

Innovation is the Motivation:

For Many New York Music Educators, Entrepreneurialism Leads to Job Satisfaction

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Innovative thinkers have shaped music education from within for generations

Want ambitious, highly motivated teachers in New York's music classrooms? Encourage them to put away the policy manuals and instead imagine what could be — just like entrepreneurs do.

That's a key finding of a survey I distributed to hundreds of New York music educators to gauge their workplace motivation and innovative practice. The unfortunate reality is that despite teachers' dreams of new ensembles and curricular transformations, school systems tend to deflate ambitions via four "killer Ts:" Thrift, Testing, Time (lack of), and that particularly potent sedative, Tradition.

These factors conspire to undermine teachers' willingness to try something new. Indeed, many who responded to the survey cited Common Core and APPR as the kryptonite obstructing their visions of superhero teaching. So, what's an ambitious teacher to do? Below, I provide a closer look at the tenets and findings of the survey followed by a few practical suggestions.

Change from within?

Much is made of entrepreneurship in the arts today¹ — how to market yourself, develop business savvy, or win a job. But these are career development skills; true entrepreneurship is a complex process through which individuals or groups transform outside-the-box thinking into new endeavors that generate measurable value.

This broader concept of entrepreneurship provided a framework for survey questions assessing teachers' taste for innovation and perceived self-determination. Can school music teachers be entrepreneurs? Perhaps not in the traditional sense while at school, but I surmised they might resemble *intrapreneurs*, that is enterprising workers who enhance large organizations from within through entrepreneurial ideas and actions.² After all, innovative thinkers have shaped music education from within for generations — dreamers like Shinichi Suzuki and Julia Ettie Crane.

With this in mind, the purpose of my survey project was to explore the extent to which New York music educators practice intrapreneuring, and how this might relate to teacher/school demographics and workplace motivation.

Survey methodology

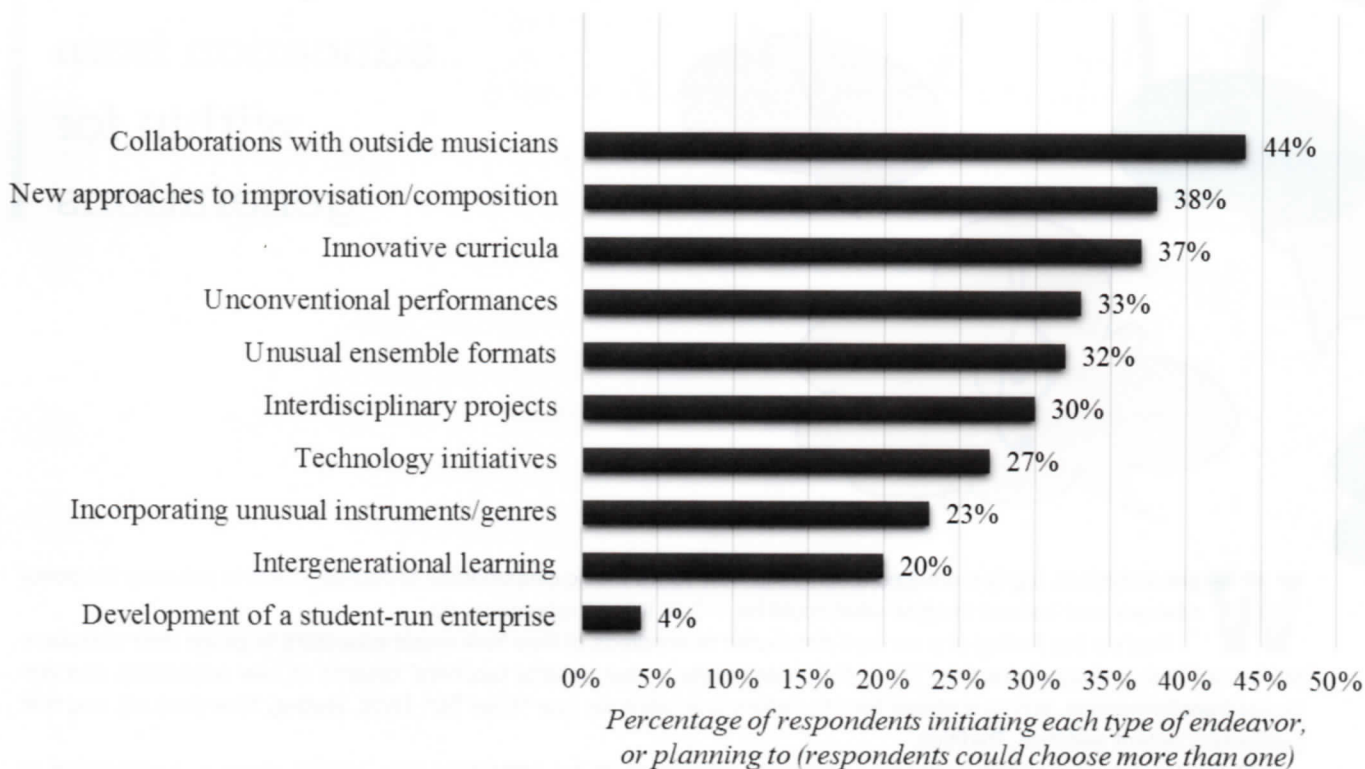
In February 2015, I distributed my anonymous online questionnaire to 1,351 public school music educators working in central and western New York districts. A total of 576 (42.6 percent) completed it, an even mix of female and male teachers working across levels and specialties in suburban, rural and urban schools.

The questionnaire contained demographic questions and a variety of rating scales assessing aspects of motivation and intrapreneuring in the context of public school music teaching. For example, respondents rated the degree to which the following statement applied to the intrapreneurial climate within their school(s): "My school leaders allowed me to bend rules and make mistakes in order to develop innovative teaching ideas."

Most teachers innovate

The survey produced some surprising results. More than 80 percent of participating teachers reported that they had pioneered an innovative musical endeavor in the recent past, or planned to do so in the near future. **Figure 1** lists the venture categories cited most frequently.

Figure 1
New Musical Endeavors by Category



Despite identifying with musical intrapreneuring, fewer than 30 percent of respondents reported having resources necessary for launching new learning projects, and only 36.5 percent agreed that their school leaders granted leeway to bend rules and make mistakes.

Demographically, inclinations towards intrapreneurial teaching were spread evenly across various teaching contexts with one exception: music educators in urban schools reported significantly more confidence in their abilities to be innovative. Many reported that the challenges they faced in urban districts created opportunities to circumvent policies, take risks, and combine existing resources in unconventional ways. (As the old English idiom goes, sometimes necessity is the mother of invention.)

Motivation follows innovation

To test the relationship between intrapreneuring and work motivation, I used a statistical technique called regression analysis. I discovered that the more intrapreneurial a teacher felt, the less likely he or she was to feel demotivated at work. In fact, an intrapreneurial mindset and facilitative work climate accounted for upwards of 50 percent of the variability of teachers' perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness — all elements crucial to healthy motivation.³

The aspects of intrapreneuring that most strongly predicted motivation included organizational risk tolerance, encouragement of creativity from supervisors, and teachers' ability to persuade colleagues to buy into their visions for new educational ventures.

What about you? Do you feel empowered to pursue a new musical opportunity that holds the potential to fulfill your professional aspirations and the needs of your students? Perhaps, as one respondent wrote, you feel that, "New York State regulations are taking all the creativity and innovation out of education." If the idea of intrapreneuring excites you but you don't know where to start or feel that you can't, consider the following ideas:

- **Start small.** Write down your vision for your teaching future and look at it often. Allow yourself to get excited about the potential to start something new. Occasionally, use five minutes of a lesson to go out on a limb with an unusual teaching idea.
- **Speak up.** Share your ideas with trusted colleagues to glean their reactions. Ask other inventive teachers in your district to find out how they balance innovative ideas with requirements and mandates.
- **Ask, suggest, give.** When the time is right, schedule an appointment with a supportive administrator. Most likely, they, too, have dreamed about a professional makeover. First, ask to hear their perspectives on teacher motivation and change. Suggest a trial version of your new idea, and realize that it may take more than one conversation to convince the person. And, be ready to give something in return, especially if you can help solve a problem, such as taking the lunch duty shift that nobody else wants.
- **Embrace the best of both worlds.** Standards and innovation aren't mutually exclusive. With a strategic approach, you'll be able to fulfill your teaching dreams and your accountability obligations.

Music education intrapreneurs perform dual roles—equal parts conspirator and collaborator. Results of this study suggest that, despite the headaches present within modern educational organizations, a growth mindset and inventive spirit can invigorate and sustain passion for the "business" of music teaching and learning. ||

Josef Hanson received his Ph.D. in Music Education from the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester in 2015. Currently, he serves as Assistant Professor of Music in the Department of Performing Arts, University of Massachusetts-Boston. This article is based on his dissertation research.

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