

2007 JUNE KING MC FEE AWARD:

Unraveling a Meaningful Mentor Relationship: A Visual Culture Dialogue Between an Art Education Professor and her Former Student

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This presentation features approximately ten percent of my 23-year-dialogue with a former student, Julie DiSiena, from Cleveland State University mostly



through post and greeting cards. Julie's enthusiasm for learning about multicultural education and different types of people struck me as unusual. She mailed me a package of photocopied correspondence that I sent her over the years (personal correspondence, October 16, 2006). This act touched my heart. To think that a former student cared enough to save this correspondence shows the longitudinal power of educational mentorship. In so doing, Julie taught me many things as well. Many educators keep in touch with former students, but not many educators turn these

relationships into research. So this experiment is an adventure for us and for the Women's Caucus. How and why do meaningful mentorships grow?

What is a mentor? People conceive of mentors as family members, favorite teachers, insightful friends, people with whom they worked, and people they admire. Mentoring often is a "commitment to recognize, encourage, and celebrate that, which makes each of us unique" (Empey, 2004). A mentor is essential for achieving success in life. In the world of business, the right advice at the right time can achieve wonders. Mentors are the keepers of important traditions and life-shaping stories: they pass on the knowledge that would be difficult for a beginner to learn on his own and teach all that is needed to know to achieve success in the chosen fields. Socrates, a classic mentor, described himself as "a mid-wife assisting the labour of the mind in bringing knowledge and wisdom to birth" (Kapur, 1997). A mentor is a treasure and one heart speaking to another.

Mentoring studies took the form of advising programs for novice teachers (Vinh, 2003; Zimmerman, 1994), to regenerate teaching (Szumlas, n. d.), as a way of lifelong learning and bridging the generation gap (Abbott, 2006), or for professional study, such as the journal of *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*. Art education has documentaries of famous

university male teachers, like Lowenfeld (Saunders, 2003), female teachers who made a difference (Lindsey, 2001), and even family mentors (Stokrocki, 2001). Collins and Sandell (1984) wrote about the visual and accompanying written dialogue among women in special exhibitions in which women were "bringing their 'private' sphere into light" (p. 63). They proclaimed the need for documenting female role models and support systems of all types. Many studies featured simultaneous mentoring, but few were longitudinal. These long-lasting studies may occur through some kind of continuous dialogue.

Dialogous Methodology and Visual Culture Study

Dialogous research, especially ethnography and semiotics, evolves as intersubjective communication (Bastos & Ross, 2004). The shared worlds that grow from dialogues are in dynamic change and recreation as people renegotiate meanings (Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995, p. 3). While male researchers tend to use an authoritative and reductive monologue, female researchers may use a multivocal expansive writing style (Ibid, p. 22). Our dialogous reflection features a conversation that began with e-mails, and phone conversations around the meanings of post and greeting cards that are a form of visual culture.

Visual culture is an ever-expanding field that incorporates all visual forms. Freedman (2003) defines visual culture as "all that is humanly formed and sensed through vision or visualization and shapes the way we live our lives" (p. 1). Whether fine, folk, popular, or graphic arts, postcards, or greeting cards, visual images carry meanings that go beyond the representations and mere nostalgia. The goal is reflexivity, a process of making one self-aware of one's immersion in everyday and popular culture to examine one's own position (Duncum & Bracey, 2001). The meanings of these humble, everyday commercial arts transcend the ordinary and reach the existential and spiritual realms of experience.

We chose images that proceed chronologically. Each entry consists of parts of Mary's correspondence, followed by Julie's comments, and then ends with Mary and/or Julie's reflections on the meanings of the images as a visual culture work in process.

The Roots of our Relationship

When I moved to Arizona State University in the summer of 1990, my husband had to teach at Case Western Reserve, so Julie DiSiena, an elementary art teacher friend and a former student, offered to accompany me on this long five-day excursion, cross country to Phoenix. The trip was a two-week vacation for her before she started teaching in the fall. The scenery along the trip was amazing and unforgettable. Due to limited space, we open with a memory of Julie's visit the next year.

Examples of Our Correspondence

1991, July. Camelback Mountain.

Mary: Remember when we saw this site and how impressed we were with its size and presence! The mountain stands as a beacon in the middle of the valley. I miss Cleveland and you. You art teachers were my best friends when I was the lonely art educator. Hello to your mom & dad.

Julie: I remembered seeing the mountain when I drove out with you and treasured the memory. It is more spectacular at night with all the lights. Mary do you remember seeing the rain in the distance and then that awful storm?

1991 White House Ruins, Canyon De Chelly National Monument, Arizona.



Mary: This is what you missed when you wouldn't come down into the canyon with us. There is a safer trail, where all the tourists walk... School is hectic. I teach Monday & Tuesday all day and evening too—pretty tired. Christine Thompson has our papers for the early childhood publication. She just sent them out for review. Be patient. She has photos of mine too. Hello to Mom and Dad DiSiena! Good luck in school.

Julie: You sent the card of what I missed seeing when I visited because I was afraid of

heights and would not go down in the canyon on foot with the Navajo guide. While you hiked down the trail, I walked along the canyon rim and remembered the lovely smell of juniper berries. This was sacred land. I remembered the quiet and gentle demeanor of the Navajo. This visit inspired me to write a multicultural story that you helped me with and edited. Later, I presented it at the USSEA conference and it was published.

Mary: This card is about exploring the immense environmental aesthetics of the red rock canyon on the Navajo Reservation that we traveled to. This place inspired several of my ethnographic studies, especially my [Manual Barkan] award-winning case study, "A School Day in the Life of a Young Navajo Girl (Stokrocki, 1994). It was great to have an elementary art teacher along for additional reflections.

Julie: The children at the school seemed quiet but willing to talk when they were asked. I was impressed by the work I saw. They were proud of it, especially those I photographed. They had a wonderful rapport with their teacher. I was amazed at how "ignorant" I was. I did not know that there were so many Indians alive and forced on to such large barren land. I was immediately aware that it was a culture of its own within the United States. Some places had no indoor plumbing, which was unbelievable to me.

1992 The Meller Drammer, 1933.

Mary: Hope your students like the Disney card of Mickey Mouse. I taught about the history of anima-

tion ever since I was a young teacher. Recently, I discovered that the cartoon was a spoof on the melodrama, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The weekend of April 10-11, I'll be on the Navajo reservation, unless you can come visit here before April 9. On Easter Sunday I fly out to the AERA conference in San Francisco for the first time. In between, I have to correct final papers, because the NAEA is the week after that conference. It's a hectic time. Please come visit. PS. I won the Mary Rouse Award!

Julie: I thought how you liked teaching about popular culture more than I did. I was glad to hear that you won the Women's Caucus -- Mary Rouse Award. I know she always helped the women. I still remember how she told me there is "a good old boy's club," but women will have to establish their own network and pull each other up. I also know she worked hard on her research.

Mary: I was always looking for teaching devices to inspire Julie's elementary teaching. I sent her a timeline of the History of Animation from *Time-Life* that I still use today and extended it to the history of anime. I was surprised to find that Julie remembered this award.

1992 The Holy Family by Fra Filippo Lippo (1406-69)

Mary: My Christmas trip back to New York to see my family was emotionally draining. I really miss them. Keep up the good cheer. Maybe the levy will pass the second time. Don't give up! Your artwork is becoming sensational. Good for you—perseverance. You are a great teacher. Have someone videotape you! My trip last week up to the reservation took all day to get home—a long,

treacherous snowstorm. God bless you and your family. Show the card to your students.

Julie: This painting is a favorite of mine. I love the delicate airiness of the fabric and its trim on the figures. I had written Mary of our school levy problems. Mary spoke of her reservation trip. I liked it and shared it with my brother. I did not share it with the children, probably because some of my students were members of Jehovah Witness.

1993 Canyon Country by Jean Adams (1984).

Mary: The cartoon painting of a Navajo family riding through the canyon commemorated my walks through the Canyon DeChelly. I hoped that you would share it with her students. The InSEA Conference in Montreal was very special no doubt. I am glad to see that you met so many people. The international connection is very important. We had a very nice Thanksgiving with the pussycats, who ate too much turkey. The weather was lovely. Bill [my husband] had the fireplace roaring at night. As I get older these simple times are memorable.

1994 The Superstition Mountains, Arizona

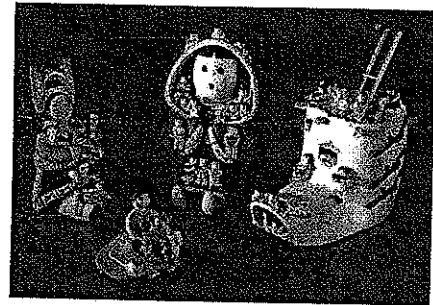


Mary: This is my painting of an Arizonan desert landscape that I painted in high school. I copied it from a National Geographic photograph. I didn't even know the name of the

mountain in the background. Years later when we moved here to Phoenix, I learned that this was The Superstition Mountains, and we moved to the foothills of this beautiful place. My father said that I was conceived out here during the war and some ancient spirit lured me back here. You should come visit us.

Julie: I remembered the lovely Phoenix sunset. The sky was more expansive than in Cleveland, creating spectacular colored vistas in the evening. Lovely quote inside: "May you have... The Spirit of Christmas which is Peace; the Gladness of Christmas which is Hope, and the Heart of Christmas which is Love..."

1994 Storyteller Dolls



Mary: Hope that you like the image of the storyteller pottery, commemorating my research in ethnographic storytelling (Stokrocki, 1995). Most elementary teachers love this image. The Youth Art Month video was wonderful! You look good and sold the program. Congratulations! Good luck at the middle school. I know that your heart is with the little ones.

Julie: I always loved this image. The faces of the dolls often have their mouths hung open. Look at children's faces when you have them interested in a story. Their expression is the same. I

like this image because the children love to hear stories.

Mary: I love the story dolls too—we are kids at heart and love good stories. We both made paper dolls as kids. I can't believe that it's 20 years since I taught in the public schools. Maybe that's why I am so fond of narrative research.

1995 Mount Arahata, Agri, Turkey; Kilim, Diyarbakir,



Mary: Greetings from Mount Arahata, in Eastern Turkey. We were accompanied by a military escort to this place, and visited the *caravanserai* [palace] where I bought my beautiful *kilim* [flat woven] rug. The carpet featured the story of *Noah's Ark* that was found nearby. My Turkish colleague Olcay Kirisoglu and I used the carpets to introduce art criticism into the higher education curriculum. We published Turkish adolescents' reactions (Stokrocki, 1999) and children's cross-cultural responses (Stokrocki, 2001) to them. Later, I discovered that the Mountain is near the city of Van in Turkey.

2000 Masks of Illusion, Acrylic Painting (Stokrocki, 2004).

Mary: Go to my website (Stokrocki, 2007) and choose one of my paintings that you like the best and tell me why.

Julie: I loved the three cats the most. I like the color in all of them. The pictures are all animated, spirited (not in the cartoon sense but in their sense of movement behind the colors and images). It reminds me of Franz Marc and most recently of a lecture I attended on Charles Burchfield. This Salem, Ohio artist takes images from nature, but is more committed to the spirit of it than exact rendition.

2002 Horsehair Baskets.

Mary: *Papago and Pima weavers coiled these tiny baskets from horsehair. If you like these art forms, why not take an anthropology course.*

Julie: The designs are interesting. I like the tiny man and horse figures all circling around the center. Hard to believe that they are made of hair!

2003 Julie's Students' Artworks



Julie: I sent you photos of my children's art. Some were unsuccessful examples due to lack of time. We had just seen each other in Montreal at the InSEA Conference. It was wonderful to attend my first international art education congress.

Mary: I love the photos of your tiny tots, especially the photo of

two little girls modeling clay and wearing Betty Boop T-shirts to show me that they are indoctrinated at an early age with popular culture figures. One little girl makes a peace sign with her hand. Thank you for the article on looking at art with toddlers (Shaffer & McGhee, 2004). Keep up the good work!

2004 Giants of Anime are Coming! (Mann, 2004).

Julie: Here is an article on anime that you will find very helpful. My students are watching anime. I sent it to you because I remember how you said anime was such an inspirational teaching tool, and you loved the children's large innocent eyes.

Mary: *This is fantastic! It's just what I need in teaching my new course on Visual Culture. My teaching research has come a long way since documenting a microcomputer graphics course featuring simple animation sequences with gifted students (Stokrocki, 1984) and Kid Pix animation with Apache children (Stokrocki, 2002) I need to learn more about anime.*

2004 Kapadokya, Nevsehir, Turkey

Mary: *Happy 50th Birthday! The InSEA Conference was a tremendous success in every way, in spite of Bush's visit with NATO. Lots of dancing and good spirit shared here. We traveled to this ancient place of limestone caves and 100 underground cities. Your paper on using multicultural stories with children was on display at the conference. Wish that you could have attended the conference. My family is well and sister is recovering from back surgery. Wish you and your parents more happy birthdays!*

Julie: This is very interesting—the landscape is cavernous and mysterious—like living bone. How I wish I could have seen the underground frescoes on the walls!

2005 Antonio Gaudi's works, Barcelona

Mary: I am recuperating from my miserable cold. It gets lonely here. The museums are great and I love Gaudi's architecture. It is tough negotiating the trains and sleeping overnight on the top bunk. Learning much and hope I have the stamina to survive. It's very expensive here. My research goes slow and I wonder if I make any sense at all? I loved being with the children at the Catholic elementary school. Miss you. Teaching is a wonderful profession—it fills your soul. God Bless you!

Julie: You wrote of all the interesting sights and of the difficulties. You did such an amazing job in diverse situations. We have shared rooms, but we get little or no money. That is what I thought when I read your card. Our value in society is not often considered important, but we are believers and committed to art in all its aspects.

2007 The Next Generation of Superheroes

Mary: I am so grateful to you for sending the International comics series, called The 99, about a band of superheroes based on Islamic archetypes, each imbued with one of the 99 qualities that the Qur'an attributes to God (Kesting, 2007). After the Gulf War in Kuwait, Al-Mutarwa, a psychologist, worked with many Arab survivors of torture and treated people suffering from post-traumatic stress with comics. He wrote a 1996 children's book, To Bounce or Not to

Bounce that won the UNESCO award for literature for tolerance. I wonder who will be the next generation of Art Education Superheroes.

Julie: To meet someone you can learn and grow from is wonderful. To have that person become a friend and share the love and passion you have is a remarkable gift.

UNRAVELING THE MEANINGS

So what does our visual correspondence signify? In regards to visual culture preferences, most of the images that Mary sent featured **mountains**. Mountains signify enduring places and majestic sites and may be construed as significant forms. Langer (1953) argued that artworks actually “present emotional content for our contemplation” (p. 298). I am not concerned in arguing the status of these images as art, but as visual culture. Their function is to recollect life experience and emotional responses from “ordinary folks.” To Julie, who was afraid of heights, they were indeed beautiful but fearful forms. Life experiences are also full of such opposites. We also noted growing interest in teaching visual culture, even though Julie was resistant at first. So what did we learn about mentoring?

Similar middle **class roots**. Our dialogue exposes, family concerns about our parents, Catholic spiritual concerns, and personality characteristics, which are childlike, empathetic, and adventuresome. It reveals such teaching qualities as persistence, desire for connection, evolving, caring, self-selecting, reciprocity and possibility. All these ingredients are important for sustaining

meaningful dialogous relationships. The visuals signify aesthetic and life experiences that we shared or share vicariously.

Desire for connection.

Mentors may want to be connected to students when they get lonely, but speaking depends on listening and being heard, which is a relational act (Gilligan, 1982, p. xvi). The self is an empty shell and a network of connections is significant, especially for women. Gilligan (1982) reframed women's psychological development as “a struggle for connection” (p. xv). On the other hand, a mentoring relationship is evolving, caring, and self-selecting. Formal mentoring programs may fail when there is “too much structure, too little structure, inappropriate expectations, poor communication” (Boyle, 2005). “Mentoring may reduce stress, increase career satisfaction, and improve productivity. Women with female mentors reported significantly lower income than females with male mentors” (Blake-Beard, 2005). Such teachers, new and experienced alike, seem to band together, not only for commiseration, but also for problem-solving and sharing resources.

Reciprocity and possibility.

Mentoring is a two-way street. “Mentoring ought to focus on better positioning of goals, rather than whining and complaining” (Watson, 2005). Mentors also need support from their students. So in time, mentorship is reversed, and students can teach their mentors about new art forms and pedagogic ideas. The art of mentorship grows when people share accounts of patience, persistence, and deep perceptions. We make

our profession cohere by sharing our stories, our ways of storytelling, and our reasons for stories (Zander, 2007; Coates, 1996).

Future implications.

We need more longitudinal studies of educational mentoring. What else can we learn by documenting our visual dialogues with junior teachers, especially those in the trenches? What will we learn by studying ordinary women mentors, such as Stokrocki's (in press) matriarchal costume and performance art in Zimmerman's *feschrift* (Sabol, in press)? What are the results of e-mentoring of younger colleagues and of women of color? (SJB Research Consulting, 2004) This calls for "Holy Mentormony," the establishment of sacred mentorships—those that continue to glow (Max, 2007). S/he who finds a mentor, finds a treasure (Kapur, 1997).

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**JUNE KING MC FEE,
KATHY CONNORS,
CARRIE NORDLUND
AND MARY J. ROUSE
AWARDS CRITERIA &
PAST RECIPIENTS:**

- McFee Award Recipients
 2007 Mary Stockrocki (AZ)
 2006 Rita Irwin (BC, Canada)
 2005 Christine Marmé Thompson (PA)
 2004 F. Graeme Chalmers (BC, Canada)
 2003 Mary Ann Stankiewicz (PA)
 2002 Amy Brook Snider (NY)
 2001 Larry Kantner (MO)
 2000 Elizabeth J. Saccà (QC, Canada)
 1999 Renee Sandell (MD)
 1998 Cynthia Colbert (SC)
 1997 Rogena Degge (OR)
 1996 Carmen Armstrong (IL)
 1995 Karen Hamblen (LA)
 1994 Pearl Greenberg (NY)
 1993 Alice Schwartz (PA)
 Enid Zimmerman (IN)
 1992 (not awarded)
 1991 Georgia Collins (KY)
 1990 Marilyn Zurmuehlen (IA)
 1989 John A. Michael (OH)
 1988 Frances Anderson (IL)
 1987 Diana Korzenik (MA)
 1986 Sandra Packard (TN)
 1985 Jean Rush (AZ)
 1984 Arthur Efland (OH)
 1983 Jessie Lovano-Kerr (FL)
 1982 Hilda Present Lewis (CA)
 1981 Marylou Kuhn (FL)
 1980 Helen Patton (NC)
 1979 Ruth Freyberger (IL)
 1978 Laura Chapman (OH)
 1977 Eugenia Oole (MN)
 1976 Mary J. Rouse (IN)
 1975** Year Initiated
 June King McFee (OR)

The McFee Award is given annually to honor an individual who has made distinguished contributions to the profession of art education, one who has one brought distinction to the field through an exceptional and continuous record of achievement in scholarly writing, research, professional leadership, teaching, or community service.

Rouse Award Recipients

- 2007 Flavia Bastos (OH)
 2006 Mary Hafeli (MD)
 2005 (not awarded)
 2004 Kathy Unrath (MO)
 2003 Deborah Smith Shank (IL)
 2002 Minuette Floyd (SC)
 2001 Yvonne Gaudelius (PA)
 1999 Laurie Hicks (ME)
 1998 Karen Carroll (MD)
 1997 Doug Blandy (OR)
 1995 Christine Thompson (IA)
 1994 Renee Sandell (MD)
 1993 Elizabeth Garber (PA)
 1992 Mary Stockrocki (AZ)
 1991 Sally Hagaman (IN)
 1990 Linda Ettinger (OR)
 1989 Kristen Congdon (FL)
 1987 Karen Hamblen (LA)
 1986 Judith Koroscik (OH)
 1985 Enid Zimmerman (IN)
 1983 George Geahigan (IN)
 1982 Beverly J. Jones (OR)
 1981 Phillip C. Dunn (SC)
 1980 Marion Jefferson (FL)
 1979* *Year Initiated Marianne Scruggs (NC)

The Rouse Award is given annually to recognize the contributions of an early professional who has evidenced potential to make significant contributions in the art education profession.