

NATIONAL ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO.1

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The **Connected Arts Networks (CAN) project** establishes national virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for educators in dance, music, theatre, and visual and media arts. CAN aims to build a sustainable model of professional learning for arts educators in public schools to strengthen their leadership skills and build their capacity to address social-emotional learning and equity, diversity and inclusion in their arts instruction. Find out more about the project and our partners [here](#).

Art discipline-specific PLCs provide space for Teacher Leaders to share their expertise and personal perspectives on the content areas. They are a place where educators can study their own teaching practice and collaborate with peers on how to improve student learning. PLCs are spaces of affirmation, compassion, and patience as well as supportive environments for risk-taking, vulnerability, and honesty. In this document you'll read about beneficial PLC experiences from current CAN Teacher Leaders



How could participation in an arts-focused Professional Learning Community (PLC) impact your teaching practice, support student learning, and benefit your school community?



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National Association
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Indeo
National Dance Education Organization
Advancing Dance Education in the Arts



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Amber Arnold (she/her/hers)

Fine Arts Instructional Coach

Gwinnett County Public Schools
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Amber Arnold is the Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) K–12 fine arts instructional coach in Suwanee, Georgia. She supports the instruction of visual and performing arts teachers, with a focus on fine arts teachers who are new to GCPS Fine Arts. As an instructional coach, Amber collaborates with teachers to help them clarify and reach their goals by serving as a thought partner and providing professional support. In addition to supporting teachers, she facilitates the Fine Arts Mentor Program as well as a collaborative learning team for the Fine Arts Teacher Leaders.

Community: What strategies do you utilize to build a supportive climate and culture with students? With peers?

In the classroom, I used my classroom guidelines and beginning-of-the-year activities to cultivate and grow a supportive classroom culture. We were a team in the art room, and everything from the rules to clean-up routines supported that collective team effort. I worked on my word choice and the way I interacted with others to model being a respectful team member. With peers, I try to honor the adult learning principles shared by Elena Aguilar through how I facilitate professional learning sessions, in how I reflect and use their feedback, and how I work to make my professional learning mirror engaging instruction.

“As educators, embracing lifelong learning helps us reach our professional goals and address areas of growth, but it also models a growth mindset for our students.”

Action Research: What questions or wonderings are you exploring in your own teaching practice this year? What helps you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

This year I’ve really focused on how to support teachers over time. What does the scope and sequence of my coaching practice look like? In the classroom I built an art program over many school years, and building my coaching work over time is important. Providing opportunities for teachers to reflect, share takeaways, and give me anonymous feedback has helped me push past the surface and address areas of growth. I also set small intentions for myself for specific conversations or learning sessions.

Impact: From your experience, what are the most powerful aspects of a professional learning community that impact your instructional practice?

In my role as an instructional coach, I’ve had the unique opportunity to attend professional learning in multiple fine arts disciplines. Each arts discipline builds community in their own way! The most powerful aspects of a PLC that has impacted my practice are active learning from a student’s

perspective, structured and timely routines, and a focus on naming the “how” in addition to the “what” through the gradual release of responsibility and instructional moves.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources (authors, articles, books, websites, etc...) that you’d recommend to colleagues right now?

- Elena Aguilar and Jim Knight (Authors)
- *The PD Book: 7 Habits That Transform Professional Development* by Elena Aguilar
- Art21.org
- [Antiracist Art Educators](http://AntiracistArtEducators.com)

Reflection: When you consider why you started your teaching practice and where you are now, why do you choose to keep showing up?

As educators, embracing lifelong learning helps us reach our professional goals and address areas of growth, but it also models a growth mindset for our students. I keep showing up because I’m learning alongside the teachers I support, and I want to continually refine my coaching practice. I keep showing up because professional learning for teachers improves student outcomes and learning. Together, through meaningful, engaging, and instructionally strong teaching, we can help students learn to be creative thinkers and achieve mastery of their art form.



What are your strategies
for creating an inclusive,
welcoming, affirming learning
community/environment for
students and/or peers?



Jared Cassedy (he/him/his)

K-12 Performing Arts Coordinator, Conductor
of the Lexington High School Wind Ensemble

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for Music Education

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Jared Cassedy is the K–12 performing arts coordinator and LHS Wind Ensemble conductor for Lexington Public Schools in Massachusetts. He also directs the Junior Massachusetts Youth Wind Ensemble at the New England Conservatory and chairs the Massachusetts Music Educators Association Northeastern District. Jared was also President-Elect of the New Hampshire Music Educators Association, and a K–12 fine and performing arts director in New Hampshire. He received the Grammy Music Educator Award in 2015, and was honored as a National Music Teacher of Excellence by the Country Music Association (CMA) Foundation in 2022.

Community: What strategies do you utilize to build a supportive climate and culture with students? With peers?

To me, this is all about relationship building! At the end of the day our students, our colleagues, you and me—we just want to feel valued, cared for, and supported. It may be simple in nature, but when you authentically and genuinely invest in the folks in your life on both a professional and personal level, it's amazing how safe structures are created that enable innovative ideas, provide space for deep and meaningful discussion and debate, and create an environment steeped in personal agency. Additionally, it provides time for active listening and self-reflection.

Action Research: What questions or wonderings are you exploring in your own teaching practice this year? What helps you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

I am continuing to wonder how I can further fuse my work between diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging with social-emotional learning. It may seem obvious that the arts provide a natural platform from which students can find belonging, take advantage of program opportunities, and where folks can celebrate their identities and backgrounds, however, this will only happen if we make deliberate and changing actions, and genuinely EMBED this work into our daily instruction, planning, and programming. What pushes me to address areas of growth is wondering “Is this enough?” And as it should be, it never truly is!

Impact: From your experience, what are the most powerful aspects of a professional learning community that impact your instructional practice?

For me, the most powerful aspects of a PLC that impact my own instructional practices are the continued opportunities to SHARE! Time seems to be very limited by today's standards, so taking advantage of our time to collaborate and to share best practices and instructional approaches; calibrate assessments and the rubrics we use to assess our students; and use data as a means to inform next steps, identify trends in student learning, and to make curricular changes is really important. Additionally, ensuring that the PLC team has aligned goals and beliefs around this work is exceptionally important.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources (authors, articles, books, websites, etc...) that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, edited by Susan D. Blum
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* by Zaretta Hammond
- *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi

“What pushes me to address areas of growth is wondering ‘Is this enough?’ And as it should be, it never truly is!”

Reflection: When you consider why you started your teaching practice and where you are now, why do you choose to keep showing up?

I keep showing up because teaching is one of the most humbling gifts we can be afforded. Through teaching, I remain an active and engaged learner. There is not one day that goes by that I am not taught or shown something incredible by my students and colleagues. We have the incredible fortune to work in an environment where we not only hope to provide those around us with the tools to be positive contributors to society, but where we (if we allow it) are also able to become reflective and changing within our own contributions and existence.





Kimberly Hoj (she/her/hers)

Dance Teacher, Career Technical Education
Teacher on Special Assignment

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Kim Hoj is founder of the Nordhoff High School dance program, where she currently teaches. In 2021, she was a recipient of a California School Board Association Golden Bell Award for Excellence in Education, and recognized as an Outstanding Nordhoff Teacher. She has also served as a visual and performing arts and career technical education coordinator in Santa Barbara, was co-president for the California Dance Education Association, completed the California Department of Education Leadership Development Institute for career technical education, and served as a consultant for the Ventura Unified Arts Collaborative and the Léni Fé Bland Performing Arts Partnership.

Community: What strategies do you utilize to build a supportive climate and culture with students? With peers?

I keep a whole-child/whole-person perspective in my interactions with others, and dance is just one facet of their lives and identities. I start many classes in a circle and encourage movement to share how we are feeling, which helps me attune to individuals. For adults who do not see themselves as movers, I integrate ways for them to share what matters to them within the context of the setting. Self-referential learning makes a difference in building deeper meaning within the creative laboratory of the dance classroom. I plan deliberate ways for students to express themselves in class.

Action Research: What questions or wonderings are you exploring in your own teaching practice this year? What helps you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

I am currently exploring how to promote student voice within creative projects focused on subjects that are hard to express while also nurturing student identity. Some dancers have expressed a desire for the world to be a kinder, better place that is less impacted by racism. I am currently devising lessons to hold space for students to develop a greater sense of their identity, explore their beliefs and dreams for a kinder world, and how to apply those possibilities into movement. Dialogue with my student teacher (an alum of our program) has been most meaningful in pushing towards growth on this topic.

Impact: From your experience, what are the most powerful aspects of a professional learning community that impact your instructional practice?

Being part of a professional learning community reduces the isolation that can contribute to disconnection from others and from resources that support classroom learning. So often teachers of the arts are solo within the school setting, without job-alike partners nearby. This was my experience in my first several years of teaching dance. Being part of a professional learning community built on trust and a commitment to expand one's learning can help build motivation and momentum toward shared goals. Being part of the Language of Dance community over the years has reduced that initial isolation. I am grateful for those connections.

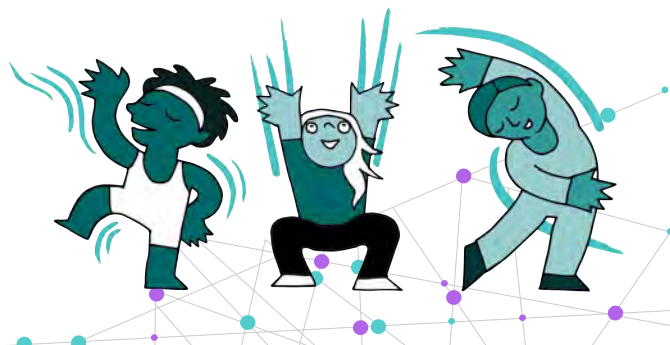
Resources: What are the top three educational resources (authors, articles, books, websites, etc...) that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- As part of a course on mindfulness, I am currently reading *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and I cannot recommend it highly enough. It reminds us that self-care needs to come from the inside out.
- *Atlas of the Heart* by Brene Brown is my go-to book for emotional literacy to help inform my life and teaching practice.
- Though this book was published many years ago, *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl is top notch. We have all lived through great challenges in the last few years, and this book always helps me to put challenges in perspective.

"I start many classes in a circle and encourage movement to share how we are feeling, which helps me attune to individuals!"

Reflection: When you consider why you started your teaching practice and where you are now, why do you choose to keep showing up?

Back when I started teaching, I knew that school was a safe place, and that meant a lot coming from a home life that was unpredictable. Teaching is a labor of love for me. As I have developed my teaching practice as a dance educator, I am more aware of how my own values and vision intersect within my classroom to support kids. That is the love part. The labor part might look like work to others—and though it can be hard, I keep showing up because of the relationships with my students. They make the labor worth it.





Tina Barone (she/her/hers)

Theatre Teacher

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Tina Barone is an actor, director, and educator with a degree in theatre performance from Wagner College in Staten Island, New York. She also holds a master's degree in education and is well versed in Stanislavsky, Meisner, and Uta Hagen acting methods. She has been teaching theatre in an elementary school for the past 20 years. Tina has also directed musicals and plays all over the New York tri-state area, and has appeared in numerous community theatre productions.

Community: What strategies do you utilize to build a supportive climate and culture with students? With peers?

I try to foster community in my classroom so children feel heard and have opportunities to take on leadership roles. I select a "Director of the Week," in which a student leads us through routines. I let students choose the units of study, and with my students and peers, we co-create community agreements so we know how we want to communicate with one another.

Action Research: What questions or wonderings are you exploring in your own teaching practice this year? What helps you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

I am currently exploring my teaching clarity and breaking down a standard into learning targets and success criteria. I realized this was an area that needed addressing when I went to revise my old units, which left me asking too many questions. I am also looking at where the social justice standard of identity is addressed in my units, and how I can highlight it more.

“...with my students and peers, we co-create community agreements so we know how we want to communicate with one another.”

Impact: From your experience, what are the most powerful aspects of a professional learning community that impact your instructional practice?

The ability to have a community of like-minded educators who have knowledge of the same content I teach is an immeasurable resource to have. It has helped me restructure my units, form inquiry questions based on gaps in my students' learning, and adjust my lesson planning to be more student centered.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources (authors, articles, books, websites, etc...) that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- [The Drama Online Library: National Theatre Collection](#)
- [Cultivating Genius](#) by Gholdy Muhammad
- [Art Assessment for Learning](#)

Reflection: When you consider why you started your teaching practice and where you are now, why do you choose to keep showing up?

I keep showing up for the children because a theatre teacher made a huge difference in my life in helping me to discover who I am both on and off stage, and I hope to help others do the same.



How might a Professional Learning Community (PLC)

support your growth and understanding of concepts such as social emotional learning (SEL) or equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility?