

Mobile technology in the field: Effective tool or elaborate toy?

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This research sits within the framework of pedagogic strategies promoting spatial literacy in teaching. The development of spatial literacy is important in assisting in the transfer of spatial thinking and Geographical Information Science (GIS) to field disciplines.

The practice of GIS is of itself an ICT experience, whether viewed from a theoretical or applied standpoint. Historically, learning GIS has been a lab based experience. From the perspective of those closely involved with GIScience, the opportunities for using GIS technologies to enhance fieldwork are many, including contemporaneous digital data entry, adaptive mapping, reflection on sampling or, in conjunction with data loggers, to provide spatially robust readings of environmental variables. In contrast, we note a considerable degree of circumspection on the part of geographical “experts” towards this approach who suggest that the use of digital technologies in the field is merely to engage superficially with “toys”. With this dichotomy in mind, it is interesting to reflect on practitioner perspectives within the field teaching literature and our own experiences seeking to implement our integrated field-technology vision.

Recently, students have been equipped in the use of mobile GIS technologies such as GPS enabled PDAs and tablets plus a variety of digital environmental sensors. These skills have been embedded via a series of practical exercises across a range of modules and levels; further to this familiarisation phase, the technologies have been used in support of other geographical applications in the context of independent or semi-independent fieldwork. We look at the benefits and implications of these curriculum changes from the perspectives of technically focused teaching staff, traditionalists and to the reflections of students who have been involved in these developments. Our case studies also touch on the role of the podcast as an encourager and facilitator of change in this context.

Themes: ICT in Teaching; Teacher Experiences; Students Experiences; Web 2.0
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