Mixed Media Reflection: ePortfolios in an SLCC Study Abroad Program

Contents

1. Practice Identifiers
2. Connections to Other Sections of the Catalyst
3. Conclusion

Students on a study abroad trip to London, England, created multi-media portfolios of their experiences and reflected on their learning.

Students on a study abroad trip to London, England, created multi-media portfolios of their experiences and reflected on their learning. The program used London as an experiential classroom, and students were given specific instructions to write about—and document with images—the cultural, historical and political places they visited. Within those parameters, students were given a great deal of freedom in choosing how best to approach the project. A few weeks after returning from London, students presented their ePortfolios to their friends and family as well as other Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) staff and faculty.

Author: David Hubert
Practitioners: David Hubert developed this practice for the London study abroad program, and Adam Dastrup did so for the Japan study abroad program. Only the London study abroad program ePortfolio is described here, but the two practices were very similar.

Part I: Practice Step-by-Step

Students in the London study abroad program met with professor Hubert all during the Spring term, discussing readings about British history, culture and politics. These sessions were designed to prepare the students for the trip, which took place over three weeks in May. Dr. Hubert instructed the students to create a significant sub-portfolio about the London trip and house it in the Learning Outside the Classroom section of their SLCC ePortfolio. That sub-portfolio needed to contain nine different sections responding to the following:

- What impact did the Roman Conquest have on Britain? Rely on your readings and what you learn at venues such as the Museum of London and the Roman Baths. Reflect on what it was like to see and touch Roman artifacts.

- What impact did the Norman Conquest have on Britain? Rely on your readings and what you learn at venues such as the Museum of London and the Tower of London. Reflect on what it was like to see and touch Roman artifacts.

- How did the Great Fire of 1666 alter the architecture and layout of London? Rely on your readings and what you learn at venues such as the Museum of London, the Monument, and St. Paul's Cathedral.

- What do you think are the 8 most important artifacts in the British Museum? Do some pre-departure research on the Web to identify 10 artifacts you want to see there. Visit each artifact in the British Museum, take notes, and narrow down your list to the final eight artifacts. Write about their historical significance as well as their meaning to you.
What are the 8 most significant artistic pieces you encountered in the following venues: the National Gallery, the Courtauld Institute, the Tate Modern, and the Tate Britain. Write about their significance and personal relevance to you. Do some pre-departure research on the Web. Visit each piece in the museums (2 pieces per museum) and take notes.

Write briefly about the importance of the following historical figures: William Shakespeare, Charles Darwin, William and Caroline Herschel, Charles Dickens, Florence Nightingale, John Harrison, Emmeline Pankhurst, and Queen Elizabeth II. Rely on your readings, Internet research, and the venues we visit in London. Reflect on your “encounters” with these people at some of the places we visit in London.

Describe the domestic impact of World War II and the immediate postwar years in Britain. In a reflective piece, tell the reader what it was like and put yourself in the place of the typical Londoner during those times. Rely on your readings and what you learn from venues such as the Museum of London and the Imperial War Museum.

Describe and reflect on the major steps in the process of transforming the British state from a medieval monarchy to a modern parliamentary democracy. Your readings will be very helpful, but we will see several important artifacts and places in this transformation.

Describe and reflect on your favorite educational experience on our trip.

As they visited the various sites described above, professor Hubert instructed them to take detailed notes and take photos that they could then import into their ePortfolios. In the evenings, students worked on their ePortfolios in the hostel where the group resided. In the two weeks after returning from London, students polished their ePortfolios so they would be ready to present in an evening meeting on the SLCC campus.

Part II: The Role of Reflection in Advancing Student Learning
Each individual section of the students' London ePortfolios was designed to mix description and reflection. Professor Hubert wanted students to write for an outside audience (their friends, parents, and other SLCC instructors), and become more adept at balancing descriptive writing with more impressionistic reflection in which the student personalized the experience.

Each ePortfolio page became an opportunity for students to engage in active inquiry on-site at the British Museum, the Houses of Parliament, or whatever the days’ venue happened to be. Students went into each experience knowing that they would need to synthesize concrete learning (most of London burned to the ground in 1666) with their personal reactions (what would have been like to have survived such a conflagration without modern disaster relief and social welfare programs?). They also went into each experience having done pre-trip readings intended to jump-start their ability to put new venues into proper context.
The study abroad ePortfolio, with its emphasis on a variety of historical, political and cultural experiences, was inherently integrative. It asked students to bring in cross-disciplinary perspectives and mix them with personal narrative and multi-media artifacts.

**Part III**

Any evidence for the impact of ePortfolio on student learning in the study abroad program is qualitative. Professor Hubert had led three other London study trips prior to the implementation of ePortfolio, and was very impressed with the depth of student learning on this trip. One way to look at this is to examine how the students and Professor Hubert—who did the ePortfolio assignment along with his students—each handled parts of the ePortfolio.

*William and Caroline Herschel* were two of the people we “encountered” on the study abroad trip. See how student [Aspen Hinkle](#) personalized the experience by tying it to the relationship she has with her brother and to a paper she had written previously for her English course.

Meanwhile, **Professor Hubert** related to visiting the Herschel’s residence in Bath because he is an amateur astronomer.
When student Robynn Clayton wrote about the Domestic Impact of World War II, it is clear that the physical experiences of going through the war tunnels at Dover Castle and the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum helped her contextualize what she learned about that era.
For Professor Hubert, having his children along on the trip added a personal dimension to his understanding of how British families suffered during the war.

Students on study abroad trips often get “museum fatigue,” a condition that can be debilitating physically and educationally. For this trip, the students were able to pick the artistic pieces that appealed to them in each venue, and this freedom of choice is a powerful way to make the experience meaningful to students. Trina Neiser and Professor Hubert demonstrate their thinking about their learning and experiences.

**Practice Identifiers**

*Location*—this practice is used in our two study abroad programs—to London, England, and to Osaka, Japan. The study abroad courses are in our General Education program.

Scale—Approximately 20 students per year do the study abroad trips.

*High Impact Practice*—International experiences are considered to be High Impact Practices. Additionally, students are asked to critically and creatively think, reflect, and show their “work” (learning) through mixed media reflections.

**Connections to Other Sections of the Catalyst**

This practice connects to two other sections of the Catalyst site. With respect to technology, the web-based ePortfolio platforms are accessible from anyplace, so they are ideal for using with study abroad programs. In addition, even though this practice is quite small in scale, it has helped us with our scaling up efforts because we have been able to show it to other faculty doing experiential learning activities.

**Supporting Documents**

- Assignment Details—These were presented above in the description section.
- Student Work—Links to student work were presented above in part three of the description section.
- Connections to other Polished Practices—N/A

**Conclusion**

We use ePortfolios in study abroad programs to deepen student learning by having them describe and reflect upon their learning experiences while on location in England or Japan. This was the first time we tried this practice, and we are working on methods to have students elaborate on their reflections.

Students on a study abroad trip to London, England, create multi-media portfolios of their learning and reflections on their learning. Students will create a significant sub-portfolio about the trip and house it in the Learning Outside the Classroom section of their SLCC ePortfolio. David Hubert, Professor of Political Science, will be teaching/leading the course this spring.

Below are the instructions and prompts that London Study Abroad students are given to complete their travel portfolio.

**Instructions and Prompts**

On the “Learning Outside the Classroom” tab of the Gen Ed ePortfolio, students will create a page dedicated to the London study abroad program. On that page, students will have separate subpages responding to each of the following:
What impact did the Roman conquest have on Britain? Rely on your readings and what you learn at venues such as the Museum of London and the Roman Baths. Reflect on what it was like to see and touch Roman artifacts.

What impact did the Norman conquest have on Britain? Rely on your readings and what you learn at venues such as the Museum of London and the Tower of London. Reflect on what it was like to see and touch Roman artifacts.

How did the Great Fire of 1666 alter the architecture and layout of London? Rely on your readings and what you learn at venues such as the Museum of London, the Monument, and St. Paul's Cathedral.

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Write briefly about the importance of the following historical figures: William Shakespeare, Charles Darwin, William and Caroline Herschel, Charles Dickens, Florence Nightingale, John Harrison, Emmeline Pankhurst, and Queen Elizabeth II. Rely on your readings, Internet research, and the venues we visit in London. Reflect on your “encounters” with these people at some of the places we visit in London.

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Each subpage will be a combination of text and images. I will provide you with a specialized notebook in which to take notes. Students will take notes at various venues and from the readings that pertain to each topic, and then should write your analysis and reflections and take photos while in London. When back in SLCC, you will then put everything together into a nice portfolio of their learning. We will gather in June to share our portfolios with each other, our families, and with other SLCC folks that I will invite.