

Part 1

The Evolution of the Situation

My interest was initially born out of frustration. First, I was frustrated with myself for not putting more energy into my own artwork. I always put so much time and energy into my teaching, but it leaves very little for my own artwork. I feel that it is important for art educators to also be working on their own art; however, I have not been keeping up with my own work over the past few years. This is a problem because I am not putting what I believe into practice.

My second area of frustration was with my school district. For years, I (along with colleagues) have requested professional development opportunities that are relevant to my work as an art educator. For years, our requests have been ignored and we have been subjected to required participation in professional development that is meaningless and wasteful. After years of frustration with myself and my school district, I realized that I need to take my own professional development into my own hands. I realized that if the school district is not going to support quality professional development for me and my colleagues, I can either continue to gripe or I can take action.

It has also been frustrating to work in an isolating environment where there is no support for my work/struggles/successes as an art teacher. As an elementary art teacher, I am the only art teacher in the building. Since the district does not provide time for the art department to meet, I only see and talk with other art educators when I make time for it. Only two of my six colleagues are willing to make time outside of the contractual school day to meet; therefore, our department suffers. I feel that I suffer, professionally, by working in a sort of bubble. At the elementary level, most specialist teachers' (art, music, physical education) schedules are so packed that we rarely have time to talk with other teachers at all. I generally spend each day teaching art with children, which I love, but there is a sense of isolation from my peers. This certainly cannot be a good thing in most professions, but particularly in a school setting.

The situation I began with was the discrepancy. I became aware of the major discrepancy between how I *believe* an art educator should practice, and what I was *actually doing*. The frustration had been brewing for quite some time, but it took some self-reflection and honesty for the real situation to become clear.

Schmuck explains this part of the process:

Self-confrontation occurs when people become clear about what they value and gather data to see if they are being true to those values. As discrepancies between values and results of efforts become apparent, there is cognitive dissonance, emotional discomfort, and a wish to change. The sine qua non of action research is clarity of values. To start to get real clear about their core values (Schon 1983, 1987). Then educators can move from focusing on themselves to focusing on results, (Schmuck).

It became clear to me that I needed to make a change in order to practice what I preach. At first, though, I also felt that I needed to create a form of change that would impact more than just me. I thought I needed to create change that would affect other art educators, school administrators, public policy, or public opinion- or *something* bigger than me. This thinking process began in September of 2010, and it took me most of the fall semester to decide that maybe a “small” change could be meaningful.

At this point, many months later, the situation has evolved. I am no longer concerned with making a change in my school district. My position as an elementary art teacher is being reduced due to budget cuts. But my position is being reduced more than any other. I have colleagues who teach the same number of classes, are responsible for the same number of students, and have the same workload as I do. Yet, only my art position is being reduced. It is becoming more and clearer how little my school district values the visual arts. Last year, they cut 1.2 art teacher positions out of seven. They cut an entire graphic arts program from the high school. Now, they are reducing my elementary position and cutting all funding from the middle school art budget. Music, technology, and physical education are barely impacted. My principal told me that the art position was being reduced because “...it requires less work and planning than other positions.”

Some teachers feel that it is an act of discrimination- cutting my art position while my colleagues will be paid more and have more time to do essentially the same amount of work and meet the same responsibilities. But no one else cares enough to really fight for the visual arts. Because there is no contractual support for my argument, the union recognized an injustice but will not fight against it. So, I have come to realize that I work in a community that does not support what I do for a living. There are some parents and families who care about the visual arts, but as a community the support is truly not there. Not from the school administration, not from the union, not from most of colleagues, and not from the residents of the town. Now, the change that needs to happen is all about me.

In proactive action research, creative problem solving and innovative practice precede data collection; however, the desire to risk doing something new often stems from one's previous unconscious data collections. These unconscious thoughts and feelings take the form of unexpressed frustrations, unfulfilled dreams, and unexpressed wishes. They are the psychological

foundations from which one's search for new and better practice emanates. They are the personal roots of proactive action research, (Schmuck).

As Schmuck points out, my search for a better practice is fueled by previously unexpressed frustrations and wishes. I want to be a part of a community of art educators. I want to work with others, talk with others and share ideas. Currently, I am not a part of any true community. In the beginning, I was frustrated about my lack of adherence to my own philosophy. I felt a need to create my own professional development because no one else was. Now, I still want to connect with other art educators- that objective has not changed. But I realize that the community I want to be a part of does not exist in my workplace, nor do I feel any need to build it. I have tried to build that sense of community for years, with little success. For now, "work" is just a job (unfortunately) and I hope to build community for myself outside of the confines of the workplace. I will reach out to other art educators, and those who want to participate and connect will respond. This is how I will start to build my own community.

Reflection/Dialogue/ Inquiry to Illuminate the Background

It was important for me to think about and consider my past frustrations (discussed in the above section) in order to get started. Picking apart my frustrations helped me realize that I needed to stop holding others responsible. In order to get control of the situation, I needed to take responsibility and examine my own role. Instead of thinking "My school district does not allow time for me to meet with colleagues" I thought "In what way can I make time to meet with colleagues?" Reframing frustrations allowed me to reframe the direction of my project.

Talking with colleagues and other art teachers was also fruitful. It became clear that I was not the only person feeling frustrated and lonely. Some other art teachers also seemed to feel isolated at times, and some had similarly unsupportive administrators. It also helped to talk with art teachers who felt supported by their school districts. I spoke with one art teacher in another district who refused to leave her part time job, despite a serious need for more income, because she felt so supported by her colleagues and principal. All art teachers agreed that they wanted more opportunities to display their own artwork.

During the summer of 2010, I began participating in a weekly ceramics studio. That experience has reminded me of the importance of connecting with others. I was aware of my feeling of isolation; however, it wasn't until I began connecting with artists and art teachers that I knew I *needed* to connect with others. The inquiry that illuminated the background for this project was very informal but very enlightening. Getting clarity on my own feelings and needs, through talking with others, set things in motion.

Part 2

Proposed Action

My proposed action is to create an art exhibition opportunity for art educators. Art educators from around the South Shore (in eastern Massachusetts), will be invited to participate in an art exhibit. All art teachers will be invited to participate, including those who teach in public and private schools, retired art teachers, and those who work as private instructors. By participating in an art exhibit, art educators will have an opportunity to meet and connect with one another. Art educators will also have a chance to share their original artwork with one another and the public. The exhibit might also raise public awareness about the skills, talents, and hard work of art educators. The proposed action may help to fulfill my own need to connect with other art educators.

Most art teachers are also practicing artists, but in some contexts they are not recognized or celebrated for their work as artists. In public school settings, there is no expectation that art teachers also continue the practice of creating and exhibiting artwork (as in a higher education environment). For those art educators that do continue to create their own art, it can be challenging. Dedicating the necessary time and energy to creating original artwork is extremely difficult while working full time as a teacher. Since art educators are not commonly recognized as practicing artists, it might be assumed that they are continuing the practice of art-making based on some sort of intrinsic motivation. I believe that art teachers deserve to be recognized for their work as practicing artists. An art exhibit that features the work of local art teachers will help to highlight their skills, creativity, and dedication.

Try a New Practice

A new practice definitely contributed to my motivation for developing the proposed action. After I began taking pottery classes at a local art center, I immediately felt a sense of artistic community. For a few years I'd wanted to study ceramics; I had no idea that a pottery class would provide so much more. Each week in class I was surrounded by other artists, some novice and some professional- but all were working collaboratively on individual creative objectives. People were talking about artwork, and the creative process, and sharing ideas and debating aesthetics and critiquing one another's work... It was addicting. At first I thought I just liked working with clay; after a while I became aware that it was the connection to other artists that I was most drawn to.

I had been so frustrated with myself and my school district, and had been looking for ways to get what I needed through *my job*. Participating in classes at the art center helped me realize that I could find connections with other artists elsewhere. But it also brought to my attention how much I needed that

connection, and how important it is for art educators to 1.) work on their own art, and 2.) connect with others. There were three other art teachers in the class with me, and the three of us spent part of each pottery class discussing lessons, ideas, materials, and other issues relating to teaching art. What I needed, professionally and personally, was not available through my job; therefore, I needed to seek it elsewhere.

Part 3

Constituent Building & Incorporating Hopes and Dreams

My hope was that I could find someone to help me develop the idea and actually put on an exhibit for art teachers. I knew I couldn't do it alone. And I knew I needed to try and really put this idea into action. Simply writing an action plan wouldn't be enough, because the idea had been rolling around in my head for a few years. One of my dreams is that art teachers *will* participate in the proposed exhibit and it will be a success. Defining "success" will be part of the ongoing development process.

In the beginning of this process, I spent time asking colleagues if they would be interested in participating in a group exhibit for art educators. I thought that this was the type of support and interest that would make up my "constituency." As I spoke with colleagues, no one showed any interest in helping to put together such an exhibit, although many did express some interest in showing their artwork. Through reflecting on the many conversations I'd had, it slowly dawned on me that I needed support in the form of people who believed this to be a meaningful endeavor, and people who were willing to work towards its success.

I decided that I would attempt to actually develop my idea and apply for a grant to fund the art exhibit. I spoke to a friend about co-writing the grant with me, and she loved the idea. This friend, Tracy, has a great track record for supporting the arts in the community; she is also on the board of the Friends of the John Curtis Free Library in Hanover, MA. The library was one of my proposed venues for the exhibit, so Tracy's support for the project was helpful in many ways. She is an advocate for the arts, a member of the Friends, a creative thinker and a hard worker. Tracy's vision was one that incorporated library programming based on the exhibit. She imagined ways that the library community, as well as the larger community, could connect with the artwork. Tracy and I discussed dividing up tasks and inviting others to work with us.

Cooperative Action research can be carried out at different system level of the school district... networks of educators and their community stakeholders.... Most cooperative action research takes place in small workgroups with three to ten members. These groups are characterized by task interdependence and regular face-to-face meetings. To be effective at implementing all steps of cooperative action research, the members must communicate clearly with one another ... (Schmuck).

Tracy invited Karen, a local parent, artist, and private art instructor, to join us. We didn't realize at first that Karen is also a member of the local Cultural Council, from which we were requesting funding. The three of us met together, discussed ideas, and put together the grant. Karen was a perfect addition to the team due to her experience as an artist. Her knowledge of putting together gallery-type exhibits outweighs mine, and we needed that knowledge to help develop the idea. Karen also helped us to fine-tune our definition of "success." I was imagining that many art teachers would participate; however Karen helped us to see that even a few participants would make this endeavor a success. She discussed with us how an exhibit featuring the works of a few artists could have just as much impact as one with many artists.

The three of us began meeting regularly in person and discussing our plans and hopes over email. We each took on different tasks related to the planning process and things flowed organically. Karen and Tracy are both parents in the school district where I teach, which makes them part of an important group of stakeholders. As parents of public school students, they agreed that it would be beneficial to the children of the district to see their art teachers' artwork on display. I had considered this, but it certainly was not a priority of mine. I realized quickly how working with a team would be beneficial for me as well as the development of the initial idea.

Proposed Action with Constituents, Incorporating Hopes and Dreams

My proposed action is to plan and develop a group art exhibit for art educators, and evaluate whether a group art exhibit is an effective action for increasing connections among art educators. This process will include my primary hope to provide an opportunity for art educators to connect, Tracy's hope to provide creative community programming, and Karen's hope to promote the visual arts.

Part 4

Look at Past Actions & Collect Data

The data I set out to collect never really manifested. I discovered that some communities had put on exhibits for art educators, but none had gone the extra step towards evaluating their impact. It seems that public school art teachers have recently started participating in more faculty exhibits, or maybe they have just become savvier at publicizing the events through the media. Either way, drawing attention to the work of public art educators is one way to bolster support for public arts education programs in times of decreased funding.

In 2010, the art department of the Arlington Public Schools put on their first faculty art exhibit. In an interview with Arlington Art Director David Ardito, he made it clear that the goal for the department was to draw attention to the fact that Arlington's art teachers are also practicing artists: "*I think that Arlington children are lucky to have art teachers who are also professional artists dedicated to the practice of art making. This exhibit demonstrates that dedication.*" Other public school art departments in Massachusetts have been in the headlines during the past few years for having faculty or student/faculty shows. It doesn't appear to be a common occurrence across the nation; however, there are many public school Art Departments whose faculty members participate in public exhibits. Rose Shaw, an elementary art teacher in West Palm Beach, Florida, shows her work with colleagues annually. "*Working with her peers at the shows gives Shaw an opportunity to exchange ideas with other art teachers. The shows also are a way to keep current on the latest art trends and teaching methods, she said,*" (2010). In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, art teacher Karen Swigart was quoted in regards to a faculty exhibit: "*Art teachers that create artwork and show their skills walk the talk,*" Swigart says. "*The message is that all artists travel the same creative journey that we ask our students to travel in our classrooms everyday,*" (2010).

Check What the Data Mean

The very little anecdotal evidence available shows that art educators' exhibits have an impact on the public as well as the teachers who exhibit work. By *anecdotal evidence*, I am referring to a few quotes in newspaper articles. It seems that there are opportunities for some art educators to share their work publicly, though it is not a widespread practice. It also seems that most exhibits of art educators' artwork are *not* implemented by school districts. Individual art teachers or art organizations seem to be the forces behind the exhibition opportunities.

I plan on collecting some type of data from the proposed exhibit. If there is data available that supports the efforts of the proposed action, it is more likely that the action will be beneficial and become a new practice. If collected data shows that the proposed action is in any way detrimental or has no impact, it would be helpful to have that information. Why implement and continue to implement an action if we are unclear on its purpose or impact? The anecdotal evidence collected seems to point towards two notions: 1.) art educators share their own work publicly in order to connect with other art educators, and 2.) art educators use exhibition opportunities to show their students and the public that they practice what they preach.

Evaluation

Determining what to evaluate was more challenging than determining how. After much consideration, I learned that the purpose of the evaluation process would be most beneficial if I collected data in order to answer a question for myself. I know that *my* main goal in planning the exhibit was to provide an

opportunity for art educators to connect with peers. I am interested in why other art educators might choose to participate in an exhibition.

There's a line I picked up at an evaluation conference that nonprofits may want to use as funders challenge them to document results: "Measure what you value, and others will value what you measure." ...We waste a lot of resources when we measure things for the sake of compliance. When we focus, instead, on utilization focused evaluation, the two critical questions are these: Who's going to use the information? For what purposes? (Bare, 2005).

The only person will most likely utilize the collected data would be me; therefore, I designed it to suit my interest. As part of the registration process, participants will respond to the following:

<u>Your responses to the following questions will be used to collect data and will remain anonymous:</u>						
-Grade levels taught (circle):	preK-K	1-4	5-8	9-12	higher ed.	adult ed.
-How many years have you taught art? (circle):	1-3	4-9	10-15	15-24	25 +	
-Why are you choosing to participate in this exhibit? (circle):						
professional development	artistic development		share my work publicly			
just for fun	sell/promote my work		something to do this summer			
connect with other art teachers	stay current in my field		try something different			

The use of this brief questionnaire during the registration process will hopefully ensure a response from each participant. Less formal data will be collected through both email and in-person conversations with participants

Part 5

Reflection & Dialogue

While planning this action proposal, feedback from classmates helped me shape the direction of my evaluation process. Initially, I was concerned with having some sort of data to prove to school districts or school superintendents the value of exhibiting artwork for art educators. After much consideration, I realized that for my purposes, the evaluation process did not need to be used to determine *worth*. I was more interested in learning *why* art educators find value in exhibiting their work publicly. Simply by participating, art educators show that they want to exhibit their work. By digging a bit deeper, I hoped to discover why.

Upon reflection, I also discovered some of my own misleading assumptions. While in the beginning stages of this planning process, I assumed that other art educators would see this as a much-needed chance to connect with peers. That was my primary goal and I assumed it would be shared. Developing an evaluation tool was challenging, but with reflective thinking and peer feedback I eventually shed my original assumptions. I realized that collecting data about *why* art educators might participate in a public exhibit would assist me in evaluating the purpose of implementing such an action.

The most valuable thing I have learned is the worth of a good collaboration. At times, collaborating with others feels more difficult than doing things on my own. I am often hesitant to work on projects or ideas that are meaningful to me for fear of losing control. In this situation, I have been pleasantly surprised at how natural and easy collaborating has been. Tracy, Karen and I have shared goals as well as varying priorities. Knowing that other people share my enthusiasm for this idea is wonderful. But working with people who are willing to expend time and effort in order to make the idea a reality is more than I could have hoped for. If I hadn't spoken with friends and colleagues about my idea, I would never have gained such strong supporters and collaborators. When an idea is locked up inside my brain, it's impossible to judge how "good" of an idea it is. Proposing an idea to others and allowing them to climb on board has been freeing and enlightening. It has given me the confidence to see this proposed action through until it becomes a real, living project. We have submitted a grant for funding, but have agreed that we will move forward with organizing an exhibition opportunity for art teachers regardless of funding. What began as a "small" idea has already grown into something bigger. It's exciting.

Bibliography

-Anderson, Andrea (2005). *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume XI, Number 2, Summer 2005, Issue Topic: Evaluation Methodology, Ask the Expert, An Introduction to Theory of Change.

-Bare, John (2005). *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume XI, Number 2, Summer 2005, Issue Topic: Evaluation Methodology Promising Practices, Evaluation and the Sacred Bundle.

- Schmuck, R. (1997). *Practical Action Research for Change*. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight.

Art faculty exhibits:

-Arlington Public Schools (David Ardito), 2010

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/arlington/features/x2048880689/Arlington-art-teachers-work-featured-in-Town-Hall-exhibit>

-Chelmsford, MA,

http://www.chelmsfordlibrary.org/programs/exhibits/art_teachers.html

-Palm Beach County, FL

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/county-art-teachers-show-their-creative-sides-at-1106678.html>

-Pittsburgh, PA

http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/valleynewsdispatch/s_661670.html

-Riverside CA

http://www.pe.com/localnews/riverside/stories/PE_News_Local_Wartshow22.2547234.html

REGISTRATION FORM

Beyond the Classroom: An Exhibition of Original Works by South Shore Art Educators

Artist's Name _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____

Artist's Employer _____

Submissions are limited to one piece per artist

Title of Work _____

Medium _____

*Size (see guidelines for restrictions) _____

Year _____ **Price _____ Check here if *Not For Sale* (NFS) _____

Your responses to the following questions will be used to collect data and will remain anonymous:

-Grade levels taught (circle): **preK-K 1-4 5-8 9-12 higher ed. adult ed.**

-How many years have you taught art? (circle): **1-3 4-9 10-15 15-24 25 +**

-Why are you choosing to participate in this exhibit? (circle):

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| professional development | artistic development | share my work publicly |
| just for fun | sell/promote my work | something to do this summer |
| connect with other art teachers | stay current in my field | try something different |

By signing, I indicate that I have read and agree to the General Terms, Conditions, & Guidelines for the *Beyond the Classroom* exhibit.

Signature of the artist

date

Please mail this completed and signed form by August 10, 2011, to:

Beyond the Classroom
c/o Friends of the John Curtis Free Library
534 Hanover Street
Hanover, MA 02339
attn: Tracy Marchetti

General Terms, Conditions, & Guidelines

Beyond the Classroom: An Exhibit of Original Works by South Shore Art Educators
at the John Curtis Free Library, Hanover, MA
August 30, 2011- September 30, 2011
Opening Reception: Tuesday, August 30, 2011, 6-8p.m.

ELIGIBILITY: Open to all art educators living or teaching in the South Shore. One piece of original artwork per artist. All work must be original and completed within the last 3 years.

AWARD: Four honor awards will be given: one for “Best in Show” and 3 “Judges Choice.” No cash awards.

PANEL of GUEST JUDGES: A panel of 3 judges will select 4 works to receive honor awards. The panel includes Kathy Soles, Artist, Lisa Doyle-Bates, Gallery/Business Owner, and Dave Petty, Business/Gallery owner.

ENTRY PROCEDURE: Registrations must be mailed by August 10, 2011. Some late registrations may be accepted based on available space. There are no entry fees. It is not necessary to send images with the registration. All entries will be accepted. One entry per artist.

Artwork must be dropped off on Wednesday, August 24, 2011. Each piece of work must include the artist’s full name clearly attached to/written on the back of the work. All work must be received ready for installation. Please take proper precautions in supporting your work for display. All framed work must be securely framed and wired, ready for hanging. All unframed, 2-dimensional work must also be properly prepared for hanging; clamped glass or sawtooth hooks are not considered acceptable preparations for hanging.

*The maximum height of 2D work is 60 inches; maximum width for 2D work is 44 inches. Sculpture and 3-dimensional work must be accompanied by a sturdy pedestal. Video/film artists are responsible for providing and delivering their own equipment including monitors/screens.

Pick up of work is September 30, 2011. The Library accepts no responsibility for work not retrieved by the deadline. After 30 days the Library may discard the work.

SALES: **The John Curtis Free Library will charge a commission of 15% on all work sold through the exhibition. Work need not be for sale.

LIABILITY: Great care will be taken with all artwork, but artists are responsible for insuring their own pieces as well as equipment. The John Curtis Free Library, and any volunteers or staff involved in handling the work, will not be responsible for any loss or damage to any artwork or equipment.