

ENACTING CHANGE SURVEY RESPONSE

For information on the Enacting Change Survey Project, facilitated by Joanna Rees, see the NAEA Women's Caucus website at <http://naeawc.net/activism.html>

Cynthia Colbert **July 17, 2009**

Mentoring is a strong part of my educational philosophy and outlook. My mentor and PhD advisor from the University of Missouri Larry Kantner still sends birthday cards and offers advice and support. He is available to offer wise counsel and to entertain me with his stories of worldwide adventures since retiring. He inspires me to look towards my future outside of the academy. Larry has served as an uncle figure for my daughter and friend to my husband and is considered by all as part of my tribe.

I received my PhD in 1978 from the University of Missouri where I studied with Larry Kantner. I accepted a position to teach at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for two years. At the University of Illinois George Hartman and Ted Zernich were in their glory years. They were also bullies, but from them I grew a thicker skin and I also learned how hard they worked to be successful. During the day, they seemed to be playful pranksters. Their real work came in the evening. Both came back to work after dinner and worked until around ten o'clock each evening. I noticed their hard work early on in our relationship. I admired their long collaboration, as well.

Perhaps their collaboration inspired my own 30+ years of writing and researching with Martha Taunton. Martha received her doctorate from the University of Illinois, working with George and Ted. She worked at the University of Iowa with Marilyn Zurmuehlen, who had been at the University of Missouri and was my masters and early doctoral advisor. Our coming together to collaborate was a wonderful decision. Together Martha and I authored numerous articles, collaborated on 30 years of presentations, and published the first kindergarten textbook.

My other 2 colleagues at the University of Illinois were Jim Marshall and Ken Lansing. Both were wonderful in helping me find my way. Jim became a good friend. Ken was a nurturing mentor to me. He read manuscripts I prepared for publication and generously gave his time to me for discussion of the merits of my ideas. He made concrete suggestions for improvements at a time when I needed his nurturing. I am indebted to him.

It was hard to be an educator at Illinois with four well established men. I was on a two-year appointment and was often treated like an outsider. Some of the art studio faculty thought I was a graduate student. I learned a lot including not trusting everything that was said. After my two year appointment ended, I came to the University of South Carolina where I have worked for twenty-eight years. This institution was a good fit for me. My

Chair, John O'Neil was someone who understood my work and who was approachable and kind. My first dean was warm and supportive and offered me extra travel funding when I asked. Another strong Dean, Carol McGuiness Kay, saw strengths in me that I had not noticed and placed me on important committees and in positions of authority. She has become one of my closest friends.

At the University of South Carolina I worked with three male art educators. We ran a big BFA degree program, as well as graduate degrees including the IMA, MA, and MAT degrees. We still have the same degree programs, but now I work with three female art educators. In my third year as Chair of the Art Department, I hope that I am nurturing to our young faculty and that I am perceived as approachable and supportive as my first Chair was to me.

My vision for the Art Department is to hire the best the brightest faculty and try to arrange things so that they can thrive. I try to build a community by example. I encourage formal mentoring in our department. Because I was the recipient of mentoring by Ken Lansing and later by Nancy Smith and Laura Chapman, I strongly believe in sharing what I know about our institution or profession with younger faculty. Nancy Smith was an academic mentor to my research and Laura Chapman has been generous in many ways. Her recommendation of Martha and me as authors of a textbook in a series that bears her name is just one example of her generosity. Laura was also an outstanding mentor on the politics of the academy.

Nancy Smith from Boston University, whose work on children's drawing development overlapped with my work, offered to read my articles and asked me to read hers. What a thrill to be asked my opinion of writing by someone I admired. The responsibility to offer criticism to Nancy seemed to be simultaneously a wonderful opportunity and burden. As an editor of *Arts & Learning Research*, I edited the words of some famous art educators who came before me. At first I was uncomfortable in changing their work for publication. After a warm and generous response from Jean Rush about a piece of hers I edited, I felt more secure in the role of editor.

I have been the recipient of outstanding nurturing by many generous women. I became president of Women's Caucus in 2002 and served in that position until 2004. I followed the presidency of Kathleen Desmond, whom I consider to be a good friend and whom I reviewed for tenure back when we were much younger. There was a smooth transition of the incoming president taking on some duties during the last year of the president's term. I helped create the Women's Caucus breakfast so that more women were able to attend our session featuring a local, female artist. Seven o'clock is early, but there are no conflicting papers or events at that time. Women's Caucus has a number of highly regarded members who are nurturing the next generation of women.

As an academic and Department Chair there are a lot of tough choices to make and I find it is important to have supportive men and women as a sounding board. There is an informal network of art educators who are Chairs, Department Heads, and Deans. I often rely on them as well as my long-time collaborator, Martha Taunton, when making a decision, or use them as a sounding board when I am considering making a change.

My husband and I have a daughter who is grown. My husband and I are both professors and we staggered our teaching days so that our daughter always had a parent available. If I had to do it over again I would have tried to have a child earlier and had more than one child. Many women who are professors don't have children because they are working so hard to gain tenure during their childbearing years. To add a baby while you are working towards tenure is very hard. At the University of South Carolina we have a family friendly policy that makes us competitive with other institutions. We offer time off or reduced teaching loads after the birth of a child for the principle care giver. Having a family is a juggling act.

My best friend, Professor Martha Taunton, is firmly rooted in my personal and professional life. Like many women who collaborate on research and we've become like family. We crossed professional boundaries into the personal. She is like an aunt to my daughter and I am the same for her lovely daughter. I love having Martha and Suyin in my life, as does my family. Our collaboration continues to evolve.

A lot of my research on the drawings and clay modeling of young children has been put on the back burner while I serve as Chair. Chairing is exhausting work. When you spend your day on the computer, going back to it in the evening is not what I am inclined to do. I've turned my focus from research/writing towards art making. I work in an institution where art making is encouraged in addition to research and writing, and this support has encouraged me as a bookmaker. I love being in the studio as it nurtures me in ways that nothing else does. It is quiet there and I can think clearly. I can work without interruption and I enjoy what I am doing. I am entering exhibitions and recently had work accepted in exhibitions in Oregon, Louisiana, Florida, North and South Carolina.

I may be coming full circle, as I was allowed to take art studio courses for my outside area for my doctorate. My work in ceramics had the same impact on me in the 70's that bookmaking does now. I love the process, the hands-on and minds-on work that is not tied to the computer/typewriter. Bookmaking has energized me and made me feel more whole. Paired with chairing the academic unit, I find that art making is a good combination.