

'My Life in a Day'

Funding Report



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'My Life in a Day' is a joint work project with the Communities and Culture Network + (CCN+), funded by the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC).

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‘My Life in a Day’ Summary

‘My Life in a Day’ (MLD) is a small-scale project, the primary aim of which has been to foster new forms of public engagement around a recently established multimedia data collection on ‘Everyday Childhoods’ at the Mass Observation Archive¹. The project developed out of an AHRC Digital Transformation study, ‘Curating Childhoods’ (see below): a collaboration between researchers from the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) at the University of Sussex² and the Mass Observation Archive³, examining the ethical and practical dimensions of developing a multimedia archive of children’s everyday lives.

Building on this work, the MLD project embarked on an ambitious programme of events and activities designed to increase the public visibility and accessibility our study’s outputs. Under the banner of ‘My Life in a Day’, we co-organised two interlinked public events children and families, centred around the new ‘Everyday Childhoods’ collection:

- A pilot May 12th ‘Mass Observation’ diary day for children and young people.
- A ‘My Life in a Day’ family workshop hosted at the Mass Observation Archive.

In addition to these two public events, the MLD project has developed a series of short films for researchers and archivists, exploring some of the key ethical issues of working with children’s and young people’s archive data. Drawing on footage from a workshop with children and families who have previously been involved in research, the films provide a resource for wide range of practitioners concerned with the ethics of children’s archive data in a digital research environment.

‘Curating Childhoods’

Funded by an AHRC Digital Transformation Amplification Award, ‘Curating Childhoods: Development a Multimedia Archive of Children’s Everyday Lives’ (Sept 2014-Sept 2015) is a highly innovative project that has sought to transform how we design and curate an ethical archive of children’s everyday lives in the digital age. In partnership with the Mass Observation (MO) Archive, the project has coordinated activities and events aimed at encouraging new

¹ The Mass Observation Archive specialises in material about everyday life in Britain. It contains papers generated by the original Mass Observation social research organisation (1937 to early 1950s), and newer material collected continuously since 1981. See: http://www.massobs.org.uk/archive_today.htm

² Prof Rachel Thomson and Dr Liam Berriman

³ Led by Fiona Courage, Special Collections Manager and Curator of the Mass Observation Archive.

forms of knowledge exchange between researchers, archivists and young people. One of the central aims of this project has been to bring together expertise from the *public data practices* of archivists and researchers and the *private data practices* of young people in order to develop new dialogues around how data is shared and cared for in a digital society. Still on-going, the project is engaging with stakeholders, including parents, young people and archive users. The Curating Childhoods is a project that has the potential to enable long term and lasting impact for the way we think about and use multimedia archives of children's data in the digital age.

Aims of 'My Life in a Day'

'My Life in a Day' sought to generate new opportunities for public engagement with the findings and outputs emerging from the AHRC Digital Transformations study 'Curating Childhoods'. To this end, its primary aims have been:

- To popularise the Everyday Childhoods collection by inviting children and young people to contribute digital or physical diaries of their day as part of the Mass Observation's annual May 12th event.
- To co-host an event with the Mass Observation Archive where children, young people and their families can learn what archiving a diary of their 'life in a day' involves, and how the diary might be used by future researchers and historians.
- To develop new resources that address the ethical and practical implications of curating and sharing archival data about children and young people's everyday lives in the digital age.

Project activities

1. May 12th 2015

The 'Everyday Childhoods' archive collection at the Mass Observation Archive was initially established with data from the ESRC-funded project 'Face 2 Face: Tracing the Real and the Mediated in Children's Worlds' (Sept 2013- Sept 2014), where 'day in a life' observations were carried out with two longitudinal panels of children and young people. Through the MLD project we have expanded this collection further by bringing into it May 12th diaries made by children and young people from across the country. Historically, the Mass Observation Archive has confined its May 12th events to written diaries by adults. Whilst the Archive has

occasionally partnered with schools to generate diaries of children's days, it has never held an open invitation for children and young people to submit diaries.

Working in collaboration with the Mass Observation team, we invited a small panel of participants from our previous research projects to record their own self-documented 'my life in a day' diaries. The young people were invited to record their days on the 28th December in written or multimedia form (or a combination of both). On receipt of the diaries, we found that for many young people using video or photography to document their day appeared to be a more familiar and accessible format than written diaries⁴. Based on this experience, we advised the Mass Observation team as they prepared for 2015's May 12th event - helping them to reflect on how multimedia diaries may transform the forms of self-documentary that they receive (see box 1).

Box 1 - Temporality of self-recorded diaries

Recording in the moment (Digital/multimedia diary)

- 'Live' recording of activities/events as they unfold during day.
- Metadata of notes, images, sounds (e.g. timestamps) correspond to specific moments in the day.
- Reconstructed through fragments of data.

Recording on reflection (Written diary)

- Diary-style of recording - written account at the end of/after a day.
- Primarily reliant on memory to reconstruct account.
- Produced as a single cohesive narrative account of the day.

We also helped to raise awareness of the event by creating [a short promotional film](#) targeted at children, families, schools and youth groups. In December 2014, we hosted a workshop at the Mass Observation Archive participants from previous studies around issues of archiving and re-using data. This event was filmed and, with the permission of our participants, we able to use segments of recording to create a film about May 12th and Mass Observation narrated by one of our project participants. This film was uploaded onto the CIRCY YouTube channel and was distributed through University of Sussex and Mass Observation social media accounts, along with a blog post describing how to take part in the event. The film and the blog post were also sent through email lists to a number of local schools and youth organisations.

⁴ A selection of these diaries are available on the Everyday Childhoods website: <http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/everydaychildhoods/case-studies/selfrecorded/>

Through this strategy of targeting specific networks of schools and organisations, the blog post was recorded as having receiving nearly 300 page views, and the YouTube film over 250 views. On May 12th we continued to send out reminders to organisations, encouraging them to invite their young people to take part. The Mass Observation team also set up a stall at the Brighton Open Market, encouraging families and members of the public to take part in recording their day.

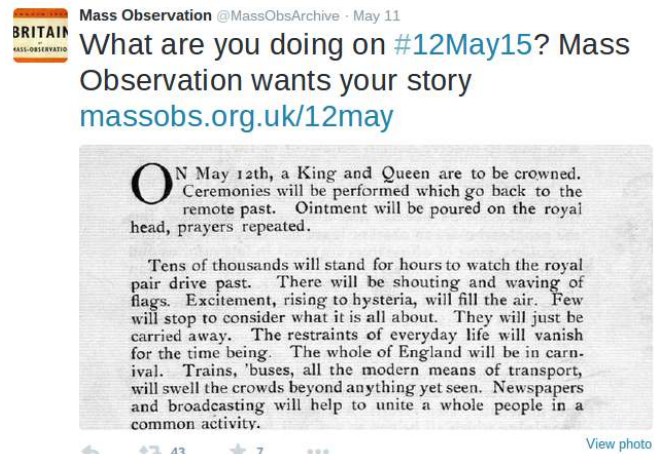


Figure 1 - Tweet from Mass Observation on May 12th

At the time of writing (the beginning of June 2015) the Mass Observation has recorded over 357 diaries submitted by children and young people, with more expected to arrive over the course of June. Whilst it is hard to quantify what would count as a successful pilot year, we feel that this shows significant promise for the potential future growth of the Everyday Childhood collection. Following on from this project, our aim is for May 12th to continue as an annual Mass Observation event for children and young people to record and submit diaries of 'my life in a day', further cementing the position of the Everyday Childhoods collection as a historical and longitudinal resource for understanding children's changing lives over time.

2. 'My Life in a Day' workshop

On the 23rd May 2015, we co-hosted a 'My Life in a Day' public workshop with the Mass Observation Archive as part of the annual Brighton Fringe Festival. Hosted at The Keep (home of the Mass Observation Archive collection), the workshop was targeted at children and families - particularly those who had taken part in the May 12th diary day and who wished to submit their diary in person. The overarching aim of the workshop was to provide children and their families with an opportunity to visit an archive in-person, and to learn more about documenting and archiving records of everyday life.

The workshop was arranged across three different activity spaces - each run by different groups but with a



common theme of documenting and archiving the everyday. The first workshop space was occupied by the Mass Observation Archive's Education and Outreach team (Suzanne Rose and Kirsty Patrick), who had led the organisation of the May 12th diary day. In this space, children and their families were invited to find out more about how the archive works through a range of activities and displays, including: examples of new and old May 12th diaries; a history of the Mass Observation project; [a short film showing how new diaries are processed](#); and an activity area around the Mass Observation theme of 'what makes you happy' (linked to a longstanding Mass Observation theme of ['what is happiness?'](#))



The second workshop space was home to the 'Everyday Childhoods' project (facilitated by Prof Rachel Thomson and Dr Liam Berriman). In this space participants were invited to learn more about using multimedia devices to document everyday life, and to reflect on the everyday ways that data is shared, both publically and privately. A significant portion of the workshop space was arranged around a cinema projector screen, playing the self-recorded 'my life in a day' films recorded by project participants in December. The 'mini cinema' was run by three young people involved in the study, who were invited to represent the study as 'Project Ambassadors'. Each of the young people were invited to introduce their own films and describe for visitors how they had recorded their day, what they had chosen to show, and to share their experience of archiving it and sharing it publicly. The cinema proved to be a popular family experience, and the audience was often comprised of multi-generational groups of children, parents and grandparents watching the films together. This prompted a number of discussions around how similar or different their own family's everyday lives were to those shown in the short films, as well as revealing aspects of children's lives generally inaccessible to their parents (for example life in school or online.)

Alongside the cinema activity, Prof Rachel Thomson hosted a small discussion space where parents and guardians could consider issues around depositing children's diaries of their everyday lives within a public archive. Dr Liam Berriman also hosted a small workshop space for teenagers to reflect on the different kinds of information and data they share in their everyday lives (e.g. diaries, school reports, secrets, photographs) and the different public and private audiences they share with (e.g. parents, best friends, Twitter followers).

Occupying the third workshop space was a local youth photography collective called '[The Cameraheads](#)' (led by photographer Lindsey Smith). In this space, members of the photography collective led activities for children and young people that focused on ways of visually capturing the everyday. As part of one activity, young people were loaned cameras to complete short challenges, such as taking a photograph of an everyday object of a particular shape or colour. The photography collective also had a photographic display of recent images taken by members as part of the May 12th diary day.



Being part of the Brighton Fringe Festival had both positive and negative consequences for the workshop's popularity. In total over thirty people attended the workshop, many of whom had heard about the workshop through its advertisement in the Festival programme. However, the workshop found itself in stiff competition with many other festival events focused on children and young people. Consequently its location at The Keep (a short rail or bus journey from Brighton) placed it at a distance from other festival events, potentially resulting in lower attendance than what might have been possible in a more central location.

Overall, the workshop received positive feedback from the attending children and families - many of whom signed a contact sheet requesting to be updated on future Mass Observation events for children and young people. This has encouraged the Archive to hold further events for schoolchildren and families later in 2015, to build on the interest around May 12th and the Everyday Childhoods collection.

3. Short online films for researchers and archivists

Addressing one of the broader aims of the Curating Childhoods study, the MLD project has also contributed to new forms of ethical understanding around researchers and archivists' engagement with children's archival data in a society where digital media practices are collapsing the boundaries between raw/cooked and public/private data. Using film footage from the Curating Childhoods project workshop in December 2014, we commissioned a freelance filmmaker (Susi Arnott) to create a set of short films addressing key themes and concerns relating to the use of children's archival data, to be shared across a wider network of research and archival practitioners. Featuring young people, archivists, parents and researchers, each of the films encourage new forms of ethical practice for practitioners directly engaged in handling children and young people's archival data. Five short films have been

created in total, addressing themes of: [what is data](#); [looking after data](#), [sharing data](#), [protecting data](#), and [consent](#).

These films have been hosted on the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth's [YouTube channel](#) and the [Everyday Childhoods website](#). Though yet to be formally launched, the films have already begun to be shared across a number of professional networks.



- Following an event on 'Qualitative Longitudinal Research' held in Leeds on 8th June 2015, Prof Rachel Thomson shared the films with attending colleagues from the Timescapes Archive who have been looking for new ways of exploring the ethics of data archiving with children and young people.
- On the 22nd and 23rd June, Prof Rachel Thomson, Dr Liam Berriman and Fiona Courage ran an advanced NCRM methods workshop at The Keep on 'Capturing Everyday Temporalities Through Qualitative Longitudinal Research'. Attended by a cross-section of doctoral students and senior researchers, the workshop included a panel on the ethics of qualitative longitudinal and archival research. Dr Liam Berriman presented the short films as part of this panel session, which sparked a number of discussions around new forms of participatory ethical practice and the challenges of multimedia and digital data.

In both instances the films have shown significant potential as learning tools and as new models of participatory ethical practice with children and young people. In the longer term we intend to share the films more widely, such as through ethics case studies for professional research bodies, such as the ESRC and EPSRC.

Conclusion

The growth of born digital 'archives of the everyday' (Beer & Burrows, 2013) across commercial social media platforms has raised a number of questions regarding the future role of physical archives in mediating cultural heritage in the digital age (Clough, 2013). Whilst such questions are beyond the scope of this short project, we feel that MLD has offered some key insights into the potential future role of the archive as a mediator of digital and multimedia documents of the everyday, and of enabling new relationships between these materials and different community groups. A broader theme of the Curating Childhoods study has been to explore the

potential ethics dialogues between the private data practices of those young people accustomed to using social media, and the public data practices of archives. The MLD project has contributed to this by demonstrating that there is a desire amongst young people and their parents/carers/teachers to explore the public archive as a space for curating digital accounts of the everyday for future generations.

Future objectives

This study has sparked a number of potential future avenues for research. Below we briefly outline three different themes that have been opened up by the My Life in a Day project:

1. Archival proximities - Exploring the multimedia diaries of children's everyday lives across the UK and South Korea.

May 12th 2015 was the first time that the Mass Observation Archive extended its public invitation for day diaries to any child or young person in the UK. This was not, however, the first time that such as May 12th event has been held internationally. Over the last two years the Institute of Digital Archiving at Myongji University, in collaboration with the Mass Observation Archive, has hosted May 12th diary days with school children and students in South Korea. As with our own May 12th event this year, children in South Korea have been invited to create and share electronic, photographic, written or drawn diaries of their day. These have subsequently been deposited in digital format at the Human and Memories Archive in South Korea (a small selection of examples are available online at: http://omeka.hmarchives.com/exhibits/show/exhibit_140512.)



This co-existence of these two new collections represents an unprecedented opportunity for future international comparative research exploring the contrasting multi-media diary accounts of children's everyday lives in South Korea and the UK. Through their shared origin in the Mass Observation May 12th tradition, these diary collection constitute new forms of temporal and archival proximity that are ripe for further empirical exploration. On the Centre for Innovation and Research Childhood Youth's Masters programme in Childhood and Youth Studies we are fortunate to have a regular cohort of student from a wide range of international backgrounds, including South Korea. As a future research objective, we propose to commission MA research dissertations that begin to explore how these two collections might offer comparative insights

into the self-recording of everyday life by children and young people across both countries - and, in doing so, further realising the archival proximities between both collections.

2. Facilitating public engagement with digital archival materials

Our focus in this project has primarily been to facilitate and encouragement interaction with the multimedia 'day in a life' diary materials in the Everyday Childhoods archive collection. However, alongside this data is a collection of interviews with children and young people about everyday objects that represent their past, present and future.



These include a variety of sound recordings and images that accompany each of the objects discussed in the interviews. One of our future objectives is to explore new and innovative methods for facilitating engagement with this archival data in an interactive installation. We have drawn particular inspiration from a recent installation at the Mass Observation Archive called the 'Theatre Jukebox', which used RFID technology and a projector to bring to life 'postcards' from the Archive's collection. Our aim would be to adapt this

technology to create an installation where members of the public could interact with material objects, which are overlaid with original sounds and images narrating the object's significance.

One of the primary objectives in developing this installation will be to explore how the different temporalities embedded within archival data can be made tangible through different material and digital modes of storytelling. For example, how a childhood toy might provide a window into a young person's biographical and generational narratives.

3. Sharing Childhoods: Ethical practice and children's data in the digital age.

Along with the Face 2 Face and Curating Childhoods studies, the MLD project has highlighted significant ethical challenges for current research involving children and young people's digital data. Key ethical questions have arisen for a range of practitioners in terms of what kinds of digital data we collect, store and share from children's everyday lives and, perhaps most importantly, how that data is used. Whilst our focus in up till now has been on the practices of researchers, archivists and young people themselves, we believe that a wider debate needs to occur that incorporates professionals from market research, R&D, and policy and charity sectors. Recent Channel 4 television documentaries such as 'The Secret Life of Students' and 'Teens' have shown the enormous potential of technologies capable of [harvesting and sharing digital data](#) from and about young people's everyday lives, yet there remains little discussion around the ethical questions this raises.

Building on our previous research, we plan to develop a series of events that will bring together a range of practitioners and stakeholders to formulate a new ethics agenda around children and young people's digital data. This will involve the participation of not only academic, commercial and public sector researchers, but also children and young people as key creators, sharers and distributors of digital data. Ultimately, we would seek to develop a set of timely research ethics resources that are fit for a digital landscape where distinctions between public/private and user/producer are rapidly collapsing.

Bibliography

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