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Teaching Art and Art History to beginners with Khan Academy: A proposal

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Author Note

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Rationale

Khan Academy is a collection of educational, YouTube-hosted videos on the Internet, each about 10 minutes long and focusing on a particular concept in mathematics and the sciences. The content is presented by Khan Academy founder Salman in both auditory and visual form, with pictures and diagrams shown to help students grasp the concepts (Supplemental Online Products, 2014). The videos are also accompanied by randomly generated assessments and interactive challenges to test students' knowledge, each of which generates precise data for educators, including time spent on particular skills, correct percentages, and other measures that can be used to track progress and provide additional support when students stumble. As a teacher and active participant in professional development, I've learnt about Khan Academy and how effective it can be as a supplementary resource. After my exploration of the resource, I can attest to the clear and concise way that subjects are explained in the videos, as well as, the practice exercises for students.

This proposal will address the ways in which Bahamian Art teachers can use clear and proven strategies through Khan Academy to help students embrace art and art history. The course will be offered as a mini-MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) so that students from the Family Islands can also benefit despite their geographic location.

Background of Research

The researcher became interested in this research when she noticed how disinterested her students were in art and art history as a subject and was curious to know whether this was a trend within the high school environment throughout the Bahama Islands. To say that today's adolescents are distracted by a rapidly accelerating academic, political and social world would be an understatement (Frey & Fisher, 2004). One of the issues with small island states has been a lack of appreciation for the arts. To garner student interest and to enhance the classroom interaction, the researcher wants to design a mini Massive Open Online

Course (MOOC) for use by all Bahamian teenagers on art and art history using Khan Academy. This technology is being adopted by many teachers around the world and the Bahamas need not be left behind. The researcher plans to investigate and observe the how to implement a MOOC on teaching art and art history to beginners. Since traditional modes of delivery are unable to disseminate knowledge on a scale that matches learning needs of adolescents within Bahamian high schools.

The computer-generated exercises are a valuable supplementary resource for students and students can actually begin the art classes using smarthistory.com. Smart history is presented by Khan Academy, but it adds more information to the art concepts and videos. It is anticipated that before students get to the videos, they will begin reading some preliminary information to better help them understand the art they will be studying as a subject. In addition, this course should prepare students for future art appreciation and art history courses.

Policy Considerations

While an assessment has not been done on whether improving adolescent art literacy will change the landscape of cultural literacy within the Bahamian high school environment – there is no reason why it cannot be part of the vision for the implementation of a future art and cultural literacy policy both within the high school and the wider Bahamian society. Programs were developed in the past to sensitize the public, promote relationships and raise cultural literacy standards for students and adults. However, moving forward the researcher would like to see improvements included in the Art and Art History, Cultural literacy and wider education policy of the Bahamas as well as the likelihood of achieving this using technology as a tool/resource within Bahamian high schools.

Outcomes

- The promotion of major movements in the Western art world over the last two thousand years.

- To examine the roots of art in prehistory and provide seminal examples of work from 240 of the leading artists in the context of their school, period, vision and technique.
- To explain the impact on and relevance to the development of art, and a brief history of the artists life in conjunction with local Bahamian artists and their story.
- Students will also be exposed to glossaries of artistic movements and technical terms as well as famous images in the Western world.
- A detailed art literacy improvement plan

For the researcher, the future success of the Bahamas depends in large measure on our ability to foster the growth and development of every Bahamian art student in our society and to document this through research—a task that should lie at the heart of our national cultural literacy mission (Department of Education, 2009).

The Current State of the Field and Description

Arts curriculums usually incorporate instruction in the visual and performing arts, including drawing, painting, dance, music, and theater. A curriculum integration activity for seventh graders (or any other grade it is introduced) is called “The Theory of Color” which integrates technology into the subject area of color theory. The technology needed requires access to a student computer lab, requires a computer connected to projector or interactive white board (IWB). In addition, software needed includes PowerPoint and any paint program, paint app and Khan Academy’s Smart History. Students who participate can visit the smart history page, once it loads, they can select themes, and then they can click on the link for “the very beginner”. Typing the link or clicking the link below the digital format, will take the student to the smart history page. Teachers can perform the activity to ensure that the students can appropriately follow the steps or instructions provided for the art and art history course.

Description (Khan Academy)

There are numerous resources that provide a broad overview of the usefulness of Khan Academy. They are listed below for review.

Khan Academy – overview: <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

YouTube Videos: <http://www.youtube.com/user/khanacademy>

Khan Academy stories: <https://www.khanacademy.org/stories>

Website: <https://www.khanacademy.org/about>

TED lecture(s): http://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education

Smart history: smarthistory.com

Assessment Plan

Evaluation: a teacher-created rubric.

Teacher observation and the rubric will be used to determine the quality of the projects. Higher levels of complexity or variance in the final projects will also be evaluated.

Conclusion

Art Educators using this curriculum will be exposed to:

- More and varied diagnostic tools for use in the secondary education sector.
- Digital lifestyles (use of You-tube videos, and e-technologies to aid instruction)
- A shift toward multi-cultural literacy (using diverse and experimental strategies along with what is utilized through Khan Academy)
- Develop policy that focuses on art, language and cultural literacy for adolescent students that incorporates the work and legacy of local Bahamian artists.

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Appendix

Artifact - Art lesson plan

PART A:

Focus question for instruction: How does the world around you reflect colors? Why is color important to art and understanding art?

The learning objectives:

- 1) Students will increase understanding of color theory.
- 2) Students will increase use of reading, math, and writing in the art classroom.
- 3) Students will demonstrate abstract conceptualization of written materials.
- 4) Students will demonstrate skills using paint software, or a paint app.
- 5) Students will write out the time periods and some detail about each time period (Khan Academy).

Students are given a brief introduction explaining the goals of the lessons. They are told that an important part of the lesson is their ability to demonstrate their reading and writing skills. A simple pre-test is given to allow students to demonstrate any preexisting knowledge of the content area. Topics to be covered include:

- Color mixing
- Relating reading and color theory
- Relating color to written descriptions
- Integrating technology: This lesson will spread over time to allow adequate computer access time.

Deliverable: Students will create a drawing with the paint program. The requirement for this art piece will be that it clearly shows three primary, three secondary colors, one tint, and one shade. It can be taught to other students using the mini-MOOC concept (Paldy, 2013).

PART B: Viewing and Describing Art (Watching a video from the Khan Academy site. Click on the watch tab. Then choose Humanities on the drop down menu to select Introduction to Art History when the new page comes up. The page can be found at <http://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-history/introduction-to-art-history>)

Videos:

Why look at Art (approximately 2 minutes)

The Skill of Describing (approximately 4 minutes)

Documentary of local Bahamian artists (5-8 minutes)

Assignment suggestion:

Try and get students to pick out the mood and feeling, as well as, all of the elements described in *Van Gogh's Starry Night*, such as stroke and subject and the lesson can be spread over several days.