

Position Statement on Materiality and Sustainability in Art Education [Adopted March 2026]

PLATFORM: RELATIONSHIPS

NAEA acknowledges that art education is deeply connected to materiality. Artmaking has been widely recognized as a central pillar of preK–16 art education. In school settings, these creative practices tend to involve significant material usage, ideally with dedicated art budgets, tools, supplies, equipment, and facilities supporting these activities.

As NAEA values ecological sustainability and restoration, we recognize the material practices of art education as meaningful opportunities for ecological inquiry, innovation, and learning. Building upon the ongoing efforts of art educators, we advocate for sustained attention to the material culture of art education as a means of aligning creative practice with environmental responsibility.

NAEA recommends that art education:

- Transition to using ecologically sustainable materials and supplies;
- Reduce energy consumption associated with art activities;
- Implement systems for reuse, recycling, upcycling, and composting within the classroom or surrounding learning environments;
- Foster an ethic of care toward the materiality of the classroom, including the regular maintenance of quality art tools;
- Promote classroom inquiry and dialogues surrounding the environmental costs of material manipulations and ecological alternatives;
- Establish partnerships and collaborations with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to enrich environmental insights surrounding materials; and
- Develop curriculum-based artmaking experiences that use minimal manufactured materials, emphasize resource cultivation, and promote ecological sustainability.

To realize such cultural change within preK–16 art education, collective effort beyond the classroom will be essential. NAEA encourages collaboration among the following groups:

- Material manufacturers and suppliers to offer affordable, quality eco-friendly supply options and information regarding the manufacturing processes and environmental footprint of supplies;
- Districts and schools to recognize local vendors and approve the purchase of nontraditional art materials;
- Community partners to deliver safe materials and supplies otherwise destined for the landfill to art classrooms (in cases where art educators have expressed a

- desire to use these materials in their classrooms);
- Art education certification and licensure ~~pre-service teacher education~~ programs to teach and model mindful methods associated with the use of alternative materials in art, including the safe, responsible harvesting of outdoor materials and the collection and reuse of discarded objects; and
- Educators and institutions to establish partnerships with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to deepen understanding of sustainability in art education.

Moreover, NAEA maintains that achieving these transformations will require shifts in how art and materiality are understood across diverse stakeholders. These shifts include efforts to:

- Challenge assumptions of material abundance and disposability;
- Broaden concepts of artistic expression beyond conventional materials, forms, and skills; and
- Expand understandings of art itself to encompass both object-based practices (art as object) and more temporal, relational, and conceptual approaches (art as gesture, dialogue, or meaningful interaction).

Definition of Materiality:

In this context, materiality refers to the physical properties of art materials (e.g., clay, paint, fabric, pixels, sound waves) and, more broadly, the active role these materials play in shaping an artwork's meaning, the creative process, and the viewer's experience.

Resources:

Bertling, J. G. (2023). *Art education for a sustainable planet: Embracing ecopedagogy in K–12 classrooms*. Teachers College Press.

Boyer, J. (2025, October 2024). *Natural dyes, inks, and printing*.
<https://padlet.com/studioboyer4/getting-started-with-natural-dyes-inks-and-botanical-printin-32ak2gm4z1mbiru0>

Ecology and Environment Interest Group. (n.d.) *Resources*.
<https://naeaecologyandenvironment.weebly.com/resources.html>

Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). *What is the meaning of a circular economy and what are the main principles?*
<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/circular-economy->

[introduction/overview](#)

Gablik, S. (1991). *The reenchantment of art*. Thames & Hudson.

Graham, M. A., & Goldsberry, C. (2024). *Reimagining the art classroom: Field notes and methods in an age of disquiet*. Intellect.

Hasio, C., & Crane, T. J. (2014). Teaching art a greener path: Integrating sustainability concepts of interior design curriculum into the art education curriculum. *Art Education*, 67(6), 35–39.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2014.11519296>

Next.cc. (n.d.). *Green materials*. <https://www.next.cc/journey/discovery/green-materials>

Parsons, G., & Carlson, A. (2024, August 16). Environmental aesthetics. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Fall 2024 ed.). Stanford University.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/environmental-aesthetics>

Sang, A. N. H. (2010). Plastic bags and environmental pollution. *Art Education*, 63(6), 39–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2010.11519101>

Weintraub, L. (2019). *What's next? Eco materialism and contemporary art*. Intellect.

Position Statement on Materiality and Sustainability in Art Education [Adopted March 2026]

PLATFORM: RELATIONSHIPS OR CURRICULUM

NAEA acknowledges that art education is **deeply connected to a field often defined and informed by its** materiality. Art making has been widely recognized as a central pillar of preK–16 art education. In school settings, these creative practices tend to involve significant material usage, ideally with **special dedicated** art budgets, tools, supplies, equipment, and facilities supporting these activities.

As NAEA values ecological sustainability and restoration and is committed to promoting it within art education, we identify these material traditions as significant opportunities for ecological reimagining and as sites for ecological education. Building upon the work that many art educators have begun, we call for renewed attention to the material culture of art education.

As NAEA values ecological sustainability and restoration, we recognize the material practices of art education as meaningful opportunities for ecological inquiry, innovation, and learning. Building upon the ongoing efforts of art educators, we advocate for sustained attention to the material culture of art education as a means of aligning creative practice with environmental responsibility.

NAEA recommends that art education:

- Transition to using ecologically sustainable materials and supplies;
- Reduce the use of ecologically harmful manufactured art supplies and materials;
- Reduce energy consumption associated with digital art activities
- Implement reuse, recycling, upcycling, and composting procedures in the classroom or surrounding outdoor areas, with stations in place to support these activities;
- Implement systems for reuse, recycling, upcycling, and composting within the classroom or surrounding learning environments.
- Foster an ethic of care toward the materiality of the classroom, including the regular maintenance of quality art tools;
- Include awareness of energy consumption and pollution that can result from the use of digital (i.e. AI, etc.) and/or electrical tools (i.e. kiln usage, etc.) in the curriculum as well as school-based policies
- Promote classroom inquiry and dialogues surrounding the environmental costs of material manipulations and ecological alternatives (e.g., material life cycles, circular economies, biodegradability, and regenerative reuse, repurposing, and recycling);
- Teach green art criticism in discussing art regarding the environmental impact of the materials used in artwork.
- Include teaching about the work of environmental artists.
- Include teaching environmental aesthetics.
- Establish partnerships and collaborations with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to enrich environmental insights surrounding materials;
- Develop and include in the curriculum artmaking and art engagements that utilize minimal manufactured materials, emphasize resource cultivation, and contribute positively to ecological sustainability.
- Develop curriculum-based artmaking experiences that use minimal manufactured materials, emphasize resource cultivation, and promote ecological sustainability.

To realize such cultural change within PK–16 art education, collective effort beyond the classroom will be essential. NAEA encourages collaboration among the following groups:

~~To realize such cultural change in PK–12 art education contexts, efforts will be required beyond those of art educators and students. We call for the following:~~

- Material manufacturers and suppliers to offer affordable, quality ecofriendly supply options and information regarding the manufacturing processes and environmental footprint of supplies;
- District and schools to recognize local vendors and approve the purchase of non traditional art materials;
- Community partners to deliver safe materials and supplies otherwise destined for the landfill to art classrooms (in cases where art educators have expressed a desire to use these materials in their classrooms);
- Art education certification/ licensure pre-service teacher education programs to teach and model mindful methods associated with the use of alternative materials in art, including the safe, responsible harvesting of outdoor materials and the collection and reuse of discarded objects.
- ~~Establish partnerships and collaborations with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to enrich environmental insights surrounding materials;~~
- Educators and institutions to establish partnerships with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to deepen understanding of sustainability in art education.

~~Moreover, for these kinds of transformations to be achieved, NAEA maintains that mindsets about art and materiality across diverse stakeholders will need to change to:~~

Moreover, NAEA maintains that achieving these transformations will require shifts in how art and materiality are understood across diverse stakeholders. These shifts include efforts to:

- ~~Challenge notions~~ assumptions of material abundance and disposability.
- ~~Expand notions~~ Broaden concepts of artistic expression beyond conventional materials, forms, and skills.
- ~~Expand understandings of the nature of art to include both object-oriented notions (i.e., art as object) and more temporal and conceptual views (e.g., art as a gesture, relation, dialogue, or meaningful outcome).~~ art itself to encompass both object-based practices (art as object) and more temporal, relational, and conceptual approaches (art as gesture, dialogue, or meaningful interaction).

Definition of Materiality:

Resources:

Bertling, J. G. (2023). *Art education for a sustainable planet: Embracing ecopedagogy in K 12 classrooms*.

Boyer, J. (n.d.). *Natural dyes, inks, and printing*.

<https://padlet.com/studioboyer4/getting-started-with-natural-dyes-inks-and-botanical-printin-32ak2gm4z1mbiru0>

Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). *What is a circular economy?*

<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/circular-economy/introduction/overview>

Gablick, S. (1995). *The reenchantment of art*. Thames & Hudson.

Graham, M., & Goldsberry, C. (2024). *Reimagining the art classroom: Field notes and methods in an age of disquiet*. Intellect.

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Next.cc. (n.d.). *Green materials*. <https://www.next.cc/journey/discovery/green-materials>

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Sang, A. N. (2010). Plastic bags and environmental pollution. *Art Education*, 63(6), 39-45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2010.11519101>

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