

Interconnectedness, Mycelium, and Black Feminism: An Anti-Oppressive Praxis for Music Educators

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Abstract

Black feminism and mycelium symbolize a sense of interconnectedness that can contribute to an anti-oppressive praxis for music teachers and music teacher educators. Building a music making and learning community that rejects dehumanization and provides care for each other relies on understanding the deep interconnectedness of our world. This type of interconnection and community is reflected in Black feminist scholarship. Author and activist adrienne maree brown (2017) embodies the ethos of Black feminism within her description of interconnectedness through the imagery and power of mycelium. As one of the largest organisms on earth, mycelium is an interconnected system of roots that detoxifies and creates healthier ecosystems. Making music inherently requires interconnected interactions. Musicians and educators have a responsibility to create a music making and learning environment that prioritizes the interconnectedness of their community. In this paper, I weave brown's and other Black feminists' understandings of interconnectedness through the understanding of mycelium into the broad world of music making and music education in order to interrogate systems and practices that exacerbate oppression. This work highlights the importance of developing a teaching ethic that centers anti-oppressive practices such as centering the lived experiences of students as well as creating a protective sense of community.

Keywords

Black feminism, anti-oppressive praxis, mycelium, interconnectedness

In the words of Patricia Hill Collins (2022), “Black feminist thought’s core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the U.S. matrix of domination” (251). Black feminism suggests that we challenge oppression through collective action by centering our intersecting identity points. This understanding can provide a lens through which music educators can tangibly embrace a practice that centers interconnectivity by critiquing barriers and exclusionary practices.

Black feminism and mycelium symbolize a sense of interconnectedness that can contribute to an anti-oppressive praxis for music teachers and music teacher educators. I begin this work with a personal journey about navigating my career as a Black, queer, woman music teacher educator. Next, I provide an overview of anti-oppressive praxis within the context of music education and then broadly describe Black feminist characteristics. With a basic understanding of Black feminism, I then outline Black feminist adrienne maree brown’s¹ (2017) book *Emergent Strategy* to build an understanding of interconnectedness and mycelium with the goal to reimagine the broad world of music education. This work centers the importance of developing a working and teaching ethic that challenges oppressive structures through supporting each other, students, and celebrating a culturally diverse world through interconnection.

brown (2017) embodies the ethos of Black feminism within her description of interconnectedness through the imagery and power of mycelium. She states that mycelium “connects roots to one another and breaks down plant material to create healthier ecosystems. Mycelium is the largest organism on earth. Interconnectedness. Remediation. Detoxification” (45). According to brown, mycelium represents one of the largest, most interconnected organisms on earth. I offer that music educators can draw from characteristics of the interconnectedness within mycelium in addition to other Black feminist writings to create an anti-oppressive music learning environment that recognizes the complexities within our humanity and protects students and the teaching profession.

A Personal Journey of Interconnectedness and Community

The immersive and energy-filled sounds created by New Orleans style brass bands reflect a deep interconnection between each musician and the audience. Improvised grooves from the horns on top of layered percussive polyrhythms provide a seamless foundation for dance and energy. When attending a New

Orleans style brass band concert, I feel the reciprocal relationship from the musicians to the audience and from the audience back to the musicians. Audiences typically feel the amount of trust between the musicians needed to create such transcendent musical experiences. The interconnectedness between the musicians and audience influences the experience as a whole. Through participatory music-making, such as call and response and improvisation, the musicians become a facilitator, and the audience becomes an integral contributor. Trust, interconnectedness, and reciprocity greatly impact this collective music making experience.

My journey toward becoming a music educator and music teacher educator has been immersed in deep experiences of interconnection between family members, loved ones, colleagues, and friends. As an instructor, I find value in establishing a connective learning environment focused on participatory techniques that center students' contributions. As a music teacher and music teacher educator I incorporate improvisatory play in ways that empowers students' musical abilities with and without sheet music. This type of learned skill requires students to lean into their interconnected abilities as musicians by listening and responding to the sonic sounds around them.

As our society continues to be hostile towards marginalized and racialized individuals, I find it imperative to recognize the power and impact of the interconnection between all involved parties within teaching and learning. My ability to maintain the classroom as a space for students to interrogate and reflect on social realities is strengthened by the connections and relationships I have with colleagues and community members. As I have grown as an educator, I have witnessed the positive effects of a music making and music learning space where intentional interconnection is the foundation.

Interconnectedness represents a reciprocal, intermingled relationship influenced by the collective of the group. Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970/2000) recognized the importance of multi-way, reciprocal knowledge sharing through his critique of a master/apprentice or "banking" approach toward teaching, where the teacher is the sole holder of knowledge and "deposits" information to the students (53). An interconnected learning environment centers a collective, connective experience that reflects the same amount of trust present in a New Orleans style brass band. This collective, connective experience is inherent in many forms of music playing and learning and can reflect characteristics within anti-oppressive praxis and Black feminism.

Anti-oppressive Praxis

Anti-oppressive praxis in education includes the understanding that teaching is not politically neutral (hooks 1994). Lauren Kapalka Richerme (2024) emphasizes the ethical considerations of praxis in music education. Education scholars Heidi Bacon and Lavern Byfield (2018) describe praxis as something lived and experienced through practice. I use the term praxis to describe the active, ever-evolving practice that can come from theoretical understandings. Educators have a responsibility to understand the complex social reality in which they teach. Pedagogical approaches, such as abolitionist teaching (Love 2017; Sabati et al 2022; Stovall 2018), antiracism education (Dei 1996; Hess 2015), culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995; McKoy and Lind 2022), and Black feminist thought (Collins 2022), can aid in not only understanding those complex realities of society, but also turning that understanding into an ever-evolving praxis. Additionally, understanding structural racism through the lens of critical race theory can aid in understanding complex systems (Lewis 2022). Later, I detail how music educators can use brown's *Emergent Strategy* as a pedagogical foundation on which to build a responsive approach to the ever-changing needs within the classroom.

Anti-oppressive praxis is grounded in the ability to reimagine, build, and dream about creating practices and structures that center empathy and embrace the complex humanity within our multifaceted lived experiences. Robin D.G. Kelley's (2022) concept of freedom dreaming aligns with the ethos of the aforementioned approaches through a critique of harmful systems. Freedom dreams center the needs of those most impacted by structural barriers, such as racism and other effects of capitalism in addition to homophobic, transphobic, sexist, and other hegemonic practices, to explicitly imagine how those barriers can be eliminated. Kelley states, "Without new visions we don't know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics but a process that can and must transform us" (xii). I use this grounding to center the importance of not only recognizing systems and practices that cause harm or marginalization, but to also understand that music educators can build and create new practices that serve those most affected by oppressive systems.

Education and music education scholars use the theme of imagination and dreaming in particular ways to generate new ideas about how to expand and

reimagine common practices. Bettina Love (2017) uses abolition teachings as a foundation to dream of new ways of understanding education as it relates to students who are most vulnerable to oppressive systems. Loneka Battiste (2024) uses Black music aesthetics as a way to reimagine musical experiences that center Black musics. Juliet Hess (2020) emphasizes art as the foundation for reimagining a different world. She highlights how discourse around abolition, critical reconstructionism, and critical pedagogy can be a foundation to build something new.

An anti-oppressive praxis additionally provides a foundation to embrace non-performative inclusion. For inclusion to function as an extension of anti-oppression, it must extend beyond simple, additive measures. Such inclusion involves addressing structures and barriers that originally caused or created the exclusion. Rathgeber et al. (2025) refers to this type of inclusion as “deliberative inclusion.” They use the term “deliberative inclusion” as a way to create inclusion by addressing harmful systems. Juliet Hess (2022) further critiques performative inclusion by highlighting the shortcomings of DEI efforts in schools of music. I expand this critique of performative inclusion by describing deliberate inclusion as efforts that eliminate the root cause of exclusion. Deliberate inclusion goes beyond adding diverse elements into a learning space. This type of inclusion focuses on critiquing the initial cause of exclusion and thus creating a more inclusive practice.

The foundation of an anti-oppressive praxis involves recognizing lived realities, reimagining structures through the elimination of harmful barriers, and creating a deliberate inclusive environment that addresses the root cause of exclusion. As an extension to an anti-oppressive praxis, Black feminism centers intersectionality and collectivism as a way to challenge systems of power. In the next section I provide a broad overview of Black feminism as a path toward understanding the relationship between interconnectedness, mycelium, anti-oppressive praxis, and music education.

Black Feminism

Black feminism, which is an artery of an anti-oppressive praxis, grounds my practice of community building and teaching. Black feminism centers the fight for equity and liberation by recognizing social realities and centering the intersectional and interconnected experiences of Black women. By emphasizing Black women’s experiences and stories, Black feminist thought—an extension

of Black feminism—critically considers multiple layers of oppression, such as sexism, ageism, racism, and classism (Collins 2022). In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* Angela Davis (1999) analyzes the music of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday to center the work of three influential Black women artists as well as determine “how these women’s performances appear through the prism of the present, and with what these interpretations can tell us about past and present forms of social consciousness” (xi). In her analysis of Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” Davis states, “Art never achieves greatness through transcendence of sociohistorical reality. On the contrary, even as it transcends specific circumstances and conventions, it is deeply rooted in social realities” (183). As Black feminist perspectives center social realities, I too center social realities in the classroom by establishing an interconnected learning environment that emphasizes community and trust.

Black feminism foregrounds the collective and community in the fight against the violence that Black women experience. For example, the Combahee River Collective represents a powerful group of interconnected Black women who recognized the importance of collective action and community movement in the fight against violence toward Black women (Taylor 2017). In the Combahee River Collective Black Feminist Statement (1995), a defining piece of writing of Black feminism originally written in 1979, they share their politics on what grounds them in the struggle toward liberation. They state, “Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work” (2). Similarly, in *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth Richie (2022) detail the history and connection between abolition, feminism, and liberation. They detail how INCITE!, an abolition feminist organization dedicated to “the survival and care for all peoples,” outlines their vision based on “radical freedom, mutual accountability, passionate reciprocity” (as cited in Davis et al. 2022). INCITE! is part of a genealogy of radical feminist of color organizations who have “troubled gender essentialism, forging over time a collective political consciousness of gender violence as always also shaped by racism, class bias, transphobia, heterosexism, and so on” (92). These examples show how Black feminism grounds itself in community in the work toward the liberation of Black women and other oppressed identities.

As a music teacher and music teacher educator, I build community by leading with those same principles. These principles have influenced the way I co-create a classroom that centers student expertise and contribution. In practice,

I establish this classroom environment by giving students the opportunity to share their lived experiences, co-generating accountability structures and expectations, and emphasizing peer-to-peer learning. By recognizing the inherent value of collective contribution, I present myself as a facilitator who creates a holistic music-making experience that encompasses the powerful impact of collaboration in music.

In music research, Paula Grissom Broughton (2023) connects Black feminism, as a pedagogical lens, to jazz instruction. She critiques jazz pedagogical methods that do not explicitly address the socio-political context of jazz music and offers Black feminist pedagogy as an approach to inform jazz education in intentional ways. In her words, “Black feminist pedagogy is a pedagogy of protest and activism that demands urgent social and political change. In addition, it critiques dominant educational systems that are built on White privilege and patriarchal ideologies. Last, it fosters a mindset of inclusion and expansion instead of exclusiveness and chauvinism” (55). By identifying Black feminist pedagogy as an approach to critique structures of exclusion, Broughton provides space to highlight the interconnectedness of the music world.

A broad understanding of Black feminist ideas can help music teachers establish an anti-oppressive praxis within their learning and teaching environments through enacting interconnectedness and recognizing systems of power. adrienne maree brown (2017) emphasizes the concept of interconnectedness as a key aspect of *Emergent Strategy*, which is rooted in Black feminism.

Emergent Strategy and Mycelium

Within her writings, brown is intentional about centering the needs of those affected by systemic oppression. In *Emergent Strategy*, brown (2017) weaves permaculture with approaches toward community building. She introduces mycelium within permaculture in a way that speaks to the power of interconnection. Permaculture represents a sustainable system within agriculture that can translate into building community. brown gifts readers a perspective toward cultivating a shared community based on Octavia Butler’s work. She states that emergent strategy “was initially a way of describing the adaptive and relational leadership model found in the work of Black science fiction writer Octavia Butler (and others). Then it grew into plans of action, personal practices and collective organizing tools that account for constant change and rely on the strength of relationships for adaptation. With a crush on biomimicry and

permaculture” (23). brown continues, “Biomimicry or biomimetics is the imitation of the models, systems, and elements of nature for the purpose of solving complex human problems. Permaculture is a system of agricultural and social design principles centered around simulating or directly utilizing the patterns and feature observed in natural ecosystems” (23). Through her emphasis and connection to permaculture, interconnection, and a sense of rootedness, brown provides a foundation on which music educators can build and strengthen their anti-oppressive practices.

Emergent strategy represents an acknowledgement and response to a world where change is a constant. brown (2017) provides different elements (derived from nature and permaculture) as a response to this constant change and as a way to recognize the interconnection between each other. These elements can connect to music education in multiple ways. Below, I list and describe each element and provide a short example of how it has shaped my teaching practice.

1. Fractal—*describes the relationship between small and large. brown associates fractals with never ending patterns that create a type of ripple effect, where small occurrences may impact a larger system and vice versa.* As a music teacher, fractals make me reflect on the artful mosaic sounds created by collective contribution. Each individual musician contributes in a way that impacts the greater performance experience.
2. Intentional Adaptation—*represents how we change to survive or better live in a particular environment.* As a Black, queer, woman music educator, I have had to adapt and codeswitch so that I could fit into my environment. Musical code switching requires fluency in multiple musical literacies to gain access to broader environments and opportunities. An example includes a gospel musician who is musically strong but may not read music in a traditional way. They would have to adapt and broaden their musical literacy to find acceptance within a traditional collegiate school of music.
3. Interdependence and Decentralization—*describes who we are and how we share. Additionally, brown emphasizes the importance of the distribution and delegation of power through the process of decentralization.* Interdependence and decentralization represent my responsibility as a music teacher educator to model shared autonomy in the music classroom. I create a balanced learning environment where students share responsibility for their learning experience. This approach can be compared to a co-constructed classroom that emphasizes ungrading and reflection as potential assessment tools.

4. Non-linear and Iterative—*is the pace and pathways of change. Within this element, brown highlights the non-linear nature of change and transformation. This element also connects to a sense of grace needed to unlearn linearity.* When I was a middle school beginning band teacher, I (at the time) unknowingly incorporated this element as a central approach in my teaching. By understanding the specific and unique needs of the beginning instrumentalists in the class I taught, I adjusted and broadened different technique-specific benchmarks to support their musical learning. For example, instead of assessing students on achieving a specific instrumental technique, I assessed students on their growth toward that specific technique. This approach allowed for an iterative and supportive path toward success.
5. Resilience and Transformative Justice—*represents how humans and the natural world recovers and transforms. Within this element, brown (2017) states, “But if we want to create a world in which conflict and trauma aren’t the center of our collective existence, we have to practice something new, ask different questions, access again our curiosity about each other as a species” (150).* As a music teacher educator, I emphasize curiosity as a source of creativity. When I center curiosity and questioning as a foundation, I open the opportunity for preservice teachers to take the opportunity to use their questions to consider how they might center curiosity in their future classrooms.
6. Creating More Possibilities—*encompasses how we move towards life. brown highlights how this element connects to abundance.* I compare this element to freedom dreaming (Kelley 2022) and building a future filled with thriving individuals through a connected community. I commonly facilitate a freedom dreaming activity with students and educators where I ask them to reflect deeply on their desires for their lives without barriers, and I have them identify how a strong sense of community can help them realize their desires. Freedom dreaming allows a space to embrace abundance and possibility, and that abundance is reflected in the collective.

When I was first introduced to *Emergent Strategy*, I became aware that I unknowingly incorporated many of these ideas into my teaching practice in subtle and overt ways. With more awareness I began to develop these practices to become more intentional as an educator. These elements provide a structure through which to understand interconnection, community, and constant change within our profession—year to year, day to day, class to class. In addition to these strategies, brown (2017) identifies mycelium to further understand

interconnectedness within community. These strategies and brown's description of mycelium led me to further consider the importance of recognizing the impact of interconnectedness as an aspect of an anti-oppressive praxis in music education.

Mycelium

brown (2017) uses mycelium to describe the importance of embracing connections with one another. Mycelium is an incredibly strong and complex interconnected system of fungus and mushrooms. This system can be used to warn of harm and support strong connections. Educators can use the concept of mycelium to better understand how our interconnectedness can strengthen our ability to challenge harmful systems and practices that exacerbate oppression and exclusion.

Mycelium's deep, interconnectedness allows for a sophisticated communication system. Scientist Suzanne Simard (2018) describes mycelium as being able to communicate, defend itself, and perceive threats. "Mycelium, the threading that makes up most mushrooms, communicates between trees, particularly about toxic growth, a process called mycorrhiza" (85). This type of communication alerts of potential harm and provides a process to identify any threats to the system.

brown's and Simard's definitions of mycelium lead me to consider how interconnectedness can strengthen roots to one another and break down barriers, in order to create a healthy or more liberated classroom environment and ecosystem. By exploring the relationships between interconnectedness, mycelium, and music teaching, I propose that interconnectedness through the lens of mycelium can become a praxis of anti-oppressive music teaching.

An anti-oppressive approach toward teaching is meant to detoxify threats within music education. Detoxification occurs when toxicity is identified and then eliminated through intentional measures. To detox in music education means to identify and eliminate practices and policies that maintain exclusion and forms of oppression such as white supremacy. Music education scholars who identify and critique practices that exacerbate oppression are the ones (among others) who are identifying threats within the profession. Once the threat is identified, music educators can push toward eliminating the threat. This process requires deep communication, connection, and trust. The often-siloed nature of music education can prevent the ability to cultivate the type of

trust required. In this case, the silo can be considered a contributing factor of the threat. Deliberate inclusion efforts as well as tangible structural change from an interconnected collective can inform this detoxification process.

The elimination process is much more complicated than the identification process. Mycelium and the different elements mentioned above such as “Non-linear/Iterative” or “Resilience/Transformative Justice” can provide a sense of direction for music educators in the journey toward detoxification. These elements can inform how to connect with one another and embrace empathy, deep communication, and interconnectedness. This understanding of Black feminism, mycelium, interconnectedness and detoxification, can lay a foundation for music educators to embrace an anti-oppressive approach toward teaching music.

Further Connections to Music Education

A strong sense of interconnectedness allows music teachers to lean on the collective to embrace and create new anti-oppressive practices in music education. These new practices can include an ethos shift from performance driven work toward process driven work. Just as mycelium represents strong communication, interconnection, and detoxification, a process driven music education can prioritize experiential learning and connectedness as being just as important as the performance (product). By emphasizing the process or the experience of music-making and music-learning, there is more space to critique, analyze, synthesize, and transfer music making experiences while deemphasizing competition and perfectionism. This approach creates space to embrace lived experiences and to center community. In this way, I argue that music educators and music teacher educators can build an anti-oppressive ethos in their classroom by emphasizing students’ lived experiences and expanding music teachers’ ability to build a protective community.

Lived Experiences

Anti-oppressive practices require a commitment to connection to oneself and connection to one another. Interconnectedness exists in multiple ways within music education. The act of creating music together is an inherently interconnected act. As musicians create music together with one another, music educators facilitate musical learning through a mutually joined or connected action. Music educators can further highlight this interconnectedness with students by

affirming their lived experiences. The importance of centering interconnectedness affirms students' humanity and sense of belonging. For example, Lewis (2022), details how music educators who learned about systemic racism found the importance of recognizing the vast cultural experiences that their students bring into the classroom. The process needed to properly understand their students also involves openly challenging racist and oppressive policies/action from within and outside of the school building. This approach requires an effort toward deep interconnection which can lead to detoxification through anti-oppressive practices and pedagogical approaches in the classroom.

Suzanne Hall (2024) details her lived experiences of dealing with racism and incorporates W.E.B. Du Bois's double consciousness and Sylvia Wynter's "new science of the word" to reimagine a more inclusive music education. Hall states: "Wynter advocates for a reimagining of knowledge production that encompasses a broader range of human experiences which she describes as the new science of the word" (72). The use of Sylvia Wynter's work echoes the importance of recognizing lived experiences by centering human agency. Hall continues, "This includes, in part, centering human agency by acknowledging the active role individuals play in shaping their own histories, cultures, and identities, bridging the sciences and humanities, and recognizing the interrelatedness of these disciplines" (72). This statement emphasizes the importance of not only highlighting the lived experiences of our students, but also making sure students have agency in naming their cultures and identities.

Latasha Thomas-Durrell (2021) argues the significance of music educators embracing students' lived experiences by reflecting on her own experiences. She shares her first memories of music education as being filled with improvisation, composition, gospel traditions, and family. This music education did not occur in an academic classroom, but with her grandmother and other family members. Her description of music-making experiences with her family as a young person reflects an interconnection that resulted in trust and safety. Within her music learning experiences in a K–12 academic classroom she shared, "I found no representation of myself nor acceptance of my well-established culture of music" (114). There was a lack of interconnectedness. She continues "Not validating my cultural background led to feelings of disconnect between my home and school cultures. Without guidance on how to navigate between the two, the result was a loss of my Black musical identity, as school music did not affirm my life experiences" (114). She asks music educators to "Imagine that music educators teach with a philosophy of cultural

responsiveness, acknowledging and supporting students' backgrounds instead of adhering to a curriculum mostly based on people, musics, and pedagogies with which students do not relate" (115). An anti-oppressive praxis that recognizes the importance of interconnection reflects Thomas-Durrell's desires by centering the lived experiences of the students within the music classroom.

Comparably, Lorenzo Sánchez-Gatt (2023) identifies interpersonal affirmations as a way for music teachers to help students make sense of their lived experiences and futures. Sánchez-Gatt suggests an Afrofuturistic lens as a way for music educators to recognize and combat antiblackness with interpersonal affirmations as a key element. Within interpersonal affirmations, Sánchez-Gatt uses Janelle Monet's music and imagery as a way for students to create music and art where they can imagine utopian futures or reimagine dystopian pasts. Through this type of activity students can support each other while exploring antiblackness and also provide an opportunity to dream for liberation. Sánchez-Gatt states, "Intentional subversion of white hegemonic narratives and critical reflection in the music classroom can help students name oppression, make meaning of transgressions made against them, and cultivate heart" (147). By allowing students to share their interpersonal affirmations, they are able to recognize and affirm their lived experiences in a way that challenges antiblackness and other forms of oppression.

Protective Sense of Community

Music educators additionally have the opportunity to exercise the power of interconnectedness with each other as colleagues. Like mycelium, music educators can protect and warn of harm through collective movement and action. In these next paragraphs I highlight how music education researchers reference interconnectedness through community.

A protective sense of community involves an acute awareness of the needs within the community. Joyce McCall, Adrian Davis, Marjoris Regus, and James Dekle (2023) recommend Black music teachers find their "tribe" (78) when navigating through a school of music experience. Even through their research process, they highlight the benefits of being in community with other Black researchers who share similar life experiences. They state, "This process not only positioned us to establish a working rapport, but also situated us to create a trusting and empowering community where we discussed our cultural and racial backgrounds, and life histories as musicians, music educators, graduate students, and scholars" (61). This type of community rapport is an example of

how an interconnected sense of being can create an environment that provides trust and empowerment.

A community that prioritizes activism within music education requires interconnection. In her final chapter of *Music Education for Social Change*, Juliet Hess (2019) reflects an interconnected sense of community through her description of a pedagogy of community, which she uses to conceptualize future activism in music education. Hess situates connection as a central facet of a pedagogy of community. She states, “The second facet of a pedagogy of community involves connecting the musics studies to their histories, linking musics to their sociopolitical and sociohistorical contexts, and refusing any artificial dichotomy between music and other ‘subjects’” (151). By not only creating a connected community inside and outside of the classroom but creating connections in relation to the classroom music and its sociopolitical histories, a pedagogy of community reflects the interconnected system found within brown’s (2017) understanding of mycelium.

Interconnectedness allows for a space of support that can combat oppressive policies, such as divisive concept laws. Divisive concept laws (DCLs) explicitly restrict K–12 teachers from discussing topics related to race, gender, and systemic oppression (Bylica, Hawley, and Lewis 2024; Salvador, Bohn, and Martin 2023). According to Karen Salvador, Andrew Bohn, and Anne Martin (2023), divisive concept laws affect music educators across music teaching contexts. Music educators in their study reported feeling a sense of fear with regards to incorporating songs or approaches that explicitly deal with racism and oppression. Additionally, the authors discuss how music educators have experienced negative consequences for teaching about equity. Creators of divisive concept laws and other attacks on DEI initiatives aim to seed confusion and division within the teaching profession. These efforts are the antithesis of an anti-oppressive approach toward education. Kelly Bylica, Hawley, and Lewis (2024) share how certain participants in their study identified possible union affiliation as a source of protection from the harms of DCLs. Union protection through interconnection can provide a system of tangible support and connection where music teachers are able to teach in a way that affirms the humanity of their students without the threat of retribution from DCLs.

In short, the deep, interconnected web of communication and warning, similar to mycelium, can create a protected space for music teachers to combat oppressive practices within their classrooms. This web can be formed through trust and reciprocity. For music teachers, interconnection can involve a sense

of shared protection through community building and union organizing. Within the classroom, interconnection can occur through spaces that affirm students' humanity. This type of classroom does not recede from addressing sensitive subjects but rather confronts those subjects with delicate truths. Similarly, an anti-oppressive classroom rejects hate and ideologies steeped in white and American supremacy. An anti-oppressive classroom welcomes friction and discussion in ways that reject dehumanization. By modeling practices and connectedness on mycelium, music educators can maintain a structure and system of support that protects, detoxifies, and builds a strong collective that centers the humanity of both teachers and students.

Conclusion

Within this discussion of engaging an anti-oppressive praxis for music teaching and identifying threats or toxins within our profession/practices, it is important to note that educators may define, describe, and categorize these threats in very different ways. Although different descriptions exist, there is a certain non-negotiable when creating an anti-oppressive environment even within the complexity of our current world. This non-negotiable includes recognizing our shared humanity. As mentioned above, Suzanne Hall (2024) emphasizes the human nature of music making. In her fourth principle of an inclusive music education, she suggests music educators to “embrace the ways individuals use music to uplift the human conditions or circumstances” (75). Hall and Black feminism teach us that recognizing the humanity of the students within the classroom is a non-negotiable act when creating an anti-oppressive space.

Black feminists' perspectives, including brown's (2017) emergent strategy and description of mycelium, provide a grounding for an anti-oppressive praxis that prioritizes interconnectedness in a way that music educators can model. During a time when educators experience censorship through legislation or fear of retaliation, the power that comes from being interconnected is essential. Just as mycelium creates a healthier ecosystem through interconnection and detoxification, music teachers can create a healthier learning and teaching environment (ecosystem) by using Emergent Strategy and Black feminism as guides. Building together through a strong sense of interconnectedness provides a space for music educators to create new and bold practices that challenge oppression and affirm students' lived experiences.

Interconnectedness is a pillar of anti-oppressive pedagogical practices and Black feminist approaches. By recognizing the collective and shared strength within education networks, educators can establish working and learning environments that affirm the humanity of the students and educators in the classroom. The interconnectedness displayed within mycelium is powerful. It is vast. It is resilient. Our interconnectedness as music educators has the potential to be just as powerful, vast, and resilient.

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Note

¹ Like bell hooks, adrienne maree brown intentionally chooses not to capitalize her name.