



News and Notes

May 2012

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From Our President

Greetings to all of you from Montana, where springtime has arrived early. Of course, those of us who have lived here a while know that a snowstorm is just around the corner! Nonetheless, flowers are blooming, trees are budding, and the songbirds and shorebirds are returning to our mountains and prairies.

Meanwhile, the work of Music EdVentures continues, especially in the realm of cyberspace. Have you visited the website lately? The new video clips are an outstanding addition, easily accessible with the home page radio button. What a treasure trove of information, mentoring, and modeling available in these video clips! It's often been hard to explain the Music EdVentures/SongWorks approach in writing, or even in person. SEEING what we do is tremendously effective, and now, thanks to this format, viewers can view the lessons again and again! These short clips represent so much preparation and care on the parts of the teachers, the students, the script writers, the narrator, the videographer, the website committee, the web developer. Thank you to our Minnesota members and friends, especially Molly, Terolle, Leah, and David; and to Pamelini and Ryan in Oregon, for getting these clips up and running. Thank you to our board and officers for supporting this work. By the way, there are MORE videos to come featuring Leah Steffen and her students, so keep visiting the website!



Judy Fjell
Helena, MT

The internet offers us so many opportunities. The Facebook group set up by Kari continues to nurture our steady contact, idea sharing, moments of light entertainment, and even videos of Texas tornadoes(!) with assurance from our members that they were okay in the midst of this amazing weather. Our professional connections are developing further with the Wikipage set up by Mary Kuterbach. Keep those ideas coming!

Another exciting Music EdVentures development from the President's perspective is the formalizing of a "Presidential Team." Marilyn Winter (Past President), Terolle Turnham (President-Elect), and I (current President) are now functioning as a "Presidential Team." We had our

first Skype meeting just a few days ago and were able to accomplish so many organizational tasks in a friendly and efficient way. We are looking forward to working together over the coming year and implementing our vision for the future of this beloved organization.

One of our visions is to prioritize leadership development and service opportunities for all of our members. We hope to communicate to all of you how welcome you are to full and active membership in Music EdVentures. It inspires all of us when we can share the passion, commitment, and creativity of teaching. I am so proud to be a member and designated leader of Music EdVentures. We are the kind of people for whom teaching is much more than simply a job.

So may the spring continue to foster your growth as a teacher and may your gardens, families and homes bloom and grow. Keep in touch with our Presidential Team with a any ideas and reflections you may have!

Judy

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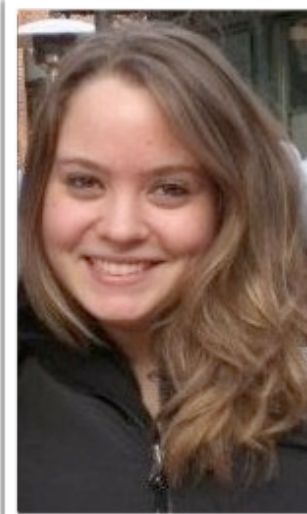
Emerging Pioneers in Education

Sixteen educators were recipients of the 2012 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 2012 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. We hear from four EPs in this issue: Carianne Bennett, Ruthanne Fisher, Samantha Smith, and Tia Turner.

As I stepped off the plane in Vancouver, BC in the early morning hours of March 1, 2012, all I could think about was the rolling feeling in my stomach. This was the day that I was to present at MEI's International SongWorks conference in Richmond, BC as one of this year's Emerging Pioneers. Here I was, alone at 1 o'clock in the morning trying to find my bus, only able to focus on the task that lay ahead of me that day. Somehow I found the bus, got to my hotel room with three sleeping roommates, and was able to sleep a few hours before the day's activities.

When I walked into the room soon to hold all of our conference activities, my mind was immediately put at ease. I was greeted with excitement, curiosity, and welcomed by every conference member in the room. These individuals' welcoming natures helped to create an environment of understanding, inquisitive knowledge, and playful learning that clearly aligns itself with the SongWorks principles. After only a few minutes in this room, I knew that this was a community I wanted to belong to. It was a place to learn and grow with educators of different backgrounds, experiences, and specialties, who were all willing to take the time and effort necessary to guide a new educator like myself. From the moment the conference started we were learning through action and play; there was no sitting on chairs with rigid posture or sense of hierarchy or intimidation — we were playing and learning together, on the floor singing the *Farmer in the Dell*. From here, the hours passed like the blink of an eye. The amount of information and learning I gained during these three short days was immense, invaluable, and most importantly fun!

At the 2012 MEI conference, I learned that I am an extremely fortunate person to have such a supportive, understanding, and loving community of highly intelligent and articulate people working with me to facilitate the creation of a world for playful and explorative education in music. This conference was more than just the exchange of knowledge for me; I learned that I am not alone in my aspiration to create a place for students of all ages to learn and love music with and through each other. This feeling of support is what really set MEI's conference community in a league of its own for me. I feel privileged to say that I am now a member of this community, and I hope that together we can create a place of playful, enjoyable, and engaging music education for all. §



Carianne Bennett
Oberlin, OH

A native of North-Central New Jersey, Carianne is a Master of Music Teaching student at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where she also earned a Bachelor's in Vocal Performance. She performed multiple roles with the Oberlin Opera Theater department. She sees her future in educational outreach, performance, and pedagogy.

Ruthanne Fisher
Glenside, PA

A graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Ruthanne teaches general music at a K-8 school in Philadelphia, PA., where she started the music program four years ago. Ruthanne enjoys spending time with her family and friends both in Philadelphia and Oberlin, OH.



Dear Ms. Fisher,

We are writing to let you know we are worried about you. Last month you disappeared from school for three days, and when you came back you were a whole different teacher! We believe you may have been brainwashed. Don't get us wrong, we love that you have so much more energy and enthusiasm, but maybe it's just a little bit too much. Since you got back to school, we've been learning a LOT of new songs and games...this is a ton of work. We are moving around a lot more in music class now—you know we have something called recess, right? That's when we are supposed to have all of our fun, but now we're having so much fun in music class, too....we are so confused!

Next order of business: you need to tell these Molly, Leah, and Jeanette girls that we are not happy with them—they are going DOWN. Why would they give you ideas to assess us where you actually have time to see how we did? The old way, where you didn't have time to look at all 600 papers so we just wrote whatever we wanted, was much better. Also, someone should probably tell Leah that there is a whole industry where people get paid to compose their own music!! How can you expect us to work for free??

Lastly, you should know that people can hear you when you are in your office singing the praises of Bennett, Bartholomew, Langness, Fjell, Coffin, and tons of other people...you need to tone it down a little bit. Are they friends of yours? Maybe you could do like we do, and share your snacks at lunch with them instead of constantly babbling about how they helped inspire you, renew you, and reconnect you with your teaching. And did we hear you say you were going to let other teachers know about all of this stuff? Now kids everywhere will have to be actively engaged in their music education!

Like we said before, you were most likely brainwashed, but what can we do about it? Looks like you are stuck this way...too bad!

Sincerely,

Your concerned students

P.S. You know when you call us zombies and move those scarves around we are only letting you *believe* you're controlling us, right? You seem a little power hungry. §



Samantha Smith
Shaker Heights, OH

Samantha completed her Masters in Music Teaching degree at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She is in her second year of teaching general music (K-8) and an after-school music program at the Intergenerational School, a highly performing Cleveland charter school. Samantha lives with her husband Danny and Sphynx cat Neo.

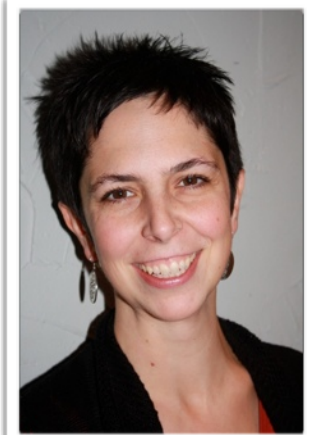
The 2012 MEI conference was truly revitalizing. I had attended the conference as a student in 2010, but the experience was completely different as a teacher. This year, I was able to take information back with me and apply it directly to my teaching; when I was a student, I had to try my hardest to retain all of the incredible ideas I had learned for future reference. I feel that this conference was just what I needed to make the end of my second year of teaching more meaningful for both my students and myself.

I first began to study the SongWorks approach under Peggy Bennett at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and was able to immediately apply the principles and techniques as a student teacher in her MusicPlay classes for children ages 3-5. The students were responsive and loved everything we studied. Unfortunately, I was met with more resistance when introducing folk songs during my first year of teaching at an urban school. I was somewhat hesitant to fully develop lessons because of my students' behaviors. During my first year, I used the principles and techniques of SongWorks, but I did not feel like I was exploring all the songs had to offer. It was at the beginning of my second year of teaching, when I began to prepare for the MEI conference, that I really began to hash out how I use the principles in my teaching. I realized that I had been using the principles as an overarching set of ideals, but I decided that I wanted to try to use them as a tool for lesson planning as well. Leading up to the conference, I made it my goal to let the principles shape my lessons, and I found that my lessons became more coherent and meaningful to the students. Attending the conference just added momentum to the success I was experiencing using SongWorks in my classroom. I felt energized by all of the wonderful ideas the presenters shared, and the diversity and depth of topics really helped me to get my creative juices flowing. Since the conference, I'm finding that my lessons are more meaningful, and that I am planning them with more vigor and purpose.

Overall, the conference was like a breath of fresh air for me. Sometimes working as a music teacher in a school can be isolating, but it was wonderful to connect with so many like-minded individuals. I do not think I could envision a more welcoming group of people who truly wish to see each other succeed. Each person's love for teaching in an authentic and meaningful way is evident, and I am incredibly grateful to be a part of this community. §

Tia Turner
Port Coquitlam, BC

Tia completed a Jazz Studies degree from Capilano University and her Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia. In the past 11 years Tia has taught music to all ages from K-12 and currently teaches K-5 music at Cape Horn Elementary in Coquitlam. She is also the Artistic Director of the Girls Choir at Coastal Sound Music Academy. Tia is the mother to lively nine year old twin boys.



Being a newcomer to the "SongWorks family," I feel I may have a bit different perspective on the experience of the conference. I want to share some of my insights from last year's conference as well, because that was my first introduction to many of the members, and I think it made the most memorable impact on me.

I have been to my share of conferences over the years, some music-related but others for various aspects of my life. Over the years, I have often left these conferences wondering if they were worth being away from my family (or even just my favorite book in the days when there was time for such luxuries!). I would usually walk away with some useful information and, if it was a music conference, I would usually have some ideas to try and if I was lucky possibly some philosophical ponderings. After my twin boys arrived 9 years ago, I really started to get selective in what I

chose to attend and eventually stopped attending our provincial music educators conference, as I really didn't feel it justified time away from my family.

The Music EdVentures Conference and family have completely restored my faith in the value of a conference and my commitment to something else in my life. I have to say that the biggest impact by far for me was not necessarily each individual session or the information gained, although each and every session was fantastic, but the way that all of the members and attendees treated each other. I discovered that those committed to the SongWorks approach not only use it in their teaching, but have embodied it as individuals and use these principles in their interactions with others in their daily lives.

I was amazed at the genuine humility of everyone, and the sense that we are all here to learn from each other. No one is too old or too experienced to gain something from each and every presentation. The respect, care and commitment shown by everyone involved was truly remarkable to me. I came to the conference excited but anxious due to my inexperience with SongWorks, and I left feeling invigorated, inspired, encouraged, and empowered to go out and try what I had discovered.

Being back in my own school now I am continually delighted and amazed at how some of the most simple ideas can be the most rewarding and make the biggest impact on my students. With a "supportive family" surrounding me the potential is immense. I am so grateful to have been given this opportunity, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your generosity, compassion, and dedication to such a wonderful cause.
§

*When I approach a child he inspires in me two sentiments:
tenderness for who he is, and respect for who he may become.
~Louis Pasteur*

*Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after the other.
~ Walter Elliot*

*Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap
but by the seeds that you plant.
~ Robert Louis Stevenson*



Peggy D. Bennett
Professor of Music
Education,
Oberlin College
Conservatory of Music

Sweet Girls: Finding “The Look” by Peggy D. Bennett and Bronwen Davies Fox

Peggy says . . .

Having spent two decades being a “sweet girl,” I was ready to begin my first year of teaching with a smile on my face and joy in my heart. It was easy for me to take my “sweet girl” behaviors into the classroom. I had learned them by believing I had to be “nice” to everyone, by taking care not to make anyone angry or uncomfortable, by saying what I thought someone wanted to hear rather than what I felt or thought, and always, always avoiding hurting someone’s feelings.

I really did believe that the happier I would be, the happier the children I taught would be. That the more energetic and excited I was, the more the children would love music class . . . and me. And, I believed that the happier the children seemed, the more other teachers would think I was a “good music teacher.”

But of course, smiles and sweetness sometimes brought out exactly the opposite responses from those I had hoped for. When my “sweetness” wasn’t working, I had no other options, other than scolding. I knew that I did not want to scold like I had seen and heard family members scold, but I didn’t know how to scold, so sometimes those words that had been planted in my head from childhood, simply came out. I was actually horrified, and a little sick to my stomach when “verbal vomiting,” like a pressure cooker venting steam, would be my default way to discipline students. What a pendulum swing my young students had to endure in my switches from sweet to sour! It would take me decades to “grow” alternative and authentic ways to express a range of responses to my students (tall and small).

Now I know that “the look” I give, when authentic, is an outward manifestation of “the look” I feel. So, I spend lots of time reflecting on how I want to think and feel about my students, and I hope “the look” from my face and from my spirit reveals that.

Bronwen says . . .

As a new teacher fresh from the graduation stage, I was warned by several veteran educators not to crack a smile during my first year of teaching, or at least not for the first five months. For a person who loves to smile, this sounded like an impossible restriction. I was sure I would slowly freeze and become as hard and implacable as the Easter Island stone heads.

Despite the experts’ advice, I greeted my new students with a wide grin and a firm handshake on the first day, then proceeded to let my excitement and nervousness bubble over in the form of rapid talking. I looked out over the music stand at the forty-five eighth-graders waiting to see what the new choir teacher would do, and I gulped. Decorum and professionalism teetered dangerously on the edge as I resisted the urge to laugh and tell them I was just out of school (as if they couldn’t tell).

That first day I smiled broadly and began the class with a dialogue about our choir goals and what rules and expectations should govern our classroom. I expected semi-thoughtful suggestions for creating our class goals, but received raucous laughter instead: a boy had politely raised his hand and stated that our goal should be to watch movies every day. There were at least three ways I could handle this response: ignore his comment and move on; restate that we were compiling a list of *reasonable* goals; or, acknowledge his opinion and put it on our list in true democratic style. For each of these three choices I could have responded with a smile, frown, or neutral expression. I chose to smile, but then I attempted to “set him straight” about what I was trying to do, and these two actions were in conflict with each other. Students continued by laughing at any responses anyone suggested, and it took some time for my inexperienced self to



Bronwen Fox is the vocal music teacher for Grades 4-12 in the Oberlin City School District. She teaches general music and choir and is the music director for the high school musical. A graduate of Oberlin College Conservatory (MMT), Bronwen attended the MEI Conference in 2009 and lives in Wellington, OH with her husband, Matthew, and daughter, Maria.

steer us back to the path I had envisioned before class began. After my first day, the echoes of teachers' voices telling me to banish my smile and present a stern demeanor grew louder.

During the next two years I struggled to find a balance between the introverted, eager-to-please person I thought I was, and the respected, in-control teacher I thought I should be. My smiles did not always aid me in gaining the students' attention, but frowns rarely achieved this either. When I was stern I frowned too much, which was a red flag for most, a rejection to some, and a deterrent for few. I would then revert to smiles, but this was usually taken as an invitation to talk loudly and was rarely taken as a sign that I was trying to be encouraging and humorous.

I tried on many different cloaks, so to speak, and in doing this I broke one of my own standards of teaching: be consistent. I no longer knew what to expect from myself, and I imagine the students didn't either. One day my approach would be humor and kindness, and the next day it would be unsmiling brusqueness. My smiles would charm one day, but have no effect the next. Certainly a myriad of factors contribute to how students act from one day to the next: weather, hormones, the day's lesson, what a peer said in class, what the student had or didn't have for breakfast, which parent drove him or her to school. With all this unpredictability, a teacher who acts like a pendulum can be the straw that breaks the camel's back, or it can just mean that students will not be easily convinced to participate and sing in music class. I knew I had to make a change.

What did I need to do to inspire my students to enjoy singing all kinds of music? How could I quiet the room with a look? Seeking answers, I studied other teachers and administrators and tried on parts of their personality and teaching methods. I found that much can be learned from others, but to work well this knowledge must resonate with my own beliefs and values. These beliefs and values, however, were still forming and growing. I was constantly developing my approaches to classroom management, rehearsal planning, and how I interacted with students of various ages and in different situations. Growth came from experience, and experience took time.

But, I was impatient with myself. I was not learning from my mistakes fast enough, nor was I seeing change happen quickly enough. I was tired and frustrated.

I began my career with warnings to limit my smiles and set a tone that established me as a teacher who was not going to put up with rude behavior and inattention. But as time went on, I was not always hiding my smile; it just wasn't there. When I did smile, it sometimes felt like a mask I put on, and this disturbed me. This couldn't be good for me, and it couldn't be good for the children and adolescents I was teaching. Without my smile, without this expression of happiness, everything seemed more serious and frustrating. Student behaviors wore on me more than ever, and I was quick to find fault in a behavior or action. I was not keeping to the "choose your battles" principle because everything seemed like a battle.

Something clicked for me when I recently heard a woman being interviewed on NPR about her experiences as one of the first girls to attend a New England boarding school. The interviewee, Lorene Cary, commented that the experience of going from public school to boarding school was going from an education where her teachers "tried to figure out what was wrong with us in order to try to fix us and get us better," to an experience where the teachers tried to "figure out what was special and exquisite about us."

I want my students to see the second kind of look on my face, a look that conveys that I am interested in finding wonderful things in each of them. I want to feel free to respond with humor and a grin when a situation warrants it. I want my face, my voice, and my body language to show that I know people have good things in them, and I want to find out what they are. This look is more than just a smile, or a frown, or even a neutral expression. I cannot describe how my face appears with this look on it, but I know what it *feels* like, and I know what it looks like on students' faces when they sense that I see the good in them. I want to be the girl with that look. §

Editor's note: Do you have a response to the Sweet Girl stories? Please share!

Do you have a story to tell -- changes that you made on your journey to becoming a teacher? Let us know!

The TIPS Feature! What topic would you like? What would you like to share? Let us know!

Contact: alangness@comcast.net

2013 MEI CONFERENCE MINNESOTA April 4, 5, 6

New dates

Plan now to attend!
Apply for your leave!



MARK your 2013 calendars!
SCHEDULE your 2013 spring concerts!
Invite your colleagues and friends!



Anne Mendenhall, MN

Know this!
2013 Conference will be
another BEST EVER!



Terolle Turnham, MN
President-Elect

Conference Co-Chair



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Bloomington, MN 55431
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Free shuttle to/from MSP airport and Mall of America
Music EdVentures rooms: \$79+tax



[Check out our new YouTube Video...](#)

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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NEW DATES

2013 MEI CONFERENCE

April 4, 5, 6

Bloomington, MN

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!

\$45 Regular \$75 Sustaining \$100 Patron \$20 Student

Make checks payable to MEI (USD)

Include your name, address, phone and email.

Send to Anna Langness, Treas.

1179 Lilac St.

Broomfield, CO 80020

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.