MMS04: Multimedia Media Messaging in the Curriculum

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Position Paper & Presentation

*Fresh Thinking Pilot Project -
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Feasibility Study

**Swan District Education Office, Bentley, Western Australia
in conjunction with Swan City Youth Services (SCYS), Midland
Redevelopment Authority (MRA) and the Police Citizens Youth Club
Association of Western Australia, Midland, Western Australia**

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Abstract

The MMS04 project seeks to engage young people aged between 15 - 25 years of age in a program that offers a range of creative learning experiences utilising face-to-face communication skills, mobile technology use and other evolving or emergent information communication technologies. Swan TAFE, Midland campus, is using the curriculum offered by the 'Course in Wider Opportunities for Work' and the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) as the core framework for the proposed MMS04 project. Within this literacy and numeracy focussed framework, project participants will be engaged in activities which have a literacy, numeracy and life skills focus. This project will provide successful completion with entry level qualifications in Information Communication Technologies (ICT). A large component of this blended learning experience is a negotiable project component where individuals and teams of students interact with other groups of students within a national context. The creative outcomes from this collaboration will be showcased via an interactive electronic interface on the world wide web and within appropriate community events.

Keywords

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Introduction

The underpinning conceptual framework on which the MMS project will pivot is the '*Mlearning Matrix*' (see appendix) developed in early 2004 by Alexander Hayes and members of the Innovations & Development Team at Swan District Education Office. Participants of this MMS04 project will be required to engage in a planned and scheduled series of action learning activities employing mobile technologies, including personal mobile phones and project specific Personal Digital Assistants (PDA).

Students will also be actively involved in the assessment and evaluation of the program, testing, building and improving the current conceptual model through a participatory design ethos.

1.0 The Technology

Studies undertaken by the Author and members of the Swan District Education Office as well as members of the Swan TAFE Information & Technology team, indicates that the uptake of mobile technologies which integrate Internet browser capability with multi platform software applications are emerging as the fastest growth area for digital communication.

The rate at which the business sector embraces these mobile technologies for core business functions indicates the changing patterns of communication which are now affecting the community at large. VET practitioners have the opportunity to integrate mobile technologies into the learning environment as the cornerstone to engaging and retaining in education and training young people aged 15 to 25 who would otherwise be highly disengaged.

2.0 Stakeholders

This program was managed by Swan TAFE, Midland Campus, Western Australia and training activities were conducted in conjunction with Swan City Youth Services (SCYS), and students of the Certificate 2 course in Information and Communication Technology at Swan TAFE, Midland, Western Australia.

3.0 Change in the Classroom Setting

The ramifications for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia of pervasive mobile technologies such as the mobile phone and to a much lesser extent, the Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) is now evident. The roll out of these technologies is rapid, exponential and as we are witnessing, right across the VET sector and in related industries which intersect with training and assessment.

Mobile technologies now integrate more and more of our everyday functions, for instance our diary has now been collapsed into an electronic calendar on the phone or the handheld calculator which has also been collapsed into an "app" on our phone. Our '*always on*' availability is now also impacting on our workforce capacity, yet the rhetoric seems to always return to "prolific use of mobile phones by youth aged between 15 to 19 years of age". The fact is we are all now mobile phone users and so "prolific" applies to everyone and hence the change in the classroom setting.

4.0 Shift In Data Transmission

The transportability and ease of transmitting data between locations or virtual spaces and places is rapidly also changing the manner in which we communicate as human beings. The ability to document and send data in real time has for instance changed the role of media and reporting in society and likewise the disinformation and disruption that can be experienced as a result of this 'always on' proximity.

The main appeal of mobile technologies for youth (young people) who are often '*on the move*' and sourcing new friendships, is investigating their environments and storing information for entertainment and, even more recently, undertaking everyday transactions. This point of contact and the fact that the phone is a wearable computer means the curriculum can also be seen as a data transmission zone, effectively the VET sector curriculum must shift to embrace 'delivery' by virtue of this change in zone for learning.

5.0 The Aging VET Practitioner

A large proportion of these data transactions now include 'ming-mong' or data-blogging and moblogging activities, where images, short video files and audio narratives are transmitted from one location to another. Considering that these

young people have the ability to and will adopt the technology which advantages them the most, any interactive experiences that 'unleash' learning potential utilising these mobile devices are of the utmost priority for the VET practitioner and hence the emphasis on this mode of interactivity between MMS04 participants. Professional development opportunities for VET educators interested in exploring this domain and incorporating this technological orientation their curriculum delivery are scarce, hence the need for projects such as MMS04 to 'test-bed' ideas and dispel myths that the 'aging VET practitioner' is a disadvantage to the sector.

It is apparent that the merge between mobile phones and other 'multi-use' Personal Digital Assistants is possibly the most powerful innovation in consumer electronics to date, enabling the user to undertake tasks with accelerated performance. This performance is embedded with learning outcomes that match many of the competencies sought by training practitioners and employers alike. The 'MMS04' project therefore, is designed to immerse a group of young people in a work force simulation, whilst live time data processors are collecting, collating and processing information which is relevant to their lives, real in the everyday context and valid irrespective of the ever evolving range in technological device complexity.

4.0 Funding

This 'MMS04' project was funded from May 2003 until March 2004 as part of the Building Diversity program and the Workforce Capacity Building program accessible through the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET WA).

5.0 Target Group

The predominant age range of clients who access services through the Swan City Youth Services was 15 to 25 years. This project was designed to meet the needs of any interested clients of the Swan City Youth Services who were 15 years and above or who had permission from guardians to attend this program.

6.0 Client Experiences

Clients who took part in the MMS04 program had often been early school leavers who presented with:

- Negative past experiences in education settings;
- Low literacy and numeracy skills;
- Poor primary and secondary school results;
- Left school at an early age;
- Mental health issues related to trauma;
- Mental health problems relating to alcohol and illicit drug use;
- Continued exposure to verbal, emotional and physical abuse;
- Juvenile Justice and social services system contact;
- Referred from government and non-government agencies.

7.0 The Burgeoning Challenge for VET Australia

According to the draft Youth Advantage Strategy published in May 2004, as well as the South Australian Social Inclusion Board[1], despite the provision of online service delivery that interleaves flexible and negotiable training with traditional forms of delivery, a large number of students continue to drop out of secondary education for a variety of lifeworld reasons.

Considering that these young people often disengage from traditional settings due to a variety of reasons other than those posed by modes of education and training (ie. arcane delivery methodologies), the need to tailor a curriculum that engages and retains these individuals is paramount. A high proportion of young people at risk of disengaging, have had negative experiences with education and training and are often economically, socially and emotionally disadvantaged.

Youth who are at risk of disengaging with the traditional education or training sector are often highly engaged in activities that support their retention and inclusion in their respective peer groups. The mode of contact that occurs between these individuals often embraces mobile technologies and in many cases exceeds the level of face-to-face contact these individuals have with each other. This sets a precedent for how we critically embrace the 'school-of-the-present' not simply dismiss this as an analogy and some form of future soothsaying.

8.0 A Shift in Delivery Strategy

To embrace the changes in the internet and related digital interfaces, including mobile phone networks, often the individual young person (in most cases) cannot remember a time when the internet was not connected worldwide in education and training. This therefore becomes the key demarcation between those who consider

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[1] Available at https://apo.org.au/node/30072

these mobile technologies to be 'disruptive' and those who consider them to be integral in their lives.

The 'MMS04' project therefore is designed to engage young people in a dynamic and innovative flexible learning context, supported within a dedicated facility that caters for young people's interests and needs, with ease of access to transport. This project will be conducted as a networked live-time learning experience within which democratic principles of participant contribution known as 'm-etiquette' shape and forge the manner by which the project evolves and grows.

9.0 Digital Interfacing

The interface between mobile technologies and other training modes including online learning is increasingly blurred. The 'where' of service delivery is less important as to 'when' as the onset of multimedia and mobile service delivery becomes ubiquitous.

The opportunities that mobile technologies now present for the education and vocational training sector are numerous however, serious ramifications for the VET sector exist if the educators within that sector are unable to adopt and adapt commensurate with the rate of what is driving industry and the economy.

To that end, the MMS04 project will engage students and educators alike with a user-friendly and intuitive digital interface,mobile compliant and extensible with 'drag-and-drop' architecture. Students will be able to interact with their online and mobile repository with ease, capture, share or manipulate content and interact with peers through the same interface. The capacity to develop friendships and ongoing relationships with fellow participants and partake in learning experiences not thought possible in traditional learning service delivery environments opens up new avenues of engagement, once thought impossible to deliver as 'in-the-hand' learning.

10.0 Networked Learning

The rollout nationally in Australia of mobile GSM and fibre-to-node networks has reshaped the way we consider the 'sanctity' of the classroom setting. Pedagogy is now pushed to a point where the network of 'medium' itself is becoming as powerful as the process of engagement.

Irrespective of this potential, many educators are quick to point out that learning experiences and training environments that embrace the possibilities that these mobile technologies provide must still retain the integrity of the 'lived' and 'face-to-face' learning experience in a social setting, especially in the VET sector.

The proof of retaining individual students who are fully conversant with this technology and who are also at risk of educational and training disengagement, now lies in the provision of learning experiences which use these mobile technologies that interface with the other digital divides that would otherwise exclude them. The provision of an appropriate physical location in which face-to-face activities is also of vital importance.

11.0 Key Stakeholders

The MMS04 project is supported by funding of researcher and activity facilitator Alexander Hayes through the Swan District Education Office, Bentley, Western Australia who also works in conjunction with the Swan City Youth Services (SCYS) in Midland, Western Australia.

Alexander Hayes has secured funding and support for the initiative through the revitalisation project known as the Midland Redevelopment Authority (MRA) who will support the installation of an arts precinct sculpture which the current Learning Legends project has recently completed. In addition, Hayes has established a working relationship with the Police Citizens Youth Club Association of Western Australia, Midland, Western Australia.

The Police and Citizens Youth Service is equipped with sporting, recreational and technology facilities to cater for young people's interests and needs. The MMS04 project team will engage in activities in order to develop and provide a creative and innovative program within a flexible and learner centred training delivery facility at the Midland site.

12. Technological Investigations & Prototype

Students will have the opportunity to explore the full dimensions of MMS technologies within a flexible creative learning context and will be encouraged to capture and edit their works using PC facilities for collation. A range of teaching strategies will be adopted to engage, retain and motivate these young people to negotiate and complete individual learning programs, to interact in online chat

sessions, take control of online website architectural development and design and develop events with a range of participants in a national context.

The interoperable technological development of the M-Learn Matrix, is currently underway developed in conjunction with WestOne Services of Perth, Western Australia. A working prototype of the information communications system incorporating e-learning strategies in a blended learning environment designed by Alexander Hayes is already in place and interoperable user experience testing is already underway.

13. Implementation Plan

A training delivery facility, curriculum documentation, funding avenues and a Community of Practice reference group to progress the MMS04 project has already been established with connections through the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (AFLF).

Introductory focus group sessions in Perth Western Australia and Sydney, New South Wales Australia with potential students have identified a range of willing participants from across a wide range of socio economic and cultural backgrounds. Access to adequate and appropriate software, hardware resources, networking opportunities and professional development were identified as critical to this program's success.

The MMS04 program has evolved from core or mainstream training programs offered by Swan TAFE that has preceded the MMS04 concept. A range of feedback sessions conducted during 2003 with young people identified the need to develop a program that caters for the interests and needs of young people seeking relevant training and employment. A natural extension to existing services already offered by training providers nationwide is to embrace the learning tools that mobile technologies offer the VET training sector.

The MMS04 project has support from many young people who are willing to share their learning experiences with a much broader audience than that offered by traditional classroom settings. Projects such as MMS04 bring together and showcase the creative potential of young people in a series of community focussed creative learning experiences. The "real" learning, according to feedback from key representatives in youth group consultations will occur with the interaction of other people, adults, who are in many cases only beginning to understand the skills and attitudes of young people themselves.
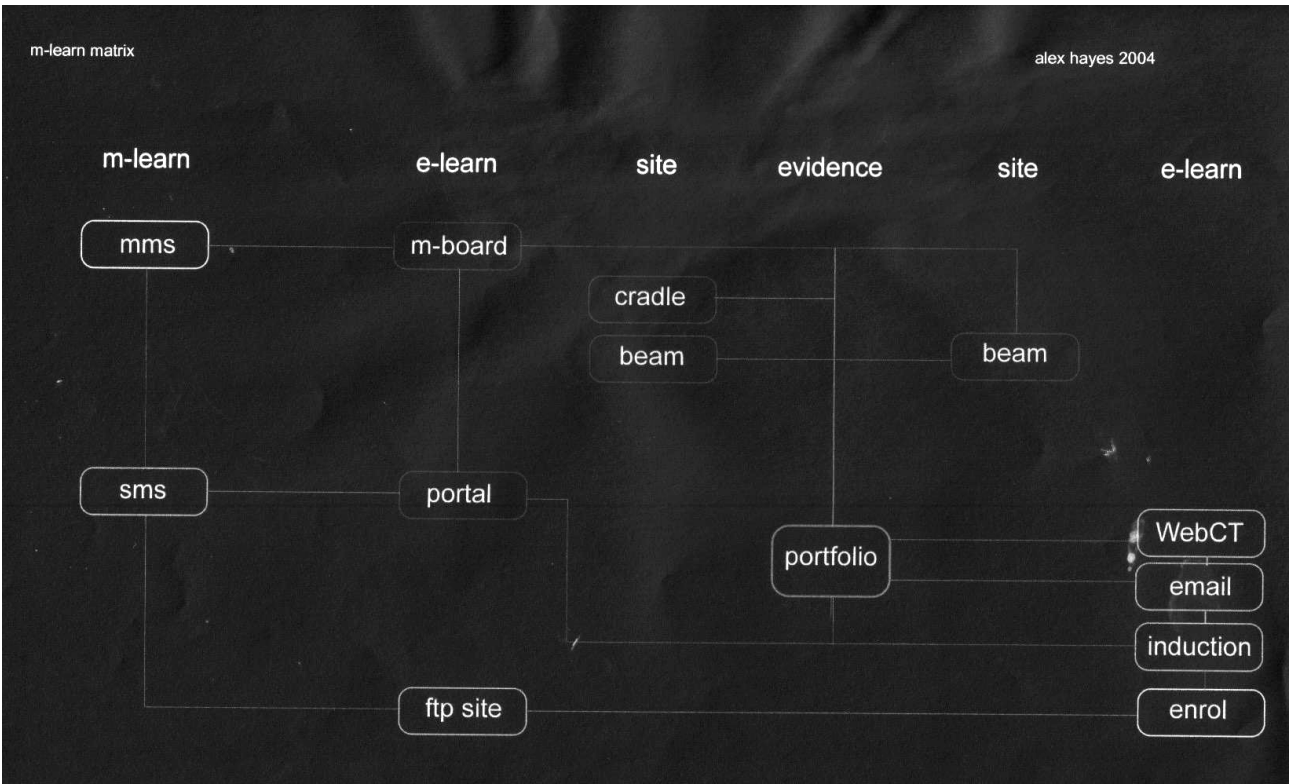
Appendix

Figure 1.0: '*M-Learn Matrix*' MMS04 Project

Figure 2.0: '*MRA Installation*' Perth, Western Australia'

Figure 3.0: '*MRA Installation*' - Project Focus Group - Perth, WA'

Figure 4.0: '*Boom Room*' - PCYC, Midland Australia.

Figure 5.0: '*MMS04*' - Presentation Slide