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Mentor's Introduction

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mentor's introduction

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Catherine Ballard's study is the most recent of a series of studies conducted under my direction. It is included in three groups of studies that are not mutually exclusive. That is, a single study may share membership in more than one group. Group One includes studies researching the content area, aesthetics, using multiple research methods. Group Two includes studies using research procedures that I have developed for analyzing disparate data and performing meta-analyses over multiple studies and methodologies. Group Three is a smaller group of studies using these procedures to generate aesthetic theory grounded in empirical observational data. The roles of aesthetics in lived experience and aesthetic valuing patterns of individuals and groups have been studied using Group Two research procedures. Participants whose cultures are similar to and different from the researchers' culture have been observed.

A large body of these studies has not been generated to serve as a basis for theory generation as yet. However, several meta-analyses over groups of studies have been done. This is a preliminary methodological step toward examining the possibility of generating grounded theory.

Catherine Ballard's study is focused on one individual with a cultural background similar to her own. This woman is an educator and an artist. In this style of research both researcher and individual or group being observed are viewed as interacting participants in the study.

As a designer of such studies, I have been challenged to develop procedures that allow all levels of interpretation to remain grounded in and linked to original observational data. The researcher's role and assumptions are evident at each level of interpretation. This includes initial coding, category construction and naming, higher level interpretations and hypotheses' generation. Researcher interpretations can be linked to and checked against initial observational data. In each of the studies using these techniques unexpected surprises in the data were discovered. Quantitative hypotheses generating and testing studies and qualitative analyses that do not use these procedures cannot consistently provide the links necessary for developing grounded theory. They do not offer the flexibility necessary for consistent discovery of unexpected categories or questions. In addition, they

cannot consistently link all levels of interpretation to initial observations to test their potential viability and meaningfulness.

Research in art education has suffered from a number of faults. Among them is failure to build a body of consistent research on important preselected topics. As more studies are completed within these three groups, it is my hope that this fault will be partly remedied in one important area, aesthetics.