

## **2008 NAEA Research Needs Assessment Findings, Interpretation and Implications**

In the spring of 2008 the membership of NAEA was invited to participate in an online assessment of the research needs perceived as most important by the NAEA membership. Three hundred and seventy-two members participated in the needs assessment with 27.2% from the Higher Education Division, 26.7% from the Secondary Division, 20.6% from the Middle School Division and 26.9% from the Elementary Division. The Division of Museum Education was represented in 8.6% of the total response and art educators who identified themselves as community art educators were represented by 7.2%. While the total survey voluntary participation was not large, the division of the participant responses was almost evenly divided among Elementary, Secondary and Higher Ed Divisions, with slightly less representation from the Middle School Division. This even distribution of responses provides an opportunity to document an initial baseline of perceived research needs across the entire organization.

The categories of research addressed in the Needs Assessment were derived from the 1994 Research Agenda and the 2005 Task Force Report compiled by Beudert and Thompson with further development by an NAEA appointed Research Committee in 2007-08. In the Needs Assessment participants were asked to rank each of the topics then given two opportunities to make open ended comments and offer additional topics to the list. This methodology was utilized to provide opportunities for many voices to be heard and further possibilities to be generated rather than solely utilizing an analytical reductive approach. The Research Needs Assessment aligns with all components of the NAEA Strategic Plan by offering members an opportunity to identify and define research necessary for professional growth that will support and enrich teaching and learning in art education, establish new communities of research, and inform advocacy and policy development.

### **Interpretation of Ranked Responses**

When the top two rankings of survey items were compiled there appeared to be three clusters of topics. As the topics became more specific or related to a more specific group of teachers and students, they tended to be less frequently rated as “highly important”. Specific concerns may reflect particular interest affiliation or division foci. These lower rankings do not negate the importance of the issue but illustrate the larger, more complex picture of research needs across all members of the organization. Research needs in different contexts underscore the importance and need for all of these topics in the overall research picture. The survey suggests that the research needed in the field is complex with many inter-related facets and topics.

Research topics were numerically ordered by combining frequency the item was placed in the two highest positive responses. The percentages for each item reflect the frequency with which participants that ranked the item as a strong or very strong positive. Findings of the survey suggest three main clusters of topics. These items fell into the broad topics of student learning, teaching, and curriculum. As the topics became more specific or

related to a more specific group of teachers and students, they tended to be less frequently rated as “highly important”. Specific concerns may reflect particular interest affiliation or division foci. These lower rankings do not negate the importance of the issue but illustrate the larger, more complex picture of research needs across all members of the organization. The survey documents that research needed in the field is complex with many inter-related facets and topics.

The importance of topics were rated in the following way:

**Group I.**

1. Research about student learning 89%
2. Research about teaching 88.7%
3. Research about curriculum 88.5%
4. Research about the instructional context 82.9%
5. Research about teacher preparation 80.1%

**Group II**

6. Research about policy 78.9%
7. Program and Instructional evaluation 77.5
8. Demographic research 77.4
9. Arts Based Research 75.6
10. Research in visual research and culture 74.2
11. Research addressing students – special needs 74.2
12. Research in arts leadership and professional development 72.7
13. Conceptual research 71.3

**Group III.**

14. Research about instructional contexts beyond the art classroom 63.7
15. Research regarding gifted and talented 61.6
16. Research about museum education. 58.4

### **Ranked Items and Qualitative Findings**

It may be somewhat unsurprising that research related to the broad topics of student learning and teaching are of the greatest concern because these are the topics that continually engage all art educators at every educational level and context. The research topics of student learning, teaching, curriculum, instructional contexts, and teacher preparation were most frequently rated as “highly important” or “very important” by the survey participants. The comment sections of the survey provided participants an opportunity to further elaborate or extend their rated responses. Comments from each of the survey items are reported in this section.

**Group I.**

## **Student Learning**

Student learning was the number one concern (89%) with research about teaching (88.7) and curriculum (88.5) basically tied as the item of greatest concern, followed by research about the instructional context (88.9) and teacher preparation (80.1). If the greatest concern is on student learning issues of pedagogy, the content of curriculum, and the conditions under which instruction is delivered are all intertwined. The effectiveness of a teacher's approach to students, curriculum, and instruction are all impacted by teacher preparation. While all of these items are closely related the comment section in each item provided some indication of specific needs within the research topic. For example, in the comments about the need for more research about student learning the most frequently mentioned topics were creativity and learning through studio art production (14). Other research topics mentioned the impact of diversity in heritage, values and language on student learning (6), the assessment of student learning (3), the effects of particular teaching practices on student learning (2), and the impact of museums on student learning (2).

## **Teaching**

Comments about research in the area of teaching included: preparing teachers, supporting novice teacher support and professional development (10). Specific comments suggested more research about pedagogy & dissemination about "best practices" in utilizing effective studio and discussion techniques. The use of technology in teaching art, issues addressing diversity in art instruction, teaching in museum education, and teaching students with special needs were listed as areas needing more of specific research.

## **Curriculum**

In the area of curriculum the comment responses were primarily focused on research to develop and articulate effective curriculum. There were a number of comments, both "pro" and "con" regarding the practice of integrating art with other disciplines. Other needs included:

1. Research to look closely at how to effectively structure the art education curriculum, including assessment methods,
2. Research that investigates and defines the kind of thinking and development of creativity that occurs in the art classroom
3. Research concerned with preparing students for a global society, and incorporating issues of social justice and contemporary social issues
4. Research tied to larger policy issues- how to use curriculum research to define the benefits of the arts

## **Instructional Contexts**

On the topic of Research about Instructional Contexts 40% of the comments pointed to the need to investigate and document the instructional context in the K-12 setting. The instructional context might include facilities, adequate instructional time needed for teaching

and learning, budgets, planning time, and levels of administrative and community support. Another area of concern noted by survey participant comments was the relationship or impact of educational policy (both NCLB and local administrative policies) on the instructional context and on how art instruction is delivered. A third area of research viewed as important was the instructional context in community and museum settings.

### **Teacher Preparation**

There were thirty-five comments describing the needs related to Research about Teacher Preparation. Unsurprisingly most (54% of responses) of the comments pointed out concerns about the teacher preparation curriculum. Several participants (11%) commented on the need for more field experiences, while many others expressed concerns about standards and the breath and balance of curriculum content. A second related concern (35%) in the comments noted the need for more research regarding policies related to teacher preparation such as certification requirements, alternative certification programs, accreditation, state standards, and evaluation of programs and faculty. Participants also commented on the need for research about attitudes and beliefs of art teachers in different educational settings. Research about the training of museum educators was raised as an item of importance by three participants, the need for research regarding professional development and mentoring of novice teachers also mentioned in the comment section.

## **Group II.**

### **Policy Issues**

There were twenty-three comments regarding the need for research centered on policy issues. Approximately 26% of the survey responses suggested the need for research relating to NCLB or noted the negative impact of that policy. Other comments advocated that research be conducted that would demonstrate the merits of effective art education and convince educational decision-makers and administrators to develop policies more supportive of the arts in education.

### **Program and Instructional Evaluation**

The comments regarding program and instructional evaluation included the need for research to identify the most effective assessments for documenting students' art learning. Participants also pointed out the need for research regarding effective curriculum, program assessments, and the use of assessment and evaluation for educating policy makers. Other comments indicated a need for research in how to best construct assessments for many different kinds of contexts such as teacher preparation programs, and research about how assessment is used by museum educators.

## **Demographic Research**

There were a large number of comments were written addressing the need for demographic research. An approximate ranking of general comments generated the following list of topics for demographic research:

- 1.) Demographic factors impact access to art education; social justice
- 2.) Art teacher preparation programs, job rates, etc.
- 3.) Demographic information about art students' social economic, grade point, graduate rates, etc.
- 4.) Art teaching conditions, opinions and beliefs
- 5.) Content of P-12 art curriculum
- 6.) Demographics related to museum programs and visitors
- 7.) Conditions for utilizing technology in the art classroom
- 8.) Demographic information to use in advocacy
- 9.) Demographics about types of evaluation used in the field at different grade levels

## **Research in Visual and Material Culture**

There were a wide range of comments regarding the need for research in the area of visual and material culture. One group of comments revolved around definitions of visual culture. Other comments suggested research was needed to document the "best practices" in visual culture curriculum and pedagogy. Another set of issues questioned the impact of visual culture on identity and student learning. Issues related to relationships of visual culture to student learning and teaching were frequently mentioned. Finally, there were a few comments regarding the study and use of technology as visual culture, students' abilities to critically examine visual culture and the use of artifacts as visual culture in the museum setting.

## **Arts Based Research**

The comments about arts based research largely focused on the need to document the arts as a way of knowing, as a means of cognition/critical thinking, literacy, and avenue for creativity. Research that could amplify and expand valuing the arts from each of these perspectives was a perceived need. The need for arts based research to document the development of cultural identity and students' appreciation for diversity ranked second. Finally a greater understanding of arts based assessment was a third suggested area of research need.

## **Students with Special Needs**

Based on survey comments the participants saw the need for research that could assist art teachers in meeting the needs of students with special needs. Research is needed to determine:

- 1) how art education is currently being taught to students with special needs; strategies for teaching students with a variety of needs with little support from additional personnel.

- 2) the kinds of coursework in teacher preparation or professional development training is provided for teachers to meet the needs of special students
- 3) the impact of art instruction on students with special needs and how those assessments are made.

### **Arts Leadership and Professional Development**

The majority of comments pertaining to arts leadership and professional development suggested that research is needed to document effective professional development for the novice art teacher and further develop leaders to effectively communicate with administrators and policymakers. It was also suggested that demographic information is needed to better promote art education and the conditions that positively impact student learning. Many additional comments advocated the need for more professional development and leadership training in a variety of contexts.

### **Conceptual Research**

The most frequent comment (22) to this item was the need for research that examines the relationship of theory and practice in art education. A few comments noted that the relationship of higher education to P-12 practice is also related to the view of theory and practice help by each group. Another group of comments (10) suggested that research was needed to determine the relationship between current educational policy and art education theory and practice. There is also a need to examine current practice with regard to how traditional theories, such as creativity and developmental theory are utilized. Participants reported the need for conceptual research to address issues of diversity (8), assessment (5), technology (3), and museum education (1).

## **Group III**

### **Instructional Contexts beyond the Art Classroom**

While these items were not rated as “highly important” there were a number of areas of research needs defined. These needs are:

- 1) Extend research regarding teaching and learning in community arts settings with diverse student populations. Explore the benefits of a broader definition of art education for students, teachers, and the profession.
- 2) Consider how the delivery of art instruction in other contexts impacts art learning.
- 3) Investigate how policies are developed by arts organizations, state depts. of education and school districts.
- 4) Research the factors that influence public opinion about the value of art education in any setting.

5) Research the instructional contexts of museums to find out what constitutes effective learning environments and good museum-school partnerships.

### **Gifted and Talented Programs**

Comments in this area suggest that research is needed to determine:

- 1) the current conditions for teaching art to students who are gifted and talented; the most effective curriculum and teaching strategies.
- 2) what can be learned from studies of gifted and talented students that can be applied to all students. Are their common characteristics of gifted and talented?
- 3) the kind of pre-service coursework currently being offered and the kind that would be most effective.
- 4) how art museums might best respond to gifted and talented learners.

### **Museum Education**

Comments regarding museum education addressed the need for research in museum education regarding very diverse topics such as:

- 1) collaborations among schools and museums to establish how students best learn in museums; how to make museums more accessible and comfortable for everyone so a life-long interest in museums is cultivated.
- 2) best museum education practices that inform students about how works of art are made; helping them understand the artistic and technical processes
- 3) re-constructing the purpose and identity of museums as the bastions of “high art”
- 4) demographic information regarding the salaries, prestige and significance of museum education professionals.
- 5) museum practices for meeting the needs of their multi-handicapped guests.
- 6) ways in which support for museums might be unified and strengthened.

### **Additional Research Topics**

In an open-ended question when asked to suggest additional research topics several participants described the need for more research to investigate and improve public perceptions of art education to use in advocacy and communication with administrators and parents. Another equally important group of suggestions indicated the need for documenting and improving current curriculum practices. Along with teaching practices comments indicated a need to better understand how students learn, provide stronger teacher preparation

and mentoring for new teachers, and secure information about how to obtain funding for classroom research and teaching beyond the typical school day. A few comments noted that the standards and goals of state, district, and organizations (NAEA) need to be examined and updated. Research pertaining to diversity and technology was also suggested.

Seven of the participants noted that the survey was comprehensive and did a good job of covering many research topics. A couple (2) of participants thought the survey was too long, complex, and confusing. Issuing another survey was suggested.

### **What can NAEA do to support research in the field?**

When asked what NAEA could do to support research in the field participants ranked a set of constructed items in the following manner:

1. Establish an online database of art ed literature 85.3
2. Identify exemplary learning experiences and disseminate that information 84.9
3. Commission a major multi faceted study of learning in art education 80.8
4. Provide online access to valid experimental research 78.6
5. Develop NAEA Mentor Program 77.8
6. Provide an electronic network or directory of researchers and their research interests 77.4
7. Create a Visual Arts Research Fund 77.1
8. Create an online database of MAEd, Ed5, doctoral work 70.5
9. Online guidance for individual support 70.2
10. Develop research collaborations 70.2
11. Construct a database of demographic information 67.8

Voluntary comment suggestions as to how NAEA might support research in the field included the following items:

Provide resources online

Support professional development opportunities in general

Support conducting/dissemination of research

Fund research

Support professional development about conducting research

Provide opportunities for collaboration within NAEA

Develop effective advocacy to impact policies

Provide opportunities for networking online

### **Interpretation and Implications of the Research Needs Assessment**

Given the breadth and depth of possible viable responses to the Needs Research Survey there seemed to be a high level of consistency among the volunteer participants. Most survey participants were very concerned with pragmatic research or research results that could generate knowledge related to student learning and have direct implications for teaching, curriculum, issues in the instructional context and teacher preparation. Research



about educational policy and evaluation were also viewed as having real-life application to classroom learning and providing means of obtaining educational validity and administrative support. While participants in the Research Needs Assessment were open to Conceptual Research there was a strong desire to examine the translations of theory to practical applications in the field. The participant responses also suggested that research is needed to determine the relationship among current educational policy, art education theory, and classroom practice. Individual comments noted the need for conceptual research in addressing issues of diversity, assessment, technology, and museum education.

Survey participants were consistent in their perceptions of research and their views of NAEA actions that support research through access to more online resources and opportunities for research networking and collaborations. While not specifically stated the cumulative comments suggest an NAEA membership interested in constructing a more active, robust research community, both in a virtual online environment and through professional development and collaborative interactions. While funding for research was mentioned it was not the predominate suggestion. Finding ways to facilitate and disseminate research that has implications for improving art teaching and learning in all contexts appears to be the highest priority. Embedded in some participant responses seems to be the ultimate wish for the “silver bullet” of empirical research that will provide indisputable evidence for the importance of art education to all educational decision-makers, yet there is also a more complex image that emerges in the survey data. A mosaic of multiple and diverse research methodologies and a constellation of topics define the current state of research in art education. A pluralistic research approach offers the most promising avenue for addressing research needs in the wide array of current instructional contexts. The findings of the Needs Assessment Survey support continuing diversity in research methodologies and content, while simultaneously building new cross-division collaborations for conducting research and systematically disseminating research resources through multiple accessible formats and professional development experiences. Access to research that supports and extends the quality of art teaching and learning in **all contexts** continues to be an essential value and need in the field of art education.