

**ART: ESSENTIAL FOR EARLY LEARNING**  
**Early Childhood Art Educators (ECAE) Issues Group**  
**National Art Education Association**  
**Position Paper**

**Mission**

Our mission is to promote the arts as essential to early learning and to advocate for programs where art experiences are integral to the education of young children. Our mandate is to provide leadership for individuals and organizations concerned with the education of children (ages 0 through 8 years) through research, publications, and communication about appropriate art education practices.

**Vision**

Every child will have a quality early education in which rich and meaningful experiences in the arts are embedded.

**Core Values and Beliefs**

The arts are essential to early learning. Our beliefs are based on our understanding of research and theories of child development and the arts. We believe that:

- Every child is innately curious and seeks to construct personal knowledge and understanding of the world in all of its complexity.
- A child constructs knowledge in meaningful social contexts with peers and adults.
- A child experiences the world in a holistic way that is best served by an interdisciplinary approach.
- A child constructs insight and knowledge through guided and spontaneous learning experiences.
- The arts support multiple ways of knowing and learning that are inherent in the unique nature of each child.
- The arts empower children to communicate, represent, and express their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.
- The arts offer opportunities to develop creativity, imagination, and flexible thinking.
- Every child has a right to his or her cultural heritage. The arts can enrich a young child's understanding of diverse cultures.
- Early childhood art programs should be comprehensive in scope, including studio experiences, interactions with artists, visits to museums and art galleries, and opportunities to respond to art through conversation, storytelling, play, dramatics, movement, music, and art making.

**Goal**

ECAE will strengthen the role of art education in the lives of young children.

**Objectives and Strategies**

- ECAE will advocate for quality arts-rich programming for young children.
- ECAE will engage in an ongoing review and dissemination of promising research and practices in early childhood art education.

- ECAE will encourage research in the early childhood visual arts to expand and extend existing research.
- ECAE will provide leadership and communicate promising practices in early childhood visual arts to NAEA, arts and early childhood educators, and organizations involved with programs for young children.
- ECAE will describe principles for quality arts education for young children based on the following:
  - A child needs an organized, materials-rich environment that invites discovery, interaction, sensory and kinesthetic exploration, wonder, inquiry, and imagination.
  - A child needs access to a wide variety of art media that support two- and three-dimensional expression.
  - A child needs plenty of unhurried time, both structured and unstructured, to explore the sensory/kinesthetic properties of materials and to develop skills and concepts in re-presenting his or her experiences.
  - A child needs a responsive educator who values young children’s diverse abilities, interests, questions, ideas, and cultural experiences, including popular culture.
  - A child needs a responsive educator who can support appropriate development of skills, use, and care of materials.
  - A child needs a responsive educator who understands and supports the unique ways that young children represent their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions through actual, virtual, and experimental media and processes.
  - A child needs a responsive educator who supports the multiple ways that young children create meaning through conversation, storytelling, sensory-kinesthetic exploration, play, dramatics, song, and art making.
  - A child needs a responsive educator who carefully observes, listens to, and reflects upon children’s learning, using multiple forms of documentation and assessment.
- ECAE will encourage strong relationships between parents/families and art educators in school and community programs.
- ECAE will encourage partnerships that ensure high quality in arts-based experiences for young children, such as
  - Collaborations between art educators and early childhood educators that strengthen art experiences for young children.
  - Programs for young children enriched by the development of diverse partnerships that link schools and communities.

*ECAE is composed of early childhood professionals interested in visual arts education for young children, birth through 8 years of age.*