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AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
A NOVICE ITINERANT ART TEACHER

by

KIMBERLY ANNE MUHLHEIM

Under the Direction of Dr. Melody Milbrandt

ABSTRACT

This study is an auto-ethnographic examination of reflections of a novice itinerant art teacher. The teacher taught at four schools within her first two years of teaching. Reflections of her first two years are recorded, then analyzed, and suggestions for other novice itinerant teachers are provided.

INDEX WORDS: Art education, Auto-ethnographic, Itinerant, Novice teacher, Teacher induction, Reflection, Organization, Communication, Flexibility

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A NOVICE ITINERANT ART TEACHER

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KIMBERLY ANNE MUHLHEIM

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art Education

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

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DEDICATION

To Debra H. Price and Bruce W. Muhlheim, my mom and dad. Thanks for supporting when I finally decided what I wanted to be when I grew up. It took a while, but it was totally worth it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family, friends, and instructors for their encouragement and assistance. I would also like to thank all of the wonderful art teachers I have had the privilege to work with and learn from.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Terms of the Study

In the Fulton County, Georgia School System, an elementary itinerant art teacher is one who teaches in several different schools based on the population of each school. Itinerants are full time employees of the school system, but on a part time basis within each individual school. This arrangement is beneficial to the schools because they can ensure that students are getting the art education both required and needed, and they are able to fill part time positions with fewer employees. After assessing the need for the district, itinerant teachers are assigned a tentative schedule at the end of the school year for the following year. Based on the actual enrollment numbers, this schedule is subject to change up to ten days into the school year. Principals or Assistant Principals are the chief decision makers in deciding the daily schedule for the itinerants after the school locations become official.

The school that a teacher spends the most time at is considered the home school and they teacher fulfills the duties and obligations to this school only, for example, joining committees, attending PTA meetings or professional development workshops, before or after school duties, etc. If a teacher is split equally between two schools, one school assumes the role of the home school. Currently in Fulton County, itinerant teachers divide their time between up to four schools.

Need for the Study

As an itinerant teacher I have worked in four schools in my two years of teaching. I have spent between one day and three days a week at various schools. My first year of teaching my time was divided between three schools, split three days –Monday, Wednesday, and Friday- at one, which was my home school, Tuesdays at another school, and Thursdays at the third. Now in my second year of both teaching and teaching as an itinerant, I spend three days a week- Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday- at a new home school, and Thursday and Friday at my old home school. Each school has provided a different atmosphere and environment. I find that I usually get whatever classroom space, if any, is available after all other classes have been placed with no regard to whether or not it would make an effective art room. I have had my own room in three schools, but only one had a sink and adequate storage. In the fourth school I traveled from room to room using a grocery cart.

Working at four schools in two years has its pros and cons. In many elementary schools, there is only one art teacher. I am never the only art teacher in a school and I have been lucky to work with people who are willing to collaborate on lesson plans and projects. I have been able to grow and learn as a fledgling art teacher in ways and with a speed that I don't think I could have had I been the only art teacher in my school. My experience with different administrations, school and room floor plans has helped me to become more resourceful, flexible, and quick on my feet. Conversely, I find that the less time I spend at a particular school during a week the more difficult it is to connect with colleagues and students, and I have a greater feeling of being an outsider in the school.

culture. As an itinerant art teacher the budget isn't always officially mine. In most cases, I've had to do with whatever the full time art teacher ordered, which prevents me from doing the same projects in the same way in each school. I have felt invisible and overlooked, and at times treated like an assistant.

While there is a network of itinerant teachers in Fulton County to share ideas about what works and what doesn't, there is very little information or research written specifically for art teachers, and what is available pertains primarily to art on a cart, in which the art teacher does not have a designated room and travels from classroom to classroom with his or her art supplies on a rolling cart. There is little advice on subjects like sharing and ordering materials with the home teacher, advocating for yourself with the administration, making yourself visible, organizing different projects for different schools during the same week, substituting materials, and so on.

Purpose of the Study

Although there are limited sources of related study on itinerant teaching, there are many helpful suggestions written about to organize and maintain an art cart, which can also be very helpful in an art classroom with no sink. A list of Dos and Don'ts is a great jumping off point for the itinerant teacher, but does not address some of the intricacies involved in traveling from school to school. Through my own experience as an itinerant art teacher and the experiences of my peers, I will create a list of suggestions for the new itinerant art teacher, a kind of what I wish I had known guide. My thesis will be composed of both personal narratives and the ideas of other itinerant art teachers that I have worked with. I will analyze the positive and negative aspects of the experiences and

give suggestions on what worked well, what failed, and what I could have done better. It is my hope that in my self-reflection I will not only be creating a helpful guide for others, but gaining knowledge about my own teaching style, who I am, and who I want to become as an educator.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Challenges Facing New Teachers

Teaching can be extremely rewarding, but also very demanding. Teacher induction is defined as the first three years of and can have a huge impact on a teacher's entire career (Fry, 2007). First-year teachers face challenges in transitioning from student to teacher, creating procedures and routines for themselves and their students, and fitting in to their work environment. Teachers need to be adept at communicating with both adults and children. They need to be organized, patient, and able to make split second decisions specific to individual situations throughout the day. While some new teachers find it fairly simple to adjust to their first year, many find themselves much less prepared than they had expected to be. Teachers may find themselves taking their challenges, and sometimes failures, personally. One first-year teacher expressed that her difficult first year of teaching often left her feeling incapable and unskilled (Babinski & Rogers, 2002).

In a study of four first-year teachers, Fry (2007) found that at the beginning of the school year, 10-12 hour workdays were common. However, the attitude about the long hours was generally positive. Teachers reported that after a few months they prioritized better and classroom procedures and routines started to fall into place and click with the students. They looked forward to their second year when they would go into the school year with many of their plans already prepared.

New teachers do not only face challenges with students inside of the classroom, but also outside of the classroom with colleagues. Determining a school's culture and climate and how to fit in are also an important part of a successful induction period.

Careful observation of how staff, parents, and students, interact with one another is an important way for new teachers to learn what is acceptable and expected of them.

According to Johnson (2002) new teachers should try to be outgoing, friendly, and positive, and seek help when they need it. Building a strong rapport with administration and other teachers is critical to professional success (Jonson, 2002). For example, when one novice teacher found herself left out of the group of veteran teachers in her grade level she initially took it personally. Eventually she adopted a more practical approach, realizing that like in any job, a person needs to get along with co-workers, but does not need to be best friends with them (Fry, 2007).

Schools often promote privacy and autonomy, meaning that teachers have the power to control what goes on in their classrooms and make day-to-day teaching decisions. Although this is typical of many schools, it does not necessarily mean that it is a positive aspect of education (Jonson, 2002). Autonomy can lead to a feeling of isolation, especially for new teachers. Teachers may feel that it is the social norm to talk about what goes on outside of the classroom like the weather, the news, or entertainment, or to complain about school or district policies or happenings. When it comes to what or how a subject is being taught inside the classroom, teachers tend to be very private and do not often seek outside help for classroom problems (Babinski & Rogers, 2002). This can lead to feelings of isolation. New teachers often feel vulnerable, and are concerned with looking capable to the observer. New teachers may feel as if they have no help, but are afraid to ask for help for fear of being perceived as incompetent (Wong, 2005). A subject in Fry's study (2007) found herself discouraged by her lack of relationships with other teachers because she was working through her lunch to get work done in her

classroom. “I really enjoy teaching and I really enjoy the kids, but it’s all the other stuff that gets me down... I wonder if it’s because I’ve kind of isolated myself... I wonder if I’ve hurt my relationships with the other teachers” (p. 223).

Common forms of support for new teachers during their induction years come in the form of mentoring, communication with an administrator or department chair, common planning time with other teachers in their content area, or new teacher meetings. While some teachers receive this kind of support, many new teachers receive no support at all. In an analysis of 52,000 elementary and secondary teachers using data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey, the attrition rates for new teachers who received no support was 40% (Fry, 2007). Mentoring is common, though many times new teachers are assigned mentors by administration rather than finding a mentor they with whom naturally bond. Mentoring can be very beneficial to a new teacher in terms of helping them socialize and fit in to a school’s culture, refining teaching skills, and providing support in difficult situations (Danielson, 2002). Because best results of a mentoring experience are based on developing a good mentor/mentee relationship, the results cannot be guaranteed by using a random assignment system. Mentors should be eager and caring, and experienced in the grade level or content area of their mentee (Fry, 2007). It cannot be assumed that a good veteran teacher will automatically make for a good mentor. A good mentor needs professional development to become so. A good mentor can anticipate and mentee’s needs, know what to observe and provide feedback, communicate effectively, reflect on their own teaching and foster reflection in a novice teacher (Danielson, 2002).

New teachers are expected to come into the field and perform at the same level as veteran teachers. This expectation is unheard of in other professions. Teachers often move quickly from the fantasy stage or the survival stage (Babinski & Rogers, 2002). Teachers may abandon the innovative theories they studied in their preparation and adopt the traditional methods of their veteran peers (Fry, 2007). Many examinations of the professional growth of teachers refer to Fuller's three-stage sequence, the Technical Developmental Perspective. In the first stage, teachers are concerned with controlling their class and receiving positive evaluations from their administration. Teacher's anxieties about classroom management and behavior may override their ability to reflect on the content they are teaching. When teachers feel comfortable in this first phase of teaching, they will move on to thinking about implementing what they learning in their coursework and student teaching experiences. Finally, they will become attuned to their students interests and learning. Novice teachers are at first more concerned with the technical aspects of teaching, then with the content-related aspects (Kowalchuk, 1999).

Reflection is an important tool in learning to teach. When a teacher reflects on his or her experiences, they can analyze what did or did not work in a particular situation, and learn from mistakes or triumphs. Reflecting is most often done when teachers encounter unfamiliar situations, but teachers should also reflect on routine situations as well (Kowalchuck, 1999). Effective teachers are able to reflect and consider multiple courses of action. Danielson (2002) cites Schon's definitions of several kinds of reflective behaviors. The ability to respond to an event in the classroom automatically and skillfully is called "knowing in action" (p. 184). "Reflection in action"(p. 184) is when teachers consider alternatives on the spot and are able to change course as needed.

“Reflection on action”(p. 184) happens after teaching. A teacher reflects on what went well and what needs to be changed. Reflection on action leads to a fourth stage called “reflections for action” (p. 184) in which a teacher analyses and adjusts instruction based on the needs of his or her students and plans future lessons accordingly. All of these stages of reflecting are necessary for novice and veteran teachers, alike, and facilitates professional growth by helping teachers to recognize their strengths and weaknesses (Danielson, 2002).

Little has been studied in the way of the professional development of new art teachers. Student teaching is considered to be the high point in an art teacher’s collegiate training. Reflections of student teachers on routine and non-routine situations showed that being organized was a top priority. Organization helped student teachers to feel more prepared and in control in unfamiliar situations. Student teachers also cited the need to know more about their students’ mannerisms to know when an intervention with a student might be needed. Art teachers seemed excited about learning more about their content and opportunities for professional growth (Kowalchuck, 1999).

Itinerant Teachers

Itinerant teaching is utilized by school systems in special subject areas such as visual art, music, and physical education as well as Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and in teaching of the deaf and visually impaired. Though the subjects may seem very different, many of the same themes arise for the traveling teacher. Correa-Torres & Howell address five factors affecting itinerant teachers of the visually impaired, which could correlate to issues that face itinerant art teachers as well. Itinerant teachers work with a wide range of ages, they have little input in scheduling, they must be able to adapt

quickly, they must be skilled in collaborating, and they sometimes experience feelings of isolation (2004).

The most common themes throughout the literature, regardless of the particular subject taught, are of organization, flexibility, and communication. Putting into place rules and procedures at the beginning of the school year and setting up materials in advance of class time were both important organizational strategies within the classroom setting, just as it is important to the non-itinerant teacher as well (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008). What the literature does not address is the experience of implementing these rules and procedures in different physical settings, or adapting them to the varying behavioral policies and reward/ consequence systems of each individual school.

Itinerant teachers must sometimes carry equipment or materials from school to school. If a school has limited equipment, conflicts can arise with using and sharing the available resources among all teachers. Students at different schools may have access to different materials and some itinerants try to coordinate similar activities at each of their schools to stay more organized (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008). Even when student projects are aligned with the most superior organizational skills, not being aware of field days, field trips, assemblies, or other non-teaching-activities at different schools could throw a wrench into the itinerant teacher's schedule (Hyde & Power, 2004). Itinerant teachers must learn to be extremely flexible and adopt an attitude that adapting to the unexpected is part of the job. One itinerant teacher for the visual impaired expressed this sense of flexibility saying "You work so hard to get your schedule put together, but you know it's all going to fly out the window sometimes" (Correa- Torres & Howell, 2004, p. 427). Class schedules at schools can vary because of the starting times of classes, the sequence

of grade levels throughout the day, and the placement times of planning periods and lunch periods. I could not find any research or literature that addresses whether or not any of these factors affect itinerant teachers.

Excellent communication and collaboration skills are important to have as an itinerant teacher. Itinerants must deal with many different school personnel in different settings and must be attuned to the different climate in each setting. Itinerants may feel the need to adjust their attitudes depending on their location, which can be difficult (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004). Itinerants who have an “ethic of personal accountability” (Klein & Harris, 2004 p. 156) and approach other teachers with the attitude of building “a respectful and caring relationship” (Klein & Harris, 2004 p. 156) will create a better collaborative environment in any work setting. In order to effectively serve the needs of students, art teachers and classroom teachers must find a way to communicate, support, and encourage each other. Classroom teachers sometimes incorporate art activities into their lessons as a way to engage the students. If good communication does not exist between the art teacher and the classroom teacher, teachers may not see art as a necessary part of their curriculum (Purnell, 2005). Communication is a two way street and having respect for a fellow teacher’s views is likely to be an effective approach to working together (Klein & Harris, 2004).

Specialist teachers must also be vigilant in keeping their administration informed and on board with their respective programs. Jansen& McGhee (2006) found that when media specialists shared a philosophy with and were supported by their administrations, extraordinary results were shown in the quality of media education available.

A feeling of isolation can be a problem for itinerant teachers who may not feel like they have a home in any school that they visit. To combat these feelings, it is important for itinerants to build relationships with other professionals. Sometimes these relationships are built over a period of years. One itinerant teacher noted that developing relationships with other itinerant teachers regardless of location was important to combating loneliness or isolation, but also very important in sharing ideas, resources, and solutions so that “you don’t get stuck in a rut” (Correa- Torres & Howell, 2004, p. 428). Having that kind of outreach with teachers who share in the same kinds of triumphs and frustrations is important for the “professional well-being of teachers who generally work alone”(Correa- Torres & Howell, 2004, p. 428). A once a week meeting of itinerant Adapted Physical Education teachers was cited by participants as helpful in allowing them to discuss issues and ideas about organization, time and classroom management, equipment use, and other strategies. Teachers would also benefit from the advice of more experienced teachers and mentors (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008).

In a study of itinerant teachers for the deaf and hearing impaired, twenty seven percent of teachers stated that they became itinerant teachers because it was the only job available at the time. When asked if they would like to remain an itinerant or return to a single school, two thirds of the teachers said they would rather remain an itinerant because they like the feeling of independence and being one’s own boss. Those who would prefer teaching in a single school cited the strain of traveling and the “difficulty in finding a sense of achievement and ‘closure’ on tasks- the ‘rewards’ of seeing the student achieve progress...” (Hyde & Power, 2004, p. 58).

Above all, the itinerant teacher sees students and teaching as the most important part of the job and must exhibit a sense of self-reliance and independence when performing her duties (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008). When asked what the most enjoyable part of their job was, almost all itinerant teachers expressed the love for their students. Though the volume and wide range of students they worked with could feel challenging, time spent with students was precious (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004).

There is very little research focused specifically on the concerns of the itinerant art teacher beyond suggestions for maintaining and organizing an art on a cart way of teaching in the event that a dedicated art classroom is unavailable. There are many lists to be found on the web or in field related magazines that address teaching art from a mobile cart, but none go further to address working in multiple locations, building relationships in schools one spends such a limited time in, or scheduling projects between several schools.

As seen in this literary review, itinerants must combat many challenges, including the logistical issues of navigating several schools in a week, feelings of isolation and lack of access to experienced mentors, and schedules that can vary from school to school. Being well organized, having good communication skills with faculty, administration, and other art teachers, and maintaining flexibility, are key principles to being an effective itinerant teacher. Reflection can be a useful tool for novice teachers in analyzing their successes and failures in the classroom and adapting their future plans and teaching strategies in the future.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Analysis

I used auto-ethnography (AE) as a data collection and analysis method. Auto-ethnographies are case studies similar to ethnographies. The difference between AE and ethnography is that in ethnography the researcher is an outsider writing about the experiences or cultures of others, whereas in AE the researcher is the insider, writing about his or her own experiences in his or her own contexts (Duncan, 2004).

AE is a method research in which the writer focuses on his or her own experiences as a topic, writes a personal narrative, then analyzes it to achieve a deeper understanding. The researcher becomes the primary subject of the research. The analysis of the research is based on the interpretation of the writer (Chang, 2008).

I wrote about and reflected on my first two years of teaching, both of which I spent traveling between four different schools as an itinerant teacher. I wrote each memory, reflecting on what was successful and what was not, and then analyzed it in terms of the three characteristics I found consistently in the literature I reviewed: organization, communication, and flexibility. At the end of each chapter I provided a list of suggestions that I feel might be helpful to other novice itinerant teachers. Future implication for this research could include compiling these suggestions into a manual for use by both itinerants themselves and the schools districts in which they serve.

Research Questions

New teachers face similar challenges to one another in their first year or two; developing classroom rules and procedures, figuring out what teaching methods work best, creating a physical flow in classroom, writing and re-writing numerous lesson plans, feeling out the climate of the school and the attitudes of colleagues. There are classroom situations that teachers face on a daily basis that no course in college can truly prepare you for.

Novice teachers who are also itinerant teachers face the same problems as all new teachers, only in multiples. There are few resources for itinerant art teachers to turn to. Through a reflection and analysis of my experiences as an itinerant art teacher in my first two years of teaching, I will explore the successes and failures I have encountered and make suggestions to other itinerants who may one day find themselves in a similar situation.

Research Question 1:

What can be learned from the research on itinerant teaching that would be applicable to assisting novice itinerant art teachers?

Research Question 2:

What can be learned from my first two years of experience as an itinerant art teacher that would be applicable to assisting other novice itinerant art teachers?

Research Question 3:

In what ways might my synthesis of an appropriate body of literature with my professional experiences as an itinerant art teacher serve to provide support to novice itinerant art teachers?

The Subject

Because this thesis is based primarily on my interpretation of own professional experiences, I feel it necessary to give the reader an idea of my background. I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1978. I was an only child. I had a middle-class upbringing. Both of my parents worked and we lived in a comfortable home. My grandparents lived close by and I spent a lot of time with them.

I attended predominantly white, middle class elementary, middle, and high schools. Many of the same students transitioned from school to school with me so I never had the experience of being a new kid. Though I started off as a shy child, by the end of high school I was a member of the Drama Club and Student Government, and held down a part time job at the mall. My high school electives were filled with whatever art classes were available. My art teacher was very influential and played a big part in my teen life. After I graduated high school I attended North Carolina State University, which is also located in Raleigh, where I studied Graphic Design. I had considered becoming a teacher briefly before my father dissuaded me by telling me I would never make any money teaching. I felt that graphic design would be a creative and lucrative career and I would avoid living in poverty and stress like those poor teachers I terrorized in high school.

While I was in college I was active as a member and an officer in a national service fraternity. I enjoyed the feeling of helping people and organizations in need and the camaraderie of my like-minded friends. I believe that this experience played a big role in my decision to later become a teacher.

I graduated from North Carolina State University with a Bachelor of Graphic Design in May of 2000. I received a job offer in Atlanta doing on-air graphics production for a major television network, and moved to the big city in the fall of 2000. I did not love my job, but living in a new city and being independent for the first time in my life was frightening and thrilling. My life as a graphic designer was plagued with disillusionment and job insecurity. I also envied my friends that worked at jobs where they helped people; all I did was try to get people to buy things. After being laid off for the second time in four years, I decided it was time for a change. I realized that I couldn't go back to sitting in a cubical, staring at a computer all day, a slave to the corporate system. I thought back to my time at NCSU and how during my junior year I wanted to scrap the whole graphic design plan and change my major to education. I thought about how my high school art teacher had told me she thought I should become an art teacher. At the time I thought she was trying to set me up for a life of punishment for the good-natured grief I had given her throughout high school, but now I started to think she was on to something. In the spring of 2006, I enrolled in the Master of Art Education program at Georgia State University. Within two years I obtained my teaching certification and began working for Fulton County Schools, with whom I am currently employed. Meanwhile I continue my studies to earn my Masters degree. I feel that becoming a teacher later in life and experiencing a variety of working environments from large

corporate companies to retail to restaurants helped me to transition more easily from being a student to teaching students.

In my two years of teaching I have taught in four different schools, each coming with its own set of challenges in regards to classroom setup, discipline, school atmosphere, and administration. I have had triumphs and failures. I have driven home elated and I have driven home crying. I am still trying to develop a teaching style of my own. I enjoy being a little goofy with my classes, but realize that this approach does not work on all students because they think I am giving them license to be silly and not get their work done. I am trying to find the happy medium. In two years I have learned a lot about my strengths and weaknesses, what worked for me and what I need to change. I have ended each year excited, feeling that I have learned from my experiences and can plan the next year much more smoothly.

Description of Schools

All four of the schools that I worked in were Title I schools located in two small suburbs south of Atlanta. Though all of the schools offer a state funded Pre-K program, I serviced only grades K-5. All schools were predominately composed of African-American students. Teachers were predominately African-American women.

I was lucky to have a room provided for me in three of the four schools I have taught in. In the other school I went into the classroom, carrying my supplies with me on a cart. Each of the rooms had its own set of positive features like great lighting or a sink in the room, as well as detriments, such as being far away from the main art room or having very little storage.

School A

The original building of School A dates to 1975 and two additions to accommodate a growing population. The most recent addition was completed in 2009. The school has over 800 students in Pre-K through fifth grade. Ninety-seven percent of the students are African-American, 1% are Hispanic, and 2% are Multi-racial. Eighty-five percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunches, 9% have disabilities, and there is a 49% mobility rate.

I have taught at School A both of my years teaching. My first year I spent three days a week there, and now in my second year, I spend two day a week there. Of the four schools that I have taught at, I consider my space at School A to be the best planned art room because of the availability of a sink and ample storage.

My room at School A is on the same hall as the main art room. It is two rooms, one slightly larger than the other, connected by an inner door. I use one room as the art room and the other room as my office/ storage space. The main art room has a counter with a sink. It also has two white dry erase boards, one large one that takes up almost the entire right wall and one small one on the left wall. There are also two bulletin boards. One large bulletin board that holds my word wall is over my counter and sink, and the other is small, hold my rules and consequences, and on the same wall as the door. It is set up with six rectangular tables, in two rows of three tables, with four chairs at each table; and one round table that can seat three students. Each of the rectangular tables is labeled with a color: red, green, orange, blue, yellow, and purple. Each table is paired with its complementary color in the other row, and all of the warm colors are in one row, and the cool colors in another row. The round table is simply called the round table.

Other furniture in the main art room includes a bookshelf and two small drying racks. The bookshelf had four shelves. The bottom shelf contains color-coded baskets for each of the tables, which contain glue and scissors. The next shelf up contains bottles of tempera paint, five of each color: white, black, brown, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. If I need additional paint it is stored in the main art room supply closet. The next shelf up holds three cans of paintbrushes, and markers, crayons, and colored pencils in reusable plastic tubs, one for each table. On the top of the shelf are six blue pencil cups, a large plastic container of Sharpie markers, copy paper for sketching and free-drawing, and often some miscellaneous items that kind of accrue over time.

The two drying racks are located in the corner of the room next to the round table. One is about four feet tall and rather thin and has immovable shelves and artwork has to be slid in between the shelves. It comfortably holds 12 x 18 inch artwork. The other is short and squat, about three and a half feet tall with shelves that lift. It comfortably holds 18 x 24 inch artwork or several pieces of art on each shelf. After three quarters of my first year teaching confusing my students and frustrating myself by telling my students to put their artwork on the “small” drying rack, I named each one. The taller of the two is named Dorothy, after my maternal grandmother, and the short rack is named Agnes after my paternal grandmother. Now I can tell my classes “We’re using Agnes today” and they know exactly where to go.

The second room is slightly smaller than the main room. On the back wall is a large bookshelf that goes from floor to ceiling which is three shelves wide and six shelves tall. My first year at School A, I stored each of my class’s artwork in a sturdy banker’s box. Because I am at School A fewer days this year, I only use five shelves and store

construction paper, boxes with yarn, scrap paper, and miscellaneous items. My desk and two file cabinets sit right in front of the bookshelf, and in front of my desk are two round tables. In the corner of the room is another round table. There is also a long table on which sits my paper cutter. There are two three shelf carts in the office/storage room. One is next to the door and one is hidden behind the door. The cart behind the door holds newspaper, magazines, yarn, clay, and glazes. The other cart holds large posters and teacher samples. There is also a three-shelf TV cart next to the door that I roll out to show PowerPoint presentations as the beginning of lessons.

Because the room is on the same hallway as the main art room, it is convenient to move supplies back and forth. I can send students quickly and watch them go down the hallway. I can also easily and quickly send disruptive students to time out outside of my room by sending them to the other art room. Likewise the other art teacher could send her students to me.

School B

School B opened in 1973 and today has just under 560 students in grades Pre-K through 5. Ninety-seven percent of the students are African-American, 1% are Hispanic, and 2% are Multi-racial. Eighty-nine percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunches, 9% have disabilities, and there is a 77% mobility rate.

I spent one day a week my first year teaching at School B. After a brief trial period of team teaching two classes at a time with the other art teacher, I was put out on an art cart. And by art cart, I mean grocery cart. It was metal, with four wheels, a yellow handle. And that little seat that kids can ride in. One day a week, I retrieved the grocery

cart from its place in the kiln room of the main art room. The grocery cart was locked in the kiln room to hide it from the custodian, who took it back the first two weeks I used it.

I had three milk crates, one blue, one black, one red that I... ehem... borrowed from the cafeteria. I created large flat folders out of 18 x 24 paper to keep each class's work separate. I would load up the supplies I needed for my first class, and reload for my second and third class during planning, and reload again for my fourth and fifth classes during my lunchtime. I experimented with loading the milk crates by what each class needed, but ended up organizing them by types of materials; paper in one crate, paint and paintbrushes in another, crayons and markers in another.

My personal storage at School B consisted of three shelves inside of the main art room supply closet. On these shelves I would keep boxes of regularly used and plentiful supplies such as crayons, oil pastels, markers, and watercolors.

My classroom space at School B was as variable as the classrooms I visited. I had five classes: kindergarten, first, second, fourth, and fifth grades.

Using technology, such as showing PowerPoint presentations to introduce lessons, was difficult because of the time it took to connect and disconnect televisions in rooms with my laptop.

Between the grocery cart, classroom spaces, and school layout, School B proved to be the most challenging situation in terms of physical setting that I have encountered in my two years of itinerant teaching.

School C

School C is the most diverse of the four schools with 55% African-American students, 42% Hispanic students, and 3% White and Multi-Racial students. Ninety-two

percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunches, 8% have disabilities, there is a 47% mobility rate, and 30% of students are English language learners.

My one day a week at School C rounded out my schedule for my first year of teaching. Originally there was some confusion about my schedule and I had one class a day with seven students and took over a special education room for those forty-five minutes. Thankfully once the schedule was finalized and classes were added to my load, I was moved to a portable classroom located next to the gym behind the school. My classroom took up one half of the portable, and the Talented and Gifted program class occupied the other side. The trailer was the largest of any of my rooms. It had five rectangular tables that sat four students each and a sixth table on which I kept artwork organized in stacks by class. There was a small cabinet in which I kept drawing, manila, and construction paper. On top of the cabinet I stored plastic containers for water, pencils, erasers, watercolors, paintbrushes and other items. There was a plastic shelving unit next to the cabinet that held glue and paint. There were two desks in the room, one of which went largely unused because one leg was broken. The other sat in the front of the room and I used it my workstation, my supply distribution area, and my demonstration table. There were two large white dry erase boards covering the wall on the right hand side of the classroom, and two large bulletin boards that I used to hang student work. Even though the room was large, one corner of it was taken up by extra desks and file cabinets, which lent a slight feeling of disarray to the space.

I kept commonly used supplies such as crayons, markers, tempera and watercolor paints, pencils and paintbrushes on hand in my room at all times. Any special supplies I would bring down from the main art room. I used a small cart with two removable

baskets to carry my supplies back and forth. There was no sink available so I kept a supply of water for use when painting or using clay in several plastic orange juice containers. There was a pail for dirty water that I dumped out in the afternoons in the grass behind the classroom.

The television in my room was very old and was not able to be hooked up to a computer. It had a VCR and but I only used it twice while I was there, once to play a video about Henri Matisse and once to play a movie as an end of the year treat for my kindergarteners. I primarily used books or print reproductions for visual references.

School D

School D is the newest school I have worked in; it's doors opening for the 2009/2010 school year to just over 850 students. Ninety-six percent of students are African-American, 4% are White or Multi-Racial. Sixty-one percent of students are qualify for free and reduced, 8% have disabilities, there is a 16% mobility rate, and 1% of students are English language learners.

Now in my second year of teaching, I spend three days a week at School D. School D is brand new and my room as a high ceiling, lots of windows and full of natural light, so much so that I often do not have to turn on the fluorescent lights. It juts off of the building into a large grass covered courtyard. The outer wall that looks into the courtyard is made of floor to ceiling windows. I enter each morning through double doors paneled in small windows. There are windows lining the walls looking into the hallway, but I covered them with colorful wrapping paper to prevent my students from being distracted by goings on in the hall. The back of the wrapping paper doubles as a place for my word

wall. Around one side of the room is a double step made of light colored wood. The room is very aesthetically pleasing. Sadly, it's not a great room for art.

The room feels large because of the windows and the high ceilings, but is actually not very big. There are four long tables, which seat two students on each side and one on each end for a total of six. Two of the tables are situated north/south, and the other two east/west. The tables are labeled by color, red, yellow, blue, and green. There is a large kidney table in the front of the room that I use for a desk and as a distribution center for materials. If a student needs to be removed from his or her table for disciplinary reasons, there is room at the kidney table. There is also a single desk facing the wall for the same reason. In the corner of the room farthest from the doors is a metal shelf, a file cabinet, and a traditional teacher's desk with two side drawers. My paper cutter sits on this desk. I store supplies such as paper, paint, extra crayons, and colored pencils along with books about teaching art.

I keep my class' work organized on the wooden steps around the room. I have each teacher's name labeled and taped to the step and each grade level color coded and grouped together. For each project, I try to keep the materials I need with the grade level that is using them. This system works pretty well and keeps what little storage I have somewhat organized. I also keep the boxes of glue and scissors, markers, crayons, scrap paper, magazines, and painting supplies on the wooden steps along with a small library of children's books.

I have a small white dry erase board that I can wheel in and out of my room, but it is low to the ground and hard to erase. I have a tall, double sided drying rack in the corner of the room next to the door. My room does not have a permanent television, but there is

a large flat screen TV on a cart that I can check out from the library. I have had few problems checking it out and use it often to introduce lesson plans with PowerPoint presentations.

There is no sink in the room and I depend on the kindness of the teachers in the classrooms around me for easy access to water for cleaning brushes and paint trays. I keep three milk jugs full of water in my room so that I have water for painting or clay. Students must wash their hands after class when their classroom teacher comes to pick them up.

The room is across the school from the main art room so I try to have any supplies that I know I will use on a regular basis such as drawing paper, newsprint, manila paper, paintbrushes, watercolors, a bottle of each color of tempera paint, crayons, markers, and some construction paper on hand so I will not have to carry as many supplies back and forth. Special supplies such as brayers, ink, clay, or yarn, I leave in the main art room until I need them to save my storage space.

Limitations

The conditions of this research are specific to my experiences, the schools in which I taught, and the people with whom I worked.

CHAPTER 4

REFLECTIONS ON MY ITINERANT EXPERIENCE

Two Years, Four Schools, Seven Stories

As a first year teacher I was told over and over again, the first year is the hardest. They weren't lying. During my first year of teaching I was still taking graduate classes, attending new teacher meetings, new art teacher meetings, new teacher support groups, faculty meetings, and adjusting from the student life back to the working life. Somewhere in the midst of all of it, I found time to write lesson plans, and develop classroom routines and behavior strategies that meshed with my teaching style. All of this would make for a challenging year for any teacher, but I did not have the schedule of just any teacher, I had three schools instead of one.

The knowledge and experience I gained in my first year helped me to breathe easier my second year, when my school load was cut from three to two. My experiences began to feel less sensational, allowing me to really think about what I was successful at and what I could improve on.

The following stories are a few of my experiences from the past two years. Some are positive, some are negative, some are just plain amusing, but all of them have allowed me to reflect on my interactions with my colleagues and my students, my planning and organization, and my growth as a professional and a person. Revisiting each memory allowed me to use "reflection on action" (Danielson, 2002, p184) and identify the successful and unsuccessful aspects of each experience. An effective teacher needs to be organized, needs to effectively communicate expectations to students and collaborate with colleagues (Wong, 2005). An itinerant teacher also needs to be flexible and adapt

quickly because of ever changing school schedules (Hyde & Power, 2004). This is especially important for itinerant teachers as many times the itinerant is carrying teaching materials around from school to school (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008) and adjust their own attitudes depending on the climate of the school (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004). After each story I have analyzed the use of and need for organization, communication, and flexibility and put together a list of suggestions for novice itinerant teachers based on what worked or did not work for me.

The First Day(s) of School

I stood in the front of the classroom staring at eighteen pairs of eyes that were staring right back at me. I had met them at the door, asked for a straight and silent line, and ushered these five and six year olds into my classroom, reminding them that we enter the classroom quietly and sit properly in our seats until the teacher is ready to begin. The teacher. Oh! That's me!

I was assigned to three predominately African-American, Title I schools. I spent the first week in training with the other new teachers, learning how to look up information on the system website, how to check my email, school rules and procedures. My training was solely at my home school, the school I was going to spend the most time in. I spent hours deciding how to set up my room, where to put tables, how to store materials and projects in progress. What seating arrangement would have the best flow around the room? Would all of my students be able to see from all angles? Should I color code the tables or number them? What were my official rules? I tried to sort and use all of the knowledge from school and student teaching that was flowing through me. I bought

several books on classroom management, survival strategies for elementary art teachers, lesson planning, inspiration and motivation, pretty much anything having to do with being a first year teacher. I reread “The First Days of School” by Harry Wong and created checklists of what I needed to do. I went over my rules and procedures speech in my head countless times and wrote a cheat sheet on the board so that I wouldn’t skip anything important. I was ready.

And now here I was, standing in front of my first class, a group of kindergarteners who had been in school for about half an hour. A few of them had attended Pre-K down the hall the previous year, but for many of them, like me it was their first day here. Once again my identity changed, as it was not until the moment they walked into my classroom and the door shut behind them that I finally felt I was no longer the student that I had been for the past two years. I had no supervising teacher in the room to glance at for a nod of approval, no safety net in case I stumbled. What if they figured out that I had never done this before and went wild? What if they knew I was more nervous and scared than they were? I took a deep breath and began my speech.

With each class my first day jitters calmed a bit. The younger students spent a lot of time asking what happened if someone was so bad they got sent to the office. Would they get a spanking when they got home? How long would they have to stay in the office? What if you did something so bad that the office had to call the police? Older students asked what happened to the previous two art teachers. Some tested me by playing around or talking and I answered by making them an example for the rest of the class and sending them to time out. I swelled with pride when I overheard one student tell

another, “Man, she don’t play.” This was the reputation I wanted to get around the school.

My next two days were “first” days quite unlike the previous one. I had only visited each school briefly in the pre-planning days. These days were generally filled with professional development and team building activities at my home school. I tried to meet with the two other art teachers I would be working with and succeeded in having lunch with one over the summer, and briefly talking to the other at an art department meeting. I did not go to the schools until I was scheduled to teach the first week, after students had arrived. Each time I walked into a new school, I once again had the first day jitters. There was quite a bit of confusion, as neither school knew quite what to do with me or where to put me. They seemed as unprepared as I was, perhaps even more so. At School B, I worked in the room with the home teacher, and our classes were sometimes doubled up. At School C, I did not have any classes and spent most of the day working on lesson plans or helping the home teacher organize.

I truly felt that I experienced what a brand new teacher might go through on her first day several times that year. I was finally relocated to a portable classroom at School C and given a firm class schedule, but that was two weeks into the school year. Around the same time I started teaching at School B in classrooms on a cart, but with an ever-changing schedule. Meanwhile, my well thought out classroom layout and behavior plans at School A were moving along relatively smoothly, with minor adjustments here and there, progressing at what seemed to be the same pace as most of my friends in single school assignments.

Analysis

I left School A feeling satisfied but exhausted, overwhelmed but proud. All in all, I felt that it had been a successful day. I was the teacher. I was an adult. And of course, I immediately called my mommy to let her know how my big day was. That night I went to bed knowing that I would have two more first days at my other two schools, but unlike today, it would only be the first day for me. What I had gained in that first day experience, however, gave me the confidence to approach my next set of students knowing I had the skills necessary to create more successful days like my first.

Organization is a major factor for any teacher, novice or veteran, on the first day of school (Wong, 2005). I felt very organized for my first day at School A because I had spent a lot of time developing my classroom procedures and an outline for what I was going to say to my students. I wrote a list on the board that I could refer to, to ensure that I was telling each class exactly the same thing and not leaving anything out. My rules were not set in stone, and were adjusted over time, but for that first day I knew exactly what I wanted to say and was able to adequately convey to my students what my expectations of them were. My first day at School A was nerve-wracking and a little scary, but also successful because of all of the forethought I put into it.

I was unprepared for my first days at School B and School C. I had not visited the school, introduced myself to the administration, or seen my classroom, or lack of classroom. I only vaguely knew the art teachers I would be working with, as opposed to working closely with the art teacher at School A. The brief amount of time I spent talking with the teacher from School B may better have been spent discussing our classroom

management plans than our lesson plans. My lack of preparedness made the first days at these schools feel hectic and much less successful.

I also felt more organized at the school in which I had established communication with the other art teacher. I knew the main art teacher at my home school from my college art education program. We went through our student teaching semester together and developed a great friendship. We had, and continue to have, great professional communication. We worked together in developing layouts of our rooms and talked about how we planned to introduce our rules and procedure to our students. I had very little communication with the other two teachers I worked with that year prior to the first day I would be at their school. More communication may have made me feel more at ease. I could have also found out more about the school from them.

An itinerant teacher must always maintain flexibility (Hyde & Power, 2004). It is virtually impossible to teach the exact same lesson each day, especially at a different school in a different setting. This is true from the first day to the last day of the school year. Even with the most well thought out, well-communicated plans, something will need to be changed.

Suggestions for the Itinerant Teacher

- Some schools, including three of the schools in which I worked, applied a school wide discipline plan. Having universal discipline strategies can be helpful in maintaining a safe and social environment for students (Sprague et al, 2001). Separate the location based procedures from behavioral procedures. Procedures based on classroom setting will need to be changed for each school, but general classroom rules and behavior should be consistent throughout every school. You

can develop your classroom procedures after you have gotten your room assignment.

- The effective teacher has a well-managed classroom in which students know what is expected of them from day one (Wong, 2005). Create an organized plan for the first day. List what you want to go over on the board so students can follow along. Know that this list may need to be altered some based on the physicality of the classroom.
- Try to get in touch with the main art teacher at each school. Email or call and introduce yourself. Ask about the school, the administration, and what tactics are successful for them in the classroom. Each school will have a different dynamic for both teachers and students. Find out the names of important go-to people; principal, assistant principal, receptionists, bookkeepers, and technical personnel.
- Always remember that no matter how well thought out the plan; it will inevitably need to be changed. Maintaining a positive attitude and a sense of humor will make the potential chaos of your first few days much more bearable.

The Day the Assistant Principal Made Me Cry

Any teacher can expect changes to happen in the beginning weeks of schools. In my county, administrators go by what is called the Ten-Day Count. Ten days, or two weeks, into the school year, they reassess their enrollment numbers and class sizes. Sometimes new classes are formed when more children arrive than the expected enrollment.

As a specials teacher, the ten-day count can dictate a new class being added where you previously had planning time, or students entering or exiting classes as the general

education class sizes are adjusted. A wise art teacher knows you never begin any in-depth projects before the third week of school as students and schedules are still being moved around. I personally spend the first week going over rules and procedures with every class, and the second week talking about, making, and decorating sketchbooks.

For an itinerant, the ten-day count can dictate where you are placed. Since the need for the itinerant art teacher is based on the populations and number of classrooms in a school, an itinerant may be moved around based on enrollment. A school may have thought they would need an itinerant for three days, but if enrollment was lower than expected, they may only need a teacher for two days, and the teacher gets moved to another school for the extra day. In the two years that I have been teaching, I have never been moved to another school after the ten-day count, but it has been a close call both years.

All of this being said, a teacher can reasonably expect that by the third week of school the schedule should be somewhat stable, and by the fourth week it is pretty stable barring assemblies, testing schedules, and field days. So imagine my surprise when I would arrive at School B each week to find out that I was now teaching a completely new group of students.

The home teacher at School B and I originally tried to co-teach. We were both new to this school, and we were told that the home art teacher and the itinerant art teacher co-taught the year before. Co-teaching involves two teachers planning and teaching together in the same environment and is sometimes used as an inclusion tool for special education students in the general classroom. Teachers plan and teach together (Duchart, Marlow, Inman, Christensen & Reeves, 1999). In our case, it would have involved our

two classes sitting together in the art room and both teachers working together to teach them. In the instances I have heard of it working in an art room; one teacher might take the teaching role in introducing the lesson and demonstrating the project, while the other teacher organizes and passes out materials. The teachers might switch roles, especially if one teacher has a deeper knowledge or expertise in a certain medium or with a particular grade level. There has to be a lot of communication between the teachers about classroom management, discipline, lesson planning, and organization.

We soon found out that team teaching was not going to work for us. Our class sizes were too large and it was overwhelming for us to have fifty students in the art room. Many of the students had disciplinary issues that were exacerbated when put in close quarters with so many of their peers. She was still setting up her room and the location of supplies was ever changing. Our teaching styles did not mesh. Our communication was lousy. I was frustrated and annoyed when things did not go my way. I felt uncomfortable, like an unwanted guest in someone else's house.

As expected in those first two weeks the schedule was still changing. Each week it seemed like there was a different class coming at a different time. One week we had one kindergarten class, the next week we had two completely different classes and the original class now came to art on Fridays. We may have two third grade classes the first week, and one and a half classes the second. It was frustrating when trying to establish that certain classes might have two art teachers. Few students had any idea who I was. School B was also testing out a method of sending 4th and 5th grade students to art, music and PE-divided by gender, which also became very confusing. When I talked to other art teachers about the scheduling difficulties, they told me it was not unusual for so many

changes to be made in the first two weeks of schools, so I figured I should grin and bear it.

By the fourth week I moved out of the room and onto the cart, which brought yet another schedule change. Now I had my own classes and I was to teach them in their classrooms, but because the administration did not want to upset classroom teachers by telling them they had to accept me, they left it up to the teachers themselves to decide who wanted me to come into their room during what would be their planning time. Two teachers were actually very supportive, or at least indifferent and welcomed me. The other grudgingly accepted me. So now I had Kindergarten, first, and second grade classes, all of whom I had never seen before. I began by going over rules and procedures with the students. The problem was, even I didn't know my procedures since being on the cart was completely new to me, and the students corrected me on my rules, feeling that the rules in their regular classroom superseded mine. By this time I still had not been assigned my own fourth or fifth grade class so I would go into the main art room and either work on my plans or assist the other teacher. We were no longer team teaching in my mind, this was her classroom and if she needed me to do something I would help her out, but if not, I laid low.

By the fifth and sixth week of school the schedule was still changing. One week I had a third grade, the next week I didn't. One week I was in one kindergarten room, then next week I wasn't. I received the information via email on Monday afternoon about my schedule on Tuesday. Planning was virtually impossible. How was I supposed to start a project with a class if I had no idea if I would be teaching them the next week? On top of that, how was I going to adapt the lessons that I was teaching in my own home school to

the classroom conditions? How would I organize my cart? How would I establish my authority as the teacher, when the classroom teacher was still in the room working and the student automatically went to her with questions? There was a wealth of information online, but between new teacher meetings, new art teacher meetings, and writing lesson plans, when would I have time to look at it? I wasn't able to stay late at School B because I was required by the administration at School A, my home school, to attend faculty meetings on Tuesday afternoons which meant I had to pack up and drive there right after dismissal. I had so much to deal with just being a first year teacher and now this! The inhumanity! The injustice! This was not what I signed up for! My attitude and motivation at this school was sinking fast.

I emailed the arts coordinator about the situation and she suggested that I speak with the person in charge of the schedule about my concerns. I should create a list of reasons why this inconsistency was unfair and shorted the students at the school of a good, solid art education. The students deserved to have a quality art experience and a prepared teacher, neither of which they were able to get when their unprepared teacher wasn't able learn their names, much less to even begin a project. I prepared a list of reasons that I felt emphasized how all of this confusion was hurting the students of the school. No administrator would want to do something that hurt the school, right?

The assistant principal was the man in charge of the schedule and I arranged a meeting with him to speak of my concerns. I sat down on the small folding chair in his office, confident in my reasoning, sure that this man would be won over by my well thought out argument. I could not have been more wrong.

I had gotten few words out of my mouth before I was completely shut down. A booming deep voice informed me that he was not going to force any teachers to be put out of their own rooms so that their class could have art. Furthermore, this was a school with an 82% transition rate and students were constantly moving in and out of classrooms. The fourth and fifth grade schedules had to be adjusted based on the number of students that were allowed in the gym and they were still figuring that out. In a few short sentences this tall, imposing, deep voiced man, had negated any complaint I ever had. He might as well have said, “deal with it” and slammed his door in my face. He chastised me for even thinking to complain and made me feel small and incompetent. I never even had a chance to explain my brilliant arguments! I knew what it must have been like for students sitting in this man’s office, receiving a lecture for their wrongs. I was upset and embarrassed. Even though there was no way I could have known that this would be the outcome of our conversation, I felt stupid for even trying to talk to this man.

The schedule continued to change throughout the year. I gained a fourth grade class after the gender divided class experiment failed miserably. My kindergarten teacher decided that after Winter Break she no longer wanted to have art in her room so I gained a new kindergarten class in the middle of the year. I was informed that five fifth grade students who were too much of a behavior problem to remain with their own class in art were now my responsibility. I was again frustrated and annoyed, but now I knew better than to voice my concerns or opinions. I wanted to approach these situations with gusto, prove that I could make lemons out of lemonade, but my heart wasn’t in it. I felt let down by an administration that barely knew whom I was. I was a blip on their screen in the grand scheme of their school.

Analysis

As a new teacher, I left college with high hopes of making a difference and acting on the behalf of my students. I thought that everyone, in the interest of the children, would be willing to sit down for a rational, adult-to-adult discussion about the pros and cons of decisions being made. Now some kind of virginal, naïve bubble had burst. I avoided the assistant principal when arriving at school. I used to walk in the front door and give him a hearty hello in the morning, but I began slinking into the back of the building. If I saw him in the hall I walked past quickly, my head lowered.

A lack of organization on the part of the school was the primary reason I decided to discuss my class schedule with the assistant principal. I had little idea what to expect each Tuesday when I showed up. If I did get any information, it was on Monday afternoon, which did not leave me enough time to get my lessons together. Being a new teacher, I did not have a stockpile of one-day projects to do with classes that I might not see again the next week. The school was even more disorganized than I was.

This is an instance of communication just not working. I did not feel that I was able to voice my concerns via the home teacher because she was also new, struggling, and had her own problems. I did not want to add to these, but I also did not trust her to advocate on my behalf. After trying to indirectly voice my concerns through her with no success, I decided to go to the source. I do not think I could have planned what I was going to say to the assistant principal more thoroughly. I felt that I was going into our meeting with a valid argument. I did not expect for our conversation to be so one sided or to for him to be so closed to my concerns.

I do think I took what he said too personally. Because the thought had not occurred to me that he could possibly disagree with my brilliant argument that highlighted the benefits to his students, his negativity took me completely by surprise. While I think frustration and disappointment would have been natural reactions, I let this one incident make me skittish for the rest of the year, trying to avoid the man all together, and letting it shape the way I felt about the school, and to some degree it's students. It was difficult to maintain a positive attitude and I was grateful that I only had to go there once a week. I have often wondered if my sour attitude made the other art teacher uncomfortable and I regret that it may have.

Suggestions for the Itinerant Teacher

- Always keep a professional attitude when speaking with members of administration about concerns you may have. Be aware that the less time you spend at their schools, the lower on their priority lists you may be. This does not mean that your concerns are not valid, but that you need to take extra care when approaching administration and be able to back up your requests.
- Accept that no matter how well thought out, sometimes your requests will not be met. This is not a personal attack, but a professional decision.
- Do not let the actions of an unfriendly administration color your attitude towards an entire school or its students.
- Be prepared for changes in schedule by amassing a stockpile of one-day lesson plans or sketchbook ideas.

What's That Smell

In my first year of teaching I was still trying to figure out when it was appropriate to let students leave the room. I generally do not let students go to the restroom during my class for several reasons. Older students often use the bathroom as an excuse to get out of doing an assignment that they do not like or find difficult. Some students tend to play around in the restroom when left unsupervised; making a mess, vandalizing property, or just simply taking longer than they need. But the main reason I do not let student go to the bathroom in my class is that we have forty-five minutes a week together and I do not want them to waste any time that they could be working.

At School C, my classroom was in a collection of portable trailers behind the school. The classroom was close to the gym, which had its own restrooms, but students still had to walk outside and into another building. Since I was unable to monitor them walking down a hallway by popping my head out of the door like I could at some of my other schools, my resolve was set that I would not let students leave my room for any reason.

My kindergarten class at School C came right after lunch. Before coming from the cafeteria, the teacher or teacher's assistant was supposed to take the class to the bathroom. Inevitably one of the students would ask to use the restroom and fully believing that the child could wait until the forty-five minutes was over, I would decline to let them go.

There was a tiny little boy in this Kindergarten class. He had the air of a miniature old man, what you might call an old soul. He was always at the back of the line, moving slowly and deliberately. He was extremely polite. When he spoke, he sounded like he had

a perpetual cold, pronouncing his “M” as a “B”, making my name sound like “Biss Ballhime”. He was a little doll that you just wanted to pick up and put in your pocket and take him because he was so precious. He was also the kid that you couldn’t turn your back on for a second because he would be covered in paint or glue. He would come into my class clean and leave covered with whatever material we were using that day. I always felt I should send him home with an apology letter. I finally brought in a t-shirt for him to use for a smock; it only partially worked.

One day about ten minutes into class this precious little boy raises his hand and very politely asks if he can leave to use the restroom. All of the previously stated thoughts went through my head. While I didn’t think this was a child who would play around in the bathroom, I knew he had a tendency to move slowly and would take a long time. The class had just been to lunch, so I knew he had the opportunity to use the bathroom on the way to my class. Here was my classroom, in a portable trailer behind the school, near no one who could keep an eye on this boy as he walked around. At this time I did not know about the bathroom in the gym next door, and I do not know if my student knew about the gym bathroom either. I felt very isolated. I could send him with a bathroom buddy, but then I would be taking another student away from his work and have two small kindergarteners roaming the halls. Would they go to the closest bathroom or would they go all the way across the school to the kindergarten hall? Would I get in trouble for letting one or two students leave my room with no supervision? If I let this student go, will other students suddenly clamor to go to the bathroom as well? I had to say no. True to form, this sweet boy accepted my decision with no question or protest and continued working.

What happened next now seems almost predictable. I circle the room, checking on all of the busy little bees in my classroom. I stop at the little guy's table and talk to one of his tablemates when suddenly I hear a panicked little voice.

"Ms. Muhlheim..."

His eyes were wide, his posture hunched. Not immediately putting two and two together, a reaction that I attribute to being a first year teacher and being childless myself, I did not quite understand what was going on. It only took a second to figure it out. And then the smell hit me. Oh, the smell. I immediately sent him, along with a buddy, to the clinic to call home and get him a change of clothes.

Analysis

I cannot say if my decision to not let him go to the restroom would have been any different if I had been in a setting I was more familiar with, or inside the building surrounded by classrooms and teachers that I knew, but I do know the proximity of my room to the bathroom played a large factor in why I would not let this little boy out of my classroom. Thinking back I don't know if he would have even made it to his destination before his accident happened and he would have been stranded in the hall. At least it happened in my room, and I could send him to the office with a friend. Sometimes you have to grasp at whatever justification you can to make yourself feel a little better.

Each classroom is required to have a map of the campus showing evacuation routes for fire drills or tornado drills. In hindsight, I should have looked over these maps more closely to locate the closest restrooms, and to point them out to all of my students, letting them know that on the rare occasion they were allowed to use the restroom in case

of an emergency, these would be the ones I expected them to go to. This could have been incorporated in my beginning of the year rules and procedures speech.

Rules and procedures are necessary in a classroom (Wong, 2005), but flexibility is always necessary. I was too rigid in my no restroom rule and should have let the little guy go to the bathroom, along with a buddy to keep him on the right path. After this incident I reflected on what was more important: the student finishing his work or the student not having an accident in his pants. The latter was definitely more important.

Suggestions for the Itinerant Teacher

- Take the time to get to know your surroundings, not only locating the closest restrooms but the other art room, cafeteria, office, library, and teacher's rooms. Let students know where you expect them to go when they leave the room. Send them with a timed note.
- Be flexible. Time in art class is precious and important and you want your students to spend as much time working as they can, but sometimes it will be necessary to let a student leave the room. Use your best judgment.
- Trust your students.

Epic Fail

The schedule at School B was constantly changing, especially for fourth and fifth grade. At the beginning of the year, the administration wanted to try a new approach to the way that fourth and fifth grade went to their specials class, so they broke them up by gender. The girls from one class would join the girls from another class and for one all girl class and likewise for the boys. To add to the confusion, the schedule of which

combinations of classes went to specials together and which days kept changing. One week Ms. Smith and Mr. Brown's boys would come to art on Tuesday, then next week it would be Mr. Brown and Ms. Jackson's girls. There was a problem with room capacity in every special, and in the art room students were forced to sit at the end caps of tables and in the extra desks that were usually reserved for time out just to have a seat. The school had hoped to curtail discipline problems with these single gender classes, but the girls still bickered and argued and the boys still fought. By October yet another schedule change was made, and fourth and fifth grade began coming in co-ed homeroom classes again.

By this time I was roaming the halls with my art grocery cart and it was up to the fourth grade teachers to decide who was willing to allow art in their room. Most did not want me because that would mean their room would be occupied during their planning time. One teacher was indifferent and accepted me into her classroom.

Our first day together set the tone for the rest of the year. It was fall and the students were working on paper mache pumpkins in their single gender art classes. That day during lunch and planning, the other art teacher and I cross referenced our class lists and tried to find as many of the pumpkins for this class as we could. It was a difficult task as the pumpkins were at this time only balls of newspaper held together with masking tape. Some of them had legible names, but many did not. I found as many as I could, figuring those that I could not find would quickly make a new ball of paper and catch up with the rest of the class. I loaded the pumpkins into my cart along with newspaper strips, a container of paper mache and several bowls. I had done paper mache the previous summer while teaching camp and it wasn't so hard, why should this be? The

kids would work in groups around a bowl, covering their newspaper ball with the gooey mixture. No problem, right?

Huge problem. First, I was not anticipating the layout of the desks. Each desk sat individually, in rows, not clustered together like in the other classrooms. No problem, we would just have to move the desks into small clusters. Students moved desks. Students also talked, accidentally dumped the contents of the desks onto the floor, argued, and played around. I had not given very good directions, had not been specific enough, and now I had lost control of my class. When the din finally died down and desks were in place, I began passing out pumpkins. Only about half of the class had their pumpkins. Some pumpkins were just lost, and others were the wrong student. Because we needed so much newspaper for students to remake their balls, we ran out of newspaper to use to cover the desks and I had to send a student across the school to the main art room to get more. He came back with a small amount of newspaper and two more pumpkins.

At this point, the room was a disaster. Newspaper crinkled, rustled, sprouted wings and flew across the room. Pumpkins were tossed around like beach balls. Some students looked at me in such a way that I knew they knew I had no idea what I was doing at that exact moment. Other students ignored me completely. I should have stopped, cleaned up, regrouped, and gone over my rules and procedures like I did on the first day with every class. I assumed that because these students had been in school for some time, they would automatically listen and know how I wanted them to behave. I did not take into consideration that this was a new setting for art for them, that I was a new teacher to them, and that we were working with a medium with an inherent potential for

disaster by its sheer messiness factor. I expected us to dive in head first, but there was no water in this metaphorical pool.

So what I did was vastly different than what I should have done. What I did was get out the messy gooey paper mache and let students begin working. Again, a disaster. There was a sticky mess everywhere. Too many students crowded around my too few bowls of goop. They squealed and screamed at the cold, sticky texture on their skin, and again at the peeling and flakiness when it began to dry on their hands. They did not cover their paper strips with a thin layer of paper mache, but instead piled it on with wild abandon. They threw wet balls of newspaper around the room. I spent my time frantically divided between helping students who were trying to do their work and attempting to discipline those who were not.

I looked at the clock and realized it was ten minutes past the end of class and we needed to clean up. The classroom teacher was standing at the door eyeing the spectacle. I flickered the lights and yelled at my students to sit down and close their mouths. Then I did it again since they did not pay attention to me the first time. I told them they had thirty seconds to put their pumpkins back into my grocery cart, and put all of the newspaper in the trash. At this point I was not interested in recycling or saving newspaper that was clean, I was only interested in leaving this classroom as fast as possible. Like all of my instructions to this class, this was also too vague and left room for too many students to be out of their seats. Students ran around the room picking up paper. Two students fell and knocked their heads together. Several students did not help in the clean up effort at all and just went to the sink and began to wash their hands. It was a free for all. I stood silently, watching in amazement, trying to pinpoint where it had all gone

wrong. I apologized profusely to the classroom teacher for the state of her room and for holding up her class. Luckily she had a pretty good sense of humor and told me it was OK. With a flick of the lights and some more yelling, I finally got the students back into their seats. The classroom teacher assured me she would take it from here and instructed the students to move their desks back. The room was still littered with small pieces of wet newspaper. I walked back to the art room with my cart of soppy newspaper balls, defeated, confused as to why these students didn't immediately fall in line and act exactly the way I expected them to. It was October, shouldn't they know how to act by now?

Analysis

Some student undoubtedly knew how they should behave, but I had gone into a room full of kids who had no idea who I was and laid down no groundwork. I did not convey my expectations, rules, and procedures. I spent the rest of the year on the defensive with this class because I did not set up a good offense. I should have treated the first day with this class like I did the first day with all of my other classes. Even though they have been in school for some time. Because of my failure to do so, a negative tone was set for the rest of the year. There were some bumps in the road that were beyond my control such as constantly changing seating arrangements and students missing classes due to band and orchestra, but I know now that if I had conveyed my expectations for behavior on that first day instead of just trying to keep this class on track with the rest of the fourth grade, the year may have been more enjoyable for everyone.

In this instance I failed to be both organized, and an effective communicator. Instead of taking a step back and introducing myself to these students, finding out who they are, and conveying my rules and expectations to them, I chose to rush in and try to

get the project they were working on finished. I should have spent a few minutes during my planning time, which was right before this class, scoping out the layout of the room and getting the class roster. We may have lost a week of actual production time, but we could have potentially had a much more productive year had the basics been covered. Beginning with a drawing project and working our way up to messier media like painting or paper mache may have been a good way to introduce art into the classroom.

Suggestions for Itinerant Teachers

- Do your research! If you must go into the regular classroom to teach, drop in to see what kind of seating arrangements you have.
- Treat every day with a new class like the first day of school, even if it is well into the year. Missing on day of production to go over rules, procedures, and expectations is worth it.
- Set up a regular seating arrangement. Students will always move their desks to the same place in the room and sit in the same groups for art class. This may also help to establish a differentiation between regular class time and art class time.

The Importance of a Backup Plan

One of the pros about my schedule during my first year was that because I was teaching different lessons at each school almost all of the time, there was very little need for me to carry supplies back and forth to schools. Each of the schools had almost everything I needed, and since my lesson at School A was usually completely different from my lesson at School B or School C, I rarely had to worry about forgetting anything.

Since I spent every other day at a different school, if I missed a day of work, it did not greatly affect my schedule.

Now in my second year of teaching, I split my time between two schools. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday I teach at School D. Thursday and Friday I teach at School A. After a year of teaching three different lesson plans to each grade every week during my first year, I was looking forward to keeping my plans consistent throughout the week between the two schools. Other than a not having access to a sink at School D, and some physical aspects of the room, my settings were relatively similar, which made my goal attainable. But with this newfound consistency came the task of loading up my car every Wednesday and Friday afternoons to transport instructional materials and supplies back and forth between schools. My cargo may include my lesson plan notebook, assessments, worksheets, visual references, teacher samples, or posters. I have borrowed supplies that I may only have access to at one school such as certain colors of yarn, glaze, and wallpaper samples, or supplies that may be nicer at one school, like brand new paintbrushes.

The problem is, I forget things. I forget my lunch. I forget to feed my cat in the morning. I forget I have to put gas in my car. I forget where I put my keys. So many times in the bustle of afterschool activities: cleaning up, washing paint trays, loading or unloading the kiln, talking with other teachers, making copies, writing lesson plans, I sometimes forget what I need to pack up and take with me.

Sometimes being unprepared for traveling between schools is completely accidental. One Tuesday I went home not feeling well. I felt run down, stuffed up, achy, coughing. I was the perfect commercial for an over the counter cold remedy. I knew I

needed a day of recovery, lying on the couch and eating chicken noodle soup. I called in sick to work and arranged a sub and spent Wednesday at home. Then Wednesday night a panic hit me. All of my supplies, my lessons, my school laptop, and my assessments, were at School D. I had to be at School A at 7:15 am on Thursday. Theoretically I could get up really early, make the thirty minute commute to School D, get my stuff, the make the additional twenty minute commute between School D and School A. With my track record of running out the door at the last minute, I knew that this was not a realistic option. I needed to prepare in another way.

I thought about what my students were doing. One or two classes were supposed to have a quiz on the artist they were studying. We could review and put the quiz off for another week. That would surely make me their favorite teacher for the day. Several classes were watching PowerPoint presentations and sketching as an introduction to the lesson. Perfect! I had my memory stick in my purse. I left my school issued PC laptop at School D, but still had my own personal Mac laptop at home, which I could take to school with me. I could keep those students on track! After several moments of frantic planning and stressing, I had a plan. I knew my day would be successful and it was. I hate to think what I would have done if I did not have my own computer to rely on. I may have been able to borrow a computer from another teacher or the computer lab. I may have had to put off introducing lessons to those classes until the next week. I may have been able to use more traditional visual aids like books or posters. My back up plan would have been different, but what I learned from this experience was that it is important to have the flexibility to create a backup plan so that no class is wasted.

Analysis

Constant traveling means that organization is an absolute necessity. On the eve of a travel day, it is imperative that you take a little extra time and go through what you need in your head. I have tried to make this a ritual. I turn off my computer and mentally go through my classes for the next day. I look around for my supplies and put them in a bag. At the beginning of the year I used plastic grocery bags, but the PTA gave us nice black duffel bags and I've been using that ever since. I always carry my lesson plan notebook to each school. Then I think about any worksheets or visual aids I may need. Then I think of any supplies I may need. Then I make sure I have taken my memory stick out of my desktop computer and put it in my purse, as I will use it in my laptop at my other school. Going through my mental checklist not only helps me pack up, but also helps me feel prepared and confident for the next day.

But sometimes things get forgotten and a teacher must be flexible. Parts of lesson plans may need to be switched to accommodate materials that are available. I generally start my lessons with a PowerPoint presentation about the artist or culture that the class will be studying, but I have on occasion needed to put that off a week because I did not have my computer or the file that I needed. If I forgot visual aids, I spend a few quick minutes pulling up similar pictures on the internet and printing them out. While being unprepared because of misplaced or forgotten materials is never ideal, a teacher can minimize the damage to her schedule by thinking quickly.

Suggestions for Itinerant Teachers

- Develop a checklist and a routine for packing up to travel from one school to another. Write it down if you need to. Do the same things in the same order every time and this will minimize mishaps.

- Keep a schedule of what you are working on in each class for the entire week.
Vacations and holidays, assemblies, fire drills, etc., can put classes off schedule so what you are doing at one school may not be what you are doing at another.
- Take your computer home each day.

Connecting with the Classroom Teachers

At the beginning of each school year we are required to write a Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP). In a CIP, a teacher lists goals that they would like to achieve over the course of the year and actions that they intend to take to achieve those goals. At the end of the year, the teacher and the administration go over the goals and actions together to see if they were met. This year one of my goals was to increase the faculty's awareness of what students learn in art throughout the school. The previous year I had made it a point to display the county's art standards, a description of the project, and information about the artist with every project I displayed in the hall. I was much more successful at this endeavor at my home school because I spent the most time there. Although I displayed some work at my other schools, I admit that I did not always display information about the project. This year I have been much more diligent about having project description and standards posted at both schools. Since I usually do the same projects, I can easily print out information twice and have it ready to hang.

This year I specifically wanted to work on my communication with the classroom teachers. Though I have come across one or two teachers in the past two years who have been uninterested in my class, most teachers are very receptive and eager to know what their students are doing in art. I have found that when I explain to teachers what we are

doing, teachers become more aware that what we do in art class is a fun, but important way of backing up and reinforcing concepts that students learn in the regular classroom. Through talking with teachers, I also find out more about the strengths or weaknesses of some students. I have found that teachers that I have kept an open dialogue with are more likely to let me pull a child out of his or her regular classroom for a few minutes to finish a project.

I have been particularly successful with keeping a good dialogue going with my first grade teachers this year. I feel that my first grade lesson plans are some of my strongest in creating cross-curricular tie-ins. We have integrated social studies when learning about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Patterns, forms, shapes, and symmetry have reinforced math concepts. Most recently we learned about the life cycle of a plant. We will plant seeds in pinch pots that we made and observe them growing, which ties in to the science curriculum.

Each day when my first grade teachers come to pick up their students I tell them what we have been working on, and often what my plan is for the next week. Sometimes, if there is time, I ask the students to explain to their teacher in their own words what they have been working on, or to tell her about an artist. I encourage the teachers to come in and look at the children's artwork and the kids are very excited to show off what they have created.

This week my frequent interaction with one of my first grade teachers really paid off when I was put into a technology bind. I do not have a TV in my room at School D, but have access to a flat screen TV on a rolling cart, which I check out from the library. In addition, I have to check out a cord to hook my computer to the TV. On this particular

day, there was no cord available; other teachers had checked them all out. I was worried that I would waste a day of instructional time with my students because the technology I needed to introduce my lesson was not available, and I did not have a backup plan. The teacher asked me what I looked so frazzled and frustrated and I explained the problem. Then she graciously offered to let me use her room, which was equipped with an interactive whiteboard that was already connected to her computer. She was willing to give up the solitude of her classroom during her planning period so that I would be able to introduce my lesson. I was able to pull up my PowerPoint presentation on her computer and work with her students in their classroom.

Analysis

I know that part of this outcome is because of the good nature of this teacher, but I also feel that if I did not keep the lines of communication open between us, and keep her informed of what we do in art she may have been less eager to offer up this solution. I enjoyed the few minutes I spent with teachers as they came to pick up their class, explaining our project or letting students tell their teachers what we were studying and making.

Not only is good communication with classroom teachers a good way to learn about or exchange information about students, it also helps facilitate a connection between art and the regular classroom. I frequently asked teacher what students were learning in reading, math, social studies, and science to help me design lessons that were appropriate for the grade level. For example, if I wanted to teach a lesson that involved symmetry, it helped to know if the students had been introduced to symmetry in their math class. I might approach the introduction of my lesson differently depending on

whether they had or had not. Most teachers I worked with were eager to see a side of their students that they may not get to see in the regular classroom. Some are even surprised at what certain students have accomplished. Communication with the classroom teacher is also important in disciplinary matters. I often found that students with behavioral problems in my classroom also had problems in their regular classrooms, too, and discussing these problems with classroom teacher may lead to insight or a solution. I had some behavior issues with a fifth grade class at the beginning of this school year. Their homeroom teacher supplied me with the rules of conduct sent home with each student and a list of their parents phone numbers and email addresses. Once the students knew I had this information, we were all on the same page and the problems decreased phenomenally.

Suggestions for Itinerant Teachers

- Develop a good working relationship with the teachers you service. Sometimes these are the only people in a school who know who you are. Working on your relationship with classroom teachers will assure them that even though you are out sight, their classes are not out of mind.
- Make sure that teachers know what days you are at that school.
- When teachers come to pick up their classes, encourage them to take a quick look at their students' work.
- Students love to show off! Ask questions and let them tell their teacher what they have learned.

- Let teachers know when you are doing a project that directly relates to a classroom subject so that they can be aware of the connections between art and everyday subjects.
- Go to the classroom teacher if you have a concern about a student. They will be able to give you insight to behavior management strategies that work.

What's My Line?

Sometime when I am teaching I like to think of myself as an actor. Like many art teachers I know, I develop a script for each project in my head as I am writing my lesson plans. I try to be as consistent as possible when introducing a project so that each class gets the same information. Of course, some classes are more inquisitive than other and we may stray off topic, but the general information is the same. Who is the artist? Where is the artist from? What are some interesting things about the artist's life that will interest the students and keep their attention? What are the elements of art that I am teaching? How do I explain the project to my students? And also like many actors and art teachers I know, I get better at my performance as I practice it. I get more efficient each time I teach the lesson.

In addition to having a script for each project, I also have scripts for everyday routines such as entering and exiting the room, passing out materials, and cleaning up. I like the analogy of choreographing a dance. Repeating the clean up procedures the same way every day ensures that the students know exactly what they should be doing and when they should be doing. It also helps me to run through a checklist in my head of what needs to be done.

Creating routines and procedures that work for both the teacher and the students can be a challenge in the first year of teaching. It can be doubly or triply challenging when a first year teacher is assigned to three different schools with three totally different classroom environments in each one. I had between one and three days at each school to get myself acclimated. If a teacher at a single school feels that something isn't working and wants to change it, she could implement her change the very next day and see result immediately. I would have to wait a week.

My physical setting at some schools would change from week to week. Sometimes I would show up at School C on Thursday mornings and my entire room would be moved around and I would need to take time away from getting ready for my classes to fix it. At School B, my routines changed depending on the classroom I was in. The students became confused when I tried to enforce my discipline strategies instead of what they were used to in their homeroom class. I felt like I was always on the spot, improvising, and slightly out of control. I had to stop, even if just for a few seconds, to think of what I wanted my students to do. I sometimes gave confusing instructions, which led to behavior problems in some classes by leaving students too much free time to play.

Since I spent most of my time at School A my first year, I developed the most consistent routines, and a teacher "script" for cleaning up. I even find myself moving around the room the same way in each class. On an average day of drawing or painting it goes a little something like this:

"You have two minutes to work. You have about a minute to work, so you need to come to a stopping place. Everyone stop what you are doing. Put your pencils and

erasers in the blue pencil cups/ paintbrushes in the water. Green table I like the way everyone stopped working, please help me pick up supplies. Everyone else work together to clean your tables so that when the Green table comes around they can pick up your supplies. Stack your artwork up in the middle of the table (if drawing) or when I call your table please put your artwork on the drying rack. We will be using Dorothy today* (if painting). Sit quietly in your seats. Review of artist/ standards/ project. When I call your table you may line up at the door.”

- I have two drying racks in my room and noticed that my students would get confused when I said “put your artwork on the big drying rack or small drying rack” so I named the drying racks after my two grandmothers. Now students ask which one they should use by name. They also think it’s pretty funny when I tell them why the drying racks have “old lady names”.

Now that I have two classrooms that have similar settings, plus more experience, my routines are more consistent throughout both schools. I based my routines on School A because I felt that by the end of the year, I had developed procedures that worked for me. There are slight differences that on a day when I’m feeling frazzled or tired, can still leave me thinking “What’s my line?” Here are several examples:

- I do not have pencil cups at School D. I found that students were dropping the pencils into the cups too hard and breaking the leads. For some reason this wasn’t a problem at School A. So I hand out pencils individually and keep them stored in a small flowerpot. But sometimes I still start my clean up procedures “Put your pencils and erasers in the

blue cup.” Then I get strange looks from my students and ten hands go up to ask if they can collect the pencils.

- I dismiss my tables by color. At School A I have six tables; red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. At School D I only have four tables; red, yellow, green, and blue. Sometimes I find myself calling for the purple table where there is no purple table. Again, strange looks from my students.
- I use my tables at School A as a way to teach color. The warm and cool colors are in rows together and complementary colors are beside each other. For me it creates a kind of built in color wheel and gives students reminders about what colors are grouped together. Over the past two years this has become part of my script for many of my lesson plans. I lose that ability at School D, and have to come up with different visuals and even a different way to move around the room.

Over the course of the entire year, each of these small incidents can seem somewhat trivial. It’s just saying the wrong table name, or giving the wrong direction. Just backtrack, laugh it off, and move on. But sometimes I feel like I don’t run as well managed a classroom as my friends and colleagues who have been the primary teacher at their school for two years. I also worry about losing credibility with my students, especially with classes that have more discipline issues. Do the students see me as scatterbrained because I’m directing tables that don’t exist to line up? Will they lose respect because they think I don’t know what I’m doing, or will they just think it’s Ms. Muhlheim’s weird quirk?

Analysis

This is a difficult subject to analyze, as messing up what I say is such a spur of the moment action. I do know that it happened more often when I was not feeling my best, when I was tired or hungry or frustrated. I don't know if there's much that a teacher can do in terms of organization, communication, or flexibility that can prevent it from happening. There are two factors that I'd like to introduce that can help the management of forgetting your lines: consistency and a sense of humor.

Being an itinerant brings with it the possibility of being reassigned to a different school each year. I find that my comfort and consistency in reciting my routines and scripts, increases the more time I spend in a school. I was much more comfortable at School A the first year that I taught because I was there three times more than either of my other schools. When I was reassigned there in my second year, I knew exactly what where everything was and how things were organized from day one so I often found myself slipping into my script from School A when teaching at School D.

Most of the time saying the wrong thing and having students look at you like you are crazy is just kind of embarrassing. In moments of frustration, I tend to get more flustered when this happens, but most of the time I shrug it off and remind the students that I work at two different schools. Yes, they look at me like I have two heads, they probably laugh at me, but I try to laugh with them because it really is kind of silly.

Suggestions for Itinerant Teachers

- When possible, keep your rooms set up similarly. For example, use colors to distinguish tables, have one color table designated as a demonstration table.

- When possible, teach the same lessons at each school. An artist's biography or the steps of a project are not going to change from place to place so your script each day will only change when it comes to routines of the classroom.
- If you have to teach different lessons, take time at the beginning of the day to collect your thoughts and figure out your plan for the day. Make a list of what your students will be studying and the materials you will need.
- When faced with a situation in which you completely blunder what you meant to say, slow down, regroup, and then say what you mean.
- If students look really confused, remind them that you work in several schools and each one is slightly different.
- Don't take yourself too seriously. Keeping a sense of humor and laughing at your own mistakes is an excellent way to ease frustrations and can increase your resilience (Bobek, 2002).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Writing about my experiences over the past two years has enabled me to think about what I have learned as both a new teacher and an itinerant. The complete list of suggestions for itinerant teachers based on my reflection and analysis can be found in Appendix A. My original intention of this project was to highlight the unique challenges and situations that face itinerant teachers, but as I wrote about and analyzed my situations and memories, I realized that most of the difficulties that I was having in the classroom were not all that different than the challenges facing my other friends and colleagues who were also first year teachers. We were all adapting to new environments, finding our footing as new teachers, and making the adjustment from student to teacher. Like my friends stationed in a single school, I tried out many different discipline plans and behavioral strategies, I worked on becoming better organized, I attended what felt like countless meetings.

I feel that my experiences as a new teacher fell within the technical-developmental perspective of learning to teach (Kowalchuck, 1999). In my first year, especially the first semester, I was primarily concerned with survival. I wanted my class to behave well so that if I was observed I looked competent. When I tried to step out of that role to talk to administration, as in the story *The Day the Assistant Principal Made Me Cry*, I was shot down so quickly and harshly that I felt it best to continue to focus only on myself. My memories from my first year are rather sensational. In addition to the surprise of having a kindergartener have an accident in his pants, I was cussed at and

almost bitten, had students throw tantrums and called each other the “N” word. For the first eighteen weeks of school I felt like I was confused, disorganized, and frustrated far more than I ever thought I would. By the end of the first year I had amassed both knowledge and lesson plans that I was eager to use the next year. When writing down my memories from the second year I had to think harder about what to write about. My students have been generally very well behaved and I am less shocked or flustered when the occasional bad behavior arises. My students’ artwork is better this year and I owe that to being more prepared for my lessons and teaching the same lessons all week long. Experience has allowed me to focus on what I really want to accomplish in each class, not just on how to get my students to sit down and be quiet. I have been able to shift my focus from the behavior of my students to my own organization skills. Over the course of the past two years I have talked to other art teachers who began teaching at the same time as me and have single school positions. Our development as teachers seemed similar, leading me to the conclusion that many of the challenges that I have experienced are common among new teachers in general, and not exclusive to itinerant teachers.

There are some aspects of being an itinerant in the first years of teaching that are different than a teacher in a single school. Organization is important to all teachers (Wong, 2005), but especially important to the itinerant teachers because of the amount of movement involved in the position (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008). An itinerant must know what supplies are available to her in each school and what special supplies need to be transported back and forth. I originally kept a folder for each grade level containing lesson plans and assessments, and eventually moved it to a more secure binder, which I carried around with me in a duffle bag when I moved from school to school. I tried to

create a routine for myself when I packed up to minimize forgetting anything, but sometimes it happened.

Itinerant teachers must also be very flexible (Hyde & Power, 2004). In my first year I had to be very flexible about my lessons as I was teaching several different lessons per grade level each week. Unlike my single school counterparts, I had to switch gears every day in regards to what I was teaching and the physical setting in which I was teaching. Materials may not always be available at each school and the itinerant may not be able to order them. Sometimes I adapted materials for certain settings. I did not like using tempera paint in the homeroom classrooms, so I often substituted watercolors instead. Schools each had different school wide discipline strategies, if they had any at all, and I had to adapt to each one. Schools also have different schedules with events that can disrupt the art schedule. An itinerant may miss more classes over a period of weeks due to assemblies, awards ceremonies, field days or field trips than a teacher in a single school. The itinerant needs to be able to be flexible to adapt to schools' changing schedules.

Communication is also very important to the itinerant teacher (Klein & Harris, 2004). When I was offered my job by the arts coordinator for my school system, she told me my outgoing nature would be a benefit in being itinerant because I seemed to have no problem talking to people and getting to know them. Getting to know the staff at two or three different schools is difficult, even for an outgoing person. At School B and School C, I was often mistaken for a substitute teacher. If I needed something I might be told to go talk to Ms. X but I would have no idea who Ms. X was or where her office was and likewise, Ms. X had no idea who I am. It is difficult to communicate with people when

you have no idea who they are. Keeping a list of who's who in administration, front office, and technical support for each school is a good idea. Developing a support network in each school may be helpful. Connections with supportive teachers and administrators help to foster a sense of belonging within the school community (Bobek, 2002). Communication with the home art teacher at a school is the most important. She can be a useful liaison between you and the school. She can order supplies that you need. I tried to have a good professional relationship with all of my fellow art teachers and ended up being good friends with several of them. Creating positive relationships with colleagues that share similar experiences can bolster the resilience of new teachers (Bobek, 2002).

It is critical to my experience that I was placed in three school in which the home art teachers were also novice teachers; two were, like me, in their first year, and one was a veteran teacher, but had only been an art teacher for a year. Mentoring is an important tool for the growth of new teachers; when left to their own devices many must rely on trial and error and may experience little early satisfaction (Danielson, 2002). Because there are certain aspects of being both a new teacher and an itinerant teacher, I wish I had been provided more access to a mentor who understood the issues of itinerant teaching. In my second year the main art teacher at School D had been teaching for more than five years, and I learned a lot working with her. She had also been an itinerant in the past. It was helpful to finally reach out to a veteran itinerant teacher to ask them questions. But as a new teacher, I also worried that others might question my ability to do my job. I now realize that was a counterproductive thought. I think it would have been helpful for

itinerant teachers to have a platform in which to share their ideas not only for teaching, but for advocating for themselves as well.

I know that some itinerants enjoy the anonymity of the job; being at a school one day a week enables you to sort of sneak in, teach your classes, and sneak out, but most of the time it made me feel like an outsider. I talked to an itinerant music teacher who has been teaching for many years who felt this way and she stated that perhaps if she was in the beginning of her career she would want to be seen and heard and make a name for herself, but that she felt she had done all of that and now she enjoyed coming and going relatively unnoticed. Perhaps that marks a difference in the attitudes of seasoned teachers versus novices in regards to servicing several schools.

In talking with friends who were also novice art teachers about their challenges, I came to realize that my experiences as an itinerant were not all that different from their, even though they were assigned to a single school. A first or second year teacher who is also an itinerant needs to develop excellent organizational skills because of constant movement (Akuffo & Hodge, 2008), the ability to communicate effectively with several different sets of faculty and administrations (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004) and the main art teacher at her school, and flexibility in planning and implementing lessons because of the differences in schedules between schools (Hyde & Power, 2004).

Teachers can benefit from reflecting on their experiences, whether successful or unsuccessful to determine strengths and weaknesses (Danielson, 2002). Itinerant teachers can use these reflections to determine why something may have worked in one school but not in another and adjust future projects accordingly.

Recommendations for further study

There is very little research about itinerant art teachers, and much more can be done. Although I have analyzed my experiences through traits found through a review of relevant literature this study was exclusively about my experiences as both a new teacher and an itinerant teacher. New itinerant teachers may benefit from a mentor program or support meeting that focus specifically on them and their challenges. A survey of new itinerant teachers could provide a list of common topics and concerns for discussion. Research about veteran itinerant art teachers could also give insight to what teachers need to focus on to be successful in their job in the long run. Research on the issues facing itinerant could also be of use to the home art teacher in a school in regards to working with the itinerant. Scheduling, ordering and sharing materials, possible team teaching strategies are all subjects that could be covered.

Reflection may be beneficial to all teachers, especially novices. The four types of reflective behaviors: knowing in action, reflection in action, reflection on action, and reflection for action are all important to becoming an effective and successful teacher. They enable the teacher to consider multiple solutions to a problem and make informed decisions (Danielson, 2002). Reflection and the analyzing of my experiences was an important part of this thesis process. It enabled me to critically think about my strengths and weaknesses, my successes and failures. The effects of the reflection process on novice and itinerant art teachers are also a consideration for future study.

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APPENDIX A

Suggestions for Itinerant Teachers

The First Day(s) of School

- Some schools, including three of the schools in which I worked, applied a school wide discipline plan. Having universal discipline strategies can be helpful in maintaining a safe and social environment for students (Sprague et al, 2001).
Separate the location based procedures from behavioral procedures. Procedures based on classroom setting will need to be changed for each school, but general classroom rules and behavior should be consistent throughout every school. You can develop your classroom procedures after you have gotten your room assignment.
- The effective teacher has a well-managed classroom in which students know what it expected of them from day one (Wong, 2005). Create an organized plan for the first day. List what you want to go over on the board so students can follow along. Know that this list may need to be altered some based on the physicality of the classroom.
- Try to get in touch with the main art teacher at each school. Email or call and introduce yourself. Ask about the school, the administration, and what tactics are successful for them in the classroom. Each school will have a different dynamic for both teachers and students. Find out and keep a list of the names of important go-to people; principal, assistant principal, receptionists, bookkeepers, and technical personnel.

- Always remember that no matter how well thought out the plan; it will inevitably need to be changed. Maintaining a positive attitude and a sense of humor will make the potential chaos of your first few days much more bearable.

Setting Positive Expectations

- Treat every day with a new class like the first day of school, even if it is well into the year. Missing on day of production to go over rules, procedures, and expectations is worth it.
- Students love to help! Set up a reward procedure in which students earn the privilege of helping pass out or clean up materials.
- An effective teacher is proactive instead of reactive (Wong, 2005). Try to “catch” students doing the right thing and give them positive reinforcement instead of only reacting to negative behavior.
- Trust your students.

Site Specific Planning

- Do your research! If you must go into the regular classroom to teach, drop in to see what kind of seating arrangements you have.
- Take the time to get to know your surroundings, not only locating the closest restrooms but the other art room, cafeteria, office, library, and teacher’s rooms. Let students know where you expect them to go when they leave the room. Send them with a timed note.

- Set up a regular seating arrangement. If you have to go to a regular classroom, set a procedure in which students will always move their desks to the same place in the room and sit in the same groups for art class. Give each group a name similar to what you may do in an art classroom setting; by colors, numbers, artist's names, etc. This may also help to establish a differentiation between regular class time and art class time.
- When possible, keep your rooms set up similarly. For example, use colors to distinguish tables, have one color table designated as a demonstration table.
- Be flexible. Time in art class is precious and important and you want your students to spend as much time working as they can, but sometimes it will be necessary to let a student leave the room. Use your best judgment.

Professionalism

- Always keep a professional attitude when speaking with members of administration about concerns you may have. Be aware that the less time you spend at their schools, the lower on their priority lists you may be. This does not mean that your concerns are not valid, but that you need to take extra care when approaching administration and be able to back up your requests.
- Accept that no matter how well thought out, sometimes your requests will not be met. This is not a personal attack, but a professional decision.
- Do not let the actions of an unfriendly administration color your attitude towards an entire school or its students.

Connecting with the Classroom Teachers

- Develop a good working relationship with the teachers you service. Sometimes these are the only people in a school who know who you are. Working on your relationship with classroom teachers will assure them that even though you are out sight, their classes are not out of mind.
- Make sure that teachers know what days you are at that school.
- When teachers come to pick up their classes, encourage them to take a quick look at their students' work.
- Students love to show off! Ask questions and let them tell their teacher what they have learned.
- Let teachers know when you are doing a project that directly relates to a classroom subject so that they can be aware of the connections between art and everyday subjects.
- Go to the classroom teacher if you have a concern about a student. They will be able to give you insight to behavior management strategies that work.

The Importance of a Backup Plan

- Develop a checklist and a routine for packing up to travel from one school to another. Write it down if you need to. Do the same things in the same order every time and this will minimize mishaps.
- Keep a schedule of what you are working on in each class for the entire week. Vacations and holidays, assemblies, fire drills, etc., can put classes off schedule so what you are doing at one school my not be what you are doing at another.

- Take your computer home each day.

Lesson Planning

- When possible, teach the same lessons at each school. An artist's biography or the steps of a project are not going to change from place to place so your script each day will only change when it comes to routines of the classroom.
- If you have to teach different lessons, take time at the beginning of the day to collect your thoughts and figure out your plan for the day. Make a list of what your students will be studying and the materials you will need.
- The other art teacher at your school can be a great resource! Don't be afraid to ask questions, whether it's about a lesson plan that he or she is doing that you really like, or something school specific.
- Be prepared for changes in schedule by amassing a stockpile of one-day lesson plans or sketchbook ideas.

Play it Cool, It's OK to Make Mistakes

- When faced with a situation in which you completely blunder what you meant to say, slow down, regroup, and then say what you mean. If students look really confused, remind them that you work in several schools and each one is slightly different.
- Don't take yourself too seriously. Keeping a sense of humor and laughing at your own mistakes is an excellent way to ease frustrations and can increase your resilience (Bobek, 2002).