

CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO.5

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION

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 reach and serve all students through their arts instruction, including social-emotional learning (SEL) and equity, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I) strategies. Find out more about the project and our partners [here](#).

CAN believes that SEL and ED&I practices overlap to contribute to greater accessibility in the classroom. Arts educators can better serve students with developmental differences by making changes and adaptations to their classroom environments and curriculum. Making these adjustments through a knowledge of equity and inclusion can improve students' self-awareness, communication, emotion regulation, and interpersonal connections. In this document, you'll read examples of how current CAN Teacher Leaders create accessible arts classrooms. The goal is for students of all abilities to feel a sense of belonging as members of a community and as creative learners. To hear more from Teacher Leaders, visit our website for a CAN podcast episode on this topic.



How can arts educators ensure that students of all abilities have the support they need to make meaningful connections to their learning and tap into their creative potential?



Krissi Davis (she/her/hers)

Orchestra Director

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In her 19th year of teaching, Krissi Davis is the orchestra director at Midtown High School in Atlanta, Georgia. She earned her Bachelor of Music from Georgia State University, and a Master of Music Education from the University of Georgia. She is currently a doctoral candidate in music education at Georgia State University where her research interests center on culturally responsive teaching in the string orchestra curriculum. Named as the Atlanta Public Schools Teacher of the Year in 2019 and 2021, orchestras under Krissi's direction perform regularly in the community, and they have also performed at Carnegie Hall, the Chicago Symphony Hall, and the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) National Orchestra Festival. Krissi's article on recruitment and retention of minority populations in string orchestra programs was published in the February 2021 issue of *American String Teacher*, and she has presented sessions at the Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA) In-Service Conference in 2018 and 2020, and the Midwest Clinic in 2019. As a member of the ASTA and GMEA, Krissi has served as a Large Group Performance Evaluation (LGPE) adjudicator and a district-level orchestra chair. She currently serves as the GMEA orchestra division chair.

Community: What strategies do you use in your classroom to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for students of all abilities?

Creating supportive spaces for students to explore their musicality is of utmost importance. Creating supportive spaces includes getting to know them as people and recognizing and affirming their prior knowledge and individual learning styles. Taking the time to learn personal details, such as pronouns and proper pronunciations of names, goes a long way in establishing relationships. Instill the notion that mistakes are OK! Celebrate the process of learning just as much as the outcome or finished product. Start a new lesson by allowing students to share what they already know about the subject.

"Students' diverse cultural backgrounds, upbringings, and learning styles must all have a place within the curriculum."

Action Research: How and when do you learn about your students' unique abilities, outside of reading their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

Learning about my students' unique abilities is an ongoing process that happens throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, students fill out "interest inventories." I also dedicate one class period a week as "check-in" time with my students. During this class period, three to five students receive individual time from me where I support them in their current individual needs. This can be anything from additional support on music we are working on, help with college admissions essays, or a conversation with a trusted adult.

Impact: How does your curriculum/instruction provide experiences for students to grow both socially and academically?

Multiple opportunities are given throughout the year that allow students to grow musically within the ensemble and independently. One such example is the 1st-semester enrichment project. At the beginning of the year, after the students identify their two to three individual musical goals for the year, they complete an enrichment project. Based on the goals they identified, we work together to design a project that allows them to work on their individual goals. Past enrichment projects have ranged from composition projects to community outreach, where students gave recitals and lessons at area retirement communities.

Resources: What are the top educational resources related to inclusion and accessibility that you would recommend to colleagues?

- *Marginalized Voices in Music Education*, by B. C. Talbot, 2018, Routledge ([link](#)).
- *Sociology for Music Teachers* (2nd ed.), by H. C. Froelich and G. D. Smith, 2017, Routledge ([link](#)).

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

As our student population continues to diversify, we must do the work to make sure every student is acknowledged and affirmed within our arts programs. Students' diverse cultural backgrounds, upbringings, and learning styles must all have a place within the curriculum. For some arts programs, such as string orchestra programs, this is essential to the survival of programs in the future.





Sean Turner (he/him/his)

High School Teacher

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Over the past 21 years, Sean Turner has developed and led various performing, multimedia, literacy, and PBIS programs for at-risk youth. His research interests include critical youth studies, multimodality literacy, critical discourse theory, special education, and the application of Lessac Kinesensics (Bodyvoice Training) within educational, health, and wellness contexts. As an educational leader, Sean has been instrumental in the development of remote, writing, and social-emotional learning supports for various schools within the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). He is also certified in special education and theatre. As part of his experience, Sean has led multiple teacher-inquiry and school-based support teams centered on the implementation of culturally relevant interventions that target behavior and academics. He has completed internships programs with New Leaders, the Wallace Foundation, and Teaching Fellows. He has also led NYCDOE teams regarding the use of Formative Assessments, Cultural and Behavior Supports—as well as CDOS—transitional services.

Community: What strategies do you use in your classroom to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for students of all abilities?

I use a framework of multimodality to draw on the lifeworlds of students in the creation (or re-creation or performance) of different texts. This includes using aspects of multimodal pedagogy to create authentic assessments (performance tasks), as well as allowing for the codesign of affinity and imaginary spaces with students.

Action Research: How and when do you learn about your students' unique abilities, outside of reading their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

Outside of the IEP, I learn about my students in the following ways:

- The use of affinity spaces in the classes—where I participate with students—in the co-construction of text (or performance).
- Allowing opportunities for each student to rewrite history (or their stories) through the tasks.
- Reflective journals (blogs and video tasks).
- Most importantly, just listening and participating in dialogue with them (asking them about themselves—what they like and don't).

Impact: How does your curriculum/instruction provide experiences for students to grow both socially and academically?

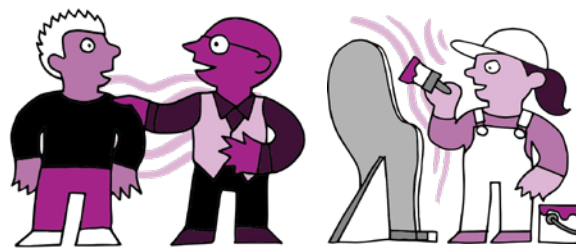
In general, I look at the curriculum within different lenses: (1) self to self, (2) self to other, and (3) self to larger group (public spaces). Many students are just in the “self to self” stage, so providing them spaces to critically reflect in each lens is important for showing growth. Often what we do is “therapy,” and only later on, when we start to really self-teach or self-instruct, then you see the final areas of growth.

Resources: What are the top educational resources related to inclusion and accessibility that you would recommend to colleagues?

- *Re-Thinking Disability: A Disabilities Approach to Inclusive Practices* by Jan W. Valle and David J. Connor, 2019, Routledge. ([link](#))
- *Social Diversity Within Multiliteracies*, by Fenice B. Boyd and Cynthia H. Brock (Eds.), 2015, Routledge ([link](#)). I wrote a short chapter in the book introducing inclusivity and diversity within a framework of multiliteracies.
- *Cultivating Genius* by Gholdy Muhammad, 2020, Scholastic ([link](#)).
- *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, by Maxine Greene, 2018, Teachers College Press ([link](#)). See also her philosophy of aesthetic education [here](#). This book relates to the different experiences (that are often forgotten about) when doing an IEP or considering a student's ability.

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

I am always committed to supporting change—particularly when young people start to unleash their own creativity and artistry, find joy and criticality in their own work, and share that in public spaces. As long as there is a place where I can support that larger communal work and advocate for those (often left in silence) to share those spaces, I get excited.





Rebecca (Becky) Visintainer (she/her/hers)

Dance Educator

North Plainfield Middle & High Schools
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Rebecca (Becky) Visintainer is a New Jersey-based dance educator teaching at North Plainfield Middle and High Schools, as well as Washington Rock Dance Studio. She graduated from Rutgers University with a BFA in Dance Performance and a Masters in Dance Education PreK-12. Becky completed a year-abroad program to study dance at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London, England. She is certified in American Ballet Theatre's National Training Curriculum Pre-Primary through Level 3, she is a 500 Hour Registered Yoga Teacher, and she also remains active within the larger dance community. Becky has served as a part-time lecturer for Rutgers Graduate School of Education, instructing a course on social justice for the Dance Education Program, and she has written interdisciplinary dance and theatre lesson plans for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center's Teacher Resource Committee. She has served as an adjudicator for the National Honors Society of Dance Arts Scholarship and as a mentor for the National Dance Education Organization's New-Teach Mentorship Program.

Community: What strategies do you use in your classroom to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for students of all abilities?

- Movement explorations that require physical collaboration (i.e., leader and follower exercises)
- Celebrating individual success and sharing in 'failures'
- Effort and progress over perfection
- Tiered technique—encourages student agency to practice without boredom or discouragement
- Collaborative, project-based learning with creative process and cooperative problem-solving focus
- Participation options if injured or ill (i.e., student rehearsal assistant, DJ, or choreography assistant)
- Injury as an opportunity to grow within boundaries
- LMA (Laban Movement Analysis) notation symbols as a language support
- Allow for varied responses (i.e., written, drawn, spoken)
- Intentional selection of curricula materials representing students and their interest

Action Research: How and when do you learn about your students' unique abilities, outside of reading their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

At the beginning of the year, I invite students to create two collages; the first depicts their definition of dance, and the second depicts their inspirations. I establish a line of communication with other teachers, counselors, case managers, and families to gain a holistic understanding of the whole student. Throughout the year, creative tasks and choreography illuminate students' creative voices and thought processes. For example, students choose a current event topic, research it, formulate their opinions, and present their views in a choreography. They also add their 'go-to' song to a class playlist. I build on this momentum through exit slip questions and engaging students in conversations.

Impact: How does your curriculum/instruction provide experiences for students to grow both socially and academically?

My curriculum is rooted in authentic, creative problem-solving tasks. Many assignments are collaborative in nature and require students to learn about historical or current events, many of which topics are determined by students' curiosities. Students learn how to approach the creative process as a research process, to question, seek out answers, gather data, formulate ideas, and present and defend ideas clearly to an audience through movement, written language, and speech. The curricula supports the notion that art does not exist in a vacuum but rather represents the society and time period from which it is from.

Resources: What are the top educational resources related to inclusion and accessibility that you would recommend to colleagues?

- The Critical Response Process by Liz Lerman. The scaffolded feedback model helps students organize and articulate their thoughts.
- *Dance and belonging: Implicit Bias and Inclusion in Dance Education*, by C.U. Davis, 2022, McFarland & Company, Inc. ([link](#))
- The Kentucky Network offers handbooks of lesson plans across art forms presented in developmentally appropriate language and inclusive of age, ability, race, gender, and geographic location.

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

If we expect students to be changemakers as adults, we must provide them the space and tools to question, dream, fail, and grow as children. This is my "why." Through this work, I have challenged my own beliefs and "the way it has always been taught" mindset. Movement is universal and it is a gateway to SEL and ED&I. Engaging students in authentic, inclusive learning that fosters curiosity, inquisitiveness, and compassion permeates into the outer spheres of the class community over time. I truly believe that this work equips students to be informed agents of change in society.





Matthew Grundler (he/him/his)

Visual Arts Educator

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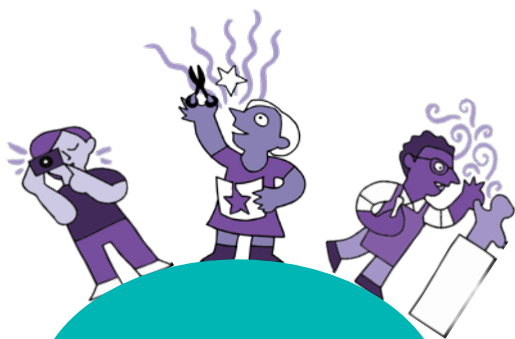
Matthew Grundler has been an art educator in Plano ISD for 20 years. For the past 5 years, he has been teaching at the middle school level, but he has also taught K-5 for 14 years, as well as 11th and 12th grades. Matthew uses his passion of being a divergent thinker to empower students in finding their strengths of creativity. Teaching a variety of grade levels has helped strengthen his skills as an art educator in addition to utilizing the connections and ideas from other educators in all content areas. Matthew is cofounder of the Twitter chat and podcast #K12ArtChat (2010), he is an Apple-certified educator specializing in iPads (2016), and he was awarded the Outstanding Middle School Teacher by the Texas Art Education Association (2020).

Community: What strategies do you use in your classroom to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for students of all abilities?

For the first several days of school, we do not focus on rules and expectations. I reassure students that everyone comes into my class at different levels of abilities. We focus on what creativity really is by playing some games; students work in small groups to help create one large picture with six items they must include in the drawing. This is a great way for me to get to know the students, but also, the students get to see what strengths they all have.

Action Research: How and when do you learn about your students' unique abilities, outside of reading their Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

I start from Day 1. For me this involves walking around the room, having conversations with all students, and listening to their conversations with peers. With the previously mentioned activities, I will also sit and work alongside the students, and just let them talk. That is how I get to know my students—by finding out what they are interested in, and what gets them really excited.



What are your strategies
for creating an accessible and
inclusive classroom environment?

Impact: How does your curriculum/instruction provide experiences for students to grow both socially and academically?

Our curriculum is an ever-changing one. We are constantly adding additional artists of varying backgrounds. We also have lots of think time in place to let students look and talk about the artwork. We also have conversations comparing works from artists in the past to current, contemporary ones.

Resources: What are the top three educational resources on leadership you would recommend to colleagues right now?

- ADDitude magazine includes tips and strategies for working with and understanding the struggles of people with ADD/ADHD. There are also workshops and webinars about working with youth and adults.
- Adobe Express is a fantastic tool for students to use not only as an app for designing posters and flyers but also to create customized ways to take notes. Our students use this to document their creative process through the use of text and images.
- NAEA Collaborate is a platform for visual and media arts educators to connect with others and to see what is going on around the country. Members of NAEA can post questions, but anyone can view conversations.

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

In the past week we had our open house at school. A parent told me that their child was so excited to hear me talk about my struggles with ADHD that the student began to feel a little more normal and started to tell the parent all about how Grundler has ADHD too. Kids need to understand that you can relate to them, they need to feel that they are OK—even with things like anxiety, ADHD, learning challenges, or neurodivergent brains. All they really have to do is figure out what works best for them to be successful.