



The Ontario  
Art Education  
Association

## Working Equity Policy

*The arts are instruments of freedom and robust ways for responding to social justice issues and lived experience, expressing feelings and ideas, and imagining new possibilities for humanity.*

The Ontario Art Education Association champions the important role of visual art and media art learning in maintaining and promoting more just, **EQUITABLE** communities, both locally and globally. Models for curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are truly equitable disrupt the persistence of bias and discrimination in our present society, allowing students to recognize themselves and confidently voice their ideas, emotions, and aspirations. As well, the visual arts and media arts offer students unique means for self expression and representing multiple or hybrid identities.

**DIVERSITY** is about looking past prevailing norms and standardized representations, to permit a wider view of humanity and greater possibilities to the challenges of learning and living. An expectation of diversity embeds socially-just practices and policies that promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of individual and group identities that shape all human interactions including, but not limited to, age, gender, race, socio-economic status, ability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, and national or ethnic origins.

A program, curriculum or performance task is exclusive when it limits, bars access to or omits people or ideas from consideration. A truly **INCLUSIVE** visual arts and media arts education rejects elitism and gatekeeping by embracing democratic, shared principles and affording full access to opportunities and resources. **Inclusive representation of our cultural heritage implies a global view, incorporating non-Western and Indigenous products, people, and perspectives**, i.e., Canadian First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures should be equally situated in the curriculum and understood as fundamental to this nation; African-Canadian or Caribbean-Canadian artists and their works (as well as other racial communities) should be numbered among historical and contemporary practitioners; are students encouraged to research female and/or gender-nonspecific artists for art appreciation tasks?

### Freedom of Visual Expression & Censorship

OAEA endorses **freedom of visual expression** in which unrestricted, frank discourse remains a hallmark of democratic society and our culture of creativity. The arts are instruments of freedom and robust ways for responding to social justice issues and lived experience, expressing feelings and ideas, and imagining new possibilities for humanity. Freedom of expression in the arts must be preserved, and while individuals have the right to accept or reject any work of art, they do not have the right to censor works of art by or for others.

Teachers have a responsibility to:

- (1) introduce students to a range of visual imagery, while supporting them in developing their interpretative and critical thinking skills;
- (2) encourage students to employ their authentic visual voices and choose imagery of personal significance;
- (3) set aside personal artistic preferences in order to permit and equip individual students to investigate and engage with differing images, ideologies, and opinions; and
- (4) be sensitive to age appropriate imagery and content, and consider the distinct nature of their community and education system, as they support their students' freedom of visual expression.

### **Imagery Use and Cultural Appropriation**

OAEA believes that understanding the complexity and context of images is fundamental to students' development as visual learners and artists/designers. Images are often symbols of power and consequence and, although our digital world makes images ubiquitous and seemingly authorless, they invariably are connected to particular individuals, communities or cultures. "**Cultural appropriation** is the unauthorized use or theft of icons, symbols, rituals, aesthetic standards, and representations from one culture or subculture by another. Appropriation also occurs when a person of the dominant culture purports to be an expert on the experience of the dominated culture or trivializes the experiences of a member of the dominated culture." (NAEA Position Statement, March 2017)

Visual arts and media arts educators are urged to make curricular and instructional choices that:

- (1) present images of both historical and contemporary cultures and world-views of diverse peoples, imparting a respect for and cultivating understandings about their unique perspectives;
- (2) address instances of cultural appropriation and, instead, move towards **cultural appreciation** that values the ownership and seriousness of cultural images;
- (3) cease perpetuating stereotypes and inequities, and question presumptions of homogeneity, about individuals or cultural groups.

Approved by the OAEA Board of Directors, Oct. 3, 2020