Carlos Manjarrez moderated the discussion about two resources that were established to help people sort through current arts and culture research: Createquity Arts Policy Library (APL) and Arts EdSearch (AES).

Ian David Moss provided a history and overview of the APL:

*I thought I’d start with some background on Createquity. I started it as a personal blog while a graduate student in the Yale School of Management in 2007 to provide a kind of bird’s-eye view of what it was like to be an arts person in a business school. It started to be followed by arts administrators and so saw a broader potential. The current site launched in 2009. We launched the Createquity Fellowship (formerly Createquity Writing Fellowship) in 2011, enabling other authors to write for the site. In 2013 there was an expansion of the editorial team to include two other editors. Today there are about 10,000 visits per month and 3500 subscribers.*

*The APL grew out of my time as an intern at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation where I was exposed to all of this research that I didn’t know existed. The first piece I wrote was a lengthy review and analysis of Florida’s Rise of the Creative Class, which generated a lot of interest in the site (including from Florida himself). I decided to formalize that process in the Arts Policy Library.*

*Each entry is itself a blog post. Each has three parts: 1) summary 2) analysis and 3) implications. Two editors edit each entry: a “naïve” editor who has not read the underlying research being summarized and a “savvy” editor who is familiar with the piece being reviewed.*

*There are 20 entries by 15 authors. Each takes an average of 45 hours to write and another dozen or so in editorial work – it is not a casual process.*

*The goals of the APL are two-fold:*

1) *Serve an internal audience by helping those of us who are involved with Createquity make sense of the world we’re working in;*

2) *Serve an external audience by translating and filtering research for practitioners and the field more broadly.*

*Analysis gets a lot of attention in the editorial process. We’re developing some heuristics for that analysis, which involve specific questions aimed at assessing relevance, transparency, rigor of research design, and the soundness of the conclusions.*

*To date, we’ve mostly focused on studies and publications that already have a high profile, regardless of their quality. We are interested now in expanding to review studies that have a lot to offer but haven’t received a lot of attention. However, this will require a new curation model that we’re still figuring out.*
Thus far, we’ve been much more successful with the first goal/audience than the second. On a year-by-year basis, average page views for individual entries in the APL are declining, which is in contrast to trends for the rest of the site. A reader poll we conducted indicated that 20% of respondents, most of whom were subscribers, didn’t even know the APL existed. These are some signs that we’re not yet reaching our goal of generating broad visibility and dialogue around arts research.

Sandra Ruppert of the Arts Education Partnership provided background on Arts EdSearch (AES)

We are trying to get more people familiar with the high quality research and get people to discuss it. AES is a first-of-its-kind interactive clearinghouse for arts education research and policy. It is a project of the Arts Education Partnership, created in 1995 through an interagency agreement between the Department of Education (DOE) and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). It is part of the Council of Chief State School Officers, a resource for state leaders on the role of arts in education. It is part of a coalition of organizations dedicated to delivering a “complete education” especially in light of the new Common Core standards. It is a hub for research, policy, and practice and has published a compendium of high quality research studies and research agendas.

Why did we undertake this project? We got tired of hearing people say “We’d like to support the arts but we don’t have any research on impact of arts on education.” We knew that research existed, and realized we needed a clearinghouse for such research.

What we had in mind first was a matrix where you could find what you needed by educational level, and different ways to find information. A lot of work went into defining the categories and the cells of the matrix with a focus on outcomes and who those outcomes targeted. We redesigned the site in 2013 to make it easier to find information focused on student and educator outcomes for learning in and through the arts. Each catalogued research study includes a summary and implications for policy. We also use the catalog to identify research gaps. The brochure “Preparing Students for a New America” is a trifold brochure summarizing the research.

AES catalogs about 220 studies in the outcome areas of academic, cognitive, personal, and social/civic. To determine the criteria for selection we contracted with researchers and ultimately determined that the research needed to meet AERA criteria (American Educational Research Association). We use both absolute criteria and quality criteria. We realized during collection that not all of the research was related to outcomes of ARTS learning so that is one of the absolute criteria.

The collection process has four steps: submission, evaluation based on absolute criteria, evaluation based on quality criteria, and summaries added to the Arts EdSearch database.
There have been 33,000 visitors over the last six months with 62,000 page views from 166 countries. The top countries outside the US are, not surprisingly, from the English-speaking world: UK, Canada, Philippines, Australia, and then India.

Carlos exhibited a graphic comparison of the two collections: “Review of the Workflow Process.” He pointed out a few distinguishing features:

- APL entries are more long form analysis
- AES is a more controlled environment
- APL includes a mechanism for feedback

The first question, or discussion topic, is about the sustainability of these efforts.

A1 from Ian: It is pretty labor-intensive work. Our selection criteria for pieces to get reviewed includes that they already have received a lot of attention. That’s one reason why there are only twenty entries. I think where we could have more impact down the road is in discovering the undiscovered. That will require a whole new strategy. Trying to figure out how to do it is a big hairy problem.

A1 from Sandra: Creating resources like this is a big time commitment. For us the most labor-intensive period was in development. We have a fellows program with grad students from Lesley, Harvard, and so on to help with that. When we have new studies come into the database, we make sure people know. We use social media [twitter]. It is still a work in progress and I agree it is a big hairy problem. For us Arts EdSearch is a means, not an end.

Q2: What have you done besides the web analytics to get a sense of the audience?

A2 from Sandra: We ask people all the time what is useful for them. We don’t do many big publications anymore, but these small colorful brochures help bring people in. We can distribute those in the thousands.

We see our audience as researchers and funders, but we have always seen our primary audience as the person going to the school board meeting and needing hard data. We have to keep going back and asking the audience and keeping it fresh.

A2 from Ian: The reader poll has already been mentioned. That gives us a little more info about the APL and other resources on the site. I was distressed that a higher percentage of subscribers didn’t see APL as one of the main reasons why they read Createquity.

Q3: What does the APL have to do with other resources like Cultural Policy Center, C-PANDA, etc and why aren’t you all working together on this?

A3 from Ian: The analyses are unique to APL. Most of those other resources compile or link to lists of research available without the in-depth analysis.
A3 from Sandra: *We think about that a lot and are looking for good models. One of the places we looked for synergy is the US DOE “What Works” clearinghouse. The research there is more experimental in design while AES is more in alignment with AERA and AEA. We’re always looking for the potential for partnerships.*

Q4: To what extent can or do your collections serve to mediate the problem of inaccessibility of academic research journals?

A4 Ian: *I admit that we have done virtually nothing to address that problem but it is a huge one. Many of the “diamonds in the rough” we’d be looking for in the future will likely come from those journals. Shout out to the U Chicago Center for Cultural Policy “Digest” which is dedicated to making academic work more accessible.*

A4 Sandra: *The studies in AES must be publicly accessible to be included. One of the reasons for that is we don’t link to the actual studies or store them. We provide a full citation and someone who is interested should be able to find the study.*

Q5 to Ian: *My sense is that there are two goals – critical review of research and dissemination of research. It might be useful to disentangle them and come up with some kind of peer review process.*

A5 (Ian): *Intriguing idea -- especially the idea of differentiation. Not sure about peer review. There’s already a lot of review with the two-editor setup and a lot of time goes into that. I’m interested in getting more researchers involved but am concerned about the time commitment.*

Q6 to Sandra: *Can more people be involved with Arts EdSearch?*

A6 (Sandra): *We tried some different ways to do that, like the fellows program for example. But asking people to make the time commitment is a concern for us too. We are trying to develop a “community of practice” but that gets built over time, especially because there are multiple users and audiences.*

Q7: *What do you need to grow, besides the obvious?*

A7 from Sandra: *By and large, funders aren’t interested in a research database. What we’ve gotten serious about is the products that come from the database. Trying to put enough staff resources toward the project is the real challenge. We’re interested in growing the educator side of this because of the very important conversation going on now about educator effectiveness. People have to see its [the database’s] utility.*

Q8: *What is the return?*
A8 from Ian: For us, I don’t want to sell the internal goal short. The truth is that even if nobody else read the APL, it would still have value because it informs our writing for the rest of the site. If I’m putting in the work to make sense of all this research it is very easy for me to then make it possible for the public to benefit from that work. And, it’s useful for those who don’t have the tools to analyze the research that’s out there.

A8 from Sandra: The demonstrated return for us is we want to change the conversation about college and career readiness and the role of the arts in a comprehensive education. [The speaker provided a specific example of the use of the resource by federal policy actor and another example of the research database being used in California to secure Title I funds for arts education.] The collection can also be used to find research gaps, such as we’re missing fundamental research on arts education and high school graduation rates.

Q8 from Anne Gadwa Nicodemus: Are there people on the call who find the work useful and if so, would you volunteer to help with the effort?

A8 from Jennifer Novak-Leonard: I was raising my hand to serve as a reviewer….related to my earlier comment about having a peer review structure and also the need to review the gray literature.

Comment from Ian: This is really an infrastructure problem. Maybe there’s a way to set up a collaboration mechanism among people with aligned interests.

Comment from Steve Cline: Seeing Sandra’s site and taxonomy reminds us that we can share each other’s taxonomies to help make all of our work more efficient. It’s important to give our attention to this metadata and share it.

Response from Sandra: There are a lot of ways to slice and dice things. It’s important to be explicit. As we went along, we shed a lot of studies because they weren’t about arts ed.

Q9 from Andrew: Do either of you work on the bridge between gray literature and academic literature?

A9 from Ian: If you looked at things from a topic frame or a claims frame, rather than on a study-by-study basis, then you could potentially bridge that gap.

Carlos thanked everybody and wrapped up the session at 3:27 EST.