

Improvise, adapt!

Improvise: *to compose, recite, play or sing extemporaneously; to make or create something by using whatever is available.* “Create something by using whatever is available!” that sounds like teaching!! We create young musicians of the students that come to us for instruction. We use the talents they bring and build upon them to help them realize the art of music. In spite of the obstacles and roadblocks we make the teaching and the music work, we learn to adapt! We accept our students where they are, we alter our instruction to fit their needs, we use whatever means are available and we share our insight and help them realize a life filled with joy and music. We are so lucky to be a part of this wonderful profession!

I share a story with my education majors about a band director I know who was scheduled to march in a parade in downtown St. Louis. Because of circumstances beyond his control his buses could not take his band to the parade. So he had his band members meet at the nearest Metro Station, the Booster’s bought tickets, and they arrived at the parade site on time. He improvised, he made it work. Here in St. Louis we are fortunate to have a new El Sistema program. The teachers started with nothing, they asked for donations of instruments, they held fundraisers, borrowed instruments and music. They had their first concert two weeks ago! Yes after only starting in August a concert! They had to improvise they had to overcome and they did. It is an honor to know these dedicated individuals. I know you can offer additional examples of this kind of leadership and dedication.

Nothing replaces good planning and preparation. But things do not always go the way you plan. We all have had to think on our feet and make a lesson work or change direction during a rehearsal just to make the most of the situation. This type of improvisation is part of what we do as teachers. We must make the most of the time we are given with students and not let minor inconveniences get in our way. Make it work!

When I taught improvisation I spent a lot of time helping students understand and use guide tones within the chord changes. I know everyone is very aware of the forth coming implementation of the new Teacher Evaluation. MMEA has been working to create a “guide tone” document that we hope will help all of us negotiate the changes that are taking place. We have formed a Task Force consisting of Music Educators and Administrators to formulate a document that we hope will give anyone interested some suggestions for formulating an evaluation procedure that is centered on what we do in the music classroom and how the

various activities that are observed align with music standards based on sequential instruction. The goal is to offer a tool for teachers and administrators that they can use to formulate an all-inclusive look at what we do as Music Educators. I am excited about the work and how things are shaping up. I hope you will find this a useful tool that will relieve the stress and take away some of the mystery of this new element to our careers. Look for the introduction of this document at a session on Thursday of 76th conference.

The new evaluation procedures reach down to our pre-service Music Educators as well. They are also undergoing a great deal of change. Missouri Society of Music Teacher Education is very aware of the many concerns with the proposed changes to the certification process. I have asked Daniel Hellman, Missouri Chair of SMTE, to do an in-depth review of the new rules and offer recommendations to DESE as to changes that are in the best interest of our future Music Educators. I participated in a panel discussion about pre-service evaluation at the annual MADSM meeting hosted by University of Missouri School of Music. Wendy Sims, MU Director of Teacher Education, and Lori Wilcox, MU Director of Assessment, presented facts and updates on the new rules for certification and the different assessment procedures that will take effect September 2014. There are many aspects of the new rules that potentially will have a negative effect on our future music educators and the profession. It is time for action. When Daniel and Wendy and other SMTE members across the state have an opportunity to make a comprehensive review of the new rules I will be contacting you to write a letter of concern to your legislature and DESE. A sample letter with speaking points will be developed for you to use.

In October I attended a two day workshop sponsored by NAFME on Teacher Evaluation. This workshop was held in conjunction with the National In-Service in Nashville, TN. This meeting was very beneficial for me as I work to create our own documents. It was a real eye opener to listen to the wide array of approaches that various states are taking to the evaluation procedures. Many states have been working on this process for a long time and have dedicated a huge amount of time and money to the development of the music teacher evaluation criteria and the means to measure student growth. It was information overload for two days but very helpful.

On October 25, I visited with the NAFME-C Chapter at Central Methodist University. What a great group of young people! We talked about NAFME and MMEA and how both organizations can serve as a resource for them now and when they begin teaching. As I drove home I was excited for the future of Music

Education with young teachers like these assuming the leadership roles in our profession. These are difficult times for young people as they continue their work to become teachers. They know of and hear about all of the changes taking place and their future can seem uncertain. As veteran teachers we must be vigilant with protecting our profession through advocacy and staying knowledgeable about legislation that threatens Music Education. We need these fresh new minds to lead us into the future. MMEA is dedicated to helping them realize their goals and dreams.

MMEA is excited to announce the development of a new aspect of our web site, the "New Teacher Resource." MMEA Mentoring Chair Steve Litwiller will manage this new area. The goal of this new addition is to offer a resource for new teachers with teaching ideas, sample lessons and materials, advice from veterans, links to various web sites to assist with on line tasks and mentoring ideas and resources if needed. The first couple of years of teaching depending on your location can be a lonely time. MMEA wants to be the place where new teachers can reach out for assistance if needed. This is an ongoing project that we want to develop and upgrade over the next several years. Steve may be contacting several of you to make submissions. I encourage you to visit the site and if you would like to make a suggestion for content please contact Steve or myself and we will help with the posting.

Looking ahead....April is Jazz Appreciation Month. Plan to incorporate elements of jazz into your concert bands, choirs, orchestras and general music classrooms. Why leave improvisation just to those enrolled in our jazz ensembles. Play/sing simple blues tunes as warm ups and encourage students to improvise! Let them be creative!

Advocacy moment....Condoleezza Rice trained to be a concert pianist. Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, was a professional clarinet and saxophone player. The hedge fund billionaire Bruce Kovner is a pianist who took classes at Julliard. Studies show that serious music training seems to correlate with success in other fields. High achievers believe that music opens the pathways to creative thinking. These high achievers say music has sharpened; collaboration, creativity, discipline and the capacity to reconcile conflicting ideas. Music may not make you rich but it helps to train you to process different points of view and most importantly to take pleasure in listening. (New York Times, Oct. 2013)