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## **Upping the “Anti-”: The Value of an Anti-Racist Theoretical Framework in Music Education**

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## Upping the “Anti-”: The Value of an Anti-Racist Theoretical Framework in Music Education

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### Abstract

*In a time that some have argued is “postracial” following the election and reelection of Barack Obama (see Wise 2010, for discussion), this paper argues that anti-racism is a crucial theoretical framework for music education. I explore three areas of music education, in which such a framework can push toward change. The first area speaks directly to positionality and recognition of where students are situated in the matrix of domination (Collins 2000). Secondly, anti-racism encourages multicentricity and readily allows for multiple epistemologies or ways of knowing the world, in a manner quite contrary to a more ensemble-based paradigm. Finally, this critical theoretical orientation enables the pursuit of an equity agenda in the actual practice of teaching. In order to give practical context to these ideas, I draw on research from a multiple case study of four elementary music teachers in a large Canadian city. To varying extents, all four teachers employed an anti-racist orientation in their teaching. I use examples from three teachers in the field to illustrate how teachers used this orientation to implement differential recognition, encourage the use of multiple epistemologies, and pursue conversations about equity.<sup>1</sup>*

**Keywords:** *anti-racism, positionality, multicentricity, equity, social justice, music education*

**I**n a time that some have argued is “postracial” following the election and subsequent reelection of Barack Obama (see Wise 2010, for discussion), this paper argues that anti-racism is a crucial theoretical framework for music education. For George Dei, anti-racism is

an action-oriented educational strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and interlocking systems of social oppression. It is a critical discourse of race and racism in society that challenges the continuance of racializing social groups for differential and unequal treatment. Anti-racism explicitly names the issues of race and social

difference as issues of power and equity, rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety. (Dei 2000, 27)

An anti-racist framework offers much to music education. In this paper, I explore three areas of music education, where people can mobilize such a framework to push toward counterhegemonic change. The first area speaks directly to positionality and recognition. Employing an anti-racist orientation allows teachers to understand where students are situated in the matrix of domination (Collins 2000) and adjust their teaching and their teaching relationships accordingly. Secondly, anti-racism encourages multicentricity and readily allows for multiple epistemologies or ways of knowing the world, in a manner quite contrary to some of the more dominant ensemble-based paradigms of music education. Finally, this critical theoretical orientation enables the pursuit of an equity agenda in the actual practice of teaching. Using such an orientation allows teachers to pursue “courageous conversations” (Singleton and Linton 2006) in the classroom and seize the opportunities that arise to have these difficult conversations. I begin with an exploration of anti-racism as a theoretical framework, followed by a theoretical examination of three possible ways this framework may function in music education to interrupt the logic of white supremacy. Finally, I employ the findings of a multiple case study to illustrate with practical examples the theoretical facets.

### **The Importance of Positionality: Locating Myself**

In Rebollo-Gil and Moras’ (2006) work, Amanda Moras, a white anti-racist scholar, critiques her positionality and states why she believes it is so important to situate herself in the research and in her classroom. She remarks that “[i]n any classroom, beginning a dialogue about race or opening an anti-racist agenda must be pre-empted by these introspective assessments of our own social locations as educators” (391). She finds that such introspections facilitate the opening of a dialogue within spaces where such conversation is typically shut down. As a white, middle class academic and teacher, my positionality is certainly relevant to this work. I have received unearned privileges at times due to my race. Further, as a white scholar doing anti-racist work, there is actually a paradox hidden in my ability to start these conversations about race and white privilege. In situations where a person of color

may be shut down for being “angry” or “having an agenda,” my own positionality is often read as “neutral,” allowing me to start a discussion—a terrible irony in the work of anti-racism.

### **Why anti-racism?**

When we consider Dei's (2000) definition in more depth, it becomes clear that this focus on power and dominance allows for a powerful critique of whiteness and dominant positionality with an orientation toward change. This critique is important because unfortunately, the structures of domination that anti-racist orientation target did not disappear with the election of Obama. They are all too apparent in high-profile cases in the United States, including those of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Jordan Davis, as well as in the less blatant, but insidious reinscriptions of white supremacy as the prevalent operating structure in the world today.

Within the field of music education, Butler, Lind, and McKoy (2007) help us understand the effect of race, ethnicity, and culture on music education through grounded theory. They put forward a conceptual framework to understand how these factors affect music teaching and learning and explore “educational equity in relationship to music education” (241). They examine five factors: the teacher, the student, the content, the instruction, and the classroom context. Butler, Lind, and McKoy consider the influence of race, culture, and ethnicity on the student, the teacher, and the interactions between them. The model then illustrates the ways in which these relationships (which are affected by race, culture, and ethnicity) mediate content, instruction, and context, and ultimately influence music learning. The quantity of literature they explore in the music education context may indicate a recognition of the significance of positionality to teaching and learning. However, the presence of such literature indicates a need in music education for a theoretical framework that acknowledges positionality in a manner that emphasizes these factors and works against white supremacy as an operating structure.

*White supremacy: A definition*

I define white supremacy through the work of Charles Mills (1997), who argues that society is actually predicated on a racial contract upheld by white people for the perpetual subjugation of non-white “subhumans” or “subpersons.” The racial contract is invisible to those it privileges (white people), yet it functions on political, moral, and epistemological levels as a historical actuality with very real material effects. According to Mills, over time the proscription of subhuman status moved from an overt to a covert operation. Throughout history, white people enforced the racial contract through violence and ideological conditioning; the mental, emotional, and ideological coercion aims for nonwhites’ complete acceptance of their subhuman status. Given the manner in which these hierarchies are reinforced, Mills claims that we must begin our work with a deep understanding of the historical reality of the current society, which is rooted in an unnamed political structure—global white supremacy (Mills 1997, 125).

The work of Cheryl Harris (1995) adds further nuance to Mills’ argument. Harris contends that whiteness is actually property—that to have whiteness is to have something valuable. Legally, property includes “every thing to which a man may attach a value and have a [legal] right” (279). Harris shares a narrative about her grandmother’s working life and the way that she “passed” as white in the working (white) world. She uses this experience to illustrate the idea that whiteness is a valuable commodity and notes that her grandmother’s story is not unique. She argues that this coerced denial of identity (i.e. “passing”) was enacted in order to gain some of the privileges “naturally” accorded to white people. In a world where the covertly operating global structure is white supremacy, whiteness is a valuable commodity indeed.

In this discussion, it is crucial to note a distinction between individuals and political structures. Mills (1997) highlights the difference between “whiteness” as phenotype/genealogy versus “Whiteness” as a politicoeconomic system committed to sustaining white supremacy (106). In arguing that global white supremacy is the overarching political structure, it is not to say that all white people are racist. On the contrary, this argument actually emphasizes the importance of understanding systems and structures of oppression rather than attributing systemic racism to the

acts of individuals (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Rather than a color, in other words, “whiteness” is a specific set of power relations.

### “Just what is anti-racism...”

The constant presence of white supremacy necessitates taking an “anti-stance” in order to begin the process of working against these structural hierarchies. An “anti-stance” deliberately works in opposition to established norms—in this case, global white supremacy (Mills 1997). It is action-oriented and strives toward equity and equality. Taking an “anti-” stance allows us to actively work against hegemony, as defined by Gramsci (1971, 12),<sup>2</sup> and strive toward breaches in racist discourse (Rebollo-Gil & Moras 2006).<sup>3</sup> Anti-racist scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) advocates a shift from being “nonracist” to being “antiracist” (15). As he notes,

[b]eing an antiracist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected *materially* (receive benefits or disadvantages) and *ideologically* by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality. (15–16)

This active anti-stance speaks to the action-orientation of this theoretical framework.

Another key element of anti-racism is its staunch critique of liberalism. Goldberg (1993) elucidates a paradox of liberalism in modernity. He argues that modernity commits itself to liberal principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but then insists on the moral irrelevance of race. Bonilla-Silva (2006) furthers this discussion with what he terms an “abstract liberalism frame” (26–28)—a framework that draws on political liberalism (i.e. equal opportunity) and economic liberalism (i.e. choice, individualism) to explain racial matters. These matters include naturalization (where examples of systemic racism can be explained as “natural” occurrences), cultural racism (racism that relies on culturally-based arguments to explain racism), and finally, minimization of racism (minimalizing the effect of racism in the lives of people of color) (28–29). Critiquing a system that enables the dismissal of race and racism as matters of the individual, therefore, is a fundamental tenet of anti-racism.

Anti-racism is also particularly useful because of the applicability of the notions of intersectionality and what Collins' (2000) identified as a matrix of domination (a concept originating in black feminist thought). The emphasis on intersectionality allows an understanding of where different positionalities are situated in the matrix of domination in varying situations. Understanding the way that different oppressions intersect helps cast light on the complexity of the struggles that different people face. Integrative anti-racism thus examines intersecting oppressions in a non-hierarchical manner (Dei 2003).

Further, anti-racism aims to problematize the marginalization of certain voices in society (Dei 2003). It cites the relevance of personal, experiential knowledge in a manner reminiscent of the concept of "counterstory" in Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Counterstories and counternarratives are stories told by voices that are typically marginalized in society. They are the voices too often submerged by the dominant narratives. Conversely, anti-racism is holistic and works to account for all aspects of human experience (Dei 2003).

Anti-racism also looks to unmask unequal power relations, relying on critique as a key analytical tool. Significantly, Thomas (1987) argued that the recognition of unequal power between groups is salient in any discussion of anti-racism. For Dei (2003), anti-racism recognizes the social effects of race and considers all integrated forms of oppression. It challenges whiteness and privilege with their dominance and invisibility and critiques the discourse of colorblindness.<sup>4</sup> It also problematizes the marginalization of certain voices in society and explores how differential power and privilege work in society in terms of access and structural inequity (Dei 2003, Chapter 4).

Finally, anti-racism challenges the institutions in society that facilitate unequal power relations. As such, schooling is a key site of struggle for many anti-racist scholars. Hesch (1995) finds that anti-racist education can potentially challenge the effects of a racist education system. He argues that

[i]nstead of developing programs and curricula to change children so that they adjust to the school, anti-racist educators are concerned with changing institutions, through such measures as the politicization of the formal curriculum, attention to the "hidden" curriculum, changes in the ways children are streamed and assessed, the hiring of more



minority staff, and the promotion of those already hired. (Hesch 1995, 106)

To further this institutional critique, Dei (2003) notes that anti-racism education recognizes how the elements of identity affect and are affected by schooling. He advocates for an inclusive system. Simultaneously, anti-racism acknowledges the role of the traditional education system in reproducing inequities and also requires that school problems experienced by youth are understood in context (Dei 2003, 31–32). Challenging the institutions that perpetuate inequality and inequity in society, therefore, is an important element of anti-racism.

After considering the work of these anti-racist scholars, I would like to offer the following broad definition of anti-racism for application to music education. I rely on Dei's (2000, 27) definition cited previously as a basis, highlighting a number of key elements. For the purposes of this paper, anti-racism is an action-oriented anti-stance that allows for the systematic critique of liberalism, the application of intersectional analysis, and the voicing of counternarratives within society. It also employs critique as a key analytical tool, systematically critiquing unequal power relations, colorblindness, and systemic racism, as well as challenging institutions that facilitate these unequal power relations. There is potential within anti-racism to actively breach dominant discourses in society with a focus on agency, resistance, and action.

In selecting anti-racism over critical race theory (CRT), I note that the CRT principles outlined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) share many of the same tenets as anti-racism. These tenets include a staunch critique of liberalism and Eurocentrism, a focus on intersectionality and counternarratives, among other principles. What is perhaps most significant in anti-racism is its action orientation (Dei 2000). While it is a critical framework, it is oppositional in nature and it can be employed to push toward change. Critical race theory, conversely, functions more as a tool for analysis. As an analytical tool, it also serves as a potential implement in the toolkit that is anti-racism. Critical Race Theory was rooted in the United States and emerged from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and was originally employed in the legal context. It grew out of a dissatisfaction with Civil Rights discourse and a critique of Critical Legal Studies' omission of race from the discussion (Crenshaw et al. 1995). It was later applied to education (Ladson-Billings 1998). Conversely, it is difficult to



separate anti-racism from education. Much of the work that employs anti-racism as a critical framework speaks directly to education (see, for example, Dei 2003; Dei and Calliste 2000; Hesch 1995; Ng, Staton, and Scane 1995). There is potential within anti-racism to formulate counterhegemonic education—to actively breach dominant discourses in society with a focus on agency, resistance, and action. When we center power and domination as this framework facilitates, we may see the possibilities for counterhegemonic music education.<sup>5</sup>

### **“...And what's it doing in a nice field like music education?”**

In her 1998 article, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) argued for the applicability of critical race theory to the “nice field” of education. Having explored the fundamental elements of anti-racism as a theoretical framework, I will examine theoretically three ways in which anti-racism can push music education to “breach” naturalized assumptions of the logic of global white supremacy, in order to begin to function differently in the world.

### *Positionality and the “Matrix of Domination”*

First, I address positionality. Anti-racism emphasizes intersectionality. Collins’ (2000) matrix of domination—a system of understanding the multiple subjectivities for bodies marked as Other—is an excellent tool to consider the way overlapping oppressions intersect. Collins (2000) defines the “matrix of domination” as the “social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (228) and identifies it as a model for understanding the way society organizes different oppressions. In her work on the lived experiences of black women, Collins argues that racial oppression often subsumes gender oppression in activism within the black community. Collins (2000) and Crenshaw (1995a) instead both suggest working with an intersectional approach to oppression to address the privileging of certain oppressions over others.<sup>6</sup> The matrix of domination, then, is a tool to identify the organization of these oppressions. However, within education, there is potential consequently for the silencing of some voices in favor of others in the classroom community, noting that the stronger voices may hold a place of greater privilege within the matrix of domination than the voices that remain silent.<sup>7</sup> In the

educational context, subsequently, Dei (2003) advocates not for any degree of homogeneity, but rather “communities of difference” (37)—classroom spaces where difference is honored and recognized for the differential privilege that it entails.

Further, according to McCarthy’s (1988) argument, the matrix of domination is nonsynchronous in nature, as opposed to some of the earlier additive models for understanding multiple intersecting forms of oppression.<sup>8</sup> Oppression here is understood relationally and leaves room for “contradictory effects even in similar institutional settings” (275). The variables of which McCarthy (1988) writes—race, class, and gender, in addition to sexual orientation, immigrant and refugee status, age, marital status, religion, and disability—are not static or monolithic in nature, but rather in flux and occur differently in different people in both similar and varying situations.

This theoretical concept allows music educators to recognize that students are situated on uneven terrain where a combination of systemic factors co-mingle and influence what is understood to be a student’s so-called “merit” or “ability.” It helps us understand that students have or lack various degrees of privilege in relation to other students, and that recognition of the distribution of privilege is fundamental to engaging in an education rooted in justice. Such a music education recognizes that the concepts of “merit” and “ability” are thus social constructions that rely on systemic distribution of privilege. If merit and ability are constructed and if that construction becomes visible, we can then work toward “leveling the playing field” in a manner that is socially and materially significant. It is important to note that this conceptualization of merit and ability as social constructions is not unique to anti-racism among critical theories. However, in anti-racism, race is salient in all discussions. This salience of race and its use as an analytic lens in the examination of merit and ability provides different insights than other critical theories.

### *Multicentricity*

The second concept is that of multicentricity—a theory that is, in my thinking, deeply applicable to music education. I rely on the work of George Dei (2003) once again to consider what he terms a *multicentric* curriculum. This concept of curriculum destabilizes Europe as the center upon which to base all thinking and history.

Instead, multicentricity focuses on the many different centers that the students bring to the classrooms. Multicentricity works to center the students in their own realities first and then move to the less familiar. It considers the relationships and power relations between different centers and is conceptually integrative. Such a curriculum opens up a wealth of possibilities in music education.

Dei (2003) proposes this multicentric curriculum and pedagogy as a response to the question of what an inclusive school system might look like following the anti-racist principles he identifies. For Dei (2003), inclusivity means: 1) dealing with equity and justice; 2) having a multiplicity of perspectives; and 3) making instructional practices respond to diversity (78). He emphasizes that inclusivity is neither additive, nor celebratory. Rather, a multicentric curriculum centers the student's personal experience and focuses on contextual learning from the subject location of each individual. It would, for example, allow the "African child to see and interpret the world with his or her own eyes, rather than with those of the 'other'" (Dei 2003, 92).<sup>9</sup> However, Dei notes the importance of not merely replacing one hegemonic knowledge system with another. For Afrocentric scholar Molefi Asante (1991), a person "educated in a truly centric fashion comes to view all groups' contributions as significant and useful" (171). Because their own backgrounds are validated, this education allows students to see themselves "not merely as seekers of knowledge but as integral participants in it" (Asante 1991, 171).

Therefore, in a multicentric curriculum in music education, multiple musics and musickings occur not as additive in relation to the dominant (Western classical) body of knowledge, but as integrative. Each music is important, and students can view and engage with them from shifting perspectives, as Gould (2005) suggests.<sup>10</sup> Like the previous discussion of students having varying degrees of privilege in relation to one another, a multicentric music curriculum acknowledges the privilege granted to various musics and the manner in which privilege is reflected materially within music education. Such a curriculum includes not only multiple musics, but also many orientations toward music. Students come to understand music through multiple epistemologies, recognizing that there is more than "one way" to know music. This destabilizing of Europe as the center is a significant impediment to white supremacy in music education. Supporting students in recognizing different ways of

knowing the world is a powerful move toward dismantling systems of privilege as they currently stand.

### *Pursuing an Equity Agenda*

Finally, in order to truly breach the logic of global white supremacy, music educators can actively pursue an equity agenda. Feminist music educator Julia Koza thinks specifically about the manner in which auditions to music education programs reproduce the cycle of exclusion. In the article *Listening for Whiteness*, Koza (2008) examines the way postsecondary voice auditions exclude certain bodies from the academy through requirements that are raced and classed.<sup>11</sup> Exclusion is technically based on “style,” but the notion of style itself and, more specifically, preferences for certain styles are inherently tied to race and class.<sup>12</sup> She finds that audition committees “listen for whiteness” through “funding” or validating a narrow definition of Western training deemed worthy of further study. However, she ultimately advocates for listening in this manner—not to “fund” it, but “to recognize its institutional presence, understand its technologies, and thereby work toward defunding it” (Koza 2008, 154). While her discussion in this article pertains specifically to auditions, it is applicable to other structures and institutions within music education and beyond. If, as music educators, we actively work to identify and expose the covert operation of white supremacy in our classes, in our pedagogies, in our schools, in our districts, and beyond, we can push to defund whiteness and privilege in a manner that could potentially be quite powerful.

### **From Theory to Practice**

In order to illustrate these ideas, I draw on empirical research from my doctoral work (Hess 2013) —a multiple case study of four elementary music teachers in a large Canadian city. I employed the methodology of a multiple case study (Merriam 1998; Yin 2009) to consider the discourses, practices, and philosophies of three of these four educators. Amanda, Anne, Sarah, and Susan teach in Toronto—one of the largest and most diverse cities in Canada—in four very different schools at opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. Their programs are distinct; what they shared was, by their own definition, a common identification with the goal of challenging

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dominant paradigms in their classrooms.<sup>13</sup> I observed in each school for an eight-week period for two full days each week, conducting semi-structured interviews at the beginning, middle, and end of each observation process. At each school, I followed an observation protocol that focused my attention on consistent aspects of each class I observed,<sup>14</sup> in addition to completing three interviews, and keeping a journal. The data from this study were extensive. The interview transcripts, my journal, and the observation protocols totaled over 1200 pages of data. I coded the data for significant themes in approximately seven weeks and constructed themes (Charmaz 2014) based on commonalities that emerged from the data. In the period following the time in the schools, I checked in with the participants at various stages of the data analysis. The teachers received transcripts to make changes if they deemed it necessary. As I completed the writing for my dissertation, I sent school and personal description sections to all four teachers to check for validity and reliability very early in the process, followed by the analytic writing as I completed it. There were no requested changes in the writing, and I was able to have a couple of conversations in response to the work. To varying extents, all four teachers employed an anti-racist orientation toward their teaching—an approach supported by the school board,<sup>15</sup> but adopted more unevenly in schools. I draw on examples from the field to illustrate how the teachers used this orientation to successfully implement differential recognition, encourage the use of multiple epistemologies, and pursue conversations about equity. While the multiple case study included four teachers, I draw on the work of only three—Amanda, Sarah, and Susan—to give an illustration for each of the three theoretical points explicated in the previous section.<sup>16</sup>

### *Positionality and the “Matrix of Domination”*

In considering positionality and the application of the matrix of domination to teaching praxis, I examine the work of one of the music educators, Susan Thomson.<sup>17</sup> Susan’s school had a high degree of socioeconomic privilege. Plus, students at the school were predominantly white. The majority of students were second or third generation Canadian and of Eastern European descent. The class disparity within the school was extreme. The majority of students came from households of privilege. They participated in afterschool activities every night of the week, according to

Susan, including private lessons and various classes (dance, martial arts, etc.) and had many opportunities to travel. School fundraisers were overwhelmingly successful, and the school had many resources at its disposal. The school was also located near a housing project.<sup>18</sup> In every class, there was a small minority of students, largely students of color, who lacked the financial security of the majority of their classmates.

Susan was well aware of the differential degrees of privilege and access among her student population. She wanted to see a change in the education system in order to facilitate the careful consideration of the needs of individual students:

I look at things and it comes down to things like having money to get the right running shoes, or it's TTC [transit] tickets to get to something. And there has to be that kind of personal, really personal look at any kid who's fragile and some kind of a "This is how we do it, this is the way we make sure this happens for this kid." And I don't see that in place. I just think if you took everyone who was employed from the Ministry of Education on down in elementary and secondary education in Ontario and divided the number of adults by the number of kids who are using our services and just put us in small pods, it would probably work out to four adults to ten kids. And four adults to ten kids could do a lot if we could re-think the model and start again.

Susan saw ways in which the system failed students and wanted to see support put in place to consider the needs of all students. While this notion could certainly be viewed through a liberal discourse of benevolence (Meiners 2002), that is not the discourse at play here. Susan believed strongly that it was the responsibility of the system to ensure that all students got what they needed—whatever those needs happened to be. Her use of the word “fragile” is interesting and has raced and classed qualities. Rebollo-Gil and Moras (2006) argue for the avoidance of language coded in this manner. However, the care Susan took to analyze the positionalities and needs of individual students manifests in her classes in at least two ways.

Susan actively recognized economic disparity in her school—a disparity that was raced as well as classed. She worked to address this inequity in ways that were within her control. A student who had just graduated had prepared and auditioned for an arts high school. He was musical and largely self-taught. His more formal music training took place in Susan's class. However, according to Susan, the arts school sought students with private lessons. As a young black student from a single-



parent family, lessons were beyond the scope of possibility. Susan was extremely upset by the classed inequity this arts school rejection demonstrated and planned to draw attention to the matter with the director of the school board. However, considering the student's positioning in relation to access and privilege, Susan facilitated his attendance in music camp on a scholarship in grade eight. Susan felt strongly that the system failed to serve students at a socioeconomic disadvantage and addressed the limits to opportunities in the ways in which she had control. Her power over the situation is linked to her own privilege as a white, middle class woman in an institutionally recognized position of authority. This power is important to recognize; however, it is equally necessary to note that she pointed directly to systemic flaws that privileged differential positioning—flaws she believed needed to be addressed much more broadly.

Further, Susan worked to provide differentiated instruction consistently in her classroom. She teased out the philosophy behind her practice of differentiation:

If you believe kids like to challenge themselves, why wouldn't they select something a little harder when they're ready for it? And they do. And the kid who's done something...the easy thing really fast usually can be moved on to the next thing because they really get the plus of succeeding quickly. So, yeah...to me that's a no-brainer. Always give kids open-ended things or several alternatives.

Susan provided levels of challenge in activities for students to self-select according to their needs, without singling out any particular student or raising students' level of self-consciousness. Differentiation was organic to her classroom, and students were clearly comfortable trying multiple levels of an activity. It was common in her class to see students working in small groups toward one of the possible tasks. Susan was keenly aware of the way the factors in the matrix of domination affected the students. Socioeconomic factors intersected intensely with race in her school due to the local housing project and the minority of students in each class who lived there. She identified the racialization of the special education program at the school, noting the disproportionate number of racialized students at lower socioeconomic levels who were streamed into special education classes—a systemic problem that Susan believed the school board needed to address. Susan illuminated multiple intersections that include the complex relationships of race, disability, and class within special education programs.<sup>19</sup>



For Susan, “differentiation” was grounded in the idea that “ability” is a social construction controlled by systemic factors, all of which need to be taken into account. She actively recognized the manner in which access to private music lessons influenced students’ so-called “ability” and worked to take these factors into account. When teachers consider how gender, race, class, immigrant and refugee status, age, language, disability, religion, and sexual orientation affect the students in their classrooms and account for it in their teaching, they create an environment that facilitates very different kinds of access. In Susan’s class, in the eight weeks I observed, I never saw a student belittle someone who chose a simpler activity over one that was more complex. Rather, students seemed to accept the choices others made and worked toward the project of the day. Observing the students work in small collectives was common and students often took mentoring roles with each other as they accomplished their task. Upon reflection, I wonder if it might be possible to complicate this differentiated approach to account for more than issues of class and access to music. There were multiple intersections of positionality here—at minimum class, race, and disability. I wonder what might change in terms of access if differentiation included the possibility of multiple genres that rely on different strengths. Differentiating in that manner may open up even greater possibilities for access.

### *Multicentricity*

In considering multicentricity as a curricular structure, I look to Sarah’s Javanese Gamelan program. Sarah worked in a school at the opposite end of the socioeconomic spectrum from Susan. Identified specifically by the school board as a school with a high degree of socioeconomic need, Brownstone’s student population was largely composed of students of East Asian descent who were new immigrants to Canada or first generation Canadians. Sarah’s program integrated multiple musics, including among others, Ghanaian music, Brazilian music, Western classical music, folk musics from Eastern and Western Europe, Mandarin songs, hip hop, and Javanese Gamelan. Her room housed a homemade Gamelan, made largely from pots and pans and hammered-down keys from Orff instruments<sup>20</sup> to adjust the metal for the Javanese tuning. Unlike other oral and written traditions students learned in her

class, Gamelan uses different technique (with the exception of some debatable similarity to the Orff instruments), an emphasis of aural cues over visual cues, and a distinct tuning system. Gamelan also orients toward the end of the phrase; rather than the first beat receiving emphasis, a large gong accentuates the end of each phrase. The epistemology for Javanese Gamelan is significantly different than one for Western classical music, and the students in Sarah's program moved between multiple epistemologies, adapting their orientations toward the music as necessary. Sarah saw all of the classes in the school for music and worked with students from junior kindergarten through grade five. The school valued music and she saw each class between three and four times a week. Students commonly had a class on Gamelan, followed by the review of a song for the upcoming school musical, an instrumental music lesson taught by an itinerant (visiting) music teacher, and a choir rehearsal after school. It was interesting to observe so many of the same students participate in all of the activities available to them and change musical styles without seeming to give it a second thought. This adaptation was not as easy for me. After five weeks of observations, I recorded the following note in my journal:

I have now started to feel the different orientation of the Gamelan; the end of the phrase is the most important part. The gong ageng and gong siyem sound on beat eight. It's so interesting how your brain wants to put the music in a box that it understands. I'm finally starting to think it on its own terms at the end of week five in this school. (Excerpt from journal, March 2012)

My observations of my own cognition also resonate with Asante's (1991) assertion that we typically begin from our own cultural referents.

Sarah had studied Gamelan extensively, and her program was multi-faceted. She drew on her own knowledge, and that of practicing Gamelan musicians. Not only was she able to provide a complex and nuanced view of Gamelan herself, but she also introduced students to a wonderful dancer/drummer, an opportunity to play a set of professional instruments, and the chance to regularly visit the Indonesian Consulate. Contrary to a tokenistic approach to a diverse range of musics, the students' experiences of Gamelan could not be reduced to a single experience. The nature of the inclusion of the Gamelan, then, was far from an additive approach. Instead, it was integrative and relational, allowing students to recognize the multiplicity of ways

it is possible to know music. As students came to understand this tradition of musicking, the following interactions took place in a grade five/six Gamelan class:

Sarah reminds them that they are one big jigsaw puzzle. One boy volunteers, “It’s like the pieces have separated and we have to put them together.”

This student’s analysis of the manner in which the Gamelan instruments joined together to become a cohesive whole was a nuanced perspective reflected in the way this particular class played the Gamelan. Their individual parts complemented each other and as an outside observer, it was a music that truly interlocked. Sarah understood the importance of the opportunity of listening from outside and regularly chose students to listen to their class from the front of the room. Further, there was a moment in Sarah’s Gamelan class one morning that beautifully demonstrated another possible outcome of providing such opportunities to students:

The students are excited at the instruments. They talk to each other and play a bit on their instruments. They play loudly—much louder than they need to—but they are able to play the gong tone together after a few tries. One student says, “Whoa. We’ve only got 5 minutes left. Whoa.” They are completely focused. (Excerpt from observations, March)

The class goes on to reflect on what they just played. This moment perfectly captured the “flow” that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Elliott and Silverman (Elliott 1995; Elliott and Silverman 2015) discuss in their respective works. Completely absorbed by the activity, this student “fell out of time”—lost in the flow of the activity. As this student worked to develop another way of knowing music, he was swept into a “flow experience”—demonstrating complete and utter absorption in a new way to understand music.

A typical liberal view of expanding the curriculum may allow students to know more than one music through following an additive model, but in multicentric music education, students learn that there are multiple ways to think about music. The hopeful extension to this way of thinking is the understanding that it is possible to consider the world from more than one orientation. In the period of time I observed, Gamelan was the primary focus. However, the genres studied in Sarah’s classes over the course of the year were extensive. Students studied music from multiple continents and the older students worked with a local high school student who was a

hip hop artist. In watching Sarah's students move from work on the Gamelan to studying Western music, it seemed as though the music was no longer "strange" or "exotic." Rather, students seemed comfortable and even fluent in its language, not noticeably viewing it in any way as different from the every day. There is a danger of exoticism, however, in studying a broad range of musics. In studying the Gamelan in depth, students were able to avoid that approach to diverse musics with the Gamelan. It would be interesting to see the manner in which other musics were studied throughout the year.

### *Pursuing an Equity Agenda*

Finally, I consider the ways that teachers might actively pursue an equity agenda in their teaching. Like Susan, Amanda taught in a predominantly white school of privilege. Situated in a neighborhood of two million dollar homes, the majority of these students had many advantages. Amanda's program—a diverse approach to Afrocentric musics in the Americas—provided sociohistorical and sociocultural context for all musics taught. Students studied Ghanaian music one month before I arrived. In the time I observed in her class, she discussed the Middle Passage and traced points of departure for enslaved people from Africa to their points of landing in the Americas through the use of a proportionally accurate Peters map of the world. While I observed, students examined the Afrocentric musics that emerged in the Americas after the transatlantic crossings. Amanda struggled with a way to frame this unit with the students. She was determined to situate the musics as rich *in spite of* rather than *because of* horrendous violence and oppression. She worried that the oppressive history might be lost with the wrong presentation. As a result, she tried to make the severity of the slave trade felt with each group. She emphasized that current music with African roots is due to the strength of African culture, rather than any positive effect of the slave trade. With each class, she stressed the circumstances out of which the music emerged. They traced the different transatlantic crossings together, beginning with studying the music that resulted from the Portuguese colonization of Brazil and the enslavement of African peoples to work in Bahia. The students studied *maculelê*—a music from Brazil originally performed with machetes

on plantations in Bahia. From there, students studied Afro-Cuban music, followed by code songs from African American plantations, and then the blues.<sup>21</sup>

Amanda began this unit on African diasporic musics by inquiring how what we hear on the radio could conceivably be connected to Africa. The classes considered possibilities; some arrived quickly at the history of enslavement and the transatlantic passage. For other classes, those with younger students in particular, making this connection was difficult. On a winter afternoon, Amanda introduced this unit to grade three students through telling a story:

“Between 1450 and 1800, things were happening in the world that forced Africans to move to North America, South America, and the Caribbean.” Amanda introduces the slave trade—a practice she refers to as “the trading and selling of people.” She estimates that 15 million Africans taken and enslaved. She calls it “kidnapping.” People were “chained, forced to walk for as long as it took, sometimes for weeks. Europeans would overload the ships because some people would die.” Amanda and the students also discuss colonization at a very basic level. She asks the students: “Does anyone know why in Cuba, they speak Spanish, in Brazil, they speak Portuguese, and here, it’s English?” The students are unsure. Amanda frames colonization as being “about people who wanted to make money. They treated humans like animals.” She describes this period of history in language that the students will understand. She says that Africans were “kidnapped and forced to move to somewhere new.” They discuss the plantations and the ownership of people and the requirement to work. (Excerpt from observations, January 2012)

These grade three students were horrified by her descriptions of the transatlantic passage and enslavement. However, as a class, they took this discussion to a place unexplored by any of the other classes, and the connections they made were both interesting and disturbing. As students of privilege, they immediately associated themselves with the plantation owners. The students discussed what they would do in such a situation and determined that they would “buy slaves and set them free”—that they would not own slaves in that position.

The discursive shift in this conversation was worrisome. Amanda, with her words on this subject, worked to make the situation a felt reality for the students. The fact that they believed that in that same position as plantation owners that they would have “saved” the enslaved people and liberated them is problematic. The study focused on teachers; teacher pedagogy and interviews took place with teachers and

not students. As such, it is less possible to ascertain the reasons behind some of these discussions. Given the limitations of the study, I consider a possible reason from a theoretical perspective. Over the time I observed, students referred to the movie “The Help” (Taylor 2011) on a number of occasions as they tried to understand the subject matter.<sup>22</sup> The movie was a recent release and was quite popular through the fall of 2011. Some of the students had clearly seen it since they brought it into the discussion. “The Help” is one of many films that capitalizes on the “white savior film genre.” The discourse of the white savior is pervasive in media (Hernán and Gordon 2003; Hughey 2014). Hernán and Gordon (2003) offer a powerful critique of this discourse in Hollywood films that span almost a hundred years. They describe this figure as the white “messiah” who commonly appears in these narratives:

The messianic white self is the redeemer of the weak, the great leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of color from poverty and disease, or leads Indians in battle for their dignity and survival. This is a narcissistic fantasy found in many Hollywood movies. Often the white messiah is an alienated hero, a misfit within his own society, mocked and rejected until he becomes a leader of a minority group or of foreigners. He finds himself by self-sacrifice to liberate the natives. (33-34)

The ubiquity of this discourse in the media, including in a film that a number of the students had recently seen quite possibly influences the classroom discussion on this issue. Hernán and Gordon’s (2003) book *Screen Savors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* cites over fifty movies that employ this white savior narrative. The discourse is pervasive and the students’ discussion exemplifies the very same elements cited above. Students insisted that were they to find themselves in the situation of the plantation owners that they would choose to purchase and liberate the enslaved people. However, as the classroom discourse shifted in this direction, Amanda immediately said, “But what if everyone else was doing it?” She pointed to the financial discrepancy and loss plantation owners without enslaved people would experience if all of the other plantations used slave labor.

With her response, Amanda refocused the discussion on inequity and worked to help students understand the complexity of such a situation. She employed the orientation of critical anti-racism to further the agenda of promoting equity. To approach teaching from a non-critical perspective could foster discourses of charity and benevolence in this situation. Amanda did not allow the students to take up this



position. Employing a critical framework, she followed the conversation, but pursued an anti-racist agenda, daring to have what Singleton and Linton (2006) refer to as “courageous conversations.” This pedagogy worked to both reveal and dismantle privilege and is consistent with Koza’s (2008) suggestion to both recognize and defund privilege. Amanda addressed both present and past issues from an anti-racist perspective. The on-going colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the political situation in Cuba were both topics that arose over the students’ work with Afrocentric music. The anti-racist framework was useful in both discussions in fostering the understanding of the very real influence of systemic racism in the world today. Taken together, these tenets of anti-racism provide three powerful approaches to address systemic hierarchies in music education.

### **Conclusion: Upping the “Anti-”**

In a world where the tragedies that befell Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Jordan Davis can and do regularly occur, the argument that we are in a postracial time fades into impossibility. What happened to those men was not an accident. It was intentional violence enacted on black bodies. Further, systemic structures not only allowed, but enabled that violence to occur. In a world where these acts can happen, the necessity for anti-racism as a theoretical framework for both teaching and living is apparent. In music education it is a place to begin. Based on the actions of the three teachers explored in this paper in relation to tenets of anti-racism, I believe that it is possible to work for justice through music education. As Koza (2008) pointed out, it is feasible to both listen for and defund whiteness and this work is not only necessary, but imperative. It is time to “up the anti-.”

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Hess (2013) for extensive detail on the individual cases.

<sup>2</sup> Gramsci (1971) identifies two functions through which the dominant group sustains hegemony or remains dominant in society: “(1) The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production, and (2) The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed” (12).

<sup>3</sup> Anti-racist scholars Rebollo-Gil and Moras (2006) encourage readers to breach racist coded language and mobilize counternarratives to discourses currently circulating. It is these breaches that help move us into a new place. Breaches might include such steps as making visible racially coded language and introducing counternarratives into public forums—stories not necessarily heard in “mainstream” society.

<sup>4</sup> See Bonilla Silva (2006) for a detailed discussion of colorblindness. See also Crenshaw (1995b) or a discussion of the manner in which the opposite of colorblindness—race consciousness—was equated with racism.

<sup>5</sup> If subaltern classes in society sustain hegemony through giving their consent “to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” and the state upholds the dominant group’s authority by enforcing said direction on those who do not consent (Gramsci 1971, 12), counterhegemonic education may function in the Freirian (Freire 1970) tradition of asking students to “name the world” and work to change it—to actively identify hegemonic systems around them and resist them.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Patricia Hill Collins work belongs to the theoretical/political movement that originates in the United States called “Black Feminist Thought,” not anti-racism. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work belongs firmly in critical race theory. However, I use the work of both scholars to discuss intersectionality in anti-racism, as intersectionality is fundamental to anti-racism and their work is exceptional in this area.

<sup>7</sup> See Ellsworth (1989) for an example of the subsuming of certain voices within the context of critical pedagogy.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, discussion of parallelism in McCarthy (1988, 274).

<sup>9</sup> In this discussion, note that while acknowledges differential positions, Dei refers to a child with roots in the continent of Africa, as opposed to the more common Eurocentric approach to subjects like history, science, philosophy, etc.

<sup>10</sup> I note here that there is much privilege associated with this type of mobility.

<sup>11</sup> In searching for an adjective to describe the manner in which these requirements are raced and classed, I stumbled. They are not “covertly” raced and classed as that word implies intent. They are also not necessarily “unconsciously” or “unintentionally” raced or classed, because the logic of white supremacy indicates that it is not particularly surprising at all. Rather these requirements speak to the “hidden curriculum” described by Michael Apple (2004), among others. The requirements are simply manifestations of the larger structure of white supremacy that operates as a global phenomenon. This phenomenon extends to music school auditions.

<sup>12</sup> She cites the listener demographics of certain music styles/genres as examples.

<sup>13</sup> Because “challenging dominant paradigms” was self-determined by participants, the definitions ranged broadly. For Amanda, it meant actively challenging oppressive structures in society through class content. Susan shared Amanda’s view, but focused her attention on the older students for this subject matter. Sarah’s focus was working with a real diversity of music to share a broad range of experiences with students. Anne shared Sarah’s focus on diversity, but also believed that in the face of all of the cuts to the arts, simply having a school music program was challenging dominant paradigms.

<sup>14</sup> I consistently focused on classroom set-up, content of the class, pedagogy employed, classroom management, power dynamics, timing of the class, and participation and completed one observation protocol sheet for all classes observed (6-8 per day).

<sup>15</sup> School boards in Ontario correspond to school districts in the United States.

<sup>16</sup> See Hess (2013) for extensive detail on these situations. See in particular chapters 5-8.

<sup>17</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>18</sup> This housing is community housing provided by the government.

<sup>19</sup> See Erevelles, Kanga, and Middleton (2006) for a discussion of the intersection of race and disability in the context of schooling and the overrepresentation of African American students in special education classes. See also Mitchell (2010) for a discussion of the disproportional representation of racialized students of the lower socioeconomic classes in special education programs.

<sup>20</sup> Orff instruments are barred instruments—pitched percussion (e.g. xylophones)—that are utilized in the Orff approach to teaching music.

<sup>21</sup> See Hess (2013) for more detail on the individual cases.

<sup>22</sup> There were eight separate mentions/discussions of the movie during class time over the time I observed. All mentions occurred in classes with students in grade three through grade six.

### **About the Author**

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