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Teaching Art in the Age of Social Media: Firsthand Accounts of Five Technology-Savvy Art Teachers

Elizabeth Delacruz, Deborah Brock, Tricia Fuglestad, Karissa Ferrell, Juliana Huffer, Samantha Melvin

Introduction by Elizabeth Delacruz

For nearly two decades my students (future and practicing art teachers) and I have been exploring ways to integrate new technologies into our teaching. In 1996, I responded to a call for proposals and received funding to take one of my University of Illinois courses to the web. It's been headfirst into the technology abyss ever since. Today I teach online for the University of Florida Art Education Masters Degree program. Wanting to stay current with educational uses of digital and social media, my technology learning strategies rely heavily on *DIY* (do-it-yourself) learning, which involves investigating new uses of technology shared by others, self-teaching, creating my own models and curricular projects, asking others how to do things, and a lot of playing around with apps, sites, software programs, and digital media devices. I believe that these are also strategies of many art teachers I know, including the art teachers contributing to this essay. The following five vignettes, shared by art teachers with whom I have recently interacted, highlight creative uses of technology in their own classrooms. We close this paper with tips for teachers wanting to weave technology into their own classroom practices.

Samantha Melvin: Engaging Padlet for Student Dialoging and Connecting Online

My class does not have computer workstations, laptops or iPads. Many of my students do not have state of art computers or Internet access at home. We are what you would call technology resource-limited. Nevertheless, I have been recently engaging my students in dialogue about art that can be facilitated through the use of various online technologies. I focus here on one online site, Padlet (<http://www.padlet.com>). In order to

understand the flexibility of Padlet, I compare it to a bulletin board and a stack of sticky notes: each student has the opportunity to post an idea, comment or resource using the virtual sticky note. They each contribute to the asynchronous dialoging available to all via a web link. To make this work in a room with limited technology resources, my class Padlet is projected onto the whiteboard in my room, and most of our activities take place during class time.

One of our Padlets is collaboration with University of Texas, Department of Art and Art History students, and their professor, Dr. Melinda M. Mayer. *Taking Chances, Making Mistakes and Getting Messy* is an example of connecting prior to our field trip to the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, for a tour geared to the big idea of “taking chances.” As a class, my students posted questions for the university students, sharing a diverse group of artists whom they felt contributed to this exploration of risk through art. The university students responded, discussed concepts and prepared for the ensuing conversations on site at the museum. All students used Padlet to document the process of exploring ideas, asking questions, and reflecting on the museum tour.

Another Padlet I created served as an online environmental intervention: *Finding Our Voices: Environmental Interventions* provided my students with the tool to express their ideas for helping the environment and making a difference. We explored questions such as “What kind of impact on the world do we want to have?” And “How can we make a difference locally to help globally? Students learned how other artists advocated for environmental responsibility by using recycling in their work. Students read through the online Padlet commentaries, and then conceptualized a collective vision for a local intervention: collect recycling, use it for art, and share our environmental message with others through art. Students determined that a mural would communicate the ideas with the resources we had been collecting. We then set up the art tables at recess--allowing any students to have an encounter with art with a message. The completed mural is on exhibit at our local government offices as an “intervention” installation, hopefully causing others to think about their own actions in regards to ecology.

Padlet provides my students with the learning experience of sharing ideas safely with an online community, and it facilitates my goal of helping my students to talk about art, to make their voices heard, and to connect, communicate and collaborate interactively

with one another as well as with artists, students, and educators outside of our classroom. See our Padlet *Taking Chances, Making Mistakes and Getting Messy* at <http://padlet.com/FineArtsStudio/o04jn2o8es>, and our Padlet *Finding Our Voices: Environmental Interventions* at <http://padlet.com/FineArtsStudio/w64tbs28iw>

Juliana (Hoolie) Huffer: Using Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter for Art Education Community Outreach

As an art educator, I am always looking for ways to engage students in experiencing art as well as producing art in the classroom. I devised and after school program called “Art Heroes” recruited from my classes. Their mission was to use their artistic abilities to assist the community. The students began fundraising for the *Relay for Life* charity walk that funds cancer research. This band of students worked tirelessly for five months by face painting at various local events and by selling their artwork at local art festivals. All the proceeds were donated to the *Relay for Life* charity. One might think this is the end of the story, but in reality it is just the beginning. Not only did they create artwork to help a cause they believe in, students used social media as a platform to generate a local following to support their goals.

Using the Instagram app and social media site (our Instagram name is @artheroesnfmhs), my students documented their five-month journey through photography, from their first events leading up to the finale of the relay. Our plan was to extend students’ reach beyond their friends and the school campus to a wider public audience. The idea was that Instagram followers would similarly engage in our journey to reach our monetary goal, first by being captivated by the active Instagram photo feed and texts that accompany Instagram images; and second by attending and donating during one of our local fundraising events. Using Instagram this way was easy to employ this strategy, as many high school students already had their own Instagram accounts and they already knew how to upload photos, tag themselves or fellow teammates as well as aggregate their official art heroes work through hashtags (#artheroes #artheroesnfmhs). We also created a Facebook page <http://facebook.com/artheroesnfmhs>. The Instagram app allowed the students to simultaneously post images and texts onto our official Art Heroes

Facebook page. We also used Twitter (@artheroesnmhs) to publicize and gain followers and funders for this event.

As evident in their Instagram/Facebook photos, my students exhibited an immense amount of camaraderie with each other and tenacity to work selflessly for this cause as many of them have family or friends that had been affected by cancer. The biggest surprise were the students who gave up their weekends, after school hours and worked together as a team to lift each other up for a cause bigger than themselves.

Our social media use and documentation now remains as a digital footprint as a curated collection of the student artwork, *Relay for Life* event photography, and face painting. Even more profoundly, it is a display of art through social practice- or *relational aesthetics*. With myself as a ringleader and catalyst orchestrating the team activities and social media tools, I was decidedly empowering my students as advocates. As a result, my kids collected a substantial amount through their art making, social media activism and personal resolve. The social benefit was the fabrication of a positive social impact on our school, the local community who engaged in charity work with our relay team, and certainly the students who became real Art Heroes themselves.

Deborah Brock: Curating and Connecting Online through Blogger, Tumblr, and Flickr

Over the past couple years, I have been exploring how to use online media sites to enrich my high school photography program. My photo students have always created physical art journals based on their experience in my classroom. These journals include class notes, research about artists, techniques and processes, and they serve as a means for students to reflect and document their artworks. Social media seemed like a perfect way to share these journals and give my students access to how contemporary artists are using historical and alternative photographic processes alongside newer technologies.

In 2010, I created my first Photography class blog using BlogSpot. Students scanned pages from their handwritten journals, posted them to our blog, and received feedback from audiences outside of our class. Students told me that this blog process helped validate their views about what they created. On the blog site I posted questions about assignments and topics not covered in class. Experimentation and discussions about

photography increased on and off the Internet. An important contributor to the success of the blog was my ability to provide images and links within the posts on the blog. Students shared their interests by attaching their own links, images, or “tags” about artists and artworks. As a teacher I liked that BlogSpot allowed me to control group members (that is who was allowed to be a member of the group). I also gained a better understanding of student’s perspective about projects, lessons, and my teaching style.

I liked BlogSpot but wanted to connect my students with more artists. This led me to Tumblr, another blog site. I created a student Tumblr site giving them freedom to identify and develop their own topics and conversations. This shift to student-control of the site led to the Photography Club members using Tumblr to schedule meetings and create a record of events. Not only did we use Tumblr in the same fashion as BlogSpot but also I could “file” links in a menu on the landing page connecting students to more contemporary artists, galleries of images, a Facebook group devoted to this project, discussion boards, and resources for materials. I also used another Facebook group to find former students and invite them to join the Tumblr blog. Finally, we used Flickr (a photo-sharing site) as our online repository of student created photographic images, captions, reflections, and conversations. As an online gallery Flickr it is easy to organize, share, and provide a quick glance of artworks without having to read any text. Since I teach other studio classes, Flickr further allows my students to explore artistic possibilities beyond photography. Often I will use the Flickr galleries to show examples of past student artworks and projects in lieu of a PowerPoint. It has encouraged class conversations instead of lectures.

Our use of all these sites has been constantly evolving. My approach all along has been to create these sites for students, launch, and see what happens. Not everything worked great the first time, and I have been learning along with the students how to use these sites effectively. Blog sites also require maintenance, as links expire and must be updated or removed. Recently my classes have begun using Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram. In summary, social media has enabled my students to become greater participants in their learning and it increases their networking opportunities and collaboration on projects. Former students now return to these sites, and often share how photography plays a role in their lives beyond high school. View this ongoing work at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/room3130/sets/>

www.room3130.tumblr.com (*at the time of the writing, my Tumblr site suffered a snafu, and Tumblr is rebuilding the site for me), and

<http://room3130art.blogspot.com>

Karissa Ferrell: Creating Art For Change through an Online Auction

In the fall of 2013, I met Priscilla Perez, founder of the Havenly Blue Foundation, a local organization that advocates for abused children (<http://Havenly.org>). A collaborative partnership quickly formed as Priscilla and I exchanged ideas for ways to use art to build awareness, raise funds for the cause, and show students how art can have a positive impact. I soon designed a jewelry project for my 3-D Design class at Los Alamitos High School (CA) where each student used Havenly Blue's Fallen Butterfly mark as a starting point to create a unique piece of wearable art that would then be auctioned online as a fundraiser. The Fallen Butterfly mark is an emblem of hope featuring a child's silhouette on a butterfly's wings.

To introduce the project I invited Perez to share with my students her touching life story of survival. Volunteers filmed the event, and the resulting video helped promote the cause and market the art auction. Using a jeweler's saw, my students cut by-hand each pendant, earring, and bracelet design. Students also participated in-group peer-critiques to highlight the strongest designs and most professional craftsmanship. Nearly 100 students were invited to submit their works to the auction site. Each student-submitted artwork was photographed and available for online bids using a mobile-friendly website developed by DW Ferrell. A local eatery hosted an event to kick-off the extended auction; students brought their families to view the works, hear about the issue of child abuse, and learn about the Havenly Blue Foundation's mission. Parents placed opening bids and the first night of the auction raised over \$1,000. That number grew quickly as participants shared the online auction with extended family and friends using social media. The auction encouraged families to engage in friendly "bidding wars" resulting in a great success for all parties involved. The proceeds of the auction were split three ways with 1/3 going to the Havenly Blue Foundation, 1/3 to the Los Alamitos (CA) Art Department, and 1/3 to each participating student.

The impact and success of this project is enduring beyond my traditional ongoing art curriculum. It gave my students an opportunity to connect to a real life problem and empowered them to use their creativity to become part of the solution. My students were impacted by what they learned about child abuse and telling others, therefore their engagement and motivation was notably higher than previous independent projects. They reflected on their sense of pride in knowing that their hard work was going to benefit abused and neglected children. To help spread curricular approaches similarly inspired, I have presented this project at the 2014 National Art Education Association Annual Convention, and I have open-sourced my curriculum and the auction resources as model for other art teachers wishing to develop their own charitable projects involving the sale of student art. My online auction is viewable at <http://Havenly.Teachart.org>, See also <http://Fly.TeachArt.org> where I share the curriculum and offer tips to create your art auction online.

Tricia Fuglestad: Creating on iPads

I teach art in an elementary school in a typical middle class, mid-sized, Midwest school district, in a moderately tech-supported art program. Over the years my students and I have made digital images and videos as part of our curriculum. I recently got 25 iPads for my classroom via fundraising, contests, and grants. I'm now on an exciting journey with these iPads, watching my students' skills evolve as new iPad apps emerge and my art program expands. There are things I can teach to even the youngest of my elementary population that I never could have dreamed of teaching before. Practically speaking, pulling out laptops in a 45-minute art class, introducing a complicated software program like Photoshop, and plugging in graphic tablets so they could draw, didn't result in much more than an experience. The Photoshop interface took time to understand and the tablet took practice to master.

All these time issues and obstacles are eliminated for students when they draw on the iPad. Simple yet powerful apps open up very advanced concepts like working with layers, transparency, merging, transforming images, and applying effects. I can teach things I never was able to dream of teaching now to even my youngest students because of these multifunctional creation devices. With one iPad a child has access to photography,

stop-motion animation, movie-making, apps for drawing, graphic design, drawn animation, apps for photo effects, video effects, collage, tessellations, apps for learning, playing, researching, organizing, collaborating, writing, visual note-taking, curating, file management, composing, recording, communicating, and so much more.

The challenge for the art teachers then becomes how to harness the power of the iPad to create meaningful and rich art lessons that enhance student learning. Or better yet, how to transform the learning experience. For example, I was able to transform an old lesson with my 2nd graders this year that we called a *Really Spooky Landscape*. This landscape lesson included a ghost in the foreground, house in the middle ground, and the night sky in the background with the illusion depth created with overlapping and relative size. This year, I transformed the lesson by eliminating the ghost from the painting and having students add it with iPads as a semi-transparent animation using the DOINK animation app over a digital image of their finished paintings. This meant I could teach them about overlapping in a dynamic way as well as the concepts of transparency and digital animation. To showcase their animations we created a collaborative movie with an original spooky soundtrack made with the Nodebeat app. This non-traditional visual music creation app made music with a touch of the screen. The movie began with an introduction by students talking about what made their landscape spooky while they magically stood before their animation using the green screen app from DOINK. I invite fellow art teachers to view my lesson and student creations on my Fugleblog

<http://drydenart.weebly.com/1/post/2013/12/really-spooky-landscapes-complete.html> .

Teachers may also explore over 60 art education iPad lessons, tutorials, and resources on my “Creating on iPads” web page at <http://drydenart.weebly.com/creating-on-ipads.html>

Technology Tips for Teachers: Things to Think About

There are ample websites, online papers, workshops, and presentations that offer terrific tips for teachers wanting to implement a new technology in their class rooms. To such lists and offerings of advice, we add the following tips derived from our own collective experiences, successes, and, yes, failures.

- **Ask.** Start by asking, “*What do I want to teach?*” not “*What apps should I use?*” or “*What social media site do I want my students to learn?*”

- **Talk to Young People!** Many kids (*aka* millennials) know a lot about social media and apps, and they certainly have more time to noodle around with mobile devices, and popular destinations online. Engage them in conversations about your project early, before you launch it. Ask for their advice.
- **Seek.** Talk to teachers in your school district who are using social media in their classrooms. Google the topic and read about how teachers are using social media in the classroom. Go to social media or technology-use presentations by other art educators. Look online, watch how-to videos on YouTube.
- **Make Friends with a Local Tech-Savvy *Idea-Person*.** These folks are everywhere. You only need one.
- **Connect Beyond your School.** Use social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Art Ed 2.0 (<http://arted20.ning.com>) to learn and share with others beyond your school. Create your very own personal/professional-learning network (PLN) of people and resources.
- **Fund.** Never hold back due to lack of funds! Beg, grant write, fundraise, crowd fund, and enter contests to get equipment, software, and site fees (if any). Communicate with parents and the community about your art room's needs, projects, and funding goals.
- **Practice.** To prevent loss of class time and frustration, learn in advance how the site or app actually works. Lurk around in the site/app you want to use. Practice and play with the site or app. Google questions about it; read/view the tutorials provided with the app or site.
- **Manage.** Learn how to collect, format, and label students' digital art and accompanying texts (if any) that you intend to use in the app or site
- **Entice.** Don't just post "assignments" using online sites and tools. Entice students with interesting creative problems and/or unusual facts about art, artists, techniques, and art history.
- **Reward.** Tell students how their engagement with the media you are using will be assessed and graded. Include what kind of rewards they will receive by sharing.
- **Build trust.** Know that it may take time for students to warm up to your educational use of social media. If you are also a participant in an online activity

that you created, know that it may take time for students to trust you as an online peer.

- **Know and follow all school district rules** concerning technology and the Internet. Obtain in writing administration and parental approval before beginning the project. Consult with your IT person. Your principal can work with you to approve a specific permission waiver for parents of participating students, listing all the apps and websites used as well as your information in case the parents have any concerns to address with you. Obtain specific consent for photos and videos of students. Save all documentation involving permission and consents.
- **Monitor** closely student online interactions associated with your project. Keep it professional, cordial, and focused on the tasks and learning activities. If you see inappropriate online behavior take it off your site immediately and meet with the student privately to address the behavior. Notify your administration about the situation and how you resolved it.
- **Share.** Encourage students to share these social media learning activities at home and with friends. Share your social media projects and curricular work with fellow teachers, in your school and beyond.

Some Final Thoughts

The art teachers contributing to this essay demonstrate how utilization of emerging technologies in the classroom may be quite simple, limited in scope and scale, or quite grand, transpiring over an entire school year. These teachers work in schools with varying degrees of technology support. The point is that the scale or scope of technology utilization is entirely up to the individual teacher, poor support may not necessarily be insurmountable, and that technology-enriched teaching and learning initiatives are adaptable to most any circumstance or inspiration. What these five art teachers bring to these endeavors is an *entrepreneurial spirit* (what's imaginable is possible) balanced by a *practicality ethic* (what's feasible). Imagination, adaptability, initiative, and feasibility are second nature to art teachers...and the time is now right to dive in headfirst and bring new and emerging technologies into our classroom practices!

Suggested Readings from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

- Purcell, K.; Heaps, A.; Buchanan, J.; Friedrich, L. (2013). How teachers are using technology at home and in their classrooms. The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/02/28/how-teachers-are-using-technology-at-home-and-in-their-classrooms/>
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- Thompson, K.; Purcell, K.; Rainie, L. (2013). Arts organizations and digital technologies. The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/04/arts-organizations-and-digital-technologies/>

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