

Russ Faunce – NYSSMA® President



NYSSMA®: Music Education That Inspires ALL Children to Connect, Belong, Create

Choosing the three words Connect, Belong, and Create for what would become my NYSSMA® presidential slogan for 2022-2023 was somewhat of a journey — a journey that I rather enjoyed in the end, but still a bit of an expedition.

First of all, the slogan needed to be symbolic of the post-Covid times in which we find ourselves, reflective of a rapidly changing world, and most important, a message that would inspire and motivate the NYSSMA® membership. It needed to be more than words on the bottom of letterhead, a statement on the cover of the School Music NEWS, or a graphic on a pen. What were NYSSMA® past presidents thinking when they came up with their own words of encouragement and inspiration for New York music educators during their two years of elected office?

I started my own road to this slogan one day when I was preparing a student-teacher seminar on the NYS learning standards. Much to my surprise, two of the three descriptors were right there in front of me — Connect and Create. It got the old cogs in my mind turning. I thought what great bookends these two, simple words would be to get me started. Little did I know how important and significant they would become. After doing a little research on the Internet, I learned that both connection and creation are part of the seven fundamental needs that all people share:

- Safety and survival.
- Understanding and growth.
- Connection (love) and acceptance.
- Contribution and creation.
- Esteem, identity, significance.
- Self-direction (autonomy), freedom, and justice.
- Self-fulfillment and self-transcendence.

*There is power in
the music we share
with students*

Our human need for music

Was it a coincidence that two of the NYS Learning Standards for the Arts had a direct link to our fundamental human needs? I don't think so. After all, learning itself is something all people have in common, something we all spend our lives doing, whether that education is formal or informal. I then began to think about the role that music and music education plays in all those basic human needs, and that's where it all started to come together.

Miriam-Webster defines the word connect as: *Connect (verb) — bring together or into contact so that a real or notional link is established. Join together so as to provide access and communication.*

As supporters and creators in the arts, we use music to connect in a way that not all forms of communication accomplish. Whether it's a lullaby, music that accompanies and enhances life events, such as weddings and funerals, or the mood-changing effects that music provides to people all over the world, its power to inform, communicate emotion, and connect people is undeniable. It's the music we share in our school settings that perhaps has the greatest connection in the daily lives of our students, their parents, and the audiences that hear the music they make.

It's our responsibility as music educators to help nurture and mold the next generation of music consumers and creators. Music plays a powerful role in people's lives in a myriad of ways, but for most children, the fundamentals of the form learned in school become the basis of their taste throughout their lives. Music provides an opportunity for personal connection and connections with a larger community, all through the opportunity to escape into the world of music.

Webster defines the word create as: *Bring (something) into existence, cause something to happen as the result of one's actions.*

Creating has so many dimensions. I like to think of creating as the manifestation of our dreams. It's our opportunity to think beyond the norm and find new and innovative ways to express our thoughts and feelings. The bigger question in all of this is: which comes first, connecting or

creating? That's a question that only the creator can answer, and I suppose it depends on which direction the connection is going.

A sense of belonging

Finding that third verb wasn't initially as easy. I spent weeks and dozens of phone searches looking for the perfect word. Was it *believe*, was it *imagine*, or maybe *achieve*? Synonym after synonym, nothing felt right, until a discussion one day when the NYSSMA® BEDR committee decided to substitute the word "representation" for "inclusion" and add the word "belonging," to focus on the foundation of strong relationships as a critical element in NYSSMA's DEI work. Bingo — my third word was found, and it was to be snuggled between two important arts learning standards.

Belong (verb) — be a member or part of a particular group or organization.

Music provides a sense of belonging and communicating with others, both in terms of making music and consuming music. Music provides an opportunity to find a personal connection with what is important to you, share that connection with someone else, and ultimately end with a feeling of being understood and appreciated. After all, weren't all our own favorite songs as teenagers those whose lyrics or melodies perfectly captured an emotion we were feeling at the time? It's that feeling of commonality, belonging, with an artist or their work that sets the soundtrack to our lives.

Moreover, there is power in the music we share with students. And now more than ever, there is even greater opportunity to find new and innovative ways to use music to play powerful roles in our students' lives. I encourage you to strive to make musical connections that enable your own students to belong.

Words matter

Since choosing those three words, I've done a ton of thinking about how I could use those words to promote and support music education as I travel across New York State. I figured, why have the slogan unless I was willing to share my enthusiasm for what the message meant with all of you? The power of connecting, feeling like you belong, and then using that newfound sense of self to create is what music does best — it is the literal representation of emotion in the world.

Michael Salzman chose "Making the Magic of Music Education Accessible for All," as his presidential slogan. He was clearly thinking at the

time about accessibility and reaching beyond the traditional classroom to find pathways into our inner city and rural schools. Not only was this his slogan, but he carried that mission throughout his presidency, and I find tremendous inspiration in his example.

So, get ready to hear much more about these three words in the next two years! The power of this artistic medium in the lives of those we touch with music is too often overlooked. I encourage you to take advantage of the music around you, let it touch you personally, and allow yourself to be the conduit that spreads that music in a way that allows your students and their audiences to Connect, Belong, and Create. ||

For you NYSSMA® History buffs . . .

After consulting with the *School Music NEWS* editor, who in and of himself is a NYSSMA® history book, it seems that Past-President Pete Brasch (1994-95) may have been the first NYSSMA® President to start the slogan tradition. It is with a great deal of admiration and respect for the men and women who came before me that I share with you the visions that the following past NYSSMA® Presidents brought to their leadership efforts for their two-year terms.

Dr. David M. Brown	'20-'21	"Embracing Music for a Lifetime"
Michael J. Salzman	'18-'19	"Making the Magic of Music Education Accessible to All"
Michael W. Brownell	'16-'17	"Music: Success for All"
Dr. David A. Gaines	'14-'15	"Music Education: Orchestrating Success"
Marc E. Greene	'12-'13	"Celebrating 80 Years: Sparking a Song in the Heart of NY"
Daniel. Mosher	'10-'11	"Music Directs Our Lives"
Susan L. Weber	'08-'09	"Music Education: A Passion for Life"
James J. Cassara	'06-'07	"NYSSMA: Sound Education"
James E. Orgar	'04-'05	"A World of Music for All"
John M. Krestic	'02-'03	"Focused on the Future"
Dr. Earl Groner	'00-'01	"Together in Harmony"
Richard P. Rabideau	'98-'99	"For Kids' Sake"
William J. Mercer	'96-'97	"Music at the Core"
Peter Brasch	'94-'95	"Sharing the Vision"