

## A NOTEworthy Collaboration: Pairing with Music Teachers to Grow Your Reach

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by Angie Jameson and Nathan Bachofsky, March 2022

For school librarians, some co-teaching opportunities seem obvious, while others may come across as far-fetched. In my first year as a school librarian, I focused much of my efforts on working with the English language arts (ELA) and social studies departments to aid in teaching research and promoting reading for pleasure. When a substitute teacher took over our choral department near the end of the school year, I saw the opportunity and found the courage to propose a research unit in the choir classroom. The success I found through this experience inspired me to think outside the norm and set goals to work with every staff member in the district.

### Media Support

Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, many teachers found themselves in a panic to develop a plan to offer inclusive, all-encompassing opportunities for students. In our school district, we ran a hybrid schedule with a full-time virtual academy. While so many music programs shifted from performance focus to a music appreciation focus, our music and library media programs decided to seize this as an opportunity to collaboratively innovate. The programs found ways to host rehearsals while more than half of their students were learning from home at any given time. The final result was a virtual celebration of orchestral and choral music, which would allow each student to continue honing their musical abilities in a new and exciting way.

The music teachers found new ways of rehearsing repertoire both synchronously and asynchronously. After perfecting their parts, musicians used software such as Soundtrap and Upbeat to record their individual lines that were then edited and put together to make the ensembles and music come alive again. The challenge was to then find a way to share the work with community members, families, and friends.

During a co-taught class with support from the media specialist, students learned how to create personalized GIFs of themselves to place on Google Slides. For the concert presentation, all students from the 7-12 choral program were featured in an interactive way for stakeholders to see and enjoy. As we transition back into a world where choral concerts have made a safe comeback, there are many opportunities for collaboration to continue between the media and the music department.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Learn how to livestream events for the department and offer a media intern or staff member to attend these events to run the required equipment.
  - Write a grant to purchase audiovisual equipment if you do not have professional-grade equipment.
- Film and/or photograph concerts or events and have student media interns, media specialists, or media student teachers put together a digital package for music departments to share.
- Assist your music department with the creation of visually appealing slideshows to supplement concerts during acknowledgments, song information, etc.

In the 2020-2021 school year, the 7-12 music and media department also collaborated to create a music recruitment campaign for our younger students. We filmed the skit in the library using media equipment, and our media specialist put together the video after collecting a compilation of video clips and photos from each department. This video was adjusted and reused for a variety of purposes including the guidance counselor's transition to the middle school program. Some music departments do not have the time, equipment, or knowledge of how to put this type of marketing into action, so offering to help can strengthen your relationship with them. Once you've proven your value to various departments, they may be more willing to trust you to bring research or literature into their classrooms.

### Research in the Music Classroom

It's critically important to build relationships with your teachers before asking them to try something new. Attending concerts, offering tech support, and inviting staff to book clubs are all ways you can begin building a rapport with your colleagues. Once you understand the teacher's style and norms, you can begin planning for research opportunities within their classrooms.



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To begin, draft up a few ideas before calling a meeting and treat the meeting like a pitch. In your pitch, offer various research options with varying timelines to satisfy each teacher's need and any area of concern. While you are in the early stages of planning, explore the standards specific to your state to help the content area teachers understand how the experience will benefit all parties involved. Once you pair the state standards with the resources available to your school, you can begin drafting specific ideas. During these stages of planning, consider ways beyond the traditional research paper to demonstrate student learning. Music instructors typically have class sizes that far exceed the typical ELA or social studies classroom, so offering an assessment that will not become an overwhelming heap of grading for the teacher is critical.

As you sell your project, resources, and assessment plans to the teachers, remind them as many times as they need to hear that you are here to help them in every step of the process. Offer to attend research presentations, support the teacher by assisting in scoring the research components, and determine any other support(s) that will help you get your foot in the classroom door. In addition to supporting the instructors with planning and grading, teaching research in these classrooms is an opportunity to co-teach and share your expertise. Offer to spend as much time as the teacher would like rolling out the assignment and during any class time dedicated to research work. If the teacher assigns an extended project, host research sessions dedicated to supporting your students in the library during their break periods.

Understanding the dynamics of each music director's classroom is crucial in planning your pitch. Spend time understanding the calendar of concerts to find windows of opportunity for small or large-scale research projects. Is there time between a winter concert and winter break? How is this time being filled? Oftentimes, ensemble directors have periods of time after concerts and before breaks in which they are looking for activities. Will the classroom teacher travel to attend a state or national teaching conference? Are there any other times a teacher will plan to have a substitute? These are all great opportunities to reach into music classrooms and serve as a co- or guest teacher for the day or week.

### **Successful Model One: High School Career Research**

Students enrolled in high school choir wrapped up their spring concerts and had downtime before the end-of-year exams, so we launched a research project to focus on career readiness. The plan aimed to address the following standards for music education and English language arts:

- I can evaluate potential musical career choices and develop a personal strategic career plan.
- I can propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
- I can respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify my views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented (Ohio Department of Education, 2020; English Language, Grade 11-12).

After engaging in a lesson focused on using library resources, specifically Ferguson's Careers in Focus digital collection, students prepared to debate another group of students who studied a similar, but different career, with the aim of defending their career choice as the superior of the two. A panel of judges, including the music department teachers, administrators, and school counselors, attended the debates. Some students took the debates to the next level, planning skits, magic tricks, and songs to perform as part of their evidence.

### **Successful Model Two: Middle School Genre Research**

For this project, students were instructed to use specific databases provided by our school and state libraries to address the following ELA standards and inform the entire school about a musical genre of their choice:

- I can write informative texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- I can conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- I can gather relevant information from multiple digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation (English Language, Grade 7).



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In order to address these goals in a way all parties were comfortable with, we included a lesson on creating posters using Google Drawings to demonstrate findings. Seventh and eighth-grade students spent fifty-minute class periods preparing for, creating, and presenting this research project in pairs or small groups. The first day included an introduction to the project as a whole, a tour of library resources, and a refresher on MLA-format expectations. Once all student questions were addressed, students began selecting and generating research questions and diving into their research. For the next three days, students worked independently with the option to collaborate with classmates to ask questions and share findings. Some students thrived in the research process, while others flourished in the design process. On the last day of the unit, students shared their posters with their classmates and instructors. They were scored on the following:

- Thoroughly answered the four-to-six research questions, with each answer supported by evidence from a reliable source.
- Information presented draws from at least three reliable sources from selected databases available to our students.
- Google Drawing has a clean design, with at least three images included.
- Use of MLA format for citing sources, including a works cited section and in-text citations
- Control of syntax, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and conventions for structure, paragraphing, and mechanics
- Presentation skills, including eye contact, not directly reading the poster, and pace of speaking.

After each student had a chance to share their learning, staff at the middle school voted on the two posters with the most compelling designs and information. The top two posters were printed on a large format printer in our library and put on display in the hallway outside of the choir room.

### Successful Model Three: Middle School Artist Research

Similar to the research experience described in Model Two above, this assignment engaged our students with our local and state-level research databases. Students aimed to reach the same objectives with a more specific focus and a different presentation medium. Collaboratively, music students researched an artist or band of their choice and answered six-to-seven student-generated questions using library resources after taking a tour during class. To demonstrate their learning, students used Google Sites to build websites addressing the research questions. At the end of the unit, our young researchers presented their findings to the class as they projected their Google Sites for all to see.

### Lyric Analysis

Depending on the song selection of the choral or music department, offering to support your teachers through a lyric analysis activity can be a way to build a relationship with them. When our choir performed Gwyneth Walker's composition of Mary Swenson's poem "I Will Be Earth," we co-taught a lesson on lyric analysis. To get the students up and moving, large Post-It notes were hung around the choir room with one line of the lyric written at the top. Groups thought critically about each line and moved around the room to record their interpretation. Then, we discussed an analysis of the poem as a whole. This activity went over well with students, and it helped provide a framework for lyric analysis for our choral director to use with our students in the future.



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### Book Love

While the school librarian position has changed over the years, one thing remains constant: our commitment to readers' advisory and fostering a love for books and reading among our students. The music classrooms are a great place to promote book love and provide readers' advisory. As when planning research or tech lessons with your music classes, find times of the year where there may be downtime or unstructured school days to offer your book talk service for music classes. It's important to recognize that every moment of instructional time is critical for music teachers to prepare students for concerts and recordings, but post-concerts, group photo day, and other opportunities may arise to plan a meaningful day of reading promotion.



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After our 2021 winter concert and before winter break began, our choristers participated in a readers' advisory lesson that resulted in parents' reaching out to share their excitement that their children have added books to their holiday wish lists, as well as emails from students: "Hello, Thank you for coming in today to talk with the choir class! I've been in a bit of a reading slump, and today really inspired me to get back into reading!"

To kick off our lesson, we went over how to log in to our digital content platform, Sora, and add our public library to access more books. From there, I book talked some digital and physical titles related to music including (but not limited to):

- *Bakarah Beats* by Maleeha Siddiqui
- *Tune It Out* by Jamie Sumner
- *Dough Boys* by Paula Chase

- *Emmy in the Key of Code* by Aimee Lucido
- *I Am Drums* by Mike Grosso
- *The Lonely Heart of Maybelle Lane* by Kate O'Shaughnessy
- *The First Rule of Punk* by Celia C. Pérez
- *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas
- *The Haters* by Jesse Andrews
- *Finding My Voice* by Marie Myung-Ok Lee
- *Big Time* by Tom Ryan
- *Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy
- *Pumpkin* by Julie Murphy

To build this list, the advanced search feature in NovelList Plus, Ebsco's literature-based database, was extremely helpful.

As music educators move their programs further into the 21st century, we find more need for developing programs that go beyond just teaching notes and rhythms. There is a missed opportunity when students cannot dig deeper into content through research, and we encourage you to embrace the power in connecting musical experiences to other life experiences as outlined above. Many music educators may not feel confident leading students through such activities, but with the partnership of the school librarian, music groups can reach a deeper level of learning and understanding.

#### Works Cited

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#### MLA CITATION

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