Jisc Digital Learner Stories

Angela

This is one of twelve ‘digital learner stories’ collected and published by Jisc as part of its Digital Student project. You can read other stories and follow up the themes from Angela’s story by visiting the Jisc Digital Student blog: https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/

Angela's video


About Angela

Angela is 17 and a first year A-level student at Portsmouth College where she is also part of the student Apple Ambassador team.

Angela's digital learning

- Angela credits her personal digital practices for giving her:
  o the motivation to be an independent learner
  o easy access to apps, games, YouTube videos and other digital resources linked to her interests and learning needs
  o an understanding of the digital skills she may need as she considers future employment
  o a lighter backpack, replacing heavy textbooks with an iPad
- Angela loves the visual aspects of digital media for learning. She uses:
  o social media such as Pinterest for research and collaboration on her Graphics A-level course
  o YouTube for fun and engaging explanations of issues in Biology, as well as a ‘no cost’ way to learn the ukulele
  o the camera on her iPad for taking date stamped images of notes and homework instructions on the classroom notice board
Angela acknowledges the role of the college in introducing her to social media and apps for learning. This support has included:

- a list of useful apps as part of her induction information
- membership of the college student Apple Ambassador programme, now in its fourth year
- staff using digital technologies creatively and in diverse ways, and encouraging students to do the same
- active support from the college for independent learning with students’ own devices
- a culture of student-staff partnership, modelling a 'give and take' relationship around the use of digital tools for learning

Angela's key message is that digital technology actively encourages exploration and curiosity, and it has a key role in formal education

Angela's story

Angela is an ideal ambassador for the role that digital technologies can play in learning. As a child learning English as a second language she discovered that she could hear English pronunciations using digital recordings. Later on she used MyMaths videos and bite-sized learning to revise in short bursts, which she credits with her achieving a Maths GCSE. Choosing a sixth form college with an Apple Ambassador programme gave her the opportunity to help others, while gaining more experience and expertise herself. Angela says the programme "helps me and it helps [other students]... I learned how to upload my work through Google Drive and then I was able to help others."

So what digital technologies does Angela favour? She has a mobile phone and laptop, and of course, an iPad, which is provided to all staff and students at the College. Angela says, "When we first came into college, we were given a booklet about what we would learn and a list of apps that would be useful. It was suggested that we download the apps and explore them in our own time to see what they could do for us." The college uses Google Drive for assignment submission, and Google Docs for student collaboration. Individual teachers underpin their subject knowledge by suggesting appropriate apps for use before, during and after class. For example, Angela uses Pinterest in her Graphics A-level. "We pin our art work into Pinterest to share with the world and share with our teachers. We follow our teachers and they follow us back. They check the progress of our work via Pinterest and can see if our work is ready to be submitted." In Biology, along with specific apps such as iCell, the teacher and students have a group Facebook page. In Geography, the teacher uses iGeology for subject matter background and Google Classroom to communicate and share resources, while the students keep in touch through Facebook Messenger.

In the first year of her A-level studies, Angela's teachers have led the choice of social media in use. Angela thinks that "It's a good thing to be guided by the teachers, because that means everyone is part of this and they are in the same place instead of being all over the place." But Angela also feels that there is a positive "back and forth relationship with teachers - we gain feedback and give feedback. We can be proactive and suggest other techniques [to use in the classroom]... We have suggested to our geography teacher that she records her voice so that we could go back and take notes from the recording." This more equitable student-teacher relationship enhances the
learning experience for Angela and gives her scope to think in turn about how she can "encourage others to learn. What would be fun and pleasing for them to learn?"

Thanks to her role as an Apple Ambassador, Angela has had the opportunity to reflect on her preferences for learning. As a visual learner, she finds that YouTube is a particularly valuable learning tool, and she appreciates having TinyScanner on her iPad which allows her to scan mind maps and file them to review or share later. She uses various cameras on her digital devices to take pictures of work in class, and finds that the date stamp facility means she can keep her notes organised. Angela says that curiosity is her greatest strength as a digital learner. Not only does she ask "How can I best improve my work?" but she is increasingly "good at being self-taught and using my devices. At this age, some people tend to lose their curiosity. A digital device helps maintain it." She remains open to new approaches and is always trying new things in her Apple Ambassador role. She also appreciates the confidence it gives her to work with other people. "In the world, in industry you're always having to work with other people and ... that's a good balance. You're always connected and you're very dependent on others."

Asked whether her college experience is preparing her with the digital skills and habits she will need in the future, Angela is very positive. "I know employers are looking at what we can bring to work. I can bring my digital and technical skills." Looking ahead to her choice of university she feels that the digital technology available will be an important consideration in her decision. "I'm looking at a uni with up-to-date systems instead of having to use out-of-date computers. Since I'm now good with my technology, it's important not to go backwards."

Key issues

- **Inclusion**: Free web sites and apps allow anyone to get learning. Digital learners can choose the devices they use and the style of delivery that suits them best (visual, sound, text, games, self-assessment, repetition).

- **Making time**: Having access to personal devices means that learning can be fitted into busy lives.

- **Communication**: Digital tools mean you can stay in touch with classmates and tutors wherever and whenever you are studying, and allows you to find people with a common interest, e.g. on social media.

- **Digital safety and wellbeing**: Learners rely on institutional policies and well-trained staff to guide them on the appropriate uses of digital technology, especially social media.

- **Enjoyment and fun**: Learners enjoy using digital apps such as quizzes and learning games to reinforce their learning, especially if these are offered as an extra or ‘bonus’ opportunity when other work has been completed.

- **Skills for work**: Professional apps and networks connect learners with the world of work. If these are available to learners on their personal devices, they develop the habit of engaging with the world as professionals. Learners are also motivated to certify their digital skills, as they know employers are looking for digitally confident workers.

- **Tutors as digital models and mentors**: Tutors are often responsible for introducing learners to professional software and the practices that go with it. They need to be digitally confident and up to date in their own practice. They should also be able to identify and support diverse students’ needs so that everyone can learn successfully together.
Independence: Angela likes the way that tutors introduce tools and techniques but then hand them over to the learners to explore further and to use as they want. "Then we can be independent learners."

Angela uses the following technology, apps and websites

- Pinterest: to share her work in Graphics and to research the work of others
- TinyScanner: an iPhone/Pad app that scans as an image or PDF file
- Facebook: Messenger for personal group communication and FB Pages for class resources and teacher communication
- Google: for quick problem solving: "It's up to date and that you can find exactly what you are looking for, unlike using a textbook."
- Google Drive: used by the college for its file storage and synchronization service, which synchronises across devices
- YouTube: described by Angela as 'a learning tool'
- iPad: replaces heavy textbooks, has a large range of apps that support learning and transfers files wirelessly and securely
- Kahoot: a classroom quiz tool which motivates learners to finish work quickly, and tests what they have learned in an engaging, game-like way