Introduction

Sculptor Joel Shapiro once remarked: *"Design just does not interest me. . . The process does and the development of the idea."*[1]

Why have students make artworks?[2] Although artmaking is the primary enterprise in most elementary, middle, and high school artrooms, do art teachers ever ask themselves "Why am I having students paint landscapes, fashion clay pots, construct collages, and render self-portraits?"

In 1943, Abstract Expressionist painters Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Adolph Gottlieb, in a letter to the *New York Times,* declared: "There's no such thing as a good painting about nothing."[3] As a former art teacher, an art-education professor, and a painter, I also feel that artmaking is foremost a meaning-making endeavor and that students— besides manipulating media, developing technical proficiencies, or learning good design principles through their artworks—can and should explore and express meaning. The intent of this text is to explore artmaking as a meaning-making endeavor, which is exemplified by the work of professional artists and may be translated into classroom practice.

From Creative Self-expression to Meaning Making
In contrast to meaning making, the creative self-expression approach to art education, which dominated from the 1940s until recently, offered a limited notion of the complexity of the artmaking process. Students created from intuitive urges that required little overt instruction. The primary responsibility of art teachers was to provide students with opportunities to encounter various kinds of media and techniques. A more recent approach—compre-
hensive art education—offers a more complex understanding of the artmaking process. Scholars Clark, Day, and Greer describe this development:

In the early 1960s, at the height of the popularity of creative self-expression, several conferences were held at which art educators questioned the fundamental assertions of the self-expression approach and suggested alternatives. Since then, theorists, scholars, and researchers have developed a body of literature that has moved consistently away from the creative self-expression approach.[4]

Comprehensive art education contends that, in addition to art production, art instruction should embrace art history, art criticism, and the philosophy of art. Implementation of comprehensive art education not only expands the content of art instruction but also—according to Clark, Day, and Greer—significantly alters the notions of such factors as the learner, the teacher, creativity, and adult art within the context of the classroom.

Whereas in the creative self-expression approach, the focus had been on developing creativity, self-expression, and an integrated personality; in the knowledge-based comprehensive approach, instruction has become less about nurturing and more about teaching valid art concepts at the student's level. Adult art, no longer seen as inhibiting self-expression, becomes of primary significance for student expression. Creativity is no longer an innate attribute that requires only encouragement and opportunity, but, instead, one that benefits from overt instructional intervention.

The knowledge-based approach of comprehensive art education offers a less romanticized view of stu-

dent artmaking, contending that instructional intervention is both desirable and necessary. Based on this approach, this text embeds artmaking instruction within a context of learning that derives from an integration of art criticism, art history, and the philosophy of art, thereby informing students' artistic expressions.

Artmaking Informed by Big Ideas

The approach in this text also extends somewhat beyond comprehensive art education to embrace a more interdisciplinary character, through an emphasis on big ideas—the overarching notions that reach beyond any particular discipline. As discussed in Chapter 1, big ideas are broad, important human issues. Examples of big ideas are power, identity, community, nature, and conflict; and big ideas such as these have become useful tools for linking the various subject areas in the interdisciplinary curriculum efforts of the last decade.

Professional artists' use of big ideas to motivate and direct their artistic expression provides another reason for focusing art learning on them. In this text, sculptor Claes Oldenburg, in his colossal monuments, pursues the big idea of changed meanings in everyday objects; installation artist Sandy Skoglund explores the big idea of human behavior in contemporary society; and sculptor George Segal expresses the big idea of alienation in the urban environment. The big ideas in these and other artists' work are so significant that they sustain the artists over years of artmaking. And, all importantly, the focus of *student* artmaking around big ideas makes the process relevant. By using big ideas, students find that artmaking is more than creating an interesting design or learning a particular technique with a specific medium: artmaking also becomes an expression of important ideas related to their own life and the lives of others.

Organization of the Text

So as to develop the reader's understanding of the artmaking process and the importance and function of its parts, each chapter in the text focuses on one component. Chapter 1 explores the concept of big ideas and lays the foundation for the subsequent chapters; Chapter 2 considers the importance of establishing personal connections to big ideas; Chapter 3 argues for building a knowledge base for big ideas; Chapter 4 investigates problem solving with big ideas; Chapter 5 looks at the setting of aesthetic boundaries with choices of media, formal qualities, subject matter, styles, and techniques to express big ideas; Chapter 6 examines the use of big ideas in designing artmaking instruction into a holistic learning experience for students; Chapter 7 addresses less concrete aspects of the artmaking

The Artmaking Process

Big Ideas	Problem Solving	Knowledge Base	Personal Connections	Boundaries	Ways of Working
conceptual foci	conceptual technical visual practical	general artistic technical	past experience individual interest social context heritage	formal choices technical choices media styles subject matter	risk taking playing experimenting delaying closure

process (such as risk taking, postponement of meaning, and experimentation) that have implications for classroom instruction, and offers guidance to teachers for implementing the artmaking process in a manner that encourages inquiry and discovery. All the chapters explicate these practices with big ideas by artists, in artworks, and in classroom artmaking.

Characteristics of Constructivist Teaching[5]

Authentic activities (instruction that has strong
　　connections to the real world)
Student collaboration
Active learning
Deep knowledge of a topic or discipline
Use of prior knowledge
Increasing complexity of understanding
Access to content experts

A Constructivist Approach
Highly visible in current school reform literature is the notion that students be engaged with understanding and meaning making. This constructivist approach to teaching and learning argues that the goal of teaching is students' understanding and that students *construct* knowledge, not simply reproduce it through memorization, recall, or routinized application.[6] Artmaking conceived as an exploration and expression of big ideas reflects a constructivist approach. The implications of this are that students *not* produce artworks from rote formulas or create products that have little meaning beyond the exploration of media or the development of technical skills, but, instead, that students make artworks to investigate and express ideas; and, based upon constructivist practices of authentic learning based upon the real world, that students model their artmaking on that of adult artists and thereby learn how adult artists make art. The goal, however, is *not* to develop students into professional artists, but to structure classroom artmaking into a more meaningful activity, one based upon real-world authenticity.

Professional Artists' Practices in the Classroom
Comprehensive art education advocates instructional modeling based on the professional practices of art critics, art historians, aestheticians, and artists as a way for students to learn about art. For instance, art critics describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate artworks; and the adoption of these same practices as standard procedures for conducting art criticism in the classroom encourages students to become more-skilled viewers of art. In theory, the professional artist's practices should have become a rich resource for classroom instruction but, to a large extent, this has not occurred. Therefore, the purpose of this text is to consider the professional artist in light of practices that can have significance for classroom artmaking.

The professional artists examined in the text are contemporary artists working in the context of current ideas, trends, values, and beliefs that inform a particular art world—the one most often addressed by Western professional critics and art historians. This is not to say that other art worlds—those that are community-based or self-taught or non-Western—cannot contribute models for classroom artmaking, but that such worlds exceed the scope of this text. Additionally, the selection of contemporary artists reflects my belief that students find contemporary artworks more compelling than those of the past. I have found that students are often more open and ready to embrace the unaccustomed, and frequently are not as disturbed as adults by new art forms and practices. Further, although contemporary artworks often challenge traditional artistic forms, they are more likely to depict visual imagery and

subject matter that students find familiar, providing useful connections to the artworks.

Research for the Text

In conducting research into artmaking practices at the elementary, middle, high school, and university levels, I observed classroom practice, held formal interviews, conversed informally with art teachers and art-education students, and instructed graduate and undergraduate studio methods courses with the ideas that inform this text. Other research—which I most often conducted through published artist interviews and art criticism—involved examining the works and practices of professional artists, especially those of international installation artist Sandy Skoglund.

From this body of research about the professional artist, I derived practices that have meaning for the classroom. The questions I pursued revolve around the artist's exploration and expression of meaning: What allows the artist to explore and investigate ideas? What permits the artist to find new perspectives and insights, push boundaries, and delve into ideas at deeper levels? How does the artist emphasize the process over the product? How does the artist make artistic decisions? Such questions—and professional artists' answers to them—developed my understanding of the artistic process and how professional artists use it to create not only products, but meaning too. My desire is that this text, which resulted from this research, will serve not as a recipe or a formula for designing classroom artmaking, but as a guide for implementing artmaking as a meaning-making endeavor in the classroom.

Notes

1 Barbaralee Diamondstein, "Brice Marden," *Inside the Art World: Conversations with Barbaralee Diamondstein* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), p. 271.

2 See the author's article, S. R. Walker, "Why have students make artworks?", *Art Education*, September 1996, 11–17.

3 M. Rothko, B. Newmann, & A. Gottlieb, Letter to the *New York Times*, 1943.

4 G.A. Clark, M.D. Day, and D. Greer, "Discipline-based art education: Becoming students of art," *Journal of Aesthetics*, 21, 2, Summer 1987, p. 133.

5 These characteristics were compiled by the author as a general guideline to current educational understandings of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. The list is not comprehensive (other characteristics could be added), nor is it meant to imply that constructivist teaching and learning must always include all of these characteristics.

6 The reform literature is extensive. A useful bibliography can be found in F.M. Newmann & Associates, *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996).