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mentor's introduction

Patricia Stuhr

Ohio StateUniversity

Dear Readers and Jan;

I've had the unique opportunity and immense pleasure of sharing with Jan her MA thesis and Ph.D. dissertation research experiences. I feel that we both learned a great deal about the relationships possible between art and special education; the benefits and pitfalls of collaborative teaching/learning practice; and about ourselves as art educators, researchers and people through these investigative endeavors.

Jan's theoretical knowledge and practical experience with special populations is extensive. Her MA thesis was a superb action research project. She dealt with areas in the field of art education that have been greatly neglected, learning disabled special needs students, interdisciplinary curriculum planning and pre-service teacher preparation. Her work was thorough, intellectually stimulating, and innovative. Jan's dissertation research built upon her MA investigation. The results of her MA study found that a cooperatively planned and interdisciplinary, integrated arts curriculum had great benefit for elementary learning disabled students and their classroom teacher. In addition, she determined that the collaborative process was crucial to the success of an interdisciplinary teaching and learning experience.

She utilized this information on the collaborative process when formulating her dissertation and added a pre-service art teacher preparation component. Her Ph.D. research provides educators with a model for integrating the arts into the curriculum for learning disabled students and their teachers and provides a method of pre-service teacher training in this area. Many states have mandated mainstreaming students with special learning requirements into regular classrooms. Jan's research breaks the ground for the formulation of curriculum and teaching of pre-service teachers in new ways to fulfill this mandate and contributes in this way to the teacher reform movements. Her work is clear, *theoretically grounded and written an accessible manner*. I believe that Jan's work makes serious research contributions topically, methodologically, and practically.

Jan relied on action research as the primary research methodology for her case study investigations. She innovatively combined ethnographic strategies with action research techniques to explore pre-service teacher preparation in collaboration with a special education teacher. Her work provides an exemplary model for ethically narrating complex classroom and collaborative interactions while retaining the integrity of the situation.

Another laudable element of Jan's research is the fact that the curriculum employed in the study was designed to take the students' and teacher's work community into account. The students were encouraged to explore the aesthetics, art, and artists available, literally in their own backyard, using an integrated curriculum. In this way, constituents from the community became involved in the student's learning. Students were also able to connect in a more concrete and intricate way with their community, which positively affected their self-esteem and their pride in their neighborhood.

Many academics and teacher/researchers have considered the issue of who benefits from research projects. In Jan's research projects everyone involved in the projects won in a big way. The collaborating teacher, pre-service teacher, learning disabled students, researcher, and members of the community all gained from the experience. This was not a "surprise" outcome of her research, but rather a serious consideration embedded into the study design from the beginning. I have used Jan's work in my graduate classes as an example of altruistic and moral research planning and encourage anyone interested in this aspect of research to seriously review her work.

Indeed working with Jan has been a pleasure. A pleasure compounded by the fact that we became friends through the graduate studies research process and are now colleagues in the same state university system. Thank you Jan for all I've learned from you.

Sincerely,

Pat Stuhr