

Student Use of Audio Recorders and Blogs for reflection – A Case Study

On 22 May 2012, I spoke to two Museum studies students about how they were using digital technologies to support their learning.

They told me that they used their own audio recorders to record lectures:-

... when it comes to revision time, I listen back to them and make additional notes on top of my lecture notes. I tend to wait until revision time because it all comes back.

With mine it's the same but I don't record every lecture – sometimes I forget. And then I make notes straight after.

Both students were using their own audio recorders:-

With mine, I can't take the digital files off and put them onto my computer so I just use them to make additional notes for essays and revision.

Mine's one my Grandad gave me and it's really old – I have used my phone as well

They told me that the audio recorders helped them to concentrate better in the lectures, safe in the knowledge that the audio recorder was taking down all the key facts:-

*It eases the pressure off having to get all the facts down from each lecture. Sometimes I fall into the trap of just writing down what's on the board rather than listening to what the lecturer is saying. So having the audio recorder means that I can make notes of what I feel is relatively important, but then just listen and take it in. I find that **since I've been using it I've learned more from just listening** to the lectures rather than madly trying to scribble down what they're saying.*

I asked whether they had used their audio recorders for anything other than lectures. They hadn't, but they cited an example of a fellow student who did use an audio recorder on field trips. When I asked whether they had tried that, they told me that they wouldn't because they 'despise the sound' of their own voice. Self-consciousness was also an issue:-

...it's OK I guess if you're in a group and you're talking into your recorder, but if you're on your own I'd feel if I was talking into my recorder I'd be disturbing everybody else that was in the room, or that they'd be listening to me and I'd feel self-conscious.

Another student said that she actually preferred writing:-

I quite like writing. It's like my train of thought ... seeing it, I find that helpful. I can process, and ... you know, it links – whereas I feel like I'd say something (into the audio recorder) and it would stop and I don't know if it would carry on.

...Like audio recording, I think when I recorded a lecture, that's their interpretation. And my recording is like my ideas, like what I draw from it, and then when I write, I'll remember something through writing it, and it's be the base of my argument, my writing isn't all like what he's saying, it's what I'm thinking, what I'm getting from it, like I can stress things, if I think they're important I can star, and write like 'ESSAY' in capitals

I asked whether there was anything in actually hearing the voice again when they were listening back to audio recordings that brought something back:-

It kind of puts me back in the mindset. (..) I think it does tend to take me back coz it's never less or more interesting than the lecturer was. And I can remember sitting there and going 'oh yeah, that's the one where like..' you know. I can remember the slides and stuff that they showed.

Mark asked whether there was a potential to rely on the recording, and not concentrate during the lecture:-

I do remember last year we had a visual and audio recording, like no-one took the lecture, I think it was Griselda, it was a recording of her speaking and her slides in the auditorium – but it was fine – it was a bit like 'oh, you're not here, but you're here', so that's a bit like relying on that, it's a possibility because someone can't be there, it can be recorded and because it's in a lecture, it's not active, you're just listening aren't you

With the audio recorders, I find that I pay more attention when I've got it because I don't have to worry about writing everything down, it's like you kind of engage more and really listen to the whole thing rather than just thinking right, I've got to try and scribble everything down.

Blogs

I asked them whether they used blogs. One of the students had set up a personal blog:-

I've also got a blog which I use to describe events that I've done, and work experience. I've set it up at the beginning of this year 'coz it was my aim this year to get lots of work experience, so I'm just documenting that. It's really for my own benefit.

So how does it benefit you?

I come back and I reflect on it, if I write it down straight after I've done it. I guess it's like a diary, and I don't forget names of people even though I don't put them actually in it, if I'm talking about my mentors, I remember, oh yes that was (x). It's just to document what I've done, so when I come back to writing my CV, I can look at it and say 'oh actually I have done quite a lot', more than off the top of my head. And museums that I've been to, or galleries that I've been to, people I've talked to, that kind of thing(..) sometimes I'll think, well I did that festival but I can't remember anything that I did in it, whereas if I write about it I think, oh yeah I did loads of customer service and helped put this huge tent up

The blog was kept anonymously, for personal use rather than something written with an audience in mind. I asked what benefit the blog gave them, that a written journal wouldn't:-

It's easier to put photos on, coz I can just get it off the internet, or I can just take a photo, I don't have to worry about sticking things in, it's like an unlimited space really, so I can put videos on it, you can't really put videos in a diary, and also you can link it to other people who are doing very similar things, like there's one person who's following me who's doing almost the exact same thing, sort of blogging their experiences of going to different galleries and work experience, and they're in Canada, and it gives me inspiration, (..) I've thought I've never thought about doing that before, so I

could look into doing something like that, for example he or she does loads of work in schools and I've never thought about doing that before, so I could try

The same student also used Twitter, but more for social purposes – because it's quicker and less personal than getting an email or phone number. They also follow professional organisations such as the Arts Council, and found that as these organisations also started to follow them, they became aware of the need to manage their online identity:-

...so I've got to watch what I say now. Rather than just telling my friends what I've been up to, it's now sort of more oh, I've been to this really inspiring gallery

I asked whether they would consider setting up a blog that was designed to be a public one that employers might see:-

Yeah, potentially. I just need to get more confident about my writing style. On my blog at the moment, it's really informal, it's really colloquial

Another student felt that it would be a good idea – but had concerns about it being time-consuming. She also used Twitter, but had some concern about how the data was being used:-

I don't like the fact that it's too public. Because I saw something about how US congress are blogging ... are recording every single Tweet

Although she found that it was useful to meet people and find work experience through following on Twitter, and emailing.

I also asked whether they used discussion boards or anything like that. They told me that they used Facebook to share frustrations, but also to share videos and other resources. They also talked to each other on Facebook to clarify things like footnotes and to compare progress. They could see potential for using facebook for more course related work:-

It's a shame though because we don't talk about the readings on it, and that's the one thing that I think that I'd like another voice on it, not just my own, what I think from it, I do look at the internet sometimes and see what other people are taking ... but we don't talk about it, but we should I think

I asked whether there were any other digital technologies that they found helpful:-

The internet, to look for explanations so if a reading is particularly difficult then using the internet to look up a reader, to bring up different books that I could look up, and then one of those was on Google Books

It's so good, Google Books – you can find a specific word – you don't have to read the whole book

I listened to this lecture on YouTube and it was great and I got loads of ideas

JSTOR is amazing as well

After the focus group, I received an email from one of the participants with further thoughts about how she used a blog:-

I enjoy keeping a blog as a way of reflection after a week of particularly difficult material or after I have had a new experience (whether that's work experience or visiting a new museum/gallery/exhibition).

It helps me gather and organise my thoughts. If I can sit down and write out a chronology of my day and comment on each part - what I liked, what I didn't, what I learnt etc, when it comes to an interview or a situation when I need to list my skills or why I want to work in museums I'll be able to use varied examples and have thought out answers ready to just pick out of my head.

Similarly if I'm struggling with course material I find talking it through with someone helps immensely, what is equally as useful is sitting down and systematically go through the course material, without the stress of knowing it will be marked.

I like keeping a blog because I also like the satisfaction of people commenting on it my writing with ideas and helpful suggestions. It's rewarding when people comment back as well and say I've helped them with work experience ideas or they've enjoyed reading my thoughts on museum studies!