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Mentor's Introduction

MARILYN ZURMUEHLEN
The University of Iowa

Walker Percy (1960) wrote: "The search is what everyone would undertake if he were not stuck in the everydayness of his own life. To be aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair" (p. 13). The epigraph Percy chose for this novel is about Kierkegaard's despair--the condition of existence in which a person is not one's true self. Ideally, the search in which every graduate student engages, whether in reading, in reflection, in writing, in making art, or in the formal project we call a dissertation, is for the possibility of that true self.

Priscilla Fenton and Christine Thompson came to graduate study with rich and satisfying lives as artists who shared the experiences of art with children and adolescents through their teaching in elementary and secondary schools. Is it then disparaging even to consider that such lives might be "stuck in everydayness"? I think Percy is more graphically describing that stance which Schutz (1970) characterized as the "natural attitude"--one in which we go about the routine pursuits of our daily affairs and we take for granted that we understand the objects and events and people that we encounter. Certainly, we can recall some of those "routine pursuits" in teaching art: the ideologies accepted from our undergraduate education and from school authorities and teaching colleagues, the concrete objects and supplies to be maintained in an ongoing art situation, the nearly constant sense of time as external (whether in the designated class "periods" of a school day, or "grading periods," or semesters, or even academic years), and, of course, in the numbers (although not the persons) of students that Buber (1965) pointed out we cannot select, but who, year by year, are our destiny.

What can students be "onto" in graduate school that raises the possibility of the search? Time, for one thing. Time to reflect and interpret and so to establish meaning from the sedimentation of their previous experiences. Time to discover ideas and writings that they had never thought to think about wanting to know. Time for Ms. Fenton to work in fibers, to investigate children's responses to fiber materials, and to wrap "mummies." Time for Ms. Thompson to do calligraphy, to study what her former students found valuable in their own art work, and to make paper. New students for another thing: undergraduate students planning to be elementary teachers, art majors teaching community children on Saturday mornings, and art student teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

They eloquently acknowledge their intellectual heritage--those individuals about whom Buber (1965) wrote: "Because this human being exists, meaninglessness, however hard pressed you are by it, cannot be the real truth" (p. 98). What can I say of their mentor's role? Well, we share much of that intellectual heritage, and, certainly, we share the search for meaning. I try to nurture what Coles (1964) called "the chance to translate the possible into the actual" (p. 332). Finally, I hope they not only will come to recognize their questions but also to follow the

poet Rilke's wise counsel: "Try to love the questions."

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