Chapter 2
Purposeful Practice: Using Technology to Enhance Teaching and Learning in Visual Arts

Donna Mathewson Mitchell
Australian Catholic University, Australia

ABSTRACT
This chapter examines the integration of information communication technology to enhance teaching and learning in visual arts classrooms. It draws on a participatory action research project conducted with teachers in schools to explore the distinctive nature of secondary visual arts teaching practice. From this data the author presents three examples that particularly illustrate the use of technology for practice. The first example presents a teacher who uses technology as a vehicle for student-centred learning. The second example provides an account of a teacher who uses social media and mobile technology as a pedagogical tool to connect with students. The third example tells the story of a teacher-educator working in an online environment. Together these examples illustrate a diversity of ways that technology is integrated into teaching at the level of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The implications of this diversity are explored relative to teacher identity, student experience and relationships to place.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter examines the integration of information and communication technology to enhance teaching and learning in visual arts classrooms. Its draws on a participatory action research project conducted with teachers in schools to explore the distinctive nature of secondary visual arts teaching practice. In addressing the use of technology as an aspect of teaching, I argue that approaches to the integration of technology are necessarily diverse and related to teacher identity, student experience and place. Teachers make decisions about their uses of technology in ways that are related to their career and its development, the students that they teach and the affordances, limitations and opportunities of the places in which they teach.

I begin with a brief outline of visual arts education in terms of teaching and learning. In this section I draw on practice theory to develop a foundation of theoretical resources to inform the discussion. I then look at visual arts teaching as a complex professional practice drawing connections with the role of technology in visual
arts education. I examine a number of recent studies and tease out what they indicate about current views of technology and how it is being used in visual arts education. In what follows I provide three examples of teaching that illustrate the use of technology for practice. The first example presents a teacher who uses technology as a vehicle for student-centred learning. In his practice, technology is a central, cohesive force linking curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The second example provides an account of a teacher who uses social media and mobile technology as a pedagogical tool to connect with students. In this case technology has a more supportive role in developing relationships of trust and facilitating patterns of momentum, situated in the social world of students. The third example tells my story as a teacher-educator working in an online environment. In this example digital stories are used as an assessment tool to create a collaborative environment, to facilitate exploration of self and identity and to introduce the possibilities of technology as a creative teaching tool in visual arts. In looking across these three examples I argue that they illustrate the diversity of ways that technology is integrated into teaching. I further speak about how this integration is driven by adapting professional habitus that are attuned to student experiences and the possibilities of educational contexts. I conclude by speculating on how initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning may be able to better explore the possibilities of technology relative to teaching practice.

BACKGROUND

In the following section I provide a broad overview of the background literature and theory that informs this chapter. This foundational examination will look at visual arts education and practice theory, visual arts teaching and socio-materiality, and visual arts teaching and technology. I also outline the research context the forthcoming illustrations of practice are drawn from.

Visual Arts Education and Practice Theory

Visual arts exists as a specific area of learning in secondary schools, although its existence has always been tenuous and contingent. Elliot Eisner (1997) has most persuasively argued two types of justifications for the teaching of visual arts. The first justification is contextualist. This viewpoint sees art as being used to achieve a set of educational values relative to the needs of the child, the community or the nation. Art education is seen as a means to meet social needs such as the development of self esteem, the exploration of social relationships and the development of creative thinking. This viewpoint is supported by a range of research that focuses on the power of art to develop critical thinking (Koo, 2005), to assist in personal development (Dinham, Grushka, MacCallum, Pascoe, Wright & Brown 2007), to affect learning in other curriculum areas (Bamford, 2006; Davidson & Michener, 2001; Piscitelli, Renshaw, Dunn & Hawke, 2004; Hunter, 2005) and as a vehicle for social reconstruction (Ewing, 2010). More recently and in neo-liberal terms, creativity as achieved through visual arts education is viewed as the new key economic driver of international competitiveness (Davis, 2008). According to Eisner (1997) the second justification of visual arts education is essentialist. Essentialists argue that: ...art is a unique aspect of human culture and experience, and that the most valuable contribution that art can make to human experience is that which is directly related to its particular characteristics. What art has to contribute to the education of the human is precisely what other fields cannot contribute (Eisner, 1997, p.5)