



## 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.