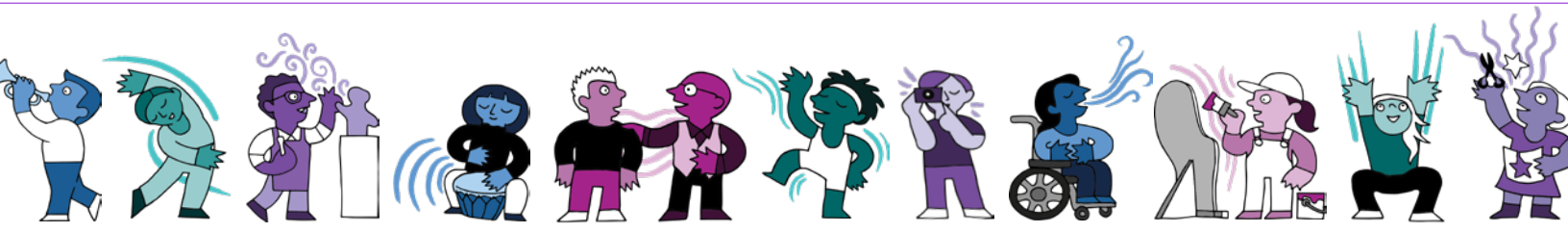


CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO.4 TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The **Connected Arts Networks (CAN) project** 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](#).

In this handout, CAN Teacher Leaders describe their experience in schools around the country. One of the CAN goals is to explore how an investment in professional learning for arts educators can transform the value, support, and impact of arts education within buildings, districts, and communities. We know that when schools leverage the unique leadership skills of arts educators, they gain creative problem-solvers, experienced collaborators and partners, family and community engagement specialists, and experts who understand entire student bodies across grades and over time.

We believe the most effective teacher leaders are equitable and responsive to student and community culture, as well as mentors to peer educators. To hear more from Teacher Leaders, visit our [website](#) to listen to a CAN podcast episode on this topic.



What are some ways you can serve, or already are serving, as a leader in your school and community?
Why is it important for arts educators to serve in leadership roles in their schools and communities?



Charles Jabour (he/him/his)

Theatre Faculty

Somerville Public Schools
Somerville, MA

Charles Jabour is a Boston-based theatre educator and producer. He currently serves as the theatre faculty for Somerville Public Schools and as the advisor for the Highlander Theatre Company at Somerville High School. Charlie centers his practice on theatre as tool for equity and social justice in urban schools. His research on cultural identity development, which received an honorable mention by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education in 2015, continues to guide his practice. As an organizational leader, he draws from his background as a creative producer for large cultural institutions, including the New York Public Library, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. He holds a BA in Arts Management from Eastern Michigan University and an MFA in Theatre Education and Applied Theatre from Emerson College. As a proud member of the Educational Theatre Association, Charlie is honored to be a member of the theatre cohort of Teacher Leaders for the Creative Arts Network.

Community: How have you served as a leader in your school community? What do you think are the most important skills leaders should have?

I believe the most important skills for a leader to have are vision, ability to communicate that vision, and the resilience to be a part of the winding path toward that vision. I've had the good fortune of being a part of many new initiatives, but I am most proud of the ongoing work we are doing to build an urban high school theatre program toward a vision of equity and excellence. This journey has not been without obstacles, but I am confident that through vision, communication, and resilience, we will find success.

Action Research: In your opinion, how can we build a school leadership structure that meets the needs of all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities?

I believe this work starts with building a culture of support and trust toward reflexive practice. There is a natural and justifiable tension between school leaders, who are more often than not our evaluators, and teachers who are more often than not feeling under attack and fearful for their jobs. Asking teachers to do the necessary and difficult work around equity means we need to trust our school leaders to be on this journey with us, and to support practices in the classroom with structural change at the institutional level.

Impact: How has CAN supported your ability to lead, whether in your school, your PLC, or outside the project? What does it look like to coach or lead with equity?

CAN has supported my ability to lead in a multitude of ways, but the most powerful way I can identify at the moment is through access to a network of allies. Some arts educators are fortunate enough to have a PLC within their building or district, but many of us feel isolated and without access to value-aligned colleagues in our own content areas. The CAN PLC has provided the crucial support of collaborators to support, challenge, and hold me accountable to work toward the vision of a more equitable program in my school.

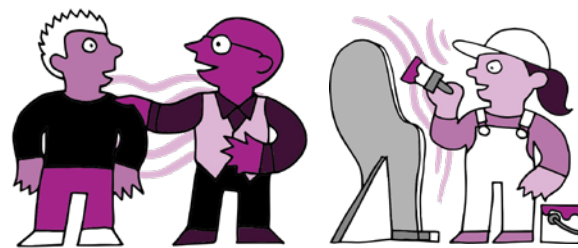
Resources: What are the top three educational resources on leadership you would recommend to colleagues right now?

- [*Emergent Strategy*](#) by adrienne maree brown
- [*How to Be an Antiracist*](#) by Ibram X. Kendi
- [*Learning for Justice Website*](#)

“CAN has supported my ability to lead in a multitude of ways, but the most powerful way I can identify at the moment is through access to a network of allies.”

Reflection: Why are you committed to leadership work? Why do you keep showing up? What advice would you give an arts educator who wants to take on a leadership role at their school?

I'm always drawn to the places where I feel I can make the most positive impact. There have been times when I have felt exhausted or stalled, and in retrospect I have come to realize that what I was actually feeling in those moments was an inability to effect change in the way that I desired. Leadership, for many of us, is about being in a position to do the most good for the most people. The advice I would give those who are similarly aligned is to find meaning in the process, not in the product.





Corazón Tierra (she/her/hers)

Dance Educator

LEAP

New York, NY



Corazón Tierra is a dance educator, somatic movement educator, dance artist, and poet dedicated to helping children, youth, and families cultivate body—mind wisdom. She is the creator of EduDanza, a somatic movement dance education approach, and of DanzaYo, a participatory community dance practice. Corazón is also a master teaching artist with LEAP in NYC, where she teaches dance to K–12 students, leads the LEAP literacy teaching artist cohort, and offers social—emotional learning and literacy professional development trainings. As a dance maker, Corazón is best known for harmoniously fusing her poetry and dance into performances exploring the connection of the female body with the natural world. She has shared her dance work in the United States, Spain, South Africa, and Puerto Rico. Corazón is also a faculty member of the Language of Dance Center, and she holds a Master of Arts in Dance and Somatic Well-being from the University of Central Lancashire (UK), and a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education and Social—Emotional Learning from Erikson Institute. Her literary work is published in two anthologies, she has published one poetry book, and her dance scores are included in the *Portable Dances* book series.

Community: How have you served as a leader in your school community? What do you think are the most important skills leaders should have?

I helped develop the literacy framework at LEAP after conducting collaborative action research and identifying best practices. I lead a cohort of teaching artists and support their development through a strength-based approach, and I also speak with funders about the benefits of dance education. Transformative leaders are grounded in the values that honor collective well-being, as well as personal fulfillment. These exceptional leaders are receptive to the needs, passions, and dreams of the people in their communities. These are the leaders who celebrate strengths, identify areas of support, offer mentorship, and nourish greatness. Transformative leaders co-create collaborative environments.

Action Research: In your opinion, how can we build a school leadership structure that meets the needs of all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities?

If we want to meet the needs of all students, we need to ground school leadership structures in student-centered practices that emphasize collaboration, connection, and agency. All leadership roles should be responsive to the specific needs of the students and their families. The conversation with families should begin with these two questions: What do you need? In what ways can we support you? Each student and each family have strengths, gifts, hopes, and dreams that can enrich the whole school community. Our job as educational leaders is to uncover all that “wealth,” and create an environment for interconnectedness.

Impact: How has CAN supported your ability to lead, whether in your school, your PLC, or outside the project? What does it look like to coach or lead with equity?

CAN has supported my ability to articulate the value of what I offer as a dance educator. Through rigorous action-research

practice, I am documenting the evidence that shows how my dance pedagogy supports agency in students. The mentorship model of the CAN project is nourishing my growth and expansion, and I am discovering my leadership style, which is deeply rooted in collaborative principles. Reflection, receptivity, embodiment, and generosity are essential for leading with equity.

“Reflection, receptivity, embodiment, and generosity are essential for leading with equity.”

Resources: What are the top three educational resources on leadership you would recommend to colleagues right now?

- *Bicultural Parent Engagement: Advocacy and Empowerment*: Read review [here](#).
- [Explore SEL](#), which offers a comprehensive view of the SEL field. I often consult this website when I’m preparing presentations.

Reflection: Why are you committed to leadership work? Why do you keep showing up? What advice would you give an arts educator who wants to take on a leadership role at their school?

I’m committed to offering dance learning experiences to children and families from historically marginalized communities. Because the benefits of dance education are often unknown or undervalued, I engage in initiatives that advocate for dance education. Leadership in dance education is about making the benefits of dance education visible—we can do this in a conversation with a parent, or in a presentation for a funder. As dance educators, we are already leaders in our classrooms, and I invite you to explore this question: In what ways can I expand my educational leadership to spaces outside of my classroom?

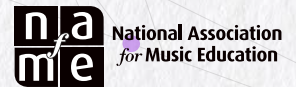




Nathan Rødahl (he/him/his)

Director of Orchestras

Port Angeles High School
Port Angeles, WA



Nathan Rødahl is a rising star in music education and advocacy. He is an accomplished violinist, conductor, and vocalist who has excelled in classical and alternative traditions. As a member of the National Council for Orchestra Education and Pedagogy of NafME, Nathan has worked to increase the visibility and relevance of orchestra education in public schools. He is grateful to be a member of the NafME CAN Teacher Leader cohort to advance practical tools to liberate the music classroom. Nathan is also the creator of *High-Strung, the Orchestra Podcast*, which he created during shutdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to continue enriching students' lives through the power of music. Nathan is the director of orchestras at Port Angeles High School and music director of the Bainbridge Island Youth Orchestra in Washington. He received his training in education at Pacific Lutheran University, in addition to numerous continued education courses throughout the nation. Nathan is always excited for new frontiers in education and welcomes invitations to explore contemporary music performance and alternative styles.

Community: How have you served as a leader in your school community? What do you think are the most important skills leaders should have?

I have been a leader in the traditional sense serving as a music department chair, region president for the local music educators' association, and in leading school orchestras; however, leadership is more than a title. The differences between a spectator and a leader should not be as simple as the leader holding the clipboard. An effective leader bears the burden of accepting fault on behalf of the organization and serves their constituents in collaboration with their community. A perspective of liberation is required for effective leadership, to uplift those who are led through the act of leading.

“To lead with equity means having awareness of others' needs, and in turn, curate solutions that meet those needs according to the previous definition of equity.”

Action Research: In your opinion, how can we build a school leadership structure that meets the needs of all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities?

School leaders must begin a process of liberation within themselves and those they lead to ultimately arrive at a point where leaders do not assume they have all the answers—nor should they be expected to—and those that lead are provided the support and agency to advocate for their own needs. Fundamentally, we must begin a journey together that promotes inquiry into past mistakes and accepting discomfort in self-examination and is in all its efforts student centered. School leadership must find a way to meet the needs of their superiors AND serve the needs of each student: AND, not OR.



Impact: How has CAN supported your ability to lead, whether in your school, your PLC, or outside the project? What does it look like to coach or lead with equity?

CAN offers the opportunity to see the educational landscape through the lenses of my peers in the cohort—to experience rather than conceptualize a perspective outside of my own. Most importantly, CAN has cultivated an awareness of teacher–student agency in the classroom and emphasizes how liberation in the classroom builds and reinforces that agency. Equity, to me, means that one receives what they need when they need it and in the way that they need it. To lead with equity means having awareness of others' needs, and in turn, curate solutions that meet those needs according to the previous definition of equity.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources on leadership you would recommend to colleagues right now?

- *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education* by Lind and McCoy
- *The Ideology of Competition in School Music* by Sean Powell
- *Real Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg

Reflection: Why are you committed to leadership work? Why do you keep showing up? What advice would you give an arts educator who wants to take on a leadership role at their school?

The arts are essential to human life, yet they are among the first programs to be cut or marginalized in our communities that view the arts as opulent and only available in times of abundance. Artists are therefore required to represent themselves, and those they serve, to whichever governing body or institution determines their continuity. Artists need leaders to defend their position at the core of the human experience, and those leaders need the best training to advocate and defend the arts from those who need education and experience to understand the value of an art-rich community.



Tim Needles (he/him/his)
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NATIONAL
ART EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

Tim Needles is an artist, educator, performer, and author of *STEAM Power: Infusing Art Into Your STEM Curriculum*. He is a TEDx Talk speaker, a technology integration specialist, and he also teaches art, film, and emerging media at Smithtown School District and Five Towns College. Needles's work has been featured on NPR, in *The New York Times*, Columbus Museum of Art, Norman Rockwell Museum, Alexandria Museum of Art, Katonah Museum of Art, and Cape Cod Museum of Art. He's a recipient of International Society of Technology in Education's (ISTE) Technology in Action Award and Creativity Award, the NAEA Eastern Region Art Educator Award and ArtEdTech Outstanding Teaching Award, and the Rauschenberg Power of Art Award. He is also a board member of the New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education and the New York State Art Teachers Association. Needles is also a National Geographic Certified Educator, Kami Hero, Formative Champion, PBS Digital Innovator, a NASA Solar System Ambassador, an ISTE Community leader, NAEA Art & Media Technology Interest Group chair, and an Adobe Creative Educator. He is active on social media at @timneedles.

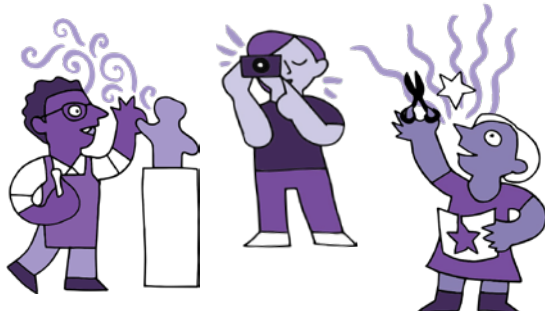
Community: How have you served as a leader in your school community? What do you think are the most important skills leaders should have?

As an artist and educator, I've helped bring creativity into classrooms by connecting teachers, building projects together, and developing student-centered collaborative STEAM learning experiences. I think the most important quality of a good leader is having the ability to be a good listener. So often it appears that leadership is about your vision, but it's about being open, collaborative, and helping develop an inclusive, unified vision.

"A student-centered classroom gives students ownership of their own learning, and they are much more motivated and independent because of it."

Action Research: In your opinion, how can we build a school leadership structure that meets the needs of all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities?

I have found that the school leadership structure tends to persist with a status quo mindset and doesn't reflect the whole school community. Structural change is necessary to include formal and true collaborative decision making that reflects all the voices and perspectives in the school community.



Impact: How has CAN supported your ability to lead, whether in your school, your PLC, or outside the project? What does it look like to coach or lead with equity?

I believe collaboration is a skill that we can all develop, so CAN has offered us the opportunity to work with a diverse group of terrific educators on meaningful, creative, and inclusive work. It's helped build that collaborative skill set even further as we infuse SEL and ED&I into expressive, impactful projects for kids.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources on leadership you would recommend to colleagues right now?

- *Drive* by Dan Pink
- *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica
- *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* by Simon Sinek

Reflection: Why are you committed to leadership work? Why do you keep showing up? What advice would you give an arts educator who wants to take on a leadership role at their school?

Leadership needs individuals who don't necessarily see themselves as natural leaders. It's not all about ego and power; it's about supporting students, making change, and impacting our future. As Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see the world!"