

# UMFCNAFME FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER

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## **A Message from the President**

*By Steven Mailloux-Adler*

Usually, in these messages, the President recaps all the amazing events we have held this semester and talks about how fun it was to grow closer as a NAFamily. When I sat down to write this, I went back to last semester's newsletter for inspiration and found myself fixating on the pictures of our chapter smiling and having fun in our natural habitat. I was surprised that seeing a group of people enjoying themselves and not wearing masks seemed so foreign to me, like a distant memory. This was the NAFME I hoped you would all experience for yourselves.

This semester was. . . something. It wasn't bad or anything, just different. We didn't have our benefit concerts or usual forum meetings. We didn't host any schools for Shadow Day or hold fundraisers for our Grant. We didn't sing, dance, or play together and we didn't plan for FMEA together. But we did support each other. We still helped each other and laughed with each other. We still met new friends and learned together. We worked on our conducting together and learned from our grad students. We didn't share

bagels, but we did share scribbles! We didn't taste Kristina's Brownies, but we definitely learned not to trust Ishaan when he says he was doing his tasks. . . kinda sus bro.

This semester was challenging. I will admit that the e-board and I struggled all semester trying to sustain some sense of family and community that we once had! But we made it and just like any other semester, I am grateful for you all and I am proud of each and every one of you! We may not have done that many activities together, but each one of us fought to make the best of this situation, whether at school, at home, or elsewhere. Not only that, but each one of us also supported someone else just trying to do the same.

As this is my final "Message" as President, I want to thank you all for making this a very special three and a half years. I have loved every second of it and I am saddened by the realization that my time is over. We really made NAFME into something great, even if it has taken a blow from COVID. As I reminisce on the past and present, what NAFME once was and is now, I can't help but feel excited about the future. Mia, Jose, Ben, Kara, and Emma – you have my full confidence. You are 5 wonderful people with 50 wonderful people who have your backs! I know you will do great things for this chapter and its members. Dr. Coffman, Dr. Abril, Dr. Overland, Dr. Zdzinsky, and all of our amazing graduate TA's – I cannot thank you enough for your endless support of our organization and for your intense efforts in shaping the minds of a new generation of music educators. I can't imagine how hard it has been to give us such a meaningful experience despite current limitations. Mia, Jordyn, Emily, and Aly – you have served this chapter well; thank you for being caring friends and for serving this chapter with love and hard work.

I love you all! Don't forget to be there for each other, spread love, and be kind. You are the sun that rises in my soul.

– Steven Mailloux-Adler

## Virtual Teaching Survival Guide (Zoom)

*By Isabella Herrera*

1. Create boundaries for your time  
The fine line between work life and home life has become increasingly blurred since the pandemic hit and we all started working from home. Set specific "work hours" which includes teaching, planning, replying to emails, etc. After these "work hours" are over, it's "me time." Your mental health will thank you later.
2. Have a support system  
It is important now more than ever to have a support system- your family, friends, coworkers, spouse, whomever it may be. The long and winding road is not meant to be walked alone. Consider joining a facebook group of music educators, where you can share amongst each other resources, advice, and the nuanced yet universal struggles of virtual teaching.
3. Whiteboard and Screenshot are your best friends!  
Don't forget to use all that Zoom has to offer! The annotate tool is ALSO your BFF - if you didn't know, students can annotate on your shared screen by clicking on "Settings" and scrolling to the annotate tool.
4. Classroom Management still exists in the classroom environment  
Toy with your zoom settings. One thing I like to do is select "Mute Participants Upon Entry" under "Audio Settings." I find that this reduces background noise when class is starting and sets a more professional tone in the classroom. Also, don't forget to set your audio type to "telephone and computer audio." This will allow students that don't have access to the internet to join via phone. You just need to give them the

number for the meeting to call in. Lastly, consider turning chat off and using Nearpod or Parlay instead. I recommend this because chat can get very distracting and lead to side conversations that have nothing to do with class topic. I have also realized that students prefer to type their questions or answers in the chat, which I find to be more impersonal than speaking out loud...if you have led a virtual classroom before you know the struggle! Facilitating discussion-based learning tools such as Nearpod and Parlay might be a more functional alternative.

5. Always have a water bottle with you!  
Virtual teaching can get exhausting, especially on your vocal chords! Don't forget to hydrate!
6. Consider investing in blue light glasses  
Blue light radiating from your screens can cause eye and vision problems, as well as messing with your circadian rhythm. Blue light glasses filter out the blue light. Personally, I use blue light contacts since my vision is already beyond repair. It is a great investment!
7. Don't lose your cool over technical difficulties  
Always have a backup plan for these situations. If that doesn't work, then trouble-shoot and think of an alternative. However, **never** lose your patience and project your emotions onto your students! Remember that these are troublesome times for everybody.
8. Put mental health first  
Some weeks we thrive and some weeks we survive. In these times we must spread consideration, kindness, and patience. Virtual teaching has revealed many trials and tribulations but that is nothing compared to the virtual learning our students experience on top of the plight of Covid-19 in their personal lives.
9. Know your limit  
When juggling too many balls, you need to decide which are glass and which are plastic.
10. Remember why you are doing this  
After long hours of sitting on the same spot, neck cramping, eyes deranged from staring at a screen, and voice hoarse from lecturing, take a moment to reflect on the good parts of your day. Moreover, remember that this virtual chapter in your life is temporary and we will all come out of it stronger, together.

## Dear Journal ... I Will Learn to be Better: Reflecting Your Way Towards Becoming a Mindful Music Educator

*By Víctor Manuel Rubio Carrillo and Stephanie Jones*

Imagine, if you will, a reality in which you get the dream job you wanted. There is a concern to this; in that scenario, it is your responsibility to engage in quality musical experiences with hundreds of people. Currently, you and your music education colleagues have spent countless hours developing your artistry and learning about *Kodaly*, *match-grip*, or something about *Picardy thirds*? Becoming a professional music educator after graduation will be a reality. How will students respond to the program you create? How does all of this make you feel?

Often, music teachers feel overwhelmed at the idea of being the sole person in charge. Research on teaching stages suggests it will take some years before you become comfortable with your practice (NSDC, 2008). To get to this point, you will need a lot of support and mentoring. However, unlike other teachers in the school setting, you may be the only music educator on staff—a very likely scenario. This situation will require you to have extensive knowledge of multiple subjects, wear many hats, and understand ways to deal with the pressure.

Life goes by so fast that each generation of new students brings a quicker pace of change in technologies and musical interests, and the methods that you once learned may not hold to teach the diversity of skills and experiences that children and youth need to develop (Kelly, 2016). Were you able to adapt? Or were you a victim of the circumstances? Before you know it, retirement will be around the corner. Some music educators retire with the satisfaction of having taught intentionally to multiple generations of music students. Unfortunately, others just killed time with a job.

Failure to adapt to students' needs can substantially impact them, leading them away from music rather than towards it. As the music educator, how will you improve your practice? Will learning happen intentionally or by happenstance? This text offers some strategies to learn what it takes to be a *mindful music educator*.

### **Reflective Learning Through Critical Reflection**

Learning involves a progression, a change, an improvement, which can affect attitudes, skills, or knowledge (Duke, 2017). If, as teachers, our learning process becomes stagnant; then, we risk losing touch with the students' realities and needs. If you want to keep improving your music education practice, we encourage you to foster a systematic learning process in your teaching, one that can become a habit and help your learning efforts.

How to do it? Psychologists use the term *metacognition* to understand the process of monitoring your thinking (Rhodes, 2019). This process is what helps you examine your judgments and emotions. It also enables you to control your memory. Metacognition is *how you know that you know*. To put it in other terms, what can lead to powerful learning outcomes is your capacity to reflect on your experiences. If you add a critical layer, meaning you problematize your actions and thoughts, attempting to actively find problems and propose solutions to your practice, then you are a step closer to becoming a mindful music educator.

### ***Pedagogical Journaling***

One of the simplest ways to be mindful is to keep a *pedagogical journal*. For instance, developing the habit of writing down your thoughts about what happened in each class is a good idea. In your notes, you can detail the problems and potential solutions. As this habit grows, you will notice trends of what works and what doesn't.

Why write them down? After every encounter with students, your mind fires ideas and memories. At times, these thoughts can be overwhelming. Some ideas are illuminating; to preserve them, write them before they fade away.

Imagine that you teach six classes on Monday, each with a set of challenges that lead you to think about how to help specific students or remedy class needs. Likewise, Tuesday through Friday brings a new set of challenges and needs. Friday, you are exhausted and eager for the weekend. Welcome back to Sunday; it is prepping time again. What were the problems you spotted on Monday? So much has happened during the week; you cannot even recall. So you look at your lesson outline from the previous week. You think to yourself, *“this looks fine; we’ll just need to try harder.”*

Writing is thinking; when you write about the students, problems, observations, and potential solutions, you can examine things with much more detail (Duesbery & Twyman, 2020). Writing helps you engage in a dialogue with yourself and make explicit what your mind was problematizing. That way, on Sunday, you might be surprised by all the helpful things you suggested should be done. You look at last week’s lesson outline, see your reflections, and think to yourself, *“wait, this actually doesn’t look fine; we don’t need just to try harder; I need to change it.”*

After your teaching encounters, you can engage in pedagogical journaling as a method to engage in *critical reflections* about your practice, your values, and your emotions. Instead of hitting your head against the same wall, journaling can help you learn quicker. You can clarify the pedagogical themes about music education, its methods, and their application by journaling.

### **Music Classroom Research**

We often hear of research as a highly specialized practice done by a few wizards in ivory towers. We are here to let you know research is for all of us, not just a few. But what is research then? In a nutshell, research is a methodical way of asking and answering questions to help you solve problems. How do you start? Well, one way is to research your practice in the music classroom. Why examine your practice? To help you solve new and recurring problems. Take a look at what Educator Sandra Hardy (as cited in Shagoury & Miller Power, 2012) has to say about classroom research:

I am a teacher-researcher. I study students, and how they learn fascinates me. I am the one who desires to do what’s best for students through my own classroom research. I make informed decisions about curriculum and methodology based on my current student population and best practice (p.3).

Similarly, one of the most influential educators across the Americas, Paulo Freire (2001) wrote:

There is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other. As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I Intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover (p. 35).

Instead of limiting your actions to what others say is a good practice, research questions can help you inform your teaching and learning. By being methodic in your procedures, you can create valuable new knowledge. At the end of the day, how can you teach others to learn if you are not learning yourself?

By reflecting on your learning process, you can question the value of your actions. Did the outcomes match your expectations? What about the students' expectations? Do you need to approach things differently? Research belongs in the music classroom so that you have more tools for facilitating meaningful learning experiences.

### **Gaining Music Classroom Research Skills**

Like most skills, research requires practice. Once you find the themes to address, you should be driven to read what others have to say. That way, when you implement new musical strategies, you can test them critically by asking yourself, did it work? Why? Why not? Reflect on what you read, on the methods you implemented, on the information you collected, and use that to decide what comes next. Use your pedagogical journal as a space to evaluate your process.

As mentioned, having a mentor can be pivotal for your development. Seek classroom research communities with whom to collaborate, be that in your state association, your district, or even at an international level. Do not isolate yourself. Social interactions are a valuable source to exchange experiences and commiserate about educational challenges. By being together with other music educators, you can enhance your professional development and music classroom research.

### **Conclusions**

A constant reflective process is needed throughout your career to check if you live up to your values. Interestingly, research findings show how university students had higher dispositions towards child-centered education; however, practicing teachers displayed the opposite (Miller, 1976). Did teachers change their values once they entered professional practice? Or were their values too challenging to implement? The mismatch between values and actions is more common than you might imagine, and it isn't easy to notice. How can you change your actions if you do not find anything wrong with them? Should you change your values, so they align with your actions? These are complex questions to ask yourself; however, they are worth asking.

Show the world that your values are aligned with your practice. If there is a mismatch, have the confidence and comfort to show the world how you are working to realign it. Students will intuitively value the hard work you do and will respect that you are learning alongside them. They will know you are authentic and coherent. Meaningful reflection can lead to meaningful practice, helping you intentionally teach successfully multiple generations of music students. Remember, pedagogical journaling is a step closer towards being a mindful music educator.

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