

"Orchestra" Reimagined

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In the U.S., "alternative" music groups exist as adjuncts to many school string programs. They perform all kinds of fiddle, mariachi, and even rock and roll music, and a few are quite well-known (e.g., Saline, Michigan's "Fiddlers Philharmonic" and "The Lakewood Project") However, most of these groups meet outside the school day, and are acknowledged by directors to be most valuable as recruiting tools for the in-school "orchestra" program.

But what would happen if the class called "orchestra" was not conceptualized as a large ensemble led by an expert? Further, what if musicianship in this class was not dictated by 18th-20th century re-creative traditions but expanded to include improvisation and composition? What if vernacular musics and informal learning styles were welcomed and encouraged in such a class?

In this session, we will tell the story of our journey into a collaborative, immersive example of such an "Orchestra Reimagined" that benefits not only secondary students, but pre-service teachers who work with them. Once a week, Waverly string classes are "flipped" in order for students to meet in small groups to work on cover song arrangements that they eventually perform for each other. Process and product are assessed as part of their grade. MSU string methods students spent 8 class sessions over 8 weeks with the eighth-grade students, facilitating their cover song work as well as doing more traditional internship activities. MSU students also arranged and performed a cover song for the Waverly class. The result was a rich, empowering learning experience for all involved. As one of the MSU students wrote, "We are always told about using 'alternative' ways of teaching in the music class such as cover tunes and rote songs, but this was the first time I was able to see it in practice."

In our session, we'll discuss the students' work, our perceptions, and ways of planning and implementing this kind of collaboration.