



*Advancing Art Education*

## **What does the 2011 NAEA National Convention theme “Creativity, Imagination, and Innovation in Art Education” mean, and why was it selected?**

At first glance, it would appear to be the essence of what this field is all about. But is it? Creativity, imagination, and innovation are 21st-century skills that all learners will need to be successful. What are those skills and in what ways do we (or might we) address those skills in all students in preK-12 classrooms? Not just the artists, but the scientists, software developers, business people, the 95% of the class that will not spend a lifetime directly involved with the visual arts as a producer—but instead as a consumer. What do we or might we provide as valuable learning for these participants?

A long history of cross-dialogue among many disciplines has been enriched by contributions from the visual arts. For example:

- The visual arts have informed the world of science on the very nature of perception.
- When looking at a work of art, viewers attend to the information selected by the artist—a power well-documented by, among others, Arnheim.
- Drawing remains a lucid tool of the imagination.
- The business world embraced the work of an art director by the name of Alex Osborn who wrote about the strategies like ‘brainstorming’ he used to cultivate creativity in his graphic arts department.

The history of advances in perception, innovation, and creative thought are rich with voices from visual arts. Why stop now?

Having a set of general definitions for the nouns ‘creativity, imagination, and innovation’ might help bring forth great answers that bridge multiple disciplines. Merriam Webster’s online dictionary provides two useful definitions:

**Innovation** as 1) the introduction of something new, or 2) a new idea, method, or device: novelty.

**Imagination** as 1) the act or *power* of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality.

(Unfortunately, despite the rule we were taught that one can not define a word using that word, the most common definition for **creativity** remains: 1) the quality of being creative, or 2) the ability to create.)

An often- cited definition of creative thought that is more useful is “a process in which the individual finds, defines, or discovers an idea or problem not predetermined by the situation or task” (Kay, 1989, p.11). This definition includes the many transformational strategies employed toward the goal, works at various levels of expertise—from the expressive creativity of a child to the masterful expansion of a field from a Picasso, and crosses disciplinary boundaries.

The task put forth by our NAEA President and Board of Directors is to add voices from outside the field to broaden our view of how and where we fit in the big picture of this global call to action in education and the work force.

—Sandra Kay, San Diego State University & The  
Center for Critical Thinking and Creativity

2011 NAEA Convention Program Coordinator

## References

- Arnheim, R. (1974). *Art and visual perception*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- EnGauge: 21st Century skills (2003). NCREL/ Metiri Group. Retrieved May 4, 2010, from [www.metiri.com/21/21centuryskillsFinal.doc](http://www.metiri.com/21/21centuryskillsFinal.doc)
- Kay, S. I. (1989). Differences in figural problem-solving and problem-finding behavior among professional, semi-professional and non-artists. (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1989). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 50, 9002552.
- Kay, S. I. (1994). A method for investigating the creative thought process. In M. A. Runco (Ed.), *Problem finding, problem solving, and creativity*, (116-129). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Osborn, A.F. (1963). *Applied imagination*. (3rd Ed.) New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- TED 2010 Conference Proceedings.