

Creativity and Innovation

The 78th Annual MMEA In-Service Workshop/conference theme “*Creativity and Innovation*” was inspired by the 21st Century knowledge and skills that our students will need to thrive in a world where change is constant and learning never stops. Music Education speaks to all aspects of the 21st Century skill set: critical thinking, collaboration, communication but perhaps the most elusive is creativity and innovation and how we can incorporate this into our teaching and encourage creativity in our students.

As I write this I am attending the NAFME National In-Service in Nashville. The theme for the NAFME conference is “*Empowering Creativity*.” The primary focus of the sessions that I have attended has been the development and encouragement of creativity for our students and for us as teachers. As teachers we live and work in a time that requires us to think in creative way and develop some innovative ideas as we deal with new demands of assessment, evaluation and the implementation of new curriculum and standards. In his article, *The Cornerstones for Program Success*, Tim Lautzenheiser states: “We live in a fast paced society; our student are programmed to move quickly, therefore we must open our minds to new ways of thinking and being. If we do not, we are doomed to: remain the same; status quo, predictable, boring, simply going through the motions, stale. Rich rewards go to those who stand back and see the bigger picture, seek new opportunities, and look for ways to create artistic and emotional beauty within the learning environment.”

The creative process consists of three components; imagine, create and innovate. We imagine a mental image or concept that is not physically present. The ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, and actively produce something is to create. When we make imagination and creativity a reality and put these ideas into practice it becomes innovation. Consider NASA landing on the moon. President Kennedy presented the challenge and imagined the United States as being the first to send a man to the moon, NASA got busy to create the means. After much work, trial and error we were able to land on the moon. I have enjoyed the process of working with a composer as we refine a work that we have commissioned. We talk about (imagine) the style, instrumentation, form, etc. The composer starts his work (creating). The composer sends me a portion of the piece and we collaborate and share ideas to make the final product a reality (innovation).

I consider creativity to be more than just composition and improvisation. As teachers we make creative choices when making musical decisions; ideas of interpretation are generated by knowledge of composer and context; we alter our performance based on input, communication and synthesis during rehearsal and collaboration; understanding the text of a composition helps to form creative interpretations, we make creative decisions of performance based on evaluation of a recorded performance. As teachers we make creative decisions on ways to introduce and teach a musical concept.

I don't consider myself a particular creative person. I have learned that the process for me is not a light bulb moment but a rather long process where curiosity fuels my interest. In his book *The Mastery of Music* Barry Green states: “each one of us possesses creativity. We each have our

own unique DNA, fingerprints, voice pattern, and so forth, and our minds are every bit as diverse as our physical characteristics. Our creative ideas emerge from the cauldron of our imagination, memories of past experiences, contact with other individuals and their creative works, cultural upbringing and education, interests and intuitive feelings.”

I have witnessed that most original thinking is the result of collaboration and sharing of ideas. No one lives in a vacuum. Some of the great scientific breakthroughs have almost always come through some form of fierce collaboration among people with common interests. Giving students the opportunity to collaborate with each other as suggested through the new Core Music Standards opens possibilities for creative thinking; *creative ideas, concepts, and feelings that influence a musicians’/students’ work will emerge from a variety of sources.*

Sir Ken Robinson in his book *Creative Schools* states “our schools educate students to become good workers, rather than creative thinkers.” As educators we must create the conditions that allow creativity to flourish keeping in mind that creativity will manifest itself differently in every student. We must create a classroom environment that encourages student input and a place where they feel safe in sharing novel ideas, varied opinions and approaches. A place where students are encouraged to develop their own personal interpretations or improvisation based on study and informed practice. A common misconception is that only a few people are really creative. Everybody has tremendous creative capacities. Creativity in education needs to be about everybody, not just a few.

It is our hope that you will find inspiration in the sessions and performances during our In-Service to think in creative ways that will lead to innovative ideas to enhance your teaching and we hope that you will encourage your students to collaborate in ways that will lead to creative thinking and inspire the freedom to be creative.

MMEA’s first annual Mentoring Conference was held October 4 & 5 at Tan-Tar-A. A huge thank you to Steve Litwiller and his staff for producing a tremendous event for our new colleagues.

Please watch the web site for an announcement for our third annual Advocacy Hill Day in Jefferson City. I hope that you will be able to join President Jeff Melsha and me as we advocate for Music Education in our schools.

Finally it has been a sincere privilege to serve as the President of Missouri Music Educators Association. Thank you for your support and patience for the last two years. The association is in extremely capable hands as Jeff Melsha assumes the position of President. I will continue to serve the association as Past-President and I have accepted Jeff’s invitation to serve as Advancing Music Education chair. I look forward to the opportunity to continue our advocacy initiatives, keeping the lines of communication open with DESE and opening a dialogue for the upgrade and adaption of the new Core Music Standards in Missouri. Thank you and as always if I can be of service to you or your program please do not hesitate to contact me. See you in January!