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The Time for Change is Now

Many, if not most, of our music programs and departments have become rigid and overly academic, moving farther away from connection, community, and expression. Do we value the performance above the process and lose kids along the way? I've wondered and worried for years about how we could swing the pendulum away from Western Art Music and a heavy focus on technique, back toward the national standards and culturally responsive teaching. We are experiencing a perfect storm of events: #metoo, COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, digital learning and a presidential election. If ever there was a time to make the change, it is now. In other words, IT'S GO TIME. I am totally inspired by our current place in history and how we can leverage it for lasting change in our field.

I am a huge proponent of the "all play" ensemble. We avoid this type of learning because we're concerned that outliers will be left out. That students who are "behind" the group might flail and quit. That students who are "ahead" of the group won't be challenged and will quit. I'm here to say that if you structure learning to center community building and music making, these worries won't materialize. An "all play" is a longstanding tradition in many communities. Think about a church choir, drum circles, bluegrass jams and jazz jams,

to list a few. **People contribute what they are ready to contribute, not what we decide they need to contribute.** This is music making and togetherness.

"But Kelly, what does this LOOK like?" Imagine this: You provide a lead sheet to your students. A lead sheet has melody, lyrics (when appropriate) and chord changes. Your students will use their large ensemble knowledge of key signatures and note reading here, especially when learning the melody. You also have an amazing opportunity to teach chord structures and theory: roots/thirds/fifths/sevenths, how to compose a bass line, and all sorts of extension activities for more advanced students. Your song selection can, and should, center on American Roots Music. All of your students will learn to be singers. It's a slam dunk approach to hitting the National Standards and 21st Century Skills.

Even if you think this concept or approach to teaching is jive, we all know that our job security in this digital age depends on embracing the change. Class roster with five beginning guitar students, five advanced jazz students, ten orchestra students, ten concert band students and five choir students? This sounds EXCITING to me. Sure, you will have some heavy lifting at the start because your students and their families have certain expectations, but you will also find that it's

truly worth it. **Students improving at their own pace. Teaching our students as they come to us.** Let the idea of PRODUCT go... maybe just for a while...or maybe you'll discover that it's awesome. Once we come together in our classrooms, we can reassess our program goals, but let's save that for another day.

"But Kelly, this is totally new to me and I'm freaking out!" Yup, we all are. Here's what you do: **Center yourself as a learner, alongside your students.** This, my friends, is a total game changer. You don't need to have all the answers. Seriously, folks. LET GO. Embrace your own learning and your own musicianship. Even better, find a colleague to collaborate with. Team teach, share resources, and create a dynamic community of music lovers and learners.

Please reach out to me for support. Beyond my role as the WMEA Jazz Curriculum Officer, I'm also the Washington President for the Jazz Education Network. It helps me serve as your representative on these boards if I know what you need. Beyond board work, it's literally a huge part of my job at Seattle JazzED. I've spent the summer preparing and piloting digital materials for you and your students. Use them, please. I'm here to help and to listen.

