Mentor's Introduction

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Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries, for that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet need most, I bring.
(Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, p. 10)

Much has been written in the field of art education about the teaching-learning process. Conjecture and experimental studies have purported to bring answers to what art teachers should teach and how art students learn. Still, little is known about the mysterious and elusive process of art teaching and learning. Present interest and enthusiasm for naturalistic inquiry as a means of understanding the teaching-learning process may provide impetus for studies that attempt to discover patterns and relationships within the dynamics of actual art classroom settings. In these studies, researchers themselves became recorders, explainers, and theorizers about what they observe in the field. Whitman's library shelves can be filled with studies, the result of much time and effort by researchers who elect to use methods related to naturalistic inquiry. Hopefully, their efforts will begin to result in explanations and understandings of the art teaching-learning process in a variety of educational situations.

Karen K. Thomas and Trudy G. Wilson are two doctoral students in the Art Education Department at Indiana University who are interested in using naturalistic inquiry as a means of explaining how students react to
their art learning environments. Thomas, a former kindergarten through third grade art teacher is focusing her dissertation study on art choices of students in a preschool setting. Wilson, a former college art methods instructor in a class on naturalistic inquiry, chose to study two students’ views of an art methods course taught at the undergraduate level. Both researchers used data collection methods related to naturalistic inquiry such as participant observation, informant interviews, and document analysis. Whereas Thomas’ case study is the result of over two years of field research, Wilson’s case study is at a germinal stage that could lead to a more in-depth study at a later time. Both studies here presented conclude with discussions about the impact of an instructor’s teaching style on how and what students learn. Because how and what students learn is the business of art educators, these two case studies provide food for thought and much needed information to be packaged for placement on well-filled, but lacking, library shelves.

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