



News and Notes

August 2011

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From Our President-Elect

MUSICAL RELATIONSHIPS



Judy Fjell
Helena, MT

Greetings to all Music EdVenturers, as the summer season shines on us in our far flung locations. Some of us savor each day of vacation, while others are working intensely on projects that can happen only this time of year.

Wherever we are, chances are that our thoughts often turn to Music EdVentures activities and colleagues. We are indeed a special bunch, brought together by our love of teaching, singing and learning. For us, this isn't just about "the music," it's also about the *relationships* we have with each other and our students.

I recall an "ah-ha" moment about musical *relationships* from an early experience with singing solfeggio. I don't possess perfect pitch, so it was a breakthrough to realize how I could use *relationships* to sing and read accurately. By using the moveable "Do," key signatures, solfeggio, and intervals, any of us can listen to sounds and connect with how they are represented by symbols on staves. In SongWorks we use the shorthand of ideographs, maps, and song dotting to help us establish *relationships* with music and language. Ultimately, music is all about *relationships*.

We're fortunate to have our Music EdVentures colleagues and the opportunity to get together at annual conferences. At this special time, we can connect with each other and grow in learning through music.

It's already time to begin thinking about our **Twentieth Anniversary Conference** next year in **Vancouver, BC**. Betty Phillips and I have begun the conference planning, and many Vancouver colleagues have come on board, too. Annette Coffin procured a meeting space and Fleurette and friends have been sowing SongWorks seeds to help develop a bountiful experience.

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Judy, cont'd from page 1

Our annual conferences and local meetings are the primary avenues for sharing our skills and nurturing our Music EdVentures *relationships*. I urge you to set aside money each month or do whatever is necessary so that you can attend our 2012 conference. Check early about airfares and make sure your passport is up to date. Scholarships are available, and we encourage you to apply if you need assistance in order to attend.

Recalling the Portland conference in 2011, I am deeply moved by our connections. It was a unique gathering of both longtime members and the Emerging Pioneers - representing the past, present and future of this organization and its timeless teachings. The 2012 conference will be another wonderful opportunity to build both skills and *relationships*. Please plan to be there as we evolve our organization and deepen our strengths. §

Music EdVentures, Inc. Celebrates 20th Year

2012 MEI Conference
March 1-3

Executive Airport Plaza
Hotel and Conference Centre
Richmond
Vancouver, BC

Co-chairs Judy Fjell and Betty Phillips
are planning an extraordinary conference

SAVE THE DATE

Emerging Pioneers in Education

Eight young educators were recipients of the Fleurette Sweeney Fellowship for Emerging Pioneers in Education. In return for this recognition and financial assistance we requested feedback from our Emerging Pioneers about the 2011 Conference. In this issue and future issues, EPs will tell of the insights they gained from experiencing the principles and practices of the SongWorks approach at the conference and in their classrooms.

As human beings, we are naturally pulled toward what is most familiar in life. The familiar provides us comfort and a sense of security. For example, when I started my job as a full time music specialist at Eisenhower Elementary last year, I initially taught activities I had either observed or taught during my student teaching practicum with Dr. Anna Langness at Bear Creek Elementary in Boulder, Colorado. Student teaching was the closest thing to a real teaching job I had ever had, so I naturally used that material since it was familiar and I knew it could be taught successfully.

Unfortunately, my student teaching with Anna only lasted two short months, so sooner or later I was going to have to come up with a significant amount of new material for my students on my own. The land of the unfamiliar was eventually staring me in the face. Creating my own curriculum was a daunting task, even though I had more than enough resources accumulated from my graduate studies, practicum work, method books, professional conferences, and mentors. It was sorting through this vast amount of material that was the biggest challenge. With each piece of music, I was relying on my expertise as opposed to my personal experience.

As a first year teacher, my “expertise” did not feel like much, but I had a job to do. It was as if the 200 kids pouring through my door every day were saying “ready or not, here we come!” In February, I was able to participate in the MEI conference where attendees were both new and veteran teachers. Over the course of the weekend, “Emerging Pioneers” and experienced teachers presented side by side. I was struck by how wonderful everyone’s ideas were, regardless of whether they were retired, in the middle of their career, or recently graduated. Seeing the “inexperienced” teachers shine helped me get past some of my self doubt and trust in my ability to create a quality curriculum.

I returned to Boulder with a new sense of confidence and many great ideas about how to take a song and turn it into an intriguing learning experience. When I look at a song and decide if it is something I would like to teach, I have learned to ask myself the following questions:

1. Do I enjoy listening to or making this music?
2. What elements (formal or aesthetic) of this song are most interesting?
3. What elements of the music could fit the district curriculum?
4. How can I create a unit by tying in other related songs and activities?
5. What would be an interesting and varied way to introduce the music?

In addition to asking these questions, I taped a copy of the Principles from “SongWorks” in plain sight by my desk. These principles guide me as I try to create lesson plans that will teach and inspire my students.

If you ask someone who has been in the game for 30 years how they maintain these principles in their teaching, they might have many answers at the tip of their tongue. As I find my way through what is not yet familiar, I am discovering that I do have the answers to these questions, but it takes me some time and effort. Attending conferences and spending time with other educators infuses my teaching with new ideas and answers and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to be an “Emerging Pioneer” at last year’s conference. Thank you!§



Angelie Timm
Boulder, CO

Angelie graduated from Saint Cloud State University in MN as a voice major, married and moved to Colorado where she received her MM plus teaching certification from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She teaches general music and choir at Eisenhower Elementary in Boulder. Angelie pursues her love of singing as a featured soloist with the First Presbyterian choir and as a private voice teacher. She also conducts summer music theater workshops for children.



Jeanette Kinney Potvin
North St. Paul, MN

Jeanette received her BA from the University of Minnesota, Morris with majors in Music and Education. She is in the final stages of completing her MAEd from Hamline University with a focus on Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Development. Jeanette has been teaching for 17 years and has taught K-5 Vocal Music and Choirs at Royal Oaks Elementary in Woodbury, MN since 2002. She is married with two daughters, ages 4 and 2.

Since I left Portland, I have been writing like a fiend (some days more fiendishly than others) as I work on my capstone project to complete my MAEd degree through Hamline University in St. Paul, MN. It has taken me a very long time to arrive at a capstone (thesis) topic I am passionate about, and over the past year have landed on the topic of studying the use of SongWorks Principles and Practices in the elementary classroom. Of course, now that I am into it, I keep telling myself “DUH! Why didn’t I arrive at this sooner?” But I’ve been on my journey for a reason, and I’m content even though I don’t have all the answers about the timing. In any case, the SongWorks principles have been at the forefront of my mind for quite some time now. Reflecting on my experiences at the 2011 Music EdVentures conference has led me to several conclusions.

Most of the “veterans” seem to consciously employ the idea behind Principle 1 in their everyday life. Principle 1 is “Students have the right to be treated with respect and dignity for their ideas, skills, and stages of development.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997) *All people* have the right to be treated with respect and dignity for their skills, ideas, and stages of development. That’s an idea that I, of course, agree with but could do a much better job living out. During the conference, Tony Williamson gave a striking example of Principle 2 (“Students deserve an engaging learning environment in which they feel safe enough to demonstrate freely their understandings and skills through various types of participation.”) in his session when he was faced with a “student” who forgot an answer. Instead of simply calling on someone else, he let that student choose the next person to respond; giving the initial student a chance to participate even though he/she did not wind up sharing an idea. I have taken this response back to my classroom and am constantly amazed at how a typically non-responsive student becomes more involved simply because I gave him or her the opportunity to save a little face in front of his/her peers.

I have been pondering Principle 3, “Student learning is the responsibility of both the student and teacher” often lately. In some ways, I feel liberated by it in that I need to allow my students to take responsibility for their own success or failure. It is frustrating, though, when there are some in our society that seem to want to place the responsibility for student learning solely (or mostly) on the teacher. For example, there is a bill that is under discussion in our current MN legislature that would potentially tie 50% of every teacher’s performance evaluation directly to student performance on a standardized test. As Eisenhower said, “Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you’re a thousand miles from the cornfield.” Yikes.

Principle 6: Accurate and constructive feedback helps students become independent learners. As a teacher, I need to continually remind myself to give accurate, constructive, and *specific* feedback to students. They crave it, more than hearing simply “good job.” Students want to know why something was good, or what can be done to improve. Applying this principle has helped me specifically in the past month in communications with a parent. Giving specific and accurate feedback in a constructive manner has allowed me to (so far) navigate the choppy waters that often surround this parent, who is notorious for being unpredictable in dealings with school staff.

My experiences at the 2011 conference combined with other events in my life have led me to reflect on Principle 5 – a teacher’s attitudes, behaviors, and methodologies should be compatible. As I look at the many master teachers in Music EdVentures, I realize that they are simply living their lives, and the peace, joy, and energy that comes through in their teaching is not a “method” or an “approach”... it is simply who they are as a person. Everything is compatible, again, in their everyday life. A *person’s* attitudes, behaviors, and methodologies (practices?) should be compatible. I know not all people in Music EdVentures share my faith, but it also speaks to what I have learned from the Bible: ...for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). That is the kind of person I strive to be; a transparent, honest individual. §

Sharing SongWorks with Colleagues

Vicky shares what transpired when pursuing grant assignment #2. "Within two months after returning from the MEI Conference, visit with at least one colleague about the SongWorks approach and its benefits for children."

I met in April with the Elementary Music Coordinator for my school district, who was also the music specialist at my school for fourteen years. She's sort of a celebrity when she drops by, as you can imagine! She is well-loved, and we have a good relationship. She seems happy with my work at Dover and is still in contact with many teachers and administrators there.

The administrator was receptive and interested in what I wanted to share with her.

To preface our meeting, I had told her I wanted to discuss some of the things I learned at the MEI Conference in February. The mistake I make in talking about SongWorks and this approach is to try to relate it to the Kodaly Method or Orff Method, so I tried to keep from making those comparisons. It is difficult not to compare! I did begin with a bit of background about Mary Helen Richards and Education Through Music. Once I started talking about specific things we do, the conversation was not as difficult for me, because we agreed that within all methods or approaches there are things teachers do which are simply "good teaching." I was also able to share my joy and passion about the sessions I attended at the conference, speaking as one teacher to another about why these sessions made a difference in my classroom when I returned. So the first part of our meeting had to do with me talking about SongWorks as a framework for teaching, and the second part was more of a conversation about specific things I learned at the conference.

Thinking back to why making comparisons with the big elementary music methods makes me uncomfortable, I see that for one thing, it doesn't work to generalize. Different teachers use the methods differently. What I believe is one method because of my experience with it may be very different from someone else's perception, simply because methods are fluid things, dependent on how they are actually used. They are living things, in a way. So labels don't really work. I may not necessarily be talking about the same thing as another person when I say "The Kodaly Method." So it is best to just avoid making comparisons. It is hard for me to steer clear of this, but I see that I need to do so. Making comparisons like this really just becomes an impediment to communication.

Though I felt a bit tongue-tied in the beginning I did feel my "presentation" went well. Next time I choose to share about the SongWorks approach I'll know better what to talk about and what to leave out. Trying to describe SongWorks as it compares to other approaches is uncomfortable for me. Sticking to the things we do and reasons why makes more sense to me, and using specific examples of "how it looks" in my classroom can make it come to life!§



Vicky Suarez
Richardson, TX

Vicky graduated from The University of Texas at Arlington and was honored with scholarships from the Texas PTA and Texas Music Educators Association to pursue graduate study. After teaching elementary music in the Arlington schools for seven years, Vicky chose to stay home with her three children for 14 years and has just returned to teaching music (grades K-5) in Richardson, TX! Vicky is also passionate about volunteering as a breastfeeding counselor with La Leche League International.

Strong reasons make strong actions.
William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Back to School Conditioning for Voices



2011 Anna Langness & Angelie Timm

Above is an image of the handout used at the 2011 MEI Conference. If you would like specific information regarding these vocal tips email Anna. alangness@comcast.net

Back to School with Antonio

This summer I was rowing a boat with some friends and you'll never guess what happened.
Four in a Boat. . .

I have a song game about vacation:
Yonder she comes and its howdy dowdy do.
What have you done since the last time I saw you?"
What sorts of things did you do this summer?
Tell the person next to you two things that you really enjoyed. Say one thing that you didn't like.

Watch me like a hawk. If you figure out the secret clue I'll teach you how to sing and play the game.
Let's Catch a Rooster



High stepping horses,
High stepping horses,
High stepping horses
go jiggety, jiggety jog.

Can you sing and jump
at the same time?

Let's try that again
while you are jumping
and notice who is
singing.

*Oats, peas, beans
and barley grow.*
*Oats, peas, beans
and barley grow.*
*Nor you nor I now anyone
knows,*
*how oats, peas, beans
and barley grow.*
Tell the person next to you
five things that grow. When I
began to sing the song again,
sing along as you mix around
and end up with someone
new to share your ideas.

Whose voice do you hear
the most? Me? This time
I am going to walk around
and notice who is singing.

Let's do a listening check: Anna? Can you tell me what Doug just said? Do you know why you couldn't hear him?

Gina seems to know the song really well. Is there someone who could be her twin and sing just like her?

Personal Reflections:
I am so tired! Tomorrow I have to make sure my last class of the day is as energetic as the first. I must pace myself a little better.

I wonder why that didn't work?

I wonder what would possess Sam/Susie to act that way?

There is nothing wrong with sitting next to your best friend. If you find yourself visiting and not able to concentrate, point to the place you will move in the room to make things go better. (Most kids are able to handle this.)

Lasting Friendships



Betty Hoffmann and Fleurette Sweeney on an Oregon beach circa 1980

The Purpose of Music EdVentures, Inc. is to search for and practice ways of making music and interacting with people that preserve and celebrate the dignity of both. As a guiding principle, this purpose will focus our work on:

1. Practices that foster interactive, facilitative learning environments.
2. Strategies that empower the learner within the context of music experience and study.
3. Networks that encourage collaboration between diverse disciplines, professionals, and interest groups.

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SAVE THE DATE

2012 MEI CONFERENCE

March 1-3 (Th-Sat)

Vancouver, BC

Visit the MEI Website

www.musicedventures.org

Read articles, get ideas, and learn more about Music EdVentures, Inc. -- a great way to teach and a fun way to learn!

**Support the Mission of MEI
with your membership dues!**

\$35 Regular \$50 Sustaining \$100 Patron \$10 Student

Make checks payable to MEI (USD)

Include your name, address, phone and email.

Send to Anna Langness, Treas.

1179 Lilac St.

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News and Notes is the monthly communication of Music EdVentures, Inc. (MEI). Regular features will keep members and friends up to date on coming events and the latest teaching techniques, tips and strategies. Submissions are due on the 15th of the month prior to publication and may be submitted months in advance, indicating the month in which

they are to be published. The committee reserves the right to select material to be published according to length and appropriateness. Articles should be 200-325 words. Visuals should be scanned and submitted as PDF or jpeg files. Submissions may be sent to alangness@comcast.net and may be edited to accommodate space limitations.