

Artists as Mentors: A Mid-Career Art Educator Rekindles Her Artist Self

“The artist’s experiences, shared through the life story interview and studio visit, provided Rose creative inspiration through insights into another artist’s philosophy and content knowledge.”

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ABSTRACT

A mentoring relationship between a mid-career art educator and a late-stage artist, is facilitated through the art educator's action research and life story narrative which is key in learning and sharing the artist's philosophy. The author uses narrative inquiry and Deleuze's sense and event to represent the affective knowing of IG learning and demonstrates psychosocial benefits of mentoring.

KEYWORDS

action research; intergenerational learning; mentoring; narrative analysis

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Figure 1. Oz by Mary Stephens

Heart tokens are piling up under a collaged painting titled Oz (Figure 1). The ruby red slippers are a focal point among a background layered with text from newspaper clippings, a playbill and vintage entertainment figures. The melancholy expressed in the image seems to be reflected in the expression of participants gathered around it. I overhear them sharing concerns about the artist, who is missing from today's seminar, in whispered conversations. I overhear words--surgery . . . second opinions . . . suddenly. The artist Mary Stephens should be here to talk about her artwork, but instead Carol Rose, her co-presenter, will use video recordings to share her story and demonstrate Stephens's working processes in an afternoon workshop for fellow educators.

This narrative accounting of an event marks the culmination of Rose and Stephens working together. Their story relays powerful knowledge and demonstrates an emotional bond, gained through an intergenerational (IG) mentoring relationship mediated through art. Most art educators initially learn from artists through the professional relationship of college student and professor (Jin, 2018). According to Zwirn (2006) the successful transition from art student to art educator/artist is often hindered because of gender related issues. Zwirn says this accounts for art educators being largely female, and professional artists being predominately male. The potential of IG learning between female art educators and artists offers possibilities to buoy mid-career art educators who face challenges related to age and

gender, and to amplify the wisdom of late-stage artists. The initiative I set forth in this research may serve as one form of remediation for the gendered nature of art education (Dalton, 2001; Sandell, 2004) and addresses older age as an asset, showing a late-stage artist as mentor, who articulates philosophical understandings represented in her artwork, providing lasting and affective professional development.

In a survey of art educators, Zwirn (2006) noted women repeatedly mentioned a need for respect and empowerment as artists, and some relayed an “inconsistent sense of their artist identities,” whereas, male art educators relayed a nascent confidence in their role as artist (Zwirn, 2006, p.173). Jin (2016) refers to post-secondary art education in university settings as adults in pursuit of change, looking not only for places to learn, but for mentors to assist them in professional or personal ways. Jin ponders how art professors’ philosophical understandings are represented in artwork, how it relates to teaching and how it influences students. Jin questions how psychosocial influences are involved in mentoring and teaching. These questions are addressed in the mentoring relationship described in this research, where participants share aesthetic understandings related to practice, demonstrating psychosocial growth. By analyzing this lifelong learning event for its relational dynamic, I will show that the affective learning was key in producing creative thinking (Beighton, 2015) – a valuable goal in art education.

Adult Mentoring

Theory development in the field of IG studies is relatively new and was initially based on developmental theories identified as: social network theory, social identity theory, dynamic interactional theory and mentoring (Kuehne, 2003). Mentoring is a one-on-one supportive relationship between a younger and older person, which has mutually beneficial social/emotional benefits (Kuehne, 2003) and is mutually revitalizing, with benefits for both mentor and mentee (Chipping & Morris, 2006). Research supports mentorship as reciprocal and it suggests that older participants are encouraged to learn and grow as well (Parisi et al., 2009).

Adult mentoring between generations is considered a valid means of personal and professional growth (Fletcher, 2007). The “possible selves” construct is a person’s ability to realize her potential within a collaboratively supportive and challenging mentoring relationship in a social dialogic context (Fletcher, 2007, p. 76). Beyond dialogic exchange, the relational dynamic of mentorship is an aspect of lifelong learning which adds an affective and creative dimension in which creativity is more about time and processes than objects or spaces (Beighton, 2015).

Beighton (2015) uses Deleuze’s (1969/1990) concept of event to explain that in lifelong learning, events’ internal dynamism “embody dynamic change which relates events to what they are becoming rather than what they are” (pg. 16). In this way, an event is not

simply a happening or occurrence, but carries significance and continuity to the future for the participant (Deleuze 1969/1990; Williams, 2004). Beighton argues that the goal of lifelong learning should be affective and creative. The relational dynamic of mentoring relationships support affective learning by going beyond the formal boundaries of professional and IG helping relationships, and takes place in a mutually supportive and informal environment (Phillips & Hendry, 2000). Yorks and Kasl (2002) posit that because of the diversity among adult learners, in this case diverse in age, whole learning strategies that fully engage the affective domain are needed.

In considering adult to adult mentoring, complementary needs and assets may factor into its success. Late-stage artists have particular age-related needs and assets—they must deal with an increasingly smaller network of age cohorts as their multiple networks of professional connections and friends diminish (Jeffri, Heckathorn, Spiller, & Simon, 2007) and they have life stories and philosophies to return to the community (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum (2010) strongly suggest that relationships formed between mentor and mentee through the activity of sharing stories allows participants to experience their lives and their world more meaningfully in a community of practice. Sharing a complete life story which highlights important aspects, through a guided interview allows the teller to share what is important in their life (Atkinson, 2007).

Life Story Interview

The life story interview involves a dialog in which questions are asked, answers transcribed and the story of lived experience is retold through a narrative. The methodology is characterized by one person helping another in the telling of their own story (Atkinson, 2007). Atkinson (2007) says the life story interview facilitates reliving stories and in so doing, it brings to life again stories held in the “heart, mind and soul” (p. 238) or as affect, perception and duration, which values our pasts as the accumulation of experience and inherited knowledge (Deleuze 1969/1990). The life story narrative demonstrates intersubjective compassion through the interviewer bonding with the story teller and empowering the teller through the acknowledgement of their story (Atkinson, 2007).

Art Educator/Researcher

Art educators often feel conflicted with multiple identities: as educator and artist, or educator, artist and researcher (Thornton, 2012). Thornton (2012) argues that the art educator’s integration of all three identities: artist, teacher and researcher are important for both fields of art and art education. He suggests action research is an effective means for art educators to define and research problems, develop a plan of action, and analyze and reflect on their solutions (Mills, 2011). It is professional development that is emergent, embedded in practice, ongoing, and teacher-directed (Burnaford, Fischer & Hobson, 2001). Art teacher action research groups guided in inquiry methods by a university researcher

enhances an art teachers' practice, by encouraging teachers to understand their beliefs and practices and how they came to be (May, 1993/1997).

Art educator researchers use visual journals as a way to archive experiences and insight for later use by recontextualizing information, which allows for critical analysis (Delacruz & Bales, 2010, p. 38). A journal's use in action research is a form of presentational knowledge that keeps alive the "comprehensive qualitative richness of actions and experiences" (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 373). The recording of visual, auditory and tactile images can disclose important experiences because participants engage through action and memory in an elemental synthesis of experience with reflection (Yorks & Kasl in Heron & Reason, 2008).

Teacher Action Research with an Artist

As part of my dissertation research to understand how to integrate local place into art curriculum through aging artists' knowledge, I organized action research inquiries with the local art museum and Carol Rose and three other art educators to identify local late-stage artists, who were at least one generation (20 years) older. Group members produced personal journals and a curriculum publication featuring each artist (NTIEVA, 2013) and presented their research to the community at the artists' exhibition at the museum. Their method of research was to identify and interview an artist, keep a journal, write a brief life story narrative for the curriculum they were developing, and teach it. The artists each gave permissions for the use of their story and all participated in community presentations, except for Mary Stephens.

My original research questions evolved and so did my understanding of action research as being "with rather than on" participants, which led to this research (Heron & Reason, 2007). My challenge in analyzing the participants' data was to show the path and connections of inquiry between the researchers and the artists that led to my conclusions (Sumara & Carson, 1997). I did this through narrative inquiry and the data provided by Rose and Stephens led me to a conclusion about what adult-to-adult mentoring looks like between an art educator and artist, and how it works.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative writing provided a link between the action and the meaning by mapping out interpretive paths between the participant experience of the action research and explaining a meaning, by reconstructing data into interpretive and analytical research texts to show social significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This allows for interpretation, which may deconstruct events, and allows for a post-structural reading (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004). I used Deleuze's (1969/1990) theoretical framework in which data work to reveal meanings of affective experiences of sense. Deleuze defines sense as felt rather than spoken. A Deleuzian post-structural approach looks at what texts do, rather than what they appear to say (Czarniawska-Joerges, B. 2004). I used sense theory (Deleuze, 1969/1990) as an

analytical tool to work with the context-embedded data, to keep preconceptions of IG experiences from distorting the “logic of evidence” (Lather, in Keifer-Boyd, 2014, p.199). I reassessed aspects of the narrative in which stories of experience emerged, and considered first the experience, or the sense of the event, as valuable to reflect upon (Boulton-Funke, 2015). Then I used psychosocial theory to identify and classify these qualities as a mentoring relationship.

I illustrate the psychosocial growth demonstrated in mentoring using the lens of life span theory developed through surveying narrative texts across the life span, which generalizes how different aged persons experience life differently (Baddeley & Singer, 2007), and I show how difference works positively in IG relationships.

Participants

Rose is a mid-career art educator, who recently joined a high school art department after 15 years in an elementary position. Rose shared some dissatisfaction in her new teaching appointment. She expressed stress in switching grade levels, entering an established art department and being saddled with teaching all entry level art classes, which left her feeling inadequate. She chose Stephens to participate in her action research because she was acquainted with her from art classes at a local university two decades earlier, and admired her art. Stephens was well established in the art community, having lived and exhibited in the community since the 1990s, following a career as an artist in a neighboring state. Rose recorded Stephens’s life story through interviews and videotaping at her home and studio, demonstrating her collage and painting techniques.

Findings

Rose shows a sensitive interpretation of the tactile aspects of Stephens’s story in this excerpt from the *Pride of Place* curriculum (NTIEVA, 2013):

Stephens recalls as a child how she loved to create, loved to paint, and how she particularly loved sculpting. She remembers how she started drawing using pencils and yellow writing pads she “stole” from her father. Her father was a “gauger.” Mary recounts how he used a beautiful metallic tool to measure the contents inside a tank in the oil fields. He wrote down his measurements on yellow pads and telegraphed the results. Mary loved his yellow writing pads! Then, she used the walls when she couldn’t find paper. In school, she loved to experiment with shading, but her teachers did not like that. She did have teachers who understood her, however. She remembers that she didn’t like edges; it took her a long time to understand that things have edges. She struggled with making edges on a two-dimensional surface. Yet she learned about edges after modeling with clay and experimenting with three-dimensional forms (Rose in NTIEVA, 2013, p. 78).

Rose interpreted the story through the eyes of an art educator, noting Stephen's early struggle to define edges on paper. I sensed Rose also found commonality with Stephen's childhood art experiences, as an artist, because in my exit interview with Rose, she recounted her own early child artist transgressions, using her mother's lipstick to draw on walls.

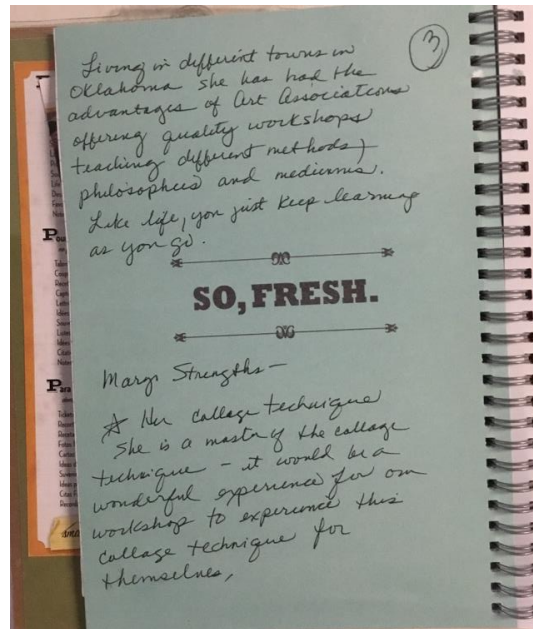


Figure 2. A page from Rose's journal

Rose's Journal Pages

Rose used her journal to document learning from multiple sources: incorporating notes from our workshops, visual images, and personal encounters with Stephens, whose philosophy, quotes, and interview transcriptions dominated Rose's journal. When Rose wrote about Stephens's philosophy of art and chose to interpret it in poetry in her journal, she documented the experiential learning gleaned from Stephens and her artwork. Rose took handwritten notes of her interview with Stephens and transcribed them, adding a reflexive element to her journal by graphically emphasizing text important to her. Rose made the journal a document of her personal journey through this research, as indicated by her language and choices for inclusion. A page in Rose's journal demonstrates she valued Stephens's words, by graphically recontextualizing it. Rose created the poem *The Work of Mary Stephens (as a Sojourner)* from her interview with Stephens (Figure 3).

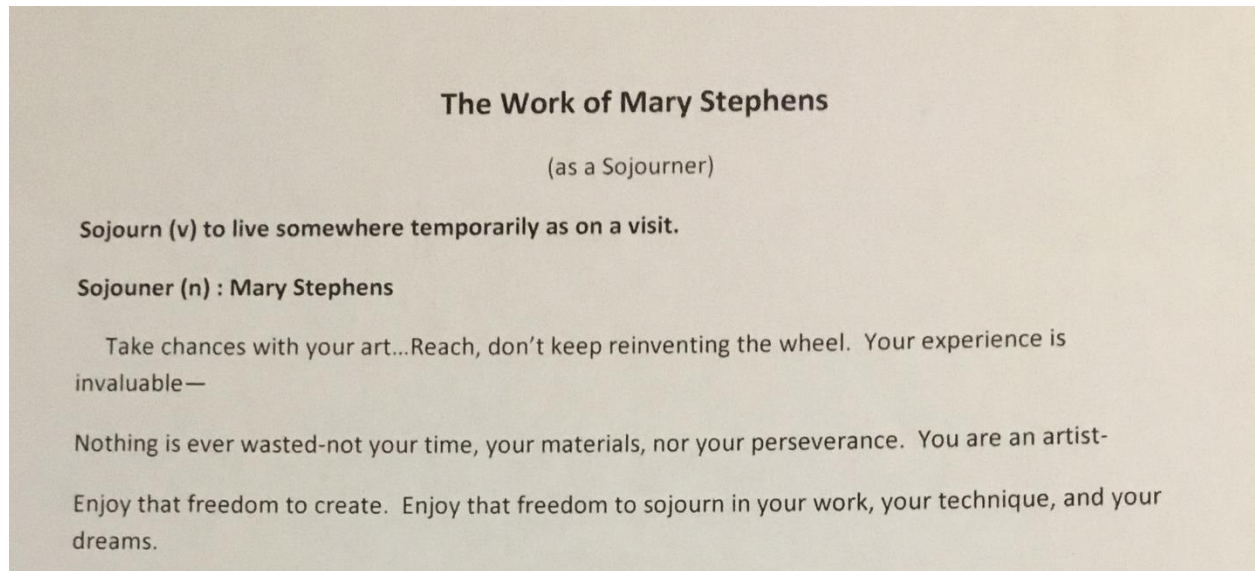


Figure 3. Rose's journal page The Work of Mary Stephens: as a Sojourner.

Rose's reflections in poetry based on her interview demonstrates she benefited personally through Stephens's sharing her aesthetic philosophy. In her exit interview, Rose iterated the reflective aspect of her journal, which represents her own personal preferences in art and research. Explaining why the journal had become so important to her and how it functioned for her, Rose said,

These were things that Mary [Stephens] said, and I wrote things down because I just was like a sponge with her. I wanted to absorb everything she could tell me. I really benefited, I think, doing this research with her. (C. Rose, personal communication, June 3, 2013)

Rose co-creates knowledge.

Rose's journal conveys the richness of her experiences (Heron & Reason, 2008) and provides insights into her connections with Stephens as an artist, highlighting what she learned from Stephens's life story interview and studio demonstration. Her journal functions to transfer her experiential learning in action research into affective learning through her reflective and creative process, (Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Viewing Rose's recorded interviews with Stephens gave me the opportunity to see and hear source material for Rose's journal. In her journal Rose commented upon what Stephens told her and reformatted it poetically, demonstrating she valued this new found knowledge. In this way Rose recontextualizes a segment of the life story interview, representing a collaboration with Stephens.

This excerpt from the audio recording reveals Stephens' art philosophy as she talks about content:

Stephens: I like to be able to communicate to someone through my painting. Nothing is more satisfying [than] to have someone look a long time at my paintings and ask questions. "Why is that in the painting?" I don't always have an answer, because sometimes it is serendipity. Things just happen. I love that, when things just happen. Leave it alone and paint will do what it will do.

Rose: A happy surprise.

Stephens: Absolutely.

(C. Rose, personal communication, March, 2013)

Rose's journal notes included this remnant of the recorded conversation: "Her favorite word is 'serendipity,' which means 'when things just happen, it's a happy surprise!'" Note here that Rose combines Stephens's definition with her own and demonstrates the situated emergence of this narrative. Rose revisiting the aesthetics conversation, marks it as an important event of understanding and exemplifies the relational dynamism and creativity available through lifelong learning (Beighton, 2015) and is what Deleuze (1969/1990) would call the pure event.

At the conclusion of the community presentation Rose led a studio experience, teaching collage technique learned from her studio visit with Stephens. I video-recorded Rose working confidently with the adults at the workshop quoting Stephens "serendipity," to reflect her mentor's art making philosophy, as she taught collage and painting in repeating workshop sessions.

IG Learning and Mentoring

In our formal exit interview, at the culmination of the teacher action research I asked Rose about intergenerational learning and whether she thought that was part of what was happening in her relationship with Stephens. She said,

I didn't see it at first. At first . . . I thought it was just for the pure research, but after researching her and . . . meeting her, getting to know her, I realized that there was an intergenerational concept going on between the two of us, because she's a little older than me. But comparing her to myself, and then to my students—yes, there was some learning that was taking place . . . [for] me as student. (C. Rose, personal communication, June 3, 2013)

IG learning through mentoring has a strong affective component, and Rose had not considered the learning component until I brought it to her attention.

The following conversation took place the next week, and demonstrates the depth of their emotional bond. Rose recounted her last conversation, when Stephens told Rose she had received a diagnosis for what looked like ovarian cancer.

‘My stomach’s been hurting.’ That’s what she said to me. . . I called her [Mary Stephens] and she must have been lying down, and I think we talked about 30 minutes, and that’s when she explained what was going on (her illness) ...she made it sound like ‘I’m going to be back.’ . . . I love her, I think she is wonderful, an awesome person (personal communication, June 10, 2013).

Stephens had flown to Boston to see a doctor where her family lived, and had planned to be back in Wichita Falls, TX to mount an exhibit in the fall (Carter, 2016). It was Stephens’s absence from the summer seminar which brought this close relationship into sharp relief and through writing the narrative analysis, excerpted in the introduction above, I came to identify the psychosocial qualities of mentoring and its relational dynamic that encourages creativity.

Discussion

Art Educator/Researcher/Artist

This data demonstrates how art educator/artist/researcher identity comes together (Thornton, 2012). Rose’s positioning as researcher empowers and builds confidence through blending new knowledge and creative practices. In retelling Stephens childhood memories, Rose clearly shows her interest as an art educator in how a child artist perceives the world and this connects her with Stephens through shared ways of being artists, which includes ways of seeing and being in the world (Baddeley and Singer, 2007). As Rose documents the child artist’s perceptions and struggles, the narrative has elements of the co-creation of story between child and parent, capturing the child’s voice and providing adult explanations (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Rose co-created the story of growing as an artist, and related to her own childhood memories of drawing on walls. Rose’s narrative construction of self-as-artist through this process is revealed as she shares her childhood artist transgression.

Additionally, Rose participated creatively with Stephens by collaborating in an aesthetic perspective. Rose’s journal extended her experiences by reflecting on events and creating poetry. When Rose combines Stephens’s definition of serendipity with her own “happy surprise,” she demonstrates the situated emergence of the narrative, in which Rose’s collaboration with Stephens, grows her knowledge about artmaking, and her identity as an artist. The relational dynamism of the event and her creative response demonstrates what Deleuze (2004) would call the pure event and Beighton (2015) highlights as the creative possibility in lifelong learning.

Social Development in Mentoring

The affective quality of learning shared in the data is unique to this relationship, but can be generalized through the interpretive lens of psychosocial growth found in mentoring relationships, which supports the art teacher's artist identity (Zwirn, 2006). Rose's reflections and presentations demonstrate a deep admiration for Stephens. Rose had significant conversations with the artist which benefited her by adding depth to her art knowledge and buoyed her sense of confidence, both ways of embracing the possible self as artist (Fletcher, 2007).

I sensed Rose's psychosocial growth through the research. Rose had projected a lack of agency and ill-ease in her teaching position, which appeared to improve following her work with Stephens. Rose relayed confidence as she taught Stephens's approach to collage and painting to adults in repeating workshop sessions at the community presentations. The importance of agency is found in a survey of middle-aged adults' life story narratives by McAdams, Hart, and Maruna in Baddeley and Singer's (2007) discussion of life span theory. Middle-aged narratives shared a common theme of agency, including achievement, status, self-mastery, and empowerment (Baddeley & Singer, 2007p. 193). Rose's new found agency and empowerment indicates psychosocial growth and increased the respect and empowerment female art educators may be lacking as artists (Zwirn, 2006).

The dialogic context of the mentoring relationship helped Rose develop her possible self as artist/teacher/researcher (Fletcher, 2007; Thornton, 2012). Rose succeeded in transferring research to both teaching and creating while presenting curriculum and an art-making experience to her peers and high school students. The mentoring relationship empowered Rose to realize her potential as an artist and in new roles as teacher-trainer and secondary art teacher, increasing her status and contributing to a sense of agency. Mentor-ing. Rose said that she was like a student to Stephens, although her inquiry with the artist began as a researcher, she came to see Stephens as more than a research subject, and instead as a teacher and friend. Beyond Stephens's sharing her philosophy of life and art and demonstrating her art techniques, she welcomed Rose into her personal life by sharing details which Rose took to heart. Stephens shared personal confidences, including health concerns and sadness over the death of a grandchild, bringing to life again stories that affectively shared pain and bared the heart (Atkinson, 2007).

Stephens benefitted from being a mentor, because she found in Rose someone to share her feelings with (Chipping & Morris, 2006) and who could return her stories to the community (Baddeley & Singer, 2007) while reflecting significant aesthetic understanding. Typically, a theme of reminiscence dominates the older adult's narrative (Watt & Wong, in Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 195) and in telling her story to another artist Stephens gained support and developed camaraderie. Rose's friendship countered losses of Stephens's local artist cohort, which the action research group had become aware of, and the event of

IG mentoring offered Stephens even more, because she gained validation and recognition of her life's work from sharing her reminiscences.

Needs and assets

In Deleuze's theory described in 1969/1990 *Logic of Sense*, difference from the norm is sense producing. For instance, marriages are usually age similar, so a May to December marriage may leave us puzzled. Awareness of sense leads to a search for meaning, and an unsettled sense can lead to research possibilities. Although the events of this research brought Rose and Stephens together through the common element of art, it was the difference in their life experiences that produced sense in ways unique to mentoring relationships. By examining differences based on each of their needs and assets related to life experiences they shared, I offer an explanation for why this powerful mentoring relationship developed.

In mentoring Rose and Stephens each reflected an issue related to distinct age-related themes typified in life span theory—middle adulthood agency and older adulthood reminiscence. This event of lifelong learning produced dynamic change in Rose as she gained knowledge and confidence in “becoming,” being open to the challenge of learning, like her students. Rose's need for agency and professional support in her teaching role was met by the assets found in Stephens. Stephens's complementary need for camaraderie, often lacking for a late-stage artist, was supplied by Rose, who became a confidante. In writing an ode to Stephens's aesthetic, Rose uses time and process creatively within the relational dynamic of her mentor to produce poetry which influenced her art making and teaching as well. The creativity released in this relational dynamic supports Beighton's (2015) concept of the creative aspects of lifelong learning privileging time and processes over objects and spaces.

Conclusion

Female art educators can find effective ways to build knowledge and confidence as artists through IG mentoring relationships which benefit both parties. Using a complementary approach where each participant knows they have something to give and also recognize they can admit weakness or need can bring results, and through collaboration, a dynamic creative production can result. Although this is a single instance where an IG relationship promotes deep learning through mentorship, it demonstrates potential as an invaluable form of professional development for art educators because it offers affective learning. IG mentorship with a late-stage artist extends adult education by inspiring creative work and theory development. Co-equal IG mentorship is important because it builds an appreciation of the needs and assets of each participant and encourages psychosocial health and development. I recommend that art educators and artists share time and stories, as part of research which is valuable professional

development promoting the artist/art educator/researcher identity. Further research into the uniquely gendered nature of this positive experience is recommended.

The artist's experiences, shared through the life story interview and studio visit, provided Rose creative inspiration through insights into another artist's philosophy and content knowledge. This provides a valuable form of lifelong learning outside of the academy and workplace and opens opportunities for late-stage artists to engage with community.

Epilogue

Mary Stephens went to Boston for treatment of ovarian cancer and was never able to return to her home to exhibit her work (Carter, 2016). She died two years after her diagnosis. Carol Rose gave presentations about Stephens to her students around Texas and the US.

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