



Curriculum Support

for teaching in Creative Arts 7–12

A school perspective: Introducing Photographic and Digital Media

The following article has been written by John Skillington, HT Visual Arts, James Fallon High School in response to a request to provide a single perspective on setting up the facilities, resources and wherewithal to conduct a photographic and digital media course. John's comments are based on his personal experiences and will not necessarily apply to all teachers and all schools, but they might provide some ideas for teachers who are thinking of ways to introduce the new elective course in their schools.

Introduction

The new Stage 5 Photographic and Digital Media (PDM) elective course will be implemented in schools from 2005.

Experience suggests that this course will be popular among students in my school who would previously have been electing school based content endorsed courses in photography, film-making and visual design and those students who have been pursuing digital and/or photographic forms within Visual Arts.

The PDM course provides a new learning pathway for students to make and study a range of photographic and digital media works in greater depth and breadth than in the Visual Arts elective course.

The content structure, language and approaches to open-ended investigation are common to Visual Arts and Photographic and Digital Media courses.

Course requirements

The course requirements for making and studying photographic and digital forms are sufficiently flexible for a range of situations across different schools.

The course allows my school to offer a range of forms to suit our facilities, resources and current expertise. We provide learning opportunities in *wet* photography and digital imaging within the *Still form* and digital video within the *Moving form*.

The following course information on essential content is from the *Photographic and Digital Media Years 7–10 syllabus*, September 2004 p. 14.

In making Photographic and Digital Media works, students:

- investigate practice, the conceptual framework and the frames in one or more of the areas of *still*, *interactive* and *moving* forms

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- have the opportunity to undertake a broad investigation of more than one form, for example, web design from the interactive area and video from the moving area or specialise in one form, for example, wet photography from the still area
- investigate computer based technologies
- use a journal to document ideas and interests, experiments with materials, techniques and technologies, and to record relevant technical information
- develop a portfolio based on investigations of the world using a range of photographic and digital equipment and techniques.

In critical and historical interpretations, students:

- use the conceptual framework and the frames to understand the field of Photographic and Digital Media
- investigate relevant events, photographers, artists, designers, agencies and critical accounts of Photographic and Digital Media practice.

Schools may elect to implement one or a range of areas based on their human and technical resources. For example, if your school has well established facilities and teacher expertise in wet photography, this can be a focus *Still form*. Future directions could involve broadening the course to include other forms.

Your long term plan to develop spaces and resources to deliver all course components will depend on a whole school policy on the use of technology in classroom practice. It is therefore important to establish the Photographic and Digital Media course within a whole school context – the licensing of software, the location of computers, the accessibility of classes, groups and individuals to the equipment and the allocation of memory to each faculty are broad considerations.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a requirement of all subjects. It is important that your school's computer coordinator is aware of the unique requirements of the Photographic and Digital Media course, with storage and memory capacity being two areas that are critical for implementing the course in its entirety.

Photographic and Digital Media course in the classroom

I emphasise in-depth investigation of ideas expressed through created images, rather than superficial image manipulation in order to address syllabus outcomes.

In *wet* photography this can be achieved through the acknowledged practices of its broad history. Digital

imaging is more problematic with a limited recent history which includes entrenched clichés absorbed through the popular media.

Our students are guided to investigate manipulation tools as thoroughly as possible, before moving from the descriptive to the expressive.

In digital imaging there is a tendency to rely on the software to provide expression through over reliance on pre sets, such as filters, but more especially relying on appropriated images. I think it is important that digital imaging be seen to emerge from traditional photographic practice rather than the other way around. The practice of making is then more authentic as individual expression, because the student is encouraged to be the author at each stage of the process.

Digital cameras are invaluable within the establishment of the digital component of the course, but film cameras should be highly valued in both *still* areas. Film cameras have the advantage of being more controllable and providing high quality images at an affordable price, negatives can be scanned inexpensively, the only disadvantage being the lack of immediacy. Commercial scanning is affordable and preferable to the film scanner accessories provided with many flat-bed scanners, as these are quite poor in comparison. Some schools may consider a dedicated negative scanner rather than discard a major investment in film cameras. Flat-bed scanners themselves are widely used as proxy cameras with some contemporary photographic practice involved in direct image making using these devices as end producers rather than just as another resource for digital imaging.

Digital video is an area that has grown enormously in line with the level of consumer involvement in technology enabling the home computer to become a relatively sophisticated video editing suite. There are a range of basic editing software packages available with *Adobe Premiere* and *Final Cut Pro* amongst the best but with inexpensive versions such as *Pinnacle Studio* and *I-movie* more accessible to schools.

**The reconfigured landscape/bodyscape*, a Photographic and Digital Media unit of work written and trialled by John Skillington, is available on the Department of Education and Training Creative Arts web site. <http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/creativearts/>

John Skillington
Visual Arts Head Teacher.
James Fallon High School Albury