

ENACTING CHANGE SURVEY RESPONSE

For information on the Enacting Change Survey Project, facilitated by Joanna Rees, see the NAEA Women's Caucus website at <http://naeawc.net/activism.html>

Sylvia Corwin
July 6, 2009

The essence of my story is that I worked hard, found good people to work with, and together, we made a difference for NYC school children. In 1989, I retired as Chairperson of the Art Department of the largest high school and went on to teach in NYU's Department of Art & Art Education. I continue, as Emeritus, on the Board of Governors of University Council for Art Education, having edited UCAE NEWS for 18 years.

My secondary school career began in a magnet school; talented girls were programmed in Major Art, daily, for three consecutive periods. When the Board of Education decreed that no student whose reading score was 2 or more grades below level was eligible for elective courses, Washington Irving HS art program was doomed. At the same time, I was completing a Master's degree for permanent certification. Visual Thinking was required reading. I wrote to psychologist, author Rudolf Arnheim for advice. He volunteered to come to New York from Harvard, explained his learning/cognition/perception theories at the high school principal's monthly meeting. We identified eight school leaders willing to bring reading specialists to collaborate with art teachers in classes of slow readers. NYSED validated Reading Improvement Through Art after the evaluation confirmed "significant improvement beyond expectations". (ERIC ED184 095). For the next twelve years I was Developer/Demonstrator of RITA. Kennedy was the demonstration site.

An impassioned art education advocate, I founded the NYC chapter(partnered with the United Federation of Teachers) of the state teacher's organization, served as President of NYSATA, and spearheaded a drive to improve the quality of art instruction in elementary schools. Overcoming daunting roadblocks, we established a new license, requiring that

visual art could not be taught by the traditional common-branch teacher. Citywide, young children's art instruction is delivered by certified art specialist teachers, today.

Leading an art teachers' organization, negotiating legislative changes, supervising a funded program and a high school department, I rarely encountered gender bias. During the early years on the principal's cabinet I was the sole female. Occasionally, that turned into an advantage. I was not competing for a promotion; my colleagues were highly motivated, inspired women. My reputation as a successful grants writer helped engender respect and cooperation. Women teach differently than men do and, manage our space differently. Whether we're washing paint brushes, installing an exhibition, counseling a parent, the "woman's touch" is evident.

In my view, reforming NCLB is our profession's greatest challenge. Scholar Laura Chapman, recalling RITA's longevity and documented success, considers RITA methodology an appropriate alternative to the failed, traditional remediation approach. To address this concern, I am in the process of "telling the RITA story" in a book and journal article. Recollections from participants in the RITA Pilot year, 1975-76, and replications, are invited: sylcorwin@aol.com.