There has previously been much activity, much discussion and much interest around the capacity of mobile devices to deliver, support and enhance learning for the disenfranchised, the disadvantaged and the developing communities and regions of the world especially those in Africa. Much of this discussion, interest and activity is however uncritical, simplistic and poorly synthesised.

In general the argument for using mobile phones or other mobile devices to address educational disadvantage is straightforward and perceived to be a *no-brainer*: their ownership and acceptance are near-universal and cut across most notions of *digital divides*; their use is based around robust sustainable business models; they are, unlike other ICTs, found at the base-of-the-pyramid (BOP) amongst the 'next billion subscribers'; they deliver information, ideas and, increasingly, images.

Moreover, there is the rapidly increasing ownership of more powerful handsets in the developing world, the decreasing real costs of this hardware and connectivity, the increasing coverage of higher specification networks in these regions and the increasing activity of corporates representing publishing, handsets, services and infrastructure looking for sustainable business models based on the educational use of mobile devices in developing regions. These represent opportunities to intervene, to promote and to guide this activity in order that worthwhile educational experiences and opportunities become more widely and more equitably distributed.

A more critical discussion is however needed because various communities, necessary actors in facilitating successful learning using mobile devices and technologies in Africa, each come with considerable potential but often inappropriate contributions, partial understandings and flawed assumptions:

- Mobile learning is an emerging but fragmented global research, policy and practitioner community that has exploited mobile devices to extend the reach of learning and of educational opportunities, and has developed applications and formats that enhance and extend - and disrupt and challenge - the concepts of learning and education. The projects and pilots of the mobile learning community now impact on policy and provision in many parts of the developed world thanks to judicious advocacy and credible evidence. The achievements of the mobile learning community are not necessarily characterised specifically by any *developing/developed* divide but equally are not widely known or understood in the developing regions.
- The m4d, and larger ICTD, community of researchers, activists and practitioners have currently generally only addressed learning and education as *service delivery* issues, using mobile technologies to smooth the operations of educational institutions, and have not engaged significantly with education processes or practices.
- Mobile learning, insofar as it takes place in Africa, has been seen as part of e-learning in Africa and as part of the rhetoric of *catching-up* and *leap-frogging*. The technologies of e-learning necessarily but perhaps implicitly embody ideas and practices of teaching and learning native to America or Western Europe or Asia Pacific. Furthermore the model for procuring and deploying and supporting ICT for education is no longer appropriate, being based on institutional procurement, provision and control rather than learner ownership, use and confidence.
- The pace at which mobile devices and technologies are brought to market and more importantly are exploited, domesticated and appropriated leads to a very fragmented understanding of their affordances and of the nature and significance of any medium-term trends.
- Given the momentum and widespread acceptance of the *development* agenda, it is important and urgent to debate and discuss the issue of *development* and the issue of *appropriate* technology, in relation to e-learning, and especially to debate and discuss these issues in relation to each other. The key questions are, "Are they antithetical? Is one at the expense of the other? Can they be reconciled?"
- Is in fact, *development* a flawed modernist and western European concept, ill-suited to cultures and societies that were possibly only partially *modern* and may be transmuting with something beyond modernity as they engage with near-universal mobility and connectedness?

- There can sometimes also be vagueness in defining in practical terms the *African-ness* that *development* or *appropriate* technologies and systems are supposed to be addressing: is it sparsity, rurality and distance? Is it poverty and deprivation? Is it infrastructure, capacity and organisation? Is it national, cultural and linguistic diversity? Or is it something else? There is always a risk of making superficial generalisations or untrustworthy inferences but there is always a practical need to learn what can be transferred or replicated too, and a need to formulate policy.
- Mobile devices increasingly allow users to generate, share and discuss identities, ideas, images, interpretations and information, specific to them, their locations and their own physical and virtual communities, in effect to determine and manage their own learning and knowledge. This problematises the role, status and credibility of formal education and its institutions but also impacts and perhaps threatens learners' indigenous cultures, languages and social structures, perhaps rooted in stable hierarchies, a more oral tradition and unique epistemologies.

Tension between philosophically sophisticated researchers, cautious and conscious of (over-) generalising from a messy and contingent reality and policy-makers and donors needing simple prescriptions and universal truths to work with (and fund).

Areas that must be explored also include the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches, *progressive* versus *traditional* values in education, the need for educational technologies that enable some Africans to compete in a global knowledge economy and for educational technologies that enable others to subsist and survive, the relationships between mobile learning, lifelong learning, distance education and classroom teaching, the ethical and cultural aspects of educational interventions and the boundaries and differences between various research communities and their methodologies for example between participative design and anthropology.

KENYA

This seminar will attempt to get behind the simple narratives and the beguiling generalisations in order to explore whether mobiles are capable of supporting sustainable, authentic and appropriate education in Africa.

Further readings:

Donner, J. (2008) The Rules of Beeping: Exchanging Messages Via Intentional ''Missed Calls'' on Mobile Phones, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13 (2008) pp 1–22

Donner, J. & Escobari (2009) A Review of the Research on Mobile Use by Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Proceedings of ICTD2009, Doha, Qatar, 17-26

Duncombe, R. (2009) Mobiles for Development Research: Quality and Impact, Proceedings of 1st m4d Conference, Karlstadt

GSMA (2010) mLearning: A Platform for Educational Opportunities at the Base of the Pyramid, London: GSMA Development Fund, available from http://www.gsmworld.com/documents/mLearning_Report_Final_Dec2010.pdf

Heeks, R. (2008) ICT4D 2.0: The Next Phase of Applying ICT for International Development, Computer, Volume: 41, Issue: 6, pp 26-33

Heeks, R. (2007) Theorizing ICT4D Research, IT and International Development, Volume 3, Number 3, Spring 2006, pp 1–4

Hollow, D. & ICWE (2009) eLearning in Africa: Challenges, priorities and future direction, available from ICTD website

Kleine, D. (2009) ICT4What? – Using the Choice Framework to Operationalize the Capability Approach to Development, Proceedings of ICTD2009, Doha, Qatar 108 – 117

Kreutzer, T. (2008) Assessing Cell Phone Usage in a South African Township School

Kriek, L., Matthee, M., Lotriet, H. & Batchelor, J. (2010) Comparing the Emancipatory Value of two South African Mobile Learning Projects, Proceedings of mLearn2010, Valetta, Malta, pp176 - 183

Lee, A. S. & Baskerville, R. L. (2003), Generalizing Generalizability in Information Systems Research Information Systems Research, 14(3), September 2003, pp. 221–243

Mulder, Jorrit (2008). Knowledge Dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa: What Role for Open Educational Resources (OER)?. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam. pp. 58–67. http://www.gg.rhul.ac.uk/ict4d/workingpapers/mulderOER.pdf. Retrieved 2011-01-01.

Schaffers, H., Cordoba, M., Hongisto, P., Kallai, T., Merz, C. & Van Rensburg, J. (2007). Exploring business models for open innovation in rural living labs. Paper presented at 13th International Conference on Concurrent Enterprising, Sophia-Antipolis, France, 4-6 June 2007.

Schuurman, D. & De Marez, L. (2009). "User-Centered Innovation: Towards a Conceptual Integration of Lead Users and Living Labs", In Proceedings of COST298-conference The Good, The Bad and The Challenging, 13-15/05, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Toyama, K. (nd) On Writing ICTD Research Papers

Vosloo, S., Walton, M. & Deumert, A. (2009) m4Lit: a teen m-novel project in South Africa, Proceedings of mLearn2009, Orlando, FA: UCF