

# **Creating a Visual Arts Education Research Agenda for the 21st Century: Encouraging Individual and Collaborative Research**

## **Introduction**

The National Art Education Association is committed to on-going research efforts aimed at improving visual arts education across all contemporary educational levels and environments in which teaching and learning about visual arts education occurs, as well as to develop substantial knowledge related to advocacy, policy making, evaluation, and leadership. Access to research is viewed as a core value, need, and priority within the field. This is evidenced in such NAEA publications as *Creating a Visual Arts Education Research Agenda Towards the 21st Century* (1994), *NAEA Research Agenda Briefing Papers* (1996), *Studies in Art Education*, and *Translations*, as well as the National Art Education Foundation (NAEF) grants. And importantly, the *2007-2010 NAEA Strategic Plan* outlines the development of Research and Knowledge as one of its four strategic goals.

The revised research agenda that follows seeks to encourage members of NAEA, working both individually and collaboratively, to undertake, participate in, read about, put into practice, and benefit from research that not only extends our shared understanding of visual arts education within a variety of school, museum, community arts, and alternative educational environments, but also reflects the diverse backgrounds, needs, and qualities of individuals across the lifespan, who are involved in preschool to lifelong learning within the visual arts.

## **Background**

In 2008 the NAEA conducted an on-line *Research Needs Assessment*. The categories of research addressed in the survey were drawn from the 1994 *Research Agenda* and *A Plan to Encourage Research on Learning in the Visual Arts* (2005), along with specific recommendations from members of the NAEA Research Committee appointed in 2007-2008.

*Creating a Visual Arts Education Research Agenda Towards the 21st Century* (1994) emphasized research in eight key areas: demographics, conceptual issues, curriculum, instruction, instructional settings, student learning, program and instructional evaluation, and teacher education. This *Agenda* still remains a cornerstone for research within the field. *A Plan to Encourage Research on Learning in the Visual Arts* (2005) focused on specific topics related to research on student learning in the visual arts and forwarded specific recommendations for encouraging individual and collaborative research endeavors.

Recognizing that visual arts education in the early 21st century is continually expanding, not only in terms of its traditional teaching, learning, and research perspectives, but also in the areas of teacher and learner diversity, visual culture, material culture, museum and community arts education, leadership, professional development, policy studies, arts-

based inquiry, and new technologies, the needs assessment survey provided members, as outlined in the *2007-2010 NAEA Strategic Plan*, an opportunity to identify and define research necessary for professional growth that will support and enrich teaching and learning in visual arts education, establish new communities of research, and inform advocacy and policy development.

The needs assessment survey findings suggest that the research needed within the field is by its very nature complex, given its many interrelated facets and topics, and that the survey participants wish to locate ways of facilitating and disseminating research that will have implications for the improvement of art teaching and learning across all educational contexts.

### **A Visual Arts Education Research Agenda**

Given that there is a wide range of possible and worthwhile concerns to contemplate and research questions to ask and study within visual arts education, the four categories of the *2007-2010 NAEA Strategic Plan* - *learning, community, advocacy, and research and knowledge* - provide the framework for the research agenda. A sampling of questions, many of which were reflected in the responses to the *Research Needs Assessment*, is presented under each category. Even though research is identified as a separate category within the strategic plan, the sample questions reflect its underlying presence within all of the categories.

**Learning:** *Focus on exemplary professional development initiatives that build member capacity to be effective educators, leaders, and advocates for art education.*

Sample questions:

- \* How is student learning in art approached, accomplished, and measured when instruction is studio-oriented; focused on the study of visual and/or material culture; or is discipline-based; issues-based or integrated with other subject areas?
- \* How do the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment reflect the needs of preparing diverse teachers and students for a global and just society?
- \* How do experienced teachers, relatively inexperienced teachers, teacher educators, classroom teachers, museum educators, community arts educators, and artists in the schools contribute to the processes of learning within visual art?
- \* What are some of the exemplary teaching and learning practices within art education?
- \* How does art learning differ for young children, students in K-12 schooling, adult learners, teacher education students, and the museum visitor?
- \* What are some of the human and material conditions which mitigate against effective art teaching and learning?
- \* What is the impact of technological and on-line learning contexts?

**Community:** *Focus on building a more cohesive professional community among art educators and museum art educators through enhanced communication strategies.*

Sample questions:

- \* What are some definitions of community within visual arts education?
- \* What are the attitudes and beliefs of art educators, museum educators, and their colleagues towards developing a professional community?
- \* What factors enable art educators to communicate effectively as members of a professional community?
- \* How do the professional aspirations and goals of art educators who work in schools, museums, colleges and universities, community-based programs, and policy and evaluation arenas differ?
- \* What factors influence and shape the visual arts education policies developed by arts organizations, state departments of education, and school districts?

**Advocacy:** *Focus on communicating the importance of student learning and lifelong learning in the visual arts to art educators, policy makers, parents, and the community.*

Sample questions:

- \* What is the relationship between current educational policy and real-life art education theory and practice?
- \* What are the factors that influence and shape parental and public opinion about the value of art education?
- \* What factors enable educational decision-makers and administrators to develop policies that validate and support the visual arts in education?
- \* What factors enable art educators to communicate effectively with administrators and policymakers?
- \* How do museums become more accessible and comfortable for everyone in order to cultivate a life-long interest in museums?

**Research and Knowledge:** *Focus on expanding access to information on current and emerging policy issues that affect art education.*

Sample questions:

- \* How can research studies in the areas of learning, community, and advocacy become integral and vital components within the NAEA visual arts education professional literature?
- \* How can research be conducted across the divisions and issues groups? What kinds of research collaborations and networks are possible within the NAEA?
- \* How can practitioners be more directly involved in the research process and become valued for their expertise and insights? What aspects of visual arts education research and knowledge are of most benefit to practitioners?
- \* How can research case studies be conducted and developed on the practices of exemplary teachers, students, administrators, policy makers, and other educators who work within diverse visual art education programs?
- \* How might a diversity of research approaches (e.g., experimental, qualitative, arts-based, ethnographic, historical, philosophical, action research, teacher as researcher) contribute to our understanding of visual arts education?

## **Recommendations for Encouraging Individual and Collaborative Research**

The following recommendations are to encourage NAEA members, working individually and collaboratively, to carry out, take part in, understand, implement, and benefit from research in visual arts education by:

- a. developing a set of on-line *Guidelines* for professional development related to conducting and examining research, as well as initiating research across the NAEA divisions and issues groups;
- b. developing an on-line *NAEA Directory of MA Theses and Ph.D. Dissertations*;
- c. compiling a series of on-line annotated bibliographies and syntheses of literature related to a defined list of topics. The bibliographies should (a) highlight claims in which the impact of art learning and teaching are strongly substantiated, measurable, and consistent with other findings, and (b) emphasize implications for art education practice;
- d. developing an on-line list of NAEA members - scholars/researchers, teachers, administrators, policy-makers, museum and community arts educators - who are willing to serve as mentors to NAEA members who wish to pursue a research study;
- e. developing an on-line directory of art teachers who have been identified as exemplary and who are willing to conduct research and/or are willing to let their classrooms serve as research sites;
- g. developing a directory of policy makers and administrators who are willing to share their expertise; and
- h. developing links and references to other educational research databases.

## References

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