

Internet Survey for Art Teachers: The Results

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In late September 2005, I posted a survey on the Web that was designed to elicit responses from K-12 art teachers regarding their use of the Internet and other digital technologies in the classroom and home. 198 teachers participated in the survey, which ran from September 30 to November 15, 2005. While I am delighted that so many teachers responded to the survey, it's important to recognize that this sample is not necessarily representative of all art teachers. Indeed, the high percentage of reported technology use by the participants might be more a reflection of how the survey instrument was administered (online) than of actual technology use by art teachers in general. Still, the results of this survey offer an intriguing glimpse into the digital lives of art teachers and the ways in which some teachers use the Internet as a personal, professional, and instructional tool.

Following some brief comments about the survey instrument, the report itself, and the respondents, I will present the major findings of this survey.

The survey instrument

I used SourceForge.net's phpESP application software (<http://sourceforge.net/projects/phpesp>) to develop the survey for this study. I found it easy to install and just as easy to use to create the survey and analyze the results. On the other hand, I discovered that the software does not allow you to edit or correct errors in the survey once it has been published online. Thus, I had to let a few minor errors I discovered in the survey early on stand and allow it to run its course.

Reporting the results

In reporting the results of this survey, I've synthesized the responses of participants under four major findings. In doing so, I indicated the percentages for teachers who responded to individual items relevant to the specific finding. Be aware that I rounded the percentages to the nearest whole number, some items allow for multiple answers, and a few respondents did not respond to some items. Thus, the percentages for some items may not always add up to 100%.

Who responded to the survey?

Teachers were asked to check what grades they currently teach, from Pre-K to high school. Many responded by selecting more than one grade level. Thus, approximately 10% of the respondents reported that they teach pre-school level, 48% teach at the elementary level, 46% teach at the middle school level, and 33% teach at the high school level.

77% of the respondents were public school art teachers, whereas 23% taught in private schools. 35% reported that they've been teaching more than 15 years, while 7% reported that they were in their first year of teaching. Other responses were pretty evenly distributed between 1-3 years (12%), 4-6 years (13%), 7-9 years (11%), 10-12 years (11%), and 13-15 years (12%) of teaching experience. In all, the teachers who responded to the survey were a pretty diverse group.

Finding #1: Art teachers today are wired. They use computers, cell phones, digital cameras, CD burners, scanners, email, and Web sites a great deal at school and at home to accomplish various tasks.

In a typical week, the most popular technology devices used by art teachers are a desktop or laptop computer (97%), a cell phone (84%), and a digital camera (82%). Other frequently used technology tools include a scanner (59%) and a CD burner (52%). Far fewer art teachers (17%) use a MP3 player or a personal data assistant (12%).

Nearly all of the art teachers surveyed (98%) have an Internet-connected computer at home, and a personal email account through a commercial Internet provider (96%). Approximately 9 out of 10 of art teachers (89%) said that their school district provides them with an email account. However, almost 3 out of 4 art teachers (74%) access the Internet most frequently from home. The majority of these teachers have high-speed Internet-access at home with either a cable (33%), DSL connection (32%), or wireless connection (10%). A smaller percentage of art teachers (21%) said they have a dial-up connection at home.

Over two-thirds of the art teachers in this survey indicated they have a high-speed Internet connection in their classroom (68%), whereas 27% were not sure what type of connection they had in the classroom. Only 3% of the responding art teachers have a dial-up connection in the classroom.

36% of the art teachers in this survey said they are online more than 10 hours per week, while 35% are online between 6 to 10 hours per week, and 28% are online between 1 to 5 hours per week.

What do art teachers do online? Not surprisingly, nearly all of the teachers in this survey (98%) reported that they use e-mail to communicate with distant family members, friends, and colleagues. Just as many teachers (98%) use the Internet to gather information or images for classroom lessons. Furthermore, 93% of the art teachers in this survey said they use the Internet for personal research (e.g., gathering health or travel information), while a little over 80% said that they shop online.

Half the art teachers in this survey (50%) said they use the Internet for professional development (e.g., taking an online course), while 47% said they use it for personal entertainment. A relatively less popular Internet use is instant messaging with family and friends, which 39% of art teachers said they do.

When asked what Internet tools and services they personally use or visit in a typical week, all of the responding art teachers (100%) said they use email, and almost as many (97%) said they use a search engine (e.g., Google) or a Web directory (e.g., Yahoo!). Other popular Internet services include list-servs, mailing lists, e-groups, and mailrings, which 80% art teachers said they often use. Approximately 39% of art teachers use a Web portal site (e.g., MSN) while 28% use instant messaging software in a typical week. About a third of the art teachers surveyed (32%) have a personal Web site and 21% said they have or visit a Weblog (i.e., blog) weekly. Far fewer art teachers (6%) visit chat rooms while they are online.

Finding #2: Art teachers today value the Internet and are comfortable with using technology in the classroom. However, teacher enthusiasm for technology doesn't always lead to frequent student engagement with the Internet in the classroom.

The vast majority of art teachers in this survey rated their computer expertise as either “advanced” (37%) or “intermediate” (57%). Only 6% of the respondents felt they were “novice” computer users.

When asked how the use of technology ranks at their school, some 39% of art teachers checked it was a “high priority,” while 49% indicated it was a “moderate priority,” and 11% said it was a “low priority.” These percentages shifted when teachers were asked how Internet use ranked in their classroom. Some 24% checked it was a “high priority” while 44% said it was a “moderate priority.” Almost a third of the respondents (31%) said Internet use was a “low priority” in their classroom.

Over 8 out of 10 art teachers said they use images or information from the Internet or World Wide Web in their lessons or classroom presentations, either “always” (19%) or “frequently” (65%). 14% said they do so “occasionally” and 1% checked “never.” In contrast, only 4% of the teachers reported that their students use the Internet or World Wide Web “always” and 29% said their students “frequently” do so. Half the teachers (50%) checked that their students “occasionally” use the Internet or World Wide Web in the classroom and 16% checked their students “never” do so.

Finding #3: The most popular student use of the Internet in art classrooms, by far, is as a research tool. Art students typically visit pre-selected Web sites while conducting individual or group research projects.

68% of the art teachers surveyed indicated that their students have used the Internet or World Wide Web during the past year to conduct individual research, while 39% checked that their students went online while working on group research projects. More than half of the teachers (58%) indicated their students visited pre-selected Web sites during the past year. However, it appears that few art students participate in treasure hunts (9%) or WebQuests (11%)—two popular Internet-based activities that require teachers to pre-select Web sites for their students to visit.

If we look beyond research, other uses of the Internet by students receive much less attention in the art room. Approximately 22% of the teachers surveyed reported that their students published their artwork on the Web (*) during the past year, while 8% said their students built a Web site. In addition, relatively few art students used the Internet during the past year to exchange e-mail with students in another school or country (8%), or to collaborate with students in another school on a project together (5%). Lastly, 19% of the teachers checked “none of the above” when asked to select among options identifying typical student uses of the Internet for school purposes.

Finding #4: Art teachers face many obstacles in attempting to use the Internet with students in their classrooms. The most significant barriers include not having enough computers in the classroom or enough time in the school day to promote effective Internet use by students.

Almost three-fourths of the teachers (73%) surveyed checked “not enough computers” and over half of the teachers (52%) checked “not enough time in the school day,” in response to the question “What, if any obstacles do you face in using the Internet with students in your classroom?” 39% of the teachers cited “lack of adequate access to the school’s computer lab” and 36% cited “outdated computer or software” as impediments to Internet use by students. In addition, over a third of the teachers (34%) checked “school filters or firewalls” and nearly as many (31%) checked “lack of technical support in my school” as obstacles. Smaller percentages of teachers cited “concern about objectionable material posted online” (18%), “lack of support from my school administrators” (15%), “limited knowledge of how to integrate the Internet into the art curriculum” (13%), and “limited knowledge of how to use computers” (9%). 23% of the teachers checked “other obstacles not mentioned” and 4% indicated that they face “no obstacles” in using the Internet with students in their classrooms.

Conclusions

The past decade has seen a significant increase in the presence and use of the Internet and other digital technologies in art classrooms. For the most part, art teachers have developed a certain comfort level with computers and have successfully integrated the Internet into their daily routines in the classroom and at home. In addition to making frequent use of email and listservs to communicate with family, friends and colleagues, art teachers most often use the Web to gather information and images for their lessons and classroom presentations.

Similarly, students primarily use the Web in art classrooms to gather information and images for individual and group research projects. The use of the Internet as an electronic publishing tool by students or as a vehicle for linking students from different art classrooms or countries together in online cultural exchanges or joint creative work has yet to be explored in most art classrooms.

Lastly, the results of this survey show that there are many challenges facing art teachers who attempt to integrate the Internet into their curriculums, most prominent among them being inadequate time and equipment. While Internet access itself is no longer a significant issue in classrooms today, it seems clear that substantial support and resources are needed—well beyond what is currently available in schools—before teachers and students will be able to realize the power of the Internet as a revolutionizing educational tool in the classroom.

Note

* It's not clear here whether students themselves published their artwork online, or whether teachers did so for the students.

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