

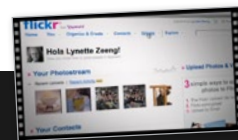


# LEARNING TO TEACH ONLINE

## CASE STUDY

# Using Flickr as an online classroom

Featuring: Lynette Zeeng, Swinburne University of Technology



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<http://bit.ly/d18ac5>



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|--------------------|---|
| <b>Context</b>     | - Several classes of around 30 students in Communication Design and Film and Television degrees   |
| <b>Description</b> | - Blended class. Face-to-face studio for learning photography techniques supplemented by an online component using <a href="#">Flickr</a> for submitting and presenting work, peer feedback and teaching comments |
| <b>Technology</b>  | - Flickr, a free website for storing and sharing images   |

Written by Simon McIntyre

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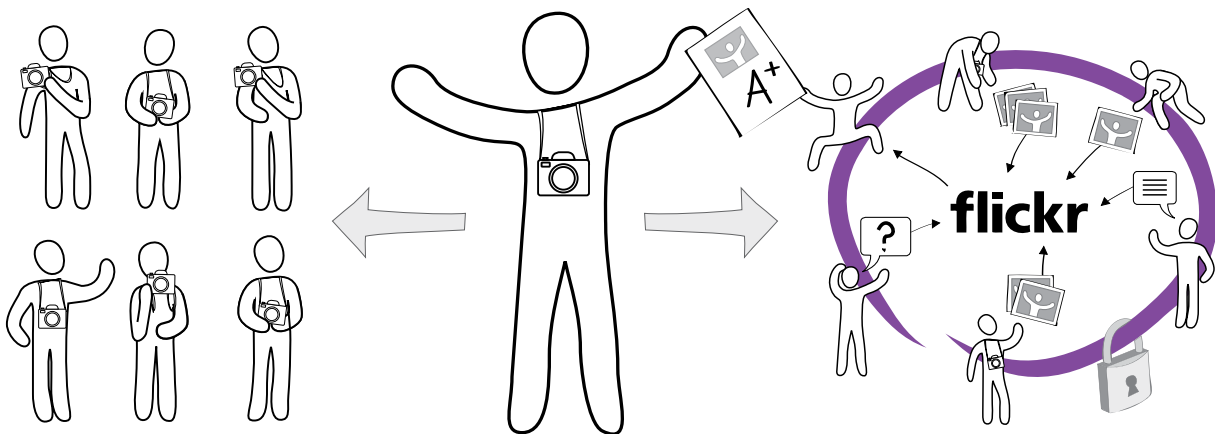


## Aims and overview

This case study aims to give you a basic understanding of the website Flickr, and how it was used to teach photography in a blended (face-to-face and online) class. It discusses the benefits of using an online community for submitting, organising and giving feedback on images, and the impact on student learning. Key issues surrounding pedagogic planning and teaching with Flickr that were encountered in this context of the case study will also be examined, highlighting the benefits and potential issues of adopting this approach.

## What is Flickr?

Flickr is a popular online image hosting website. It is also an online community that allows people to share images, leave comments on photographs and join larger discussions. It is also a popular method of hosting images that are imbedded in blogs and other websites. People can create free accounts and upload a limited number of photographs and videos into online albums which they can tag and share with the world. A paid subscription is also an option for those who want unlimited online storage space for their images. Flickr can be useful for teaching in any discipline where creation or discussion of images is important.



Users have the ability in Flickr to create private groups where images and discussions can be shared away from public scrutiny, which can be ideal for teaching. Students can share their images with the group, and view and comment on each others work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Teachers can easily track student progress, comment and grade work online, freeing up time in the face-to-face class.

## Other examples of photo sharing websites

Flickr's strength is in its online community, and discussion and commenting features, however there are many different photo sharing websites similar to Flickr. Some examples of these different sites include:

- [Photobucket](http://www.photobucket.com) [www.photobucket.com](http://www.photobucket.com) (free)
- [Smugmug](http://www.smugmug.com) [www.smugmug.com](http://www.smugmug.com) (paid subscription)
- [Bluemelon](http://www.bluemelon.com) [www.bluemelon.com](http://www.bluemelon.com) (free or paid subscription)

## Case study outcomes quick summary

### Key benefits

- Students usually find Flickr easy to use, as the inherent concepts are similar to many other web 2.0 platforms
- Positive student feedback about the use of Flickr in their learning
- Higher levels of student engagement. Students see much more of their peers' work than in a face-to-face class
- Students engage in higher levels of critical thinking and reflective practice through peer review of work, making comments and joining online discussions.
- There is 24/7 access to the online classroom, meaning that students have more opportunity to be exposed to other students' work. There is more opportunity to learn by example, have questions answered, receive peer mentoring from other students and to build confidence within the online community
- Comments made on images are permanent, making it easy for students to refer back and reflect during the entire semester
- Students can upload and comment on work at any time that suits them, they are not limited to class time
- Students don't have to continually print photographs for submission, saving time and money on materials and chemicals
- There is time for students and teachers to have discussions online about relevant topics that there is usually not time for in class, which can lead to a deeper understanding of the subject matter
- Marking student work is much easier. Teachers do not have to deal with bulky physical portfolios, and can mark work at any time or location convenient to them
- Flickr has an in-built email system called flickr mail. Students can email their teacher directly and alert them about changes to uploaded work. This enables the teacher to click a link and visit the work directly

### Key issues to consider

- Don't assume students automatically understand how to use the software. Special care needs to be taken to guide students in how you want them to use the website in the class
- A free account on Flickr only has space for 200 images. This may need to be considered when designing assessment tasks
- Users can licence their images under copyright or creative commons. Before using other people's images on Flickr for educational purposes it is important to check the copyright permissions
- Some institutions may not allow the use of open web 2.0 software for teaching, check with your institution

## Motivation for adopting an online teaching strategy

Lynette Zeeng is a photographer from a traditional background, who became increasingly concerned about the gap between current digital photography technology and the way photography was being taught to students. The reasons that Lynette decided to develop an online extension of her classroom included:

- Her decision that it was important to embrace digital technology in her teaching in order to make her course more relevant to how students already engaged with photography, and to ensure their knowledge

would be relevant to current practice

- She taught several face-to-face tutorial groups, but students only ever saw the work of those in the same group, and didn't have an opportunity to discuss their work with students in other groups
- She wanted to maximise the use of face-to-face teaching time for learning the technical and practical aspects of photography, but had to balance limited class time between this task and student presentations and critiques
- Managing large numbers of physical portfolios for each student submission was problematic and time consuming

## Why Flickr?

In order to try to address the above issues, Lynette decided to try Flickr the following reasons:

- Flickr is contemporary and widely used. It is a globally accepted technology for storing, managing and sharing digital imagery, and has currency and relevance to modern photography
- It is a very visual platform, making working with large numbers of images more efficient
- Each photo uploaded also contains the [metadata](#) of the photograph, including information such as shutter speed, exposure, aperture, focal length. This is an invaluable record for the teacher, and helps reinforce students' understanding of the technical aspects of photography
- It has a capability of allowing comments to be made on photos, offering an increased opportunity to incorporate peer review across several classes, enabling students to reflect on their peers' work, increasing critical analysis and communication skills
- All uploads are date stamped, meaning student activity can be easily monitored
- The in-built organisation and search capabilities of Flickr make it easy to keep track of the work of a large volume of students
- Students can build an online portfolio and archive of their work, which they can make publicly available if they choose

## Planning

Initially, Lynette felt very daunted by the technology and was uncertain about deviating from her usual and familiar teaching approaches. However, the experience ended up being a very positive one for Lynette and her students, and she felt that she had discovered a new effective means of teaching photography. This was because she spent considerable time planning how she would balance the face-to-face and online components of her class:

- What elements of the face-to-face class work well, and what could work better? What would be the best use of time in the classroom, and what could be done better online?
- Spend time exploring the Flickr website, and understanding the various functions and methodologies. Get

*help from a technician or a colleague who has a good knowledge of the technology*

- *Look at the learning outcomes of the class in the context of the assessment and the opportunities offered by the technology*
- *How can the technology be used to best support the learning outcomes, and how can the technology improve the way the assessment works? Flickr is good for student submissions, presentations and peer review*

## Teaching

Lynette has used Flickr as an online classroom for the last four years. The website is used for student submission of work, peer feedback and has been invaluable in streamlining the marking process. Lynette suggested that the following issues were important to consider when teaching using Flickr:

- *The face-to-face component of the class is best used for teaching practical skills in the use of cameras, as well as discussing the expectations and assessment*
- *The first face-to-face class should be dedicated to introducing students to Flickr, helping them understand how to set up a profile and join the class Flickr group, how to manage photos and how to tell when they have received online feedback. Tutors should also attend the orientation class so that there is a common understanding across classes of how the Flickr and face-to-face relationship works*
- *Students should be asked to create brand new Flickr accounts for the class, so that personal photos are not mixed in with photos students upload for the class, thus maintaining proper social and ethical boundaries*
- *Making students upload an image to represent themselves in Flickr is advantageous because it becomes easy to associate work submitted online with students in the face-to-face component of the class*
- *Discourage students from adding anything but their name to the profile. This keeps the online classroom professional and appropriate for learning*
- *Students should set their time zone to eastern standard time in their profile so that submission times and dates can be correctly recorded on images they upload. This makes it easy to manage submission and there is a record of whether students submitted on time*
- *When making groups in Flickr for classes, make sure to name them clearly so as to represent the class group for easy identification. If you use Flickr over several semesters or teach several groups it can get confusing*
- *Set ground rules about how students should interact and communicate online. For example Lynette has banned the use of offensive language and images deemed inappropriate for the class*
- *The fact that Flickr only supports 200 photos in the free account can be used as a device to encourage critical analysis in the students. This limit means that students have to make informed decisions about what to upload to stay under the limit. Lynette asks her students to submit a minimum of 100 and a maximum of 200 photographs over the entire semester*
- *Students can start discussions and ask questions in the discussion area inside the Flickr group. This means that questions can be answered by anyone in the group and students can have access to the teacher outside of class time*
- *All submissions are done online. Students make a Flickr 'set', which is a collection of images in response to a particular assignment, and submit their set to the class group, making it easy to compare and mark images*

- *Utilise the fact that Flickr enables students to see the work of others in different groups if working with large numbers. This is valuable for encouraging discussion and exposing students to different approaches and techniques*
- *Students commenting on each others' work was made compulsory by Lynette, in order to encourage participation and greater opportunities for peer learning amongst the online community. Students are given the opportunity to update their work in response to feedback before final marking*
- *Using the Flickr gallery feature to showcase good examples of photography can have a powerful impact upon student learning. Images that set a standard and illustrate best practise can be transferred from a student's image set, or from other public Flickr accounts straight into the gallery. This can help students understand what is expected of them, and is a good moral boost for a student if their work is featured*
- *If you are working with tutors, make sure you choose ones that are open to the idea of teaching online and challenging their own set beliefs about teaching photography, it makes the process run much more smoothly*

### **Issues to consider and suggestions for dealing with them**

Although using Flickr for teaching has many advantages, there are also some potentially problematic issues that need to be considered before starting out:

- **Issue**  
*Sometimes students can struggle for a few weeks to become familiar with the technology and its functions*  
**Suggested strategy**  
*Spend a class going through the website, explaining how it works, and what is expected of students in relation to the course and assessment. Always allow time in face-to-face classes for questions related to the website and its use.*
- **Issue**  
*Flickr is an open website, which means student work is visible to the public. What about privacy?*  
**Suggested strategy**  
*Flickr users can control most aspects of privacy in their account. They can determine who can view, leave comments and add other information to their images. Students should be encouraged to check their account and make these settings as secure as possible. Information about how to do this can be found on the [Flickr help website](#).*
- **Issue**  
*Photographs are visible online to everyone and can easily be downloaded and reused without permission*  
**Suggested strategy**  
*This issue can be solved by making the images viewable to only a select group of people as outlined above, however this process can often be complicated when many people are required to see the images. Another strategy adopted in this case study was that students were asked to upload low resolution photos, meaning if people did copy or download them they are not of high enough quality to produce good prints. You can*

*also encourage students to set copyright permissions on their photographs. This will not stop people from downloading them, but students will be properly covered by copyright law. This process is explained in the [Flickr Technical Glossary video](#) associated with this episode. Students also have the option of licencing their images under creative commons, allowing free distribution and use by third parties.*

## Conclusion

Hopefully the information in this case study has enabled you to develop an understanding of how Flickr can be used in teaching photography, and we also hope you are able to see possibilities of how to use it in your own teaching. For further help with exploring Flickr, please see the related technical glossary episode that will explain the basics of the website.

## Additional information

Flickr help website [www.flickr.com/help](http://www.flickr.com/help)

Flickr online forum [www.flickr.com/help/forum/en-us](http://www.flickr.com/help/forum/en-us)

## Additional reading\*

[Capturing, Analysing and Critiquing the Visual Image Using Web 2.0 in Studio Classes](#) (2010). Studio Teaching Project: Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC).

Graham, S. (2009, 4-6 December). [A Case Study of University Students' Use of Flickr Photographic Networking to Develop Confidence, English Language Fluency and Shape World Consciousness](#). Paper presented at the Englishes and Literatures-in-English in a Globalised World: Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on English in Southeast Asia, Singapore.

Robbie, D., & Zeeng, L. (2008, 30 November - 3 December). [IT's evolving, they're changing, we're listening: Everybody's learning](#). Paper presented at the Hello! Where are you in the landscape of educational technology? Proceedings ascilite Melbourne 2008, Melbourne.

Zeeng, L., Robbie, D., Adams, K. M., & Hutchison, C. (2009, 7-9 December, 2009). [Where's my class? Using Web 2.0 for collaboration in a design environment](#). Paper presented at the Same places, different spaces. Proceedings ascilite Auckland 2009, Auckland.

*\*Note: Some readings are held in subscription only databases. In most cases accessing the link from your institution's network will enable access.*



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Flickr [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) appears in this case study in a non-commercial context in accordance with the Flickr Guidelines and Terms of Use [www.flickr.com/guidelines.gne](http://www.flickr.com/guidelines.gne) and [au.docs.yahoo.com/info/terms](http://au.docs.yahoo.com/info/terms). All personal images featured in this case study are with the express written permission of the copyright owners.

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**Lynette Zeeng**

*Education Development Coordinator, Communication Design*



## For more Learning to Teach Online, visit the COFA Online Gateway



To find out more about the Learning to Teach Online project, or to view the video component of this episode, please visit the COFA Online Gateway.

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### About the project

The [Learning to Teach Online](#) project is a free professional development resource designed to help teachers from any discipline, whether experienced in online teaching or not, to gain a working understanding of successful online teaching pedagogies that they can apply in their own unique teaching situations. It hopes to encourage dialogue, discussion and the sharing of ideas about online learning and teaching across disciplines and between institutions around the world.

### About COFA Online

COFA Online is an academic unit at the College of Fine Arts (COFA), The University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, Australia. It has been innovating online pedagogy, academic professional development and effective online learning strategies since 2003.

### About The University of New South Wales

UNSW has an enrolment of approximately 40,000 students, and is the leading international university in Australia with over 10,000 international enrolments from over 130 nations. UNSW was also ranked as the top university in 2009 in the Australian Government Learning and Teaching Performance Fund for the quality of its teaching.

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