



## You Don't Have to Yell

Well, actually, I kinda think I do.

Because our students need us to do better. They need music in their lives. Our field is keeping music from them. It is unacceptable and damaging. It is rooted in white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy. I'm not here for that.

I'm starting to panic.

We had a golden moment to rethink music teaching. And now we're in person again. Getting "back to normal" and totally ignoring the trauma that we all lived through. But what about composition? What about improvisation? What about reflecting and responding?

I am Kelly.

My name means "Warrior Maiden" in Gaelic. I've spent the pandemic trying to change the face of music education. A weekly podcast with my best friend talking with other music teachers who are change agents. Writing these articles. Attending board meetings.

I am Lenne Lenape and Cherokee.

The way that we teach music in the schools is rooted in colonial values. It was designed to tame the savages. It was meant to erase indigenous tradition and culture. I resist the idea that music in the schools is "great for teaching discipline and patriotism". This is simply a continuation of colonist ideals.

I am fat.

We allow women to exist on professional stages when their bodies fit a patriarchal model of beauty. "Sex appeal" drives hiring. I resist the idea that the professional stage is limited to women who are height weight proportionate. Every time I step on a stage, it is an act of resistance. The patriarchy doesn't get to decide what I wear (or what my students wear) to perform. But it definitely isn't a tuxedo.

I am a single mother.

The rigorous schedule that is forced upon teachers is rooted in heteronormative expectations. Band trips, football pep band, jazz festivals, and unpaid labor. When we internalize "it's for the kids" and say yes to another evening commitment, we teach the wrong lessons. I shouldn't have to have three side hustles on top of my salary job. We continue to lose teachers not just because of low salaries, but because you need to have a spouse or to be childless to sustain the schedule.

I am a trombonist.

Instruments are gendered by the time students are in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. I play an instrument that is gendered male, but doesn't require a penis to play. Sitting in trombone sections for 32 years has taught me that we aren't asking our male students to adjust their behavior. Instead, we are asking everyone else

to "deal with it". No one should have to be strong enough to repel toxic masculinity just to play in music class.

I played the game.

The reason that I have a voice in our field is because I achieved traditional measures of success. I inherited a music department that 60% of the student body elected into, and I didn't run it into the ground. My kids won awards. It isn't lost on me that this is the reason that I'm invited to run for music education boards or to be a guest teacher.

I am not perfect.

Far from it. Perfectionism is a core value of white supremacy. Engaging in conversation, calling each other in, saying "yes" to collaboration, demonstrating a willingness to learn and grow, this is how we show our students that perfection isn't a value worth pursuing. I resist the idea that we should avoid things we can't do well.

I'm on a mission. I lift while I climb.

The way that I teach is different than the model we are taught in school. Creating community that is not in competition with itself, working together to create beautiful music from a place of struggle, is what I know how to do. I have seen that this "other way" uplifts students while allowing them to be their authentic selves. And for the skeptics out there, the kids can play.