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David Burton, *Exhibiting Student Art: The Essential Guide for Teachers*.

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## Foreword

Terry Barrett

In this book, David Burton shows us how to bring art that students make in art rooms to more public spaces within schools and local communities. By doing this, we greatly expand the joy and enlightenment that students' art can provide. *Exhibiting Student Art* is an important contribution to practice that promotes active student learning in classroom communal activities. This learning is for the benefit of the learners and the larger communities in which they reside. Rather than relegate student art works to crowded walls where they were made or display it on singular home refrigerators, or worse, throw it in the trash, Professor Burton and the many teachers with whom he has collaborated show us how to expand audiences for students' artistic expressions.

Burton shows us how to help our students become active participants in expanding a formerly limited artworld comprised only of students and their teachers, and perhaps their parents, to broad and diversified areas. There is much valuable learning to be had, for students, teachers, and their newly expanded audiences, through Burton's actual experiences with, and expansive spirit regarding the exhibition of student art.

In Burton's proposal, elementary, middle school, and high school students prepare their own exhibitions of their own works of art. The potential for active learning by the art students is inspiring. In selecting works to be displayed, students must grapple with constructing and organizing themes by which they can select a work and place it within an intellectually coherent grouping. The process teaches them to make difficult but fair choices about inclusion and exclusion. They are occasionally challenged to rationally resolve conflicts over what some consider controversial art. Such discussions can help students learn to disagree respectfully and come to acquire skills of consensus building, thereby preparing them for active participation in a democratic society.

Once works to be displayed have been selected, the student exhibition designers must determine the advantages and limitations of a given exhibition space and design the space towards its greatest potential. They face the challenges of preparing works to be hung or otherwise displayed and installing them for maximum aesthetic appeal and expressive communicative possibilities. They determine what texts, if any, should accompany the exhibition and the individual works of art that comprise it. They invent ways to publicize the exhibition, and to build communal events around it for different audiences. Finally, they assess the effectiveness of what they have done so that they may learn from shortcomings and become motivated toward designing more effective exhibition experiences in the future.

Students who are taught well by teachers who are influenced by this book will joyfully discover that the artworks that they make have value to others, because of the works' aesthetic appeal, expression of thoughts and feelings, and ways they have made their personal experiences accessible to others in visual materials.

When students successfully transfer what they have learned from mounting their own exhibitions to looking at exhibitions in private galleries and public museums, their

school experiences with art will extend into positively altered, lifelong interactions in many art worlds in which they can engage themselves, their children, and others throughout their lives. Because of their early art learning, they will be more likely to alter their home environments more consciously and knowledgably. They will attend with more curiosity to how families and friends embellish their own living spaces. They will approach an art exhibition seeking its organizing theme and how that theme colors the meanings of each work in the exhibition. They will wonder about the exhibitor's criteria for selection: what is included and what is excluded and why? They will attend to printed information accompanying the exhibition and the artworks, and how it has been written and designed to shape their impressions of what they see. They will likely watch and overhear others looking at art, learning about people's different preferences and values. They will assess their own experiences of the art, and perhaps seek out what professional critics have written about it.

By having been personally involved in creating exhibitions of art, students now and in the future will realize that all decisions, not just decisions about art, are based, more or less, on reasons. If teachers help them internalize the information Burton has provided in this book, students will be rightly wary of many decisions that are based on too few, or merely arbitrary, reasons; they will also be better prepared in their future lives to recognize and celebrate careful and effective decision making.