

**Inevitable Change Towards Virtual Education:
Reasons for Keeping Art Educators During the Covid-19 Crisis**

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Inevitable Change Towards Virtual Education: Reasons for Keeping Art Educators During the Covid-19 Crisis

This paper is in response to the closing of physical school environments and the transition to virtual classes for art educators and art students due to the COVID-19 virus. This paper discusses why virtual art-education should continue and why art-educators should not be furloughed despite the many pitfalls and unpreparedness of school districts. Those that can hold virtual classes, should continue with art education despite challenges and setbacks. This paper should act as a basis for future situations where online practice should quickly be implemented, and why it is important to keep up with virtual learning even when traditional art classes are in session.

Art as a subject is consistently evolving. From one movement to the next, there is transformation in the way artists create, but minimal change has been made in the way students learn. Traditional learning platforms are concrete, but in times of desperate situations, like the one we are experiencing now, traditional learning becomes obsolete. So, just like the everchanging art world, students, educators, administrators, and the government must adapt in order to make learning possible. Quitting at the sign of difficulty will not allow change to happen, and if we must thrive, change is inevitable. Through the Facebook group, Online Art Teachers (K-12), many art educators and professionals explained that their administrators or policy makers advised them against advancing the curriculum due to equity issues with so many students not being online, advised them to only focus on enrichment activities, advised them to review previously learned concepts, advised them to not grade turned in work, and advised them to focus on social emotional learning. Then the question becomes, why not furlough art teachers if substantial learning is not occurring?

History Repeating

It is extraordinary to learn about repeating events in our history and the way education was previously impacted by outbreak of viruses. According to Quinn (2011), in 2007 and in 2009 several states were forced to temporarily close schools due to “concern over an antibiotic-resistant strain of *Staphylococcus* called MRSA” and “a widespread outbreak of H1N1 virus, also known as the swine flu” (p. 19). It was only in our recent history that such events took place, and after 11 years history repeated itself on a worldwide scale. Quinn (2011) explained that in order to combat disruptive situations in our daily in-school activities, “art educators must consider e-learning when devising curricula and pedagogy in anticipation of emergencies, such as pandemics or natural disasters, which might force students to learn from a remote location” (p. 19). Technology has advanced to the point where many educators already practice virtual teaching across our nation, such as Florida Virtual Schools. Then, learning from our recent history and what already has been established in the e-learning world, policy makers should not be afraid to continue online education during the Covid-19 crisis.

Patton and Buffington (2016) explain that “as technologies change rapidly, we need to ensure art education policies, standards, practices, preparation of preservice art teachers, and the art classroom” are able to use “current technologies for artmaking” (p. 159). From this event, it is vital for educators, administrators, superintendents, and policy makers to learn how to keep students learning and educators teaching without serious implications. Instead of cutting art-education courses from virtual learning during the crisis, administrators and policy makers should foster an innovative framework for distance learning where there is “freedom to fail: space to take risks, experiment and try new things” where “failure is viewed as part of the

process” and innovation makes the school thrive (Simonson, 2018, p. 6). All educators are essential and virtual learning for new comers will not be perfect, but teaching students is priority.

It Can Be Done

With distance learning plaguing many schools throughout these difficult times, our mindset must change where education is seen “not as something to finish but as an exploration of all that can be known” where we foster students who are lifelong learners (Roubides, 2017, p. 2). According to Roubides (2017), “lifelong learning, from the perspective of the educator, is the process where an individual, teacher, school, community and country encourages, incentivizes and promotes a learner to obtain knowledge, skills and abilities across their lifespan through formal, non-formal and informal means to satisfy the needs of the workforce and the individuals curiosity” (p. 2). Instead of moving away from art education and considering the subject as non-essential, students can be taught to fulfill their education and teachers are encouraged to continue their teaching.

There is no way to escape technology, because technology is involved in the students’ daily lives. Whether the students are virtually communicating with their friends or corresponding with their teachers, technology is intertwined. Instead of avoiding virtual education or furloughing “nonessential” teachers, the idea of lifelong learning needs to be imbedded within the students and our educational system. Roubides (2017) explained that lifelong learning “removes any stigma to education received in non-traditional formats”, they can learn at any time or location, their motivation is increased because they choose to participate in their learning and “their education is related to the effort they invest” (pp. 3-8). While the information is presented to students virtually, it is up to the art educators to explain it and make it meaningful.

As supplies are limited in many student households, art educators must become creative in deciphering what could be used in order to keep the students engaged and provide them with meaningful lessons. Behind closed doors, policymakers might not see the constant research efforts done by teachers, but social media platforms are filled with discussions by art educators where ideas are constantly flowing. Freedman (1997) wondered, “are we not, as art educators, responsible for teaching about all aspects of imagery” (p. 11)? Instead of keeping classes for the sake of enhancement activities, or cancelling art education classes all together, awareness to administrators and policymakers must be made about the amount of work art educators are putting into creating meaningful lesson plans that will engage and inspire our students. Roubides (2017) explained that “educators will need to adapt current lesson plans to incorporate this new medium into all the classrooms” which would allow “teachers a variety of ways to deliver information to students” (p. 38). For students “the most stimulating aspect of their work is the ‘trial and error’ capability of technology” and the “vast amount of imagery and information available on the Internet give students a wide range of resources (Freedman, 1997, p. 8). There is always an undo button for students, which allows for revision and development of ideas to evolve.

Perspective

The moment where my own school and many of those from around the country went into remote teaching, there was an undeniable support group created for art educators on social media. Through the Facebook group, Online Art Teachers (K-12), over seven thousand members from across the world, with a substantial amount of helpful posts of support and lesson ideas, art educators came to each other’s support during the pandemic. Whether the art educators are virtual teaching veterans or newly integrated teachers, there is no doubt that it is possible to teach

creative art activities, with limited to no supplies, to art students virtually. The ever-evolving Facebook group provides a variety of suggestions for meaningful virtual art lessons: Google Earth virtual tours of famous World Heritage Sites, participation in art contests, virtual 360-degree museum exhibits, and even STEAM art projects. As we are practicing social distancing, virtual art education is possible with a plethora of free and online resources, and exemplary advice from experienced educators. It is essential to understand that art teachers are collaborative, malleable, adaptable, imaginative, and should not be underestimated.

Conclusion

It is crucial for schools to establish and continue virtual education because students need to keep learning. Policy makers and school administrators must make sure that technology is abundant in their schools and technological equipment is provided for all students in a time of crisis. Art educators should have the ability to learn new technology, outside of these desperate times, through professional development learning. Patton and Buffington (2016) explain that “for all visual art educators this should be a call to action on two fronts” where “K-12 students who are not exploring media making on their own due to a lack of knowledge or resources are not learning or participating in the twenty-first-century skills” and “as K-12 schools continue to cut funding to the arts and other ‘nonessential’ programs, visual art teachers without the ability to instruct in the media arts may be viewed as ‘nonessential’” (p. 164). Students and educators must integrate technology into daily lessons within the classroom so that technology does not seem like a foreign concept. Investment in technology, is an investment in the future because history will always repeat itself. All we can do is expect for it, plan for it, and make peace with it.

References

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Action Plan

Issue: Virtual art-education should continue and why art-education teachers should not be furloughed despite many pitfalls and unpreparedness of school districts across the United States during the Covid-19 pandemic.

People involved:

Art Educators

Administrators

Policy makers

Venues:

Digital Platform

- Social media outlets: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
- Policy maker emails

Awareness Campaign: Six social action posters were created for a visual influence of the selected audience for the action plan. In theory, the posters would be distributed through email campaigns and social media platforms to reach policy makers in each state. The posters suggest that teachers are not dispensable and there is a strong need to continue virtual education during the difficult times in this country.





