

Speaking Visually

We've heard it before, "a picture says a thousand words." Imagine the benefits when we assist our students in understanding the significance of that statement and guide them in participating in the visual dialogue that is everywhere.

Venture Proposal
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1 The Challenge

Art education has the potential to lead the reform in education at the secondary level. While there are numerous online art course options, with some that excel at providing instruction in technique, the options available lead students to the creation of art for arts sake. When this is the case the inclusion of art in the curriculum is overlooked in favour of focusing on teaching the core subjects. Students are left to believe that the primary purpose of art is to communicate highly personal experiences, to entertain, or to create aesthetically pleasing pieces. Opportunities to guide learners to view images critically and consider their impact and influence on their culture are lost. At a time when visual communication is increasing dramatically, our educational institutions need to adapt and offer learning opportunities that ensure students develop a visual literacy.

2 The Solution

When students understand the subtleties of visual communication and are directed to define “their own personal positions in relation to questions and issues of cultural experience” (Duncam, 2002, p. 20) they learn how to communicate issues, interests, and passions. In approaching art education in this way students become participants in creating meaningful visual content rather than simply viewing this content. Their ability to comprehend the visual messages they receive increases and they learn to respond using images they create.

Speaking Visually provides online course options for students to participate with a community of learners and develop a visual language for communicating their solutions to problems that are current and relevant to the student’s own community and culture. Speaking Visually goes beyond teaching technique by providing the structure for creating a learning environment in which students work collaboratively while developing critical thinking skills that allow them to address the problems they wish to face in creative ways and then reflect on these solutions to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

2.1 Features

Visually Speaking targets the development of key 21st Century literacy skills including:

- Visual literacy - learning to read images and recognize their subtleties and symbolism and to understand the influence of images on choices and opinions.
- Critical thinking - problem solving, analysis, logic, reasoning, and critique.

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- Creativity - development of unique ideas and acquiring the skills required to successfully communicate these ideas visually.
- Collaboration - learning with an online community of peers and experts and participating in both construction phases and consolidation phases to develop ideas beyond the capabilities of any one individual.

Speaking Visually offers flexibility by providing modules that can be selected according to the individual student's preferences, interests, and needs. Placement interviews that include the submission of an online portfolio for more experienced artists, and identify students' interests determine the starting point and appropriate module for each individual. Schools do not need minimum numbers of students to be able to participate as courses are online allowing students to participate from home or school at a time that is convenient to the learner. In addition, learners throughout North America are invited to participate. At any one time there may be students, teachers, and artists from across the continent participating in a particular module.

Modules have scheduled start and end dates with project due dates throughout the module. Without this structure students would not be able to benefit from collaboration during problem solving or small group and whole class critiques. Modules range in duration from eight weeks for beginner levels to twelve weeks for advanced levels.

Each module begins with opportunities for students and mentors to meet one another and participate in low-risk activities. After this introductory period students form small groups and are presented with an ill-defined problem to solve and a requirement to express solutions to their problem visually. In beginning level modules the expectation is for the student to create one piece while intermediate and advanced students may create a series of three or more pieces. Some groups may choose to create pieces that address a range of solutions and ideas in response to a problem while other groups may work together to complete pieces that are closely connected and together work as a series to make a unified statement regarding a problem.

Group discussion and contributions are observed and moderated by teacher mentors, and modules include skills tutorials. Online workshops are given to provide further skills and technique training. Speaking Visually mentors provide visual and oral feedback to make recommendations for further development of work and to demonstrate technique.

Because students work in groups they experience problem solving in community and arrive at solutions that address the needs of society and culture as well as self. Students may find

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themselves conducting interviews and researching in order to arrive at logical solutions supported by primary and secondary sources.

3 Keys to Success

We are quickly moving into the conceptual age and a creative economy where creative ideas are sought and highly valued. Currently, high school courses are not designed to aid students in developing necessary skills such as the ability to interpret, problem solve, and communicate solutions in creative ways (Smilan & Miraglia, 2009). To be considered literate in the conceptual age, critical thinking skills and creativity skills need to be fully developed. Speaking Visually provides leadership in assisting learners in gaining necessary skills. Modules go beyond what is offered by other online art options yet they are competitively priced.

4 Company Summary

- Leadership - With my experience and training as an instructional designer and an art teacher teaching art online, combined with my focus on constructivism and arts integrated education while completing my Master of Education Technology degree, I possess the qualifications to provide a clear vision, strong leadership, and mentoring to teachers, and artists, and create modules that meet the criteria for Speaking Visual offerings. In addition, I have experience as a business owner and therefore am able to complete financial projections and provide direction to administrative support staff.
- Teachers - When student numbers exceed 100 FTE I will hire an art teacher with a degree in visual arts, training as an art teacher, and at least three years experience teaching art either in the classroom or online. Preference will be given to art teachers who have experience working collaboratively with other subject specialists to create arts integrated units. A student, teacher ratio of 1:175 will be maintained.
- Mentors - Practicing artists will provide valuable input and share their expertise during each module. Initially these mentors will be artists I know personally. As Speaking Visually grows, artists will be hired by recommendation.
- Technical Support - I have a fully qualified tech. support person who is available to work full-time. Rick has more than 25 years experience working in a technical support position for large companies including the University of Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Telephone. He possesses the skills to deal effectively and efficiently with students and staff. There will be a student to tech. support ratio of 1:200.

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- Administrative Support - When student numbers exceed 175 FTE I will hire administrative support to manage enrollments, answer general enquiries, and assist with marketing, promotion, and bookkeeping.

5 Marketing

Speaking Visually will promote its modules by:

- Developing a website and advertising the site through social media sites including:
 - ★ Facebook,
 - ★ Twitter, and
 - ★ LinkedIn.
- Emails describing modules and their advantages will be sent to districts and schools, and provincial and state professional art organizations such as the BC Art Teacher's Association (BCATA), and the National Art Education Association (NAEA).
- Brochures highlighting offerings will be presented during conferences and course design and online teaching training sessions.
- Advertising in teacher education publications.
- Word of mouth through professional organizations including: Community of Expertise in Education Technoloy at CeetBC.ning.org and Art Education 2.0. ArtEd20.ning.org

6 Competition

While there are a number of online art course options, their focus is on the development of technique. Students work alone with only a teacher, written instruction, and video tutorials to guide them as they create art pieces that demonstrate technical skill. The Vancouver school district offers online Art & Design 12 with a primary objective of providing bridging for students planning to attend art college.

Top rated online art courses include:

- **Art School Online** - Students complete lessons and photograph work for instructor feedback. <http://www.interactiveartschool.com>
- **Artyfactory** - Free lessons that include, "illustrated step by step tutorials." <http://www.artfactory.com/>

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- **DrawPj.com** - Paid membership allows access to six fundamental drawing and painting units and art instructor feedback and guidance. <http://drawpj.com/>
- **Drawspace** - Offers free downloadable drawing assignments. Paid options include teacher feedback <http://www.drawspace.com/>
- **Improve My Paintings** - Free art instruction designed to promote F&W Media, publishers of art books and magazines <http://improvemypaintings.com/>
- **London Art College** - Approaches art education to reinforce “more traditional methods” of teaching art <http://www.londonartcollege.co.uk/>
- **Schoolism** - Paid lessons provide self-taught or video feedback options. Lessons are delivered via video. <http://schoolism.com/>
- **Academy of Art University** - Provides video instruction by experienced artists. Students participate in a community of learners consisting of artists and peers, and engage in critiques of student work and discussion of art trends. <http://online.academyart.edu/schools/fine-art/>
- **Vancouver Learning Network** - Art & Design 12, offers online critical studies as a transition course to students planning to attend art college. http://vlns.ca/course_details.php?id=125&online_id=86&paper_id=

7 Support

Speaking Visually will begin start-up with 8, six week long beginner modules, and 10, eight to twelve week long intermediate and advanced level modules. Start-up costs and short fall for first year wages is expected to total \$45,000.00. The break-down is as follows:

- Module and tutorial development.
- Web-site development and hosting.
- Print material including brochures.
- Moodle Hosting.
- Wages - One full-time tech. support person (ratio, 1:200). One full-time teacher mentor (ratio 1:175). Administrative support when student numbers exceed 175 FTE. In order to secure skilled staff and prepare for growth during year one, full-time technical support and one full-time art teacher should be hired.

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8 Benefits - The Return

During year one and year two the investor will be paid interest only payments at the rate of prime plus 3% on the initial investment. In years three and four the principle and interest will be repaid in full. In years five through seven the investor will share profits at a rate negotiated prior to entering into an agreement. The investor share should not exceed 20% of annual profits or a maximum total profit of \$45,000.

Conclusion

Speaking Visually offers online options that address the needs of 21st Century students to develop critical thinking skills and creativity while working collaboratively with a community of peers and experts to communicate through visual means. The skills they develop while participating in Speaking Visually modules are the skills that leading educators recognize as the skills required in order for students to participate and contribute in society in meaningful ways.

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References

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