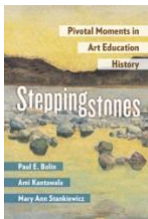


# Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History

Reviewed by Adriana Katzew



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

**Authors:** Paul E. Bolin, Ami Kantawala, and Mary Ann Stankiewicz

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In the summer of 2021, as I was teaching an intensive two-week seminar on the history of art education for graduate students in art education, *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History* was just coming out. At that time, my students were already reading the standard text we use in the field, Arthur Efland's *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (1990).<sup>1</sup> Efland's book served as a way to ground my students in the field since it provides a survey of the history of art education; at the same time, the text raised many questions and qualms since it predominantly presented the White male European perspective at the exclusion of other histories and perspectives.

The opportunity to review *Steppingstones: Pivotal Moments in Art Education History* written by three of the leading scholars in the history of art education—Paul Bolin, Amin Kantawala, and Mary Ann Stankiewicz—has allowed me to consider the text from multiple perspectives. First, I approached it as a scholar who has engaged in research in this field. As a Latina scholar who has written on the Latinx experience in the history of art education, I wanted to see how this book expanded the field. I also approached *Steppingstones* as a faculty member who has taught the history of art education, with an eye on how this book can expand my own teaching and my students' learning. Finally, I considered what my students might gain from this book and how its content and tone might impact *what* and *how* they research and contribute to the field as they reflect on their own perspectives, interests, and passions.

*Steppingstones* is framed into two parts. The first part, “Thoughts on History, Historical Research, and Teaching Art Education History,” provides us with essential aspects to consider when doing research on the history of art education. In its first chapter, Bolin invites us to consider the meaning and importance of metaphors within historical discourse. How can metaphors offer meaning and visual cues to our own research and our writing about it? Bolin explains the metaphor of steppingstones weaved in throughout this book, which is key to understanding the thinking that underlies this text: to challenge “future historians to unearth and explore previously overlooked steppingstones of history, as well as to revisit—with new insight and purposeful intent—steppingstones that have for many years been considered a taken-for-granted feature of our historical past” (p. 11). Bolin also offers a preview into the second part of the book, which consists of historical discussions “to intrigue and inform readers through their steppingstone journey in this waterway of art education history” (p. 11).

The second chapter provides us with a conversation between Stankiewicz and research librarian Henry Pisciotta on digital resources and methodologies. In addressing the issue of access, this chapter brings to mind students for whom digital access is vital, especially for those who cannot afford to travel to physical archives. How can we teach our students to place digital research in a larger context? What kind of guidance can we offer our students? This chapter’s discussion on visualization is especially relevant as we consider how to put it into practice in our own scholarship and teaching.

In the book’s third chapter, Kantawala provides us the metaphor of “digging and shaping vessels of meaning” to discuss historical research. Some aspects of this chapter are especially beneficial for beginner researchers in the history of art education, as she explains the importance of revisionism and theory, as well as a range of sources and evidence in historical research. Kantawala then shifts her chapter to respond to the question, “How do I teach an art education history course?” and provides us with ways in which she, Bolin, and Stankiewicz each teach this kind of course. These different approaches are useful for both faculty who will be teaching the history of art education for the first time, as well as those with more experience who want to expand and reconsider their pedagogy. Kantawala closes this chapter by talking directly to us, the readers, hoping that we will engage with history “in a unique way as you shape and construct meaning from your vessel....As educators and historians, I invite you to anticipate the big picture—which offers an array of possibilities and alternative perspectives and presents opportunities for becoming agents of change” (p. 40).

The second part of the book, “Pivotal Steppingstones in Art Education History,” provides 12 chapters of specific historical content. Chapters 4 and 5 are connected as Kantawala first discusses the intricacies of the British schools of design and their pedagogical influence, and then shows us how Britain’s Great Exhibition of 1851 is connected to the history of art education in colonial India. Kantawala considers the Great Exhibition “as a moment of knowledge creation and a steppingstone for mapping international histories of art and design education” (p. 58). These two chapters stand out because Kantawala establishes her own positionality shaped by her own identity—an important reminder for graduate students and scholars engaged in researching the history of art education to position ourselves, bring our own voice as Kantawala has done here, and identify the reasons behind our own research interests. Another crucial point in these two chapters is that Kantawala establishes the intertwined histories between colonizer and colonized, and brings to the forefront international perspectives. In Chapter 8, Bolin continues to expand the international perspective through his chapter on the international influences of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial exhibition on art education in New England and beyond, especially

through his discussion of the exhibition from Japan and its impact on the United States and on art education in New England. Stankiewicz's Chapter 14, which focuses on the 1965 Penn State Seminar, provides us with the context, content, and consequences of this key event. This chapter allows the readers to see its connection to a more global landscape, as well as to the missing voices and perspectives.

Several other chapters in this second part of *Steppingstones* focus on individuals or groups who have been overlooked, whose stories are incomplete, minimized, or made invisible. In Chapter 6, Bolin focuses on the individuals who initiated legislation that required free drawing instruction in Massachusetts public schools in 1868–69. While those individuals were all men, Bolin mentions that only one woman appears to have been involved in the events leading to legislation, and he invites us to consider where the voices of other women are in this history. In Chapter 8, Stankiewicz discusses the racism in art education at the 1893 Chicago World's fair, including the response from African Americans<sup>2</sup> who challenged their exclusion at the fair. Yet, before telling this history, Stankiewicz positions herself at the beginning of the chapter: "My perspective has been shaped by the invisible knapsack of White privilege. My interpretation is constructed on a scaffold of facts and influenced by my assumptions, biases, and the type of story I choose to tell" (p. 101).<sup>3</sup> It is important for readers of the book to understand this positionality as we reflect on our own when we engage in our research.

Chapter 9 provides a story of resistance by highlighting the story of Black educator Charlotte Hawkins Brown. In telling her story, authors Kathryn Farkas and Bolin frame this chapter as a response to the call that Bolin and Kantawala (2017) issued in another text: "the longtime exclusion of the many rich and valuable accounts centered on African Americans within our field is both regrettable and troubling, and must be addressed and altered" (p. 114, as quoted in Bolin & Kantawala (2017), p. 206).<sup>4</sup> In Chapter 10, Stankiewicz provides us with the history of administrative progressives, functional art education, and commercial culture from 1918–1945. Within this story, she frames the story of African American artist educator Frances Euphemia Thompson, whose belief was that all Black people could benefit from art education. Chapter 13, by J. Célèste Kee and Stankiewicz, offers us an important perspective on Viktor Lowenfeld, one of the most influential art educators whose theories on creativity and growth are still part of many preservice programs in art education. The authors enlighten us on the role he played in African American art education and on his sense of social justice, which was informed by his own history and identity as a Jewish man forced to flee Nazi Austria. The authors remind us that "storytelling forms history. By choosing certain narratives and excluding others, we share the stories we tell about the origins and foundations of our field" (p. 147). Chapter 11, written by Alphonso Walter Grant and Kantawala, centers on political resistance and the Black artists of the Harlem Renaissance. By focusing on the Great Migration and providing specific Black artists of the Harlem Renaissance as counternarratives, the authors invite "art educators to move beyond perceptions of received histories of art education to include diverse perspectives from Black people, indigenous people, and people of color" (p. 157).

In Chapter 12, Bolin provides us examples of art education in the United States through the technology of radio between 1929–1943. This chapter invites us to consider how new technologies can be used for art education. As I read this chapter, I started to think of the many populations in the United States whose home languages were other than English, and whether they were excluded from art education through the radio during this period. By looking at the past, we can imagine future possibilities for innovative technology to teach about art and provide more access to art.

In the preface and concluding chapter of *Steppingstones*, the authors frame in detail the unique approach this book takes to historical discourse within the field:

Chapters in this book set out to capture the emerging dynamic of social and historical engagement, embracing considerations of contemporary concerns, including colonialism, racial and social prejudice, intersectionality, minoritized populations, multiculturalism, and White supremacy, as well as their relationship to the past in art education. Despite...efforts to discuss these issues and conditions that distort our historical legacies, the field has not, for the most part, engaged in such contemporary-driven language. This text sets out to give historical voice to many of these present concerns. (p. xi)

The next time I teach a course on the history of art education, I will certainly use *Steppingstones* as one of the readings, as it will offer critical perspectives that need to be in dialogue with other texts in the field. I applaud this book for foregrounding international perspectives in the field, and for making visible the histories of Black art educators in several chapters. We must continue to make visible these narratives, and at the same time we need to expand the field so as to make visible the histories of art education and artist educators from other communities, such as indigenous, Asian, Latinx, and other minoritized populations in the United States. This is long overdue.

## Notes

1. Efland, A. D. (1990). *A history of art education: Intellectual and social currents teaching the visual arts*. Teachers College Press.
2. “African Americans” is the term that several authors use in their chapters.
3. I have omitted the citations provided by the author to capture her thoughts more fluidly.
4. Bolin, P. E., & Kantawala, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Revitalizing history: Recognizing the struggles, lives, and achievements of African American and women art educators*. Vernon Press.

## Author Biography

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