

## Book review

### Mobile Learning Communities: Creating New educational Futures

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Danaher, P. A., Moriarty, B., & Danaher, G. (2009). *Mobile learning communities: Creating new educational futures*. New York: Routledge (pp. xiii, 210).

Mobile learning and distance education have an obvious relationship. Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The New Zealand Correspondence School), for example, provides education for New Zealanders travelling or living temporarily overseas. People on the move in developed societies are increasingly able to continue schooling, using an expanding range of learning technologies as they travel and keep in touch with teachers and communities of learners. Mobile learners can be considered to be on a continuum from the international jet set to urban homeless people. Contemporary manifestations of mobility include itinerant sheep shearers, nomads (particularly in Africa), the Roma in Europe, children of globally mobile professionals, and highly-skilled migrant knowledge workers in fields such as information technology. The term “neo-nomadism” is used by the authors of *Mobile Learning Communities* to describe the development of counter cultures of artists, exotic traders and bohemian workers. Mobility may be prized by some groups and devalued by others with different access to power and support. Some people have a romantic idealism about those who are mobile and have been able to escape the confines of civilisation and the routines of industrialised labour. Settled people sometimes feel uncomfortable with those who move in and out of their communities and are considered to be of no fixed abode. This book is about mobile learning communities—an international and increasingly diverse phenomenon spanning both the developed and developing worlds. In the developed world, national and international travellers engage in workplace learning and use information and communication technologies to organise themselves as learning communities. Meanwhile, in less-developed parts of the world, mobile learners sometimes have difficulty accessing learning opportunities at all. In all cases, governments have to find ways to provide educational opportunities for citizens who do not live settled lives—whether they live in the connected, digital world or are displaced, homeless, and without resources or a place to call home.

The authors define a mobile learning community as:

a group of people who are mobile for sustained periods of the year or of their lives and who recognize in themselves and others a common experience of mobility and a shared commitment to learning for themselves and other group members (p. 3).

The book is based on an examination of the intersection of mobility, learning, and community, each of which is likely to engage the interest of distance educators. *Mobile Learning Communities* draws on 17 years of empirical research with occupational travellers, workplace learning, globalisation, and emerging technologies to explore how mobile people make sense of themselves as learning communities. This is one of the strengths of the book. Mobile learners bring knowledge and experience to schools and communities, but how do schools and settled people receive those who migrate and settle—permanently or temporarily—among them?

The first chapter of *Mobile Learning Communities* examines the concepts of networks and partnerships, raising questions about marginalisation and exclusion. Each chapter concludes with an overview of the implications of mobility for broader educational practice, and questions for reflection. The aim of each chapter is to focus on the link between mobility and learning

communities in terms of networks and partnerships. The question is: How do those who are mobile partner and network with those who are like themselves as well as with people who lead settled lives? As increasing numbers of displaced people cross borders and migrate in search of economic, social, and educational opportunities, how should governments respond?

The authors ask to what extent educational futures for members of mobile communities should be located within formal education “provided, or at least sanctioned by the state” (p. 178), raising the possibility that education systems may be fundamentally flawed and antagonistic to mobile groups and hence need to be supplemented by other approaches. Mobile learners are an international phenomenon, yet they are not always accepted in an increasingly globalised world. A case in point is the education of migrants—particularly people who have travelled from one country to settle in another. Many schools enrol migrant children and this book provides insights into how they might be accommodated. One of the approaches the authors suggest is to focus on the knowledge and experience of mobile learners such as migrants in classrooms. They draw attention to the work of Salinas and Fránquiz (2004) in the United States who have argued that, in the case of migrant children in that country, multicultural education encourages us “to embrace culturally responsible or congruent teaching methods that address different ways of knowing” (p. xii), a view supported by Cardenas (2004) who argues that migrant children’s experiences “create formidable assets” (p. 250). It is up to teachers to recognise and build upon these assets to enable migrant children to succeed in school.

*Mobile Learning Communities* challenges traditional thinking about non-sedentary learners just as distance education once challenged traditional ideas about the provision of education. Distance educators and mobile learners in the developed, digital world have obvious common interests. There are many mobile learners, however, who are not part of this world, and this volume provides insight into their experiences and critiques existing notions of schools and of learning. This book will interest distance educators, principals, school boards, teachers, and members of communities that host learners who are not settled. For distance educators, *Mobile Learning Communities* provides insight into what the authors have sub-titled “new educational futures”. New educational futures for mobile learners will be shaped in part by the response of distance educators together with advances in learning technologies.

## References

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