

LEARNING IN A

VISUAL

AGE

the Critical Importance of VISUAL ARTS Education



NATIONAL ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



About NAEA

Founded in 1947, the National Art Education Association is the leading professional membership organization exclusively for visual arts educators. Members include elementary, middle, and high school visual arts educators; college and university professors; university students preparing to become art educators; researchers and scholars; teaching artists; administrators and supervisors; and art museum educators—as well as more than 54,000 students who are members of the National Art Honor Society. We represent members in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, U.S. Possessions, most Canadian Provinces, U.S. military bases around the world, and 25 foreign countries.

NAEA's mission is to advance visual arts education to fulfill human potential and promote global understanding.

NAEA's vision is that students of all ages benefit from comprehensive, balanced, and sequential learning in the visual arts, led and taught by qualified teachers who are certified in art education. Art educators meet ethical and rigorous standards of excellence in preservice preparation, ongoing professional development, pedagogy, and inquiry in the field. School-based visual arts instruction surpasses national, state, and local standards and is enhanced through access to art museums and other community resources. The power of the visual arts to enrich human experience and society is recognized and celebrated throughout the world.

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Note: Much of this publication was drawn from an earlier edition of *Learning in a Visual Age*.



Learning in a Visual Age: The Critical Importance of Visual Arts Education

Every day, American young people spend more than 4 hours watching television, DVDs, or videos; 1 hour using a computer; and 49 minutes playing video games. In many cases, youths are engaged in two or more of these activities at the same time. Little wonder this era has become known as the “digital age,” and Americans born after 1980 have become known as “digital natives.”

Yet it might be equally accurate to refer to the current era as a visual age. Although many digital tools rely on sound and text, most disseminate images—as a result, youths who spend a third of their waking hours in front of a screen are saturated with images. The ubiquity of images in young people’s lives has transformed the way they learn and perceive the world. And their use of images has created a demand for new skills to enable all young people to make sense of the visual world.

The predominance of visual images and demand for new abilities has also transformed the workplace. In the “flat” world that the journalist Thomas L. Friedman describes in his influential book, *The World Is Flat*, aesthetics and creativity are just as important as technical knowledge in the new economy. “The secret sauce comes from our ability to integrate art, music, and literature with the hard sciences,” Friedman says. “That’s what produces an iPod Revolution or a Google. Integration is the new specialty. That is what we need to prepare our children to be doing.”

These transformations place a premium on the types of abilities visual arts educators develop: visual-spatial abilities, reflection, and experimentation. They suggest that schools and their community partners need to strengthen visual arts education as a content area and to integrate the arts into other areas of learning to ensure that all young people become knowledgeable and skillful in the visual age.

Yet in a short-sighted effort to help make children competitive in a global economy, many schools have reduced visual arts instruction in favor of a greater emphasis on mathematics and science. These actions in some cases have resulted from accountability policies that measure school performance on a narrow set of abilities.

“Decades of research show strong and consistent links between high-quality arts education and a wide range of impressive educational outcomes.”

—President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities



Fortunately, leaders are beginning to recognize that these actions are misguided. As The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities stated in its 2011 report, *Reinvesting in Arts Education*, "Decades of research show strong and consistent links between high-quality arts education and a wide range of impressive educational outcomes."

What is visual arts education, and what does it provide? Why is it important, and what can art educators teach their colleagues in other disciplines? In 1977, the National Art Education Association (NAEA) issued a powerful statement of its values, entitled *What We Believe and Why*. The document outlines compelling reasons to champion art education for America's children as:

- sources of aesthetic experience,
- sources of human understanding,
- means of developing creative and flexible forms of thinking, and
- means of helping students understand and appreciate art.



“We know that imagination reaches toward a future, toward what might be, what should be, what is not yet.”

— Maxine Greene

The document states:

Art is a rendering of the world and one's experience within it. In this process of making art forms, that world and one's experience with it must be tapped, probed, and penetrated. The search is both inward and outward.

The document also includes a sharp critique of the narrowness of schools and society that could have been written today:

In the culture of the United States, and in particular the culture that pervades American schools, the overriding conception of knowledge and the dominant forms of conception and expression are linguistic. To know in America, particularly in American schools, is to be able to put something into words. This belief has skewed the curriculum in such a way that important forms of understanding are omitted, or neglected entirely, biasing the criteria through which human competency are appraised.

When those words were written, invention of the World Wide Web was still over a decade away. The conception of knowledge and society's reliance on visual imagery has changed since websites, high-speed broadband, Skype, YouTube, Flickr, and other examples of technological innovation have become commonly available.

Learning in a Visual Age further emphasizes the centrality of visual art education in a visual age. First published in 2009, it is the result of a year-long—and ongoing—conversation within NAEA that included discussions in board meetings, conversations with Association members, and a 3-day summit of leading educators from across the nation held in August 2008 in Aspen, Colorado.

In this document, we examine evidence about the capacities that art education develops in students and what it can prepare them to do. We explore what high-quality instruction looks like and take a look at some environments in schools and in other settings in which excellent visual arts instruction takes place. We conclude with recommendations for federal policy makers that will strengthen visual arts education to help ensure that all young people can thrive in the visual age.



What High-Quality Arts Education Provides

The late Elliot Eisner, one of the authors of the 1977 statement, reiterated the case for the value of the arts at the 2008 Aspen summit.

“With the arts, children learn to see,” said Eisner, Professor Emeritus of Child Education at Stanford University. “We want our children to have basic skills. But they also will need sophisticated cognition, and they can learn that through the visual arts.”

What are the forms of cognition students can develop through the visual arts? Lois Hetland and Ellen Winner discovered an answer while studying five visual arts classrooms in two Boston-area schools for a year. “What we found in our analysis should worry parents and teachers facing cutbacks in school arts programs,” they conclude in their 2007 book, *Studio Thinking*. “While students in art classes learn techniques specific to art, such as how to draw, how to mix paint, or how to center a pot, they’re also taught a remarkable array of mental habits not emphasized elsewhere in schools.”

These habits include observing, envisioning, innovating, and reflecting, Hetland and Winner state. “Though far more difficult to quantify on a test than reading comprehension or math computation, each has a high value as a learning tool, both in school and elsewhere in life.”

These abilities develop children’s intelligence, argues David Perkins, Senior Co-Director of Harvard University’s Project

Zero. The practice of looking at art, he noted at the 2008 Aspen summit, requires thoughtful attention to what the artworks have to show and say. And works of art connect to viewers’ personal and social lives. Thus, looking at art “provides an excellent setting for better thinking, for the cultivation of what might be called the art of intelligence.”

In addition to developing students’ intellectual capabilities, visual arts instruction also helps develop young people’s sense of civic engagement. The arts stimulate or release imagination by bringing into existence an alternative “reality,” noted the late Maxine Greene (2007), former professor emeritus, founder, and director of the Center for Social Imagination, the Arts, and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. In that way, young people can envision a world that is different from the world they know; thus art education opens the possibility for creating new worlds, rather than simply accepting the world as it is: “We know that imagination reaches toward a future, toward what might be, what should be, what is not yet.”

The artistic features inherent in new technologies also make possible new forms of social interaction. By creating a video and posting it on YouTube, for example, a young person instantly creates a new global virtual critical community, because viewers around the world can comment on the work and provide needed feedback. At the same time, the work creates an audience for future works.



How High-Quality Arts Education Can Prepare Students for the Future

The learning capacities and abilities that visual arts education develops are essential knowledge and skills for all learners. However, in an era in which student learning is measured first and foremost by standardized test scores in reading and mathematics, the arts—along with many other subjects—are being impacted by this policy at state and local levels.

However, students learn a great deal in high-quality visual arts classes that is not captured on standardized tests. For example, as Hetland and Winner found, by teaching students to look through a cardboard frame called a viewfinder, teachers at Boston Arts Academy help students learn to *observe*—something naturalists, climatologists, writers, and doctors need to know how to do. In addition, visual arts teachers encourage students to form mental images and use them to *solve problems*—an ability that chemists and architects use to create models and that inventors use to think up new ideas. Learning to *innovate* is an important ability that standardized tests typically do not measure.

Outside of education, there is a growing consensus that these abilities are just as important as scientific and technical know-how for the 21st-century world young people are entering. “Corporate leaders in America believe that the success of America is going to depend on a

flow of innovative ideas,” according to Susan Sclafani, a former high-ranking official in the Bush Administration’s Department of Education and panel member of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. “And, they believe the innovative ideas will come because students have the opportunity to engage in the arts.”

Moreover, visual arts instruction also helps students learn to value diverse perspectives and cultures, something that is increasingly important in a global society.

But skillful teaching is required. “Does visual arts learning offer a particularly good platform for developing creativity? I say yes,” says David Perkins. But, he cautions, “The transfer of learning from art to other domains is no free lunch. It won’t just happen. We have to help people to generalize from what they have done.”

Perkins argues strongly that more research is needed to determine what makes the knowledge and skills developed through visual arts education transferable to other domains. Such research would help teachers identify the necessary “bridging moves” that enable students to generalize their knowledge and skills into other areas of learning.



What Excellent Visual Arts Teaching Looks Like

What does high-quality instruction in the visual arts look like? Researchers have begun to identify the characteristics of effective learning environments and the ways that teachers can engage students to develop visual arts knowledge, skills, and habits of mind.

As skillful educators have found, teaching students to be creative is a deliberate process, much like teaching students to be literate or to be able to solve mathematics problems. It takes more than simply handing out materials; expert teachers break down the creative process to enable students to identify the problem, gather relevant information, try out solutions, and validate those that are effective.

In their study of exemplary art classrooms in the Boston area, Hetland and Winner and their colleagues found that teachers fostered a relationship with their students that was like that of a master craftsman with an apprentice. Teachers engaged in demonstrations and lectures to convey information; they created opportunities for students to work; and they encouraged critiques of the student work.

In the process, the teachers not only enabled students to develop their artistic skills and understand the art world; they also helped them see patterns, learn from their mistakes, and envision new solutions. In contrast to the conventional view that art instruction is focused solely on creating art products, the researchers found that skilled instructors engaged student thinking; they helped them understand the choices they and other artists make and the implications of such choices. Students are taught what high-quality work is and how to evaluate their work and that of their classmates against emerging standards.

For example, Hetland and Winner note:

During class critiques, and one-to-one as students worked, teachers asked students to reflect: "Is that working? Is this what I intended to do? Can I make this better? What's next?" At Walnut Hill School, Jason Green questioned individual students almost relentlessly as they began a new clay sculpture: "What about this form? Do you want to make the whole thing? Which part of it?"

Perhaps not surprisingly, these techniques are similar to those found to be essential for high-level student learning in other subject areas as well. The 1999 National Research Council (NRC) report, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, examined research on student learning and described the learning environments in history, mathematics, and science that produced student understanding in those disciplines. The report describes effective learning environments in language that could be used as accurately to describe excellent visual arts classrooms. Effective learning environments are:

- learner-centered, in the sense that teachers build on the knowledge students bring to the learning situation;
- knowledge-centered, in the sense that the teachers attempt to help students develop an organized understanding of important concepts in each discipline;
- assessment-centered, in the sense that the teacher's attempt to make students' thinking visible so that ideas can be discussed and clarified, such as having students (1) present their arguments in debate, (2) discuss their solutions to problems at a qualitative level, and (3) make predictions about various phenomena; and
- community-centered, in the sense that the teachers establish classroom norms that learning with understanding is valued and students feel free to explore what they do not understand.

As that report suggests, effective teaching requires an environment that is conducive for learning. Such an environment includes a professional learning community in which everyone—including adults and young people—is continually collaborating and advancing their own knowledge and skills. It also includes multiple means of assessment to enable students to demonstrate their abilities in multiple ways.

Effective teaching requires a substantial amount of expertise. It requires teaching by a skilled and experienced professional with extensive arts content background, a range of pedagogical approaches, and the patience and persistence to turn small advantages and unexpected events into major breakthroughs in learning. It requires the teaching of an arts education professional who is a continual learner throughout his or her career, and one who is an active member of the art, education, and arts education communities.

Regrettably, some states downplay the skills required for effective visual arts instruction by adopting alternative certifications requiring minimal professional development and requirements that underestimate the competencies teachers need in the classroom. It takes qualified professionals, with the ability to create effective learning environments, to understand art beyond the school and into the community and the contemporary world, and to engage students' thinking and understanding to help students learn in the ways the NRC study described.



“It takes qualified professionals, with the ability to create effective learning environments, to understand art beyond the school and into the community and the contemporary world...”



How to Infuse the Arts Into Learning Environments

The importance of the arts' ability to engage students should not be underestimated or understated at a time when nearly half of all students in major American cities are not graduating from high school on time. The research on the causes of the dropout problem portrays these students as failing to connect with anyone or anything before they vanish. Arts education can provide the critical connection to engaging young people in learning.

A growing body of research within the arts points to the conclusion that challenged and disengaged students are even more likely than other students to benefit from high-quality visual arts instruction. In addition to helping young people develop important knowledge, skills, and habits of mind, the arts have a great capacity to engage many students who otherwise would be alienated. Such a capacity is particularly important for English language learners, who might be able to engage early on with visual arts education in ways that motivate practice and create a context for development of skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Such skill development in the context of making and

looking at art that expresses personal ideas may ultimately be shown to benefit language use in subjects that require greater facility with English.

The potential for such advantages is enhanced when the arts are at the center of a school. Such schools can transform themselves into vibrant learning centers. As Steven Seidel, the director of the Arts in Education Program at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, put it in a 2005 essay: "When students, teachers and others (including administrators, parents, artists) gather around a work of art created by an artist or a student in the fourth grade and they strive to understand that work—what they see, what it means to each of them, what it makes them feel—they not only make sense of the work, they build community and understanding among themselves."

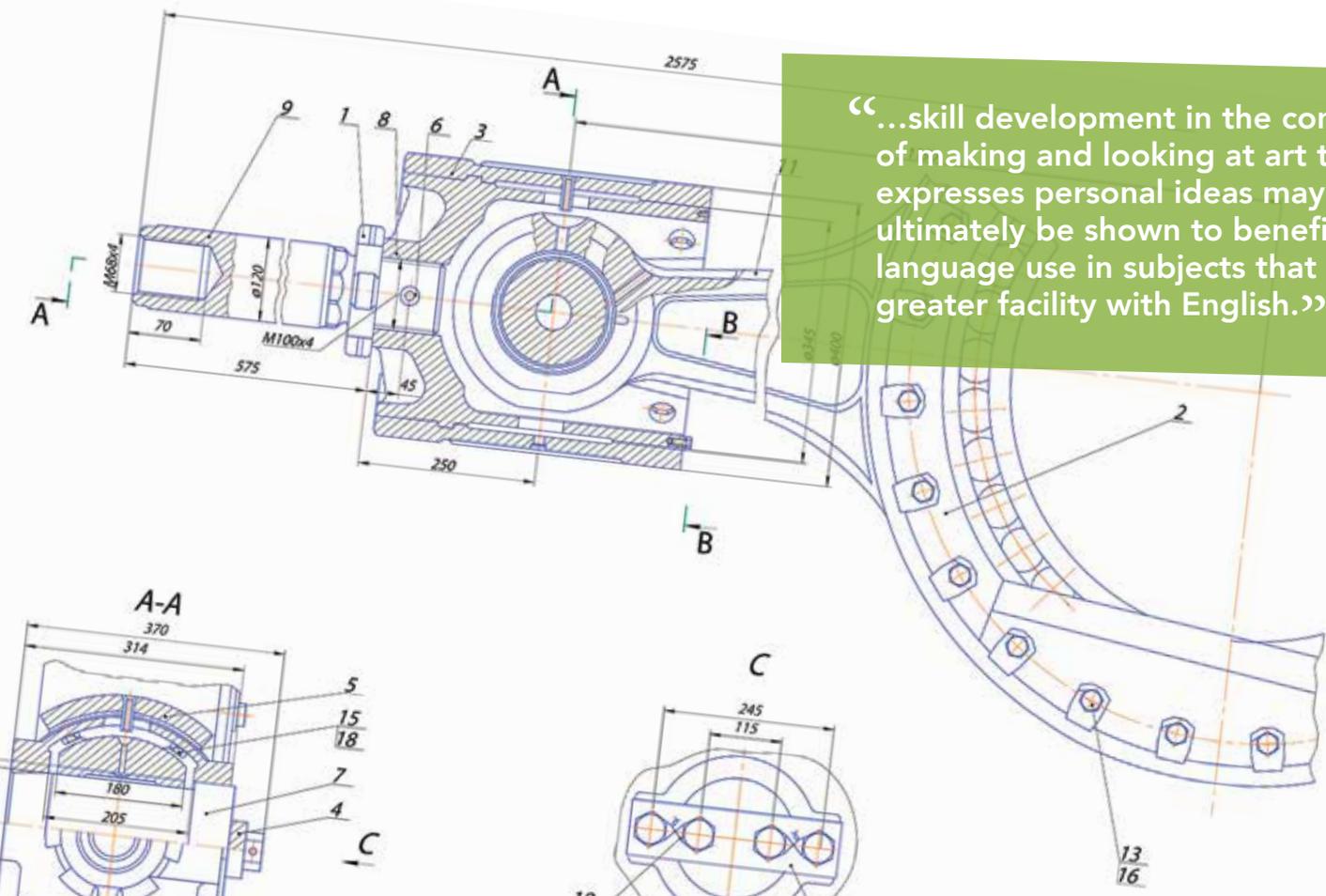
Olivia Gude helped stimulate such a conversation at Chicago's Charles Steinmetz High School. After reading about racial tension at the school, Gude, who is a professor of art education at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, approached the principal with her portfolio and an idea:

to have Steinmetz students work together under her supervision to design and create a multi-racially themed piece for the school. The principal gave Gude the go-ahead, and after 2 years of work with over 100 students, Steinmetz High's foyer sparkles with intricately designed panels of glass-tile mosaic. Working with elementary school children, teens, and inter-generational groups in rural, suburban, and urban settings, Gude has created public art that represents school curriculum and community values. She wonders: "Why shouldn't every high-quality school enliven itself with products of student creativity?"

The infusion of arts doesn't end when school is out. Excellent after-school programs abound that offer students opportunities to engage in visual arts challenges that are aligned with the school's curriculum. In Lawrence, Kansas, for example, the Van Go Mobile Arts program serves students from low-income families, many with mental health and educational challenges. Under the program, students are paid to create commissioned artwork, such as designing and building public benches.

"The bench-building program helps kids understand that they are contributing to the community," says program director Lynne Greene. "They have a chance to be the 'giver,' rather than the receiver. Their self-confidence grows so much. They also feel more connected to the community, and we know that the more connected they are to the community, the more likely they are to develop as positive members of it as adults."

Museums, too, are critical to infusing art throughout a community. The high-quality materials produced by museums, the knowledge and skills of museum educators, and the museum collections themselves are extraordinarily valuable resources to extend learning far beyond the classroom. "The objects we hold in stewardship for our culture have many dimensions of significance and can participate in many aspects of the education enterprise—from the social studies teacher who wants to connect students with art depicting or made at the time of the Civil War, to the French teacher who 'takes her students to France' by visiting a museum to see French art, to the elementary school teacher whose students find the theme of community embodied and illustrated by art from across the globe," says Kent Lydecker, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, Florida, and the former Associate Director for Education at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



“...skill development in the context of making and looking at art that expresses personal ideas may ultimately be shown to benefit language use in subjects that require greater facility with English.”



Ensuring Excellent Visual Arts Education for Every Student

How can every student have access to the kind of excellent art education that can develop their intelligence and produce the abilities that they will need in the visual age? To begin with, we need more information on what effective instruction means and what the effects of such instruction are for students. While the research that has been conducted so far is promising, the cumulative evidence remains inconclusive. We need to know more about instruction and its impact to inform policy makers and practitioners.

There have been too few studies of art education using experimental designs that some consider the “gold standard” in social science research. In 2007, Hetland and Winner led a team of researchers in conducting ten meta-analytic reviews of quantitative studies (that had been conducted over the course of 50 years) that tested the link between various kinds of arts instruction and cognitive and academic achievement in a range of subject areas. They found that the claims of arts advocates exceeded the evidence from science.

Mary Ann Stankiewicz, Professor of Art Education at Pennsylvania State University and Senior Editor of *Studies in Art Education*, the field’s leading research journal, has observed the continued turn away from quantitative and experimental research. She notes that few of the submissions received of late tend to fit those categories, and that those serving on the current Editorial Advisory Board would feel more comfortable evaluating non-quantitative research studies.

Doug Blandy, a past Senior Editor of *Studies in Art Education*, noted of 83 studies he received in his first year and a half at the journal, only a very small percentage had used quantitative or experimental methods. He suggested that doctoral students might not be aware of the value of experimental research or sufficiently prepared to conduct sophisticated quantitative or hypothetical studies.

In addition to more quantitative research, there is also a strong need for other types of research, such as qualitative studies that show the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in rich description. And to achieve external validity, research on learning in the visual arts must be conducted in a wide variety of settings, both inside and outside of schools, including after-school programs and museum and community settings.

Arts educators agree about the need for additional research. In a survey of 372 members of NAEA, 89% of respondents said research about student learning, teaching, and curriculum was “highly important.” Respondents were very concerned about research knowledge that would have a direct impact on the classroom.

As researchers collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data about the effectiveness, impact, and improvement of teaching practice in art education, the entire field must continue to advocate and make every effort to implement authentic assessments. The Model Cornerstone Assessments developed along with the National Visual Arts Standards provide examples of assessments which educators can develop. Expanding the message that the arts can be assessed continues to build understanding of the rigor involved with study of the arts.

How Can Visual Arts Literacy and the National Visual Arts Standards Support Learning in a Visual Age?



Visual Arts Literacy

Visual literacy constitutes the new thinking and learning skills of a digital age and a creative economy. These are the types of cognitive skills young people will need to find their place in a globally competitive workforce. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector is a \$699 billion industry, which represents 4.3% of the nation's GDP—a larger share of the economy than transportation and agriculture—according to a press release in early 2015. The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$135 billion in economic activity annually (spending by organizations and their audiences) that supports 4.1 million jobs and generates \$22.3 billion in government revenue (Americans for the Arts, 2015). Technology innovations such as big data, data analytics, and visualization will simply increase the importance of visual and spatial learning skills.

Digital media, broadband Internet, streaming video, social media communication channels, video games, and related cyber innovations encourage end-users to rely less on traditional literacy and numeracy skills and more on visual acuity skills—including mastery of perspective, proportion, nuance, abstraction, and ambiguity. The new media environment does not ask its participants to memorize theories or apply rules to solve specific problems; rather, it challenges users to explore, discover, sample, collaborate, and—as a result of these new patterns of learning—sift value and meaning from a glut of electronic information. Stephen Apkon (2013) calls it a visual deluge. According to Apkon, the global population of 7 billion people in 2012

utilized 3.5 billion television and computer screens, while the rate of smartphone production outpaced the birthrate of human beings.

Visual media are redefining what it means to develop the tools of literacy to understand a changing world—with regard not just to the reception of information but also to its expression. (p. 9)

Marcel Just, Director of the Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging at Carnegie Mellon University, argues that text is a human invention while visual learning is biological and therefore a product of nature. “A picture is worth a thousand words” for a reason, and the digital age merely amplifies the meaning of this old adage. The explosion of visual images and animated or live-action stories, along with the relative decline of text-based printed information, is changing the way we use our brains to think and learn—for instance, de-emphasizing memorization and emphasizing multi-tasking (Just, 2010).

THE ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR

IS A
**\$699
BILLION**
INDUSTRY

REPRESENTS
4.3%
OF THE
NATION'S GDP

—The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

THE NONPROFIT ARTS INDUSTRY

GENERATES
**\$135
BILLION**
IN ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY ANNUALLY
&
**\$22.3
BILLION**
IN GOVERNMENT
REVENUE

SUPPORTS
4.1 MILLION
JOBS

—Americans for the Arts

As a result of this proliferation of visuality, our notions of literacy—fixed since Gutenberg’s time—are undergoing enormous changes. Where effective communication was once the product of being able to read and write, the new literacy depends not only on reading and writing but also on integrating images, animation, video, and sound. Using digital formats to communicate has crossed the chasm—from an isolated technology skill practiced only by experts, to a common literacy requirement for general social competency (Warlick, 2005).

Visual literacy within the creative economy will only gain in importance as the global economy itself evolves. Jeremy Rifkin (2014) talks about the shift that is taking place in terms of the Collaborative Commons, where “millions of self-managed, mostly democratically run organizations, including charities, religious bodies, arts and cultural groups” and other entities “generate the social capital of society” (p. 16). In this new economic environment, “prosumers” (p. 19) produce and share goods and services at or near zero marginal cost. “Ownership,” Rifkin says, “is becoming less important than access, the pursuit of self-interest is being tempered by the pull of collaborative interests, and the traditional dream of rags to riches is being supplanted by a new dream of a sustainable quality of life” (p. 19).

Next Generation National Visual Arts Standards

The next generation National Core Arts Standards (for visual arts, music, theatre, dance, and media arts) released in 2014 can play a major role in the development of art education advocates and leaders. Based on the Understanding by Design (UbD) principles of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005), Visual Arts Standards and Assessment Teams crafted the Next Generation Standards and Model Cornerstone Assessments to help art educators operate in the educational currency of enduring understandings and big ideas. The Standards identify 15 enduring understandings that guide teachers in their work with students from preschool through high school. The levels of sophistication and instruction change with time as students stack their learning as they grow. Both contemporary art and design are included to help better prepare students for subsequent jobs in the creative economy. As the digital age unfolds, visual literacy increasingly impacts how we live, where we go, and the choices that we make throughout life; the Standards will make a powerful contribution in guiding students in their cognitive, social, and emotional development in preparation for college, career, and citizenry.

The Standards will help art educators communicate beyond the *what* of their subject matter and into *why* art matters. With a common language in place, members of the wider art education professional community will be empowered to promote and advance the essential value of art education.

“As the digital age unfolds, visual literacy increasingly impacts how we live, where we go, and the choices that we make throughout life; the Standards will make a powerful contribution in guiding students in their cognitive, social, and emotional development in preparation for college, career, and citizenry.”





Mobilizing a Professional Community: A New Brand of Leadership: A Call to Action

It appears that a combination of creative and transformational leadership strategies will be needed to help parents, school boards, policy makers, community leaders, and elected officials place art education in its proper context—not as an expendable luxury, but as an essential component of a well-rounded education in this digital age.

NAEA is working collaboratively to move the national conversation about visual literacy and art education in new and positive directions, as well as preparing NAEA members to conduct that conversation inside and outside their classrooms.

The advocacy struggle is extremely difficult and far from over. To inform a broader constituency and to deepen the understanding of decision makers about why art education is essential, NAEA realizes that art educators need to become their own champions, articulating the importance of visual literacy and the added significance of art education to a creative economy. Yet, many art educators have difficulty articulating the essential learning that takes place in their classrooms to stakeholders outside the art education community.

The need for visual literacy in the age of the Internet and social media brings heightened importance to the role of art education in society. Art educators help students build the recognition, perception, sensitivity, imagination, and integration skills needed to make sense of the world around them (Eisner, 2002). Art educators teach the technical skills needed to execute ideas, but they also challenge students to think in ways that promote discovery and exploration, that risk the possibility of failure as the price of moving ahead,

and that embrace surprise as a much-desired learning outcome. Digital media gives art education a wider mission, making visual acuity a skill set arguably as important as reading or math proficiency.

Art education needs to be positioned and its purposes communicated with an eye toward the compelling context of ever-proliferating visuality in the 21st century. Only creative leadership—including the identification of valuable new ideas, the analysis of competing alternatives, and the promotion of select ideas to stakeholders inside and outside the art education community—can make this transformation a reality.

Correcting the paradox of decreasing access to art education requires answers from both within and without. In outreach to professional communities beyond art education, NAEA's goal is not to maintain that art is better or more important than math or reading. Rather, we seek to help others—educators, voters, taxpayers, policy makers, and the public—understand why visual art education is essential to the development of human potential.

With creative leadership from both national and state levels, we can begin a new dialogue on the critical role of art education within society and the creative economy; to re-establish art education as a core subject within the public school curriculum and as a priority within school budgets, and to build new bridges of understanding about art education with other stakeholder communities in order to ensure a brighter and more sustainable future.



Recommendations for Policies That Support High-Quality Visual Arts Education

There is substantial evidence that high-quality education in the arts provides students with opportunities to develop a number of capacities that are not well addressed in other areas of the curriculum such as visual-spatial abilities, self-reflection, and experimentation. In addition, visual arts education has been shown to create a dynamic school culture and to motivate students who might otherwise be at risk of dropping out of school.

However, there is growing evidence that despite the inclusion of the arts as a core subject in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the largest federal legislation which provides policy guidance and funding for education in the United States—the implementation of this legislation when it was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act led to an erosion of arts education in some schools. A Center on Education Policy survey found that 16% of districts had reduced time for art and music instruction by an average of 57 minutes a week, or 35% of instructional time devoted to those subjects. The data also shows that the loss of instructional time in the arts has been concentrated most in low-performing and high-poverty schools.

Bolstering the knowledge base about art education and strengthening practice for every student will require policy changes at all levels: federal, state, and local. With the December 2015 reauthorization of ESEA as the Every Student Succeeds Act, there are opportunities for furthering policies that can support arts education and enhance understanding of the value of arts learning. To bring those policy changes about, NAEA recommends the following:

1. The continued importance of the arts within a well-rounded curriculum to build understanding of the value of arts learning.

Having the arts in the list of well-rounded (formerly “core”) subjects in each reauthorization of ESEA since it was first included in the 1993 reauthorization sets the tone at the federal level that the arts are important subjects of learning. It is equally important that the arts are recognized for their value at the state and local district levels if the arts are to be valued in both schools and communities, and if all students are to have access to a high-quality arts education. The identification of the arts within important legislation at all levels often means that these subjects are assessed, that there is broad access to the range of disciplines within each of these subjects, that educators are trained to teach these subjects at the state’s colleges and universities, and that additional project funding for arts education is available at the federal, state, and local levels from government, foundations, and local funding agencies, including local arts councils.

2. The need to gather data about the visual arts in parity with other subject areas.

In order to understand access to the visual arts, we need to be diligent at all levels to see that data about access to the arts—the number of faculty members, the number of students enrolled in courses, the number of courses offered, the frequency and length of instruction provided at specific grade levels, and the dollars allocated to resources for the arts—is gathered and built into data-gathering systems.

Without reliable data, claims that access to the arts is limited, being cut, or actually expanded are not validated. Given that the arts encompass several disciplines, we, as a field, need to be thoughtful about what data is absolutely essential to know, rather than insisting that large amounts of data be gathered.

3. The need for graduation requirements in the arts.

State-level graduation requirements are frequently dependent upon the elected officials in the state house and/or at the state department of education and can change with leadership transitions in these offices. As the arts are important to developing human potential and a culturally diverse, visually literate citizenry, having high school graduation requirements include study of the arts—as defined by individual states—provides the kind of direction which will enable many students to experience arts learning who otherwise might not have the opportunity to do so.

4. The need for an ongoing arts education committee to create a strategic vision for arts education and to support efforts to ensure funding and other resources for the visual arts.

The need for resources is often a major stumbling block to offering a high-quality, comprehensive art education program. Gathering data and having a plan championed by an ongoing art education committee comprised of both in-school and community-based cultural leaders can provide a voice for not only maintaining but also expanding these resources based on a strategic vision for arts education which can be adopted by the local school board. Having a local committee which understands access to the arts in the context of overall educational goals ensures that the arts

community is engaged in the work on an ongoing basis, not only when there is a crisis.

5. The need to support certified/licensed art educators.

At the heart of a high-quality visual art education program in schools are the certified/licensed art educators who form the backbone of a teaching force dedicated to standards-based art education curriculum for our students. While these programs can include museum education experiences; community-based teaching artists; and arts integration units which support collaborations among classroom teachers, other subject area teachers, and arts educators in addition to other types of partnerships, the foundation of a high-quality program depends on those art educators dedicated to the day-to-day development of their students.

6. The need to support strong community partnerships which in turn support the role of museums, other community cultural organizations, and higher education in building high-quality arts education.

Community partnerships are complementary experiences that enable students to learn about the full scope of access to and understanding of the arts. They help students to see career options in the arts and provide opportunities to interact with professional artists. Optimally, these partnerships should also intersect with the National Visual Arts Standards, which include outcomes related to these experiences, especially within the areas of presenting, responding, and connecting. These experiences do not replace access to high-quality art education programs in schools taught by certified/licensed art educators.

7. The importance of the arts in supporting creativity and innovation efforts in schools and communities.

Many individuals and organizations engaged with school improvement efforts at all levels—federal, state, and local—speak about the importance of educating today's students in ways that build their knowledge and skills in creativity and innovation, both of which are highly valued in the workforce as well as in life. Study of the arts can be masterful in creating a context and environment for both creativity and innovation. The arts are not the only subject areas which promote creativity and innovation, but they are certainly among the best ways of instilling an interest in looking at the world and solving problems in new ways in this visual age.

“With the December 2015 reauthorization of ESEA as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there are opportunities for furthering policies that can support arts education and enhance understanding of the value of arts learning.”

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NAEA Platform and Position Statements

Since 2008, NAEA has also developed and adopted position statements on various issues and topics identified by the NAEA community. Members are invited to contribute to the identification of issues for position statements. These position statements reflect what a consensus of NAEA leaders believe about these key issues and may be used by the Association and its members in local, state, and national contexts. Once adopted by the Board, all position statements are posted for members as well as the public, and reviewed every 3 years to ensure their continued currency and relevance.

The position statements are organized around the NAEA Platform Categories: Students, Art Educators, Relationships, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. For more information, go to www.arteducators.org/statements



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