

Nancy Benz

TEPS Report

American String Teacher's Association 2017 National Conference

March 2-4, 2017 Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Dr. Hicks,

Thank-you for the opportunity to attend the ASTA National Conference through the TEPS Committee Professional Improvement Plan grant. Although I have attended other music conferences through NYSSMA or ECMEA, this conference was specifically for string teachers at all levels and was attended by over 1200 participants. Besides sessions sponsored by the music industry, there were presentations by individuals, college students, and prominent innovators in the world of string music. There were performances by competing Orchestras at different age groups, and a professional performance presented by the Verona Quartet.

I attended approximately seventeen sessions for the three day conference, and I plan to use my ideas in the classroom and share them with members of the music department. In addition, I was able to visit the exhibits, peruse the string music, and share handouts with colleagues.

William Harvey was the opening speaker and shared his thoughts on the need for musicians to become "Citizen Artists." He quoted Pablo Casals, "Perhaps it is music that will save the world." Mr. Casals performed at ground zero after the fall of the twin towers. He felt the need to share his gift of music and express his hope for humanity. Mr. Harvey encouraged all of us to be more proactive and consider our position in the world.

Because I attended so many varied sessions, I'd like to share a few important highlights:

Bring Your Students to the Next Level through Effective Assessment- Margaret Berg, Univ. of Boulder Colorado and Denise Odegaard, NAFME President

This presentation discussed the new ASTA Curriculum that will be available on line and in print in a few months. The curriculum will have *Categories* and a rubric for 1) Baseline 2) Developing 3) Proficient 4) Advanced. The *Categories* will be skills needed to play a string instrument, such as Executive Skills: right and left hand skill development.

Assessment refers to all tools, approaches and processes. The speaker reminded us, "just because you taught it, doesn't mean you've learned it." The rubric gives us an individual picture that develops over multiple grade levels and keeps the teacher aware of skills that need attention. The assessment should also be educative, ie. Students learn how they are doing. The rubric should include different ways for the student to learn the skills. Many examples were given in different music class settings which I feel would be helpful in the Orchestra setting.

Terrific Trios! Multi-Level Ensembles in Three Parts
Daphne Gerling, Katherine Lewis and Hillary Herndon

This morning session was devoted to suggestions of viola literature at multiple levels to encourage ensemble playing for the violas. Most often, the viola plays harmony in the orchestra and playing in an ensemble allows the student to play an expressive melody line. The professors had participants play and demonstrate various selected ensemble music. I also learned that there is a viola society that offers free music as a resource for teachers and interested musicians.

Release the Grip: Memorable and Effective Strategies for Developing and Reworking the Violin and Viola Bowhold

Martha Walvoord, University of Texas at Arlington

The language for the bow hold conjures up tension in the hand, ie “grip.” Walvoord expressed the need to instruct students to understand the terms for the parts of the hand, parts of the bow, and put names to things and the equipment we use. She encourages the use of imagery to explain how the hand moves, such as “tipping a pitcher of water.” Walvoord discussed the need for positive directions in instruction because the brain learns better. Tell the student what you want and state in a positive command statement. Negative statements do not work as the students do not retain the information.

Electrify Your Strings Program with 21st Century Technologies Mark Wood

Sponsored by Electrify Your Strings/Wood Violins

This was by far the best session of the entire conference! Mark Wood is the inventor of an electric wooden violin that is in the shape of a V. The violin straps around the body and does not have to be held with the chin. The violin can be made with frets like a guitar, or without frets like a regular violin. Mark has made instruments with 4 or 5 strings. He has recently created instruments with 6 and even 7 strings. The instruments are all electrified and allow for a beautiful “violin” sound in an electric instrument. Along with being electrified, the violin expands what can be accomplished creatively with the music and with sound effects from the various pedal effects.

Mark has a keen interest in working with schools and teaching students how to experience the creativity of improvisation. He showed a clip of some of his in-school programs and various teachers spoke of their experience. One teacher started with one Viper Electric Violin and has now acquired 12 Vipers, and 3 cellos.

Mark Wood made some very interesting observations and statements about music and teaching:

We now have an opportunity to redefine music in the public schools with the collaboration of classical music and technology. Do not be afraid to integrate the two. The message he brings is that music is more important than ever to our growth as a society. Music is emotional and it’s about engagement for the students and the next generation of musicians. Technology in music must be driven by musicians.

At the end of the presentation, Mark performed his electric violin for us using back-ups he had created. He also shared his *Fire and Ice* video. I felt so inspired by hearing the music and watching what Mark was able to do with technology. I decided to buy a Stingray Violin that has 5 strings and have taken it back to school so my students can try it with my amp. So as a result, I have students playing electric violin on the 8th grade Orchestra/Chorus Concert!

Recording 101: How to Prepare for the Studio Recording Greg Byers, Saint Paul Conservatory of Music

Greg Byers gave an excellent presentation about different ways to record your students and play back their performance. He explained that with the new technologies available, recordings can even be made with an iPhone. Byers explained the concepts of tracking sounds, editing and mixing. It’s important to understand the signal flow from microphone to audio interface to computer to speaker output. Besides equipment, Byers discussed the available digital audio work stations, such as Logic, Pro Tools and Garage Band.

Sponge Activities for your Bassists Dennis Whittaker, University of Houston Moores School of Music

Mr. Whittaker is a creative bass instructor who taught in public schools and the collegiate level. He presented a handout with many ideas to engage the student bass player during the orchestra rehearsal. Many times the bass student loses concentration at the back of the room while the other sections are learning notes. Whittaker had wonderful ideas to strengthen the right and left hand muscles. He used a rubber band to do an exercise placing the rubber band around the thumb and index finger and open and close the hand. The muscle on the outside of the hand needs to be stronger to hold the bow and to hold the

bass string down. He also gave several suggestions for having extra worksheets for the basses to keep them engaged. He suggested a folder with worksheets specific to the bass.

What's New in Essential Elements Interactive (or EEi)

Dr. Robert Gillespie, Ohio State University

Sponsored by Hal Leonard

Dr. Gillespie, one of the authors of Essential Elements Method books used by Clarence string teachers, discussed the new features of the technology for the EEi. Essentialelementsinteractice.com is in the cloud so that teachers and students may access the material from any electronic device. The internet is needed to connect to EEi. Teachers receive the necessary code from the Essential Elements teacher manual and students need the EEi version of their method book- the symbol is on the cover with the code in the back cover.

Gillespie explained and showed demonstrations from each of the features available Music Studio and Recording.

Moving String Education into the 21st Century: Learning How to Drive the Improvisation Bus

Mark Wood, Dr. Robert Gillespie

Robert Gillespie is at Ohio State University and is the guru of the modern Essential Elements Method that is used at our school and many schools throughout the country, and in the world. He is a classically trained musician and up until now, the two men were on different paths of violin pedagogy: Gillespie taught the traditional classic music and Wood taught modern electronic music with an emphasis on improvisation. In the meantime, many public school teachers have felt the need to teach improvisation but have a classical background. It is one of our national standards to teach improvisation, but most don't have a system of instruction.

This session was a historic moment for string music instruction! The two pedagogues have come together to write a method book that step by step allows students to create music. It gives students the understanding of harmonic structure that improvisation is built upon. Students learn how to choose notes for a key center and then move to a new set of notes in a new key- just like jazz musicians improvise over a chord progression.

Gillespie lead a group of college students through some of the exercises in the book and called on individuals to improvise short one and two measure melodies over the chord progression. The book leads to a 12 measure improvisation in blues shuffle style, and at the end, one of the more experienced students performed an innovative improvised solo on his electric violin.

My experiences at this conference were beyond my expectations. It was incredibly exciting to see how string education is changing and incorporating technology into the performance of music. However, at every session the presenters were concerned about making string instruction accessible. We all feel the need to encourage our students every day in the classroom, and to give support to the older students who consider music study as a career. String music has an incredible history and I am looking forward to sharing the new materials for instruction that I found so helpful and inspiring.

Thank-you again for the opportunity to attend the ASTA conference. I certainly appreciate being able to learn new ideas and share them with my students and my colleagues. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Nancy Benz