Foreword to the First Edition

After a candy-pile night of trick-or-treating, the butterfly closed up her wings and retired to examine her bounty. Dumping the contents of the paper jack-o-lantern on the kitchen table, my granddaughter smiled and went to work. During the course of the evening, Emilie built candy towers, chocolate cars, and a fancy version of her name using lollipops as big red dots. The candy artist refueled with treats, proceeding even more energetically to find new possibilities in her palette.

To function as an artist, a child requires a canvas—in this case, the kitchen table, and the recognition that candy is an art supply. With the confidence of an expert player who knows that art supplies lie everywhere, the young artist sets out to explore. The information adults can teach children about art is as vast as the history of art itself, yet it is children’s artistic behaviors that allow them to spend hours of intense concentration on independent artmaking.

This book suggests the essence of art teaching, which is to inquire the following: What do we need to provide young artists that will allow them to take full advantage of their artistic behavior? The authors describe what we can make available in school and at home, so that children can continue to function as artists. A guiding light to teaching art is looking at children engaged in playful and creative activities. In Halloween art, we see the importance of maintaining play and independence, so that children have the self-confidence to discover art and act on their ideas. An art curriculum that provides for basic artistic behaviors will sustain an artist and art connoisseur for life.

When teachers construct art curriculums and approaches to teaching art to children, they often reach into a bag of tricks—consulting other adults about what is good for children and what aspects of adult art children should study. Teaching adult art to children neglects the one certainty in the art world: change. If you don’t follow the art world for a moment, there will be hundreds of new artists and art trends passing by. There will always be new materials, media, and techniques to consider. Perhaps the fundamental question for all art teachers to consider is

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one that asks, “What is timeless in art?” Besides the surface articulations of space, shape, and “beauty,” what is more steadfast and timeless than the antiquities of artistic standards? It is emotion that compels creation and includes fun and play—it is a child’s pure artistic behavior. What art teachers should ask is, “What is timeless in art?” The answer is children’s artistic behavior. Yet the appreciation of adult art and techniques was not the essence of our Halloween evening. It was the artistic playing of a young artist, sleeping with an old slide box that has a tastefully glued, candy-furnished home inside.

When the slide box is transported to art class the next day, it is to raise awareness of the uniqueness of children’s art. A timeless art curriculum includes the appreciation of children’s artistic behaviors. An art class is a place where children’s collections, finds, and ideas are the stars, and supportive adults treat their art seriously. The goal of art teaching is to recognize the child-artist, who comes to art class with rich resumes and pockets filled with collections. An art class is providing the time and opportunity for children to share ideas and act on their plans.

The authors and I have supported one another’s work in art education for more than a decade. We believe in a curriculum that enlivens playful hands and promotes freely moving bodies in an art class and that art teaching has to engage children in independent artmaking. We know that children’s artistic behaviors exist in their confidence as “idea people,” seeing themselves as artists with many good ideas. We believe in the power of children as players, inventors, and futurists.

This book contains some of the most important wisdom to be shared with art teachers, who are interested in supporting the creative life of young artists like Emilie. The writing represents experienced voices of people who have spent their careers setting up studios as safe places for students to be creative in school. The artists share their most valuable insights of observing, supporting, and modeling artistic behaviors in teaching art to children.

—George Szekely, University of Kentucky, 2008

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