



Technology Keeps Music Education in Our Schools: A Q&A with Teaching Artist Alyssa Greengrass

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Distance Learning (DL) and Video Conferencing (VTC) is taking education by storm as more and more educators and more and more educational institutions embrace the incredible educational opportunities now available as a result of recent technologies. While these technologies make it possible and more viable to keep the arts in schools in the face of historic budget cuts and limited access, the types of connections now possible via VTC also inspire students as well as teachers.

One such educator, [Alyssa Greengrass](#), teaching artist in the Distance Learning Program under the direction of Christianne Orto, Dean, [Distance Learning and Recording Arts](#) at the [Manhattan School of Music](#) (MSM), is inspiring students while she herself continues to be inspired as well. Alyssa, a flutist and a burgeoning teaching artist, views the inspiration she and her students glean from MSM's Distance Learning program as instrumental to a strong educational foundation.

Recently, the *Public Sector View* editorial team reached out to Alyssa to discuss some of the more inspiring experiences she has had as both a teacher and a student through DL. Continue reading below to see what Alyssa had to say about MSM and the incredible connections she has made with world-class musicians and students from around the world:



Public Sector View (PSV): *What benefits do you feel distance learning delivers to teaching artists and students participating in music programs? How has distance learning and the use of VTC been beneficial to your students and contributed to success at Manhattan School of Music?*

Alyssa Greengrass (AG): In a society where students are using technology every day in many different ways throughout education, it only makes sense for music to be the next subject integrating new tools for learning.

DL exposes students to new teachers and learning opportunities that they most likely have never encountered. I have experience teaching private lessons, group lessons, master class's to one location, master class's to multiple locations at once and coaching a High School wind band through MSM.

Each one of these genres comes with its own exciting challenges but more importantly they open the door to extraordinary learning. One of the things I've noticed whether I'm teaching two students or 40, is how intimate it feels. While there is a screen separating the students and myself, I am able to speak and connect with them in such a personal way.

As a flutist, the technology has made instruction thrilling as I hone my teaching technique! For example, being able to have the camera zoom in on my embouchure on command allows a large group of students to get an up close and detailed look at what I'm explaining. As a distance learning teaching artist, I have grown so much as an educator through these experiences. There are many variables involved in creating a successful distance learning connection. The cameras, the microphones, the number of students, the number of locations on a call; I need to be aware of all of these things while making sure I'm able to communicate what I'm trying to teach in the most effective way possible, without being right there next to them.

But, being able to use all of these variables to my advantage not only enhances the learning experience for students but has pushed me to become a better teacher. As one of the top conservatories in the country, MSM is such a trailblazer with distance learning engagements. They are continuously making strides to provide top quality learning to as many different environments as possible, and I look forward to continuing to be a part of their future DL endeavors.

PSV: *What types of collaborative interactions have you had with other teachers and how do these collaborations enhance student learning?*

AG: As a student at MSM, not only as a teaching artist, I've had a lot of opportunity to participate in distance learning master classes. We get to work with teaching artists from all over the country, all over the world really, who call in on master classes with us.

For example, we've worked a great deal with the [National Art Centre in Canada](#). Those master classes are pivotal in opening up our entire network of artists so that we get to work with multiple world-class teaching artists at the drop of a hat. There's less fuss with having to drive people here and there and organizing the logistics of bringing someone in physically. And, these VTC connections really are just as good as somebody sitting in the same room with you, if not better.



“Once you're in the right place with music education, where you're getting inspired and excited, it sticks with you for life.”

For example, when I teach as a flutist, one thing that is really beneficial- as I mentioned above- and one of my favorite aspects is that the cameras can zoom in on my face, my fingers, and my embouchure. Students can really see what's going on as I go through the exercises.

It's the same thing as a student. I get to sit there and be so close to the action and what's going on. It's really spectacular.

One of the aspects I am really fascinated by is that with DL we can really get into these schools at a different level of musical education. The band teacher has their role; and so, for me, coming in as a teaching artist and really being able to do more intensive, specific work with the kids is very rewarding. It's so incredible.

One memorable moment from my master class series was in one of the first series I participated in as a teaching artist, we brought in multiple connections at once; it was fascinating.

We were connected to three classes in different physical locations at once. There were multiple screens hooked up and each one of the connections could hear and see me and also the group I was working with at the time. But, also while I was working with another group, the other groups were muted so they could try the exercises at the same time while still hearing me but not being distracted by the other groups. It was just incredible.

For me, one of the best things as a teacher is when another teacher tells me the students are practicing my exercises in their free time and were really engaged. For me, coming out of that experience, I felt so good about teaching and being able to connect with all of those locations at once and really absorbing how powerful DL really is and how much it can do. It was like a giant Google hangout.

One of my most memorable experiences as a student was when [Christopher Millard](#) the principle bassoonist for the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Canada connected with one of my master classes.

I learned so much from him and was so excited by his extensive knowledge of the flute technique and repertoire. I would love to meet him in person one day. I still remember sitting there- in one of the large DL rooms in Miller Hall- and every word that came out of his mouth was a gem. I was furiously scribbling every other word, making sure I soaked it all in.

PSV: *Music and arts programs are being cut and/or reduced across the country. How does using video and other distance learning solutions help combat this issue of budget and access?*

AG: I think that using video and other distance learning solutions are definitely a way to work with programs that are struggling or being reduced throughout the country.

Giving students access to great teachers and lesson plans via video call can enable new learning experiences for larger groups. Having multiple locations on one video call is another way to combat budget issues within music and arts departments.

I do not believe what I do should replace traditional music instruction, but my experiences with teaching distance learning have shown me how instrumental and important these tools are for arts education. Just as technology in the classroom is improving students' abilities to learn,

distance learning is providing different tools that I hope will continue to be used and expanded throughout schools.

To learn more about the incredible experiences students can have with distance learning technology and video conferencing, click [here](#).