Mobile learning: Avoiding Common Pitfalls

**WHAT IS MOBILE LEARNING?**
Mobile learning traditionally means any learning that is mediated by a mobile device such as a smartphone, tablet, or mini computer. In the bigger picture, mobile learners access their content, tools, and communities any time, any place, often in a mixed environment of multiple devices with 24/7/365 Internet access.

**COMMON MISTAKE: PUTTING TECHNOLOGY AHEAD OF PEDAGOGY**
It’s easy as a district to fall short in building a real vision of how learning will change with technology and what the expected benefits are. Such failure puts the district at risk of not meeting unspoken stakeholder expectations and suffering the resulting public backlash.

**WHAT TO DO**
- Pull together a substantive vision
- Get clear on the specific benefits of the transition to mobile learning
- Bring old policies into the digital age
- Figure out how to keep it funded - self-funding
- Design your approach for technology infrastructure, professional development, and continual iteration and improvement
- Be mindful of human fairness - plan how to mitigate inequity today and eliminate it in the future

**PITFALLS**
- Falling for the hype or blindly following other districts without your own vision
- Planning for mobile learning in isolation and then trying for stakeholder buy-in after the fact
- Depending mostly on vendors to design your technical or human infrastructure (be true to your vision and avoid cookie-cutter solutions)
- Failures of transparency or communication (tell them why you are doing this, then tell them again)
- Letting limited resources stop you (be creative, do what you can, work towards results)

**WHAT TO DO**
- Check your plans for technology, professional development, and program alignment (design them to evolve graciously as things change, because you know they will)
- Be clear on your updated policies - will they survive contact with your students?
- Educate parents and students, both about why you are choosing mobile, and what is expected of them (then educate them again)
- Consider real-world testing (pilots, student white hats, lots of devices at once)

**PITFALLS**
- Implementation by committee (someone has to pull it all together)
- Implementation by top-down mandate
- Going to scale with an untested approach (be true to your vision)
- Too much focus on others’ best practices instead of on a culture of innovation
- Policies not updated to reflect digital realities
- Incomplete communication with parents and students
- Flaky technology: insufficient bandwidth, slow devices
- Unsustainable purchasing practices
- Failure to communicate expectations

**WHAT TO DO**
- Share widely your progress toward the vision
- Track outcomes and analyze root causes
- Punish teachers for bad experiments, but not good ones
- Iterate and improve practice, but also iterate and improve the vision

**PITFALLS**
- Impatience – educators need 3-4 years to shift their practice
- A lack of transparency (bring your stakeholders along on the journey)
- Punishing poor outcomes of good experiments (it happens!)