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Navigating the research/ practice divide

ABSTRACT

This article provides an introduction to the development of the 2012 NAEA Research Commission and its mandate to bridge the divide between art education research and practice. Art education and its most significant generator of professional identity, the National Art Education Association (NAEA), contain an extensive range of practices played out in a wide range of sites. Art educators include PK-12 classroom teachers, community organizers, museum educators and curators, pre-service instructors, researchers, research professors, instructional materials manufacturers and arts administrators. In 2012 the Board of the NAEA reestablished an NAEA Research Commission with the expressed goal of attending to relationships between research and practice in art education. The initiative, emerging out of this member-driven association populated primarily by PK-12 practitioners, required a shift in orientation to adequately address the needs of that audience. This article provides insight into the documents, policies and discussions that have led to the crafting of the Commissions' existing form and to the changing orientations towards leadership that occurred as a result of the mandate of the commission. The article will propose that an attention to aesthetic leadership provided a useful sensibility for navigating complex conditions with multiple variables. Aesthetic leadership draws upon disciplinary and personal habits that inform awareness and action. Aesthetic leadership also emerges out of improvisational responses to unanticipated phenomena. Leadership can be a latent capacity underdetermined or overdetermined by groups, fields or individuals. Invested participants subsequently come to speak differently about their interrelationships as a consequence of emerging conditions. This way of

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speaking about leadership is conducted in relation to a field's ability to reconstruct a research/practice model that is shaped by both present conditions and theories.

In 2012, the Board of Directors of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) authorized the reformation of its NAEA Research Commission, which had been first established in 1994 (Brewer 2000). This new iteration of the Commission included changes in its structure and mandate. The approval called for a Commission that was to be a continuing body, identified within the governance structure of NAEA with direct reporting to the NAEA Board (Sabol and Adler 2011). The approval also called for changes in the charge of the Commission, which went beyond prior commissions in that it was to foster a research responsive community (Research Matters) as it identified a set of research goals (Research Agenda) and fostered particular research-related activities (Research Initiatives). These practices were to be set within an overarching goal designed to address concerns about the gulf between theory and practice, paying particular attention to work that would have an effect on learning environments.

These changes raise questions about the kinds of leadership that the Commission might work to develop, capable of navigating these two central issues: (1) a membership-responsive commission and (2) a conception of research that is linked to, developed out of, and influential in affecting practice. These issues share a correlation with the theory/practice divide that has been constructed within the field. Contributing to this construction are factors such as the interests and employment levels of the NAEA membership and broader conceptions of relations between theory and practice.

The purpose of this article is to situate leadership within the field of art education research and within aesthetic theory emerging from American Pragmatism. How can a leadership model that embraces a pragmatic orientation, utilizing contingency, criticality and disinterest provide a developmental platform for the field? Such a model would inhibit closure and promote inclusivity, while valuing productivity, social justice and emerging conditions. In art education this includes the development of field-responsive new knowledge as brought forward by artists, researchers and educators; the incorporation of new knowledge from other fields; and the retrieval of underdeveloped or underrepresented habits that gain new currency within emerging contexts.

It would be limiting to naturalize ideas about leadership itself around a set of free floating best practices. The fostering of leadership needs to be attentive to its emergence from unsuspected locations, and forged through a combination of life events, cultural conditions, personal states and social interactions. Although often the case, there are no guarantees that leaders in one domain will continue to galvanize a following in another. And of course, leadership can be found and cultivated within individuals, groups and institutions. There are several reasons for considering leadership as an aesthetic event. John Dewey (1934) proposes that opportunities for aesthetic engagement are inhibited by duty, which could be characterized as compulsively holding onto past practices, and drift, which could be characterized as a compulsive and uncritical attraction to shiny objects and novelty. Avoiding these conditions is a task of leadership. Pragmatic aesthetic decisions assume that we operate within a world of contingently held habits, that those habits are available for demystification and that subsequent events are situated in a recontextualized landscape, often unimaginable from the point of origins (White 1998). These

point to the value pragmatic aesthetics holds as a form of leadership useful for navigating through a diverse community with differently held beliefs and values but with common needs and aspirations.

1. NAEA's parent organization, the National Education Association (NEA), had a weak art division that was overshadowed by the regional associations.

INSTITUTIONAL HABITS: RESEARCH AND THE NAEA GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The establishment of the 2012 Research Commission was built upon a substantial history of the field's interest in the ways that research could inform and promote the field. This interest is commendable, especially in light of the fact that the majority of the association's members were PK-12 practitioners not formally engaged in research. Prior to the establishment of NAEA in 1947, the field had organized itself through regional associations whose members were drawn from art teachers, art supervisors, and university and college professors (Michael 1997). Teachers were also informed by periodicals, such as *School Arts Magazine* that had a national distribution, and textbooks, such as the *The Art Teacher* (P. Lemos, 1931). Research projects conducted by governmental and/or philanthropic organizations, as well as studies initiated by researchers in other fields also contributed to classroom practices, but their distribution was not fostered through a single national organization.¹

It is useful to see the kinds of leadership that contributed to the formation of NAEA and the changes in orientation towards research that the association made over the years. The initial governing body of NAEA included two members associated with research institutions: Edwin Ziegfeld, Columbia University, and Ray Faulkner, Stanford University; two members associated with teacher's colleges, Italo de Francesco, Kutztown University and Dawn Kennedy, Alabama College; four art supervisors from public schools: Cara Joyner, Virginia; Idella Church, Rio Vista, CA; Bernice Seltzer, Des Moines, IW; and Alfred Howell, Cleveland, OH (Johnson 1997). There were no practicing classroom teachers on the initial board. Today, the NAEA Board includes nine classroom practitioners. As NAEA's first president, Ziegfeld's role was substantial. His presence was motivated in large part through the encouragement of Marion Quin Dix, Art Supervisor in Elizabeth, NJ. Dix's advocacy of Ziegfeld is a case where we see the leadership of practitioners championing the value of researchers (Burton 2001; Ziegfeld 2001). The first constitution of the NAEA, written in 1948, states in Article II:

The purpose of the organization shall be the promotion, advancement and improvement of art education throughout schools and other educational organizations.

(Johnson 1997: 30)

Note that research is not mentioned as a purpose or in support of a purpose of the organization. Research is set apart in Article IX within the functions of the Committee on Policy and Research whose duties are outlined in Article II, Section 3 of the ByLaws as:

The Committee on Policy and Research shall encourage, stimulate, and carry on research programs in art education and will assemble the results of that carried forward elsewhere on matters that seem pertinent to the promotion of art education.

(Johnson 1997: 33)

The association's first publication, *The Journal of Art Education*, was not founded as a research journal but rather as a tool to distribute issues related to advocacy and professional learning (Michael 1997: 23–26). This orientation towards research had shifted by the rewriting of the Constitution in 1995, where it states:

The purpose of the Association is to promote art education through professional development, service, advancement of knowledge, and leadership. To that end, the Association will: promote quality instruction in visual arts education conducted by certified teachers of art; **to that end the association will encourage research in art education**; hold public discussions; sponsor institutes, conferences, and programs; publish articles reports; and surveys; and work with other related agencies in support of art education.

(Johnson 1997: 65, emphasis added)

Although the mission of NAEA is now restated with 'advancement of knowledge' as an expressed purpose, with a stated objective to 'encourage research in art education', the provision of Article IX for a Committee on Research and Policy has been removed as a standing committee. At the same time, however, in 1992 the Board authorized the development of a Research Agenda to be carried out by the first Commission on Research in Art Education (Dorn 1997; Zimmerman 1994). Enid Zimmerman chaired that Commission which was supported by a number of Task Force Chairs (Brewer 2000). Each Chair was charged with the production of a briefing paper related to their assigned topic. All of these chairs were drawn from higher education, as were most of the first members of this Commission and subsequent holders of that office (Brewer 2000; Beudert and Thompson 2005; Milbrandt 2008). A significant product of that Commission was the *Handbook of Research and Policy* (E. Eisner and M. Day, 2004).

Despite the removal of the Committee on Research and Policy from the NAEA constitution, the role of research in the field since the organization's inception in 1948 was pronounced. In the late 1940s and 1950s, research universities began to develop doctoral degrees in Art Education (Hutchens 2001). These graduates came to accept positions in teacher education programmes throughout the country, having an influence on the field. So much so that Edwin Ziegfeld, as reported by Judith Burton (2001), had regrets that the national conferences initiated by NAEA had come to overshadow regional conferences. Ziegfeld noted that changes in the orientation of the conventions could be partially attributable to the fact that university faculty could be reimbursed for travel to conferences, which moved the focus of presentations from being classroom-centred to research-centred (Burton 2001). University faculty not only advanced their work through presentations and publications, but they also mentored their students into the field through shared presentations and support of their projects.

This growing interest in research in the field was reflected in the 1959 publication of *Studies in Art Education* edited by Jerome Hausman. The Seminar for Research in Art Education, initially an informal gathering of researchers, was established as an Issues Group in 1970. Other issues groups with particular research, communications and advocacy interests were also founded, such as Women's Caucus (1976) and the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education (1982) and, most recently, the Community Arts Caucus (2012), each pressing

forward underrepresented aspects of art education through the research initiatives of their members (Qualley 1997; NAEA 2014). While the association has provided an avid support system for researchers, at the same time, their identities resided primarily outside of the central structure of the organization and largely to the exclusion of PK-12 practitioners. How then could the organization develop a support for research that provided direct and meaningful connections with classrooms and how could practitioners be encouraged to formulate their best practices into research projects?

SITUATING RESEARCH LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE MEMBERSHIP

The approved NAEA Strategic Goals of 2007–2010 included the research-oriented goal (NAEA 2014): *NAEA will increase its value to members by assessing programmes and services that inform practice, and by expanding access to information on current research and emerging policy issues that affect art education.* The reauthorization of the Research Commission in 2012 emerged out of a growing concern that teachers in the field and art programmes in general were vulnerable due to: spending cuts stemming from the 2008 recession, and educational initiatives such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that oriented school administrations to focus on math and verbal skill development. Conversations on the NAEA Higher Education listserv called for a re-establishment of the Research Commission. In anticipation of a revision of the association's strategic goals for 2011–2014, the Higher Education Research Steering Committee submitted for Board approval a request to reauthorize the Research Commission with the added request that the new commission be a sustainable and established component of the NAEA governance structure. This request was considered informally by the Board, which led to including within the 2011–2014 Strategic Plan a research-oriented goal with four strategic objectives:

NAEA conducts research and generates knowledge that enriches and expands visual arts education, and widely shares that research and knowledge.

- Re-establish an NAEA Research Commission to regularly advise the Board on guiding the direction and managing NAEA's research agenda.
- Create and support partnerships between researchers and practitioners to improve practice, as well as deepen and expand knowledge.
- Share research and knowledge with multiple audiences within and beyond NAEA membership.
- Secure funding for conducting research and generating knowledge.

(NAEA 2011: 8)

In pursuit of this goal, the Board established the NAEA Research Commission Task Force chaired by Robert Sabol to draft a recommendation to the Board (Sabol and Adler 2011). The work of this Task Force set forth a new vision for the Commission, one that provided the initial framework for a reconception of the forms that research-related leadership tailored to serve a member-governed association. Out of the Task Force's recommendations three distinctive strains emerged: (1) Inclusivity – in past iterations, commissioners had been drawn from leadership positions associated with

various NAEA journal editors, NAEA presidents, the Executive Director, Seminar for Research, administrators and practitioners. The task force, in response to the goal of closer ties between research and classroom practice, designated seats to represent each of the Divisions plus three at-large members. Included also is an ex-officio representative from the National Art Education Foundation (NAEF); (2) Comprehensive – in the past the Commission was created for a specific task, creating and implementing a Research Agenda. The task force recommended that the Research Commission be charged with the greater goal of attending to Research Matters writ large, which included the development of a Research Agenda, but was also to tie research issues to the larger strategic goals of NAEA, which included: Community, Learning, Research, Advocacy and Vibrancy; (3) Durability – Research Commissions in the past had been conceived as aligned with the development and completion of a research agenda. The Task Force recommended that this Commission be durable, holding a place in the governance structure with direct reporting to the Board and clearly defines terms of service. The Task Force provided a comprehensive set of recommendations that were unanimously accepted by the Board. Following the procedures outlined in the recommendations, the revised Research Commission was established in 2012.

GRAPPLING WITH RESEARCH/PRACTICE NARRATIVES

The aforementioned historical narrative features a significant shift in the notion of what kinds of leadership might work to create an enduring and generative community of professionals responsive to both research and practice. Unlike past Commissions that were framed around the identified tasks outlined by the Research Agenda, this Commission's primary directive was to be inclusive (Community) in its mission, vision, goals and objectives. It needed to develop a framework that was generative (Vibrancy, Learning, Advocacy) and it needed to develop a Research Agenda and foster independent research (Research). These directives conditioned what the commission would consider to be the successful result of their work. Whereas a Research Agenda-oriented Commission would measure results in terms of particular findings or a review of past findings, this Commission's results would be more fully understood as a community that was responsive to Research-Based Practice and Practice-Based Research.

Even before the first gathering of the Commission in the summer of 2012, the importance of communication with the membership was identified as a central priority. If the Commission was to be durable and rally the membership around research/practice it needed to recognize communications as a central to its purpose. That following summer, the Regional Leadership Retreats would take place prior to the first meeting of the Commission. In preparation for that the Commission sent a request to the VPs asking the following three questions (White 2012):

1. What structures might the regions put into place that would facilitate communication with the Research Commission?
2. What opportunities for professional development around research would be most useful for state, regional leaders and members?
3. How might the Research Commission best inform state and regional members about opportunities for engaging in research initiatives?

The responses to these questions were used during the Commission's first meeting during a Summer Retreat in 2012 to consider how to map out a communications network for the Commission.

The first summer retreat was foundational in that: the Commissioners needed to self-identify personally as members of a Commission; the Commissioners needed to construct the Commission in relation to NAEA members and visual arts educational research community; and the Commission needed to orient itself in relation to future work. The first of these goals was worked at through a series of exercises that include work in small groups to map-out the field. One mapping was the range of relationships that existed within NAEA, another set of mappings involved the dynamics of relationships between research and practice and perceptions of research within the field. These exercises were not instrumental in that they led to a particular result but rather provided the Commissioners an arena to discuss commonalities and differences. They provided opportunities to discuss the important recognition of the many facets and interests within NAEA and the question of how to address those constituencies. They also initiated some useful discussions and models that led to specific conceptions about ways we might work to develop a shared conception of the Board's mandate. This led to the development of a Mission Statement:

The NAEA Research Commission contributes to a global network of knowledge about art education that advances the NAEA Mission and Strategic Plan, impacts student learning and teacher practice in P-16 schools and in art museums, and communities, and other educational settings, exercises leadership in art education research that encourages NAEA members and the broader education community to understand, utilize, and value research, and connects research, practice, advocacy, and policy through its programs, and services.

(Research Commission 2014a)

It also led to the development of a Vision Statement that included a section that stated:

Teaching and learning in the visual arts in P-16 classrooms, art museums, and community programs, and other educational settings, are strengthened through knowledge gained through research. The National Art Education Association is a respected leader in educational research and the hub of a global research knowledge network. The NAEA Research Commission promotes a variety of research methods at every level of NAEA membership that demonstrates how art education fulfills human potential and promotes global understanding. The NAEA Research Commission establishes research priorities, coordinates working groups to encourage sound ethical research, identifies sources of funding for research, serves as an advisor for philanthropic organizations considering funding visual arts research, facilitates research partnerships, aids in the dissemination of research information and findings, undertakes professional development for research initiatives, contributes to leadership development in the area of research, encourages the use of research to influence education policy, and advocates for a vibrant research culture within NAEA and in the field of education.

(Research Commission 2014b)

It developed a set of goals that aligned with NAEA's Strategic Goals (Research Commission 2014a):

1. Community: The Research Commission contributes to a global network of knowledge about art education and supports diverse communities in using research to improve practice, advocacy and policy.
2. Advocacy: The Research Commission advocates for a vibrant research culture that produces and disseminates research that informs art education practice, theory and policy.
3. Learning: The Research Commission helps members develop skills and understandings as researchers and use research to improve their professional practice.
4. Research and knowledge: The Research Commission coordinates and facilitates programmes, policies and practices that demonstrate how teaching and learning visual arts in P-16 classrooms, art museums, community programmes and other educational settings are strengthened through knowledge gained from research.
5. Organizational vibrancy: The Research Commission utilizes systems and structures within the NAEA to promote a culture of research and leadership to advance the NAEA's mission and strategic plan.

And it developed a Research Vision Statement to ground the framework for considering the various kinds of research and topics that might be useful and centrally located in the field of art education. Excerpts from this statement include:

To make sense of changing cultures, societies and settings, researchers devise, adopt, and adapt methods and technologies to create new knowledge that improves our understanding of human experience ... Visual arts and design are distinctive forms of experience and knowledge that can deepen our understanding of the changing world ... Art education researchers use the processes and practices of art and, multiple modes of inquiry, within diverse contexts, to respond to important issues and problems ... Art education research brings theory and practice into a purposeful relationship when the knowledge gained is accessible to practitioners, researchers, parents, administrators, community members, and other interested stakeholders. The outcomes of research take many forms and, like data, remain inert until acted upon. Information generated by systematic research informs and improves professional practice, theory, advocacy, and policy when it is applied individually and collaboratively to meet personal and public needs. Art education research therefore is a participatory practice that continues to reveal new insights, embrace a culture of research, and develop a community of research practitioners.

(Research Commission 2014d)

These documents grounded the Research Commission's future discussions, especially in relation to research/practice relationships in the field, the varieties of learning communities that were represented and the wide range of responsibilities that the Commission was asked to consider. Although the need for specific findings to support art in the public schools seemed pressing, and the establishment of a Research Agenda seemed to be the most direct means

towards that end, the Commission came to understand that this iteration of the Commission, which would advance understanding between and among teachers and researchers, required a more nuanced approach.

2. This was also noted in the recommendations in 2000 as noted by Tom Brewer (2000)

DEVELOPING RESEARCH MATTERS

Of particular importance was the need to establish a framework for communicating with the membership. Not only did the commission see the need for inviting participation of teachers, but it also needed to foster the work of individual professors and NAEA interest groups. To this end, the initial survey results from the VP's summer retreats provided important information about ways to proceed.

From these the Commission agreed that, if it was to provide an overview of Research Matters, it needed to have a web microsite location on the NAEA website.² Over time, this would become the go-to site for coordinated visual arts education research interests. The Commissioners would share the job of being the Editors for parts of site, which include: Opportunities, Publications, Initiatives & Collaborations, Professional Learning, Findings and Resources, The Commission and the Interactive Cafe (Research Commission 2014d). A Commission Working Group chaired by Doug Blandy was established to work with Linda Scott, NAEA Webmaster, along with Kathi Levin, Commission Consultant to build this site. They also consulted with Scott to envision interactive capabilities desired by the Commission to be incorporated into future iterations of the website. Of particular interest to the Commission was the Internet Cafe, edited by Mary Hafeli and Chris Grodoski, which was to serve as a meeting place where unconnected members could generate research related conversations.

The second Research Matters initiative was the establishment of a Liaison Structure that provided links between the Commission and the various Affiliated Groups, Divisions, Vice Presidents, Publications and Board Members that constitute the various areas of interest that participate in the work of NAEA. Each Commissioner was assigned a contact based upon their expressed areas of interest. The Liaison structure has been useful for surveying groups with different interests and for meeting to consult with the leadership at various times.

The third Research Matters initiative was the formation of the Professional Learning through Research (PLR), a working group chaired by Amy Pfeiler – Wunder and connected to the Commission through Commissioner Kelly Berwager. The group is composed of NAEA members selected by the NAEA Board's Division Directors and the Vice Presidents. It has as its Mission Statement: 'The PLR provides opportunities for continued professional growth in support of conducting, using and sharing research that promotes teaching for learning in the visual arts'. The PLR's role is to advance workshops, discussion groups and web-based information exchanges aimed at improving the membership's orientation towards research and fostering a research responsive professional community.

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH AGENDA

The first communications through the liaison structure was a request for a response to a set of questions developed to determine the particular needs, interests and practices of individual constituencies. The questions were intended to advance both an understanding of the Communication structures

that would be useful for the interest groups, Divisions, publications and Board members, and the specific research interests and concerns of each of these groups (White 2013). The questions were organized as follows:

Communication Structures

- How is your group organized to facilitate communication?
- How is professional development supported within the group? Where do the research interests of your members lie?
- How might the Research Commission speak with you as a group?

Research Needs

- What kinds of research is your membership involved with? Any projects as a group?
- What broad research topics do you think would serve the greater NAEA? Why is this a pressing need? What issues do they address?
- What focused research topics and methods would serve the particular interests of your group? What issues does this address and why?
- What internal structures do you have in place that would facilitate communication about research within your group and with the Research Commission?
- What opportunities for professional development around research would be most useful for your members? What research methods would members of your group like to know about?
- How might the research commission best inform you about opportunities for engaging in research initiatives?

From the responses to these questions, which in some cases involved lengthy interviews, the Research Commission began the task of developing an NAEA Research Agenda. A Commission Working Group co-chaired by Melody Milbrandt and Enid Zimmerman developed the draft proposal. The Research Agenda (NAEA 2014) was conceived as a guide for researchers and practitioners. It is set up as a matrix with four topics set on a vertical axis, Assessment and Evaluation, Social Justice, Emerging Technologies, Demographics, Social Justice, Technologies, each of which were assumed to be of the time and changeable, and four areas of focus set on the horizontal axis: Students, Art Educators, Context (educational settings) and Content, which were assumed to be more durable. This matrix forms a set of cells that delineate intersecting research interests. The Agenda supplies sample research questions that reside in each cell, for example, the intersection of Social Justice and Students containing the sample question 'How can art education prepare students to be citizens engaged in a global community?' (NAEA 2014: 3).

Whereas the 1994 Research Commission also developed a Research Agenda and subsequently identified Task Force chairs associated with different topics to develop initiatives such as briefing papers, the intention of this current Commission is to foster and motivate Agenda-related research initiatives that align with cells in the Research Agenda matrix. The first step in this process will be to identify and align the body of existing research findings with the cells of the Agenda. This is to provide resource material for subsequent projects and to further serve as an advocacy document, with the primary goal of improving classrooms and other instructional spaces.

The Research Commission also works to initiate and foster specific research initiatives that seem timely and likely to provide successful results and new interest. An example of this is the Data Visualization Working Group, chaired by Chris Grodosky (Research Commission 2014c). Here, a specific interest that grew partially out of a mapping exercise conducted in the Commission retreat grew out of a specific demographic project, the GPS demographic mapping of government educational data. This work then spread into the larger domain of Data Visualization and the implications that this approach to understanding data might have for the field and its role in the work of the wider culture. The Data Visualization Working Group put out a call to NAEA members who participated in a presentation at the 2014 NAEA convention in San Diego. Projects like this, which start with an interest held by Commissioners and are identified as worthy by the Commission, are then cast into the membership at large to expand and redefine the research possibilities. This appears to be a useful way for the Commission to embark upon specific research initiatives. Members are inspired and connect with the vision that then turns into multiple initiatives aimed at particular results. The Commission sees this Research Working Group as a model that creates a pathway for research initiatives brought forward by the membership.

3. For discussion of aesthetic in relation to duty and drift, see Dewey (1934).

CONCLUSIONS

The work of this Research Commission – charged with attending to Research Matters, developing a Research Agenda and fostering Research Initiatives – has required a different leadership orientation than one that was limited to studies related to a Research Agenda. This points to a central dynamic in what we might refer to as Aesthetic Leadership, the ability to avoid premature closure on one hand and infinite drift from topic to topic on the other.³ The aesthetics of leadership, demonstrated by the Commission, navigates through research/practice distinctions in the arts, moving beyond their mutual construction towards the primary goal to which they both contribute: improved learning through the visual arts. This latest iteration of the Commission needed to place primary importance on assuring the membership that their interests, both shared and outlying, were heard and would find a place within the communication structure. In addition, it needed to inhibit an urge to be expedient and to bring foreclosure to our work through a particular project, which could be over-determined by the Commission or the interests of the moment. The primary task was to develop an enduring and generative orientation to Research Matters. While the Commissioners understood that part of that process was the development of results to demonstrate the value of the Commission, those results could not replace the larger political purpose of developing a greater understanding of research/practice relationships.

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