



## ESCalate Developing Pedagogy and Practice 2010/11 Grant Project Final Report

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**Date submitted** 14 December 2011

**Project Title** Balancing the demands of in-school placement with out-of-school study

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**Institution** Anglia Ruskin University

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**Project Start date** 1 March 2011

**Project End date** 31 December 2011

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## **Balancing the demands of in-school placement with out-of-school study**

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### **1. Summary**

#### **Balancing the demands of in-school placement with out-of-school study**

Our project used SMS text messaging with a cohort of PGCE trainee teachers working in their placement schools to support their writing. The design of the intervention was carefully scaffolded to reflect the significant points in the process of writing a Masters level assignment. Trainees were required to access a number of key readings and asked to complete tasks that involved them engaging with the literature in a critical manner. These tasks took place via SMS and were timed to occur at different points of the semester, and, as agreed with trainees, over a 24 hour period. In total, there were 4 readings with associated activities across a 4 month placement. The strengths of this approach were that it encouraged the trainees to be both concise and critical. It also gave trainees academic support when off campus on a full time placement by focussing their thoughts on their ongoing university assignment. Focus group data shows initial disquiet from some students with the incorporation of SMS as a tool of communication; however, our findings indicate that all trainees accessed the materials and included them in their final submission.

### **2. Project overview**

#### **Project aims**

The affordances of mobile technologies are blurring the time and space constraints placed upon students studying at a distance. This study explored how to scaffold critical learning and also documented the 'invisible' struggles that education students face when expected to write their postgraduate research project while on placement within their schools.

#### **Methodology**

This piece of work focused on developing subject knowledge, developing research skills and producing and evaluating curriculum resources in their subject area. The key to success at postgraduate level is to engage with this task at a more than superficial level. Therefore it is the higher-order skills which we hoped to develop using this mobile learning approach.

During the research, the trainees in the ICT pathway worked as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This approach was selected as the trainees already knew each other through a series of face-to-face sessions in the first semester. This project offered an alternative way to communicate with our trainees in a meaningful way. Using mobile technologies offered students the opportunity to locate their University tasks in an authentic and situated context (Kukulska-Hulme, 2007).

Our project aimed to explore the affordances of mobile technologies by supporting students writing their postgraduate projects when they are in a placement setting. The method included:

- a) Capturing the stages in student writing over their placement by the use of filmed individual research diaries (via flip cams).
- b) Scaffold student critical thinking by having four 24 hour 'key intervention points' where students and staff will have a critical text dialogue tutor-student; student to student peer groups; student to tutor. Facilitated by using txttools ([www.txttools.co.uk](http://www.txttools.co.uk)), students used their own mobile phones.
- c) We planned to capture previously 'invisible' aspects of our students' lives outside the classroom.
- d) By analysis of an initial questionnaire, an analysis of video diaries and focus group interviews we will identify a framework for key interventions that will provide staff who are supporting students in other contexts with insights into the key 'tipping point interventions' that make a difference to the student experience.

The following evaluation activities have been carried out:

- The students completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the project
- The tutor was interviewed at the end of the teaching period
- The students took part in a focus group at the end of the teaching period
- We still need to analyse the student video diaries; extracts from these will be agreed with the students and placed on the website.

## **Results**

### **Questionnaire analysis**

Full findings and a discussion is available in our interim report, available electronically from <http://www.ESCalate.ac.uk/8140>

To look at the academic achievements of the students, we have compared the scores from their second assignment in May with the scores from their earlier assignment in December, and also the amount in which they participated in the interventions (the number of txt messages they each sent). This is summarised in the following table.

Name	Assignment score	Score compared to previous assignment	No. of txt messages sent
Student B	82%	Up	16
Student E	50%	Up	16
Student K	70%	Up	15
Student D	75%	Down	13
Student G	60%	Down	8
Student I	66%	Down	8
Student F	77%	Up	7
Student A	63%	Down	4
Student C	33% (40% on retake - capped)	Down (forgot to include appendix)	4
Student H	62%	Down	3
Student J	58%	Same	2

The students who engaged with the TxtTools project most were Student B, Student E and Student K. All of their grades went up after the TxtTools project.

This shows there is a correlation between the number of messages sent and whether their mark went up or down from December to May. Our findings indicate that all trainees accessed the materials and included them in their final submission.

Feedback from participants, from the student focus group and the tutor interview has also been considered for the results of the project.

### Focus Group Findings

In the focus group we asked the students for their feedback on our project aims and how we achieved them. The results are summarised below.

### Student suggestions for technologies that could be used to achieve the project aims

There was much discussion amongst the students about the technologies we chose to use for the project, and it was clear that students each had their own preferences based on what they use in their everyday practice, and that there was not necessarily one technology that would suit them all. Some really useful discussions ensued, and the pros and cons for alternative technologies that were raised by students in the focus group are summarised in the following tables:

txttools	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It could be a really good tool to encourage you to be reflective or to share experiences e.g. on activities that went well, behaviour management tips.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responses to comments were separated from original comment – they weren't linked or threaded.</li> <li>For the assignment one student asked the tutor to email all of their responses, but they then had to work out which question each response was for.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the text exceeds the maximum character length it is sent as more than one message and it's difficult to piece together and identify the complete message (especially if several messages are sent/received at the same time).</li> <li>• Because the texts came through anonymously you couldn't ask for more feedback/clarification from that person.</li> </ul>
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<b>Text messages</b>	
<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liked the immediacy.</li> <li>• "The thing with the text is that it goes wherever you are."</li> <li>• Texts are good to prod or remind you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to express opinions in a text.</li> <li>• Students who don't text much didn't like it.</li> <li>• Didn't know whether to write in text speak or proper English.</li> <li>• Not enough characters to be able to express what you want to say.</li> <li>• Want a record of comments made – not easy with a large number of texts (some students deleted them to free up memory or space on their phones)</li> <li>• Can't click on a link someone has shared and go to it from a text.</li> <li>• If you don't have credit you can't participate.</li> <li>• "10 years ago using text messages would have been quite exciting, but not now."</li> <li>• The immediacy benefit of the text was lost if you weren't able to deal with it.</li> <li>• Time consuming to write.</li> <li>• If you haven't got a contract to have to pay to send it (other mediums are free).</li> </ul>

<b>Facebook</b>	
<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use something we're more comfortable with, such as Facebook.</li> <li>• Can express views.</li> <li>• More accessible – PC and mobile "different methods for access".</li> <li>• You can add links of things to share. If someone posts a link you click on it to go there.</li> <li>• Someone can post a comment or question and others can comment on that underneath.</li> <li>• It's a place for sharing things – advice/ideas/links.</li> <li>• Posts are logically presented – you can</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can't be anonymous.</li> <li>• Posts will remain in Facebook (they'll remain as a record).</li> <li>• If it's one Facebook group, everyone in the group would be able to see comments (not just the 3 or 4 in the small group).</li> <li>• Some schools ban the use of Facebook so it wouldn't be accessible at school.</li> <li>• Those who aren't signed up to Facebook could be excluded.</li> </ul>

see who it's from and the topic it relates to.	
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Twitter	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An alternative to using Facebook which is banned in some schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doesn't have a group feature (like Facebook does).</li> </ul>

Blogs	
Pros	Cons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The University system was too cumbersome to access each other's blogs.</li> </ul>

Forums/discussion groups	
Pros	Cons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"You're tempted to just not look at it".</li> <li>Wouldn't be able to access from phone unless it's a recent one.</li> </ul>

Other suggestions raised included Skype, LinkedIn and Email, but these were not discussed at length.

In the focus group, students were asked to physically represent their attitudes to the project by drawing a smiley face. The results are as follows:

- 2 students happy
- 6 students neutral
- 2 students unhappy
- 1 student had mixed emotions, but ended up happy

### Positive and negative comments about the project

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A student who had a lighter teaching schedule on intervention days was able to put some time into it.</li> <li>Some students enjoyed it – reading the literature, making comments and seeing other students' viewpoints.</li> <li>Useful and helped for writing assignment – look at answers and elaborate on them.</li> <li>Liked the idea of sharing thoughts and ideas and communicating with the other students.</li> <li>Liked the immediacy.</li> <li>Made them focus on the academic side. Would be good for a more academic course where you've got more time to be able to receive the messages and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Texts arrive when working/in class</li> <li>- Texts arrived in the evening when you don't want to or can't engage in the task. One student saw this as "invading our free time."</li> <li>- Difficulty of finding time to respond and managing large numbers of texts – students with a family found this more problematic.</li> </ul> </li> <li>If you were busy the texts would accumulate and become unmanageable.</li> <li>Time period of intervention was too short.</li> <li>Writing a text messaging was really awkward and time consuming.</li> </ul>

<p>participate “because it’s instantly in your face”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I thought it was a good idea.”</li> <li>• “Concentrated the mind to actually read certain literature that I possibly wouldn’t have done otherwise.”</li> <li>• Liked the deadline for reading the article and responding.</li> <li>• Liked the email summaries sent by the tutor at the end of the intervention. “I really got something from reading other people’s opinions when they were all collated at the end, I really enjoyed that. So that was a good idea.”</li> <li>• Liked having to condense a response into 160 characters.</li> <li>• Liked the dynamic nature of it and having to respond by a deadline.</li> <li>• It was very good for keeping in touch with your course mates.</li> <li>• “I really enjoyed reading some other people’s responses to it.”</li> <li>• One student said the project had helped her to remember what was covered.</li> <li>• “Now maybe we’ll all have a better understanding of how mobile phones maybe could and maybe could not be used in education. We’ve seen directly how that works.”</li> <li>• It would be a good tool to make us reflect on our teaching practice and share experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would have liked to review comments for assignment but inbox had been deleted several times because of the volume of texts.</li> <li>• Not easy to comment in short messages and include words like ‘pedagogy’ within the character length.</li> <li>• If you ran out of credit you couldn’t participate.</li> <li>• It mixed mediums/technologies - receive text (phone), download reading from a computer, print it out, take it to school, write out questions on paper, type up text, key in text on phone and send, see responses and respond on phone.</li> <li>• Not compulsory or contributed to marks – some don’t make as much effort and some would make more effort if it contributed to their grade.</li> <li>• Too many things to do.</li> <li>• Couldn’t tell how many characters you’d written (particularly a problem with newer smartphones).</li> <li>• At the end when writing assignment, it was difficult to relate the comments to the specific readings.</li> <li>• Didn’t know how to reference comments they wanted to use in their assignment and didn’t feel it appropriate to include “text message language in quotes”.</li> <li>• A student with an old phone found the memory kept filling up.</li> <li>• It wasn’t feasible to engage during the school day – too busy.</li> <li>• Too many messages to deal with.</li> <li>• “It’s difficult to do it you’re mobile really, to read and to think of an answer in 160 characters.”</li> <li>• The nature of the questions posed made it difficult to respond immediately, even if you could.</li> <li>• You couldn’t reply to the message sent by the tutor to ask for clarification if you needed it.</li> <li>• Having txt events a month apart meant I lost enthusiasm. I soon got engrossed in school work and forgot about the txt tools.</li> </ul>
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## Relevance

Relevance emerged as a clear theme from this work, as students found themselves immersed in their placements. There was a sense of them being busy anyway, focused on school placement - students were more interested in technology as a medium of sharing behaviour (dealing with pupil behaviour in classroom), whether their lesson plans worked, things more directly impacting on the student experience of placement. To a certain extent this was seen as an 'intrusion' as the material the students were requested to engage with was not seen to be as relevant as it could have been (they have to balance of all the things they need to).

Comments made in the focus group included:

"I think we could have focussed more on the classroom practice as well, the lesson plans we used, activities we done in class as well, because I thought a lot of it got you thinking academically really well, but didn't really focus on our teaching practice ... so maybe even getting each of us to talk about how our days went, good lessons we taught, lessons that didn't go so well, I think that could have been more relevant to our essays." Student H

"Maybe have a bit of reading and then perhaps have a question asking how it relates to a lesson you've taught during that week or during that day. And then kind of linking it into what you're doing during the day as well ... linking in with your actual placement ... because that's what you're thinking about at the end of the day isn't it." Student G

This project was developed after an analysis of the previous cohort of student, who displayed exactly the same behaviour, but, upon reflection, they wanted to be made aware of the academic work required. They had reported they get 'sucked' into school placement and forget academic work.

## Timing

The 24 hour 'quick reading' days had a mixed reception. If it was any longer, some wouldn't do as the immediacy and focus is not there. However, students, especially those with families, felt that the 24 hour time was restrictive: if you couldn't do anything during day you would plan to do it in the evening, but then the unanticipated happened, e.g. not having childcare, not having credit, or other social commitments meant you were not able to participate. One participant got up early in the morning to take part, but her messages then were out of sync with the others that arrived the previous day. The following comments were made by students in the focus group:

"The timing was a bit of an issue because I don't know if this was coincidental, but whenever there were the txttools days, they would always be my busiest teaching day, so it would be a bit of a nightmare to get back in from the lesson and think oh I've got to respond to that, but I also need to prepare for the next lesson, so because of that it was a bit hard work." Student B

"The timing of it really wasn't suitable for me, but on the days where I was able to contribute, I quite enjoyed it, reading the passages and making a contribution, but I felt a lot of the time I was trying to play catchup." Student F

"The main problem was the timing. We needed a morning off, to focus on it instead of it coming in the middle of a year 9 lesson." Student J



“During the school day like everybody else it really didn't work for me, I was just too busy. And there were some evenings, I've got children and things, I sort of earmarked the evenings perhaps to catch up and then something disastrous would happen at home, and I'd have to do rushed answers or no answers at all, so possibly a longer period of time might help somebody in my situation.” Student K

“Or say, between 4 and 5 consider this question, and then the next day between 4 and 5 you're going to get another question. So it's not too late at night, but you've finished school so you can do it.” Student C

“I liked the dynamic nature of it, so like, you had deadlines ... Thursday was my day off so I could really concentrate on doing that well, so I like the urgency and the dynamic way of it.” Student E

### **Txttools**

The Txttools SMS system did not respond as we had anticipated in forwarding the messages, and necessitated the tutor intervening manually. We have developed a full technical brief from the project, and Txttools are using this to develop their Forum.

### **Project Impact**

#### **Student Impact**

There were primary and secondary impacts on the students who participated in this project. The most significant primary impact has been mentioned earlier: that those students who participated most enthusiastically in the project saw their grades increase in a long writing assignment. For all students who were involved in the project, their reading for the assignment was more focused and more directed and this helped them in developing academic skills at this level. A secondary impact of the study came about due to the fact that the students were trainee teachers of ICT and as such will have responsibility themselves for incorporating technologies such as mobile technology in the classroom with students. Therefore, this study in which they were students may have a beneficial impact for them as teachers. Student J was observed on teaching placement with a Year 7 group when she set a homework task for them based on them using their mobiles to ask questions; she claimed she had done this because the research project had opened her eyes to the benefits of utilising mobiles in education. Student I said in the focus group that, “I thought it came along nicely with the idea that you've got all those articles about ICT teachers using children's mobile phones, and now maybe we'll all have a better understanding of how mobile phones maybe could and maybe could not be used in education. We've seen directly how that works.”

The focus group comments indicate that our intervention does work in the sense that they all did the reading, and this did encourage some of the students to start their project work earlier. Comments included:

“I thought it was a good idea, it made me, it concentrated the mind to actually read certain literature that possibly I wouldn't have done otherwise.” Student K

“It made you focus on what you needed to focus on in a piece of text and it directed you to the right bits.” Student D

“I started [working on the assignment] when it happened ... it made me start earlier.”  
Student J

The longer term impact on the student body in the department will increase as we plan to integrate the use of TxtTools more fully into all of our teaching.

### **Staff Impact**

Secondary teacher training staff work closely together and ICT is just one of six subject areas in which Anglia Ruskin has a specialist subject lecturer. Students in all subject areas have the same difficulties in balancing academic demands whilst on placement full-time. The progress of the project with ICT trainee teachers has been followed closely by the staff team through secondary phase meetings. It is proposed that subsequent use of the text messaging software will involve all secondary staff. Some staff members are less confident with technology and this will enable them to acquire new skills in an important area for their development.

### **Institutional impact**

Our work was presented at the first Anglia Ruskin Research Staff Conference, and the Dean attended our presentation. We were then encouraged to develop a larger scale project for other cohorts out on placement, and to bid for internal research funding. We are now rolling out the idea of SMS messages to students on placement in a variety of contexts, in the first instance trainee teachers ( our large third year BA primary year 3 students) our nursing students (500 going on placement in March next year and 400 social work students).

Our Faculty Flip cameras have been loaned out to students for creating video clips for their work, and we plan to ask our Year 3 cohort of trainee teachers for 5 volunteers to film their thoughts as they develop their major projects.

### **Wider impact**

At London Met, a tutor in the Education Department who was present at our paper at the ALT-C conference in September approached us to use our approach with her students.

We presented a paper at the ITTE (Information Technology Teacher Education) conference in July. This generated a lot of discussion after the paper was given, and a lecturer in Middlesex is keen to find out more about the approach and utilise it with his trainee teachers.

We are planning a workshop for May/June 2012 to be open to all local teacher training providers where we will disseminate the results of our project together with other developments in mobile learning relevant to students out on placement. We will also make this event open to interested students.

We have been invited to contribute to the Anglia Ruskin Staff-Student research seminar series (7/06/2012)

### **Limitations of the Work**

Each student was loaned a FLIPcam, and requested to keep a video diary of their progress on the project. This part of the project was hampered, mainly because of the slowness of University procurement, the FLIPcams didn't arrive until half way through the school placement, and although we sent them out to each student, only 4 made use of these. The material we have seen thus far is not very useful in terms of academic writing.

## References

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice Learning, Meaning, and Identity* Cambridge University Press: UK

Kukulska-Hulme, A (2007) Mobile Usability in Educational Contexts : What have we learnt ? International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning Volume: 8, Issue: 2

## 3. Outputs

Sentance, S, Holley, D & Bradley, C. (2011). Supporting education students on school placements with mobile devices. Association for Learning Technology Conference (ALT-C), 6/7/8 September 2011

Sentance, S, Holley, D & Bradley, C. (2011). Texting Trainees: supporting academic writing on placement. ITTE conference, Keele University, 5/7 July 2011

Holley, D Sentance, S, & Bradley, C. 'Because it wasn't compulsory, I didn't do it.': challenges in supporting students via mobile technology. Anglia Ruskin University Staff Research Conference, Friday 2nd September 2011

Technical Specification for a 'perfect fit' between students and technology

Final Report. Available at [www.ESCalate.ac.uk](http://www.ESCalate.ac.uk)  
And also at [www.texting-traineeteachers.net](http://www.texting-traineeteachers.net) (site populated in January 2012)

## 4. Details of future planned dissemination activities

Holley, D; Sentance, S & Bradley, C. Mlearn October 2012, 'Mobile learning in context'. Helsinki, Finland 16-18 October 2012.

Working title: Using mobile technologies to support student placements

Eastern Region ITTE teachers. Hosted by Anglia Ruskin University. Date tba (May/June 2012). Workshop on mobile learning

Holley, D; Sentance, S & Bradley, C. Anglia Ruskin University Staff-Student seminar series 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012 Cambridge Campus

Title: Texting students in workplace settings – what have we learned?

Higher Education Research Seminar (HERS), Institute of Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University, 31 January 2012.

Title: 'Using text messages to engage students in academic work.'

We are talking to Txttools about a possible invitation about contributing to their next event to disseminate our work.

We plan a full journal article (journal TBC) documenting the project aims, methods and results. Sue Sentance and Debbie Holley have been allocated places at a faculty writing retreat on January 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 2012 to start work on this.

## 5. Expenditure profile (£5000)

Submitted to ESCalate

## 6. Summary

***“It concentrated the mind to actually read certain literature that I possibly wouldn’t have done otherwise.” Student K***

Our project involved encouraging trainee teachers on their placement to critically engage with selected readings directly relevant to their final assignment. These were staged as 4 x 24 hour interventions where the tutor sent prompting SMS text messages direct to the students; and the students were then expected to respond with short messages not exceeding 160 characters. The research comprised an initial questionnaire; students were requested to capture their thoughts via flip camera; a focus group at the end of the project; a tutor interview and an analysis of the students’ final grades. Our findings indicate that all the trainee teachers accessed the material, and all took part in the project, but at differing levels of participation.

Our project has a number of outputs:

- An interim report with a full analysis of the questionnaire
- An anonymised focus group transcript
- A tutor interview
- A technology ‘table’ with students preferred applications for future use
- A technical specification for using an SMS system

These are housed at [www.textingtraineeteachers.net](http://www.textingtraineeteachers.net)

Our findings indicate that we can use new technologies to engage students academically; however, it is difficult to use a single technology that suits the needs of a diverse student group. These students were diverse in age, gender and in the technologies they were familiar with and used in their everyday life. Some said using Facebook would be better (because they used that a lot), whereas for others, this was not a good solution because they didn’t use it (the students have already set up their own Facebook group for the course, and some are already using that of their own accord). Some suggested using a combination of technologies, such as text messages and emails, or text messages and Facebook. The ideal solution would be a combination of having SMS notification, but dialogue via something else more suitable to be able to see the thread of comments and who they were from.

The project team found the SMS project offered the trainees the immediacy of a prompt and a targeted task; a dynamic medium; and it reached the mobile device at their current location. The affordances of mobile technology in terms of not having to login and not having to visit a site to ‘see’ if something had happened were appreciated. The system used for sending the SMS text messages did not have the functionality to be able to support the project aims fully, and this raised issues for both the students and their tutor. The student feedback from this project has been excellent in terms of starting to fully understand what aspects of technologies students like and find useful. It also provides insights into the issues of supporting students at a time and place that is convenient and appropriate for them, in the placement context.

