



DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL VIBRANCY THROUGH MENTORSHIP

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Building Relationships Through Mentorship

I distinctly remember stuffing a slew of envelopes during my second year as an early professional in anticipation of our state conference. I was attending the conference because leaders in the state organization energetically invited me to join and I enthusiastically said, “YES!”

The conference committee worked hard to bring in Faith Ringgold as our keynote speaker. The months of planning and raising funds to support her travel were over. Now there was a flurry of last-minute preparation for the event—stuffing welcome bags, checking on food, and ensuring our registration numbers were strong. On the day of the conference, I was beyond ecstatic to meet Faith Ringgold. The big moment came when I (ME, a second-year teacher!) was asked to place her slides in the slide carousel. These were the days when one wrong move meant upside-down images for the statewide audience of art educators.

I still hold that moment as a milestone in my unfolding art education career. I not only wanted to place the slides correctly in the carousel, I also wanted to get it right as a new professional in the field. I felt connected to the world of art education by meeting a well-known artist, working with a team of passionate art educators, and being valued as a member of an organization. I still fondly remember feeling

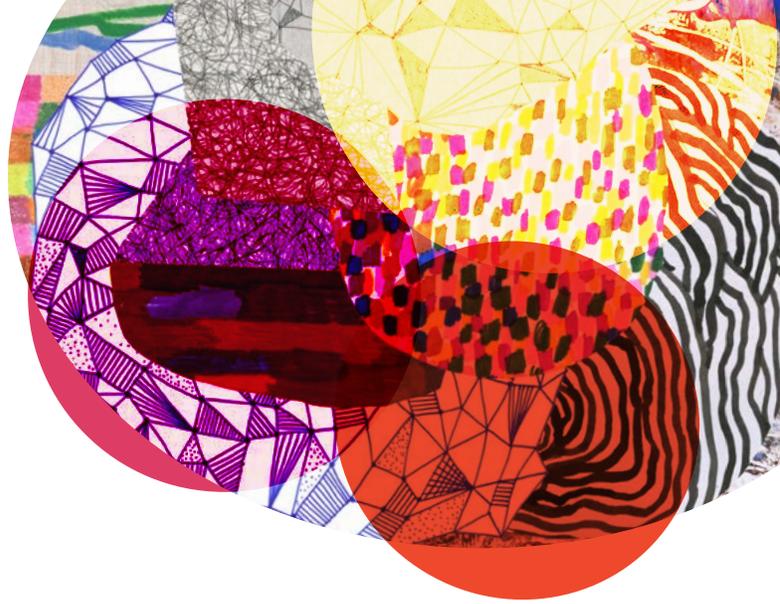
recognized as an individual with something to contribute to the broader organization, making it easy to say “YES!”

Mentoring early professionals in professional communities contributes to the community building and organizational vibrancy outlined in the National Art Education Association (NAEA) strategic plans (2011–2014 and 2015–2020). Building relationships emerges from the strong ties formed when individuals take on the role of mentor. Here I reiterate the value of building mentor–mentee relationships with early professionals, defined as preservice or early career art educators, museum educators, and community arts organizers, among others.

Defining the Mentor–Mentee Relationship

Mentorship involves sharing our journeys not only as teacher and student, but, more importantly, as learner to learner. A feminist notion of mentoring suggests relational

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interactions versus mentoring where one is superior to the other or where the mentor sets the agenda for the relationship (Barrett et al., 2009). McClure and Thompson (2009) highlight the delicate balance of a mentor being “nearly invisible” with the mentor’s “responsiveness perfect and intuitive each time” (par. 5) building ease through ongoing dialogue.

NAEA Strategic Goal: The Next Generation—Nurturing Future Leaders

The strategic goal of Community calls on members to develop the next generation of leaders by being responsive to the needs of early professionals. There is widespread interest in assuring the NAEA community welcomes, supports, and nurtures students who want to become art educators. The goal of Organizational Vibrancy reminds us to personalize relationships with preservice educators as “members are hungry for recognition, appreciation, inclusion, and validation at a formative time in their lives

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and careers” (Rhea & Schiller, 2010). Recognition and appreciation are paramount in honoring one’s individual story and experience. As the field calls for more dialogue on equity, inclusion, and diversity, the importance of mentoring relationships heightens.¹ Many of the most meaningful mentoring relationships develop organically as individuals find commonalities and connection while recognizing difference with a desire to be changed or improve practice. Critical self-reflection is tantamount to dialogue with others. As individuals prepare to be “fully attentive to the complexities of learners’ lives in relationship to their identities in the culture of the art room,” mentors and mentees must engage in the difficult “work of examining their [(our)] own biases and privilege” (Rao & Pfeiler-Wunder, 2018, p. 33).

NAEA’s establishment of the National Task Force on Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion in 2017 illuminates the critical need for a multiplicity of voices and ongoing conversations about our personal and professional identities. These conversations, coupled with deconstructing the ways in which privilege and power are embedded in educational settings and institutions (Rao & Pfeiler-Wunder, 2018), offer the catalyst for change in how we see and define ourselves and others. Mentor and mentee relationships, with their focus on both shared stories and willingness to engage in tension, provide the possibility for just such conversations—dialogues that compel change in ourselves and our institutions when we are committed to this ongoing work.

The Value of Professional Service

In a time of persistent concerns for arts advocacy, continued cutbacks, and standardized testing impact on students and educators, membership in a professional community offers the necessary resources to be successful as an art educator both inside and outside educational settings. In educational settings, mentors certainly offer continuing support with the executive functions of teaching, building a classroom community, developing curriculum, and navigating the educational community. Encouraging participation in the organization also creates opportunities to build community with beginning educators beyond the walls of the educational site. Developing leadership dispositions in preservice educators has the most significant and lasting effects on both preservice students and the field. Developing an aptitude for professional service early in an educator’s teaching journey fosters leadership skills

by moving beyond acquiring knowledge in the field to establishing a stronger sense of professional identity through the informal bond mentors and mentees find in the value of learning together (Wenger, McDermott, & Synder, 2002).

When young professionals build connections and community within the field, they simultaneously share their talents, ideas, research, and teaching practice, all of which continually give back to the profession. Professional service brings individuals together, growing collaborative opportunities. Standards presented by the

Mentors and Mentees Participate in Reciprocal Learning

Education is the necessity of life, and the relationship shared between young and old in teaching is the constant process of renewal (Dewey, 1916/2004). In this process of renewal, we are also continually adapting the environment to meet the needs of the living organisms within it (Dewey, 1916/2004). Professional communities focused on organizational vibrancy are living entities made up of dynamic and diverse individuals who breathe life into the organization by their service to the organization, commitment to the group, and

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Council of Chief State of School Offices (2011) give insight into the significance of leadership and collaboration in education. Standard 10 focuses on the importance of active engagement in professional learning—that better practice improves student learning and advances the profession. Leadership inside and outside educational settings provides a broader understanding of the field that enhances professional practice and has a strong relationship to improving student learning. This supports NAEA’s mission to shape human potential.

I felt shaped by the collaborative spirit of my first conference. I was empowered by working with others to enhance the field of art education through our commitment to broadening our knowledge base and collaborating with and learning from others. The NAEA Preservice Division continually demonstrates a commitment to growth within the association by including student outreach coordinators with representation in each NAEA Region, increasing programs offered at the National Convention, and building connections through social media. As a student chapter advisor from 2010 to 2014, I supported members’ visions for change by listening and guiding them to the resources and tools that would help their ideas come to fruition. In turn, their high level of energy continually fueled my own leadership and research in the field. Simply put, we learned about leadership from each other.

shared visions to bring future change and energy to the organization. Communication with one another moves beyond the transmission of knowledge to the sharing of ideas to enlarge and change experiences (Dewey, 1916/2004).

This does not mean that communication is always easy. Nor does it mean that the mentor–mentee relationship or even one’s relationship with the organization always exists in a state of equilibrium. Tensions create opportunities to listen, reflect, and revisit perspectives in order to open up new possibilities for greater understanding of each other. Through this interaction, as individuals grow and share their stories, the culture of the organization is also shaped. Regarding mentor–mentee relationships McClure and Thompson (2009) stated, “It is a tough and intense relationship involving both the desire to please and pressure to progress” (par. 6). Through mentor–mentee relationships we honor the rich resources each art educator holds. Our diverse backgrounds, professional histories, and stories of teaching, learning, and creating are vital to share with others.

The time is ripe to pool our resources to continually support not only preservice educators, but all art educators in our organization. How else can you be involved in the field? What is your story of being involved at the regional,

state, or national level? Have you shared your story? As Webster-Wright (2009) advocates, we need to move from a knowledge deficit model to a knowledge-possessing model. What have you already shared with others as a mentor? How else can you involve those entering the field?

Vital to the sustainability of and advocacy for art education are mentors who guide the future generation of young professionals. Invite early professionals to say “YES!” Yes to presenting their research, program, or curricular projects at a state or national conference, yes to volunteering at the next state conference... yes to being a dynamic advocate for the field.

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Notes

¹Visit www.arteducators.org/community/national-task-force-on-equity-diversity-inclusion

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