

February 2015

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Hello to All Fine Arts Teachers in the State of Missouri

I almost referred to you as specialists. I don't know whether to apologize or not. I remember when I went from being referred to as a teacher or even an ancillary and all of a sudden became a "specialist." I just shrugged and said "OK." It did not matter, because I always knew I was an art teacher. For three days last week I was with the music teachers at The Missouri Music Educators Association Conference at Tan-tar-a at the Lake of the Ozarks. Now, there are some specialists! And, of course they are teachers as well. The conference consisted of highly accomplished student band, symphonic, jazz and vocal performances combined with informative and engaging workshops for three days. I left the conference moved by the commitment to excellence that our music teachers are able to instill in our Missouri youth. Throughout my career as an art teacher I always noticed that the music teachers in my school returned to school a little happier and a little more carefree after their conference. Now I know why. The music teachers know how to recharge their batteries.

There was much talk during the conference about the National Core Arts Standards. Even though Missouri has not adopted the standards, as arts educators we can start to use the terminology of the National Standards Matrix when designing instruction and communicating to students, fellow teachers, administrators and parents. All of us in the arts perform, create and respond through our disciplines. We are strongest though, when we connect.

The theme of the music teacher's conference was *Mentoring*. I had an opportunity to tell about one of my music mentors, and I'll retell the story here. Twenty years ago, Mr. Irwin Brick and I were colleagues at McKinley Middle School in Saint Louis. He was the band teacher and I was the art teacher. We shared a common preparation period and he liked to come to my end of the hall and visit. We were a professional learning committee of two. Together we solved the world's problems. I remember I just enjoyed hearing his stories and soaking up his wisdom about teaching. Frequently he would refer to a school where he taught in the early fifties. He said it was called The Allied Arts School, and was apparently an early effort at integrating all of the arts with the academic subjects in grades K-8. I remember thinking at the time that such a school would really take some leadership and vision to get off the ground. Of course we have such schools now, and many of you are involved in making the arts a part of all aspects of the curriculum. We still have a ways to go though, don't you think? Many of you are sharing your ideas about arts integration with me. I appreciate it, and keep them coming.

Oh, and this too, our conversations about the arts would always end with Mr. Brick reminding me that music was the greatest art.