

Virtual Professional Learning Communities: Connecting Music Teachers in Small Schools to Meaningful, Content-Specific Professional Development

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The 77th Midwest Clinic
International Band, Orchestra and Music Conference
December 21, 2023



Audience Poll

Please follow the link or QR code to take a short poll.

bit.ly/VPLCmid

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[Poll Results](#)





The Beginnings of our Professional Learning Community (PLC)

- Evolved from a graduate class at Minot State University
- Inspired by personal positive experience through MMEA Mentor Program
- Propelled by project researching music teacher isolation and retention

NAfME: Amplify 2020 Call for Research Proposals

- NAfME leadership sought collaborative research between university faculty and PreK-12 music educators
- We had to move forward with our project without knowing whether our proposal would be accepted

SPECIAL EARLY CALL for Collaborative Action Research Proposals – Amplify 2020: Bringing the Future into Focus



SPECIAL EARLY CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Submit your proposal by June 28
"Amplify 2020: Bringing the Future into Focus"
November 5-7, 2020
Orlando, Florida
#NAfME2020



SPECIAL EARLY CALL for Collaborative Action Research Proposals Amplify 2020: Bringing the Future into Focus

Opens: **April 4, 2019**

Submission Deadline: **June 28, 2019**

Acceptance Notices: **August 30, 2019**

Amplify 2020: Bringing the Future into Focus, including
the NAfME Biennial Music Research and Teacher Education Conference
NAfME National PreK-12 Conference
NAfME All-National Honor Ensembles

**November 5-7, 2020
Orlando, Florida**



Professional Development in Music Education

- District-sanctioned or district-led inservices
- Professional workshops
- Continuing education courses and summer classes
- Conferences
- Observations/feedback from administrators
- Mentorship programs
- Observing veteran music teachers
- Networking and unscripted professional conversations
- Online forums and social media groups
- Contest adjudications



Professional Development (Continued)

- Most professional development is ineffective in promoting true professional growth or fostering meaningful change in music teachers
- Music teachers are seeking differentiated professional development where they can:
 - Communicate with other music teachers
 - Interact with mentors
 - Seek advice on specific problems
 - Observe colleagues teaching
 - Learn over time
 - Integrate through hands-on experiences

(Bush, 2007; Bowles, 2002; Conway, 2008; Conway et al., 2005; Garet et al., 2001; Hammel, 2007; Stanley, 2011; Stanley et al. 2014; Weimer, 2017)



Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

PLCs are:

- Groups of teachers who gather to ***collaborate***, share wisdom, discuss teaching practices, and examine student work.



What is a PLC?



Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

What PLCs can do:

- Reduce music teacher frustration
- Help reduce feelings of isolation
- Increase teacher retention
- Music-specific PLCs can involve
 - Brainstorming and exchanging ideas
 - Reviewing teaching strategies and student performance
 - Exploring new approaches and methods of music teaching
- Some of the most effective PLCs involve video recordings



“I’m not overly impressed with my planning for my large ensembles. It’s the same warm-ups and then it’s usually whatever current piece [we’re working on]...Every year I start out and I want to add more to the teaching of just like the technicalities of things, and it just seems like I just get in that rut of, ‘Okay we have another performance coming up, so...”

(Rebecca, pre-VPLC interview)



VPLC Design and Activities

- Six members from ND and MT with 3-17 years of teaching experience
- Met bi-weekly over 7 months on Google Hangouts
- Centered our meetings on Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance
- Rolandson - Group Facilitator; Hekkel - Participant/Leader
- Activities - within meetings and between meetings
 - Reading about CMP and creating/implementing CMP lesson plans
 - Providing feedback on peers' lesson plans, videos, and student work samples (through Google Docs)
 - Collecting and uploading samples of student work
 - Video recording ourselves CMP in the classroom
 - Visiting and sharing experiences

Our VPLC (2019-2020) focussed on Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP)

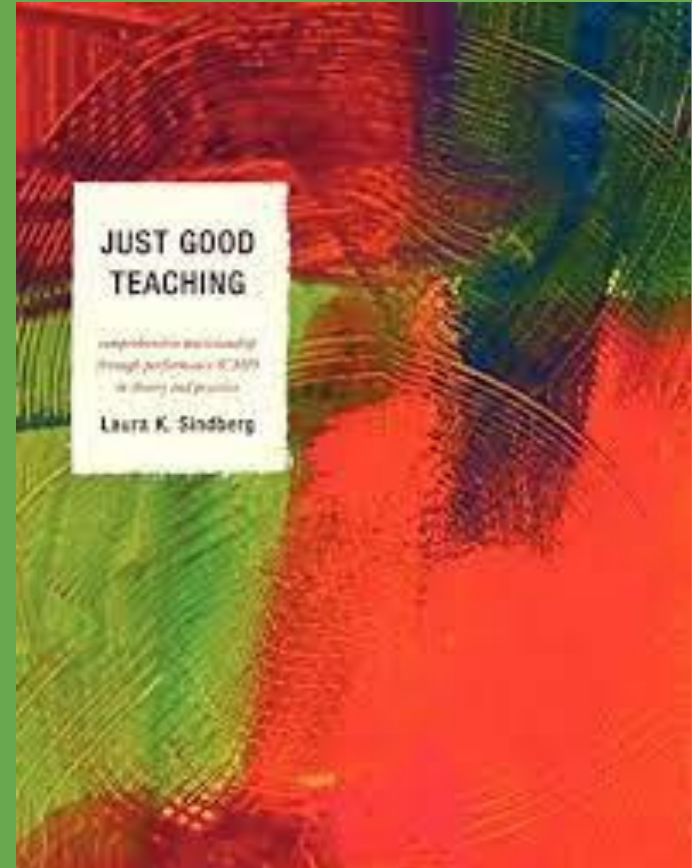
CMP Focussed VPLC

- PLCs most effective focussed on central topic
- We were experienced and familiar with positive impacts of CMP
- CMP remains an underutilized teaching method
- Established framework could guide our work



VPLC Focussed on CMP

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What Resulted from our VPLC

- Teacher growth and confidence
- Benefits of gathering virtually
- Reduced professional isolation
- Benefits of sharing videos



Quotes from VPLC members

“We’re all teaching music and we can have...discussions with people that are disciplined in our field and know things [about effective music teaching].”

(Brian, post-VPLC focus-group interview)

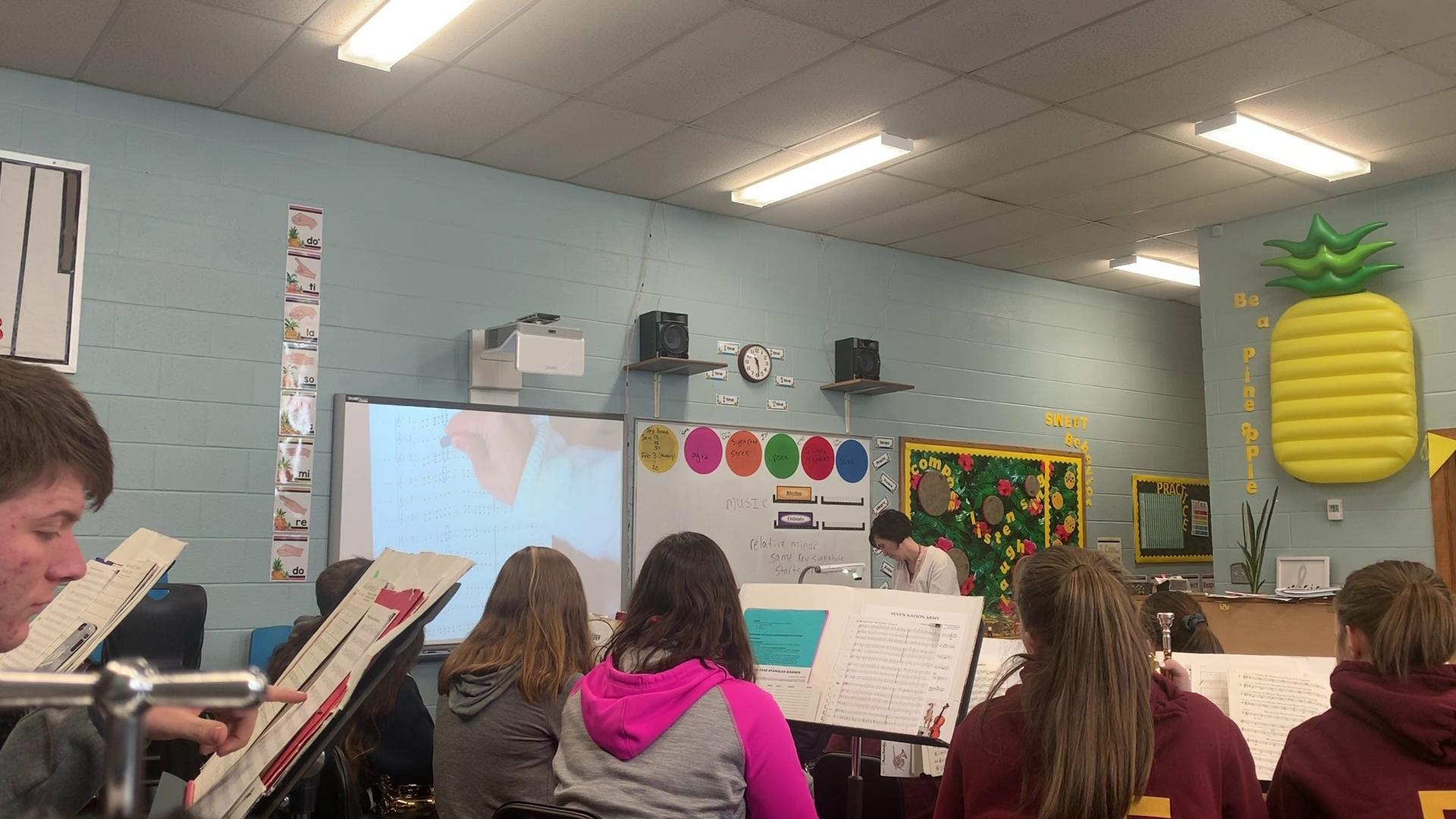
“I enjoyed the challenge of having peers inspect your work and challenge you on things you do, like, ‘Oh, why are you teaching it this way instead of this? I’d never thought of that before.’ So getting that perspective from colleagues was really valuable.”

(Greg, post-VPLC interview)



“I’m not overly impressed with my planning for my large ensembles. It’s the same warm-ups and then it’s usually whatever current piece [we’re working on]...Every year I start out and I want to add more to the teaching of just like the technicalities of things, and it just seems like I just get in that rut of, ‘Okay we have another performance coming up, so...”

(Rebecca, pre-VPLC
interview)



Participant: Greg

- Please review Greg's shared videos/materials/student work from the first lesson(s) he provided. Please leave your feedback below in your assigned Color.

Brian Feedback in Green

I know this is a topic of disagreement sometimes, and I know there are technically 2 beats in 6/8; however, I have had pretty good success in teaching first, there are 6 beats. Kind of keep to the rules of traditional meter rules (top number is how many beats, bottom number is which rhythmic note gets one beat), then teach them that it breaks the rules. 6 beats in a measure then show them how to "break" the rules. Then counting in 6/8 will be 123456. And using 16th notes in 6/8 will be easier to count. Also, where you counted 6/8 as 1+a2+a, that could be confused as an 8th 2 16ths rhythm.

I love how you constantly have to redirect your students like I do nonstop.

Rebecca Feedback in Blue

Without seeing the students...it sounds like maybe a couple of the same students are answering your questions. This happens to me all of the time too. I like to call on random students or draw names, so they all have to pay attention and it gives me a better idea of the students that might need a little more explanation. I know some students can have anxiety over not knowing if they will be called on, so you could draw a couple of names and let them know who you will be calling on next.

Lana Feedback in Orange

"Don't do that please." Those first interruptions... I can relate! Good job moving on. It's a good feeling when you get to that point where they are all captivated.

I agree with Brian's suggestion of "thumbs up" instead of "does that make sense" because you'll always have that one kid, and then thumbs give the quiet ones (who understand) a chance to show you that the majority are ready to move on. It actually seems like they have a pretty good grasp on this when you clap and play, but then there are those squeaky wheels. I also like Rebecca's idea of calling on specific students.

Dr. Rolandson Feedback in Red

I loved that you pulled the excerpts through technology and projected those for all to see.

I do always think that when things are "new" or "different", students naturally kind of buck the system a little. If this were more common, I imagine that the students who were less on board with this will be more accepting of the procedures.

Nice job on sticking with this and insisting that ALL students participate.

I would be interested to know the next logical follow-up...did this help when you actually attempted to read through the march? Were students more proficient at reading/performing the rhythms in the Sousa?



Most Effective Collaborative Professional Development:

- Is musical
- Is sustained over longer periods of time
- Allows teachers to participate voluntarily
- Builds on the group's collective wisdom
- Includes multiple opportunities for reflection
- Provides site-specific support for teachers
- Allows for mentor/mentee relationships, collegial relationships, and peer connections to develop



Good News!

A Well-crafted VPLC meets all of these criteria!

VPLCs are also accessible to any Music Teacher! All you need is:

- A computer and internet access
- Video-conferencing capabilities
- Small group of teachers/colleagues
- Openness to share teaching and student work



Creating a VPLC Recommendations and Considerations

- Connect with at least one (ideally 3-5) interested music teachers
 - Group members will impact the focus/direction
- Select a topic for initial work:
 - Pick one thing!
 - Assessment, CMP, Connection to History/Culture, etc.
- Select VPLC activities and ways to share student work
 - Recordings, videos, written assessments, others



Recommendations and Considerations Continued...

- Every PLC should choose a facilitator! (this person could change)
- Decide on a meeting time (likely will be after/before school)
 - Meetings should be semi-frequent (weekly or every other week).
- VPLCs are most effective when teachers share, discuss, and evaluate teaching and learning

Selected References

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Questions?

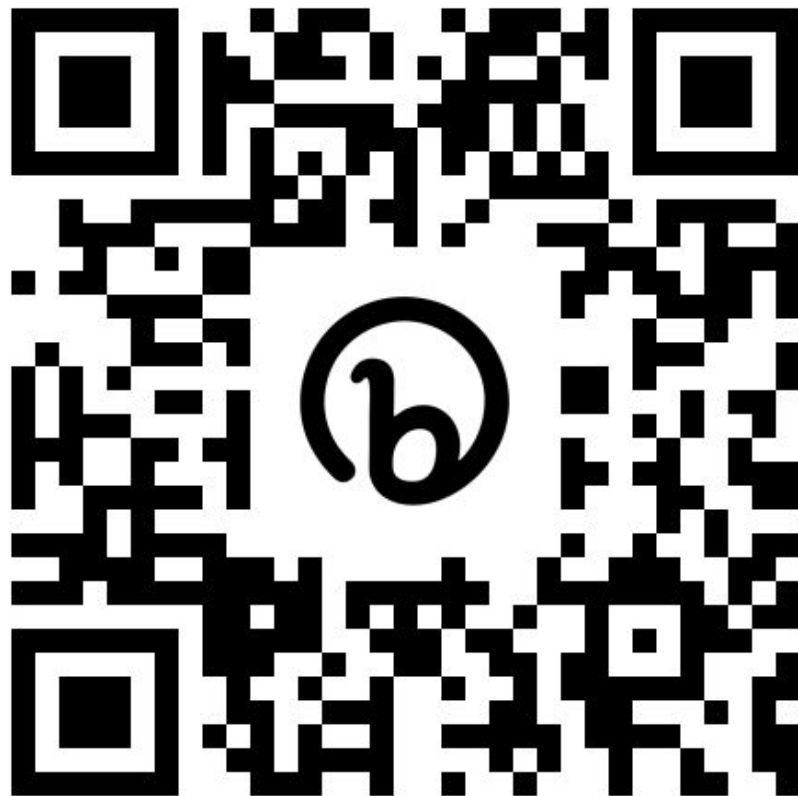


VPLC Website

If you are interested in reading more about this VPLC project, follow this link to read our article, published in the Journal of Music Teacher Education.

bit.ly/VPLCsite

*This link is case-sensitive.
Please type the link exactly as written.*





Thank you!

Thank you for attending our session. Please share
our story with other music educators!