

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

DOING “THEIR MUSIC”:  
EXPLORING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM

VERONICA A. BALESTINO  
SPRING 2018

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree  
in Music Education  
with honors in Music Education

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Sarah H. Watts  
Assistant Professor of Music Education  
Thesis Supervisor

Linda C. Thornton  
Professor of Music Education  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper provides an in-depth definition of culturally responsive teaching as it applies to the music classroom, and examines incorrect perceptions that have arisen throughout the development of this pedagogy. It provides a framework for what a music classroom would look like if run by a culturally responsive teacher. Finally, literature is explored and synthesized that addresses pre-service teacher preparation in the field of music education and its intersection with cultural responsiveness. An appendix in the form of a teacher's guide is informed by the literature surrounding this topic. Developed to be a practical application of the research, the guide is intended for the pre-service teacher or experienced teacher in a new context.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project like this could not have been completed without the help and support of many people. I would like to thank the following groups and individuals for all they have done during this entire process.

Dr. Sarah Watts, for the countless hours you spent on our meetings and in editing, for your guidance as I discovered my own teaching philosophy and what culturally responsive teaching truly means for my future classroom, and for your infinite patience. You have been an incredible mentor and I am eternally grateful for all you've done.

Dr. Linda Thornton, for your expertise during this entire thesis writing process. I am incredibly blessed to have had you as my Schreyer advisor for four years to guide me through this time of discovery, frustration, and success as I worked through many, many honors projects.

Dr. Ann Clements, for your support in my interest of musical cultures. Your enthusiasm for creating authentic music making experiences was contagious.

Dr. Jeanine Staples and the teaching assistants involved in the Penn State Philadelphia Urban Seminar, for first introducing me to the idea of culturally responsive teaching. Your persistence and guidance in stretching my teaching ideologies helped me to discover my passion for this topic.

The Pennsylvania State University, the Schreyer Honors College, and the Penn State School of Music, for the wonderful college experience, with many, many opportunities for personal growth.

My family, for being the best support system imaginable. I couldn't have done this without you.

Thank you.

## Chapter 1

### Vignettes of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Action

#### Doing “Their Music” in the Music Classroom Setting

It is 2:00 PM on a Wednesday. The music classroom stands quiet, as if awaiting the entry of an energetic class of seventh graders. Desks are shaped in a U around the teacher’s desk, with an upright piano in the front of the room. The tables at one side of the room are stacked with music textbooks. The concrete walls are off-white and bare, decorated only by a few posters that read, “Our class rules...” and “Treat others the way you want to be treated.” The music room is tucked away at the end of a hall at one end of the building, but the smells of a just finished lunch still linger in the classroom.

The bell rings and in trickles the class of seventh graders over the course of several minutes. They are in no hurry to get music class started, preferring to use this time to get caught up on what is happening in each other’s lives since they’ve chatted at lunchtime. The students all wear the same light blue polo, but, eager to show off their own individual styles, wear the shirts and navy blue slacks or skirts in very different ways. One girl wears high socks and her arms are decorated with rows and rows of bracelets. Another pairs the slacks with a studded belt and large silver hoop earrings. One boy slouches in the room in a baggy polo and pants, wearing headphones and blasts a hard rap tune. The headphones do nothing to block out the loud bass and beat of the song and another student mockingly does a little dance to the rhythm before laughing and admonishing the boy to turn his music volume down.

Because of some changes to the daily schedule, their teacher informs the group that they have a free day during music class time to get some studying done. The students lose no time in

clumping together in small groups based on the topic of conversation they prefer and settle down to some important socializing. One clump buzzes about an upcoming school dance and many of the girls are very concerned with what they might wear or who will ask them. Another student sits on top of a desk and makes up his own rap lyrics, earning him a frown from the teacher and barks of laughter from a few of his buddies.

During this time, a pre-service teacher has been sitting off to the side of the classroom, casually observing the behavior of the students. Two girls seem as curious of her as she is of them, and they walk over to her, hesitantly asking her what she is doing there. She explains that she will be helping in the class for a few weeks. The girls go on to grill her about what “her music” is. They want to know what kinds of music she listens to, what instruments she plays and how she decided that she liked teaching music to kids. Upon discovering that the pre-service teacher can play the piano, the girls drag her over to the neglected piano in the front of the room and ask her to play. She asks if they have the music to a song they like to sing. Cautiously, one of the girls pulls a few pages of sheet music from an unorganized pile in the back corner of the room and hands them to the pre-service teacher. As the opening strains of a familiar pop song begin to fill the room, several other students find their way closer to the piano. By the second verse, the singing goes from timid to strong. It is led by the two girls who originally chose the song, who are hesitantly joined by more and more of their classmates.

The pre-service teacher notices that these students have a lot of musical influences that come from outside of the school building as evidenced by the interaction in the classroom at the piano. She wonders if there is a connection between the music of their school and the music in other aspects of their lives. In the interaction that follows, she is able to observe what their musical lives look like when they aren't in music class.

### **Doing the Music of Their Community**

It is a sunny Memorial Day. The usually quiet streets are filled with sounds of excited chatter and laughter as kids run up and down the block. People with baseball caps and red t-shirts gather in clumps on the street corners. In the neighborhood square, women are setting up tables and chairs, carrying huge platters of food and calling to their children to run home and bring items they forgot.

The close-knit community surrounding the local school organizes a neighborhood clean-up event, involving many of the families and volunteers. Some groups do maintenance work on the neighborhood garden by weeding or ripping dead shrubs from the soil to make room for new vegetable or herbal plants. Others clean garbage from empty lots or paint old buildings. By the middle of the afternoon, women make their way around to the different groups of volunteers with water and snacks. The sun has been beating down for a few hours now and everyone is sticky and covered in a thin layer of dust. The workers' chatter can be heard throughout the neighborhood, between old friends and new acquaintances bonding over the satisfaction of completing hard work together. As the afternoon comes to a close and work starts to wind down, the smells of dinner blow through the air.

People begin to congregate in the neighborhood square, grabbing stacks of paper plates and passing them down the line. Women pile heaping scoops of rice, beans, chicken, pork, and beef onto the plates, accompanied by a variety of salsas, different choices of tortillas, and salads. The air in the square is thick with delicious smells. The seats and sidewalks are crowded with sticky, tired and hungry workers enjoying the meal. As people continue to socialize, strains of music begin to fill the air. A simple drum beat is soon joined by a chorus of drums and voices

chime in with a robust, energetic sound. Within minutes, a circle of chatting, munching people tapping their toes to the lively rhythms forms around the musicians.

On the ground sits a group of five or six men and boys on drums, members of the community who have created a family band. The drums are all different sizes, some tall and cylindrical, while others are fat and short. The tops are covered in what looks like animal skins and bound with rope, while the bottom and sides of the drums are made of wood and are hand carved. Two sisters do complicated dance steps along with the drum beats. It is a dance that involves their whole bodies. Feet are doing steps in time with the thump of the main drum. Hips sway gracefully and arms twist and gesture in the same smoothness as their hips. The enthusiastic crowd around the band grows, getting involved in the dancing, calling out praise, learning fancy footwork steps and clapping along with the beat of the music. The pre-service teacher spots many of the children from her school in the crowd. Some of these same children from the neighborhood teach the dancing and explain to interested bystanders how the drum rhythms work along with the dancing and singing. The same old and new friends who have worked together cleaning up the neighborhood now dance hand in hand, stomping their feet in time with the rhythm, re-energized by the meal and music.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction and Rationale

Music is a ubiquitous aspect of the human experience, yet despite its extensive influence, it remains something that takes on different meanings and uses depending on the context in which it is present. Consider the opening vignettes. The pre-service teacher was able to observe the students' musical interests, paying attention to the music that came from peer influence as well as the music existing within their own community. She noticed the way they expressed their musicality, and how they showed musical curiosity in the classroom. Once the students felt as though they were being heard and appreciated, a doorway to more conversation about musical cultures could be opened. Perhaps that could even be a springboard to launch discussions about musical topics such as timbre, rhythm or form. The songs the students consider "their music" could be a good starting place to reach the objectives teachers need to achieve.

Music education comes in many forms and has different functions. Each classroom is unique and what is taught there is often a reflection of the community. In cases like the one in the vignettes however, the music class is not an accurate representation of the rich musical culture that exists within the community. In some classrooms, a person might observe students entering, opening their music textbook and reading through a few song selections without actively making music or making musical choices. There might be a classroom where the only music presented to the students is from the Western canon. In another scenario, students might be heavily involved in musical experiences outside of school, but feel that the music class at school has no connection to the kind of music they "do." These situations may be common, but teachers do have the tools to better serve their students.

Many pre-service music teachers are trained in University music education programs similar to the environments in which they grew up. They feel comfortable and at home in these settings and often continue getting experience in similar situations during student teaching. It is these teachers, who are new to the field, as well as experienced teachers in new contexts, who can benefit most from adapting an approach to teaching in the music classroom that takes the students' culture into consideration. If a teacher intends to reach all of these students, then it is important that she become familiar with their backgrounds and teach them in a culturally responsive way.

The process of becoming a culturally responsive teacher may be an uncomfortable one, yet is immensely meaningful. Extensive self-reflection is involved and a teacher must be prepared to ask herself challenging questions along the way. This could be a time of identifying and confronting biases. It is completely normal to struggle with personal philosophies and shifts in teaching ideologies. The philosophy a teacher may have at the beginning of the process will grow and change as she makes new discoveries about what it means to be culturally responsive.

There is extensive literature on the subject of culturally responsive teaching, but this paper will look through a unique lens at the ways in which it can be used practically in the music classroom. The purposes of this project are twofold. First, the existing research will provide a background and framework for exploring and illuminating aspects of culturally responsive teaching. Additionally, the practical application of this information in the form of a teacher's guide will aid teachers in bringing culturally responsive teaching into their own classrooms. This guide will serve as a launch pad for teachers to explore a path of culturally responsive teaching, examining their own practice and considering questions such as:

1. What is best for my students while keeping their cultural backgrounds in mind?

2. What is the best way to reach them and engage them most effectively so that they are motivated to learn?
3. How can I become aware of what is happening in the community and how can I bring that into my classroom?

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

#### Culturally Responsive Teaching: Definition

Consider the term *culturally responsive teaching*. To define this, the word *culture* must first be understood. In this context, culture refers to the ethnic, religious, and familial backgrounds of the students in a classroom. Culture encompasses the past experiences students have had, their musical backgrounds, values, beliefs, the ways they interact with other students and teachers, their learning styles and their communication styles (Abril, 2013; Bond, 2014). Considering culture in teaching is an important and complex issue, one which Mixon (2009) addressed saying, “culture determines how we think, believe and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn” (p. 2). When addressing the subject of culture in the classroom, the teacher needs to look at her own cultural background as well as the cultures of the individual students and that of the entire school community.

The next piece to defining culturally responsive teaching is to understand the word *responsive*. In the classroom setting, a teacher is considered responsive when she recognizes the needs of her students and adjusts her teaching based on those observations. While teaching a single lesson, it is important that she be able to form an immediate response to the feedback coming from her students. In the first vignette, the pre-service teacher saw that the students had an interest in popular music and responded to that observation. The culturally responsive teacher also needs to be able to look at her long term goals for a class and make conscious decisions based on what she knows her students need.

Once the terms *culture* and *responsive* are understood separately, they can be applied to teaching in the music classroom. Over the years, huge strides have been made and more conversations have emerged about how to most effectively use this pedagogy in schools. Using the term *culture* in the same thought process as teaching is slowly receiving more attention from scholars in the field. Abril (2013) discussed the omission of culture in pedagogy:

The item missing from many conversations about multicultural music education and its practices was the culture of the students being taught. Culturally responsive teaching helps to move attention from the things we teach to the children we teach and the social learning environment where music learning experiences occur (pg. 8).

Initially introduced in the general education setting, Ladson-Billings (1995) was one of the earliest pioneers to define culturally responsive teaching and bring it to the attention of educators as an important consideration. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally responsive teaching is “a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment” (p. 160). An introduction of this concept into the music educator’s way of thinking was the next natural step.

Culturally responsive teaching is simply a way of teaching where a teacher uses her knowledge of the students in the classroom to inform the content and approach she will use to teach music in a way that is most effective, meaningful and relevant to the students (Abril, 2013; Lind & McCoy, 2016; Shaw, 2015; Wiens, 2015). A culturally responsive teacher takes into account students’ past experiences, musical backgrounds, and ethnic ties (Bond, 2014). She consciously uses knowledge of her students to inform how she instructs. The repertoire she chooses to teach and in what ways it is presented are based on the learning styles of her students.

Pedagogy must also be considered, taking into account how music is transmitted and taught in other cultures in comparison to the one with which the teacher is familiar (Abril, 2013; Wiens, 2015).

The learning experiences that students have outside of the classroom inform how they learn in the school setting and also what skills and knowledge they bring to the music room. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2012) eloquently described the importance of being aware of the core of culturally responsive teaching, saying, “Language, behavioral expressions, interpretations of actions, and societal expectations are all culturally borne and implemented...Participating as a member of these microcultures makes each individual a multicultural being” (p. 72). Reconsider the vignettes. Out in the community, the students from the music class participated in the drum group and were valid musicians in the musical culture that surrounded the school. Abril (2009) spoke of this as, “students viewed as members of extended cultural circles that exist beyond the classroom” (p. 3). Rather than seeing them just as students, the pre-service teacher recognized their legitimate involvement in the musical community.

### **Incorrect Perceptions**

By definition, culturally responsive teaching is not a pedagogy reserved for a single setting. Often assumed to only be necessary in an urban environment, this kind of teaching can be applied in all school settings, whether they are urban, rural or suburban, and for all cultural populations (Banks, 1993). Students of similar cultures do often share musical preferences, but their musical lives are also influenced by peer interests and their home environments among other factors. Because of this, musical diversity exists in every classroom, regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic differences or religious preferences. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy

that exists to address and embrace the diversity of each individual setting and to help students learn in a way that is most effective for them.

There are many myths that surround culturally responsive teaching. In an article on multicultural education, Banks (1993) remarked that “multicultural education is for the others” (p. 22). In this context, the term *others* is defined as the population of students in a school environment who are placed in a minority group for any reason. These might be students who speak a language other than English, who have different religious preferences from the majority or who come from a socioeconomic background separate from most of the students in that school. However, diversity is more than a difference of language or skin color and is found in every school population in many forms (Bond, 2017). There is an incredible range of differences in musical backgrounds that students bring into the music classroom.

Banks (1993) also addressed the myth that “multicultural education is opposed to the Western tradition” (p. 23). The culturally responsive teacher knows the merits of the Western musical canon and the teaching techniques that accompany it. She is aware that the traditional, teacher-centric approach to teaching is a very valuable method and has been proven to have a place in the music classroom. However, this Western method in her classroom is one of many. When she is teaching about another musical culture, she pays close attention to how that music is transmitted and taught in the culture from which it originates. The authentic sharing of a culture’s music also has a valid place in the music education setting. Rather than multicultural education opposing Western tradition, the culturally responsive teacher recognizes that multicultural education complements it. Knowing this, she needs to be able to distinguish in which situations one or both methods are appropriate for use in her classroom. This teacher knows her students well enough to relate the Western traditions and canon to music with which

they may be more familiar (Bond, 2017). Western music is incredibly important to teach to students, but it is crucial to make sure the students realize it is not the only valuable music that exists and that there are many other valid, influential types of music that stem from other cultures.

### **Culturally Responsive Classroom – What It Looks Like**

What makes someone a good teacher? Reflect for a moment on a teacher from the past. What aspects of her personality made her a great teacher? What teaching techniques did she use that were effective in getting her students to learn? How were her students engaged during the class? What did her classroom look like? The words *culturally responsive* can be inserted before “teacher” in all of these questions and can be revisited through this lens. The following section will outline what a hypothetical culturally responsive classroom would look like and the kind of things a culturally responsive teacher might do with her students in the music setting.

The first step in creating a culturally responsive classroom is for the teacher to be self-aware. Without this piece of the puzzle, the rest of the pedagogy would not even be able to take shape in the classroom. Previous research has demonstrated that teachers who shared similar cultural characteristics with their students were able to connect with them more easily and understand their learning styles much more than teachers with different cultural backgrounds from their students (Shaw, 2015). A teacher’s musical background is always going to influence what and how she teaches. Because of this, it is important for a teacher to understand exactly how she identifies herself within her community and in relation to her culture and how the two intersect. Shaw (2015) saw the benefit of “cultural self-awareness as allowing a teacher to acknowledge cultural differences which is important” (p. 20). This is especially true when

considering the differences in cultural norm behaviors, such as how students interact with their teachers or participate in certain activities. The teacher should be aware of the influences of her musical background as well as her past experiences and skills that she brings into the classroom. Knowing this helps the teacher to see herself through her students' eyes.

The next layer to a culturally responsive classroom is how well the teacher knows her students. In a new environment, a teacher may walk into a setting where she has no understanding of the type of community her students come from, the prior musical experiences they may have had, or even the school culture. It is important to learn about students in an individual capacity (Abril, 2013; Lind & McCoy, 2016). Once the teacher understands a student's unique characteristics, she needs to consider how the student functions within his social circles (Abril, 2013). In the first vignette, the pre-service teacher quietly observed the students' behaviors around each other and how that was related to their musical conversation at the piano. In a culturally responsive classroom, the teacher will understand the students' musical backgrounds, their past life experiences, the way they interact with their families and the conversations they have about music. In one of Shaw's studies (2015), a participant remarked that "I'm working with different schools so I have to, in an instant, change things around. I change my teaching style according to the specific group. I can't just be the same teacher in every situation" (p. 11). Knowing the details about the students contributes so much to being able to adapt teaching.

Along that same vein, a culturally responsive teacher applies the knowledge she has of her students' background to choose appropriate repertoire and materials. Abril (2003) believed that the teacher should find valuable ways to "help students make connections between the music being studied or performed in the classroom and the musical world beyond the classroom" (p.

11). There has always been a slight disconnect between the music at school and the music of the students. Shaw (2015) defined cultural scaffolding as “the process of using students’ own cultures and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement” (p. 28). To bring the music of the students into the classroom is showing that they have valid musical experiences. The teacher is letting her students know that the music they like, listen to and create outside of school is valuable and worthwhile enough to teach in the classroom. From the earlier vignettes, when the pre-service teacher took the time to play the pop song, it showed the students that she found their music worthwhile enough to spend time performing it during music class. That gesture was all it took for them to realize that the teacher valued their musical interests and to recognize that they shared some common musical ground.

The repertoire chosen for a class acknowledges that it is important enough to be taught, so an effort should be made to include familiar musical heritages. In this way, students will not just be taught and lectured about a culture. The culturally responsive teacher can help her students share their own related musical experiences with the class to make the material have a more rich and personal connection to the students (Abril, 2013). For example, in the second vignette, the pre-service teacher observed a rich musical tradition happening in the community in which many of her students participated. She may have had no experience with that particular music or culture but could have provided opportunities in the music classroom for the students to share their knowledge of the music with their peers or help them to use those skills to make connections to other music and cultures. A teacher will never be able to know everything about every single culture, even the ones that she is sharing with students, but Shaw (2015) believed that a culturally responsive teacher should work to develop “a knowledge base about ethnically diverse groups’ cultural values, tradition, communication, learning styles, contributions, and

relational patterns” (p. 20). Having that foundation will help a teacher communicate with her students, realize which gaps their cultural knowledge might be able to help fill, and understand where there might be some tension or difficult topics to address about a particular culture.

Choosing repertoire is challenging because of the importance of presenting music in a way that is accurate and representative of the culture from which it comes (Mixon, 2009). Shaw (2012) asked a variety of questions for a culturally responsive teacher to pose to herself when making decisions about music in her classroom: “What music would build upon my students’ prior experiences? What pieces would capitalize on their cultural knowledge? What selections could my students experience through their preferred learning styles? Which would showcase their culturally informed performance styles?” (p. 76). Not only can music be a connection to the cultures with which the students are familiar, but the music in class can be the bridge to learning about new unfamiliar cultures. There is a balance here that is important for the teacher to consider deeply, but when chosen effectively, the music selections could very well lead to improvements in students’ attitudes toward unfamiliar music and cultural groups (Abril, 2009) as well as teaching tolerance and interest in the culture of others (Abril, 2013). Shaw (2012) had more questions for use when considering new music for students: “How can we apply these same ideas to music that may be completely unfamiliar to them? Whose culture would that have a connection to and why would we want to teach it?” (p. 76) How could the pre-service teacher from the vignettes apply her students’ knowledge of popular music and the music of their community to unfamiliar types of music she might want to introduce? Conversations can stem from learning about the music of familiar and new cultures between students. Bond (2014) summed up the issue of repertoire selection eloquently, saying, “by including a wide variety of

musics... one can validate the preferences of many, while expanding the soundscape of all” (p. 5).

When considering culturally responsive teaching pedagogies, there is a huge emphasis on the importance of teaching for a variety of learning styles. This begins with a teacher’s understanding of the background of her students. The context in which a student grows up has a major influence on his preferences for gaining new knowledge (Abril, 2013; Lind & McCoy, 2016; Mixon, 2009). Depending on the culture of a student, he may prefer to learn in a less formal way than a teacher lecturing in front of a classroom. Another student may learn best working collaboratively with other students and learning through conversations. Shaw (2015) stated that “each teacher must mindfully enter into the work of ‘knowing their students’ worlds’ and designing instruction that responds to their strengths, interests and needs” (p. 34). A culturally responsive teacher uses a wide span of techniques in her “teaching toolbox” over the course of a single lesson in an attempt to help all of the students learn in the most effective way.

While keeping all of these other considerations in mind, a culturally responsive teacher also maintains the highest expectations for her students. Just as the culturally responsive teacher will make personal discoveries about her culture and the kinds of music she feels most comfortable with, her students should be making similar discoveries in the music classroom. Being able to make comparisons between “their music” and music of cultures they did not know existed will challenge their past assumptions. Learning within a culturally responsive classroom will help students realize and appreciate the vast world of music. Bond (2014) believed that “although instructional strategies will differ based on student strengths, the musical elements and the cultural practices associated with the repertoire, a high expectation for all students should remain” (p. 7). In a classroom where culture is being addressed, it is extremely important to

create a space where students feel safe to share their experiences with one another and have conversations about difficult topics (Abril, 2009). Whether the music from a culture is familiar to the students or completely new, there should be a high level of respect for that culture and a motivation instilled in the students to want to understand and communicate about that music (Bond, 2017).

### **The Intersection of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pre-Service Teacher Preparation**

A myriad of studies have been conducted with pre-service teachers and their perceptions of their preparedness to teach in a culturally responsive way. From these studies, a few clear results have emerged. The overwhelming response has been that pre-service teachers feel that culturally responsive teaching is a foreign concept to them (Abril, 2009; Cain, 2015; Shaw, 2015). Most have never even been introduced to the term *culturally responsive* during their formal training and have no idea where to start to think about bringing the pedagogy into their future classrooms.

On the subject of teacher self-awareness, pre-service teachers may realize that they feel uncomfortable with their own cultural identities. Research has shown that the majority of teachers going into the field of music education are white and female (Shaw, 2015). At the same time, the populations of schools are becoming more and more diverse (Abril, 2009; Shaw, 2015). The teacher needs to have an understanding of her own cultural and musical identity before being able to connect with her students' identities in the musical setting. Abril (2009) made an important statement about this issue, saying, "before they can value their own students' musical backgrounds, teachers need to value their own diversity" (p. 12). Pre-service teachers tend to keep their past musical skills and backgrounds separate from their teaching lives, never bringing

that information into the classroom to share with their students (Cain, 2015). For instance, a pre-service teacher may often reference her classical formal training when teaching, but never mention to her students that she was a part of a rock band in high school, a member of a Strolling Strings program or grew up listening to classic crooner hits around her home. All of those are completely valid pieces of her musical background that might help students realize that there are more connections between school music and “their music” than they initially assumed. It is crucial for the pre-service teacher to embrace the rich musical culture she came from outside of her formal training.

Beyond the cultural differences that may exist between the teacher and her students, studies have shown that there is also a difference in the musical training of these pre-service teachers and the training needed to connect to students who have not had formal education in Western music (Abril, 2009). Universities advertise undergraduate music education degrees that will produce well-rounded teachers with knowledge and understanding necessary to advance the field of music education. Often though, pre-service teachers realize that they have much experience in classical training, but find it difficult to rework their skills into classroom settings that require understanding of other musical styles (Kim, 2016). If a novice teacher has not had experience with a musical culture, she does not feel comfortable teaching it, especially when some of her students might be more familiar with that culture than she is (Shaw, 2015). This is where culturally responsive teaching is so important because knowledge of the musical culture can also be shared from students to the teacher. Research has demonstrated that this was a barrier to pre-service teachers, most of whom felt as though they were lacking in the type of training required to teach in this way (Shaw, 2015).

## Chapter 4

### Description of Teacher's Guide

Exploration and synthesis of the background information previously discussed led to the development of a teacher's guide. The teacher's guide is comprised of a series of interactive materials, intended to be completed in a sequence as the pre-service teacher or experienced teacher in a new context explores the process of becoming a culturally responsive teacher. This guide is designed to be reproduced and distributed separately from the body of the research paper, hence the existence of a cover page, table of contents and directions for teachers.

The first section contains materials that assist the teacher in becoming more culturally self-aware. Using a collection of guided questions, she will reflect upon her teaching philosophy and her musical experiences. Additionally, she will be asked to look at her own cultural heritage. The second section in the guide assists the teacher in learning about her students and the school community demographics. After filling out materials about her own personal experiences, her students (if age appropriate) can also complete their own questionnaires about their cultural heritage for a straightforward comparison and contrast at the end of the process. Other materials aid the teacher in identifying the culture bearers (experts in a particular musical culture) as musical resources within the local community. One of the resources in the teacher's guide is a template for a music blog, which would be an interesting way to collect information on the kinds of music important to students from grades six through twelve.

The final section of the guide combines what has been collected in the previous materials and gives the teacher tools to assess how she can teach more responsively. The self-assessment component is a good way for the teacher to evaluate her comfort level with the music she has researched for class. The data compilation provided by the guide allows the teacher a

comprehensive view of the breakdown of her classroom, the commonalities and differences between herself and her students, and ways to move forward as an effective teacher. She can use these materials to more easily see similarities and differences between her culture and that of her students. Then she can reevaluate her teaching philosophy and look at how that aligns or does not align with what she believes should be taught in the classroom. One of the materials gives the teacher an opportunity to record how a situation may have been handled in her classroom and reflect on how culturally responsive teaching might help if a similar situation were to happen in the future. This tool will give pre-service teachers a starting place in the process of becoming culturally responsive, even if it just helps them to see that their original teaching philosophy may not completely line up with the population of students that they have in their classroom.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Culturally responsive teaching in music education is a pedagogy in which the music educator uses the knowledge she has of her students' backgrounds to present material to them in a meaningful way. In the music classroom, this means that the teacher is aware of her own musical strengths and weaknesses in a cultural context. She is familiar with the ways in which her students interact with the music in their lives outside of the school setting. The teacher validates the forms of music that her students consider to be their own. Using music that is familiar to the students, the teacher creates a connection to the music she teaches in the classroom. Music for the classroom is chosen with her students and their cultural backgrounds in mind. Music education for the culturally responsive teacher goes beyond the music that is taught to embrace the cultural traditions of the learner and presents music in a manner that is both relevant and culturally respectful.

## Appendix

# Teacher's Guide

Exploring the Process of Becoming  
A Culturally Responsive Teacher



Veronica Balestino  
The Pennsylvania State University  
Spring 2018

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## How to Use This Resource

### Purpose:

After reading an extensive amount of literature on culturally responsive teaching in the music classroom, it became clear that it would be useful for teachers to have a practical application of the information. This collection of materials is meant for immediate use in the classroom.

Imagine that a teacher wanted to start a unit on jazz. She would first need to identify the amount of experience and comfort she herself has had with the genre. Then she would want to know how familiar her students were with jazz, whether there were any jazz opportunities in the community and a plethora of other pieces of information that might be useful to know how the genre of jazz would fit into her curriculum. Once beginning the unit, she would want to continue to revisit her comfort with the genre and assess whether her teaching was true to the style and background of jazz, as well as how effectively it was taught to the students.

The materials in the following guide are intended to help a teacher through the process described above, no matter what the genre of music or music topic or age or stage of the music learners.

### How to Use:

The teacher's guide is comprised of a series of interactive materials, intended to be completed in a sequence as the pre-service teacher or experienced teacher in a new context explores the process of becoming a culturally responsive teacher.

The first section contains materials that assist the teacher in becoming more culturally self-aware. The worksheet "Considering Teaching Philosophy" is a collection of questions to

prompt the teacher to think about her educational and musical philosophy. “Considering Personal Experiences” is a material with fill-in bubbles. The bubbles contain questions about musical experiences and background about the teacher that will help her to realize her musical strengths and weaknesses. She should have her older students fill out the same questionnaire about their musical experiences, for a straightforward comparison and contrast with her own.

The second section in the guide assists the teacher in learning about her students and the school community demographics. “Learning about the Community” is a place for teachers to take notes on the demographics of their students, school, and community. The “Music Blog” was provided as a template for older students, grades six through twelve, to complete. Once filled out, the teacher will be able to collect the information for future reference in her lessons. The blog gives students a voice to talk about the music that is important to them. For younger students, it might be possible to prompt them through verbal questions rather than having them write information down. “Finding Culture Bearers” is a resource to help the teacher feel comfortable with the community surrounding her school. It is a place to collect data on the people from the community who have special knowledge, skills or background in a specific type of music. Keeping track of these culture bearers and inviting them into the classroom is a good way to teach music authentically even if the teacher isn’t as familiar with that particular culture.

The final section of the guide combines what has been collected in the previous materials and gives the teacher tools to assess how she can teach more responsively. The “Self-Assessment Checklist” is intended to be filled out for every musical culture the teacher wants to bring into her classroom. It asks about her familiarity with the music and culture and the research she has done. The data compilation page or “What My Classroom Looks Like” is a very open-ended space for the teacher to reflect on what she has learned through her research. There are two

question prompts but the rest of the spaces are available to fill with comparisons of ethnicities, languages, and musical heritages of the teacher and the students. It is a space to contrast the types of music that are important to the students and the teacher and the ones that will be most familiar in the classroom.

After working through the process of culturally responsive teaching, it is necessary to periodically check back in on the personal progress that has been made. The “Self-Accountability Reflection” is comprised of three different materials. The first piece is for the teacher to consider the big picture. The questions provided are open-ended for her to reflect on the major concepts of culturally responsive teaching as they apply to her own classroom. The next page gives the teacher an opportunity to record any situations that may have arisen in her classroom, how they were handled and how culturally responsive teaching might help if a similar situation were to happen in the future. The last material for self-reflection helps the teacher to look more closely at her teaching philosophy. She will reevaluate how that aligns or does not align with what she believes should be taught in the classroom. Finally, a reading list is provided for further personal growth in the area of culturally responsive teaching.

This tool will give pre-service teachers a starting place in the process of becoming culturally responsive, even if it just helps them to see that their original teaching philosophy may not completely line up with the population of students that they have in their classroom.

What are my objectives for my classroom?

What are my long term goals for my students?

## Considering Teaching Philosophy

How do I create musical experiences for my students?

What are the ways I select music?

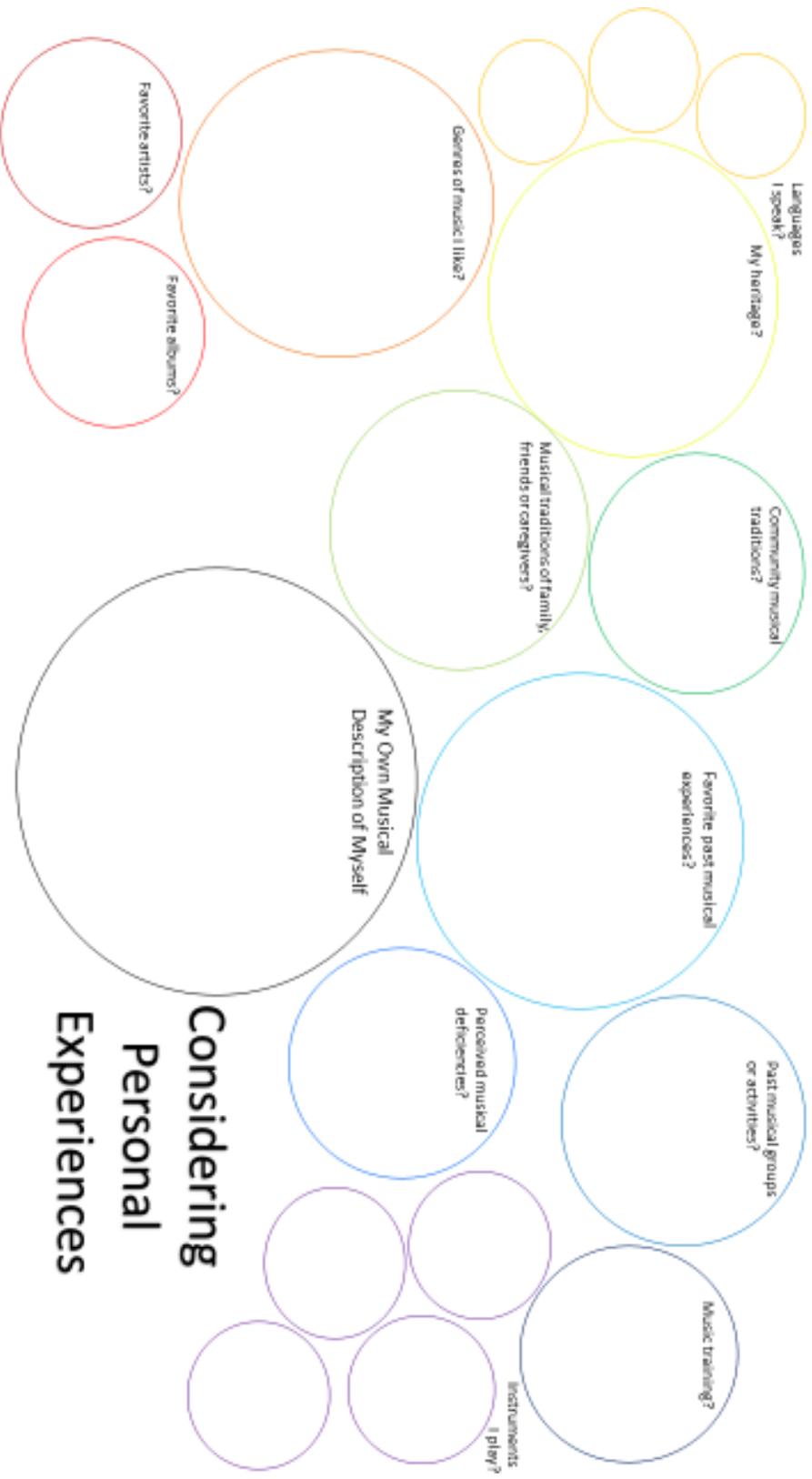
What do I value about teaching music?

What do I think my students should learn in my music class?

## Considering Teaching Philosophy

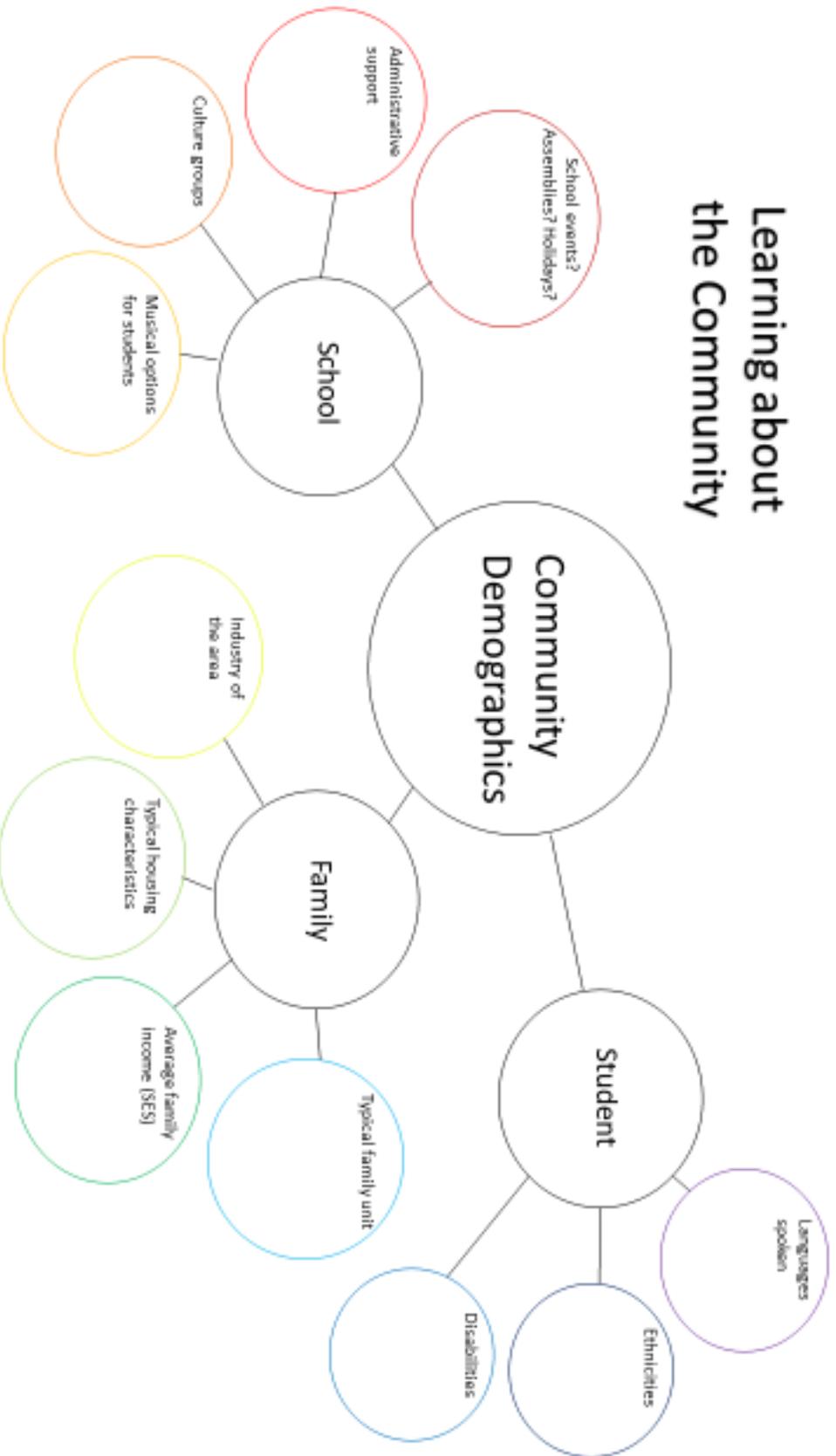
What genres of music do I think should be covered in my class?

What musical cultures should be included in my curriculum?



**Considering  
Personal  
Experiences**

# Learning about the Community



**Directions:** Think about a piece of music that is important to you. It could be a recording or some music you heard live. Fill in the spaces with words, pictures, colors and/ or shapes.

**Title of piece?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Artist?**

**Why is this piece of music important to you?**

**This music reminds me of...**

**This music makes me curious about...**

**How does this music make you feel?**

**Instruments in the piece?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Genre/ Style?**

**Music Blog**



## Self-Assessment Checklist

(type of music)

When introducing a new music and its culture, have you considering the following?

- Have I done background research on this music?
  - Am I familiar with the characteristic sounds of this music?
  - Do I know what instruments are typically used in this music?
  - Do I know what the performance practice is (sacred, secular, folk)?
  - Do I know how this music originated?
  - Am I aware of how this music is taught in the culture it comes from? (i.e. immersion)
  
- Have I seen videos of this music being performed or played?
  - Heard multiple recordings of music from this culture?
  
- Have I done background research on this culture?
  - On the population of people who do this music?
  - On the areas where this music occurs? (Geographically bound?)
  - On the language of this music?
  - Can I correctly pronounce this language? (If applicable)
  
- Do I have a personal connection with this music or culture?
  - How familiar am I with this music? 1    2    3    4    5
- Do I know if any of my students have a personal connection with this music or culture?
  - How familiar is this music to my students? 1    2    3    4    5
  
- Do I know of any culture bearers in my community who are familiar with this music?

Notes:

What is my level of familiarity with the cultural backgrounds of my students?

What is my level of familiarity with the music my students are listening to?

## What my Classroom Looks Like

Look at the similarities and differences between yourself and your students. Compare and contrast in the blank spaces.



Date and information about group?

What happened?

### Self-Accountability Reflection

How did I respond?

How could Culturally Responsive Teaching help improve this situation for the next time?



## Reading List for Personal Growth -

\* Abril, C. R. (2009). Responding to culture in the instrumental music programme: a teachers journey. *Music Education Research*, 11(1), 77-91. doi:10.1080/14613800802699176

- This article explores more about how to reshape an existing music program with a culturally responsive approach.

\* Abril, C. R. (2013). Toward a More Culturally Responsive General Music Classroom. *General Music Today*, 27(1), 6-11. doi:10.1177/1048371313478946

- This article includes a solid definition of culturally responsive teaching, as well as a list of strategies to bring culturally responsive teaching in the classroom.

\* Banks, J. A. (1993). Multicultural Education: Development, Dimensions, and Challenges. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(1), 22-28. doi:10.4135/9781452218533.n494

- This article is a good one to read further information about the arguments against culturally responsive teaching and how to debunk those myths.

\* Bond, Vanessa. (2014). Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Choral Classroom. *Choral Journal*, 55(2), 8-15.

- This article has an extensive list of culturally responsive teaching strategies and how culturally responsive teaching can be specifically applied to the choral setting.

\* Boon, E. T. (2014). Making string education culturally responsive: The musical lives of African American children. *International Journal of Music Education*, 32(2), 135-146. doi:10.1177/0255761413513662

- This article is included for reading to gain a deeper understanding on childrens' perceptions of music, specifically in the string education setting.

\* Cain, M. (2015). Celebrating musical diversity: Training culturally responsive music educators in multiracial Singapore. *International Journal of Music Education*, 33(4), 463-475. doi:10.1177/0255761415584295

- This article explores training for pre-service teachers in diverse music, specifically in Singapore.

\* Hoffman, A. R. (2012). Performing Our World: Affirming Cultural Diversity through Music Education. *Music Educators Journal*, 98(4), 61-65. doi:10.1177/0027432112443262

- This article is helpful for further reading on how grants can be used to connect content areas and implement school-wide culturally responsive teaching.

\* Lind, V. R., & McKoy, C. L. (2016). *Culturally responsive teaching in music education: from understanding to application*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- This book is an excellent read to further define and explore culturally responsive teaching, especially how it applies to the music education setting.

- \* Mixon, K. (2009). Engaging and Educating Students with Culturally Responsive Performing Ensembles. *Music Educators Journal*, 95(4), 66-73. doi:10.1177/0027432109335479
- This article includes more information about how to create new ensembles with a culturally responsive approach.

\* Shaw, J. T. (2015). “Knowing Their World”. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 63(2), 198-223. doi:10.1177/0022429415584377

- This article is useful for gathering tips on how to adapt teaching styles depending on your classroom setting and to learn more about exploring teacher self-awareness.

\* Wiens, K. F. (2015). Considering Culturally Responsive Teaching, Children, and Place in the Music Room. *General Music Today*, 29(1), 19-23. doi:10.1177/1048371315594005

- This article includes a list of practical suggestions for implementing culturally responsive teaching into the music classroom.

For further reading... (add your own)

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**Academic Vita of Veronica A. Balestino**  
vbalestino@gmail.com

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*Bachelors in Music Education, 2018, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

Doing “Their Music”: Exploring Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Music Classroom  
Thesis Supervisor: Sarah H. Watts

**Teaching Experience:**

Foot of Ten Elementary School, Duncansville, PA  
Altoona Area Junior High School, Altoona, PA  
St. Paul’s United Methodist Church Children’s Choir, State College, PA  
Ferguson Elementary School, Pine Grove Mills, PA  
Bostley’s Child Care Center and Preschool, Williamsport, PA  
St. Boniface Church Children’s Choir, Williamsport, PA

**Other Work Experience:**

Penn State Center for Performing Arts, University Park, PA  
Techno-Link Corporation, Williamsport, PA  
Freelance musician for weddings

**Performance Experience:**

Junior Voice Recital, Penn State University  
Sophomore Voice Recital, Penn State University  
La Boheme Penn State Opera Theatre, Penn State University  
National Association for Teachers of Singing competition winner, Messiah College, PA

**Additional Experience and Professional Development:**

Pennsylvania Music Educators Association member  
American Choral Directors Association member  
Penn State Concert Choir section leader  
Phi Sigma Kappa Penn State Honor Society