

MMEA Innovations: Moving Forward

By Tom Westmoreland, Lynnfield High School

I am once again excited to report on the work completed by the MMEA Innovations Council in the past year and to share our vision for the future. Comprised of elementary, secondary, and collegiate educators from around the state, this council's charge is to bring focus to the use of contemporary music in classrooms, emerging pedagogy, technology, and culturally responsive curricula to our membership. Through our discussions within the committee, as well as feedback we've received from the MMEA executive board and members, we have developed a plan for creating space to share ideas about curriculum, highlighting best practices in inclusive pedagogy, and bringing students together from around the state to share their work with one another and take part in meaningful educational experiences.



The Innovations strand at this year's All-State Conference covered a diverse set of topics ranging from composition in the classroom to social justice issues in music education. Seeing the membership of MMEA engaged in discussions about innovative and inclusive practice was both promising and inspiring for members of our council. Sessions included student-led repertoire selection, inclusive practices for students with disabilities, contemporary ensemble pedagogy, culturally relevant and diverse repertoire, arranging popular music for chamber groups, and teaching music through social sciences. Thank you to all

the clinicians who shared their ideas and led meaningful discussions at this year's MMEA All-State Conference.

We also hosted our second annual Innovations Festival at the conference. Dr. Josef Hanson from UMass-Boston presented an engaging clinic to students about creative and entrepreneurial thinking. This session challenged students to improvise both musically and theatrically, to generate ideas and transform them, and to reflect on their own creative processes. The clinic finished with a performance of short punk rock songs composed by students in the style

of "blipcore." The festival concluded with students from Charlestown High School's contemporary music ensemble and Lynnfield High School's jazz & rock ensembles performing for one another in the World Trade Center Amphitheater. From an emotional and creative cover of "Creep" by Radiohead, performed by Charlestown, to classic rock songs performed by the Lynnfield groups, these talented students shared their voices at this year's conference with great success. I want to express my gratitude to Adam Calus from CHS for bringing his talented students to share their music, and to my students from Lynnfield for their enthusiastic performance. Many thanks to our conference committee chair, Dr. Ruth Debrot, for her vision and logistical support in making the festival happen this year at the Seaport. I also want to express a special thank you to Dr. Sandra Doneski, MMEA president, for her continued support of this program at the conference. And finally, thank you to Adam Friedman from Boloco in Boston for providing lunch (free of charge) for our students.

In addition to these sessions and events, we also received feedback from members in both formal and informal settings about what the Innovations Council could be doing to drive important conversations about music education forward. We found that there was a desire for efforts in the following three areas:

- **Communication & Collaboration:** We will be looking into creating networking avenues and opportunities to share best practices among innovative teachers.
- **Ongoing Professional Development:** The DESE is looking for teachers to have high-quality professional development which they define as "A set of coherent learning experiences that is systematic, purposeful, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving teacher practice and student outcomes" (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/standards.html>).
- **Student Performance Experiences:** Educators expressed interest in opportunities to share music from emerging and contemporary ensembles as well as high-quality clinics and guest conductors for student learning experiences.

We are currently planning a series of events and activities to meet these needs for the 2018-2019 academic year, so stay tuned! We are in discussions with the MMEA Executive Board to make sure our activities are in line with their strategic planning. We are looking forward to sharing with you our plans to provide meaningful & sustained professional development, forums to connect educators and share best practices, and venues for the MMEA community to share the amazing student work that is happening in classrooms across Massachusetts.

I would also like to thank the members of the Innovations Council for their time and efforts over the past year: Libby Allison (Berklee College of Music), Tony Beatrice (Boston Public Schools), Dr. Joe Hanson (UMass-Boston), Laura Lamore (Nashoba Valley Technical High School), and Dr. Kinh Vu (Boston University). We are also happy to welcome Dr. Ruth Debrot (Sharon Public Schools) and Kevin Coyne (Waltham Public Schools) to our council, and we are looking forward to working with them in the coming year.

As we end another school year, the Innovations Council will continue to pursue the goals of bringing focus to and supporting members who use contemporary music, creative pedagogy, technology, and culturally responsive curriculum. If you are interested in providing feedback on our activities or to join our mailing list, feel free to contact Tom Westmoreland at tom@musicedge.org.



Tom Westmoreland has been teaching instrumental music at Lynnfield High School since 2004. He earned his undergraduate degree in music education from James Madison

University and a Master of Music Education from Boston University. He is currently the chair of the MMEA Innovations Council and the editor of the Innovations column in the MMEJ.

Being Kind While Saving Time

By Karin S. Hendricks, Boston University

A common (although not universal) myth in our profession is that the most efficient means to music performance preparation is a top-down, teacher-directed approach in which we minimize potential for student error by controlling as many diversions or distractions as we possibly can. This idea likely stems from a factory management model, as well as from the influence of military routines upon band education in the early twentieth century. We now live in a different world than the one that embraced those ideals. However, a tension lies in the reality of our students' worlds and that of the testing and accountability model imposed upon them (and us). As teachers, we are often caught between top-down requirements and standards to meet, and our desire for student-centered classrooms.

I suggest, however, that we don't have to choose between efficiency, high expectations, and kindness. I propose that teaching with compassion goes hand in hand with student motivation, engagement, and the development of strong musicianship. In my book, *Compassionate Music Teaching*, I described six facets of kindness (trust, empathy, patience, inclusion, community, and authentic connection) practiced by five celebrated music teachers. In this article, I draw upon a few ideas from the chapter on empathy to discuss how compassionate teaching is efficient teaching.

Note: It is possible to do this same exercise with other chapters in the book. For example, trust relates to a sense of student ownership and commitment, while the chapter on patience covers aspects of goal setting and adjustment, scaffolding, and classroom management.

Empathy

Empathy is often misunderstood as an inherently positive trait. Actually, empathy—or the ability to understand or feel the experiences of others—is a neutral capacity that can motivate us

to do good or ill. For example, when I understand those things that might cause a student to suffer unnecessarily, I have a choice to (a) limit their exposure to those things or (b) use the threat of suffering as a means of manipulating the student to do something I want. We may, of course, also do nothing, which would also not be considered compassionate. Acts of kindness and threats are both possible with the same kind of empathetic understanding. However, only one of the two is compassionate. For empathy to be compassionate (and therefore efficient), it requires that "a person not only understands and feels for . . . others but also feels compelled to make things better for people in need" (*Compassionate Music Teaching*, 57).

Threats may be perceived as a means of saving time in that they typically get a quick response of conformity. However, evoking a sense of fear in a student is not likely to stimulate the clear thinking, creativity, or recall that are necessary for long-term success. Time saved in the moment may, therefore, be stolen from the future when instructions need continual repeating for a student whose attention is split between music and self-preservation.

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MMEA 2018 Conference Reflection

By Dr. Ruth Debrot, MMEA Conference Chair 2018



Despite the Nor'easter that hit the Boston area in March, the 2018 MMEA All-State Professional Development Conference went on very much as planned. Well, almost. On Thursday, the conference began according to schedule, but the weather on Friday wreaked havoc on the day's events. A huge thank you to those of you who braved the inclement weather and demonstrated patience when sessions and concerts were cancelled.

Highlights of the Conference

Exemplifying the positive spirit that prevailed during bad weather on Friday, general music teachers, led by Dr. Rachel Gibson, facilitated an impromptu sharing session. Teachers who believed they were attending an African drumming session arrived to find out the scheduled clinician could not get into Boston. Demonstrating tremendous flexibility and a generous spirit, elementary general music teachers volunteered to share favorite lessons. As a result, many people learned new activities to use in their classrooms. One session participant remarked that “it was great to be able to share what we love with people that do the thing we love.”

The conference keynote, Dr. Constance McKoy, received a standing ovation for her speech, which challenged Massachusetts educators to implement culturally responsive pedagogy practices in music education. McKoy illuminated many relevant and challenging issues facing educators working in the field of music education today. McKoy's conference sessions were described by participants as “inspiring and well-researched.” Through video excerpts and by sharing thought-provoking personal narratives, McKoy justified the need for and ways to engage in culturally responsive teaching in the contemporary music classroom.

Kudos go out to the MMEA Innovations Council, led by Tom Westmoreland. The council is primarily concerned with contemporary issues in music education. This year the council brought in Dr. Josef Hanson from UMass-Boston, who inspired contemporary-minded educators with “What's the Big Idea? A Workshop for Innovative Thinkers in Music Education.” Hanson's fresh approach to teaching and thinking in the postmodern era provoked session participants to re-evaluate their programs and begin to think critically about what it means to lead a fulfilling life as a music educator.

On Saturday, Dr. Hanson returned as the featured clinician for the Innovations Festival. Working with high school students, Hanson co-created an atmosphere of creativity. Using music and humor, he broke the ice by using fortune cookies as scripts for dramatic improvisations. Afterward, Hanson presented some cutting-edge, 30-second songs to model and inspire brief musical compositions by the students. The composition process began, and then students watched intently as their peers presented their own original, 30-second songs and received responsive feedback. Finally, the student-led ensembles from each school demonstrated their intense passion for music by sharing pieces that ranged from classic rock to pop, jazz, and hip hop.

The inclusion of nontraditional approaches and ensembles was well-received by our membership. In particular, the Plymouth Northern Lights, a high school a cappella group, gave an inspired and energetic performance on Friday afternoon. André de Quadros and members of VOICES 21C presented a thought-provoking session about contemporary choral pedagogy. Their concert on Friday evening was characterized by top-notch musicianship combined with humanist philosophy and a global perspective.

As We Look to the Year Ahead...

Plans for the 2019 MMEA All-State Professional Development Conference are under way. The conference will take place at the Seaport Hotel and Conference Center next February 28, March 1 and 2, 2019. Currently the keynote speaker and conference theme are being discussed. The database for session applications will have opened by the time you read this. At that time, MMEA president Sandra Doneski will have sent an email to our membership. Consider sharing your expertise or encourage someone you know to present on a topic you find to be informative and/or innovative.

If there is a specific topic you are interested in or if there is a clinician you would like to suggest, please let the committee know. Each year the conference committee responds to both conference evaluations and member suggestions as much as is possible. The overall purpose of MMEA is to advance our profession and to serve the professional development needs of our membership. Contact a council chair or conference committee member to make your voice heard. As always, you can reach me at rdebrot@aol.com. Have a wonderful summer!



Dr. Ruth Debrot has spent her career demonstrating a joyful approach to teaching music. Ruth is a music specialist for the Sharon Public Schools in Massachusetts and a faculty member at Boston University, where she completed her doctorate in music education.

Sessions and People

Music educators from across the Commonwealth attended this year's conference for professional development, musical inspiration, and sharing and connecting with like minds.



Local students gather to explore creativity in the Innovations Festival.



Ken Trapp leads a well-attended ukulele session.



Hard-working and dedicated collegiates (past and present) are the steam that powers the annual conference.



MMEA President-Elect Dr. Cecil Adderley chats with Frank Davis of World Cultural Tours at the exhibitor coffee hour.



MMEA Presidents past, present, and future. From left to right, Cecil Adderley (President-Elect), Thomas Walters, Michael LaCava, Noreen Diamond-Burdett, Faith Lueth, David Neves, and Cathy Connor-Moen.