MICHELLE HERRING

14. YOU HAVE TO GO TO THEM

Like any new teacher fresh out of college, I was eager to teach children all of the wonderful things that I had learned in my undergraduate years. I felt well prepared to teach, having had training from some of the best professors in the country. I wanted all students to have the opportunity to learn everything that I had learned about music.

My undergraduate music studies focused on Western European classical music, delving into music of the masters such Claudio Monteverdi, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig Van Beethoven, and Igor Stravinsky. Analysis of each era of music and the social and political ramifications opened my vistas to classical music in ways that were new and exciting. In music theory classes, we analyzed form and structure, which provided further insights into my own expressive interpretation. Private voice lessons consisted of singing classical vocal repertoire. In vocal ensembles, we sang music by composers considered to be in the Western canon.

Before college, I had very little exposure to the inner workings of classical music. I did not prefer art music because I did not understand it, but through my training, I began to appreciate it and even enjoyed performing as a soloist and in ensemble settings. I was eager to open new pathways for my own future students.

Little did I know the challenges that I would experience when applying the pedagogical techniques that I had learned to the middle school choir. Teaching was more complicated than just disseminating content and expecting musical excellence. I had to motivate by building strong relationships and by creating curriculum that was relevant to students' lives.

In this chapter, I will describe the journey of my middle school girls' choir as we struggled with connection and understanding during my first year teaching. Through trial and error, I found the instructional strategies and pedagogical techniques of culturally relevant pedagogy most helpful in understanding student backgrounds and connecting their cultures to the curriculum. Culturally relevant pedagogy will then be defined as a pedagogical method for connecting with students from all backgrounds. Practical applications of the tenants of culturally relevant pedagogy will then be discussed within the context of the middle school choir. Finally, I will present pragmatic uses of culturally relevant pedagogy in training future music educators at the college level.

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Feather Boas, Black Hoodies, and John Deere Hats, 105–123.

I'M NOT LIKE YOU. YOU'RE NOT LIKE ME

I am presently the assistant professor of choral/general music education at a small university in the Southeastern United States. I teach undergraduates how to become choral music educators in public schools. Along with basic pedagogical elements such as classroom management, instructional strategies, and curriculum development, I also teach methods for connecting with students and strategies for addressing sociopolitical issues in the music classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an underlying theme in every course that I teach, and I instruct future music educators on ways to implement it in their own classrooms.

My interest in culturally relevant pedagogy stems from my experience as a choir director in an urban middle school in Texas. My students were demographically, economically, and culturally diverse. In utilizing the elements of culturally relevant pedagogy, my students and I forged stronger understandings of our backgrounds and, thus, stronger teacher and student relationships.

When I began teaching, I wanted my students to have the same *Aha!* moment that I had experienced in college with regard to understanding classical music. My first teaching job was unique in that I had been a student, and this was where my own musical journey began—in sixth grade choir. In addition, my mother, brother, and uncle had also attended this school. Some of my former middle school teachers were now my colleagues, and the assistant principal was now my boss. Teaching at this school was like "coming back home."

But can you ever really go back home? I found that the student population had changed. Many of my students came from backgrounds unlike my own. I grew up as a middle-class Jewish White girl. As a teacher, the demographic of my school was now over half Latino, with fewer White and even fewer African American students. In addition, there was a small population of international students who were not native English speakers. From a socioeconomic perspective, some students were incredibly rich, living in the most expensive homes in town, while others were homeless, moving from hotel to hotel in the worst parts of the city.

At the district level, the No Child Left Behind Act allowed students in low-performing schools, those who consistently earned failing scores on the annual standardized exam, the choice to leave their campuses and attend a high-performing school. The district provided free transportation to students for the school of their choice, and the host schools were required to accept them. Some principals used school choice to rid their campuses of discipline problems, causing a negative impact on the host schools. Also, the majority of low-performing schools in our district were in predominantly minority, low-socioeconomic neighborhoods whereas our school was in a predominantly White, middle-class suburb. The transition was difficult for new students and current students because both were adjusting to children with whom they may have never interacted. Similarly, teachers found it challenging to teach the new students who were academically mediocre, compared to the current student body.

Although I was excited to teach choral music, many of my students were not excited to learn. In fact, they were not enthusiastic about singing in general. While several students chose choir as their music elective, others were placed in choir for various reasons. The choir class had become a dumping ground for students with discipline problems, students who could not afford band or orchestra instruments, and students who thought that choir would be an easy class.

Not only was there an age gap between my students and me, but there was also a socioeconomic, racial, and religious gap. Similar differences between the students themselves frequently created division and conflict in the school. In addition to the typical cliques found in any middle school, disputes centered around socioeconomic and racial differences. There was often an air of "us versus them," or indifference toward others who did not directly affect a student's day-to-day life. The division was clear when I observed the cafeteria during lunchtime, on my morning bus duty, and in my classroom. I would hear students gossiping about each other in the hall, see students avoid sitting together in the cafeteria, and witness physical fights in the courtyard. Getting students to work together was a high priority for me if the choir were to be successful.

Choral music is a group activity. In fact, Merriam-Webster (2016) defines *choir* as an "organized company of singers." Unlike math, or art, or even physical education, choral music requires a group of people working together to exist. Teamwork is not a pleasantry but a necessity. If my students would not work together, the quality of the choir would suffer. Some of the dislike for other students was innate and had been reinforced in previous school years by peers, teachers, and parents. It seemed an impossible task to create unity within the group in order to reach musical excellence.

I began the school year with team-building activities to develop familiarity between the students. For a teacher, these team-building activities were an interesting phenomenon to observe. The students did activities wherein they had to communicate with each other to achieve a specific goal. For example, in one activity, students had to take off their shoes and put them in a pile in the middle of a circle. One person closed their eyes while the others instructed the student to the whereabouts of their shoes. With their eyes remaining closed, the student then had to put on their shoes and fully tie them. The students also did a "human knot" activity in which they would stand in a circle and grab two different hands of another in the circle. Then, they had to untangle the knot without releasing their hands. This exercise required many different leaders because everyone had a different view of the knot. The students had to work together to solve a problem. It was fascinating to see which students would take leadership roles and those who chose to be silent and watch.

As the teacher, I had the opportunity to conduct the team-building exercises and observe student behavior. I was able to surmise the perceived leaders and followers in each group and note who was confident or shy. I also observed body language; some students would seem restless while others would sit or stand still. Some students would begin activities with a shy demeanor but would relax once they started having

fun. Other students were completely willing and outgoing from the onset and would do anything that I asked.

While these team-building exercises brought most of my choirs together, the varsity girls' choir was still divisive. There were 13 girls in that class, all from different backgrounds. Most of them were eighth graders and had been in choir for three years. During that time, some had been fueling conflict and disagreement among each other in the choral program. It also seemed that they believed that being the varsity treble choir meant that they were the best choir in the school and that hard work was not necessary.

The girls were accustomed to singing difficult music, which for our middle school was in three or four voice parts. Based on their previous accolades, I chose three-part music for their first concert. The girls could read the notes, but musically, they sounded mediocre. The chords never sounded in tune because everyone was trying to sing over each other, and most of the girls would sing as loud as they could so that they could be a "superstar." They would not listen to each other to match their pitch, vowels, or timbre, and although I would ask, only a few would try to comply. Eventually, students would get frustrated and revert back to their solo voices. We had to get back to basics.

I had the girls turn in their music and gave them one song: "Pie Jesu" by Gabriel Faure. Despite being a unison piece, it is difficult. "Pie Jesu" cannot be performed to its musical potential unless everyone is singing in perfect unison; the choir had to sound like one voice. The students received the music, glared, and groaned. Some reminded me that they had been singing four-part music last year and that unison music was for beginners. I explained that singing unison music was difficult because it takes great skill to have many singers match their pitch, timbre, and vowels simultaneously. They were still skeptical.

As we worked on "Pie Jesu," they were still unable to sing as one. They remained as divisive as they ever were, bickering with or ignoring each other in class. The eighth graders were derisive of the two seventh grade students in the choir, one of whom was a native of South Africa. I was literally preaching to the choir, and nothing was happening. Clearly, the traditional instructional strategies that I had learned were not effective. I had to think outside of the box.

One day, the girls walked into class, and all of the chairs were stacked up on the risers. The girls asked, "Where do we sit?" I told them, "You won't be sitting today. You will be standing in a circle in the middle of the room." Confused but obedient, they obliged. We started our normal vocal warm-ups, and I asked the girls to close their eyes while singing. There was an immediate focus in the room. I then asked them to hold the hand of the person next to them while keeping their eyes closed. As we sang our unison warm ups, they started to sing together. I told them to listen and see if they could sound like the person next to them. Their singing sounded like glass: smooth and clear. It was beautiful, and the girls were excited. They started talking to each other about how good they sounded. This was the first step of many in creating a sense of unity in the varsity treble choir.

To this day, I am befuddled as to why the singing in a circle activity succeeded. I have often wondered if it was the girls hearing their potential and deciding it was worth the work. Other times, I have thought that they had an *Aha!* moment when they heard their sound. The greater goal of a beautiful sound may have overshadowed the dislike that they had for one another. A third theory is that the girls were just tired. It may have been exhausting to put in the effort of not liking someone every day or finding ways to make fun of her. Perhaps it was far less exhausting to release that tension and work together toward a common goal.

For the purposes of this chapter, I contacted some of the girls from that choir and ask them their thoughts. I was able to reach two of the girls, the two seventh graders in this story. One student, Jane (pseudonym), is currently a first-year middle school choir director. I reminded her of the story and asked her what changed that day when they held hands in the circle. She said,

> It put us all on an even playing field because I know I was timid, because I was a seventh grader trying to fight eighth graders… I think it just made us all… it was just a humbling thing. Singing in a circle and really listening and then holding hands was something that connected us and made us feel a part of something bigger… a bigger family. It forced us to be better listeners and to sing out into the circle and really connect with the music and each other… We were immediately connected. I don't know if it was that physical holding hands or singing in unison, I'm not exactly sure what caused that. I remember being able to let my guard down a little bit more. (personal correspondence, September 23, 2016)

Caroline (pseudonym) had similar thoughts about that day. She revealed that, unlike the previous director, I arrived demanding excellence and standards from the beginning. She said, "Part of it was that you just set a high bar for us" (personal correspondence, September 23, 2016). Similarly, Caroline mentioned the physical and mental connection that happened that day: "Obviously there was that physical connection, but also the sensory and visual aspect too. When we saw each other, we knew we had to work together" (personal correspondence, September 23, 2016). Additionally, she remarked that, when standing in a circle, "the tools were more tangible when you could see the faces you work with" (Personal correspondence, September 23, 2016). Caroline said that the circle formation shifted focus from the teacher to the ensemble. I became the facilitator of learning rather than the disseminator of information.

We continued singing in our circle every day. The girls would stand next to different singers each rehearsal and begin laughing together and supporting each other. I started incorporating music in multiple parts, and the girls worked hard together to sing each piece beautifully. Choir class became a family. If a girl was having a bad day, we would support them by discussing their problem or making them laugh. We often would do group hugs, which would make everyone laugh, including the girl facing a problem. They knew that choir was a safe place where

everyone supported each other. It is a special bond that many of them still share today.

Once a year, middle school choirs from our region performed a concert for adjudicators, who would evaluate and score our performance. After the concert, choirs would read a song at sight for a different set of judges for evaluation. The scores earned from the concert and the sight-reading portions were often used to evaluate teacher competence, which was stressful to many. When we arrived to our performance venue, the girls and parent chaperones got off the bus and went into the lobby. I asked the girls to form a circle and hold hands, and I reminded them of our journey and how proud I was to be their teacher.

I asked the girls to say what being in choir meant to them that year. After each response, we gave each other a hand squeeze in the circle. Some of the responses resembled, "Choir for me has meant having a family," "Making friends I never thought I would have," "Singing better than I have ever sung in my life," "A safe place," and "Choir is what I look forward to every day." This choir became more than just music class to these girls. They had forged friendships as they worked toward a common goal. I told them, "When you sing today, bring that joy to your judges. You never know what kind of day they have had or what's going on in their lives. They don't want to hear robots. They want to hear music. I believe in you, and I'm beyond proud of the young women you have become this year." Then we performed.

The stage was huge, and there were many larger choirs from other schools that could fill the stage. We were not one of those choirs. Instead of the traditional choral riser formation, the girls made a semicircle in front of the stage. Just before we were to sing, one of the girls asked, "Can we hold hands?" Proudly, I said, "Of course you can." Before they performed, I said, "Give them your gift." They sang beautifully and felt every note, many with tears in their eyes by the end. Pride beamed from the girls and from me. Our performance scores were negligible at that point because we had accomplished a bigger goal: unity through music. When we finished, the judges applauded, which is unusual and certainly discouraged. The girls earned sweepstakes—the highest scores possible at this contest.

For the remainder of my teaching tenure, the varsity girls' choir held hands in their performances. Every year, a new member would ask me why they hold hands, and I would tell the story all over again. Henceforth, in the varsity treble choir, girls knew that they were expected to work together and to work hard. I continued maintaining high expectations for my students in all of my choirs. I made an effort to get to know them personally and work through issues that were troubling them. Without knowing it, I had started the path of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy into my classroom.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

After five years in the classroom, I returned to school for a master's degree in music education. My work as an educator led me to research cultural relevance while in

graduate school. I was specifically drawn to culturally relevant pedagogy, a method of teaching built on the cultural identities of students.

Culturally relevant pedagogy, or CRP, supports curriculum that is sensitive to and non-judgmental toward the cultural backgrounds of students (Brown & Cooper, 2011). Irvine (2010) further characterizes CRP as enhancing students' success by acquiring knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and translating this knowledge into instructional practice (p. 58). Gay (2000) describes a culturally relevant pedagogue as one who "teaches to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students" (p. 29).

Researchers also have described CRP using terms such as *culturally appropriate*, *culturally congruent*, *culturally responsive*, and *culturally compatible* (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* and defined three criteria for CRP: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

Academic Success

The first criterion, academic success, refers to student learning in the classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogues ensure academic success by setting rigorous learning objectives, engaging students in critical thinking, holding high expectations and long term goals for students, and utilizing real-life examples to help students understand difficult concepts (Young, 2010). Meeting students' classroom needs, such as adapting to student learning styles or ensuring that students have classroom materials, may be important for all teachers to consider, especially when trying to reach students whose backgrounds differ from the teacher. Culturally relevant pedagogues can meet student needs by incorporating a multicultural curriculum and bridging cultural gaps (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). According to Mason (2010), "within music education, multiculturalism is often used when referring to world music or music that is not American or Western art origin" (p. 29). Depending on a variety of factors, ethnic differences might also reflect socioeconomic issues that may affect the classroom.

For example, Irvine (2010) describes an incident in which a teacher modified a teaching method to the students' cultural backgrounds. The topic of the day was classification, and students were to sort items that were alike and unalike. When the students were shown a photograph of kale, they could not identify it. Some students identified kale as collard greens. A similar response occurred when the students were shown a photograph of broccoli. The teacher then recalled the students discussing different kinds of cars they had seen in the school parking lot that morning. The students were more knowledgeable about the different makes and models of cars, so the teacher applied the topic of the day to cars instead. Students classified cars based on make, model, model year, color, and cost. The teacher taught classification by adjusting instruction and making the content culturally relevant.

It is important that teachers have high academic standards for all students regardless their background. According to Lind and McCoy (2016), music educators face unique challenges regarding academic rigor and meaning in lessons. The authors posit not only that our students come from diverse backgrounds with different learning styles but that many of our students also have very different experiences in music. Students with several years of private instruction may be working alongside peers with little or no background in music study (p. 69). Lind and McCoy (2016) caution teachers who provide enrichment activities solely to advanced students who study music privately because teachers may inadvertently be reinforcing the differences among their students. Rather, teachers may consider having students collaborate in classroom learning communities where the teacher and the students alternate the facilitator of learning role. Such an instructional strategy may promote democratic principles, benefit a variety of learning styles, and encourage student use of their previous knowledge.

Academic success is achieved by having a rigorous music education curriculum and believing that all students, regardless of background, can meet expectations. In my classroom, I assign projects with enough structure to be understood but with enough lenience for students to be creative and to develop a product of which they can be proud. Below are some practical examples of academic success in both the middle school choral classroom and at the higher education level.

Show me what you know! The final concert of the year was called "Disney Darlings." The performance consisted of large ensemble performances as well as solo performances by students. The students performed in the cafetorium (cafeteria transformed into an auditorium) where parents enjoyed a banquet hosted by businesses in the local community. The cafetorium was beautifully decorated each year by parent volunteers and students. The transformation of the cafeteria was truly majestic.

Disney Darlings was a completely student-run performance in that students oversaw the lighting, sound, and stage management. While I helped with music preparation, the students created choreography and decided the costuming for large numbers. The soloists practiced with me, and we collaboratively discussed stage blocking, props, and costuming. Most times when the soloist would ask for suggestions regarding their performance, I would ask them, "Well, what do you think? What would be most effective?" I believe that this discourse allowed them to think critically about their project, as they were autonomous in the decision making process.

The best part about this experience, from a teacher perspective, was watching the students excel on their own. My job during the show was to sit in the front row and to cheer for them. I also made welcoming remarks and handed out choir awards at the end of our final performance. Every year, I felt proud seeing my students become independent and apply their knowledge. It was when I was no longer needed that I knew that I had done my job.

Because Disney Darlings was a fundraising event that hosted 300 people each night, there was pressure for the show to be successful. There was always an expectation that every student would do their best and continue the tradition of excellence with the show. Each year, the students tried to top the show from the previous year. While some students were able to showcase their solo singing, other students were able to help with costumes, makeup, and choreography. It was a rigorous task every year but one that students accomplished with pride. Students were a vital part in the success of Disney Darlings. Each of them brought their experience and strengths to the project.

Academic success at the college level involves implementing a concentrated program of study wherein undergraduates develop instructional strategies that formulate their personal teaching style. For example, undergraduates learn how to teach a choral rehearsal frame in methods courses. One assignment is to prepare three songs with a local middle school choir to be performed in a choral festival at the end of the semester. They have the autonomy to decide which songs will be performed (with the help of the school's choir director), the order in which the songs will be prepared, and whether they will include choreography. It is the undergraduate's responsibility to find a piano accompanist for their portion of the concert. They must also decide what their singers will wear and collaborate with the school's choir director on transportation to the event. While students utilize class time to ask questions such as "What should I do about _____," I try to allow the class the opportunity to provide answers to the question in addition to mine. It is my hope that the student has many possibilities from which to choose when formulating their decisions.

A choral festival serves as the class final exam where middle school choirs from the county travel to our university performance hall. One by one, the university students conduct their middle school choirs in front of a live audience and their peers. The undergraduates are often amazed at what they accomplish, and because they had autonomy with many aspects of the project, they are even more proud.

Cultural Competence

The second criterion of CRP, cultural competence, is defined as providing opportunities for students to recognize personal cultural values and beliefs while acquiring access to the wider culture. Gay (2002) posits that teachers acquire factual information about the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups by learning about students as individuals. Young (2010) conducted a study surveying urban elementary teachers and administrators on their use of culturally relevant pedagogy in relation to Ladson-Billings' definition. Within the criterion of cultural competence, Young (2010) found that three themes could foster cultural competence among teachers: "know your students, build relationships with your students, and affirm students' cultural identities" (p. 252). She states, "to know the

students well required the teachers to know them beyond the walls of the school; it meant taking a personal interest in them as individuals, not simply as pupils behind desks" (p. 252). The second theme that Young discovered was that positive student relationships were accomplished by instruction that was relevant to the students' lives. The third emergent theme in Young's study, affirmation of students' cultural identities, best demonstrated the connection of students' origins to multicultural literature in the classroom.

According to Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011), it is important for teachers to acknowledge, not ignore, the diversity in the classroom. In order for activities to have the maximum effect, they must occur on a daily or weekly basis. A one-time superficial activity such as an ethnic food day will not have the same effect as frequently dancing and singing songs or reading folktales to teach cultural competence. Culture should be interwoven in the curriculum throughout the year and used as a springboard for equality (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

An important aspect of cultural competence is taking a personal interest in students' lives. In the following example, I discuss the importance of building positive, personal relationships with my middle school students. I tried to find ways to better understand who my students were outside the classroom in order to build curriculum that would meet their academic needs.

Getting to know you. As stated earlier, many of my students were not like me. There were generational, socioeconomic, racial, and religious gaps between us. I had much to learn about my students and their backgrounds, so I often found myself hosting lunch in the choir room or going to lunch with students in the cafeteria. This was a great way to see my kids in a different light—around their friends. We would talk about music that they were listening to, who was dating whom, and what was happening at school. We would also talk about high school, college, and future plans.

Inevitably, someone would ask me if I was coming to (insert random sporting event, dance recital, play here) that evening. I would always try to rearrange my schedule to go to a game, gymnastics meet, play, or talent show. Again, attending these events allowed me to see my students in a different environment. Also, I was usually the only teacher at such events. The students and parents could see that I cared about them and their lives outside of the choir classroom. Did it consume some of my personal time? Yes! But I believed that attending such events was a short-term investment for a long-term goal. While I was sacrificing an evening to attend a middle school football game (short-term investment), I was strengthening the teacher/student relationship (long-term goal). My students believed that I was invested in them personally and, thus, may have felt a stronger connection to the choir.

Unlike many teachers, I would have my students for all three years of middle school. Building relationships took place in and out of the classroom environment. For example, I used early morning or after-school bus duty to get to know my students as well as others in the school. Students would often walk up with their

headphones on, and I would ask them about their music. Many times I would get, "Sorry, miss. I'll put it away." I would usually say, "No, come over here. Let me hear it." I would inquire about the artist and the name of the album. Sometimes, I would request a recording of the song so that I could listen to it, too. In addition to learning about students' music preferences, inquiring about the latest music trends kept my own music listening current. I use similar strategies discussed above in building relationships with my undergraduate music education majors.

Getting to know my undergraduates is an important part of my job. I sing with my students in our university-sponsored community chorus. Singing together is a great way for us to bond as we work through difficult repertoire. There are also community members in the choir from a variety of backgrounds and age ranges. During the day, the community members and students lead lives with various tasks and responsibilities, but for two hours each week, we are all the same; we are all there to make music.

Singing in the choir helps me appreciate my students in a different light as well. I get to hear their musicianship, to see their discipline, and to experience their success. Participation in this choir gives me the opportunity to recognize when they are struggling with particular aspects of music or are afraid to sing out for fear of singing incorrectly.

The students also experience working with me outside of the classroom setting. I usually arrive in a t-shirt and jeans, to which the students comment, "You look comfortable." I usually reply, "I'm off duty," and we laugh. The conductor is a colleague of mine, and I respect her expertise by arriving on time to rehearsal, being prepared with my materials, and being attentive.

Although I am their professor, I am not perfect. My students get to see me make mistakes in the music and learn and improve from them. Mistakes are how we grow and are a necessary part of the process. Through singing together, my students and I build a relationship that may not exist with classroom interaction alone.

Utilizing student experience in the curriculum is an important component of cultural competence. Below is a personal example of how I utilized student backgrounds in the middle school choral curriculum. In this way, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of my students, which created a stronger teacher/student relationship.

In my classroom, Thursdays were listening activity days when students could write a song title on the classroom whiteboard for study. Of course, the songs had to be appropriate for the classroom, free of expletives or references to drugs or sexual activity. After I screened the song and typed the lyrics, we would study the music. The students would listen to the song in its entirety and answer listening questions (see, Appendix A). We would also discuss the themes of the song and how they were reflected in the students' lives, themes such as faith, heartbreak, loneliness, conflict, or rejection.

Similar to the team-building exercises, I could learn a lot about students through their song choices. With permission, students whose songs were chosen for the

weekly listening activity explained their song choice. Sometimes, they would pick music with heavy themes of hurting and heartbreak and would describe a person or an event that was troubling them. Other times, students would pick a Christian rock song and would describe their faith. Occasionally, we would listen to hip hop music that would address the societal inequalities that students faced. From time to time, students picked a particular song simply because they liked it. It was interesting to see students relate to one another through song choice or the way that the song made them feel. We had some wonderful classroom discussions and were able to use the students' music to discuss musical ideas in class.

Every once in a while, we would analyze a classical piece that I provided. We listened to "Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine" by Eric Whitacre, a song that I performed in college choir, and discussed how the composer made the voices sound like a flying machine. I shared that being able to sing in the college choir was difficult for me since I was unable to read music when I entered school. This was the first song that I sang without fear because I felt competent in my music-reading ability. Through my experience, I hoped to extinguish any fears that they may have had about singing or reading music. These conversations, spurred from the listening activities, created a different lens through which we could learn about each other.

The choir room was a safe place where we could objectively discuss why we liked or did not like a piece. The students were not allowed to simply say, "I don't like this." They had to explain their dislike using music vocabulary (the tempo, the singing, the genre, etc.). Such a process encouraged students to think critically about music without offending their peers.

Academically, students were able to use the music vocabulary that they learned in class and apply it to different genres of music. Bringing students' music into the classroom environment may have bridged the gap between school music and home music. Also, students provided the content of the lesson and, thus, brought their previous knowledge and backgrounds into the curriculum. Through their music, we could discuss social issues and examine sociopolitical topics in the classroom. Being conscious of sociopolitical concerns and how they affect student lives is the third element of CRP.

APPENDIX A—LISTENING ACTIVITY

"Open Arms"
Elbow

You're a law unto yourself
And we don't suffer dreamers
But neither should you walk the earth alone

So with finger rolls and folding chairs
And a volley of streamers
We can be there for tweaks and repairs
Should you come back home

We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again

Tables are for pounding here
And when we've got you surrounded
The man you are will know the boy you were

And you're not the man who fell to earth
You're the man of La Mancha
And we've love enough to light the street
'Cause everybody's here

We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again
We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again

Everyone's here
Everyone's here
The moon is out looking for trouble
And everyone's here

Everyone's here
Everyone's here
The moon wants a scrap or a cuddle
And everyone's here

We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again
We got open arms for broken hearts
Like yours my boy, come home again

Everyone's here
Everyone's here
Everyone's here
Come home again

The moon is out looking for trouble
The moon wants a scrap or a cuddle
The moon is face down in a puddle
And everyone's here

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJV71cW40OQ

Listening Questions

1. How would you objectively describe this piece?
2. What is this song about? How does this transfer to the world around us?
3. How many voice/instrument parts do you hear?
4. In what setting do you think you would hear this piece?
5. Did you like this piece? Why or why not?

Sociopolitical Awareness

The third criterion for CRP, according to Ladson-Billings (1995), is sociopolitical consciousness. It is defined as the ability to acknowledge the structural inequalities and racism that exist in society and education. According to Gay (2011), culturally responsive teachers "challenge racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression" (p. 31). Such pedagogues strive for social justice and academic equity within their classrooms, the wider school community, and the education system. Discussion of sociopolitical issues in the classroom "builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities" (p. 31). Culturally responsive teaching questions the structural inequalities in the education system that negatively impact students of color (Lind & McCoy, 2016). Lind and McCoy (2016) posit, "For learners, culturally responsive teaching transforms the way they [the students] see themselves in terms of their personal efficacy and in relation to their cultural communities and the larger society" (p. 19).

Race should not be ignored as an aspect of CRP, as it is often the cause of alienation and hostility that characterizes the school experience (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Critical race theory, or CRT, is used in education to "analyze social inequity that is covertly demonstrated through racist practices within academic institutions" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 70). The purpose of CRP is not to criticize but to acknowledge race. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) encourage sociopolitical consciousness among teachers regarding the possible effects of race on student achievement. According to the authors, "CRT provides a framework and for some a tool of analysis for examining educational practice and structures that continue to subordinate groups of people" (p. 71). Culturally relevant pedagogy provides a means by which to deliver such instruction.

Racism is interwoven into the social, political, and economic institutions of society. At the macro-institutional level, racism may not be overtly noticeable. This covert racism could result from "acts of indifference, omission, and refusal to challenge the status quo" (Spears, 1977, p. 129). In essence, institutional racism is not a direct malicious act but a rational act to those who seek to benefit from its implementation.

An example of racism in education is and unintended effect of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative. NCLB was an attempt by the federal government

to close the achievement gap between majority and minority student populations. According to Gay (2007), the rhetoric used in NCLB does not reflect the reality of its implementation. The purpose of the NCLB initiative was to ensure a quality education for every student. Under NCLB, students were required to take the same test at the same time in the same way. This may not be a realistic structure for schools with diverse populations. Gay (2007) cites many researchers who provided evidence that students learn and demonstrate knowledge in various ways. Learning experiences can be further varied by race, ethnicity, culture, identity, and socialization. In addition, Gay (2007) states that the learning styles of a diverse student body should be welcomed as assets, not liabilities. To avoid negative scores on the school's report card, students who struggle with the English language are sometimes pardoned from taking standardized tests. Some students of poverty and some ethnic groups may not have the linguistic skills associated with Standard Academic English and are not included in any English-language learner categories. Ultimately, according to Gay (2007), minority students may be suffering from the consequences of NCLB.

Saunders (2007) presented a series of experiences that drew him to explore racism in the classroom. Specifically, he recalled listening to rap music on television and realizing that rappers were not solely rapping about sex, drugs, or crime but also about their social struggles. When Saunders (2007) used words such as *ghetto*, students would insist that "life is more complex than any set of stereotypes can capture" (p. 186). Saunders (2007) notes some challenges to the discussion of race in the classroom: being of Caucasian descent and discussing racism, encouraging students to think critically about how to rectify racism in schools without solely taking inventory of racist events, and bridging gaps with students so that they may feel comfortable to discuss racism.

Sociopolitical consciousness in the classroom involves creating a space for students to discuss global social issues within the context of curriculum. I believe that music—and any art form, for that matter—can provide a means for students to identify and interpret current events and critically reflect on society. The following is one way that sociopolitical consciousness is applied at the college level.

Let's talk about it! Current events and viral videos often provide an opportunity to have a sociopolitical conversation in my undergraduate music education classes. I use social media with most of my students and can see articles or videos that they post to their timelines. Sometimes, my students will send videos or articles that they would like to discuss in class. This is one way that students are contributing to the curriculum based on their cultural backgrounds.

Most recently, we discussed Dwayne Reed, a fourth-grade teacher from Chicago, Illinois. A first-year teacher, Reed wrote a rap for his students, created a music video, and posted the video to *YouTube* (Gotham, 2016). The lyrics inform the kids that they will have fun but will work hard in Reed's (2016) class. He also tells the students that he is excited to meet them and to be their teacher:

Wel-come to the 4th grade, so ha-ppy to meet you,
Can't-wait til I see you, we're gonna have a good time
We'll-learn about science, find-ways to apply it
I bet that you'll like it, we're gonna have a good time

Hello, I'm your teacher
My name's Mr. Reed, and it's very nice to meet ya
I'm from Chicago, I love eatin pizza
And I dress to impress, but I'll still wear sneakers

It's my 1st year teaching, so it's all real exciting
Got some ideas, and I'd really like try them
Like making songs to remember what ya hear
We'll be learning so much, but the end the year

To my friends and my peers, the parents and the students
I'm ready, you're ready, we're ready, Let's-do-this, (YEAH)
But absolutely no day-dreaming
Working hard til the bell starts ringing

Wel-come to the 4th grade, so ha-ppy to meet you,
Can't-wait til I see you, we're gonna have a good time
We'll study mathematics, division and addin
And don't forget fractions, we're gonna have a good time

I'll always greet you with a smile
I'll always try to make the lessons worthwhile
And when you do good work, I'll acknowledge
Cuz I know that you're headed off to work or to college

So we gotta keep it positiiiiiive, that's the is key
Have respect for each otherrrrrr, and don't forget ME
Have respect for yourselves, and the staff, and the school
Having fun can be cool, when we're following the rules—nah, nah

Time's gonna fly (breath)
Before ya know it, you'll be movin in to grade 5
But for now, we'll be workin, and a-learning, and a-singing
All the way til the bell starts ringing

Wel-come to the 4th grade, so ha-ppy to meet you,
Can't-wait til I see you, we're gonna have a good time
We'll learn about English, write papers and read them
A-pluses, you'll see them, we're gonna have a good time

Go teacher! Go teacher! Go teacher! Go teacher! (Reed, 2016)

In addition to describing the expectations that Reed set for his students, my class discussed music advocacy. Reed is a general education teacher, not a music educator, but used music to welcome his students. In his song, Reed (2016) said that he has new ideas that he would "really like to try," such as using music to help students retain information. We talked about how music will help Reed achieve his goal and how important the arts are in education.

We also examined sociopolitical aspects of this video. Reed is an African American male elementary school teacher. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), during the 2011–2012 school year, 76% of teachers were female. Additionally, only 18% of American teachers were teachers of color, with 82% of teachers being white (NCES, 2013). Based on the data, students may encounter a male teacher less often than a female teacher, and even fewer male teachers of color.

The impact of Reed being a male, African American elementary teacher was of particular note to my class. All students, both African American and White, talked about Reed possibly being a role model for African American boys and, for some, a father figure. The students reminded me of billboards that they had seen advertising the importance of being a father, many of which showcase African American men.

Reed utilizes hip hop and rap music genres as a means to reach his students. My students noted how hip hop and rap have traditionally been an avenue to debate social issues affecting people of color and how Reed uses it as a way to reach students with a familiar genre. In the song, Reed (2016) informs students about himself: "I'm from Chicago, I love eatin' pizza/And I dress to impress, but I'll still wear sneakers." He also primes his students for what they will be learning in class as well as the high academic and social expectations of his classroom. Importantly, my students noticed that Reed (2016) provides the students with what they could expect from the teacher: "I'll always greet you with a smile/I'll always try to make the lessons worthwhile/And when you do good work, I'll acknowledge." In this way, Reed understands his role in helping the students be successful.

One quote of particular note to my students was "Cuz I know you're head in off to work or to college" (Reed, 2016). The general consensus of public schools has been that every child would go to college, my class noted, and were deemed a failure if they did not. However, there are some students who do not want or need to go to college to have a successful career and choose vocational or on-the-job training. They mentioned the importance of plumbers, electricians, cosmetologists, and others who are in important and valuable professions that do not require college degrees. I shared that, in my youth, adults would try to scare children into working hard by saying, "You don't want to work at McDonald's when you grow up, do you?" I told my students that, in the morning when I am tired and hungry, I am thankful that Ms. Tracy is at McDonald's to take my order. Moreover, I have watched Ms. Tracy greet me, take another order, answer questions from another employee, and process my payment all at the same time. Ms. Tracy is important to keeping me doing what I do every day. Discussing current events, articles, and videos in the classroom creates

a critical discussion of the world around us—a world in which they will soon be educating.

Culturally relevant pedagogy includes racial discussion and its sociopolitical impact on student culture. CRP not only provides a means to present music through a cultural lens but also encourages academic success therein. The elements of CRP—academic success, cultural consciousness, and sociopolitical awareness—can be applicable to any grade level and any subject area from elementary school to higher education.

YOU HAVE TO GO TO THEM!

When I was teaching in public schools, my goal was to create instruction and curricula that were relevant to students' lives so that all of my students would learn the life skill of making music in their respective demographic, economical, and cultural environments. As a professor, I have a goal to help students think empathetically about their future students' lives and critically about the education system. I want my undergraduates and future educators to make the effort to truly know their students outside of the classroom. The students will not always come to you; you have to go to them. *You* have to go eat in the lunchroom. *You* have to go to sporting events. *You* have to listen to their music. *You* have to incorporate their cultures into the curriculum. *You* have to ask them about their day. *You* have to tell them you are glad that they are there. *You* have to be their advocate. *You* have to make them feel important and valuable. *You* have to go to them.

By no means am I advocating for the absence of cultures outside a school's demographic in the curriculum. However, I believe that, when students have a deep connection to curriculum, the experience can be more meaningful to both teacher and student. I am advocating that, as music educators, we find creative ways to incorporate students' cultures into the classroom. I encourage educators to seek ways to understand why their students see the world the way they do and how this worldview is expressed through classroom content. I strive to embolden educators to utilize curriculum that may help their students process social issues permeating our world today. In doing so, teachers and students become co-facilitators of learning and are personally invested in the curriculum.

It is my goal that students graduate feeling important and valuable and that their backgrounds are viewed as assets and not deficits. I hope that, as educators, they will inspire and empower their own students to change the world around them and will continue to work toward social justice and fight inequality in their classrooms. I hope that they will forge strong relationships with their students built on truth and understanding. In the words of the late Rita Pierson (2013), "Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be." By empowering our students to achieve greatness and challenging them to empower the next generation, that is how we change the world.

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