

Professional Investigation Project

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EDCI 596

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8 March 2026

In my research for discovering professional organizations in my content area, I came across the National Art Education Association. The NAEA prides itself on fostering community for educators all across the country, allowing for both professional and personal growth in their careers. I had the pleasure of speaking with an educator who is very involved in his community and the NAEA conference, Frank Juárez. He has been attending the NAEA conference for 20 years and been a teacher for 25 years. He is also an artist, publisher, editor-in-chief, curator, and an art business coach. Even as a veteran teacher, he is still dedicated to furthering his education and speaks highly of NAEA as well as its yearly conference. I found him online through his blog posts where he details his experience at the NAEA convention and thought his takeaways were very insightful.

Part 1: The National Art Education Association and its benefits

The National Art Education Association was established in 1947 with a mission focused on, “creative growth and innovation by equitably advancing the tools and resources for a high-quality visual arts, design, and media arts education throughout diverse populations and communities of practice,” (“About Us”). Their core values include creativity, inclusivity, interconnectivity, ingenuity, and responsibility, driving them to assist marginalized communities in creating successful and competent future generations.

The NAEA has a plethora of memberships. The one that would apply to my situation would be Preservice, which is for undergraduate and full time graduate students. It is \$40 per year and it is the lowest priced membership. It gives all of the benefits of an Active Professional membership, which is for current teachers and includes the right to vote and hold office at the national level (“Membership”). The Active Professional membership is \$105 per year. The

membership comes with a multitude of benefits. It allows for dual membership to the applicable local art association in 42 states, Indiana included. It also allows for discounts to the NAEA convention, access to online professional learning, subscriptions to a fair amount of journals and news outlets, including *Art Education*, *NAEA News*, *Art Education Policy Review*, and *Creative Industries Journal*, advocacy and leadership opportunities, grants, National recognition awards, discounts on insurance, the ability to sponsor a chapter in the National Art Honor Society, access to interest groups and the online community NAEA Collaborate, and the ability to participate in their juried member art exhibit (“Membership Benefits”). Members are also able to exhibit their student’s artwork for the National Art Honor Society. It is apparent that being a member of the NAEA is exceptionally beneficial. The membership price tiers are reasonably priced as well, with the Preservice membership coming down to about \$3 per month and Active Professional coming down to \$8.75 per month. With that in mind, I believe that a NAEA membership is immensely feasible as a student and eventually as a future educator.

Part 2: NAEA’s Teacher Journal

The National Art Education Association’s journal, *Art Education*, is considered the official journal of their organization. They cover a wide variety of topics for educators, publishing six times a year featuring, “an editorial, at least five peer-reviewed articles, and an instructional resource that can be applied in an arts classroom, studio, or program,” (“Art Education Journal”). A NAEA membership gives one full access to every article. However, since I do not currently have a membership, I only had access to a handful of articles. The articles I chose were *Pandemic Reflections: Cultivating Authentic Learning Through Reflection in Art*

Class by Amber Tackett and *Stories of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Experiences, Fears, and Hopes* by Ketal Patel and James Wells.

In Amber Tackett's article, *Pandemic Reflections: Cultivating Authentic Learning Through Reflection in Art Class*, she reflects on her experience traveling to Israel and witnessing the stark differences in living situations between Israelis and Palestinians. After creating a painting based on this experience (Figure 1), she had her class dissect the painting first without knowing the meaning. They were confused, not knowing the purpose of the wall. After she explained the meaning behind the work, her students said they felt sad for the people who could not travel past the wall. She reflects on this saying that allowing students to process the art that they see can lead to them discovering knowledge and emotions that they may not have done before (Tackett 34).

Tackett also notes that when adults create art, it is usually based on a personal experience that the artist wants to demonstrate to their audience, and that students should have the opportunity to do the same thing. Since this article was written in 2020, she discussed with her students how the COVID-19 pandemic made people feel isolated (Tackett 35). She tasked her students with creating a piece of art analyzing the feeling of isolation through a series of discussion questions. This led her students to create thought-provoking pieces that described their experiences in the pandemic. After showing some of the pieces her students created, she contemplates this assignment stating, "rather than just creating lessons that result in cookie-cutter art, art educators should create lessons that promote more authentic learning because it fosters students' engagement and helps them formulate their positionality in the world," (Tackett 36). I fully agree with this sentiment. Having students create art that is meaningful can be really

therapeutic for them and allows them to properly process their emotions. This could lead to less behavioral issues if hypothetically that were a problem in the classroom.



Figure 1. Amber Tackett, *Suffer the Little Children: Israel's Apartheid*, 2020. Oil on canvas.

In Ketal Patel and James Wells' article, *Stories of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Experiences, Fears, and Hopes*, the authors are sharing their encounters prior to becoming art educators as well as after they became art educators. Ketal's experience was that she was very passionate about art growing up and initially majored in business because she was not aware that there was a path to art education (Patel and Wells 14). She also mentioned that she felt that there were barriers to becoming a teacher as not only did her mentors have doubts, she had doubts in herself. She reflects on this experience stating, "It is not simply the idea that representation matters; it is the idea that the work we do has real implications on the future of our field and who does and does not find a place within it," (Patel and Wells 15). Wells' experience in becoming an educator had its hardships as well. His elementary school was underfunded and did not have an art program, but his drawing skills became well-developed to where he was accepted into an art school. There, he was able to become an apprentice to a teacher and was eventually able to become a teacher himself. They share their experiences in hopes to spread a message to art

educators. That they hold the power and influence to allow students to gain access to these resources, so that they may become well-rounded educators themselves.

The second part of the article has Patel and Wells describing their experiences as educators of color, both of them being asked to serve as the diversity chair in their respective school boards. Patel, while gracious in her acceptance of her role, felt that the board was not addressing important issues that arose in their community, as most of the population was conservative. She stressed that this lack of inclusion for all would lead to more inequity in the education system, and that it is an art teacher's job to address these issues and bring transformative change (Patel and Wells 16). When James Wells was asked to be on the state board as the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion director, he felt tokenized as one of the few educators of color. He addressed this issue and brought up questions inspired by a metaphor introduced by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, "mirror, windows, and sliding glass doors," (Patel and Wells 17). This metaphor involves looking internally and outwardly and providing ideas on how to solve important issues. Through their experiences of growing up and becoming educators, Patel and Wells encourage art teachers to aspire towards an increase in representation for art educators, having a foundation of justice in one's work, hope that future ED&I work is not in response to racial trauma or a sudden realization of inequity, and a commitment to raising one's voice and advocating for change (Patel and Wells 17). This article was profusely informative in bringing to light the issues that students and educators of color experience. It is important for educators to acknowledge their privilege and create an environment for all of their students to succeed.

Part 3: NAEA's Online Resources

The National Art Education Association's website contains a wide variety of resources for members. They are organized by categories which include professional learning, equity, diversity and inclusion, research, publications, standards, and NAEA platform and position statements ("Resources"). They also have a collection of essays that NAEA leadership have written in order to educate professionals on active assessment strategies and philosophies. Additionally, they have a career center where members can create a profile and receive tailored job opportunities in the art education field.

The Professional Learning category of the resource section has incredibly valuable information available. They have webinars, open studio conversations, and curated collections. The monthly webinars are free for members and \$49 each for non-members, offering professional development credit and certificates of participation ("Professional Learning"). The open studio conversations are free for all, allowing for anyone to tune in and share ideas. Also, the NAEA allows members to access curated collections, which allows for "art educators easy access to a wide range of topic-specific resources, best practices, and tools centered around key themes in art education," ("NAEA Online Learning"). There, members can find helpful information for their classroom, including standards and back to school tips, as well as access to monthly mentor meetings, all in which help art educators be successful. All of these resources are tremendously helpful, allowing for new and veteran teachers to feel comfortable and prepared for the school year.

Part 4: Interview with Frank Juárez

Q: To start, can you tell me about yourself?

A: I have been teaching high school art for over 25 years, currently in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. I am engaged with anything and everything related to art education. I am the National Art Education Foundation Chair and I am also the Art Department Chair at the high school where I teach. I am also a publisher, editor-in-chief, curator, writer, and artist.

Q: What was your experience like at the National Art Education Association Conference?

A: I have been attending the conference for two decades. I have been both a presenter and attendee. Being a presenter at the National level took 8 years of applying and being rejected before I was accepted. Overall, I was happy with the process because it showed my dedication to the cause and my desire to present. 2014 was the year I first presented in New Orleans and I have been presenting ever since. As an attendee, it is basically a conference on steroids. You are surrounded by people who speak your language and go through the same obstacles as you. It features over 600 sessions that teachers can attend that pertain to anything from Pre-K to Higher Education. It's like a buffet where you pick what you are interested in. There is so much information to absorb and so little time to do it, but it allows for a lot of reflecting and processing.

Q: Where is it held?

A: It travels to different cities every year. Last year it was held in Louisville, Kentucky, this year it is being held in Chicago, Illinois.

Q: Do you have a favorite city you've attended the conference at?

A: That's hard. It's like picking your favorite child. I do prefer New York because you see almost double the amount of attendees. It is a great way to disengage from teaching and be in a new city surrounded by educators. You are able to take care of yourself and just reset.

Q: What are the benefits and challenges of attending the conference? Do you feel it is worth it to attend?

A: Yes, it is highly worth it to attend. The NAEA Conference is a great way for networking, especially if you are an educator looking for a job. Also, depending on where you end up teaching, you could be the only teacher in your field within 100 miles. Having those connections is really beneficial. The conference also comes at a time when your energy levels are low and you need a pick-me-up. When you go to the convention, you come back with so many ideas that you are basically a new person. The biggest challenge that comes with attending is funding. Registration costs \$225, then there is the cost of driving or flying as well as lodging and other miscellaneous expenses like food and parking. For a while, I was paying out of pocket until my school received professional development funding and then I became a presenter. Now, I am fortunate that 99% of my fees are covered. NAEA does offer a scholarship for first-time attendees which is awesome, but I would say funding and also finding substitute coverage are the biggest challenges with attending.

Q: Do you think the NAEA is worth joining? What can young educators learn from joining this organization?

A: As a professional, I think it is very important to be a part of an organization. Most states have a dual membership where you can be a member of NAEA and your local art education

association. I pay \$125 per year and that pays for both the state and national membership. They have an abundance of resources that can benefit you as an educator including webinars that discuss relevant topics we go through in our field. It also looks great for your career because you are representing your school and your district and you are showing that you are always learning. One thing about educators is that they like to help other educators, and knowing what I know now, there is no better time than the present.

After my interview with Frank and exploring all of the resources and benefits that the National Art Education Association has to offer, I believe that a membership is essential for art educators. With the allowance of attending a conference and gaining access to a wide variety of information, the NAEA sets art teachers up for success. They create an environment that is inclusive, educational, and productive, fostering a community among art educators. Not only do I believe that a membership is beneficial for any and all tiers, but I maintain that attending the NAEA convention is important as well. The NAEA convention has significant benefits, including opportunities for networking, presenting, and professional learning, creating long-lasting relationships among educators and allowing for growth among careers. I found that researching this organization and interviewing Frank Juárez opened my eyes to everything that this career has to offer, while also preparing me for what the future has to hold.

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