

# Mentor's Introduction

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## Recommended Citation

Zimmerman, Enid. "Mentor's Introduction." *Marilyn Zurmuehlin Working Papers in Art Education* 11 (1992): 15-16.

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# *mentor's introduction*

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When I grew up one of the major highlights of every weekend was my long walk to the local branch of the New York Public Library to return books and replenish my supply of reading materials. This was before my family had acquired a television set and reading was a favorite form of amusement and adventure for many young people. Andrew Lang's **Yellow, Blue, Green, Orange, White, Black**, (and any other color that was available), fairy tales were among my favorites. Never would I have imagined, at that time, that one day I would be writing a mentor's introduction to Deborah Smith-Shank's research that is based on using a folklore format of narrative analysis to explore pre-service teachers' experiences with art, i.e. fairy tales as a means of creating meaning and method for visual arts education.

Smith-Shank has been involved for a number of years in reading and listening to pre-service elementary teachers' stories about their art and art education experiences. Her research leads all art educators to question if they are "good fairies" or "dragons." We need to ask how do we help or hinder our students in meeting their goals and how can we aid them in their journey to becoming outstanding professionals.

I have taught art methods to pre-service elementary and pre-service art teachers for almost two decades. For the past ten years, I have asked these pre-service teachers to write about their "memories of things past" in respect to their art experiences in both formal and informal contexts. In reading their responses, what impressed and astonished me was that so many of these pre-service teachers had very negative memories of their art experiences at the elementary and secondary levels. Since these people were preparing to teach art, either as specialist art teachers or general classroom teachers, their attitudes about studying art, based on their prior learning contexts, were important in terms of understanding their reactions as they might affect their future success teaching art to their students.

Deborah Smith-Shank also was amazed at the intensity of pre-service elementary teachers' reflections about their past and present art experiences. The stories these people told about their early art experiences, in focus groups, interviews, and written self-reflections, provided Smith-Shank with valuable insights into their experiences as students of art. According to Smith-Shank, these self-reflections "can inform educational pedagogy by

identifying heroes, contracts, dragons, helpers, magic potions, positive and negative sanctions, and various educational journeys; some of which exemplify success and others failure." All this is the stuff that makes fairy tales capture children's imaginations and enables them to empathize with the plights of heroes and their missions.

Deborah Smith-Shank has written with candor, sensitivity, and insight about the content of pre-service teachers' autobiographic stories, linking these stories to developing post-modern educational pedagogy for elementary educators. Her research makes an important contribution to the field of art education. The methodologies she used as well as the information she has collected and analyzed contribute to thinking about new ways of preparing pre-service teachers to integrate art as integral parts of their general classroom curricula.

Most fairy tales end with a moral lesson or resolution of problems enabling the main protagonists to live happily ever after. I hope that the field of art education will pay heed to Smith-Shank's caveats and art educators will prepare pre-service teachers for a future in which their students will learn to appreciate and value art in their lives and in the lives of the culturally diverse people who populate their worlds.