Mentor's Introduction

Judith Smith Koroscik
Research in the field of art education has embraced a multitude of topics over the years. While that trend is to be expected given art education's interdisciplinary nature, our approach to research can be viewed as a problem. With so few active researchers in a field and with so many topics to investigate, it is not surprising to find we have a history of spreading ourselves too thin. That is a serious concern because fundamental research questions cannot be adequately addressed without systematic and prolonged inquiry by many researchers. Dialog within a community of scholars is essential for several reasons, including the need to build consensus on what questions are indeed fundamental and which ones are in most urgent need of study. Substantive disagreement among scholars is equally valuable, particularly when those involved share the same research agenda.

I gauge my effectiveness as a mentor on my students' grasp of these principles. Gaining expertise in research requires the acquisition of a body of knowledge. All good mentors work to ensure their students develop such expertise. However, at the doctoral level, students should also be expected to understand the value of collaboration, both in setting research priorities and in executing investigations. They should demonstrate potential for sustaining a line of inquiry beyond their dissertations. And they should show promise for making substantive contributions to theoretical dialog with scholars who pursue related research.

Elizabeth Kowalchuk is a student of mine who has learned these lessons extremely well. Her choice of a dissertation topic could not be of greater importance. She intends to study how teaching is affected by a teacher's knowledge of art and of pedagogy. Many of us recognize that teaching is limited by the knowledge a teacher possesses, yet evidence is lacking to demonstrate the nature of those limitations and how they might be overcome. Liz' research will begin to study this problem. Her findings should be of great value to those of us who seek to improve teacher preparation and inservice programs.

Teachers for the 21st Century, by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986); and Tomorrow's Teachers, by the Holmes Group.

From the earliest stages, Liz conceptualized her research as a long line of investigations, not a single study. Her dissertation will comprise the first three phases of this larger program of research. Subsequent phases will provide rich opportunities for collaboration with other educational researchers and with K-12 art teachers.

This dissertation is also exceptional because Liz intends to use a variety of methods for collecting and analyzing evidence on teacher knowledge. She has carefully chosen research methods to fit her research questions, not the other way around. One phase of the project involves conducting an experimental study, another phase relies on classroom observation, and a third phase involves interviewing teachers.

Liz is exceptionally well prepared to undertake this research. She possesses advanced knowledge of art education and related fields of educational research. She has an infectious curiosity that continually challenges her own knowledge, and she has earned the respect of her peers for sparking substantive debate on research issues. I, too, have learned a great deal from our numerous exchanges and look forward to continuing the dialog.