

March 28, 2018

Dear Oklahoma Alliance for Arts Education Board Members,

I am incredibly appreciative to receive an OAAE travel grant to attend the 2018 American String Teachers Association (ASTA) National Conference in Atlanta, Georgia! The OAAE Travel Grant allows me to fund my conference attendance at a minimal personal expense. Fortunately, I was able to minimize hotel and registration costs by sharing a room between three other conference attendees and submitting my conference registration payment during the “Early Bird Conference Registration Fee” window. However, even with opting for minimal fees, the overall travel and lodging cost to attend, including the conference registration fee, airfare, and hotel fee, totaled \$794.06—a high cost for an Oklahoma educator to pay alone. I plan to use funds from the grant to reimburse conference registration and hotel costs. I am very grateful to receive financial assistance from OAAE in order to attend the 2018 ASTA National Conference!

While at the conference, I attended many educational sessions including: “Music Industry Showcase: Fiddle & Song--Sequential First Year Fiddling,” “Let’s Jam! Teaching Spontaneous Music Making Skills to Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced String Students,” “Nourishing Soul, Mind, and Body In Every Lesson—A Holistic Approach,” “Bowing Styles for the Ages: How to Choose and Play Bow Strokes for Baroque, Classical, Romantic Eras, and Fiddle Music, for School Orchestras,” “Adaptive Technique: Modifications in String Pedagogy for Students with Physical Disabilities,” “Make Every Second Count! How to Guide Your Students to Improved Technique and Musicianship,” “Strategies for Beginning and Intermediate String Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder,” and more! I was also able to attend live performances from the “Mark O’Connor Band,” “Time for Three,” and orchestra groups in the National

Orchestra Festival. As a conference attendee, I had the opportunity to participate in an open jam session hosted by Christian Howes, as well.

Orchestra directors (myself included) often utilize improvisational techniques, akin to fiddle music (Jazz, Be-bop, Swing, Irish, American Folk, etc.) as a vehicle for creative opportunities on an individual, as well as group, level within the ensemble. While I am familiar with methods of teaching improvisation at higher levels of string instruction, it was incredibly beneficial to me as a middle school orchestra director to learn and experiment with methods of teaching improvisational techniques at the beginning levels. The following week, I was able to successfully teach my 6th Grade Beginning Orchestra students how to improvise using the fiddle tune, "Old Joe Clark," found in their method book! My beginning students were able to create their own variations on rhythms, improvised melodies, and walking bass lines!

In his presentation, "Bowing Styles for the Ages" Robert Gillespie reviewed the different stylistic tendencies of each major musical era, particular pieces of grade appropriate music that utilize each style, and how to produce each style with an orchestra ensemble. Whether my students are preparing music for a concert, contest, or learning music for music's sake, Robert Gillespie presented incredibly relevant and specific information to string teaching that I can always utilize in my classroom. I also attended an incredibly unique session, "Adaptive Technique," in which Dr. Elizabeth Chappell presented information on how to adapt a violin, viola, cello, or bass to a student with a physical disability.

While Dr. Chappell presented instances on how teachers across the nation made remarkable adaptations for students to be able to play a stringed instrument, her biggest assertion was for teachers to ask, "What physical movements are essential in order for students to play a stringed instrument and how can you recreate that scenario on an individual level for a student

wanting to play a stringed instrument?" Though I have not encountered a situation in which I have needed to physically adapt an instrument for a student, I believe I will now be well equipped to make any adaptations when necessary.

My biggest takeaway from attending the conference is that students are capable of doing anything; they will rise to whatever standard you hold them to and its necessary for us teachers to adapt the learning experience as best as we can.

OAAE Board Members, thank you for making this educational and inspiring opportunity a possibility for me to attend! Again, I appreciate the work you put forth in order to make the OAAE Travel Grant an option for arts educators in our state and am grateful to be a recipient of the grant this year! I will definitely spread word of its existence, and plan to apply for it again in the future.

Sincerely,

Michele Contreras