**Unlocking the educational potential of displaced people**

**Mobile learning in ‘third spaces’**

*Gill Ryan argues openness, partnership and co-creation provide the keys to unlock the educational potential of displaced people around the world using mobile technologies.*

This blog is based on a co-authored chapter in a book called [Critical Mobile Pedagogy](https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/critical-mobile-pedagogy-john-traxler-helen-crompton/e/10.4324/9780429261572) that explores how mobile technologies are being harnessed to support displaced people in their learning. The [chapter](file:///C:\Users\gpr78\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\PQK6RNZ5\Supported%20mobile%20learning%20in%20the%20%22Third%20Spaces%22%20between%20non-formal%20and%20formal%20education%20for%20displaced%20people) considers what motivates refugees and other displaced people to pursue online and mobile learning and the associated challenges. We present examples of three organisations that offer ‘hybrid’ alternatives to non-formal and formal education for displaced people (Witthaus and Ryan, 2020).

We use the concept of the ‘third space’, a term coined by postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (1990) who described the ‘first space’ and the ‘second space’ as inhabited by the colonised and the coloniser respectively. In contrast, he proposes that the ‘third space’ can be imagined as a hybrid space between the two in which neither coloniser or colonised dominate. In the chapter we use the ‘third space’ concept as a lens to explore how refugees and other displaced people are using mobile technology to access learning and how mobile technologies have the potential to recalibrate power relations between educators and learners if certain values are embedded in practice. We also look at what constitutes ‘good’ hybridity (Bauhn and Fulya Tepe, 2016), and what enables learners to exercise agency in their own learning.

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While many displaced people lack access to digital devices such as laptops, most will have mobile phones, with ownership as high as 96% in some refugee camps, although not all have smartphones (Hounsell & Owuor, 2018). Mobile learning can provide refugees with “access to people and digital learning resources, regardless of place and time” (Kukulska-Hulme, 2010) though they may need support to develop online learning skills. In addition they need access to sufficient internet connectivity to engage. Displacement, digital poverty, and variable digital literacies shift the spaces in which learning takes place.

What our case studies have in common is that learning through mobile technologies often occurs in hybrid spaces, outside the formal spaces of educational institutions, with support from organisations. The case studies we investigated involved: first, a community-based programme in Scotland; second, a national programme in Germany; and third, an international programme based in Switzerland. Through them, we identified key elements of ‘good hybridity’: openness, partnership and co-creation. Let’s see how these work in practice.

First, [Bridges Programmes, Glasgow](https://www.bridgesprogrammes.org.uk/), is a voluntary organisation that supports the social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and other displaced people in Glasgow. They work with partner colleges and universities to support people to get them into work (if eligible) or to provide pathways to suitable educational respurces and courses by providing access to both formal and non-formal learning opportunities, with support for online and blended learning. They have also co-created a [course](https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=56496) called Reflections on Transitions with and for displaced place in Glasgow using the OU’s OpenLearn Create platform. The aim of this course, according to the website is”

*to get you started on thinking about yourself, who you are, where you are now, what you want to do in your present situation and how you can work towards doing what it is you want. The course and the activities within it are presented from the perspective of learners who may be new migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. But we hope that whatever your personal perspective, you’ll find this course useful in reflecting on experiences that have some importance to you, and that it will help you with future choices or decision making.*

This kind of openly available, co-created learning is vital to ‘good hybridity’ where learners become active and confident agents in their own learning.

Second, [Kiron Open Higher Education in Germany](https://www.deutschland.de/en/kiron-open-higher-education-germany) aims to enable refugees to access a university education. Kiron offers ‘study tracks’ in the form of curated MOOCs from universities around the world, which have been matched to programmes offered by higher education institutions in Germany, Lebanon and Jordan. Kiron has its own learning [platform](https://kiron.ngo/en/) and invites learners to participate in small-group online tutorials to complement the MOOCs, using online conference technology. Again, we see the values of openness and participation in action and Kiron makes these core values in facilitating mobile learning for displaced groups.

Third, [InZone](https://www.unige.ch/inzone/who-we-are/) is based at the University of Geneva’s Global Studies Institute, with a mission of “pioneering innovative approaches to multilingual communication and higher education in communities affected by conflict and crisis” (InZone, 2019). In partnership with other universities and the UNHCR, they build higher education spaces in fragile contexts. They offer formal and non-formal academic programmes to refugees in Jordan and Kenya, primarily in refugee camps, using a combination of online and mobile technologies. Learners can use their smartphones with virtual support and/or with face-to-face and online support in the camps. The use of [Open Educational Resources](https://oeru.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA34OBBhCcARIsAG32uvOYGfzUUs-RX7OrwU8-hAoAXD16gP89q5Hhfad9PaFRJGxr8a0xfhYaAugnEALw_wcB)  (OER) enables InZone to deploy limited resources towards translating learning materials and meeting local learning needs. InZone’s vision of co-creation allows “refugee learnes who harness these technologies [to] become the producers of educational materials instead of remaining the passive recipients of information designed to prepare them for the host country’s higher education system” (Moser-Mercer, 2016).

Openness, in terms of using OER made available with a creative commons licence, and using platforms such as OpenLearn Create and edX, is a key feature across the three examples above illustrating the potential of OERs for “opening up access to educational opportunity and reconfiguring traditional boundaries between institutions and wider society” (Cannell, Macintyre & Hewitt, 2015). Non-formal open learning can provide a pathway to accredited formal education, which is the goal for many displaced learners. Each of the initiatives above has managed to establish sustainable and extensive partnerships with institutions and other stakeholders to expand and/or to validate their learning provision. Through the co-creation of tailored resources, displaced groups can actively shape the curriculum rather than be passive recipients of pre-designed courses.

What we have learned through our examination of these three cases is that it is not mobile technology alone which creates third spaces with ‘good hybridity’. Rather it is the effective use of open tools in online spaces by educational and refugee support organisations, working in partnership and engaging in practices that foster learner agency, that will bring about the change needed in educational provision for displaced groups around the world.

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With Gabi Witthaus she co-authored the chapter on which the blog is based. A green open access version is available on [Refugee Learning Stories](https://refugeelearningstories.org/published/supported-mobile-learning-in-the-third-spaces-between-non-formal-and-formal-education-for-displaced-people/) and the edited book in which it appears is entitled

[Critical Mobile Pedagogy: Cases of Digital Technologies and Learners at the Margins](https://www.routledge.com/Critical-Mobile-Pedagogy-Cases-of-Digital-Technologies-and-Learners-at/Traxler-Crompton/p/book/9780367204570)

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