

Commentary: Art (Education) of Governmentality

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This essay considers efforts to forefront knowledge dissemination at National Art Education Association (NAEA) National Conventions as a form of governmentality on art education scholarship. Starting with an analysis of the presenter policy as well as the review criteria, we consider how this rhetoric reflects neoliberal ideology and actually limits the potentials of the field for change, critique, and diversity of insights. From within this paradoxical space, we offer provocations, strategies, and quandaries. Through usurping the governmentality bearing down on thought and research dissemination, we join counter factions that have worked and continue to occupy the margins and centers of the NAEA National Convention.

Art of Governmentality

Foucault's (2004/2008, 2004/2009) concept of the art of government is grounded in his analysis of political forms emerging from the seventeenth century that began to undergo an economization wherein capitalist markets increasingly reoriented the processes of government. He maintained that governments intervene on the public all the way down to individual morality, values, and behavior to better enable economic prosperity. In this manner, the market is more in control than the state or any given governmental administration as the organizing principle of governmentality. This neoliberal governmentality restructures the state, society, schooling, and the individual through government of the self and of others.

Foucault's governmentality asserts that every idea and act are undergoing neoliberal transformation through a generalized economization. Governmentality works over a complex network of practices and organizations connected through rhetoric that influences our beliefs and priorities. Knowledge, teaching, culture, learning, and research are not immune to neoliberalism's advancement and are increasingly subject to economic appraisal. Under neoliberal governmentality, everything is equalized by its potential capital—even inquiry, thought, practice, and critique can and should be measured in terms of economic capacity. Are we getting our money's worth? Am I supplying knowledge that is in demand? Is this of value to my potential earnings or to the economy? Will this curriculum efficiently facilitate vocationalization? Can this content be quickly understood across contexts for transfer and practical application? As a principle of intelligibility, neoliberalism's generalization of the economy provides an analytical scheme through which to scrutinize individual activity as well as social relationships and even potential in economic terms beyond monetary exchanges that mobilize "a sort of economic analysis of the non-economic" (Foucault, 2004/2008, p. 243).

A seemingly non-economic domain such as art education cannot dodge such a framing. In fact, the authors of this essay feel that NAEA annual conventions act as epicenter for such a marketplace of ideas, as well as products, that reflect this governmentality.¹

Art of NAEA Convention Guidelines

Art educators form conceptions of what art education is and could be through practices of governmentality reflected in discourses such as research agendas, commissions, institutes, white papers, guidelines, calls, themes, and review criteria that announce and give consent to what is possible. Governmentality proceeds from these parameters that internalize and reflect intelligibility in line with the reconceptualization of society under neoliberalism. Foucault's (2004/2008) *pastoral care*, interpreted as pedagogy, is a key mechanism for maintaining governmentality. It is no wonder then that what sessions are allowed into the NAEA conference must meet very specific criteria because submitters are not only presenting their scholarly and practical wares, but they are also entrusted with representing NAEA's governmental orthodoxy and the pastoral care of its members. Submitters are in fact representing a particular art education brand and then training the art education flock in the acceptable ways of the time, through permissible presentation forms that, all in all, advance the mission of the association.²

As one arm of NAEA's power over the field, particular words and phrases make their way into our language, values, and modes of activity. Through a regime of biopolitics, NAEA's rules and policies shape our conduct and imagination. Art

educators' subjectivities are addressed and partially formed in this language and its procedures. We reconfigure what we do to this ideological schema or risk being unheard, unseen, or deemed incomprehensible, superfluous, or even dangerous to the field. To go against such guidelines would be considered a perversion against the rationality of NAEA within a culture of compliance.

How do these guidelines reflect a deeper rationale of governmental imperatives? When the NAEA Convention documents undergo a counter-reading as governmentality, one can begin to identify how language is used to nurture particular forms of thought aligned with the intelligibility of governmentality. Readers of this paper may recall the subtle processes of self-governing they take on in crafting their perspectives into NAEA-worthy proposals and presentations in response to phrases and terms such as clarity, exemplary, timely, findings, best practice, rigorous, standards, appropriateness, practice-based evidence, engagement, and accuracy. Below, we analyze this rhetoric further through sharing passages from the Presenter Policy, Review Criteria, and presentation format descriptions from previous years.

The discourse of business is apparent in recent NAEA National Convention Calls for Presentations that articulate a specific type of pragmatics focusing on the practical applicability of professional learning through the convention. Knowledge is valued that is “supported by research and practice to inform, inspire, and compel exemplary professional practice” (NAEA Proposal Guidelines, n.d.; “Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations,” n.d., para. 10). The expectation of efficiency, concision (there is now a 400-word limit to full session description and 30 words for the program description), and deliverables for ease of takeaway echo tenets of the knowledge economy that view learning as an investment of time and human capital whose use-value encompasses enhanced job performance “for the purpose of improving visual arts instruction in American schools” (“Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations,” n.d., para. 18). As the policy reflects: “Attendees of the NAEA National Convention have an expectation that program sessions provide quality professional development and are relevant to art educators and NAEA members” (“Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations,” n.d., para. 32). In describing the NAEA National Convention, it is claimed that “all sessions and events are 100 percent content-oriented and substantively based” (“Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations,” n.d., para. 20).

These guidelines have an overall normative and flattening effect on art education scholarship reflected, for example, in parameters that negate critique of the structure itself. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the NAEA Convention Presenter Policy is reflected in the following sections that must be agreed to in order to submit a proposal for the convention:

- (b) My presentation will not defame, slander, or libel any person, firm, or corporation;
 - (c) My presentation will be professional and shall not denigrate NAEA, its programs, or representatives in any manner.
- ("Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations," n.d., para. 28–29)

These statements anticipate conflict while starving art education out of its own reinvention through drastically containing the possible conversations that could be shared, thereby keeping the future reach of art education abridged and stunted.

Governmentality is further enforced in the 2018 Proposal Guidelines for two out of the four focus areas designating proposals for the convention—research and STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics)—by instructing or infantilizing authors to craft sessions under these focus areas that “will provide a safe and supportive environment for all points of view” (NAEA Proposal Guidelines, n.d.). This additional and embedded criterion stands as a warning that did not seem necessary for the remaining two focus areas of leadership or global connections. The authors of this essay find these specific omissions highly ironic.

The 2017 review criteria for proposals honed in on clarity of content and outcomes, defined goals, relevance, appropriateness, as well as potential for active participation, while the updated 2018 criteria was amended to encompass statement of purpose and outcomes, organization of content, relevance of topic, and impact on practice. Relevance is a predetermined entity that judges according to what is deemed to be of interest or to have “currency” (NAEA Proposal Guidelines, n.d.) for replication in art education practice. Clarity is highlighted in five out of eight of the review criteria from 2017 and attached to two of four in the criteria listed for 2018 proposals. The notions of clarity and precision within the limited words permitted to articulate your session, title, and program description infer a lack of ambiguity often associated with the abstractness, denseness, and impracticalness of theoretical, critical, or philosophical language. This limpidity is grounded in a pragmatic blindness that makes only proposals that are easily understood through an exactness of direct application in rigorous curriculum valid.³ The impact on practice category from the 2018 criteria that ranks each proposal on its viability as a model of best practices poignantly drills this point home.

Under the knowledge economy, knowledge is most valuable when it considers learners as consumers—when learners regard what they are learning as a worthy exchange for their time and money—in and beyond schooling as lifelong learners. Here, clarity is key. You cannot take away know-how unless it is predicated for you in a form of simplistic intelligibility that carries maximum transferability into art education contexts so that the art educator subjectivity is decided

in advance—we know what you need and how you should be served. This assumes learners who cannot think deeply for themselves, requiring a basic cause-and-effect transfer of knowledge from expert to ignorant that fulfills the promise of objectives and goals laid out in any given session proposal.⁴ This equation should sound familiar to those in many current educational settings where learning objectives are to be spelled out in advance and key points must be highlighted for clear takeaways aligned with the process of efficient knowledge acquisition.

To be unclear, deemed irrelevant, unspecific, inappropriate, confusing, disengaging, or lacking in goals, description, or content will earn you the lowest scoring of 1 out of a possible 5 points for each criterion from the 2017 rubric. While to be poorly described, unlikely to attract interest, deficiently impactful on professional growth, lacking in relevance, poorly organized, without supporting examples, vaguely described, and/or without reference to outcomes only earns you 1 point out of a possible 4 for each criterion from the 2018 list. Moreover, the session format synonymous with the National Convention that best facilitates this transfer is the lecture based on the disseminating of “exemplary lessons, instructional practices, programs, and/or initiatives based on actual practice, and/or teaching strategies” (“Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations,” n.d., para. 41). Intelligibility here panders to the widest possible audience of art educators characterized as practitioners, not art educators as intellectuals who appreciate the parameters of art and its education as encompassing the unclear, ambiguous, imprecise, complex, irresolute, perplexing, and uneasy.

Taken as a whole, these guidelines limit the intelligible to what is already known, easily translated in 400 words, that reviewers and educators can unhesitatingly connect with what they already know, value, and believe. The bottom line is you appear to have to believe in the illusion of precise and best practices in relation to art and its education and be willing to relay this to others. Challenging this common sense, clarity, specificity, relevancy, and appropriateness seems like an insurmountable task. Other avenues need to be explored toward change and the unhinging of the perpetuation of such intelligible fictions.

Art of Self-Government

What is the logic of governance displayed within these guidelines that marks the limits of intelligibility? What form of governmentality, implied in these documents, has authority over the organization and individuals associated with it and, by extension, controls the knowledge allowed to be validated and shared at this venue? The convention proposal format and rules work as pedagogical modes that implement a subjectivizing power over participants, providing a frame of reference

or common sense regarding the art education subject, knowledge dissemination/representation, and the limits of what is valued within the field. This is relayed, spread, and preserved through a common language, modes of address, coercion, and ways of engaging with the field that are implied within the policy, so that the proposal submission process itself acts as an arm of governmentality in its smoothing of hard edges and announcement of what should be prioritized by the field.

The current running through these guidelines is a re-orientation of much art educational thought. It requires many art education scholars to adjust their relationship with the field so as to better align with the ideology pushing this process toward becoming a contest in self-governmentality and obedience. As we ready our work for submission, the authors of this essay recurrently find themselves refashioning their scholarship for ease of consumption and the bait of pragmatic appeal. All of these values work on the identities of art educators as we sell our wares in the spirit of individualism, entrepreneurialism, salesmanship, and market metrics: How can we attract participants? How might we sound more alluring and useful? Are the ideas stated clearly enough? We undergo a process of not only peddling the fruits of our intellectual labor, but also of selling our human capital—the intelligibility of our identities, behaviors, and thoughts.

In a sense, we are selling our ideas,⁵ marketing them through this particular prism, and our survival as scholars depends on this entrepreneurial competition. These processes of reorganization do not end with the proposal submission; we must also tailor our presentations in light of the experience economy and the expectations of knowledge dissemination implied in the policy. Will our ideas sell to as wide an audience as possible? Will participants find it valuable for their time and thereby better our chances at being allowed to return next year? These internalized matrices are in part how we refashion our scholarship to be NAEA-worthy. We are a success as long as what we do can be recognized as worthy human capital. Is the intelligibility of our identities, ideas, and modes of delivery up to snuff, or do we have to reorient ourselves in order to be heard, valued, and understood? We need to sell ourselves and our product aligned with the entrepreneurial spirit of self-management.

We all undergo self-governing when fashioning our proposals in an attempt to get accepted into the convention. We submit to a disciplining of the self to best meet these guidelines—we may do this already in our work and scholarship so that the proposal disciplining is minimal, as the process is seamlessly aligned with our working modes, or it may be a much less comfortable mode of governmentality that poignantly surfaces during this process. In the case of the latter, the specific forms of governmentality at play are fascinating to consider for each of us. How do we each attempt to hit the notes?

In light of this analysis, we might better appreciate how neoliberalism limits alternatives. The NAEA guidelines, call, and review criteria not only provide the

description and measure of what is appropriate and effective scholarship; they also announce that alternatives are unimaginable. The guidelines seem to be a blueprint for a type of self-government: “If you are competent at art education, then you disseminate this knowledge in these ways.” This is a system that manages us and controls which knowledges and modes matter and will be allowed to be shared as valuable. This is how NAEA policy deploys power over presenters and knowledge that is shared or generated. Now we turn to how this plays out within learning at the convention.

Art of Professional Development

Professional development, like the NAEA conference, is another arm of self-government fulfilling the state’s desire to produce economically beneficial citizens. Ongoing or lifelong learning is a feature of art teaching and post-Fordist labor required not only to gain employment in the field, but also to keep a job and facilitate students’ future employment. Therefore, learning is a form of capital that learners—including novice and seasoned art teachers, in the case of our NAEA conferences—are responsible for accessing, managing, and accounting (and even in some cases, assessing) to maintain and enhance their future earnings and productivity as workers. Economies dependent on knowledge and intellectual labor, such as our current late capitalist economy, rely on lifelong learning so that individual workers have the autonomy to meet their own needs toward self-actualization within the changing landscape of labor (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 398). Here, it is our responsibility to avail ourselves of learning as capital and to capitalize on it in terms of future earnings or the future earnings of our pupils. At NAEA, individuals are provided with autonomy over what knowledge they wish to consume and in what form, albeit pre-curated by the Association’s guidelines, as argued earlier. Some still may suggest that even though the review process and guidelines limit what is possible, it is, in the end, up to the art educators to exercise their freedom to choose what knowledge they need.

So you have a choice in how you will discipline yourself in terms of the social norms of governmentality—NAEA policies set the terms for your choice. In this component of the governmentalization of learning, learning encompasses both self-government and government of others coupled as freedom and domination—the self is involved, implying a practice of freedom, but those self-controlled acts are presupposed and funneled into a specific form of subjectivity mandated by the government regime in line with the dominant neoliberal ideology (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 393). Here, the market economy of ideas associated with professional development assumes teachers just want to consume what they want to consume through exercising individual choice, but are not able to sustain paradox or ambiguity and therefore require road-tested forms of knowledge delivery

and content, all the while not wishing to encounter the interference of such useless modes of learning as discomfort, confrontation, and/or philosophical questioning. In this way, NAEA conference protocol seeks to purify the knowledge economy down to its most readily consumable form for ease of consumption, enhanced customer satisfaction, strategic alignment between supply and demand of knowledge, and efficient investment of time for the maximization of human capital on the part of art educators. The logic continues that teachers have less time to pursue and/or less ability to process intellectual “noise,” and therefore they need convention session offerings that allow for the most economical delivery of human capital—know-how, best practices, exemplars, research sound bites—through pedagogical clarity, so that the takeaways meet demand and can be transferred with little to no fuss, critical thinking, or questioning.

Art of Paradox

Yet another feature of governmentality is paradox. Just when you think you’ve determined neoliberal rationality, it co-opts social democratic values, terms, and modes under its discipline to throw you for a loop and coax your complicity. In an ironic and timely twist, NAEA’s National Convention theme for 2017 was “The Challenge of Change.” Here is the full call:

Change is a difficult, unpredictable and unwieldy process, yet it is inevitable, especially in this dynamic, ever changing world. 2017 marks the 70th anniversary of the National Art Education Association. With this milestone anniversary in sight, the 2017 NAEA National Convention seeks to reflect upon our rich history and look to the future to identify the many challenges ahead for the field of art education.

Change is, essentially, effective action that acknowledges multiple narratives of history and philosophy; effective action respects the needs of diverse learners, embraces new philosophies of teaching and addresses social justice. As learners and educators, we experiment with innovative elements of technology and design and explore social media with respect for the past and an eye to the future.

Change is never complete and that is the real challenge: it is a continuous cycle that requires both vision and action. NAEA seeks proposals that inform and inspire action through civil discourse and generate practical conversations for envisioning the future of art education.

NAEA invites diverse proposals from members that inform and inspire art educators to challenge assumptions and—through the cross pollination of ideas—to see their critical work through the prism of change. (“Welcome to the 2017 NAEA National Convention Call for Presentations,” n.d., para. 1–4)

While Foucault’s governmentality manages the population into a way of thinking and being that works hard to silence dispute, this theme appears to squarely

take on such “unwieldy” risk, requesting “civil discourse” coupled with “practical conversations” encompassing “new philosophies of teaching” and “effective action” including “social justice.” In our reading, instead of the embrace of democracy, this maneuver actually embraces a hatred for democracy (Rancière, 2005/2009) while promoting the fiction that NAEA is democratic and welcoming of change. Whereas this theme seems to be governing what is doable, sayable, and thinkable in a populous and radical way, the theme still works under the cover of anti-democratic guidelines and policies whose friction-free stipulations greatly curtail the potential of challenge and change brought on by dissensus and antagonism. This obvious contradiction between the theme and policy surfaces the following question: How are we to propose change and alternative forms of governmentality if we cannot challenge the current order of NAEA?

Art of Subversion

The NAEA accelerates the goals of governmentality in subtle and not so subtle ways, which keep certain knowledges out and limit our collective futures for the field. This governmentality controls what is possible and even what can come into being, as if the organization defines the bounds of truth for art education and not the other way around. This state of affairs reveals the fictions we propagate and endure, for as history reveals, neoliberal analysis is not the only mode of evaluation available to art education, professional development, or learning, for that matter. But within the art (education) of governmentality, if you are not playing by the rules, then you are fractious and frictional in aiming to disrupt the field’s intelligibility. You are a threat.

Instead, there is a compressing and containing in the recrafting of art education into acceptable forms for NAEA knowledge dissemination. The guidelines, while reflecting a discursive regime, work on us and through us as certain words sanctioned by the institution—that is, NAEA—seep into the vocabulary of art education, limiting modes of engagement and behavior associated with what is possible to think, say, feel, value, and believe in relation to the field. Moreover, this constraining anticipates and seemingly squashes any possibility for antagonism, rebellion, and re-invention. The field stays intact and unsullied in its solidity as heralded by such an orthodoxy, but this immovability also always holds the potential of intervention and resistance, beginning with the very unease many of us feel when we undertake convention proposals and presentations that are edited into the NAEA mold.

How might we attempt to elude and deny the internalization of neoliberalism’s intelligibility and governmentality? Is art and its education not a place for useless experimentation and impractical critique? How might we elude and repudiate these fictions of intelligibility? How have art educators been antagonistic to

knowledge delivery in the form of business as usual at NAEA conferences? What saboteurs have facilitated resistance—sustained, ephemeral, clandestine, or otherwise?

Wherever there exists power, there exists friction, but also the opportunity for resistance and subversion (ever dependent on power and its abuse for fuel). We have many choices here—coerce ourselves and others into playing along with the rules, manufacture our own orders, undertake exit strategies, re-occupy the order as a refusal, hide our treason in plain sight, and so on. In our experiences with NAEA conventions, attempts at destabilization have included unsanctioned and sanctioned solidarities, identities, and modes of dissemination through alternative conferences, *Salon des Refusés*, lobby activism, parallel online actions, session interventions, and various informal and formal meetings, exhibitions, performances, and actions. The authors (i.e., Barney & Kalin, 2015; Kalin & Barney, 2014) have attempted additional interventions, walking a knife's edge of "getting in" to the convention and then stretching the forms and participants of NAEA as far as they might go without breaking or calling security. Others have exceeded, transgressed, and reconstructed their planned and sanctioned participation within the NAEA conference system. Art educators have been clever in working within institutional spaces.

Guidelines reflect a discursive regime embedded within an orthodoxy that enables stability and reproduction, but they also provide definitive points of departure for a variety of actions performed by the daring and unsatisfied who long for something else. Any orthodoxy concurrently creates tension and inspires antagonism. However these responses exist and are disseminated—over coffee, a letter to NAEA, through alternative conferences set up within the official conference—points to the limits of freedom within governmentality, for example, the limits of our national organization, but not those it claims to serve. What unconventional, counter-fictions—perspectives, modes, solidarities, and subjectivities—are waiting, waning, and perpetuated on the margins? While radical agendas for art education do not often survive the review process, these mandates for transformation may be brewing on the edges or piercing the current logics for us to peer through, join, and/or validate, if we so choose.

Notes

1. One obvious example of this is to be found in the 2018 NAEA Convention theme of *Art + Design = STEAM*, aimed at fostering innovative makers and thinkers ready for creative careers of the future that will make an "impact on the economy" (NAEA Proposal Guidelines, n.d.).
2. The NAEA (NAEA Proposal Guidelines, n.d.) refers to this process as curating.
3. This is one example of a direct application that can be found in the NAEA Strategic Vision Goals including community, advocacy, learning, research, and knowledge, as well as

organizational vibrancy that proposals prior to 2018 were required to address. Within these goals, the development of rigorous curriculum is mentioned twice, under research and knowledge as well as learning.

4. The NAEA's Curriculum Slam! using the now ubiquitous PechaKucha format (presentations limited to 14 PowerPoint slides and 7 minutes) seems an exemplar in pre-curated, efficient delivery here. Additionally, the interactive Flash Learning session format offers a fast-paced introduction to viewpoints in under 10 minutes and no more than 10 PowerPoint slides (NAEA Proposal Guidelines, n.d.).
5. However, these ideas are largely rebranded within this frame of NAEA governmentality. They are reformed, reworked, and repackaged to sell a sanctioned form of art education.

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