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Mentor's Introduction

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Flannery O'Conner said, "I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say." The clarifying power she described is familiar to those of us engaged in education and research—the form of our thinking is shaped as the hand delineates letters into words with pen or pencil, or as a typewriter, perhaps even a word processor, strings sentences into the structure of an idea. Peter Voulkos described his way of working with clay to an audience at a crafts conference: "Most of the times when I work I work in the dark, but sometimes I have just a vague idea of something and I want to bring it into being." I think Flannery O'Connor would have recognized his understanding, especially when Voulkos added, "If I knew what it was going to be in advance—if I had a visualization that I could draw on a piece of paper, there'd hardly be any point in my doing it." The point in asking graduate students to write the kind of autobiographical narrative that Joan Yochim explores in her paper is for them to know—to know what they think about art, about teaching art, and, especially, about teaching art in specific contexts to individuals who have their own unique autobiographical situations.

In his rich and provocative essay, "The Message in the Bottle," Walker Percy described a castaway on an island whose isolation is now and again slightly relieved by his discovery of bottles washed onto the shore. These bottles carry messages of a very diverse nature. In one is the announcement that 2 plus 2 = 4, in another is the news that "Jane will arrive tomorrow," and yet another contains the message, "Being comprises essence and existence." Of course, readers recognize that the situation Percy constructed is an analogy for an individual's life, and it is Percy's way of introducing us to the notion that there is a difference between a piece of knowledge and a piece of news. He argued that while both are real, that is to say valid, we are prone to mistake a piece of

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knowledge for a piece of news, as, for example, when we attempt to apply verification criteria to a piece of news. Here his analogy has moved into epistemology (he is asking us to reflect on the nature of knowledge) and such questions are inextricably embedded in **how** we come to know, that is, what we sometimes call research. If art is thought of as one of the messages washed on shore in Percy's bottles it is what he called a piece of news, that is to say, its nature is existential, and existential questions are the province of phenomenological and interpretive, or hermeneutical, methods of research.

Phenomenological and interpretative perspectives on the world clarified the necessity for a method that Roger Poole refers to as deep subjectivity. "Deep subjectivity," he claimed, "has to discover (first of all) and then to trust to (even harder) a space of personally won philosophical commitment." Ms. Yochim's paper is an instance of the narrative research with which graduate work in Art Education at The University of Iowa is identified. She writes about places and events and people from her own history that really matter to her and, in making these choices, she discovers her personally won philosophy. Such narratives gather fragments of experience into a new form so that, for writer and readers, meaning and values are revealed as both past and present appear differently and are merged into a new perspective. The understandings from this kind of research are authentic because they are existential for the writer, and, when the narrator is insightful and deeply reflective, existential understandings are possible for readers, too, through the experience of what Barbara McClintock called "shared subjectivity."

Occasionally, I am asked why I have graduate students read accounts by novelists and storywriters. Adeptness, obviously, is one answer. Of course, I hope that reading skillfully presented written works will establish a touchstone from which they can construct quality writing voices of their own. A more fundamental and important intention is that they discover a community of people for whom writing is a way of making sense of life. Ms. Yochim describes her experience of this kind

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of affinity that may develop between reader and writer. She reveals shared subjectivities, and, through her paper invites us to share these and others, as well, from our individual life perspectives.