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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Revolutionizing Music Education for BIPOC Students—New Possibilities of Practice

By

Jan-Mitchell Ko

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

In the Field of Educational Leadership and Social Justice

Loyola Marymount University

School of Education

2024

Revolutionizing Music Education for BIPOC Students—New Possibilities of Practice

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By

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This dissertation written by Jan-Mitchell Ko, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

**6/3/2024**

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EDUARDO F. Lopez (May 4, 2024 09:15 PDT)

Eduardo Lopez, Ph.D., Committee Member

## **DEDICATION**

**Dedicated to Jolan and Juliet. To all the music teachers working to create culturally responsive music classrooms, who bring forth new possibilities in music education: your efforts expand students' and communities' definitions of music education by highlighting the rich cultural backgrounds of our students' world. When I am asked the question, "Why study music?" my response has always been, "When I studied language and history, I found music; when I studied science, I found music; when I studied math, I found music; but when I studied music, I found myself." I hope those who engage in the study of music will find themselves reflected in the music.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of the Study .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Research Questions.....	4
Significance of the Study .....	5
Theoretical Frameworks .....	8
Research Design and Methodology .....	9
Limitations .....	10
Delimitations.....	11
Definitions of Key Terms .....	11
Organization of Dissertation.....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction.....	13
Historical Context.....	13
University to K-12: Western Classical Music as a Universal Standard.....	22
The Persistence of Racism in Music Education.....	24
Race Matters in Music Education.....	27
Cultural Relevance: The Importance of Cultural Relevance in Music Education.....	30
The Power of Teacher Perceptions .....	35
Music Teaching Workforce .....	36
Conclusion .....	40
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>42</b>
Introduction.....	42
Sample and Population .....	45
Peer Research Interview Method.....	46
Data Collection Plan .....	47
Data Analysis Plan.....	47
Conclusion .....	48
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Introduction.....	49
Theme 1: Cultural Hegemony Within Music Education .....	50
Theme 2: The Pressure to Conform.....	55
Theme 3: Resistance to Change.....	58
Theme 4: Systemic Issues in Music Education.....	59

Theme 5: The Challenges and Opportunities.....	60
Theme 6: The Dismantling and Expanding .....	67
Theme 7: Structural Barriers.....	69
Conclusion .....	76
<b>CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>79</b>
Introduction.....	79
Cultural Hegemony in Music Education.....	79
The Pressure to Conform .....	83
The Resistance to Change: Pedagogical Shifts.....	85
Duality and Dialectical Tensions .....	86
The Challenges and Opportunities.....	87
Cultural Disconnect and Relevance .....	87
Shifting Traditional Paradigms: Dismantling and Expanding .....	88
Structural Barriers.....	90
Departmental Disconnection.....	92
Implications.....	93
Theoretical Implications .....	93
Practical Implications.....	96
Recommendations for Practice .....	97
Curriculum Development.....	97
New Training Program Developments .....	98
Policy Reforms.....	99
Breaking Down Systemic Barriers.....	99
Inter-Departmental Collaboration.....	100
Diversify Admissions Process and Faculty Diversity.....	100
Community Engagement .....	102
Recommendations for Further Research.....	104
Longitudinal Studies .....	104
Comparative Studies .....	105
Limitations .....	105
Summary .....	106
Conclusion .....	107
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>113</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Interview Participants (All Names Are Pseudonyms) .....	46



## ABSTRACT

Revolutionizing Music Education for BIPOC Students—New Possibilities of Practice

By

Jan-Mitchell Ko

This dissertation critically examines the entrenched Western classical music paradigm in K-12 and higher education music programs and its impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2017) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 2022), the study explores how this dominance leads to epistemological and ontological imprisonment, marginalizing non-Western musical traditions and perpetuating cultural hegemony and systemic racism.

Through qualitative peer research interviews with BIPOC university music education students, faculty members including the curriculum director, the research uncovers significant themes, including normalizing and cultural hegemony of Western classical music, the pressure to conform, resistance to pedagogical shifts, and structural barriers to implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies. Additionally, it highlights the duality and dialectical tension educators and students face navigating the dominant Western paradigm while striving to integrate diverse musical epistemologies.

The dissertation passionately advocates for new possibilities in practice through transformative approaches to music education that honor students' cultural backgrounds and challenge dominant narratives. The text suggests the need for changes in the curriculum, policies, and inclusive educational practices to better represent the diverse cultural backgrounds of all students. It offers practical recommendations for educators and institutions to create a fairer and

more inclusive music education environment, ultimately working to remove barriers and improve the success of BIPOC students in music education.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

My first teaching position in music education was at a high school in East Hollywood, a diverse neighborhood with a significant immigrant population. Although the school was new, I realized that despite its fresh paint and updated appearance, it felt strikingly similar to every other school I had attended and taught in as a teacher. The classroom structures, seating arrangements, curriculum, books, rules, culture, and even the unchanging school clock on the wall seemed like a replica of the past. My mentor teacher and I were working on creating a music classroom where we were attempting to mold our students into classically trained musicians. However, I quickly realized this approach needed to be more culturally relevant to our diverse student body. The standardized band book we used, which claimed to incorporate “world music,” presented tokenized versions of popular folk songs worldwide (Escalante, 2019). One example was a song called “Mexican Tune,” which reduced a rich part of Mexican heritage to shallow stereotypes and images that lacked cultural context and significance. Witnessing this normalization of such harmful practices was not just unsettling; it was deeply upsetting and made me question the integrity of our educational system.

Unfortunately, this approach did not resonate with the students of African American, Latino, and Asian descent, many of whom came from immigrant families. These students, with their rich tapestry of cultural experiences and musical traditions, were left feeling alienated and disengaged from the music education process. In reflection, I grappled with the challenges of a curriculum that was disconnected from my students’ cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

The curricular materials of my teacher preparation program did not offer an authentic representation of non-Western classical music culture, tokenizing other cultures and highlighting the glaring centralization of Western classical music education in this urban school. Instead of making connections with the music curriculum and my students' lived experiences, my teacher preparation program focused on classroom management, creating a 12-step lesson plan, and implementing a Western classical pedagogy. The teacher preparation program did not prepare me to engage students on a culturally relevant level. This approach felt limiting and even problematic, especially when it implied that Western classical music was universally superior. While some students may have enjoyed playing, it often felt like we were forcing them into a mold of classical musicianship that did not resonate with the lives and communities of the students we were teaching. The prescribed repertoire and teaching methods suggested that Western classical music was the only valid form of music knowledge and experience, further isolating students from their musical traditions and confining their cultural understanding and experiences in music education through cultural hegemony. This disconnect was a significant issue that demanded a more profound examination.

### **Statement of Problem**

A lack of cultural relevance and responsiveness in music education in schools with a high population of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students is not just a problem but a crisis in American education (Ladson-Billings, 2022). As Bishop (1990) pointed out, when children do not see themselves reflected in the books they read at school and encounter distorted portrayals of their culture, it conveys a powerful lesson about their societal devaluation. Bishop's observation was painfully evident in the context of music education.

The current music education paradigm, rigidly centered around Western classical music, has existed for far too long (Bond, 2017; Bradley, 2012a; Doyle, 2012; Hess, 2021). This approach, deeply rooted in European art music epistemologies and ontologies, has marginalized non-Western music, particularly the music of BIPOC students' cultures. In schools where the majority of students come from culturally rich BIPOC communities, this paradigm fails to reflect and honor the diverse backgrounds of these students. The profound impact of this exclusion perpetuates a sense of cultural devaluation and marginalization, reinforcing existing educational inequalities. The need for a shift towards a culturally sustaining music education that embraces and integrates the rich musical traditions of all students is not just a suggestion but a necessity.

Existing literature strongly supported the idea that recognizing students' cultural identities and experiences in the curriculum can significantly enhance their educational journey (Will & Najarro, 2023). Moreover, numerous studies in education have consistently shown that when the curriculum aligns with the cultural background and real-life encounters of BIPOC students, it can profoundly enrich their educational journey (Dreilinger, 2021; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). This research underscored the potential of a culturally sustaining music education to transform the learning experience for all students.

The exclusion of diverse cultural representation within the "traditional" dominant Western classical music curriculum may contribute to feelings of devaluation and marginalization, reinforcing existing educational inequalities. However, this gap also presents a promising opportunity. By developing innovative, transformative, and inclusive music programs that genuinely connect with the cultural backgrounds and life experiences of BIPOC students, we can begin to bridge this divide. There is a real potential to create music programs that not only

center around the cultural world of BIPOC students but also genuinely honor and celebrate their lived experiences, fostering a more inclusive and equitable music education system that could transform the educational landscape.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to explore the training of music teachers in a music education program at a large public university, focusing on defining “music education” and addressing the challenges and opportunities involved in implementing culturally sustaining music education. A peer research interview methodology engaged faculty and students in a music education program at a large prominent public university in Southern California (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010). The insights gathered were crucial in understanding how trained music teachers utilize and incorporate K-12 BIPOC students’ lived experiences, music cultural assets, funds of knowledge and identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Moll et al., 1992) in music classrooms. The study also examined the implications and strategies for enhancing the music curriculum in urban school classrooms, explicitly focusing on cultural relevance and inclusivity. Ultimately, the study sought to identify implications and practices for improving the music education system, including teacher preparation and professional development, to better meet the needs of BIPOC students.

### **Research Questions**

The following four research questions guided the study:

### **Perceptions of Traditional Music Curriculum:**

RQ1: How does a music education program define music education, and to what degree has it shifted away from Western classical definitions?

### **Strategies for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Cultural Inclusivity:**

RQ2: What innovative strategies can be identified as essential for college students training to become music educators who effectively incorporate diverse cultural assets and leverage students' funds of knowledge to create inclusive music classrooms in K-12 schools?

### **Personal Experiences with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Music Classrooms:**

RQ3: What are the potential implications and recommended approaches for enhancing the music curriculum in urban school settings from the perspective of college students studying music education? How can these recommendations focus on cultural relevance and inclusivity within their future classrooms?

### **Role of Teacher Preparation and Professional Development:**

RQ4: How can college-level teacher preparation and professional development programs be refined to equip future music educators better to address the unique needs of BIPOC students in K-12 settings? What are the potential practices and strategies to enhance the inclusivity and diversity of music education in urban schools?

### **Significance of the Study**

Exploring how music programs defined music education, the degree to which it had been shifting away from the Western classical tradition, and the challenges and opportunities in implementing culturally sustaining music education pedagogy was crucial in understanding the

cultural disparity within music education. Due to the robust nature of music, music education can be part of robust solutions to meaningfully solving the social and political conflicts that occurred by understanding how culture was essential in building meaningful communities where students were building cultural bridges and creating a unique history that integrated the diverse cultural history and knowledge of the community. When students unite to create a culture in this manner, they invest in a bonded history that transcends individual experiences, providing the community with a mutually invested history they have created. According, to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) social development can occur when diverse groups learn and create cultural history together, they form a bond where individuals weave into the intimate part of each other's history (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). The BIPOC communities are rich with innovative ideas and insight, resilience, and intellectual and cultural wealth, which are tremendous sources of renewable resources in our cities. As UNESCO (2023) stated:

Throughout the ages, culture has been the deep reservoir of innovation and creativity: the ultimate renewable resource. Yet, now more than any other time in history, the challenges we face are interlocked, multifaceted and indisputably global. Fragmented communities, rising inequalities, contemporary complex forms of conflict, coupled with the climate crisis and technological transformation are causing such upheaval that societies will only be able to overcome global challenges through enhanced diversification and tapping into cultural diversity, which is only possible if all cultures are equally valued. (p. 1)

We must develop a solution or model within music education to demonstrate how cultural building through this medium can help address global divisiveness. This shared experience can



serve as a model for unity, balancing individualism and collective progress in the United States—a worthy goal given global divisiveness.

The narratives and ideologies promoted within the music education classroom can profoundly influence how students perceive themselves and their cultural history. Music education can either expand students' epistemological and ontological horizons or confine and imprison them. As Bishop (1990) highlighted, the curriculum serves as both mirrors and windows for students, reflecting their culture, history, and experiences while providing a multicultural perspective that broadens their cultural intelligence. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the implications of a dominant narrative that perpetuates Colonialism and Eurocentrism, especially when it fails to represent BIPOC students, who are often the majority in these urban school settings.

This study was not just a theoretical exploration, but it has the potential to catalyze real change. It prompted a reevaluation of music education practices to make them more accessible, inclusive, and robust in meeting the needs of BIPOC students in a multicultural and pluralistic society. It highlights the challenges and limitations of the traditional music curriculum in urban schools, contributing to a broader conversation on reimagining, redefining, and expanding music education. It promotes cultural relevance and inclusivity, empowering BIPOC students to value their history, culture, and identity. The potential impact of this study on developing more equitable and inclusive music education policies, curricula, and instructional strategies is significant.

The findings of this study were not just academic insights, but have the potential to significantly impact the development of more equitable and inclusive music education policies,

curricula, and instructional strategies, which can foster a more inclusive and empowering learning environment for all students, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. In addition, this study addresses the gap in education research and the challenges of implementing a culturally relevant curriculum in urban schools. The findings will provide insightful information for future research, guiding the way for more effective and inclusive music education practices.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study's main theoretical frameworks, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 2022) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2017), were not just academic tools but have been theoretical frameworks for promoting inclusivity, equity, and student empowerment in music education. By drawing on critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, this study aimed to critically analyze the issues surrounding the lack of cultural and critical frameworks in current music education in public schools. Critical race theory (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2017), provide a lens to examine how race and racism intersect with education, highlighting how systems of power and oppression impact marginalized students' experiences, including in the context of music education. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1998) focused on incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into the curriculum to make education more meaningful and relevant to their lives. By utilizing these theoretical frameworks, this study aimed to critically analyze the current state of music education in public schools and explore ways to develop relevant and meaningful curricula that reflect students' diverse cultural backgrounds. It sought to create music learning experiences where students see themselves, their identities, and their experiences represented, valued, and honored, thereby promoting inclusivity, equity, and student empowerment in music education.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

This study adopted a unique qualitative peer research interview methodology (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010) which centered on in-depth semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) as the primary source of data collection. This innovative approach involves peer research interviews specifically tailored to the context of music education. Semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) will be the cornerstone of the data collection strategy.

My qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) approach was comprehensive, involving in-depth interviews with participants and a critical analysis of power dynamics, social structures, and cultural norms. This thorough method has allowed me to explore and understand the issue of cultural responsiveness in music education from a holistic perspective, taking into account the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape the experiences of students and teachers in the music classroom. The research addressed the lack of criticality and cultural responsiveness in the music classroom, particularly in urban schools, by delving into the perspectives and experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) college students training to become music teachers. The study involved a diverse range of participants, including three BIPOC college students who aspire to be music teachers, the director of curriculum, and faculty members. By capturing their narratives, insights, and personal experiences, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. The open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) allowed for flexibility while maintaining a focused approach. These interviews delved into the participants'

perspectives on cultural responsiveness, the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and their envisioned role in addressing the issue in future music education.

Data was analyzed using a critical qualitative lens. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach systematically examined the interview transcripts to identify themes, patterns, and critical insights. The analysis focused on how cultural responsiveness was perceived, enacted, and influenced within the music classroom. It considered broader discourses, ideologies, and power dynamics that shape the experiences of students and teachers, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

By adopting this qualitative peer research interview methodology (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010) meticulously designed, this research provided a nuanced exploration of the challenges and possibilities for promoting cultural responsiveness in music education, specifically emphasizing the perspectives of future music educators. This approach, carefully chosen, aligned with the research objectives and facilitates a deeper understanding of the research problem's complexities.

### **Limitations**

The sample size was limited to five participants. The findings may be limited in generalizability to a larger population of music education students or other educational settings. The specified focus of the sample may restrict the applicability of the results to broader contexts or regions. As with any qualitative research, there was potential for data collection and analysis bias. The researcher's perspectives, assumptions, and interpretations may influence the findings

despite efforts to maintain objectivity and rigor in the research process. Researchers should consider this inherent limitation in qualitative studies when interpreting the results. Additionally, this study was geographically constrained to a specific location within Los Angeles County, which may have unique contextual factors. The findings may not be directly transferable to other educational settings, regions, or demographic contexts. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings to a broader range of educational contexts may be limited.

### **Delimitations**

The scope of this study was limited to music teachers in urban schools, and the findings may only apply to some types of teachers and educational settings. The researcher's access to participants may be limited, and some potential participants may choose not to participate, which may impact the sample's representativeness and findings. This study specifically focused on the perspectives and experiences of music teachers in the context of teaching music in an urban setting. This study used qualitative methods, limiting the findings to a qualitative framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach limits the research to qualitative data and may not include quantitative measures and perspectives. The study's time frame could be more extensive than a longitudinal study, which may impact the depth and breadth of data collected and analyzed. The findings of this study may not show the long-term changes or trends of culturally relevant teaching and curriculum in music education.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) was the term used to describe racialized and marginalized students of color who are non-White.

People of Color is a term that referred to persons or groups who are non-White Anglo-Saxon European Americans.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This study sought to examine how music educators consider race and culture when creating music learning spaces, how they define music education, the extent to which it is shifting away from Western classical music traditions, and the challenges and opportunities involved in redefining music education to reflect their BIPOC students' cultural worlds and lived experiences. Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study and its purpose. Chapter 2 presents a literature review, offering a historical and theoretical contextual understanding of music education in the United States. Chapter 3 outlines the peer research interview methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 discusses the findings based on significant themes identified through the analysis of qualitative peer research interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the findings along with the theoretical and practical implications, recommendations, and concluding statements.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 investigated how music programs define music education, starting with a brief history of music education in the United States. The literature review explores critical historical, racial, and cultural issues on how universities and K-12 music programs define music education, highlighting the need to shift from Western classical traditions to incorporating non-Western music cultures, pedagogy, and experiences in urban classrooms. The chapter also discusses classroom dynamics influenced by these social, historical, and cultural factors and provides workforce population statistics to contextualize the issues presented in this study.

#### **Historical Context**

This section examined how the intertwining of colonialism and racism with Eurocentric musical culture historically served as a mechanism of oppression within the context of music education in the United States. Understanding this history is crucial for recognizing how current dominant music education standards, such as musical aesthetics and cultural value systems, are rooted in racism and colonialism. The scaling of these musical ideologies has led to their normalization as dominant hegemonic functions in the modern United States music education system. This analysis urgently addresses systemic issues of racism and colonialism in music education, highlighting their profound impact on defining the music education curriculum and pedagogy.

The history of music education in North America is deeply rooted in European colonialism. This influence began in the early 1500s when European missionaries sought to

“civilize” Indigenous peoples by teaching them European music (Britton, 1985; Good-Perkins, 2022; Spell, 1922). Hernan Cortes established the first mission music schools in 1524, modeled after European choir schools, with Pedro De Gante as the first documented European music teacher in North America (Good-Perkins, 2022; Spell, 1922). These early efforts reflected settler colonial beliefs of musical saviorism and elitism (Good-Perkins, 2022, p. 40). Jesuit priests used music as a tool for the spiritual conversion of Native Indigenous people (Britton, 1982; Good-Perkins, 2022; Spell, 1922).

Since the early days of colonialism in North America, European settlers utilized music as a tool for asserting control over Indigenous populations. In the 1500s, they imposed their musical practices, including the establishment of choirs and regulation of vocal expression, aiming to supplant the spiritual and cultural traditions of native peoples with a dominant European narrative (Spell, 1922; Britton, 1989; Good-Perkins, 2022). Good-Perkins (2022) argued that these efforts led to cultural genocide and hegemony, justified through discourses of music saviorism, improvement, and refinement (p. 72).

During the early Colonial Period in British North America, European settlers began establishing colonies and implementing governance, economy, and cultural systems to shape the region's development. Music and religion were integral to the Puritans' daily lives, exemplified by the publication of the first printed book in North America, a small hymnal, “The Bay Psalm Book,” in 1640, underscoring the importance of religious music in the lives of the Puritans (Britton, 1982, p. 1). Puritan families engaged in daily prayer practices, Bible readings, and the singing of psalms (Zinar, 1978, p. 24). The singing school movement emerged from the need to cultivate these religious music practices further, beginning in the 1700s. It sought to improve the



quality of music in church services and establish formal music education systems (Britton, 1982, p. 91). The printing press was crucial during this period, enabling the production of tune books and other music-teaching materials, which solidified the movement's impact on American music education (Britton, 1982; Robertson, 2001).

Singing schools and choirs were instrumental in colonial North America and British colonies. According to Good-Perkins (2022) early British and settler colonial music teachers promoted a binary of “good” and “bad” voices, perpetuating ideals of a “proper” and “correct” way to sing that still influence music education today (p. 46). Olwage (2005) discussed the use of Curwen's Tonic Sol-Fa system as a form of “disciplining choral” and internal colonialism, where British cultural norms replaced Indigenous musical traditions in South Africa (Olwage, 2005; Good-Perkins, 2022). Colonial authorities utilized Western classical musical pedagogy, exemplified by John Curwen's Tonic Sol-Fa system (Curwen & Zinar, 1983), to control these choirs (Good-Perkins, 2022). These methods, including Curwen's hand signals and Tonic-Sol-Fa, were widely adopted by missionaries across the British Empire, contributing to pervasive music colonialism and cultural suppression (Good-Perkins, 2022, p. 74).

In the early 1800s, the establishment of music conservatories in the United States, modeled after European institutions, marked a significant development (Britton, 1982). Lowell Mason, credited as the “father of public school music” (Pemberton, 1992; Rich, 1942) was crucial in integrating vocal music into the Boston Public School curriculum in 1838. Influenced by Pestalozzian methods, Mason's initiatives led to the formal inclusion of music in school curricula nationwide, laying the foundation for modern music education (Efland, 1983; Rich, 1942). This period also saw the emergence of structured roles like the music teacher and

supervisor, shaping the organizational framework of music education (Britton, 1982). Concurrent with these developments, early American conservatories such as New England Conservatories adopted European teaching methods (New England Conservatory of Music, 2020). These institutions further solidified the influence of European musical traditions in American education, echoing the earlier colonial efforts to impose cultural norms through music.

In 1819, Congress passed the *Civilization Fund Act* (1819). According to Grande (2015, cited in Good-Perkins, 2022), “The work of teachers, church leaders, and missionaries were hardly distinguishable during this era; saving souls and colonizing minds became part and parcel of the same colonialist project” (p. 16). European and settler colonialists in North America attempted cultural genocide through cultural reprogramming, brutally stripping Indigenous identities via Indian boarding schools with the mission of erasing Indigenous cultures and enforcing European norms, revealing the violent nature of such cultural domination. The ideology of Manifest Destiny and the mission of “civilizing” native people justified the removal of Indigenous peoples from their land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015, p. 2). In 1830, the *Indian Removal Act* (1830) was enforced, leading to the brutal abduction and removal of Native American children and their placement into boarding schools (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015).

Indian boarding schools suppressed native Indigenous cultures through music education, forcing children to abandon their cultural heritage. This process began as early as the 1600s with John Eliot’s “praying towns” and Jesuit schools along the St. Lawrence River. President Ulysses S. Grant formalized it under his Peace Policy (1869-1870), which placed Indian reservations under Christian denominations (Smith, 2004, p. 89). Settler colonists abducted native Indigenous children and forced them to sing European songs, dress in European styles, and conform to

European standards of civilization, erasing their spiritual and cultural identities (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015, p. 8). Captain Richard Henry Pratt, who created the government-funded Carlisle Indian School from 1879 to 1918, believed the native peoples were “savages” and needed to be “civilized.” His motto was “Kill the Indian, save the man” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Smith, 2004). According to Good-Perkins (2022),

Pratt argued that the impact of slavery on African Americans was a positive one. Slavery, according to Pratt, saved African Americans from their “savage” origins and was “the greatest blessing that ever came to the Negro race—seven millions of blacks from cannibalism in darkest Africa to citizenship in free and enlightened America. (p. 54)

During this period at the Carlisle Indian School, officials stripped Native Indigenous people of their clothing, culture, and names and cut off their hair. Learning Western classical music was a foundational part of this mission. According to Good-Perkins (2022), “Curriculum at the Carlisle School included Western classical musical training” (p. 75). The catalog of the Indian Industrial School, 1902, included “Tone and breathing exercises, breath control, staff notation, analysis, and choral works in four parts” (Good-Perkins, 2022, p. 75). In 1894, officials enforced Western classical music culture by creating the Carlisle band and choir, which toured different states. A news writer, as cited by Good-Perkins (2022), championed Western classical music training and stated, ‘It showed that, as William Congreve wrote, “Music has charms to soothe a savage breast.”’ Articles in the Baltimore Sun, Wilmington News, and The Christian Advocate championed this as a success, comparing it to “civilizing” or “evolutionary” progress, which was simply cultural genocide. According to Good-Perkins (2022), “The concerts provided

aural and visible evidence of cultural genocide, which for Pratt and the public were markings of a successful “civilizing mission” (p. 75).

These European music education systems had a dual nature. While Western classical music education proliferated as part of the standard public school system, anti-literacy laws enforced on enslaved Africans forbade literacy, reading, and writing. This legacy began in South Carolina in 1740 (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 202). Despite these draconian laws, enslaved Africans in America cultivated a rich musical culture of their own. The music of oppressed peoples, particularly African Americans, has proven to be the most influential and popular Music created in America today. A rich music culture developed through brutal forms of slavery and oppressive living conditions, yet music was a form of communication, deep expression, and empowerment. Thus, music education in America has always had two sides: the formal, dominant master narrative of the Western classical European paradigm and the vibrant, resilient musical traditions of oppressed communities.

According to Good-Perkins (2022) historically, music has been integral to cultural identity, and dominant groups have used definitions of “good” and “bad” music as a means of control. Regulating the human voice was central to this “civilizing” mission, wielding significant power, punishment, and shaming for not conforming to the standards of “Godly,” “Proper,” and “Correct” vocal aesthetics existed to create a single universal standard of definitions of music (Good-Perkins, 2022, p. 74). These musical hierarchy ideals persisted in music education, initially focusing on controlling vocal expression. The mission of musical conquest was part of the historical oppression of non-White racial groups in the U.S. A dominant music culture imposed itself in various ways, with European and White American leaders perpetuating this

standardized paradigm by forming conferences and clubs to enforce “proper” standards through standardized music education methodologies and philosophies. These practices inherently subordinated non-white populations and reinforced a racial hierarchy within music education. Good-Perkins (2022) highlighted this disparity, stating, “While the Fisk Jubilee Singers acquiesced to the Western classical concert performance ‘standards’ imposed upon them, their performance would never be adequately ‘standard’ because of the bodies which they inhabited” (p. 66).

The American Missionary Association (AMA) mirrored this musical conquest in the African American community by aiming to convert and educate newly freed slaves, preventing them from reverting to the animism of their African forebears (Ward, 2000, as cited in Good-Perkins, 2022). Good-Perkins (2022) states that the Tonic Sol-Fa movement and Western classical vocal pedagogy influenced the founder of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The founder embraced the Tonic Sol-Fa movement's ideology, which sought a “purity of tone.” The Fisk Jubilee Singers were used to strip away African cultural sounds, replacing them with Western European musical ideals deemed universally correct. Ward (2000) wrote, “John Ogden, one of the school’s founders, believed that education was the solution to what he regarded as the dangerous emotionalism of African American worship” as cited in Good-Perkins, 2022, p. 105).

According to Good-Perkins (2022), “Ogden’s racist views of the African American worship style were commonly held amongst White educators and missionaries, both in the South and in the North” (p. 106). The aim was to replace the African American voice with what the European Americans saw as “pure” and Western classical definitions of “good.” These are more

than aesthetic differences but racist ideologies paralleling the segregation, brutal racism, and lynching of the African American community at that time.

Starting in 1864, music education curricular and pedagogy development was emphasized and expanding (Howe, 1992; Mark, 1989). Luther Whiting Mason expanded music instruction to all grade levels, emphasizing music reading and classroom teacher involvement (Howe, 1992; Mark, 1989). Technological advancements, such as the phonograph (invented in 1877) and the radio (commercialized in the early 20th century), enabled new listening programs, transforming music education into a more comprehensive subject (Efland, 1983). Walter Damrosch was a highly influential pianist, composer, conductor, and music educator whose music education radio broadcasts reached nationwide in the United States and Canada, eventually globally (Howe, 2003). School boards recognized the value of music instruction, leading to its widespread adoption nationwide.

Around 1920, instrumental music and public performance grew in the public school system. School bands and orchestras gained popularity, with instrumental performance becoming a focal point of music education (Martin, 1999). Influenced by military and patriotic music, marching bands became symbols of community pride and received strong public support (Whitehill, 1969). Military influences were significant, with World War I veterans bringing their band values and pedagogy into public schools, reflecting European military band traditions (Whitehill, 1969).

In the 1960s, music education began embracing aesthetic education and including diverse musical genres in the curriculum. Advocacy for music education highlighted the need to incorporate non-Western classical forms, marking a significant shift towards a more inclusive

approach (Mark, 1989). During this period, music educators recognized the importance of acknowledging various musical traditions, reflecting the cultural and historical significance needed to serve diverse school populations. During the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium, music educators recognized the importance of including the original music of African Americans—Jazz—in the U.S. public school curriculum (Choate et al., 1967). Despite this recognition, the history of music education in the United States is marked by resistance to and exclusion of non-European music.

However, even though landmark cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) aimed to desegregate schools, mainstream music education largely resisted integrating jazz and other non-European musical forms. Colonial legacies and racist ideologies continued to shape music education, dictating what was considered “proper” or “legitimate” music. Authentic American music, rooted in the experiences of enslaved and oppressed peoples, has profoundly impacted both locally and globally. On September 23, 1987, Congress officially designated jazz “a rare and valuable national American treasure” (H.Con.Res.57, 1987-1988). According to Sonny Rollins, as quoted in Daniels (1985):

America is deeply rooted in Negro culture: its colloquialisms, its humor, its music. How ironic the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America’s culture as his own, is being persecuted and repressed, that the Negro, who has exemplified the humanities in his very existence, is being rewarded with inhumanity. (p. 1)

European musical standards often disregarded and devalued the rich musical traditions of Indigenous and African American populations. The system predominantly served White, European-descended populations, marginalizing women and people of color. This exclusion has

had lasting impacts, contributing to ongoing disparities in the representation and recognition of diverse musical traditions in contemporary education. Examining the persistent dominance of Western classical music in K-12 and higher education is crucial to understanding these disparities.

### **University to K-12: Western Classical Music as a Universal Standard**

Music schools from K-12 to university level perpetuate the notion that Western classical music is the standard all students must learn (Bond, 2017; Bradley, 2012a; Doyle, 2012; Lovesey, 2017; Jensen-Moulton, 2020; Hess, 2021). Although the classical period historically spans from 1730 to 1820, “classical music” often serves as an umbrella term for Western art music (Kajikawa 2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019). Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) explain that U.S. music schools, established by White elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reinforced the supremacy of Euro-American culture by maintaining a strict separation between classical music and considered non-Western classical music as less cultivated (p. 159). Hess (2021) further emphasized that “Eurocentricity often dominates the curriculum” (p. 16).

Both public and private music education systems profoundly ingrained themselves in Western classical music. Bond (2017) stated that music education generally operates under Western European traditions, accepting a monolithic canon, narrow definitions of artistic beauty, a focus on notational literacy, and Eurocentric views of musicians’ roles in a hierarchical structure (p. 154). The music education system seamlessly embeds this standard, leading most students and teachers to perceive it as the “norm” (Kajikawa 2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019). The lack of distinction between Western classical music theory and courses offered at the



university level implies universality, where the language of universality suggests that Western classical music is essentially music itself. Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) explained examining music descriptions such as keyboard skills, methods, or voice classes reveals the implied dominance of Western classical music.

Institutional standards and regulations uphold the Western classical music tradition, ensuring its persistent presence in university curriculums. Understanding how these standards reinforce the dominance of Western classical music is crucial for comprehending the broader implications for music education. Curricular classes are Eurocentric, focusing on Western classical music, reflecting the training received from undergraduate courses (Jensen-Moulton, 2020). Jensen-Moulton (2020) stated:

Since well before the 1970s, most higher education music programs in the U.S. have aligned with European standards, relying on Western music theory, history, ear-training, and keyboard, combined with classical private lessons and ensembles, as the core of a future musician's training. The National Association of Schools of Music has tailored their accreditation of higher education music programs to this classical paradigm. (p. 1)

A Western classical music paradigm governs music education despite America's diverse musical cultures, from higher education to K-12. Jensen-Moulton (2020) noted, "NASM's [National Association of Schools of Music] curriculum is still rooted in their original 1924 [document]" (p. 4). Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw, et al., 2019) stated, "It is a system that privileges the music of white European and American male composers and tends to exclude the music of almost everyone else" (p. 156). Understanding this entrenched perception of universality is essential to analyzing how universities define Western classical music as the standard.

Clear lines of cultural and racist ideology persist in music education, revealing the walls of cultural hegemony within education systems across the United States. Darder (2012) stated, “Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony is based on the notion that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways: as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership” (p. 32). In the context of music, reflecting Lowell Mason’s standards and guided moral philosophy of music education rooted in European and Western classical music ideology (Pemberton, 1992; Scanlon, 1942), cultural hegemony exists as a form of ideological dominance in music education. Universities often regard Western classical music as a universal standard, which has significant implications for the inclusivity and diversity of music education programs. We must critically examine this perception of universality to understand its impact on the curriculum and student experience. Analyzing the classes offered at the university and K-12 levels and the language used to label these classes reveals how the idea of the universality of Western classical Music has become normalized in these crucial educational centers.

### **The Persistence of Racism in Music Education**

Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2022) are critical to addressing these deep-rooted issues in music education. Music classrooms cannot escape the normalization of racism, the reinforcement of stereotypes, and the influence of White supremacy. These theoretical frameworks allow us to understand and dismantle the embedded racism and white supremacist ideologies in the classroom. Additionally, viewing this issue through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) highlights music teachers’ profound challenges when establishing equitable and inclusive music environments for BIPOC students within urban schools. Analyzing this normalization involves dissecting what is

considered a defined standard, tradition, and expectation in music education. This is crucial due to the shifting demographics of public school students in the United States, characterized by a notable increase in non-White student enrollment over the past two decades, the music curriculum remains predominantly centered around European Western Classical music (Bond, 2017). Examining teachers' unquestioned perceptions and values through a CRT lens can reveal how race influences the perceptions and values of teachers who do not critically question their perceptions and values (King, 1991). As Liu (2022) stated, "If teachers hold uncritical subjectivities, they run the risk of promoting dominant narratives and marginalizing the knowledge of communities of color" (p. 26).

Music teachers primarily train in Western classical music epistemologies, ensembles, instruments, and methods. In elementary or "general" music training, they often draw from the historical lineage of singing schools and continue to utilize Curwen hand signals (Bugos, 2011). Additionally, teachers commonly use American folk songs to teach Western classical theory at the elementary level (Doyle, 2012, p. 34). However, upon examining the traditional American folk songs commonly employed in primary education, it becomes evident that some of these songs, ingrained in the musical fabric of America, carry racist histories (Hess, 2021). Hess (2021) stated:

Folk song repertoire also raises issues of racism. Folk songs typically included in elementary classroom repertoire emerged from the blackface minstrelsy tradition, including songs like "Jump Jim Joe" ("Jump Jim Crow") and "Jimmy Crack Corn/Blue-Tail Fly." Blackface minstrelsy dates back to the 1840s and originally involved White performers coloring their skin black to ridicule African Americans. Performing minstrel

songs in the classroom actively exposes students to a racist practice and also potentially communicates that the teacher condones the practice. (p. 16)

The historical racist message of White supremacy and the perception of inferiority of BIPOC communities is pervasive in the American songbook. Even seemingly innocent nursery rhymes such as “Eeny Meeny Miny Mo,” “Ten Little Monkeys,” “Ten Little Indians,” and “Old Mother Goose and the Golden Egg” convey messages of class and power, stereotypes, and values from a dominant culture (Ulen, 2022, p. 1).

Renowned legal scholar and professor Derrick Bell pioneered Critical Race Theory, which initially emerged as a legal theory (Delgado et al., 2017, Ladson-Billings, 1998). It resounds with a clarion call asserting that jurisprudence is far from neutral. Racism in the United States permeates throughout our socio-political system, and it is evident in the history of public education and the multilayered structures of cultural hegemony embedded and reinforced in music classrooms. The basic tenets of CRT, according to Delgado et al. (2017), are:

First, racism is ordinary, not aberrational—“normal science,” the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country.

Second, most would agree that our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group. (p. 8)

Delgado et al. (2017) stated a third theme: “The ‘social construction’ thesis holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations.” CRT is also concerned with social change and activism. Delgado et al. (2017) stated, “Critical race theory contains an activist dimension: Unlike some academic disciplines. It tries to understand not only our social situation but to change it” (p. 8).

## **Race Matters in Music Education**

Race matters (Annamma & Winn, 2019). Ideology permeates the music classroom, whether the teacher knows it or not. Racism can be hidden by educators in music education, often going unnoticed in the structure and daily routines of the school culture. CRT scholars consider the most elusive and powerful form of racism to be the neutrality of racism (Delgado et al., 2017; Solorzano, 1997). In the classroom, the race and culture of students are visible, and ignoring the most apparent features of a student is disregarding a big part of the students. As Ladson-Billings (2022) stated:

Given the significance of race and color in American society, it is impossible to believe that a classroom teacher overlooks the race and ethnicity of the children she is teaching. Further, by claiming to notice, the teacher is saying that she is dismissing one of the most salient features of the child's identity and that she does not account for it in her curricular planning and instruction. (p. 35)

The perception of non-Western music inferiority has its deep historical roots in the slavery and colonialism of the United States. The language of defining what is deemed superior music versus what is deemed inferior music is part of musical lingo in Western classical music circles, such as "highbrow" and "lowbrow," which come from phrenology. Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) stated, "The term 'highbrow' (in opposition to 'lowbrow'), for example, comes from the phrenologist's lexicon and describes the superior cranial shape of northern Europeans. In this way, classical music and whiteness are co-productive, meaning that they define and reinforce one another through a shared opposition to undesirable racial, ethnic, and class groups" (Koza, 2008, p. 158). Moreover, these racist messages, implicit or explicit, are

linked to the lineage of White supremacy. They are not merely subtle forms of ignorance but microaggressions reflecting the deep historical imprint of racism in the United States (Solórzano, 2020). They serve to continue perpetuating the cultural hegemonic program that benefits White people in the United States. This type of deficit thinking in music education is pervasive. Examining how embedded racism and colonialism are in music education reveals that these statements are not merely acts of ignorance but part of the ideological messages of White supremacy that persist in our society, particularly in music education.

The normalization and centering of Western classical music silences any discourse on why Western classical music is the standard. It is stoic, unquestioned, and silently governs the expectations of how a music classroom should be. Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) stated:

Color Blindness thus survives and thrives not because of what it produces, but because of what it prevents: that is, exposure, analysis, and remediation of the skewing of social opportunities and life chances by race. Rather than a recipe for a just society, colorblindness constitutes a core component of a long-standing historical whiteness protection program. (p. 24)

Race-neutral language of music courses avoiding race is explicitly named “keyboard skills,” “musicianship,” and “music theory,” and as Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) argued, “Although music curricula avoid mentioning race explicitly, they tend to prioritize certain approaches to hearing, performing, and understanding music that reinforces the cultural superiority of classical music” (p. 161). Preserving Western classical music as the highest form of music in music education. However, music differs for different cultures. According to Bond

(2017), “What is considered to be ‘music’ is not universal; furthermore, the musical devices that are favored in one culture may not be aesthetically pleasing in another” (p. 13).

The concept of racial capital provides a framework for understanding how Western classical music serves as a privileged form of knowledge within the educational system. Analyzing this dynamic reveals the broader socioeconomic and racial implications of maintaining this musical standard. Western classical music is “privileged” knowledge and cultural capital. Bradley (2012a) stated:

In North America, a narrower understanding of music education has grown around school-based choirs, bands, and orchestras. In such circumstances, this idea of music education is more or less synonymous with large ensemble experience, and Western classical music is privileged as knowledge worth having. Indeed, it is the only recognized form of musical knowledge that is considered valid for entry into many North American university music schools. Residual colonial attitudes thus determine the cultural capital required for entry to university music programs through a process Koza (2008) calls “listening for Whiteness”.(p. 669)

Access to music schools has a historical pattern of being predominantly limited to White students, typically those who have had prior exposure to music classes in high school and possess the means to afford music mentoring for audition purposes (Crenshaw et al., 2019; Koza, 2008). In orchestras at any level in the United States, there is a small percentage of African Americans and Latinos (DeLorenzo, 2012). Elpus and Abril (2011) link the stark contrast between the number of White students and African American students in this context to socioeconomic status (SES) and race, particularly the availability of high school music programs.

Koza (2008) argued that it is these barriers epitomized by the auditioning process to get accepted to a university music program that shows the disparate inequalities and lack of access. Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) stated:

There are numerous ways that whiteness and classical music can be related forms of property. For centuries, classical music was explicitly regarded as the music of white elites expressing their superior European heritage. To have access to classical music—to effectively possess it as a performer or patron—meant having access to other property reserved for whites, such as expensive musical instruments, music lessons, and concert subscriptions. (p. 200)

### **Cultural Relevance: The Importance of Cultural Relevance in Music Education**

Teachers who come from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds may see their BIPOC student behaviors as “abnormal.” Fitzpatrick (2012) stated, “While they interpret the behaviors of their students as being ‘deficient’ or ‘abnormal.’” (p. 2). This set of assumptions is often termed the ‘deficit model’ of urban or multicultural education” (p. 55). The language of the deficit has been a persistent and well-orchestrated system of normalized stereotypes placed upon BIPOC students, which has come in various labels (Ladson-Billings, 2022). However, Studies have shown that teachers’ genuine interest in their students’ rich cultural knowledge is beneficial (Doyle, 2012; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Siwatu, 2007). Gloria Ladson-Billings began to move past the deficit question about African American students and what is wrong by flipping the question to “What is right with these kids?” Culturally relevant pedagogy is an educational epistemology that empowers students through cultural empowerment by honoring the student’s culture, values and lived experiences. Ladson-Billings (2022) indicated teachers



who focus on students' ability to conform to a maintain the status quo of educational pedagogy adheres to an assimilationist teaching style. As Ladson-Billings (2022) stated:

One perspective on these low expectations and negative beliefs about African American students comes from mainstream society's invalidation of African American culture. This invalidation of African American culture is compounded by a notion of assimilationist teaching, a teaching style that operates without regard to the students' particular cultural characteristics. According to the assimilationist perspective, the teacher's role is to ensure that students fit into society. And if the teacher has low expectations, the place that the teacher believes the students "fit into" is on society's lower rungs. (p .23)

Critical race scholar and educator Gloria Ladson-Billings developed the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy to create a more cohesive, culturally congruent pedagogy that fills the home and school gap (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally relevant pedagogy creates a classroom environment where students and teachers can develop cultural competence, respect the students' cultural wealth, and participate in problem-solving activities that encourage students to address issues within their cultural contexts (Clark, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995). As multicultural scholars indicate, student empowerment is crucial to culturally relevant pedagogy, where culture and teaching methods create more equitable classroom success opportunities (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching is "a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment." The three criteria of culturally relevant pedagogy are: (a) Students must achieve academic success; (b) students must develop and maintain cultural competence; and (c) students

must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).

Music teachers who dominate the classroom space centered on the Western classical music canon and Eurocentric values without allowing BIPOC students' input on the repertoire devalue and suppress students' voices, limiting the potential musical knowledge they should be able to experience. A lack of a culturally relevant curriculum that focuses on Eurocentrism transmits the harmful message that music within their community is inferior. As Bradley (2012a) stated:

Where music education fails to help students make musical connections to their lives outside school, many infer that they are simply 'not musical,' or that their areas of musical interest lack value. This psychological imprint of musical inferiority mirrors the internalized sense of inferiority that results when Indigenous cultures are denigrated in colonialist systems of education. (p. 671-672).

The lack of diversity in the music curriculum mirrors a study conducted by the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (2019) regarding representation in books within the most significant public school education district in the United States, New York. Despite its diverse population and historical significance as the birthplace of the Harlem Renaissance and Nuyorican movements, the curriculum frequently emphasizes and prioritizes works by White authors. The New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (2019) exposed that in this public school district, where 85% of the students are non-White, more than 80% of the authors featured in the curriculum were White. Fitzpatrick (2012) underscores that "Research shows that many students are becoming increasingly alienated from traditional means of schooling, experiencing a

disconnect between their home lives and their school environment. Culturally relevant pedagogy is often cited as a way that teachers might increase student investment in and comprehension of school curricula” (p. 56). Studies have shown that BIPOC students who engage in a culturally relevant music curriculum where Western classical music is decentralized feel culturally linked. The new music curriculum added interest to the music program (Doyle, 2012). However, music educators rigidly fixate on the Western classical music paradigm, posing immense challenges when creating an educational experience beyond this mindset.

Many researchers have shown that music teachers try to incorporate “world” music in their curriculum but fail in authenticity. It is often void of its cultural context written in Western classical notation, and issues of cultural appropriation can occur (Cho, 2015; Stone et al., 2018). Cho (2015) stated, “One negative result of this can be that elements of an appropriated culture are (intentionally or unintentionally) distorted and used as a gimmick or a costume when normally they would be treated with some respect or reverence” (p. 1). The issues of the inclusion of non-Western European classical music in the class to be researched, as Bond (2017) stated, “As many have suggested, however, the simple inclusion of non-Western European art music is not enough; one must consider the issues that may emerge when working with a varied body of repertoire, including authenticity, musical integrity, transmission, and pedagogy” (p. 9). Attempts to incorporate multicultural music have often required music to be revised, merely tokenizing non-Western cultures without establishing meaningful cultural connections with students. They are reifying these notions of the inferiority of BIPOC students.

According to Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017), culturally relevant pedagogy is not a novel idea, and classroom pedagogy historically has been centered on White culture and

Eurocentric values, where White students greatly benefited from a curriculum centered on White cultural values and norms (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017), about the study by Irvine and Armento (2000) on culturally relevant pedagogy, stated, “In fact, they maintained that culturally relevant teaching has been a staple in U.S. schools for centuries, but it has been mostly in line with one group of students—the cultural knowledge and history of U.S.-born, middle-class, English-speaking, White students” (Irvine & Armento (2000), as cited in Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017) stated:

In essence, they claimed that pedagogy is culturally situated in a foreign framework, and at times dismissive, to students of color and that given the current demographic shift, teachers need to acquire an understanding of different types of cultural knowledge. Irvine and Armento also contended that this is one of the primary reasons that, historically, White middle-class students have performed better in school than all other student groups. That is because the epistemological origin of school knowledge, values, culture, content, examples, analogies, and practices is heavily steeped in a Eurocentric and patriarchal worldview, experience, and ideology; it thus omits the experiences, history, contributions, and culture of people of color, the poor, and women. (p. 10)

This rigid, fixed Western classical music educational system alone cannot fill an apparent cultural chasm. There is a cultural disconnect between the teachers due to incongruent cultural instruction and the need for preservice training in culturally relative and responsive practices (Siwatu, 2007). Gay (2002) wrote, “The knowledge that teachers need to have about cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that

ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways” (p. 107).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is a framework that became the impetus for other frameworks, such as culturally responsive pedagogy. Both have been interchangeable, but there are a few differences. Culturally Relevant pedagogy is closely tied to Critical Race Theory and is in the veins of liberatory emancipatory practices of Critical Pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated, “Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society. The teachers I studied work in opposition to the system that employs them” (p. 140).

### **The Power of Teacher Perceptions**

Teachers’ perceptions of their students significantly impact the success of students of color (Love & Kruger, 2005). Dewey (1910) wrote in his book, *How We Think*, about how concrete structures such as monuments are reflective of human thought (p. 16). This notion that teachers create their classroom structure through intent reveals that these artificial structures have the power to limit their students’ potential and empower them by creating authentic, humanizing learning spaces. The classroom is more than just a building but a social construction where ideas of power, race, and cultural hegemony conflict. The way teachers structure the music classroom can be very dominant, and every movement is intentionally controlling, from the tone of voice to the structure of the pedagogical style. Ladson-Billings (2022) stated that how a teacher acts and interacts with the students is part of pedagogy. As Darder (2002) stated, “What has been ignored is how class formations and mainstream beliefs, attitudes, and values are deeply anchored within dominant cultural and class expectations—expectations defined by the interests of the

economically and politically powerful and carried out by the country's most inconspicuous moral leaders—namely, teachers” (p. 5).

Numerous studies have underscored the harmful effects of enforcing cultural hegemony on BIPOC students, including the reinforcement of default ideologies such as deficit mindsets onto BIPOC students and the normalization of racist stereotypes. Research has demonstrated how detrimental this can be (Henry et al., 2022). Conversely, case studies illustrate the positive impact of culturally responsive pedagogy, which enhances student engagement, self-image, identity, and value while improving the school culture (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Cherfas et al., 2021; Dreilinger, 2021; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). These benefits underscore the need to address cultural hegemony and systemic racism within the public school system and to identify opportunities for meaningful change.

### **Music Teaching Workforce**

As aforementioned in the historical overview, the legacy of music education, particularly the role of music teacher, goes far back to the formation of early colonial singing schools established by figures like John Curwen, Lowell Mason, and Walter Damrosch (Good-Perkins, 2022). It continued to shape contemporary practices, particularly in the training and methods of music teachers. The structure of music education roles and the emphasis on Western classical pedagogy reflect historical precedents that persist today.

University preparation programs for single-subject music teachers typically emphasize Western classical music pedagogy, leading music teachers to continue centralizing music education within the Western classical music paradigm. This legacy, rooted in the foundations laid by early music educators and supervisors, continues to shape the field's expectations and

standards. The predominantly White and female workforce, often from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, brings implicit and explicit biases into the classroom. These biases significantly impact the teaching and learning experiences of BIPOC students, perpetuating systemic inequities. The demographic disparities within the teaching workforce further complicate the dynamics of music education. Understanding the origins of these biases and addressing these issues is essential to foster a more inclusive and equitable teaching environment and provide opportunities for students and teachers of all backgrounds to engage with diverse musical perspectives.

Historically, the teaching workforce in public schools, including in Los Angeles, remains predominantly White, with over 80% of public school teachers identifying as White and less than 9% identifying as Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or multi-racial (Schaeffer, 2021). Despite the relatively higher percentage of Latino/Hispanic teachers in Los Angeles, White teachers still constitute the majority. In urban schools, the majority of the student population are BIPOC students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, but the majority of the teaching force in these urban schools is White (Doyle, 2012; Shaw, 2015). Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017) wrote, “The growing chasm in the United States between the cultural and ethnic makeup of classroom teachers are White, middle class, and monolingual” (p. 8).

In the context of music education in the United States, most music teachers are White. This demographic imbalance is particularly pronounced, as Elpus (2015) revealed when comparing the number of White music teachers to BIPOC-licensed music teachers. The former leader of one of the most significant music associations in the country once suggested that people

of color lacked the necessary musical ability to teach. Kajikawa (2019, as cited in Crenshaw et al., 2019) highlighted this viewpoint, recalling a statement by Michael Butera, who, as the head of the National Association for Music Education, represented over sixty thousand music teachers nationwide. Butera's explanation for the lack of diversity within his profession included remarks that "[B]lacks and Latinos lack the keyboard skills needed for this field" while implying that music theory was deemed too challenging for minorities (Associated Press, 2016). In addition to the remarks made by Butera, it is crucial to recognize these highlighted embedded deficit mindsets toward students of color and teachers of color.

Despite the shifting demographics, historically, there have been challenges when White teachers teach in these urban schools highly populated with non-White students. White teachers in these urban schools often leave to teach at schools with a higher population of White students or leave the profession (Hyland, 2009). Hyland (2009) wrote, "This high attrition rate among teachers of students of color is a critical problem in education" (p. 96). The cultural and pedagogical disconnect White teachers have while teaching students of color cannot be solved without support (Hyland, 2009). A small percentage of teachers are confident in teaching students of diverse backgrounds (Legette, 2003). Legette stated, "In that teachers convey, directly or indirectly, their own values, attitudes, and personal perceptions about teaching and learning, a greater understanding of the need and value of multicultural education is warranted" (p. 51). Legette (2003), "An overwhelming majority (99%) of the teachers felt that music from other cultures should be included in their classes" (p. 2), but only 35% of the participants included multicultural music in some of the music classes. There needs to be more preservice instruction and a lack of cultural pedagogy congruent with the students of color these teachers



teach (Siwatu, 2007). White teachers can unintentionally come to the classroom with preconceived notions, values, and deficit paradigms that harm students of color (Howard & Rodriquez-Minkoff, 2017; Shaw, 2015). Shaw (2015) wrote, “Regarding urban teaching with trepidation, teachers might miss opportunities to view educational institutions as capable of catalyzing positive social change” (p. 199).

Critics have long targeted the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) for its Eurocentric focus and the exclusion of people of color from its practices and policies. According to the Tanglewood Symposium’s declarations in 1967 (Choate et al., 1967), which recognized the need for music education reform to include diverse musical traditions, there has yet to be much progress. This ongoing issue has resulted in decades of calls for reform to address these inequities (Good-Perkins, 2022). Third-party researchers Cook and Ross (2019) found serious exclusionary barriers centered around racism, cultural hegemony, sexism, and a deep-rooted resistance to curriculum change (as cited in Good-Perkins, 2022).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2022) provides methods to restore cultural connections and bridge music cultures that are misrepresented and excluded by the dominant hidden curriculum. Critical race theory emphasizes the use of counternarratives. Counter-storytelling offers a way to empower BIPOC students by countering these negative stereotypes; Delgado et al. (2017) stated, “Critical writers use counter stories to challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious narratives and beliefs” (p. 50). Using counternarratives can disrupt the “single story” (Liu, 2022, p. 2). Hess (2019) stated, “A focus on counter stories in music education encourages music educators to purposefully center different voices and work to hear systematically excluded voices” (p. 52). According to Liu (2022), it can be a tool to

contextualize culturally sensitive issues around different music traditions in the music classroom. Liu (2022) states, “The aim here is not to reinforce stereotypes but to serve as alternative epistemology to acknowledge the diverse music cultures in the world” (p. 26). Pulido (2009) studied how educators can use hip hop as a counternarrative tool to challenge master narratives.

In a time when the majority of students enrolled in public schools are students of color and during a time of racism, violent divisiveness, and inequitable living situations for many students living in urban environments, music education can be a valuable tool to address the larger systemic and hegemonic structures of power and privilege while honoring students' culture and lived experiences. Bond (2017) stated, “Student perspectives and cultural heritage(s) are validated when their music repertoire and musical practices are embraced” (p. 160). Understanding the deeper, elusive biases, racism, and elitism that influence music educators’ practices, perceptions, and definitions in the classroom is essential to examine how the standardized norms of Western classical music education shape these perceptions.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, broader racial, social, economic, and historical contexts deeply intertwine with music education in urban schools. Employing a Critical Race Theory and Culturally Relative lens to create an inclusive and relevant music education environment requires music educators to be aware of their students’ diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, challenge cultural hegemony and Eurocentric norms, and address historical structural inequalities that have marginalized BIPOC students. One crucial aspect involves examining how cultural hegemony, race, class, and culture influence the music classroom, significantly impacting student identities and self-worth. Currently, the K-12 urban music education curriculum predominantly

emphasizes Western classical music. By analyzing the different powerful forces that shape the music classroom, educators can leverage the cultural richness and real-life experiences of BIPOC music students, creating transformative and empowering learning environments (Abrahams, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Hess, 2021). This shift is essential for advancing equity and fostering learning spaces that genuinely embrace and amplify every student's diverse musical epistemologies, community, lived experiences, and cultural world.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative study employed a peer research interview research methodology (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010). This approach involves interviewing peers in the same field and gathering their opinions, thoughts, and perceptions regarding the research questions. It leverages shared experiences between the interviewer and interviewee to build rapport and trust, fostering more open and honest communication. Peer research interviewers bring a unique perspective and understanding that can lead to more nuanced data collection. This method is precious when researching hard-to-reach or marginalized populations, as it can improve participant comfort and engagement, enhance the quality of the data collected, and contribute to the empowerment and skills development of the peer research interviewers themselves. The study by Devotta et al. (2016) delves into the benefits and challenges of engaging peer research interviewers in qualitative research, highlighting its potential to improve awareness and acceptance of disenfranchised groups, enhance research quality, and increase participant comfort.

In this study, I conducted peer research interviews (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010) with individuals in music education, primarily those in a university program, including faculty and students preparing to become future music educators. I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Loyola Marymount University before conducting these interviews at a prominent public university in Southern California. My former Master's degree advisor at this

university, who taught there, introduced me to the director of the music program and another faculty member. They agreed to be interviewed and helped initiate the search for suitable participants and candidates for my study. Due to the controversial nature of the conversations regarding critical race and cultural issues, I decided to keep the university and participants anonymous. This decision was also recommended by my advisor to ensure the focus remained on the issues without any potential backlash.

The program under study was a unique joint music education program between the undergraduate department and the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. It stands out as the only music education program in the system where students can earn a California subject matter waiver in music and complete their teaching credentials during their senior year. This distinctive program not only prepares future music educators to teach in traditional school music programs but also encourages innovation and change within the profession. Moreover, it nurtures socially responsible practices in the classroom and community, making it an intriguing and appreciable context for our research.

Before proceeding with the peer research interviews (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010). I employed a rigorous Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This process, which involved obtaining approval from both my university, Loyola Marymount University, and the prominent public university in Southern California, was crucial to ensure the ethical considerations of the study. All necessary documentation was thoroughly reviewed and approved. After receiving the necessary approvals, I sent out information to prospective student participants and received responses. With everything in place, I proceeded to conduct the peer research interviews. To

further encourage participation and make the Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)) process more comfortable for them, I offered a Starbucks gift card as a small gesture.

After receiving all necessary documentation approvals, the Director of Curriculum and the faculty helped send a group email to all current students as a pool of potential candidates. I received three responses from current students in the program, all at the same level but with different primary focuses. Some were dual majors in vocal and piano performance, while others focused on band and orchestra. All were part of the university's teaching credential music program. The interviews were recorded over Zoom, lasting 45 to 50 minutes each. Finally, I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the interviews for themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The study employed semi-structured peer research interviews to capture the perceptions and experiences of BIPOC students and faculty in university-level music education. Participants included two faculty members involved in curricular reform and three non-White students from the school of music education, selected for their insights into the challenges and opportunities for change in serving BIPOC students in music programs. Conducted via Zoom, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using qualitative methods to identify significant themes, presented alongside pseudonymized quotes from participants. This peer research interview methodology, a qualitative approach involving interviews within the same field, allows for a holistic exploration of the social, cultural, and historical contexts shaping the experiences of students and teachers in urban music classrooms. The study utilized semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to gather rich, nuanced data from university music professors and students, providing in-depth insights into their perspectives, experiences, and practices. This approach illuminates the complexities of promoting cultural responsiveness in

music education, contributing to a deeper understanding of the associated challenges and possibilities.

The researcher first obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Loyola Marymount University and a prominent university in Southern California where the research was conducted. With IRB approval, the researcher conducted the study at the target university. This study uses semi-structured interviews and qualitative critical data analysis. The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews and open questions based on the research questions. The researcher will critically investigate and analyze the teacher's worldview, framing the discourse within larger systems of hegemony, politics, culture, race, gender, class, and sex.

This peer-interview qualitative research study utilizes an emergent design, which Creswell (2020) defined as the process the qualitative researcher will adapt to changes as the researcher engages in data collection. In addition, Esposito and Evans-Winter (2022) stated that the researcher must be able to adapt and change depending on the research site. During the research process, occurrences may change the type of questions being asked to the participants involved, and specific aspects of the research may need to be adapted.

### **Sample and Population**

For this qualitative study, participants were chosen for purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “The criteria you establish for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases” (p. 97). The type of purposeful sampling the research will utilize will be convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is based on time, money, location, availability, or sites or respondents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The selection of participants will be focused on

BIPOC-credentialed music teachers in training who are training to work in urban school districts in Los Angeles County. This criterion was based on the purpose of the study, which centers around music teachers in urban schools in Los Angeles.

**Table 1**

*Interview Participants (All Names Are Pseudonyms)*

Participant	Role	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Major
Jane	Director of Curriculum Reform	Chinese American	Female	None
Jennifer	Professor	Biracial	Female	None
Eunjung	Student	Korean American	Female	Piano/Music Education
Anna	Student	LatinX	Female	Voice/Music Education
Tala	Student	Filipino American	Female	Band/Music Education

### **Peer Research Interviews**

Qualitative semi-structured peer research interviews (Byrne et al., 2015; Devotta et al., 2016; Kinnaird et al., 2021; Lushey, 2017; Lushey & Munro, 2015; Warr et al., 2010). will be in-person interviews and contain open-ended questions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “Overall, good interview questions are those that are open-ended and yield descriptive data, even stories about the phenomenon. The more detailed and descriptive the data, the better.”



(p. 120). Semi-structured questions were based on the opinions and perspectives of the music teacher and the type of knowledge the music teacher holds regarding specific issues and subjects centered around the research questions being studied. These questions were derived from the primary research questions, which centered on the perceptions of BIPOC educators towards the traditional music curriculum and how it influenced strategies used to foster culturally relevant pedagogy and inclusivity, brought out challenges and opportunities within the field of music education in the K-12 setting as well as the university level. These semi-structured questions were directly connected to the research question and the rationale for each question, all explicitly designed to understand better the unique challenges and opportunities to serve the needs and improve the overall academic experience of the BIPOC student community in music education. For the complete interview questions and rationale, see Appendix.

### **Data Collection Plan**

The data collection plan for the semi-structured peer research interviews were as followed: The researcher conducted in-person interviews. The interviews were recorded using Zoom application software and a digital audio recorder. During the interview, the interviewer took notes, writing down any notable feedback. All digital data collected was stored on a dedicated hard drive. All field notes and digital data collected were stored in an encrypted database.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “The much-preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 197). Data were analyzed on the same day of collection. Data analysis is used to make sense of the data and answer the

research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), so reviewing and organizing the data is vital to develop a sense of what the data means. The data will be reviewed, and open coding will occur. In these initial steps, the researcher will code out the raw data and then place the coded data into themes. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) gave the example of codes as “trees” and themes as the “forest.” These codes will be gathered into categories of themes. Axial coding was performed as the data was broken down into major categories and subcategories to understand the narrative of the emergent themes. During this phase, the data was in a state of organization, restructuring, and reassembly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), The themes were analyzed critically through descriptive analysis, describing what meaning is derived from the themes in light of the theoretical framework utilized in this study. The quotes will be concise to honor the voices of the participants.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the peer research interviews conducted at the prominent public university in Southern California provided valuable insights into the unique joint music education program. The rigorous IRB approval process through the university conducting the study and the public university music program being studied ensured the integrity and ethical standards of the study. With the help of the Director of Curriculum and faculty members, a pool of potential candidates was established, and incentives were offered to encourage participation. The interviews, conducted via Zoom, featured students with diverse significant focuses within the teaching credential music program. These interviews were meticulously recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed, revealing essential themes.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents findings from peer research interviews conducted with faculty members and students actively involved in curriculum reform at a prestigious university in Southern California, a region known for its diverse cultural landscape. The focus of these interviews is to shed light on how music education is defined, the extent to which it diverges from its traditional definitions, and the unique challenges and opportunities within music education at both K-12 and higher education levels, specifically in addressing the needs of the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community. The major themes identified through qualitative analysis, which involved coding and peer research interviews, were based on the low variability of participants' responses, revealing clear patterns. This innovative research approach provides a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

The first overarching theme that emerged was the dominance of Western classical music, a finding that not only underscores but also demands the urgent need to redefine music education. This dominance continues to define music education and reflects a cultural hegemony that marginalizes other music traditions. The second theme was the pressure to conform to this Western classical music tradition, shaping classroom decisions. The third theme was the duality and dialectical tension between the need for change and the strong resistance to it. The fourth theme highlighted the formidable challenges of implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies, a challenge that our research aims to tackle. The fifth theme centered around the opportunities and challenges of implementing a cultural relevant and responsive music curriculum. The sixth

theme focused on dismantling the Western classical music education paradigm and expanding toward a more inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogy, a task that requires immediate attention. Finally, the seventh theme addressed the structural barriers within institutions that hinder the creation of culturally responsive and inclusive music environments, often due to siloed music education departments, a barrier that our research aims to break down.

### **Theme 1: Cultural Hegemony in Music Education**

As mentioned in the introduction, the major themes emerged through a qualitative analysis of the responses from the peer research interviews. The themes are based on significant patterns that emerged due to the low variability in participants' answers; many responses revealed clear and consistent themes. The first central overarching theme that emerged from the interviews was the dominance of Western music, which continues to define music education, reflecting a cultural hegemony that marginalizes other musical traditions. This finding underscores the urgent need for change in music education, a need that our research aims to address.

One question posed to all participants was whether they believed there was a prevalent perception that Western classical music is considered superior to non-Western music. The faculty hesitated to comment, but Jennifer acknowledged that some might hold this view. All the students agreed that this was a common perception within the culture of music education, reflecting a lens of dominance and universality. When I asked Tala if she thought European Western classical music dominated the music curriculum, she responded, "Definitely, yes." However, no one challenged the assumptions that Western classical music is the only musical

culture with a notation system, that it lacked improvisation, or made connections to music epistemologies like Jazz, blues, gospel, or hip hop.

The segregation of Western classical and non-Western classical music within the language used by the participants was prominent throughout the interviews; there was an apparent hierarchical language of segregation between Western classical music and non-Western classical music. These distinctions hammered the hierarchical language within the Western classical music education paradigm. Each participant emphasized these distinctions using similar patterns of words to express, reify, and define the dominant culture. The peer research interviews revealed a clear pattern: participants referred to Western classical music as “higher,” “sophisticated,” “healthy,” “foundational,” and “advanced.” In contrast, they described non-Western classical music as “cultural,” “ethnic,” and “world music.” Additionally, they primarily associated Jazz and other non-Western music forms with improvisation while closely tying Western classical music to notation.

Eunjung highlighted the shared perception of Western classical music as the dominant, standardized music pedagogy. This view treats Western classical music as a distinct cultural epistemology and as the universal form of music. She stated this notion was heavily instilled in her thinking, “Western classical notation theory is so emphasized, and I think there is a general understanding that as long as you master this concept, as long as you master this theory—a concept that is again classical and Western—you can do anything. I think that is a shared kind of perception.” These strong perceptions create barriers, which the participants highlighted.

Faculty and students deeply embedded the language of cultural hegemony in their responses. Eunjung echoed these sentiments, noting a strong emphasis on learning Western

Classical music as the norm. Eunjung stated, “There is a very, very strong emphasis on students traditionally learning music through Western styles initially, and having that become their norm.” She further explained that Western notation, Western music, and Western classical music are drilled into students as the foundation and are considered a “healthy foundation”. Eunjung highlighted how these ideas and concepts rooted in Western classical music are ingrained in students, labeling Western classical music as a “norm” and foundational knowledge perceived as a “healthy foundation.”

Due to this very Eurocentric centering of Western classical music as the “default” standard, there was a strong message of a master narrative of White supremacy in these music educational spaces. Eunjung stated:

I think seeing composers that are all very traditionally White, and traditionally male as well, I think, sets a precedent for the kind of music that we would be looking for as even as we're older, and per, we perceive as the standard or the norm, and also kind of what is most high quality or highest and quality in terms of music, and because there is there is a pattern of white heroes, white authors, white people that we perceive on television as well. Just truly and historically white people, white politicians, white actors and public figures. I think. adding onto that white male musicians and composers that we're studying, and we're kind of establishing in our brains as musicians growing up as being kind of our heroes.

Anna echoed this shared perception by stating Western classical music is essentially “White people music”.

Non-Western music was not highlighted and all students mentioned the saturation of Western classical repertoire and non-Western music as Eunjung stated was seen as an “afterthought”.

Anna stated that there was very little funding for non-Western classical music ensembles. Anna stated, “In my experience, there wasn't a lot of funding for culturally diverse ensembles, or if ensembles tried to have culturally diverse music, it would just be one song in one concert.” Tala expressed how White male composers are dominant figures in Western classical music. Tala stated:

A staple repertoire is like big name composers to understand music history in America, even though that does tend to be more like White American focus, I guess. And I think but the history of the ensembles that they're playing with, I think, is still relevant, like orchestra students. The history of the orchestra is dominated by these certain European voices.

The lack of BIPOC representation in music education was apparent and Tala expressed how it is challenging for BIPOC students to see themselves as part of Western classical music with a lack of BIPOC role models in the Western classical world. Tala stated:

There's a lot less, I guess, support in terms of like a young composer having a role model that is like them, and it's like there's so many white male composers to be experienced right? And it's much easier for White male children to see. Oh, these people are composers. I can be a composer, too, whereas, like, if there is a Black female child who does not have any experience with playing music from black female composers. It's harder to see like oh, I can be a composer, too, when I grow up, even if they can't

verbalize that barrier then, or that challenge, or that pro that kind of way of thinking. I think, to a certain extent, I like it. It is there when you have the ability to see yourself in some way, in another, in a position or in someone else's shoes. It's a lot easier if you have so many role models to choose from. And I think that for music educators it's important to choose music that highlights a diverse array of composers, and make sure that you highlight, and you, I guess, explain your repertoire choices in a way that doesn't make it seem like tokenizing, or it's like, Oh, we need at least one female composer on our concert. It's not like checking a box.

The curriculum heavily emphasized Western classical music, positioning it as the standard. The historical weight of the expected Western classical band, orchestra, and choir was evident in the responses from both faculty and students. Jane stated:

It's still very much stuck in a very traditional way. . . . It's just very slow to change, and yes, I'm now seeing mariachi music in some of this, you know it is still slow, but my judgment of the school is still very much on the traditional band, orchestra, and choir.

Tala stated:

When I think of the traditional K-12 band, orchestra, choir—or what I assume if someone were to say they're a public school music teacher—I would assume they teach band, orchestra or choir. Given the history of these three subject areas.

Anna reflected on how different general elementary music curriculum was from secondary music education as she stated she felt that there was an apparent shift in the overall educational experience. Anna stated:



So, I feel that as students become older, the intention from the educator shifts from exposing students to culturally diverse music to fitting them into my ensemble where there are expectations of musicianship and an advanced level of performance. It's much more likely that you have your orchestra, your band, and if you're lucky, a wind ensemble or a great choir. All these groups are predominantly based on Western standards of what music should be. I didn't have any jazz choir or jazz ensemble in my school.

### **Theme 2: The Pressure to Conform**

As Jane stated, the dominance of Western classical music epistemologies and ideologies is prevalent at the university level, establishing it as the norm. Anna expressed her feelings of needing to conform to Western classical music traditions and how this process has shaped her. Moreover, Anna insightfully shared that there are systemic inequalities that advantage affluent White students and disadvantage BIPOC music students

Anna also shared how her experience entering the university's music program influences her teaching approach. She encountered intense pressure to conform to competitive standards, which she describes as "hustle culture." She recounts studying violin for six years, progressing to a level that required increasingly expensive private lessons, which her family eventually could not afford. She explained, "I received about six years of private violin lessons from middle school to mid-high school, and then my parents just couldn't afford it anymore because, once you get to a certain level of proficiency with an instrument, the lessons get pricier."

Applying to the university as a music education major for voice, Anna found the transition challenging due to her background: "The first year of being in music school was difficult for me because I had never really been exposed to the hustle culture and the

expectations of what being a classical musician was like. At my school, it was very much like a gospel choir; we did hymns and things. My orchestra was so small, maybe like 20 kids on a good day because it was a really small school, and we did a lot of church music.” She felt culturally out of place and struggled with the cultural climate at the university, which demanded conformity to an idealized version of a classical singer: “It was difficult for me to adjust to the expectations, the weight of expectations to conform to this mold was heavy. I felt really overwhelmed in music school, and that experience influences how I approach teaching.”

Anna emphasized the importance of diversity in music education, reflecting on her experiences and how they inform her teaching philosophy. Anna stated:

I would definitely want to include lots of diverse music. Non-Western music should not be treated just as “world” music or “cultural” music, which is inherently different. I loved the gospel choir, and when I entered the university, I wasn’t familiar with the standard repertoire. This experience made me realize the importance of independent study for students to take cultural music and experiences seriously.

Anna thoughtfully touched on the challenges of learning European languages for classical singing, which she described as an inherently different experience. She noted how her affluent peers had a significant advantage in having the opportunity to study Western classical music, and in the auditioning process, they came with the cultural capital that advantaged them. They benefited from the cultural dominance of Western music, which caused her great distress as Ana spoke about these issues. She felt that students from affluent families generally find this academic education easier, suggesting that including more diverse cultural music could help

other students understand the unfamiliarity and appreciate the learning process as cultural visitors. Anna stated:

I think all the Latinos, maybe like most, around 80% of the Latinos I know, which is probably less than 20 students, are in the music education program. And it's skewed more than I expected. We joke about it, and it's funny, but as a double major trying to be a vocal performance major, it's really weird because I never considered my background much. Where I come from, there were a lot of Latinos, and I didn't have many White or East Asian friends who came from very affluent backgrounds. Let's be real—if you're a performance major, your parents probably had the money to pay for lessons for you to be accepted as a performance major. So for music education majors to be held to the same standards, to perform this repertoire like a performance major, that's inherently racist and classist.

The traditional curriculum is misaligned with the cultural backgrounds and needs of BIPOC students. Tala stated:

The history of these three areas is pretty narrow in terms of being responsive to students' cultures. In my experience and observations, there are certain ways that teachers are now trying to expand the kinds of repertoire they use and the concepts and language they use in the classroom to connect to students' culture. But overall, I would definitely say the tendency in band, orchestra, and choir—the default for a lot of people—would just be to draw from the same standards that have been used over and over again, using the same Western concepts that have been used for years. It definitely takes more effort to include culturally responsive material, rather than having it built into the curriculum itself.

### **Theme 3: Resistance to Change**

Significant resistance exists to moving away from the traditional Western classical music paradigm. Jane, the director, has observed long-standing resistance to changing the music curriculum. Based on her extensive experience as a student and professorship and witnessing generations of students, the repertoire remains predominantly within the Western classical music paradigm. She acknowledged some incremental changes, including mariachi music, but emphasizes that the issue extends far more profoundly. Additionally, discussions among students and faculty highlight widespread frustration with the curriculum's persistent focus on Western classical traditions in band, orchestra, and choir. These conversations reflect a slow pace of change, underscoring significant resistance to diversifying the musical curriculum beyond its traditional boundaries. The themes of duality and dialectical tension were evident in the responses in various ways throughout the interviews.

Due to the immense resistance Eunjung highlighted in this theme, the most challenging aspect of creating change in music education is the “willingness” to want change. Eunjung stated that a crucial step towards inclusivity in the curriculum is the willingness to do so, which would be the most challenging step. Eunjung stated, “I think in terms of strategies, I would say even getting to that initial step of wanting to be inclusive in the curriculum . . . would be the hardest step.” Furthermore, Eunjung reiterated the need to dismantle the prevailing mindset entrenched in Western classical music traditions. She criticized the norm where Western classical music is deemed superior and everything else is treated as an afterthought or merely an embellishment to musicians’ repertoire. Eunjung stated:

It's very convenient and familiar for many musicians to adhere to the norm or standard of Western classical music being superior, and everything else being just an afterthought or a mere addition to their musicality or musicianship. This mindset, that as long as you have mastered classical music you can do anything else, is quite entrenched. However, it's challenging to change, especially since many music educators and performance professors are older and may not be keen on breaking away from what is familiar.

#### **Theme 4: Systemic Issues in Music Education**

The findings revealed several systemic issues that hinder the adoption of culturally responsive and inclusive music education. Policy and Curriculum Constraints: Existing policies and curriculum requirements often hinder the inclusion of non-Western music and culturally responsive teaching methods. Anna stated, "I would definitely want to include lots of diverse music. Non-Western music should not be treated just as 'world' music or 'cultural' music." Furthermore, the findings show there is a notable lack of collaboration between the music education department and the ethnomusicology department. Jennifer stated:

Our admission process, this is number one. No longer the only very welcome qualified, I mean, this many years of private lessons as a good teacher can be qualified to enter a music department.

Students are required to participate in Western classical ensembles with limited opportunities to join non-Western ensembles or learn non-Western instruments. Anna stated:

Here, like the program where I'm at, we do a lot of methods classes where we learn all the woodwinds, and then we learn all the brass instruments. So, I think doing another

methods course on non-Western classical instruments would be great. Just so I know what they are and what they sound like, and where I can express them.

### **Theme 5: The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

There is a pressing need for pedagogical reforms that embrace culturally relevant and sustaining approaches to better engage and support all students. This is a clear call for pedagogical reforms that incorporate culturally relevant and sustaining approaches and offer opportunities for new musical epistemologies. Jane stated:

I've used project-based learning so that students can present their culture. They go back home to their parents, to their grandparents, and bring this to the class.

Tala stated there is a need to go beyond the Western classical music tradition as she stated, "Music is present in all cultures but it's not valued in their academic setting," and her strategies have been to invest in understanding the music that comes from her students' cultural worlds.

Tala stated:

It's important, the first step is to get to know what students are interested in outside of the classical music world and what kind of music they listen to, as well as the kind of life experiences they have with art in general and with other types of music.

Jennifer described innovative ways to create connections between non-Western music epistemologies using a Western classical instrument in a non-Western context. She described a project-based lesson where students used Western classical instruments in various musical contexts. Jennifer stated:

Our midterm project is not just about playing. This methods class teaches how to play and instruct on an instrument, but also to explore non-Western applications of the violin and viola, seeing how these can be incorporated into a school music program. I've had students delve into everything from the Bollywood use of the violin to various mariachi styles, even to queer disco. We look at how the technical aspects of playing differ, as well as the cultural contexts in which these instruments are used, which becomes quite moving for the students.

Anna stated:

Recently, our university choral studies doctoral candidate had her recital last week, and it was extended vocal techniques based off of traditional Korean music. It was amazing, and I had never done music like that in my whole life. We were moving, we were chanting, we were on stage and off stage. She had three or four players playing traditional Korean instruments, and she said that she had to search all of LA to find people who could play. And I was like, why aren't we making a standardized place where people are learning these instruments? It would not only benefit performers but also educational resources. Like, let's have a couple of cultural players come and do a 30-min set for my fifth graders. They would think that's so cool. So that's what I feel like college-level programs are missing.

Challenges regarding the authenticity of repertoire by "twisting" the curriculum to make it culturally responsive and finding culturally responsive repertoire revealed a need for professional development and research in culturally responsive music teaching methodologies.

Jennifer highlighted that instrumental music faces significant challenges in adapting non-Western music to Western instruments. Jennifer stated:

I think there are definite challenges for instrumental music versus vocal music in this respect. For example, it's very challenging to adapt certain non-Western folk songs for instruments that are tonally specific, like the French horn, which is really hard to play if you only know three or four notes from folk melodies of non-Western cultures. There's something inherently that needs to be reworked there, as opposed to singing, where you can engage in call and response easily with non-European music. In my opinion, we need not only music from various cultures but also authentic music representation, which is a problem in existing curricula right now.

Anna believed that the approach to teaching non-Western classical music should be carefully examined and treated with respect to the culture. Anna stated:

Inherently they are different because they are different. I would encourage the study of both, but take care to treat 'cultural' music with the respect it deserves, rather than generalizing it or merely adding it as a supplement to the curriculum.

Jennifer stated:

Certainly, stepping away from the Western canon and looking at how different cultures and different rhythmic and tonal structures exist in different parts of the world, and how we can recreate that for our own kind of performative experience, is really powerful. I think there are definite challenges for instrumental music versus vocal music in this respect. For example, it's very challenging to adapt certain non-Western folk songs for instruments that are tonally specific, like the French horn, which is really hard to play if



you only know three or four notes from folk melodies of non-Western cultures. There's something inherently that needs to be reworked there, as opposed to singing, where you can engage in call and response easily with non-European music. In my opinion, we need not only music from various cultures but also authentic music representation, which is a problem in existing curricula right now.

Tala gave a specific example where she taught a popular Mexican folk song to her garage band ensemble class. She stated the teacher preparation program provided the curriculum. Tala stated:

I teach an elementary school garage band class, and one of the songs was a common folk melody from Mexico, found in a method book. Part of our assignment and teaching this class and lesson planning was to have a lesson dedicated to introducing the cultural context of this melody. It's well-known, and there are demonstration videos online on how to perform the dance and play the music. However, finding actual information about the origin of the song was challenging; it's unclear if this is a real mariachi song performed by mariachi ensembles or if it was created for educational purposes.

Tala saw challenges in the authenticity of these types of predetermined curricula and also faced challenges when researching the origin of these non-Western classical pieces, possibly due to language barriers. She highlighted the “narrowness” in culturally connecting with students from richly diverse backgrounds. Tala stated:

One of the pieces we wanted to do is a pretty common kind of folk melody from Mexico, but it's kind of the melody you find in a method book, if that makes sense. So it was. This is part of a predetermined curriculum given to me by the preparation program, and they

encouraged us to find. And so part of our assignment and teaching this class and lesson planning was to have a lesson dedicated to introducing the cultural context of this melody. And so this is a well-known melody. And you know, it's in method books. There's like demonstration videos on it online, how to do this dance, how to play like, how to isolate these intervals. How to teach it is the song? But then in terms of finding actual information about the origin of the song. It was very floaty, like they don't know if this is a real mariachi song that is actually performed by Mariachi ensembles? Or is it just like, was it made up for education, or where? Exactly where does it come from? Like what culture it goes like. very undocumented, I guess. Like it wasn't. There wasn't a lot written about it, at least in English. And that's also another barrier is like there could be all these resources in another language. When you're researching another culture that you don't have access to, because you're not a part of it. I guess, makes it another obstacle. But just like in seeing that research area, where I couldn't find information about the piece I was being told to teach. It made it feel a little bit less authentic. Am I just pulling from the small pool of examples that already exist? Instead of really trying to find something that will matter to these students and connect to their culture because most of my students were Hispanic in that class that I was teaching like? Is this something that is really part of something that they would hear in their daily life? or is it just the education version of it.

Honoring and integrating BIPOC students' cultures into the music curriculum is essential to fostering a sense of inclusion and value. Valuing and honoring BIPOC students' cultures and voices in academic settings is essential. Anna stated:

It's not fair to assume all students have had the same experiences in music education.

When introducing young students to music, it's important not to immediately use

Western classical notation, as there are many ways to express musical concepts through

words, expressions, and movement.

Eunjung emphasized the necessity of educational experiences that prepare students to be culturally responsive, acknowledging the importance of valuing and understanding diverse cultures. Eunjung stated:

Opportunities for us to take classes that are non-classical applications or non-classical techniques on 'classical' or traditional aspects of music education are crucial. Music education is a great opportunity for music educators and college-level educators to receive training and insights on how to be better prepared and equipped to be culturally sensitive teachers, and to be inclusive and respectful of the very real cultures and needs of our students.

Culturally relevant music education offers a meaningful Family Connection. Jennifer stated:

By looking at music education through the evolving definition of culturally responsive pedagogy and finding ways to adapt it to fit the needs of the community you are serving, the implications are huge for participation and community support. We know that when schools are part of communities—when they serve as a collective place for parents, families, administrators, and elected officials—it creates a gathering place where people feel like they belong.

Jennifer also mentioned that not only do students succeed academically, but there are also lower risks of early drug and alcohol abuse and early sexual activity when they feel connected and supported by their school communities. Eunjung highlighted the benefits of culturally relevant and responsive music pedagogy, which extend beyond the classroom to impact family and community:

There's no way that it would not improve their learning experience because I think music reaches people in ways that are relevant and personal to them, especially young musicians. Having music pedagogy and instruction that is very personal moves them and gets them interested and passionate about it. Honing a passion for music in young musicians is extremely crucial, especially during their development. So, making it more personal, more relevant to their families, and to the people they love most is important. It's something that they can bring back to their parents and their household and say, 'Look at what I've learned,' getting them to take an interest in it as well. I think that's extremely important. There's no way that it would not improve students' engagement and their interest in the subject.

Tala stated that music can be an excellent opportunity to connect with the students and appreciate different cultures because music is present in these different cultures. Tala discussed the significant role of music in cultural education, emphasizing its universal presence across cultures and its potential as a tool for enhancing cultural appreciation and intelligence. Tala stated:

There are students who don't connect with classical music as much as some others might, and I think that by increasing the diversity and the kinds of music you bring to students,

that they might not be able to find on their own. Then you have more opportunities for a wider range of students to connect with music in some way, and I think it just provides more opportunities for students to find something to latch onto. And then I think it's tied into culture, because, like you said, like the music that their families listen to, if they play a song at school, and they know that this is something their parents like or their family likes, and you bring it home, and then you share music with your family. I think it creates like that community, and that closeness and that intimacy that music can provide; and I think that just like If a student isn't compelled to listen to or perform classical music, then that can turn them away from music, and it stops that kind of like continued investigation and curiosity into music, and I think, by constantly providing new sounds to students and new opportunities.

Furthermore, she explored the communal and familial aspects of music, suggesting that music can strengthen community bonds and family closeness. Tala stated:

If they play a song at school that their family likes, and they bring it home, it creates that community and closeness that music can provide," she said. This connection can encourage students to share music with their family, enhancing intimacy and community through shared musical experiences.

### **Theme 6: Dismantling and Expanding**

Throughout the interviews, there was a clear and consistent call for dismantling existing structures and expanding educational boundaries. Jane used the word "deconstructing," and Eunjung stated that the Western classical teaching approach needs to be dismantled. In response to the question, "In your opinion, what innovative strategies or approaches can future music

educators like yourself employ to make music classrooms more inclusive and culturally relevant for all students?” Eunjung stated:

Dismantling the traditional approach to teaching music in K-12 institutions is not straightforward and easy to follow, even when it comes to teaching music theory in classical Western notation. It’s simple and convenient for many teachers to continue with this traditional route.

Jennifer stated:

Certainly, stepping away from the Western canon and looking at how different cultures and different rhythmic and tonal structures exist in different parts of the world, and how we can recreate that for our own kind of performative experience, is really powerful.

In addition, Jennifer saw introducing non-Western music as a cultural visitor as a significant challenge and is still examining that approach. She points out the dilemmas and challenges in instrumental music that need to be examined when stepping away from the Western classical music paradigm.

These different perspectives all pointed towards dismantling the traditional Western classical music teaching approach and a need to expand on different pedagogical approaches, methodologies, and epistemologies. All the participants stated that the influence of a highly rigid Western classical music culture was very dominant. Throughout the interviews, the faculty and students responded in frustration as they were reaching a shift away from the epistemological imprisonment of the culturally hegemonic Western classical music paradigm. Jane stated:

We want to diversify our curriculum. So we are working on it and we now have a new theory class that is more inclusive of music from different genres.

## **Theme 7: Structural Barriers**

Structural barriers within the institution significantly hinder the creation of a culturally responsive and inclusive music education environment. The music program has siloed departments; despite a robust ethnomusicology department, its lack of connection with the music education department leads to a fragmented approach to music education. Anna stated:

In my music education training, there has not been a lot of crossover with the Ethnomusicology department, although we've gone over it in a few of our classes. It's never really integrated, and it sucks because music education is already such a compacted degree.

Students were required to meet specific ensemble and methods class requirements. Specifically, students were required to be in Western classical ensembles with limited opportunities for non-Western ensemble participation. Anna stated:

Here, like the program where I'm at, we do a lot of methods classes where we learn all the woodwinds, and then we learn all the brass instruments. So, I think doing another methods course on non-Western classical instruments would be great. Just so I know what they are and what they sound like, and where I can express them.

A significant challenge that emerged was evident while interviewing the faculty and students and during the data analysis, which focused on the training of musicianship and less on the training of being an educator. Jennifer emphasized that creating culturally relevant and responsive spaces goes beyond the curriculum. Jennifer stated the school's mission was not for students to complete a research paper but to weave cultural inclusivity and responsiveness into the educational philosophy. At the same time, a significant theme emerged that was emphasized

by all participants, which as the older policy of ensemble requirements was rigidly limited and centralized to the study of Western classical music.

The participants mentioned that the degree program is “packed” but the ensemble requirements of participating in a band, orchestra, or choir limited their educational experiences. Despite having a world-renowned ethnomusicology department at the university, students at the school of music are required to perform in Western classical ensembles, leaving no space for non-Western ensemble classes. Jane noted that she actively fought against this issue. Many students expressed grievances about their inability to take non-Western ensemble classes taught by experts and sought assistance.

Anna spoke about the weight and pressure of Western classical music theory and expectations were significant for her. This highlighted the need for more opportunities for students to learn non-Western classical music methodologies, theory, and pedagogy and experience making music in a non-Western classical ensemble. In connection with the need for more opportunities to learn different music epistemologies, Anna also raised concerns about the funding disparities between the ethnomusicology and traditional music departments, indicating a historical undervaluation of non-Western music. Anna stated, “Ethnomusicology is significantly excluded from the music department, and they do not interact at any level.”

Regarding teacher preparation and professional development programs, Anna emphasized the need for greater integration with ethnomusicology to enhance educators’ ability to meet the unique needs of BIPOC students. Anna stated, “Strangely, we spend so many years on Western classical music theory from a particular perspective, with no distinction or crossover



with the ethnomusicology department”. Anna advocated revamping music history to include different racial and historical perspectives rather than maintaining a mono-musical culture focus. Anna also mentioned the missed opportunities for students to participate in ethnomusicology ensembles and workshops, which could provide valuable cross-cultural experiences. “More accessible workshops, rather than having to travel across the country, like a workshop on improvisation or Indian classical notation, would be incredibly beneficial,” she suggested. Anna called for a broader, more inclusive approach to music education that respects and integrates a variety of cultural perspectives. This would enrich the academic experience and better prepare students to engage with a diverse global society.

Anna engaged in a thoughtful discussion about the role of teacher preparation and professional development programs in meeting the unique needs of BIPOC students. She emphasized the potential for transformative change in music education, mainly through a more integrated and culturally responsive approach. Anna noted a significant gap in the current curriculum, pointing out the need for a crossover with the Ethnomusicology department. This sentiment underscored her belief that music education should be more inclusive of various musical traditions to reflect students’ diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, Anna criticized the narrow focus on Western classical music history, which typically spans from medieval church music to new-age opera, without adequately considering global musical developments. She expressed excitement about recent efforts to revamp the music theory course at the university. However, she reminisced about her experiences, dominated by extensive studies in Western classical theory. Anna stated, “It was just three humongous books of Western classical theory, and it was overwhelming”.

Anna proposed that music schools integrate more ethnomusicology courses and provide opportunities for students to participate in cultural ensembles. She suggested that such initiatives would not only enrich the curriculum but also offer practical experiences that align with the diverse cultural identities of the student body. Anna stated:

I think that not all music schools have those ethnomusicology programs, which sucks because it's a missed opportunity.

Anna also pointed out that these workshops should be accessible to all students. Anna stated:

Providing more resources, for like you know, like for professional like teachers who are who have already been teaching to like workshops on how to read Indian classical notation, or this is how to teach this specific sort of improvisation from this country, or having more workshops and workshops that are more accessible and not just at like this conference halfway across the country, you know.

Anna advocated for a comprehensive overhaul of music education to include a broader range of cultural perspectives. She called for increased collaboration between music education and ethnomusicology departments, a more globally inclusive music history curriculum, and the provision of practical ensemble experiences. Her insights highlight the need for teacher preparation programs to expand, ensuring that future music educators are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students and foster a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.

Tala also emphasized the importance of cultural representation within the music education curriculum. She suggested that students would benefit from participating in ensembles that reflect their own cultural heritage, which would enhance their connection to the music and

deepen their educational experience. Furthermore, beyond theoretical learning, she stressed the need for practical experiences where students can actively engage with different musical traditions. This could be achieved through workshops and hands-on music-making, which would provide valuable real-world experiences.

Lastly, Tala advocated for a pedagogical shift towards understanding the factors that contribute to a successful classroom. This involves not only learning about diverse musical practices but also experiencing these practices first-hand. By ensuring that music education students as musicians themselves have exposure to these diverse practices, they can better understand the learning process from the student's perspective before transitioning to teaching roles. Eunjung recognized the need to expand teacher preparation to meet the needs of BIPOC students and develop educators who understand the nuances of culturally responsive music education. Eunjung stated, "I think that would be awesome and amazing. It deserves that kind of training and begs for teachers that are even more nuanced in that topic. I would love to receive training and gain insights from those kinds of teachers." Eunjung suggested that there should be more training on how to teach students who are racially and culturally diverse. Eunjung stated:

When you're facing a group of students who have a culture and history that you're not completely familiar with, and you don't know how to approach or honor properly, it's so hard. I think that shouldn't be just an issue but an obstacle to overcome at that moment. Music educators should definitely receive training and insights on how to face those situations.

Furthermore, Eunjung noted the importance of training and preparation for these situations before students enter the field. However, in her experience as a pianist, the university does not

place enough emphasis on the study of culturally relevant music repertoire and has been focused on meeting high standards within the Western classical music paradigm. The university has emphasized a highly competitive “hustle” culture, as Anna had put it, make it difficult to move beyond this dominant mindset as music students in the university due to experiencing a harsh level of Western classical music centric expectations to be met. Eunjung stated:

As a pianist, especially from where I'm from in Northern California, and the studios and my classmates that I've been surrounded by my whole life, we're all from a very homogenous population. Most of my studio mates, especially in my communities, have been Asian American, specifically Korean American. It's easy to say that we lose ourselves in this kind of Western mindset.

Eunjung further spoke about the lack of non-Western music in her training, which revealed a constant theme of dominant Western classical music being more than just repertoire, but an ideology and cultural mindset that dominates the learning space. Eunjung responded by pointing out a significant challenge. Eunjung stated, “Terms of the challenges. I think, finding instructors that are equipped to deal with college level musicians and college level educators that have a focus on inclusivity and cultural relevance.” Eunjung gave a recent example of a class called Jazz Pedagogy but was taught by a White male whose background was in classical choral studies. Eunjung added that there was a challenge at the university to find instructors who are equipped to teach the students non-Western classical music based her knowledge of a class where students at the music program had felt the instructor of this particular non-Western classical music class was not qualified to teach culturally relevant music curriculum. Eunjung stated, “this class that preached. You know, cultural relevance and inclusivity in our education as

educators and I think, having finding instructors that are equipped to teach us these kinds of techniques and these kinds of approaches to pedagogy is a lot more difficult than I expected and I think, having opportunities for us to take these kinds of classes that are, you know, non-classical applications or non-classical techniques on quote, unquote, classical or traditional aspects of music. Music education is a great opportunity for music educators and college level educators to receive training and insight” At the end of the quarter she had asked her peers who had taken the Jazz class Eunjung was referring too and inquired from peers what they have learned and her peers could barely tell her what they had learned. Eunjung stated:

They were trying to learn through improv and improvisation, improvisational techniques that are rooted in non white, non classical music. But the teacher was a white male who had his background in choral studies, classical choral studies. So I think, just having, yeah, I think having instructors that are equipped to teach us might be the biggest challenge.

In addition, she expressed similar sentiments regarding how siloed the music departments were and provides a detailed description of this grievance that resonated with the other students regarding the university’s failure to provide non-Western classical educational experiences.

Eunjung stated:

I think it’s because they see, or in the music school music. It’s the music department used to consist of music, performance, and music education. which I found was quite interesting. And there was the Ethnomusicology Department and the Musicology department and the Music Industry department. which were all very different. If the School of Music was a conservatory, there would be different schools, or there would be

different concentrations where we would all be split up, and we all very much are split up. I found it interesting how music, education, music performance had very, very similar curriculums and degree programs or degree paths and I found it interesting. How It would be. Obviously, it's a privilege for music education programs and music educators to receive, you know, insights from guest artists and guests, educators and guests, musicians to further our education and our training, but I found it interesting. How we would rarely get talks, or rarely get instruction from musicians that are not white or not teaching classical.

Eunjung emphasized the necessity of educational experiences that prepare students to be culturally responsive, acknowledging the importance of valuing and understanding diverse cultures. Eunjung stated:

Opportunities for us to take classes that are non-classical applications or non-classical techniques on 'classical' or traditional aspects of music education are crucial. Music education is a great opportunity for music educators and college-level educators to receive training and insights on how to be better prepared and equipped to be culturally sensitive teachers, and to be inclusive and respectful of the very real cultures and needs of our students.

### **Conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the complex and deeply entrenched issues within music education, particularly the dominance of Western classical music and its impact on BIPOC students. The participants' insights reveal a strong need for systemic change, including policy reforms, increased interdepartmental collaboration, and adopting culturally responsive

pedagogies. Structural barriers such as siloed departments and inequitable admissions processes further complicate efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable music education environment. By addressing these themes and implementing the proposed changes, music education can become a more inclusive, culturally relevant, and enriching experience for all students, fostering a greater sense of value, identity, and community. The next chapter will discuss the implications of these findings and provide recommendations for future research and practice.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the findings from interviews with faculty and students involved in music education at a prominent university in Southern California, focusing on their experiences and perceptions of music education reform concerning BIPOC students. The analysis revealed several emergent themes that are pivotal for understanding music education's current challenges and opportunities.

To summarize the findings in Chapter 4 and the implications discussed in Chapter 5, a prominent theme was the dominant perception of Western classical music influencing how university music students perceived classroom expectations in urban school settings. There was a duality and dialectical tension as students and educators grappled with the dominance of Western classical music, which often misaligned with the needs of BIPOC students. These findings highlight the need for a significant shift away from this dominance. Many participants, educated in Western classical music, now recognize the necessity to move beyond these perceptions. These themes emphasize the critical need for a transformative approach in music education that aligns with the diverse cultures, epistemologies, and ontologies of today's students. The insights from these discussions lay the groundwork for the recommendations, strategic interventions, and

further research proposed in the following chapter to enhance cultural relevance and equity in music education.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In the findings, both faculty and students provided similar responses regarding the current and traditional definitions of music education, the need for change, and the extent of shifts attempted in music education. They also discussed systemic and structural challenges and opportunities in creating culturally relevant and sustaining music education. Through qualitative analysis, the findings revealed the cultural hegemony of Western classical music curricula at all educational levels, demonstrated by the continued dominance of Western classical composers, methods, and pedagogy as the standard in music education. This dominance reinforces a cultural disconnect, as these composers do not represent diverse musical traditions and cultures. Major themes presented in the findings include the dominance of Western classical music, the pressure to conform to these standards, resistance to change, challenges and opportunities of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, the need for dismantling and expanding the curriculum, and structural barriers. These themes are interconnected, showing how the dominance of Western classical music creates a cultural disconnect, pressures conformity, and resists change while highlighting the challenges and opportunities in dismantling existing structures and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy to overcome structural barriers.

#### **Cultural Hegemony in Music Education**

As mentioned in the findings, faculty and students responded similarly to music education's current and traditional definitions, the need for a shift, and the degrees of change attempted. They also discussed systemic and structural challenges and opportunities for creating

culturally relevant and sustaining music education. Qualitative analysis revealed the cultural hegemony of Western classical music curricula at all educational levels, demonstrated by the dominance of Western composers, methods, and pedagogy. This dominance reinforces a cultural disconnect, as these composers do not represent diverse musical traditions and cultures.

Historically, the marginalization of BIPOC communities has created divisions along race and class lines, perpetuating oppressive structures that benefit cultural hegemonic ideologies. This parallel and persistent pattern is evident in music education, where the dominance of Western classical music significantly shapes curricula, perpetuating white supremacy and racism through cultural hegemony. This hegemony imposes structural determinism, confining, segregating, marginalizing, and imprisoning the epistemological and ontological experiences of BIPOC students in both K-12 and university settings.

Historically, the foundation of music education in North America is deeply rooted in European colonialism and the cultural dominance of Western classical music, and based on the findings, this historical dominance still powerfully shapes current definitions of music education, perpetuating white supremacy and racism through cultural hegemony. Faculty and students consistently highlighted the continued dominance of Western classical music, mirroring the historical lineage of making European music the standard to which everyone, particularly BIPOC students, must conform. Echoes the mission of European missionaries in the early 1500s, who aimed to “civilize” indigenous peoples by teaching them European music (Britton, 1985; Spell, 1922). Hernan Cortes established the first music schools in 1524, modeled after European choir schools, reflecting settler colonial beliefs of musical saviorism and elitism (Good-Perkins, 2022). The early efforts of Jesuit priests using music as a tool for spiritual conversion underscore the

deep-seated cultural hegemony that continues to influence contemporary music education (Spell, 1922; Britton, 1982). European and Western classical music, along with the moral missions of John Curwen and Lowell Mason, have shaped the ideology of how music education should look, sound, and function. This influence remains strong in university programs and public school systems. These ideas and practices are evident in the findings.

The normalization of Western Classical music extends beyond music to influence broader educational dynamics, perpetuating dominant narratives and excluding BIPOC musical cultures. This practice is not merely a subjective preference, found in the findings, but a systemic issue that has persisted in historically privileging the music of white European and American male composers while excluding the music of other cultures (Crenshaw et al., 2019). As Bradley (2012b) noted Western classical music is considered “privileged” knowledge and cultural capital, benefiting those who align with its traditions and marginalizing others (p. 408). Despite the growing recognition of the need for culturally responsive pedagogy, the prevailing ideology of Western classical music education limits students’ opportunities to engage with diverse musical epistemologies and deepen their understanding of their cultural histories. Given the history of a “default” deficit model of education, racialization, and non-culturally responsive approaches toward BIPOC students in these educational spaces (Good-Perkins, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2007), Overlooking this glaring theme without a critical and cultural lens misses a crucial opportunity to understand that this cultural dominance deeply connects with white supremacy and class oppression within the educational system.

The findings suggest a robust segregated line between Western and non-Western classical music, shown in the dominant hierarchical language that differentiates and segregates Western

classical music from non-Western classical music. This pronounced segregation in music education is deeply intertwined with issues of coloniality, class, and race, reflecting a hierarchical structure that privileges certain musical traditions over others. The exclusion of music from historically oppressed groups in America—including African enslaved people and their descendants, as well as Indigenous cultures—and the ways these traditions intersect with Western classical music, are central to understanding the clear divide in what is deemed standard and non-standard, normal and abnormal, white and “other.” The term “Western classical music” is used as a form of cultural capital, perpetuating a line of segregation that emphasizes these distinctions (Crenshaw et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Good-Perkins, 2022; Koza, 2008). This term, entrenched in cultural hegemonic practices and presented as traditional standards, prevents students from exploring deeper critical, cultural, and non-Western epistemological connections, effectively confining them within a historically shaped cultural framework that requires transformation. Essentially, confining them to epistemological, ontological, and cultural imprisonment, where it controls, confines, and harms BIPOC students but advantages white students. It is the instrument of alienation, part of a systemic orchestration of control, part of this ideological and academic apartheid (Darder, 2012; 2020).

According to the findings, the educational system celebrates white-centric racial composition and aesthetics, centers white narratives and legends, and solos a Eurocentric cultural history. In contrast, non-White narratives, voices, and music are muted (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). This dominant Western classical music pedagogy reinforces the deficit model of education, reifying this analysis supported by literature that discusses the impacts of cultural hegemony in educational settings, particularly in schools with significant BIPOC populations.

The literature validated these themes of how dominant groups enforce their culture onto oppressed communities, in this case, BIPOC communities, and highlights how cultural mismatches between predominantly white educators and the communities they serve can exacerbate cultural chasms and conflicts, influencing teacher perceptions and classroom dynamics, thus shaping student identity and perceived value (Darder, 2002; Doyle, 2012; Good-Perkins, 2022; Hess, 2021; Love & Kruger, 2005;). The findings indicate these themes are present at the university level and within K-12 educational institutions.

### **The Pressure to Conform**

The entrenched normalization of Western classical music within educational systems serves as a form of cultural hegemony, pathologizing other musical forms and epistemologies. Based on the findings, there is a significant expectation to conform to Western classical music standards, a "normalization" deeply rooted in the history of music education, which prioritizes Western classical music over diverse traditions (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Koza, 2008). It correlates with the historical mission and hegemonic function of stripping away Indigenous, African, and other non-European cultures, music, spirituality, and identity. The findings highlight the harsh expectation for students to become Western classically trained, effectively subtracting their ethnic and cultural identity, language, and history to gain acceptance into this university that honors only Western classical musicianship, culture, and identity. Critical Race Theory (CRT) emphasizes that this normalization extends beyond music to influence broader educational dynamics, perpetuating dominant narratives and excluding BIPOC musical cultures (Solórzano, 1997; Delgado et al., 2017).

We can apply Critical Race Theory, which states that jurisprudence is not neutral, to music education, where the normalization and standardization of cultural hegemonic ideas and practices create an elusive form of control. As previously noted, this dominant music education paradigm essentially normalizes systemic racism that mainly benefits white and affluent groups (Bradley, 2012b; Crenshaw et al., 2019; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Koza, 2008). Deficit models of education were once normalized perceptions unquestioned (Good-Perkins, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995), but as further research in the field of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies developed, these deficit models of education were found to be harmful and did not encourage success within academia, devalued BIPOC students and falsely labeling BIPOC students as unacademic. These unquestioned and unchallenged normalized practices are elusive, and, as seen through a critical race theory lens, they are the most harmful (Solórzano, 1997; Delgado et al., 2017). Moreover, this normalization extends beyond music to influence broader educational dynamics, including language and pedagogical methods. It perpetuates dominant master narratives that elevate White cultural narratives into cultural immortality or perpetuity and excludes BIPOC musical culture, narratives, history, music epistemologies, and ontologies-deeming them as ahistorical.

This hegemonic power shapes classroom dynamics, presenting Western classical music not merely as a cultural option but as the universal standard of musical excellence. This approach disregards the rich musical contributions from diverse cultures, including those integral to students' heritage. For example, culturally significant music such as Gospel, Blues, Jazz, and hip-hop, which emerged from historically oppressed communities in the United States, is often excluded from academic recognition. Despite Hip-Hop's profound global influence and

relevance to American cultural identity (Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Morgan & Bennett, 2011), it and similar genres are frequently excluded and undervalued in educational settings. It is a persistent exclusionary practice that is not passive but an active enforcement of a narrow cultural hegemonic perspective that dominates educational spaces. This dominance is often unchallenged due to misconceptions, a lack of diverse knowledge, and an overarching need to uphold traditional authority, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing white supremacy (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Fergus, 2016; Gillborn, 2015; Lui, 2022).

### **The Resistance to Change: Pedagogical Shifts**

The interviews reveal a critical need for systemic change in music education. This change should dismantle the White-centric Western classical music curriculum and integrate various musical and cultural practices and epistemologies, creating an educational environment that transforms and challenges cultural hegemony. The diverse musical backgrounds of BIPOC students are acknowledged and valued.

A strong call for pedagogical reforms was evident in the findings, emphasizing the need for culturally relevant and sustaining approaches. Based on the findings, the definitions of music education have mostly stayed the same; however, there is a desire for a more significant shift. Many students and faculty discussed the necessity of integrating innovative strategies that connect the cultural music of the students with their familial and historical contexts. This need stems from a need for more engagement to engage students effectively within the confines of the Western classical paradigm.

Based on the findings, this pedagogical shift faces solid resistance from many music educators whose sole educational experience is deeply rooted in Western classical music. There

is a duality and dialectical tension, as educators are often deeply rooted in Western classical training yet recognize the importance of exploring other musical epistemologies to connect with their students, causing immense frustration. According to the faculty and students, many educators find comfort in the familiar Western classical paradigm, and venturing into diverse musical epistemologies requires significant effort. However, the interviews underscored a solid desire to shift towards a broader range of musical pedagogical epistemologies that can enhance educational outcomes and awareness of BIPOC students at the university level and K-12 education level. Therefore, by dismantling the traditional dominance of Western classical music, music education can become a more inclusive field that respects and incorporates a variety of cultural perspectives, epistemologies, and musical traditions.

### **Duality and Dialectical Tensions**

Faculty and students recognize the necessity for these changes but report challenges in deviating from traditional educational models. However, they acknowledge the need for pedagogical reform in music education, yet they encounter significant challenges when attempting to deviate from traditional models dominated by Western classical music. Resistance is pervasive; many educators hold implicit and explicit biases that hinder these necessary changes. As the findings highlight, one of the most formidable obstacles is the willingness to change itself. Overcoming the ingrained mindset fostered by longstanding cultural hegemonic structures and ideologies proves challenging.

The interviews reveal a duality and dialectical tension. Educators recognize the need for transformative pedagogical shifts but must overcome resistance to achieve these changes. Despite these challenges, the participants interviewed—students and faculty—are eager to



initiate change. They express a strong desire to shift away from the centralized role of Western classical music in education. Overcoming ingrained mindsets fostered by longstanding cultural hegemonic structures and ideologies is essential for initiating transformative pedagogical shifts. The literature highlights the difficulties in changing established practices and the importance of critical reflection in this process (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love & Kruger, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2022) observed in the post-COVID context that our aim is not to return to normal because that is how we ended up in this situation and seeking a hard reset (p. xi).

### **The Challenges and Opportunities**

All the students interviewed expressed a keen interest in transcending deficit mindsets, a term that refers to a shift in perspective from viewing students from marginalized communities as lacking certain skills or knowledge to recognizing and valuing the unique cultural knowledge and experiences they bring. This shift in mindset is motivated by the cultural richness their students bring; it reflects the perspective of Ladson-Billings (2022), who advocated shifting the deficit question from “What is wrong with these students?” to “What is right with these students?” (p. 2). Within the context of culturally responsive music education, this transformation translates to asking, “What music exists within my students? What music do my students bring?” and “How can I honor the traditions, cultures, and lived experiences of my students in these academic settings?”

### **Cultural Disconnect and Relevance**

The participants revealed significant challenges, including a significant gap between the traditional music educational curriculum and the cultural identities of BIPOC students, impacting their engagement and representation. The dominance of Western classical music within the

curriculum represents a cultural chasm that does not align with the identities and needs of BIPOC students. This misalignment impacts their engagement and sense of representation in educational spaces. The lack of composers of color in the curriculum sends a clear message about which cultures and identities are valued in academic settings.

Both students and faculty have voiced a pressing need to shift away from the Western classical paradigm, advocating for an educational approach that honors and integrates non-Western musical epistemologies. This approach connects with students' cultural backgrounds, family histories, and the music they encounter daily, fostering a more inclusive and representative musical education (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Good-Perkins, 2022, Ladson-Billings, 2022, Moll et al.,1992). They advocate for an educational approach that honors and integrates non-Western musical epistemologies, connecting with students' cultural backgrounds, family histories, and the music they encounter daily. However, the prevailing influence of Western classical music continues to shape curricula, resulting in a pervasive disconnect not only in K-12 education but also at the university level. This ongoing issue underscores the need for systemic changes to foster a more inclusive and representative musical education. This misalignment affects their engagement and sense of representation in educational spaces. The literature emphasizes that recognizing and integrating students' cultural backgrounds can significantly enhance their educational experience (Good-Perkins, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### **Shifting Traditional Paradigms: Dismantling and Expanding**

It is imperative to dismantle Western classical approaches and shift toward culturally responsive pedagogy, which could facilitate more inclusive educational practices.

The interviews revealed a prevalent theme of dismantling the traditional Western classical paradigm deeply embedded in music education and a clear shift towards a culturally responsive pedagogy. This movement aims to create more inclusive educational practices by moving beyond the entrenched Western classical approaches, addressing various cultural hegemonic stereotypes, misconceptions, and racism, and challenging implicit and explicit biases within the curriculum. The findings have focused on expanding the educational scope to include non-Western instruments, performance styles, musical epistemologies, and ensembles. It also involves making connections across diverse music styles, genres, and cultures.

A key goal expressed by both students and faculty were to dismantle the dominance of Western classical music in the classroom. This effort is part of a broader initiative to understand and deconstruct the hierarchical structures and dominant narratives traditionally shaping music education. The movement towards dismantling these traditional paradigms is challenging yet crucial for developing a curriculum and pedagogy that are more equitable and humane. Such spaces would allow students to enhance their consciousness of new musical epistemologies and foster a greater ontological awareness within their communities. This aims to create a safe environment where students can authentically express and share their musical identities. This transformative approach is essential for moving away from the highly centric Western classical music tradition towards pedagogical praxes that embrace the diverse musical contributions of all cultures.

The interviews prominently discussed curriculum expansion and the dismantling of traditional paradigms, highlighting the desire to enrich music education by incorporating a broader range of musical epistemologies, ontologies, and cultural understandings.

Opportunities to diversify the curriculum were repeatedly mentioned, suggesting that there is significant potential to include a more comprehensive array of musical traditions, teaching methodologies, and pedagogical frameworks. These are opportunities to broaden the curriculum to include a more comprehensive array of musical epistemologies, cultures, and teaching methodologies. This approach aims to give students a more comprehensive perspective on how various musical traditions and cultures intersect. The proposed curriculum changes advocate for a more inclusive approach that moves beyond the narrow focus on training Western classical musicians. It embraces educational research and learning diverse musical styles, epistemologies, ontologies, cultural practices, and pedagogies from different traditions beyond the Western classical music education paradigm.

### **Structural Barriers**

Interviews indicated that outdated policies prevent the acquisition of skills relevant to serving BIPOC students' needs. Both students and faculty expressed a strong interest in stepping away from the Western classical music paradigm and seeing opportunities for reform in the educational preparation and structural policies within music departments. Such changes are necessary to broaden the musical educational experiences offered to students, which could, in turn, profoundly impact how music is taught to BIPOC students. They emphasize the value of BIPOC students' cultures and voices, which are crucial in these academic settings. These proposed adjustments are not just about adding variety but are crucial for creating a more equitable and relevant music education environment. Students strongly desired more inclusive and relevant educational experiences within music education departments at the university level, which are currently hindered by outdated policies that favor Western classical music traditions.

Interviews with students have highlighted significant systemic barriers in music education, particularly the prevalence of outdated policies prioritizing Western classical music.

Outdated policies in higher education and K-12 hinder the development of educational experiences that cater to the diverse needs of BIPOC students. Key music educator associations such as the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) have long been criticized for their Eurocentric focus and the exclusion of people of color from its practices and policies (Good-Perkins, 2022). Despite the Tanglewood Symposium's declarations in 1967 (Choate et al., 1967), which recognized the need for music education reform to include diverse musical traditions, much progress has yet to be made. This ongoing issue has resulted in decades of calls for reform to address these inequities (Good-Perkins, 2022).

As stated in the literature review, the curriculum policies of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) need to be updated (Jensen-Moulton, 2020). These policies hinder the development of educational experiences that cater to the diverse needs of BIPOC students. Students expressed a strong need and desire for curriculum changes at the university level that would include a broader range of musical epistemologies. They seek opportunities to develop skills in various musical traditions that resonate more closely with their cultural backgrounds and contemporary musical environments. This recurring theme underscores the urgent need for reform in music education policies to make them more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all students. The director of curriculum reform stated that changes to the admissions process have been underway, which underscores the crucial equity issue regarding affluent groups having advantages due to the cultural hegemony of Western classical music in higher education (Crenshaw et al., 2019; Koza, 2008).

## **Departmental Disconnection**

This disconnect is pervasive across departments, highlighting a need for more integration and communication, especially between the music education department and ethnomusicology. The findings have revealed a disconnection between the music education department and the world-renowned ethnomusicology department. This lack of integration and communication between departments perpetuates a segregated approach to music education, with Western classical music prioritized and other musical forms marginalized (Crenshaw et al., 2019; Koza, 2008). Effective integration of these departments is crucial for creating an inclusive academic environment that values diverse musical epistemologies and cultures. Such division not only serves the interests of those resistant to systemic change and who are inclined to perpetuate cultural hegemony and maintain the status quo but also notably disadvantages BIPOC students. This is particularly critical given the university's location in a diverse, cosmopolitan area with a high population of BIPOC residents. The local educational context is also predominantly composed of students of color, emphasizing the urgent need for these academic departments to collaborate.

Effective integration would facilitate a more inclusive academic environment that values and reflects diverse musical epistemologies and cultures. Unfortunately, the current siloed structure of the university departments perpetuates a segregated separation. Western classical music is prioritized and isolated, while other musical forms are marginalized. This entrenched segregation not only mirrors but also reinforces broader societal inequities, historically favoring students from affluent backgrounds who are deeply entrenched in Western classical traditions to the detriment of a more diverse majority (Crenshaw et al., 2019; Koza, 2008). The findings

underscore a critical theme of segregation within the university's music departments, both in practice and philosophy, highlighting an essential area for potential reform to serve all students better and reflect a more equitable approach to music education

Numerous studies underscore the harmful effects of enforcing the historical scaling of Western classical cultural hegemony on BIPOC students. These effects include the reinforcement of default ideologies, such as deficit mindsets, and the normalization of racist stereotypes, which marginalize and devalue the cultural and musical contributions of BIPOC students. The findings highlight the need for a more inclusive and culturally relevant approach to music education that acknowledges and values diverse musical traditions and perspectives. Research has demonstrated how detrimental this can be (Henry et al., 2022). Conversely, case studies have illustrated the positive impact of culturally responsive pedagogy, which has been shown to enhance student engagement, self-image, identity, and value while improving the overall school culture (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Cherfas et al., 2021; Dreilinger, 2021; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). These benefits underscore the need to address cultural hegemony and systemic racism within the public school system and to identify opportunities for meaningful change.

## **Implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

The prevailing theories in music education and pedagogy predominantly center around Western classical music, fostering a misleading universality and excluding diverse musical practices and epistemologies. Incorporating a variety of musical theories and pedagogies that resonate with students' cultural experiences and daily lives is essential for creating an inclusive and effective learning environment (Jensen-Moulton, 2020). This shift challenges the

longstanding cultural hegemony embedded in music education and promotes a more equitable approach that values the musical contributions of all cultures (Bradley, 2012a; Howard & Rodriguez, 2017). There is a critical need to dismantle the exclusive focus on Western classical music and expand towards a more inclusive and diverse pedagogical approach. Shifting away from the constraints of epistemological and ontological imprisonment. There is a pressing need for a dismantling of Western classical approaches to teaching music and expanding beyond Western classical approaches.

All participants in the study emphasized the necessity of moving beyond the traditional Western classical music education paradigm. They highlighted the importance of adopting pedagogies, methodologies, and epistemologies that transcend the confines of this dominant system. Such a shift aims to foster a more humanizing and culturally connected relationship with students, which is crucial for the changes in music education. The theoretical implications highlight an extreme inequality of the dominance and traditional imposition of the Western classical music paradigm at the K-12 and the university level. Moreover, it underscores the epistemological, ontological, and cultural constraints imposed by a narrow, exclusive pedagogical praxis. This dominant focus has fostered a misleading universality- falsely presenting Western classical music as the quintessential musical highlighting the ontological constraint- while diverse musical practices and epistemologies from different cultures offer unique approaches to musical theory, performance, notation, and instrumentation.

Music education in the context of this research often remains confined within this Western classical music paradigm, a limitation mainly attributable to cultural hegemony intimately tied to white supremacy and structural racism. As a result, music education



preparation courses typically focus on Western music theory and performance, lagging in innovative practices in educational research that address the specific needs of BIPOC students. Innovative pedagogies, including culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies and critical pedagogy, which prioritize student voices and their experiences over traditional, top-down, teacher-centered educational approaches that treat students as mere receptacles for knowledge, should be integrated.

Some may argue that the current music curriculum is irrelevant—Western classical Music, for example, can still uplift students’ lives. Akin to asserting that Shakespeare can inspire BIPOC students. However, such arguments overlook the ongoing reinforcement of cultural hegemony and the normalization of narrow standards limiting BIPOC students’ cultural, epistemological, and ontological worlds and confining them into epistemological and ontological imprisonment. Instead, why not highlight authors who resemble the students, come from similar backgrounds, and share their struggles? This approach is arguably more relevant and impactful. More importantly, we must consider other epistemologies and ontologies. Persisting with a Eurocentric curriculum without critical examination perpetuates cultural hegemony in education. Paulo Freire might say that this represents “false generosity”—efforts that appear beneficial but fail to effect genuine change (Freire, 1970, p. 44).

Incorporating a variety of musical theories and pedagogies that resonate with students’ cultural experiences and daily lives is essential. This means moving beyond the conventional view that Western classical music theory is the sole framework necessary for understanding music. Instead, embracing diverse musical epistemologies and culturally responsive educational practices can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment for the BIPOC

community. Furthermore, modern technology has transformed how music is created, shared, and experienced, especially in genres like pop, hip-hop, and electronic music, and through multimedia, virtual reality, and video gaming. These developments introduce new instruments and methods that should be integrated into music education to broaden the learning experience. Expanding the scope of what is taught can make music education a genuinely inclusive space that reflects the dynamic nature of contemporary musical landscapes.

### **Practical Implications**

To highlight the practical implications of this study, it is essential to consider how these insights can be applied to reform music education curricula, teacher training programs, and policymaking to serve the BIPOC community better. These reforms should aim to dismantle the dominance of Western classical music and integrate a variety of musical cultural practices and epistemologies, creating an educational environment where cultural hegemony is challenged and the diverse musical backgrounds of BIPOC students are acknowledged and valued.

First, reforming music education curricula can significantly change how music teachers engage with BIPOC students. The study's findings suggest that innovative, culturally responsive projects can help teachers connect with students on a deeper level—not just through the performance of notes or theoretical concepts, but through a profound open desire for deep cultural epistemological and ontological awareness of non-Western culture and epistemologies. Furthermore, they are learning to develop criticality and problem-posing activities within the curriculum that connect diverse music with the broader contextual historical, social, and cultural worlds we inhabit. These approaches can be practically implemented in classrooms through strategic reforms in music education, creating opportunities for future music students to explore

diverse musical epistemologies and cultural experiences. This includes learning different instrumental methodologies beyond Western classical music, participating in workshops focused on culturally responsive music education, and taking classes in non-Western musical traditions. Highlighting the value of different non-Western musical cultures, epistemologies, and ontologies within university music education departments is also crucial. This can be achieved by incorporating these elements into teacher training programs, which should include courses that address the specific needs of the BIPOC community, emphasizing cultural inclusivity, relevance, and responsive pedagogy. These programs should not only teach musicianship but also educational practices that enhance the ability of future educators to meet the needs of the BIPOC community effectively

Additionally, policy making in education must evolve, dismantling the master narratives and structural determinism that have historically dominated the field, such as the pervasive influence of Western classical music. Policies should be developed to encourage and accommodate the needs of the BIPOC student population at the university level, offering students opportunities to engage with non-Western ensembles and to challenge stereotypes and biases that segregate musical traditions. These policies should also extend to K-12 settings, aiming to dismantle outdated practices and develop a more culturally responsive music educational experience.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

### **Curriculum Development**

Develop and integrate curricula that reflect diverse musical traditions, not just those from the Western classical canon. Based on the study's findings and implications, it is essential to

develop and integrate curricula that reflect diverse musical traditions, epistemologies, and cultures relevant to the lived experiences, cultural worlds, families, and histories of BIPOC students. Such curriculum development is crucial to creating education that is genuinely culturally responsive to the BIPOC community. The focus should not be limited to the Western classical canon but should expand to encompass a variety of musical epistemologies. Developing a curriculum that incorporates a range of sounds, instrumentation, and repertoires from diverse composers is vital. This approach ensures the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the needs of the BIPOC community in today's context. The goal is to avoid reverting to outdated norms or perpetuating the status quo. Instead, the curriculum should be adaptive, flexible, and continually evolving to meet the changing needs of students. This responsiveness is fundamental to truly inclusive and equitable education.

### **New Training Program Developments**

Implement training programs for educators that focus on culturally responsive teaching practices. The implementation of training programs for educators, focusing on culturally responsive teaching practices, is crucial for advancing music education. These programs should be led by experts in culturally responsive music education and educators who utilize a variety of teaching methodologies beyond Western classical music pedagogies. The inclusion of innovative teaching practices and experiences in non-Western music ensembles and traditions is vital. These training programs should also introduce educators to non-Western musical epistemologies and pedagogies, including alternative notation systems, music theory, concepts, performance styles, and improvisation techniques. Offering these diverse experiences helps teachers develop new approaches and understandings, which can inform the creation of curricula that better address the

needs and cultural backgrounds of the BIPOC community. By equipping educators with these tools and knowledge, we can foster an educational environment that embraces a broader spectrum of musical expressions and teaching strategies, thereby enhancing the inclusivity and relevance of music education for all students.

### **Policy Reform**

Advocate for policy changes that facilitate educational equity, such as funding for culturally diverse programs and research. Based on the study's findings and implications, advocating for policy reform is crucial to promote educational equity and support culturally diverse and responsive programs. This includes securing funding for culturally responsive, non-Western music ensembles in K-12 education settings, where Western classical music traditionally dominates ensemble, band, orchestra, and choir offerings.

### **Breaking Down Systemic Barriers**

Policy changes should aim to eliminate the systemic barriers that currently hinder access to non-Western music, theory, pedagogy, and epistemologies. This includes addressing the siloed nature of departmental organization at universities, facilitating integration across departments to enrich the educational landscape. Furthermore, policy reforms should ensure that funding is available not only for music programs but also for cultural community events, in addition too, further research in the field of culturally responsive music education. These events can serve as vital platforms for families, schools, and different ensembles to share and perform, fostering greater cultural connection and meaningful engagement within the community.

Such policy initiatives should focus on removing any institutional obstacles that prevent the full expression and appreciation of a diverse range of musical traditions, thereby making

music education more inclusive and reflective of the broad spectrum of cultural identities present in the community. To address systemic issues in music education and better serve the needs of BIPOC students, it is essential to revise and eliminate outdated policies that restrict access to culturally responsive and non-Western-dominated pedagogies and epistemologies. This is crucial at both the university level and in K-12 education settings.

### **Inter-Departmental Collaboration**

Policies should be developed to facilitate stronger connections between different departments within music schools, particularly between the music education and ethnomusicology departments. These changes are part of a broader effort to dismantle the dominance of Western classical music and expand the curriculum to include a wider range of musical traditions and scholarly approaches. Reforming these policies involves reframing and rethinking the current structures to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate a limited view of music education. Implementing policy changes that promote this initiative is key to advancing a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally relevant music education system. These policies should not only remove barriers but also actively encourage integration and collaboration across various academic disciplines and musical practices, fostering a richer, more diverse educational environment.

### **Diversify Admissions Process and Faculty Diversity**

Addressing inequitable practices in the admission and audition processes at the university level is crucial for fostering diversity and inclusivity within music education departments. Policies should revise audition requirements, recruit diverse students, and diversify faculty. Changing the audition process to recognize and value performances from various musical

traditions, not just Western classical music. This shift would honor diverse musical artists and epistemologies, welcoming a broader spectrum of talent and backgrounds into music programs and implementing initiatives to recruit a more diverse student body. Recruiting a diverse student and faculty would involve outreach to communities traditionally underrepresented in music education and providing support mechanisms to assist students from these backgrounds during the application and audition processes. Create policies that promote hiring a diverse faculty committed to innovative, culturally responsive, and inclusive musical education. Diversity among faculty can inspire similar openness and inclusivity in K-12 music education programs. Incorporate and value music from various cultures and epistemologies within the curriculum. This approach not only enriches the educational experience but also helps dismantle persistent myths, stereotypes, and biases associated with the classical music paradigm. By implementing these policy initiatives, universities can create a more equitable and culturally responsive environment that positively influences music education ideologies, classroom culture, and the development of K-12 programs. Such changes are essential for building an educational framework that truly reflects and serves the diverse needs of the BIPOC community, ensuring that music education is accessible and relevant to all students. Encourage K-12 settings to adopt more inclusive musical educational programs that are open to different musical epistemologies. This can help eliminate misconceptions and ignorance woven into the dominant cultural hegemonic narrative, which often segregates non-Western music.

More concrete and tangible guidelines for incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies into the current music education curriculum. The need for more tangible and concrete guidelines for incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies into the current music education curriculum is

crucial. It is important to move beyond mere discussions about necessary changes and actively shift pedagogical approaches within curriculum design. Often, music educators rely on outdated curricula developed in previous preparation programs, which may not adequately reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. To address this, there should be a direct relationship between music education preparation programs and the schools they serve. This connection would facilitate a deeper understanding of the specific communities that educators are teaching in. Collaborative research and investigation into these communities are essential to identify their unique cultural needs and challenges. Furthermore, collaboration should extend across university departments—such as ethnomusicology, musicology, and the school of music education—to support music teachers in developing practical, applicable guidelines and curricula.

By fostering these partnerships, educators can be equipped with up-to-date, relevant, and culturally attuned resources that they can effectively apply in the classroom. This approach not only enhances the educational experience for students but also supports music teachers in becoming more effective and culturally responsive educators.

### **Community Engagement**

Strengthening partnerships with diverse communities is crucial to ensure that music education is reflective of and responsive to the rich cultural nuances of these communities. It is important to move beyond the isolated, siloed environments often found within K-12 and university settings. Expanding these partnerships to include diverse communities, various non-Western ensembles, and local musicians and artists who resonate with the students' cultural worlds can significantly enhance music education.



Developing such partnerships not only enriches the educational content but also supports the growth of culturally responsive music education frameworks. These collaborations should aim to integrate the cultural assets and perspectives of the community into the curriculum, thereby providing a more relevant and engaging learning experience for BIPOC students. By doing so, these partnerships can play a pivotal role in shifting and reforming music education towards a model that truly values and incorporates the diverse cultural backgrounds of all students.

Creating platforms where students and community members actively contribute to the development of curriculum and pedagogical strategies in music education could significantly increase engagement, not only within the community but also across the broader community. Such involvement helps students forge stronger connections with their local environments, enhancing their social awareness and empowering them with research tools. By recognizing their own communities as valuable sources of knowledge, students can play a crucial role in shaping music education programs that are genuinely reflective of and relevant to the diverse backgrounds they represent.

Facilitating these platforms requires teachers who are open to and supportive of centering student voices and community voices. By doing so, educators can unlock new avenues for curriculum development and discover innovative pedagogical strategies that might not be evident without direct interaction and communication with the students and the community. This approach not only diversifies the educational experience but also ensures that the music education space advances to meet the changing needs and aspirations of its participants, fostering a more inclusive, responsive, and dynamic learning environment.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

### **Longitudinal Studies**

Recommendations for further research in music education should include conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of innovative culturally responsive pedagogies such as culturally sustaining music pedagogy. Such studies would provide valuable insights for educators, researchers, and music education preparation programs, helping them to understand the enduring effects of these pedagogies on BIPOC students' academic achievements and well-being. Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of culturally responsive pedagogies in music education. Exploring how innovative culturally responsive pedagogies in music education influences BIPOC students' identity, sense of value, sense of purpose, and their epistemological and ontological development is crucial. Additionally, it's important to examine how these pedagogies affect students' long-term engagement with music education and their interactions with other interdisciplinary fields they choose to pursue.

These studies could also investigate the effects of dismantling the culturally hegemonic Western classical music paradigm and the implementation of new musical epistemologies, pedagogies, and methodologies that emphasize cultural responsiveness and relevance. Including an exploration of new technologies in the field of music education would further enrich our understanding of the transformative potential of culturally responsive approaches. Overall, longitudinal research will offer a deeper understanding of the long-term impacts of these innovative pedagogical strategies and contribute to the development of more effective, inclusive, and relevant music education practices.

## **Comparative Studies**

Further research should also include conducting comparative studies to analyze the outcomes of traditional and culturally responsive music education programs. Such studies would provide a detailed understanding of the nuances and differences between these approaches. Insights from both types of programs could be synthesized to develop a more meaningful and innovative music education curriculum that integrates the strengths of each.

Additionally, it's essential to investigate the scalability of successful models of culturally responsive music education across different educational contexts. This research would examine whether the strategies and approaches that prove effective in one setting can be adapted and implemented in other settings, maintaining their effectiveness while accommodating diverse student populations and varying institutional structures.

By exploring these areas, researchers can help determine the best practices for broadening the reach and impact of culturally responsive music education, ensuring that it not only supports the needs of diverse students in one context but can also be effectively applied in a multitude of educational environments.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of this study primarily stem from potential biases inherent in qualitative research, as well as from the demographic and geographic scope of the participant pool. The study focused on a specific geographic location—Southern California—and involved a relatively small and possibly not diverse group of participants. Specifically, the research was limited to interactions with two faculty members and a small number of students from the School of Music Education.

Such a limited sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the perspectives and experiences of participants may not represent those of broader or different educational and cultural contexts. Additionally, the focus on a specific academic institution and a small group of individuals might have introduced biases related to the institutional culture or individual experiences, which might not be applicable elsewhere. To address these limitations, future research could expand the participant pool to include a larger and more diverse group of educators and students from multiple geographic locations and institutions. This expansion would enhance the applicability of the findings across various educational and cultural settings.

### **Summary**

The study revealed several key findings centered around the need for significant changes in music education to better serve BIPOC communities. A central theme is the dismantling of the Western classical music paradigm and expanding curricula to include non-Western music cultures, epistemologies, and ontologies. This shift challenges the status quo and calls for the development of innovative, culturally responsive pedagogical practices tailored to the needs of the BIPOC student community. The degree of shifting away from the Western classical music paradigm should align with the needs of students, cultural relevance, and equitable anti-racist, anti-colonialist beliefs. Additionally, there is a critical need for curriculum and policy reforms at both university and K-12 levels. These changes should be mutually influential, aiming to create a more integrated and culturally responsive educational framework. Faculty and students are advocating for diversity within the music education community, creating strategies for culturally responsive education that connect with students' familial backgrounds, honor their identities, and recognize the presence of implicit biases and deficit thinking within the current educational

paradigm. The importance of culturally responsive education is underscored by its potential to validate and celebrate the musical expressions that are part of students' daily lives and cultural heritage. Music education must undergo a thorough reevaluation to dismantle outdated myths and misconceptions, involving reassessment of current practices to develop pedagogical approaches that are more inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the diverse histories and experiences of students.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter concludes with significant insights into the need for systemic transformation within music education, emphasizing the dismantling of the Western classical music paradigm and the incorporation of diverse musical cultural traditions, epistemologies, and ontologies. The findings underscore the importance of reevaluating and expanding the music curriculum to be culturally responsive and reflective of the BIPOC communities' rich musical culture and lived experiences. Key themes identified include the necessity of structural and institutional changes at both university and K-12 levels, which are critical for fostering a more inclusive and interconnected educational landscape. Advocacy from faculty and students highlights a strong desire for diversity and culturally responsive strategies within the music education community, aiming to address and rectify the ongoing issues of implicit biases and deficit thinking. The transformative potential of culturally responsive education has been profoundly illustrated by the voices of the faculty and students, showing its capacity to connect students more deeply with their families, communities, and cultural identities. This approach not only enriches students' academic and personal lives but also challenges and dismantles the racial and cultural hegemonies entrenched in traditional music education paradigms.

Moving forward, music education must continue to adapt, be flexible, and change by embracing the varied musical expressions that embody the histories and experiences of oppressed peoples and indigenous cultures, as well as the contemporary musical forms that students encounter daily. Emphasizing these diverse musical traditions in academic settings is the beginning of a powerful transformation within music education—one that promises a more equitable, inclusive, and authentic learning environment for all students.

In conclusion, the findings from this study advocate for a redefinition of music education that is not only aware of historical and social hegemonic forces but actively seeks to dismantle them. The results highlight the extreme inequality and dominance of the Western classical music paradigm at K-12 and university levels, underscoring the epistemological, ontological, and cultural constraints imposed by a narrow curriculum. By fostering an educational framework that is truly inclusive and representative of all cultural expressions, music education can significantly contribute to dismantling systemic barriers and promoting a richer, more diverse academic and cultural landscape. Embracing these changes will enable music education to begin a transformative process that enhances its relevance and inclusivity while actively challenging systemic barriers and cultural hegemonies. It is essential to create an academic environment where all music students feel valued and where their cultural worlds, lived experiences, and communities are seen as assets rather than challenges. Breaking free from the dominant centric position of Western classical music in education is beneficial not only to BIPOC students but also essential for fostering an equitable and authentic learning experience that truly reflects the diverse society in which we live.

## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

#### Research Question 1: **Perceptions of Traditional Music Curriculum**

How do university students preparing to become K-12 music teachers perceive the traditional music curriculum?

#### Research Question 2: **Strategies for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Cultural Inclusivity:**

#### Research Question 3: **Personal Experiences with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Music Classrooms:**

#### Research Question 4: **Role of Teacher Preparation and Professional Development:**

1. Can you describe your perceptions of the traditional music curriculum in K-12 settings and how you think it aligns with the diverse cultural backgrounds of students?

***Rationale:*** This question aligns with the first research question, which seeks to understand how college students aspiring to become music educators perceive the traditional music curriculum in K-12. By asking about their perceptions, the researcher gains insights into their initial understanding and attitudes towards the traditional curriculum, serving as a foundational point for the subsequent questions.

2. In your opinion, what innovative strategies or approaches can future music educators, like yourself, employ to make music classrooms more inclusive and culturally relevant for all students?

**Rationale:** To address the second research question, this question explores the strategies and approaches that future music educators envision employing to create inclusive and culturally relevant music classrooms. It encourages participants to consider innovative solutions and provides valuable insights into their preparedness for this aspect of their future careers.

3. Could you share specific examples or experiences from your training where you've encountered challenges or opportunities related to cultural inclusivity in music education? How did you handle these situations?

**Rationale:** This question delves into personal experiences and challenges related to cultural inclusivity in music education. It helps the researcher understand how participants have encountered and navigated real-world scenarios during their training, providing context for their perspectives and the strategies they mentioned in the previous question.

4. From your perspective, what are the potential implications of promoting cultural relevance and cultural inclusivity in the music curriculum within urban school settings, and how might these changes impact students and their learning experiences?

**Rationale:** Building on the third research question, this question seeks to uncover the potential implications of cultural relevance in the music curriculum. Participants' responses will offer insights into their understanding of the broader impact on students' learning experiences, aligning with your research question about the implications of cultural relevance and inclusivity.

5. As a future music educator, how do you envision the role of teacher preparation and professional development programs in enhancing your ability to meet the unique needs of



BIPOC students? Are there specific practices or training elements you believe should be emphasized?

**Rationale:** To address the fourth research question concerning teacher preparation and professional development, this question prompts participants to envision their future roles as music educators. It invites them to consider how their training can be improved to better meet the needs of BIPOC students and prepares them for suggesting specific practices and training elements

6. Can you reflect on any personal experiences or insights that have shaped your understanding of the importance of cultural relevance in music education? How have these experiences influenced your aspirations as a music educator?

**Rationale:** This question encourages participants to reflect on personal experiences and insights that have shaped their understanding of cultural relevance in music education. Their experiences and self-reflection can provide context for their aspirations and motivations as future music educators.

7. How do you see the concept of “culturally relevant pedagogy” and “culturally sustaining pedagogy” being integrated into your future role as a music educator? What steps or strategies do you believe will be essential for fostering a culturally relevant classroom environment?

**Rationale:** To explore the integration of cultural competence in their future roles, this question invites participants to consider the practical steps and strategies they believe will be essential for

creating a culturally inclusive classroom environment, aligning with the research focus on cultural relevance and inclusivity.

8. What do you think are the key challenges and opportunities that college-level programs should consider when preparing students for careers in music education with a focus on cultural relevance and inclusivity?

**Rationale:** The final question addresses the challenges and opportunities in college-level programs, which are vital for understanding how future music educators are prepared. It ties into the research question about how college programs can better prepare students to meet the needs of BIPOC students in K- 12 settings, asking participants to consider key factors to improve their training.

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