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2/12/12

Integrating Digital Media in Art Education

Goals, Applications, and Limitations

Technology is a major part of our daily life in the 21st Century and the incorporation of technology in education is increasingly in demand. This week's readings explore how the internet and digital media affect our culture and how as art educators we can teach students to think critically about the internet and be aware of the influences digital media has on our social development. In the article, "From Bricks and Mortar to the Public Sphere in Cyberspace: Creating a Culture of Caring on the Digital Global Commons," Elizabeth Delacruz (2009) explores, "how and why online social networking may lead to or reinforce a sense of community, how online communities may contribute to the public sphere and global civil society, and what this has to do with art education," (p.2). Alison Colman (2004) addresses a different topic regarding digital media in her article, "Net.art and Net.Pedegogy: Introducing Internet Art to the Digital Art Curriculum," in which she states the purpose of her research was to, "investigate pedagogical strategies that would encourage secondary students to think critically about their perceptions and use of the internet, guide them in analyzing works of internet art, and introduce them to using the internet as an artistic medium," (p.61). The internet is visited by a majority of people on a daily basis and influences the way we communicate with and understand the world. As educators we need to observe and evaluate this interaction and teach our students to be aware of how the digital landscape has an impact on our social identity. Through studying internet art, we can provide students with the frame work of how to analyze and synthesize the language of digital media.

In my classroom I would like to engage my students in a conversation regarding social media as a place to create and strengthen community. As stated by Delacruz (2009), "millions of people use social networking sites and other forms of electronic communication to maintain and strengthen social ties, to manage and facilitate existing relationships, to plan and coordinate schedules, and to seek and exchange important information," (p.4). I believe that students would benefit from thinking critically about how the internet aids in the creation and strengthening of communication. Delecruz (2009, p.3) also provides insight into the criticism of interface in terms

of community stating, "Skeptics argue that virtual communities lack critical elements that define authentic, geographically based, communities. Those elements include a feeling of permanence and belonging, a sense of location—the very essence of a neighborhood, and warmth from the local history," (Stoll, 1995). I want my students to explore the idea of the internet aiding in the creation and sustaining of global communities by creating, through social media, a virtual community that communicates and shares ideas directly with a sister school in another country. Through this project we would evaluate the aesthetics of social media, create a site that is accessible to members of each country (for example, Facebook is banned in China), apply our knowledge of aesthetics in the creation of the site's design, and create a topic for us to discuss mutually. I like to think of this project as a class-wide "digital pen-pal" platform. Through regular posting of the artwork made in our classes we will open discussion between both classroom environments and search for common grounds in our separate communities, as well as explore our differences. We will also post artists of inspiration, videos, local events that may contribute to explorations in art making, and do a collaborative art project between the two schools. Each student will partner up with a student from our sister school and explore an idea to research that is relevant to both communities. The students will then create individual art pieces about the topic and then we will display the finished art pieces online as a diptych. Students will then perform a critique which allows them to analyze the differences between the interpretations and the similarities throughout the art pieces as well. Not only will this teach students to think critically about social media in our daily lives, how social media aids in the forming and strengthening of communities, and how to assess the aesthetics of internet art, it will allow us to further our discussions of visual culture and multiculturalism as well.

I foresee a number of limitations with this project, as technology both opens up many opportunities, but also creates roadblocks that necessitate creative problem-solving tactics along the way. The first issue that I can imagine with this unit of study is finding a sister school. Surprisingly, most schools around the world do not offer art as part of their secondary curriculum. Also, I would need to consider the geographical time difference. We would most likely be communicating through a blog style of posting comments and could respond during our own time zones, but there may be a delay if the sister school is in a different hemisphere. Also, if we ever wanted to communicate directly through Skype and have face to face discussion, we would have to figure out a specific time to meet, it would be outside of class, and we may need

the aid of translators. Beyond the limitations of time differences across the globe and finding a secondary art classroom (or even college level) that would be willing to collaborate in creating a "commons in cyberspace" (Delacruz, 2009), there are limitations with the technologies provided by the school. As Delecruz (2009) states, "although 99% of U.S. schools now have networked computers, and students are increasingly using the Internet at schools, they do less than one would expect, possibly due to limited availability, old computers, filtering software, and inconvenient access (Hitlin &Rainie, 2005). Moreover, poor school technology infrastructures and restrictive school policies truncate and confine teachers' classroom technology practices (Zhou, Pugh, Sheldon, & Beyers, 2002)," (p.10). The school creates many boundaries and limitations in taking full advantage of the technological resources we as teachers would like to implement in our teaching practice. I can foresee many issues with trying to utilize the internet and technologies available at school, and students becoming frustrated and trying to do most of the project at home. Regardless of the issues and roadblocks that come with integrating technology into the classroom, the lessons and critical thinking application teaches students to be aware of how the internet acts as extension of our community and a place to perform as artists.

I agree with what Elizabeth Delacruz (2009) states in her article, "From Bricks to Mortar to the Public Sphere in Cyberspace: Creating a Culture of Caring on the Digital Global Commons," that our aims as art educators should be to, "embrace notions of a citizenry that is creative, caring, and connected and one that is imaginative, informed, and engages with others toward our mutual goals of building the kinds of worlds we ourselves wish to inhabit," (p.14) and that by educating and creating awareness of the ways we contribute to our global commons through technology needs to be facilitated in the classroom. Below is a list of artists and organizations that have websites exploring the digital landscape. Many of the websites have had a profound effect on my personal understanding of how the internet can achieve social change through social media. I have shared some of these sites with my students and will continue to explore and create conversations about new digital media in my classes. The "rabbit hole" of information seems to be endless.

New Digital Media Websites:

Here are some websites of artists or organizations exploring digital media as a platform for discussion:

- www.artbabble.com

- www.pbs.org/art21

- www.ted.com

-www.aaronkoblin.com

- www.mashable.com

- www.artnet.com

-www.rhizome.org

References:

Colman, A. (2004). Net.art and Net.pedagogy: Introducing Internet art to the digital art curriculum. *Studies in Art Education, 46*(1), 61-73.

Delacruz, E. M. (2009). From bricks to mortar to the public sphere in cyberspace: Creating a culture of caring on the digital global commons. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 10*(5).

Swann, A. (2005). The role of media and emerging representation in early childhood. *Art Education, 58*(4), 41-47.

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