

Preface

How This Book Came to Be

Back in 2015, at the National Art Education Association's Conference in New Orleans, we were invited to meet with Robb Sandagata, editor at Davis Publications, to discuss an idea for a choice-based resource book for secondary-level teachers. At the time, we had been working together at Apex High School in Apex, North Carolina, and had developed several methods for delivering a choice-based program. We were eager to put our ideas on paper. Two years later, in the early summer of 2017, Davis Publications released *The Open Art Room*. It was an immediate success, becoming one of Davis Publications' best-selling resource books.

Between the time we first met with Robb but before the book was released, we each experienced significant changes in our teaching careers. Apex High was scheduled to be demolished. A new high school was to be built on the grounds. All students and staff would be moved to a temporary location while construction was underway. During that same two-year period, Ian was offered and accepted a position at South Brunswick High School in Southport, North Carolina. Melissa stayed on in Apex High's temporary location. These changes affected the way each of us taught. To meet the needs of our new school settings, we each began to develop new methods for presenting student-directed courses.

Some changes expanded upon the methods we wrote about in *The Open Art Room*. The Artistic Thinking Process was improved to offer students an even better model for developing, creating, and reflecting on their artwork. New Artistic Behavior Unit plans were developed to expand the programs and offer scaffolding from one level to the next.



Our new educational circumstances led both of us to develop completely new teaching methods. We discovered that these new methods enhanced the way we presented artists, taught techniques, and introduced media. We realized there was a need for a sequel to *The Open Art Room*. The idea for *Making Artists* was conceived.

When considering what would go into *Making Artists*, we knew we didn't want the new book to replace *The Open Art Room*. Much of the first book explains the philosophy of choice-based teaching. It presents a basic framework to help teachers who are considering moving from a traditional teacher-directed class to a student-directed learning environment. *Making Artists* expands on that framework. It is designed to help teachers who are already moving towards a choice-based program to be even more successful.

How This Book Is Organized

If you are familiar with *The Open Art Room*, you may have noticed that it was written as a collaborative effort. Since we were working at the same school and developing our methods together, we deliberately designed the book to read that way—as a team effort.

The content contained in *Making Artists* was developed differently. Though we communicated often about the changes we were making in our curricula, we developed the new methods presented in this book separately. In planning the structure for *Making Artists*, we decided that the best way to present the content would be in two separate but cohesive sections. Thus Part 1, In Practice: Scaffolding Student Learning, was written by Melissa. Part 2, In Practice: Discovering New Methods for Making Artists, and Part 3, Making Artists in Other Settings, were written by Ian.





Introduction

The Student as Artist

There are many aspects of art education that much of the profession accepts as truth. For example, all students need to be working on the same concept at the same time, or skills related to realism are especially valuable, or only advanced students who have learned the foundational skills of rendering should be able to set their own artistic course. Many instructors also believe that students learn how to be artists when their teacher plans out the steps of a project, then teaches those steps to students. We accept these beliefs as truths. But are they?

What if we decided not to accept these common beliefs as truth?

What if we viewed creative thinking as a foundational skill?

What if we gave students creative control?

What if we planned art instruction that could teach students how to work confidently as artists?

The truth is that students can use their own ideas at every level of their learning. “Good” art can and should be defined by the student as much as by the teacher. Student-led classrooms, where individuals work on their own ideas at their own pace, can be far more engaging and productive than traditional approaches to teaching art. Lessons planned with specific outcomes and rubrics in mind can be limiting. The fact is, our students often have better ideas about the art they should be making than we do. We don’t have to do all the planning ourselves. Instead, we can work in partnership with our students to guide their learning individually, offer feedback, and connect them to work that is personally meaningful. Then we need only to watch the magic of creative freedom unfold.

Another truth: teacher-directed content, when used exclusively, shuts students out from learning the real work of artists. Those tried and true lessons that we see year after year—the mandala color wheels, the gridded portraits, the still life drawings that were planned by the teacher to achieve beautiful results—represent missed learning opportunities. So much of accepted art education pedagogy allows for this theft of ownership that it often goes unquestioned by art teachers themselves, let alone by administrators or policy makers. *That's how it's done*, many think, not knowing that there is a better way. If you are reading this book, it is likely that you, too, have seen some of the issues in the field and are looking for more—more meaningful work, more student involvement, more creative independence in your classroom.

You want to do more than teach students to make projects. You want to make artists.



PREVIEW

A New Vision

Others before us have challenged the status quo, thought differently, and created a movement that continues to grow today. Our teaching has been deeply influenced by the thinking of these instructors. Teaching for Artistic Behavior, or TAB, began in the elementary schools in the 1970s. From the beginning, TAB was centered on the student artist. In *Engaging Learners Through Artmaking*, TAB pioneers Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith lay out an impactful vision for art education by asking us to consider just three sentences:

- What do artists do?
- The child is the artist.
- The art room is the child's studio.

Those three sentences are at the heart of what we share in this book. In an elementary school, this three-sentence curriculum is usually applied to a classroom arranged with open centers, where students self-select their media and create art that they have envisioned with little adult direction or intervention. Its application in secondary education might look different, but it has similar goals. In our secondary settings we use Bootcamps and Explorations to teach students how to use the studio classroom. We use

Themes and Packets to support students as they re-learn to trust themselves as artists and connect with the personal voice they may have suppressed during years of the teacher-directed learning that fills our schools. We use the Artistic Thinking Process to teach a framework for making artistic decisions. There are different levels of teacher-led content in our instruction, depending on student needs and the specifics of our teaching situations, but our goal is always to give students the tools they need to find ideas, make plans, and create personally meaningful work all on their own.

Different Situations Require Different Solutions

As you read through this book, you'll notice that it contains different methods for developing a student-directed curriculum. This may seem odd. Most books meant to assist teachers in developing a curriculum would present a single, well-defined method. This book has several. Why? The simple answer is that different situations require different solutions.

As we've said, this book is written with the secondary teacher in mind. Our focus is on developing an art program for middle and high school students. Does that sound like a homogeneous group? Every school is different. Class schedules are different. Art rooms are designed differently. Students come from different backgrounds, with different levels of experience. No two schools are the same, and no single method for delivery is right for everyone. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but there is one that will fit for you.

Understanding the need for different solutions is the first step in developing your art program. Deciding which approach is right for your situation is the next. How do you know which method will work for you and your students? The easy answer might be the hardest: You don't. There will be some trial and error. In the introduction for each method, we have included situations in which the method might work best. These recommendations are primarily based on how familiar students are with choice-based teaching. As a general rule, it's best to start with a modified level of choice. You can always loosen up as the students gain confidence in making their own decisions.

Teachers thinking about implementing a choice-based program often have reservations. Will this work in my school? Will it work with my grade level? Will it work with my students' socio-economic background? The answer to all of these questions is yes. You can find successful choice-based programs in all regions of the world, from large inner-city schools to small rural towns, in blue states and red states and even the purple ones. People enjoy learning if the learning process is enjoyable. That's what student-directed programs are all about.

