Cultural Humility in Music Teacher Education: Toward Transformative Dialogues on Power, Privilege, and Social (In)equity

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Abstract

Cultural humility has gained traction as a potentially transformative construct in social justice work, compelling practitioners to engage in a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique to recognize the limitations of their knowledge, practice openness toward others, and actively work to mitigate systemic inequities. In this paper, we draw theoretical interpretations from an empirical study of cultural humility as negotiated and developed through dialogues within a preservice music education course. By considering cultural humility through an iterative analysis of both empirical findings and theoretical perspectives, we propose that cultural humility comprises a fluid interrelation of *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal*, and *transformative* dimensions. We further articulate the significant internal struggles and challenges that emerged from this work as students navigated the various complications and contradictions that materialized through the process.

Keywords

Cultural humility, dialogue, equity, music teacher education, social justice

> Dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. (Freire 1970/2010, 90)

Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire's plea for humility in this epigraph may not be cemented in most readers' minds as the central takeaway of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Yet, a closer read of his most celebrated text, further reinforced by later writings such as his similarly influential *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (2005), reveals Freire's staunch belief in the centrality of humility within any dialectical encounter. Freire fervently called on individuals to engage in dialogical humility by practicing open-mindedness and non-superiority toward one another and engaging in critical self-reflection as they pursue the interminable journey of humanization (Freire 1970/2010). In the absence of humility, according to Freire, dialogical encounters rooted in arrogance become futile at best and oppressive at worst.

Reflexive music educators recognize the importance of engaging in praxial dialogue toward socially transformative ends as an ethical imperative (Benedict and Schmidt 2007). Yet, while many express a baseline awareness of and sensitivity to social inequities, they might nevertheless lack the confidence to engage dialectically with others toward such ends. However, in practicing Freire's call for humility, music educators might recognize that the active mitigation of social injustices lies squarely within their ethical responsibilities as artistic citizens. Kallio (2021) thus obliges music educators to "assume a degree of social responsibility in navigating diversity and difference in ethical ways" (2). This requires the difficult task of "engag[ing] in critical inquiry and moral deliberation as to *who* comprises the classroom community, *whose* values and norms construct the *good* in any given setting, and *what* is construed as moral—and by implication—hateful or hated" (2, italics in original).

Preservice music teachers in particular—many of whom are, for the first time, grappling with existential questions of what will comprise *their* ethical stances as they enter the profession—ought to develop the confidence to engage with their students and colleagues in powerfully ethical, transformative, and—as Freire reminds—humble ways. Ostensibly, the social mindset Freire endorsed over 50 years ago parallels a specific form of humility that has more recently responded to the dehumanizing subjugation found within various human-centered professions, including medicine, social work, counseling, and education. The burgeoning concept

of *cultural humility* thus compels individuals to continually self-reflect upon the limitations of their knowledge as they practice openness toward others (Hook et al. 2013, 2017) and work to directly address systemic inequities in partnership with their surrounding communities (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, Tervalon and Murray-García 1998).

From Competence to Humility

The concept of cultural humility developed in response to significant critiques leveled against the related model of *cultural competence* (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). Although a thorough discussion of cultural competence is beyond the scope of this paper, it remains pertinent to begin with a brief discussion of the construct, including the important critiques against it, in order to recognize cultural humility's subsequent appeal among practitioners. Cultural competence "entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awarenesses and sensitivities, learning specific bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching" (Moule 2012, 5). Deardorff (2006) defined *inter*cultural competence as one's "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (247–48).[1] In her work developing intercultural competence among preservice music teachers, Emmanuel (2003) noted that the construct allows teachers to "confront and examine their personal beliefs toward 'others' so that they may move toward some kind of common ground with their diverse students" (35). Similarly, Brøske (2020) offered that intercultural competence is "about having a basic attitude that emphasizes respect and curiosity for all people rather than focusing on the exotic and different representations of cultural expression" (96).

Most commonly, cultural competence is criticized for its supposed emphasis on obtained cultural knowledge; the term "competence" seemingly implying that broad knowledge of various cultures can automatically translate into "knowing" the idiosyncratic lived experiences of individuals (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, 170). As Dolloff (2020) critiqued, "the connotation of the word 'competence' implies a list of skills that can be learned" (143). Dean (2001) accordingly calls cultural competence a "myth" because it is impossible to ever fully achieve competence in another culture. Relatedly, there is a tendency for cultural competence to become

both tokenistic and/or essentialist by normalizing whiteness and treating "culture" as neutral (Danso 2018, Fisher-Borne et al. 2015). Indeed, it presupposes the practitioner's identity to be that of the dominant culture. Pon (2009) thus considers cultural competence to be a "form of new racism" (60) because it "devalues non-White cultures without using racist language" (in Danso 2018, 417). This becomes harmful—violent, even—because using "culture" as a euphemism for race makes it difficult to address racial inequities directly (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, Hess 2021). Hess (2021) calls cultural competence "cartographic" in that it involves "mapping racialized space"—a colonizing practice that is "rooted in a desire for mastery" (11). In effect, these shortcomings (and others) cause cultural competence to fall short in enacting a transformative social justice agenda that can reasonably address systemic inequities.[2] The criticisms against cultural competence have thus led practitioners from several fields of study to turn toward the construct of cultural humility instead.

Physicians Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) initially introduced *cultural humility* in response to cultural competence's apparent shortcomings. While they acknowledged the need to obtain as much cultural knowledge as possible, they argued that it is an incomplete approach to working equitably with diverse populations because "an isolated increase in knowledge without a consequent change in attitude and behavior is of questionable value" (119). The turn to cultural humility, therefore, represents an effort to view diversity as an ethical *mindset* rather than some proficiency to be attained with training or experience. To Tervalon and Murray-García (1998), cultural humility comprises a *lifelong* commitment to (1) self-reflection and self-critique, (2) redressing power imbalances, and (3) developing mutually beneficial partnerships with communities. As a result, "cultural humility becomes a process, not an endpoint, one that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners" (118). Fisher-Borne and colleagues (2015) offered three similar components with their definition: (1) institutional and individual accountability, (2) lifelong learning and critical reflection, and (3) mitigating power imbalances (174).

Other conceptualizations of the construct have also been proposed, some of which promote similar dispositional stances but do not necessarily compel the same active commitment to social transformation. In psychological counseling, Hook and colleagues (2017) offered that cultural humility consists of both intrapersonal and interpersonal components. Intrapersonally, it requires

practitioners to develop an awareness of their limitations in understanding another's worldview and cultural background. Interpersonally, it requires an other-oriented stance toward individuals, including respect, lack of superiority, and openness to others.

Although cultural humility has not yet been examined empirically in music education research, several scholars have theoretically addressed the potentials of the construct in pursuit of transformative music education. Conkling (2019) proposed cultural humility as a framework in the preparation of preservice choral music teachers. Dolloff (2020) called cultural humility a "music education response to historical abuse" (136) in reckoning with Canada's assimilationist and genocidal past toward First Peoples. Hess (2021) presented cultural humility as a productive alternative to the "cartographic" pitfalls resulting from mastery-oriented "best practices" approaches to cultural diversity. And Janes (2021) employed a critical autoethnographic epistolary to question the ethical treatment of cultural humility as a universal educational virtue for music educators.

In this paper, we introduce empirical perspectives to the extant cultural humility literature in music education to add a degree of "groundedness" to the compelling theoretical foundations offered thus far. Cultural humility's need for pluralistic epistemic perspectives compels us to adopt a reflexive approach that iteratively weaves our empirical findings with contextualized theoretical interpretations.

The Cultural Humility Learning Experience

Stemming from Freire's (1970/2010) appeal that any dialogue must involve an act of humility, while also recognizing the potentials of cultural humility in obliging continual self-reflection, accountability, and the mitigation of social injustices (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015), we embraced cultural humility as a potentially transformative tool capable of facilitating constructive dialogues across the profession. Through this process, music teacher educators facilitate the ethical work of preparing future music teachers to engage critically with matters of difference and division among their future students, colleagues, and administrators (Westerlund et al. 2020).

We take seriously Conkling's (2019) cautionary that cultural humility "is not intended to be learned from a university-based course, but instead from ongoing

engagement in clinical practice" (737). Nevertheless, we identified among our music education students a keen and timely desire to engage critically with the most pressing matters in our profession, sparked largely by the global Black Lives Matter protests in response to the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and several other Black Americans during the summer of 2020.[3] Concurrently, amid a global pandemic that confined students to self-quarantine and subsequently pushed most courses to remote learning formats, we were forced to reckon with our limitations in facilitating direct opportunities to mitigate systemic inequities through real-world teaching and learning scenarios. Without the ability to engage our students in direct field experiences, we concentrated on facilitating culturally humble dialogues between peers, leading to their expressed intentions to engage in transformative efforts given future opportunities to enter into their surrounding communities.

One of the criticisms of cultural humility is its lack of a specific framework (Danso 2018), thus making it difficult to conceive of a shared framework or curriculum across teaching contexts. To that end, we note that it is precisely this lack of a specific framework that allows practitioners to eschew essentialist "best practices" (Hess 2021) approaches that might serve to repress the construct's socially responsive potentials. Similar projects in general education, medical education, or social work settings have adopted unique teaching approaches. We took a comparable approach while adopting a shared focus on exploring issues of equity, power, and privilege (e.g., Robinson 2017). It was also important that any effort to develop cultural humility among preservice music teachers critically anticipate and account for mixed experiences with privilege and oppression (Lund and Lee 2015)—especially with regard to the implicit expectation for minoritized students to address their own experiences with inequity and oppression in the classroom (Hess 2019).

We constructed a cultural humility learning experience that comprised direct discussions about cultural humility and complementary topics on positionality, intersectionality, social equity, and critical pedagogy. We followed Ross' (2010) recommendation that developing students' cultural humility ought to feature "informal, participatory learning activities, such as role-playing, field work, structured student journaling, service learning, interactions with fellow students, and small group discussions" (318). However, it was not possible to structure in-person service-learning experiences given the circumstances of remote learning.

Before engaging students in the cultural humility learning experience, we thought it was vital to first identify their initial viewpoints on several timely issues in the profession. For example, they discussed whether it could be considered ethical for composers to write music "inspired by" unfamiliar cultures; whether teachers should continue to program and perform music from composers with problematic (e.g., homophobic, xenophobic, anti-Semitic) pasts; and whether discussions of race, inequity, and privilege have a place in music teacher education courses. After completing the cultural humility learning experience, the class then engaged in a second dialogue with the same peer on a different prompt. This provided an opportunity for each pair to mindfully practice cultural humility as they considered their stances on a new but related topic. The pairs were created purposefully by the authors to encourage dialogues with opposing viewpoints. We took care to help students feel comfortable expressing their disagreements in a productive manner (see hooks 1994, chapter 3) but were mindful not to force minoritized students to "defend" their sources of oppression(s) with a peer from a dominant group.

Students also completed written reflections and a 20–45-minute semi-structured interview after the cultural humility learning experience. The interviews allowed students to elaborate on comments they made during their dialogues or wrote in their reflections, as well as expand upon possible scenarios in which cultural humility might be challenged. The lead author was the instructor of record for the course, while the second author completed interviews with consenting students and collected all data to maintain confidentiality between students and the course instructor. From the 22 consenting students, three identified as Asian American (Pat, Pamela, and Alexis) and two as Latinx (Jonathan and Sophia), with the remaining students identifying as White. The institution's ethics review board approved the study.[4]

Reflexivity through *Pedagogical Humility*

As cisgender White men, we both remained critically reflexive of our positionalities as we engaged in this work with students. Dr. Coppola, the instructor-of-record, modeled the need for reflexivity by outlining his social identity according to Collins' Matrix of Domination (2000), thus reinforcing the importance of self-reflection as a privileged instructor facilitating equity work with students. He also

mindfully attempted to practice bell hooks' (1994) *engaged pedagogy* by embracing personal risks, practicing vulnerability, and exercising care and compassion toward others while recognizing that conflict is sometimes a necessary and productive outcome of difficult discussions. In this way, he continually sought to remain reflexive of personal discomforts and communicate them to students in the interest of shared growth.

While engaging with students during one-on-one interviews, Dr. Taylor remained reflexive of his social privileges as a White male but also recognized his minoritization as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, which may have solicited particular responses from students while discussing sensitive social justice-related issues. Together, our largely privileged identities compelled both of us to practice *pedagogical humility* (Case et al. 2021), in which we "stay[ed] open to the possibility that students might also teach us, that there is value in consistently seeking constructive feedback from students and peers, and that increasing our self-awareness and self-reflection is an ongoing process" (8–9). Accordingly, we constantly strived to embrace our unfinishedness and room for growth within this work.

Cultural Humility in Three Dimensions

Hook and colleagues (2013) conceptualized cultural humility as comprising both intrapersonal and interpersonal components. Elaborating on these two, Hayley Janes (2021) suggested a third dimension that bridges both the interpersonal and intrapersonal domains toward openness and accountability. We build upon Janes's interpretation and suggest that a third dimension exists not merely as a reflexive bridge between one's intra- and interpersonal dispositions but functions as a unique and equally important dimension—one which compels a commitment for transformative action toward social change as well (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). Synthesizing the extant psychological, philosophical, and sociological literature on cultural humility, we conceptualize a three-dimension construct of cultural humility, which supports an interwoven process of *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal*, and *transformative* commitments (see Figure 1).
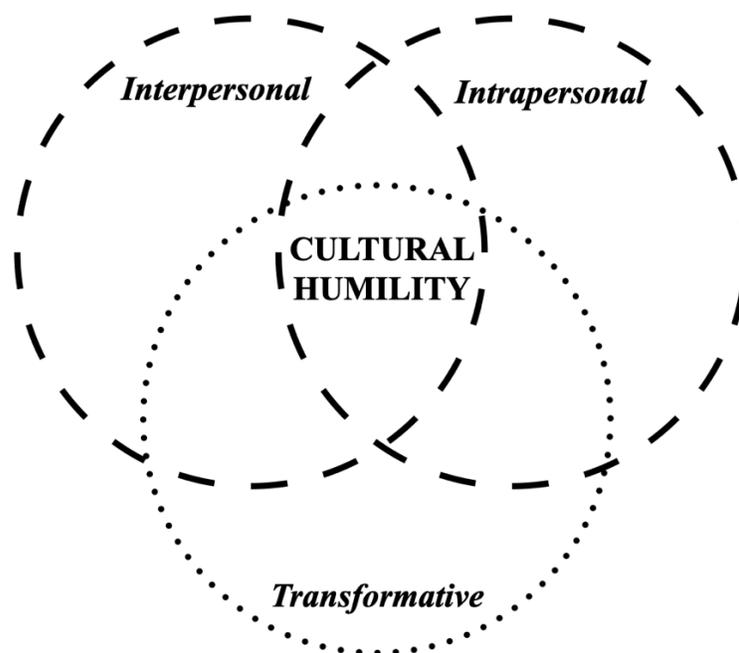
Figure 1. Cultural humility in three dimensions.

Intrapersonal Dimension

Without sufficient self-awareness and self-critique, students may either dismiss the existence or causation of social injustices or fail to recognize the impetus for further transformative action. Students demonstrated their intrapersonal thinking by (a) acknowledging their gaps in knowledge and demonstrating a desire to learn, (b) recognizing their privilege or marginalization, and (c) recognizing and practicing a lifelong commitment to self-reflection.

Acknowledging Gaps in Knowledge / Desire to Learn

Speaking directly to the "humility" facet of the construct, many students acknowledged the limitations and situatedness of their knowledge as they engaged with others (Hook et al. 2017). During their second dialogue, for instance, Alexis and Chris struggled to arrive at a solution regarding the programming of problematic composers. After questioning how they might respond to such a scenario, Alexis finally expressed that they need not necessarily arrive at a correct answer themselves but might consider seeking outside perspectives instead:

> You need to remember that you're not alone, so you can always ask your colleagues and see, like, "hey, would this be acceptable or respectful if I perform this piece with this group of people?" Because I feel like having that outside opinion, instead of focusing it all on yourself and thinking, "well, this is what *I* think, this is how *I* want to do it, this is what I'm thinking,"—maybe having someone else be like, "Hey, I'll take a look at it."

Straightaway, Alexis's acknowledgment of intellectual limitations eschews a stance that so-called culturally competent educators might erroneously claim: "knowing" something to be true because of previous training or study (Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). Merely acknowledging one's intellectual limitations, however, remains incomplete within the entire process. After all, someone who remains willfully ignorant would likely not be considered culturally humble at all. Therefore, a disposition of intellectual humility must accompany an ongoing willingness to learn. Several students expressed this desire through self-education but further recognized that mindful educators must also work to supplement their obtained "book knowledge" with the contextualized knowledge of their specific students. In this way, learning becomes deeply situated and minimizes the potential for essentializing students' lives according to theoretical ideas rather than lived experiences (see Hess 2021; hooks 1994).

Bonnie illustrated this need to continually learn about her students' specific and contextualized lives as she and Benita discussed the appropriateness of programming Christmas music. She articulated a desire to involve minoritized (e.g., Jewish, Muslim) students directly in such discussions in order to make musical experiences meaningful for all, further sharing a helpful strategy for seeking out these students' views without Othering them in the process:

> I can be very uneducated because I'm in the majority. And so, I've been meaning to create a list of questions that I want to put on a first day questionnaire. Such as, "what does winter look like for you?" And they might just think that's a "get to know you" question. But for *me*, it's like, "what do I need to know about winter that I don't already know that I can include in my concert?"

Recognizing Privilege and Marginalization

Bettina Love (2019) noted that teacher education programs typically do not require students to have "any understanding about where they stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression and how these systems function in their everyday lives" (130). Thus, a culturally humble commitment to redressing power imbalances

might begin intrapersonally by recognizing the relative privilege or marginalization that one may carry through their identity. If not for this important step, individuals might see social inequity as something "out there" and altogether separate from themselves. As Martina acknowledged when considering the appropriateness of programming a Black spiritual as a White conductor:

> I feel like it's difficult, because I feel like we [*she and her partner Alvin*] come from very similar backgrounds. So, it would be different if we said, "oh, no, that's not racist. Oh no, no big deal. That's not racist against Black people!" Because we never would be in that situation. [...] And that's why I feel sometimes I can't speak out about this stuff because I've never been in their shoes, and I will never experience [it].

Expectedly, the ability to recognize one's privilege emerged to be quite contestable for some students new to this work. Arnie, Victor, and Jan struggled to grapple with their relative privilege to varying degrees, even as they acknowledged benefiting from it. During his interview, for instance, Victor recognized his White privilege and expressed efforts to educate himself about racial issues in response. Nevertheless, his verbal hesitations and desire to change the subject signaled his overall discomfort in addressing his privilege aloud:

> I'm in a state of privilege, so ... maybe I have a tough time ... empathizing with people because ... yeah ... [*sighs*]. Since I'm not Black, or since I'm not poor, I don't know exactly what's going on. I'm not being directly affected. I'm not living it, but I try to supplement that lack of experience with...I guess as much knowledge and context as I can...to understand why...maybe Black people are disproportionately in poor situations in America. And yeah, it definitely roots from racism. Anyway, [*laughs*] I don't want to get into that.

It was puzzling to us that Victor recognized his privilege—one indicator of culturally humble thinking—but seemingly wielded it in an attempt to explain away his self-identified lack of empathy. Such comments illustrate why the intrapersonal embodiment of cultural humility is itself insufficient. Indeed, Victor later commented that he often feels dismissed as a White male, writing in his journal that "woke Twitter loves to drag White people for existing."

Like Victor, Jan's struggle to recognize her privilege detracted from her ability to engage in culturally humble interactions with her classmates. She often cited her two adopted Ghanaian sisters during discussions of privilege, as if they ought to absolve her from further self-scrutiny. While discussing the podcast *Nice White Parents* during class, Jan countered a student's claim that reverse racism was a myth.

> First of all, the idea that "because I'm White I've never been marginalized," I think that's really … weird because I've been *broken up with* because I was White. So, I think it's like, sucky that we automatically assume that only *this* group of people can be marginalized or whatever. The school I went to was like 13% White and Asian *combined*, so it was really common for people to make fun of me for my race.

During this portion of the discussion, the instructor addressed the theoretical underpinnings of "reverse racism," explaining that while White people can experience *individual* cases of discrimination, they cannot experience *systemic* marginalization, given their dominant status in U.S. society (see Collins 2000). Jan's comments nevertheless came after this discussion, perhaps pointing to an intrapersonal unpreparedness or unwillingness to grapple with uncomfortable realizations about her whiteness and social privilege.

Self-Reflection and Lifelong Learning

Self-Reflection. Witnessing one's self-reflection in action was especially salient as students grappled with their evolving stances on particular issues. For instance, as he reflected aloud while comparing the tearing down of Confederate statues to performing historically problematic composers, Fred caught himself nearly falling into a double standard:

> I totally agree with tearing down all the statues of people who owned slaves,[5] or sold slaves, or were racist. Like, I'm *for* that. And then when you talk about Wagner, like, should we disregard and play none of his music? Then it's like…well, I mean, I don't know! I know I have to take the same viewpoint and apply it to everything if I'm going to— [*cut off by Victor*]

Relatedly, Miles' and Rita's second dialogue revealed a compelling instance in which a dialogical encounter led to a meaningful change in someone's viewpoint. Miles was initially defending the emphasis on Christian music within the choral canon, explaining that explicitly religious undertones are not usually present during choral performances and that, nevertheless, such repertoire has become a normalized part of the choral canon. Rita pushed him on his viewpoint, stating that such normalization is only a result of the dominance of Christian culture throughout the United States. Practicing self-reflection, Miles then attempted to view the issue from the perspective of a minoritized group—a dialogical tactic that had been offered in class. He quickly admitted that as a devout Christian, he might feel uncomfortable singing, for example, a Muslim prayer chant.[6] Recalling this turning

point, Rita stated in her reflection, "I especially enjoyed the point in our conversation where Miles said he felt uncomfortable performing music of non-Christian religions and immediately realized that that arguably contradicted his belief that it was okay to make non-Christian students perform Christian music."

Interestingly, Miles' self-reflection was not one-sided. During this same dialogue, Rita began to reconsider her stance as well, writing in her reflection,

> I followed that up by saying I don't believe that performing a piece of music means you are espousing its values and immediately realized that that arguably contradicted my belief that there is a problem with forcing non-Christian students to perform Christmas music. We had a good laugh at that.

Perhaps unknowingly at first, Rita's self-reflection led her to problematically shift focus *away* from an equitable solution for the marginalized group. However, as she continued to reflect afterward, she recalled her discomfort in practicing so much cultural humility toward Miles, a member of a privileged religious group in the U.S. She recalled that instead, cultural humility "would generally have been more focused toward minority religions or minority races." Her continued reflection allowed her to consider all possible viewpoints, which momentarily led to some personal bewilderment but eventually allowed her to recognize that cultural humility must consistently work toward the equitable justice of marginalized groups.

In this case, Rita's self-reflection uniquely illuminates the sometimes unsettling and circuitous journey of engaging in cultural humility. When self-reflection becomes truly open, honest, and continuous, the path ahead often reveals itself to be twisting and complex rather than straight and direct toward constant awakening. Later, Miles shared during his interview:

> I think before this, I hadn't really given a lot of thought to the subject, but I think before this, I would have just gone with a standard "the vast majority of the canon is sacred. You just have to roll with it. You *have to*." And then, going through this experience and having all these different group discussions and prompts did cause me to have to look more deeply into that, and think about that a little bit more closely.

Lifelong Learning. Taken together, Miles' and Rita's dialogues revealed the interminability of this work. The pursuit of cultural humility has no endpoint but requires a lifelong commitment (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). For some, this might also include turbulent ebbs and flows, demonstrating both positive forward growth and occasional setbacks along the journey.

For example, despite his continued struggle to practice cultural humility during class dialogues, Arnie recognized that people always have the ability to continue learning as long as they remain committed to their efforts. As he commented during his interview:

> It's really stupid [*sic*] for people to judge people because everyone is always subject to change. Everyone. It doesn't matter what your background is, it doesn't matter what you think; everyone is able to change. And I think it's always up to us, as the leaders of the classroom, to be able to give them that chance to see in a different way.

While Arnie's comment could be taken as an evasion of personal urgency to engage in self-improvement (i.e., "we can condone our problematic views today because we can always work to improve later"), his commentary also echoes the words of Paulo Freire (1970/2010), who wrote, "at the point of encounter there are neither ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting together, to learn more than they know now" (90). Indeed, it might be common for educators to reproach or "write off" students who express their ignorance toward such social issues—especially given our legitimate fears about how they might handle such issues with their own students in the future. Furthermore, while educators must indeed address these students' problematic views, the challenge of cultural humility asks us to not only recognize our individual interminable journeys in this work but the continuous potentials of others to endlessly grow as well—provided they are willing to engage humbly and perseveringly in this work. In this way, we treat students as *subjects* rather than *objects*—a core tenet of Freire's (1970/2010) pedagogy.

Interpersonal Dimension

While the intrapersonal and interpersonal manifestations of cultural humility were fluid and intersecting, there was nevertheless a relatively clear distinction between one's internal processes and their external dispositions toward others (Hook et al. 2017). Students most saliently demonstrated an interpersonal orientation through (a) recognizing power imbalances and (b) practicing other-orientedness and openness toward others.

Recognizing Power Imbalances

While the intrapersonal dimension of cultural humility requires individuals to recognize their privilege, this step must accompany an *external* understanding of how power imbalances play out in the lived world. As Hess (2021) affirmed, "to aim for equity, self-awareness must engage power" (12). Indeed, Victor might be said to have practiced cultural humility intrapersonally through the recognition of his privilege. Yet, he could not be said to have practiced it *interpersonally* because, as expressed by his disdain toward "woke Twitter," he scornfully denied the power imbalance resulting from his privilege (and from which his privilege emerged). In contrast, during her interview, Delette pointed out that because of the general lack of racial diversity within band contexts (Abril 2009), she would need to take it upon herself to mindfully address the power imbalance that she would likely find in her future ensembles:

> I think from a band perspective, I had never really thought that it was a thing. That all of my band directors were White, and most of the head band directors were all men. I had never really considered it or thought that it was weird, but it is just kind of showing how there is a power imbalance, and just how … as a future White band director, I would need to be very sensitive and culturally humble when it comes to students with all different backgrounds. Just how important it is to recognize my own privilege, and that there is a societal imbalance, and so to try to work toward getting rid of that imbalance in the classroom.

Other-Orientedness and Openness Toward Others

The most common form of interpersonal cultural humility was observed through the practice of other-oriented dialogues. As Rick commented in his second reflection:

> One aspect about myself that I think I have changed my view on is that I need to listen more and not think of my ideas being the "right" ideas. This is what I think leads to a slight change in the dynamic between my partner and I. This time, we felt much more open to expressing ideas and elaborating on them rather than just giving one-sentence answers. Our improved dynamic led to a more thought-provoking conversation.

Reinforcing the idea that cultural humility occurs on a spectrum, Jan practiced a newfound openness toward her partner, Delette, as she actively worked to understand viewpoints different from her own. While she still struggled to intrapersonally acknowledge the role of her privilege, seeing herself as a victim of

reverse racism, one can imagine her willingness to continue listening openly to dissenting viewpoints as potentially playing a significant role in her future development. As Jan shared in her interview:

> I think in the past, I've been very, like, "no, no, no, let me get my point across." But even before these classes, I was like, "okay, I'm going to listen to what this person has to say," just to try to understand where they're coming from. Because I think that…it's funny, 'cause even if someone completely disagrees with you on any topic, there's almost certainly a reason behind it, and I want to know the reason.

This dynamic of openness was not practiced by Jan alone, but by her partner Delette as well, who shared in her reflection after their second debate:

> I noticed myself trying to listen more actively rather than thinking of what I wanted to say next, and I was really trying to put myself in Jan's shoes and understand her perspective. I also felt like my beliefs were valued and heard as Jan listened attentively, and we both asked questions to seek a better understanding of the other's views. I believe the class discussions on cultural humility were very helpful for these debates.

Delette highlighted the importance of listening openly to one's interlocutor, even if it is clear that their views might be problematic. Still, culturally humble teachers cannot merely listen passively to problematic views as they ignore them, so the *transformative* dimension of cultural humility, as we will discuss, becomes essential for this work to be most powerfully realized.

Detractors to Interpersonal Openness. While most students reported that their partner practiced openness to their views, some occasionally undermined otherwise productive efforts by dominating the conversation. Most likely coming from misplaced enthusiasm rather than any sort of outwardly oppressive intent, on a few occasions, some White male students (e.g., Miles and Arnie) dominated the conversations with their White female (e.g., Rita) or Latinx male (e.g., Jonathan) interlocutors (see Lee and McCabe 2020 regarding this troubling trend). As Rita shared in her second reflection:

> One thing that was less good this time was that I felt like Miles dominated the conversation a little bit at times. He never did anything like cut me off or talk over me, but at times I wanted to follow up with something he said, or ask a question, or suggest another way of thinking about something, and it felt like he just kept talking, moving on to new related topics without stopping with the chance to dialogue on them.

As educators aim to practice openness toward others, they must also avoid making broad assumptions about individuals or social groups. Several students shared moments from their pasts in which they either were offended by assumptions or perpetuated problematic assumptions themselves. As an example of the latter, Arnie offered a shallow explanation for the lack of diversity in music participation during his second dialogue:

> This is my speculation. I've talked about something similar with a lot of my African American friends. I think it has a lot to do with how they're raised. Because there are certain families—and this applies to a lot of people—but I feel like this can sway a little bit more for African Americans. I feel like they're not entering music as well because they're not being raised to appreciate that kind of stuff. And I feel when you—if you lack that father figure in your life or the mother figure, et cetera, that can have different results as far as some people who are raised with two people—two-person families.

This troubling comment illustrates how Arnie did not engage in skepticism or self-reflection regarding his own beliefs despite his self-expressed desire to continue learning about social inequities. Thus, what could have been a productive intrapersonal commitment to learning became moot due to an interpersonal unwillingness to re-examine his assumptions toward others in a critical manner. Such interactions are not constrained to preservice music educators alone. During her interview, Alexis also shared the harm she experienced from a high school music teacher's microaggression toward her as an Asian American vocalist:

> One of the assistant directors would be like, "oh, you're in choir? I thought you would be in orchestra or something." I got that a lot, but then I think it got to a breaking point because he would joke around about it, and then the students would assume that it would be okay to joke about it, and then I was teased about it a lot.

Transformative Dimension

Taken together, the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of cultural humility are essential to establishing a mindset that "helps [people] avoid being entrenched in the circuit of [their] own truth" (Freire 1970/2010, 72). However, the lifelong practice of cultural humility can only be fully recognized once practitioners direct their humble mindsets toward actively mitigating systemic oppressions (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015, Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). This transformative dimension thus asks teachers to serve as *abolitionists*, which Bettina Love (2019)

declared to be more than a mere approach to teaching, but rather a "way of life, a way of seeing the world, and a way of taking action against injustice" (89). Within a transformative approach to cultural humility, Fisher-Borne and colleagues emphasized that individual and institutional accountability function "as inter-related gears, having to work in concert with one another *in order to incite long-term change*" (174, emphasis added). To this point, Paul expressed during his second dialogue that when institutional accountability falls short—as in, when a school culture perpetuates or fails to address systemic oppression—teachers themselves should take action, adding, "remember, the school culture can just be wrong. You can change it."

Relatedly, Rita shared in her interview that one can reasonably practice cultural humility by merely recognizing one's accountability, but it should lead to subsequent action as well:

> I think recognizing things without addressing them is one *step*. It's better than not recognizing it, and it demonstrates more cultural humility than just turning a blind eye to that stuff. But it's not the end of the road. And so, I hope that people who are genuinely invested in practicing cultural humility would recognize that and want to go beyond that step and actually start addressing issues like that.

To illustrate one such example of a student actively "addressing issues" with regard to a peer, Jonathan interrupted Arnie's stance of non-accountability after sharing a high school story in which he remained complicit as classmates teased a Black football player:

> **Jonathan**: [*Sighs*]…I don't necessarily mean to, like…call you out on it, but…you said that they don't… offend to it like, you know, that kid and the football team? But, uh…
>
> **Arnie**: Well, like—sorry, I wasn't the one making those jokes. It's just like, I would always see people, like, it's like, it's like, they would both perpetuate the direction of the joke. So, it's like, they both, they both, like, they both make remarks about each other. That's what I mean.
>
> **Jonathan**: Yeah, sometimes it is, sometimes it is a friendly thing. Uh, but…even then, well, times are different now, you know? I wouldn't joke about it… there's just no place for that, really.
>
> **Arnie**: Mhmm.
>
> **Jonathan**: Even if it is just joking. That's my personal opinion.

In preservice teaching contexts, transformative efforts have typically been carried out through service work (Brown et al. 2016, Lund and Lee 2015). However, given the restrictions of entering into surrounding communities during a period of social isolation, we primarily focused students' attention toward critically examining their role and accountability in transformative efforts, through which they subsequently expressed their specific intentions to act upon their self-recognized social responsibilities in the future.[7] This approach might have been favored by Freire (1970/2010) as well, whose circumstances of being in exile from Brazil while writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* caused him to concede that, although action and reflection should occur simultaneously, "a critical analysis of reality may...reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time" (128).

Nevertheless, while students readily accepted their intrapersonal and interpersonal responsibilities in this work, discussions regarding the transformative dimension of cultural humility yielded the most prevalent hesitations. Many students openly worried about how they could interrupt social harm without suffering potentially negative repercussions regarding their future hireability as music educators. Several also alleged that transformative work might tend to become "violent" or "divisive." As a class, we critically reflected on these assumptions while reminding ourselves that activism may take several forms (Love 2019).

Internal Struggles and Challenges

Especially for those less experienced or prepared to engage in social justice work, students' internal struggles emerged as so substantial that they represented a standalone theme rather than some inconsequential derivative of the cultural humility process. By recognizing and understanding these potential struggles, music teacher educators might feel better equipped to address some of the aforementioned apprehensions in a more confident and efficient manner.

Polarization and Politicization: "Music for Music's Sake"

Although all students acknowledged the importance of social justice and agreed that inequities should be critically addressed in U.S. society, many also deferred their responsibility to confront such issues within their classrooms. Several students conveyed the straw-man argument that music ought to "bring people

together" and that talking about social justice in music classrooms only serves to "divide people." Such arguments not only neglect the vast history and influence of protest music but also overlook that without critical reflection, music education can never truly "bring everyone together." Indeed, by citing the "music for music's sake" argument, teachers can write off questions of identity politics or ethics as irrelevant to their craft (Elliott and Silverman 2015), which functions to silence those without equitable access to music education.

Arnie felt quite strongly about the potential for politicization and polarization, declaring in his first dialogue that "I think it's our job as music educators to educate [students] in *music*. It's not our job as music educators to educate them on politics." Victor shared a similar sentiment in his second debate, questioning whether "we just forget about this genius music that was created" once learning about a composer's problematic past. And in her first debate, Jan argued that

> we only need to think about the *music*, like the human emotion that that composer is expressing, whether it's pain, or passion, or joy […] that's a *human* thing. It doesn't matter what race you are; it doesn't matter what sexual orientation you are. That's a human experience that everyone can relate to. And that brings us closer together as people. And I think if we try to separate people too much, then we lose that.

Talk of politicization risks silencing teachers into compliance, thus potentially thwarting transformative efforts in their tracks (Bradley 2012). This must be addressed directly by music teacher educators, such that preservice music teachers recognize the difference between overtly discussing *politics* versus discussing matters of *ethics* and *human rights* in the classroom. Indeed, education is neither apolitical nor neutral (Freire 1970/2010, hooks 1994). When political policies directly affect the lives of humans within and beyond the classroom walls, a culturally humble mindset compels educators to respond accordingly. To do otherwise is to enable systemic violence through silence (see Hess 2019). During a class discussion, a Latina woman named Sophia articulated fervently:

> I feel like a lot of the times, the differences between the issues that different races face is *politicized*, so it's made to kind of make people be like, "oh no, I don't want to touch that," because you feel like you're getting political in the classroom—you feel like it's something that has this sort of mystique around it, when in reality it's *real life*.

Politeness, Civility, and Decorum: Acquiescing to the Other

bell hooks (1994) outspokenly problematized the role normative ideals of politeness and civility play in the silencing of dialogue. Especially when framed through hegemonic (i.e., White, bourgeois) ideals of politeness, otherwise essential acts of interrupting problematic behavior can be written off as "rude," thus serving to cocoon the fragility of privileged groups. hooks recognized that conflict may reasonably arise in the classroom—even toward the instructor—and that such interactions can become profoundly influential to growth. Nevertheless, students commonly noted in their reflections that their dialogues were "civil"—as if this might somehow indicate the ultimate success of their dialogues. In anticipation that her views would likely not be shared by her partner, Jan pre-empted civility in her first dialogue with Delette by nervously declaring, "no matter what you say, I'm not going to hate you as a person!"

Martina recognized the potentially silencing effects of too much politeness or civility, noting in her second reflection that "we always start out with an exact answer and get nervous that we will offend someone, so we end up saying that there is too much grey area." Similarly, Pat openly wondered, "if I wasn't to speak first, would Pamela have a different opinion? I was wondering with the way I presented my opinion, was it too harsh or too biased where she had to agree with my thoughts?" And as Miles further added,

> you always have to gauge just how upfront [you] can be. Because, of course, you go in there with the idea that "okay, we're going to practice cultural humility, and we're going to be kind, and we're going to be courteous," but we still always gauge our target; try and figure out just how bold can I be in what I say.

Practicing Cultural Humility Among Minoritized Groups

Moon and Sandage (2019) critiqued the role of cultural humility among therapists of color, noting the double standard that results when marginalized groups are expected to practice cultural humility despite the historical trauma they continue to endure in society. They claim that "the language of cultural humility may soon serve to maintain the status quo, functioning as yet another way of applying assimilative pressures" (82). Certainly, cultural humility should be practiced by all to some degree. Still, a minoritized group's practice of cultural humility must not

serve to undermine their pursuit of social empowerment by humbling themselves toward a privileged interlocutor.

 Jonathan, who is Mexican American, occasionally appeared to humble himself toward Arnie's problematic viewpoints. Granted, Jonathan did "call out" Arnie's racial complicity at one point, but he also perhaps practiced an unfitting degree of cultural humility by possibly being *too* open to his privileged interlocuter's oppressive beliefs. While Freire endorsed a dialogical approach in which each person remained open to their interlocutor's potential for change, the dialogical relationship between Jonathan and Arnie was further reinforced by an already imbalanced power dynamic—one in which a marginalized person further sought to practice humility in an attempt to tolerate a privileged person's oppressive stance. Jonathan expressed that he does not always feel as if his opinions matter, which he declined to ascribe to his minoritized status specifically, but nevertheless recalled his father's reminders that "people don't think we have a right here" as Mexican Americans.

Practicing cultural humility can feel at times contradictory among marginalized groups beyond dialogical encounters as well. Pamela, an Asian American woman living in Hawai'i, struggled to reconcile her cultural expectations with the transformative goals of cultural humility. During the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, she felt compelled to speak up in solidarity with the movement but felt an internal tension as a woman raised in a culture that tends to not "speak out against things." As she shared:

> I remember talking to Chris about the Black Lives Matter stuff and social media. And I was like, "Chris, everyone's posting, and I feel so bad! Like, I *support* Black Lives Matter, but I don't feel comfortable posting about it. Because at home, it's just not really in our culture to speak out about things. And I don't know what to do. Because I don't want people to think like, the whole 'silence is oppression' thing [about me]." I was like, "what do I do?"

While Pamela expressed internal conflict about her desire to speak out, she simultaneously felt an opposing tension to remain silent among her Asian American friends:

> **Pamela**: [My friends] were telling me how they were taking a break from social media. They were like, "yeah, we get [that] it's important, but they're not the only people who have struggled." And I remember sitting there like, "I don't know how to address this!" So, we kind of just moved on to another subject.

Dr. Taylor: Did you want to speak up and just not know what to say, or did you just not want to speak up at all?

Pamela: Um, I think it was a combination of both, honestly. I think it was a fear of not knowing what to say and saying something wrong, and fear of being looked at differently by my friends, I guess…and like, starting maybe an argument?

Indeed, the practice of cultural humility becomes intrinsically more complicated—and in some ways, contradictory—when marginalized groups are asked to practice humility in an identical fashion as their privileged peers. Womanist scholar Stacey Floyd-Thomas (2020) eloquently argued that historically minoritized groups must "reject the virtue of moral codes that suggest that one should take comfort in their demoralized circumstances that occur at the hand of the devious systems and the deviant practices that have dominant agency and authority within our society" (18). Indeed, future work should directly address the complicated nature of cultural humility among marginalized groups, which must be nuanced so that the construct can remain an empowering framework for all rather than reinscribing a new form of subjugation.

Cultural Humility Through the Lens of Freirean Praxis

The practice of cultural humility comprises three interrelated dimensions. The first two build from Hook and colleagues (2017), depicting a fluid interaction between an internal process of recognizing social inequities (*intrapersonal*) and an external disposition of other-orientedness and openness toward others (*interpersonal*). Building from these dispositional requirements, the *transformative* dimension asks culturally humble practitioners to actively participate in mitigating social injustices toward more equitable ends (Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). This commitment requires both individual and institutional accountability (Fisher-Borne et al. 2015). Considering these dimensions in sum, we share Rita's position that practicing some components is better than practicing none at all, and we echo Rick's view that cultural humility likely exists on a spectrum, in which practitioners may succeed in some (but not all) dimensions at a given time:

I think cultural humility is somewhat on a spectrum. Some people may be very self-aware, and they'll practice cultural humility on themselves and try to be great in that regard to themselves but won't try to help others or have that talk with others. So, I don't think it's that they *don't* have cultural humility. I think it's just

maybe they're very introverted, or they're trying to focus on themselves before they help others. It could just be that they're still in the process of learning about cultural humility. It doesn't mean they have zero of it. They just might not have as much as someone else.

Nonetheless, it remains pertinent to critically examine the specific ways practitioners might risk falling short of their emancipatory potentials if they lack mindful attention to each dimension. By paralleling this study's three-dimension concept of cultural humility with Freire's (1970/2010) praxial call for *action* and *reflection*, we offer that a disproportionate emphasis on either reflection or action could cause unintended ruptures of the process. Indeed, as Freire avowed, "if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers" (87).

We might envision cultural humility's interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions as being closely associated with praxial *reflection* (see dashed lines in Figure 2) because one must reflect upon their relationship with social justice issues both individually and in context with others. On the other hand, the transformative dimension is closely associated with praxial *action* (see dotted lines in Figure 2). Accordingly, we can envision how each interacts with one another toward a comprehensive manifestation of the construct. First, if someone embodies the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of cultural humility but fails to engage in transformative work, they might be said to engage in what is colloquially called *armchair activism* or *slactivism* (Abramo 2020). Freire (1970/2010) might critique that this position can only bring about an "armchair revolution" (66) because such reflection fails to lead to action.

On the other hand, if someone engages productively with others through a positive interpersonal disposition while willingly engaging in transformative work, but simultaneously fails to reflect on their intrapersonal role within systemic relations of power and equity, they might be said to engage in *performative allyship*. Here, Freire might critique that such a position places disproportionate attention on one's actions without sufficient reflection regarding their relative privilege or gaps in personal knowledge. Such practitioners will readily engage in the pursuit of social justice but will fail to humbly reflect on their inner purpose with this work (Coppola, 2021). Thus, their actions may become "self-glorifying" (Love 2019, 117).

Finally, if someone recognizes their intrapersonal role in social justice work and accordingly engages in transformative efforts through activism—but fails to practice an other-oriented interpersonal disposition toward others, they might

engage in *dehumanizing tactics*. Here, practitioners may unknowingly participate in the dehumanization of others by failing to self-reflect on their interpersonal stance toward them as fellow subjects. Similar to performative allyship, Freire might critique this position as placing disproportionate attention on one's actions as well, but without sufficient self-reflection regarding how they choose to engage with others. See Coppola (2021) for a more nuanced discussion of both performative allyship and dehumanizing tactics in music education discourse. Because of these potentials, all three dimensions of cultural humility must be mindfully addressed and reflected upon throughout one's life.
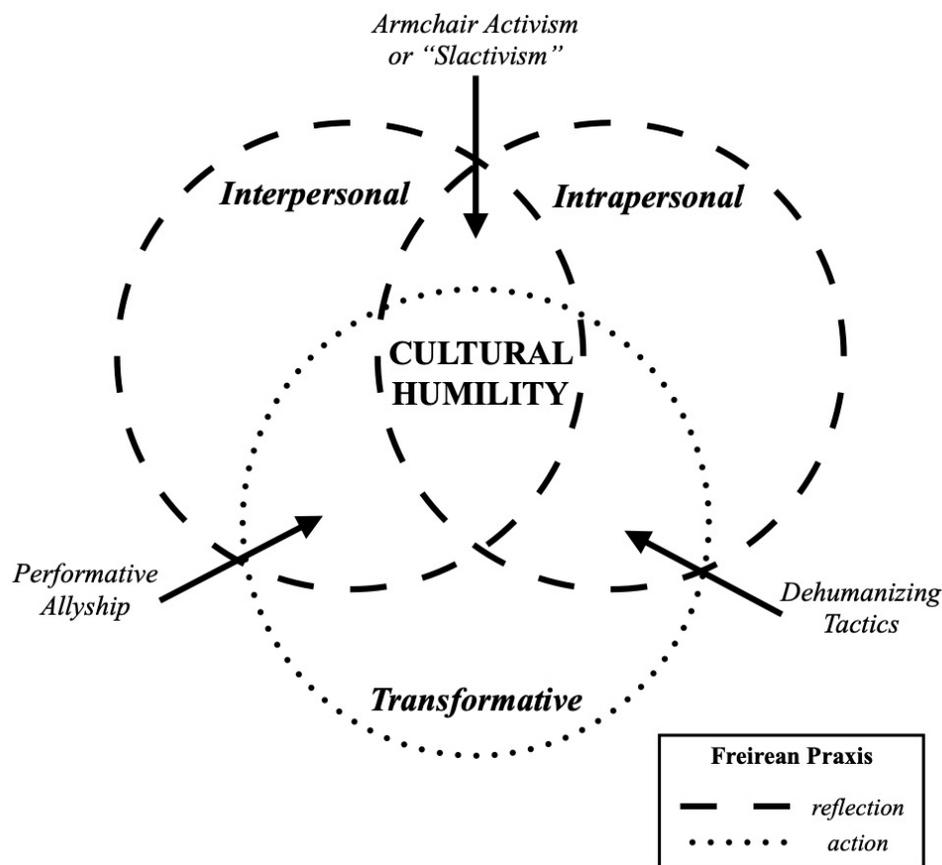

Figure 2. Conceptualizing cultural humility through the lens of Freirean praxis.

Coppola, William J., and Donald M. Taylor. 2022. Cultural humility in music teacher education: Toward transformative dialogues on power, privilege, and social (in)equity. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 21 (1): 110–41. https://doi.org/10.22176/act21.1.110

Conclusion: Does the Music Education Community Need Another Cultural Construct?

We offer that cultural humility provides a unique approach for preservice music teachers and music teacher educators to address the complications and contradictions inherent within our profession and broader society. By providing opportunities to engage dialectically with one another, music educators confront the vast ideologies, priorities, values, and ethical stances that will inevitably arise within and beyond their classrooms. However, while we agree with several other music education scholars' preference for cultural humility over related cultural constructs (Conkling 2019, Dolloff 2020, Hess 2021, Janes 2021), we are skeptical of *any* construct's ability to function as a panacea or "master virtue" (see Lavelock et al. 2017) for music educators. Cultural humility is certainly not without its problems (Moon and Sandage 2019). As Janes (2021) recognized, cultural humility may function as a "virtuous vice" and "vicious virtue" if teachers fail to employ a critical lens persistently while adopting the framework.

Might it be possible that, as Danso (2018) argues, the benefits of cultural humility lie merely in semantics—that the term *humility* is more agreeable only because it suggests a more productive mindset or attitude than the skills-based and mastery-oriented fixation that the term *competence* might imply? Although the purpose of this paper is not to argue for the superiority of cultural humility as a construct, we believe its appeal lives far beyond semantics. Its unique strengths include (a) the focus on self-reflection concerning power and privilege, (b) the emphasis placed on non-mastery and the refusal of "best practices" approaches (Hess 2021), and (c) the call for long-term, transformative action among practitioners. With this said, we suggest that cultural humility need not (and should not) necessarily *replace* related cultural constructs such as (inter)cultural competence, culturally responsive education, and others—especially if one's reasoning for doing so rests merely in a desire to keep up with the latest pedagogical "fad." Rather, the advancement of cultural humility offers opportunities to *build upon* the existing frameworks that music educators have long embraced. To suggest that cultural humility is superior to any other cultural construct would be quite a non-humble claim, indeed.

Returning to the lifelong interminability of cultural humility, we reflect on our students' journeys throughout this work and feel optimistic for the continued

growth of preservice music teachers, who, like Arnie, Jan, and others, might uncover significant opportunities for further self-reflection and growth in this work. One might accordingly imagine Victor's recognition of privilege to give rise eventually to a deeper understanding of his whiteness, Jan's consistent openness to others to manifest into more reflexive self-evaluations, and Arnie's recognition of his continued potential for growth to progress ultimately toward a commitment to stand in solidarity with his marginalized colleagues as a co-conspirator. The work of cultural humility makes such self-growth compulsory, as educators continually interrogate personal conceptions of self and other within our pluralistic world. For those whose development of cultural humility appeared to be further along at this point—for example, Rita, Paul, Martina, Fred, and Alexis—the framework does not accept their cultural humility as "finished" or "attained" but beckons continued self-growth throughout their lives as well. Calling upon its inherent interminability, we thus advocate for the development of cultural humility to span the entirety of preservice music teachers' development. In this way, cultural humility can become far more potent as a fixture of the music program's institutional culture rather than a one-off unit topic that might become lost in the grand scheme of a student's course of study.

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Notes

[1] Explicit distinctions between *cultural competence* and *intercultural competence* are lacking in the literature, although the latter appears to function as an extension of the former. Westerlund and colleagues (2020) point to the "future-oriented stance" and "life-long construction" (3) that the term *inter*cultural affords.

[2] In the spirit of critical dialogue with respect to cultural competence, see Danso's (2018) rebuttal of these critiques. A close reading of *inter*cultural competence, however, reveals that the construct does indeed share important commonalities with cultural humility—for example, (a) a focus on attitudes and dispositions, (b) the recognition that such work is a lifelong process, and (c) reflexive understandings of one's own power and privilege (see MacPherson, 2010).

[3] The empirical portion of this study took place during the fall of 2020.

[4] For specific details regarding the method and procedures for the empirical portion of this study, please contact the corresponding author.

[5] We have chosen to present students' voices verbatim throughout this paper. We recognize that there are some instances in which culturally insensitive terminology is used (e.g., "slaves" rather than "enslaved people;" "minority" rather than "minoritized") but felt it imperative to capture students' ongoing journeys with cultural humility.

[6] We present Miles' example here, but we note that the Muslim prayer chant is not quite an analogous example, as Muslim prayer would not be considered *musiqa* in the same way that music is utilized in Christian prayer (Wade 2004, 7).

[7] Of course, it is possible that these discussions on cultural humility led students to engage more confidently in transformative efforts within their own social spaces beyond the virtual classroom.