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15. DIGIART AND HUMAN RIGHTS

New Media Visual Art Integration for Teacher Candidates OR
Avoiding the Information, Communication Technology (ICT) Vacuity
Using Visual Art Education Infusion

A NEW MEDIA VISUAL ART INTEGRATED PROJECT FOR
TEACHER CANDIDATES

It has been found that educators in all disciplines are confused with what to do with digital technology (Buckingham, 2007; Cuban, 2001; Roland, 2010; Watts, 2008). What is crucial to education is the merging of effective, meaningful pedagogy with suitable and valuable technological infusion (Buckingham, 2007; Buckingham, Willett, & Pini, 2011; Mullen & Rahn, 2010; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). The question is, how does one do this well? Many teachers approach the integration of technologies from a ‘technicist’ (technical) rather than from a creative, artistic perspective (Roland, 2010; Watts, 2008). Put simply, they are perplexed about what to teach, and how to teach it. One reason for this is that teachers tend to teach the way they have been taught (Greb, 1997; Roland, 2010). Some educators simply give up and let computers sit unused (Cuban, 2001; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). If teachers do use technology in classrooms they primarily use it in boring, unimaginative ways, repeatedly making use of it for retrieving or showcasing information: in short, teachers habitually employ computers as glorified chalkboards, digital libraries, or simple notepads (Buckingham, 2007; Cuban, 2001; Roland 2010). The body of research is still evolving in this area and far more is needed in order to learn ways in which to creatively integrate digital technologies into curricula while underscoring effective pedagogy (Bell & Bull, 2010; Castro & Grauer, 2010; Shin, 2010; Watts, 2008).

Writers increasingly have argued that visual art and digital technologies have a natural affinity (Bastos, 2010; Gouzouasis, 2006; Sweeney, 2010; Watts, 2008). Gouzouasis (2006) advocates for all educators to view the arts as the foundation when teaching digital technologies in order to foster our youths’ imaginations and creativity. He writes that, “If we are to venture beyond the vacuum of ICT contexts, it is urgent that artists and arts educators begin rethinking the role of the arts and all forms of technologies” (p. 9). In addition to this, Buckingham, a seminal researcher in cultural and media studies, strongly advises all teachers to adopt the visual art education model because he envisions the crucial importance of art studio production.
(hands-on art making). Art educators teaching studio typically nurture students’ self-expression and imaginations through the exploration of different art forms and themes (Buckingham, 2007, pp. 163–164). Why not do this with digital art as well? Hence, both Gouzouasis and Buckingham specifically point to the value of approaching digital technology infusion in other subject areas with an art education focus. The intention is for students to deal with artistic themes in the “digital studio”, hence nurturing youths’ self-expression, promoting curious minds, and encouraging creative explorations.

Gouzouasis (2006) postulates that technology must be informed by the arts to make it meaningful. Even though many art educators resist using digital technologies (Bastos, 2010; Choi & Piro, 2009; Peppler, 2010; Roland, 2010) and teach outdated concepts, antiquated content, and old forms of delivery (Roland, 2010, Watts, 2008), there are indeed some who are advocating change and a few who are integrating newer technologies into their curriculum in imaginative and creative ways (Castro & Grauer, 2010; Castro, Sinner, & Grauer, 2010; Lachapelle, 2010; Lin, Castro, Sinner, & Grauer, 2011; Rahn, 2010; Roland, 2010). For this chapter the author has sought to add to this body of knowledge by writing about a unique project combining digital technologies, human rights education, and art education.

The Project

For over ten years the author has taught a class called “Teaching Senior Years Art.” Teacher candidates training to teach art in high schools are required to take this course in their second year of a Bachelor of Education Program at the University of Manitoba, located in Canada. The curriculum the author has designed and implemented is entitled, “digiART: A New Media Visual Art Integrated Project” and has been a major assignment since 2003. As a result of digiART, teacher candidates not only learn about teaching traditional art but also newer digital art forms. What better way for students to acquire an understanding of effective pedagogy in teaching new media than by modeling it? What better way for students to develop rich curricula than by having them actually experience it?

During 2011–2012 and 2013–2014 the author selected the theme of human rights for the digiART project. Human rights is an effective and engaging subject as corroborated by other scholars’ findings, (Chung, 2010; Darts, 2004, 2006; Delacruz, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). A subject such as human rights is worth studying intensely. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) write, “Most digital creativity is of the unspectacular sort. What stands out to us is not the absolute (and relatively small) percentage of Digital Natives [youths who are comfortable using digital technologies] doing the most creative things online, but the extent to which this creativity represents an opportunity for learning, personal expression, individual autonomy, and political change…This trajectory is particularly important for how we ought to be educating our kids in a digital era” (p. 113).

Many of the students in pre-service education use technology in their everyday lives as “consumers” or users of digital art. In digiART, however, they are asked