

Mentor's Introduction

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As Mary Ellen Connelly commenced her graduate study, like so many other doctoral students, she wanted to undertake a study that would result in insights that would improve art education. She was particularly interested in the issues relating to the improvement of art instruction. It was her belief that art teachers were not as well prepared to teach as they should be; and the culprit, if there was one, was the initial college preparation program for art teachers. It seemed to me that the issue was not quite so simple; there had to be many factors that affected the behavior of teachers. And as we discussed these factors, Mary Ellen began to investigate the processes by which teachers become, and remain professionalized in art education. She investigated the literature relating to professionalization in a variety of fields and then began to construct a theory relating to the structure of professional behavior and the levels of professionalization in art education. Here, she was not only breaking new theoretical ground, but she was also confronted with the task of measuring art teachers' beliefs about professionalization (which she accomplished through a questionnaire she constructed) so that she could estimate the extent to which the field is professionalized. She wished also to determine whether higher levels of professionalization are related positively to teachers' openness to the ideas reflected in recent efforts to reform art education. To assess the degree of art teacher openness to reform she had to develop a second questionnaire.

Her data show that her theory of professionalization is basically sound (although it will still require some refinement and expansion);

and her two questionnaires were valid and functioned reliably. Most importantly, she was able to show that higher levels of professionalization among art teachers are positively related to openness to change. In effect, she has shown us that if we wish to improve the quality of art instruction in the schools, then we will have to pay special attention to the very complex and life-long process of professionalization.

A fine and important piece of inquiry notwithstanding, it pleases me nearly as much to note that Dr. Connelly plans, at least for the time being, to continue to teach elementary school art. It is comforting to know that teaching and scholarship can co-exist in one individual - one highly professionalized art teacher.