Understanding social media ecologies for an emergent art education through the modeling of a Facebook community[1]

Entendendo o ambiente da mídia social para uma emergente educação da arte por meio do modelo da comunidade Facebook

Heather Hughes

Doutora pela Pennsylvania State University. Tem o título de Master of Education na University of Houston. Obteve o bacharelado em Psicologia na George Washington University. Atua na Pennsylvania State University, Department of Art Education. E-mail: *hhughes@psu.edu.*

Abstract

Investigation of the uses and meanings of social media for education and research are critical for teaching professionals in the twenty-first century. This paper presents aspects of an ongoing study of how members of an arts-based social network on Facebook co-construct and negotiate their experiences in community through hypermedia, and what these experiences mean to them. Virtual ethnographic methods and activity theory are used to collect and analyze data from participant interviews and site observations, which reveal how the affordances of social media enhance and extend community participation while altering institutionalized boundaries of traditional modes of education. A model of community-curated curriculum is developed, with implications for emergent pedagogies in the context of digitally-networked art education.

Keywords: social media, art education, Facebook.

Resumo

A investigação do uso e significados da mídia social para a educação e pesquisa é crítica para os profissionais do ensino no Século XXI. Este artigo apresenta aspectos de estudos em curso de como membros de base artística na rede social Facebook constroem e negociam mutuamente suas experiências na comunidade por meio da hipermídia, e o que essas experiências significam para eles. Métodos etnográficos virtuais e teoria da atividade são usados para coletar e analisar dados de entrevistas com participantes e observações no site, os quais revelam como os recursos da mídia social incrementam e ampliam a participação comunitária enquanto alteram limiares institucionalizados da educação tradicional. Um modelo de curriculum de comunidade coadjuntora foi desenvolvido com implicações para a pedagogia emergente no contexto da rede digital na educação da arte.

Palavras chaves: mídia social, educação da arte, Facebook.

Introduction

As the "use of the Internet by people of all ages around the world to create, remix, and share media content through engagement in participatory cultures is rapidly increasing" (MONTALTO-ROOK HUGHES, 2009, p. 341), teaching professionals in the twenty-first century "need to think about how to engage and motivate students into utilizing their favorite and familiar digital media as effective learning technologies" (LU, 2008, p. 48). For teaching professionals in the field of art education, a field that considers "visual culture" (DUNCUM, 2002) and "material culture" (BOLIN BLANDY, 2003) within its purview, widespread investigation and understanding of emerging technologies and their pedagogical implications is not only wise, it is necessary when these cultures are becoming increasingly digital and virtual.

According to Laurillard (2008), interactive communications technologies can support and extend ideas and practices of "open teaching" by allowing teaching communities to create alternative communication routes around the obstacles (and failures) of traditional education. By utilizing social media and embracing the values they embody, educators can shift from distributors of prescribed knowledge within a teaching hierarchy that positions learners as passive recipients of trickle-down metanarratives to facilitators of opportunities within learning ecologies where people participate in the meaningful negotiation of personal and social experiences around contextually-relevant cultural artifacts through the building, sharing, and remodeling of ideas.

Learning ecologies supported by the emergent technologies and philosophies of social media are places with digitally-networked infrastructures where educational experiences are extended into everyday life and everyday life is considered material for community negotiation. Educational experiences facilitated through social media ecologies *become* opportunities opened up *with* learners to engage in the creation, critique, revision, and extension of ideas across boundaries and in multiple ways.

The Study

The purpose of the ongoing research study presented in this paper is to improve awareness and understanding of uses and implications of emergent technologies and philosophies for art education and research in the twenty-first century. To achieve this purpose, the following questions are explored: *How do participants in an art-based social media ecology construct and negotiate their experiences in community through hypermedia, and what do these experiences mean to them?* To address these questions, qualitative, virtual ethnographic research methods and activity theory are utilized to assemble a model of what is going on at the Facebook site of Art21, a multi-media producer of contemporary art educational programming that utilizes Facebook to connect with and share content amongst the audience members of its social network-many of whom are artists, educators, and students.

Based on the premise that we learn about social media by immersing ourselves in them and conducting our research using them, as well as talking with people about them, watching people use them, and seeing them emerge in other social settings, virtual ethnography provides a framework of ideas and methods to investigate ways in which use of the Internet becomes socially meaningful (HINE, 2000). According to Hine (2000), virtual ethnographers view social media as both culture and cultural artifact. Virtual ethnography is a framework adaptive to the socio-cultural conditions being studied, and is "research of, in, and through the virtual" (HINE, 2000).

As a social theory of human consciousness, activity theory construes consciousness as "the product of an individual's interactions with people and artifacts in the context of everyday practical activity" (KAPTELININ NARDI, 2006, p. 8). To understand the unity of consciousness and activity, activity theory defines consciousness as the "the enactment of our capacity for attention, intention, memory, learning, reasoning, speech, reflection, and imagination" (KAPTELININ NARDI, 2006, p. 8). According to Kaptelinin and Nardi (2006), it is through the exercise of these capacities in everyday activities that we develop, and what our existence is ultimately based on.

Guided by virtual ethnographic and activity theoretical frameworks, the data collected for this study comes from observations of the everyday practical activities happening within a virtual social media ecology, as well as interviews with members of the ecology's social community. All data collected for this study are digitally-native in format and were done so in the virtual through hypermedia from the location of researcher-as-community-member. Data analysis for this study is also occurring through the use of hypermedia qualitative data analysis tools, such as Web-based information visualization and coding programs.

Since October of 2009, data collected for this study has come from five main sources: Observations of the Art21 Facebook website from the public view (which is the same view afforded to the members of the social network), observations of the Art21 Facebook website from the behind-the-scene perspective of the website administrator with access to reports of the website's traffic, interviews with members of Art21's social network on Facebook who are determined for purposes of this study to be the most active participants on the Art21 Facebook website, questionnaire interviews with members of Art21's social network at-large on Facebook, and interviews with Art21 staff members. The Art21 Facebook website was selected from all possible Art21 resources as the site of this study because it is the most outwardly evident "Web 2.0" (ANDERSON, 2007) in terms of the amount of visible community participation and level of individual identities present. In short, it's where the people are.

Over the course of the previous six months, observations of the Art21 Facebook website have been made weekly, and more than thirty interviews with members of the social network have been conducted, with Art21 staff interviews to follow in May of 2010. Interviews with members of the Art21 social network on Facebook include questions pertaining to each participant's personal identity, such as age, current location of residence, and job title(s), along with questions regarding their identity in community, such as why they joined the social network, what kinds of things they do at the site, and what community membership means to them.

Findings

Findings from interviews with members of the Art21 Facebook community and observations of the Art21 Facebook site suggest that affordances of social media alter institutionalized boundaries of traditional modes of education and allow for enhanced and extended community participation in the curation of its own emergent curriculum. Data collected to date shows that community members engage in the exhibition, archiving, reflecting-on, and critique of their own and others' posted content in ways which are dialogic, democratic, locally and globally relevant, through hypermedia, and during times and from places which are self-regulated.

Interview questionnaires with members of Art21's Facebook community at-large reveal that community members of all ages participate in the social media ecology at different times throughout the day from places of work, places of leisure, and from different places within their homes, which are located across the United States and in other countries around the world. Interview responses also show that participants regularly engage in art-based activities offline, and that participation in the Art21 Facebook ecology allows them to enhance and extend their understandings of, and experiences with, art in their everyday lives through the affordances of hypermedia.

Through the Art21 Facebook ecology, community members consume hypermediated art educational programming on-demand, access the latest information about what's going on in the contemporary artworld, connect with other members of the community who are artists and educators for professional development, and contribute to the co-curation of community content/curriculum through participation in the community and sharing information with one another. In this ecology, participation is observed when community members post written comments to the community about their questions and ideas, when they post references to their own artwork for community feedback, when they vote and comment on others' posts, and when they navigate through community content via the interface.

Implications

In the simplest of terms, Art21's Facebook site is the interface between its media and its audience. In, more complex terms, Art21's Facebook site is the ecological ground on which Art21 and the audience members of its digitally networked community connect and construct, negotiate, and share information and experiences. By connecting with audience members through its site on Facebook, Art 21 opens up opportunities for audience members to co-create and negotiate their experiences with Art21. As new ways of thinking about contemporary art manifest in the activities and artifacts of everyday life, Art21's site on Facebook becomes an environment for the unfolding of emergent, interactive, and community-driven conversations about these ideas and artifacts.

When Art21 program content is shared amongst its audience members through the social media of Facebook, that content becomes activated as social objects for community negotiation and (re)creation. Through this

model, Art21 can engage a large and diverse audience whose interactions stem from relationships around content. As the community negotiates the content that emerges from the course of *being community*, content and community become intertwined and community members become co-curators of the community as an emergent curriculum.

As the community becomes the curriculum (CORMIER, 2008), participation among community members increases and their experiences become more personally meaningful because the curriculum is seen as a reflection of their own will and interests. This social media ecology wherein the community/curriculum emerges is not bound to the constraints of traditional educational experiences. Utilizing social media as an ecological ground for an emergent art education in the twenty-first century opens up opportunities for learning communities to overcome the obstacles of traditional education. When these opportunities are opened up, community members can become co-curators of their own community curriculum through meaningful, engaging, enhancing, extending, active, democratic, conversational, relational, contextual, modifiable, participatory, negotiable, adaptable, and sustainable experiences afforded by the architecture of hypermedia and the values they embody.

The Art21 Facebook ecology described in this study acts as a "rhizomatic" (DELEUZE GUATTARI, 1987) "para-site" (WILSON, 2003) where hypermediated art educational experiences unfold from "pedagogical hinges" (ELLSWORTH, 2005) built into the "participatory architecture" (O'REILLY, 2004) which supports it as a "space of flows" (CASTELLS, 1996). In this emergent model of a social media ecology for art education and research, the community/curriculum is always a work in progress that never reaches closure and its hypermediated architecture ensures that new entry points to participation can always be opened up and (re)created along the way. It is a place for the negotiation of the challenges of an emergent art education in the twenty-first century.

As engagement with social media by people of all ages around the world is becoming increasingly prevalent, teaching professionals in the twenty-first century must address the needs and desires of dynamic contemporary cultures by opening up their pedagogical practices for community negotiation. Through the investigation, understanding, and utilization of social media, educators can initiate and sustain an effective address to this irrevocable need for pedagogical change.

References

ANDERSON, P. 2007. *What is web 2.0? Ideas, technologies and implications for education.* JISC reports. 2007. Retrieved May 12, 2009, from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/techwatch/tsw0701b.pdf

BOLIN, P.E., & BLANDY, D. Beyond visual culture: Seven statements of support for material culture studies in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 44 (3), 2003, p. 246-263.

CASTELLS, M. *The rise of the network society.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

CORMIER, D. *Rhizomatic education: Community as curriculum.* 2008. Retrieved February 15, 2009, from http://davecormier.com/edblog/2008/06/03/rhizomatic-education-community-as-curriculum/

DELEUZE, G., & GUATTARI, F. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

DUNCUM, P. Visual culture art education: Why, what and how. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 21 (1), 2002, p. 14-23.

ELLSWORTH, E. *Places of learning: Media, architecture, pedagogy.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.

HINE, C. *Virtual ethnography.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.

KAPTELININ, V., & NARDI, B.A. *Acting with technology: Activity theory and interaction design.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

LAURILLARD, D. Open teaching: The key to sustainable and effective open education. In T. Iiyoshi & M.S.V. Kumar (Eds.), *Opening Up Education: The Collective Advancement of Education through Open Technology, Open Content, and Open Knowledge.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, p. 319-335.

Lu, L. Art café: A 3D virtual learning environment for art education. *Art Education*, 61 (6), 2008, p. 48-53.

Montalto-Rook, M. & Hughes, H. Enhancing user participation in an art gallery space through the development of a user generated wiki. In M. Simonson (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Design and Development Division*. Louisville, KY, 2009, p. 341-345.

O'Reilly, T. *The architecture of participation*. 2004. Retrieved on February 22, 2009, from http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/articles/architecture_of_participation.html

Wilson, B. Of diagrams and rhizomes: Visual culture, contemporary art, and the impossibility of mapping the content of art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 44(3), 2003, p. 214-229.