

Book review

Quinn, C.N. (2011). *Designing mLearning: tapping into the mobile revolution for organizational performance.*

Richard Mark Brown

American University of Sharjah, UAE

Designing mLearning is a great starter manual for people who know very little about technology and mLearning. This slender, easy-to-read volume has a great deal of essential information for administrators who have been tasked with designing programs from the ground up with the intention of including mobile devices in their programs or businesses as educational devices. The author provides considerable background and a clear rationale for including mobile learning in any program.

This book is written for administrators – not for teachers – and, unfortunately, it is not written specifically for educational administrators, although several small sections do directly address mLearning in educational institutions and many of the examples and discussions related to business can be adapted for educational use.

Quinn has clearly tried to cover all his bases and provide information to anyone interested in designing a program which plans to include mobile devices. To assist the absolute beginner, the book provides a fairly complete overview of what devices and programs are currently available as well as giving a historical overview to convince the unconvinced that things really are changing. This was interesting but not really necessary for any reader who has had an interest in technology over the last twenty years. Throughout Chapter 4, I couldn't help but think that any administrator who doesn't know this information should not be involved in making decisions about mLearning. Does anyone today really need an explanation of what a trackball does or what a QR code is? The author also devotes two pages in Chapter 9 to how to set up a design team. It is possible that a technologically-inexperienced teacher or administrator will be tasked with setting up a program, but this is unlikely to be necessary information for most administrators.

While administrators of independent institutions in the UAE could benefit from the information contained in this book, for those already involved in the UAE iPad Initiative this book will not be very useful. Quinn has written *Designing mLearning* to help administrators develop a guiding philosophy **before** anything is done on the program. Since the iPad Initiative is now well underway, much of this information is irrelevant.

This book is also not intended for those who expect a single device to control program delivery (i.e. creation and collection of work, dissemination of material to students, assessment, and administration):

“...you should not think about mLearning as delivery of *courses*. mLearning is about *augmenting* our learning – and our performance.” (p.17)

“The opportunity exists to think about mLearning as a formal learning augment as well. By using an abstract model on the components of the learning process, we can also get a handle on formal mLearning. However, to be clear, the emphasis is on augmentation, not on delivering full courses.” (p.110)

Where this book shines is in examining larger philosophical areas. From Chapter 7 through 14, the author deals with the large issues relevant to any mLearning program planner. For example, when designing an mLearning program which will use a variety of devices, Chapter 7 lays out the four C's of mobile capability: knowing how students and teachers will access *content* (e.g. school server, 3G phone service, personal internet connection), *capture* information (e.g. file download, camera), *compute* a response, and *communicate* with instructors and other classmates will affect how mobile devices are used to augment learning. While not new ideas, it is useful to be reminded of these parameters when designing a program. In Chapter 8, the author examines the need for an integrated portal to allow content to be gathered, disseminated, and administered easily and then moves smoothly from these back-end considerations to Chapter 9 where more immediate concerns of the instructors are covered, such as the need to minimize file size and provide ways to stop and start media on a mobile device. Numerous diagrams throughout these chapters help to make the concepts easy to understand. Much of this information should be useful to administrators as they develop their philosophies and guiding principles for the integration of mobile devices into their programs.

This book is worth reading. There are little nuggets of useful information scattered throughout and reminders of important issues related to the use of mobile devices in teaching. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of a teacher/educational administrator, because much of the material in this book is aimed at augmenting business training, it requires some work to make it fit. Most of the illustrative examples in Chapter 6 (Getting Concrete) do not deal with the context of an educational institution. As well, the approach to educating employees is different from the approach to educating students. While there is crossover and many lessons designed for businesses can be adapted for schools, business learners tend to be highly motivated and are often looking for informal 'just-in-time' learning. They are often independent learners, and, as much as we might like to believe that the business model is similar to our K12/college model, educational institutions are generally required to deliver time-ordered, prescriptive curricula to large numbers of students who then need regular standardized assessment. What works with companies and their employees does not necessarily work in formal educational settings.

Criticism of this text as a manual for developing whole institutional courses is, of course, unfair. The author makes no pretense of providing this, and in fact makes it clear that he believes the best use of mobile devices is to augment courses. He provides a good, clear rationale for this belief and clearly lays out how to implement mobile learning in training programs. This book is thus not aimed at educators in the context of current institutional/national initiatives promoting a particular technology across the board, but it does illuminate some issues that will likely be important as mobile learning policies develop throughout the Gulf.

One final note - while I found the book interesting, the rather careless editing was at times irritating and occasionally confusing. At \$41.32 for a hardcopy and \$33.06 for an e-copy, such carelessness is inexcusable.