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**Critical Intervention/Personal Voice Action Plan: We can’t do it Alone**

**The Wake-up Call**

I was hired to teach art to 917 public school students, from kindergarten through sixth grade. There was no trace of lesson/unit plans from the prior art teacher’s eight years; she took it all with her. Just a large room piled high with boxes, materials, supplies, scraps and leftovers. But, no worries! Before the school year began, I spent a week organizing the classroom, delighted with the plethora of art supplies- I was in my element! But my heart began to sink as time went by. With so much to do, starting from scratch, I was overwhelmed. But I was afraid of seeming like I was complaining (one of the points May brought up in the article), so I was silent, stoic, and frazzled. The previous art teacher had rounded up a network of volunteers in a manner that gave her a volunteer for every class, every day of the week, but there was only one precious volunteer remaining. She apologetically shared with me, “All the others got burned out …. They won’t be coming back.” She could only make it two days a week for one hour each day, but those classes were heavenly, because I had the support I needed. The memory of those days has fueled my newly discovered personal voice- and an action plan to intervene on behalf of my fellow art teachers in Brevard County.

**The Incentive**

Brevard County, Florida does not offer any collegiate visual art or art education programs, even though the community is highly arts-oriented. The nearest arts programs are offered at UCF, a university over an hour away in Orange County. There is a plethora of art education internships available in the Orlando area for art majors, so those in need of internships have the pick of the litter. Consequently, if art teachers in our Brevard County schools are looking for in-class support through internships, they are out of luck. The UCF students do not like driving all that way for a non-paying position. We need interns! If an art teacher has the time, resources and/or connections to round up volunteers, it is wonderful. However, many of our public school art teachers do not have that “luxury” and they are expected to fend for themselves. Although I had to “fend for myself” during my short career as a public school art teacher, I did not know at the time that it tended to be the norm. After recently reading Wanda May’s (1994) article, “The tie that binds: Reconstructing ourselves in institutional contexts”, I began to suspect that this is widespread among public school art teachers. May described many art educators as the lone wolves of the school system, often silent about lack of connection, community and support, adding that “as long as any of us are in pain or are silenced, we are collectively responsible.” (p. 138). She was talking about me, and many, many other art educators. We are collectively responsible for one another.

Just to make sure I’m not just being a wimp, I looked up the parameters for teaching the arts with Brevard Public Schools (BPS)- here are some of BPS’s suppositions for the art class:

Many teachers of the arts take an individual and creative approach to instruction, but the underlying and fundamental supposition is to:

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| Continue personal learning to remain highly qualified |
| *Engage in consistent, weekly instruction incorporating 40-50 minute classes* |
| Use multiple imagery and a full range of vocabulary associated with each lesson/unit |
| Teach proper use of materials, musical scales, stage directions  and movement |
| Use story to formalize the visual art produced in writing, movement or song |
| Expect a final product that is professional and age appropriate |

BrBrevard Public Schools (2004)

I italicized the one supposition that was not remotely possible in my situation: “Engage in consistent, weekly instruction incorporating 40-50 minute classes.” Although forty minutes per class was scheduled, it was literally back-to-back. By the time a “40 minute” class was over, I had to be set up for the next class (40 minutes after one class was standing at the door, the next class was waiting at the door while the prior class filed out). I had, if all went *perfectly*, 30 minutes to engage the students in art-making and learning. Plus, due to our school size, I was on a rotating schedule that met every six days instead of every five.

**Is this Normal?**

After some research, I found that my public school experience was not uncommon. In fact, teachers of other disciplines struggle with issues concerning class size and lack of support (Collegeboard Advocacy, 2012). The biggest roadblock to both of these issues appears to be funding. On January 26, 2013, a public hearing was held regarding closure of four of our elementary schools. All were approved for closure (Brevard Public Schools, 2013).This will bring even more students into the schools that remain, resulting in another increase in class size without additional support.

I see no signs of relief here! But something has got to give, for the sake of student learning. In an article highlighting a collaborative community art class project, Theresa Marché (1998) shared the final epiphany of that class project art teacher that "if I want to make any changes around here, I can't do it alone." She added that innovative education depends on a team approach, making new programs less vulnerable to the suppositions of the educator who goes solo. She concluded that “experience also highlights the impact of seemingly small decisions…like a pebble thrown into a pond, effects of this decision rippled outward to the community and then reflected back again inward to the school community, creating an ever-changing pattern of connections and personal relationships.” (Marché, 1998, p. 12). Wanda May (1994) is in agreement with this when she concludes that “reforming art education is impossible without creating and participating in professional communities where we work.” (p. 136). May’s article had a profound impact on me, leading me to realize that I have unwittingly kept a code of silence for over a year, ignoring the problem that I now realize is not just a “me” thing; it was and continues to be an “us” thing.

On Diane Ravitch’s Blog (Ravitch, 2013), she included a post by retired art teacher Anita Getzler (2012), who voiced her concerns about student/teacher ratios and the need for support:

I believe the public is unaware of the day-to-day realities of the classroom

And the great harm being inflicted upon students and teachers by the steady

increase of classroom size. I have written about my own teaching experience

in order to shed some light on this critical situation, and move citizens to act

to save the heart of our educational system (Getzler, 2012, as cited by

Ravitch, 2013).

**Time to Take Action**

Since class sizes are continuing to rise, and since funding for more teachers per students does not appear to be an option, I propose providing reliable, consistent in-class support for our art teachers through community effort. But it will have to begin with me.

I currently work full-time in a non-teaching role at Brevard Community College (BCC), soon to become a four-year college. If I can make a successful pitch to BCC for a four year degree in art, we can offer internships, and internships will provide warm, willing bodies to the art classrooms, creating a symbiotic relationship between the public schools and our college. Even if a Bachelor in Art Education is not offered, I believe that an art student not interested in art education would benefit from the immersion of the intensely creative environment of an elementary and/or secondary art class, but this will require deeper research. I would also like to include another community-based component to that relationship by involving our Central Brevard Art Association (CBAA) in the effort.

The only thing I ever proposed was a toast, so I am definitely out my element here. I am a dreadfully needy beast, in need of all the help I can get. I wish to submit a proposal to BCC for the addition of at least one four year art degree program at the Cocoa campus Fine Arts Center. I wish to submit a proposal to the Brevard County school board to put an art internship program into place for Brevard Public Schools Art Teachers to utilize. I wish to submit a proposal to the Brevard County school board to put an art internship program into place and utilize it. As money is a huge issue for the public schools, the internship will be unpaid. As time is also a huge issue, I would also like to submit a proposal for the Central Brevard Art Association to help coordinate the internship program. I am willing to be the project coordinator, but I am convinced that a larger body of community involvement would be the most beneficial. I am still not sure if one should be proposed before the other, if they should be proposed separately at the same time, or if there should just be one proposal including all of the components and presented to each. At minimum, I hope to recruit representatives of support for this project from the elementary and secondary schools, the fine arts department at the college, and the art association.

**The Project in a Nutshell**

1. Many, many contacts and interviews with artists, art teachers, art students, administrators and coordinators in my community.
2. A proposal to the Brevard Community College to offer a four year art program, with internship options, on the Cocoa campus.
3. A proposal to the Brevard County School Board to put an internship program in place, for elementary schools first, then possibly the secondary schools.
4. A proposal to the Central Brevard Art Association to become involved in the coordination of the internship program.

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