

Mentor's Introduction

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mentor's introduction

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A crystallizing experience is the overt reaction of an individual to some quality or feature of a domain: the reaction yields an immediate but also a long-term change in that individual's concept of the domain, his performance in it, and his view of himself.

Walter & Gardner, 1984

Michael's interest in this project grew from his years working as an art specialist in an elementary school and his conversations with the principal of that school. During one critique of his performance as part of the teacher evaluation process the principal volunteered the fact that he himself had had a very little art instruction and though he was complimentary about Michael's general methods of the lesson, he didn't feel that he had the background to comment on the content of this lesson. However, even with the lack of experience in the arts, the principal did provide ever increasing support for and interest in the art program. During the ten years that Michael taught there he witnessed this increase in support and encouragement by his principal. This led him to believe that in some ways the principal had been learning about what an art program should and could be as he observed lessons, watched the use of resources in the classroom, came to appreciate the exhibits of student art work hanging in the hallways and display cases, and as they talked together about art education.

When Michael came to the University of Missouri to begin his doctoral studies he was assigned to instruct an art methods class for elementary education majors. In an effort to become acquainted with his students, on the first day of each semester he gave them the task of writing some background information and encouraged them to include an art experience that they might recall, either positive or negative: one that particularly stood out in their memory. What he discovered by doing this was that while some did not recall an art experience that was particularly memorable one way or the other, a great many of the students came into the class with very real fears and anxiety, and that often it seemed as though a particular experience served to symbolize this anxiety or perhaps even represent its genesis. On the other hand some students enthusiastically wrote about a positive experience and that they looked forward to the class.

When the time came to begin considering topics for his doctoral thesis he was reading Elliot Eisner's description of John Dewey's concepts of educative and miseducative experience. He became intrigued with these concepts and saw a relationship between them and what he was finding in the first day writings of the preservice elementary teachers in his class. Further reading led him to additional writing by and on Dewey and his philosophy. These readings became the ground his study. This led him to Howard Gardner's use of the term,

crystallizing experience and the focus of his study to consider the influential factors of art experiences and their relationship to the attitudes held by Missouri public school principals towards art education.

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