

CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO.3

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The Connected Arts Networks (CAN) project establishes national virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for educators in dance, music, theatre, visual and media arts. CAN aims to build a sustainable model of professional learning for arts educators in public schools to strengthen their leadership skills and build their capacity to address social-emotional learning and equity, diversity, and inclusion in their arts instruction. Find out more about the project and our partners [here](#).

We believe social-emotional learning (SEL), together with culturally responsive education, are cornerstones of effective teaching and learning for a comprehensive and inclusive arts learning experience. Through SEL, students develop skills that allow them to be successful not only in school but in all parts of their lives. In this document, you'll read about experiences from current CAN Teacher Leaders as they work to create welcoming and supportive learning communities in their classrooms. We acknowledge that educators across the country face varying degrees of support and/or challenge in implementing this important work and we encourage educators to consider which strategies in this Tip Sheet might best serve their students. To hear more from Teacher Leaders, [visit our website](#) for a CAN podcast episode on this topic.



How can arts educators model practices to support social-emotional learning competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making through standards-based arts instruction?



Cristin Carole (she/her/hers)
1st-Grade Teacher/Dance Educator
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#shirleyhallbassdanceeducatorsforum



As a proud CAN Dance Fellow, Cristin Carole began her dance training under the tutelage of her aunt Shirley Hall-Bass at the Sammy Dyer School of the Theatre in Chicago, and later studied classical ballet with Elizabeth Boitsov. She has an undergraduate degree in technical theatre and a Master of Arts in Teaching. Cristin has served on the faculty of the City Colleges of Chicago, the University of the Bahamas, and as adjunct faculty for the graduate program in education at Columbia College in Chicago. She has also been instrumental in the development of the Joffrey Ballet's Bridge Program for children of color, and worked as a movement designer and consultant for major productions at the Steppenwolf, TimeLine, American Blues, and Writers Theatre in Chicago.

Community: What is your process for creating educational experiences that build and sustain community?

For the past 6 years I have been exploring how my practice of performing arts integration can become even more culturally responsive by allowing students to lead with what is genuinely interesting to them. I also do my homework on the background of my students and intentionally make relationships with parents. I give the students authentic purpose, whether by creating a persuasive writing unit about Piping Plovers, the endangered birds that nest on Lake Michigan beaches, or by putting on a dance performance for parents.

Action Research: What questions or wonderings have you been exploring in your own teaching practice this year around Social-Emotional Learning? What helped you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

Because my students are between 6 and 7 years old, SEL is fundamental to my classroom management practice by helping students become well-versed in identifying feelings and conflict resolution. By integrating SEL into my dance practice, my classroom community is strengthened. I thought this meant students would also feel safe, so they would take risks creatively, but my GAP analysis showed that I was not extending the creative opportunities to my students in the way I thought I was. This year, I have been integrating creative processes and collaboration to see how I can get younger students to create their own dances sooner.

Impact: How has a focus on Social-Emotional Learning amplified student voice in the classroom? What specific story/moment might you share?

The weekly SEL lessons, the schoolwide focus on social justice standards and our classroom theme, "We Are a Community of Writers" (where dance is text too), all create a solid student-managed learning environment. My current action research project asks students to choose a favorite social justice book and collaborate with a partner who has a similar theme. That collaborative project built relationships and empathy which became apparent when Pistachio, a bearded dragon and our class pet, died. The student choices were incredible; they filled his tank with notes and drawings of appreciation.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources related to Social-Emotional Learning that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- Charles Chip McNeal
- *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Third Edition) by Glenn E. Singleton
- "The Heart of Arts Learning: A Playbook" by Kerri Sullivan

"...SEL is fundamental to my classroom management practice by helping students become well-versed in identifying feelings and conflict resolution."

Reflection: Why are you committed to this work right now? Why do you keep showing up?

I was raised by a generation of Black teachers, social workers, doctors, and professionals that really believed in responsibility to race. Through my own life experiences, I have come to understand how important the arts are in building a just and equitable society. Performing arts education goes hand in hand with culturally responsive teaching practices and social-emotional learning.





Heather De Koning Foley (she/her/hers)

Visual Arts Educator

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Brooklyn, NY



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Heather De Koning Foley is a visual artist and educator who teaches art and architecture + design to elementary students in Brooklyn, NY. She is also a CAN Teacher Leader for both the National and New York City Professional Learning Communities. Working as the arts liaison, Heather is responsible for coordinating all schoolwide arts programming. Heather is also a member of the Instructional Leadership Framework Team and leads the implementation of equity, diversity, and inclusion at her school. She enjoys teaching her students about how artists and designers can be agents of change in their communities. In 2008, Heather and her students were honored at the White House in Washington, DC, for their community service work with the Points of Light organization.

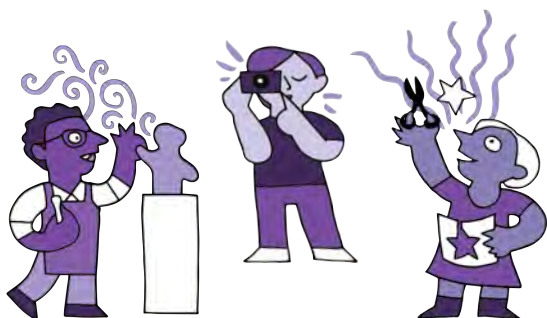
Community: What is your process for creating educational experiences that build and sustain community?

I want my classroom to be transformative for my students by visually setting the stage for creativity and offering a welcoming democratic environment. Through short artmaking projects, we discuss feelings we may have while making art and create a Design Lab charter to engage in projects that elicit teamwork and collaboration. We launch into a schoolwide identity piece that asks students to explore and share parts of their identities. These actions say to my students, "We see you, you are a part of our school community, and you are celebrated." I am the facilitator, but the students drive the work.

"A student-centered classroom gives students ownership of their own learning, and they are much more motivated and independent because of it."

Action Research: What questions or wonderings have you been exploring in your own teaching practice this year around Social-Emotional Learning? What helped you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

A year ago, after coming back in person, I started to see self-consciousness and reserved creativity in my students that wasn't there before. I sensed their need for a space that felt open and less structured. As a teacher, I started to learn how to let go and included more play and exploration in my lessons. There were more options for different materials, and the students responded. They needed a place to make things in a different way than they had in years prior. This year I built on this knowledge and wove in projects to build capacity for collaboration.



Impact: How has a focus on Social-Emotional Learning amplified student voice in the classroom? What specific story/moment might you share?

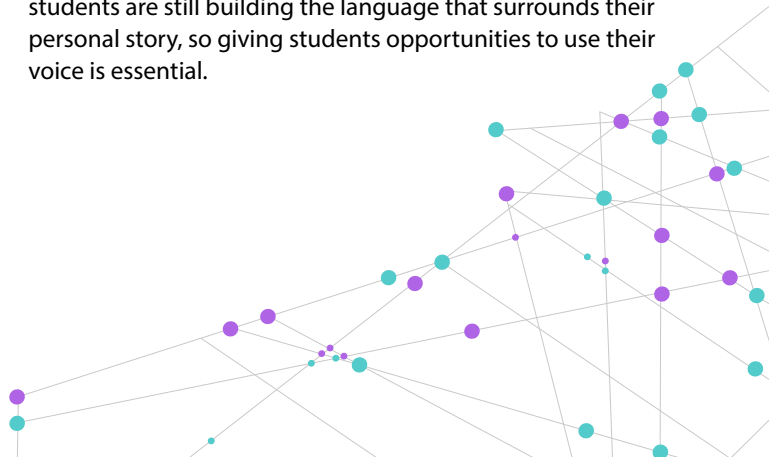
Adding in opportunities for student voice allows my students to feel heard, and it also unlocks their creativity. My students are constantly pushing the edge of possibilities because they aren't waiting for my directions. My 4th-grade media team seeks out extra time to work on their projects, and their self-confidence and drive has exceeded my expectations. They write, film, and edit content independently, while giving each other feedback and working collaboratively. A student-centered classroom gives students ownership of their own learning, and they are much more motivated and independent because of it.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources related to Social-Emotional Learning that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- [The Arts and SEL Framework](#)
- [Student-Centered Assessment Resource Guides](#) by Heidi Andrade
- [Unearthing Joy](#) by Gholdy Muhammad

Reflection: Why are you committed to this work right now? Why do you keep showing up?

Opening up to a student-centered classroom has been such a creative shift for me. As a teacher, I've had a chance to step back and consider what role the arts play in my students' lives. My students have shown me that it gives them a safe space to take risks, to grow by trying and testing ideas, to work together and learn from each other, and to explore and understand more about themselves. In elementary school, students are still building the language that surrounds their personal story, so giving students opportunities to use their voice is essential.





Kristie Farr (she/her/hers)

Theatre Educator

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Kristie is an award-winning theatre teacher from Indian River High School. Several of her productions have received Awards of Excellence in Directing from the Theatre Association of New York State. For over 25 years, Kristie has served as NYSTEA's Curriculum Chair leading theatre standards revision, curriculum development, assessment, and certification. She has been part of EdTA's SEL Lesson Plan and Model Curriculum projects, and currently serves as a Theatre Teacher Leader for the Connected Arts Network PLC. She recently published her first book, *Drama Mama: Lessons Learned in the Imaginary Elsewhere!*

Community: What is your process for creating educational experiences that build and sustain community?

The comment I receive more than any other from students is the idea that my classroom is a safe place, a brave space for students to be themselves, as well as a catalyst for creating memories and, most importantly, a family. I purposely structure my first 2-3 weeks of school in each class to build community and ensemble. These strategies create an engaging and thriving environment for learning. Students practice collaboration, building trust and confidence, listening and observation skills, sharing opinions while respecting the opinions of others, and problem solving. Building self-awareness, concentration, imagination, and creativity are directly tied to SEL.

Action Research: What questions or wonderings have you been exploring in your own teaching practice this year around Social-Emotional Learning? What helped you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

I have seen a decline in student engagement since COVID-19, so I dove into exploring the Studio Habits of Mind. These habits are naturally and deeply rooted in SEL practices. The purpose of my inquiry is to help students understand the importance of inquiry, research, and building their skills into final work. My wonderings: How do I empower students to cultivate a culture of inquiry using the eight Studio Habits of Mind? How do I measure students' ability to articulate their learning using the Studio Habits of Mind?

Impact: How has a focus on Social-Emotional Learning amplified student voice in the classroom? What specific story/moment might you share?

My number one priority is building positive relationships with my students! First, I get to know my students personally, and they get to know each other! It is so important that students feel comfortable with each other, given the work we do in a theatre classroom. I have created an inviting classroom environment that includes diverse material, displays, resources, a SEL corner with a recliner, bean bags, fidget gizmos, and adult coloring books. The students have choices in my classroom, and I encourage them to share their ideas regularly. When students feel safe, they are more engaged in their learning.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources related to Social-Emotional Learning that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- *Studio Thinking From the Start* by Jillian Hogan, Lois Hetland, Diane B. Jaquith, Ellen Winner
- [Constant Love and Learning website](#)
- *Social-Emotional Learning and the Brain: Strategies to Help Your Students Thrive* by Marilee Sprenger

"I have created an inviting classroom environment that includes diverse material, displays, resources, a SEL corner with a recliner, bean bags, fidget gizmos, and adult coloring books."

Reflection: Why are you committed to this work right now? Why do you keep showing up?

I am committed to my students. I am committed to learning new strategies for engaging them in their own learning. Most importantly, I want them to be excited about learning in my classroom, even if an assignment is out of their comfort zone. The CAN PLC is providing me a space to learn and connect with other teaching artists. I am excited about every meeting, training, and wondering that I explore. The excitement I have for the PLC is the kind of excitement I want to continue to build in my own classroom.





Meghan Hickey (she/her/hers)

General Music and Choir Teacher

Old Orchard Junior High School
Skokie, IL

Meghan Hickey has been a music teacher at Old Orchard Junior High in Skokie, IL, for more than 10 years. Discovering a passion for social-emotional learning (SEL) several years ago, Meghan has trained other teachers, as well as developed an SEL curriculum for her school. She continues to discover new ways of implementing SEL both in her classroom and within the community along with her district's SEL committee, and on the national level through Connected Arts Networks. Meghan completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in music education and received a Master of Science in Child Development at Erikson Institute in Chicago. She is also a contributing author for the book *Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: Teaching Music With Heart* by Scott Edgar.

Community: What is your process for creating educational experiences that build and sustain community?

The foundation of all my classes is community. Before we begin learning musical content, we spend several days playing games and getting to know each other. Additionally, the main theme of each of my courses revolves around how music helps express emotions. Through different units, we explore various genres and techniques used by other musicians and experiment with creating ways for students to express themselves. I strive to normalize experiences with a variety of emotions, as well as teach my students how to express themselves in ways that will not harm others.

"I strive to normalize experiences with a variety of emotions, as well as teach my students how to express themselves in ways that will not harm others."

Action Research: What questions or wonderings have you been exploring in your own teaching practice this year around Social-Emotional Learning? What helped you push past the surface to see and address a potential area of growth?

The main questions I have been exploring recently focus on student motivation. Students in my general music classes do not always choose to be there, so I was curious to see what motivates them to succeed once they are in my classroom. After gathering qualitative data from students, I found that the two most important variables that influence motivation are working with friends and positive teacher-student relationships. One area of growth for me is putting my students first. If they feel unsafe, disengaged, or unmotivated, I find out why and then change what I'm doing to address their needs and interests.



Impact: How has a focus on Social-Emotional Learning amplified student voice in the classroom? What specific story/moment might you share?

I amplify student voice in my classroom by helping students connect with their identities and creating music that expresses their ideas. I teach a unit on social justice in music where we learn about a variety of social justice issues, and students write lyrics about a topic they care about. We exercise empathy by learning how to discuss polarizing topics and respect opinions that differ from our own. Our LGBTQ+ community members are frequently bullied in our school, so I always enjoy teaching students about what each letter means, along with the complexities of human hormones and biology.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources related to Social-Emotional Learning that you'd recommend to colleagues right now?

- *Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: Teaching Music With Heart* by Scott Edgar
- [The CASEL website](#)
- *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts.* by Brene Brown

Reflection: Why are you committed to this work right now? Why do you keep showing up?

Many arts teachers work with students who will pursue the arts in college or as careers, but most of the students who come to our classrooms will not. These children will benefit from learning how the arts help with life skills, like expressing emotions in healthy ways and fostering relationships. On a more personal note, the connections I have made with students have greatly deepened with my SEL work. Students greet me more frequently in the halls, they seek me out when they are struggling, and they try to switch into my class because they enjoy being there.