

INTERVAL

SPRING 2025

Develop, promote, and support equitable learning and teaching in

Minnesota



Inside

- 2 FROM THE EDITOR
- 3 STUDENT-DESIGNED HONOR SONGS: CREATIVITY,
CONNECTION, AND COMMUNITY IN MUSIC
- 5 WHOLE BRAIN LEARNING AND THE MUSIC CLASSROOM
- 9 REAL WORLD SIGHT READING, SOCIAL PEDAGOGIES,
CURRICULAR EXPANSION, AND CLASSROOM MUSIC MODELS
- 16 CHORAL WARM-UPS: YOUR FIRST CONNECTION WITH STUDENTS
- 20 YOU'RE NOT FORGETFUL, YOU'RE OVERWHELMED:
SUPPORTING MUSIC EDUCATORS' EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS
- 24 STRUCTURING PEER-TO-PEER FEEDBACK TOWARDS EQUITY
- 29 NEW REGION MAP
- 30 MMEA BOARD MEMBERS
- 38 ENDNOTES

From the Editor



Dr. Sarah
Minette

SMINETTE@MMEA.ORG

Congratulations to all on completing another school year! I'm consistently so amazed of the work that our state music educators do with our students, from pre-school all the way through graduate school. Every time I visit a school, or see a social media post where children and adults are engaged in meaningful music making, my heart fills with joy.

With all this joy, is also the reality in which education finds currently finds itself. As an avid reader of the great James Baldwin, I am often brought back to his article "[A talk to teachers](#)". While this article was written in 1963, what Baldwin wrote is extremely relevant for today's educators, and society at large. Because we are in education, public or private, what happens outside our classroom walls greatly affects our students, their families, and our communities.

Drs. Juliet Hess and Brent Talbot, commented on Baldwin's writing, in their article "[Going for broke: A talk to music teachers](#)". They explore the various ways in which music serves as a vehicle of resistance during tumultuous times. Music as a tool of resistance, but also as a source of liberation. As music educators we have opportunities to engage with our students in incredibly powerful music making experiences, even with our youngest musicians. It is in these moments, that we can truly tap into humanity, and work with our students to see the all the possibilities of what they can achieve.

Minnesota music educators are some of the best of the best. We consistently put our students well-being first. We know that our practices need to continue to evolve to meet the needs of our students, families, and local communities. Those changes can be difficult, and at times, feel unmanageable. However, we also know that what is best for students, is best for the program—and not the other way around. I am going to challenge all of us to take charge, and "go for broke" for our Minnesota students. Continue to advocate, educate, and celebrate all the work that you are doing. Have a great summer!

Reference:

Baldwin, J. (October, 16, 1963). "The Negro Child-His Self-Image" in *The Saturday Review*. (Original Title)

Hess, J. & Talbot, B.C. (2019). Going for broke: A talk to music teachers. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 18(1): 89–116.

Members of the Editorial Taskforce



BECCA BUCK



SOPHIA BUTLER



CASEY
CLEMENTSON



DAVID DAVIS



NATALIA
ROMERO
ARBELÁEZ

STUDENT-DESIGNED HONOR SONGS:

Uplifting Creativity, Connection, & Community

By David Davis



Our state and national music standards emphasize four artistic processes: Perform, Create, Respond, and Connect. But are your students truly engaging with all four, or is performance overshadowing the rest? Many music educators prioritize performance not because they don't value creativity, response, and connection, but because our music education system—and our training—has historically placed little emphasis on these areas. As a result, Create, Respond, and Connect often become little more than isolated activities—brief reflections or perfunctory composition exercises tacked onto an otherwise performance-dominated curriculum.

It doesn't have to be that way! The Student-Designed Honor Songs project offers a different model—one where students take ownership of the creative process and use music to foster meaningful community connections. Originally created as the after-school “Elder’s Wisdom, Children’s Song” project by Minnesotan musician Larry Long, the core of this curricular project is simple: uplift a community member through student-designed original song.

Steps in the Process

1. Students choose a community member to honor
2. Students craft meaningful questions and conduct interviews to gather personal stories.
3. Students distill honoree’s words of wisdom into original lyrics
4. Students select a music genre that reflects the honoree’s background
5. Students improvise melodies and assemble musical components into an original song.
6. Students rehearse and perform live, honoring the community member.

(View a more detailed project checklist [here](#))

The culminating celebration isn't about showcasing performance prowess—it's about transforming concerts into shared experiences of storytelling and cultural connection. This process goes beyond technical skills; it cultivates critical thinking, empathy, and personal expression. It allows students of any age and in any type of ensemble to engage with all four strands of the music standards—not as isolated tasks, but as an integrated practice:

The culminating celebration isn't about showcasing performance prowess—it's about transforming concerts into shared experiences of storytelling and cultural connection. This process goes beyond technical skills; it cultivates critical thinking, empathy, and personal expression. It allows students of any age and in any type of ensemble to engage with all four strands of the music standards—not as isolated tasks, but as an integrated practice:

Create: Students don't just perform pre-written works; they compose original music, turning real-life stories into songs.

Respond: Through interviews and discussions, students practice active listening and reflection.

Perform: The honoree is brought on stage, and students perform directly to them in a deeply personal act of recognition and gratitude.

Connect: Perhaps most powerfully, this project bridges the gap between the classroom and the community. By engaging with local voices, students experience firsthand how music fosters social connection, cultural understanding, and interdisciplinary learning across subjects like history, geography, and science.

A Lasting Impact on School Culture

A student-designed honor song project can become a lasting part of your school's culture. At my school, past participants mentor younger students, and the creative energy sparked by this initiative continues long after the final performance—students still sing past honor songs in the hallways! By embedding this work into your curriculum, you can redefine music excellence—not just as technical precision, but as creativity, collaboration, expression, and authentic community connection.

As some districts undergo music curriculum reviews, educators are looking for ways to meaningfully elevate Create, Respond, and Connect within their programs. Even if you don't adopt the Student-Designed Honor Songs model exactly, this framework can help your team integrate these principles as a central part of your curriculum rather than treating them as “extra” add-ons.

Want to Learn More? Join Me at IMES!

Join me virtually at the International Music Education Summit on June 19 at 10:30am CST to dive deeper into this transformative project. I'll share student examples and practical strategies to empower students as creators, not just performers. Whether you teach band, choir, orchestra, general music, or modern ensembles, this project is adaptable for all ages and musical backgrounds. Let's reimagine music education together—ensuring that Create, Respond, Perform, and Connect aren't just checked boxes, but deeply integrated into our students' musical experiences.

Register [here](#) and use the code DAVIS2025 at checkout for a discount!

David Davis is a band, orchestra, and general music educator in St. Louis Park, MN, committed to systemic change in music education. A GRAMMY semifinalist and Yamaha “40 Under 40” educator, he designs curricula that prioritize cultural responsiveness, inclusivity, student voice, and research-based pedagogy. A national teacher leader with NAFME, he also serves on MDE's Culturally Responsive Arts Education cohort and the MMEA board, and is an MEA Racial Equity Advocate.





Whole Brain Learning and the Music Classroom

by Tamara Ragan

Studies and experiments in neuroscience have expanded our understanding of learning and the brain. One of the developments to come from this research is the concept of whole brain learning. Early in the process, educational researcher Paul Naour argued that we cannot “assume that all students will learn through whichever strategy the teacher prefers to use. The challenge facing teachers is to reach students through an understanding of their individual differences in cognitive processing” (1985, p. 10). This article describes the concept of whole brain learning, its evolution, and how music teachers can support whole brain learning by routinely engaging their learners in activities that utilize visual, aural, and kinesthetic processing.

Research Models

A pioneer in the whole brain learning concept was Ned Herrmann. Herrmann was interested in the effects of thinking styles and preferences as they related to the workplace. His model helps to identify a person's preferences for processing information and decision-making. It is important to note that this concept does not identify left-brain or right-brain thinkers. Rather, the brain's two hemispheres are connected by the corpus callosum, thus predisposing humans to be whole brain thinkers (Morgan, 2023). Nancy Mannies (1986) wrote about the potential of Herrmann's research in regard to student comprehension. Mannies described the use of varied activities as a “wedding of theory and practice in the class” (1986, p. 127).

*Everyone succeeds
when the “ah ha”
moment happens for students.*

Michael Morgan (2023) explained Herrmann's concept of whole brain learning in terms of four general areas or quadrants of the brain where processing takes place. In the “analytical” quadrant, fact-based problem solving takes place. Those whose learning preference is found here will be the decision makers in a group. Those who can take a complex task and break it down into doable steps find their preference for learning in the “practical” quadrant of the brain. These learners are structured and organized. Those who form relationships in the learning process find their preference in the “relational” quadrant. Navigating social situations and relating to people's needs are the strengths of these learners. Finally, the creative and intuitive learner's preference is in the “experimental” quadrant of the brain. These learners are always looking for connections

Evolution of the Concept

Whole brain learning should not be confused with the theories of being a left-brain or a right-brain learner. Shin et al. (2022) state that student learning based on left-brain or right-brain dominance is a fallacy. However, their research does not deny that information can be processed in different areas of the brain. By designing lessons and presenting concepts in a variety of modes that are visual, aural, and kinesthetic, teachers are essentially teaching to the whole brain (2022).

More recently, some involved in the science of learning have moved their focus away from separate quadrants in the brain toward the concept of neural “connections and circuits.” Maryanne Wolf (2019) quotes neuroscientist David Eagleman’s ideas on this topic. He believes that it is the building of these connections and circuits that allows us to learn to read. Some researchers refer to this as neuroplasticity. Can these ideas also describe the ways that students learn to “read” music, process the language of notation, and perform within an ensemble?

Applications in the Classroom

Music educators can engage the whole brain through visual, aural, and kinesthetic activities within their curricula. These varied experiences can enhance the students' learning in music programs offered within the school. When the concepts of whole brain learning are applied in the music classroom through a variety of activities, comprehension and acquisition of skills are enhanced and improved. For example:

- A chart of rhythms or solfa provides a visual tool that is processed in the facts quadrant.
- Aural processing can occur in the forms/future area of the brain as students learn the sequence of a song in both repetitive and contrasting sections of the music.
- A student who engages in walking or dancing to the beat of a song is processing the song in the feelings quadrant which includes kinesthetic activity.
- The whole brain learning model may also be observed in a listening lesson, a hands-on game, playing an instrument, or a simple composition project requiring synthesis and problem-solving.

The results of numerous studies suggest that students learn effectively when taught from a whole brain approach. With many types of music teaching methods available, teachers may find themselves delivering a patchwork of songs and activities from a variety of curricula. The type of curriculum that best fits into a classroom may be determined by various factors, such as student population, available equipment/instruments, teacher training/comfort level, and district curriculum standards. Several pedagogical approaches offer opportunities for whole brain learning in the general music classroom because they use visual, aural, and kinesthetic activities. Some of these approaches include the Orff, Dalcroze, and Kodály methods.

In the [Orff](#) music education model, the child is guided by singing, moving, dancing, and playing (Pridmor, 2025). This provides multiple contexts for processing in learning. While one child may learn best by physically experiencing eighth notes in a dance (kinesthetic and emotional areas of the brain), another may aurally process the concept by the repetition of singing a song through the sequential/forms quadrant. Playing various keyboard percussion combines kinesthetic and aural experiences in making music. The Orff model creates “a sensory awareness that is auditory, tactile, visual, kinesthetic and balanced throughout the body” (Salmon, 2016, p.15).

The [Dalcroze](#) method explores the internalization of beat and rhythm, which is processed in the brain areas related to emotion and kinesthetic activity. Beat is then expressed through kinesthetic body movements (Anderson, 2011). In his journal article, Anderson (2011) discusses the brain processing involved with the Dalcroze approach and its kinesthetic component. He cites several empirical studies that document skill acquisition and improved competencies in the K-6 classroom settings.

In the [Kodály](#) approach, singing is the foundation of music learning. Hand signs combine a visual and kinesthetic component for developing tonal memory. Stick/solfa notation is a visual type of musical shorthand that supports reading literacy as the student progresses from sound to symbol.

Students experience kinesthetic learning through games, folk dances, and play parties. A sampling of visual, aural, and kinesthetic activities for elementary general music is suggested in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Visual	Aural	Kinesthetic
Word Walls	Singing with Others/Solo	Walking to the Beat
Informational and Positive Messaging Posters	Listening to Music	Creating a Dance
Flashcards	Decode the Missing Instrument	Playing an Instrument
“People” Rhythms–Students Become the 4-beat Rhythms	Performing Different Dynamics	Playing/Creating a Game

In my kindergarten classroom, we approach rhythm in a variety of ways. We “see it” on large, oversized flashcards. We “write it” with large markers on lap boards or long lengths of poster paper. We “build it” with different sizes of popsicle sticks. We “create it” by manipulating and moving fellow classmates into “people rhythms.” We find it in chants on the board or in their texts. We “hear it” in recorded examples. Finally, we “use it” or synthesize it to write our own rhythms for others to perform.

The high school choir or band director can integrate the concept of whole brain learning within their ensembles, too. Directors are encouraged to facilitate visual, aural, and kinesthetic experiences within the context of rehearsal time. The aural skills acquired by students who have learned to use solfege singing technique allow the teacher to spend less time pounding out notes on the piano and result in a choir that sings with better intonation. Creative classroom visuals and video examples can help students to visualize a musical concept. Creating movement activities for a tough rhythmic section in a junior high band piece may seem unusual in the context of a rehearsal. However, seeing and physically experiencing how one’s part meshes with other sections of the band can provide a deeper understanding by accessing the integration processing area of the brain.

When examining one’s curriculum, teachers may find that they have already implemented concepts and activities from many of the pedagogical approaches mentioned in this article. The advantage of having many types of activities in one’s teaching toolbox is that the teacher can choose activities that will match the learning styles of many students. Everyone succeeds when the “ah ha” moment happens for students. The challenge, however, is creating a logical and sequential curriculum when using concepts from many approaches.

In conclusion, the task may be for each of us to examine our curricula and ensure we include a sufficient variety of visual, aural, and kinesthetic activities to engage the whole brain. Perhaps starting with one ensemble or one grade level would keep this task from seeming like an overwhelming challenge. It does require an investment of time; however, you might find a learning gap preventing student mastery of a particular concept. It may be an opportunity to create a better sequence of activities toward comprehension. A review of your curricula for visual, aural, and kinesthetic activities may also highlight a teacher's preferred style of lesson delivery as well as methods you intentionally avoid. It may be the "ah ha" moment for you as a music educator as well as your students!

Tamara Ragan teaches K-12 Vocal/General music at Clearbrook-Gonvick Public School in Clearbrook, Minnesota. A graduate of South Dakota State University with majors in voice performance and music education, she is in her final year of a music education master's program with Kodaly certification at Bemidji State University. Ms. Ragan is a certified adjudicator and has served as a clinician and accompanist for student festivals. She is a life-long learner whose career has spanned 42 years; and she still believes in the power of music in the lives of her students and the communities in which she has taught.



References

- Anderson, W. (2011). The Dalcroze approach to music education: Theory and applications. *General Music Today*, 26(27), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10483713114289979>.
- Mannies, N. (1986). Brain theory and learning. *The Clearing House*, 60(3), 127–130. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30186642>
- Morgan, M. (2023). *The four thinking quadrants explained, and how to communicate with them*. Herrmann. <https://herrmann.com.au/blog/2023/12/the-four-thinking-quadrants-explained-and-how-to-communicate-with-them/>
- Naour, P. (1985). Brain/behavior relationships, gender differences, and the learning disabled. *Theory into Practice*, 24(2), 100–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405848509543155>
- Pridmor, C. (2025, March 3). *What is Orff Schulwerk?* Teaching with Orff. <https://teachingwithorff.com/what-is-orff-schulwerk-process/#:~:text=The%20Orff%20Process:%20A%20Roadmap,with%20their%20musicality%20and%20creativity.>
- Salmon, S. (2016). Exceptional pedagogy for children with exceptionalities: International perspectives. In D. VanderLinde Blair & K. A. McCord (Eds.), *How the Orff approach can support inclusive music teaching* (pp. 39–60). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190234560.003.0003>
- Shin, D., Lee M., & Bong, M. (2022). Beyond left and right: Learning is a whole-brain process. *Theory Into Practice*, 61 (3), 347–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2022.2096386>
- Wolf, M. (2018). The science and poetry in learning (and teaching) to read. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(4), 13–17.

In Conversation

Real World Sight Reading, Social Pedagogies, Curricular Expansion, & Classroom Music Models

By Dr. Aaron Lohmeyer and Dr. Leonidas Lagrimas

I recently met with Dr. Lagrimas over Zoom to discuss a few points of advocacy for a quickly expanding course in American secondary settings—Class Keyboard. Below is the abridged transcript.

“It’s good to realize you’re not training concert hall soloists, but instead you’re planning for something much bigger beyond your classroom.”

LOHMEYER

Dr. Lagrimas, so nice to have a chance to sit and talk about your work. I am the current Vice President for Secondary General Classroom with MMEA—the scope of that position is to advocate for 5-12 classroom model music practices. Of course, class piano is a beautiful example of a more classroom-based approach. But before you get into that, another reason for reaching out to you is that you’re coming up to Minnesota here pretty soon, and I want to make sure that people were able to hear about happenings in our own backyard. You’re presenting at the national MTNA conference in Minneapolis this year. I was wondering if maybe you could first just describe what is MTNA for those who may not be familiar with the organization, and tell us about your session.



Real World Sight Reading

LAGRIMAS

Sure. First of all, thanks for having me here. MTNA stands for Music Teachers National Association. It’s a professional international level organization that I would say predominantly is a piano organization, but we are open to all settings and support a quite active competition structure at the local state and national levels for woodwinds, for brass, for chamber, and for voice, and strings as well.

The title of my session is, “Church Starts in 20 Minutes: Real Time Sight Reading for the Real World.” The session will basically take the attendees through what I do in my class for 20 minutes, how I give the assignment out, and how I check in with the students as they go through the activity.



A lot of students, it turns out, have a rather skewed idea of what it means to prepare a hymn for performance in 20 minutes for church. This incorporates a lot of things such as defining what it means to utilize functional piano skills in a real world setting, which is a very different beast than the more conventional piano training that people may associate with perfecting and practicing a repertoire for performance.

LOHMEYER

I love that idea of thinking of sight reading as a real world activity. I think a lot of times we may think of sight reading as something to demonstrate enough competency in, and then you move on, but sight reading is often the real work of a professional musician and requires constant attention. This is the work for a lot of musicians. I also love the word you used for sight-reading, “functional,” because it's a different mindset. It's not necessarily elimination of the search for perfection, but it is a different mindset to think, “Okay, what's going to function best in this environment for these purposes?”

LAGRIMAS

Right. And you said it yourself when you use the word “gigging” musician. I can't speak to other instrument methodologies, but most of the sight reading examples you see in piano methods tend to be strictly on Western based classical examples and yet, most sight reading in the real world is usually not on solo classical repertoire, but it's usually within a collaborative setting and it's usually something that might not be classical.

The example I always bring was my trial by fire the first time I played for a musical theater production. During auditions, when the singer put their scores in front of me, I had to make sense of it in the 45 seconds I had. It's a very different mindset than the type of sight reading that's often encountered in piano method books. First and foremost, sight reading is something that we encounter in areas usually outside of solo performance, and it's usually not classical music. Most of the sight reading I've done as a professional are in more popular or world music-based genres and they're usually in collaboration with another musician or another singer.

LOHMEYER

That's interesting. My own personal academic interest is in “multi-literacy” and how today we need to be literate in multiple musical discourses. Your example of being an accompanist for auditions is a perfect example of this form of literacy for our everyday lives.

LAGRIMAS

Well, that's similar to another thing I'm addressing in this session—it's that a lot of students and teachers associate competent sight reading purely with accuracy of notes and rhythms. But certainly, even just focusing on church, there's a competency that isn't easy to pinpoint or define, that is based on being comfortable with various styles and genres. Nowadays a lot of church hymns are actually more of a praise band or a popular or rock-based type thing. And that's something that might not necessarily come across in the written notes. You must be able to make decisions based on what you perceive in the style and the overall feel of the music. To develop this intuition for style, students really need more informal playing experiences as this is often not in the more formal curriculum.

LOHMEYER

Well, I imagine, especially in some of the contexts that you mentioned, rock, praise band, or even auditions, you might be working with just a chord lyric sheet. They might not even give you “the notes,” instead they give you the chords. And that's a different literacy—that's a different *mode* of reading. That's one of the main ideas behind multiliteracy—that today's texts are multimodal and thus require different literacies. So the nature of reading music evolves as our texts evolve. How we define the demands behind “reading music” needs to adjust to how musicians work today.

LAGRIMAS

Very much. Certainly, the idea of playing piano in a formal studio or accompanying setting is different from what you might do in a class piano course. A lot of times doing well in class piano isn't necessarily going to correlate to your experience in another setting with a different set of demands, let's say, for example, in your student teaching. That's been something I've had to deal with here in developing the class piano curriculum at Western Carolina University. I'm here on the piano faculty, where I'm trying to figure out ways to really make the class piano curriculum a little bit more reflective of what they're going to be doing as teachers. Now, some of that is attention to the specific skills I teach, but a lot of it I'm finding is attention to how I assess and grade the students.

LOHMEYER

Yeah. If functionality and our ideas of piano proficiency doesn't quite line up with the ideals of perfection in performance—there's a different kind of competency that we need to assess.

LAGRIMAS

Right, and that doesn't always break down into As and Bs and Cs as your rubric might want to indicate.

LOHMEYER

And if that rubric is slanted towards perfection, it's teaching students to adopt a certain value set, which may not even coincide with what's going to help them best in an environment where it needs to be functional—not perfect—where we forgive mistakes and we know how to move on and we can just read something for the big idea.

Keeping Class Social to Develop a Real World Mindset

LOHMEYER

I'm curious about your experience with just the classroom model of teaching. Sometimes when I talk about classroom music models, I hear about a general fear of doing away with group music making. Because there is something special that happens when you are making music with other people, there's a fear of classroom based models being all about “me” and the task in front. Are there ways that a class piano classroom can also facilitate these meaningful group music making experiences?

LAGRIMAS

Oh, absolutely. You know, just something as simple as having my students pair up in class piano and tackle a lot of things in groups in pairs, can be a really revelatory thing. Like you said, there's that perception of we're no longer an ensemble, then it's “me me me.” And so students here at Western (Carolina University) are very surprised, for example, when I have them listening to each other in pairs using our lab system. This kind of social feedback is also very much a matter of “real world” preparation so finding opportunities to have students work in pairs or groups in class piano gives them the opportunity to have someone else listen and offer informal feedback.

LOHMEYER

One of the things that you said made me think of ways I've been frustrated with peer feedback in my own classroom—that I can over-orchestrate as formal peer feedback with a really involved rubric. And while a structured rubric helps communicate skills on a continuum, I've never experienced a rubric in my professional performing life. Informal sharing and feedback is the authentic assessment for most musical practices.

LAGRIMAS

And yet, so often in classrooms, there is not any kind of collective shared thinking, or learning or exchange going on. It's like we're all at the musical equivalent of the art museum, and we're just all there to kind of take it in and no one talks to each other. And I think something as simple as having some kind of opportunity for, for exchange of thought or interaction...that's how you can make any kind of classroom music setting more engaging.

LOHMEYER

That point makes me think of some of the lessons I learned as a classroom guitar teacher, when I came in to it from a band background. Given the opportunity to observe some really top flight guitar teachers in Florida, pumping out some incredible players, I was just blown away by how much student talking was happening in some of those classrooms. My mindset was very authoritarian, I thought a great music teacher needed to replicate the social isolation of the practice room---music = drill and kill. Then here are these other teachers that are producing great student outcomes with a different, more relaxed approach. Sometimes their students are just casually talking to each other as they play. It was that more democratic and collaborative environment that I think you're talking about.

LAGRIMAS

Well, I should say too that I teach both class and applied piano. So I have my piano majors for lessons and for studio class, and it never fails to amaze me. You know how pianists---again, this always seems to be much more of an issue for pianists than other instruments---they are surprised when I ask them to give their own feedback on their own performance. Especially in piano, it is like all they are used to is just waiting to see what the teacher says, or waiting to see what I think about their performance. A lot of students honestly don't know what to say when they're asked to reflect on their own playing and or they're given that opportunity in the first place.

LOHMEYER

Yeah, that is all well aligned with where we are in music education more broadly--Create, Perform, and Respond those three processes together form literacy. Through doing those three things, we develop a critical literacy. If all we do is we play and then we pat ourselves on the head and give ourselves a little sticker so we can move on to the next page for more playing, then honestly, we haven't learned anything about music. We have to be able to reflect upon performances for "respond" to occur.

Keyboard Classrooms for Curricular Expansion

LOHMEYER

So, as biased as I am towards class guitar for curricular expansion, I've been really surprised to see how much class keyboard has taken off nationwide. I have several guitar teacher friends who have added keyboard to their class load, and some are saying their keyboard classes are taking off faster than their guitar courses. There is a recent study out by David Miller called "Public High School Music Education in Maryland: Issues of Equity, Access and Uptake" out of Journal of Research in Music Education just last year (Jan 2024), that showed keyboard had the most diverse audience among band, orchestra, choir, guitar, and keyboard. So, there is both great interest and diversity in keyboard classrooms. Why do you think we're seeing that in the U.S. right now?

LAGRIMAS

It's an excellent question, and I attribute it to a lot of different things. I suppose, hopefully without too many of my own biases showing, I think that piano is the instrument that offers the most immediate rewards in the sense of "I'm making something that could be musical." Couple that with music technology today—there are so many resources for students to teach themselves an instrument. For example, my niece and nephew are always looking up stuff on YouTube and bringing them to me.

I teach them, often through the things they first taught themselves. You know, on YouTube, most of it's not by notation. A lot of it is by rote, or they follow the lights that come down. Also, piano is something that you don't have to have a right embouchure or a bow hold to create a good sound right away. Piano is a little bit more of an immediate way in to playing the music students might choose for themselves.

LOHMEYER

I love those "follow the lights" videos that teach piano roll as notation!

LAGRIMAS

There are so many cheap, accessible resources for people to teach themselves at piano right now. Piano is also something that can really work on skills such as ear training, and overall musicianship in a way that another instrument might not provide. I think all of those are reasons why piano is taking off the way it is. You also don't need much money to get started. I mean, new pianos are very inexpensive, but used pianos are often free. But even if you just want to get a little simple electronic keyboard that plays perfectly in tune and gives you access to all these sounds, that's super cheap. There's an access advantage as well.

Classroom vs Ensemble Models of Instruction

LOHMEYER

So, "Secondary Classroom Music," (this is my VP role at MMEA) addresses the many ways music educators may facilitate a meaningful music education in ways that are not exclusively embedded in the large ensemble model. What are some of the benefits to a classroom-based model you've found as an educator with experience in both ensemble- and classroom-based settings?

LAGRIMAS

Well, you know, when I first started teaching in the public schools, this was in New York City, and I got hired at a number of different places to essentially start the music program. Yeah- from scratch. Literally, from scratch. Like they pointed me to the empty classroom—and I was even lucky to have my own classroom. And I found quickly that all of my ensemble based experiences went all out the window when I was shown to an empty room and told, "here's your room, you'll start seeing kids tomorrow."

And so I suppose one advantage is that, you know, a lot of people take the ensemble model for granted. But, that ensemble model, it's not just always going to be there when you show up at a school. Or it might not be—culturally speaking and historically speaking—it might not have the same place or prominence or priority that it might have at another school. You know, especially in an area where there might not be the infrastructure and resources or the budget to have an ensemble. You often again have to find your own way to create a music education experience and a curriculum that goes beyond you know, that traditional ensemble experience.

LOHMEYER

Great point.

LAGRIMAS

You know, I was forced to think in that “outside of the box” way when it came to what I can provide in my classroom that is musical, is authentic...and is feasible culturally, financially, logistically for my school. And so, you know, being able to think outside that traditional ensemble box and come up with something—whether it is something more keyboard based, or maybe a guitar class, or an African drumming class, or a songwriting class. Any of these things, you know I think there's an advantage when a teacher has not been boxed in by a limited set of experiences.

This is something we deal with here, by the way, with our music education curriculum here. We have a wonderful music ed program here at Western. That being said, it's also in need of a little bit of I guess updating in terms of thought. And our music ed department chair here, she is doing some fantastic things with getting our music ed majors to think beyond “you're a band person, you're a choral person. You're a K-5 general music person.” You know, because the reality is to be able to be a successful teacher anywhere in the 21st century, you have to be able to think beyond those categories, those norms. The job is different everywhere.

LOHMEYER

Right, and I think jobs are getting more and more different too. As music education aims to adopt more culturally responsive practices where we're encouraging teachers to answer “what should I do?” with “well, what are my unique students most interested in doing—what will connect them musically to their community?” This answer allows culturally responsive practices to be that which also is culturally relevant to your school environment.

Do you have any advice for a large ensemble teacher who has a hole in their schedule, and might be considering a piano, guitar, or electronic type of classroom-based model? Because I think when I transitioned from an ensemble mindset to a classroom mindset, it was a difficult paradigm shift.

LAGRIMAS

That's a good question. I guess one thing that has helped me a lot is, you know, when it comes to classroom music, the primary goal isn't necessarily going to be performance in the sense of we're preparing for a performance or we're preparing for a competition. And I attribute this to one of my mentors at NYU, David Elliot. But thanks to his book *Music Matters*, it got me to see that music is something everyone in the world participates in some way. For most of us, not as professional performers—but music is a part of all of our lives, of our culture. Whether we listen to it, or we just kind of casually, do it on our own, or we buy tickets to a concert, or we're in our car, going through the different stations on Sirius XM. We are teaching people a life skill because music is a part of our lives. In a lot of classroom-based models, I think it's important to develop a mindset around this more comprehensive view of a lifelong practice involving many forms of engagement. We need to come at it from a mindset of preparing them for a life in music which may not include performance on the instrument we may be teaching.

LOHMEYER

Exactly—I think you and I both did well enough in a music education system that was kind of performance oriented. And I'll speak for myself, it pushed me into stressful performance situations that has turned me into a performer who says yes to doing hard things. I value that. But this competition-based system doesn't have to be fact for every teaching setting—in fact it's not really used in other arts education areas...or even in physical education. I think of when I taught guitar, how absurd it would be for me to arrange my class in chairs where we have first chair guitarist all the way to 25th chair guitarist. It would feel silly in that classroom environment because you realize that you're teaching students that just don't share that value set. That's not why they're in your classroom.

"I'll just share my own early classroom guitar teaching mistake from my first year in that role. So, I had this idea of everyone needing to sit in classical position. I got the blocks and required my students to sit one leg up, guitar between legs. But, I had a student in there, and she was one of my high flyers and she came in with some guitar knowledge and wanted to be singing her songs, not playing like Segovia. She was full of internal motivation for her music. However, that seating posture just conflicted with her musical identity. She wouldn't do it. And she ultimately quit because for her, it felt like such a betrayal of herself to turn her existing musical practice into something that had to bend at the will of this authoritarian teacher insisting on his own idea of "doing it right."

There's efficient technique, sure, but in that particular instance, how many amazing guitar players still don't sit in a classical posture? I just saw a world class flamenco guitarist at Winona State...for his performance he sat legs crossed, guitar neck horizontal to the floor. A lot of great players do just fine with their own approach to posture. I needed to think more broadly about other completely valid ways to play the instrument.

LAGRIMAS

Right, it's good to realize you're not training concert hall soloists, but instead you're planning for something much bigger beyond your classroom. Again, this idea of lifelong learning in music, which I think sometimes gets obscured.

Dr. Leonidas Lagrimas is Assistant Professor of Piano and Piano Pedagogy at Western Carolina University. An emerging leader in piano pedagogy research, Dr. Lagrimas serves on the editorial board of American Music Teacher, the official journal of the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA).

Dr. Aaron Lohmeyer is Associate Professor of Music Education and Jazz Band Director at Winona State University.

TOTAL BAND DIRECTOR[®] WORKSHOP

JULY 23-24 2025

RUSH CREEK GOLF CLUB
Maple Grove, MN



World-Class Clinicians

Reading Band

Inspiration & Networking

Register online
www.eckroth.com



Choral Warm-ups: Your First Connection with Your Singers

By Greg Gilpin

Greg Gilpin is a celebrated ASCAP award-winning choral composer and arranger and a highly respected choral conductor. He is known throughout the United States leading performances at New York City's iconic Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center as well as Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. His international appearances include the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia, Royal Festival Hall in London, England, and Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavik, Iceland. Mr. Gilpin is also a producer and musician in the recording industry and is Director of Educational Choral Publications for Shawnee Press, a distinguished choral publisher.



Hi! I was wondering if you'd like to lead the choir with one warm-up? This was a question I asked several teachers before I began my first rehearsal with an all-state choir many years ago. To my surprise, I was met with fear and rejection. One teacher stepped away from me in silence, shaking their head "no" and exiting the room. Walking backwards! I've never forgotten this moment and I've since realized it was a gift not to have missed out on my first connection with the choir by asking someone else to do a warm-up. The first moment is an opportunity to create energy and build a foundation for the rest of your time together. From the thousands of music students and teachers I've worked with over the years, I've learned so many wonderful ideas and ways to warm-up a choir. We all need a refresher from time to time and I hope these ideas and reminders regarding warm-ups will help you CONNECT with your singers in every rehearsal.

The “Meet & Greet”

No matter if it's once a week or once a day, your rehearsal begins with students entering the room and possibly saying “hello” (it's nice when that happens, right?). This is your opportunity to set the tone and begin the energy of your rehearsal immediately. This is your “meet and greet”, your first connection. The moment rehearsal begins, with or without everyone, begin your warm-ups. Stretching, breathing, clapping, anything active such as a humorous vocal exercise (sung lightly). Stay focused and perhaps the 1% that may not be as engaged will join in the positive energy you are creating.

Three Basics: Breath, Vowel and Diction

I've noticed many young choirs have the same basic issues of proper breath, vowel and diction. If you're building a library of warm-ups or reviewing what you have, build them to mix and match on these three basics.

Breath: Start every rehearsal with breathing. We hold our breath way too much in our daily lives. Air is our fuel to sing. I always remind singers to “make room for the fuel.” Teach them to physically expand their bodies. Engage in breathing exercises that involve the whole body, encouraging students to take in more air than they could possibly ever need. Involve the arms and legs. Standing yoga movements are amazing ways to “make room for the fuel” and become excellent ways to stretch, too. You can easily research simple standing and sitting yoga stretches and breathing ideas on-line, such as YouTube.com.

Vowel: A uniform vowel is truly a gift from heaven. I use a vowel warm-up that also works in relation to breath work by inhaling and then exhaling a hiss between the teeth. To make this more fun, I play a competition game of who can hiss the longest and then talk about why and how the winners had success. Then I have them hiss and change their lip position from a smile to a desired “Oo” shape. I always say, “It all begins with Oo” because I find this vowel the easiest and quickest to become uniform with all the singers. They immediately hear the difference and make the connection of uniform vowels. We then keep that lip position and explore the other pure vowels. I've developed some simple hand positioning by the mouth to help with their vowel shapes such as pointing finger, finger circling, fist, flat hand, tall hand. I truly believe it is important to be physical as you warm-up and rehearse and this is one way to incorporate the hands with vowel work.

Diction: I use an exercise of a four-quarter note pattern of a consonant and having the choir echo the pattern. The singers then experience how much energy is needed to create the desired consonant. They realize how their stomach is involved in creating consonants properly and refer them to the breathing exercise we did earlier that does the same thing, creating a connection between the two. I repeat both during rehearsal when the consonants are not sounding as they should. “You gotta feel it in the gut!”

The Warm-Up Rut

Are your warm-ups functioning as a babysitter while other “business” is happening at the beginning of rehearsal? Are your singers on autopilot? Do you notice the tempo getting faster and faster? Are you doing the same warm-ups every day, all week or even longer? If the answer is “yes” or even “maybe,” it's time to evaluate the situation. Try keeping your warm-ups a surprise each day. Include minor keys and chromatic movement. Use some basic pitch memory exercises as a warm-up. For you to hear your choir and for them to hear each other better, I highly recommend not singing with the students and less piano usage. Many times, the teacher's voice and piano become crutches to the singers. They begin relying on hearing this support and not really hearing themselves. It also keeps the teacher from clearly hearing the singers' voices.

Your warm-ups for the rehearsal should also relate to the repertoire you are rehearsing. Extract a passage from your repertoire to create a useful warm-up. If you are beginning rehearsal with a ballad that has long phrases and a legato style, your last warm-up should lead to this style. If you then rehearse something energetic and up-tempo, do a quick warm-up to set the stage and begin the teaching process. Opportunities for warm-ups permeate your entire rehearsal and those moments link back to your first connection at the beginning of rehearsal, too.

Your Go-To List of Warm-Up “Keeps”

Keep It Short—Your beginning warm-up time should be roughly 5 minutes.

Keep It Simple and Focused—Take a moment to prepare and decide what is important for that day and rehearsal.

Keep It Purposeful—Each warm-up selected should be purposeful for the entire rehearsal and repertoire. Treat the warm-up as you would your repertoire.

Keep ‘Em Guessing—Get out of your rut.

Keep Learning—Some of my favorite resources for warm-ups are *IceBreakers* by Valerie Lippoldt Mack, which is full of games and activities that help your singers to get to know each other. *The Resonant Male Singer* by Jacob Narverud is a fantastic resource for warm-ups that not only work for young male singers but for female singers as well. And every exercise has photos, which is so helpful. *The Perfect Rehearsal* by Tim Seelig helps directors create an interesting, energetic, educational and well-managed rehearsal.

I encourage you to continue learning ways to connect with your choir by attending your amazing state conferences. I love attending and presenting at conferences. Join me as we continue learning new ways to connect with our singers at the first moment of rehearsal.



MMEA IS LISTENING!



Tell us what you thought
about this issue of INTERVAL
(Pssst! The QR code is also a clickable
hyperlink!)

MACPHAIL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Our music education is as unique as your students.

MacPhail delivers personalized learning for students K-12 through dynamic school partnerships. In-person, after school, and live online instruction bring outstanding music teachers into your school to provide individual lessons, sectionals, ELL support, residencies, masterclasses, and more.

Are you a Title 1 school or a school located in Greater Minnesota?

You have no-cost access to tools, resources, and residencies by artists from diverse cultural backgrounds through MacPhail's Project Amplify initiative. Project Amplify provides transformational programming that nurtures creativity, honors students' backgrounds, and provides tools and resources to support K-12 education at no cost to schools or music educators.

Questions? Email us at SchoolPartnerships@MacPhail.org



**Click here to learn more about
our school partnerships and
Project Amplify.**

MacPhail
CENTER FOR MUSIC

YOU'RE NOT FORGETFUL, YOU'RE OVERWHELMED: SUPPORTING MUSIC EDUCATORS' EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

By Corrine Galligan

A moment in the life of a music teacher: You are in the middle of your first class, mentally organizing a list of actionable feedback to give your students about the activity they are currently doing. Your watch and phone buzz with an email from the school secretary, reminding everyone about the daylong grade level field trip that day. Hmm, you think. Nobody told me about that, and that grade is preparing for an upcoming performance... You try not to allow your feelings to reach your face while still remembering your feedback for the learners in front of you, with whom you are still actively musicking.

Being a music educator takes a lot of brainpower, and sometimes it may feel like we expend more energy on the non-teaching parts of the job. Specifically, teaching requires strong executive function skills—or at least reliable strategies—to plan, organize, and execute. Whether we are planning lessons or organizing performance logistics, designing assessments or contacting caregivers, it can all be mentally tiring and can take our attention away from the more fun parts of teaching. How can we decrease this extraneous cognitive load so we can focus on the learners in front of us?



Executive Functions

“The executive functions operate like the sections of a symphony orchestra, playing simultaneously to produce seamlessly beautiful music. It is the action of these executive functions in concert that permits normal human self-control” (Barkley & Benton, 2021, p. 7).

Executive functions (EFs) are complex cognitive abilities housed in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Some experts liken them to a symphony orchestra, while others compare them to an air traffic control system at a busy airport, coordinating a variety of moving parts to safely manage the arrivals and departures of multiple airplanes on multiple runways (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University [CDCHU], 2011). Similarly, our EFs help us hold and work with multiple thoughts simultaneously, plan and organize tasks, set and achieve goals, filter distractions, and manage the impulses that might derail us from our goals (CDCHU, 2011). A high IQ doesn't guarantee strong EFs (Brown et al., 2009), and EF deficits can interfere with learning at a variety of ages (Dorr & Armstrong, 2019). EFs are not constant and can be affected by many things, including ADHD, anxiety, depression, other forms of neurodivergence, fluctuating estrogen levels, stress, trauma, and unmet physiological needs (e.g., adequate sleep, fuel, hydration, shelter, etc.).

At their most basic categorization, EFs can be divided into three functions: working memory, cognitive flexibility, and impulse regulation. **Working memory** is the capacity to hold and manipulate thoughts in your mind for immediate use, almost like a clipboard for thoughts or a computer's RAM capacity. In music teaching, this might look like:

- Remembering the feedback you want to give upon cutoff
- Doing mental math to divide students into groups and/or assign sectional or group work locations
- Taking attendance and remembering who to mark absent when you get to your roster
- Giving or receiving multi-step directions
- Remembering a phone number or email address you just looked up

Cognitive flexibility is the ability to maintain or adjust attention in response to shifting circumstances. In music teaching, this might look like:

- Finding out in the morning that a whole grade level is gone for an all-day field trip that nobody told you about, and figuring out how to adjust your lesson plans accordingly
- Learning that a song you've taught for years has a questionable past, and deciding to remove it from your curriculum
- Discovering that students' understanding of a concept is incorrect or incomplete, and adjusting instruction accordingly
- Determining how to apply your attendance policy for unforeseen circumstances

Impulse regulation, or self-control, is the ability to resist competing urges or impulses that would interfere with previously decided priorities. In music teaching, this could look like:

- Not laughing when a student says something inappropriate yet funny
- Stopping yourself from turning "inside thoughts" into "outside thoughts"
- Resisting the urge to plan next year's concert repertoire when there are more urgent things to do for this year

These are the three main EF categories, though some researchers have divided them into as many as 40 categories. Dawson and Guare (2016) divide them into 12:

- Emotional control
- Flexibility
- Goal-directed persistence
- Metacognition (awareness and understanding of your own thought processes)
- Organization
- Planning/prioritizing
- Response inhibition
- Stress tolerance
- Sustained attention
- Task initiation
- Time management
- Working memory

Take a moment to think about how these skills show up as expectations for music educators. Which would you say are your three strongest and three weakest? How have you seen these strengths and weaknesses reflected throughout your career?

The concept of **neuroplasticity** tells us that the brain is not static; genetic or environmental circumstances can negatively affect neural connections, while targeted practice can positively affect them. There are windows of marked growth of certain executive functions (Montuori et al., 2024), but researchers have also shown that cognitive flexibility may increase until one's late 20s, working memory might not reach its peak until one's early 30s, and inhibition control might not start its downward slide until one's mid-60s (Cleveland Clinic, 2024).

Strategies for Support

How can we support our executive functions to decrease cognitive load and increase the available cognitive and physical energy for ourselves and our learners?

We can engage in automatization, or building and streamlining systems to require less active input. Externalize what you can. For example, some people like to have a weekly “meeting” with themselves in which they plan for that week or the following week, program self-management systems like phone/watch alarms and wake-up/bedtime light settings, check upcoming due dates, schedule emails to send, etc. Explore your email system—there should be a way to set it to mark and automatically categorize emails from important people (e.g., administrators, fine arts coordinators) so that they do not slip down your inbox. Depending on what you teach, which job tasks can you appropriately delegate to others? For example, setting up the classroom does not require a music education degree or teaching license; it might take time to teach students how to share responsibility for the learning environment, but once they take ownership of that task, it removes it from your to-do list and allows you to spend that time and energy elsewhere.

We can use compensatory strategies, particularly those that decrease demands on working memory (Fogel, 2022). Assemble a personal toolkit of effective strategies to reduce the impact of factors that affect cognitive load. I started a crowdsourced list in October 2023—you are welcome to explore it and add your own ideas! Find it here: <https://tinyurl.com/EFMTStrategies>

Finally, remember that emotions matter too, so identify your successes and build on them. Engage in positive self-talk. Just like in music, perfection does not exist; we are aiming for improvement, effectiveness, stability, sustainability...whatever helps reduce the overwhelm so you can focus on teaching the learners in front of you.

We can organize this process of enhancing or supporting our EFs just like we would build other skills or systems (Kennedy, 2017):

1. Set personal goals based on EF strengths and weaknesses.
2. Select strategies to utilize in the process of reaching said goals.
3. Track ourselves for accountability.
4. Assess progress towards our goals.
5. Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of our plan.
6. Revisit your goals and strategies, and adjust accordingly.

Conclusion

Executive functions are integral to our jobs as music educators, and they can ebb and flow throughout our careers. We can support EFs like working memory, cognitive flexibility, impulse regulation, and more by automatizing or externalizing systems, using compensatory strategies, and being kind to ourselves and celebrating our successes. Approaching this self-supporting process is like practicing any other skill or system development, so we should be ready to reflect and iteratively adjust based on our individual needs. There is a variety of accessible literature on supporting EFs, and EF coaches exist as well. The biggest thing to remember is that if you are struggling with EFs, you are not alone, and there are resources to help you.

Corinne Galligan, NBCT, is a PhD student in Music Education at the University of Michigan. She taught elementary general music in Wisconsin for nine years, where she was a Golden Apple Teacher of Distinction. She holds a BME (Eastern Michigan University), MM in Music Education – Kodály Emphasis (Silver Lake College), Certificate in Teaching World Music (University of St. Thomas) and Certificate in Learning Differences and Neurodiversity – Specialization in Executive Function (Landmark College).

References

Barkley, R. A., & Benton, C. M. (2021). *Taking charge of adult ADHD: Proven strategies to succeed at work, at home, and in relationships* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Brown, T. E., Reichel, P. C., & Quinlan, D. M. (2009). Executive function impairments in high IQ adults with ADHD. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 13(2), 161–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054708326113>

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2011). *Building the brain's "air traffic control" system: How early experiences shape the development of executive function: Working paper no. 11*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/How-Early-Experiences-Shape-the-Development-of-Executive-Function.pdf>

Cleveland Clinic. (2024). Executive function. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/executive-function>

Dawson, P., & Guare, R. (2016). *The smart but scattered guide to success: How to use your brain's executive skills to keep up, stay calm, and get organized at work and at home*. Guilford Press.

Dorr, M. M., & Armstrong, K. J. (2019). Executive functioning and impairment in emerging adult college students with ADHD symptoms. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 23(14), 1759–1765. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054718787883>

Fogel, Y. (2022). Cognitive strategies: Moderating the relationship between executive functions and daily functioning. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(24), 16845. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416845>

Kennedy, M. R. T. (2017). *Coaching college students with executive function problems*. Guilford Press.

Montuori, C., Gambarota, F., Altoé, G., & Arfé, B. (2024). The cognitive effects of computational thinking: A systematic review and meta-analytic study. *Computers and Education*, 210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2023.104961>

Structuring Peer-to Peer Feedback Towards Equity

Mallory Alekna is Assistant Professor of Music, Human Development, and Learning at Augsburg University, where she and the students collaboratively explore equity in and through music education. Before moving to Minnesota, Mallory supported students and communities in Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Indiana, and Arizona. These experiences included a wide variety of musical practices in pre-kindergarten through graduate levels, and in public and community settings. Mallory has presented at regional, national, and international conferences on topics related to equity and string education. She is interested in contemporary curricular inquiry, creative placemaking, and critical response process as potential tools for change in music learning and teaching.

Mallory completed her Ph.D. in Music Learning & Teaching from Arizona State University in May 2021. Her dissertation was an opportunity to center the voices of underrepresented music students and to learn from them about the complex ways in which they experienced equity and inequity within their school of music.



Dr. Mallory Alekna

What is the problem? Why should we care?

Like many music educators, I want every student to know that they have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share in our classrooms, and beyond. As a former middle school teacher, I can recall trying to instill this understanding in students: that they could create, perform, respond, and connect all on their own, and that we were all worthwhile and growing musicians. However, through societal norms and schooling, students often learn the misguided notion that teachers teach and students learn. It wasn't until I went to college that I was challenged to think about how often our society places teachers above students, or how many of our daily practices reinforce these dynamics in our learning environments. For me, exploring these power dynamics became a way of pursuing the goals of equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression that I wanted to embody and promote through my teaching.

And even while I was aspiring to change these structures, I wasn't always taught practical tools to help students to take ownership of their learning. I would differentiate instruction and utilize strategies like think/pair/share. I tried asking students to contribute their ideas about what we needed to work on in our group compositions, ensemble performances, or individual techniques. I tried my best to help students feel engaged and integral to our daily lessons and discussions. Still, as a mid-career music educator, I didn't know how to step away from the traditional rehearsal and teaching strategies that I so diligently studied and observed. This led me to wonder, "How can I actively redress these hierarchies in my teaching practice? How can I change the notion that "teachers know and students are taught?" Gratefully, I was introduced to a practice that helped me to challenge these norms and to embrace different ways of being in the classroom.

And in this way, the Process becomes more than a process. It's a way of practicing and considering the questions, "how do we want to be together?" and "how do we want to be with our students, colleagues, communities, families, friends, and neighbors?"

So what happened?

In 2016, I began my graduate studies at Arizona State University. That same year, the university hired a dancer and choreographer, and MacArthur Fellow Genius Grant recipient, Liz Lerman. In the early 1990s, Liz Lerman started developing Critical Response Process (CRP) because she wanted to be able to provide, and receive, more meaningful and useful feedback. In her exploration, she realized that CRP and its underlying values allow us to do so much more than exchange feedback. By engaging in the process, students (and teachers!) can learn how to think deeply about their own work, develop critical thinking skills, and start to see themselves as capable and worthwhile contributors to the classroom community and beyond. For me, this process became a site of intense curiosity, and a way to reshape my teaching practice so that students would ultimately know and feel that they were powerful contributors to both their own learning and that of their peers.

What is Critical Response Process?

Critical Response Process (CRP) is a way of giving and receiving feedback that centers the artist/maker and is designed to leave them enthusiastic and ready to get back to work. Further, engaging with CRP as a responder—a giver of feedback—supports the development of critical thinking and deeper engagement with one's own work or creative practice. CRP is both a formal four-step process and a dynamic set of values that guide feedback exchanges. Some educators in Minnesota may be familiar with CRP in its traditional format: a large circle of participants including an artist, a facilitator, and a group of responders. However, as a current college educator and K–12 guest instructor, I have been really excited to bring the variations of CRP into my classroom because of the ways it fosters meaningful peer-to-peer learning. Mutual coaching is utilizing the steps of CRP in a peer-to-peer setting.

So what might this look like?

The four steps of Critical Response Process (CRP) are Statements of Meaning, Artist Asks Questions, Responders Ask Neutral Questions, and Permissioned Opinions (Lerman & Borstel, 2022). I will describe all four steps below; however, I often teach these steps one at a time, and across a semester or two at a pace that best supports my particular students. I have often spent a whole semester just on one step if that is what is most appropriate for the age group and the pace of learning.

CRP can be applied to any situation so long as the artist/maker has something that they want feedback on. To start the process, make sure students have identified their "work in progress." Perhaps students have been working on an individual composition or playing an excerpt on their instrument. Then, have students pair up and spread out around your space. One student will be the artist/maker, and one will be the responder. Have the artists share their work in progress, and responders listen. You as the facilitator will introduce each step and give students a timer for completing each step. Once the artists have shared their work in progress, it's time to begin the work of CRP.

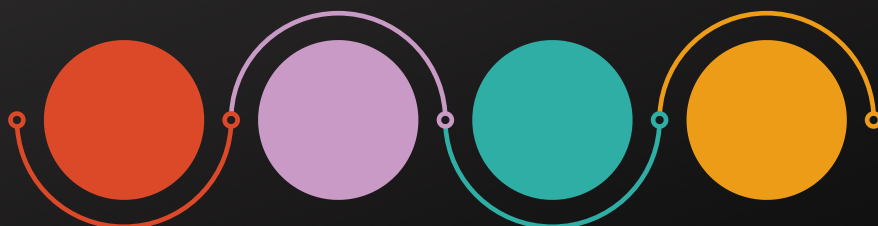
Step 1: Statements of Meaning. In Statements of Meaning, the responders are going to answer the question, "What did you notice, find interesting, surprising, or worthwhile?" I will often model a few examples, and depending on the needs of the group, can have them work with a partner to brainstorm before engaging in each step. I encourage students to come up with 2–3 things to share, and give about 1–2 minutes to complete this step. It can be helpful to remind responders that in Step 1, we are filtering our negative opinions and judgments; and while those are important pieces of information, we will utilize those in another step. For instance, "I noticed you were sitting with your feet on the floor, and [accurate playing posture]," "I appreciated how many different sounds you used in your [composition]," or "It was really cool how you made that many sounds with only three tracks."

Step 2: Artist Asks Questions. In Step 2, the artist now has the opportunity to ask questions about their work in progress and what they want feedback on. Similar to Step 1, responders may find it useful to consider a filter: we answer the artist's questions honestly, and we must stay on topic. For example, if the artist asks about their finger placement, the responders can share their opinions about their fingers. However, the responder should refrain from sharing about embouchure, tempo, etc. If artists are having trouble coming up with questions, take a brief pause as a class to brainstorm some questions. I ask students, "What worries do you have about your [work in progress]? What's the main focus of your worry? What question could you ask to help get information about that worry?" In this way we are helping students learn to flip their worries into questions, an actionable way of helping them structure problem-solving. For example, if an artist is worried that they have too few or too many ideas in their project, they could ask "What is something you would add to/subtract from my project?" Once the artist has had time to try out 1–3 questions, it's time for the next step.

Step 3: Responders Ask Neutral Questions. In this step, responders have a chance to ask questions and get curious about the artist's work. The filter for Step 3 is that responders must work to make their question neutral. A question is considered neutral when there isn't an opinion hiding in the question. For example, "Why did you play it so much slower than it is supposed to be?" might not be the most neutral phrasing. Instead, we might try "Tell me about your choice of tempo." In this step, artists will either have an idea for an answer, or, if they haven't considered this particular question/topic, they are encouraged to go beyond "I'm not sure" and try to brainstorm out loud. It's very possible that students will have trouble voicing a neutral question. We can spend time as a class working to get our questions into a neutral frame. Consider focusing on the main topic/focus of the opinion, and frame a question around that. I especially like the sentence starters, "Tell me about..." or "What is the role of ___?" to help students get to a more neutral framing. It is important for the responders to ask at least one question before going onto the next step. This helps ensure that the responders have gathered some insight about their opinions about the artist's work, before sharing their opinions with the artist in the next step.

Step 4: Permissioned Opinions. In Step 4, the responders use the phrase, "I have an opinion about _____. Do you want to hear it?" The artist has the ability to say yes, or no. In this step, the filter is that the responders must share what topic their opinion is about without revealing the opinion. For instance, "I have an opinion about how slow you played" isn't as neutral as "I have an opinion about the tempo," because slow is already an opinion. Since consent and bodily autonomy is valued in this process, the artist always has the ability to say yes/no and it is up to them whether or not they want to utilize the feedback they receive. Throughout all four steps, I adopt a "we're always practicing" mentality so that we can pause, workshop our dialogue, and jump back into the process. In this way, engaging with the process helps us learn how to craft better questions, get more clarity on topics, and share our insights in ways that will be received, heard, and potentially used.

Once you have completed the steps, switch roles and repeat the process. Sometimes we can do this all in one day, or maybe we alternate each role day to day. The focus is on quality over quantity. Helping students learn to adhere to the process takes time, but I have found it to always be time well spent.



How might I start to bring CRP into my classroom?

For me, this process didn't just happen overnight. The following are a few ideas that helped me bring Critical Response Process into my teaching practice in a way that was meaningful and manageable for both my students and myself. CRP has worked well in general music environments, ensembles, small or individual lessons, and both traditional spaces and modern spaces, including music production and digital beat making. I use this process almost every day in my college classroom, and have seen this process transform music classrooms in K–12 music classrooms.

Teach one piece at a time. Rather than trying to do the entire process, I start by sharing with students the background of CRP, and that we would be exploring this new learning tool throughout the school year. We start with Step 1: Statements of Meaning and begin applying this to a variety of aspects of the classroom. For instance, at the end of the class I would ask for three people to offer statements of meaning about our experience/learning that day. Other times, I use a statement of meaning as an exit ticket. All of these seemingly small moments provided students with low-stakes, yet impactful ways to learn and gain confidence in sharing what they noticed, found interesting, surprising, or worthwhile, eventually helping us to engage with the full process.

Scaffold the experience. My students and I have gained more ease with the process by scaffolding it similarly to how we would learn any new skill. We practice a piece of the process as a whole group, such as flipping our worries into questions to create questions to pose about our work. We might do this with a recording we make of ourselves, or on a composition we make as a whole class. Then students would practice the process in small groups or partners, such as the mutual coaching outlined earlier in this article. And eventually (what I believe to be super powerful), students can start to use CRP as a self-reflection tool for their own work. The students can use the process to help determine next steps and goals for their growth. Continuing to gain familiarity with the process will benefit students now, and will help them develop skills that support them the rest of their lives.

Practice. Practice. Practice. Most importantly, my students and I are still trying to come up with as many ways as possible to infuse our learning with CRP. I've noticed the more we do this process in class, the more students are using the structure to guide other aspects of their interactions. Students have come up to me and I said, "I have an opinion about the upcoming assignment you just gave us. Do you want to hear it?" and I've been delighted to see that they have started to find ways to communicate their needs and ideas to me with more confidence.

So what now?

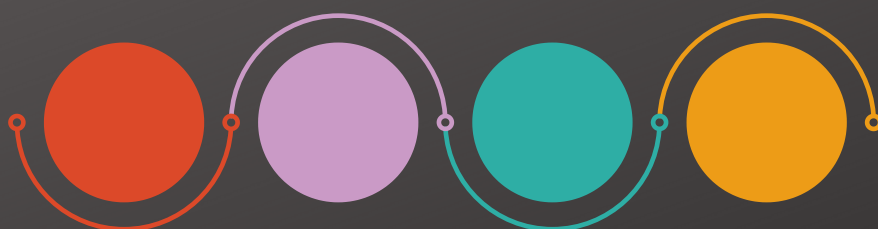
Like all things, this process becomes smoother with practice and over time. Spending time pays off when I see the changes in my classroom and within each student. In my own classrooms, I have seen students develop their abilities to ask better questions, engage more deeply with their own work, and gain confidence in their ability to connect with and dialogue with their peers. Ultimately, I believe that these experiences help to shape a classroom community where we are all learners and we are all teachers. I have been so grateful to have a process that helps students actually learn the process of thinking critically and collaborating, and to watch them take ownership of their learning. While changing the imbalance between teachers and students is ongoing and important work, it has been energizing to see my students benefit and grow through this work.

Exploring CRP has impacted my teaching in ways I never anticipated, and I hope you might experiment with some of these ideas and see what emerges in your classroom. I'd love to hear all about it! There are lots of CRP practitioners in the area (including this author!) who would love to come visit your classroom or studio and introduce CRP to young people (for a list of people see [this website](#)).

In a recently published guide to all things Critical Response Process, Liz Lerman says that, "We practice the process so we can internalize its underlying values as mental and compassionate behavior. It's a form of training to achieve generative and thoughtful ways of being with our colleagues, friends, and families" (Lerman & Borstel, 2022, p. 29). And in this way, the Process becomes more than a process. It's a way of practicing and considering the questions, "how do we want to be together?" and "how do we want to be with our students, colleagues, communities, families, friends, and neighbors?" I've come to realize that this process helped me to get curious about, and address, many of the challenges I was facing in my teaching practice. My worries around reinforcing hierarchies between my students and I have shifted as I take actionable steps to get curious, experiment, and change my teaching. While I have been engaging with this process for eight years, my deep dive and commitment to this change all started with a few, small explorations in my classroom. I hope your own explorations might support you in reaching the goals that you have for your own teaching practice.

References

Lerman, L. & Borstel, J. (2022). *Critique is creative: The Critical Response Process® in theory and action*. Wesleyan University Press. 9780819577184



COLLEGE OF
Saint Benedict  Saint John's
UNIVERSITY

Find Your MUSIC Within

Explore musical opportunities
and scholarship possibilities at
csbsju.edu/music.



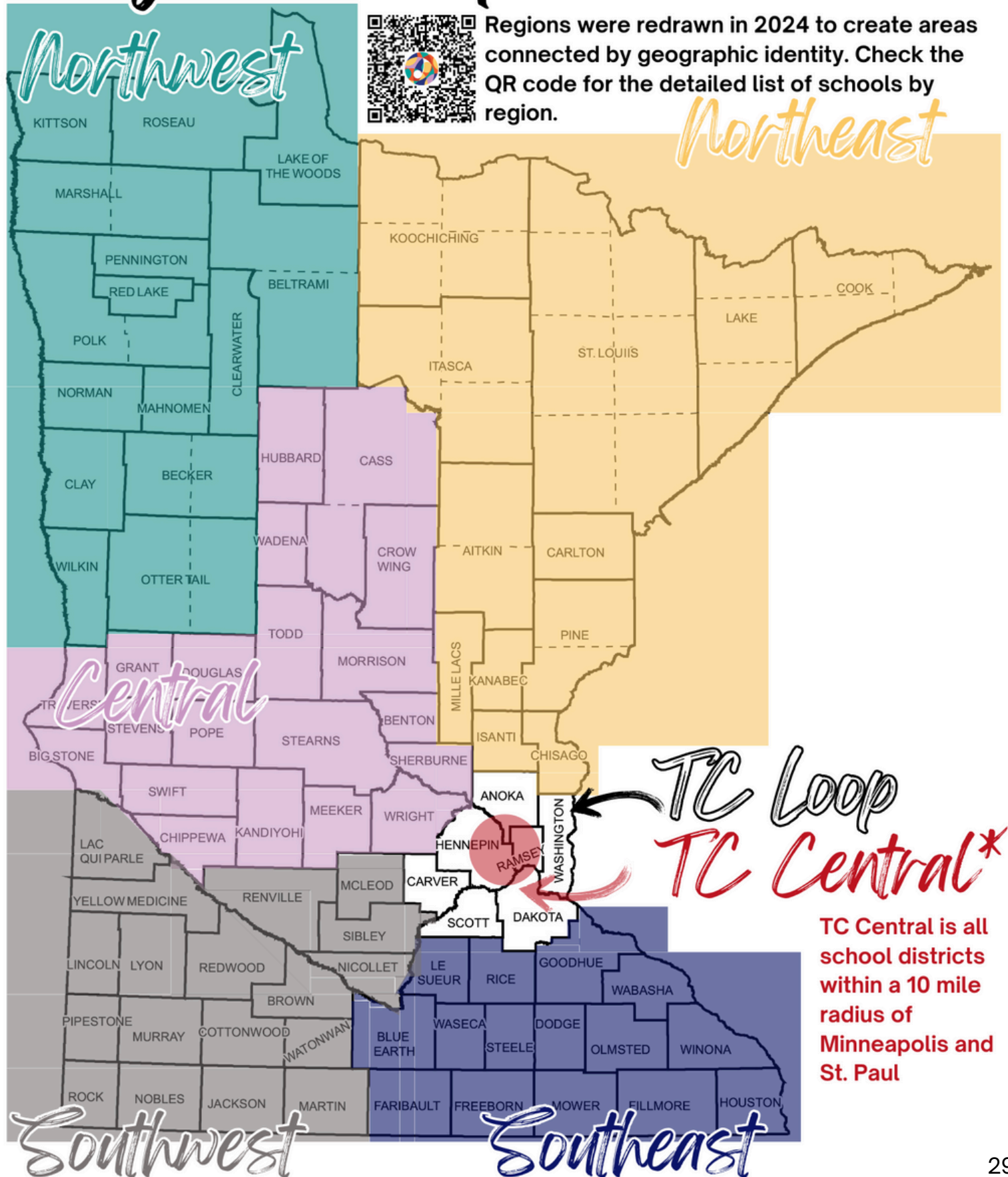
MMEA IS LISTENING!



Tell us what you thought
about this issue of INTERVAL
(Pssst! The QR code is also a clickable
hyperlink!)



MMEA Region Representation



Meet the MMEA Board



Executive Director: Jerri Neddermeyer

My background is in wind band conducting with oboe as my primary instrument. I left teaching in 2010, and I have tremendous respect for the work that teachers do daily. I was frustrated with the isolation, the responsibility for so many varied instrument specialties, the overwhelming number of students, the varied class preps, and the inability to have coverage by a qualified music educator when I was unable to be in my classroom. Like most of you, I could have taught forever if it was just the students as my focus. I loved teaching, and I believed it was a calling for me. It was extremely difficult for me to leave the classroom. I still miss it

Since beginning my position as Executive Director of MMEA in 2021, I thrive knowing I am working with other generous educators who want to make music classroom life sustainable and rewarding. I look forward to the synergy that is possible with group thought. I love learning from others, and ideally removing blockades we all have faced as educators. Some of the most rewarding work I do happens in small groups with other creative problem solvers.

At All-State Camp last year, I sat with folks from MBDA after-hours to listen to who they were and how they experience music education in their communities. I pulled up a chair with a familiar face at Midwinter Convention 2025 and asked a colleague how his program was feeling solidly on this side of COVID era education. I sat in an affinity space with others who share a similar identity to mine, and I know that none of us “just teaches music.” I am frustrated beside you for the struggles you face, and I celebrate your victories with you too. Tell me about your teaching and your community? Invite me into your schools? I want to understand.



President: Dr. Karen Howard

Karen Howard teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in music education and diversification of teacher dispositions, pedagogical practices, and music performance traditions. She is Director of the Graduate Programs in Music Education, and facilitates the Smithsonian Folkways Certificate Course in World Music Pedagogy.

She was previously an early childhood music and movement facilitator, elementary school music teacher, and choral director. She is a regular presenter working with music educators to diversify repertoire and pedagogical strategies. Karen is the editor of the series "World Music Initiative" through GIA Music Publications. While all music is considered under the title of "world music", this series focuses on marginalized and underrepresented music cultures featuring music educators collaborating with culture bearers.



President-Elect: Nicole Thietje

Nicole Thietje nthietje@mmea.org is currently serving as President Elect of MMEA. She is also Choral Director at New Prague High School, where she directs four curricular choirs, three extracurricular groups, including show choir, and serves as music director for NPHS musical productions. She is a native of Louisiana and has taught Pre-K-12th grade in both Minnesota and Florida. She received an undergraduate degree in Music Teaching/Performance from the University of West Florida, a Masters of Arts in Music Education Choral Concentration from the University of St. Thomas, and is currently working toward a PhD in Music Education at the University of Minnesota. She is excited to serve in an organization that works towards a broad and inclusive vision for music education that serves young musicians. She is committed to the work that MMEA is doing to be a leading force in supporting teachers and students in diverse and equitable practices and being responsive to the needs of its members.



Past President: Dr. Christopher Rochester

Dr. Christopher Rochester is a nationally recognized music educator, speaker, and thought leader who teaches at the MacPhail Center for Music. He currently serves as the Past President of the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA), where he is committed to reimagining music education to be more relevant, inclusive, and connected to the real lives of students across Minnesota. In addition to his leadership with MMEA, Dr. Rochester is the founding director of the Global Music Initiative, a program that emphasizes cultural relevance, community engagement, and interdisciplinary learning through music. He believes in the transformative power of music—not only to reflect society but to reshape it. His work centers on creativity and innovation, collaborating with artists, schools, and community partners to design programs that resonate with today's learners. He can be reached at crochester@mmea.org.



Co-Band VP: Mr Jonathon Knutson

Jonathon Knutson (He/Him) is currently serving as Co-Band Vice President of the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA). A native of the state of Wyoming, Jonathon headed north to study Music Education at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. Following graduation in 2007, he moved to Minnesota to attend the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, where he received a fellowship to pursue a Masters of Music Degree in Trumpet Performance, graduating in 2009. For the past 14 years, Jonathon has worked for Byron Public Schools in Byron, Minnesota, where he currently directs the high school band program and assists with lessons at the middle school.

As the son of not just one but TWO band director parents, music has always been integral to Jonathon's identity and sense of purpose. Some of his first memories are of listening to his father practice the Halsey Stevens Sonata for trumpet as he prepared for his doctoral recitals, or of holding down the beat on bass drum for his mother's high school pep band when percussionists were in short supply. As an educator, Jonathon finds meaning in the sense of community music can provide students. Every individual in a musical ensemble brings to the group their own unique voice and background that they will use to create a shared experience and collective work of art. It is no exaggeration to say that what we teach in our music classes is a model for functional society.

Jonathon is excited to join an outstanding team of individuals who are committed to helping strengthen and grow our profession in the state of Minnesota. Being able to help facilitate the Minnesota All-State Honor Band and Choir experience is something which Jonathon is particularly excited about, as he finds great joy and inspiration in watching students work hard to maximize their potential.

When not in the classroom, Jonathon enjoys fitness, cooking, playing his trumpet around southeast Minnesota, and learning Spanish though comprehensible input. If you would like to contact him in his role as MMEA Co-Band Vice President - or to share your favorite delicious and healthy meal prep recipes - you can do so at jknutson@mmea.org



Jazz VP: Joel Pohland

I am serving on MMEA to try to help create more opportunities for jazz across the state and to increase participation in jazz across the state. I want to see more representation in the All-State Jazz Band statewide, but also let students and teachers know that jazz opportunities are not limited to traditional jazz bands. Jazz is so much more. We also have a very active and vibrant professional jazz community in Minnesota and I would like to see schools be able to connect with these musicians more frequently.

If you have ideas for anything related to jazz that you believe would benefit educators and students, don't hesitate to contact me. I am all ears and want to make more happen to the best of my ability! jpohland@mmea.org



Collegiate Chapters VP: Dr. Abigail Van Klompenberg

My name is Abigail (Abbie) Van Klompenberg, and I serve as Assistant Professor of Music Education at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. In addition to teaching and mentoring future music educators, I'm honored to serve as the Vice President-Collegiate Chapters for the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA).

In this role, my goal is to strengthen connections between P-12 and postsecondary music programs across the state. I believe that meaningful collaboration across these levels is essential to building a strong, sustainable future for music education in Minnesota. Whether through resource-sharing, joint initiatives, or professional learning, I'm committed to helping educators feel connected and equipped for their work.

If you're a collegiate chapter advisor, music education student, or teacher looking to get involved, I'd genuinely love to connect. I enjoy collaborating with educators at all stages of their careers, learning from different perspectives, and celebrating the amazing things happening in classrooms across Minnesota. Feel free to reach out anytime at avanklompenberg@mmea.org — I'm always happy to chat.



Secondary General Music VP: Dr. Aaron Lohmeyer

My name is Aaron Lohmeyer and I am Associate Professor of Music Education at Winona State University. My research and practice focus on contemporary music literacies that bridge the gap between school and participation in a musically diverse, digitally connected world.

I serve as the VP for Mid-Secondary Classroom which supports 5-12 music education practices employing a classroom model of delivery in contrast to an ensemble model. These classes may be guitar, keyboard, history, theory, digital music, or any other classroom wherein the primary work emphasizes learning processes and projects that may not require ensemble performance. I became passionate about this work first as a K-6 General Music educator, and later as a 9-12 General Music educator as I discovered the many talents of students who preferred to work independently on projects of their own choosing. I am currently working on developing a Digital Music Media Honors program that will showcase digital sound projects of Minnesota students. This program is open to any student (Band, Choir, Orchestra, Jazz, Digital, Guitar, Keyboard, etc) utilizing digital recording and production tools to create original work. If you are engaged in any of the work above, I'd love to get to know you and your work. Please do not hesitate to reach me at alohmeyer@mmea.org.



Elementary VP: Michael Bjork

Hello all! My name is Michael Bjork. I teach elementary general music at Justice Alan Page Elementary in ISD622, located in Maplewood. We have two full time music teachers, and we almost exclusively co-teach. This model allows for more project based learning and more robust music making. I have been teaching for 13 years, 8 of which were in Wisconsin before moving to Stillwater. I have taught at both the elementary and middle school levels. A couple years ago, I obtained a Master's degree with a focus on Culturally Responsive Teaching. I am also part of a cohort of arts teachers doing equity focused projects through MDE grants.

I am the Elementary VP on the MMEA Board. This role is responsible for elementary programming and support across the state. I joined the board to be part of a think tank, reimagining music education, being proactive and innovative here in Minnesota. Music is a diverse language and art form. It is important to me that we are offering that amazing diversity to all students. This begins at the elementary level. We need to be giving students choice and voice in their learning and foster creativity in our young musicians. We do not have to feel like we are always on an island in that journey. We can support each other, and that is what I want to help do for all of you!

As your Elementary VP, I am all ears for your ideas and questions. I want MMEA to support you in ways that make sense, are equitable, and attainable. Elementary teachers teach in a variety of settings and schools, and I want to make sure we are doing what we can to be there for you and your students. Please email me at mbjork@mmea.org!



Northwest Region Rep: Gunnar Aas

My name is Gunnar Aas, and I am proud to serve as the Choir Director at Bemidji High School. In this role, I direct the A Cappella Choir, Concert Choir, and Varsity Choir, three dynamic curricular ensembles that showcase the talent and dedication of our student musicians. In addition to these ensembles, I teach several music-related courses, including Introduction to Theater, Rock and Roll History, and Guitar. Beyond the classroom, I am fortunate to direct two extracurricular ensembles: Vocalmotive, Bemidji High School's varsity show choir, and the Bemidji High School Madrigal Choir.

I currently serve as the Northwest Region Representative on the MMEA board. Serving on the MMEA board has been an incredibly rewarding experience. This organization has played a significant role in shaping my journey as a music educator. As a student at Bemidji High School, I had the life-changing opportunity to perform at the MMEA Midwinter Convention and participate in the Minnesota All-State Choir. These experiences, alongside the guidance of passionate music educators, inspired me to pursue a career in music education. I hope that the work done on the MMEA board can continue to support both teachers and students in the state of Minnesota.

It is an honor to now give back to the organization that helped lay the foundation for my professional path. I welcome connections and collaboration and can be reached via email at Gaas@mmea.org



Northeast Region Rep: Iris Kolodji

Iris Kolodji directs the 5-12 choirs at Marshall School in Duluth, MN. She currently serves as the MMEA Northeast Region Representative, where she works to connect and support music educators across the region. Iris is passionate about building strong, inclusive music communities and believes in the power of music education to foster empathy, creativity, and lifelong learning.

She serves on MMEA to advocate for teachers and students in Greater Minnesota and to help ensure that high-quality, equitable music opportunities are available to all learners. Iris can be reached at ikolodji@mmea.org.

In addition to her work at Marshall, Iris is active in the Duluth theater community as a director and music director. She also brings experience from teaching both internationally and throughout Minnesota. Outside of school, she enjoys traveling, live music, hiking the North Shore, and spending time with her family.

Central Region Rep: Dr. Kelly Taylor

My name is Dr. Kelly Taylor, and I am thrilled to introduce myself as the new Central Regional Representative for the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA). It is both an honor and a privilege to step into this role, where I hope to connect with and support all of you who share a passion for music education.

Currently, I teach at Litchfield Middle School, where I have the joy of leading the band for grades 5-8. Additionally, I oversee the high school percussion ensemble and direct both middle and high school jazz studies. Music has always been at the center of my professional journey; it has shaped my identity as an educator and a person. I am deeply committed to creating an enriching musical environment, not only for my students but also for our wider community. As I embark on this new role with MMEA, I am eager to work collaboratively with members in my region. I aspire to provide valuable resources, guidance, and support to assist you in your teaching endeavors. My goal is to ensure that MMEA serves as an accessible and effective tool for all members, fostering an inclusive community where everyone feels empowered to share their thoughts and contribute to our organization.

I believe that by working together, we can enhance music education throughout our region, cultivate a love for music in our students, and inspire all learners to express themselves through the arts. I welcome your ideas, concerns, or suggestions, as they are vital for shaping a future that benefits us all. Please feel free to reach out to me at ktaylor@mmea.org. I look forward to connecting with you and making a meaningful impact in our music education community! Thank you for this opportunity!





Southwest Region Rep: John Pohland

I am serving on MMEA to try to help create more opportunities for jazz across the state and to increase participation in jazz across the state. I want to see more representation in the All-State Jazz Band statewide, but also let students and teachers know that jazz opportunities are not limited to traditional jazz bands. Jazz is so much more. We also have a very active and vibrant professional jazz community in Minnesota and I would like to see schools be able to connect with these musicians more frequently. If you have ideas for anything related to jazz that you believe would benefit educators and students, don't hesitate to contact me. I am all ears and want to make more happen to the best of my ability! jpohland@mmea.org



Southeast Region Rep: Melanie Sheridan

My name is Melanie Sheridan and I have been teaching Elementary General Music for 25 years. For the past 17 years I have been an Elementary General Music Specialist in the Winona Area Public School District. I have also taught middle school General Music and Choir as well as middle and high school Band and Orchestra small group lessons. My passion has always been for the youngest musicians since I hope to impact their early musical aptitudes and foster positive attitudes for making music. I believe that all music teachers are setting a foundation for a life-long love of music listening, performing and creating music. I am excited about having the opportunity to represent Southeast Minnesota's music educators and I look forward to learning more about ways that MMEA can support music educators in my region. msheridan@mmea.org



Twin Cities Loop Region Rep: Rachel Gorden Mercer

My name is Rachel Gorden Mercer. I am a Region Rep for the MMEA TC Loop Region. I have spent the last two decades teaching, playing, and getting kids excited about music. During that time, I have taught classroom music, directed bands, and started several ukulele clubs (because ukes make people happy) in k-12 schools in Ohio, Washington, and Minnesota. My goal has always been to find ways for more kids to make more music. I currently direct band, jazz band, ukulele club, and Rock Band at Boeckman Middle School in Farmington, MN.

I wanted to be part of the MMEA board to support the mission of MMEA - "high quality music education for every student." As a doctoral student at Concordia-St.Paul, my dissertation research focuses on discovering ways to reduce or remove the barriers that prevent participation in middle school instrumental music. I am thrilled to be working with and learning from excellent music educators across the state!
rgordenmercercer@mmea.org

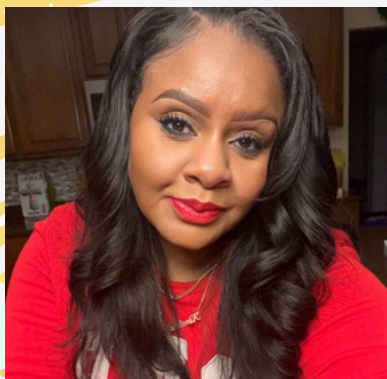


Middle-Secondary Ensemble Plus VP* : Eric Songer

I have been a music educator at Chaska Middle School West since 1997. I have a Bachelor's degree in Music and Math Education from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and a Master's degree from the University of St. Thomas in Curriculum & Instruction. Along with my colleagues in Chaska, I have created a program that includes jazz, rock, country, bluegrass, Latin, hip hop, pop, and marching bands as well as songwriting, production, guitar, deejaying, and adaptive music classes. I teach privately, compose, and arrange music, and perform as a trombonist in the Twin Cities. I was the recipient of a CMA Foundation Music Teacher of Excellence Award in 2023 and speak regularly at conferences and universities across the country. I am a Region Rep for the Twin Cities Loop for MMEA, South Central Regional President of MBDA, founder of the APME Minnesota chapter, and am on the NAFME Council for Innovations. I serve on the MMEA and these other boards because I want to bring people together to share ideas and create more opportunities for our students. I co-founded and help run the Minnesota Modern Band Festival and am the author of the book "Starting A Modern Band Program." My wife, Heidi, is also a musician and educator and we run our own music studio together. Heidi and I offer professional development for teachers on how to run a popular music ensemble. We live in Chaska, Minnesota with our kids Caleb and Abby.

Esonger@mmea.org

*Eric Songer was elected as a Region Representative, but as of May 2026, he will be serving as Middle-Secondary Ensemble Plus VP due to a position vacancy mid-term.



Twin Cities Central Region Rep: Kimberly Keaton

Hi! My name is Kimberly Keaton and I represent the Twin Cities Central Region. I am truly excited to see what it is that I can help and assist you with. As a 30 year veteran of teaching music under my belt, I bring a wealth of information and knowledge. My strengths lie in my ability to build relationships with students, which makes classroom management easier. I tell my students that I do not care if they remember one song that I've ever taught them, but remember the lessons on life. I currently work at FAIR School in Crystal, where I've taught Choir/General Music the last 10 years. My first 20 years were spent in the Buffalo, NY Public School system. I am here, not to tell you how to run your programs, but to give you support when needed. Sometimes we just need to know that we are not alone in this world of teaching. Again I look forward to hearing from you.

kkeaton@mmea.org

Retired Members Chair: Erin Berg



I am Erin Berg, Retired Members Chair on the MMEA board. I retired from the Centennial School District in 2019 after teaching elementary music in that district for 29 years (35 years overall). I am excited to be representing the retired members of MMEA and looking for ways for retirees to help the organization. One thing I would like to do is connect new teachers to retired teacher in their area where the retired teachers could serve as mentors. If you are a new teacher or a retired teacher and interested in connecting with someone, please email me at eberg@mmea.org

Community Music Chair: Cheryl Berglund



My name is Cheryl Berglund, and I teach percussion at MacPhail Center for Music in Austin MN and Riverland Community College. I serve on the MMEA board as the Community Music Chair. I have a deep passion for teaching music to all students of all ages and abilities. My email is cberglund@mmea.org

Perpich Center for Arts Education Rep: Dr. Michael Buck



A music educator for more than thirty years, Dr. Michael Buck has taught band, orchestra, classroom music, church choir, barbershop chorus and adult community choir. Currently, Dr. Buck serves as the Music Education Professional Development Specialist at the Perpich Center for Arts Education and Adjunct Associate Professor of Music at St. Olaf College. His K-12 teaching experience includes elementary, middle and high school positions in suburban

Minneapolis and at two overseas American international schools. Dr. Buck holds degrees from St. Olaf College, VanderCook College and The University of Southern Mississippi.

Over the past twenty years, Dr. Buck has been involved with various aspects of MMEA. From board member to section coach, Band VP to midwinter clinic booth vendor, conference presenter to conference attendee, there are many ways to engage with MMEA. Right now, your participation in supporting music education in Minnesota is needed, more than ever. MMEA works tirelessly to promote quality music teaching and learning. If you believe that music is core to the human experience, get involved. Join MMEA. Serve as a region representative, conference presenter, board member or all-state section coach. Ask how you can help make music thrive in Minnesota! mbuck@mmea.org

Thank you for advertising in MMEA's **INTERVAL**

- [College of St. Benedict and St. John's University](#)
- [Eckroth Music](#)
- [MacPhail Center for Music](#)

MMEA IS LISTENING!



Tell us what you thought
about this issue of INTERVAL
(Pssst! The QR code is also a clickable
hyperlink!)

Are you ready for the next **INTERVAL**? Check out the the guidelines and article descriptions to give yourself a jump start! You can also support MMEA by advertising! All of the details and the link to application form can be found at: <https://mmea.org/interval/>

Email Interval Editor Sarah Minette with any questions at sminette@mmea.org

Plan ahead for 2025-2026

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis,
with editorial review annual deadlines below:

October 15

April 15

www.mmea.org

PO Box 43956

Brooklyn Park, MN 55443

Phone (763) 566-1460

Email info@mmea.org