Exit the classroom! Mobile Learning & Teaching

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Grab your coat, pick up your smartphone
Leave the seminar room behind
Hop on a tram and meet us outside the Hauptbahnhof
Open your eyes, open your ears
Take an unrehearsed walk through the city
Who knows what we might learn?

Across five years and a range of locations and learning contexts, **James Lamb**, **Michael Gallagher** and **Jeremy Knox** (from the **Centre for Research in Digital Education**) have undertaken a series of excursions and other exploratory activities that have considered the pedagogic and methodological possibilities of mobile learning. In response to conference calls and seminar invitations we have designed and then delivered exercises beyond the classroom walls and other more traditional learning spaces of the university. On each occasion these events have been digitally mediated and have combined a practical interest in teaching and learning with theoretical work, for instance around mobile learning, multimodality, walking ethnography and digital education. This poster charts a path that begins with a two-day mobile learning workshop in Helsinki, through activities in London, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Bremen and then most recently a distributed online activity that look place within the *Festival of Creative Learning* at Edinburgh University. Without suggesting that mobile learning is suited to every context, or that we abandon the campus, through these case studies we draw attention to the critical and pedagogic possibilities that can be experienced when we exit the classroom.

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mLearning and Documenting the City

Helsinki *May 2013* Michael Gallagher

This was a two-day workshop exploring mobile learning with school and university teachers, and supported by the Otavan Opiston Osuuskunta, a network organisation for citizen education and training in Helsinki. The workshop was interested in the ways that mobile learning (as proposed for instance by Sharples et al. 2005) helps us to understand the transformation of habitus, including how this is made mobile and how that defines mobile learning. Habitus is positioned here as a set of systems of durable, transposable dispositions (Bourdieu 1977) in large part governed by the individual and systems in which they interact.

Day 1 commenced with an introductory presentation followed by group-forming and planning. This was followed by taking to the streets, with each of the four groups of four or five teachers collecting data that would help to explore their particular interests as they mapped world religion through Helsinki's iconography, or by asking how the city's architecture governs behaviour, amongst other approaches. On Day 2 the groups used their gathered data to produce a composition on their subject matter, for instance in the form of a video combining photography and audio field recordings. The work was then presented to the rest of the class in order to demonstrate different ways that mobile learning supports inquiry around habitus. Beyond the insights the group offered around the relationship between mobile learning and habitus, the two-day exercise suggested that:

- the mobile learning activity, where groups leave the conventional educational space of the classroom to explore the city, can be particularly effective in supporting collaboration between participants who have never previously met or worked together
- undertaken in the city, mobile learning enables us to interrogate our surroundings in a range of different ways, for instance by exploring experiences and ideas around architecture, religion, movement and beyond

Sights, Sounds, Smartphones: Impromptu Learning on the Streets of Amsterdam

Amsterdam *June 2016* James Lamb, Jeremy Knox

The *Visualizing the Street* conference, organised by the Cities Project at the University of Amsterdam, brought together an international group of researchers interested in how emergent digital approaches to visual meaning-making provide ways of understanding our everyday practices and surroundings. Picking up from where our London excursion had drawn to a close, we went to Amsterdam to argue that by narrowing our critical attention to the image (or any other single mode in isolation) provides an incomplete and therefore inaccurate understanding of our surroundings. To make this case we arrived ahead of the conference to undertake a 'multimodal dérive': an unscripted excursion influenced by the approach of Guy Debord and the Situationist movement (Bridger 2015), where our path through the city paid particular attention to visual and sonic phenomena (drawing for instance on Sterne 2012). Across one morning we used the camera and voice memo functions on our smartphones to produce photographs and field recordings. During our conference presentation the following day we juxtaposed photographs with sound as we made the following arguments:

- sights and sounds come together in concert and collision, talking to us about the complexity and fluid nature of the city with its different rhythms. By bringing image and sound together our gaze extends beyond the edge of what is shown in our viewfinder: we are able to hear the invisible and see the silent
- where we might wish to see ourselves as freely exploring the city, our path is always negotiated through a range of human and non-human interests and restrictions: weather, building work, hunger, self-preservation and so on
- from a sociomaterial perspective, we are not distinct from our surroundings: when we step onto the street we become entangled in the city's network of flows and patterns

Multimodality & Mobile Learning in Bremen

Bremen *September 2017* James Lamb, Michael Gallagher

In this paper-as-performance we invited delegates attending the *3rd Bremen Conference on Multimodality* to participate in a city-centre excursion that explored the theoretical and methodological compatibility of multimodality and mobile learning. Having already downloaded the cloud-based messaging app Telegram, participants assembled at the Bremen Hauptbahnhof where we formed into groups of six to seven people each. Across the next hour each group followed its own path through the city while at the same time responding to a series of 'critical prompts' scheduled in advance and distributed via Telegram and smartphone. As they wound their way through the city, participants were asked to relate their experiences to ideas from the research literature, as well as participating in short discussion activities with co-walkers, and gathering and then sharing visual and sonic data through the Telegram group. The prompts raised questions about the relationship between researcher and technology (Bayne 2014), multimodal data gathering (e.g. Dicks et al. 2011) and the potentialities and challenges of mobile learning (De Souza e Silva & Frith 2013).) After an hour of walking and talking, groups were guided towards the *Paulaner's an der Schlachte* inn where discussion continued over refreshment, but still in the street. From this exercise we concluded that:

- when the city is our richly multimodal text, mobile learning is well equipped to support different ways of investigating our urban surroundings
- leaving the seminar room behind brought a new energy and insight to the conversations that took place during the walk
- by taking to the street we open the possibility of a broader and less predictable range of hazards (traffic, construction work, people, weather) than we tend to find in the classroom
- the Smartphone can support the gathering of a range of data that until very recently would have been the preserve of those with a high level of technological access and technical sophistication
- for the time being, the Smartphone is unable to adequately account for the way that taste, smell, touch and other sensory phenomena shape our meaning-making (Pink 2009)
- complex algorithms and code present an 'enhanced' or augmented picture of our surroundings on screen that differs from what we experienced 'in the street'

Urban Flânerie as Multimodal Autoethnography

London *January 2015* James Lamb, Michael Gallagher, Jeremy Knox

The *mLearning and Documenting the City* workshop in Helsinki demonstrated how an unscripted urban excursion provided ways of exploring how we make sense of our surroundings. We further developed this approach through our contribution to the *Multimodality: Methodological Explorations* conference, hosted by the Institute of Education in London. On this occasion we combined the theoretical assumptions of multimodality with ethnography's interest in the study of cultural phenomena, as a way of interrogating our relationship with the city. Multimodality is a theory of communication which assumes that we always make meaning through a juxtaposition of different semiotic material, for instance via image, language, sound, touch and so on (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001). Our excursion was supported by the device of the flâneur, the urban explorer most famously associated with the writing and thinking of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin (Serlin 2006), but also by contemporary critical work around walking ethnography (notably by Ingold 2004). On the eve of the conference we spent a half-day exploring the EC1 postcode district of London where we used the data capturing abilities of our smartphones to generate photographic, sonic, video and GPS representations of our path through the city. We used a selection of these representations in our conference presentation the following morning where we highlighted the possibilities, but also the limitations, of our method. The key ideas to emerge from this exercise were that:

- the combination of multimodality, ethnography and mobile learning presents effective and interesting ways of exploring our relationship with the city as we make sense through an orchestration of visual, sonic and other sensory data (Pink 2009)
- mobile technologies provide ways of quickly and easily gathering a range of data however the sights and sounds of the city that we then later view on screen or hear through speakers offer an altered and incomplete representation of what was experienced on the street
- the device of the flâneur, with its connotations of social class and leisure can needlessly work against a desire for inclusive pedagogy and methodology: mobile learning design should remain alert to the danger of discouraging participation through perception, privilege and physical barriers

Wondering about the city: making meaning in Edinburgh's Old Town

Edinburgh *November 2016* James Lamb, Jeremy Knox

As part of the seminar series organised by the Centre for Research in Digital Education, we coordinated this excursion within Edinburgh's Old Town where we were joined by teachers, researchers, students, learning technologists and other interested parties within and beyond the University. The overall purpose of this 'walking seminar' was to encourage our co-walkers to consider whether and how activities beyond the classroom walls or campus boundary might contribute towards their educational work. Learning from our previous exercises in London and Amsterdam where we experienced the difficulty of translating experiences from street to seminar room (Dicks et al. 2011), on this occasion the emphasis was upon in situ learning rather than collecting data for later consumption. Participants were free to augment or document their experience of the Old Town in any digital form they wished, resulting in the gathering of photographs, sound recordings and an impromptu group playlist on Spotify that responded to our shared surroundings. Across the hour-long event conversation turned to the potential for mobile learning in a range of educational settings, including:

- ways of helping young people to learn about literature by inviting them to explore texts within the context of the city
- taking conceptual work concerned with commuter rituals out into the 'real world'
- inviting inhabitants to explore what is distinct and remarkable about their own town or city-of-residence

A short time after the excursion one of the participants, our colleague Christine Sinclair, used ideas and images from the exercise as a way of encouraging students on the MSc in Digital Education to reflect on the nature of space and place, an approach we would use within a later exercise, described below.

The Mobile Campus: Imagining The Future of Distributed and Digital Education at Edinburgh University

Online *February 2018* Michael Gallagher, James Lamb

Where all our preceding events had taken place within a particular physical location, for our contribution to Edinburgh University's *Festival of Creative Learning*, we wanted to explore how mobile learning might support distributed educational activity. This exercise had two purposes: to make the case for mobile learning as pedagogy, while at the same time raising questions about the way we conceptualise 'campus' and 'university' within increasingly digital learning environments (Bayne, Gallagher & Lamb 2014). Although we orchestrated the activity from the café beneath David Hume Tower, our 'class' of 24 students, teachers, alumni and learning technologists were spread across several campuses and three continents. Exploiting the simplicity of Telegram that we had experienced in Bremen, we used the instant messaging app to invite the group to generate and share photographs, field recordings, typed descriptions and other digitally-mediated representations of their learning space during the workshop. These 'snapshots' were then broadcast into the physical space of David Hume Tower café in what we described as 'remixing the campus', as a varied range of educational, social and transitory spaces were merged together through projected images and sounds. We further challenged the distinction between 'on campus' and 'online' by livestreaming our café space via Telegram. The following themes emerged from the event:

- through mobile pedagogy the classroom can simultaneously encompass a walk through the snow, a commuter journey, a view across the hills and a window onto the street: we are not bound to desks or enclosed between walls
- within increasingly networked learning environments, the university is differently performed across a range of spaces and contexts
- the combination of smartphone and instant messaging app provides imaginative and effective ways of connecting learners and supporting richly multimodal dialogue

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