



# HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## PROJECT ZERO

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### **New Project Zero study—*The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education*—highlights importance of arts educators focusing on quality, and need for alignment of purposes**

Many children in the United States have little or no opportunity for formal arts instruction and access to arts learning experiences remains a critical national challenge. Additionally, the quality of arts learning opportunities that are available to young people is a serious concern. Understanding this second challenge—the challenge of creating and sustaining high quality formal arts learning experiences for K–12 youth, inside and outside of school—is the focus of a new report from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

*The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education* addresses the multiple challenges of achieving and sustaining quality in arts education, across major as well as emerging art forms in rural, urban, and suburban settings. The report is available as a free download from Project Zero at [www.pz.harvard.edu](http://www.pz.harvard.edu) and The Wallace Foundation at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org). Hard copies of the report are available from Project Zero at [www.pz.harvard.edu](http://www.pz.harvard.edu).

Steve Seidel, lead principal investigator on the study, said, “Access and quality are the two great challenges for arts education. In the study, we found that while quality is a persistent challenge, many arts educators demonstrate that, with thoughtful, careful analysis, constant dialogue, and dogged persistence, it is possible to achieve and sustain high quality arts learning experiences for young people in and out of school settings.”

Edward Pauly, director of research and evaluation at The Wallace Foundation, which commissioned the study, said: “In this difficult economic environment, arts educators need to use scarce resources to create high quality arts learning experiences. This timely report points the way for educators to focus on quality.”

Major themes and findings of the study included:

***Reflection and dialogue is important at all levels.*** An overarching theme across many of the findings of this study is that continuous reflection and discussion about what constitutes quality and how to achieve it is not only a catalyst *for* quality, but also a sign *of* quality.



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The report includes dialogue tools to help arts educators build and clarify their own visions of high quality arts education, identify markers of quality in their own programs and practices, and seek alignment across decision-makers at all levels who help to shape a program's pursuit of quality.

***The drive for quality is personal, passionate, and persistent.*** For most of the people surveyed in this study, ideas about what constitutes quality in arts education are inextricably tied to fundamental issues of identity and meaning and to their values as artists, educators, and citizens in the world.

***Quality arts education serves multiple purposes simultaneously.*** Most of those interviewed believe good arts programs tend to serve several purposes simultaneously. Though arts programs differ widely in their contexts, goals, art forms, and constituencies, a hallmark sign of high quality arts learning in any program is that the learning experiences are rich and complex for all learners, engaging them on many levels and helping them learn and grow in a variety of ways.

***Quality reveals itself “in the room” through four different lenses.*** There are multiple dimensions of quality in arts learning experiences. Four lenses were found to be especially useful in focusing attention on different aspects of excellence in arts education settings: *learning, teaching, classroom community, and environment.*

***Foundational decisions matter.*** Arts education programs are based on foundational, program-defining decisions that give a program its identity and provide parameters within which quality is pursued. These decisions include: (1) *Who teaches the arts?* (2) *Where are the arts taught?* (3) *What is taught and how?* and (4) *How is arts learning assessed?*

***Decisions and decision-makers at all levels affect quality.*** Critical decision-makers include people quite far away from the classroom (e.g., administrators, funders, policymakers); those just outside the room (notably program staff and parents); and those who are in the room (students, teachers, artists). While all decisions can have an important effect on quality, decisions made by those “in the room” have tremendous power to support or undermine the quality of the learning experience.

The study addressed three questions: How do U.S. arts educators, including leading practitioners, theorists, and administrators, define high quality arts learning and teaching? What markers of excellence do educators and administrators look for in the actual activities of art learning and teaching in the classroom? And, how do a program's foundational decisions, as well as its ongoing day-to-day decisions, affect quality? To answer these questions, researchers interviewed leading arts practitioners, theorists and administrators, visited exemplary arts programs across a range media and settings, and reviewed published literature.

*The Qualities of Quality* study was researched and written by senior researchers from Harvard University's Project Zero, including Seidel, Shari Tishman, Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, and Patricia Palmer. Founded in 1967 by Nelson Goodman, Project Zero is a research center committed to



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understanding and enhancing learning, thinking, and creativity in the arts, as well as humanistic and scientific disciplines, at the individual and institutional levels. For more details on the authors and Project Zero, visit [www.pz.harvard.edu](http://www.pz.harvard.edu).

This study was commissioned by The Wallace Foundation and completed with support from the Arts Education Partnership. The Wallace Foundation seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that will strengthen education leadership, arts participation, and out-of-school learning. For more information visit [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org). The Arts Education Partnership provides information and communication about current and emerging arts education policies, issues, and activities at the national, state, and local levels. For more information visit [www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org).