

Helpful Hints:

First of all, in these crazy times of COVID-19, don't let yourself become isolated! I have seen the music education community (especially the **elementary** music community) take out its arms to embrace the challenges ahead and do their best to be inclusive to everyone. Seek these people out! There are SO MANY Facebook groups aimed at finding any and all things they can do to help you!

Secondly, SEL (social emotional learning) is not just a hot-button topic that will go away in a couple of years. It is a real thing! This was already on the horizon! Our kids are over-stressed, anxiety riddled, and now they have this gaping wedge in their lives driven there by COVID-19. I purchased the Mindful Kids and Yoga Pretzels cards (check Amazon) after attending Matthew Stensrud's workshop (Spring 2019.) However, until I was forced into remote teaching, I had never used them before. Mostly, I didn't know exactly how to really do them "properly" and of course, I had other "priorities" to worry about. Now, these ARE the priority. After watching many Matthew Stensrud webinars/workshops this pandemic and his AMAZING approach to SEL, I knew I MUST incorporate these in my lessons! I can't begin to think of teaching anything music without taking a moment for the students to press pause, breathe, and focus. I use them everyday. I have had so many kids tell me that they appreciate them now a part of our lessons.

On top of that, this year the specials teachers in my district (Art, PE, and Music) now teach (every Wednesday) a SEL class to all of our students. I will be honest saying that it has been a tumultuous start to the school year. We (the specials team) have been trying to figure this all out on top of all the new aspects to teaching during a pandemic. But, we know and see our kids need this time to be mindful of their needs and emotions. They need you! Be the givers of joy, love, acceptance, and music. Children's literature is such an amazing gateway, too! Check out the many Facebook groups who are geared towards this SEL component. And don't forget to give yourself some "me" time, too! (Always a note to myself...) You, also, have suffered a trauma. We all are overworked and overwhelmed with all of the new changes and challenges to our teaching this year. So, find a moment to breathe for yourself. Turn off the news and spend time with your family and friends. Even if you don't feel comfortable seeing people in person, Zoom, FaceTime, or however you can see someone's face and talk to them...DO IT!!!

Lastly, if you are like me you have grieved no longer teaching in your room. No singing, no folk dancing, and no shared instruments. Right now, I am teaching on a cart. We have been recommended to not sing, but hum (for very short periods of time) in our classrooms. But, like all of you, I have adapted. We may not be able to sing, but I have made recordings of myself teaching the song and the “homework” is for that student to sing/play it with a family member at home. I am planning on doing a punch card/parent check-in card (helpful ideas are welcomed) to promote singing outside of school. Worried about wear and tear of instruments with all of the cleaning, our district purchased music kits for each student to use. They will keep them in their lockers and will pull them out every music class. We are also using technology to play xylophones, boomwhackers, and other various classroom instruments. Folk dancing has gone down to its elemental form. Students stay near their desks (space), but have some non-locomotor movements to do along with music they would recognize. (Thank you to Matthew Stensrud for this idea and I break one down in my lesson plan.)

The best line I heard in a workshop this pandemic is even though the students may not be able to sing in the school (right now), giving them opportunities to listen to you/to others (recordings), they can still make music! It just may not be in the same space as everyone else. So, pull out those singing games. Pull out those hand clapping songs/games. Play. Move. Dance. Create. Show your students that music can be a guiding light for them (and you) in this crazy time!