

Access, Communication, and Learning: Physical and Digital Potentials for Knowledge-Making in Archives

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Abstract: This article describes a case study, using mixed methods that include focus discussion interviews. The study was an initiative exploring ways to enhance archival research in art education that engages physical and digital archival materials; linking the possibility of individual and social learning experiences occasioned by Web 2.0. It proposes a way to think about how researchers, within a community, can conduct historical research using archival materials, and how they can potentially share and generate new knowledge using a Weblog as a participatory architecture for communication.

Introduction

This article describes a case study, exploring how art educators at a University access and engage in meaningful interactions, inside and outside of the archives reading room, with both analog and digital art education artifacts. Images were uploaded onto a Weblog and complemented with entries authored by participants in the study. The Weblog is a participatory archive, serving as a dynamic repository and as a forum for communication, built on user participation.¹ This exploratory study serves as a foundation for the use of a Weblog in learning, research, and teaching about art education, building a grounded theory about ways to access archives and do art education historical research.

The underpinning assumptions of the study were that access to art education collections could be enhanced through online, participatory platforms. The study demonstrates that such access would aid in the collaborative generation of new knowledge, interpretations, and inquiry about the history of art education, while promoting and encouraging more use of art education archival material, and allowing for more diversity in the types of users.

This research study was conducted during the Spring semester of 2010. There were six participants, including the professor. All members of the class participated in the study. The researcher used qualitative and participant observer methods. Data was collected through focused, interview discussions. An interpretive analysis of the discussions assessed user's reactions and feedback on the use of the Weblog and implications for art education and archives.

¹ Isto Huvila, "Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralized Curation, Radical User Orientation, and Broader Contextualization of Records Management," *Archival Science* 8 (2008): 15-36.



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Published by Society of American Archivists, April 2011.

The researcher is a doctoral candidate in art education, who facilitated a graduate course on the history of art education, in which the focus was primary resources and archival research methods. Her study stems from an interest in the history of art education and the experience she gained through a graduate assistantship awarded to work in a Special Collections library at a University Archives. It was her first exposure to behind the scenes of the archives reading room. As a result, an interest emerged in the processes that support archival research and the vital connection between archivists and researchers. This link is crucial to what we know about history and how we come to understand it. It raises issues about the multiple and multilevel ways in how knowledge is constructed within the context of archives.

Learning can take place through both physical and virtual interactions and collaborations, and through planned and spontaneous communication between all who share in the value of the archives. One example illustrating this point, served as one of the catalysts to this study. A patron had traveled a distance to do research on a topic about which he was very learned. During his visit, he enthusiastically engaged the reference archivists on duty, to talk about his discoveries. Several of these conversations occurred with the author. On one occasion, the patron shared with the author a young girl's sketchbook contained in one of the boxes. The sketchbook appeared to be unrelated to the rest of the collection. However, the patron, native to the area depicted, recognized the landscapes that the young artist had skillfully rendered over a century before, on the pages of sketchbook he held in his hands. With absolute confidence, the patron identified the artist, who had not been recorded in the descriptions. Generous to share his knowledge, he put a note in the box for the future unknown researcher who would come across it, so that the young artist would not be forgotten and so that the unknown scholar could also benefit from the information. Witnessing this act of generosity, a thought crystallized in the mind of the author, watching this researcher reach out across time and space. How can the learning potential of this fragmented communication between the author and the researcher, and from the researcher to (in this case unknown) researcher, be captured?

Research Questions

The overarching questions positioning the study were the following:

- How can art educators use art education collections in both physical and digital participatory formats as a “trigger for focused reflection and learning conversations” to facilitate scholarship about the history of art education?²
- How, if at all, would Web 2.0 change knowledge construction?

The case study served as a foundation for exploring the social learning potential of online, accessible archives as a participatory environment for collaborative and connected learning.³ Connectivity is a concept long understood in archives. Avra Michelson and Jeff Rothenberg view

² Priya Sharma and Sebastien Feidler, “Supporting Self-Organized Learning with Personal Webpublishing Technologies and Practices,” *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 18, no. 2 (2007): 11.

³ For a discussion on connected learning see: George Siemens, “Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age,” accessed August 3, 2010, <http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm>.

connectivity as the intermediary between researcher and research: “Connectivity enhances the researcher’s abilities to access data, collaborate, seek input and feedback, and disseminate ideas and results”⁴.

This study focuses on the research learning process. It asks how extending the learning potential of archives, by including Web 2.0 (a Weblog), might facilitate new ways of generating knowledge.⁵ The research questions this article sought to answer were:

- How did the graduate students and the professor perceive the interaction with archival material in both physical and digital participatory formats?
- What were their perceptions in the use of the Weblog as a component of their course to conduct research?
- In the case of the professor, how did the use of the Weblog impact teaching the course, and how?
- What did the participants learn through this experience, and what do they consider are some possibilities for the role of archives in art education history based on this experience?
- Finally, how could this experience inform recommendations for archival repositories and enhance the relationship between users and archives?

This article explores these questions and attempts to answer them through an interpretive analysis of participant’s responses to focused discussion questions conducted at the conclusion of the course.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework weaves notions of communication and access (concepts increasingly expected and fundamental to digital research) through postmodern archival theory and social constructivist learning theories. Communication occurs in both virtual and physical worlds, and influences all stakeholders. It is the dialogue between archivist and user, between user and user, between teacher and learner, and finally, between learner and learner. Postmodern archival theories redefine how records are perceived, formed and used, and the archivist/ user relationship.^{6 7 8} Social constructivist learning theories emphasize, what this author calls the *searching and learning dialogue*. In social constructivist learning theory, content is introduced as encountered or requested by the learner, and understanding builds on prior knowledge and

⁴Avra Michelson and Jeff Rothenberg, “Scholarly Communication and Information Technology: Exploring the Impact of Changes in the Research Process on Archives,” *American Archivist* 55, no. 2 (Spring 1992) 244.

⁵From Paul Anderson, “What is Web 2.0? Ideas, Technologies and Implications for Education,” accessed July 10, 2010, <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/techwatch/tsw0701b.pdf>.

⁶Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist* 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002) 24-41.

⁷Max Evans, “Archives of the People, By the People, For the People,” *American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (Fall Winter, 2007): 387-400.

⁸Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 4.

discovery. Learning is a social practice, occurring through communication with other learners.⁹
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Communication and access support continued inquiry and interpretation of original sources, as well as the interaction between the user and the archivist. How a user knows what is available in archives depends largely on communication and access through archival processing decisions and outreach.^{12 13} Communication and access implicitly raise questions surrounding the nature and value of collections and the collecting mission. Postmodern archival thought explicitly re-examines the construction of dominant notions of history to recognize the “mediating role in shaping the historical record”.^{14 15} How are collections formed? What should be collected? Whose histories should be recorded? And, whose interests are served in creating the historical narrative?¹⁶ These questions often surface with the emergence of a collective interest in the history of one’s discipline.

For example, at a time when new attention was being given to the history of art education, art educators Jerry Morris and Ralph Raunft wrote *Archives and Their Role in Art Education Research*, to educate colleagues about the valuable role of archives in historical research practice. Seeking to generate interest in archival practices, they proclaimed a need for more archival awareness on the part of art educators in order to “ensure a legacy of integrity for future practitioners”.¹⁷ Their writing focused mainly on safeguarding the documentation of the field of art education through the preservation and collection of archival materials to support research, and to generate knowledge about the history of art education. They viewed this effort as a way to promote and encourage self-identity as a field within the broader educational arena, stating:

A thorough understanding of who and where art educators are today and what they are doing today is directly dependent upon an understanding of past events, people, contributions, and circumstances which have led to present conditions. Further, attention at archival concerns and the development of archival materials

⁹ Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978)

¹⁰ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

¹¹ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and also Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice* accessed February 4, 2010, <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>

¹² Nesmith, “*Seeing Archives*,” 26.

¹³ Christopher J. Prom, “Optimum Access? Processing in College and University Archives,” *American Archivist* 73, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010) 146-174.

¹⁴ Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *American Archivist* 65, no.2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 217.

¹⁵ Randall Jimerson, “Embracing the Power of Archives,” Society of American Archivist Presidential Address 2005, accessed June 7, 2010 <http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/jimerson.asp>.

¹⁶ Mark Greene, “The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist* 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002): 44.

¹⁷ Michael Morris and Ralph Raunft, “Archives and Their Role in Art Education Research,” in *Art Education Historical Methodology: An Insider’s Guide to Doing and Using*, ed. Peter Smith (Pasadena, CA: Open Door Publishers, 1995), 12.

provides a professional spirit, a core of quality self-identity, for art educators, which would otherwise be missing.¹⁸

Morris and Raunft allude to the notion of, “archival intelligence”, which is integral to communication and access.¹⁹ Referring to knowledge about the environment where research on primary sources is conducted, this awareness is crucial to generating a full investigation of a topic, and to supporting the information search process.²⁰ Researchers, who possess archival intelligence, understand and respect archival functions of collection, description, and organization and understand the processes by which artifacts are made available and accessible for continued interpretations. In order to fully gain from the archival experience, an awareness of archival processes must be fostered. This awareness fosters better quality research and broader respect for the archival mission and as Morris and Raunft add, cultivate a professional spirit and self-identity.

Embedded in the theory guiding the creation of the Weblog, was the notion that archival intelligence can be learned through communication and access. It sees learning as a social practice, drawing from constructivist theories of learning that place learners into a community of other learners, or community of practice.^{21 22} Communities of Practice are knowledge networks of people who share common interests and commonly created intellectual resources. Learning happens through relationships based on trust and respect.²³ In the case of this study, the community was art educators focused on art education history and historical research.

Postmodern archival theory, as described by Tom Nesmith, that refigures the relationship between archives and users, to facilitate communication and access, through the searching and learning dialogue, were integral to the theoretical framework.²⁴ Assuming that learning and knowledge are generated through both externalization (social interaction and sharing) and internalization (solitary, focused study), research and learning in archives is traditionally viewed in the latter sort.²⁵ Reading rooms are isolated spaces, and usually the only interactions occur between researcher and artifact, and researcher and archivist.

These interactions can occur both in the physical world and in the virtual world because they encompass the searching and learning dialogue, as a whole. Art educator and historian, Diana Korzenik considers archival research as a dynamic interrogation of artifacts, or “living research”

¹⁸ Morris and Raunft, “Archives,” 10.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, “A.I Archival Intelligence and User Expertise,” *American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 51-78.

²⁰ Carol Collier Kuhlthau, *Seeking Meaning: A Process Approach to Library and Information Services* (Libraries Unlimited, 2004) and “Information Search Process” accessed April 2010 http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~kuhlthau/information_search_process.htm.

²¹ Lave and Wenger, *Situated learning*

²² Wenger, *Communities of Practice*

²³ Jennifer Preece, “Etiquette, Empathy and Trust in Communities of Practice: Stepping-Stones to Social Capital,” *Journal of Universal Computer Science* 10 (2004): 294-302.

²⁴ Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” 24-41.

²⁵ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*

practice.²⁶ Similarly, Kirsch and Rohan see research, as a lived process, encompassing virtual, historical, and lived experiences, “intersecting as researchers extract meaning from sources”.²⁷

Archival sources used in the research process constitute many and multiple physical and digital formats: manuscripts, artifacts, oral history, images, data, sound, art etc. Perceptions of these records are shifting as Terry Cook describes from “viewing records as static physical objects, and towards understanding them as dynamic virtual concepts.”²⁸ Research, using archival sources, is a lived process. It is a sensory experience; mediated through touch or tactile engagement with the artifact, and also through intellectual and emotional engagement. Interacting with these sources, the researcher draws from a sense of fascination, imagination, experience, and knowledge, about another time and place.

Unique to a closed stacks system, such as archives, is the valuable importance of the searching and learning dialogue between researcher and archivist. The outcome of the search (the depth, breadth, and quality of the research materials) is dependent on the social capital between the researcher and archivist, and on the ability to effectively communicate.^{29 30} Typically, the interaction between researcher and archivist is oriented around this information search process.³¹ The initial communication, known in archival terms as the “entrance interview”, is most effective when both parties are good communicators, articulate, open, and receptive.³²

The searching and learning dialogue can occur sporadically over a period of time. Some researchers capitalize on this exchange, using the archivist’s broad research strengths to enhance the search for materials. Sometimes, a simple comment or question can loosen the floodgates to a full presentation in which the researcher divulges the sequence of discoveries during the entire investigation. This spontaneity can also prompt the archivist to take alternative paths in the search for materials. In these moments, is learning potential. Embedded in dynamic engagement and spontaneous discussions with researchers lies potential for new discoveries about learning methods and coming to know.

Lave and Wenger define access in learning as “talking about, and talking within, practice”.³³ Indeed, the fragmented communication between researcher and researcher also offers potential for developing new learning relationships. Archival research provides unique affordances to learning as a social process. Talking through ideas, talking about the research journey, and/or articulating the learning process, can allow discoveries to surface, and illuminate new ideas.

²⁶ Diana Korzenik, “Lost Past: Historical Research and a Question of Purpose.” *Art Education* 39, no. 2 (1986): 39.

²⁷ Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan, *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*. (Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 1.

²⁸ Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism,” 4.

²⁹ Catherine A. Johnson and Wendy M. Duff, “Chatting up the Archivist: Social Capital and the Archival Researcher,” *American Archivist* 6, no. 1 (2005): 113-129.

³⁰ Linda J. Long, “Question Negotiation in the Archival Setting: The Use of Interpersonal Communication Techniques in the Reference Interview,” *American Archivist* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 40-51.

³¹ Kuhlthau, *Seeking Meaning*

³² Gregory Hunter, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives*. (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers Inc, 2003), 220.

³³ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 109.

Dispelling the common perception of archives as secluded, dusty, treasure troves, protected by archivists shushing patrons, the searching and learning dialogue situates archival research practice, not as an isolating experience, but as a dynamic, social learning situation.³⁴ The archivist/researcher relationship, in this view, is interdependent and crucial, as each role impacts the other. For both archivists and researchers, this demands consideration of the learning process as one dependent on what John Willinsky defines as “the access principle.”³⁵ Archivists and researchers, like any scholar, hold a responsibility to “extend the circulation of their work as far as possible, and ideally to all who are interested in it and all who might profit by it.”³⁶ This idea mirrors postmodern archival theories that redefine the archives/user relationship, perhaps as MacNeil suggests, seeing users as having an active role in the creation of archival descriptions, or, using the finding aid as a tool for communication, as Light and Hyry suggest.^{37 38}

Methodology

The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections project emphasizes access and served as a model for the study. Yakel and Kraus define accessibility as, “the user’s ability to make meaningful use of descriptions of archival materials or to enhance their understanding of archival materials.”³⁹ Accessibility also describes the user’s background and experience that facilitates archival research. Communication and access were guiding concepts in developing the art education Weblog to facilitate participatory research practices for generating knowledge about archives and the history of art education. Social constructivist learning and participatory research practices also influenced the creation of the Weblog.

Participants in this case study included, an art education professor and the five graduate students in her history of art education course. In terms of inception, planning, development, and assessment, the study lasted approximately six months. The researcher’s roles fluctuated between facilitator/ archivist and participant/ observer. The researcher started the Weblog content, introduced participants to the physical archives, presented the art education collections, and participated in the virtual dialogue. The researcher also facilitated material requests and suggested materials. The researcher observed participant engagement, the interaction with materials, and assessed the use of the Weblog. The researcher also conducted focused discussions with all participants at the end of the course to assess the experience.

³⁴ Many libraries use blogs to change the dusty dynamic. See Penn State Special Collections: <http://dontcallusdusty.blogspot.com>

³⁵ John Willinsky *The Access Principal: A Case for Open Research and Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2006).

³⁶ Willinsky, *Access Principal*, 5.

³⁷ Heather MacNeil, “Picking our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor,” *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (Fall/ Winter 2002) 276.

³⁸ Light and Hyry, “*Colophons and Annotations*,” 217.

³⁹ Magia Ghetu Krause and Elizabeth Yakel, “Interaction in Virtual Archives: The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections Next Generation Finding Aid,” *American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (Fall Winter, 2007): 310-311.

Of the five graduate students participating, none of them had previous archival research experience. For most, it was their first time in archives. Therefore, learning about archival functions that support research, while cultivating awareness of archives, was vital to the success of their individual research processes and to building interest in archival research, overall.

Keeping to the value of archival intelligence, the researcher's initial virtual and physical interactions with the participants were service-oriented, under the premise that providing as much information as possible would enhance awareness of the archives, deter any psychological barriers to online group discussions, and/or change possible negative assumptions about doing archival research.^{40 41}

The Weblog

Tim O'Reilly views Web 2.0 as an "architecture of participation", a medium for interaction and communication.⁴² The Weblog (Figure 1) served similarly, as a forum for focused dialogue about art education archival material, to generate new knowledge and interpretations about the history of art education. As the materials in this collection are not currently digitized, the secured Weblog environment allowed students to be authors, creating and uploading their own digital records of selected items with a camera or scanner. A simple cell phone camera was sufficient enough to provide a workable image to read, share, and discuss on the Weblog. The Weblog also served as the link between the researcher/ facilitator and the participants for providing support for their archival research.

Figure 1: Screen shot of the History of Art Education Weblog⁴³

⁴⁰ Alexander Ardichvili, Vaughn Page and Tim Wentling, "Motivation and Barriers to Participation in Virtual Knowledge-Sharing Communities of Practice," *Journal of Knowledge Management* 7, no. 1 (2003) 64-77.

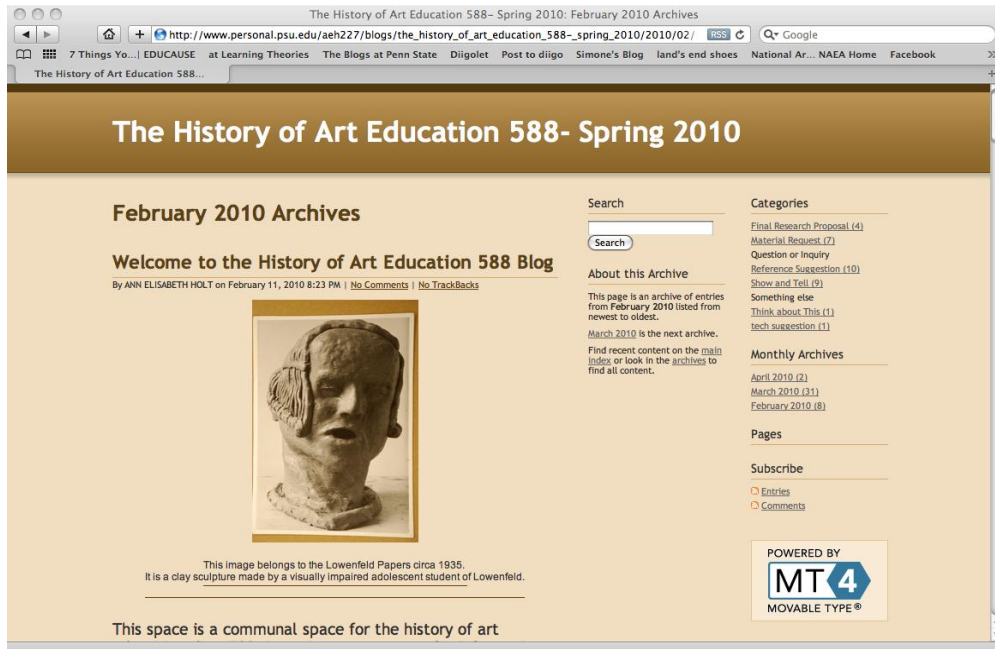
⁴¹ Kuhlthau, *Seeking Meaning*

⁴² Tim O'Reilly, "The Architecture of Participation," accessed October 1, 2009.

http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/articles/architecture_of_participation.html.

⁴³ The following paragraph is the first entry defining the History of Art Education Weblog:

"This space is a communal space for the history of art education class 588. It serves as a resource for information to help you in your research process. It serves as a reference for all of us to help each other. If you find something that might help your colleague, then post it--- share it--- inform us all. Upload images of the material you are looking at, interact with the artifacts and interact with each other. Post questions, comments, feedback, test ideas, hypotheses, compare and contrast anything related to research on the history of art education. Use the blog as a research journal, a research file, a bibliography, a writing group, or use it to help guide you toward your final research question" (The History of Art Education Weblog entry, February 11, 2010).



There were two occasions when the researcher physically met with participants in the archives. The first meeting was very important to building archival awareness. Besides an opportunity to discuss technical aspects of the Weblog, the participants were given a tour of the archives from the reception desk to the closed stacks. They gained a broader sense of the infrastructure beyond the reading room. Participants also interacted with a sampling of the art education collections presented by the researcher and saw art education material presented by the rare books curator. For the second physical meeting at the archives, students shared some of the art education materials of particular interest. From that point, all other interaction with the researcher/facilitator took place on the Weblog until students presented their final papers.

The first entries on the Weblog were intended to give intellectual access to the materials. Included in the entries, were a list of the art education collections finding aids, a link to the special collections website, and a link for a virtual tour of the archives. Also posted was the contact information for the rare books curator as well as a link to the materials in that unit that pertain to art education, definitions of frequently used archival terms, and a reference for citing archival materials. Tips on dealing with the Weblog technology were also posted.

The Weblog provides organizing functions called tags, categories, and assets allowing participants to group and view related entries together. The categories described the nature of the entry: material request, a question or inquiry, a reference suggestion, a show and tell entry, something to discover or think about, or a suggestion. In addition, the Weblog quantified categories and tags, as well as entries and comments, archiving them per month. Assets collected in one section of the Weblog interface as users posted images, displaying a visual gallery of collective interests. This is a unique function that would be difficult to replicate in the physical archives, where mixing up materials is not permitted. The virtual collaging and mixing up of

archival materials can illuminate alternative connections and insight, offering new methods for generating inquiry.

Data and Analysis

Content from focused discussions conducted after the course was over, coupled with personal observations and reflections provided the data. The focused discussions included a question guide (see Appendix A) modeled from the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections study.⁴⁴ The questions were designed to assess participant's experience with the blog, how it impacted their coursework, archival research, and their understanding of archives. The main focus was on what role the Weblog played during the research process and on recommendations for improvement. Also important was assessing participant's perceptions in the use of the Weblog for research and teaching, and how the Weblog made the materials more accessible. The next section focuses on the results from the dialog with participants. Readers should note that all quoted text is taken directly from participants' exact comments and all other text is an interpretive analysis.

Results: Participant Experience

Overall, participants viewed the Weblog as a space to voice ideas and as a place for free expression. While at first, some felt that the Weblog was another obligation similar to other online class experiences, their perceptions changed as they started generating content on it. They appreciated being able to see what other colleagues were looking at and how they were connecting ideas with the materials. As a result, interest in the archival material generated.

The students perceived the Weblog as a tool for doing research. There was general appreciation that the shared space of the Weblog was a way to showcase artifacts. Participants could sample other collections and see new ways to use the materials. They liked exploring other researcher's materials "because one could see how other people thought about things [and] their thought processes". Students claimed that the "group" investigation was interesting and less isolating; that "it helps to do research with others". The "little discussions provide ways to see the directions of the ideas and see alignments in interests" as well as "the way people analyzed their topics". They felt that the Weblog was "dynamic". However, they also felt there was "an investment factor" in terms of participating. Some expressed that if they "had the opportunity to do it again, they would do it differently and share more".

The Weblog was a place "to present ideas in nascent stages", "critically grounded ideas and thoughts and transformed it into a network of sharing". Sharing shows ways that researchers "combine sources and materials" as well as "how others do research". Students expressed a felt responsibility to contribute and share their findings. The Weblog was important because it was research-oriented making participants want to contribute and share. They felt "compelled to share and teach others"; felt a self-motivated obligation to contribute and communicate the contents of their learning. One student commented that the Weblog was a good way to learn

⁴⁴ Krause and Yakel, "Interaction in Virtual Archives," 310-311.

about research, because sharing can show a researcher “more ways to access more sources”. It opens access to sharing ideas, resources, “and things never thought about when you see how others are perceiving methods”.

The professor, after using the Weblog as a component for teaching, was able to envision continued work with it because of the “open-ended format” and the fact that new member (students) could continue building on the content. However, the professor had reservations as to “whether the Weblog would have worked on its own without being guided by a facilitator”, or without having the physical and digital environments combined. For the professor, the Weblog offered a repository for multilayered information and a shared space for multiple perspectives on an artifact. It enabled participants to “see what they won’t, or can’t see, alone”.

Another comment was that the Weblog made participants feel welcome, serving as a portal to expose the “function and code systems” of archives. Since this was the first archives experience for the students, the Weblog helped bring “clarity to what was previously a vague picture”. Students admitted their preconceived notions about archival research. They assumed that archival research was difficult, time consuming, overwhelming, and intimidating, since they usually rely on digital access to research materials. Using the services of an archivist for searching materials was not a familiar procedure for them, and it seemed obstructive. However, using artifacts and primary resources presented unique discoveries about historical figures and interpretations about history. For instance, one student admitted surprise about the inherent nature of archival records, expressing intrigue and surprise that, in their most basic sense, “archives records are really about regular lives”.

Students gained respect and patience for the archival mission and service, as well as for the archival research process. One student, who traveled to another archive to continue final project research, benefitted from the initial orientation because he was able to be more efficient at the other site. He took his new awareness to another archives site, which not only benefitted his research but also made a more effective and efficient use of the archivist’s time. For instance, he learned to pose questions about the finding aids, which do not always indicate the full and detailed contents of a collection. Visiting the other archive, he did not hesitate to engage with the social capital of the archivist to make his visit more effective.

Most participants appreciated both the physical and digital aspect of the course. The physical introduction to the archives; seeing how others go through the process and use archives, as well as touring through the closed stacks, helped to broaden understanding about the value of the archive’s broader mission. The virtual/textual orientation to the archives served as a reference and helped to situate the researchers. This exposure created more awareness and confidence toward the larger research mission, which, in turn, made it more accessible.

Access, was defined in a variety of ways. For instance, students expressed access as feeling welcome in the archives; that materials should be free to use, free of restrictions, and “not require too many steps” to obtain. It should be evident that the materials, if they are “under lock and key”, are valuable, and “worth the investment in time”. Access meant that finding aids or

resources had to be “easy to navigate, clear, and understandable”. For some, it meant that the Weblog should present good quality, adequately legible text and images.

Participant Recommendations

Participants made recommendations that concern archival research in both physical and virtual environments. Some felt that the Weblog was at first “tricky to figure out how to post”; that more initial guidance would have been helpful. Participants made recommendations in terms of organization of information and resources. For the Weblog, one suggestion was to add a methods component or “how to” entry, on historical research methods. This could also encompass guides, and examples of research in or on the collections that use various methods.

Participants wanted more information about the nature of the collections; for example, providing additional in-depth information or metadata about the nature of the collections and how they were processed. One way to accomplish this would be to add more details about the collection, donation, description, and organization processes, or as Light and Hyry suggest, information about who processed the collection.⁴⁵

For the physical materials in boxes, participants gave suggestions oriented to participatory practices or outreach. For instance, one suggestion was to add a user comment form in each box, for communicating with other users over time and distance. This would be useful for expert users wishing to contribute comments to existing descriptions. An example mentioned was a type of form indicating the date, identification of the user and affiliation, as well as the topic or comment. Ultimately such a record would serve as an additional trail, or map, documenting other voices and interpretations, becoming an integral part of the contents. The professor added that such a form should be voluntary, with some sort of archivist’s ability to verify the authenticity of the user’s addition.

Implications of the Study

The feasibility of computer-mediated social networked learning within archival research practices ultimately depends on how archives and researchers perceive their collective and individual roles. For archives, this concerns their mission and relationship with users. Evans calls for, “a view of archives as a common and public good, rather than as the protected property of an institution”. Using Yochai Benkler’s “commons-based peer production” mode, he sees archives where “the people” make digitization decisions based on the user’s needs.^{46 47} Given the funding restraints nearly universal in special collections, the Weblog represents one affordable method to use collections in the teaching arena and address issues of access, outreach, and funding. Weblogs utilize easily accessible resources to extend the value of collections and allow for more enhanced user interaction.

⁴⁵ Light and Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations,” 217.

⁴⁶ Evans, “Archives of the People,” 394-5.

⁴⁷ Yochai Benkler in Evans, “Archives of the People,” 395.

In this case, introducing the Weblog was a radical change for both the art education classroom and the University archives. It altered the way students normally access the archives and the art education collections. It opened user perceptions of archival research and the value of archives. Enhancing access to collections and enhancing archival descriptions through researchers and teaching faculty, who possess archival intelligence, will cultivate broader awareness and respect for the archival mission.

Isto Huvila states, “The most essential question regarding a participatory archive is whether it works, or not: whether the users contribute to an archive and whether the contributions created added value.”⁴⁸ The History of Art Education Weblog is still growing; representing a dynamic artifact. Faculty and students from the art education department are continuing to access and use it as a resource. Over time, the history of art education Weblog will build in content and membership, providing space for new generations of users to voice new contributions and concerns about research, teaching, and pedagogy. The research value of the Weblog increases through new additions of art education materials and resources, such as photos, links to other private and public collections, and audio files of research presentations. The Weblog is broadening the scope of the art education collections into a knowledge commons, through a network of collaborative and community based efforts. It demonstrates the value of art education archives for research and the value of collecting and preserving art education primary resources.^{49 50 51}

Conclusion

Social media tools can foster greater awareness and use of archives. Archival awareness can stimulate a more educated user and attentiveness to citizens’ responsibilities in supporting the archival mission.⁵² The participants on the art education Weblog explored the foundations of their field while gaining awareness of the broader archival mission. This awareness was integrated as part of learning and experiencing research methods.

Social media is rapidly changing many facets of our everyday existence; what we know, how we come to know it, as well as how we interact in the world. As archives and classrooms embrace Web 2.0 environments, the questions that guide these efforts should be based on pragmatic approaches that enhance their existing missions while taking stock of the real and sustainable benefits to implementing participatory information platforms.⁵³

⁴⁸ Isto Huvila, “Participatory Archive,” 30.

⁴⁹ Evans, “Archives of the People,” 394.

⁵⁰ Donald Waters, “Preserving the Knowledge Commons,” in *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons* ed. Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 145-168.

⁵¹ Morris and Raunft, “Archives,” 10.

⁵² Richard Cox, “Digital Curation and the Citizen Archivist,” in *Proceedings of the DigCCurr2009 Digital Curation: Practice, Promises & Prospects*, ed. by Helen Tibbo, Carolyn Hank, Christopher A. Lee and Rachael Clemens, (School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina, 2009) 102-109.

⁵³ Mary Samouelian, “Embracing Web 2.0: Archives and the Newest Generation of Web Applications,” *American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009) 42-71.

The implementation of social media for scholarship in a University archives depends on perceptions of the teaching, learning, and research structure. Understanding the potential of social media for such activities, can inform the development of computer-mediated discourse tools that use archives as the impetus for participatory engagement. This requires an understanding of the user and how they construct knowledge, including how they access and communicate that information. It requires understanding of how users engage in historical research processes, how they interact with artifacts, and how they create histories.

For archives and researchers, it requires focused concentration on building mutual understanding and community, and extending the research as a social act of sharing. More broadly, it means developing knowledge commons as pluralistic and democratic. It means understanding knowledge generation and mediation as a collective responsibility.⁵⁴ Developing social media as a supporting participatory architecture in archives requires a paradigmatic shift in collective consciousness. It means embracing a philosophy of sharing, and embracing collecting practices that attract plural and diverse identities, in which many voices and knowledge are represented.

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⁵⁴ Willinsky, *Access Principal*

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Are the art education collections the first archival materials you have ever used to conduct research?
2. If not, how has your experience with the art education archives blog been different from your previous archival experience?
3. I am interested in how the blog for the art education collections makes the materials more accessible. Could you tell me how you would define something that is accessible?
4. Do you think the blog makes the materials more accessible?
5. How would you define and describe research? Archival research? Collaborative research?
6. Normally, how do you go about doing research? What is your information search process?
7. How would you describe your archival research experience using the blog? Please describe what your research process was like during this project.