

How are Photoblogs Integrated into the Curriculum?

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Abstract: Photoblogging has become an exciting and popular educational activity over the past several years across all grade levels including higher education. This exploratory study collected data from graduate students enrolled in a photography class on how they integrated photoblogs into the curriculum. In addition, the recent instructional technology literature was reviewed by the research team to identify additional information on the various ways photoblogs were being used in the classroom by teachers and students to enhance students' hands-on learning opportunities, critical thinking skills, and motivation to learn.

Introduction

Photoblogs have existed for more than ten years but have become an increasingly popular online activity the past few years. In today's digital world many blogs exist that focus on photography and a few web services that provide services to enable students, teachers, and others to photoblog. Photographers of all skill levels utilize the Internet in a myriad of ways to showcase their creativity and photography to people all over the world as well as to create social networks with others online (Denleavy, 2006).

Every three semesters one of the authors teach a graduate level photography class, MEDT 7466 – Digital and 35 mm Photography. Traditionally all of the course work and examples of student and instructor digital projects are located within WebCT. This year the instructor made a change in the course and utilized Flickr in an effort to introduce students to this new technology. Examples of the instructor's digital photographs were uploaded into Flickr for students to review which made student access easier and faster. Secondly, students were encouraged to upload their digital photographs and text to Flickr for the instructor to grade instead of using WebCT. Lastly, students were strongly encouraged to use Flickr for the digital aspects of their final electronic portfolio instead of burning a CD with their digital work.

To familiarize students with photoblogging, the graduate students were provided with online background information in the form of impaticized PowerPoint presentations, word documents, and web sites. They were also instructed to register with Flickr, locate and read the online tutorial at the Flickr web site (<http://www.flickr>), and practice uploading trial photos to get the needed hands on practice before uploading any of their final work. The instructor made herself available to problem solve and mentor the students as needed.

Literature Review

Photoblogging has been defined by a number of professionals in varying detail. Dennis Denleavy defined photoblogging as using blog technology to publish pictures instead of words. In a recent study he conducted one of his respondents stated “it is a great way to let someone peek into your life and what surrounds it.” (Denleavy, 2006). The Wikipedia web site summarized a photoblog (or photolog) as a form of photo sharing and publishing that was in the format of a blog. It was different in that it focused on photographs rather than text. In the early 2000s photoblogging started being used more frequently as moblogs and cameraphone emerged. (Wikipedia, 2007).

A review of the literature revealed photoblogging has been used in a wide variety of ways by students and teachers over the past decade. Some of the more interesting applications include the following:

- Introducing yourself online using caution (i.e., a class in India, an individual on MySpace.com, the family),
- Sharing a selected topic the individual is interested in (i.e., the Beatles, eyes, monuments, large cities, their school or classroom, a profession)
- Sharing one’s selected photography with others (i.e., portraits, group shots, night time photographs, great depth of field, well composted photographs)
- Introducing others to the individual’s favorite trips, animals, friends, hobbies, art
- Showcasing daily life in a selected city (i.e., San Francisco, Sedona, London, Montego Bay)
- Document conference events
- Fires in selected cities (i.e, San Diego)
- Summarizing the past 10 years of a person’s life
- Listing Cool Photoblogs

A study by Denleavy (2006) utilizing 12 randomly selected Flickr members examined the pros and cons of photoblogging. The pros that were identified were:

- Participants received feedback from others about their photoblogs,
- You are able to share your photoblog with others online,
- Flickr is a creative outlet and motivates photographers to continue taking photographs,
- There is connectivity with people world wide through e-mail,
- Flickr is highly motivational and keeps people interested in publishing their work, and
- You learn techniques from others by viewing their online photography work.

The same study identified several disadvantages in using Flickr. These were:

- Viewing Flickr may be addictive in that viewers want to continue viewing the digital photographs and have difficulties in stopping,
- Some photographers feel that they must post photographs frequently pressure themselves to do so, and
- Copyright infringements take place.

Methodology

The participants in this exploratory study involved 22 graduate students and 1 faculty member enrolled in a graduate level photography course, MEDT 7466 – Digital and 35 mm Photography, offered fall semester 2007. They were interested in learning black and white 35 mm and digital photography. Demographic data on the participants are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic data on the participants in the study

Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 Females, 3 Males
Participants (N=24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate students = 22 students, Faculty member = 1 student
Degree Seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M.Ed. = 7 students, Ed.S. = 15 students
Majors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media & Instructional Technology = 16 students; • Middle Grades Education = 4 students, • Early Childhood Education = 1 student, • Counseling and Educational Psychology = 1 student, • Secondary Education = 1 student.

The photography course has been taught for over fifteen years at the Southeastern University. The digital component to the course was added approximately five years ago.

The survey technique using the bulletin board in WebCT was used by the investigators to collect the data for the exploratory study. Five open-ended questions were asked of the respondents. They were:

- (1) Have you used photoblogs before?
- (2) Have your students used photoblogs?
- (3) How have you used photoblogs personally and professionally with your students?
- (4) How have your students used photoblogs personally and in educational institutions?
- (5) According to your observations, what advantages of photoblogs to you and your students?
- (6) According to your observations, what are the limitations of photoblogs to you and your students?

To add to the existing database on the use and integration of photoblogs in the curriculum, the investigators reviewed the recent literature to retrieve additional information on ways students and teachers were using photoblogs.

Analysis of the Data

The research team copied and pasted all the posted responses from the bulletin board to a single word document by question so they could be easily read and analyzed by the review team. The reports were read multiple times by the authors to content analyze the data. The findings for the study's six questions and the frequency of their occurrence are in the process of being analyzed. The responses will be rank ordered from the highest to lowest frequencies. Only those statements that had a frequency greater than one were listed.

Preliminary results are demonstrating the following:

1. Have you used photoblogs before?
 - Most of the graduate students are new to photoblogging.
2. Have your students used photoblogs?
 - Few of their students have used photoblogs before due to the schools not permitting blogging within the schools.
3. How have you used photoblogs personally and professionally? with your students?
 - Some of the graduate students have used photoblogs to share photographs with their families. They also have used Flickr and Facebook.
4. How have you used photoblogs personally and professionally with your students?
 - Few have used photoblogs in the schools due to fire walls and school prohibiting the use of blogging during the school day.
5. What are the advantages to photoblogs?
 - Students viewed photoblogging as a positive experience in that it offered a chance to interact with others online, gave students an opportunity to share their photography with others world wide and a chance to learn from other experienced photographers.
6. What are the limitations of photoblogs?
 - Limitations that were identified were the cost to the online services and lack of availability of computer time in the schools.

References

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