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Practical Pluralism: Toward Anti-Racist Competencies in Music Educators

Michelle Rampal

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Practical Pluralism: Toward Anti-Racist Competencies in Music Educators

Michelle Rampal

Molloy College, Rockville Centre, NY

Abstract

The specialized curricula of music education degree programs afford relatively few opportunities to cultivate educators' abilities to recognize, acknowledge, and incorporate students' multiple lived realities within the music classroom. This is especially problematic in an age where public schools serve an increasingly diverse population of students. While many researchers are challenging established curricula and traditional music education practices, arguments stop short of outlining specific competencies that may be helpful for music educators to acquire. This paper examines and synthesizes literature between domains of educational sociology and music education in an effort to introduce anti-racist pedagogy into a music education setting. Through these efforts, I propose music educators consider adopting anti-racist competencies that could engage and promote the unique identities of all students in their classrooms. In doing so, music educators can assume a powerful role in shaping school culture, providing a space to explore the intersections of culture, power, and identity.

Keywords: *pluralism, anti-racist pedagogy, music education, social justice*

Music education faces challenges on several fronts across the United States. This is not news to music educators, particularly those who spend a lot of time and effort on advocacy. Budget cuts, layoffs, testing, and the accountability movement are among familiar obstacles that leave the music education profession collectively wringing its hands. These conditions can drive us to distraction, but these may be masking deeper issues in music education.

Music teachers in the market for a position within the last ten years have encountered an acute incongruence between our profession's mainstream discourse and their experienced realities. In some regions of the United States, music teacher vacancies are decreasingly requesting specialists in band, chorus, and orchestra.

Recent graduates from the music education program at Molloy College are increasingly called upon to establish Afro-Caribbean drumming ensembles, guitar ensembles, rock bands, and audio production classes *in addition* to traditional duties as large ensemble conductors. One graduate's bilingual Spanish skills remain indispensable to her current choral position in a public high school in New York City.

It is vital that music education adapts to meet the evolving needs of students in the 21st century. In the United States, dramatic changes in public school student demographics should certainly expedite attention to these concerns. By 2024, minorities will comprise the majority population in the United States (Roberts 2008). Between 2000 and 2008, public school student enrollment patterns exhibited a decrease in Whites from 61% to 56%, a holding pattern of 17% in Blacks, an increase from 17% to 21% in Hispanics, and an increase from 4% to 5% in Asians/Pacific Islanders (Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani 2010). As globalization increases, it is possible that schools in other nations could experience demographic changes as well. Music educators and researchers need to consider the various conditions that function to promote—or impede—moves toward greater diversity. To this end, I believe it is time for more music educators to explore race relations, and its broader implications for the profession. While this is already happening among scholars, I advocate for expanding these conversations to include practicing K–12 teachers and music education majors. I should acknowledge that I am venturing into uncomfortable territory here. There is a strong aversion to broach the topic of race in music education (Bradley 2007). Some may wonder, “Why should race *ever* be an issue in music education?” After all, the music educators I know are committed, caring people who work very hard to make meaningful learning experiences for *all* of their students. As educators, we attend to the development of whole human beings. I view music education as a powerful medium for shaping students (and teachers) to become independent, critical thinkers and global citizens. As a White¹ music educator, I worry that significant opportunities for student learning, careers, and the broader profession might be overlooked if I, along with others, lack the perspective to see these within the context of our predominantly White profession. What is done—and is *not* done—to address matters of race in music education could have vast implications for student outcomes, recruitment, retention, and the perceived relevance of our profession.

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize literature between the domains of music education and educational sociology in an effort to promote the possibilities of applying anti-racist pedagogy to music education settings. In looking for inspiration from the strides that education researchers have already made in this endeavor, I hope this will introduce a growing body of literature for current and future music educators to consider, particularly as it can relate to our discipline. The first part of this paper discusses central concepts of anti-racist pedagogy, along with how these may be valuable to consider in music education. The second part of this paper highlights a series of competencies that may prove especially useful for current and future music educators to incorporate anti-racism into their practice. These are adapted from tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995, Villegas and Lucas 2002) and “critical dispositions” outlined by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) for effective teachers of diverse learners (CCSSO 2013).

It is important to distinguish the notion of race from multicultural music education. Music educators may believe that approaching music classes with an inclusive multicultural stance, without specifically attending to race, will promote greater tolerance and understanding in our society. The goals and approaches of multicultural education, while potentially well-intended, are ultimately limited by the inability to acknowledge and “address the problem of racism’s impact on opportunity” (Blakeney 2011, 120). Anti-racist theory provides a vital means toward critically interrogating *and changing* systems, policies, and practices within music education that could restrict opportunities for students and teachers of color. It could also provide avenues to recognize and affirm effective practices that serve to empower.

The path to becoming a music educator in the United States is particularly rigorous and isolating at times. Typical music teacher education programs afford relatively few opportunities to cultivate educators’ abilities to recognize, acknowledge, and incorporate students’ multiple, lived realities within the music classroom. This is a significant problem at all levels of musical instruction, and the need to correct this is pressing. In April 2015, National Association for Music Education (NAfME) advocates successfully lobbied for language that includes music as a core academic subject in a federal proposal of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (NAfME 2015). If this designation places music on par with other core academic subjects, music educators may soon be obligated to align practices more closely with those disciplines. In 2011, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) released ten standards of effective teaching, explicitly recognizing “the teacher/learner connection [as] the most critical factor in successful learning” (CCSSO 2013, 11). Central to the consortium’s vision of effective teaching in the 21st century is understanding and meeting the needs of “diverse learners”. Despite a conscious shift toward child-centric learning and diversity in other academic disciplines, music education lags behind in this endeavor. It is imperative that this gap is attended to in teacher education programs and professional development workshops, for K–12 teachers are in the best possible position to enact immediate, meaningful changes to conventional practice.

Positionality

I am a White, first-generation college student from a working-class, rural background. My experiences as both student and educator have driven my scholarly interests toward issues of culture and race in music education. It is important to acknowledge that race and culture intersects with a variety of other factors, and place is merely one of them. Notions of plurality will vary greatly within music teachers’ environments, and I am sharing my perspectives from one geographical context. Some colleagues see a viable application for anti-racist pedagogy in urban schools, but argue there is no need for this practice in suburban or rural music classrooms where they imagine students are predominantly White. I taught music for four years in a diverse, award-winning suburban high school in New York. Despite a school population that increasingly included more Black and Hispanic/Latino students than White, a notable majority of students in the honors-level band and orchestra were White. The demographics of the lower-level ensembles of the school were predominantly Black and Hispanic/Latino. New to the profession at the time, I worked hard to be inclusive, yet had difficulty convincing some excellent musicians of color to join my honors band. In my inexperience, and like many other teachers, I resorted to a deficit discourse to explain why these particular students wouldn’t want to be in my band: these particular kids probably didn’t want to work hard in the top

band, or maybe they just cared more about socializing. It had never occurred to me that, perhaps my classroom—carefully aligned with departmental policies, traditions, community expectations, and curricular standards—was not perceived as a welcoming place for *all* students of color. Many students of color flourished in my ensembles, but some did not. Despite my good intentions, I played a part in upholding systems that probably did not benefit all students equally. My actions exemplified a deep acculturation to the norms of our profession. As a younger teacher, I never considered the possibility of questioning some of these norms. Now, I think it is important to consider how such norms could enable “colorblind-spots” to occur in practice.

My fundamental beliefs in music education are influenced by praxial philosophy, which is underpinned by a socially-informed, reflexive practitioner approach (Elliott 1995). Accordingly, my epistemological position is situated in constructionism, which accounts for the generation of knowledge through the “uncertainties and flexibilities associated with knowing, signifiers, discourses, and justification systems” (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, and Hayes 2009, 688). I aspire to teach and research in ways that attend to music education as a conduit for social justice. I aim to disrupt the profession’s tendency toward prioritizing Eurocentric traditions while exploring the potential of music education to serve in a transformational capacity toward forging a culture of trust in schools. Recently, a colleague of color told me he was “glad” I am pursuing this topic: he voiced the concern that if such scholarship were to come from him, people would “assume [he] had an agenda.” While some music educators of color feel free to share their stories and concerns, others do not. In positioning myself as a White ally, I do not presume to fully understand or speak for my students and colleagues of color. Inevitably, this paper addresses issues that I argue music teachers ought to consider from this vantage point. Further perspectives from researchers and teachers are vital and necessary, particularly concerning how these matters impact and extend to teachers of color.

I am calling for music educators of all races to have earnest conversations and take a stance against racism and oppression. Maxine Greene, social activist and educational philosopher said, “A teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own”

(Greene 1988, 14). I encourage practicing music educators and students to join scholars in questioning if the traditional trappings of our pedagogical heritage(s) are truly meeting the needs of all students.

Toward anti-racism in music education

Much of music education's history in the United States has been grounded in the premise that music represents an aesthetic object, devoid of any meaning other than "music for music's sake" (Bowman 1998; Elliott 1995; Goble 2010). The aesthetic approach to music education has manifested largely through the study of Western art music. An emphasis on the formal structures and musical elements of compositions enabled educators to embrace and present such music as an elevated art form, thoroughly neutral in representations beyond sound:

A large body of music exists that can be regarded as unconnected to any particular place . . . time . . . ethnic group, or . . . race. This is the important literature of Western art music, which is characterized by its universality, its timelessness, its "color-blindness" . . . the composition is liberated from its place of origin, the time of its creation, the physical characteristics of its creator. (Reimer 1970, 145)

While Reimer later refined his views, his earlier concept of universality remains appealing and influential to a profession still under siege. After all, music education has long subsisted at the margins of curricula in American public schools. Reimer (1991) noted an absence of a cohesive philosophical approach to American music education until the 1960s, when the rise of aesthetic philosophy coincided with a political movement in an effort to secure funding and stability of arts education in schools. The first national standards for music were created in 1994 by a task force of music educators in reaction to a glaring omission of music (and other arts) in the original 1990 proposal for the *National Education Goals* (Benedict 2004). Facing a threat of extinction from public school curricula, music educators felt pressured to present an image of consensus:

On the one hand the standards provided content legitimacy for music education, but on the other, ignoring the metamorphosis of what knowledge is most worth having . . . [which could] serve only to arrest, rather than raise, the status of music education. (Benedict 2004, 132)

School music teachers, well aware of their precarious standing in schools, may tread lightly around decisions and situations that could invite controversy and scrutiny to

their programs. Some, in an attempt to minimize such scrutiny, embrace music as an autonomous entity, devoid of specific cultural meanings. Ironically, this stance may ultimately repel more music students than we retain in public schools. Wayne Bowman (2007) raises a critical issue with our profession's penchant for neutrality:

[A] tremendously important part of what we exclude from musicianship and music study and music teaching when we view them through generic "aesthetic" lenses are *the people* of whose culture and lives musical engagements form vital parts. (117)

Within the last several years, music education scholars have increasingly investigated and raised issues of representation and oppressive practices in music education. Wayne Bowman, Deborah Bradley, David Elliott, Donna T. Emmanuel, J. Scott Goble, Julia Eklund Koza, Patricia Riley, and Patricia Sheehan Campbell are all engaged in very important work on this front. Koza (2008) posits undergraduate music education programs perpetuate systemic racism and classism in determining how students are admitted to the profession. She argues that auditions, contingent upon the performance of classical music, restrict admission to students with access to formal instruction and quality equipment. "Because the affluence gap has a racial pattern, this access conundrum . . . becomes a racially discriminatory practice . . ." (148). Undergraduate music education programs align closely with teacher certification standards that are mandated by state governments. Traditionally, this alignment has defaulted to assuming the musical performance practices of European conservatory models. This alignment also produces teachers who are "likely to perpetuate a musical monolingualism that will foster a vast cultural divide between themselves and many of their students" (149). This is particularly problematic, for "when the norms of a given musical practice are generalized to all practices, everywhere, for all times, philosophy is effectively replaced by ideology" (Bowman and Frega 2012, 25). Higher education administrators and faculty often assume a conservative approach when interpreting mandates from accreditation boards in order to preserve an institution's aura of legitimacy. These conditions pose significant challenges to curricular innovation and change. It is vitally important for all students to acquire the capacity to nurture authentic understanding and positive interactions with people from all racial backgrounds. To neglect this, in my mind, limits *everyone's* opportunities in a pluralistic society. It may also have real implications for enrollment and retention in music classrooms. More research is

needed to identify further possibilities for anti-racist pedagogy in music education, particularly in K–12 settings.

Anti-racist pedagogy provides a useful lens for teachers to consider how various aspects of their practices may impact opportunities for people of color. Blakeney (2011) offers a concise definition of anti-racist pedagogy:

. . . a paradigm located within Critical Theory utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect. (119)

A central goal of anti-racist pedagogy is to develop an “in-depth comprehension of the impact of racism and the experiences of racism” (Blakeney 2011, 121). To assume an anti-racist stance in the classroom is an intentional act (Bradley 2007, Pollock 2008), aimed toward dismantling oppression and structural inequalities while actively promoting and creating equal opportunity. Mica Pollock (2008) advances a core question for educators to consider in this endeavor: “In your practice, when does treating people as racial group members help them, and when does it harm them?” (xviii). In wrestling with possible answers to this question, teachers should consider their own positionalities within the various power structures present in classrooms, schools, the profession, and society. Well-intentioned teachers may inadvertently equate social justice with charity or “rescuing” (Bradley 2007)—such thinking does more harm than good. It presumes that marginalized people are deficient in recognizing and working toward dismantling obstacles to opportunity. True liberation of opportunity for all must be pursued *with* people who are oppressed, not *for* or *to* them (Freire 1993).

Anti-racist pedagogy has viable applications at every level of the music education profession. At a micro-level, it has enormous utility in providing teachers a perspective to better serve students from racial backgrounds that are different from their own. Students of color may feel better supported and understood in this process. It may also lead to greater critical consciousness of oppression (Freire 1993), prompting teachers and students to become allies toward social change. On a meso-level, anti-racist pedagogy could prompt teachers to consider how various school policies and practices impact access, eligibility, and participation within music classes in schools. This may involve examining school-wide practices, such as tracking and discipline. It could also mean interrogating racialized enrollment

patterns in general music classes versus performing ensembles. On a macro-level, music education leaders could encourage a recalibration of norms within the profession to encompass a broader conception of *who* is served by music educators, and *how*.

The costs of colorblindness

Racism is a social construction that functions to divide humanity by perpetuating the status quo of a dominant group (Bradley 2007, Lipman 1998, Marger 1991, Pollock 2008). “The presumed superiority of some groups and inferiority of others is subsequently used to legitimate the unequal distribution of the society’s resources, specifically, various forms of wealth, prestige, and power” (Marger 1991, 27). Culture is a range of shared customs and beliefs that exist between people. Marger (1991) further acknowledges that categories such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status co-exist and overlap with race, which complicates the notion of culture considerably. “There is a downside to the instinctive use of the term *culture* as a container of coherence: the container leaks” (McDermott and Varenne 1995, 325). When people believe that the color of one’s skin connotes a specific ethnicity, set of behaviors, and/or values, they risk assigning various labels and limits to human interactions and opportunities. In schools, this is particularly devastating and disruptive to students’ educational futures:

[R]acism is not simply a personal attitude or individual disposition . . . feeling guilty or “being nice” are not enough to combat racism. Racism involves the systemic failure of people and institutions to care for students of color on an ongoing basis. (Nieto 2008, 28)

Pauline Lipman (1998) connects the importance of teachers’ ideologies to efforts in shaping school culture and social reform: “Schools are neither neutral nor passive in the face of social crises affecting youth from marginalized communities” (6). Lipman stresses the importance of interrogating how students’ needs in the classroom are framed. Many teachers resort to broad assumptions in explaining student behavior and academic difficulties from a deficit model, which tends to connect problems in school to perceived deficiencies such as low intelligence, absentee parents, and poor attitudes (Lipman 1998). School environments that fail to validate all students’ cultural identities can breed “rational distrust” (Larson and Ovando 2001), feelings of suspicion based on negative interactions and experiences

in schools. This phenomenon can have a damaging impact on the effectiveness of schools, and can extend to broader implications in society. Music teachers could be unwitting accomplices to promoting racial distrust in schools. Uncritical practice has the capacity to

validate and recognize particular (white) bodies, to give passing nods to a token few “others,” and to invalidate many more through omission. The western musical canon predominates our curricula, while we continue to argue whether popular music should have a place in what our students learn, and which styles of popular music are “appropriate.” (Bradley 2007, 134)

Bradley (2007, 2012) leads us to consider a much larger issue here. While music educators wrestle with decisions about what genres and musical works are deserving of a place in the classroom, our profession largely neglects to examine the possible implications of our aversion to conflict. There is a fear that by incorporating various social, political, cultural, and historical contexts into our lessons, music teachers will be heading toward conversations about race (Bradley 2012, Campbell 2010). Such passivity is not helpful for our students, nor is it sustainable in our schools. “When we as teachers ignore issues because we fear ‘uncomfortable conversations,’ we unintentionally marginalize both the issues and the students who experience racism and other oppressions in material ways” (Bradley 2007, 155). Mica Pollock (2004) coined a term for such interactions: *colormuteness*. There is a price to pay for such silence—teachers may unwittingly perpetuate these norms and restrict opportunities for music students to learn about themselves and others (Bradley 2012).

Prevailing institutional norms have historically encouraged American teachers to engage in universalist policies and standards, which date back to the assembly-line model of education that became popular in the wake of the Great Depression (Angus and Mirel 1999). This kind of thinking, while rooted in the best of intentions, can be very damaging in certain circumstances. Teachers think they are treating students equally and fairly when resorting to “bureaucratic logic-action” (Larson 1997), a dogmatic adherence to institutional policies without considering the various contingencies of multiple human realities. Colorblind practices can only be equitable if every individual human being operates within the same, exact set of circumstances. This is impossible, of course, which is why colorblind ideology doesn’t work in practice as well as it does in principle. Humans are constantly engaged in a process

of cognitive sorting, where we classify and manage people, roles, behaviors, and expectations against the norms of our own cultural backgrounds. However, sometimes our “schematic expectations limit our perceptions and interpretations” (Larson and Ovando 2001, 76). When music educators assume a universal approach to their classrooms, musical selections, analysis, and assessments in the classroom inevitably filter through each of their individually embedded cultural schema. Teachers may never come to know the various musical dimensions of their students if they are only weighed against the prevailing standards of the classical canon. Even more concerning, such practices may ultimately drive students away from school music programs, impeding students’ lifelong musical engagement (Myers 2008). To ensure that learning environments foster human development, creative and critical thinking, teachers should consider all students’ identities. Music educators can be an integral part of teaching for social justice:

Notably, owing to their unique roles as agents of socialization, educators in the arts and humanities in K–12 schools are likely the best-positioned, socially-speaking, to foster such inter-cultural understanding among students from disparate cultural communities. (Goble 2010, 19)

There is an urgent need for music teachers to engage in meaningful reflection about how race matters in music classrooms. The music, practices, standards and policies that teachers have historically taken for granted as “normal” in classrooms may impact students’ identities, social interactions, and musicianship in profound ways. Labels like “world music” and “multicultural music” (and many others) permeate our professional discourse and imply that all non-Western art music belongs in one massive category. This is tantamount to cultural imperialism, where

dominant meanings of society render the particular perspectives of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other. (Abu El-Haj 2008, 178)

Music educators should be mindful of how racialized assumptions can permeate approaches to content and curriculum, discipline, various human interactions, and our professional identities. Perceptions of multicultural music education should be extended to consider the ways in which racism remains a barrier to social equality, authentic dialogue, and understanding. Anti-racist pedagogy is helpful in this,

because it simultaneously enables teachers to attend to multicultural education while actively breaking down racialized impediments to success (Blakeney 2011).

Toward anti-racist competencies in music educators

Gloria Ladson-Billings' concept of culturally relevant pedagogy requires a commitment to collective empowerment, which involves "develop[ing] and/or maintain[ing] cultural competence" (1995, 160). This includes critiquing "the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (162). Culturally relevant teachers' success rests, in part, upon "the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of their practice" (162).

Ana María Villegas and Tamara Lucas (2000) identified six strands of "essential dispositions, knowledge, and skills" to guide pre-service teachers in diverse classrooms (xxi). These strands include:

- (1) gaining sociocultural consciousness;
- (2) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- (3) developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change;
- (4) understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching;
- (5) learning about students and their communities; and
- (6) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices. (26)

These strands are amplified in InTASC's model core teaching standards (CCSSO 2013). In an effort to provide music educators with a starting point into thinking about anti-racism and cultural fluency, I present some of these dispositions and standards as competencies that I believe are highly relevant to the music education profession. In doing so, I operationalize the concept of competence as:

context-dependent ability constructs [whose] development can only be conceived as resulting from learning processes where the individual interacts with his or her environment. This means competencies can be acquired by learning or they even *have to* be acquired through learning . . . (Klieme, Hatig, and Rauch 2010, 7–8)

In this sense, these competencies are meant as descriptive, tangible ways for music teachers to consider their practice through an anti-racist lens. These competencies are not intended to impose any further types of standardization and/or assessment upon the profession: to do so could reduce the complexity of human experience to a most superficial and ineffectual end. Furthermore, I believe such actions could also discourage earnest personal reflection, which is vital to the process of acquiring anti-

racist dispositions. It is also important to disclaim that these competencies should not be regarded as a complete or sole means of promoting pluralism in music education. Rather, these are intended to facilitate individual reflection and encourage a greater conversation about these issues within our profession.

Competency 1: Acknowledge that music teaching is inherently political

Schools are political in that they administer to the public interests of our society (Noguera 2003). Society's dominant cultural norms and values are replicated through systems of public education, the only institutions legally obligated to serve every child, regardless of financial need, race, creed, or citizenship status (Noguera 2003). Elizabeth Gould (2011) describes teacher education as "political to the extent that it is characterized by exclusions and inclusions that result from choices made in relationship to power and knowledge" (874). Schools typically feature a delineated hierarchy that confers power to teachers and various levels of administrators. From this vantage point, "Good schools are often seen as places where conflict of any kind is absent or disposed of quickly" (Larson 1997, 325).

Benedict's (2004) dissertation findings support the idea that many music educators operate far removed from political conflict, and that the mainstream discourse of our profession, in its various moves toward standardization and professional legitimacy, have a great deal to do with keeping us that way.

Clearly, controversy and disorder were to be avoided. This fear and the untenable position of not being included in the standards movement coupled with the perceived need to stay away from anything politically sensitive, by avoiding upheaval, rendered a cultural inability to engage in critical consciousness. (131)

Music educators may have a tendency to separate themselves from politics out of discomfort, but also because some have based our discipline's public school survival on a universalist narrative. In acknowledging the political nature of our work, however, music educators can consciously work toward becoming effective communicators and facilitators with the stakeholders in their programs. This may ultimately help us to make meaningful connections that will enrich and sustain our profession.

Competency 2: Cultivate an awareness of educational history

Due to the highly specialized nature of music teaching, undergraduate music education majors may have few opportunities to learn about the historical context of social inequalities that persist in our schools. For instance, before the Emancipation Proclamation, it was illegal for slaves to learn how to read (Foster 1997). Minority populations were restricted to attending “separate but equal” schools (Foster 1997) until the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared segregated schools unconstitutional. Some regions were particularly hostile to this change in events. The Prince Edward County School District in Virginia opted to close their public schools for a time, rather than integrate. Instead, the district issued private school tuition grants for its White residents (Santa Ana 2004). Schools were gradually ordered to desegregate, and this was enforced through subsequent court rulings and mandated busing. Minority students were bussed into neighboring White schools while their community schools were closed, resulting in massive layoffs for Black teachers (Foster 1997). Despite a rich legacy of teaching experience, particularly in all-Black schools during segregation, Black teachers were not welcomed in integrated or all-White high schools (Foster 1997). White teachers continue to vastly outnumber teachers of color in the profession.

The United States also has a history of educational discrimination on the basis of language, with lasting implications for teachers and students. Experienced Puerto Rican immigrant teachers who spoke English with a Spanish accent were not permitted to become certified teachers until 1963 (Santa Ana 2004). Schools are still deterred from providing sustained instruction in students’ native languages (Santa Ana 2004), as federal funding is partially contingent upon specific indicators of academic progress in English. Public schools, woefully underfunded and dependent, must follow the demands of government policies to maximize every dollar they are eligible for.

Finally, a great disparity in school funding on the basis of geography remains to this day. In 1973, the Supreme Court determined that “education is not a fundamental constitutional right,” upholding school funding on the basis of property taxes as constitutional (Santa Ana 2004, 101). Families with means continue to move to neighborhoods with high property values and well-funded schools, or opt for sending their children to private schools. Families from economically disadvantaged

backgrounds do not have similar options. This phenomenon certainly occurs in many communities, across all racial groups, but its consequences wreak havoc in some underserved urban schools, where levels of racial segregation are particularly alarming.

If music educators will successfully serve the needs of all students, we should understand the historical circumstances, such as those outlined above, underpinning structures, policies, and access in public schools. This knowledge will guide the capacity to recognize and dismantle obstacles to student learning and opportunities in classrooms and schools.

Competency 3: Regard Whiteness as a culture

Due to the United States' complex educational history, the teaching profession remains predominantly White and middle-class. This seems especially true of music education. Furthermore, all-White schools, towns, and professions could be evidence of

de facto segregation, whose origins lie in a complicated mix of history, economics, choice, coercion, distrust, and prejudice. This profile is not 'natural,' but the result of a series of historical events that actively removed or discouraged people of color from living there. (Tieken 2008, 200)

In revisiting notions of colorblindness, remember that school norms are usually set, acted upon, and sustained by the majority racial group. This has serious implications for how teachers frame student needs, abilities, and behaviors: "White people may not think about themselves in racial terms; we often assume that race pertains only to people of color" (Tieken 2008, 200). White teachers may assume that good intentions are enough to carry them through their lessons and interactions with students of color. When teachers and students don't critically reflect upon Whiteness as a culture "they become unknowing agents of the prevailing cultural consciousness" (Ivers, Ivers, and Ivers 2008, 21).

Music educators should consider the implicit and explicit messages that are sent through course materials, lessons, and attitudes. The repertoire and content that we choose to select and present in our classrooms often reflect patterns of privilege (Bradley 2012, Koza 2008) as we strive to fulfill prevailing mainstream professional expectations of content legitimacy. In presenting Western art music

without ever exploring or discussing its associated cultural traditions and conventions, we “impl[y] something more ‘natural’ than cultural—a profoundly dangerous assumption” (Mukhopadhyay 2008, 14). This may seem natural to music teachers who, themselves, are products of conservatories. However, a crucial opportunity to connect with students is missed if teachers presume that their norm is (or should be) everyone’s norm. Teachers should also acknowledge the limitations and challenges of understanding music from cultures different from their own, rather than resorting to dominant modes of interpretation and analysis. Instead, music teachers could adopt Paulo Freire’s strategy of “co-intentional education”:

Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. (Freire 1993, 51)

Music teachers should model great care and respect in presenting and considering all music the world has to offer. If we fail to critically examine Whiteness along with non-White cultures, we risk being unable to recognize and respect differences.

Competency 4: Question personal positions, privilege, and assumptions

Teachers should acknowledge their positionalities in their classrooms if they are to create learning communities where plural perspectives are valued. White privilege operates in ways that can render it invisible to Whites, particularly when White cultural norms are perceived as *societal* norms (Bradley 2012). Teachers and administrators might presume that all students and parents trust in an overall perceived good of an educational institution. Colleen Larson’s (1997) case study of racial conflict at a high school identified school officials’ assumptions of trust as a significant contributor to that crisis. “[M]ost White people believe that being trusted rather than distrusted is a condition that everyone experiences” (Bradley 2012, 190). This notion enables teachers to assume that their students and communities should trust their decisions and policies without further discussion. Anti-racist teachers acknowledge their own racialized presence, and how it impacts classroom dynamics. Recall that culture is extremely complex and overlaps in many ways. Teachers should consider the ways they identify with—and diverge from—the various

subcultures they align with. For this reason, teachers of color may also find it important to question their own positionality in classrooms. Some teachers of color may possibly identify with prevailing dominant cultural norms in schools, particularly when they successfully navigated these to become teachers themselves.

I should caution that music teachers should not presume that their students embody the prevailing stereotypes, opinions, or views of their cultures. Additionally, they should not prejudge the extent to which racial or cultural identity matters for individual students (Marger 1991). A culturally competent music educator can be receptive to seizing opportunities to make all students feel valued without putting them in a position that makes them feel scrutinized or vulnerable.

Competency 5: Interrogate policies that advantage or disadvantage

Educational success for all students requires equitable access to opportunities. Music teachers can actively evaluate and disrupt classroom policies and structures that—even unintentionally—privilege some students over others. This is quite a challenge: the sheer responsibility and managerial demands of running a successful music program are absolutely overwhelming to many music educators. The stakes are high, for the fruits of our labor are displayed and evaluated most publically at various school and community events.

Music teachers work very hard to become as efficient as possible, crafting airtight handbooks and policies designed to ward off the slightest conflict before it can even begin. In doing so, teachers may resort to the universalist assumption that policies are fair and equal to all. An anti-racist educator, on the other hand, would pause to consider the ways in which policy might be unintentionally rewarding some at the expense of others. Inflexible, detached adherence to such policies without concern for the *people* who are impacted cuts away at the core of teacher-student relationships, the essence of a healthy and thriving school environment.

Music teachers should, of course, hold all students accountable for high and clearly defined expectations. However, they should be wary of assuming that students fail to abide by rules because they are deviant, or lacking in some way. This practice of deficit thinking diverts “attention from the institutionalized factors contributing to the marginalized student’s predicament” (Valencia and Solórzano 2004, 125). Pedro Noguera (2008) believes students act out in schools when their

needs as students and individuals are not being met. “By responding to conduct while ignoring the factors that cause it, schools inadvertently further the educational failure of these students and may ultimately contribute to their marginalization as adults” (Noguera 2008, 133). An anti-racist educator will take an additional step to probe the assumptions and the notions of power that drive various policies. Mica Pollock (2008) offers sage advice on this front:

Educators must analyze, concretely, *when, where, and how* it helps to treat people as racial group members, and when, where, and how it harms. Above all, educators must keep analyzing which of our everyday actions counteract racial inequality and which do not. (xix)

Competency 6: Recognize and neutralize racial microaggressions

Scholars have identified a shift in racism from overt hostility to an insidious form known as microaggressions, defined as

brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. (Sue et al. 2007, 271)

Racial microaggressions are not limited to speech. They can also manifest through behaviors and environments (Sue et al. 2007). While these are sometimes challenging to recognize, particularly by members of dominant groups, microaggressions can harm people of color. The most common, unintentionally occurring microaggressions are *microinsults* and *microinvalidations* (Sue et al. 2007). Microinsults are subtle or nonverbal acts that imply people of color are inferior. For example, if a music teacher tells a student of color with a gospel choir background, “We don’t sing like that here,” it could convey a message that her musicianship and culture is not valued. Teachers can consider their words carefully to guard against this.

Microinvalidations are actions, *inactions*, and statements that minimize the racialized experiences, feelings, and thoughts of people of color (Sue et al. 2007). Colorblindness and colormuteness are among the most damaging examples of microinvalidations, as they diminish individual experiences. If I were to show Billie Holiday’s performance of “Strange Fruit” in my undergraduate jazz history class and focus solely on the formal musical structures of the work, without acknowledging and contextualizing the performance as a profound, courageous protest against

lynching, my silence would convey that understanding a melody is more important than critically examining violence against Black people. If I were to teach like this, I doubt very much that my students of color would feel comfortable in my classroom. Rational distrust is magnified when Whites refuse to discuss or acknowledge oppression.

Since microinvalidations can also be environmentally based (Sue et al. 2007), teachers should be vigilant about the messages that they are—and are not—sending through the artifacts and décor of their music classrooms. What do our posters, signs, and textbooks say? If materials refer exclusively to the music of White Europeans from 1500 to the present, teachers are sending strong messages to students of color without saying a word.

These representations are never neutral, and students do not encounter them innocently for the first time in a classroom. Images are racially loaded, replete with meanings that the educator cannot fully know or manage. (McCarty 2008, 187)

Teachers should consider this as they select and present course materials, approach class discussions, and interpret musical performances. It is important to be sensitive to the ways in which curricula, textbooks, images, music, and other artifacts represent cultures and people.

When racialized slights occur, people of color frequently question if they are right to feel offended, while Whites often feel they are accused of being racist (Sue et al. 2007). If a person of color speaks up, he or she can be made to feel petty or overly sensitive about the exchange. This is especially detrimental in schools, where students do not occupy positions of authority:

The conventional downplaying of or inattention to the context-particular meanings of different musics in music education has led to situations in K–12 classrooms where the musics of different cultural traditions are included, but they are misrepresented, and where cultural misunderstandings and ironies are commonplace. (Goble 2010, 9)

Anti-racist educators should be on the lookout for microaggressions that occur in their classrooms, regardless of intent or origin. We can develop an acute, perceptive sense about the tone and temperature of our classrooms. All students need allies in affirming their identities while unmasking and revealing harmful classroom discourse. Teachers and students can consider the multiple ways people

experience and make meaning of their environments, as well as interactions with others. Anti-racist educators actively challenge their own assumptions, keep an open mind, and allow students to educate them on racial and cultural matters as well.

Competency 7: Commit to equitable classrooms and communities

When music educators commit to weaving meaningful social, cultural, and historical context into their lessons, they are creating intentional opportunities for students to build interpersonal connections in a diverse society. Since teachers should not presume how important (or unimportant) race is to their students (Marger 1991), it is advantageous to consider materials and academic concepts that can be explored from different cultural perspectives (Sleeter 2008, 150). Emily Styles advocates instructional materials that provide students with “windows and mirrors” in which students sometimes see their own identities acknowledged, and sometimes gain a glimpse into matters from different viewpoints (Sleeter 2008).

Classroom discussions are a critical component of meaningful learning. They can also be among the most challenging activities for teachers to facilitate and sustain. Students must feel represented and valued in classrooms before authentic, candid conversations reflecting multiple perspectives can take place. To this effect, devoting time to crafting relationships and classroom trust is particularly important, yet often overlooked. Emmanuel (2011) calls for music educators to embrace “liminality,” a dynamic in which teachers acknowledge and declare their own backgrounds as representative of *one* viewpoint, thus normalizing and validating *all* viewpoints. When all perspectives are presented and questioned on equal footing, the classroom truly becomes a community that learns from each other. This aligns well with Paulo Freire’s (1993) notion of “co-intentional education,” where teachers and students explore topics and concepts on equal footing. There are many benefits to this approach:

Teachers can explicitly encourage students to move back and forth across cultural territories just as cosmopolitan world travellers learn to cross national and language boundaries. They can engage students in explicit conversations about how different cultural currencies—languages and dialects, codes of conducts, mannerisms, and physical representations of themselves—pay off in various communities. (Carter 2008, 110)

In approaching class discussions, teachers can encourage students to engage in a “double-loop learning” process (Larson and Ovando 2001). Double loop learning resists an immediate judgment of incoming knowledge in relation to one’s cultural schema. Instead, an additional step is added. When considering new information, people should also question if the norms and logic driving that information is appropriate before deciding how to act on or use that information (Larson and Ovando 2001). If teachers and students are encouraged to weigh information in this way, critical thinking and multiple viewpoints could flourish in music classrooms. This paves the way for in-depth understanding.

Competency 8: Pursue conversations about race

Scholars highly recommended that teachers pursue additional training in the form of workshops and simulations to learn how to facilitate productive discourse (Pollack 2008). Teachers have to set the right tone and expectations for respectful and earnest discussions to take place. Jocelyn Chadwick (2008) recommends that teachers prepare students for reading, hearing, and discussing racially sensitive content at the start of a course, not at the moment that it comes up in materials associated with a particular lesson. Music teachers should be especially concerned with understanding and communicating the social and historical contexts of music to their students. Recalling that positionality matters, music teachers should also understand and acknowledge that their racial identities will certainly influence conversations in the classroom. Teachers must carefully consider the issues from multiple viewpoints beforehand to ensure conversations about race are positive, respectful, and productive (Singleton and Hays 2008).

Singleton and Hays (2008) offer excellent advice in pursuing “courageous conversations” about race. They promote the following steps: *Stay engaged, expect to experience discomfort, speak your truth, and expect and accept a lack of closure.* *Stay engaged* means teachers must keep the conversations moving forward. Silence will inevitably occur during these conversations, which can be interpreted in many ways. When silence sets in, the teacher must acknowledge it, understand, and convey the various reasons it could be occurring (Singleton and Hays 2008). Some students may be fearful of appearing racist, while others have been socialized to

believe that race talk is impolite (Bradley 2012). Other students, still, may interpret silence as a stance that racialized experiences do not matter.

Since race is an issue that remains uncomfortable and off-limits for some individuals, students may need time and opportunities to reflect on the issues. While teachers may be eager to learn from their students, it is imperative that students are not coerced into situations where they are treated as experts or spokespersons for their race or culture. Not every student may be comfortable to discuss their individual culture or identity (Singleton and Hays 2008). Space has to be made for respecting those boundaries as well. Teachers also must explicitly prepare their students to *expect to experience discomfort*:

Since we are . . . constantly being socialized into racialized points of view, it is likely that we will discover places of intense disagreement and experience new levels of cognitive dissonance as we unpack the perspectives we have absorbed. We must not retreat from the conversation when our opinions do not align with those of others or those we previously held. (Singleton and Hays 2008, 20)

In agreeing to *speak your truth*, participants in a classroom should strive to be authentic about their feelings and beliefs. Teachers can learn and develop ways to help students share their views, even if they differ significantly from others in the classroom (Singleton and Hays 2008, 20). Finally, teachers should prepare students for the messiness and complexities of such conversations, which do not have definitive endings or answers. In acknowledging that students should *expect and accept a lack of closure* (Singleton and Hays 2008), teachers help students to understand that opportunities for communication and understanding are likely to extend throughout their lifetimes.

Music classrooms have the potential to be important spaces to have authentic conversations about race and difference. As teachers become more comfortable with pursuing these conversations, we can help students develop cultural understanding that extends far beyond a superficial acknowledgement of difference.

Competency 9: Constant reflection on practice and policies

The complex fabric of our experience serves as a filter for how we make sense of our worlds. Teachers cannot ever trust that their personal filters (cultural schema) are neutral. Anti-racist educators actively commit to re-examining personal

assumptions, policies, and practices (Pollock 2008). Anti-racist educators can have a large impact by inspiring students and other colleagues to reflect upon conditions far beyond one classroom into other classrooms, schools, and the community.

Envisioning opportunity: the next steps

Music educators should embrace the opportunity to become agents of change in schools. Students' futures are too important to presume that social justice is beyond the scope of music education.

When we deny that racial, ethnic, class or gender constructions make a difference in our decisions without any serious examination of our actions or of their outcomes, we fail to take seriously our responsibility to educate all children. (Larson and Ovando 2001, 73)

Together, music educators can work toward greater inclusivity and equity in our practice. As music educators make conscious efforts to incorporate aspects of anti-racist pedagogy into practice, additional dialogue and research will surely be needed to yield rich examples and analysis. Co-constructed meaning (Freire 1993) is a messy, negotiated affair by necessity. Accordingly, I anticipate that a challenge toward the implementation of anti-racist pedagogy in music education is a scarcity of documented examples. Music teachers may also need to consider the inherent cultural and political realities at work within their schools that may require a nuanced (yet still committed) approach to this work.

While various obstacles to implementation persist, we can look to some actions within certain post-secondary music education programs as inspiration for how these competencies may be developed. These programs are enacting meaningful changes within course curricula, specifically by leading future teachers to examine their pre-existing beliefs and assumptions (Bradley 2012, Campbell 2010, Emmanuel 2005). Emmanuel (2005) took five volunteer music majors to live and work in an underserved area of Detroit for one week. She concluded that an integrated approach of coursework with immersion fieldwork was particularly effective in helping future teachers to examine their beliefs. Music education majors at the University of Washington participated in a weeklong, elective cultural exchange program with Yakama Indian and Mexican-American populations. These students received experiential instruction in cultural sensitivity and musical practices that are not traditionally represented in music education programs

(Campbell, 2010). In both scenarios, discussions were facilitated “to prepare students for activity and observation and to deconstruct the cultural experience” (Campbell 2010, 305). Program participants became more motivated to learn the musical practices of other cultures (Campbell 2010). Notably, students were willing to pursue “teaching jobs in places beyond their own familiar and safe suburban environments to work with children and youth far from the mainstream who deserve highly skilled and sincerely dedicated musicians in their midst” (Campbell 2010, 306). These types of experiential learning opportunities are making significant strides toward helping music teachers transcend traditional boundaries toward greater cultural competence.

Despite differences in philosophy, proponents of aesthetic and praxial music education philosophies alike recognize the need for a change in the way future music educators are prepared for the profession. Riley (2010) believes “university-level music education programs should consider including course-work in their curricula that addresses how to teach for social justice . . . in the contexts of music classrooms” (91). Music teacher education programs need to foster greater diversity in musical training, teaching practices, faculty and student backgrounds, and fieldwork sites. Academic rigor, musicianship, cultural immersion projects, lifelong learning initiatives, and diverse fieldwork opportunities will empower 21st century teachers to invite a broad student population to engage with music in new ways. Our profession should pursue many more conversations about this on national and international levels.

While it is vital that we continue to make changes in teacher preparation programs, we should also extend our concerns to support *current, practicing* K–12 music educators in teaching for social justice. Current teachers can engage in self-reflection and reach out to colleagues to initiate conversations that consider race in the context of music education. They can also request workshops and other professional development opportunities that specifically attend to anti-racism and cultural competence in music education. From my own experience, I notice organizers of workshops geared toward K–12 educators are rather reluctant to allow for sessions on such “heavy topics” to take place. In this way, *colormuteness* continues to prevail. Music teachers should cultivate professional identities, not simply as competent musicians and teachers, but as culturally fluent musician-

scholars. In positioning ourselves as students of culture alongside our students (Freire 1993), we can redefine the possibilities for critical thinking and discourse in our music classrooms. Our work as music educators is important and fits into a greater community (Lennon and Reed 2012, 299). These issues are simply too important to leave to the next generation to sort out alone. When music educators possess the competencies necessary to build inclusive, welcoming music programs, our students and communities will benefit. By extension, so will our profession.

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Note

¹ Deborah Bradley (2012, 190) defines Whiteness as “a cultural attitude that defines *normality* both by and for White people in societies.” Like Bradley, I intentionally capitalize this term throughout this paper to distinguish “White” as a distinct, dominant cultural identity.

About the Author

Michelle Rampal is Assistant Professor of Music Education at Molloy College and a Music Education Doctoral Fellow at New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Her research interests include the intersection of music education and culture, community music, and alternative contexts for music education.