

Chapter 1

A Personal Introduction

In recent years, there has been a gradual realization that researchers bring to their research activity personal experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and biases that will undoubtedly influence how they perceive, conceptualize, and design their research programs, as well as how they interpret and give voice to their findings. In the past, objectivity was heralded as a benchmark for good research activity. Over the last decade, a continuing debate has ensued regarding the so-called division between subjectivity and objectivity. Without raising the issues dealt with in such a debate, let me begin by saying that I have come to believe that who I am as a person, teacher, researcher, consultant, friend, and colleague has everything to do with how I choose to design, implement, report, and evaluate my research activities.

Many of us involved in empirical research would agree that we bring with us to our work all of who we are. However, not everyone would agree with revealing who we are to our audiences. And so in a practical sense, for me to share with you who I am, also reveals my own ongoing exploration of objectivity and subjectivity. In many ways, I am pursuing my own professional growth as I deal with my role in the research process.

Some feminist writers have chosen to reveal themselves to their audiences in a way that provides the reader with a greater sense of connectedness between the researcher and those participating in the research study. They have also presented a background narrative in an effort to provide a greater sense of context: my personal and professional context as the researcher directly influences the entire research process. In keeping with these notions, allow me to share with you, who I perceive myself to be.

Let me begin by saying that I can remember wanting to be an art teacher from the time I was a little girl. This was extremely unusual given that I grew up in a farming community which supported a small rural school of ten grades and approximately fifty-five children. All of my teachers at this school were responsible for teaching the entire curriculum within a multigrade situation. I can remember doing very little art activity. Exceptions centered around projects that involved students drawing pictures that depicted the events of what we were studying. Occasionally, I remember working in groups of youngsters who

created a mural based upon a social studies theme. When I was in grade eight, this country school closed down and all of the students were transferred to a consolidated high school in a rural town of approximately 15,000 people. I was able to take one year of art in my junior high school experience. Although there was a wider variety of media experiences in the art program, I remember being bored with the activities or projects that were presented. I also remember being secretly frustrated. It seemed the male teacher I had did not see any artistic ability in my work and in effect ignored me and my work. Needless to say, I never took art again in my public school education.

My desire to be an art teacher was profoundly linked with my relationship with my own mother. I can remember her encouraging me to draw, paint, and create with a whole variety of materials throughout my formative years. These experiences left an indelible impression upon me. For example, I remember looking forward to Valentine's day every year, not because of any school girl romances, but because for the two preceding weeks I could look forward to my mother coming home from the city armed with red, white, and pink paper, felt pens, glue, and scissors. We would rummage through scrap fabric drawers to find interesting textures of discarded fabric, lace, and ric rac. Then without any upset in the running of the home, I was granted free rein of the dining room table. I could create with great imagination all sorts of wild and wonderful Valentine's cards. No designs were repeated and everyone received their own personalized card. This type of artistic activity happened for virtually every special day or event happening at school or at home.

Though my mother was slow to accept recognizing herself as an artist, she in fact was an artist, and she provided a safe environment for me to explore my own artistic abilities. My parents had four children and decided ten years later to have another two children. I was the oldest of the second family. While I grew up, I believe my mother was in a phase in her life when she desperately wanted to discover what she could contribute beyond her immediate home and family. By providing me with an environment which nurtured creativity and artistic expression, she was also providing herself with the courage to become an artist.

I remember watching my mother grow as an artist. As she moved through different mediums, she demanded more and more of herself. Later, as I passed through high school, university, and into my career as a teacher, I watched my mother become an exceptional porcelain artist. Because of all the occasions given to me for artistic expression and to herself as an emerging artist, my mother and I became colleagues in art. She would always seek my advice and vice versa. We were proud of each other and each other's work.

Art was always a field I wanted to explore. Yet there was another side of me that also called for my attention. I remember as an elementary student, with mixed feelings, how I was often called upon to lead small work groups within classroom activities. Although I enjoyed working toward change and improve-

ment, and on occasion fantasized about being influential, I never really wanted to have an authoritarian role. Even though I was uncertain what kind of a leader I might be, I was drawn to leadership positions. I wanted to improve education or education related systems. Perhaps this side of me was also encouraged by my parents, particularly my father. Although I do not remember being actively encouraged to become a leader in a field, I was influenced by the constant leadership activity in which both of my parents were involved: hospital boards, fraternities, church boards, agricultural organizations, and so forth. My father was perceived by our community as a committed and dedicated leader in a number of organizations. My mother usually supported the work of my father although she, too, directed a few groups.

When it came time for me to decide upon a career, I inevitably chose to be an art teacher. Although I was convinced I should become a secondary art teacher, an early experience in my preservice education program made me aware of the great need for specialist art teachers at the elementary level. Until then I must have assumed there was no room for an art teacher in a generalist approach to education. Remembering my own frustrating art experiences as an elementary student reinforced this view.

I considered myself very lucky for my first teaching position gave me the opportunity to provide specialized art instruction to children in grades four through six. I took great pride in delivering a program rich in variety of studio materials, critical appreciation, and historical overviews. But as most educators know, we seldom spend entire teaching days teaching the subjects we love the most. To round out my days, I was viewed as an arts specialist and was scheduled to teach music classes, grades three through six, as well as a selection of language arts and health. For the next nine years, and three schools later, I would be considered an art, music, and drama specialist. Although I had a minor in drama, my musical abilities were subject to limited knowledge of three instruments. Needless to say, I spent virtually all of my professional development energy as a teacher upgrading my knowledge of music.

As an arts teacher I found myself being committed to providing a better arts education for my students than I had received. As a result I was inclined towards leadership which would encourage change and improved arts education. For instance, I was involved at the grass roots level in establishing a fine arts emphasis elementary school in my school district. As the art department head of this school, I was obligated to provide a leadership role. I was also very active in local, regional, and provincial arts education groups who played significant roles in arts advocacy: policymaking, professional development, and public awareness activities.

Early in my career, I consciously decided that after fifteen or so years as a classroom teacher, I wanted to be an art consultant. It seemed like a job that would combine everything I enjoyed doing. It was a dream I had: helping

teachers become better arts teachers. Ironically, after seven years of teaching, I was offered a halftime position as an art consultant coupled with a halftime position as an art department head at my school. It would be a role that brought me face-to-face with all sorts of issues facing arts teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, students, and the community.

Two conflicts emerged for me as I pursued my consulting role in educational change. These conflicts may resonate with the experiences of other neophyte consultants. First, I had been trained as a generalist teacher with a speciality in art education. By accepting the role of art consultant, I was essentially assuming a particular placement in an organizational structure designed to stabilize or maintain certain standards, policies, or affiliations primarily directed from either the local school board or the department of education. Specialized training for this role was nonexistent. The conflict arose as I had to rely on my previous personal and professional experiences and knowledge base without any apprenticeship and/or mentorship for my new role. Yet, the role was different and required me to alter, shift and sometimes reinforce my frame of reference according to particular situations. It seemed to me that I had to acquire a different conceptual framework in which to proceed.

Second, what quickly became evident was the accountability and credibility I needed to embody in the eyes of my clients and public stakeholders. The local and provincial government bodies assumed I would implement the art curriculum guidelines as faithfully as possible. The teachers on the other hand assumed I understood the predicament the generalist art teachers were in, or as with specialists, would realize their commitment to a particular viewpoint, and would adjust my expectations accordingly. The middle ground posed a conflict or contradiction. I could not ignore either position yet as the art consultant I had to reduce the conflicts for myself personally and professionally in order to be effective in my role.

When I decided to pursue doctoral work in education, it was only natural to pursue a research program that involved arts education, educational change, and leadership through the role of the consultant. The work presented in this book represents two interconnected studies, the first of which began as a dissertation. The first study describes and interprets the practical knowledge of a fine arts supervisor. So little is known about what consultants or supervisors know in practice or their personal practical knowledge. Much of that study is represented in chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this book. The data collection process for this study also involved interviewing people with whom the supervisor worked. These interviews led me to consider how the supervisor's practical knowledge and consultative style influenced the practical knowledge of the team of consultants or specialists with whom she worked, regarding arts education, educational change, and working with teachers. The second or extended study is comprised of additional interviews with a group of women who worked closely with the supervisor. The findings of this extended study are presented in chapter 1.

Before moving to the body of this book, let me also say that in doing this research I have come to be more reflective of my own influence upon students, colleagues, family, and friends. I have attempted to stand back at times and watch myself interact with others. Or, conversely, I have been extra attentive to the speech, actions, and silence in others as they learn about life, learning, and teaching.

This manuscript, though intimately tied to who I am as a person, woman, teacher, leader, and researcher is even more reflective of a group of women who work together to improve arts education. The supervisor in the story is the focal point of this book. Let me share with you now how I came to work with Ruth Britten (a pseudonym).

As the art consultant for my school district, I felt that I needed to be connected with other consultants in Western Canada. This connection was often portrayed through meeting one another at conferences, exchanging curriculum resource materials, acting as visiting workshop leaders, sitting on department of education committees, and other networking activities. Given the geographical distances separating me from other centers, this networking seldom included much ongoing conversation.

In preparing for the initial study presented here, I listed those with whom I felt comfortable working, who had a number of years of experience, who had expressed an interest in research, and who had enough interaction with me previously to accept my credibility as an art consultant. After prioritizing these names, one person stood out. Ruth Britten had been a fine arts supervisor for nearly twenty years. I had gone to a couple of talks she had given at teachers' conventions, and though I was impressed with her knowledge, insight, sense of humor, and compassion, I never had the opportunity to discuss any issues with her. Perhaps it was my own lack of confidence that held me back from approaching her or perhaps the right situation never arose. I also learned through a variety of sources that she was highly respected, not only in her own school board, but also across the province. When I joined the faculty of the fine arts emphasis school in my community, and took upon myself some leadership responsibilities for guiding the philosophy and curriculum of the school, it became important to invite an external facilitator who could help us refine our ideas. I suggested Ruth Britten. This day long event would serve as my personal introduction to Ruth. She gave us a good start on the road to improvement towards a fine arts program. Within a couple years, I became the art consultant, and one of the tasks I was involved in was the evaluation of school art programs. Two schools that year were earmarked, one of which was a junior high school. In consultation with my supervisor, we decided to bring Ruth Britten in as an external voice on the team of evaluators. This fine arts program review at the junior high school took several days and would serve as my last interaction with Ruth prior to this study.

When I looked over the list of potential consultants, I just knew there was a great deal to be learned from Ruth's practical knowledge as a supervisor. She was considered an excellent educator, supervisor, and leader by virtually everyone I met. In deciding how many consultants to include in my study, I decided that we had been amiss in the education field; we lacked in-depth description and interpretation of people who were highly respected and admired in our professional circles. In the case of consultants where very little research or training activities currently exist, this seemed to be absolutely important. The arts in education programs are always struggling and whatever can be learned from reading this account will be helpful to anyone involved in educational change.

Before we begin with reviewing the nature of the study, the research foundations and findings, let's turn to a biographical sketch of Ruth Britten. Who is this person I will be talking so much about?

The Supervisor's Experiential World—A Biographical Sketch

Ruth Britten has an impressive scholarly background as well as a varied teaching base from which she can draw in her role as fine arts supervisor. As a young adult she obtained a Honors B.A. (1950) with distinction in philosophy at a catholic university. Following the lead of a truly powerful mentor, a philosophy professor who was a nun, Ruth decided to become a nun herself. Though she would later leave the sisterhood, her life experiences during the subsequent ten years as a nun provided her with numerous anecdotes, stories, and a strong sense of herself in community.

Ruth began her teaching career as an elementary and junior high teacher in a New York catholic school. Before leaving New York, she obtained a B. Ed. (1956) and served as vice-principal for one year. She returned to Eastern Canada and taught in three cities over a nine year period. It was there that she taught grades one to seven art, english as a second language, junior high art, english, science, and acted as department head of humanities in a senior high school. It was also during this period that she left the sisterhood and dedicated her life to teaching and pursuing her own educational challenges. Ruth managed to take additional university drama courses to help her as a senior high drama teacher and also completed an M.A. in english (1967).

After deciding not to marry her fiance in the fall of 1967, Ruth relinquished her teaching assignment in the east and headed west in an effort to start afresh. Upon arriving in Mountainview (fictitious name), she approached the board of education for a teaching position, thinking that was the only system available. Receiving little encouragement, she was ready to try another city when it came to her attention that there was indeed a catholic school system within the same city. Ruth speaks fondly of her initial reception to that district. People were caring, interested in her, and encouraging. And in fact, she was quickly given a

choice of two teaching assignments. One was to teach in a high socioeconomic area of the city and the other in a low socioeconomic area. She chose the latter, for she believed she could provide the pupils with more insight and instruction; she also thought they would be more receptive to her teaching. The assignment was difficult in that it was split between two schools: one where she would teach junior high art and mathematics and the other, art in grades one to six.

At the end of the first year in Mountainview, she applied for the advertised position of Fine Arts Supervisor, a position that had been advertised the year before but left vacant because of a lack of qualified candidates. Receiving the position was perfect for Ruth, and being the first one in the role, she quickly sought to establish it according to the job description. In one of my field diary entries (FD or field diary #7, page 46), I reflected upon asking her about her early days in the job and how she proceeded:

At the start, she looked at the context of change by visiting all schools. Even in her interview, she said she would have to get a feel for the culture and political reality first before defining a theoretical model. For her to effect change, she needed to know where the teachers were coming from, what needed to change, and what needed to remain. She also did an overview of the facilities and then drafted a plan of action. For example, with developmental drama, she hired someone from a local theatre group to give two demonstration lessons at every school. Ruth attended many of these and listened at the side and corrected perceptions made by the teachers. Then when in-services were held, people knew what drama was all about. People couldn't talk about it without some context and the quickest way to learn about it was through demonstration teaching.

After assuming the position of supervisor, Ruth also launched a longitudinal study at an elementary school in which she taught a grade three art class every week until those in the class were in grade six. As part of her study, she also had two control groups at elementary schools of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. One of these groups received no instruction from Ruth and one was taught only in the sixth grade, but received the same instruction as the experimental group. The purpose of her research was to determine whether a sequentially developed program in art made any difference toward idea formation and had any carryover from one year to the next. To determine any differences she used the Torrance Tests of Visual Thinking as well as the verbal form, and the MacGregor Perceptual Index. In addition, she also kept anecdotal records and heuristic interpretations. At the end of the fifth grade, she completed a battery of tests in order to record the entry behavior for grade six and found the results to be statistically significant in favor of sequential instruction (FD 57, 319).

It was during the last year of this longitudinal study that her program superintendent suggested she submit a proposal for a fine arts center that she had

envisioned at an initial meeting of all supervisors in 1968, where everyone was encouraged to design five year plans for their own departments. If money were no obstacle, where would they take their programs? The government was offering school districts special funding for projects that would benefit children in a way that was not already being offered. Ruth submitted her initial plans for creating a research and demonstration teaching center for the fine arts and put forth a proposal where selected classes would be invited over time to come to the Centre. Though her superintendent thought her plans were the most visionary of those submitted, the government rejected her proposal because of the primary focus on teachers rather than students. Ruth rewrote the proposal stating that a fine arts center would be established to offer students and teachers alike an intense involvement with art, drama, and music. This proposal was accepted for implementation for the fall of 1973 (FD 57, 320). Because of this sudden development and windfall of funding, Ruth regrettably was unable to complete her initial longitudinal study, leaving the final testing and documenting unfinished.

The Fine Arts Centre would consume most of her energy for the next nineteen years. Ruth speaks of those early years with great enthusiasm for it marked significant efforts to change students, teachers, principals, parents, and central office staff notions of arts education. The 1950s and 1960s had marked two decades of a child-oriented perspective, a movement devoted to child development theories, creativity, and self-expression. The 1970s and 1980s as we now realize, introduced and have subscribed to a more discipline-centered orientation, one which commits itself to sequentially developed programs. The 1990s, though still disciplined-based in orientation, are dealing with issues related to child-centered and culturally sensitive curriculum initiatives. The Fine Arts Centre would help to establish these new notions. A full complement of staff assisted Ruth. Two specialist teachers in each of the fine arts areas, an art and a music consultant, a project manager, and a secretary manned the Centre, besides Ruth. It was a luxurious time. She maintained that number of staff until 1981 and ever since then, with a new slate of people on the administrative council, she has steadily lost staff members. When the special government funding supporting the project was finally taken away in 1987, as a consequence of budget cutbacks, Ruth lost four staff members, a very hard blow to the Centre (FD 57, 322). No one remains from the first year although Ann, the art specialist, joined Ruth in the second year of the Centre operation (FD 12, 63).

It might seem that Ruth had enough to do running the Centre, but she in fact continued to pursue her own studies. In 1973 she received a B.F.A. with distinction in visual arts and in 1978 she completed a Ph.D. Her dissertation looked at the religious symbolism in the poetry and painting of the pre-Raphaelites, an obvious interdisciplinary study between three of her personal loves: religion, english, and art history. Her scholarly achievements

were honored with the following academic awards: Kappa Gamma Pi (International Catholic Scholastic Award) in 1950, and two Killam Scholar Fellowships in 1966 and 1977. In 1981, she was honored by receiving a Provincial Achievement Award from the Minister of Culture and the Premier of the province. It reads:

Dr. Ruth Britten was responsible for undertaking an extensive research study on art education within Mountainview Catholic School System. Her findings indicated that sequential developmental programs in the arts would have a most positive effect on student learning. This research formed the basis for the establishment of the Fine Arts Centre in 1973. Under Dr. Britten's direction, the Centre serves as a nucleus for exploration in the fine arts: allows for specialists to team with classroom teachers in providing demonstration teaching in music, art, and drama for elementary school children: and, serves as a major influence for excellence in education. For her leadership in arts education, Dr. Britten was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

Her teaching experience did not end when she became a supervisor. Instead she regularly taught demonstration lessons in her school system, also taught art methods courses in education, and art history courses in fine arts as a sessional instructor at the local university over an eleven year span.

Her professional leadership record portrays her as intensely active with the Canadian Society for Education Through Art, and in the provincial Arts in Education Council. She was editor of the provincial journal in her subject area, and provincial conference chairperson, as well as being instrumental as a curriculum designer for recently developed secondary art guidelines. Her leadership with a local museum, a regional arts foundation, and the city of Mountainview Centennial Celebrations should also be noted.

Her resume lists numerous speaking engagements over the last fifteen years wherein she has spoken in several Canadian provinces and one American state. In the one school year alone, she gave four keynote addresses and one other main address to such groups as the Catholic School Trustees Association, a Religious and Moral Education Council, an Arts Education Council and two area Teachers' Conventions. Other years she spoke to such groups as the Western Canada Administrators, Early Childhood Educators, Art Therapists, Museum Educators, and teachers of the Gifted and Talented.

Ruth's publication record, though not a priority to her, spans a wide array of journals and magazines. Since the completion of her Ph.D., Ruth has actively pursued a second career as an artist and is proud of her two recent one-woman shows in which all items were purchased. She hopes to be a full-time practicing artist following her retirement from the profession.

Ruth's latest accomplishment has been the establishment of a fine arts alternative school (grades 4-6) based on the Mead Model. The school board and

parents have been so pleased with the program that a junior high extension of the program has also been instituted. Ruth and her committee are constantly adjusting the intentions, logistics, and design of this program.

This biographical sketch portrays the exceptional nature of Ruth Britten as a fine arts supervisor. Gaining access into her lifeworld might not have been possible had I not known her previously.

Let me end this personal introduction by relaying one last anecdote. In the process of gaining access for the study, I wrote to Ruth requesting her participation. I waited for a reply for approximately six weeks at which time I decided to phone her for an answer. I was prepared to proceed with a multiple case study if she declined. To my delight, she agreed. But one sentence which she said to me, stays with me even today. She said with earnest enthusiasm, "Of course I'll help a woman earn a doctorate!" At that time I had no idea I was entering a study that would eventually force me to deal with feminist issues. In fact, even as I completed my first study, I only briefly described the obvious women's issues, concerns, and beliefs held by Ruth. But as I moved on to include the women in the extended study, I realized that I had been fooling myself. In describing and interpreting Ruth's practical knowledge, I saw all of the subtleties and complexities of one person's guiding notions. Once I extended that to include the collective group, what was once perhaps too subtle to recognize, became almost the essential ingredient for success. The group of women worked together in a way that recognized the stability of practical knowledge but also made it dynamic through a collective social and historical process. Chapter 2 endeavors to situate the influence of Ruth's practical knowledge with her colleagues and how her leadership impacts them as educators. What is crucial is how her charismatic and transformational form of leadership strengthened the sense of community within the Fine Arts Centre. It also acted as a pedagogical tool to teach leadership and through the belief of all involved, everyone became leaders.