Using Flickr in the Classroom

Illinois Education and Technology Conference

During the past several years, numerous new online tools for collaboration and community building have emerged, providing Web users with a tremendous capability to connect with and share a variety of resources. Among these new tools is Flickr, a photo-sharing community that contains over 100 million photographs. This formidable database of images, along with Flickr's design and community tools, makes Flickr a compelling tool that has amazing potential for education.

The most obvious application of Flickr photography is to use it in the design of lessons that promote and build visual literacy skills in students. A wide variety of applications to learning exist by using Flickr photography, from using single photographs as writing prompts (either creative or interpretive writing) to using multiple image sets in digital storytelling projects. Student users can also contribute to the development of online stories about images, where contributors write storylines in the comment area of each photograph in a process know as Flicktion. Additionally, photographs can be geotagged, a process that links Flickr imagery with the geographical location of the source of the photo, permitting a visual, geographical study of a particular location or place. Other applications of Flickr include using Flickr to create virtual field trips and as a source of imagery to improve student presentations.

The use of Flickr imagery also enables teachers to help students understand and apply the concept of intellectual property rights. Flickr enables members to apply a variety of Creative Commons licensing to the photographs they upload. These photos then comprise various pools, such as Attribution Only, which can be searched for specific imagery. Other pools, such as Attribution-Non Commercial, permit users to use imagery as long as it is attributed and is used for non-commercial purposes. Photos from these pools can be repurposed by students in a variety of ways and can contribute to creative, engaging lessons.

In addition, the design of Flickr intentionally promotes the development of community. Members can contribute imagery to pools of photography on various topics; users may also provide metadata for photography, called tags, which create a user-defined methodology for organizing and searching for photographs (called a folksonomy). As expected with any community resource in 2006, each Flickr account can distribute an RSS (really simple syndication) feed that enables Flickr users to subscribe to any Flickr member's account (called a photostream) so that when new photos are added, the subscriber is notified.

Schools can take advantage of this RSS capability to create a database of appropriate images about their school that can be delivered automatically to parents and other community members who subscribe to the RSS feed.

In addition to RSS functionality, Flickr's API source code is available to third party programmers; this encourages the development of additional applications that make use of the Flickr photography database. Many of these applications have creative uses in various instructional settings.

Flickr's use in education settings is not without concern. This is a big open system with users uploading any and all types of imagery. In all cases, caution should be used when searching specific topics and a discussion with students about what should take place when inappropriate imagery is located should be done prior to use. As always, the use of Flickr, or any other resource like this, should be balanced against the climate and culture of the school or school district.

Flickr contains imagery that can be used in every aspect of teaching to help develop visual literacy skills, and in the process, help students understand intellectual property rights, while contributing greatly to a host of learning applications.

Classroom and School Uses of Flickr

1. Anywhere visual images are required, such as presentation, etc.
2. Single image analysis
3. Single image writing prompt, sometimes called Flicktion
4. Multiple image digital storytelling projects
5. Creating slides shows within Flickr
6. Virtual Field Trips
7. Creation of visual arguments, e.g. biology classroom-*The Case for Genetic Engineering*
8. Illustration of Poetry with Flickr, or *Flickr meets Carl Sandburg*
9. Using Flickr with Google Earth to teach Geography
10. Visual documentation of school events
11. Visual documentation of student artwork and other school products
12. Creation of digital visual portfolios, using the photoset function of Flickr
13. Social software applications: how to tag, how to make comments
14. Delivery of school/classroom visual information via RSS
15. Intellectual property rights lesson using Flickr Creative Commons licensing
16. The use of third party Flickr applications to produce classroom products:
    a. Motivational posters
    b. Magazine Covers
    c. Movie Posters
    d. Flickr slideshow
    e. Mosaic Makers

Resources about Flickr can be found at: http://www.jakesonline.org/flickrsites.htm

Add your classroom use of Flickr to the Flickr Wiki page at:
http://jakes.editme.com/Flickr