Sketchbook: Social Networking Through Visual Research

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There is a wide spread assumption within the art and design community that the visual channel is a valid channel for enquiry, analysis and evaluation, and that it should have greater acceptability within the Academy as an alternative to text. However, the explicit documented evidence to support this claim does not exist. The aim of the Sketchbook project was to attempt to provide the community with a resource that evidences visual forms of research and the conceptual journeys and intellectual processes of artists and designers. The Sketchbook project was sponsored by the Art Design and Media Subject Centre and the University of the Arts London. The project team aimed to develop an online visual research resource that would enable students to: engage in social networking in a visual environment, understand the different approaches to visual research undertaken by practitioners across a wide range of disciplines and to give them access to exemplars of a wide range of approaches to visual research. The resource enables students to develop their own online visual journal or sketchbook and to explore journals and sketchbooks created by other students and professionals. There are recommended reading lists and links to other visual research resources. Students and tutors can create groups, engage in collaborative projects and engage in comment and debate. The presentation will explain the process undertaken to develop the resource and some of the findings from user testing of the beta site. It will examine issues that other educators may wish to consider when developing online resources and investigate how social networking tools can be used in art and design education to assist students in the development of their research skills. The presentation will explain the technologies used to develop the resource and some of the technical challenges the team faced in building the resource. The audience will gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of developing a new social networking tool from a technological and, more importantly, a pedagogical perspective.