Preface to the First Edition

Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom connects to the grassroots organization of the same name, developed by and for practicing art teachers. This practice has grown from deep reflection, dedication, vision, collegial relationships, and action research over many years. The true collaborative nature of teaching for artistic behavior endeavors includes the creation of this book. Kathy Douglas and Diane Jaquith, both veteran art teachers, have worked tirelessly since the late 1990s to establish and maintain this choice-based teacher network in its many forms. This group serves to support, mentor, and give voice to practicing art teachers. Consistent with their classroom pedagogy, Ms. Douglas and Ms. Jaquith have invested their energy in designing an evolving framework for choice-based teaching and learning that supports emergent professional development. The concept sustains peer mentoring and collaborating, numerous local and national conference presentations and exhibitions, weekend and summer retreats, and impressive Internet sites. Teaching for artistic behavior has now developed into a vital national professional learning community.

Although the extensive network described above is relatively recent, choice-based art education’s roots go back to the early 1970s. Out of the pure necessity of providing authentic art experiences, teachers were inspired to offer real choices to students—it was simply common sense to them. They were inspired by their own studio experiences, collaborations with artist friends, and deep thinking about true creative behavior. They designed and refined curricula and classrooms to provide learners with rich studio environments for them to pursue teacher-demonstrated artmaking practices or the students’ own independent or collaborative interests.

Over the years, increasingly formal associations resulted in the founding of the Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) organization in 2001. This national presence has engaged numerous new and veteran educators and continues to attract solo teachers who have established and run similar programs, some for decades. TAB’s existence is enabled by the Internet and the expert caretaking by Ms. Douglas and Ms. Jaquith. Although

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supported by higher education institutions (Brown University, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and Bridgewater State College), TAB remains an independent movement firmly planted in classroom practice.

My own practice of choice-based teaching commenced when, as a teacher with 15 years of high school experience, I returned to teach grades 1–6 in a lab school. My strict Lowenfeld education, which had served me so well in my earlier elementary art teaching career, seemed inadequate upon my return from the secondary level. First of all, Lowenfeld’s motivational model on a single topic was mismatched to my classes of wide academic diversity and even wider spans of interests. Children’s worlds, including school life, had changed over 15 years. With heterogeneous grouping and inclusion of special-needs students, one single lesson no longer fit all. Also, my own secondary school practice of talking to students in an intimate, artist-to-artist manner was sacrificed in my teacher-centered mode. Overall, I was bored with my own ability to make a single lesson work and haunted by using a single source of motivation. Although I did not label them as such at the time, the “Eight Studio Habits of Mind” (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007, p. 6), so present in my high school teaching experience, were diminished in my K–6 teacher-centered approach. After talking with Kathy Douglas, I established my own variations of choice-based teaching that resulted in a personal mid-career renaissance. Giving up the control and the teacher drama of my Lowenfeld-based practice allowed me to relate to students in a mutually engaged manner that was surprising, improvisational, intellectually and expressively rich. If one asks, “Who is engaging and persisting?” and “Who is doing the envisioning?” (Hetland et al., 2007) and the honest answer is the teacher, a shake-up is needed.

The success of teaching for artistic behavior lies in its flexibility and inclusiveness. It is truly an open system that has been implemented in a variety of settings and hybridized with art education traditions of direct instruction, demonstrations, problem-posing, studio practices, and assessment. For example, I can picture teachers using a Lowenfeld-like motivation, gathering students who do not have studio plans for the day and offering it as an inspirational option.

In the context of art education history, choice-based art education resolves the conflict between teaching for content and encouraging self-expression described by Efland (1990) and bridges the gulf between the art world and the world of school art described by Smith (1996). This concept offers one way of adapting essentialist and reconstructive models of art education (Clark, 1996). Teaching for artistic behavior fits the description of postmodern art and art education as a form of cultural
production and reproduction capable of dissolving boundaries; exploring nonlinear progression; embracing the realism of society and culture; expanding notions of power, beauty, and connoisseurship; and integrating the past and present (Efland, Kerry, & Stuhr, 1996). In addition, the practice certainly teaches students “to construct meaning in works of art by attending to formal qualities, artist’s intention/context, and personal experience” (Hutchens & Suggs, 1997, p. 151) and embraces formal art principles along with postmodern versions as described by Gude (2004). Choice-based art education fits the description of a postmodern, kaleidoscope curriculum; “the designs [are] constantly changing and becoming something new, and yet all of them remain interrelated” (Slattery, 1995, p. 257). In the end, Ms. Douglas and Ms. Jaquith’s book offers a call to action and to hope, one that Smith (1996) hadn’t seen in what he has referred to as his “so often dark study” of art education history (p. 218).

From my current overview as art education professor now removed from daily contact with K–12 students, I am deeply moved by the promise of teaching for artistic behavior in all its variations. One spectacular reminder was TAB’s first national exhibition held at Massachusetts College of Art and Design’s Arnheim Gallery during the National Art Education Association’s Boston conference in March 2005. This landmark exhibition demonstrated the absolute antithesis of Arthur Efland’s (1976) “school art style” and Peter Smith’s (1995) “irrelevant” art. The wide range of work demonstrated the variety of students’ concerns, both profound and trivial: touching tributes to World War II grandfather veterans, serial goldfish deaths, a future entrepreneur’s vision of a flower shop, a visual battle of “dizzy” and “queezy” drawings, and a twig zoo. The content demonstrated in these students’ artworks was genuine and accomplished, and supported the vision of the arts as a vital life force. In Teaching for Artistic Behavior: Choice-Based Art Education, Ms. Douglas and Ms. Jaquith describe a variety of practices that promise to renew our faith in the power of truly creative endeavors.

—John V. Crowe, Massachusetts College of Art & Design, 2008