MOBILE LEARNING’S MANY MANIFESTATIONS
Teaching moments beyond the classroom

Alex, a deaf child in rural Argentina, had never been read a story. The boy’s hearing parents could not effectively communicate with him and, as a result, he was functionally illiterate and socially marginalized.

But when Virtual Videobooks* was launched, which uses technology to build a bridge between literature and Argentine Sign Language, six-year-old Alex, along with some 12,000 other deaf children throughout Argentina, entered a world of discovery they’d never had access to before.

The videos—which offer both classic and modern-day children’s stories—are told in Argentine Sign Language and spoken Spanish and can be accessed on tablets and smart phones via YouTube. Canales, the organization behind Virtual Videobooks, got the word out by giving the program to all eighty schools for the deaf in Argentina and promoting it through social media.

THE POWER OF MOBILE LEARNING
This mobile-learning program, a finalist in the 2014 World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) awards, is one example of the technology-based solutions increasingly being used to address learning challenges around the globe.

While the definition of mobile learning is as varied as the more than 100,000 education applications available in the Apple App Store, experts agree that one key hallmark is providing students with access to education-based content via mobile, Internet-connected devices.

“Essentially, the key element that defines mobile learning is the capacity for children to learn at any time, in any place, with a device for exploring the world,” says Ruben Puentedura, founder and president of Hippasus, an educational consulting company in Massachusetts that focuses on the transformative applications of technology around the world. “I call it a lively sketchpad.”

Likewise, John Seely Brown, a visiting scholar at the University of Southern California and co-chairman of the Deloitte Center for the Edge, refers to mobile learning devices as “curiosity amplifiers.”

MOBILE INNOVATION IN ACTION
Dorothy Dyer, an English teacher in South Africa, found one way to pass along her love of books to underprivileged youth in her country, where just 8 percent of public schools have usable libraries and some 4.7m children are functionally illiterate.

She founded FunDza, a free cell phone-based library that showcases works of local writers, with new content added daily. The content is retrieved via an app designed by Mxit, a South African-built social network accessible by both simple cell phones and smart phones.

Once the program got under way in 2011, the FunDza team began to highlight the works of aspiring young writers as well as established ones. FunDza attracts some 50,000 visitors a month and about 100 comments per day, with an average stay of 13 minutes per visit—a remarkable accomplishment.

ASSESSING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS
While results like these are helpful in demonstrating one part of the success of a mobile learning initiative—access—there is also the question of assessing the effectiveness of an initiative: Is learning taking place? Some companies are taking on this challenge.

Intel, for example, is launching two new apps specifically for use on both teachers’ and students’ mobile devices. The first, an app called Let’s Assess, is designed specifically for mobile teacher, peer, and student assessments. The app enables teachers to evaluate the 21st century, difficult-to-assess skills of collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. The second is an app called Shake and Teach, an idea generator that helps teachers develop new and creative ways for students to demonstrate understanding. Both apps will launch this summer at intel.com/teachers.