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## Laurier researcher studies impact of mobile devices and social media on schools

WATERLOO – The arrival of the Internet in Canadian schools, some two decades ago now, was hailed as a revolution – and of course it was, putting vast amounts of data at students’ and teachers’ fingertips.

But as Laurier Education Professor Julie Mueller points out, the arrival of mobile technology – such as smart phones and tablet computers – in the pockets of students is having an even more transformative impact.

“These things are here to stay – we’re not going to go backwards,” says Mueller. “That said, we don’t want to just passively accept mobile devices and social media in the classroom. It is important that we investigate the impact of mobile technology on student learning and development.”

Mueller’s recent work has focused on beginning to do exactly that, and she has been presenting some of her work at Congress 2012. One key finding is that as mobile technology and social media become increasingly ubiquitous, teaching is becoming less about conveying content and more about teaching students how to sort, evaluate and work with that information.

“Information is available to everyone at the touch of a button now,” Mueller says. “But students need to know how to evaluate that information, and assess its value and credibility. Ultimately, it’s about teaching life skills and citizenship.”

In one recent study, the results of which Mueller will present at Congress 2012 today, Mueller looked at the ways in which teachers in training used BlackBerry Playbooks to share information via social media, develop lesson plans, and carry out various other tasks. In another upcoming study she will examine the use of social media by students and staff at a public school in Waterloo Region.

“My research is rooted in questions around how we can harness things like social media – which students are using anyway – for the purposes of teaching,” Mueller says. “In order to do that, we need to understand how it’s currently being used.”

Mueller is quick to point out that the presence of mobile computing and social media in schools presents many challenges – they may distract students or become a conduit for bullying, for example. Mueller has also done extensive research on physical education over the years, and she notes that technology can sometimes promote sedentary lifestyles.

“One of my passions as a researcher is physical activity, and it’s important that we measure the impact these technologies are having on students’ lifestyles, so we can funnel the appropriate resources to addressing the problem.”

In the meantime, Mueller is continuing her broader studies on social media and mobile technology’s impacts.

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“These are important questions for faculties of education, where we teach the teachers,” she says. “The speed of change is very fast, and we need to be sure we’re responding to that change. We want to have teachers in the system using best practices.”

Mueller will present “Social Media Non Grata? Teaching Communication in a Hyperconnected Classroom” with Jeremy Hunsinger on June 1 at 1:15 p.m. in the University of Waterloo’s J.G. Hagey Hall of the Humanities, Room 2107.

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