



Teaching Art Online Is *Virtually Possible!*

Polly Werner

My name tag stirred conversation at the state art education conference. My school location read "Florida Virtual School" and, as people read my name tag, they asked, "How do you teach art online?" I'm pleased to answer that question in this article.

Teaching Art Online 101

I learned about Florida Virtual School at a technology conference. It sounded too good to be true. Teaching from home in my pajamas? No way! After learning that it was for a free public middle and high school, I made several contacts and was eventually contracted to write the middle school art course, which was similar to planning a year at the traditional school where I was teaching.

I used state and national art standards to determine the art skills that would be taught, and my knowledge of middle school students to incorporate age-appropriate and relevant content that would be educational and enjoyable. The course includes skill-building lessons, sketchbook activities, interactive Internet challenges, group discussions, and culminating projects to give students opportunities to demonstrate evidence of their acquired knowledge. Finally, I was interviewed and hired to teach the course.

Who Are My Students?

My students are a mixture of home-schooled children, rural students without art in their traditional school, and students with medical conditions preventing them from attending traditional schools. I even

have students who travel over the world since their parents' professions require travel as circus and celebrity entertainers and sport stars. Ninety-nine percent of my students weren't utilizing traditional art programs. In effect, I'm reaching "the rest" of the students. In this way, virtual learning has opened the doors for more students to learn about art!

How Do I Teach Art Online?

With computers and the Internet, students have access to the course any time of day, so they create their own schedules, allowing them to choose the times they can be most productive. They read the lesson (including Internet examples and links to Web sites for further knowledge) then complete a short skill-building activity in a sketchbook, which I check for understanding. Finally, they produce a work of art showing acquisition of the new skill in a creative and meaningful way. For me to "see" their work, they scan, and mail or e-mail a photograph of their art. They practice multiple technical skills when submitting work, requiring me to be a technology teacher, too! Using a rubric to grade, I provide appropriate feedback.

A Second Chance to Learn

One benefit of online teaching is that students have multiple chances to submit their work. If they don't demonstrate the skill on the first try, they can try again. I'm available to the students by e-mail, phone, or instant messaging. I speak to a par-

ent and to each student monthly, which develops a relationship with my students that allows my virtual world to feel more traditional.

Occasionally, I invite students to participate in non-required activities using a virtual chalkboard to teach drawing lessons, and usually this class is filled. We conference call and take turns drawing, which allows interaction among students, laughter, talking, and a shared learning experience just as meaningful as in the traditional classroom. I post notices on my course Web site of other art shows and contests and have shown my students' art in a virtual gallery on my Web site.

How Can You Teach Online?

Many states are including virtual learning as part of their educational systems. Art is a unique subject to include in an online school curriculum. Increasing demands on traditional school budgets have eliminated

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non-core curriculum such as art, and online classes are an excellent option for students and parents who want more educational opportunities. This is a fantastic way to work if you are self-motivated. Use the Internet and search the opportunities that are available. Maybe you'll be the next online art teacher! ☺

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WEB LINK

Florida Virtual School, an accredited, public, online virtual school in the state of Florida serving students in grades 6–12. www.flvs.net