

The PARiS Project: Mobile Learning

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Abstract

Mobile Xerte is a new addition to the award-winning Xerte Project's suite of tools for Android and iOS devices. Mobile Xerte is built around the concept of 'learning spaces', or collections of open resources that can be subscribed to using the application. Learning spaces can also be created using Mobile Xerte, and shared with other users, allowing content to be readily adapted and re-purposed amongst peers, or between teachers and their learners. The application has native support for a subset of content authored using Xerte Online Toolkits, and is open source software, released under the GPL.

The JISC funded PARiS Project provides an ideal opportunity to explore how mobile devices might support tutors' teaching and students' learning experiences, and the research and development in this area will inform technology developments as the variety of devices learners use widens. In particular, the project team are interested in discovering how students want to use mobile technology in their studies, and are exploring two angles: the device providing access to learning materials, and the device providing support for the students' learning. Several use cases have been identified by the project. The simplest is a tutor creating a set of resources for consumption in Mobile Xerte to support students' learning throughout a module or course. The content itself can be developed using Xerte Online Toolkits and the Learning Space is made available to students who subscribe to it using Mobile Xerte and consume the content on a phone or tablet. Learning Spaces can also include existing web-based resources suitable for delivery to a mobile device. Subscription to the content can be facilitated via a URL or a QR Code, and students can easily share this content with other users of the application. This use case will be the most familiar.

In the PARiS project we are exploring how learning materials can be created and presented by working in conjunction with a tutor from the School of Geography who is designing a ten credit module on Sustainability from a geographical perspective. A support resource will be built in Xerte Online Toolkits and will include a week by week breakdown of the module, providing access to a number of resources relating to each week such as: reading lists, activities, lecture topics, key questions, videos, assessment guidelines, and more.

The resource will be made available as a Learning Space in Mobile Xerte and Nottingham students enrolled on the module will be directed to subscribe to the Learning Space as part of the module introduction. Open learners who access the module through the U-Now website, will also be able to subscribe to the Learning Space through that route. A twitter #tag will be set up for this resource and the corresponding twitter feed will be made available as part of the Learning Space, providing an opportunity for the resource to evolve over time, and creating a social space in which tutors can communicate with students and students can communicate with each other about the OER.

A second use case allows Learning Spaces to be created and shared using just the mobile device by users of the application. A Learning Space – a collection of resources – is assembled using

Mobile Xerte and shared directly from the phone using the network to push the underlying data onto a web server from where it can be subscribed to, and consumed by others. Learning Spaces can be adapted and re-shared by users, allowing content to be easily re-assembled, embellished and re-contextualized by the learners themselves. In this use case, the divide between the user as a teacher and the user as a learner is significantly blurred. Here we are interested in whether students want to be active creators of content that they subsequently share with their peers.

The PARiS Project is using this approach to share the third party OER that has been collected as part of the design process. At the core of PARiS is the requirement to collect third party OER and incorporate it into the resources that are being created. This building block approach will help assess whether cost efficiencies can be realized through re-use and provide valuable data on the benefits and barriers to including third party content. To enhance this aspect of the project playlists of OER content for each module will be created and made available in Mobile Xerte. The playlists will include all of the individual third party OER resources that have been collected as part of the module design. Users will. In addition to module level playlists, there will be an option for users to subscribe a project level playlist, which will provide access to all of the third party OER collected in one location.

Furthermore, as Learning Spaces are created and shared, a highly useful collection of data about collections of OER is assembled, creating interesting opportunities for the capture of data about the learning resources, such as user ratings, related resources, user comments, and to produce new opportunities to re-surface the learning resources in novel and interesting ways. Possibilities to integrate the application with existing collections of OER such as the Xpert repository are being pursued, enhancing the user's ability to find and re-use resources.

Keywords

mobile learning, mobile apps, mobile xerte, PARiS, sharing resources, open, open-source, student centered, student generated content,