

OurPlace: Local Heritage Communities as Infrastructure for Mobile Learning

Dan Richardson and Ahmed Kharrufa

Open Lab, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
d.richardson@newcastle.ac.uk
ahmed.kharrufa@newcastle.ac.uk

Abstract. This paper proposes a demonstration of OurPlace: a mobile platform for creating, sharing and engaging with place-based mobile learning activities. Through OurPlace, local heritage communities can create and share interactive mobile learning activities which might otherwise be unattainable due to temporal and financial restrictions or a lack of technical knowledge.

Keywords: Mobile learning; community curriculum; Digital Civics

1 Introduction and Context

Previous mobile learning projects have often used domain specific, pre-prepared learning materials using hardware or digital assets [1,4]. While this has often allowed for rich learning materials, it often required significant financial investment, technical know-how and frequently diminishes their adaptability for learning activities across different curricula and locations. The result is that teachers and communities would often struggle to integrate them into their regular practice. If users are supported in creating their own digital mobile learning experiences, they could produce bespoke content designed for their learning goals, resources and civic values. However, even projects which allowed the creation of custom materials have often had their own issues, such as only offering the learner passive experiences (such as wiki pages or simple quizzes) or lacking in opportunities for learner creativity [2]. An unfulfilled opportunity exists for technologies to support teachers and community experts in easily producing creative mobile learning activities which have been tailored to support their individual goals and values.

2 OurPlace

The culmination of a lengthy series of workshops, interviews and technology prototypes [3], OurPlace (previously ParkLearn) is an open source, free to use mobile platform designed to support the creation of custom mobile learning activities. These activities are created by combining multiple modular interactions, including taking photos and video, recording or listening to audio, drawing, marking on maps and hunting down

given GPS locations. These activities are both created and consumed in the mobile application through a simple interface, allowing them to be created and experienced in authentic learning environments. Activities can be shared with others by publicly geo-tagging them to the relevant location, scanning pre-generated QR codes or entering a 'share code'. Uploaded media responses can be accessed on the accompanying website by the learner, enabling follow-up classroom activities. Further information, images and links to download the app can be found at <https://ourplace.app>.

3 OurPlace in Use, Planned Studies

As well as using the application on multiple school trips, we have been building strong relationships with heritage groups in the North East of England. Among the engagements has been the co-production of a large design workshop with the Tyne & Wear Heritage Forum, in which representatives from heritage groups from the region discussed and explored how OurPlace could be used in their own projects. The application has been deployed by several communities for their own sites, including a picture trail at a lighthouse and the production of a 'talking statue' at a local park. Further deployments are planned at the Newcastle Castle and a nearby cathedral.

Beyond further supporting independent heritage groups in creating their own learning experiences, we plan to research how technologies like OurPlace could be used as a tool for heritage exchange. Our next planned study will involve two classes from different schools producing activities for each other surrounding their area's local history. We are also further investigating how technology can assist in helping local communities produce learning materials which can fit into formal school curricula.

References

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