

Cleansing the Palette / NAEA News February 2010

It was a large, open, warehouse-like space—vast, yet stimulating and somewhat chaotic. Within the vast space were other loosely “defined” spaces—some filled with bins and bags of props and thought-provoking “stuff,” with whiteboards and multi-colored Post-it® notes and markers and foam boards and pushpins.

These were playrooms for the mind—and the home of IDEO, the renowned industrial design firm founded by David Kelley. Many know IDEO from the product designs that have come from them—the original Apple mouse, Steelcase Leap chair, Swiffer® Sweeper, or KwikPen for diabetes injections. Not surprisingly, IDEO has excelled in design awards over the past decade.

But in recent years, IDEO has expanded its range and begun applying design-thinking processes to more than products. CEO Tim Brown’s recent book, *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*, is taking the business world by storm; at this writing in December, it’s the #1 bestseller on Amazon.com in the “organizational change” category.

Last year, with gratitude to Wyatt Wade and Davis Publications, I was invited to participate alongside many of our nation’s art education administrators in a professional development retreat aimed at dipping into design thinking. In addition to reading and observing how design thinking is being applied in business, this hands-on experience has caused me to further contemplate just what a design-thinking approach might do for further developing our Association—and what I know is that we’ve been nibbling at the edges of a design-thinking approach for the past couple of years. But, in this “Year of Acting Assertively,” it’s now time to turn theory more actively and comprehensively into practice as we prepare for a next round of strategic planning that will guide NAEA’s work over the next 3 years.

You see, it’s true: “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.” And the “big idea” of design thinking is reinvention: reimagining what we do, rather than simply improving on what we already do. Design thinking is all about expanding beyond linear projections and avoiding the natural inclination to be bound by what is already there. You get this. I know you do—because design thinking dovetails with the creative process. But design thinking is also quickly moving to the forefront of progressive business and educational practice.

Within your own educational setting, have you thought about applying this practice outside of your classroom or studio? Have you thought about how such a process might be applied to influence your state department of education, the school board, or the principal or dean of your school?

As we plan for NAEA’s future and work to strengthen our identity as *the* professional community for art educators and leading advocate for visual arts education, we can benefit by applying the best attributes of design thinking toward developing our vision of the future of art education—in our schools, in our communities and states, and in our nation—to devise the paths for reaching that newly imagined future.

There was a very interesting article in *The New York Times* about what it takes for professional athletes to excel at their sports. It talked about the emerging physiological research that shows how constant



NaeA

Advancing Art Education

repetition thickens the neural sheath, continually enhancing the clarity of the neural signal to the muscles. This is how “muscle memory” is created.

Perhaps we should create our own muscle memory in applying design thinking to the development of our professional organization and community. In preparation for the 2011-2014 strategic planning process, we will be incorporating design-thinking strategies to support member engagement throughout the process of discovery and innovation.

In Baltimore, be sure to look for this creative space—the NAEA Design Lab—staffed by a discovery team and filled with possibility as you uncover issues and opportunities critical to designing the next generation NAEA. The NAEA Design Lab will overlay the many rich dynamics of the Convention and may be used as a space to mine the wealth of creativity and knowledge. Essentially, this discovery exercise will “crowd-source” our strategic planning. This goes to the heart of the “community of practice” we have brought to life through the website. I am certain the ideas will be richer and more profound by virtue of having thousands of our minds working on them together.

Now, how does this relate to the shapes I’ve been laying out for this “Year of Acting Assertively”? We’ve had *Authenticity* and *Assets* so far. In this pre-Convention Palette, I’m talking about **Aggregation**.

Aggregation is about building something that is more than the sum of its parts. Aggregation is coming together in our annual F2F* community, bringing our collective energy and enthusiasm and intellect to bear on the issues and challenges of the art education arena. It’s pooling ideas in our design-thinking space that will pollinate one another over the course of the Convention in a real-life, real-time exercise in “network effect”: each contribution from one of you will provide a spark for the creative genius of others and lead to the exponential development of strategies toward achieving a vision for 21st-century NAEA.

Aggregation also involves the assembly of all our various perspectives and values and approaches in one place—and out of that great portfolio of possibilities, developing an ever stronger culture committed to taking productive action that grows out of a design-thinking approach to solution development.

In day-to-day life, we are all faced with assorted constraints. The refreshing beauty of spring and of participating in the Convention is freedom from those constraints: No budgets. No counting heads. No opposing forces.

This year’s Convention promises to be a most powerful and enlightening experience—I urge you to join more than 4,000 art educators in Baltimore and take part and be inspired. I look forward to seeing you there!

**Translation = face-to-face*

Deborah B. Reeve, EdD, NAEA Executive Director
NAEA, 1916 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1590
Dreeve@arteducators.org