My Doctorate: Social and Digital Media Storytelling

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Keywords
Digital media │ PhD life │ Social media │ Storytelling skills

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Until recently, I never felt like I was doing a PhD. When I first started, I actually wasn't. Initially, in 2012, I was selected for an MPhil, with the task of developing and running a series of Social and Digital Media Storytelling workshops for students and staff at the host University, funded by a successful project bid. The purpose of these workshops was to prepare for digital media assessment by developing both staff and students' digital media and storytelling skills. The workshops were developed iteratively, using an action research approach. The idea was that my development of the workshops could contribute to an MPhil. In order to support the effective development and delivery of these workshops, I was enrolled onto the University's Postgraduate Certificate to teach in Higher Education (PGCHE), funded by the host University.

As a student of the host University since 2008 (I had previously studied for a B.A. (Hons.) degree in Media Writing and Production), I was fairly well acquainted with many of the media staff and spent a lot of time discussing with them the social and digital media storytelling skills that I thought I would need to be delivering. I also conducted a video interview with the Associate Director of a local theatre about what makes good storytelling. These discussions and interviews, along with my experiences as an undergraduate, were the foundations for the workshops. After approximately six months of planning, the first series of workshops were advertised through the staff bulletin, university press and on social media. There were three attendees. In hindsight, perhaps using social media to advertise workshops on how to use social media wasn't the best plan. I ran two further iterations of the workshops with similarly low uptake. In addition to the workshops, I tried to reach more students by setting up a student TV channel with the University, which worked well for a short while, but the students' enthusiasm for extracurricular activities soon diminished once their assignment deadlines approached. I was then asked to run a series of staff development workshops, which were, for the most part, well subscribed.

It was at this point that I was approached to deliver workshops for an already established module, which would change the course of my MPhil and lead to doing the PhD. The students were on a construction management course and that particular module called for them to go on a work placement. The idea was that the students could use social and digital media to document and reflect on what they were doing on their placement and share it with...
their peers, tutors and potential employers.

Through my PhD supervisors, I was introduced to Winter's Patchwork Text Assessment, which is a kind of portfolio made up from various short, creative pieces of the student's work and a summative ‘stitching’ of the patches, to show how they have met a given learning objective. There was, at that time, no real work done to bring the patchwork text into the digital culture that students were engaged in. We decided that I could develop an approach to the Patchwork Media Assessment, whereby students create digital patches and curate (blog) them online. This would allow them to have a greater audience for peer and tutor feedback and extend that feedback to industry professionals and potential employers. Students would also have access to other online metrics and analytics that they could use as a part of their feedback.

Over two thirds of the construction management students were assessed on their blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds based on the pictures, videos and written reflections that they had shared. All of the students who chose to be assessed this way passed the module, achieving good grades and an enthusiasm for social media.

The project funding was about to run out and, along with my supervisors, I had to decide whether to write up for an MPhil about digital media literacy and assessment or try to find further funding and convert to a PhD and chase up our theory about social and digital media storytelling being beneficial for employability, too. We were successful in obtaining further funding.

Through a connection at the University, I created a dialogue with a local company (a firm of solicitors). The Head of Recruitment was really interested in seeing what the students were doing and how they represented themselves and communicated, rather than a traditional CV. I worked with the University’s Student Law Society which was holding a Moot Court competition. I assisted them in filming the trial, and asked them to keep a blog, a video diary and some video profiles. I presented the video profiles and video diaries to the company and received some great feedback. The Head of Recruitment said that the students provided so much more than a traditional CV, and that they could see how passionate and enthusiastic the students were, and how they communicated. She said that these skills are just as important as their degree qualifications. I also filmed some video profiles with the company’s staff to use as examples to students going forward. The company wanted to explore the possibility of using videos for employment in future. I don’t think that will contribute directly to my PhD or skillset, but it is something that they could work on with my colleagues at the University.

**CONCLUSIONS**

So, throughout my PhD ‘process’ I was always doing things. Things that I enjoyed doing: planning and delivering workshops; filming; interviewing; creating online resources and making use of social and digital media. It is for this reason that I never felt like I was doing a PhD and because I have been enjoying everything it has made the hard work easier; the literature makes sense and is practical, the writing up is gratifying and my research is having a distinct impact.

**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and approved it for publication.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.