

Editor's Letter

Is teaching about contemporary art challenging to you? How about teaching with digital media? These days the two go hand in hand, providing the visual imagery that surrounds your students daily in the forms of advertising, design, video games, movies, television, and the like. By teaching about contemporary art, you can help your students learn to develop visual literacy skills, articulate their thoughts about art being made today, and make their own art using new media.

One of the challenges of teaching about contemporary art and media is the availability of resource materials appropriate for K–12 students. This past summer, I worked with a large city school district to develop art curriculum guidelines that embraced project-based learning, design thinking, and contemporary art. This focus was made possible, in part, because the district provided their middle and high schools with Art:21, the Peabody Award-winning PBS documentary series about contemporary visual art and artists.

Wonderfully, you, too, can enjoy the fifth season of Art:21 when it premieres on PBS on Wednesday, October 7. PBS has also thoughtfully provided extensive educator guides on all five seasons, available at no cost at www.pbs.org/art21/education/teachingmaterials/index.html.

Also, this past summer, I attended NECC, the 30th anniversary of the National Educational Computing Conference in Washington, DC. The most meaningful session I attended was the arts educators' gathering called Birds of a Feather, where many challenges were voiced by art and music teachers. Concerns were raised and discussed about the low number of arts-related presentations at the conference and art teachers' lack of technological resources such as computers, digital cameras, projectors, and other technological teaching tools.

Despite these very real challenges, who better to teach and encourage creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making than art teachers? Art teachers don't want to be left behind in twenty-first-century teaching and learning; we should be at the head of the line. There were over 18,000 people at NECC; I fear not many were art teachers. Yet the ones at the Birds of a Feather session were enthusiastic, determined, and dedicated to working collaboratively to increase the profile and involvement of art teachers in technology.

As teachers, many of us face our own challenges as digital immigrants to learn the technological knowledge and skills we need to meet the expectations of our digital-generation students. We don't have to know everything there is to know about technology, but we can start with a focus on a specialty such as digital storytelling, vector drawing, claymation, website design, or other digital arts. We can also apply the same high expectations to students' technological productions as we do to traditional forms of art.

Embrace these challenges. Search for the good in contemporary art and digital media.

Art matters!



Nancy at Site Santa Fe, a contemporary arts organization in Santa Fe, New Mexico, known for its International Biennial.

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