



# Studies in Art Education

A Journal of Issues and Research

ISSN: 0039-3541 (Print) 2325-8039 (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/usae20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/usae20)

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To cite this article: gloria j. wilson & Amber C. Coleman (2023) Review of *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History*, *Studies in Art Education*, 64:2, 261-266, DOI: [10.1080/00393541.2023.2180312](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2023.2180312)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2023.2180312>



Published online: 24 May 2023.



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## MEDIA REVIEW

### **Review of *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History***

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Bolin, P. E., Kantawala, A., & Stankiewicz, M. A. (2021). *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History*. Teachers College Press. 236 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8007-6507-4.

**A**rt education today might be viewed as a field ripe for novel perspectives, leading to research, pedagogy, and curriculum development related to critical historical perspectives and narratives (Bolin & Kantawala, 2017). In their latest scholarly pursuit, *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History*, art education historians, pedagogues, and editors Paul Bolin, Ami Kantawala, and Mary Ann Stankiewicz offer a text of significant historical junctures and social contexts within the field by assembling an edited volume—a series of pathways (steppingstones) through past histories for exploring overlooked narratives tracing people, institutions, events, tensions, and international perspectives that have shaped the course of art education. It could be said that by establishing steppingstones, the editors are not only providing a nonlinear historical bridge of sorts but are also examining what has yet to be known beneath the surface (Bolin et al., 2000). What is offered in this text could be articulated as exploring beneath the *tip of the iceberg*. What is visible at the water's surface level is but a fraction of a larger ecosystem. This idiom alludes to the phenomenon of a small part of a much larger, more expansive reality that remains obscured. Often, when curiosity strikes, we are made aware of the presence of something more. It is only when scrutiny arises that we begin probing the rest of the iceberg.

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We, the authors of this review, are enthusiasts of the arts and history and have shared many conversations about the notion of history with various arts/identity-related contexts (Coleman & Wilson, 2020; Wilson, 2014, 2018; Wilson et al., 2021). As Black women artists, educators, and researchers located in North America, we also understand the importance of context, more specifically, stating and contextualizing our positionalities/subjectivities (Wilson & Lawton, 2019). As it relates to the examining and historicizing of the field of art education, it can be argued that much has been left to be known; many gaps have yet to be attended to. We agree with Acuff et al. (2012) as they noted the importance of acknowledging our backgrounds and experiences in relation to our investigation of history. As such, we ask: *How might historians negotiate the intersection of their subjectivities, positionalities, and interpretations?* We have assessed that the field has been long overdue for such a text that attends to this question. *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History* is an anthology for those who seek to know beyond what histories have predominated the field, and what and who has been credentialed before now. As such, we felt compelled to provide reflection on this anthology, as we have each engaged this text in our teaching and research of the historical foundations of art and visual culture education.

Offering new interpretations of both local and global histories for 21st-century readers, it would not be an overstatement to imply the significance of such a sociohistorical engagement that endorses contemporary concerns (including local and global white supremacy and racial and social animus). Altogether, *Steppingstones* not only holds historical purpose, but also carries implications for critical pedagogy and potential for advancing questions of ethical concern.

Bolin, Kantawala, and Stankiewicz preface *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History* with how their metaphor of steppingstones prompts thinking about deepening engagement with moments from art education history. They discuss the need for the field to address its limited focus and framing of what is art education history. Their approach to addressing these concerns is through revisiting previous historical interpretations, exploring new subjects, working collaboratively with other scholars, and engaging the practice of history with empathy. Following this preface, the text is sectioned in two parts and is assembled as a continuation of each editor's prior historical research interests in the field. Five of the 15 chapters are coauthored with scholars in the field.

The editors immediately establish their framing device of the book with historically situated steppingstones to extend previously obscured discourses in art education history (e.g., racially and ethnically minoritized contributions). Considering an equity lens, for instance, one might draw conclusions that resources influence how (art education) history is narrated and understood, and which histories have been emphasized while others have been obscured. We consider the care in naming this book as a very purposeful act, which highlights how that their book is different from Efland's (1990) text, which, like the predominance of the history of art education, has been narrated through a Western Eurocentric lens (Acuff et al., 2012). The editors' moves to expand and reframe art education history exemplify just how much has been omitted from the archives, and this is a step toward amending the historical record.

In this review, we highlight and elaborate three broad themes that resonated with us throughout the text: (1) colonial/imperial interests, (2) Black American contributions, and (3) accessibility and circulation of

information. In doing so, we recognize the strengths of this anthology along with what is left to be desired.

Most striking about the historical offerings of this text is its illumination of art education's roots tied to colonization, competition, and capital. What is now broadly known and understood as "art education," as in many institutional endeavors of the mid-19th century, the aims of a sincere "art for art's sake" logic begins to unravel at the hands of historian Paul Bolin who highlights the West (North America)'s capitalistic aims for advancing educational policies in drawing instruction. It stands to reason that the field of art education has not wholly evolved to address a proverbial "pink elephant" in the room. To advance a manufacturing industry in the West, what is now an enduring standardization of curricular aims in K–12 public school art programs relied on British appropriation of ornamental design aesthetics of Indian-manufactured goods. In 1870, legislation was introduced and later passed that required drawing be taught in North American public education (Massachusetts Board of Education, 1870). This arguably set the trajectory for art instruction in schools and reflected ambitions of colonial and imperial conquest at the behest of a compliant labor force (Efland, 1990; Stankiewicz, 2001). What we now consider the foundational elements and principles of design supported education for introducing "taste and refinement" in the arts while simultaneously producing an orderly and socially compliant workforce to compete and raise global economic status.

As researchers in the field, we (the authors) hold advanced degrees and are positioned to have institutional<sup>1</sup> access to this knowledge. We are concerned that these historical foundations of the field are not taught in many undergraduate preservice art education programs. Teaching historical foundations of the field would assist learners

in understanding (1) that the "project of art education" began as an imperialist endeavor and (2) how visual arts programming has since been underfunded, as it is not a revenue-generating system as it once was. The field and its stakeholders (learners, educators, artists, researcher, community activists, and more) would benefit to advance this conversation, or otherwise stagnate critical and contemporary engagement with history in spite of efforts that call for change (Kantawala, personal communication, May 10, 2022).

The editors of *Steppingstones* noticeably dedicate space for telling stories of Black Americans within art education. This storytelling builds on the works of other scholars (such as Bey, 2017; Hardy, 2018; Lawton, 2017) who have conducted historical research on Black art educators and what is considered Black art education. The continuing impacts of historical racism and Whiteness supremacy (Kraehe et al., 2018; Stankiewicz, 2021) imbue a practice of exclusion of Black creatives (and other racially and ethnically minoritized peoples) from the canon and further reification of Eurocentrism in art education through the focus on the aesthetics of "high art" and culture (Hall, 2006). This signifies Whiteness in lieu of the variety of people and artistic pursuits that exist. Over the years, we have been inspired by historians, artists, educators, and scholars who have insisted on thinking through the implications of stories that have been relegated to the margins—or altogether suppressed—including who and what knowledges are recognized as valuable and important (Coleman & Wilson, 2020). For example, Acuff et al. (2012) argued that educative practices must be informed by the voices of those who have been historically excluded from the cultural mainstream. To disrupt hierarchies in the histories of art education, perspectives that challenge dominant narratives that emerged via

subsequent colonization efforts should be illuminated.<sup>2</sup> Much like Grant and Kantawala (Chapter 11), who explore the political resistance acts of Black artists during the Harlem Renaissance, recent work of Black scholars in the field have taken up the historicization of contemporary narratives representing Black women artists, from the position of Black women (Bailey, 2020; Wilson et al., 2021). As an extension of this sentiment, we offer the words of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, who notes about her writing, “First thing I had to do was eliminate the white gaze” (PBS Newshour, 2019, 2:51). This is reflective of ongoing struggles by Black women working in a White-dominated field, where there are few narratives that describe what it means to be a Black woman art educator (Acuff et al., 2019; Wilson, 2018; Wilson et al., 2021). The history of art education does not tell a complete story about art education and art educator experiences if some narratives are prioritized and archived over others (Acuff et al., 2012). Therefore, we argue that in relation to the history of art education, Black people, which includes Black women, should be valued as keepers of knowledge.

The third and final area of our framing concerns accessibility and circulation of knowledge. *Steppingstones*, as a historical text, emphasizes the importance of methods (analog and digital) and practices for framing, representing, and capturing historical threads in the field. Concerns of accessibility, such as equity and forms of economic and social privilege (Kraehe et al., 2016), arts participation, and representation (Wilson, 2018) are imperative as they relate to racially and ethnically minoritized communities. Perhaps more importantly, accessibility impacts these communities as it relates to knowledge retrieval and sharing, as well as engagement with what history “counts” and to whom history belongs (Azoulay, 2019). Additionally, we question what this means for

engaging more critically with histories at the intersections of race and gender within and across expressive tendencies (Wilson et al., 2022), in and through art education (Acuff et al., 2019), as well as what is considered “valid” arts practice (Coleman & Wilson, 2020). These concerns might serve as steppingstones to be taken and rethought by the field and its stakeholders.

This book, like its title, is a steppingstone and point of departure for thinking about history, historical research, and what it means to do historical research in art education from a variety of positions and vantage points (cultural, racial, gendered, classed, etc.). Additionally, this text advances examples of historical research and strategies for carrying out such inquiry. The editors’ advancement of their sustained historiographical work within the field is clear, and with this longitudinal engagement are able to illuminate what they regard as “pivotal moments” and narratives that previous scholarship has neglected to examine. From our racialized/gendered/class privileged vantage points, we find it useful to contextualize systems, structures, and power dynamics; we implore readers to consider: *Which narratives are deemed pivotal, as to be documented in art education history, and from what vantage point should they be narrated? How might liberation unfold when colossal narratives are recounted by the historically subjugated (colonized) rather than the colonizer?*

We see this text as instrumental in opening numerous doors for addressing other minoritized and marginalized histories in and of the field, and we have taken notice of emerging scholars from the field doing such work. For instance, Meuschke (2020) examined archives to illuminate Native American art education institutions and their relationship to their ancestral ties. Beckles (2020) artfully illuminated life stories of art educators through an Afro-Caribbean (Calypso) method to understand barriers to

arts access and participation. These are only two examples. We anticipate additional scholarship written from the position of ancestorship as a way to address additional minoritized histories from the global North and South. These histories hold potential to further reframe the field. In sum,

*Steppingstones* takes us on a journey beneath the tip of the iceberg to shed light on critical, yet latent, narratives invisibilized by an imperialist white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal system (hooks, 2003). There is still much work to be done, but this text serves as a noteworthy step.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Holding positions of faculty and doctoral student at The University of Arizona allows us unlimited access to library databases; without our institutional affiliation, we may be subjected to paywalls.
- <sup>2</sup> Here again, we are reminded of the colonial strategies that have influenced the "becoming of" art education in North America (Bolin et al., 2021). Bolin's work in Chapter 6 sheds light on global manufacturing and capitalistic aims that set the trajectory for what we now know as the field of art education. See Chapter 6 on Massachusetts legislation of 1870, "An Act Related to Free Instruction in Drawing" (Bolin, 2021, p. 72).