



CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO. 10

INCLUSIVE SPACES & LIBERATED CLASSROOMS

Connected Arts Networks (CAN) establishes national virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for educators in dance, music, theatre, 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](#).

CAN teachers are developing “wonderings” about what they can potentially do to improve their instruction to positively impact student learning and engagement. This quarter, our focus has been on how to create inclusive spaces through the use of resources such as CASEL’s Core Competencies and the Five Pursuits Framework by Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, in addition to the National Core Arts Standards. We are also exploring the [Growing Inclusivity for Vibrant Engagement \(GIVE\)](#) Guide as a resource for preparing an inclusive lesson.

In this Tip Sheet, you’ll read about practices that CAN teachers are implementing in their classrooms that stem from their “wonderings”. We believe that framing your challenges as opportunities helps garner support and build buy-in for your work. When CAN teachers are identifying a “Problem of Practice” they consider:

- What are some of the strengths of my curriculum and instruction? What areas need to be strengthened?
- What are my sources of data for knowing what my strengths are and what areas I need to improve?
- What is puzzling to me about the data? What has felt challenging?

We hope this resource aids you as you explore your own instructional strengths, and inspires you to develop practices and routines that benefit all students.



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Rachel Murray (she/her/hers)

Theatre Teacher / Arts Coordinator

Dance Specialist K–8

Spanaway, WA



Rachel Murray, MFA, MEd is currently in her 18th year as a public school dance teacher. Her teaching experience spans diverse locales including Honolulu, HI, New York City, NY, Austin, TX, and currently, Tacoma, WA. She received her Bachelor's degree in dance and dance education from Empire State College, where she was a recipient of the Richard Porter Leach Fellowship for Performing Artists, and her MFA in dance at UT Austin. She danced with Betty Jones's Dances We Dance in Honolulu, HI, The Mark Morris Dance Group in Brussels, Belgium and New York City, NY, and The Aztlan Dance Company in Austin, TX. She taught at McCallum High School Fine Arts Academy in Austin, TX, and she currently teaches at Elk Plain School of Choice, K–8. Rachel's Action Research for CAN is focused on transformative SEL, whereby students explore aspects of their identity, through dance, as a process to deepen understanding of self and others.

Community: What is your process for creating inclusive lessons and unit plans? How do you create multimodal entry points in your teaching?

One of my core beliefs as a dancer is that dance is culture. Therefore, the first step is mindset. I ask myself, how do I teach dance from a cultural lens? This is an evolving aspect of my practice, but it guides every decision I make. Next, is looking at the scope and sequence of the courses I am teaching because inclusion, to me, signals the need for a broad look at a very large subject. Then I need to consider my students so I can understand and include their interests so I can build excitement and curiosity in new areas.

Action Research: How are you incorporating inclusion into your action research as a "problem of practice"? What are the potential barriers to access that you want to address?

My first action research cycle with CAN was in a classroom with very diverse learning accommodations and needs. Ensuring your lessons have resources that provide access to your action research lessons via visual imagery, checks for understanding, and modifications will help support students' learning needs. Focusing on social-emotional learning, and the culture in my classroom as part of the process of access and inclusion has helped me increase students' feelings of belonging and acceptance. Also, if you have students who have TA support, don't hesitate to engage them. They are there to help and appreciate being engaged.

CAN teachers were introduced to the **GIVE Lesson Plan Checklist**.
What do you do to ensure that your lessons are inclusive?

Impact: Tell us about a time you were able to build a successful relationship with a student. How did this impact your instruction or curriculum development?

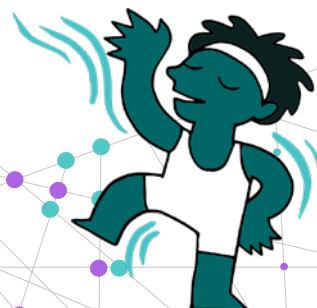
I had a student who spent most of his day in a self-contained classroom. He loved dance and was a joy to teach. I incorporate a lot of student centered work in my curriculum that is focused on creativity and leadership within small student groups. At that time, I had not had not yet taught a student with down syndrome in my class and I was nervous about creating my first student groups. I engaged my students in small groups for sharing journal responses, dance composition creative assignments, and coaching cohorts (helping each other work on various movements that require a lot of practice, such as turns, for example. The care students took to helping him as they included his input into the group work. The growth he (and the students) had via the process changed me, and the experience felt like such a success.

Resources: What educational resources would you recommend to colleagues related to this topic?

I recommend the resource *Breadth of Bodies, Discussing Disabilities in Dance* by dance colleague Silva Laukkanen. Silva's work has influenced me greatly.

Reflection: How do you build self-reflection into your teaching? Tell us about a goal that you have for this school year.

My goal this year is oriented toward elementary-age students. I am finding that many of my students who identify as athletes come in with anxiety about dancing. My current action research is focussing on ways to build connections between athletic work and dance work.





Malissa Baker (she/her/hers)

Music Teacher

Buffalo Creek Middle School

Palmetto, FL

Facebook Malissa Bukovinsky Baker

Currently in her 25th year as a music educator, Malissa teaches orchestra and chorus at Buffalo Creek Middle School in Manatee County, FL. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree, Cum Laude, at West Liberty State College, now West Liberty University, in West Virginia, and she is certified in Music Education K–12 with both ESOL and Reading Endorsements. has been named a High Impact Teacher from the Commissioner of Education, she has been a panelist and presenter at the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) Pre-Conference in 2019, and she has had the privilege of working on the Florida Music Education Association (FMEA) Emerging Leader Committee with Chairperson Dré Graham.

Community: What is your process for creating inclusive lessons and unit plans? How do you create multimodal entry points in your teaching?

A linguistic example: Allegro is a tempo marking meaning to perform at a brisk speed. The speed of the music will be very fast. When you are on your phone in school and see a teacher approaching, you put it away at an allegro speed, so it does not get taken. Visual-Solfege hand symbols are posted on the wall in a vertical ladder form, each picture includes the term and hand symbol in different skin tones. Gestural: Having students pretend to shoot a free throw to move a musical phrase through to approach a higher note.

Action Research: How are you incorporating inclusion into your action research as a “problem of practice”? What are the potential barriers to access that you want to address?

A problem of practice (POP) I will be using is by working with students in a singular class period who are different skill sets (beginner, intermediate, and advanced students in the same class period). Using the upper-level students as models and leaders to support first and second year students is the approach I have put into inception. Currently, this process is assisting in building positive relationships within the classroom and upper-level students are retaining more vocabulary and enhancing their skills by application. Potential barriers include scheduling, finding the correct balance to not overwhelm lower skill sets while continuing to challenge the upper skill sets, and retention.

Impact: Tell us about a time you were able to build a successful relationship with a student. How did this impact your instruction or curriculum development?

Through my belief in building positive relationships and music for all, I welcomed a nonverbal, autistic child into my choral class. I quickly discovered he was able to sing with

the most beautiful, bass voice! His language skills developed rapidly and his family was reluctant to have him perform at his first concert; however, his previous teacher called to encourage attendance. The family was brought to tears in hearing his voice express emotions with joy and confidence and the inclusivity of the surrounding students, as well as the audience in seeing his ABILITY. After 3 years, he can now speak in complete sentences.

Resources: What educational resources would you recommend to colleagues related to this topic?

I use resources from *Embracing our Differences*, which aligns to regulations and policies within my particular state.

I love these books by Scott N. Edgar: *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music*, *Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning*

I'd also recommend these books, which are collaborations between Scott N. Edgar and Cory Wilkerson and Michelle S. McConkey respectively: *Pathways to Joy and Meaning: Social Emotional Learning in Theatre Education*, and *Social Emotional Learning for the Preservice and Inservice Music Teacher*.

Reflection: How do you build self-reflection into your teaching? Tell us about a goal that you have for this school year.

Using collected data from various resources and assessing lessons afterward, I do reflect often. Seeking out new material and support to provide professional growth ultimately guides me toward structuring a larger goal(s) for the following school year. This year, in addition to elevating student achievement in reading and theory I am focused on celebrating students more frequently, recruitment and retention, and finding new avenues to support new and emerging educators.





Rachael Harrison (she/her/hers)

Visual Arts Director, Art Teacher

El Sol Science and Arts Academy
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Rachael Harrison is the visual arts director and art teacher at El Sol Science and Arts Academy in Santa Ana, California. She has been teaching for 15 years, holds a Masters in Education, and serves as a teacher leader in Connected Arts Network. Rachael teaches K-8 and with that she explores different art processes and media. Rachael is also an "art on a cart" teacher who switches rooms, ages, and stages every 45 minutes. She enjoys quilting, reading, and coffee in her spare time.

Community: What is your process for creating inclusive lessons and unit plans? How do you create multimodal entry points in your teaching?

When creating inclusive lesson plans, I look first at my roster and think through who is in my classroom for this particular unit. Often I have 3-5 students who pop into my mind and I start working with their needs to provide an inclusive atmosphere. To create multimodal entry points, I run through the lesson in my head and think about if I had been sitting in a training or PD all day, would this get me excited and engaged? If the answer is yes, I'm on the right track. If not, I go back and edit.

Action Research: How are you incorporating inclusion into your action research as a "problem of practice"? What are the potential barriers to access that you want to address?

One of the struggles on campus, as well as nationally, is how do we create structures for equity while also creating a climate conducive to creating art? This is the problem of practice I am pursuing as every one of my 17 classes have different needs and barriers of access that need to be addressed. Some classes have students with IEP or 504 plans, with specific learning goals and adaptations needed, while other classes may have a unique makeup of students that makes classroom management and redirection really crucial so that all students have the ability to learn during our time together.

What is a Liberated Learning Environment?

Liberated Learning Environments are environments free from restrictive and limiting barriers imposed by racist and ableist societal structures, and are collaborative and co-generative, intersectional settings guided by anti-racist, anti-ableist, stigma-free, anti-colonial practices. Liberated Learning Environments are not static; they change and evolve to meet the ongoing needs of students and facilitators as a community.

This term is inspired by Paolo Freire's work, which you can learn more about in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Citation: [Glossary - GIVE Guide](#)

Impact: Tell us about a time you were able to build a successful relationship with a student. How did this impact your instruction or curriculum development?

Students long to be understood and heard. I now have a middle schooler who in early elementary I spent time just listening to her stories. She just needed someone to hear her and listen. Now she has grown socially and doesn't need me as much, but that foundation is still there. Building into this student allowed her to settle during art time and create art. Before she couldn't create because her head was full of the drama and chaos of her own morning. By creating spaces where she could vent, she was able to engage with the art making process.

Resources: What educational resources would you recommend to colleagues related to this topic?

The book *Unearthing Joy* by Dr. Ghoddy Mohammad has changed how I interact with hard questions. It provides a structure of unit planning that I utilize that ensures I am hitting all five pursuits each unit. It is my most well-worn book on my shelf.

The *Critical Response Protocol* by Liz Lerman is what I use instead of a gallery walk now. It allows students to engage in the creative reflective process in a safer environment. I also use it with colleagues to discuss works in progress. It is invaluable!

Reflection: How do you build self-reflection into your teaching? Tell us about a goal that you have for this school year.

Journaling and sketching are how I process the world around me. It is a daily habit and I set one prep session a week to just reflect during that time. One of my goals for this school year is utilizing the *5 Pursuits Framework* by Ghoddy Muhammad and the *Critical Response Protocol* from Liz Lerman in my classroom.



We want to hear from you!
Let us know what you think about this resource [here](#).



Lissen Ellington (she/her/hers)

Assessment Coordinator & Theatre Sponsor

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West Palm Beach, FL



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Lissen Ellington's love of theatre began as a young child and continued through high school as she trained at Dreyfoos School of the Arts, focusing on musical theatre and costuming. After graduation, she obtained her Bachelor's Degree from Florida State University and her MBA from Northwood University. She spent 10 years in the business world focusing on events and marketing, and she was able to parlay her knowledge of events and marketing to her love of theatre in her current career as an assessment coordinator and theatre and business educator with Palm Beach County Schools. Lissen was the recipient of the English-Speaking Union's 2019 Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance Scholarship for Palm Beach County to study Shakespeare at The Globe Theater in London, and she currently runs the ESU Palm Beach Branch's Shakespeare Recitation Competition. Lissen was the recipient of Florida Alliance for Arts Education (FAAE)'s 2020–2021 Advancing Arts Education for the Southern Region, and in 2023, she was named Best Featured Performer in a Musical by Broadway World-Miami Metro Area. In her spare time, Lissen can be seen performing on stages around the tri-county area, running half marathons at Disney, and spending time with her husband and baby girl.

Community: What is your process for creating inclusive lessons and unit plans? How do you create multimodal entry points in your teaching?

I like creating parts of my curriculum based upon the students I have that year. My Shakespeare Unit is a great example of this. I like to show students a traditional Shakespearean play and then show them a modern interpretation of the same play, for example, *Taming of the Shrew* and *10 Things I Hate About You*. Then I have them do a compare and contrast paper of the two pieces. This helps them understand Shakespeare better and I let them pick the shows based upon the plot summaries.

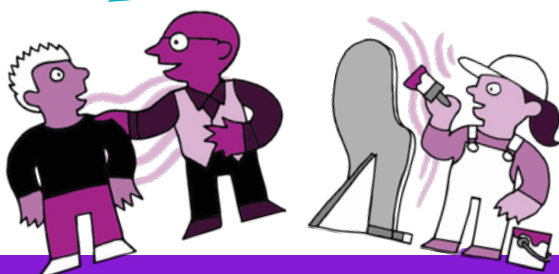
Action Research: How are you incorporating inclusion into your action research as a "problem of practice"? What are the potential barriers to access that you want to address?

My action research is about showing how theatre education incorporates all core academic subjects and how students—no matter of background—tend to be better students and perform better on standardized testing.



Want to hear more
from these educators?

Listen to the corresponding podcast
episodes on [K12 Art Chat](#).



Impact: Tell us about a time you were able to build a successful relationship with a student. How did this impact your instruction or curriculum development?

One of the things I pride myself in doing is helping students foster the theatre spark. I want to encourage students to try different things until they find "their place." One student of mine was shy, but I saw that she enjoyed singing and acting, so I recommended she join the Musical Theatre for the next year. During her 3 years in that class, her personality and her voice came out. Now she is a theatre teacher in Colorado and has said my work with her inspired her to become a theatre teacher.

Resources: What educational resources would you recommend to colleagues related to this topic?

A resource I use often with students is [TheatreFolk's Drama Teacher Academy](#). The platform has full lesson plans and the state standards that go along with them. They also have emergency lesson plans which have truly come in handy at times.

Reflection: How do you build self-reflection into your teaching? Tell us about a goal that you have for this school year.

After each semester, I like to see how the students have grown throughout that timeframe. I have them write things about their personal goals at the beginning of the semester and then have them do it again at the end of the semester. I share both items with them so they can see how they have grown through the year as both a performer and as a person.

The contents of this Tip Sheet were developed under a grant from the Department of Education's Assistance for Arts Education Program.

However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education or endorsement by the Federal Government.