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Elliot Cared

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Elliot Eisner became my mentor when I started the graduate program in education at Stanford in 1995 and will continue to be my mentor through my many memories of him and through all of his written works. “The Enlightened Eye” and “The Arts and the Creation of Mind” are my personal favorites among his books, along with the list of what education can learn from the arts. Of course, the times spent with him and the ideas exchanged in those times are the experiences most dear to me intellectually and emotionally. I loved his stories and it did not matter if I had already heard them once, or twice, before. The one about Elliot trusting the inner city Chicago kid with the keys to the art room when he went home to have lunch with Ellie, and how his son Steven referred to jet airplanes as “George Washington Planes” because the jet engines resembled the tube-shaped curls in Washington’s wig, are my favorites, and I believe two of his favorites.

Elliot helped turn my interest in education into an undying passion and he guided my attention to a wealth of education theory and research, old and new, and to designing and conducting my own research. Elliot thought on his feet, in the moment, and taught with his whole body, sometimes breaking into a few improvised dance steps to help make his point. And he listened to his students’ and colleagues’ ideas with equal fluidity and intensity. His deep interest in what we all were doing and thinking is testament to the respect and love he felt for us and I see the same for him in the eyes of those whose lives he touched. One time, I was at the

airport in Atlanta with Elliot. We were waiting for Kim Powell to arrive and from there we all drove to Athens to participate in a QUIG conference with our hosts, including Richard Siegesmund and Edmund Feldman. While Elliot and I were visiting and waiting for Kim, he became fascinated with a small boy, perhaps three years old, a few tables away from us. The boy's mother was offering a variety of food, drink and toys to the boy to pass the time while they waited. The boy clearly preferred the drink with the straw and Elliot turned my attention to this scene and said, "That kid really knows what he likes, and that is a very important thing to know." This was one of those teaching and telling moments with Elliot. He was teaching me about the power of observation and perception, that knowing what you like is important, and he was telling me who he was, a man who pursued his own passions with everything he had. Elliot really knew what he liked!

The weekend of my graduation from Stanford, Elliot had all of his graduating students and their families over to his and Ellie's house for a reception, an annual tradition. He asked each of us to say something about our experience at Stanford. I said that what had meant the most to me, impressed me the most, was that everyone at Stanford, my professors and peers, enjoyed their work immensely. I always tell my future teacher students this story and I tell them that if they don't love teaching and research, don't do it. Elliot wanted each of his students to achieve great things. We may not all see eye-to-eye as to what these things are, but what is the most enduring gift to me from Elliot is that I feel him beside me, always encouraging me, saying something like, "Go! Go for it! Figure it out! Try it on for size!" Sometimes when I jog, I don't feel the strength to finish the course on which I have set out. I think of Elliot and I feel his conviction in my abilities. I always finish.

About the author

Teresa Cotner is from Los Angeles, California. She is an Associate Professor of Art Education at California State University, Chico. She is the Director for the Northern California Arts Project (NCAP, a regional site of TCAP, The California Arts Project). She earned a BA in Art at California State University, Sonoma, an MA in Art History and Single Subject Teaching Credential at California State University, Los Angeles, and a PhD in Art Education at Stanford University. She taught high school art in East Los Angeles prior to completing her PhD. Cotner's teaching and research interests include arts education, place-based education, cross-disciplinary education, classroom discourse and qualitative research. She was the California Art Education Association 2004 "Outstanding Art Educator in Higher Education." She presents research at professional conferences regionally, nationally and internationally. Her most recent publication is a chapter in *American Multicultural Studies*, "Color-Blindsided at the Intersection of Multicultural and Integrated Arts Education" (SAGE, 2013).

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