



NEWS

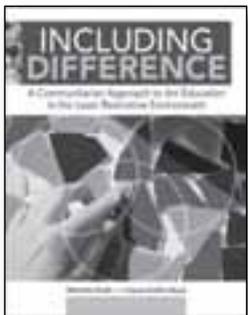
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A Conversation With NAEA Authors Michelle Kraft and Karen Keifer-Boyd



NAEA members Michelle Kraft and Karen Keifer-Boyd co-wrote *Including Difference: A Communitarian Approach to Art Education in the Least Restrictive Environment* (NAEA, 2013). Here they discuss their motivation for the book and their goals for art education. *Including Difference* combines concepts related to analysis of the current special education law and case law, issues related to preservice teacher education, and strategies to address the needs of a broad spectrum of learners within the art class setting.

What was the motivation for this book? What is the relevance of the topic?

MK: As a high school art teacher, I struggled with how to meet the special educational needs of students included in my class. I collaborated with parents and special educators, used a lot of trial and error, and paid a lot of attention to how my students responded, but I always wondered if I was “doing inclusion” right. When I began teaching at the university level, I would hear so many different stories, from my students’ field experiences, of how they observed the art education of students experiencing disabilities. Some of these stories were inspiring, and others were heartbreaking. I began to see that the inclusion of students with disabilities in the art class—I mean, true inclusion—was something with which many educators struggle.

This became the focus of my dissertation and the development of the HEARTS (Human Empowerment through the ARTS) program with Karen Keifer-Boyd, who was my doctoral professor and dissertation chair at Texas Tech University at that time. Karen and I work well together, and our concerns and research interests dovetail. From our experiences with HEARTS, we published an article in *Art Education* in 2003.¹ We’ve had quite a bit of response to that article over the years, and we realized how many art educators are concerned with how best to practice the theory behind including diverse learners in art class environment. Expanding and updating what we began there—building from HEARTS and our experiences over the last several years and from changes in technology and legislation—seemed the next logical step.

KK: Not much more to add to Michelle’s response other than mentioning my commitment to feminist practice in education—listening, mentoring, challenging, and social justice. I have created and taught countless courses based in a contemporary feminist, inclusive, and community-oriented philosophical framework, and I have guided more than 40 dissertations/theses that have been inspired by these themes in some way or another. It is from this work that *Including Difference* was born.

What do you hope readers learn from the book? How can they apply it to their work?

MK & KK: What *Including Difference* offers to the important and growing body of literature on the subject of disability and art education is a continuous thread of theory-to-practice discussion and research-based strategies for inclusion in the art class. We begin by examining the special education law itself and its implications specifically for the art class. Through the lens of communitarian theory, which finds strength in diversity, we investigate empowerment by difference. We then take the theory in the first part of the book, and present one model for implementation. We offer strategies for modifying and assessing art learning for a range of student needs, as well as ways to create inclusive community in the art class, in keeping with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the communitarian theory that we see as implicit within it. Our hope is that this book will be a powerful tool and resource in helping all of us—preservice and practicing art educators—meet the needs of all students in our art classes, regardless of (severity of) disability.

What are your hopes/goals for the future of art education?

MK & KK: We hope that high-quality art education can prepare students for a future and promote a world that is democratic and sustainable. Artwork that embodies individual experience in relation to society can teach viewers to discern injustice, which is necessary for divergent thinking that re-visions and re-constructs a just world. Culturally relevant arts education that prepares students for the future uses sensory experiences as a touchstone for developing self-knowledge. In culturally responsive teaching, cultural knowledge and experiences of diverse students are validated in a learning environment where students’ diverse backgrounds are valued. High quality art education programs that prepare students for the future will facilitate transformative embodied learning that will lead the way in just and democratic methods of teaching and learning. ■

Tell us a little bit about yourself. What do you do? What is your research focus? How are you involved in NAEA?

Michelle Kraft (MK): I am a professor and Assistant Dean at Lubbock Christian University, a private university in the panhandle of Texas. My research focus is dedicated to issues of difference, especially as they relate to theory and practice. I see art as a unique environment for inclusion of a wide range of learners and as a rich setting for developing community that celebrates our differences. Through



NAEA, I was able to start the first National Art Honor Society chapter at my high school and to recognize the talents and hard work of my students—many of whom came from challenging environments.

Karen Keifer-Boyd (KK): I am a professor of art education and women’s studies in the School of Visual Arts at The Pennsylvania State University. My research intersects feminist and



disability studies, such as my current research on Judy Chicago’s feminist pedagogy and artmaking practices. I am past president of the NAEA Women’s Caucus (2012-2014) and past coordinator of the NAEA Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education (1999-2001). I served as editor of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* (JSTAE), and co-edited an anthology on 25 years of JSTAE.

¹ Keifer-Boyd, K., & Kraft, L. M. (2003). Inclusion Policy in Practice. *Art Education*, 56(6), 46-53.