Technology in the Art Room: The New Visual Arts Renaissance

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Twenty years ago if you’d walk into an art room at your local school, you’d see traditional art being done, as it had been done for the past one hundred years; with pencils, paint, paper, canvas, clay, etc. The typical student would be grounded in the classics of art history and creating the usual self-portraits and still-life art work.

Recently, with the advent of newer technologies such as digital cameras and video and photo editing software, the art room is being transformed from an out-dated traditional classroom into a cutting-edge technical-driven domain where students can pursue more varied media and explore different areas of art that have never been taught in a traditional classroom. During this transitioning period, it’s important for the art educator to not place the importance of the curriculum on the technology itself but using the technology as a tool to engage and inspire the learner.

When I was a new art teacher eight years ago, I was frenetic and foaming at the mouth to get computers in my classroom. I didn’t really know how to use them; I just know I needed them. Little did I know the overwhelming amount of stress that came when I finally did get my computers (outdated as they were) and was told to teach Photoshop to my students. Fortunately for me, the district that hired me was very patient with me and let me teach myself and take workshops and classes to acclimate myself to the software and technology.

Those first five years were a trial and error type of learning that was actually very beneficial for me. Sometimes my students who were familiar with Photoshop taught me more stuff about Photoshop than the classes I took. Looking back on those five years, I often think that I somehow didn’t teach my best to the students since I did not know the material as well as I should have.

When I did know the material and technology, it was unfortunately, outdated. I had to keep bugging the district to give me updated technology because what good would it do if I taught my students on antiquated technology that isn’t used anymore in the industry? Did I fail them as a teacher? Did they get the quality art education that they deserved? What does the role of educational technology have to do with making sure that this doesn’t happen again?

The role of educational technology is important because it helps educators adhere to the goals and standards of the curriculum to make sure technology is being used in the right capacity. Part of that capacity is making sure the art educators are properly trained in the areas of technology that they have access to. What good is it to have a laptop for every student with all the bells and whistles of Paint Shop Pro when the teacher doesn’t even know how to use it? If the technology is available, it should be installed and used in the classroom with proper guidance. That’s why it’s imperative to have a trained staff who know what they’re doing with the technology they have and how to implement it into your curriculum.

Implementing technology into the art curriculum is fine as long as you aren’t forgetting what art is. The definition of art has many convoluted concepts and ideas that are highly debated and controversial. In a nutshell definition, art is form and content. The form is the structure and composition of a piece of art work that uses the elements and principles of design to portray a message or idea, which happens to be the content.

Art is not about mastering all the skills and keyboard shortcuts in Photoshop or knowing how many optical effects Final Cut Pro offers. The art educator must use technology as a vehicle to be the catalyst for learning and discovering the world of art. Technology should be there to enhance and foster the learning, not serve as a distraction as a useless new toy that will be forgotten about in a couple weeks.
How can technology improve the art classroom? Research has shown that group computer work is one of the best approaches to learning. This type of learning leads to more “trial and error” learning. This way any mistakes can easily be undone and fixed. With traditional art media, it’s divided into two realms: two dimensional (drawings and paintings) and three dimensional (ceramics and sculpture). With technological-driven art media, the range is even greater. Digital arts media ranges from web design to computer graphics and everything in between.

The average student is bombarded with this new technological-driven media from the moment they wake up to the moment they go to sleep. This new technological-driven art is in the design of their cell phones (industrial design) to the logos on their favorite clothes (graphic design) to the special video effects on their favorite video games (game design). What better way to engage the student than learning how to design the very same things and make the learning more genuine? Not only will the student be driven to explore and learn on their own but it will radically change the way the teacher facilitates more so than teaching.

Even if the technology is limited to just one computer and the Internet in the art classroom, it can still have a positive impact on the learner. This technology can be used as a research tool for the students to research artists and art work instead of using books and encyclopedias. This limited technology can even be used as a curriculum development tool to link up to other similar art classes to make sure that the conceptual learning is common. Even with one computer, all the art work of one class can be captured digitally via scanner or camera and stored on a photo sharing site. Thus, the art work can be shared on the Internet and accessed by people all over the world to critique. This leads itself to being used as an assessment tool, because so many people can view and judge their art work.

Even as schools begin to crumble under the weight of being underfunded, technology offers a way through this dark time through on-line learning. Virtual art classrooms offer a different setting than the traditional art classroom. Whereas students learn at a designated time and space with a traditional linear setting, through on-line courses students can learn at home when they are inspired to learn and not at a specific time or place. This on-line setting also tends to lead to more student interaction because some might be timid of the judgments taking place in a traditional classroom or they are too shy to voice their opinion in front of people.

As the students leave the art room and go to college, they are being required to master more and more computer skills. The new workforce is being asked to be more tech-savvy and knowledgeable. On the job training will slow a workforce down and that’s why it’s imperative to get today’s students immersed in technology at a young age. It’s becoming a technology-rich world, and teachers must start engaging effective strategies with their lessons to teach the skills of these technologies that involve complex problem solving. In using up to date technology in the art classroom, the students will have a solid framework to build upon as they further their careers in their artistic endeavors.

In conclusion, the art classroom should not be left behind in the technology race. Art is all around us and in many forms, much of it technological. To overlook the use of technology in the art classroom is detrimental for the future development of art in all the major fields of design. The key is to use technology as a tool for effective, engaged learning where collaborative efforts lead to problem-solving and wonderful works of art and design.

References


These 13 visual art movements are fundamental to understanding the different types of art that shape modern history. Italian Renaissance Art. “David” by Michelangelo. 1501-1504. Galleria dell’Accademia (via Wikipedia). From the 14th through 17 century, Italy underwent an unprecedented age of enlightenment. Italian Renaissance artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raphael found inspiration in classical art from Ancient Rome and Greece, adopting ancient interests like balance, naturalism, and perspective. In Renaissance-era Italy, this antiquity-inspired approach materialized as humanist portrait painting, anatomically correct sculpture, and harmonious, symmetrical architecture. Learn more about the Renaissance. Artists to Know: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael. The Basics of Art: The Renaissance. We live in a world that’s highly technical and specialized. When a man goes to college these days, he spends his time learning the skills that will allow him to seek gainful employment. Little time is spent studying art or literature. These new cultural movements gave inspiration to artists, while Italy’s trade with Europe and Asia produced wealth that created a large market for art. Prior to the Renaissance Period, art was largely commissioned by the Catholic Church, which gave artists...