

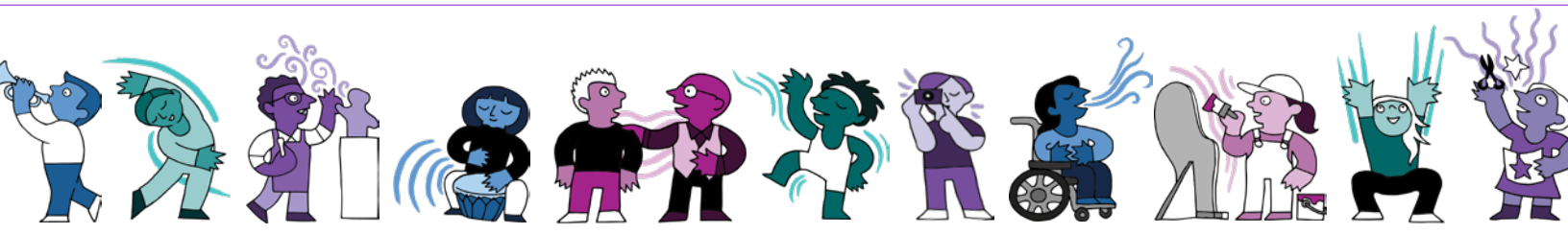


CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO.8 PLC LEADERSHIP

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](#).

In fall 2022, CAN produced a tip sheet on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the need for arts-based PLCs. The same arts educators who were participants in the first CAN PLCs in visual arts, theatre, music, and dance are now leading their own virtual PLCs with arts educators across the country. The term “Professional Learning Community” has been used to refer to any number of teacher meetings, however at CAN we believe there is power in a PLC that is well-facilitated. In the book *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, Dufor et. al. (2016) a PLC is described as “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.”

Through this resource, we are exploring what it means to be an arts-based PLC leader and facilitator. Featured arts educators describe how they create and maintain a positive learning environment for adults and a spirit of community and collaboration.



Why does participating in ongoing Professional Learning Communities (PLC) develop highly effective arts educators? How does professional learning grow teachers’ ability to develop, facilitate, and sustain a PLC grounded in action research?





Emily Ban (she/her/hers)
Dance Teacher on Special Assignment
Oakland Unified School District
Oakland, CA



Emily Ban is a dancer, choreographer, and elementary dance educator, currently teaching in Oakland, CA. Her preK-5th dance program is constructivist, focusing on dance literacy, dance-making, and spotlighting culturally relevant forms and artists. Originally from the Bronx, NY, Emily has developed and directed dance programs in public elementary schools in Minneapolis, Brooklyn, and now Oakland. She serves as Oakland Unified's dance teacher on special assignment, where she coaches new Dance Teachers and designs and leads weekly professional development for the district's elementary arts educators. Emily is a Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) Facilitator and a Teacher Leader with the Connected Arts Network (CAN) project. She holds an EdM in Arts in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a BA in Dance from Carleton College, and K-12 Dance Teaching Credentials in NY and CA.

Community: What are your trusted tools and strategies that you bring to your work as a leader and facilitator?

Constructivism is core to my approach with both children and adults. We all learn through exploration, through tinkering with different strategies, and adjusting as we discover what works best in different contexts. Just like students, teachers need opportunities to safely experiment, receive feedback, reflect, and modify approaches. Further, learning is collaborative, so it is essential that experiences are structured to invite a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. I find that collaborative inquiry protocols are particularly powerful for facilitating this kind of interactive, constructivist learning, as they prompt individual reflection, active listening, and co-construction of meaning.

Action Research: As a leader with teachers experiencing various challenges across different states, what are you discovering about the wider field of arts education?

More and more, every question I have about teaching, learning, and developing teachers comes back to balancing structure and agency. Teachers ask for structured support—curricular resources, lesson and unit templates, examples of what has worked in other teachers' classrooms, and demonstrations and models—we want to be told what works and what to do. But we also need freedom to experiment, to follow our own curricular interests, to find our own voices. In designing PD, I find that teachers need a balance of structure and agency just as much as students. I'm endlessly curious to tinker with this balance.

Impact: How are your growing leadership skills and experiences impacting daily life in your local school community?

Since joining CAN, I have increasingly taken on advocacy and leadership roles within my district. When OUSD multiplied our number of dance teachers, there was an increasing need for content-specific coaching and professional learning. Empowered by CAN, I stepped in to mentor, to advocate for the creation of a weekly dance PLC, and then to lead that PLC. I then convinced the district to create a dance teacher on special assignment position, so I now have dedicated time to design, plan, and lead weekly professional learning for all elementary arts teachers, and to offer more in-depth coaching to those who want it.

Resources: What are the main resources you would recommend to arts educators on PLC leadership?

As I've mentioned, I love collaborative inquiry protocols and use them in every PLC I facilitate, both as a community-building tool and as a structure to ensure that multiple voices and perspectives can come together in creating greater understandings than any one person could construct on their own. [The Center for Leadership and Educational Equity \(CLEE\)](#) has a wonderful library of protocols. Sometimes I use one exactly as I find it; more often I modify an existing protocol or am inspired to create something new that best serves my context.

Reflection: What advice do you have for an arts educator who wants to build their leadership potential?

Every educator I know envisions ways to improve this field. My advice is to ask questions that help you clarify what you can change on your own, what you can change if you mobilize others around you, and what is beyond the locus of your control. What is a gravity problem that is bigger than what you can impact alone or short term? What do you have the power to change right now in your own curriculum and classroom, in your school, or in your district? Where can you advocate for change that requires the collaboration of other teachers or administrators?



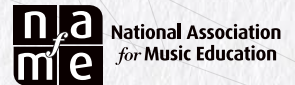


Luana Palimetakis (she/her/hers)

K–5 Music Teacher

WJ Gurganus Elementary School
Havelock, NC

Craven County Schools
New Bern, NC



Luana Palimetakis has taught for over 20 years in Ohio, Virginia, and North Carolina. She currently serves as the music teacher at WJesse Gurganus Elementary School in Havelock, NC. Luana holds the position of lead elementary music teacher for Craven County Schools and was named the teacher ambassador for her school for the 2021–2022 school year. Luana is a National Board Certified Teacher and a proud member of NAfME and NCMEA. Luana holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education (Music) from West Liberty University in West Virginia and a Master of Arts in Education (Music) from Muskingum University in Ohio. She has served as a clinician, accompanist, and adjudicator for various music events in West Virginia, Ohio, and Virginia. She is a NAfME Teacher Leader in the Connected Arts Network, a multiyear project focused on topics including equity, diversity, and inclusion and social–emotional learning. When Luana is not making music with her students, she can be found loving life with her husband, Dan, and their dachshund, Mr. Feeny, reading, and spending time at the beach.

Community: What are the trusted tools and strategies that you bring into your work as a leader and facilitator?

I strongly believe in the role of listening as a leader. Listening to everything—concerns, celebrations, anecdotes, and questions. We learn and grow together by communicating effectively; listening with intent and keeping an open mind are key. I also believe in honesty. If I do not understand something or have little background knowledge on a subject, I would rather be honest and allow someone with that expertise to share rather than pretend I know it all. I find these strategies work with both students and adults. My students are very forthcoming in sharing because they know I will listen to them.

Action Research: As a leader with teachers experiencing various challenges across different states, what are you discovering about the wider field of arts education?

I have discovered that however amazing I thought arts educators were before I began working with the CAN project, I was completely wrong because these educators consistently blew my mind! From our national music cohort to time spent with all disciplines and working with our own PLC, I have walked away often, feeling refreshed and rejuvenated. I have learned so much from the creativity and persistence of arts educators, and the way the focus ALWAYS remains about the needs of the students, regardless of the role politics play in education.

Impact: How are your growing leadership skills and experiences impacting daily life in your local school community?

I have gained lots of confidence in my leadership from working with CAN. I was already a lead teacher in our district, but I have been more willing to ask questions and reach out to support our team and our students since I started this work. I have also been able to present at multiple professional developments in my district, state, and region on various topics, including ED&I. I have also been able to take a look at myself and my teaching, and I really reflect on the role CAN has played in changing my classroom for the better.

Resources: What are the main resources you would recommend to arts educators on PLC leadership?

If I am going to be completely honest, before participating in CAN, I really had no “formal” training in leadership. My skills are mostly self-developed and learned from observation and reflection. In my previous district, one of my schools (I served at two) was working through the process of becoming a Leader in Me school, which was based on the writings of Stephen Covey. Covey’s book, *The Leader in Me: How Schools Around the World Are Inspiring Greatness, One Child at a Time*, was really eye-opening to me and it really helped me start down my own path of leadership.

Reflection: What advice do you have for an arts educator who wants to build their leadership potential?

Have confidence in yourself and take advantage of any opportunity that comes your way. Do not be intimidated by going for opportunities that may seem out of reach or beyond your years. Watch, listen, and reflect on advice from leaders in your life and the impact they have on you. Your leadership skills will develop organically as you put yourself out there. Arts educators are some of the best advocates for our public schools and our students’ creativity and artistic expression have been integral in education for thousands of years. It is up to us to make sure their importance continues.



Why do YOU think
arts educators make
good leaders?



Hilary Morefield-Colman (she/her/hers)

Media Arts Educator

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NATIONAL
ART EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

Hilary Morefield-Colman is a photographer and media arts educator based in Ventura, California. Hilary currently teaches 9–12 visual and media arts at Ventura Unified School District and is an adjunct faculty member at California Lutheran University (CLU). She holds a BA in Media Arts and Communications from UC San Diego and a master's degree in education from CLU. Hilary has worked in arts education for a decade as a public school educator in K–12 public schools and as a teaching artist for arts-based organizations in southern California, including Wandering Film School, Outside the Lens, and the Santa Paula Art Museum. Hilary is most proud to be a national Teacher Leader for the CAN Project and enjoys connecting with other media arts educators from around the globe.

Community: What are the trusted tools and strategies that you bring into your work as a leader and facilitator?

Everything I do begins with building relationships and trust. Nothing can be done without investing time and care in the individuals we work with. I am lucky to have worked with learners at every level: K–12, college, graduate, and professional. Though I scaffold to be age appropriate for each group and setting, the intention is the same. I spend a great deal of time asking questions, collaboratively building norms, and listening to understand as a facilitator. I then research and develop my approach to meet the needs of the group. Differentiated means to engage in conversation and sharing yourself helps.

Action Research: As a leader with teachers experiencing various challenges across different states, what are you discovering about the wider field of arts education?

CAN has been a rich opportunity to expand my understanding of arts education on a national scale. There is a great deal of diversity in the settings and situations in which one might be an arts educator, as well as the legal and logistical barriers from state to state that arts educators may encounter. One great barrier we have common is the “island” factor. Many of our arts educators work without a direct collaborator in their content area and can feel isolated, misunderstood, or underappreciated by their school communities. This is why conversations like those facilitated by CAN are essential.

Impact: How are your growing leadership skills and experiences impacting daily life in your local school community?

CAN for me has been a key opportunity for me to take myself and my teaching practice more seriously. I find myself growing confidence in my own voice and being more willing to take on leadership roles. This year I've written a paper, spoken at a conference, taken on leadership roles within our local arts community, and I'll be on my first-ever podcast. All of these are tasks and roles I would have hidden away from or perceived myself to not be worthy of in the past. I look forward to how I will continue to stretch and grow.

Resources: What are the main resources you would recommend to arts educators on PLC leadership?

Although not all of these resources are addressing PLCs directly, I strongly believe the conversations and ideas from these sources have been game changers for my personal facilitation skills. These texts have helped me rethink learning, facilitation, and what it looks like to create meaningful programs to benefit learners at all levels.

- *Unearthing Joy* by Gholdy Muhammad
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond
- [The MAEIA Project](#)

Reflection: What advice do you have for an arts educator who wants to build their leadership potential?

Arts educators make excellent leaders! We are empathetic, inclusive, and creative problem solvers. Start with what feels authentic to you. Leadership doesn't always mean being at the top. It means putting a foot forward to take action on the things that are meaningful to you. The service leadership model has always rung truest to me personally. Find the little niche that works for you—whether it's at your site, in your community, through your state organization, or at a larger scale, you have the capacity to share your voice and empower others to do the same.





Joy Wright (she/her/hers)

Drama Teacher

The Champion Theme Middle School
Stone Mountain, GA

@joy_hammond

Joy Hammond Wright developed a passion for theatre through her work as a professional actress and has since been sharing her love of theatre arts with the students she encounters. She enjoys working with children in a creative space and bringing industry professionals into these spaces to share their experience with learners. Joy supports the pursuit of artistic careers and works to bridge the gap with parents who have concerns about nontraditional career paths or jobs that may not have the stability of a W-2. Joy believes theatre arts education is critical to developing a sense of self and expanding creativity, as well as building self-efficacy and collaborative skills. Collectively, theatre helps society reflectively evolve and grow.

Community: What are the trusted tools and strategies that you bring into your work as a leader and facilitator?

Gratitude—I practice gratitude and try to stay open for awareness of little things I can be grateful for in each moment. Mindfulness and presence—while I am a constant work in progress, I try to be thoughtful about how I'm feeling in the moment and honor that in ways that are conducive to the environment. Asset-based perspective—I always try to remember what we are working with and how we can use what we have to move forward toward our goals. I sometimes get caught up in process and this helps me stay connected to the people.

Action Research: As a leader with teachers experiencing various challenges across different states, what are you discovering about the wider field of arts education?

I wonder what experiences or learning teachers need to have to help inspire them to make changes in their teaching practices. Or are the teachers who have applied to the program already at a place where they want to make changes to their teaching practices? I also wonder how to go about building community with so many different teachers in so many different places and how to do it authentically and meaningfully.

Impact: How are your growing leadership skills and experiences impacting daily life in your local school community?

I feel that I am being led to start a nonprofit organization to help expose more young people to the arts. Theatre education is perfectly poised to naturally incorporate SEL and ED&I into the curriculum. I believe there is an opportunity to help build student self-efficacy through after-school programming with a focus on performing arts.

Resources: What are the main resources you would recommend to arts educators on PLC leadership?

The book *The Reflexive Teaching Artist* illuminates what it means to be a reflexive in art education practice; going a step further than reflective teaching practice.

I love the [Center for Leadership and Educational Equity \(CLEE\)](#) website as it provides useful tools for becoming a better listener and asking better questions, and thinking more deeply and responding in ways that influence others to do the same.

Reflection: What advice do you have for an arts educator who wants to build their leadership potential?

Begin to have meaningful conversations about the work that you are doing. Speak with those that care and find other teachers that are interested in collaborating and supporting each other. Join the Educational Theatre Association and go to a conference. Keep learning and growing. Think bigger. Find and execute the power within your locus of control. Consider how you can extend the work that you are doing into the greater community. Follow the fun!

We want to hear from you!
Let us know what you think
about this resource [here](#).

