

Overview

#VisualizingEmpathy is an art curriculum that uses social and mobile media to engage youth in conversations about empathy through a series of missions requiring participants to create and share media on Flickr. Participants give voice to their identities, cultures and values by sharing representations of their lives on social media.

Learning Objectives

- To foster a sense of empathy toward diverse individual and cultural perspectives.
- To participate in the development of moral and ethical codes for responsible digital citizenship within an educational community.
- To develop media literacy skills by creating and interpreting a variety of messages disseminated through social and mobile media.
- To build skills in expression and media communication through the use of various digital modalities.

Procedures

Setup:

- Establish a social media network using a mobile application such as Flickr or Instagram.
- Students and instructor(s) create profile on this social network and exchange information within a private group created for the purposes of this curriculum.

Implementation:

- Instructor uses class time to establish *themes* for the following week.
- The time between two classes is used for interaction on the mobile application. During this period, the instructor sends out a series of *missions* based on the specific theme. Participants respond to these missions by creating media representations using text, images, videos, animations, sound recording, etc.
- Participants are also encouraged to engage in dialogue with their peers by liking and leaving comments on each other's posts.
- Class time is used to facilitate discussions about the interactions and content that has been generated online in the previous week.

Wrap-up:

- The media and dialogue generated by the group are synthesized and disseminated within the school. This can take the form of an exhibition, event, or individual and group presentations in the classroom.

Time Commitment:

- The project requires time commitment on the part of the instructor(s) to setup.
- During the implementation phase, interactions among instructor(s) and students are ongoing, because participants are able to create and share posts at any time and place using their mobile devices.
- We suggest a total of 4 to 6 weeks to achieve the learning objectives.

Themes:

We recommend a series of four main themes that begin with the individual and expand outwards towards the community and world at large. The themes are identity, our collective, the others and shared vision. These themes are scaffolded to encourage participants to foster a sense of empathy by first beginning to look at how they construct their own identities, and how they relate to others within their social circles. After this sense of personal and collective identity is explored through discussions and media production, the emphasis will shift to "the others", whom we encounter in physical and virtual spaces throughout the world. Finally, students are asked to take an active role by developing their own missions and interventions to articulate a shared vision for ethical global digital citizenship.

Mission:

Missions are fun, game-like challenges that are presented by instructors in the form of a visual, textual and/or auditory cue through the social network. Between two classes, instructors can send out a series of missions by choose from a wide range of suggestions that relate to the given theme. Responding to a particular mission is completely voluntary, and students are also free to interpret each mission as they see fit. The aim of the missions is to facilitate dialogue within the peer network through the exchange of media online. In order to maximize the dialogic nature of the missions, it is vital that instructor is flexible and reflexive in the selection of missions, and participates in the students' online conversations by liking and commenting on posts. It is important to use face-to-face time in the classroom to engage in discussions about their media production.

Lesson 1: Personal Spaces

In Class: The starting point of activities on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube or Tumblr is often the construction of a user profile. This includes choosing a nickname, a profile image, and other personal information that we chose to represent ourselves to the world. The construction our virtual identity becomes the basis of our interactions with online communities. The first lesson provides the opportunity to consciously reflect on the choses we make in constructing these virtual identities.

Questions of Inquiry:

How do you use images, videos and text to attract the attention of other Internet users?

What aspects of your personality are the most important to represent in your profile?

What do you look for when you connect with other people's profiles?

How can you ensure to that your self-representation is respectful to others in the online community?

Lesson Objectives:

- Develop an online profile by choosing an image, nickname, etc.
- Become a member in a private group in a social media network by connecting to peers.
- Establish a set of protocols for respectful behavior within this online network.
- Identify any concerns shared among members of this digital community.

Online: Throughout the first week, the instructor will send out a series of missions to the community from the recommended list.

Missions:

- Me
- At Home
- Coexistence
- Food
- From the Depth
- In Public
- Mapping
- My boundaries
- Mapping My Space
- Mapping Territories
- Origin
- Our sound
- We
- With Myself
- With Friends
- Writings Words

At the end of the first week of online activities:

- Participating students will have begun to develop their online identity through a series of publication on their profile that will allow their peers to recognize and identify them.
- They will find affinities and subgroups of interest within the community.
- During this time the instructor aims to motivate students to start thinking about issues of citizenship, digital citizenship and empathy.

Lesson 2: The Others

In Class: Within both physical and virtual spaces, one's identity is always entangled within the identities of others. Our identity is partly formed by the collective groups to which we belong such as family, friends, classmates and peers. We are also influenced by the shared physical and virtual spaces we inhabit every day. In this lesson, we consider the criteria we use to include and exclude others, and also how we can co-exist ethically in shared spaces with others who are not part of our social circles. This lesson provides the platform to explicitly think about responsible digital citizenship.

Questions of Inquiry:

Who are your friends? Why? What do you do with them?

On what basis do you choose to be friends with someone? Why?

On what basis do you choose to exclude someone from your circle? Why?

Who is the other? What makes me different from them?

When and how do we encounter others outside our social circle?

What are the codes that guide our relationships with others?

Lesson Objectives:

- To identify behaviours and attitudes that influence inclusion and exclusion of people within one's peer group.
- Identify the attitudes that favour the inclusion and integration of difference.
- Participate in discussions about values and codes of conduct as global citizens.
- Implement behaviours that encourage the development of common values within social networks.

Online: During week two, the instructor will send out a series of missions to the community from the recommended list.

Missions:

- The others
- Borders
- Bridging
- Building Bridges
- Exotic
- Gates
- Hold on Let go
- Intersection
- My city
- My community
- My neighbourhood
- Nation Country
- One side to Other
- Our home
- Our surroundings
- Our waste
- Perspectives
- Same different
- Tension Warning
- With Friends

At the end of the third week of online activities:

- Participating students will have begun to identify attitudes and behaviours that influence the inclusion and exclusion of others.
- They will have identified the behaviors and attitudes that support communication among diverse groups of people.
- During this time the instructor encourages students to start considering the development a collective set of values and codes for ethical global digital citizenship.

Lesson 3: Shared Vision

In Class: The objective of the final class is to give student autonomy to develop the theme of “Shared Vision” through missions and interventions that they propose to their peers.

Inspiration: Conflicts among different ideologies are a major threat to peace, quality of life and well-being of future generations. The ability to share and communicate properly is a key to a harmonious environment for all. Digital technologies enable us to communicate more easily than ever with those outside our immediate reach. Our communication and our actions online now have concrete repercussions on the future of our world.

Questions of Inquiry:

How do we build a more inclusive and harmonious world?

How should we prepare future generations to live in a world where difference is not an obstacle to cohabitation?

What are some concrete steps we can take to create this world?

What specific plans and collaboration do you envision?

Lesson Objectives:

Communicate a shared vision of cooperation and collaboration

Offer creative and practical solutions to issues that have roots in conflicts of differences.

Develop a proactive posture in establishing a common vision.

Online: During the final week, students generate and exchange their own missions.

At the end of the final week of activities:

- The student participant will have developed their own missions and interventions to articulate their shared vision for a more inclusive and caring world
- Through interactions mediated by image, video and text, students will have taken an active part in discussions on what constitutes effective ways to building communities that are inclusive of differences.
- Student have been sensitized to the importance of dialogue and their own contributions to the communities they inhabit.
- Student become more aware of the relationships within their own environment, as well as develop curiosity and empathy toward those outside of their own immediate world.

Missions:

- Blank Space
- Dreamland
- Element
- Horizon
- Protected Species
- Space Education
- Space Possible
- Team Effort
- Together at the Center

Additional Information

Origins of the Project

This project is an extension of larger research on utilizing the increased mobility and peer-networking capabilities of mobile devices to foster academic and civic engagement among youth (Castro, Lalonde & Pariser, in press; Lalonde, Castro & Pariser, in press; Pariser, Castro & Lalonde, in press). Given the ubiquity of mobile technology and its impact on the social-cultural practices of youth, this body of research aims to develop practical interventions that integrate mobile devices in educational contexts in meaningful ways that emphasize individual agency and human interactions. Some of the key questions addressed by the research include: How can the socio-cultural practices of youth in a virtual environment be incorporated to enrich learning in formal educational settings? What are the affordances and limitations of media technologies for formal education? What are some discipline-specific methods that can be used to integrate these technologies to enhance learning? Although the foundation of the research is in the fields of visual arts and arts education, we aim to provide practical insights and procedures pertinent to a wide range of educational contexts. That is why the following pages present robust and flexible teaching methods that can be adapted to meet the requirements of a wide range of academic contexts and disciplines.

Research Questions and Overview

What is the meaning of the word empathy? How do youth represent this value and how do they apply it through ethical or moral codes in their digitally mediated interactions? How do they build a common understanding of this principle through new forms of digital communication?

In order to address the everyday experiences of adolescents in a media-saturated world, this program utilizes mobile technologies to facilitate reflexive conversations within and outside of the context of the classroom. The ubiquity of mobile devices has meant that youth use their devices to capture and share their experiences, along with their views, attitudes and perceptions, with their peers in virtual environments. As such, mobile and social media have come to play a vital role in adolescents' identity construction and social interactions within and beyond the virtual world. On the one hand, the ease and accessibility of these technologies grants youth a degree of autonomy and flexibility in identity construction and the building of social networks. On the other hand, virtual environments are fertile grounds for uncritical partisanship and the perpetuation of negative perceptions of those outside of one's peer group. It is this contemporary milieu that we wish to address with our curricular interventions.

#Visualizingempathy acknowledges the role of mobile technologies in the construction of both individual and collective identities. Thus, in order to counter the phenomenon of hate speech online, our curriculum promotes positive identity construction that begins with introspection on the part of the individual and

moves toward the development of a shared vision for an inclusive community. This is achieved through a series of creative missions, where the instructor sends out a series of visual, textual and auditory promotes to participating students through a social network. These missions require participants to create multimodal representations of themselves, friends, school, community, city, country and world. Throughout this process, students and educators will have opportunities to engage in conversations about each other's representations online and within the classroom. These acts representation and dialogue enable students and teachers to engage in reflexive conversations about the moral and ethical codes involved in responsible digital citizenship.

