

## **A Labor of Love: A Rationale and Second Grade Music Curriculum for a More Just and Equitable World**

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### ABSTRACT

American music education systematically discriminates against Blacks and other minorities. Scholars have suggested practices for diversifying pre-service programs and higher education faculty; however, little literature focuses on race, power, and privilege in K-12 classrooms. Less literature exists by minorities reporting effects of Eurocentric music teaching on minority students, even though psychology, sociology, and education researchers have published numerous studies on the phenomenon. The purpose of this article is to offer a new teaching model for music educators in a second grade general music classroom. The curriculum aims to use music as a tool to develop critical learners who engage in dismantling systems of hegemony that permeate the field. Moreover, this curriculum seeks to give voice to the silenced and marginalized experiences of People of Color in the field and to implore others to tell their stories. Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is used as a theoretical framework to defend the author's ideals.

*Keywords:* blackness, curriculum, hegemony, lived experiences, love, music education, power, privilege, racism

*Freedom! Freedom! I can't move  
Freedom, cut me loose!  
Singing', freedom! Freedom! Where are you?  
Cause I need freedom too!  
I break chains all by myself, wont let my freedom rot in hell,  
I'ma keep running cause a winner don't quit on themselves.*

(Beyoncé, 2016)

"Hello, my name is Rebecca." wrote a stranger in Cincinnati, Ohio. She sent me a personal message on Facebook regarding my post (Robinson, 2016; see also Zubrzycki, 2016). At this time Michael Butera, then CEO of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) said, "Blacks and Latinos lack the keyboard skills needed for this field" and "music theory is too difficult or them as an area of study" (McCord, 2016; Rosen; 2016). In addition to labeling Latino/as and Blacks as musically inept, Butera also attributed the overrepresentation of Whites in music education to underperforming and underserved public schools. Rebecca continued:

*I saw your post regarding the immensely ignorant comment given by Michael Butera. I couldn't comment on your specific post because we're not Facebook "friends" but I just wanted to applaud you for bringing this to light. My son is 9 years old he is Latino and African American. He's in the 4th grade at Dunbar School for Creative and Performing Arts. He has played the violin since he was 4 years old. In the fall of 2014 when he was 7 years old, he decided that he wanted to play piano, so he taught himself to play. The following summer, less than one year after he began teaching himself, he auditioned in to 4th grade with a double music major, piano and orchestra. He is now playing with middle and high school students at his school. He is the only elementary student in his piano class. His talent has proven to be natural. Yet, according to Mr. Butera, he lacks the skills to be a successful musician. This kind of comment is what keeps our young boys and girls of color from believing in themselves. It hinders them from being their best. This angers me but more importantly it saddens me. Our children are intelligent and they are more than capable! Thanks again for your post!*

Jason Alexander Holmes (2016) from Rochester, New York wrote:

4. *There are those who believe NAfME and its state organizations most easily serve primarily white, suburban populations. From my observations, this belief is supported by policies within these organizations.*
5. *"We serve music education" is very different from "we serve music education when it looks like x" or "we serve to make music education look like x." (where x is often referred to as "quality" or "best instructional practices," but is narrowly defined)*
6. *Having had a black leader does not make one's organization diverse or*

*inclusive. (Kinda like having a black President hasn't made our country one bit less racist)*

*7. "It's the schools' fault," does not answer the question, "What are you doing to work through this challenge?"*

*....*

*9. Is it possible that the lack of diversity in membership (and teacher candidates of color) points to a narrow view of what our students need from their teachers? Are we providing such terrible experiences to our students of color as a whole, that we drive them (us) away from wanting anything to do with school?*

*....*

*11. I'm black and I play the piano quite well. I can also be a theory beast (only when necessary).*

*12. I also have musical skills other than keyboard technique and theory that I learned as a kid musician in church. I use these skills every day in my teaching and in my work outside the classroom (work that informs and guides my teaching).*

In the absence of social media as an identifier of twenty-first century globalization, one might conclude that Butera's comments and the public's outrage occurred in Bull Connor's "Jim Crow" Alabama.

Textbook stories about Black life in the American South describe the Jim Crow era as a time in history where Blacks were relegated (often subrogated) to second-class citizenship. Laws institutionalized White superiority and Black inferiority. Division based upon race was brazenly displayed in restrooms, restaurants, schools, stores, and churches all over the American South. While prosaic stock stories of history whitewashes the complexities of institutionalized racism, counter-narratives have documented how current stereotypes of Black musicians and Black entertainment are vestiges of White appropriation of slave culture during the early nineteenth century (Abrahams, 1992; Radano, 2003).

In 1828, Thomas D. Rice, a White comedian, created the fictional character Jim Crow after watching a Black groom dance at his wedding. Rice covered his face in make-up dark as tar, over exaggerated his nose, eyes, and mouth, and “dance gestures that may have been dictated by the groom’s physical disabilities” (Abrahams, 1992, p. 140). These appropriated performances of slave culture and entertainment became known as minstrel shows. Minstrel shows aimed to imitate slaves’ “speechmaking, singing and dancing styles, and an enactment of their most private scenes of courtship and the breaking up of their families” (Abrahams, 1992, p. 145). Due to the popularity of minstrel shows, White politicians doubled-down on the fictional character of Jim Crow by campaigning and legislating a set of codes and laws deliberately designed to keep the descendants of newly freed slaves in a state of perpetual inferiority. In his book *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music*, Ronaldo Radano (2003) wrote:

Black music...became such a powerful and urgent cultural force because it served to heighten both specificity of racial difference and the interruption of that difference. While black music rose from a cross-racial interplay--from the engagements of black and white that constituted modern racial form--it would always be actualized through performances by African-Americans. The continuing activities of whites in blackface (and increasingly blacks in blackface) that endured well into the twentieth century might have called attention to the artifice of music’s racial categories, but that artificiality would exist in contradiction, both challenging and reinforcing ideological commitments to the authenticity of blackness as such. No matter the sound, the term “Negro music” corresponded directly with the racial identification of the performer; what limited African-Americans to the performance of expressions of questionable artistic values also supplied the naturalism crucial to authenticity. (p. 257)

Radano explains that stereotypes of Blacks as lacking intellectual abilities and the promulgation of Black artists and entertainment as dangerous, exotic, overtly sexual

and violent, likely began as a grossly exaggerated and inaccurate re-creation of a slave's wedding. Thomas and other comedians profited from the racialized shows by employing Blacks as the performers in their own plight.

Baldwin (1963) in an open letter to his nephew wrote:

This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that for the heart of the matter is here and [is at] the crux of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits to your ambition were thus expected to be settled. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence. You were expected to make peace with mediocrity. Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do and how you could do it, where you could live and whom you could marry.

I know your countrymen do not agree with me here and I hear them saying, "You exaggerate." They do not know Harlem and I do. So do you. Take no one's word for anything, including mine, but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority, but to their inhumanity and fear. Please try to be clear, dear James, through the storm which rages about your youthful head today, about the reality which lies behind the words "acceptance" and "integration." There is no reason for you to try to become like white men and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you. (p. 21)

Like Baldwin, in times of bigotry and misery, I find refuge in re-discovering the beauty of Blackness that my ancestors danced and marched, sang and moaned, wrote, and concealed within the pages of history. I continually return to the question, how I can use music education as a conduit to ensure that regimes of racism and bigotry are not whitewashed as national anachronisms; yet, encourage

young minds to empathize and sympathize and thus work to build a more just and equitable world?

In this article, I aim to offer a curriculum that counters the masked narrative of Black and Latina/o invisibility in American music education by (a) re-telling stories of racial marginalization, (b) situating the stories in Black studies literature and research, and (c) merging the lived experiences of Black and Latino/a marginalization with quantitative and qualitative research supporting evidence of racial biases in our field. Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* teaches that if educators want to create a better world, then teaching and learning must "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take actions against the oppressive elements of reality." (p. 17) Aligning my beliefs with Freire, I believe that music educators wanting to change the status quo must employ music education as a conduit for dismantling hegemonic structures that permeate our field and engage others in taking up the mantle for equity in our society.

Baldwin while reminiscing on his brother's jazz concert demanded that Black people tell our story because, "there isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness." He continued, "And this tale, according to that face, that body, those strong hands on those strings, has another aspect in every country, and a new depth in every generation." (1957, p. 20) The time is now and the case for justice and equity in American music education is too urgent to wait!

### **Know Whence You Came**

The American music education profession protects White-male hegemony (Elpus, 2014, 2015; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Rickels, et al., 2013;). Pembroke and Craig (2002) estimated that out of 119,000 music teachers in the United States, 60% are males and 40% are females. Racially, music teachers in the U.S. were 94% White, 3% Black, 1% Hispanic, and 2% Other. Elpus (2015) further exposed the race and gender inequality within music education through a comprehensive analysis of the demographic profiles of pre-service music teacher Praxis II scores in the United States. Elpus analyzed 20,521 Praxis II test scores from 2007 through 2012. Test scores were first separated into two data sets: pass and fail. Then Elpus compared the results to the entire population of teachers in the United States as well as U.S. population as a whole. Elpus found that female candidates and Black candidates are more likely to fail the test when compared to their male and White counterparts. (2015, p. 16)

Elpus (2015) also found race divisions in K-12 music classrooms. When controlling for high school seniors with four or more years of course work in music who then enroll in pre-service music education programs, Elpus found a 16.07% increase for Whites, 5.48% decrease for Blacks, 6.59% decrease for Hispanics, and a 5.43% decrease among Asians. Elpus postulated that there may be a “leaky pipeline” to music teacher licensure that excludes potential music teachers by race and gender. (p. 4) The researcher remarked that though there have been studies

examining the underrepresentation of minorities in Praxis exams, “no empirical work on this issue in music education has been conducted to date.” (p. 5)

Suggesting that beliefs and lived experiences influence teaching and learning, data from quantitative studies have been used to conduct qualitative research seeking to uncover the effects of institutional biases on minorities in music education (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014; McKoy, 2013; Kendall-Smith et al., 2011; Talbot, submitted). Other scholars have examined institutional racism by reviewing admission requirements and school music curricula. The research revealed that university and school of music admission policies and coursework privileged affluent White students and simultaneously exclude other cultures’ musics and traditions. (Bradley, 2006; Bradley et al., 2007; Hess, 2013, 2014, 2015; Koza, 2008)

Researchers who study cognitive biases, individual schemas, and stereotype threat have demonstrated that conscious and unconscious biases are present even when there is no intent to marginalize or make others feel inferior. (Brannon et al., 2015; Logel et al., 2008; Markus, 1977; Steele, 2010) Black Diaspora and African-American scholars have asserted that racism and bigotry are not confined to specific times or places, nor are they reserved for individual expressions of hate.

(Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009; Coates, 2013; Lewis, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1999)

Michelle Alexander (2012), the author of *The New Jim Crow*, contended that racism must be viewed as a natural, invisible (and sometimes genuinely benign) institution embedded in the structure of a social system. (p.108) Music is a social activity and music education is a system of teaching and learning music. (Koza, 2006; Myers,



2007; Regelski, 2006; Small, 1995) Therefore, music education is a social system that is not immune to institutional racism.

### **Mis-Education, Empowerment, and Love: Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Education was elevated as an important value in my childhood. My grandmother recited, “Education is the key to a better life!” My family insisted that behaving cooperatively in school, listening to my teachers, and doing my work would put me ahead of my peers and open endless doors of possibilities. Yet, when I became a teacher I learned of a different narrative, a counter-narrative exposing institutionalized educational injustices that infiltrate schools systems across the country. (Piller, 2016; Reardon & Owens, 2014) I soon learned that the ingredients for a Black boy's success, as described by my grandparents, was only 3/5 of the recipe. My elders forgot (or chose not to mention) that no matter how hard I work, there is always someone—usually a White person—who will be given more, praised more, and advanced more than me. Teaching awakened me to organized systemic racism that told Black and Brown boys that their educational attainment would come last to Whites and Asians.

The Boston Public Schools commissioned a research study aimed at examining the opportunity and equity of Black and Latino students in the district. The study concluded, “across all indicators, Black and Latino males, who make up almost four-fifths of all males, do not have the same access to educational opportunities as their White and Asian counterparts.” (Miranda et al., 2014, p.10)

The conclusion reached by the investigators was angering as well as confounding. I wondered how was it possible that a public school district could succeed in educating the White and Asian minority and failed to provide access to quality education to the majority Black and Brown students, who look like me. The findings reached by Miranda and her colleagues echo a perspective that music education and general education have consciously and unconsciously miseducated People of Color by denying Blacks and Latino/as their right to *fully and freely* pursue a life of liberty and happiness that is equal to their White counterparts. In essence, there is a severed line in the theory of education as upward mobility for all and the practice of education as a discriminatory protector and perpetrator of privilege.

Paulo Freire (1970) wrote:

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a *praxis*. (p. 52)

Jorgensen (2005) characterized Freire's disposition of praxis in music education as intentionally creating music curriculums that frame music in societal, cultural, and global contexts. (Barrett, 2002; Jorgensen, 2005) Broadening a child's perspective to consider the world situates the curriculum in the realm of global education. (Apple, 1988; Ho & Law, 2009; Jones, 2007; Mansfield, 2004; Papstephanou, 2005) The framing of music in social contexts closely aligns with the work of many scholars who call for a more global alternative to the dominance of White European classical

music that overwhelmingly marginalizes and silences the music of other cultures. (Alperson, 1991; Elliott, 2005; Regelski, 2006; Small, 2011)

Robinson and Hendricks (submitted) described my experience as a Black man from the South who encountered and wrestled with my blackness while studying and teaching Western European classical music. The narrative resonated with research revealing that music and non-music students face barriers upon admissions into music education classes and/or programs, and often leave before completion. (Butler, Lind, & McKoy, 2007; Fitzpatrick et al., 2014; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Teachout & McKoy, 2010;)

My personal experience in music is different from the lived experiences my students bring to the classroom. It would be unethical if I ignore the possibility that my curricular choices can re-create feelings of isolation and marginalization that are familiar to me. It would be counterproductive to creating a more just and equitable world if I, a Black-male, use my authority as a music teacher to reverse power dynamics and force my perspective onto students. It would be wrong and unethical for me to proclaim that whiteness is synonymous to oppression just as it is wrong for blackness to be synonymous with music ineptitude. I cannot force anyone to pull back one's veil of privilege. Nor is it my objective to make anyone feel embarrassed or guilty simply because they were born into privilege. It is my aim to spread love and to seek understanding, not only understanding of my students and their lived experiences, but also for students to seek understanding of self and others.

On April 4, 1968, the night of the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., then Democratic presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy said:

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but *love* and wisdom toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black. (in Schlesinger, 2012, p. 875)

Freire (1970) declared that the task of the oppressed must be to liberate self and the oppressors through *love*. (p. 29) The loss of innocent young lives whether at 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama; Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado; Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut; or Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida. We have time and again been reminded just how precious each and every life is—and how quickly violence and hatred can snatch it away. In another letter Baldwin declared, “If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.” (Black Scholar, 1973/74, p. 42.) I believe my curriculum will create conscious citizens who engage in eradicating systems of oppression, only if the design and implementation is delivered as a labor of love.

### **The Curriculum: Scope and Sequence of Critical Social Justice in a Second Grade Music**

The curriculum map (Appendix A) is organized into nine sections:

- **Themes:** the overarching big ideas to be explored. Each theme serves as a lens or a framework to conceptualize each lesson of a unit. All activities must be directly linked to the theme.
- **Months:** Academic school year from September-June.

- **Guiding questions:** thoughts and inquiries to be analyzed, critiqued, and/or discussed. Guiding questions can be both explicit and implicit inquiries. Teacher can directly ask questions to students or suggest questions to serve as thoughts for the teacher and student to ponder and wrestle over throughout the development of a lesson and/or unit.
- **Voice from the margins literature:** children's books about marginalized musicians
- **Repertoire:** vocal and instrumental works to be studied and/or performed
- **Singing and playing:** music and non-music activities including but not limited to playing instruments, singing songs, playing singing games, dancing, teambuilding activities
- **Critical social justice related activities:** specific and intentional activities to engage students in critiquing hegemonic privileges in music education and in American society
- **Music communication:** tools explored that help students listen, write, read, and perform music
- **Composition projects:** projects designed for students to create music by using a variety of tools to read, write, and perform music works written by self and others

Attempting to analyze the curriculum in two discrete categories a) music and b) cultural/political is counterproductive to how music and society are intertwined. Therefore, lessons include both music and cultural/political activities (Appendix B).

Guiding questions, singing and playing, music communication, and composition projects are likely to remain the same; yet, repertoire, voices from the margins literature, and critical social justice activities are more transient. The latter are transient because issues of social justice are not confined to a specific time, place, and/or context and thus are subject to change as social, political, and student demographics shift.

### **Curricular Content in the Curriculum Map**

The main repertoire studied during unit one is “So Good, The Boston Song.” As teacher, I am responsible for teaching the song focusing on style, vocal technique, phrasing, vowel modifications, and other performance practice aspects. As students became familiar with the song, I pose questions about how students identify and know Boston:

- Who lives in the city?
- Who has political power in the city?
- Who seems to be in the upper, middle, and lower socio-economic levels of status?
- What historical events have helped shape Boston’s heritage and legacy?

Next, students interrogate their biases by analyzing four different maps of the city and charting their responses (Appendix D). Students read *Larry Gets Lost in Boston*, a story about a dog who is lost in the city. Next, students engage in research projects where they examine Boston’s numerous communities, neighborhoods, cultures, and

traditions. During the project phase my role as teacher shifts to facilitator, giving students the power to research, converse, and problem-solve in peer groups. Learning(s) from the projects are then connected back to the repertoire. In October or November, students take a field trip and tour Boston ending with an informal street performance of “So Good, The Boston Song.” Once back on campus students reflect upon the entire learning experience. Students love this unit! All 40 second graders ranked learning the Boston Song as either first or second to composition projects in an end of the year reflection. Unit one lays the foundation for the curriculum by establishing a fluidity of teacher and student interactions, critical conversations that lead and sequence instructional flow, performance opportunities, and reflection.

**The case for second grade.** Why second grade? How does one appropriately introduce and continually scaffold complex themes such as white privilege, racism, and marginalization on seven and eight year olds? Howard Gardner argued that human development from age two to seven “harbors more of the secrets and power of human growth than any other comparable phase of growth.” (2011, p. 88) By age seven the “symbolic competence [is] mastered. Habits of body and mind are set. Artistry and creativity in general are unleashed-or blocked.” (p. 88) He continued:

At this time, however, the child is attempting to make overall sense of the world; she is seeking to integrate the waves, streams, and channels of her own complex of intelligences into a comprehensive version of human life that encompasses the behavior of objects, interactions with other human beings, and an incipient view of herself. She is strongly constrained to carry out this integration, for survival could not take place in the absence of some coherent version of the world. (p. 88)

Gardner concluded that by second grade, seven year olds are in a developmental sweet spot where they try to understand and categorize the complexities of the world and simultaneously unleash their *artistry and creativity*. The conclusion reached by Gardner and his research team at *Project Zero* revealed that second grade can be a safe, nurturing, and creative opportunity to use music as a conduit for interrogating institutional and societal biases. Next, I will examine the curriculum map on a macro-level (units of study) and a micro-level (weekly lessons).

**The case for children's books.** I teach general music at an independent day school in Massachusetts. Massachusetts is home to Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, two of America's most prestigious institutions of higher learning. Of the students at this private school 69% are White. Tuition packages for prekindergarten begin at \$31,820 and grow to \$43,970 for grades 9-12. In essence, I teach some of the most affluent and privileged students of American society.

The curriculum creates an intentional and safe space for the students to conceptualize, address, and dismantle issues of race, power, and privilege in music education by positioning children's literature as a siren to amplify the voices of musicians that are absent from traditional music education texts. Each story chosen must fulfill two requirements: (1) does it connect to the lesson and learning targets to be assessed, and (2) will the story allow for students to appropriately engage in conversations that link its content to current contexts?



Critics may argue that I am neglecting the needs of my majority White classroom by only presenting stories about demographics who are on the margins. However, students of color, “deserve a curriculum that mirrors their own experience back to them.” (Style, 1988, n.p.) Style’s position defends the argument that students of color have the right and should feel represented, recognized, legitimized, validated, and celebrated in curricula. Style continued, “But curriculum must also insist upon the fresh air of windows into the experience of others.” (Style, 1988, n.p.) Here, she recognizes the majority by encouraging teachers to cultivate empathy.

Kathleen Horning (2016) and her colleagues at the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that out of the 3,200 children’s book published in 2015 in the United States, 326 were written by minority authors and only 456 were about minorities. Their analysis corroborates Walter Dean Myers (2014) *New York Times* editorial. Dean, while in school and wrestling with it means to be a black teenager in a white-dominated world wrote, “What I wanted, needed really, was to become an integral and valued part of the mosaic that I saw around me.” (p. 2) Reading stories about marginalized musicians provides opportunities for students to “empathize with other people or imagine what it's like to be in their position.” (Lund & Evans (2006) p. 65) Connecting counter-narratives and the arts in antiracist teaching (Bell, 2010) cultivates critical social justice learners who will have opportunities to encounter experiences and

perspectives that are different than theirs. A reference list of books in my classroom is located in Appendix C.

**Assessing student learning.** Abrahams (2006) contended that assessment and evaluation in any critical education program should be ongoing. My students are assessed informally and formally. Informal assessments or “Tickets to Leave” are daily and occur at the end of class (Appendix B). Before lining-up, each student individually demonstrates a particular skill-set being explored (e.g., improvising on a non-sense syllable). The process is the same for the formal assessment, except I record a number of 1-4 in my grade-book: 1-needs support, 2-approaching standard, 3-meets standard, and 4-exceeds standard.

**Improvisation as a means of music play.** Scholars have advocated for improvisation to be at the center of music teaching and learning for its inherent musical and non-musical aesthetics. (Higgins & Mantie, 2013) Kanellopoulos (2007) postulated that improvisation could be a way of “transforming the music classroom into a democratic realm in the pursuit of freedom.” (p. 114) The author’s analysis concluded that improvisation (1) is a model of being and playing together that allows children to *be* in the moment and (2) enable students to create and recreate meaningful relationships to *their* music. (pp. 114-115)

Improvisation activities occur daily in the form of door greetings, question and answer vocalises, vocal and/or instrumental call and responses. ‘Improvisation on Scat’ and ‘Improvisation on Rap’ are two activities in the ‘Singing and Playing’ section of the curriculum map where students are formally assessed. Students first

improvise on non-sense syllables (scatting) after learning about jazz and connecting jazz to lesser-known jazz musicians (e.g., Melba Doretta Liston, Troy Andrews).

Students also contextualize jazz in the political and societal structures of 1940-60's

American society. Improvising on wordless melodies sequences to students

improvising spoken word/raps in the spring. The process is essentially the same:

students trace and connect the roots of rap back to jazz and blues. Then students

connect their learning to a story (e.g., Hip Hop Dog) and contextualize rap as an

example of a community of marginalized artists expressing lived experiences.

Students demonstrate their learning(s) by writing poems about something of

importance to their lives and then improvise those poems over a simple YouTube

beat track in front of the class.

**Music communication vs. music literacy.** “Literacy is functional when it serves the productive purposes (i.e., maintaining the status quo) of the dominant interests

in society.” (Gutstien, 2006, p. 5) Maintaining the status quo in traditional music

education means producing students that can read and write music within the

narrow constraints of Western European classical traditions. Aiming for music

literacy has the potential to divide students into two groups: those who are literate

in Western European music theory and those who are illiterate in Western

European music theory and notation. My curriculum seeks to dismantle the status

quo by NOT elevating Western European music theory as the standard barrier for

deeming students competent musicians. Instead, I aim to give students tools to

communicate music to others in a way that is meaningful to them. Marie O said it

best, “Music notation comes in many styles, but all notation is doing is communicating the music from composer to performer.” (in Benedict, 2012, p. 154).

I find that John Feierabend’s (2001) *Conversational Solfege* best bolsters my objective of providing students with tools to communicate music thoughts and ideas. Feierabend’s method structures the acquisition of music sounds to that of learning a language. “One should learn with his/her ears before learning with his/her eyes.” (Feierabend, 2001, p. 9) When lesson planning, I choose four to five music activities per lesson following the sequencing of processes and steps outlined in Feierabend’s Level 1 teacher’s manual. There are 2 formal assessments of students’ ability to communicate music: Teacher-directed partner compositions (in which I will shorten to TDPC) and student-directed bands.

In the fall I organize students into partners for the TDPC. Partners are grouped based on individual growth on informal assessments and my observations of how students socially interact during the class. The goal is to pair students based on their Zones of Proximal Development. (Vygotsky, 1967) Each pair composes a 30-second piece to be performed on the soprano glockenspiel. Students monitor how well they are working with others by periodically completing self- and partner evaluations. I use student and partner evaluations to monitor social developments and conference with partners that are experiencing challenges. Intentionally scaffolding TDPC with heavy teacher intervention sequences to student organized and directed bands in the spring. Each band outlines norms and work together to

compose a #1 hit for an album release party. Students choose from a variety of Orff instruments including one's voice. Each band performs their hit piece at the end of the unit. Performances are recorded and posted to the school's internal internet platform.

**Opportunities for self-reflection and assessment.** Music educators must equip students with the ability to “express their own thoughts and feelings and interact musically with others using their own musical voices.” (Jones, 2007, p. 6) I provide opportunities for student expression through verbal/aural (responding by speaking and writing), kinesthetically (responding through movement), visually (responding through drawing/coloring), and musically (responding by singing and playing instruments).

Students visually self-reflect by imagining a better world and drawing a picture while listening to a recording of Louis Armstrong’s “What A Wonderful World.” An artifact of two students’ beautiful reflections can be found in Appendix E. Teacher reflection is also essential. Teacher reflection enables one to continually revise the curriculum to accommodate differences and make new choices to better serve the individual and collective unique needs of students. My reflections are in the form of journaling and/or immediately writing down notes in order to implement changes for the next class. Writing critical social justice units and engaging students in the struggle for liberation “cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection.” (Freire, 1970, p. 52)

**The case for public school music classrooms.** I am a former urban public school general music teacher; thus, I am aware of my current privilege as a music teacher in an affluent urban private school. (Robinson, 2014) As a public school teacher, I taught general music across seven different grades (PreK-5) and four different strands (general education, advanced work, students with learning/emotional disabilities and impairments, and English language learners). One school year, I taught over 500 elementary students a week in five unequally divided classes a day. I know the demands, lack of resources, feelings of isolation, pressed for time, and pure love, joy, and happiness that public school music teaching brings. I also cannot ignore the fact that my current position affords me more means and resources. However, the seeds of my curriculum were planted and nourished by the rain and sun of my public school teaching terrain. I hung posters of minority musicians and displayed books of varying difficulty, even though I knew I would not have time to read them. I monitored local and national events and used music as a tool to engage students in critical and compassionate conversations, even if the objective did not involve critiquing racial biases (Appendix F). I continually searched for opportunities to build bridges connecting educators and community/political leaders by inviting leaders into the classroom. (Miller, 2014; Jones, 2006, 2007) Teachers who find themselves pressed for time can choose one children's book (Appendix C) per term and craft a lesson around the context and content of the story.

Freire contended that critical teaching and learning enables teachers and students to both be subjects, “not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge... knowledge of reality through common reflection and action.” (1970, p.51) This rationale is an amalgam of my lived experiences as a Black male in the context of American music education. It is the hope that this rationale and resources herein, will serve as launch pad for individual investigation as well as a model for precedence. Be your own example in the struggle for justice. Share your story with loving kindness and teach your students how to do the same.

### **Conclusion: Be Your Own Example in the Struggle**

Tanner and Tanner (1994) stated, “[the] school that holds itself oblivious to problems and issues in contemporary life is denying its students learning experiences that are essential to the building of a better society.” (p. 151) The whitening of American music education against the browning of American society is an issue that music education must address. I argue that any music curriculum—studio, classroom, lecture hall, and the board room—that holds itself oblivious to the race disparities in American (music) society is denying students learning experiences that are essential to building a diverse field and a better world. In my current teaching context where the majority of students are White, I believe I have a crucial obligation to engender a spirit of critical social justice. I want future

generations of Americans to be equipped with the knowledge of how power and privilege can build walls as well as break barriers.

Intentionally restructuring one's curriculum may seem like a daunting task; however, changes in music education are necessary. There must be an adoption of methods in the present to shape the future. (Palmer, 2010, p. 320) Minority and/or critical social just-minded teachers can engage in the struggle for equity in many ways. Mid-career and veteran teachers should contact local schools offering music education programs and ask to mentor pre-service and novice music students in exchange for university and school of music course vouchers. Offering course vouchers within and outside of the school of music, acknowledges that music education cannot operate in a vacuum and must be interdisciplinary. In-service teachers should volunteer to present work at school, district, state, and national professional development forums. It is not unlikely that many in-service teachers are unaware of professional networking opportunities due to the demands of the school year. In this case, music education professors can lead the way by seeking out minority music teachers in their communities. Outreach can establish a classroom-to-lecture-hall pipeline. Such ongoing and frequent exchanges between practicing teachers and university professors may reveal the varied and unique teaching models that will abate the gap between theory and practice. Teacher preparation programs should hold networking events connecting their students to practicing teachers. Networking events should be held at the beginning of the year and students could find a teacher and begin to develop an apprenticeship starting



freshmen year. These suggestions and all others cannot be viewed as a loophole to escape thorough curriculum restructuring. Any and all innovations must be done in tandem with critical analysis and redesigning of traditional hegemonic music education curricula on all levels.

The heart and beauty of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* lies in the ability of the oppressed to “be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.” (Freire, 1970, p. 39) Therefore, my message to all music professionals—public and private, general education and higher education, principals office to executive suites—must be: first, reflect on who you are; second, know your past; and third, envision a better future. However, thinking must be matched with action. Action demands intentional and deliberate deeds that examine and seek to dismantle institutional racism. Empowering students to interrogate inequalities in American society and in music education is tedious; but, very, very joyous work. If the field of music education is to abate the racial abyss, then, music teachers must be willing to rethink hegemonic curriculums and design a new model of teaching that seeks to empower students to build a better world not only for themselves, but for all whom come after:

**I'm telling these tears, "Go and fall away,  
fall away"  
May the last one burn into flames.  
Freedom! Freedom! I can't move  
Freedom, cut me loose!  
Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?  
Cause I need freedom too!  
I break chains all by myself  
Won't let my freedom rot in hell  
Hey! I'ma keep running  
Cause a winner don't quit on themselves!**

(Beyoncé, 2016, excerpt from verse 2)

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Themes	Ethnography (Self)	Ethnography (Others)	Ethnography (Community)	Performance Practice and Reflection	Conscious and Unconscious Biases in Music Education	Music as a Social Ritual	Praxis: The Making of a Better World	Performance Practice and Reflection Revisited
<b>Months</b>	September	October	November	December	January	February/March	April	May/June
<b>Guiding Questions</b>	Who am I? - Where am I? - How do I know? - What can I do?	- Who am I? - Where am I? - How do I know? - What can I do? - Who are others around me? - What music is important to them and why?	- How and to what extent is music the same and different in our community? - How and to what extent is music the same and different in the world?	- How do performer and audience expectations change depending on context? - What are the performance expectations in our community?	- What are my biases about music different than my own? - Why do people make music? - Why are some musicians forgotten and others remembered?	- How and to what extent is music used in social settings? - In what ways does music illuminate culture?	- How has music been used to create a more just and equal world? - What can we do?	- How and to what extent have we grown as performers?
<b>Voices from the Margins Literature</b>	- <i>Larry Gets Lost in Boston</i>	<i>Little Melba and Her Big Trombone</i>	- <i>Dancing the Ring Shout</i> - <i>Off to the Sweet Shores of Africa</i> - <i>Music, Music for Everyone</i>	- <i>Elijah's Angel</i>	- <i>Before There was Mozart</i> - <i>The Story of Maria Mozart</i> - <i>Hildegard Sings</i>	- <i>When the Beat was Born</i> - <i>Hip Hop Dog</i>	- <i>Louis Taught Me Scat</i>	
<b>Repertoire</b>	"So Good – The Boston Song"	- "Autumn Leaves" - Concert Songs	Concert Songs	Concert Songs 	- Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-George <i>L'amant anonyme (1780) Ballet no. 1</i> - African-American spirituals - Music of the Civil Rights Movement	- "Parents Just Don't Understand" by Will Smith and Jazzy Jeff - Concert Songs	- "What a wonderful world" by Louis Armstrong - "We are the world" by Michael Jackson - Concert Songs	Concert Songs
<b>Singing/Playing</b>	- Rules and routines - Ice-breakers and team builders	Improvising scat (Vocal)	Improvising on soprano glockenspiel (instrumental)	Concert rehearsals	Improvisation on soprano glockenspiel (instrumental)	Improvise rap (vocal)	Student band practices	Concert rehearsal and performance
<b>Critical Social Justice Activities</b>	- Most amazing instrument - Boston mapping	Peer evaluations and teacher conferences on group projects	School-wide community service project	- Reflections - Assessments	- <i>My Friend Martin</i> - <i>Whose Music Is it Anyway?</i>	- Rapping original student narratives	- "What a Wonderful World" drawing	- Letters to first grade students - Reflections - Assessments
<b>Music Communication</b>	Rote, decoding familiar melodies and rhythms	Decoding unfamiliar melodic and rhythms, reading and writing music	- Reading, writing and creating music - Thanksgiving Composition	Concert Prep	- Rote, decoding familiar melodies and rhythms	Decoding unfamiliar melodies and rhythms, reading and writing music	Reading, writing, and creating music	Reading, writing, and creating music
<b>Composition Projects</b>	Teacher-directed Partner Composition - common time - quarter, eighth, rests - 60 seconds in length - played on the soprano glockenspiel - performance before holiday break				Student-directed Bands - student choice of using traditional notation or create their own system - student choose instruments - performed in mid-late May			

## Appendix B

### Sample Lesson Plan

2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Class Objective: Repeat rhythmic and tonal exercise by rote with 80% accuracy.	Time
<p><b>I. Warm Up/Do Now</b></p> <p>a) Body Warm-Up</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stretches</li> <li>2. Shake Down</li> <li>3. Breathing (hissing, counting, student feedback)</li> </ol> <p>b) Vocal Warm-Up</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sirens</li> <li>2. Lip trills</li> <li>3. Solfege: DO-RE-MI (Pattern Set 4A)</li> <li>4. 5 vowels: AH-EH- EE-OH-OOO</li> </ol> <p>c) Rules Chant- Reinforce</p>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<p><b>II. Rote-Readiness: Rhythm</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Echo Me</b></p> <p>Speak rhythmic patterns on a neutral syllable (BA) and have students repeat the pattern with the same neutral syllable.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Echo the Instrument</b></p> <p>Play rhythmic patterns on an instrument and the students SPEAK the pattern with a neutral syllable.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Learning the Song</b></p> <p>Sing Yankee Doodle (whole-part-whole) and have students repeat the song.</p> <p>Sing Closet Key (whole-part-whole) and have students repeat the song.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Knowing When Not to Speak</b></p> <p>Ask the class to stand. Tell the students that you are going to say the special pattern and have the students repeat the pattern.</p> <p>Tell the students that the special is never to be spoken. In other words, students are to say all pattern except the special one.</p> <p>Students who repeat the special pattern are to sit down. The only student left standing is the winner.</p>	<b>10 minutes</b>

	<p><b>III. Movement Activity: Watch Me Whip/Nae Nae</b> Focus on the beginning of the song by breaking down the movements.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Watch me whip</li><li>2. Watch me nae/nae</li><li>3. Watch me</li><li>4. Stinky Leg</li></ol> <p>Have students do the entire dance, checking for accuracy on the four steps.</p> <p><b>IV. Music in Society and Culture</b> Tell the students they are going to watch a short interview and the making of Silento's music video. The students should have these questions in mind while watching the video:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. When did Silento make the song?</li><li>2. What was Silento's process to creating the song?</li><li>3. Why did Silento decide to make a music video?</li><li>4. What can we learn from Silento?</li></ol> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxX00aE5Qms">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxX00aE5Qms</a></p> <p>Have students engage in a Turn and Talk to answer the questions. Share out answers.</p> <p><b>V. Ticket to Leave- Closing Assessment</b> Have students line up by improvising a short pattern using a neutral syllable.</p>	<p><b>5 minutes</b></p> <p><b>15 minutes</b></p> <p><b>2 minutes</b></p>
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## Appendix C

### Children's Books for Marginalized Voices in Music Education

#### African-American Voices

- Andrews, T. (2015). *Trombone shorty*. New York, NY: Abrams Books.
- Barrett, M. (1994). *Sing to the stars*. Little Brown & Company. Canada.
- Dillon, L., & Dillon D. (2002). *Rap a tap tap: Here's Bojangles-think of that*. New York, NY: Blue Sky Press.
- Giovanni, N. (2008). *Hip-hop speaks to children: A celebration of poetry with a beat*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.
- Hill, L. (2013). *When the beat was born: DJ Kool Herc and the creation of hip hop*. New York, NY: Roaring Book Press.
- Pahahi, H.L. (2005). *Bebop express*. New York, NY: Laura Greinger Books.
- Ransome, L., & Ransome, J. (2011). *Before there was Mozart: The story of Josphe Boulonge, Chevalier de Saint George*. New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade Books.
- Raschka, C. (1992). *Charlie Parker played bebop*. New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Raschka, C. (2010). *Hip-hop dog*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Childrens Books.
- Siegelson, K. (2003). *Dancing the ring shout*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.
- Smith, C. (2002). *Perfect harmony: A musical journey with the Boys Choir of Harlem*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.
- Walter, P. (1980). *Ty's one-man band*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.
- Weinstein, M. (2008). *When Louis Armstrong taught me scat*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
- Wood, M. (1998). *I see the rhythm*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.

#### Latino/a Voices

- Ballard, R. (1995). *Carnival*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Burgie, I. (1992). *Caribbean carnival: Songs of the West Indies*. New York, NY: Tambourine Books.

#### Multicultural Voices

- Balough, K. (1999). *Listen to the storyteller: A trio of musical tales from around the world*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

#### Special Needs Voices

- Rosenstock, B. (2014). *The noisy paint box: The colors and sounds of Kandinsky's abstract art*. New York, NY: Random House.

#### Women Voices

- Rusch, E. (2011). *For the love of music: The remarkable story of Maria Mozart*. New York, NY: Tricycle Press.

Russell-Brown, K. (2014). *Little Melba and her big trombone*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, Inc.



## Appendix D Example of Student Work

### “So Good, The Boston Song” Group Mapping Activity

**Map #1**

1. Boston has the most money
2. Belmont is a inch away from Cambridge on the map
3. some places dont have a lot of money
4. Oak Square has a even money
5. Islands
7. labels

8. Cambridge has a lot of money

9. Rocks berry has very little amount of money

Some places dont have money

**Map #2**

1. There s (T) lines
2. ~~There s a green~~
3. labels
4. they all are (T) lines!
5. Their street names
6. Green + red lines go in different directions
7. Airports (in ledge)

Boston has many islands

**Map #3**

1. I notice that there are the most white people in Boston
2. There is blue on the map
3. There is a key that tells you were the most races live there
4. There is orange on the map. they are a fair amount of black people!
5. they are a fair amount of black people!

7. there are islands there

10. It has no labels

q. Harbor operation  
6. It is white

**Map #4**

1. Boston Commons
2. no real color
3. Public garden
4. It is Boston in 1874
5. Streets
6. you can see the city really good
7. label
8. Rivers dark blue and tan colors
9. Charles River
10. The river was built from 1800
11. Bridges
12. there is labels

## Appendix E

### Examples of Student Work

#### “Wonderful World” Reflections

“What A Wonderful World”

Directions: After learning about Louis Armstrong, imagine what a wonderful world would look like and draw a picture of your world.



“What A Wonderful World”

Directions: After learning about Louis Armstrong, imagine what a wonderful world would look like and draw a picture of your world.







<p><b>MA ELA Framework Standards</b> Anchor: Speaking and Listening</p> <p>Standard: Comprehension and Collaboration</p> <p>1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>Integrate and evaluate information presented in a diverse media formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</p>	<p><b>III. A Silent Conversation with Music: Beethoven Funeral March</b></p> <p>Explain to the students that on that day in Symphony Hall, the conductor decided that he was going to have the orchestra play Beethoven's Funeral March, I was reminded of..."</p> <p>Tell students that each student will get two sticky notes. On the PINK sticky note, the students should identify what the music reminded them of. Once students have identified the memory, they are to place the sticky on the board. The YELLOW sticky note is for students to respond to someone else's memory.</p> <p>Reinforce that this is a silent conversation and that students should let what others write and the music guide their thoughts.</p> <p>Questions to be asked:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What did you hear in the music that informed your reflections?</li> <li>- Did you find it hard to thoughtfully respond to another student's point of view? If so, what exactly did you find hard about it?</li> <li>- Do you think the music was successful in making the audience feel better about the death of President Kennedy?</li> </ul>	<p>10 minutes</p>
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Example of student work from this project.