

# NARRATIVES OF NOTE: THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIALLY JUST MUSIC EDUCATION

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education (Culture, Curriculum, and Change).

Chapel Hill  
2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

ALISON ELIZABETH LAGARRY: Narratives of Note: The Dynamics of Socially Just Music Education

(Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

The field of music education has historically constructed ‘professional’ music educator identity as divorced from historical, political, and moral commitments, categorizing these responsibilities as components of ‘personal identity. This strategic dissection of identity is in direct opposition to the tenets of Social Justice Education (SJE). In an effort to move toward more inclusive curricula and classroom practice, there has been significant emphasis on multiculturalism over the last fifty years. While the aims of multiculturalism are noble, efforts at highlighting other cultures often become tokenistic in practice and, as such, do not engage with the social and political critique that are central to SJE. Previous research has centered on the merits and practical elements of teaching multicultural perspectives of music, as well as the socialization of pre-service music teachers into the professional field. Recently, however, a few scholars have begun to call for a critical shift in the aims of music education toward social justice. In order to inform music teacher education in support of this critical shift, this study analyzed the personal narratives of seven music educators and one visual art educator who maintain moral, ethical, and political commitments toward equity in their teaching practice. The study sought to answer the following research questions: What are the life experiences of music educators who take a stance toward social justice in their work? What are their conceptualizations of social justice, and how have these conceptions been constructed as such? How do these music educators conceive of their own identity and agency regarding issues of social justice? The study

used personal narrative inquiry as both methodology and frame. Findings suggest that the participants see unique possibilities for socially just music education practice, despite significant instrumental and conceptual constraints. There was variation apparent in the way that participants engage with and seek to accept or resist constraints. Thus, there exists dynamic a space of agency in between these possibilities and constraints, where music educators make moves to engage in socially just practice. The degree to which each participant resists or desires to resist constraints is grounded in their positional identities and life experiences.

This work is dedicated to Imogenecoco Pierce McDonald, whose friendship and mentorship inspired me to expand my vision of possibility and care in the classroom; and to the eight educators who participated in this study, who shared their stories and time with me this past year. Although I cannot name you, I am inspired by your presence and persistence in the field of music education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

There are more people that have contributed to my understanding of social justice in music education than I can formally thank here. I do, however, hope to acknowledge some specific mentors, friends, family members, and colleagues that have provided significant support and inspiration for me during this journey. First, I would like to thank all members of my dissertation committee. To George, thank you for continually challenging my understanding of the social world around me, and helping me to apply my expanding critical awareness to my relationships and my work. Thank you for providing me with research and writing opportunities where I have been able to apply these new skills and knowledge. Finally, thank you for believing in my ideas and allowing me the opportunity to ask questions that have no easy answers. To Charles, thank you for pushing me to see the great wealth and richness of personal narratives; your feedback and insight provided the inspiration for the design of this study. To Dan, thank you for the opportunity to dialogue openly about the field of music education, and for being so generous with your time and teaching. To Xue, your Critical Multicultural Education course was my first course in the Ph.D. program, and laid the foundation for this study and my future academic path. Thank you for pushing me to answer difficult questions, and for making me see connections between my thinking and larger discourses. To Silvia, thank you for challenging me to view social justice beyond binaries, and for introducing me to critical communities and the idea of self-care. These are two components of critical work that have sustained me throughout my doctoral studies.

I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without the camaraderie, support, and advice of my own critical community. To my academic big sister, friend, and colleague Ashley, thank you for your generous mentorship and feedback throughout this process. I am so thankful that we have been able to maintain our close friendship now that you are a professor on the other side of the country! To Mandy, my comps and dissertation buddy, I would never have made it through the last two years without you by my side to laugh, cry, commiserate, and celebrate. Thank you for so much; it has meant the world to me to have someone to share in this journey of emotion and accomplishments. To Tim C., my intellectual and literal neighbor, our projects together have helped me to delve deeper into theory and have inspired my framework for this study. Thank you for your insight, your unique sense of humor, and your extreme generosity. To Summer and Hillary, my C.C.C. ladies, thank you for your willingness to claim our cohort as friendly colleagues rather than competitors. We have shared our challenges and successes throughout this journey; I hope that we continue to rely on our friendship as a source of support and celebration. To Esmeralda, your honesty and wit have been pushed me to think differently about many things. Thank you for all of our critical conversations, and for the not-so-critical ones, too.

During Summers 2012 and 2013, I had the opportunity to work with an amazing group of individuals who challenged my understanding of social justice on a daily basis. To my Freedom School family, thank you for your intense dedication, your energy, and your commitment to re-imagining education as equitable, joyful, and relevant. Special thanks to my Freedom School leadership colleagues: Cheryal, Carolina, and Morgan. To Andy, thank you for your continuing friendship, and for speaking success into existence for the both of us. I am so proud of your recent accomplishments, and hope to collaborate again soon.

My family has provided me with a constant source of support, and a meaningful foundation for valuing relationships and roots. To my extensive web of aunts, uncles, and cousins, your frequent check-ins throughout this process have lightened my spirits, and reminded me that I am but one part of a larger constellation. To my Grandma Sullivan, thank you for introducing me to the world of music and for providing me with a model of strength. To my Grandma LaGarry, thank you teaching me to find joy and laughter in hard work. To my Grandpa LaGarry, thank you for showing me that storytelling has deep tradition and meaning, and can serve to strengthen relationships and community. To Mom and Dad, thank you for not only supporting my dreams, but striving to learn more about my work and evolving perspective at every step of the way. You've both shown me that one should approach new challenges with courage, humor, and compassion, and that goals are most easily accomplished when you accept the help of those who are willing to hold you up in difficult times. To my brother Timmy, your strength and persistence inspire me every single day; I truly admire your ability to make daring choices in the interest of your own well-being and happiness.

Finally, to James, thank you for your constant unflagging support and patience throughout this process. It has meant so much that we could pursue our work as educators together over the last several years. Your kind presence and humor serve to ground me, and help me push past my anxieties and fears. Thank you for listening to my ideas, and inspiring me to do my very best work.



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

HBCU	Historically Black College or University
HHBE	Hip-Hop Based Education
SJE	Social Justice Education
TFUMM	Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major

## **PART I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The field of music education has historically constructed ‘professional’ music educator identity as divorced from historical, political, and moral commitments, categorizing these responsibilities as components of ‘personal’ identity (Woodford, 2005). Though some scholars, such as Campbell, Thompson & Barrett (2010), Bernard (2005) and Dolloff (1999, 2007), have insisted that personal identity has a place in the field, the prevailing research largely maintains professional music identity as separate. This strategic separation of the professional field from political, historical, and moral responsibility has falsely allowed music educators to portray the field as a open and accessible to all. In this regard, music educators tout their field as one that is already inclusive, and perhaps not deserving of further critique. In divorcing the profession of music education from political and moral obligation, there is a distinct opposition to the aims of social justice education.

Social Justice Education (SJE) is a specific orientation that calls for educators to examine hegemonic power structures and create space for critique of those structures within the classroom. As Bell (1997) stated, “the goal of social justice education is both a process *and* a goal...The process for attaining the goal of social justice should [be] democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create

change” (pp. 3-4). A major tenet of a social justice orientation to education is the implication of the educator in the very same hegemonic structure they wish to critique. Thus, the personal identity of the educator is always implicated in professional identity. Any effort to maintain personal identity as outside the realm of teaching, then, is an effort to preserve the myth of schooling and teaching as neutral and non-political (Hinchey, 2004).

In the face of not just changing, but *changed* demographics of American public school students, the teaching force is still largely made up of White individuals. The field of music education has only recently begun to call for a shift in the way the field conceives of multiculturalism and culturally relevant or culturally sensitive pedagogy (Abril, 2013; Allsup and Shieh, 2012; Elliot, 1995; Jorgensen, 2002, 2003; Gustafson, 2009). In November 2014, the Task Force for Undergraduate Music Majors (TFUMM) put forth a report entitled *Transforming Music Study From its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors*. One central question considered by the task force was “What contributions can music study make to broader educational and societal issues, including cultural diversity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary understanding, ecological and cultural sustainability, and social justice?” (Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major, 2014, p. 10) The TFUMM proposes that undergraduate music curricula should, necessarily, put greater emphasis on creativity, diversity, and integration within the music curriculum. While the recommendations that TFUMM makes are laudable, they are notably focused on curriculum and not on the individuals who make up the field – neither students nor instructors. A shift in emphasis in music learning is largely framed as a way for music graduates to be more competitive in the job market. This ‘relevancy’ is a departure from the cultural relevancy or

responsiveness evoked by Ladson-Billings (2006), and perhaps misses the point. Again, the personal identity of musicians, music educators, and music students is obscured.

Throughout my experience in the field, I have always found that music education has been portrayed as a subject that easily incorporates multiculturalism, thereby achieving cultural relevancy. It is my belief that this fallacy has led to a lack of critical reflection within the field. Through selection of repertoire or songs, music educators have attempted to highlight particular cultures or musical traditions. These educators, including myself, have validated this tokenistic practice, stating that by programming music from various traditions, we are acknowledging the experiences and learning needs of culturally diverse students (Jorgensen, 2002). Though I am in agreement with the idea that all musical traditions are deserving of a place of stature within school music programs, I feel that this practice stops short of recognizing the social and political contexts of classrooms. Having said this, I believe that music educators must consider the fact that content, classroom instruction, and institutional structure can serve as oppressive forces that obscure the personal identity of both student and teacher.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the personal narratives of music educators who seek to maintain ethical, moral, and political commitments toward equity and justice within their classrooms. In working with these music educators to co-construct narratives regarding their pathway to and practice in the field, I sought to gain insight into the experiences that influence their identity construction. Additionally, I hoped to gain a better understanding of participants' sense of agency and how that might allow for engagement in social action through music education. Strategically, I recruited participants who claim to orient their practice toward equity. In other words, participants in the study are teachers who *already* construct themselves

narratively as educators committed to conveying an inclusive aesthetic and music education practice. Detailed information regarding participant recruitment is included in Chapter 3 below.

Chase (2011) stated that narrative data mined from situations where things are *working* could be as analytically rich as data gathered in situations that are neither just, nor desirable:

[W]e have as much to learn from narrative inquiry into environments where something is working as we do from inquiry into environments where injustice reigns. And I don't believe we have to give up intellectual skepticism to ask these questions. When something is working – when individuals, groups, or communities marshal ordinary resources in their everyday lives to strengthen their relationships and their communities – what is going on narratively in those environments? (Chase, 2011, p. 431)

For this study, I chose this particular course as a way to take first scholarly steps into “a profession in North America that conceives of itself as continuously under threat” (Gould, 2012, p. 82). This “siege mentality,” described by Gould, highlights the tenuous position of music programs in the American school curriculum, and allows music educators to rationalize a “near obsessive focus on advocacy” (p. 82). Indeed, this threat is not unfounded. Arts programs are frequently discontinued as a way of cutting school budgets in lean economic times, threatening the livelihood and economic security of individuals in the field. Because of this, I am wary of entering the field of music education research without first listening to those who currently embody the actions and perspectives that I hope the field can embrace. As Chase (2011) stated, “An interest in what works requires a focus on the urgency of speaking and the urgency of being heard, as well as on what it means to listen” (Chase, 2011, pg. 431).

### **Nature of the Study**



In order to examine the dimensions of music educator experience and identity, this qualitative study employed narrative inquiry as the primary methodology (Chase, 2011; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; Riessman, 2008). I sought to answer the following research questions: What are the life experiences of music educators who take a stance toward social justice in their work? What are their conceptualizations of social justice, and how have these conceptions been constructed as such? How do these music educators conceive of their own identity and agency regarding issues of social justice? Data was collected from a series of semi-structured interviews with seven currently practicing music educators and one visual arts educator. Though participants are described in detail below, it is necessary to state here that my conception of music education was purposefully broad for this study. Music educators who take a stance of social justice toward their work exist in many realms outside of traditional classroom music, and sometimes purposefully choose alternative settings in pursuit of more socially just teaching environments. As Koza (2008) stated, there exists “social funding of whiteness” in the gate-keeping technologies that allow admittance into the profession of music teaching. Once accepted into the field, pre-service teachers are socialized into practices and curricula that promote an exclusive formalist aesthetic of music (Gustafson, 2009). Thus, in order to pursue socially just teaching practices, music educators may need to step outside of the traditional school music setting. These settings, for example, may include church music programs, initiatives in various musical styles such as hip-hop or blues, or in-school or afterschool music initiatives.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the potential to interpret experiences that influence music educators to take up a stance of social justice. It was of particular interest to determine whether the identity-shaping experiences detailed by participants took place as part of formal

music education training, or other seemingly unrelated experiences. I believe this information, though specific to the context and history of the individual, might be of use to both practitioners as well as music teacher educators. For music education practitioners, the information gleaned from this study could be significant in varying ways. For those already committed to issues of social justice and equity in thought, but who struggle to connect this stance to classroom practice, the findings of this study could represent a glimpse of solidarity within the field. By highlighting the narratives of others in the field that ascribe to a similar way of thinking, music educators might seek out like-minded communities of practice. Also, the various descriptions of daily professional practice, might serve as inspiration for those in search of more inclusive curricular options. For those who are skeptical about the practicality of implementing a more inclusive musical aesthetic, the narratives of participants could serve, as Chase (2011) stated above, as examples of what one might accomplish with “ordinary resources.”

This study is also significant for the field of music teacher education, as a step toward identifying experiences, specific to the context of music education, that may help pre-service teachers to enact more socially just, anti-oppressive teaching practices. Many music educators are trained in programs that prepare them to teach White, middle-class students (Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Koza, 2008). Though curricular requirements often include a university course in social foundations of education, these courses often exist outside of a musical context, leaving pre-service music teacher without concrete examples of equitable practices and pedagogy in a music classroom setting. Ladson-Billings (2006) suggested, “most pre-service teachers enter a program that ghettoizes issues of diversity” and that curricular organization “suggest[s] that issues of diversity and social justice are tangential to the enterprise” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 38). I believe that findings from this study can bring contextual specificity to the field, in light of

Ladson-Billings' critique. Ultimately, I believe the findings from this study have the potential to influence music teacher educators to incorporate social justice education on a broader scale, as opposed to one "ghettoized" course in diversity or social foundations. Finally, I believe this study will contribute to a slowly growing body of literature, initiated by a group of like-minded music educator-scholars, that questions traditional aims and curricula in the field of music education (Allsup and Shieh, 2012; Gould, 2012; Jorgensen, 2002, 2003; TFUMM, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) stated, "Research methods and theory are all too often taught separately and implicitly portrayed as having different natures" (p.3). In line with these authors, I believe that "methods are ideas and theories in themselves" (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 3). Thus, the choice to center narrative in research is not only methodology, but also a specific theoretical framework for understanding participant identity construction and experience.

Analyses of personal narratives, beyond the contributions they make to specific areas of empirical research, can also serve to reorient theories about the relationships between the individual and the social by calling attention to the social and cultural dynamics through which the individuals construct themselves as social actors. In so doing, they have the potential constructively to intervene in the theoretical impasse resulting from the collision between skepticism of hegemonic individualism, on the one hand, and the persistent, even increasingly urgent interest in understanding selfhood and human agency, on the other. (Maynes et al., p. 2)

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, narratives are constructed in social and cultural spheres; they are neither monolithic, nor fixed. In examining how music educators have constructed themselves as agentic actors committed to equity, narratives provide a rich site for analysis.

Analysis of personal narratives are most effective when, rather than conceptualizing narrators as autonomous agents whose testimony offers transparent insights into human motivation, they explicitly recognize the complex social and historical processes involved in the construction of the individual self and, more deeply, of the ideas about selfhood and human agency that inform personal narrative accounts. (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 16)

For this study, narrative highlights a site of understanding that is vital for understanding how individuals construct identities in relation and opposition to hegemonic social structures that pervade the ‘professional’ realm of music education. Narrative also privileges ‘meaning-making’ in a way that unpacks assumptions about what knowledge is and how it is valued and shared.

Also framing this study are the assumptions of postcritical ethnography, in which dominant ideologies and power structures are viewed through a critical lens. In postcritical ethnography, critique is particular to the researcher, as well as socially constructed (Noblit et al., 2004). I acknowledge that my voice as a former practitioner of music education is present throughout the design, methodology, and interpretation of data. As noted by Noblit et al. (2004),

Objectivity is usually eschewed in postcritical ethnographies, but is never fully escaped whenever ethnographic interpretations are inscribed. The act of writing inscribes a critical interpretation that exists beyond the intention of the author to de-objectify, dereify, or demystify what is studied. (p. 22)

Post-critical ethnography stems from critique of positivist epistemologies and is situated in the complementary projects of postmodernism and post-structuralism – both described by Noblit et al. (2004) as postfoundational. Each of these suggests a departure from the researcher’s quest for omniscient objectivity, and from the push to derive grand narratives from research. Rather, post-critical ethnographers seek to maintain complexity and make clear the perspectives and

commitments of all involved in the intellectual endeavor, including the researcher. Noblit et al. (2004) outlined this commitment:

[Postcritical research endeavors] require considerable theoretical and methodological thought. They involve working through positionality, reflexivity, objectification, representation, and critical sufficiency. Postcritical ethnographies in an important sense are not designed, but enacted or produced as moral activity. Postcritical ethnographies then must assume they exist within a critical discourse that in part makes them responsible for the world they are producing when they interpret and critique. (p. 24)

The details and assumptions of narrative inquiry will be discussed in further detail in the Chapter 3 below.

### **Potential Limitations**

Alongside the justifications for selecting narrative inquiry as a theoretical frame and methodology for this study, there are a number of potential limitations. First, personal narratives are constructed by individuals, in particular contexts, at specific points in history. Because of this, it will not be appropriate to claim that findings from the study will generalize to the larger population of music educators, though readers might attempt to do so. Throughout the analysis and writing phases of the study, I have attempted to maintain context and temporal sequence as much as possible when comparing across narratives. The value of the study, then, is in the attention to specific actor's narratives regarding their experiences within the field. Another potential limitation of this study is the fact that I studied participants' *constructions* of their practice, rather than their actual practice. It is possible that their conceptions could differ greatly from their actual teaching practice. Amidst the aims of narrative inquiry, however, this is of less concern, as the primary area of interest is in the "unique insights into the connections between

individual life trajectories and collective forces and institutions beyond the individual. [Personal narratives] thus offer a methodologically privileged location from which to comprehend human agency” (Maynes et al, 2008, p. 3). Issues regarding validity, trustworthiness, and generalizability will be addressed in Chapter 3.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

I live and write as a White heterosexual American woman, who was raised in a working class town on the U.S./Canadian Border. After graduating from high school, I attended a predominately white institution (PWI) where I was not challenged to interrogate my White racial identity and the privilege that I experienced because of it. It was not until my first music teaching placement that a student challenged me to consider the role of my race in the context of the classroom power structure. Her statement, “Chorus is a White class,” critiqued the harsh emphasis I placed on classroom order. She also stated that choir at my school had traditionally been perceived as a “White class” based on the type of music programmed, and it didn’t seem like I was doing anything to meet the needs of students of color. An intense focus on appearing competent and professional had outweighed my values and commitments to socially just teaching practices, neglecting examination of my dominant positionality. My reaction to this humbling exchange was the first of many periods of critical reflection about my practice and my training. Through my students’ reaction and blunt feedback, I began to see that a focus on multiculturalism was not the same as being a critical music educator.

Moving forward from study as a teacher educator and academic, I realize that I am working both within and against the system. As a researcher, I occupy a position of power much like that of a teacher in the front of a classroom. Teachers and researchers have traditionally been accorded the power to make judgments about ability and saliency, and to delineate between good

and bad. I acknowledge this contradiction, as well as my own tensions, fears, and struggle as I seek to explore conceptions of social justice, power, and privilege in music classrooms. Most importantly, I recognize my complicity in harmful practices that have abused the power of my position, even as I seek practices that encourage, engage, and lift up.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to outline current scholarly debate, this section includes a discussion of literature from music education and social justice education. Because narrative inquiry focuses on identity construction, I will first discuss how identity is conceptualized theoretically in the field of music education.

### **Conceptualizing Identity in Music Education**

In education literature and research, there are varying definitions of identity. Speaking specifically from the field of music education, Woodford (2002) defined identity as “an imaginative view or role that individuals project for themselves in particular social positions, occupations, or situations” (p. 675). Most of the current scholarship in music education suggests that identity is socially constructed. Also implicit in this definition is that projected identities must be hailed or recognized by others in the world. As Gee (2000) stated,

One cannot have an identity of any sort without some interpretive system underwriting the recognition of that identity. The interpretive system may be people’s historically and culturally different views of nature; it may be the norms, traditions, and rules of institutions; it may be the discourse and dialogue of others; or it may be the workings of affinity groups. (p.108)

Here, Gee detailed four ways to view identity, based on the assumption that identities are not free from the grip of historical, institutional, and sociocultural powers or forces. These views include: nature-identity, institution-identity, discourse-identity, and affinity-identity. Each of these four views is salient in a discussion concerning identity in the field of music education. In this



particular theoretical viewpoint of identity construction, power is highlighted rather than obscured. For example, in explaining institutional-identity Gee (2000) contended, “Institutional realities create positions from which certain people are expected and sometimes forced to act” (p. 108). Though he insisted that an individual might resist this institutional expectation they could, nonetheless, be recognized and addressed as the identity they resist.

Also concerned with the turn from modernism, Gee (2000) described how discourse-identities might function in a postmodern sense and how emphasis has been moved “from individuals and the identities that seem to be a part of their ‘individuality’ to the discursive, representational, and semiotic processes through which identities are created, sustained, and contested” (pg. 114). Thus, in a ‘modern’ society, identity is situated in individuals who earn or merit their standing through agentic performance and discourse that is free of constraint from larger institutional structures. Referring to the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Gee explained the postmodern critique of identity, “People’s individual minds are formed out of, and always continue to reflect, social interactions in which they engaged as they acquired their ‘native’ language or later academic languages in school” (p. 114). Furthermore, any small pieces of language or discourse that are heard, uttered, or observed are “recirculated” to create the discourse that builds individual identity – situating identity, again, as a social construct.

A critique of modernism is also reflected in a shift in music education philosophy occurring in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. This shift opened the door for the study of music educator identity as a social construct. At that time, a contingent of music education scholars published works that encouraged a re-thinking of the aims of music education (Alperson, 1994; Bowman, 1994; Elliot, 1995; Jorgensen, 2002, 2003; Regelski, 1998). Each noted that advances in technology, as well as shifting demographics of American public school students, led them to

question the relevancy of current music education practices. These traditional aims were largely based on aesthetic formalist philosophy that dealt with developing responsiveness to music (Reimer, 1989). Bowman (1994) agreed that responsiveness should be a core aim of music education, but he also warned that this might lead to deterministic value judgments about musical styles and traditions that deny personal preference and other musical cultures. Western Classical music and the associated requisite skills have generally been given privileged status in the field, and even today many music educators aim to pass on the associated tenets and practices. This has had the effect of devaluing musical styles and cultures that fall outside the Western tradition and, in turn, denying validity of personal identities that rely on and celebrate these ‘othered’ traditions.

Elliot (1995) proposed a praxial philosophy of music education that focused on the practice of music making, or *musicking*, a conception of music as a verb rather than a noun. Using this language shift, Elliot sought to denote a distinct focus on music as action and practice. He stated that music is an inherently social action that has the potential to “preserve a sense of community and self-identity within social groups” (pg. 296). Another aim of this approach, as outlined by Alperson (1994), is to give value and meaning to all musical cultures within the practice of music education. Alperson (1994) stated:

The praxial view of art resists the suggestion that art can be best understood on the basis of some universal or absolute feature or set of features such as aesthetic formalism, whether of the strict or enhanced [expressionist] variety. The attempt is made, rather, to understand art in terms of the variety of meaning and values evidenced in actual practice in particular cultures (p. 233-234).

In other words, under the praxial philosophy of music education, students are encouraged to construct their own meaning and value for a given musical experience. In practice, this particular standpoint would provide a space for the inclusion of personal identity in the field of music education.

### **Personal and Professional Identities in Music Education Scholarship**

There is significant research in music education regarding the occupational or professional identity development of music teachers (Bernard, 2005; Doloff, 1999, 2007; Isbell, 2008; Woodford, 2002). Much of this research has framed occupational identity development in terms of socialization, which Isbell (2008) described as “the process by which a person learns to adopt, develop, and display actions and role behaviors typical of, and unique to a profession” (p. 163). In general, the term socialization refers to the process by which one learns and adapts to the normative values, attitudes, and customs of a culture or society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Socialization, for Isbell, is specifically focused on learning the norms and customs of a *profession* and consists of both primary socialization and secondary socialization. During primary socialization, individuals observe their surroundings and significant others within those contexts. Additionally, they observe the actions, attitudes, performances, and discourses related to particular roles and identities. Secondary socialization refers to the acquisition of “behaviors and vocabularies” that are particular to a professional field, and usually occurs as part of apprenticeship/trade training, or college degree programs. Isbell (2008) stated that the purpose of secondary socialization is “to transform lay conceptions into professional conceptions” (p. 163). In a quantitative study designed to investigate the socialization and occupational identity of music educators, Isbell’s findings suggested, “Experiences from primary socialization account for a marginal amount of variance with respect to [occupational] identity” (2008, p. 176).

Furthermore, Isbell found that “Experiences associated with secondary socialization in particular are a consistently significant predictor of occupational identity” (p. 176).

From a critical perspective, there are several assumptions to be questioned in Isbell’s (2008) study of occupational identity in pre-service music educators. First, the study relied on the assumption that most music majors have significant primary socialization experiences in *traditional school* music settings and come from musical homes (Isbell, 2008; Woodford, 2002). Additionally, Isbell cited research stating that many individuals who choose to major in music education make that decision in high school. Based on these assumptions, which imply *relatively* similar primary socialization experiences, it makes sense that there is little variance in occupational identity based on primary socialization. This perspective is in line with much of the available scholarship on music education identity in that it seeks to promote the idea that ‘professional’ or occupational identity can be construed as “void of self” (Spruce, 2012). In other words, theorization of identity in the field of music education is still largely based in the ideals of rationalism or empiricism and what Woodford (2005) refers to as a “separateness of mind and matter” (p. 186). That said, there are those in the field who seek to challenge this strategic fracturing of identity in the music classroom, and construct the field as inseparable from moral, political, and ethical responsibility.

Several music education researchers have attempted to address the glaring absence of ‘self’ in consideration of music teacher preparation (Bernard, 2005; Campbell, Thompson, & Barrett, 2010; Dolloff, 1999, 2007). For each of these scholars, identity takes on a complex and fluid dimension. Bernard (2005) positioned identity as “processual, as positions and contexts that constantly shift, and as constructed on multiple levels. The positions and contexts [referred] to include gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, and status” (p. 5). She also included professional

identities in her list of positions, noting that, for her, these include musician, teacher, and researcher. Dolloff (2007) agrees, “Identity is a complex phenomenon existing not as a unitary subjectivity, but in multiple layers, in webs, or as multi-faceted” (p. 3). Each of these definitions makes space for personal identity in a conversation of occupational socialization in that each allows for multiple complex and interactive identities. Because complexity is maintained in these conceptions of identity, Bernard (2005) and Dolloff (2007) resist positioning personal and professional as separable. Dolloff (2007) specifically stated, “developing a personal pedagogy results from the *interaction* between an individual’s beliefs and skills” (p. 193).

A consideration of personal identity in music teacher education takes into account not only personal narratives aimed specifically at the profession, but also personal conceptions and beliefs about the ways knowledge is produced (Campbell et al., 2010). The purpose of this assertion is not to claim essentialist or static views about the epistemologies based on individuals’ positional identities, but rather to say that interactions with people in specific contexts lead to certain beliefs, assumptions and values. Making sense of the world, through the lens of identity, includes consideration of those positional identities that are projected by the individual, ascribed by institutions, and the ways in which positional identities are accepted, resisted, or fully rejected. Each of these stances toward, or experiences with identity influences the way that we interact with others. Campbell et al. (2010) stated,

A personal orientation to music teaching and learning looks at all participants in the educational process from a dynamic perspective. That is, as we continue to deepen and extend our knowledge of self and others, it is always in the service of more and better teaching. We are not only present oriented; we are also past and future oriented in our thinking about teaching. Most importantly, a personal orientation framework helps us to

understand ourselves; it helps us to understand the music experiences we value, the places and situations that support learning and the ways we can help others. (p. 2)

Thus, a ‘re-marriage’ of professional identity and self within music teacher education involves a political, moral, and ethical stance. Though Campbell et al. (2010) seek to claim a personal orientation to music teacher education as separate from a critical orientation, it is my belief that these two orientations have much in common. To put things another way, I agree with Jorgensen (2002, 2003) in her contention that music teacher education must aim for a more dialogic or liberating model that acknowledges the learner’s autonomy in construction of knowledge.

In considering the how specific identities are promoted and others denied in the world of music education, some music education scholars have sought to highlight the injustice they observed in the field. Koza (2008) drew from personal observations working within a university music education program to theorize about a potential career tracking system that exists in the field of music education that privileges and commodifies certain identities – namely middle class White identities. In other words, those who are granted access to the field of university music education may gain this very access due to gatekeeping technologies that place high value on *specific* common experiences during primary socialization. Additionally, Koza stated that university audition requirements represent a social funding of race in the field of music education that materializes whiteness.

Focusing on the school music classroom, Gustafson (2009) identified several practices of music educators that devalue any musical response outside of the sanctioned, literacy-based classical tradition. She noted “good” music students are constructed as having a “good ear” and “quiet body.” These technologies stem from historical foundations of the field of music education aimed at creating “tame” and “docile” citizens. Furthermore, Gustafson used the word

*entrainment* to describe the process of training students to react to music in a prescribed manner. Gustafson noted that there is a desired, even sanctioned, musical response that “governs body, diction, and affect to produce participatory limits” (2009, p. xii). Thus, students whose musical culture - outside of formal schooling - contradicts the trope of musical response as quiet, still, reserved, and reflective are rendered as “illegible musical persons” (Gustafson, 2009). This critical scholarship in music education represents an attempt by music scholars in the field to move the field toward more socially just aims and pedagogy.

### **Social Justice Education**

Although definitions of SJE vary, most scholars agree that the foundation for this perspective is based in critical theory and a willingness to challenge knowledge that has been constructed as ‘common sense’. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) defined critical theory as “a specific scholarly approach that explores the historical, cultural, and ideological lines of authority that underlie social conditions” (p. 1). In order to truly explore these “lines of authority,” an educator must be willing to interrogate the information they have come to see as common sense so that they may “understand the meaning given to information” and “the political investments involved in that meaning” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 2). Further, a social justice educator would be critical of knowledge claims in terms of who benefits, and who is limited by such claims. Another underlying assumption of SJE is the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and heavily influenced by hegemonic ideologies and discourses; it is not “rational, objective or value-neutral” in nature (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Bell (1997) described the goal of social justice in detail,

“The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which

distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure...Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole.” (p. 3)

In other words, despite Foucauldian critique regarding the death of the subject – and agency along with it - social justice educators maintain the perspective that social change is possible through the work of agentic actors (Bettez, 2008).

Hackman (2005) defined SJE as “ a perspective that empowers, encourages students to think critically, and models social change” (p. 103). In order to accomplish these aims, she identified five components of SJE – framed as a set of tools including those for content mastery, critical thinking, action and social change, personal reflection, and awareness of multicultural group dynamics (Hackman, 2005, p. 103). Across the field of SJE, there is the implicit assumption that social justice education involves a combination of both theory and practice (Bell, 1997; Bettez, 2008; Hackman, 2005). Hackman (2005) also highlighted the trouble of assuming that multicultural education is necessarily socially just:

The lack of clarity about what multicultural education really is from the onset has allowed some educators to claim they are teaching from a multicultural perspective when they are really coming from a very limited, uncritical, tolerance-based perspective. (p. 108)

In pursuit of social justice then, it is necessary for social justice educators to consider that even knowledge constructed as liberatory may reinforce and reproduce oppressive discourses.

Because social justice educators must position themselves as complicit in an unjust social system, there are unique and significant demands on those who seek to pursue this activist



project. Bettez (2008) described the “emotional challenges” of participating in such a projects as involving “the disruption of our worldview, the demands on our energies, and the struggle of building supportive communities” (p. 274). She also outlined several dimensions of activist teaching including: promoting mind/body connection; conducting artful facilitation; engaging in explicit discussions of power, privilege, and oppression; maintaining compassion for students; believing that change toward justice is possible; exercising self-care; and building critical communities (Bettez, 2008).

### **Social Justice in Music Education**

Ladson-Billings (2006) stated that culturally relevant teachers “assume that an asymmetrical (even antagonistic) relationship exists between poor students of color and society. Thus, [the teacher’s] vision of their work is one of preparing students to combat inequity by being highly competent and critically conscious” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 30). As discussed above, issues of diversity are often “ghettoized” or portrayed as separate from the skills and content associated with music education. With this in mind, music teacher preparation programs that wish to promote social justice must politicize and problematize education *within the context of the music classroom*. Without concrete connections, pre-service music educators may continue to see the field as exempt from including student voice and political commitments in an authentic manner. Equally troubling, pre-service music teachers may seek to claim innocence or neutrality for the field, seeing diverse repertoire choice as having sufficiently addressed multiculturalism within the classroom curriculum (Gustafson, 2009; Hackman, 2005). Also implicit in this assertion is the need to make visible the power that a teacher has in the classroom. In bringing this power to light, one could better understand how power, combined with other individual and group identities, can serve to either encourage or deny personal experience. This is especially

pertinent in situations where a White music educator is working in classrooms teaching students that are culturally different from them. For these educators it is important to examine and make visible their racial identity, as well as their complicity in the hegemonic racial ideology that confers an additional position of dominance (Applebaum, 2010; Gustafson, 2009; Sleeter, 2013).

Even as music educators seek to make space for what Allsup and Shieh (2012) refer to as a public pedagogy, it follows that asserting personal identity in spaces where it has traditionally been denied will continue to involve a high level of risk. Thus, music educators at all levels must be prepared to respond to these assertions in ways that are affirming, but must also be willing to risk their own vulnerability so that students may offer critique. Applebaum (2010) suggested that humility, uncertainty, and critique emphasizing listening are dispositions that allow educators to maintain vigilant responsibility in acknowledging oppressive social ideologies. In preparing music educators to reclaim ‘self’ and so-called ‘personal identity’ as relevant and welcomed in the classroom, university curricula must include these as acceptable and worthwhile dispositions, stepping away from more traditional tropes such as control, management, and authority.

Another specific consideration for the field of music is the fact that both time and space for critical dialogue in the everyday classroom are perceived as limited. Fitzpatrick (2012) described her experience in “losing an entire rehearsal” to discuss the racial context of a band arrangement. In a field that emphasizes public performance as product, music teachers are often unwilling to give up rehearsal time, which is already lessened by other school priorities such as remediation for high-stakes testing. Thus, taking time from a rehearsal for critical discussion or engagement entails risking the potential quality of public performance. It is also likely that the tenuous position of music education in the public school curriculum prevents those within the field from offering critique for fear that music programs may be cut altogether. Additionally, in

the current high stakes testing climate, music educators often celebrate the fact that their subject area is not tested, and therefore maintains autonomy in curricular decision-making. This stance, that regards *other* subject areas as bearing the burden of oppressive schooling practices, allows music teachers to disengage from critique, effectively excusing themselves as not being part of the problem. Overall, literature regarding social justice in music education is limited and deserves significant further study. This study seeks to add to this project and contribute to the growing critical conversation regarding the aims of music education.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This qualitative study used personal narrative inquiry in order to explore the above-stated research questions. This section includes a brief discussion of narrative inquiry methodology and the saliency of this method for studying the development of a stance toward social justice among participating music educators. A description of participants is included, as well as procedures for participant recruitment and consent. Additionally, I describe the data collection process, data analysis, and ethical concerns. Finally, I reflect on the process of data collection, detailing what I found to be successes and challenges presented by the chosen methodology.

#### **Personal Narrative Inquiry**

“Personal narrative analyses have the potential to theorize and investigate a more complex and interesting social actor – constructed through social relationships, embodied in an individual with a real history and psychology, and living and changing through time. Personal narratives are complex forms of evidence that demand sophisticated analytic techniques that build on the recognition of their location at the intersection of the individual and the social” (Maynes et al., 2008, pg. 41).

Narrative inquiry is a particularly salient methodology for exploring individual identities as they relate to, and are formed through interaction with, larger social structures and institutions. In the case of this study, personal narratives were analyzed in order to explore how certain music educators construct themselves and their work as ultimately implicated in a hegemonic social structure. Chase (2011) stated that narrative researchers “are interested in how narrators make sense of personal experience in relation to cultural discourses. [They] treat narratives as a

window to the contradictory and shifting nature of hegemonic discourses, which we tend to take for granted as stable monolithic forces” (p. 422). Within the field of qualitative research, there are differing assumptions regarding the nature of narrative inquiry, as well as various approaches to narrative analysis (Maynes et al., 2008; Chase, 2011). In outlining the design of this study, I have made specific choices regarding which of these approaches is the most appropriate for answering the research questions. In order to understand narrative inquiry, it necessary to first detail the characteristics of narrative.

### **Characteristics of Narrative**

Chase (2011) defined narrative as a “distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (p. 421). Narratives are inherently interpretive, representing the individuals’ construction of meaning, based on their life experiences (Riessman, 2008). Literary and historical logics are both employed in narratives. For example, storied personal narratives are constructed with a beginning, middle, and end, though the temporal sequencing is not always linear (Maynes et al., 2008). Riessman (2008) wrote,

Individuals use the narrative forms to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and even mislead the audience. Groups use stories to mobilize others, and to foster a sense of belonging. Narratives do political work. The social role of stories - how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world – is an important facet of narrative theory. (p. 8)

Indeed, narratives are a type of performance where the interlocutor creates drama through fractures or disjunctures in their story in which “something goes awry: there is a breach in the

expected state of things that awakens response in the audience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 4). The aims of the participant, in constructing a narrative, are chosen strategically based on the perceived audience – in this case, the researcher. Thus, personal narratives are co-constructed, intersubjectively, by both the interlocutor and the researcher.

As in any narrative research, the positionality of the researcher is of vital concern. Just as the researcher seeks to understand the identity of the participant, they must also acknowledge their own interpretive influence present in the process. Maynes et al. (2008) wrote, “prevailing understandings of the self are never monolithic; they can vary according to such contours as gender, social hierarchy, race, religion, or region” (p. 17). Thus, both researchers and participants bring multiple and fluid identities to the construction of narratives, and these identities have significant bearing on the qualitative interpretation. Chase (2012) described the unique relationship between the researcher and participant that is necessary for narrative inquiry:

When researchers gather data through in-depth interviews, they work at transforming the interviewee-interviewer relationship into one of narrator and listener. This requires a shift from the conventional practice of asking research participants to generalize about their experiences (as qualitative researchers often do), to inviting narrators specific stories...When narrative researchers interpret narratives heard during interviews, they begin with the narrators’ voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator-listener (intersubjective) relationship and the active work of listening into the interpretive process. (pp. 423-424)

All components of narrative inquiry, then, are intersubjective and co-constructed, including research design, construction of narratives, transcription, analysis, and formal representation of findings.

Another important characteristic of narratives is that they portray a dual temporality, in other words, they are told through the lens of overlapping contexts. First, events described by interlocutors take place at a particular time and context in history (Maynes et al, 2008). Second, interlocutors describe these past events retrospectively, in their own *current* context and temporality. As participants reflect upon the events that make up their performed narrative, the significance of events will vary at different points in their life. An individual's construction and re-construction of identity over the life course is particularly salient for this study, in that it highlights the evolution of identity and the transformative experiences that inspire this evolution. Indeed, identities are constructed narratively and are used by individuals seeking to tell others who they are, what they represent, and to which groups they belong (Riessman, 2008). In other words, identities are used to express how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences, and how they "make claims about how [they] understand situations, others, and themselves" (Chase, 2011, p. 476). Additionally, constructions of identity hold significant influence on individuals' motivations and conceptions of personal agency: "Personal narrative analysis, we argue, demonstrates that human agency and individual social action is best understood in connection with the construction of self-hood in and through historically specific social relationships and institutions" (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 2).

### **Validity and Generalizability in Narrative Inquiry**

According to Riessman (2008), narrative analysts are generally concerned with two types of validity. First, they are concerned with the trustworthiness the participants' account, and second, the trustworthiness of their own interpretation of participants' accounts. She does qualify, however, that "narrative truths are always partial – committed and incomplete" (Riessman, 2008, p. 186). In establishing trustworthiness of narrative accounts, researchers can take measures to

reveal “correspondence” – for example, verifying events described by participants with historical documents. For the purpose of this study however, trustworthiness and correspondence are less important. Riessman (2008) explained,

For projects relying on social constructionist perspectives, the correspondence of reported events in a personal narrative with other kinds of evidence is not as relevant as in realist tales, sometimes even beside the point. Narrative scholars would generally agree that a narrative is not simply a factual report of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see the events in a similar way. (p. 187)

Extending Riessman’s point, the narrative analyst is more interested in understanding the meaning of participants’ accounts, rather than trustworthiness or validity. Furthermore, Riessman (2008), reiterated that narrative inquiry is a form of ‘case-centered’ inquiry.

Case studies focus attention on narrative detail...Important insights can unfold from the ‘many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories’ of actors in the field. Rather than trying to appeal to readers with an abstract rule or proposition, cases reveal facets, each attracting different readers who can decide the meaning of the case, and interrogate actors’ and narrators’ interpretations in relation to categorical questions...Summarizing and generalizing from case studies may not even be desirable in many instances.” (p. 194)

Despite the above critique, the narrative analyst may seek to make *some* generalization across cases.

Maynes et al. (2008) wrote that narrative researchers seek to maintain contextual specificity of narrative accounts, and thus resist making broad-stroke generalizations. However, they also noted narrative analysts may seek to make specific types of generalizations based not



on the individual participants, but rather on their *stories*. Generalizations focusing on these stories can sometimes be categorized, shifting the analytic focus to “uncovering these stories and revealing their operation in individual cases, and finding out how the stories reveal the constraints and opportunities imaginable at a certain point in time or particular social location and how they influence motivation” (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 132). In narrative inquiry then, “the stories themselves are a central focus of research; their structure and operation as stories reveals social dynamics” (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 133).

Sampling is also a particular concern regarding both validity and generalizability in narrative inquiry. This study uses critical case sampling. Patton (2001) describes this type of purposive sampling as the process of selecting a small number of important cases – cases that are likely to “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (p. 236). Because of this, it is necessary to pay special attention to the make-up of the participant pool, as varying social and cultural positions will influence narrative analysis significantly. Sampling should, as stated by Maynes et al. (2008), “take an eye toward the positions into which it taps, those it silences, and where it fits into the hierarchies of power” (p. 134). As Koza (2008) stated, gatekeeping technologies in the field of music education have served to construct a field of mostly White practitioners. Initially, I felt that this might pose a constraint for the study; however, I had no trouble in recruiting people of color as participants. In fact, at one point I worried about over-representation of African American participants in the sample group. If I were to posit a reason for this over-representation, it would be that these participants are constantly operating in a professional field where that is dominated by White culture, discourses, and music. According to Sensoy & DiAngelo (2012), oppression is often invisible to those in positions of dominance. Conversely, those who experience oppression

personally are more likely to recognize microaggressions or overt oppressive acts when they see them, making them more attune to issues of social justice and equity.

## **Participants**

Participants selected for this study were seven music educators and one visual arts educator who maintain ethical, moral, and political commitments toward equity and justice in their professional teaching practice. All participants were geographically located in the mid-Eastern region of the United States (i.e. from the Atlantic South and Southern Appalachia). I avoided using the official language of social justice pedagogy in my participant recruitment materials to ensure that participants were using their own language and terminology to describe pedagogy aimed at social justice. I provided the following description of a music educator: A *music educator* is anyone who works with people in order to teach musical skills, or facilitate and share in musical participation or activities. This definition is purposefully broad, and aims to include musical facilitators who many not consider themselves to be traditional music educators. As a result, participants were selected from music educators who teach in various settings including traditional school music classrooms, church music programs, initiatives in various musical styles such as hip-hop or blues, and in-school or afterschool drumming programs. Pre-service teachers were not eligible for participation in the study. As stated above, I was mindful of selecting a diverse sample, and attempted to include participants of differing race, ethnicity, age, and gender, as these various social positionalities have significant influence on the experiences and identities of participants. Clyde<sup>1</sup>, the visual art educator who elected to participate in the study, is the husband of Sasha, an elementary school music teacher. He was excited by the premise of the study and asked if he could participate as well. His narrative provided a

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

worthwhile comparison between music and visual arts education, and the opportunities offered by each.

The number of participants (8) selected for this sample allowed for a sufficient number of “stories” to analyze. Maynes et al. (2008) stated, “the number and array of life stories analyzed needs to fit the analytic aims of the research” (p. 134). The goal of the study, as stated above, was to study identity construction, and the meanings that can be derived from these constructions. Participants were recruited via my own network of acquaintances in education and music education including colleagues, professors, and students. As stated above, music educators that are dedicated to social justice may be situated, or may situate themselves, in settings aside from the traditional school music classroom. In line with this, some of the selected participants practiced outside of the traditional school music setting in non-profit organizations, charter schools, and programs aimed at preserving heritage culture.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected in the form of semi-structured, personal narrative interviews in a three-part interview process, as outlined by Seidman (1998). Through this interview process, centering on “in-depth, phenomenologically-based” interviews, the researcher aims to have the participant “construct his or her experience within the topic under study” (Seidman, 1998, p. 9). For the first interview, participants were prompted to tell as much as possible about their experience up to the present time, including early life and experiences, relating specifically to the topic under study. The goal of this interview is to “construct a range of constitutive events in [participants’] past experience that places the participant in the context of their lives” (Seidman, 1998, p. 12). For the purposes this study, the first interview served to establish context for participants’ experiences regarding music education and social justice. The second interview

focused on details of the participants' current experience, which in this case includes the concrete details of their current practice of music education. Seidman (1998) suggested that the researcher ask the participant to reconstruct one day of their present lifestyle, detailing interactions with students, administrators, parents, and community. For the third interview, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience relating to music education and social justice. Seidman (1998) explained that this reflection is not pursued in order to describe satisfaction or reward, but "intellectual and emotional connections between participants' work and life" (p. 12). All interviews were audio-recorded, with consent of participants, and were transcribed in full, resulting in 25.5 hours of audio recording and 305 pages of single-spaced transcript. In addition to interviews, I also collected ethnographic field notes regarding the events surrounding the interviews, as well as the setting.

### **Data Analysis**

Interpretation, or analysis, of narrative accounts is taken up in the study as *bricolage*, or "a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). As the researcher, or *bricoleur*, I attempted to arrange impressions or "images" into a legible representation of participants' stories. A particular characteristic of bricolage is the idea that interpretive method is an "emergent construction" and that new tools or techniques may be necessary in order to realize what Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to as a montage. These authors stated, "Montage uses sparse images to create a clearly defined sense of urgency and complexity. Montage invites viewers to construct interpretations that build on one another as a scene unfolds" (p. 5). In line with the tenets of postcritical ethnography, interpretive bricoleurs see research as an interactive process – a co-construction of the participant and researcher. Thus, tools for interpretation are chosen based on

themes that emerge from collected data. In other words, “the choice of which interpretive practices to employ is not necessarily set in advance” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4).

Based on the themes that emerged from participants’ narratives, I opted to use a combination of thematic and dialogic/performance approaches to analysis (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) elaborated four approaches to narrative analysis, including thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual analysis. Thematic narrative analysis involves “theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants” (p. 74). Effort is made not to fracture data in to smaller bits as would be done in grounded theory. Rather, large pieces of narrative are preserved. However, I attempted to avoid a potential pitfall of thematic analysis in which stories become divorced from context. Riessman stated that dialogic/performance analysis “is not equivalent to thematic and structural, but rather a broad and varied interpretive approach to oral narrative that makes selective use of elements of the other two methods and adds other dimensions” (p. 105). A key characteristic of analysis in narrative inquiry, delineating that approach from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), is the attempt by narrative scholars to “keep a story ‘intact’ by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). In this way, narrative analysts seek to maintain both context and temporal sequence of the stories they collect. Riessman (2008) stated,

[The dialogic/performance approach] requires a close reading of contexts, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of the narrative. Simply put, if thematic and structural approaches interrogate ‘what’ is spoken and ‘how,’ the dialogic/performance approach asks “who” an utterance may be directed to, ‘when’ and ‘why,’ that is, for what purposes? (p. 105)

The research questions for this study, as stated above, are: *What are the life experiences of music educators who take a stance toward social justice in their work? What are their conceptualizations of social justice, and how have these conceptions been constructed as such? How do these music educators conceive of their own identity and agency regarding issues of social justice?* Although it is clear that these are “how” and “what” questions, I firmly believe that the life experiences of music educators were constructed in particular contexts. Social constraints and opportunities are afforded based on institutional power structures, and participant positionality within those hegemonic structures. In sum, socially constructed identities are contingent up on context. Thus, questions of “who,” “when,” and “why” became more and more important as I moved through the analysis phase of this study.

Using Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor, Riessman (2008) noted, “We are forever composing impressions of ourselves, projecting a definition of who we are, and making claims about ourselves and the world that we test out and negotiate with others” (p. 106). For this study, analytic attention was focused on examination of specific foundational stories - including interactions and experiences - when they occur in the participants’ life course, and the motivations that influence the actor at that particular time. Examination of transformative experiences - “fractures” or “turning points” - was especially pertinent for this study.

Following the analytic method described above, I completed analysis by case. In other words, I analyzed the first, second, and third interviews for each participant in succession. Using MAXQDAPlus software, I coded “stories.” These stories were large chunks of data, detailing a specific story or experience. Some of these stories were formative life experiences that shaped their identities or educational philosophies, while others demonstrated their thinking on social injustice. Some reflections and critiques of education put forth by participants were familiar to

me from my own practice, and were easily translatable across cases. After this initial round of coding, I pieced together narratives for each participant, focusing on central experiences that had significantly shaped their identity or informed their practice. These narratives form the text of Part II. Next, I coded larger themes across cases, noting similarities and difference, while still attempting to attend to context. The themes that emerged from this round of coding are discussed in Chapter 12.

### **Ethical Concerns**

All appropriate procedures to preserve confidentiality and protect the interests of participants were taken throughout the study. First, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All appropriate measures have been taken to protect the anonymity and well-being of participants. I provided participants with appropriate consent forms detailing the parameters of the study, the requirements of their participation, and the option to end their participation at any point. As detailed above, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Participants were given the option to decline audio recording. Audio and text files are stored on a password-protected desktop computer located in my home. All names and identifying information have been changed in this dissertation. The three-interview process described above (Seidman, 1998) provides distinct opportunity for working with participants for clarification of details, as well as review of transcripts. Specifically, the third interview in the series was planned as a member-check, wherein each participant had the option to correct any interpretations with which they did not agree. In reality, most participants had a great deal of further information and reflection that they chose to share during the third interview. This prevented significant engagement in consideration of representations.

Because of this, participants were given the opportunity to read the final written representation and offer feedback prior to submission to the graduate school.

### **Reflection on Data Collection**

One of the major challenges of this study was in recruiting participants, not because social justice music educators are hard to find, but because they are *busy*. I received approval from IRB in early February, and put out an initial call for participants that resulted in no responses. Having reflected on this timing, and my own experience, I recalled that the spring semester is one long build to performances (concerts, assembly programs, musicals, graduations, etc.) and adjudications. Truthfully, as a music educator, I would not have volunteered to participate in *anything* extraneous during the semester. As several eventual participants mentioned, music teachers already face significant demands on their time. As Bell (1997) stated, social justice pedagogy takes a significant amount of time both in planning and practice. Social justice music educators, then, are outrageously busy. Because of this, all participants in this study were recruited during the summer. For most, the first and second interviews took place during June, July, or August, and the third interviews took place during the fall when school was back in session. Because of this timing, there are significant considerations to be made about the tone of the data collected.

As noted above, narratives have dual temporality (Maynes et al., 2008). In this study, it is significant that teachers constructed their narratives during the summer months, when school responsibilities were lighter. While responses during the first two interviews did contain significant reflection on time constraints and other teaching challenges, the tone changed significantly in the third interview. In mid-fall, some participants now stood face-to-face with the challenges they described during the first two interviews. Most striking was Dean, a middle



school band teacher who had recently started work at a new school. His tone in the third interview was frustrated, and angry. In the first interviews, he had described students as an abstract othered “they.” In early October, frustrated with racist colleagues, Dean consistently referred to he and his students as “us.” From a research perspective, this shift in narrative was made observable through the multi-interview methodology (Seidman, 1998). Dean’s narrative can be found in Chapter 7.

Aside from allowing me to view participant narrative in different temporal contexts, the three-interview process also offered significant opportunity to become acquainted with my participants, and for them to become more comfortable speaking with me. Across the board, participants shared more the second time we spoke. In some cases, where I travelled a significant distance for the interview, participants completed the first and second interviews in the same sitting. These dual interviews were extended, lasting approximately two hours. In this case, the extended time did offer some time to become more acquainted, though I admit that completing the interviews one-at-a-time was preferable and yielded a different type of reflection.

Participants were asked to read the transcripts of the first and second interviews prior to the third interview. This elicited reactions that I did not anticipate, and diverted the purpose of the interview somewhat. In fact, the participants were struck by reading their own voices; rather than engaging solely on reactions and reflections, most participants began the interview with several things that they had not thought to tell me initially. In some cases, these additions extended – or even changed – their narrative. Two participants noted that they had been thinking about social justice and equity in their classroom, and were eager to tell me the things that had been doing. Janice Mayfield, founder and director of TRIUMPH – the Triangle Urban Music Project of Hope – stated that she couldn’t believe how much she had shared with me. She noted

that she usually does not share that much, and became emotional in offering further insight into her musical life.

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I reflected on my own music teaching experiences. I remembered the struggles with time, and demands for performance. Speaking with Matthew, an elementary school teacher, I felt his intense commitment and dedication to his students, and recalled how I feeling overwhelmed by the demands of my job and the emotional needs of my students. My experiences, and my own narrative regarding music education have influenced my engagement with each of the narratives presented by my participants. Our stories hold distinct similarities and intense differences, but we all connect with music in ways that demand we share it with others.

In Part II, I will present the abridged narratives of the eight participants. In this discussion, I have selected specific stories and experiences to represent each music educator and the one visual arts educator. This discussion will establish some context and introduction for the audience, and highlight each participant as an agentic actor. Then, in Part III, I will delve into a multi-phased discussion of the findings. In Chapter 11, I explore themes of possibility present in each participant's individual story. In Chapter 12, I translate themes across cases in order to discuss instrumental and conceptual constraints described by each participant. Finally, in Chapter 13, I discuss the implications and opportunity for agency implied by these stories of possibility in the face of significant instrument and conceptual constraint.

## PART II: STORIES

This part of the dissertation consists of the “stories” that emerged from narrative interviews with participants. These stories are intersubjective co-constructions between the participants and myself; my voice and experience are present throughout the interviews and analysis (Maynes et al., 2008). As a music educator, I was constantly interpreting participant narratives through my own experiences within the fields of music education, music teacher education, and public education in the United States. While there are many themes that rang true to my own experiences, namely the constraints faced by artist educators in the face of high-stakes testing, there were many stories that did not align with my understanding of musical culture and practice. This departure from my own experience in music education, a field that is notoriously homogenous, represents a significant wealth of information for the field. In analyzing the stories of music educators who maintain their ethical, moral, and political commitments to equity, it is clear to see how hegemonic societal discourses have influence their musical lives. Furthermore, it is clear to see that these experiences significantly influence how the participants construct their visions of students, knowledge, and the overlying objectives of ‘music education.’ I use quotes here to denote that term *music education* holds different meanings for each participant. As will be discussed in Chapter 13, a few participants rejected the term entirely, situating ‘music education’ as a discrete, monolithic pillar – one that did not represent their own musical life and goals.

Each participant’s story was derived not only through their own storytelling, but also through my own analytic process. The stories in this chapter are presented in the words of my

participants. In some cases, I have taken some liberty with the text to present a story that is cohesive and meaningful. In other words, I have removed dialogue that is tangential to the central story, and have edited some dialogue for the ease of the reader (Riessman, 2008). I have also attempted to maintain the order in which each participant shared the stories with me. Most evident in the case of Janice, some participants chose to share a piece of information late in the process that shed new light on the narrative data collected in earlier interviews. In those cases, I had to re-visit prior transcripts using this new information as a sort of Rosetta stone to re-interpret the story.

I met the participants in this order: Lee, Janice, Matthew, Sasha, Clyde, Michelle, Dean, and then Amy. Though I considered presenting participant stories in this order, subsequent interviews took place whenever possible, and the order became more complex. All final interviews were completed after I had met all of the participants. Thus, I had some preliminary analytic impressions of each participant complicating my thinking as I proceeded in the data collection process. I will present Lee's story first, since his was the very first interview of the study and I wasn't sure what to expect. I present Sasha and Clyde's combined narrative last, because theirs was the final interview completed for the study, and likely informed the initial steps of my analysis. Each story is presented as a chapter, and includes a brief identity statement about each participant, as well as a reflective description of the interview settings.

## **Chapter 4: Lee Thomas**

**Lee Thomas** is a folk artist at the Sexton Folk Arts Center<sup>2</sup> in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. He is in his early sixties, and identifies as a Caucasian male.<sup>3</sup> Lee is employed by the Folk Arts Center to provide musical instruction for students at several districts school districts. He also performs and facilitates musical activity at local nursing homes, and a psychiatric hospital. He also coordinates arts activities at the Folk Arts Center and produces a children's radio show.

### **Setting**

I drove out from North Carolina to Southern Appalachia to interview Lee Thomas. Lee had limited availability and I was itching to get started on dissertation interviews. He sent an e-mail on a Monday, telling me he could meet Wednesday, and I decided to go for it. The Sexton Folk Arts Center where Lee works is about six hours from my home, and the air conditioning in my car was broken, so the June car ride was a serious adventure. On the ride there, driving through the mountain, it was clear that the coal-mining industry is a heavy presence in the lives of the residents of Sexton. Driving around curves on the county highways, I could see the diminished profiles of hills and mountains – the result of mountaintop removal. My prior knowledge of this area was from a documentary about the coal miners' strike nearby, so I knew not only of the significant history of poverty, but also the significant history of social action and organizing. On top of these narratives, I'd learned from my advisor about the thriving folk arts scene in the town

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<sup>2</sup> All names of people and places have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

<sup>3</sup> I have used participants' exact wording to describe self-identified demographic information.

of Sexton. This small coal-mining town has fought to maintain a connection to the music, dance, and storytelling of the area – what Lee referred to in his interviews as “*heritage culture*.” This emphasis on heritage culture, a distinct point of pride for Lee and the other people I met in Sexton, resists the characterization of “*mountain folk*” (Lee’s term) as ignorant hillbillies.

I arrived early for our interview at the Sexton Folk Arts Center. The last leg of the drive had been winding and a little confusing, so I was happy to arrive. Lee arrived after about half an hour, and I helped him carry instruments into his office. I thought we would settle in to begin the interview, but Lee said that we had to “check on a project downtown” first. He was wearing a baseball cap, but switched to another one that says “Sexton Folk Arts Center” before we took off. The grounds of the folk arts center are what you might expect from a mountain retreat, but the small main street is just steps away. Lee and I walked less than a quarter of a mile to the luthier shop located near the center of a three-block strip of businesses. We met Rob, one of the luthiers who make a variety of stringed instruments from scratch in the shop. In the shop there were various workstations that held guitars, dulcimers, mandolins, and ukuleles in various states of production. Lee explained that there are students from all over the country who come to apprentice with Rob and learn how to make instruments. Rob explained that Lee is a fixture in the shop, “Always here doing *something*, but you’ll never know what!” Rob’s description was apt, because we were there to check on Lee’s “project” – a mountain climbing pole for vaulting up the side of mountains. Lee explained that he saw this method of climbing on a documentary about South America and had wanted to try it. On his first attempt, the wood split and cracked, so Lee was using the vices in the shop to hold the pole while he treated with wood glue. We inspected the pole, and then Rob showed us the shop’s collection of historic stringed instruments. Leaving the luthier shop, Lee said we should also stop by the heritage arts shop just up the street.

We walk the short distance, and Lee told me about how the shop is meant to celebrate and promote the work of local heritage folk artists. There were many items on display and for sale, including painting, fiber art, and woodworking. I noticed there were also several CDs, and wonder if Lee's voice was represented in this store as well. A small café occupied the back corner of the shop, and Lee told me it's the only place with free Wi-Fi in town. He said, "We figure, we got to have a way to appeal to younger folks who come here to apprentice and learn more about this area." Situating Internet access in the midst of local folk art, then, was strategic.

After our walk around town, Lee declared that we had better get back to the office for the interview. We had walked in a circle, and were really only a few steps from the entrance to the Sexton center. Lee's office is situated in a small old cabin near the end of the center's parking lot. The building is oddly shaped, like someone has added on haphazardly over several decades. There are a few other offices in the building, but none are in use during our interview. The office looked to me like a space for keeping things and dropping things off, which made more sense when Lee later spoke about how many things he does within one day. There are multiple instruments, papers, coats for all kind of weather, and a collection of hats.

Throughout the interview, it was clear that Lee is accustomed to telling stories. His cadence builds as he provides details, which made punctuation decisions in transcription difficult. As Lee built each of the stories he told me, specifically the stories about his own curiosity, he left out words such as *and*, *or*, *then*, and *the*. Very often, he would state a word in way that demanded that it be written as a full sentence. For example: "Curiosity!" In a way, Lee's story resists being told on paper, the recorded interviews are a soundscape of dynamic rises and falls – a testament to the oral tradition that is a rich part of the heritage culture of the Southern Appalachian Mountains

## Lee's Story

My name is Lee Thomas, and I'm the folk arts director at the Sexton Folk Arts Center in [Southern Appalachia]. Well, I do music, stories, dance, and theater in the elementary schools. A lot of it is traditional music on traditional instruments - banjo, guitar, dulcimer - a variety of instruments. Penny whistles. Squeezebox. And we do a lot of dances. And we do the play party games of the area - this county. A fella came through here in the early 60s to the last of the one-room schoolhouses. He collected all of the play party games on the playground and the school. Wrote 'em down. So I continued that here. We do a lot of traditional dances as well. We do Native American dance and ballroom dance, a little bit of ballet, just different compare and contrast dances - different style dances - African dance. Dances of origin. So what I do mostly is geared toward the schools, elementary schools, and I play music and sing with folks at the nursing home. There's a psychiatric unit that I go and visit and we sing together. We just started herbal and edible plant walks here on campus. We have a master herbalist that we employ to come and lead those walks and we involve other people - interested people, knowledgeable people from the community with children and adults. So we started that program, and helped coordinate a visiting artist program. I am bringing in all kinds of visual arts and dance here. So we're trying to start that program...looking for money to get that going. But there's just a great need for arts in the schools here; they don't have any. Not any regular artists besides me and I don't know if that counts because I go to all of the schools. Six of 'em. So in that capacity we're always doing hands on kind of pieces. We're always singing and then recording. According to themes like pioneer, westward movement, Civil War. Some of it's just to learn a little bit about the instruments of the area. So there's some didactic stuff, you know, talking about the instruments. And we do, I do teach penny whistle and dulcimer. And it depends on the schools, you know, I just go in and say "What do you need?" "Where do you think you could use me best and what would you like for me to do. The way it's set up now; a classroom is supposed to have the arts in the curriculum that enhance their course of study. That has to go along with their course of study. So they have to show documentation that they're doing art and that it enhances their curriculum. Has to have something to do with what they're doing. So we've done colonial dances when they're doing colonial history, colonial songs. We did that this year in the spring. And told stories from the colonial period, revolutionary period. Yeah, it's a good job. I really avoided getting a teacher certificate. I saw what they were doing to 'em. A music teacher. They were just overworked. Seven or eight classes a day. I don't see how they did it. I know I couldn't do it. So I just stayed as an artist. I could've got paid more, but I don't think I would enjoy it.

I really got a late start [in music]. I didn't know that my family was musical. I mean we had singers, but I didn't know that we had musicians. I was involved more in sports growing up, than music. But my senior year in high school I got the yen to play guitar and I went and got one. My dad said, "Well, that won't last long." (laughs) So I don't know...I just stayed with it for some reason. It's just difficult at first. If you really don't have the passion about it, you won't stay with it. But I did. I just had a kind of thing going there. And then I went to college, I was playing guitar and I heard Nitty Gritty Dirt Band do *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. I wonder how that many people that affected, that one album. It had the Carter family on it. They did little interviews with people. Then I heard just this Old Time banjo player and I'd never heard it before. I had heard bluegrass and I liked it, and then I heard [that song]; I didn't know what it was. I said "Man, that's different. What is that sound?" So in college I started to look for what the



sound of that - of what I heard on that record. And I went back to here in the mountains and started studying under these different banjo masters. There was a bunch of 'em. My cousin, my uncle and people up the creek where I came from, Marcus Howard ... I just went everywhere and I went to workshops. Augusta Heritage in West Virginia and John McCutcheon taught a class in banjo. And they did that knock-down style. So I don't know, I just got a passion for it. I just kept - especially in this area - my people were from here and my ancestors were from here, so that was the connection; a real strong connection with this particular region. I just went and combed the place for musicians and learned one instrument after the next, you know, the autoharp - from the Carter Family - started playing it. Then I started hammer dulcimer and I started playing it, then the lap dulcimer, I picked it up. I just got totally immersed in the music of the area.

I was in philosophy and religion [in college]. I have a BA in that and then I went on to Master of Divinity. I was in counseling - chaplaincy. So all through [this] I was out on the West Coast in seminary in the Berkeley area and they had a workstudy and you could be a teacher's assistant in a local elementary school. So I just went to 'em and said, "What if I do music with them?" and they said "Yeah, that'll fit." and so that was part of my work there. And I just learned the trade by doing, you know, being with kids. What works? What's boring to them? How long is their attention span? It was just hands on, how to manage a classroom. So I did a lot of music with those kids, and dances. I learned how to play. I didn't like records. I wanted something live, so I played and called dances. I just wanted them to have a feel for something real. And it was a challenge. So played a lot of tunes and called at the same time. So I was learning what works with them. What dances work and how long are they able to listen and clue in on what's going on.

Well, [before that] I was playing here in Sexton. Little jobs here before I left to go to seminary. I can't remember where I was playing. I did gigs. I was doing some gigs here and yonder. When I finished with seminary, I did a chaplaincy residency in Atlanta, Georgia - Clinical Pastoral Education. And they had a folk scene there and I played with a lot of people in that. And then I got this counseling job at Cardinal Center Mission, and I thought about coming back to this area. They had a dormitory program, so I was doing counseling at the school in the dormitory. All along I was looking for a way to do music in a school. They have a good Arts Council here that employs artists to go into school as artists and do hands on material with the elementary school kids. So I applied and there was someone in the school system that thought it was a good idea. That was in Lewis County. That's where the ancestral home is. So I started doing that and I started working over here too. I forget how it went, but I was going back and forth from Sexton Folk Arts Center to Lewis County Schools, around the late 80s off of these grants. Most of the time, these artists travel from school to school, and it's a different one every year and they kind of have to go by the seat of their pants to find another grant. Write another grant...talk to another school. I really didn't want to travel around that much, so I tried to do good work where I was and they kept me at those schools for several years. I think the reason was I had a lot of hands on stuff that I was doing. I mean there's recordings [that I made with kids] all over this region. I had these girls sing with me for a Folk Week performance, and this lady brought her girl to help me sing and she said, "I still have that tape that we made in the fourth grade." And we did coal mining songs and coal mining interviews about working in the mines. She said, "That meant so much to me and I kept it and it's still part of our family." So that's the kind of thing that kept me in business, because they knew that this was something meaningful to them. We did all kinds of

projects. We did one on death and dying and families in grade school. And we did the songs around that theme. And we had the funeral director come in and talk about the history of funeral... preparing bodies, the whole nine yards. [The kids] told stories about their grandma or grandpas dying, and then we had songs on that theme, and then we had a book about it. These are all integrated into their stories, their lives, so that made it very meaningful. And we continue that and try to be creative, you know, centered -for the main most part - on what they want to do. And especially if it's the teachers [that get excited]. Leadership is the key. If you have a teacher who says: "I really want to do one on this theme..." then you will have a highly successful event.

Well, I'd really worked my way through seminary with [musical] work and I'd enjoyed it. So I don't know, I just wanted to be recognized as an artist because I'd worked so hard and learned so much. I really wanted to be recognized as an artist. I felt like that was my identity. I had put so much into learning the trade of the music and the stories. I felt like I was a folk artist. I was learning folk tales; I was learning all these instruments; I was playing jobs with them. I was just kind of steeped in the folklore material and I really wanted to share that as an artist. And I was writing pieces - children's music - original pieces. So really I was more into the artistic expression than I was into counseling. Spent a lot of time writing and thinking and working on pieces that I wanted to present.

Kids recognize their passion, you know. If it means a lot to you, and that expression is important to you then they feed off of that. It also helped that I enjoyed the children. I had a passion for it, and I enjoyed being with the students. But you know, really I was an artist. Always as arts counsel, I required that a teacher be present. So I maintained that, because we wanted the classroom teacher to be part of the experience. You go in a classroom, the teacher doesn't care what you're doing, then the kids pick up on that. But then if they see the teacher's even smiling, you know....

I was just going grant by grant [back then], and then they let me go over in Lewis County. I don't know exactly why. They had a downturn in student population and they couldn't pay me. That's what I was told. So I really wanted to come back to my roots and I felt blessed by my heritage. My dad told a lot of stories - and my mom - stories about teaching. She's a teacher. And I guess got interested in, through my dad's stories...We always had a story from home at the supper table. And they were delightful. And a lot of character and they're very unique...they didn't fit any category. It wasn't about doctors or being a teacher or being [something]...and they were very personal stories, you know...So I grew up listening to stories really. You now, some people, they would go and talk about issues at the table. I don't remember talking; I remember stories. Some people hash out issues of the nation or whatever in the news, but I don't remember that, I just remember storytelling about people in the family. I do a lot of storytelling with my students. We do stories that are important to them and we share stories. We turn 'em into either songs, or we do a theater piece about it.

So as I was still teaching in Lewis County, I was also building up here at the Center. I forget how it went. I had a different grant here. I've forgotten how [I got it]. But I was balancing both. 'Cause I felt precarious all the time, you know. I wanted to make sure I had someplace that I might go. So they had, sure enough, they turned me loose and the director, he said, "I knew you couldn't trust those people [in Lewis County]." So he kept me on here, and we looked for

[funding] for years. We went for grants, you know, and we went for this and that and finally he found a benefactor who liked what I was doing and endowed the position in perpetuity. It was just like they days of old medieval period, the Medici family, you know. Yeah, I had a patrón! (spoken with affected accent) Yeah it is [kind of a fairytale story]. I mean I just stayed with it. I didn't give up on it.

This is what I wanted to do and I didn't want to be a teacher. I just looked at 'em and they looked wore out! I mean, I'm kind of wore out as it is. I just couldn't imagine fitting [in]. I mean, I just identified as an artist - a creative. I just couldn't stomach fitting somebody's mold. Having to see that many kids not doing something vibrant. I mean, you can [do that] as a teacher, but it's hard to if you're seeing eight classes a day. And they're giving you these requirements to see these people. I was just thinking about this art teacher out here. They had a great art teacher at the high school and she just put her foot down. She wasn't going to see all those students. And then she developed a program that was turning out some real artists. She wanted people who were interested in art. So when she retired, they put somebody in there and tried to load her up with all these students coming in. I talked to her - (laughs) she quit. 'Cause she said, "Well there'd be people in there who didn't want to be in there, so they act out and I'd send 'em out to the principal, and I'd go to the principal and the principal would say 'Why you keep sending these people to me?'" and she said, "Why do you keep sending 'em back?!" So it's really how you set it up that you can really do any kind of instruction. I don't think I could be in a classroom all day. I don't see how they do it really. It's really a lot of work. To "ride herd" all day long. I just don't have it.

I mean, there's [kids] who're not going to do anything, you know? But there are people that have creative impulses and if you tap into that, it's going to be like this artist out here. She was a great artist and she liked teaching art. And she created an atmosphere [where] art was gonna happen! It just wasn't going through hoops; they were going to do art. So, it's so difficult. It takes leadership. It takes some insight in the learning process. It takes a lot of persistence. Once she left, man they just lost their art program practically. Mismanagement. [She's a] smart woman. We had this visiting artist, this visual artist - they painted gourds. I don't know how she set it up, but she had a videotape of that room and it was like a spiritual experience. You know, there was soft music, everybody was focused - there was no hollering and shouting. Everybody was busy. There was stuff all over the place, but I'd have to talk with her again. But over the gap where I go, they've run off every art teacher that they've had, and music teachers too. It's something about how you set these things up too; it's really a leadership thing. I don't know what it takes, but some of these leaders know how to be leaders. And they develop an atmosphere where they don't want to put up with shit. Like this school over here right down the road, Spring Grove, [it's] one of the top performing schools in the region and the country. They go *there* to learn how they did it, you know. And I did an interview with them and they said, [they] were determined to have quality. We would go to any means to have a quality education. We would go to any workshop; we'd go anywhere and do anything. So they had some leadership that had a real commitment to excellence. They were committed, and not just talking, not just a motto. They went to any means to have an excellent school, and everybody was on board. They had key people on board. You know, if you have a quorum of people that are really committed - if you have key people in a group, you can have something happen. You know, this area is noted for the poorest schools in the state - worst schools in the state. But I went and did a radio program on [Spring Grove], and

they have people that come to them from all over the state to see how they have high achievement. So it can be done.

I began the process [here] to let children be proud of their heritage and where they came from. So you know, it was centered on their experience and their family and it honored that and celebrated that. So I guess, you know the area has been dissed for a lot of reasons... poverty and being a hillbilly. Cultural stigmas and that kind of thing, so... I wanted them to realize what they had, and have - and lift that up and learn from it. I went to a lot of the Elliot Wiggington things in North Georgia mountains, the Foxfire Model of education, so I was influenced by him and what they were doing there in North Georgia. They published so many Foxfire books on culture and people and knowledge - mountain knowledge. They began by being student-centered. They wondered what the students were curious about - about where they lived and what they had knowledge of, so they took from that what the children already had knowledge of. So they began from that, and they would ask them what would they want to do their projects on that's in this community. "What are you curious about [that's] happening here?" They did it on ginseng and just a variety of woodwork and making chairs - everything on top of Earth that was happening *right there*. Then they just started doing documentary films about it, and they were writing books. So what I noticed that they were doing in the classroom was there were state requirements, you know, that you have to be able to do this ... so they would have those on the walls, but during the process of doing the project they would check off that "We meet this one." So it wasn't the requirements that was leading the education, it was during the process of doing something meaningful that they began to check off things like making a good paragraph, grammar - all those things - note-taking, outlining, everything that the state required them to have. But it came out of the student's experience. That's John Dewey, you know, education as experience. That's the book on John Dewey right there in practice. 'Cause John Dewey, he said, you don't really learn anything that's not meaningful to you. If you don't care about it, you don't really learn anything. So he thought that education, in his book, his philosophy he said, "I don't want to talk about education, I want to talk about how we learn things." He said, "We're gonna have to forget about talking about education, but begin [with] what is the process of learning? How does learning occur?" And just bracket education altogether. We have experiences and when these things arise that we're curious about, then we have an experience and we remember it. Then we really learn it.

I got a lot of stories at home I guess. I thought they were neat, but I also realized that there were some stereotypes about mountain people and obstacles and that kind of thing. There was a lot of writing about that, people being looked down upon because they were hillbillies. All of my people left about it, and went up North and I guess I heard stories about how they were received and how they talked or whatever. There are some people, man, they have a chip on their shoulder because of the stereotypical things. My dad did. He'd bait people just to overcome it, and he would do things. He went into a bank and he decided he would go after work to get a loan. And he went after work, he was kind of dirty and scruffy looking and he went into the bank and asked for a loan. And they hemmed and hawed and they weren't gonna give it, you know, but then they realized how much money he had in the account and they changed their attitude all of a sudden and he said, "No, that's alright, I'll think about going somewhere else." So it's that kind of "in your face" kind of thing, and he was just that way. I just admired people who overcame those things and were in people's face about it. [My father] just wanted to see if they would accept him

as a hillbilly (laughs). [Took] lot of balls to do that. I'd never do anything like that. Just to see how people. I mean, it was important. I mean a *loan* for God's sake. I mean, it wasn't a little thing! So, there were a lot of books about the culture and I did a lot of work with Appalshop over here. They did a lot of documentary about the culture - stereotypes people had about it. They did a whole movie documentary about it.

When I was out in [Berkeley], I wanted to get back. You know, I felt funny being from here and doing music from here out in California. I just wanted to. I was just very curious about this place. I was out there singing about chickens and cows. I liked those songs. I said, "Well what am I doing in the city singing about chickens and cows?" I wanted it to be a complete experience you know. I wanted to *have* chickens and have goats or whatever. And raise a garden and live out in that life. I'm still learning about herbs and edibles and I'm very curious about that sort of thing. About my ancestors and their knowledge. You see the plants that are your neighbors, you know what they're good for and you feel a part of it. And it's good for you, too! And singing the songs and living the life, it's all one piece. [When we] moved back and we had - it was big place - thirteen acres. Too many acres really. I always kept chickens for a long time and had goats and learned a lot about all that process. Had a garden. I just liked chickens to look at, you know, they're so domestic. We had pigs one time; we butchered pigs. [I didn't grow up like that.] I just heard about it. I heard stories about it all the time at the supper table. So naturally I was pretty curious about that life.

But I had a whole different life doing music around themes of justice. So I didn't really let those mix together, 'cause I can't go into elementary schools and do protest songs, you know. It's got to be centered on their experience, so I do that. It's another side of what I do. So I do a lot of music for Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and we worked on issues of justice, especially around the coal industry here. [I] sing at rallies and gatherings and go to meetings. Sing at meetings. Have some of them that ask me to do some songs. I just recently had a countrywide, nationwide meeting of people dealing with transition and justice. I mean, transition from coal and fossil fuels to a just economy - a just transition economy. And there were people that were Navajo, there [people] were from Adirondacks, and from Chesapeake Bay area. Talking about climate change and transition. And I did some songs. I did a song, a railroad song, from the African American tradition, "Can't You Line It." It's when they lined tracks; they'd have to work together. And they'd have to pick it up and lay it down together, so they had songs to go with that. You know, they'd go *Shaka-laka-laka-laka-laka-lake- UMPH* and they'd all be in syncret, synchronous you know. So I just said, "We got a lot of heavy lifting to do and we've got to do it together." We have to do the picking it up and laying it down together. It was a way of illustrating that.

I mean, we did *Shaka-laka* [in school]. Yeah, we did just to learn it. But not the interpretation of it. Yeah, we do history around the first roads were the railroads and we do some of the songs and African American history. You know, [African Americans] came with the railroads, they built the railroads and stayed and worked in the mines. I do that history, but there was a little twist to it that I did with the organizers and activists. Yeah, I do those songs and there's another one - a couple or three. And of course we did these coalmining songs, you know, the trials and tribulations, but we didn't have a political statement to say about it. So we would have coal miners come in and talk about what happened to them in the mine, and then we'd have song

about working in the mine - storytelling and songs. You know, they weren't positive songs about working in the mines. They were tragic, people getting hurt. Things like that. Big John and all that kind of thing. But I wouldn't say [in class], "Therefore we should not be mining." We should *not* be, but you know, there's another platform to say [it]. But it's difficult, you just have to be very careful. You do something publicly and it gets back to here, if you're in the newspaper doing this sort of thing. It's tricky [to] be a part of a protest with a banjo, somebody's going to take a picture of you. So I told this guy, we had a sit-in and a newspaper guy was there and I said, "I'm going to do some songs here, but I wish you wouldn't take a picture of me or interview me doing it." He said, "This time." He said, "But you'll have to know - you're in a public place. You're fair game." So it's like I said, if I am marching they'll take a picture of a guy with a banjo before they will somebody just marching, and all the people on the board are coal people here. So I got in trouble, bad trouble. I had an oral history of a woman whose husband worked in the mines, got black lung and died, and I was sharing it as material for the board here. [The director] took me out he said, "You got me in a lot of trouble here." and I had to go in and I said, "This material before you is my choice solely to put up." And [the director] said, "I'm going to have to see everything that you present anymore."

There's other things; I just about lost my job one time. Just not being careful enough. I mean, they really were thinking about letting me go. I went to the board and all that kind of thing. And part of it was just not thinking, me not thinking. Like this hat here. (Lee gestures to the hat he is wearing that states the name of the folk life center.) I am wearing this hat in a movie that's gone all the way around the world now. The state department uses it in other countries. I forgot to take that damn hat off. I just like that hat better, but I can't wear this hat when I'm doing something as publicly as a demonstration. I just forgot to take it off and I wish the organizers had remembered. I just didn't... I wear it so much, I forgot to take it off. And they did this - it's called "Deep Down" - a great documentary about mountaintop removal they tried to do in this community called Wilson over near Floyd County and people got together and stopped it. But they had people who wanted it on [the documentary] and people who didn't...and it's just well done. But I gave a talk at the hearing and I had this hat on. [The issue] became the hat. You know, because it was such a good movie - documentary - the state department got a hold of it as an example of a community, a democracy, where community takes hold and effects change. And it is a good learning tool. It would be a good learning tool for a community. There were different ideas and opinions. But I spoke, I didn't sing. I said something like, "Imagine a community that is economically bound to blowing up its own mountains." If you just kind of think about it, that you were going to create a community that was bound, economically bound to blowing up its own mountains. The directors told me, they just said, "Be careful of your attire at events." But that happened after the [other incident], [there] wasn't but one thing, there were other things that happened. After [my boss] passed away of a heart attack here, I quoted [him] when I shouldn't have. He said that when he retired he was gonna work against mountaintop removal. So that was supposed to be a private statement, that wasn't supposed to be a public statement. So that got me in a lot of trouble. And I should've checked. I should've ran the article through proper channels before going public with it. I just didn't think. They just called me and they said, "We need something for our paper" and it was a big deal.

I want to tell you about the Carcassonne square dance. It's an old tradition of dance. When I was in college I started going to it and I was really influenced by it. [The dance gathering] was

founded by a woman that did education on the mountaintop in the middle of nowhere really. And the school's still there. They're a one-room school. They do dancing. Joe Begley - I just read about him in the paper, the state paper. I went to his store and that was near the school, near the dance. I was really influenced by him about justice issues, because he was a guy living in the middle of it. He just wasn't hollering from the outside. He had to live within and organize within the community. That impressed me. You know, it's easy to holler when you're not within something happening. He ran a business and he had a store and, I mean, it would affect his business, but he fought the coal companies, and he organized against 'em. He was a great dancer and you know, I learned that the whole thing was one piece. He was working within community, he was making change, he was nationally recognized, and he was a dancer. He had a banjo player playing on his porch all the time - Austin Miller - and he was writing down sayings, different turns of phrases and he was always having a notebook full of those. So that dance at Carcassonne, we went, and it was winter it was snowing. I said, "I don't know if they'll have a dance." He said, "Oh we'll have more people there now than any time." So we pushed cars over mountains, and all that experience of doing that with everybody trying to get there... and it was packed! And they had that potbellied stove going and heating the place. And they had great music and callers and all the community was there together. It was young and old, and it wasn't like Western Squares, you know where [they say,] "Ok, now we'll walk through this dance and this is how this dance goes." And nobody's dressed up like, going to a Western - it was just a community! Young, old, everybody was there. They didn't have a lot of instruction; they had old hands there who would do the figures. You would see them doing it, and they would do it with another four, you know, another two. They did it four at a time and you would watch until it got around to you. By the time the figure got to you, you knew how to do it. It was neat, you know, there was no pause. The music started, the dance started, you watched, and then you did it. I do have to teach the figures [these days] because people don't know 'em. The novices were further down around the circle and then they would watch and they would be ready to do it when it came their turn. And it was very simple, wasn't intricate dances. But the movement, and touching people and holding hands, and holding somebody. You know without any threat, there wasn't no threat to it. So you're really holding people and touching people and movement and dance and music. It was a great combination and the whole community was there - little kids and grandmas and grandpas. Well that was the way it was here. They did house dances and they were very popular and they would dance all night. They'd take out the chairs and rugs and put 'em out in the yard and dance all night. Or they had bridge dances down here, and they'd walk for miles, because the sound on the bridge was neat. (laughs) Yeah, they would stay up and go all night. They just didn't have a whole lot of other options. That was the main entertainment.

You can combine it all - dance, movement, and music - it really gets into your system that way. It feels a part of you and part of the community. I call dances, and I just like dances. I don't know, it just has so many better qualities than religion. Nobody argues or fights about it. Nobody's guilty or ashamed, you know? Or that much controlled. It's more free and the community together and you touch people and it's no big deal and feel loved. There's no creed. But here, you know, they have those old regulars that don't allow dancing. So there's been a juxtaposition of that for a long time. Some people believe in dancing, some people believe in the church. There's been a dichotomy here for a long time. I don't know if it exists as much as it used to.

And then there's stories. People just get more attuned when you tell them a story. And you know, Biblical accounts attest to that fact. Not many people read Deuteronomy, Numbers, the Law -

and they'd rather hear a story. So if I ever want to get a class to listen. If I have a trouble class that have a hard time focusing, I just bring a candle in - turn the lights off and tell a story. They don't talk too much or get out of hand. They don't act out. So that's my thing I use a lot, my storytelling - to get people's attention, get 'em focused. Yeah, they'll focus on a story. Same thing about preaching you know, if someone preaches, it's kind of didactic - I kind of nod off. But if you're telling a story - perk up! A story's a very powerful way of conveying a message.

I don't know why it's our natural inclination to listen to a story. That's a question. I don't know how to answer that question - why people perk and want to hear a story. I just know that's the case, that's how things are communicated. That *might* be your story - of course you listen more carefully if it's a personal connection - but I think kids still listen, you know? I tell these Jack tales. I don't know what kind of personal connection they would have with Jack other than he gets out of trouble some way. Yeah, I guess they do have a personal connection with that, getting in trouble and getting out of it. Being the smallest one and being able to overcome things - bigger, larger, more influential people or monsters or whatever. I guess they do identify with that, I guess we all do.

Atmosphere is the key [to stories]! That's the setting that you create that really sets a tone for [the story]. I remember a school where they had all natural lighting. They didn't use fluorescents, and they didn't use any artificial; they had all natural light. And they just noticed that the behavior was better. People felt more comfortable and at ease. So, you know, I thought that was really interesting that would be the case. So that was creating a setting there. And, you know, sometimes teachers do turn out lights when they want their kids' attention. It wouldn't be completely dark, but it gets their attention in the same way. Turn the light out, have a focus. But, you know, they had this art teacher... I been to art classes that are chaos, but hers was just a meditation. And she spoke in a soft voice; she had soft music on. I don't know how she did it! It was moving to watch the kids! It was like a meditation. I'd like to talk with her again about how she set it up. I know she talks softly, she didn't put up with any jive. She had discipline - it wasn't shouting at 'em though. She made them do work for her if they were out of hand, and they had meditative music on. That made all the difference.

What is music to me?! That's a puzzle! (laughs) - I don't know why it speaks to people so much. \ Give somebody some kind of scientific study to answer that, but golly! It's all around us. So it sure means a lot to a lot of people, and it can convey messages. You know, you've got rhythm and music and harmony, and messages get emotionally conveyed a lot more dynamically through music. They've done [musical] things with math tables, and everything like that - just concepts that they rhymed and did rhythmic things with, and kids remembered a lot better. Many of 'em did. I think there's something about rhythm - I guess from your mother's heartbeat - the rhythm of things is kind of important to you.

Well, it's just been a surprise to be able to make music and to be able to share musically and have a job doing that. I wonder sometimes how I did that. Every now and then, to have a job that doesn't totally kill me - you know I don't have eight classes a day- that I can enjoy music. So that's it. I went into college as a philosophy and religion major and came out a banjo picker. I just got interested in it. Again, it's what you're curious about - that's what you really learn about. So [I] started looking at banjo pickers, and I was writing to my son the other day - I went to



theological school, but really I was a teacher's assistant at a local elementary school. I was doing dances and folk music with them, and storytelling. So I was in seminary, but my real vocation was off at this elementary school where I was working. So it became a thing that's more interesting to me than philosophy or religion. You hear a certain sound, you wonder where that sound came from, you get curious, and then you start! That's one of those things of learning as experience. Something it is curious to you and then you start following it, and then you start learning! That's how everybody learns really; let's start with somebody's curiosity about something. That's probably the best way we should do it in the classroom too. That's what I do with a lot of classes; I give them all options. "Ok, we can do this, we can do that."

I'm 62 right now. I think I'll hang on about three more years and look for another way. I think I'd like to just do less - do two days a week or something like that. And, I mean, I'll get these little playing jobs. And I just kind of get worn down, you know? I get migraines, and I get kind of wore out. When I'm 65 - I'll see how I feel at that time. You know, I'd just like to not do it as much.

I've been trying to trace my ancestry without any luck. There's just too many Thomases'. I don't know if [I should] start wading through that. Especially, we got a Jonathan Thomas - you know how many John Thomases' [there are]? Under every rock, behind every tree - a John Thomas came over here with Boone! But it's ancestry - the history - and I always thought I'd do a little tour - some program at like Cumberland Gap and up the wilderness and up the great wagon road up through Shenandoah, you know - all the way to Chesapeake Bay and make some songs about our ancestors at different spots along that great wagon road. And I'd like to go across, and I've never been to Great Britain, or Scotland, [or] Ireland. I'd like to put in and just retrace that. One time I'd had hopes of finding everybody in that tree and stopping along. But I have a generally idea that they probably followed, but that John Thomas business. Yeah - I don't know if I'm willing to start wading through that morass. It'll take years and years I'm afraid. We thought we had it - we thought we had a Jonathan Thomas out of Mount Airy - and we thought that was a great connection because this Old Time style. Knock-down, clawhammer style of banjo came out of there, and the style of dance that we have here. I saw a guy in Mount Airy doing the same kind of style dance. Got this ancestor from there, then I had another guy call me and say it's the wrong - they passed on the wrong information year after year. This is the wrong guy. So here we are back to square one.

I guess I hope people'd say that I'm dynamic and really in touch with kids. "He loves being with kids and doing this with them. Productive!" You know, we do a lot of recordings. A lot of CDs are out there in the community through the kids. We made recordings. We worked on one today. There's kind of a legacy of those recordings. And the radio program, there're hundreds of them. Kids radio programs. I'd guess there are hundreds of them, I'd have to count 'em, but there's plenty of 'em. So it's a big repository of stuff in the community from my experience here.

Well, around here, you know I want to leave something besides just my work. I talked with the leadership here about meeting, and said, "What are we gonna leave?" And I think I just feel like kids need - well they don't have much in terms of music education. They just have me once a week, and then they have this guy, a band guy, comes in once a week. And he didn't have a place! He'd just go up on the gym - the stage of the gym. And that's not, you know, they're

throwing basketballs around and stuff. Of course, the curtains are closed, but it's just not good. It doesn't look like they value it. It's just stuck somewhere. So if the kid does see it as valued - it's not a prime place. It's hard to get a good response out of it. They don't value it enough. What I'd like to do is set up a program where there are artists coming into schools throughout the year. You know, a variety of artists. And expose kids to different people and different ways. And we have artists that come in; they did Flamenco on Roanoke Creek. They loved it! They just want to come in and watch her. And they said, "Well we'd like to have more of this." Give 'em more opportunities to have people come in. I'll work on it, see if we can find money and how we might do that throughout the year and have local artists that show you value. Then, you have people from outside of town to broaden your horizons at the same time. So that's what I'd like to leave this program here.

## **Chapter 5: Michelle Johnson**

**Michelle Johnson** is the principal at the Kindred School, a public charter school in a Southern city school district. Formerly, Michelle was a teacher at the Kindred School, and worked with Dr. Jones to implement components of Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE) (Hill, 2013). She is in her early 30s, and identifies as an African American female.

### **Setting**

I travelled [southward] to meet Michelle at the Kindred School, having been connected through a professor at a nearby university. I'd heard about the Kindred School in a talk given by Dr. Jones, and was inspired by the unique school model. To be clear, the Kindred School does not have a dedicated music educator on staff, rather music and arts are embedded throughout the entire curriculum. The students use music and arts in math, science, social studies, and literacy to communicate ideas, increase engagement, and to encourage student leadership. Teachers and special presenters (including Dr. Jones) offer workshops using HHBE as a way to engage in activism and discussion about social systems and current events. As I drove to interview Michelle in early August, I listened to news and opinion radio discussing the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. I was frustrated, angry, and saddened by what I heard. The majority of students at the Kindred School are African American, and I knew before visiting that the school mission promotes critical engagement in social issues that affect minoritized communities. I wondered if atmosphere in the school would be affected by the events in Ferguson.

I entered the school and checked in at the front office. The school's staff greeted me and let me know that Michelle had lunch duty and would be back soon. I take a seat on a bench in the main entryway. Soon, a young African American boy ran around the corner followed by a White woman – I assumed that she was his teacher. Because of my public school teaching experience, I expected that she would yell at him for running, or maybe grab him by the arm and drag him back to the classroom; I've seen both things happen many times before. The teacher caught up with the student, directly in front of where I was sitting. She smiled and says, "Where you headed?" He responded, "I was just going for a walk!" At that point, he smiled, gave the teacher a hug, and they both walked back to the classroom together. I was first shocked that this moment was nothing but positive, from start to finish. I was chagrined to realize that I am conditioned to expect negativity in school settings.

Michelle met me soon after the student and teacher walked away and we had the interview in her office. She said she promotes an open-door policy for everyone, and I note that her office actually has three doors. Teachers must pass through her office to reach the teacher resource room in the back, and at least one door does remain open throughout our interview. Michelle initially stated that she is not a musician. Then, as we talked about her musical life, she began describing numerous musical experiences in her own life, and the life of her family. She spent a good deal of time speaking about her experience in dance, an area of arts that is not often included outright in music education. Over and over again, Michelle talked about needing music to help her study and focus; she described music as helping her to focus in the face of challenge and frustration. I thought about the loving moment I witnessed in the hallway, and then again back to the news about Michael Brown on the radio. During a short tour of the entire school, I saw intense positivity and love reflected in the classrooms and the overall school environment.

Michelle told me that she was drawn to Kindred because of their mission to “press and support” students. I saw that the school is challenging students to see the world as it is, and work to make change, but I also see that they recognize that students need support to balance the emotions that come along with critical consciousness.

### **Michelle’s Story**

So, me and music. Well, I can't say that my parents are musicians. My mother sang in the choir at church and when my sister and I became of age, they had a children's choir that we joined and sang [in]. Well I take that back! I am totally wrong. My dad was in a band when he was in high school. Oh my gosh! I'm so wrong! What am I thinking?! I'm thinking in terms of singing. Ok. In terms of singing neither of my parents are really singers, but my mom played the flute in the marching band in high school. My dad played the trumpet in the marching band in high school and he also had a band with his friends on the side, growing up in the late 60s early 70s. So they are musicians from that perspective. My dad always teases my mom and says that she was his groupie when they were in high school, ‘cause she would tag along to all the gigs. It was kind of like Motown-esque type of music, like early Jackson 5. That's what I've gathered from the pictures that I've seen. My dad had an Afro that went past the frame of his senior picture; that's how big it was. Then my mom tried to grow an Afro but her texture of hair was too soft, so it never fro'd out. So yeah, then growing up, they always had music playing. Saturday mornings was, like, clean the house. You first wake up, get your chores done and then you can enjoy the rest of the day, and music was always playing. [There was] a lot of Motown and a lot of late 80s R&B - so Luther Vandross, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Patti LaBelle. Even now as an adult. When I was younger it would be a drag to have to listen to that, but here at work, that's a lot of what I have playing as I work. Growing up from there, of course, when I got older I got into R&B and Hip-Hop music. I have a group of cousins that are older than me by a year or two, and I always tried to run in their circle. I tried to get into what they were into, which was hip-hop and R&B, and even to this day [that's] what I enjoy myself. But I have expanded my likes into some more alternative music, pop music. I listen to the top 40 stations, especially with my daughter now. I have a six year-old, she'll be seven in October, but they always have clean music, so that's the station we stick to when she's in the car, which has paid off because she likes a wide variety of music now. And I think that's pretty cool with her being as young as she is.

Music is definitely a big part of my life. I always wish that I could sing, but I can't. I did dance from pre-school until college. I stopped in college - dancing formally. I also cheered and, of course, that involves music as well. But I could never sing, even though I wanted to. If we're tying music to academics, it was in middle school, I realized that in order for me to focus I have to have music playing. I can't study in silence; I can't work in silence. Of course I do when I have to, you take standardized test and tests in school it's quiet, but that quiet is always a distraction to

me. Having music on helped me to focus on what I'm doing. I'm a lot more productive when I have music on. Even when I was in the classroom, we always had music on. Every day, from the time I walked into the room until the time I left, there was always music playing. It wasn't really loud. Usually it was around my desk area and before I came to Kindred and I was in a larger setting, kids would want to come and sit closer to my desk - even though I wasn't sitting at my desk - just to be able to hear the music that I had playing. And then coming here to Kindred, with the setting being smaller, and I pretty much have my workstation and the kids are right there - I'm teaching from my workstation. I always had music playing and they always seemed to really, really enjoy that. Here in my office - I have my music turned off because I had a meeting in here a little earlier - but I always have music playing, always.

I was in the band in middle school. I played the flute like my mom - the flute and the piccolo. When I got to high school, I couldn't be in the band and cheer, and dance, so one of them had to go, and I dropped the band. Actually, when I got to high school, dance was offered as a class, so I was able to get my dance instruction at school. Before then, it was an outside of school activity. [The type of dance I did] was jazz for the most part. When I got to high school my dance teacher taught us...we did a lot of contemporary...some African, and modern, and jazz. I did take an African dance class in college for a few weeks, but that was just for fun and exercise.

[The thing about dance that sparked my interest] was creative expression. Up until high school it was something I looked at for fun; I enjoyed doing it. I liked the music we were dancing to, and I liked the costumes. I liked to get my makeup done and performing in the recitals. But then when I got to high school and I started taking dance from Miss Samuels - who I'm still in contact with to this day - she taught the other side of dance, the creative expression, and how you can send messages and communicate to others through dance. That really resonated with me, learning how different dance techniques are connected. That's when I really started to see the other side of it and look at it from a more mature perspective - how dance can tell a story, and what that story would be. Often for our assessments in class, our performances were assessments. We'd have big shows throughout the year, but then we had to do a lot of solos. A lot of times she would give us scenarios or situations that we had to express through dance. And so, at that time, you know, you're an adolescent and you've got all these hormones raging and, you know, you're coming into your own. You feel like you're more mature than what you really are. That was a great way to really hone in on my emotions. I remember having an argument with my boyfriend and going in my parent's basement, and I turned on this Janet Jackson song - no it was a Mariah Carey song - and I just danced that same song for over an hour. And I felt so much better after. It was "Without You". I think it's on her Music Box album.

My dad was in the military, and so for the majority of my childhood, I was here in Georgia, but whenever he was stationed a great distance, we moved with him. So I've lived in Europe- in Germany - in Schweinfurt and Grafenwoehr, and then he was stationed at the Pentagon for about three, almost four years, and so we moved to the DC/Virginia area.

[I went to] Spelman College. [I majored in] Political Science and I had a minor in Spanish. I would say, well at Spelman the experience was unique because there were certain courses that we had to take in order to graduate and one of those was - we called it ADW - it was African Diaspora and the World. It was basically a course on Black history, but it was beyond just what you would learn in your typical textbook. That [course] often involved a lot of music study, because music is very present in African American history, going all the way back to Africa itself, and so that even put a whole other perspective on my love of music. To see how it started for people of my descent and how it has changed throughout the years, and how a lot of what we listen to now has African roots. A lot of people don't even realize it. Also, Spelman is very rich in tradition and so during our freshman orientation, we had to memorize the school song, and part of [that was] at the drop of a dime, any of our big Spelman sisters who were hosting orientation would ask you to sing the school song. That was quite interesting, because even to this day I will never forget that song. Never ever forget that song. That was also different because in high school we had a school song, but I couldn't tell you what the words were. From one of my favorite movies, "Lean on Me," there was a big powerful scene in that movie where the principal Joe Clark, he wanted everyone to learn the school song, and he had caught these boys that seemed to be up to no good. So that made me think about my high schools' school song when I was in high school and we never sang it. Then I get to college and it's a big part of college life, and before any convocation or formal meeting, we always sang the school song. And then personally in college, I had to study with music. Always. In my dorm room - if I was in the library I had my iPod with me. Always had music on.

When I was [younger] - when did he start teasing me about that? I want to say in middle school - my uncle used to always tell me that I was going to be a teacher. I kept telling him "No! No I'm not! I'm going to be a lawyer." I wanted to be the next Clair Huxtable - lawyer, have a family, be a phenomenal housewife and mom - all of that wrapped up in one, and that's where I was headed - to law school. When I got to college I majored in political science and minored in Spanish because for a while I wanted to get into international law. I took law classes at Spelman, Morehouse, and Clark all throughout college. Then I really got into entertainment law, partly because of my love for music. I wanted to represent Hip-Hop artists because I noticed [that] anytime anything went down, and you have these African American men represented by White men. I'm like, "Wouldn't it be cool to have a strong Black woman represent these artists?" But then when I was in college I started working. We have to do volunteer hours at Spelman, and so I volunteered at a school not too far from here in the after school program as a tutor. I did that towards the end of my freshman year and my sophomore year, and then at the end of my sophomore year I started working at an elementary school in the after school program down in Clayton County. That's when I started to develop a passion for teaching and education. My mom was an educator, but I never really thought of becoming one myself. It wasn't until I was in the classroom, and I wasn't [even] formally teaching, it was a lot of tutoring. But I turned it into a classroom setting, because most of the kids had the same homework and a lot of them were struggling. And so I developed my teaching ability from that.

[Teaching] came quite naturally, and I realized that regardless of outside stresses or issues, when I walked into that school, when I walked into my room, I forgot about all of that. It was just

about me and the kids that I worked with and how happy they made me. And how much I became a part of their life, and how much they became a part of mine. During my senior year, you know, I took the LSAT, got accepted into some law schools and when it came time for me to have to make a decision and a commitment, I started second-guessing myself. I have a cousin who when to law school, became a lawyer, passed the bar, practiced law for a couple of months and then started teaching and never touched law again, and I ran into her at her sister's wedding. I was talking to her and she was talking to me about college and asking what are my plans for after college, and I told her how I was starting to really like teaching. She was like, "Well don't be like me. I wasted all that money on law school and I haven't even used my law degree. I'm teaching and I love it." She loved it. That was her thing, and she went to grad school again and got her master's in education and her full certification. But her message to me was, "Take your time, you can defer law school. Dabble in teaching. You can see how it goes, if you teach and it's not you - then you know that law school is your route. But if you teach and you love it, then you know law school is not your route." I talked to my dad and he said the same thing. Law school is too much money to go and then not use what you learned. So I got my certification; I went one of the alternative routes and got my certification. I was actually offered a job at the school where I was teaching in the after school program as a full-time teacher. I wanna say by October of my first year teaching, I told my dad, I said, "I'm not going to law school. I'm gonna be a teacher." And so then I researched some grad programs and got my master's and now I'm in a doctorate program myself. But, it's just... that's where I was supposed to be. And my uncle, when I called him and told him what I was doing, he was like, "I knew it! I knew it from day one that you were gonna end up being a teacher." And I love it.

[I have taught] primarily the middle grades. I've taught third, fourth, and fifth and then I taught second for one year. [Students in the middle grades] need a lot of love, they need a lot of guidance. I enjoy it. That's why our middle school teachers here, they have a lunch and recess duty rotation and there's only three middle school teachers on the team for the grade level. And so, that fourth spot - cause they have duty three days a week - the fourth day of the week we have a volunteer that comes and serves at our school every year. They usually take the fourth day. Then there's another rotation for a teacher to have a second day of duty and the volunteer hasn't started yet. They don't start until after Labor Day. We always take turns filling in, and I really enjoy that time with them, being around them. The students that are in middle school now are the students that I had when I was in the classroom here, and so it's always great to be back with them. The older they get, the more interesting they become.

[After 5 or 6 years of teaching] I came here [to Kindred]. This is only the second school in my teaching career, 'cause I was at my former school for so long. And I loved it there, but it got to a point [where] it became too political for me. I felt on one end it became too political, and then on the other end, it was a lot of mess going on amongst the grade level that I was teaching on, and that didn't sit well with my spirit at all. I came from teams before then that were very collaborative; we worked together and it was an awesome, awesome environment. And then I was moved to a new grade level, for a good reason, but once I got there it was just ... I was a lone ranger. It was just me and my kids in my room all year, and even though I enjoyed my kids and I love them to death, that wasn't the type of environment I wanted to be in. When I was told I was going to be in that grade level again the next year, I started looking at other options, and then stumbled upon Kindred.



I would really say that [when] I looked at [equity] from a mature perspective was in college. I kind of felt like I was in a bubble before then, because most of the time you only associate with like-minded people, and so when you discuss certain things, you're only discussing one side of it. So here I was with a lot of people who had totally different opinions from mine, and just having to navigate my thoughts through that, and really kind of seeing both sides and feeling like the oddball because I usually could see and understand both sides. And then, even moreso becoming an adult and just understanding that sometimes ignorance is bliss. Now when things happen in our society and you go to social media and you just get to see how people really think - because they can kind of hide behind their phone screens and computer screens - it's shocking. It really does make me sad. I was online last night and I was on Facebook and I was reading these comments on Robin Williams' death. Some guy had posted this very, what I felt to be, a very insensitive comment about his death and how he didn't have any sympathy for him or his family because he had all this money and all this access to all of these medical professionals that could've helped him. And, like, I don't even fully understand what he was suffering from. I have somewhat of an idea, and just from the little bit that I do understand with depression and, you know, having a drug problem. Just because you have a lot of money doesn't mean that you have a solution to the problem. And it was like, a thread that had 200 and twenty-something comments under it. I sat there and I read all of it, and my goodness! The majority of people were agreeing with this guy and talking about how, "I can't stand celebrities because they act like the world is their oyster, and they get one little problem and it just crumbles them, and you have people that are homeless on the streets that aren't committing suicide." It was just really, really sad. Then the other side of that with what's going on in Missouri with all of these young African American men being killed by police, and then even the comments that people make about that - even other African American people. It's not in a productive way, you know? People have the right to think what they want to think, but when you are on that platform, that social media platform - even though you feel, "I'm just an average person." you don't know who can "like" it and share and how far it can go - the effect that your comments can have on other people.

Just now [I'm] thinking, like, back in the day of the Civil Rights Movement, you had a group of people that kind of spearheaded this movement towards change, and it's like, well who do we have today that could be the Dr. Kings and the Reverend Jesse Jacksons, Ella Bakers, Abernathys - you know all of these individuals. Who do we have now? And then I feel like, honestly, it could be me. It could be some of my students that we have in the building, and so I really like - as far as being at Kindred - the flexibility we have to teach this stuff. Because if you go to the school down the street, all they're focused on are the Common Core standards and the Georgia Performance standards and making sure these kids are passing these standardized tests. And, ok yes, we understand we have to do that in order to continue to get our funding, but there's this whole other side of education. And I like being able to tap into that here.

The first thing that drew me to Kindred was when I went on the Georgia Charter Schools website and I just went down school-by-school looking at - I wanted to pursue an alternative educational setting. I knew that I was becoming more confident in my teaching abilities and who I was as an educator, and I knew that the traditional system was putting me in a box. I wanted to break out of that box and so I started looking at private schools [and] charter schools. When I got to Kindred's site, one of the tabs - I want to say it's under the "About us" tab - they talk about how the mission

of Kindred is "Press and Support" - and before then [that's how] I'd always described myself. I used to give out a letter to all my parents at the beginning of the year telling them a little bit about me, and about my background, and in the last paragraph I always tell parents, "I'm a firm, but fair teacher." And so I have high expectations. I expect students to rise to those high expectations, but I'm also fair in the process, and I felt like "Press and Support" was the equivalent to firm but fair, and that's what drew me to fill out an application. I hadn't seen that on any of the other websites that I had visited prior to that. And I was just interested to see how it was around here. I had a phone interview with Dave who is now our executive director and the questions that he was asking me were quite interesting, and they weren't the typical teacher interview questions. So that kind of intrigued me even more, and then when I got here and I saw that what the website said was actually what was going on; I loved it. I even asked my partner teacher the first year - it was maybe like the second week of school - I asked her, I said, "Ok, so when does it get real around here?" and she was like, "What do you mean?" and I asked, "When do you start to see the true side of people? Like their true colors." She was like, "You are seeing the true side of people." I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no. It can't be like this all year, where everybody's getting along. Everybody loves to be here? This is not real." But that's genuinely how it is around here. The teachers love what they do. They're very passionate about education. They're passionate about the students as people, and teaching them how to have and understand multiple perspectives. Even at a very young age, and I really appreciate that. That's what's kind of kept me here.

The way I even came in to the possibility of administration here was so casual; it blew my mind. Our instructional coach that year - for part of the year she was on maternity leave - so Dave who was our principal at the time, he filled in for her as our instructional coach. So we had a meeting and the team came into his office and he had just had a difficult meeting with a parent; he was frustrated. He sits down and he's like, "Who wants my job?" and I raised my hand and they started laughing, and I was like, "No, I'm serious. I want to get into administration." He was like, "For real?!" and I said, "Definitely." I didn't think it would be anytime soon, but on down the line it was where I wanted to head. But he said, "We're gonna set up a meeting and talk about that." So we did [set up a meeting], maybe like a week or two later. He was asking me, you know, why I wanted to be an administrator. I didn't really think that it was an interview. Now that I reflect on the conversation, it kind of was. He was kind of picking my brain about different situations and scenarios and asking me, you know philosophy questions. So the following year, he said, well he kind of gave me a little background information into the future of Kindred and where the school was headed. [He said,] "I'm gonna be looking for an assistant principal, so if that's something that you're truly interested in, we can start working on that now." So we scheduled leadership meetings and he gave me literature. At the time I was in a grad school program for my master's but that was just in elementary education. I wanted to strengthen my foundation as a teacher. Once I finished that program, I immediately started looking into leadership programs, because I said, if this is a possibility within the next few years, I want to make sure that I'm ready for it. We kind of did a Kindred Leadership 101 type of program, he and I. In February of my second year here he calls me into the office very casually; I get this e-mail - "Hey Michelle. Come by when you get a moment. I want to run something by you." So then I sit down and he was like, "So I know you want to get into administration." I was like, "Yeah." He was like, "Well, how about if we make that happen next year?" I promise you I almost fell out of my chair, because he's a very casual, laid-back guy and I'm thinking, "How can he just say that so calmly?"

I thought he was just joking at first. He was like, "No, I'm serious." He said, "We need a Vice Principal. We need one next year; we're gonna be growing. I'm focusing my attention to a few other things outside of the school and I want to make sure that I have someone here that can kind of pick up the slack." And he said, "I trust you with that." That was beyond, like, there's no way I could ever thank him for even seeing me in that light, or being willing to see me in that light, and entrusting his school to me. This school is like his brainchild, his baby, and to not know me for more than two years, and to be able to entrust that with me meant *a lot* to me, and he has been so supportive. Last year we had a similar conversation about me moving into his seat, and that *really* kind of tipped me back and I had to think long and hard - not because I didn't want it - but was I ready for it? My thinking was, "Well, ok, I'm an assistant principal now." Which isn't like your typical assistant principal. It was a lot of, kind of like instructional coaching with a little bit of management on the side. John was like, "Even if you don't believe me yet, you are ready." He's definitely been a great support my career thus far - since I've been here. My big push this year is for us to implement a lot of culturally relevant instruction. That's a part of our charter, and I didn't see it as much as I thought it should be present in our classrooms. So I talked to him about it at length many times last year about that being my mission, as an administrator here. I talked to him about it and he was like, "Go right [ahead]. If that's what you wanna do, do it." There is a lot of openness that I have to have to be able to work with the faculty in making sure that's happening. I rely on Dr. Jones a lot in terms of guidance with that. She comes here often and she does professional development with our faculty to kind of teach them why it's important and how you can implement it in your classroom, and a lot of that does involve integrating music into your instruction.

We [build great relationships with parents] even though we have families from basically all over the city whose students attend here, because of the structure and the model of the school. That sense of community even though it may not be tied to the immediate physical community it definitely happens. We push for close parent/teacher communication. We have a communication policy - our teachers, part of their responsibility is to communicate with the parents at least on a weekly basis. So they may send home a weekly e-mail or paper newsletter once a week giving the parents general classroom updates, but on a bi-weekly basis they're picking up the phone and they're calling parents and checking in on an individual basis. They inform them of academic challenges, academic successes, and allow the parents to share. Most of our parents have our teacher's cell phone numbers, which in a lot of schools that's unheard of. But we haven't had any challenges as to where parents overstep that boundary. But they feel that our teachers are literally a phone call away.

We have a school-wide assembly every Friday, and at that assembly different classes come on stage and they perform in some fashion what's going on in their classroom. We have specials classes that involve all different forms of visual arts. I think right now we have like a general visual arts class, a pottery class, and a photography class going on. We also have a textile art class going on, and a couple different dance classes that are being taught. We partnered with this arts program based out of New York, and the facilitator is coming in here and she's teaching a class that involves creative writing, spoken word, dance, and visual art - all rolled up into one. So I'm really interested to see how that takes off. That starts towards the end of the month. And then teachers in the classrooms, with our focus on project-based learning, students have a lot of input in the types of projects that they complete. So they're academically related - they're tied to the

standards, but what that end product looks like is often driven by the student's interests. So I know one of the projects last year with one of our middle school math classes was how they use music to study, and they took all these different math concepts and procedures and turned them into a rap. So they had a rap about how you convert a decimal to a fraction and, you know, they have a whole music video for the scientific method and the different steps of that. They did a big unit in science on sea life, and they created this Spongebob music video, but it's like a rap video, but they're rapping about the different life forms you find in the ocean.

The majority of the students have a strong interest in music - a lot of it is hip-hop - and they'll turn anything into a rap. If you go in the cafeteria in the morning, I know last year, they were third graders then - they used to like to freestyle. And they would sit there and they're beating on the tables and they're rapping, but they're rapping about cereal, or what they're going to have for lunch later that day. And we let them do it, as long as they don't get too loud and out of control. We let them do it. But we have this one student, when he first came to us last year he struggled a lot in reading fluency, but ask him to freestyle rap, and he's the most fluent...I'm mean, it's just...he had a speech impediment as well as reading fluency issues, but you ask him to rap the last song he heard on the radio...he can do it no problem. You ask him to freestyle, rap about the outfit I have on, he can do it no problem. And I thought that was amazing. And they have...so many of our kids have those types of natural abilities to just do that, and I think that's great. There's no way in the world I would have thought to take the scientific method and in order for me to remember it, I'm going to turn it into a rap song. But you'll see them, taking the test. That year I was teaching fifth grade and that was one of the big units and my partner teacher tapped me, because we share classroom - tapped me over the bookshelf and was like, "Look at them" (whispered) - And they're sitting there like, you know...(bobbing head) because they're recalling the information in their head. And hey, whichever way they can learn it, we'll allow them to explore.

Last year the [Black history] production was based on the Civil Rights movement. It was based on a student named Kevin, and Kevin got in trouble at school. And Kevin was also raised by his grandmother, which a lot of our kids here are raised by grandparents. So Kevin gets in trouble at school, the school secretary calls his grandma to come pick him up, and as they're walking home, the grandma is fussing at him about how he's spoiled and he's not taking advantage of the opportunities, and she's referring to how hard she and a lot of people she knew and grew up with had to fight to get the opportunities that he is so easily afforded today. She sends him to the room and he falls asleep, and then he wakes up in a dream and meets Billy and Brenda (after Dr. Jones) - Billy and Brenda Black History and they take him on a journey through the Civil Rights movement that his grandmother was a part of. They did some pretty heavy stuff. They tackled some pretty heavy content in that play, but we also tried to lighten it up by showcasing the movement we had in sports and how we had a lot of famous African American athletes who were trailblazers within their sport. We also showcased music, and we talked about Motown, it was our second graders who did the scene. One class, some of the girls were like the Supremes and they were up there miming a Supremes song. We had a group of boys that were the Temptations, and so we tried to balance the light with the heavy. But all of that was going on around the same time. So while you had these people that were fighting for equality, on the other end of it you had people who were celebrating their culture through music. We did a scene on the creation of Ebony and Jet magazine because that was starting around that time, and how they

used those magazines as an avenue to communicate with the African American community. And then we also did a scene from the Freedom Riders and the Greensboro sit-in movement. And we re-created the Underground Student Non-violent protest trainings that happened at a lot of the HBCUs. That was particularly one of my favorite parts of the show because it taught the kids that there were other people close to their age that were also helping to create change. And what we do is, when we start prepping for the Black history show- the teachers integrate the content in their classrooms. You could go in the classroom and they could be able to tell you what their part of the show was about, because it's also being taught and integrated in the classroom while the teachers are still teaching the Common Core standards that they're supposed to be teaching. It requires a lot of outside thinking and creativity of the teachers, but that's what we're supposed to be all about.

I was kind of purposeful in what we're doing this year, because culturally relevant teaching should happen all year long. We even had a team of teachers who worked over the summer to expand our social studies curriculum beyond the Georgia performance standards. So when the teachers came back, and we handed them - we have what's called TEA books, Teach Everything Always books. Basically it's your Kindred teacher 1-on-1 type of Bible. And within that, for our social studies teachers, the curriculum they received in terms of "This is what you need to teach this year" already included a lot of that culturally relevant instruction that goes beyond just what's in the textbooks. They were really appreciative of that, especially with us doing it on this year-long scope – wanting to see it on a regular basis. A lot of teachers may not feel confident enough to be able to execute it effectively and we as a school said, "Hey, we're going to do our part in supporting the teachers who may need a little more support than others."

In our last professional development [Dr. Jones from the university] did with us, she was talking about culturally relevant instruction and how important it is for our students and she was like some of you received culturally relevant instruction and didn't even realize it. And everyone was like, "What?" I kind of knew where she was going with that, and she asked some of our Caucasian teachers, "Where did you grow up? And what was the dynamic of the community that you lived in? Was it around mostly other Caucasian families?" A lot of them say yes. And then she said, "Ok, when you went to school, who'd you go to school with?" Mostly Caucasian students. "What did your teachers look like?" They were mostly Caucasian. "When you opened your textbook, what did you see?" And she's like, "That's culturally relevant instruction. She said, "Now, why can't students of other backgrounds get that?" And then that kind of really made them think! I just really like having her as such a strong supporter of the school, and as an educational resource to come in and provide that perspective, because some teachers don't even realize how necessary it is. I didn't even realize it as an educator, how necessary it was, until I got [to Kindred]. The school that I came from was a little more diverse than it is here, and [I was] bogged down with [the idea of] *this is what you've gotta teach; this is how long you have to teach it, and they've gotta pass this test*. You don't even get the time to expand your thinking. But being here, and you have that time, you realize, "Man, this should be happening everywhere!" and "Why isn't it happening?" So being able to be here and kind of explore that is really, really great.

[Arts] give students more of a voice and more of an active role in the curriculum. Not only are the sitting and receiving the teachers' instruction, but they're also giving back and being an

active part of the instruction. [When arts are embedded] it sends a message that arts play a very important role in one's education. It's just as important as making good grades. And also, there are those that might not be as strong academically. [Arts give them] an opportunity to shine. Because what we've seen often here, is that students who are more so struggling learners, are some of our most creative learners. They're assessed in a formal and traditional way, as well as through art. So there's a chance to kind of counterbalance that test grade that might not be as strong with a project grade that *is* strong, based on the same content. Just because they're more creative and they're better able to express themselves through art than they are in a standard format.

I listen to all kinds of music with my daughter. All kinds. My parents are pretty much R&B fans and that's what I grew up on, but as I got older - meeting friends from different backgrounds, getting exposed to different types of music through my dance classes - I was able to broaden my interests as well. My sister is very eclectic, and that's kind of influenced me as well, and exposed me to even more genres of music that I didn't really quite entertain when I was younger. And now that has definitely played a part in what I've exposed to my daughter. She loves to sing, she loves to dance. She's a cheerleader herself. And I call them our "car-ride concerts" 'cause I'll turn on the radio and she'll be back there singing and she'll be looking in the rear-view mirror, so when I peek up she's looking and me singing. And that's always fun. But she likes a wide variety of music as well. She's in 2<sup>nd</sup> [grade] here.

[Music] is my balance. I'm in graduate school myself, it is something that I use to study to; it helps keep me focused while I'm studying. So it provides balance. It's also a stress reliever. After I've had a long day at work, singing in the car with my daughter can kind of take my mind off what was problematic at work that day. So it also gives a sense of enjoyment - but more so balance than anything. I think that music serves the same purpose for our students. I think it can stimulate creativity, stimulate their thinking. I know, when I was in the classroom, I always kept music on all the time, and it would just bring a sense of calm in the classroom, whether it was the pop station playing low in the background, or if I had on jazz, or if I had on classical.

In my experience [music] has brought a sense of peace to the classroom. So when they come in in the morning and there's some jazz playing, it automatically calms them down and helps get them focused and ready for the day. It clears their thoughts, so should they have to make challenging decisions, they're better able to do that because their mind is clear and not bogged down with issues from home that they could be thinking about, or a disagreement with a classmate. As a school we are continuing to build our arts program, and so becoming more knowledgeable in music education primarily, because we have had quite a few parents express interest in having a band or an orchestra, or having instructors coming in for special classes to teach lessons on a certain instrument. So we are becoming more knowledgeable about those types of programs or organizations that we could partner with to get more music education here at the school.

[I hope my colleagues would see me as] someone who is firm, but fair. So, having high expectations, but also being open to seeing various perspectives on situations especially with challenging students, being able to get a sense of the challenging situations and collaborating with the teachers and parents on how to best support that student who is experiencing difficulty. I think they would describe me as calm, pretty much, even though it takes quite a bit to ruffle my

feathers. Even though I could be very frustrated on the inside - I do a good job of masking the frustration to be able to work through a challenging situation. That's sort of what I mean about balance. How I handle things. And that's part of the reason why, on most days in my office, I have some type of music playing.

## Chapter 6: Amy Harris

**Amy Harris** is an elementary music educator at Lakeview Elementary School in an urban/suburban school district in the Southeast. She identifies as a Caucasian female, and is in her early thirties. She teaches general music to students grades K-5.

### Setting

Amy was the last person who signed on to participate in the study. During the proposal phase of the study, I had assumed that that majority of my participants would be White women, who are grossly overrepresented in the field of music education. By the middle of August however, I had seven participants, none of whom were White women. There are many potential reasons for this underrepresentation, but for the purpose of this chapter, I note that Amy's hesitation to claim herself as an equitable practitioner lies in stark contrast to participants who felt urgency and personal investment in liberatory teaching practices. When I sent her the recruitment flyer, she questioned whether or not she would be a worthy participant. She stated on the phone that she *tried* to maintain her commitments toward equity in the classroom, but didn't feel like she was always successful. She also noted that at that her school, which boasts a population of 900 elementary students, intense scheduling constraints often prevented her from engaging in liberatory work. Despite these challenges, Amy told me that she was constantly reflecting on her relationship with her students, and how power might play a role. After I explained that the study focused on identity construction – specifically how music teachers view themselves in relation to their students – Amy and I both agreed that she would be an appropriate candidate for participation.



When I arrived at Amy's school, she apologized for the state of her classroom saying that she was in the process of setting things up for the year. The classroom was large and spacious, and I noted that there are very few chairs. By the back wall, there was a collection of Orff instruments and an assortment of classroom hand drums. There were posters littered around the floor, and Amy told me that she was just about to put them up on the walls. The posters were familiar to me; they depicted musical symbols, solfège, and the music staff – all in support of scaffolding music literacy. Off to the side of the classroom was a small office. I noted that there was dim lighting in the office, similar to what one might find in a yoga studio. There was a bulletin board posted with various quotes and affirmations. Amy described this as her “zen” place where she goes to center herself and breathe in the morning and throughout the day. She noted that she is somewhat anxious by nature, and needs to calm herself each day before she teaches.

In the first interview, we talked about Amy's history with music, and ended up spending a significant amount of time speaking about her time teaching in Texas. Amy proselytizes the wonders and benefits of her first teaching experience, highlighting the opportunity for significant professional development and interaction with like-minded music colleagues. Having attended the state music conference in Texas, I understand that music education there is significantly different. In fact, I had enjoyed some of the professional development offered, and used it in my own high school classroom. I also know, however, that the music curriculum in Texas is highly structured and leaves little room for teacher or student agency. In our second interview, Amy compared the music education climate in Texas to her current everyday practice in the Southeast. She stated that she wishes she could do more, that she could see her students more often, and that there were more opportunities for her professional growth.

In our third interview, several months later, Amy stated that she had been very reflective about our earlier conversation. Her schedule was just as hectic in the new school year, though she stated that she has been thinking more and more about what her experience in Texas signifies for her practice. She described a music education utopia where students are engaged, and where she has the time to teach all of the musical skills and experiences that she believes are vital. As we reflected together on our music teaching experiences, Amy suddenly recalled a moment in class during the past week when everything seemed to work perfectly. She described her feeling of “letting go” in that moment, and we ended the interview considering what letting go might mean for her practice moving forward.

### **Amy’s Story**

My musical background starts with my family and in the church, for sure. My mom has always been a church pianist, from the age of 13. She was raised in a Baptist church and my dad has always been a pastor in a Baptist church, so that has been my upbringing. I come out of that, but that was from age zero to eighteen. So obviously music was a big part of our lives, but mostly church music, and mostly Christian music. I was a member of the church choir, children's choir, and then adult choir. Whenever there was an opportunity to sing, I was there, and I usually got the solo. My sister sang a little bit too, but it was pretty clear from an early age that I had an ability to sing, and so I would often do special music and people knew me as like the pastor’s daughter who sang. Then in school, whenever there was a choir opportunity, I was there. I started in chorus in elementary school all the way up through high school. Going back to the church - hymns and music in the church - we weren't as conservative as some Baptist churches. We sang a number of hymns and also contemporary Christian music. My family - my dad, especially - you know, in the car - the music we would enjoy listening to was contemporary Christian, and Christian Rock, that kind of thing. So, like, through middle school and early high school I was really big into going to lots of Christian Rock concerts. That changed when I was maybe fifteen or sixteen. I kind of started to get tired of Christian music. I just, I don't know, I knew there was more out there obviously, but we didn't listen to a whole lot of what we called secular music. That was a big distinction in my family, you know, sacred and secular - Christian and secular. We would occasionally listen to a lite rock station or something, but you know, I wasn't raised with a whole knowledge of all of the decades of American music, or even really music history or World music or anything like that. It was when I was in high school, I stepped into a little Boutique-y store and I heard Ella Fitzgerald playing on the recording and it stopped me in my tracks. I mean, that's like, kind of a pivotal moment for me because I kind of went from all of my music being Christian music, and kind of went into exploring music history more or less, and going back all the way to the 20s and 30s and kind of working my way through rock history and pop. Kind of training myself. Giving myself that history that my parents weren't really giving

me. That continued through college. I went to a Christian college actually, a four-year college, but I didn't listen to a lot of Christian music at college. Of course, I was a music ed. major, and I got really into jazz music then.

Backing up, I grew up in rural Midwest, so half of my life - from zero to ten - we were actually in a suburban town, so I had more of a suburban experience there. Then when I was ten we moved to a small rural town. It was a very touristy town in the summer, but very rural - lots of farms. That's where my parents still live. I went to a very small school though, and so there weren't a ton of opportunities for music, and we only had one music director, music teacher. She was my music person from middle school through high school, and since it was a small community, there wasn't - we had like the main chorus that you would take during the school hours, and we also had like a special show choir ensemble, not quite that fancy. Our school didn't have a lot of money to spend into that kind of program. I do feel like I missed out on doing big school musicals or being able to diversify my music, so I feel like I was a little bit limited that way, and also kind of limited by my church upbringing, in a sense. So it was in high school in my senior year, and I got accepted into state honors choir, and I was in the women's chorus for that. We went to University of Michigan for a two-day workshop and then the concert. Our conductor was Sandra Snow, and it was during one of our rehearsals - watching her with all her energy, and she's gorgeous - she's just embodying this...She's really tough, which I loved. And like I said, the only other person who I had seen - who was my music conductor and choral director was my school - I couldn't see myself in her shoes. She's a very different person from me and very quirky and eccentric, and just really crazy. It didn't click for me until that moment with Dr. Snow. I was like, "I think I could maybe do something like this." I wasn't ambitious enough to think I would do what she was doing, like be a doctor or anything, but I thought, "You know, why haven't I thought about music education in the past?" and that was the moment where I was like, "I really CAN do that." I do have a history; our family has a lot of ministers and teachers. My sister always wanted to be a teacher, so I think I've always been kind of independent and so I shied away from wanting to say that I would be a teacher. So anyway, I spent the rest of my senior year in conversation with my music teacher, and she helped me to get ready for some of the classes I would be taking in college.

So I went to a four-year university, it's called Oaktown University and it's in a rural town. So basically moving from one farmland to another, to the cornfields. It's kind of a very isolated place. My parents went there and it's in my family, so it's just sort of a place that I always thought, "Oh, I'm going to go there." For Christian colleges, it's a very strong academic Christian college and I liked that about it, and for Christian colleges they were fairly strong musically. I went in as a music ed. major [with a] vocal emphasis, and pretty much knew right away that I was gonna go the route of graduating and then becoming a teacher. Grad school has never really been a part of my family. It was never a goal. It was never anything that they encouraged. It was like, "You're gonna go to college, and you're gonna get a job, and you're gonna pay off these loans. We can't afford to send you full-ride." So anyway...and that was fine. It was more affirmed to me along the way that my strengths and attributes and my level of musicality works well for elementary, so I discovered that I wanted to do elementary in my elementary methods class. The teacher for that wasn't anything special. She was a quirky lady too, and kind of bumbling - kind of crazy. She was like a retired teacher who they found, and she happened to be a Christian, so they could put her on staff. The good thing about her is that she laid out for us every class, just

all of the materials and all of the curriculum, and all of the methodologies that are available to you if you decide to go into elementary music ed. To me was the most appealing part. I was like, "Wow! I didn't realize there was so much that I could choose from! So much variety! Every day could be different!" Honestly in my elementary years, I was not involved in a stellar music program at all. The teacher was kind of standoffish, and we all just kind of sat in chairs and had our little music books. And yeah, it was fun to sing some of the songs and stuff, but it wasn't anything spectacular. So it kind of opened my eyes to [the idea] that I would be able to create an experience that was really cool for little kids. That appealed to me; it works with my level of musicality. I'm not much of a pianist, so being a high school music choral director was kind of out for me, and that was fine. I just can't sit down and play, like an accompaniment to an octavo. So yeah, it just kind of clicked and then I did my student teaching at a really great elementary school. The music teacher there was phenomenal. They had a great room, and equipment, and she let me be really independent, and it was a very good experience there.

Right after that, we decided that we were gonna move. I got married, actually, after my junior year in college, and my husband Ryan was also a music ed. major. We met in college and he was more of the band route. He played the oboe and during my senior year, he had already graduated and got a job at a charter school teaching music nearby. They happened to fire all of their music teachers six weeks into the school year, so we were kind of left hanging. I finished up my senior year of college. He was just doing kind of an odd job, and along that way, he decided that he wanted to go into music history; he wanted to go into musicology. So we decided to move and we had a good friend who was a former professor of ours who had gotten all of her degrees at UNT, and she was really influential in our lives musically, really. She was the coach of the jazz singers that I got really involved in that was kind of my identity, my musical identity in college.

[This former professor] was, like, the star singer in the UNT jazz singers when she was there, and was really close to the director. It was kind of cool to be part of that lineage in a sense, even though we were at this kind of silly Christian college. But that was a really hardcore music opportunity that I got that I am really grateful for. So anyway, we moved to Texas and he got his master's, and then that summer before we left [Ohio] I got a job in teaching in Texas at a public school. It was cool because I actually was contacted. I sent my resume out to all of the districts, of which there are a million of them around Dallas, and I was contacted because they're always looking for teachers. It's just a great place to be, to work, as a teacher. I was contacted by a woman - two years later she became president of American Orff Schulwerk Association. I came to realize what an influential person she was, and high up in the world of Orff. So anyway, she was the person that hired me. She was working as the elementary music coordinator for Richardson, and was just a really influential part of starting me up in music. There was also another music teacher at the school I got hired at, and it was great to work alongside another music teacher. That's very rare; most schools just have one music teacher, but we had two. Those two years were just amazing as far as growth. I feel like I was able to really grow. I received Level 1 certification in Orff and Kodaly, and there was just a plethora of opportunities there.

We moved [from Texas] because Ryan, my husband, decided to go for his PhD in musicology and that's why we moved here. He went for three years at one university, and he got another master's technically, and then he decided to quit that program. He's actually still working in the music department, but kind of on the admin side of things. I would say that together, we have a

lot in common musically. He came from a similar church background - much more conservative. But we had the same family music background, where our families were kind of ministers and teachers and musicians. The two of us together have really grown in our musical journey. We've kind of both had to take a step back and teach ourselves to have a broad enough music base. We were very limited, you know, I think that's a big overarching theme. I think that looking back, I see how limiting growing up in that kind of environment can be musically. I mean, at the same time, it does teach you to love music, and the community of the church is really important, I think, in forming your musicality. So we've had to kind of make a journey ourselves of getting into the more intellectual side of music, the more academic side. Then last year I got my National Board certification, so I feel like in my career I've really tried to get as many certifications and things as I can. I don't have my Master's though.

So, like I said, when I walked into that store, there was Ella Fitzgerald playing. That's my favorite style of music, vocal jazz. Getting into Oaktown, I started with Jazz singers when I was a sophomore, and it was kind of the cool music kid crowd to be in. It was fun be a part of group where we had to work really hard. We probably worked harder on a lot of those songs than I had to work in some of my other classes, just to get the notes and the style. I think my voice works really well for jazz singing. I have a nice straight tone, and kind of a pure quality, so I felt really at home with that kind of music. That also helped me decide that I would be a good model for young kids also, because with that tone quality I don't have to worry about a lot of heavy vibrato or anything. I would say the jazz music we were doing - the repertoire - the things that I was listening to because of that, as well as the repertoire that I was doing in my vocal lesson studies were a big part of influencing me into a more intellectual grasp of music.

So we moved here and I sent my resume out to everywhere. That was right at the beginning of the recession in 2008, so I did not get a job that year. I was offered a job, I should say. It's kind of ironic. I was offered a job at Northfield elementary, which is literally right down the road from where I live right now, but we were living somewhere else then, and the commute was forty-five minutes plus. I had just come out from Texas having to commute [a long way], and that was horrific. My prayer was to find a school that was in a community that I lived in, so I could feel like I could be connected to the families, that I wouldn't mind bumping into them at community events and things. I wanted to feel that connectedness. So I turned that down, because it just didn't feel right. I worked in an animal hospital that year and then in the springtime of 2009 I started sending out my resume again and - during that time, I should say, that I got in contact with a music ed. professor at a local university and we met several times for lunch and things. Just talking to him about how my experience in Texas was really quite stellar actually, and coming here, I see that people in music ed. around here are far behind. It's the same thing with broader educational experience. Like, the things that we do here in staff development and professional development - we did five years ago in Texas.

So, that professor was a good person to lament to because I think he kind of understood that - yeah, we're kind of lagging around here. I wish that there was more of an exciting, fervent music ed. community. I think it's true, there are certainly people who are trying their best to dive into Orff and Kodaly and things like that, and trying to keep the chapter alive with workshops and things like that. But overall it just seems like a lot of my colleagues have kind of settled into this... There's this stereotype about music teachers for a reason, I think, that we can be sometimes

lazy, or show videos. That's actually kind of true with some teachers that I've noticed. Anyways, it's just totally different here. But so anyway, I went to observe some of the music teachers around this area during that year when I was not a teacher. So I tried to stay abreast of what was going on. I saw that there was an opening for Lakeview and honestly, I saw where it was, where the location was and we were just a couple miles down the road at that point. I just decided to walk over and walk in the door with the résumé and a business card and just see who was there. I just took a risk. The assistant principal was there at that time, and we talked for a little bit. I think I made a good first impression and I was asked for an interview pretty soon after that and hired. So that was kind of lucky! I've been here ever since. This is gonna be my sixth year, so I just finished my fifth year, and I've only been at this school since we moved here.

The [Lakeview school] community is diverse, which is awesome. The student population is close to maybe 40/30/30 - White/Black and Hispanic. Some Asian. There are 900 kids. I think that land is expensive around here and my district has not purchased land to build another school; they need to, desperately. Anyway, the school has just ballooned in size and gets bigger every year. It's been a real challenge being the only music teacher, and there's only one art teacher. So the arts here, I feel like, get the shaft. I mean, it's a beautiful classroom; it's a beautiful school. I love the people here, I have no problems with any of that, but it is really challenging for me to do my job as effectively as I want to and as I've been trained to do - with all of the things I experienced in Texas, and I saw the kids twice a week in Texas! So it's been such a huge change. I see the kids once every eight days for 45 to 50 minutes, and that roughly equals about 20-22 classes a year. It's really hard to fit in half of what I need to. It's hard to maintain continuity.

This summer my goal was to really knock out a curriculum that fits this situation and it's been super challenging, because I'm like, "I really want to do this activity, but I can't! I don't have time!" I need to teach this in second grade, but in order to do that, there's a process we have to follow. I can't just introduce the concept without having practiced it, or without having prepped it. We need practice and we need assessment and that takes a long time! So when you're talking about trying to fit in the necessary concepts for music literacy, it knocks out some of the more whimsical activities that I would love to do that kind of just promote more of a love of music. It's really hard to balance those. And just having to grade and keep track of 900 kids - I certainly don't have to collect as much data as a classroom teacher would need to, but I have to give grades. So I try to get grades whenever I can, but it's really tricky. So that's a bummer. I love the school and the reason I haven't left or tried to find anything else is because it is a great community. The PTA is really strong; the parents are really encouraging. It's fun to just have kids from all over the world in my classroom and it's a great balance. The PTA provides us with grant money every year and I've been able to collect a really great assortment of instruments. I have everything that I need. I'll be honest with you, I really do. Not everybody can say that, but it's because of our PTA, and I don't want to go to a school where that's not there.

[The only thing] they can't give me is time. They cannot. There should be two music teachers here and that goes into a whole other can of worms, with the districts and what they value above other things. Like I said, in Texas, our school was not quite 700 kids and there were two music teachers, and that was the norm. I think maybe the big thing there is their high school band programs are just out of this world, and you have to build that. They figured out how to build it from the ground up. That's what it is here – leaving you to do your own thing. It really is, and

that's the trouble that we face. And we've noticed that as elementary teachers we do a lot of extra activities and extra things and we notice kind of in middle school, and not with all the music teachers, but with a lot of them, the ball kind of gets dropped. Then it gets picked up again in high school, where there's a concentration of serious teachers. I hate to say that, but there are definitely issues.

I would say I started to think about issues of equity moving here, because, and it kind of goes along with where my husband and I have landed spiritually. There was not a lot of emphasis growing up on social justice. In fact, we shied away from that. All the emphasis was on getting people saved. It wasn't about practical ways to promote social justice or equity. In fact, I went to school in a school district that had busing and I was part of, obviously, the White kids in the hometown, and we had African American kids getting bused in. So, but that was just kind of how it was, and so I feel like when Ryan and I, when we were in Texas, we kind of got away from Evangelical Christianity and we moved into what I would maybe call, like an emergent church situation. I think it's kind of shifted again, but I think shifting my beliefs and focusing my beliefs and just even growing up and just realizing that I was in a sheltered world growing up. Having moved several times in the United States, you see a lot and you realize what the real world is. I started paying attention more to society, and I still believe in God and I still believe in Jesus, and I believe in a Kingdom. This is what we talk about all the time at church; it's the least among us. Everything that you thought - but flipped. That's the kingdom. It's not the people in power. Well, like we were talking about last night, the oppressed shall go free. That's a statement Jesus made and proclaimed and it rocked everybody's world because he flipped everything.

I think converting that [idea] into what I come here to do every day, I have to shift my mindset. Instead of looking at the kids with the most and the kids whose parents are in positions of power and elevating those kids, I'm really trying to shift that to maybe even overemphasizing calling on children, or helping children who I know come from a rough background - who are a part of the powerless, and that the other kids might not choose to be friends with. And I'm trying, in the little teeny tiny ways that I can, whenever there's an opportunity to do that in class. I'm trying to do that. I feel like teachers have a lot of power in that way, in just the little things. Whenever we decide to have partner work or group work, or anytime we decide who to call on when the kids raise their hand. I feel like a lot of those ways, over time, if I'm shifting my thought to trying to build up the kids who are normally going to get left in the dust if nobody tries to empower them, I'm trying to be a little more innovative in directing class to empower those children. [I try to] give them leadership responsibilities and roles, and let them be the first one at the instruments. Not in any way that singles them out, but when you have the little White girl who raises her hand and always knows all the answers, and her parents are really smart, and they might be the most wonderful family ever - if you keep on calling on that person, and you keep on using them as an example, I feel like it starts to shift. The kids kind of can notice where their 'place' is in line and I don't think that's right. I don't want to give any kid an idea that "You are better than this other kid." You know? So any way I can, I'm trying to turn the tables. That's the overarching goal. I'm trying to be more conscious of that, and it was not in my consciousness even in Texas teaching, because it was never - I wasn't raised to be conscious of that.

It is in the little moments when you have an opportunity as a teacher to elevate a child. You should take advantage of that; you have to take advantage of that. If there's an opportunity for me

to make a kid feel like he's smart or she's smart, or she's got abilities; you have to take advantage. I feel like you have to err on the side of choosing those kids more often a little bit, because it's gonna work out O.K. for that little White girl. You know what I'm saying, like in the grand scheme of things, she's got the support system. She's in a position of power already. And *yes*, of course I'm here for that child too. It's not that there aren't things that *she* needs and ways in which I can be of service to her. I think music, when you compare it to other subject, music is one of those subjects in which everybody can be a participant. Everybody has value. Everybody can participate at any level and you feel like you're part of the club. You feel like you're part of the team if that's the way that you teach music, right? And I think maybe an Orff based curriculum helps. I would say that, because it's very inclusive. Everybody has a role to play.

[The thing is, the girl raising her hand], it's me! Exactly. And I don't feel so bad, because I know she's gonna be ok, because I remember that. Thinking about how do you get that across to five-year olds? I don't know! I think you just get it across in like, you see the teacher not calling on the same five White kids every time, and you see that this teacher, Mrs. Harris, she's really pretty good about picking everybody. When I walk in here, I don't know that I'm going to be the most special kid anymore. I want them to know that they're special, 'cause it's amazing what will come out of their mouths - as far as, "He always does this. He always does that Mrs. Harris. The classroom teacher just ignores it." You hear so many things that you, you know. When I was student teaching, I got called out on for calling on some of the same students all the time, and I did not even notice! But it takes practice. Getting to know your curriculum really well, and then your mind doesn't have to stay focused as much on "What am I gonna teach?" - methodology or process. Then you can be a little more open to what's really going on in here socially. It's all these levels, you know?

I'm always thinking about, was I fair? Or my mind is always going back sometimes maybe too much in the past and just re-evaluating. Did I take the right approach with that student? How could I have reached them more? Or saying, "Yeah! I did a good job with that and I should do more of this." So I'm always evaluating and always trying to do the next thing better. That's how I work anyways. Throughout the day I'm also just making sure that the flow of my lesson is appropriate and that there is enough movement and that there's enough... I'm not spending too much time on one thing. I guess that's one good thing about an eight-day schedule, is you get to do the lesson six to eight times and you really get good at it. Sometimes I do get bored of it, which is why I have so much material. I can always substitute an activity in. I want to have continuity though, it's really important that because there's so much drawing on literature - referencing songs -that if in the next year I did something different with a class, they're not going to know [that song].

[Three Months Later]

I was just thinking in the transcript - I really am dreaming of this utopian music ed. experience. You can see how badly I want that in my descriptions of things and where my concerns lie, and what my hopes and dreams are. I was just thinking that there definitely is that shift from my teaching experience in Texas to teaching experience here, and how the Texas experience really focused on how to teach music - and I feel like my experience here has been everything but that. In a lot of ways, it's been how do you relate to your community? How do you deal with



children? How do you diversify your curriculum, or just the way that you teach and act around kids, and handle situations? So I feel like, and I think that goes along with my experience with my packed schedule, and this school being so large, and not seeing the kids enough - I *can't* teach what I'm supposed in the Texas terms - or in the music ed. world terms. I can't do it. So I feel like I'm having to pay more attention to relationships with the kids, and between kids. I do pay more attention, I think, to equity and to fairness and to all of those things that *would be* extra to teaching music - but really are kind of at the center. I think more than anything, I'm having to deal with those things first and foremost, because I can't do what I want with music. It can't be that perfect utopian, perfect little Orff class or Kodaly class.

[A utopian music education experience] would mean having a class that's focused, and paying attention, and eager, and ready to learn, and excited about the material you have for them. And they're on board, and they participate, and you're not having to pull teeth to get them to sing or just clap or pat the beat along with you. I think, it doesn't mean that they have to be perfect kids, but they're eager and ready to learn. Actually, I feel like I had an experience with a class last year. It didn't last long, but there was a second grade class, and at the beginning of last school year - they only had about sixteen kids in the class. They eventually got more students, and they diversified, and there ended up being more issues in the class. But this first class, they came in and it was just heaven. It was like, we were all on music cloud nine. We were all singing, and skipping. It was like there were fairies around. It was like this weird out of body, it was like, "This is AWESOME!" They were all with me, we got through our lesson plan, and they were on board. And so, I guess maybe it's like the emotion in the room. It's just light and cheery, or willing to work hard. And I think also, a utopian music ed. experience for me would be able to get the kids into improvising and into composing, and into those further along states, and stages. I feel like it's so hard to get them to the point where they can go to the Orff instrument and actually create their own melody, because we barely have time for them to learn how to play the beat on it. You know what I'm saying? We're kind of stuck - or I feel like I'm kind of stuck in those very beginning stages. It would [also mean] seeing them more often, and being able to have them be more student-led and be able to create music, and create their own projects, and be very project-based. And it would also mean that there would be time for performances for the school and it wouldn't be such a hassle. So I guess, you know, in a utopian world, I'm looking for a small school. I'm looking for a small class. I'm looking for kids that are ready and eager to learn, and I'm looking for time.

Orff is very movement based, so there's very little time in which the kids would be sitting or actually need a desk. So automatically, my curriculum dictates that I have a wide-open space, because I incorporate a lot of play parties and folk dances, and movement - creative movement. I need that wide-open space, so chairs just don't find a place in my room. My philosophy is just - it's purely movement-based. Everything we do, we add some kind of movement to it. If you're sitting in a chair, that tends to lend itself more towards looking at a page of music - focused on that - singing, following the words, perhaps doing worksheets, which I think is boring. My elementary music experience had a little bit of that in it and I don't look upon that very fondly. I was one of the ones who didn't mind reading a song out of the book, and there are certainly times when I have the kids do that. But I think if it was an everyday thing, they're not actually *making* music at that point. I guess it would be like the kids always reading a book, but never telling a

story, or acting out a story, or living a story. They're always constantly reading it through somebody else's point of view or something. So I want them to experience and *make* music.

We take a fast pace in here, so we're always going from one part of the room to the next. And my pace in life is fast. I overcrowd my schedule probably, so I guess that sort of fits my personality. And I love sitting on the floor - I think there's freedom in [that]. Also, I want music to be just a totally different experience for them when they come in. They're used to sitting in desks and chairs all day, so it's really nice and freeing and limbers up the body and helps, maybe, even certain kids breathe better if they're not encumbered by a chair - having to sit in a chair. But on the other hand, that can be a little too free for some kids who need a little more restraint. Like, for instance today, I had to pull a chair over [there] - I do keep some in the back. I had to pull a chair over for a kid who just was all over the place on the carpet. It was harder for him to sit on a free space, so there are certain times when I might use that, but that's more of a tool for behavior.

I think the arts are a way for kids to be themselves and be their whole selves. That's what the arts are. It's creating, it's moving, it's playing, speaking, singing, composing. You know? Problem-solving. It's everything. You're constantly doing everything in one simple song. And a song is not simple, as we know, right? It's amazing what the brain and the body do, especially when - I think it's brain, body, spirit, all combined into one. I think there are general ed. teachers who try to incorporate that into their curriculum, but I think it's very easy to do in music. Because that's just what music *is*. So yes, I want the kids to know when they come in that this is where you can be totally you. You can explore a different part of yourself. The room looks different. You're sitting in a different way. You're not just sitting the whole time. We're making shapes and patterns, and music with our bodies.

Music helps me breathe. It takes me to a different realm, a different sphere, where I can be a better person. And it takes me out of what can be kind of an anxious, sometimes fearful, sometimes overdriven, and over-scheduled person into a calm, focused, more loving, more happy person. And I mean, honestly, if I have had a hard day... how ironic is this?... If I've had a hard day teaching music, I go in my car and I listen to beautiful music. It reminds me why I do what I do, even if I maybe did it badly that day. But it takes me back. And the team aspect of it, when you're in an ensemble with somebody or a group of people is unlike anything you can experience.

I hope [that music] gives my students, number one, a positive experience in their day. I hope that it gives them something that they can achieve. That they can leave my classroom and say, "I did this. I was successful at it." Even if it's one little thing. Because they don't get to play instruments other places, they don't get to rap on their bodies. They're told that that's not good. They don't get to sing. If they're singing in the hall or dancing in the hall, that's not O.K., right? Or in their classroom. So it's a chance for kids to explore a different part of themselves. To open up insights into different areas of their life that maybe they haven't explored - or maybe they're not allowed to explore at home. Maybe music and dancing having that sense of freedom is shunned at home. They also make connections all the time to things that they experience in the real world that they never knew had any relation to music or vice versa.

So obviously part of music-making is the ability to read music, but I feel like unless you've experienced the actual percussive or melodic nature - or your body is making music... Unless you've experienced that, looking at it on a page isn't really going to mean anything to you. Especially children. They need concrete examples, and what better way to do that than to sing with your own instrument, and pat your own body, and feel the rhythm. Nothing gets a class more on task and more on target than me automatically just singing a song, or me automatically just starting to pat the beat. If I see that there's a little bit of wiggle or unfocused [behavior], singing automatically works. I don't have to reprimand, or direct behavior. Automatically music takes care of that, because it's an experience. Kids want to have experiences that are concrete all day. I think we want them to be literate, but looking at words all day is not...they need to have experiences. They need to actually live those words, like I said. Be able to tell their own stories. And I think that happens in the school, I'm not saying that it doesn't. But that's why I want them to first create music, make music, speak, sing, imitate, play before we get to labeling. Before we get to the part where they're sitting and we're looking at the board and we're actually figuring the rhythm out and notating something.

The arts create humans; without the arts we can't be human. We can't learn to be human. Humanity would be ugly and a mess - and it is, but music makes that better. And I think purely music - in and of itself - is a spiritual experience no matter what. When people are involved in music-making, in whatever way, they are better able to put aside hate and anger, and strife, and whatever else is going on, and better able to focus in on what it means to love and what it means to be kind. It promotes good feelings, and we need that to be able to look at somebody as equal to ourselves. My spiritual formation has led me to believe that that's what I should do as a moral human being is to treat people the way I want to be treated, and even beyond that - because that's a little too individualistic - it's just much more of a big picture. It's not about me; it's about the greater whole. If I'm going to live my life, not looking out for my own back, but seeing how we as human beings create systems that work against other people, music can - in this microcosm of my classroom - it can help to break down those systems, and break down those barriers. And people can see each other for who they are. You can just be human I think. I think the best times in my classroom come from when the kids are just - they're making music. I had an experience yesterday, it was a very tough class, and I let go of that utopia thing that I was talking about and we had a play party. We did a song from Jamaica, and it was rhythmic and fun, and I had fun, the kids had fun. They were getting along, I started seeing this group of girls putting their arms around each other, and it was out of love. And it was girls who a few minutes earlier might have been making sneers at each other. This class has a lot of issues that way, relationship issues, but we were all on board. It was a very human, lovely experience. I think that made those kids better, it made me better, because there was love and happiness. The class started off just horribly. And it was, like, one of the best classes that I've had in a long, long time. It's been tough this year. Just a lot of challenges, and I've really been holding onto the fact that things aren't fair for my job here. That I'm not treated fairly, you know, that what I do - people think it's not important - or they don't value it. They misjudge me. You know, I spent all this time creating this wonderful curriculum that I'm not able to teach. Yesterday was like, I was at the piano playing - and they were just doing - they were all on board. They were all participating. I don't know if that's because I let go, or if it was the make-up of the class, but I think it was because I let go. And I started to just have fun, and it was just about the music. Yeah.

I think [my colleagues] would say, "She's a great music teacher. She really loves the kids. She really tries hard to do the best job she can do. She's on top discipline issues when she can be, she's on top of her lesson planning, she's conscientious, she shows leadership in our PLC. She is... most of the time... enthusiastic and seems like she's enjoying her job, and I like working with her." I do think that's what they would say. I think if you sat down with the art teacher and PE teacher for a super long time, they would probably say that I might tend to stress about some things that I need to let go of. Or that once in a while I can have mood swings that affect my performance. I can get a little frenetic. I think if you talked to them for a long time, if you built a relationship, and they were like "You know, honestly..." I think they would say I really try to be on top of it. But! I'm still here, I'm committed to being here. The [students] come to me, we still have this time together.

I don't care if [my students] go on and be professional musicians. That's not a concern of mine. That's fabulous and wonderful and if they make it to the big leagues, I hope they thank me for it. But that's not what it is. It's about them being able to be better humans - absolutely. It's them being able to learn skills in here to be a better person, and to be sweeter and kinder and happier. [To] understand what justice is, and understand what fairness is, and understand that they are special, even if when they walk out the door the world tells them, and their parents tell them, and everybody tells them, "You're nothing. You're not gonna make it." I think about 'em like in middle school, and beginning in high school. I want those kids to look back upon their elementary education and think about music class as being a place where they felt like they could be a kid, where they could explore, where it was *fun*. And fun is a loaded word. Fun doesn't mean recess to me; if you had fun in my classroom, I hope it's because you worked hard, and we were a team together, and we accomplished the musical goal. If we did that, then I know that you gained more confidence. Because I think that's the outcome of accomplishing a musical goal. I hope that they look back and say, "You know, Ms. Harris was *for* me." I hope that that's what they say. "There were people in my life in elementary school that were for me. She was one of them."

## **Chapter 7: Dean Battle**

**Dean Battle** is a middle school band director at Parkside Middle School in a large Southeastern city. He recently relocated from another school in the same city. Dean is in his late twenties and identifies as a Caucasian male.

### **Setting**

I met with Dean at his new school, Parkside Middle, a few weeks before school started. At this point, he'd had access to the space for about one week, and was working to sort through the equipment and music. The school is located in an upper middle class neighborhood comprised of very large, expensive homes. Though located in a large Southeastern city, this area is suburban in terms of both appearance and distance from the city center. When I arrived at the school, Dean was waiting for me outside the school. He said he has just arrived from an early morning marching band practice at the high school nearby. We entered the school, and it was clear that many of the staff we meet in the hallway had not yet had the opportunity to meet Dean. We got a few suspicious looks, as if they were trying to assess whether or not we belonged in the school. Dean's classroom was a remodeled auditorium. What would have been the proscenium of the stage was a plaster wall, while the other walls were made of concrete bricks; there were no windows. The shining wooden floor and wheelchair ramp remained, and made for a strange topography in the room. All of the music stands and chairs were stacked and stowed. A piano sat in the center of the room next to two chairs and a small table. It was clear that Dean had prepared this small workstation for our interview.

I started the interview in the same way I had started all of the others, and asked Dean about his musical life story. For the first hour of the interview, I said very little else. Dean told his story continuously, only stopping to tell me where the story was headed next. The narrative seemed prepared, much like you might read in a memoir or historical text, which made sense when I learn about his interest in history and musicology. In a way, his narrative seemed a bit triumphant, for lack of a better word. Dean highlighted his success as a student of music, and later as a music educator; he was clearly proud of his work in the field. His tone was enthusiastic, though measured. Just the same, it was clear that Dean was excited to tell me about himself and his work. Our interview lasted a little more than two hours, and Dean let me know that he was very excited to read the finished product.

When I spoke with Dean three months later, his tone had changed. In our phone conversation, I could hear some exhaustion in his voice that could simply have been a product of starting the school year. However, when we started to chat, I realized that he was facing some new challenges at Parkside. In our first interviews, Dean spoke warmly about his colleagues and their collaboration. He described his negative interactions with new colleagues as though they were a disappointing surprise. Most notable in this conversation was his description of an interaction with a teacher who expresses a deficit view of Latino boys. I realized at this point that Dean had begun referring to himself and his students as “us.” Previously, he had described students using “they” as a pronoun. This shift in thinking is significant in terms of Dean’s conception of identity. At his previous school, he narrated himself as aligned with the teachers in giving students positive experiences. Now, he narrated himself as aligned with the students. When we wrapped up our conversation for the final interview, Dean sounded upset and a little angry. I asked if he has anything to add, and he says definitively, “No, I don’t.” Because our

previous interviews were so long, I was surprised that he has nothing else to say. I sense something is changing with Dean, and I'm curious to know what he might say if I called to check in again.

### **Dean's Story**

I started taking band in sixth grade. Before that, of course, we had our elementary music program and it was pretty good. It was very informative; they covered all the grounds. Most elementary music teachers do only choral or instrumental and ours did both, so we had great exposure. Then in sixth grade I joined band and started off playing clarinet with the intent to switch to saxophone and I got sidetracked. We had a fairly large program and two really wonderful teachers that said, "Hey, do you want to try this instrument?" So about halfway through the year I switched to bassoon because I wanted to give it a shot. That didn't work out so well for me, so I switched back to clarinet, and then ended up on bass clarinet. Most people think that that is not as important, but I actually really enjoyed it and they definitely pushed me along to go further. They encouraged me to take private lessons one summer, and do summer music programs, and audition for the honors ensembles within our district. I was just captivated by it and I loved going to clinics and getting with a group of strangers and learning music over two or three days and then putting on a very substantial concert. That, to me, was just exhilarating. Then, by eighth grade, they had me in jazz band. So I finally got to play tenor [sax] and that was interesting. We always did large group festival, and so we did full band and jazz band festival on the same day. It was a lot of fun just being pushed and challenged in such a way that not all eighth graders get the same opportunity.

I grew up in [a suburb of a Southeastern city]. When I moved up into high school, I mean, there was no question about doing marching band or not. It was like, "I'm going to do this." So that was a whole new set of experiences that really brought on a lot of leadership opportunities. I think I had it naturally in me, and the directors kind of worked with me throughout the four years of high school developing that leadership set of how to run a sectional or a woodwind ensemble independently without the director being around. Not just playing, but marching as well. Of course, we always did very well in the marching band competitions; we continued to rank superiors in festival performances and auditions for ensembles, and the district honors ensembles, and at the state level as well. I think probably around eighth grade, I knew I wanted to be a teacher and originally I wanted to do history, and part of me still does actually. I have not given up on that. That's where the musicology and the ethnomusicology comes in; it's where I can live out that dream. About sophomore or junior year I knew that I wanted to be a band director. I didn't announce it, I didn't tell anyone. I didn't do the traditional route of going and visiting colleges. One of my dad's co-workers lived in the mountains [near the university] and I've known her for many years. She said, "Well, we have a really great college up here, you should come check it out." I went up there and did not see any musical performance or anything like that, but I just fell in love with the area. I met with some of the faculty, they were very encouraging, very interested in me coming up there to study.

I realized that [the faculty] were taking a very special interest in their students. I went up there and visited during spring break of my senior year, and I took a friend that was in the band with me, and we drove up there together and spent the night. We went to a concert and it was one of their more substantial artist-in-residence programs. It was just mind-blowing how well everything was put together. I think the concert was probably a Friday night. So we showed up Friday during the day, and attended a few classes. They let us come and see what the expectations were. Then I met with the clarinet professor - she was anticipating me bringing my instrument and that we were gonna have a one-on-one lesson, but I didn't get that memo. Knowing that they were going to take a very special interest in developing me into a musician and a music educator, I think that really resonated deep within me. After that there was no other option of where am I going to go to school. I knew exactly where, and I found a teaching scholarship that I applied for that covered the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition, which was a pretty substantial chunk of change. I ended up being awarded the scholarship, which was very fantastic. Let's see, then college started and of course you had to do marching band. And I went from a band of 120 to almost 300, and it was very exciting. It was something new, something energetic, and meeting so many people from so many different places that all shared a common goal of performing together. I think that I finally realized why I like the clinics so much. [It] was that all these people came together to share a common goal of doing something musical and something excellent, something that they could put their whole selves into.

College was a lot of fun; it was a very small music department, about 200 students in total, so it was a lot of one-on-one with your instructors. Most everyone had an open-door policy to where you could come in and ask for help, or just sit and talk or get advice, or anything that you needed, they were always there. [They were] willing to put forth the extra effort for you, and since I've been out in the teaching world and talking with folks that went to different schools, I realize that that is not normal. Not all of music education programs, or not even all degree programs have that one-on-one relationship. Not just with the clarinet professor who was my main advisor, but with the department head who later became my boss when I was workstudy, and [later] the wind ensemble director who was also the conducting teacher. Even some of the vocal faculty were very engaged in my education. So I was in marching band and then wind ensemble, and worked my way all the way up to first chair by my senior year - had to get the grad students out of the way. (laughs)

Clarinet was my primary in marching band, and then wind ensemble. [In] clarinet ensemble we rotated - I played bass, soprano and E-flat [clarinet] because they knew that I wanted a very wide range of skills. Not everyone in the department was as engaging and as willing and eager to do new things as I was. I ended up singing in choir. We had a community orchestra - since we don't have a strings department - we had a community orchestra where students could go in and fill in the wind parts, so I was playing principal in that. So with all my ensemble stuff, I sit and look and watch at how rehearsal techniques were used differently, and following the conducting gestures. As a student that was very beneficial. I started to incorporate [some of those things] in the music classroom, a lot of the vocal techniques that we were taught and that I picked up on with tone production. Incorporating all of this in, even at the middle school level, has been very engaging. It's definitely good to paint a more holistic picture for the students.



During my third year of college, we started taking our music history courses and after our first little research paper to get us progressing along to our big final paper - the professor pulled me aside and said, "You know, you write really well and you're very good at articulating what you have to say." She said, "There's a nation-wide research conference that I think you should work on." And of course her background is musicology and research is what she does, so that's her interest as well. So she said, "Why don't you take a little bit of time and look at what interests you and what would you like to do." So I played around for a little bit and I think the first really major research paper that I wrote was on the history of the clarinet, which everyone has written on. I submitted my abstract to the national conference for undergraduate research and then did a presentation up there with a whole group of strangers that have similar interests in what they're doing and learning how to do presentation stuff. By my senior year I had come across some shape-note singing and how it is still being used in Western Blue Ridge Mountains and is becoming more of a revival in folk tradition. Not necessarily as an act of worship, but a preservation of history. I became very interested in this, and judging by the different harmonies that are produced and how everyday people can sit and sit read music by the use of the shapes. So senior year, my national conference for undergraduate research was on shape-note singing in the Western Blue Ridge Mountains, and a look at the traditions from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century - how it's still being preserved fairly original to the way it was done from the book that was published in 1873.

The first school that I worked at was a rough environment. It was mostly inner-city, low socioeconomic. It was a minority school, but I would not say that it was a stereotypical, the way you would see it in a Hollywood movie. The kids came to school already with baggage, and in the middle school and high school years they did not always know how to handle their emotions. One of the things that I realized very quickly in my first year of teaching, that throughout the school day, there is a lot of yelling that goes on - not just from peer to peer, but from student to teacher and vice versa. "Well, there's one reason that you guys don't want to work is because it's a very, very negative environment" So it took me a long time to think and plan things out of how to separate the band room and what we do as a musical ensemble - change that completely around, from the school around us. So we talked about how to create the correct environment. This was a full classroom discussion, 'cause everyone was involved with it. I said, "I don't want to have a negative rehearsal, because if you're angry while you play, you're not going to play well. You're not going to go home and practice. You're not going to be interested in what we're doing as a group. So let's see how we can work better together, and have a real, real good experience." And it took a while for them to learn how to handle themselves correctly in class, and how to not get upset when they make a mistake, or not feel completely devastated when I give them constructive feedback. At first, they were taking - "Oh, well, you know the rhythm goes like this." or "The fingering should be this." - they took that as, "I'm no good at this." Some of it became very dramatic, and I said, "No, calm down, it's really ok. Just take a few deep breaths and we'll fix this. It's not the end of the world. It's not set in stone." So using that to work with them, and with a lot of patience and a lot of grace, encouraging them, "Ok, so today didn't go so well, but when you come back in next time, if you play 'this' much better, it's gonna make the whole difference in the world.

It did take a while to turn things around. I would say roughly two years to change the mindset and to change the attitude. Once [the students] saw that I was willing to stick with them, and I

was not going to kick them out of band because they weren't good enough, or they're not allowed to practice at home because they live in an apartment and their neighbor gets disturbed - once they realized how much I really cared about them...I'm sure they were talking about it amongst themselves and they finally someone said it during class. "Hey, you're different." And I said, "You're right." It really made it a whole lot better, because me being a young White male, I'm not what they're used to being around. When, I did things differently than their old instructor, and of course, when you come in to a program you don't want to revolutionize things, but they were not used to playing for a full class period. Having that time to adjust, it took them a while. And there was a lot of frustration going on. We were a Title 1 school. A lot of the parents were concerned about the financial obligations associated with a band class, so we pulled together a lot of resources and built up a set of instruments that we could use even if one person or two people used the same instrument. There would be two mouthpieces, and they would alternate taking it home. We would always have extra books that were provided to them. We would have a set of music that they could personally have, but if they happened to forget it or they lost it, there would always be something in the band room at school for them to use. You know, realizing that if they mess up, they are very used to getting yelled at, or being punished, or having some sort of negative action associated with that, so approaching that in the opposite way of, "Ok, so you messed up this time, you know, here's your pass."

A lot of the students, they were very smart, they were very keen on picking up with the social settings and they said, "You know, Mr. Battle, You don't act like so and so." And I said, "Yes, that's right." And I said, "Which one do you prefer?" and they said, "Well, yours because you're very... you stay calm, you're very prepared." I said, "Yeah. Band class is structured. That's how school works. You might not agree with what that other teacher is doing, but they're still your teacher, and if they're not giving what you need, you guys are smart enough to be independent and do some of these things on your own." And I said, "Even if you're not quite understanding this mathematical concept and the teacher is not being very helpful to you, you have a large group of teachers here who are willing to help you out." And once we built those types of relationships it really, really turned the band program around, and their attitudes as well.

We always, and this is one of the techniques that I did to bring all my students together, at the beginning of every class while we're getting set up, and usually before we do our warm-ups. We would always take time and talk to each other. A lot of the time they needed to get stuff off of them; they needed to take a deep breath and relax. I noticed my fourth period class didn't have a good third period teacher, so we had to calm them down and bring them focused into what we were about to do. So we would always have that time to sit and share. I would always interject a few things to start a new discussion; it wouldn't be very long. [These techniques] were not modeled. It was not taught at the university level. I think it just came through with a lot of practice. During my summers in college - oh I guess I should have said this - during the college years I got involved with a group out of Atlanta that facilitated programs on leadership development and drug and alcohol awareness and prevention. The camp director's mother was a co-worker of my mom, so that's how I got involved with them and it was a lot of fun. We would always focus on at-risk populations. I learned a lot of my techniques from working camp. It wasn't always fun, there was a lot of rough schools that we went into and groups of kids that said, "I don't want to do this, I don't want to be here." Well, how do we make it engaging? How do we

make it exciting, and how do you walk away from this with something that you didn't have before - a positive experience that you didn't have before?

After I graduated, the thing with my scholarship was I had to work in the state where I went to college. I went on several interviews and I really did not want to get too far away from my family. So I thought, "Well I'm not too far from my family. Ok, so this city will work." I went on interviews further out, and then said, "No, I can't live this far." I liked the idea behind the magnet. I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but I needed a job. And I was there for four years.

There's a lot of reasons why I left that job. I was no longer impressed with the administration at the old school. They were not going in the direction of having a solid arts program. Their concentration was on test scores. It's sad, but that's what education is now. The band program was actually pretty solid, and the kids and I worked very well together, so that part was a little bit hard. It was time to leave. That's how I felt. The opportunity here presented itself to where this director retired and the band program right now is not that good. I had two interviews here and they hired me after the second one. Actually, they hired me on the spot. I basically have to come in here and rebuild the same way I did over there. I mean, it's a different [social] class. I would say this is more of a working class. I wouldn't say it's an upper class; it's a good cross sample of middle class families and the other neighboring directors, we've all worked together on committees and stuff, so we know each other. The job came open here, and the principal called around to say, "Let's find the right person to come in here and turn it around." And so they said, "Let's get Dean over here." That's just really [it]. The high school that I was at this morning, I work very well with the director there, and so we're going to team up with three of us. I'm going to help out the high school and they're going to help me. The middle school director and I are going to partner together to make sure that our kids go up to the high school equally prepared. That's really why I wanted to come over here, so I could learn from them, because they're all mid-career, and I say I'm still beginning; I've been beginning for a while.

When I was doing the leadership training [I started thinking more about equity]. We were in a very rural little town called Connelly. And I had traveled a good bit while I was in high school and a little bit on college, cause we would go on tour with the ensembles, but I had never really seen poverty before; I had no idea. It was the first time that we had gone to a school. Usually we have programs at a university where kids come and it's like summer camp, so this was the first time we had actually gone out into the community to do training. So I'm in a classroom and I'm the lead facilitator and I have one person assisting me. This was probably the summer of my second year in college. I got a room full of, I don't want to say alternative students, but it was shocking. There were students that had been arrested; there were students that were pregnant. It was eye-opening. I was never... we did not have that when I was in school, when I was in high school. I walked in and I said, "Ok, what am I going to do now?" and we had our instruction manuals in front of us, of what activities we were supposed to facilitate and debriefing questions, and what the purpose of all the activities were. So I closed my book and I said, we were all sitting in a circle, I said, "We're all going to go around and say our names." I knew the person sitting next to me, and I said, "This is my friend Tony, and Tony said this before." So I repeated, and everyone around had to go and say something that the person on their left had said before. We did that twice. Tony had been arrested. He was arrested for drug possession and he had spent

some time in alternative school - but he didn't say that to begin with. His first one was, he said that he liked to skateboard or something like that. So we did our morning thing, and it actually ended up really well. It was very energetic, it was very lively. I got in there and captivated their interest. That's what it felt like at the time. It was very high-paced to get them engaged, get them involved, get them excited about whatever thing we were doing, and really break down the barrier that, "Yeah, we're in a school right now, but we can have a good time while doing it." So after our morning session we were walking to lunch, and I stayed behind in the room and straightened things up, and Tony was waiting for me out in the hall. So Tony and I walked down from one end of the building to the cafeteria and he just opened everything up to me and just gave his entire life story all at once. So I sat listening - and we talked, and we talked, and we talked. And I think we even talked during lunch. And I was like, "Yeah, you've gone through these really rough things in your life. But now you're at this place. I said, you're doing better now right?" He said, "Yeah. I'm clean, I'm not doing drugs anymore." And I said, "So what are your goals right now? For the next couple of years, what are you going to focus the most on?" So we talked about it. I said, "I agree with you, now I'm going to add to it. Your little brother's here. Do you want your little brother to follow your bad examples or your good examples?" And that clicked with him immediately. Just, the cloud parted right there, and that really, really brought my attention to not everything in the world is what I experienced in high school. And, you know, judging by the people that I went to college with, you know, when we sat around talking about our experiences and how we got to where we are, a lot of them had very limited views. It was segregated out there. There was a White side of town and there was a Black side of town. There was no other way to describe it, and I had never seen anything like that before. And to think that, you know, I grew up in a Metro area, I went to a very, very diverse high school. But to go down to Connelly and to see something that I would think would be like the South in the 50s and 60s, I didn't know this still went on, to the extent that they would have segregated proms. I said, "Well, this just beats anything I've ever seen."

One of the reasons that I like teaching so much [is that] it can be a lot of fun. It's not always a lot of fun, but it's never a dull moment. It's always an adventure. It's always a new problem. There's always something else. It's never stagnant. Sometimes [leadership] camp got very emotional with people knowing that they need to get something off their chest, and it was a very safe space. We would always make sure that everyone was included, everyone felt loved and nurtured, and it was always positive. I would say, 70% of the participants in the group would always share something that they need to get off their chest, and they would leave it in that space, and it was over and done with. It was always that it's O.K.; it's not set in stone. [I wanted] different groups of people to see the similarities and differences with their peers, because a lot of them have very one-track minds. They think, "This is how everyone operates. Just like me." Real life doesn't always work that way...ever.

At the old school we always had this thing in the mornings. I don't want to talk about it, but I'm going to anyways, so you understand. It's very traumatic for me. The other part of our magnet was JROTC and we would have morning formation. Sixth grade through twelfth grade, everyone went immediately into the gym and it was social time and chaotic time, and it wasn't pretty. That's really when a lot of the yelling began. It was like every day. So I would, I raised the question a few times throughout my four years, I said, "Formation needs to change." They had social time; there was no structure there. They were sitting up in the bleachers for almost thirty

minutes, and at 9:15 when school started everyone would make their way to the gym floor where everyone would have a specific place. They were separated by grade level, and at the high school level they were separated out by platoons and all that other ROTC stuff. Immediately, they had to go into serious, *I'm a statue* mode. There's no talking, no moving whatsoever. I flat out disagreed with that completely. I said, "Well first of all, you can't expect a sixth grader or a twelfth grader to stand still for very long." That's just unrealistic, and it never worked. In four years, it never really caught on, and I made it very clear that I did not like formation. The kids didn't like it either, so we would joke about it in class. I said, "But really, it's something that we apparently have to do. So if you have to do it, I'll do it too."

In homeroom I did a curriculum with them called *Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions* and I think it was written for a high school level, so I definitely watered it down for sixth graders so that they could understand it. We integrated any prior experiences to help them understand what we talked about. So we talked about pollution, we talked about poverty, water scarcity - all the natural resource management. Really broad picture stuff, and it was really open to however we could interpret it. At the end of each lesson, they would create something in their small group or individually, and it would go up on the wall. At the end of the unit they would produce something, usually a diagram, or a work of art. It could be anything, depending on what we were doing. And that's what would receive the grade. And it took them a while to get used to it, because it required a little bit of creativity on their part. Once they realized that sometimes there is no wrong answer... You interpret my instructions, and that's sort of disagreeing with some people's teaching philosophy with having everything lined out, so there is no room for error. But it was fun, and once they got to their science classes and their social studies classes they were able to integrate what I had taught them back into what they were learning. That's another thing that I would do with my band students, I would always pull in something from their other classes, so that when they go back and forth, they have something to carry with them.

I knew what I was going to get myself into [with the daily ROTC formation]. And sometimes it's very easy for me to let my frustrations get the best of me, and that's human. But I realized if I stay calm, other people will follow me. They follow my cues very well. Even in formation I would go, and I would have a lot of non-band friends. But they just kind of, the kids are pretty drawn to me. I don't understand why. So I would go and sit with them in the bleachers and we would sit and laugh and carry on, and we would talk about whatever. So that brought in the non-band people to understand what the band people do. So knowing what I was getting myself into, and knowing that class might not go so well. Something might come up, because the people that plan things at that school did last minute everything. I don't like that.

In the mornings, most of the teachers are in the gym with us. So I would, I'm a pretty social person, so I would probably go and talk to everyone. I have several go-to people. I did not like the teaching styles of everyone at that school, or their classroom management philosophies. We had a lot of disagreements on stuff like that. One high school history teacher was on international committee with me, and we would always bounce ideas off of each other. We are very hard workers, and we liked to think outside the box and plan - let's do something new, let's shake things up - and those are the people that I'm naturally drawn to. The middle and high school art teacher, for a long time was only other [person of the] arts department at our school, so when I started teaching, she was my mentor, and we bonded very well. She likes to talk equally as much

as I do, so we would probably spend way too much time talking about life, and how to do things better. There'd be several [teachers] that would come in my room after school and vent, but it was always, "How can we do it better?" When I started teaching, I struggled a lot. Not so much with classroom management, but with dealing with the kids that just don't get it and refuse to get it. I didn't understand, and I thought that they were doing it because they didn't like my class. But about January of my first year of teaching I had this great realization that it wasn't just my class, they're doing it in all of their classes. I had no idea, because I was new. I wasn't going out and seeing what the other teachers were doing. But there was a few of us that we decided, let's go visit classrooms. And so I always said, "If you want to come in the band room and see what we're doing, by all means, come on in and see what I'm doing. If you have something to suggest, go ahead." And I would reciprocate. It wasn't anything formal; there would be no note-taking. It wasn't like an observation, I just wanted to drop in and see what you're doing, and it was always very supportive.

Aside from my responsibilities at school, there's an ensemble that I play with, it's a community group - it's a community concert band - I would say it's an advanced high school level band, and it's a lot of fun. Sometimes I have meetings after school that I have to go to, and usually they last too long, and I just want to go home. But it was very exhausting at times. Sometimes we'll do church stuff after. I used to do church music, but that doesn't happen anymore. Sometimes I go and meet up with friends and have a social life. I get off work at 4:15, well that turns into 4:45 because I have carpool and so forth, but everyone else gets off work at 5 o'clock and we just meet for dinner. School does take up a lot of my time. On the weekends, I don't normally stay in town. I like to leave, because I like to put everything stressful that happened during the week, and go off and meet up with some friends from college, or whoever wants to go. We'll go hiking, and just spend the weekend outdoors, or I'll go down to my parents' house and spend time with them and my sister. I'm going to be an uncle, so I really should start hanging around more often. But I like to go and visit people. I like to go on little road trips, any sort of adventure. I am committed to having fun and random adventures. This fall actually, I'll probably be helping out with a high school group, because they start rehearsals, probably the same time we end school. I actually like working with high school age kids more. So it will be good to have that interaction so that we can grow the middle school program up to the high school. I think I said that before.

[Three months later]

[What I think is important is] allowing all of my students to have the opportunity for music and have the opportunity to be successful whether or not, you know, regardless of what their background was or whether or not they really *sought* to get into it. At least give them the opportunity to prove themselves wrong. I think being in band class allows you to be someone who you are not. Like, everything prior can be ignored, your outside life of schooling, your outside life from the classroom, while you're in school. [That] can be ignored as well, and you specifically only focus on your craft. You don't have to worry about what you look like, or what you ate for dinner the night before, or what you're gonna do later. If you put yourself in the moment fully, your rate of success is probably gonna be much higher, and you'll probably enjoy it a whole lot more. And get more out of it if you're not constantly worrying about other things that are not music related.

I think when kids have issues, or when there's a difficult situation that arises, or they don't know how to handle themselves other than the adult telling them what to think or how to act or how to do something correctly or differently, have them have sort of guided discussion of, "How are you feeling in this situation" If you're constantly squeaking on your clarinet, why do you think it's happening? Because I can stand up in front of you on the podium and say, "Well, you're squeaking because your reed's in the wrong place." But if we have a student involved in having a two-way conversation instead of just a one-way street, they would probably be more inclined to fully understand and fully grasp the situation, and then make some sort of positive change from it. Then, if it's more of a social thing - you know, we're having an issue with behavior in class - or it's something outside of class that's troubling them, it would be the same thing of "How can we work through this?" rather than me saying, you know, "You're just gonna have to grow up. Just forgive 'em or ignore 'em." What can they do so that they feel that they have some ownership over the conflict resolution that we're working for? Does that make sense?

[My new school] is very interesting. It is not what I expected it to be. There are ...I'm taking over after someone retired, and the past couple of years, he has not really done much of anything in regards to teaching. And I was told this well in advance, so I anticipated that, but a lot of the minority students were ignored, so I have a good number of students who play really well, and then I have a handful of students who are completely lost to the world. I'm trying to balance the class of almost fifty, and there's a huge range of abilities to make sure that everyone is still engaged. It's actually really difficult, but it's slowly getting better. There's not a lot of disruptive behavior. There's a lot of immaturities, which I would say - some people would say is pretty normal for the middle school age group. But, I don't know. Maybe if you multiply it by ten compared to what I'm used to, then I guess it's a little bit more equal. The biggest thing that I have noticed comparing the two schools is the other faculty members are not - they're not social. In fact, they're very standoffish and some of them have been really rude. I mentioned it to the orchestra teacher who is, you know, her job is to make sure I'm not completely lost with the new way of doing things. I said, "Someone came in my room and said something really nasty to me the other day" and she said, "Yeah, that person is just generally rude to everyone." I said, "Well that's strange, why would they wanna do that?" I didn't understand. You know, at my old school we had a lot of camaraderie and we were able to talk to each other about school issues or personal issues or just sharing things. Generally just having an open mind. Here, I literally have no one to talk to. There have been a lot of people who will just come up and start complaining, and there's this one teacher, she's an ESL teacher and she was talking about stereotypes for Hispanic males, and she was saying that everyone acts the same way. I said, "Well, that's not how my experiences have been working with Hispanic males." And you know, I tried to rationally explain these things to her and she just would not listen. I just finally gave up and that was that. "Ok fine, if you feel that way." It's very strange.

So far, the orchestra teacher and I are good pals. I teach orchestra with sixth grade with her; we're team teaching. We have very similar views on pedagogical techniques, and she's never worked with a band person before and I've never worked with an orchestra person before. We've actually started sharing ideas, which is really cool because I think she said she's been teaching twenty-one years. So it's really cool to learn from each other, and we were talking the other day about the other elective teacher who is really interested in the cultural studies like I am, and she teaches a computer class or something. She said, "Oh, you really need to go talk to her, because

she's interested in this as well. Between your two ideas, we could really start something and get it going at the school, because the school does not have global education." And you know, there might be some opportunities to start some new things, or at least get some kids interested in global studies and how the world works, and all the other fun stuff I did at my old school.

[Music] would be the highest form of self-expression that fully embodies creativity and teamwork skills with other musicians. I definitely agree that music brings people together. It's not necessarily the only way. But probably, in this day and age, working in the public school system, music would be a great way to bring folks together to teach the teamwork and self-discipline, and setting high standards for yourself.



## **Chapter 8: Matthew Williams**

**Matthew Williams** is an elementary general music teacher at Northview Elementary School in the same Southeastern district as Amy Harris. He is also an instructor with the non-profit music organization MusicKids, based on the Venezuelan music project *El Sistema*. Matthew is in his early thirties and identifies as an African American man.

### **Setting**

In my first interview with Matthew, we met in shared office space at a nearby university. The space was very impersonal, a series of (at the moment) unoccupied desks stacked with books and personal belongings of students. Our interview tone was fairly awkward at first, echoing the impersonal nature of the office – this was researcher turf, not participant. The tone changed when Matthew started telling stories about his students – he seemed to like talking about them more than he likes talking about himself. He noted that his classroom is inaccessible because of summer cleaning, but asked if I'd like to schedule our next interview at the school where the MusicKids summer program is happening. He stated that they were in preparation for a big performance.

When I arrived at the elementary school, I didn't immediately find the MusicKids program, though I saw a ton of kids! In the cafeteria, I ran into a familiar face – a site coordinator for a Freedom School program who I had met at the CDF National Training in Knoxville, TN. I realized that the school is housing both programs simultaneously. The site coordinator gave me a tour of the Freedom School classrooms. There was uplifting artwork throughout the hallway, and visible in each classroom. I recognized the familiar messages of "I can make a difference in

myself, my family, my community, my country, and my world, through hope, education, and action” – messages that I taught just the summer before. This tone was very different from the academic/research vibe of our first interview. This atmosphere was one that *showed* equity work being done with children in an arts integrated program. This encouraged me before I even saw the MusicKids program in action.

When I located the MusicKids summer program, they were in full rehearsal. There was a band of professional adult musicians accompanying them as they sang Pharrell’s *Happy*. And the kids *were*, truly, happy! They were in a large gymnasium with a stage at one end. The room was already set up for the performance, with several rows of folding chairs. Students – probably grades 1-5 – were in a formation that expands past the stage. They would have fit on stage if this was a traditional choral performance, but there was a lot of energetic choreography – even for the smallest participants. There was a dance break in the middle and a few selected students showed off their moves. The professional musicians lent an authentic vibe to the whole situation – they asked questions of the director as one might in a more formal band or orchestra rehearsal. The kids were part of a professional performance. I could see that they believe it, and so did the adults in the room. Matthew and his colleague Olivia said a few things to the group after the first run-through. Mostly, these were comments about energy - about how much fun they should share with the audience. After a second run-through, which was definitely more energetic, the kids received high praise, a few announcements about the performance, and were dismissed for recess. Matthew was still visibly excited from their performance when we began our interview. It was also clear that he does not have much down time during summer camp. He looked tired and sweaty and said he hadn’t sat down since the kids arrived.

For our third interview, I met Matthew during his planning period at Northfield Elementary. He is clearly an important figure at the school. He met me at the front office and had 2-3 interactions with students before we made it to his classroom. He hugged one student, but in the midst of a serious conversation. He asked the student if he would be staying after school, and said that he (Matthew) would call the student's grandmother to be sure that it's O.K. He asked another student why he got silent lunch this week, and the student told him that he wants to do better – in fact he had already received some praise today from another teacher. Matthew said “That's Great! Keep it up!” Both students were African American boys; these exchanges demonstrated what Matthew said is his inspiration for teaching at Northfield, teaching students who look like him.

Matthew's classroom was large and L-shaped. There were multiple spaces for activities, including a (very) small stage and risers. I noted that there were *no* pictures of White students in his room. The textbooks used had only students of color on the cover. There were posters with students of color playing instruments. There were also hand-painted musical posters around the room, where (as I learned later) the art teacher had painted the actual student selected to play the lead role. A few students popped their head in and said, “Hey Mr. Williams!” while we talked – just as he described at our first meeting. Matthew is a very tall man, but we both sat in very tiny chairs for the interview. It was clear that Matthew's classroom is conceived as a relevant and welcoming space for his students; adults are welcome if they are willing to acknowledge that students – their needs and interests – are first priority.

### **Matthew's Story**

I am Matthew Williams. I am the general music teacher at Northfield Elementary located in [a small Southeastern city]. For the MusicKids program, I am one of the general music teachers who helped design the general music curriculum. We teach general music through theory and

games on Mondays and Fridays for my school. I also assist with the violin instruction and I am one of the choral directors for MusicKids for the Strauss choir, which is our beginning choir.

I started music at a very early age. My family was very musical - mainly vocal. We all sang in a choir. That was kind of mandatory for all of us, although only my sister and I sing now. My siblings have gone off to do other things, law practice and the navy, but when we come back together we still sing. So at a very early age, music was very important in my life. I had a chance to be in our local district boy's choir. That was a gathering of young boys from the age of 7 to 18, and we rehearsed every Monday. We got to travel around the country and I liked it and I kept up with it. So I participated in music education programs at my school through vocal and band and orchestra as well. In band I started out with trumpet and I moved to the valve trombone, which is similar to the trombone, it just has fingerings on it, or the finger valves. And I ended up on the baritone. We sang gospel music at my church, so it was mandatory to be in our youth choir. *Every* Saturday we had rehearsals. Every second Sunday we all sang in our choir in our black and white [clothes].

I had some great music educators. And I often think about my music teachers. I actually received the *Teacher of the Year* [aware and] someone was asking me, "Why did you choose this path?" Why did you choose this career? And honestly it's because I had great music educators. And I thought, you know, my involvement, and my enjoyment of singing can help inspire others - whether it's young people or adults - to also enjoy singing as well. I think all of [those teachers] had two sides. There was the music educator side; they wanted you to learn as much as you can about the instrument - learn as much as you can about composers. They were very strict and firm, but also not so strict that I couldn't approach them. [That] was one of the reasons why I think I really fell in love with music, 'cause we could have conversations about music and other things with my music teachers. So they were strict and firm, but also loving and caring at the same time, and I've modeled my teaching practice on what I did with them.

Right in the summer before my senior year, I actually had the opportunity to do a program at college called Project Launch. They invite juniors to come and discover and learn about the campus and learn about different opportunities, and things that you can major in. I met *no one* in my session that wanted to do music. But I think I wanted to do history [education] at first, so I would've been a history teacher. But I met a university music professor at a festival a couple of years prior to that. I think it was my freshman year in high school. I knew that he worked at the university, so I was able to talk to him. From there, I was really convinced that I wanted to do music education and I wanted it to happen at [that university], and that [came] from visiting the university and talking to [that professor]. I auditioned somewhere in the summer between orientation. I think all the freshman students auditioned. I didn't audition for a scholarship, because I think I still kind of wanted to do the history thing, so I didn't want it to be binding if I changed my mind. But yeah, we all had to audition. I remember it being very intimidating and being very nervous because, you know, you're meeting students who are coming from all across the country, and we all had different experiences. I mean, there was something common in our music training, but we grew up in different areas, so it was kind of intimidating. I think, number one, being the only African American in my class that year. It was like, "Wow." But I still wanted to do it, and I still had the drive to do it. But I would say at first it was intimidating.

I think my voice teacher, she was my voice teacher here for all four years, I think she recognized something in me that I didn't see in myself at first. It was just her pushing me, the encouragement. I think my freshman year I was also in the male chorus then sophomore [year] College Choir. So it was all those things, all those teachers. And of course, [my professor in] opera workshop saying, "You can do this." I said, "You know, I think I can. I think I'll stick with it." After the first four years here at college, I did the MAT program here as well. And after that, I got my first teaching job at the Public Arts Magnet School (PAMS) and I taught [high school and middle school] there for three years. I was teaching choral music and some beginning piano classes.

I liked the experience at PAMS. Well, it depends on which year you ask me about. My first year was still learning the students. I taught at my church; at that same time I was the music director of our church choirs - right after college. I had some experience doing that while I was in school as well. I enjoyed the level of music-making, and actually I miss that now, doing more challenging, complex music. My first year I did the advanced choirs, and then I chose to teach the non-advanced choirs just so we [could] do more with recruitment, especially the African American students. I think my third year there was more success, but it took a while for students to appreciate choral singing. There was actually another choral director there as well. We tried to make sure that our program was something different than from what the other schools offered around the district. We really pushed for more classical singing. We would do, like, a cabaret show with some musical theater, but mainly studying the great choral works. [We really] emphasized musicianship and choral skills like sight-singing - all those things. Not to say that the other programs didn't offer that, but I felt that those schools went in a different direction singing a lot more pop music, that kind of thing. I think that's when, also, *a cappella* music started to come about, so they were really into those types of music. That was in 2005, when I started there.

So one of the reasons why [I wanted to teach the lower groups] - it was a middle school and high school choral program and I taught the advanced middle-schoolers - I really enjoyed some very young talented singers, but I felt the kids that looked like me weren't in that group. There were some, but compared to the whole choral program, it wasn't enough to me. So I talked to the other choral director, I was like, "You know, I enjoy teaching both levels, but I would like to help out with our recruitment by teaching the non-advanced choirs." It was kind of chaotic at first because I did have students who didn't want to be in that classroom kind of place. I was like, "This is a school of the arts, this shouldn't happen at our school" - but it did. So that was challenging and tough to work with those types of students. But honestly, I enjoy that, because I got to see singers grow, and then I got to see those singers eventually move up to the advanced choirs within those last two years that I was there.

Well, in my third year our recruitment wasn't as high as we thought, so there were two choral directors and my job went to 50%. So I'm scrambling, looking for a job, so kind of like, "I don't know what I'm going to do." I thought about a job offer in Wilmington, but I was like, I would rather stay in the area. One day during the summer, I got a call from the principal at Northfield Elementary - saying, "Hey I've heard about you, and I know that you've taught at PAMS at the middle school/high school level, but would you be interested in elementary?" And I was like... "No, not really." Because I was like, you know, these are little kids... NO! But I decided to

take the offer because nothing else was working, because you know how music teachers stay - just like librarians - they stay at one school. So no one at that time was retiring or moving on for the high school and middle school level. So I was like, you know what? I'm just going to take the job offer and see how it works. And I was preparing for the job. I got back, I went through all of my textbooks for elementary teaching and started thinking [and] remembering when I was interning and going through the grad program. Although I love teaching the higher level kids, but I [remembered] I really enjoyed the music-making with the younger kids as well. Because it was like we were playing games, but they're still learning music! They're laughing, I'm laughing and it was all fun. So you know, I'll give it a try. And ever since then I was hooked on it. [Hooked on] my school, and I really enjoyed our kids. I've been here for six years.

Prior to me coming to Northfield, there was a [music] teacher, she worked [at Northfield] and she still was very affiliated with our principal. She actually kept the violin classes going [after I arrived]. [Before I arrived] she started a violin program and instruction during the school day with fifth graders. She wrote a grant through High Strung violin, so they were able to get twenty-five violins for a class. After she left, there was still interest from parents and students and the principal to continue the violin program. I'm like, "I'm vocal, I took the classes in college, but I would have to definitely review." So she actually volunteered the first year to do a violin academy on Saturday mornings. So we had about nine students who, I think they were made up of mostly fourth and fifth grade students. And I think she was still in contact with Kim Craft who was working with the State Symphony at that time. And there was a partnership with Northfield Elementary and the State Symphony. So I think our principal wanted to keep that going. So really, when I came in all these things were kind of already coming into place. I think my second year there I wrote a grant with Mr. Holland's Opus, which is an organization based out of California. They were able to grant us some instruments and that was mainly also through Kim Craft. We had a partnership with the State Symphony and she's like, "Look, there's this program and I think you should apply." So we wrote the grant for that and we received it. After that, I think Kim went to do their youth fellowship in Venezuela, so when she came back she wanted to start the program in our community and we were very fortunate to be one of the pilot schools for that program (MusicKids).

So our pilot year, it was really just general music and violin, and in the general music program, you know, the kids were playing on Orff instruments. They're learning game songs. But then there was opportunity for the big group to sing. I think we did "What a Wonderful World" – Kim Craft had an idea, and said, "You know what, the kids sound great. Let's continue or let's add a choir to MusicKids for next year." I didn't lead it that year. There was another person who came in and, I just kind of assisted them, mainly because of my responsibilities with my church. I was still the music director, but I still wanted to be a part of it. So the second year, I was the assistant, and the third year we were able to separate the groups from beginning, intermediate, and advanced. So I became the Strauss choir director, which were the beginning students. We really just started working on fundamentals of singing, producing good sound, shaping vowels, breathing, that kind of thing. This is our fourth year, we just finished our fourth year, and I did the Strauss choir again this year.

You know, I always see the advanced kids are learning at a faster pace or singing complex music, but it's one of those things. I think it had to grow on me. The same with coming into

teaching elementary school. You know first, it's all these little kids. Actually I was explaining to our kids at camp, 'cause I am doing the choir there as well. Just from September, there has been so much growth in their sound and their tone. It's amazing! I was getting goose bumps! We were singing the *Star Spangled Banner* - it's one of our songs - and this beautiful tone was coming out from them. Starting out, the group was [mostly] kindergarten students, so it's kind of difficult to work with that age, but they're coming along with the older kids and singing with gorgeous tone.

One of the reasons why I chose to stay at my school was, number one, the school is made up of, I think fifty or close approximately 50/50 Hispanic and African American [students]. So these are students that look like me. Also, I had some very positive experiences with my students the first year and I think a part of that was a lot with the male students. I really felt like if I left, I would be doing a disservice to those kids. So that was a lot of my motivation to stay. So those kids could see "Wow! There's someone that looks like me. There's another male teacher here!" 'Cause you know at the elementary level there are very few male teachers in general. So those were some of the deciding factors and my school had very low performance for testing. I think that was another reason why I wanted to stay, to have some type of input in helping the students receive their potential in academics as well. I remember making the decision and after making the decision or actually meeting people - it was like "Oh where do you work?" when I tell them the city, they say, "Where do you teach?" and they're like, "Why do you teach there when you could be teaching somewhere else, more prestigious maybe?" And those were the reasons why I tell them. You know, these kids look like me. I feel like I am a role model for a lot of the students, both male and female. So to me that's really what motivated me to stay is seeing the equity piece there. As a singer, as a [college] student, I was obviously aware that in the classical field there are not a lot of African Americans. Even looking around at the population for the choirs, you know, probably one or two, and even when you do like festivals and those experiences, you still don't see a lot of it. So I think that was a lot for me. I was like, "You know what, I want to do this so that this doesn't continue." I think that was a big reason of it too.

For me, especially with the MusicKids, it's like we want great musicians. Obviously we perform at concerts. We want the kids to be at their absolutely top and their best. At the same time at the end of the day, for me and I think for the other teacher-artists as well, we want what's best for the child. They can take the skills they're learning in music and apply it in any situation in life. And I was thinking about our first year, starting with MusicKids - I didn't really know how to choose the kids. It was pretty basic, we sent out applications and if your parents turned them in, you were in. We chose twenty students, but there were a lot of students who were very shy, and kind of kept to themselves. As the program continued, they became outgoing. Their speech got a lot better. So those were things that I didn't expect to see. Dealing with music it's just like, "Oh I'm gonna just teach music, general music. Play these games. Teach this theory." But those were things that I think helped benefit the kids. They're becoming leaders. One of the ways that my students in my general music class are assessed is that we're actually moving away from letters for grades. We use the O, S, and N for the elementary. O is outstanding, S is satisfactory, and N is needs improvement. But in order for a student to be O, they have to be that leader, which for me means that they can take any concept that we're talking about and teach it to another student, share it with their parents, or even give a presentation on it. I think that applies to MusicKids as well. These kids are becoming leaders even outside of the classroom.

I think it very challenging at times to do school, MusicKids, and church. I think for me, [it's challenging] because my job at the church is an hour and a half away in my hometown. So I was very fortunate to have that job offer, but physically I have to drive there every second and third and sometimes fifth Sundays or fifth weekends. Sometimes I'm leaving right after the MusicKids rehearsal. So physically it's very challenging because the drive there, I have so much music in my head. But I think that's good because you know, that's one of the things I admired about my Men's Choir professor is that, you know, he could teach a Mozart Requiem with choir, but he can also do show choir. So he was able to do multiple genres of music. I kind of wanted to do that. So at my church we're singing gospel, at school, the choirs are doing mostly folk music with some pop music. Then in MusicKids we're trying to make the change to mostly classical with some folk music too. But I think overall there's a lot of music in my head. So in practicing I'm like, "Oh no! That concept was for this piece and not that one!"

I grew up listening to gospel music, so I think for me that is my favorite. Just because of the experience and the expression and the stories that are able to be told through the music, too. My truck is filled with all kinds of vocal music, so one of those is the Mozart Coronation Mass, and I think I fell in love with that because I had to teach that with my students. My third year at PAMS we were able to sing that with the Community Choral Society, and I was able to teach the coronation mass to my students. So I loved that, you know, and definitely some of the vocal solo baritone repertoire that I learned in college.

One of the things I really love about working at my school and the group of kids that I work with is that they actually make the music room their home. They'll come try to use the restrooms right down the hall from the music room, but they'll find a way to come into the music room and say, "Hey Mr. Williams!" and, "Have you heard this and that?" We have these informal jam sessions, and I have kids who will wanna play the drums the first thing. So I'll play piano while they're playing the drums, or while they're singing their song that they've maybe been working with at their church. We do some spirituals in both school and MusicKids as well. I mean they're a little different in genre [from gospel], but kind of related. We start school at 8:30. A part of the reason why we have the orchestra program is because students started coming in earlier, especially the car riders. My room is at the very entrance of the school, so I am one of the first teachers they see. They will come in and say, "Hey Mr. Williams, can we jam in here this morning?" and I have no problem, because, over time this is when you can see the fruits of your labor - when those kids can get on their instruments and start improvising or creating sounds. You're like, "Wow! That actually sounds great!" and then question them, you know "What kind of form was that?" trying to relate it to something that we actually do in the music classroom. So because of MusicKids, those students had to bring their instruments to the music room. But those students decided to practice! Maybe they couldn't get in they're practicing at home, so they would come in and practice in the morning. Over time I would have ten to twelve instrumental players - cellos, violins - and we were jamming. It's like, why not make this official, and our first year was last year. I think a lot of that had to do with MusicKids because, these were the kids that were bringing their orchestra instruments, and it was first to simply drop them off, but it came with the jam sessions and now we have an orchestra. It's also a chance for the kids to try things out. The kids would want to try out someone else instruments. So, you know, all kinds of good things [are] happening in those morning sessions!



I was also kind of thinking of specific students that I've seen growth in and there've been a lot of [them]. Particularly, a student that came back to visit me the last week of school. He's now in high school. At my school we have a lot of students who have mental health issues and all kinds of scenarios - where, if [a school] has any kind of issue, we have it. I mean, literally, there's a line to get medication for the day at the front office. But I remember this student had a lot, a lot of trouble. He couldn't focus in class. He would outburst. He couldn't get along with his peers. So I kind of hate to write students off, but I know that was one student I could not reach through music - at that time. But he came back to visit me the very last week of school. I think one of his buddies stayed across the street from the school. He came by and said, "Mr. Williams! What's up?" and I'm like, "Hello..." (laughs) - because I didn't recognize him. He got so tall. But, just hearing him speak, seeing his presence, you could tell that there was a change. I don't know exactly when that happened, but I'm thinking this is a kid who's going to end up, you know, either honestly in jail or prison, dead or, you know. I hate to say that, but he was on that path. To hear him come back and say, "You know, I've changed my behavior. I'm having a good time at school. I actually go to school." I know that was a problem when he was in elementary and I think a lot of that was out of his hands. But I mean, just from him speaking to me, and I didn't recognize him at first. Then it was like, "Oh yeah, I do remember you!" I was like, "You were the kid who gave me a hard time." He said, "Yes sir. But, you know, I've changed." And I'm serious! You can tell there was a change just by seeing him. He was very squiggly, wormy, squirmy throughout the day. He just couldn't... he didn't have a lot of self-control. But you could tell the change to his character. So that was one of the stories I thought about. I don't know if that one particularly had to do a lot with music because at that time I don't think he enjoyed music. But I will have to say that there must have been a connection between myself and him for him to be able to want to come back and just to say hello. So I think that, to me, that meant a lot [as to] how I'm serving the kids at Northfield Elementary.

At my school I'm able to do a mentor program through our guidance counselor and there was a partnership also with the local police department. So over the years as I've been at Northfield, I've mentored maybe twelve students. Maybe twelve boys, I usually have two a year. Most of them they keep in touch. They come back and visit just to tell me what they're doing, and I always try to get them to do something musically with me, whether it's learning the drum, or singing. In particular, there's a student who *loved* to sing and his voice had not changed yet. He's in fifth grade, so of course he had a very high voice. He would love to learn all kinds of vocal music, but particularly, we were preparing for the African American history program and he wanted to learn Sam Cooke's *A Change is Gonna Come* and he absolutely rocked that song. First of all, he gained a new fan club from the students, but to know now that he's still continuing vocal music, because he had a good experience in elementary school, to me, that means a lot. Honestly when I was teaching middle and high, that was one of the [things] we were concerned about, especially for the middle school age. They'll do good in the elementary, but when they get to middle school - especially boys - they want to kind of dismiss music because it's not as cool as visual or theatre or whatnot. To see him still want to continue that... to me, that means a lot.

[The way I structure a class meeting] depends on the rapport I have with the class, the previous interactions with the classes. But for the most part I try to start with something very active, but still relates to the subject matter that we're doing. Something that gets them moving and thinking at the same time. And we have at the school, several philosophies and programs, but we really

try to do a lot with distributive summarizing. Which means that you're not just asking the kids to, you know, recite information. And you're not just asking them to spill it out at the end of class - to give a summary. But you're constantly reviewing, asking them questions, and then getting them to talk with each other. And at first, I think that was kind of hard for me because I was out of my comfort zone, you know, "I'm teaching music. We're rehearsing. This is an ensemble." But, in a way it's kind of helped because it's building those relationships with the students and then they actually get a chance to build relationships with each other.

Hispanic Heritage Month [is] in October, so everything comes fairly quickly. So I wanted to, usually I waited until, like October, which gave them only about two weeks and really two days, because I was seeing them once every school week and I wanted to start that earlier. So this year for fifth grade we did the *Cumbia del Sol* and we studied the *Cumbia* - both the dance and some music. So they were able to learn some dances and play some Colombian rhythms for the *Cumbia*. We actually had a staff member on hand who is from Columbia, so he was able to give some insight on the culture and the dance. I think that sparked for our Hispanic population, because they were very excited - although most of our students are from different countries. It was exciting for them to learn about another culture from Columbia. [The staff member is] actually our family facilitator, so he's like the person to go to if you need something translated or if I am having a problem with Spanish-speaking students.

Next is preparing for the winter holiday program. In fifth grade, we study the Nutcracker. Each year we've done something different. Our first year we told the story through a pop-up Nutcracker book, which was pretty cool. The second year we had students give a summary of their experience. They actually get to go to the ballet in December. We've gone to two different venues to see it performed. This year was actually the best in my opinion. We got to talk about the kid's experiences, but they also got the chance to act out the ballet. We studied some ballet dances, kind of like introduction to ballet. I was trying to find a way that would not intimidate the boys. I said, "Well you know, some football players actually take ballet to help them with their foot skills and footfall." So I was trying to bring in things like that to try and relate to them. But [the boys] were energetic, mainly because we did the battle scene from the Nutcracker, I think. We had soldiers, mice, the rat king, the whole nine. We had costumes for the kids and it took some time to rehearse. They would come during their lunch and stayed after school a few times. This year, it was about 14 kids in all who did it, and we had auditions for it. They were really excited about it, so I was glad to see that from them.

So this year [for Black History month] I thought about really trying to get them to think about the conditions that people lived through during Civil Rights, without going into a lot of details. They were able to apply knowledge from their grandparents, or their parents, or even things that they learned in their regular classes. I kind of approached it in a cautious manner, because I never want to step overboard overloading them with too much information or content of things they can't handle. But I think in this case, they could. We talked about race and how people protested - how it wasn't just African Americans but it was different ethnicities [that] protested for civil rights. We listened to two Motown songs, one was by Marvin Gaye *What's Going On?* and *Change is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke. I explained to them, "This is the first time in Motown history in which you had writers, songwriters and artists talking about big current events and things that are going on around them. Usually how I approach Motown music is as music that

you can dance to; it makes you feel good; it's happy music. In this case they were able to see that it could be something else. It could be very much historical, and by the end of the lesson we were able to talk about it. Also, I took two apples, a green and a red, and we talked about the characteristics of each apple - what was different, what was similar - and then we took it a step further in asking, "How are the apples related to people?" and particularly the people during the Civil Rights Movement. For the most part, they were able to recognize that the apples represented the people and we came to a conclusion that we're all different on the outside, like the apples, one's red, one's green. We're all different colors. We don't have the same hair, and we don't have the same eye color. We're different on the outside. But we all share things that are similar on the inside. So they elaborate on that, they say, "We share bones. We all have a heart. We all have a nose." Things like that. I think for the most part, the kids caught on very quickly. And I think a lot with that was having them study it in their other classes prior to music. So, like, for example, I remember...one of the girls remembered reading a story about the Civil Rights Movement in Media class and she was able to recognize that, "Hey! This is the same lesson. We're still talking about the Civil Rights Movement and how African Americans and other people weren't treated nicely." So they were able to recognize the connections there.

I am also on our school improvement team, which is a governing committee for our school. So we work, actually, it's why we're meeting in August early on adapting our school improvement plan and really getting everyone on board in terms of what we're trying to achieve as far as our goals for that year. I was voted on [to the school improvement team]. (laughs) And it was one of those things where we had a different principal at that time and she was like, "You know you should really do it." and I was like, "Ahhhh..." you know, 'cause we had MusicKids still. I was just like, "It's too much." But I actually like it, because I get to see the other side of it. I work with a great supportive staff and we're always positive and we always, you know, we're able to not just talk about the problems, but come up with some solutions. So that's really what kind of motivates me to stay on the school improvement team. But yeah, I was voted on, so it was not a goal of mine. It was not. And you know there are some teachers who need to be on that committee or this committee to do my leadership part of their end-of-year evaluation when I was like, "That's not for me. Maybe next year. Maybe the next year." (laughs)

I have a very positive relationship/interaction with both our principal and assistant principal. I think they're very supportive of the programs that we have. One of the things that we kind of struggle with since I've been there is having good concert etiquette from both our guests...well, the parents and performers...from the students. So that's been a struggle because, you know, I worked at PAMS and it was totally, at our first concert I was like, "Why are people talking and getting up and babies are crying?" that kind of thing. So we've kind of come up with a plan for this upcoming year. One of those is really teach that in the class first. Sending out information to parents and you know, giving them the information they need. And we did that last year as well, but I think it's going to be more successful and effective this year. But yeah, I have a great relationship with our administrations, and I actually remember my first big meeting with our principal was about MusicKids, because it, you know takes funds from our budget to fund that. And she had all these ideas, she was a new principal to our school this year. So she had all these wonderful ideas and she was... you know as any principal... how am I going to fit this within my budget. Katie came over. We talked to her, we showed her some information about the program and how the kids are achieving, they're progressing. It's not just about music, but these skills

could go into any direction. So from that she was very much on board as far as supporting MusicKids... helping to fund that program at our school. And of course, because we have MusicKids, I interact a lot more with our parents. I would say because of MusicKids, our parent involvement has increased at our school and for the music program in general. One of the things I think that helped with that is, we used to have a bus that would take kids back to their homes after the rehearsals, but because of funding we couldn't really do that this year. So the parents had to actually come in and pick up their kids and I wouldn't line them up and send them outside. They actually had to come to the music classroom. So we had a chance to informally meet and just talk about their students and really about anything. But I think because of that program, our parent interaction has definitely increased. And they're so proud of their students and the progress that they make. They're always like, "Kevin showed me how to play this on his violin and he's going to play it next weekend at his grandmother's birthday party!" and I'm like, "Wow, that's so awesome." I love my Spanish-speaking parents - particularly. I remember for the [MusicKids] potluck they were like "Mr. Williams, when are you going to eat?" and they all just saved me like, three big plates of all this nice Spanish food. Actually, I told them I love tamales, so they brought tamales for the program! (laughs) They are very engaged with their kids and the programs that they do at the school and I think that's because of MusicKids.

I don't really have any hobbies besides music. I think most of the time I am practicing music and spending time with family. Actually, I see them a lot as I travel home for the other music job. Especially my nephew, which that's mainly turning into now, music lessons. Growing up, he wants to play the piano and drums. And I have other nephews and nieces who also like to play music as well. So they always ask me to spend Christmas with my brother in Winston-Salem and he has twin boys and they're like, "Did you bring your keyboard this time?" and I'm like, "Can I just come by myself?" But they see that I enjoy it, and when they come to visit me and watch me in my church, I think that's something that captivates them and motivates them to want to learn an instrument. But they're excited about music to. And usually, just, you know when I go home - which is quite often - I spend time with my grandmother who is 78 years old. So we're able to cook and do different things and go out. Although she doesn't like going out, but I try to push her to walk and things like that. So usually just hanging out with her on the weekends when I go home. We celebrate everything. It's like now; we have had a celebration every month since, like Mother's day.

I think [my colleagues] would describe me as someone who is definitely caring. Who cares about their students, not only inside of the classroom, but their academic process outside of the classroom, and what they're doing also in the community. I think they would say that I'm dedicated to the school and to the students. Actually, I have had that said before, from other teachers. This is a tough place. We have a lot of teachers who don't stay within the year, or they transfer out for whatever reason. I think for this school it does require dedication from all teachers. You know, I had my first class that I taught for six year, last year. And it was a blessing to watch them grow from kindergarten and move up all the way to fifth grade.

For me, I think, I used to be the person who wouldn't really give hugs. I taught high school and middle school. It was the handshake, "Hey how are you?" But at the elementary level - they love to be hugged, they love the attention. So I think that's one way of showing you care. Also, you know, with my student I just had at the door. He's assigned silent lunch this week, and I literally

went to his house yesterday. He lives right across the street and I talked to mom and dad. To me, that shows that I'm going above and beyond in the caring aspect to make sure that he's meeting the music expectations. Caring involves high expectations from all of my students at all times. I think [my colleagues] might say that I usually go above and beyond for my students, and I advocate for students. Especially getting programs that would serve them here. Also, with the other leadership things I do for the school, like being on the school improvement team. Last year I was the chairperson for our United Way campaign, which we raised over \$700, which was the most we've raised since I've been here six years.

In terms of advocating, I think there are two ways that can go. The first is for students who need special services or extra resources, making sure that as an educator and teacher that I'm documenting those things. Like, for example, with behavior. There're some students in my class that need that extra support. So the only way that we can have a behavior specialist to come in, is if I'm gonna advocate along with the other teachers. For me that would mean documenting those cases where he's maybe acting out, and then communicating that with his parents and his teacher. The only way that those services would get here is if we're documenting. The other way I think is bringing in special programs like MusicKids, and writing grants for students. I hope to write a grant this year, actually, in the next few weeks. [The grant is] for twenty of our fifth graders to go to the performing arts center to see Annie. We actually did the Annie Jr. musical, a few years ago; our posters are over there. Our students are always asking to go to something. I said, "You know what, [Annie is] coming in December, I think it would be a great opportunity for our students to go and see it!" Usually, for fifth grade, we also go see The Nutcracker. Unfortunately, they're not gonna do the ballet close by this year, so we wouldn't be able to do that. So I thought Annie would be a great way for the students to have a cultural experience, and musical theater experience.

When I think of music, I'm first thinking of expression. It's a way for an individual or a group of people to express themselves vocally or instrumentally. I just think of it first as being something that's expressive, and then also creative. For me, when I think of music, there are no boundaries, even though we're taught in music theory that you have your guidelines and things like that. But I think because it is expressive, one can be very expressive through creativity. I think with the equity piece - of course we have kids that are coming from different backgrounds, different circumstances, and situations - but I think the creative part is what draws those kids to music. In class I offer a lot of opportunities for kids to be expressive and creative. A lot of times I'm expecting for it to be one way, and actually with their ideas, they turn it to be something else, which is even better. An example of that is, there was one time where we were making poems. We had groups and each group had to come up with a way to say it, and it involved instruments, and there could be singing or movement with their poems. I was expecting the kids to do something that we had been talking about throughout that unit. As soon as I turned to one group - they turned the poem into, like, a hip-hop song. Well, at first I didn't really expect that, but that's what they're used to, and they made it work for that assignment.

Well, part of our standard is to include lessons that include improvisation. So for our African American history month [with] our third graders, we study the blues. And we learn it through the eight-bar blues, and the twelve-bar blues, and of course that incorporates improvisation. So there's a part where everyone's playing the same melody of the blues scale, and we learn that as a

class. I usually give them sixteen measures to improv, and we do it through a question and answer - meaning that they work with a partner and they have eight bars to improv. We call the first person the question, and then their partner would answer it through improvisation. We set up [the instruments] in the blues scale. So they have that boundary, but on the bar instruments, they can play any note that they want to; they can play any rhythm that they want to, so they're being expressive and creative through improvisation.

I think the arts, you know, there's a very human side to it, which again goes back to the expressiveness of the arts, and being creative. Like, you know, what I try to convey to my students no matter what age they are is, "Yeah it's great to learn the pitches, the rhythms, the notes, but when it's all done, we're communicating a message to the audience." We're still communicating a message, and that message travels from me to the audience, or from one person to the next person. I think in the big picture, [I hope my students can communicate that] "we're young, but we're striving to be better each day."

I had this conversation with my principal [about my professional future] over the summer. I'm definitely committed to this school and to our students here. I do have [other opportunities], and we talked about this. If I wanted to, I could go to another school - pretty much anywhere I wanted to, but I'm choosing to stay here for now. Our students need to see people that look like them doing positive things and being the person that helps motivate them. I'm not saying that it couldn't be someone of another race, but I think it's very important that especially our African American boys see someone who looks like them who is on the right path, and who can help them get on the right path as well. So for that, I'd love to stay here a few more years. I'm not sure the exact time frame, but I'm committed to this school for now.

I think all students need great teachers. No matter what walks of life our students come from, they deserve our best. I give up a lot of my time, because I love what I'm doing, and I have no complaints of doing that. So when I was interviewing teachers over the summer, dedication was one of the things that I mentioned. The question that I would ask was, "What qualities do you think a good teacher would have?" And usually they would say all these other things, and then I'd lead up to asking about dedication. At a school like this, you need dedicated teachers. Like I said before, there're times when teachers leave within the school year because it's too much. Maybe not necessarily the kids themselves, but the expectations that come from our administrators downtown, the district, the state, and especially since Common Core has come up. I really do believe that if you're dedicated and you have a mind to serve and reach our young people, then they're gonna learn and they're gonna wanna come to school.

## **Chapter 9: Janice Mayfield**

**Janice Mayfield** is the founder and director of the non-profit music organization TRIUMPH: The Triangle Urban Music Project of Hope. Her organization collaborates with various public and private organizations to empower youth through the music of the African Diaspora. In providing identifying information Janice, who is in her early sixties, asked that I describe her as “an African American woman in touch with her roots.”

### **Setting**

For each interview with Janice, I met her in the TRIUMPH office, which was buried deep within the basement of the Methodist church in a small Southeastern city. The church is at the center of a lot of action, an active railroad track runs just behind the parking lot. Also nearby are a series of defunct factories, the former industrial hub of the city. Now, due to a wave of “urban renewal” – which could just as easily be termed gentrification – it is the ‘lifestyle’ center of the city, home to expensive industrial loft condos, trendy dining, and boutique-style retail establishments. The church is an old stone building, built for the booming city population at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Janice instructed me to enter at the back of the building, under the Spirit Café sign. Each time that I arrived for an interview, the door was locked, and I had to call Janice’s cell phone to come let me in. For the first interview, she said, “Oh, the door was open! You just have to really try hard.” For the second interview, I tried harder. I pulled and pushed, but the door was clearly locked. Again, Janice told me it had actually been open the whole time. For the third interview, several months later, I didn’t even try. I arrived and immediately called Janice. She said, “Oh! I forgot to unlock the door.”

Janice's office was a large room at the center of the church basement, close to a small multi-purpose gathering area with a stage at one end. In the office, there were several file cabinets, a small meeting table, a piano, a couch, bookshelves, and a desk area. The couch, where I sat for all the interviews, was covered in a bright African printed cloth, and faced Janice's desk. The office was highly organized, and each time Janice told me about a particular lesson plan or instrument, she located the materials quickly to show me. During the first and second interviews, Janice had prepared an extensive set of notes and topics. She answered my questions in a measured, but very reflective manner. When I asked if she has anything that she would like to add, she had examples of literature or documentaries that she thought might be worth examining for the study. In our third interview, we began in this same manner, but remarking on her read of the first two transcripts, she stated, "I can't believe how much you got out of me." This was a surprise to me, because her interviews were lengthy and detailed. Somehow she thought she had been holding back. About a half an hour into the interview, Janice made a comment about an inscription that her piano teacher had written at the front of each of her music books. It was a touching story, and I took it at face value; it was a Bible quote about hands doing good service. Truthfully, I sort of brushed over it mentally, but tried to get it down in my notes nonetheless. As I was scribbling, I realized that Janice has gone silent, something that was unusual in my relationship with her. I looked up and she was crying. After a long pause, she shared some information that forced me to reorganize my entire analysis of her narrative. This small piece of information – about how music allowed her to build her world, a world that was safe and focused on beauty – led me to consider how the African Diasporic Aesthetic that she promotes through TRIUMPH is actually a dynamic world-building methodology. She



unapologetically re-imagines another framework for music education, and the positive identity development that comes along with it.

### **Janice's Story**

My name is Janice Mayfield and I'm the founder and executive director of TRIUMPH the Triangle Urban Music Project of Hope. I'm also a private piano teacher. This is my studio. TRIUMPH is a non-profit music education organization with a focus on music of the African Diaspora. So we harness music of the African Diaspora to 'bump up' life success of urban youth. We have a number of programs. Right now we lead workshops with youth to focus on teaching them the history and culture of this music. We do that with community organizations, schools... We developed the curriculum materials that we use in those classes and we do professional development for educators.

It will be really hard to tell you a little bit [about my musical journey]. (laughs) So I started in music in elementary school. My first instrument was violin, because that was taught at my public school, which was a racially segregated elementary school in [a Midwestern city]. I started piano lessons around age eight, I think it was, and my piano teacher was an organist for the National Baptist Convention for thirty-five years. At the time I was taking lessons from her, I really had no idea of the significance of her work. To me, she was just a music director at church. Probably after about a year of piano lessons, my teacher started sending me out around the region as a substitute musician for churches in the region, directing choirs and playing the piano for churches. Actually, I was doing this in junior high school. From there I picked up clarinet and I played that in high school in the marching band, and college. I played [violin] a year or two. I didn't really continue that, but that was my start in music. My parents were insistent that all 17 of us, well I should say all 16 of us, took piano lessons.

Well, I think [my choice to continue with music] it probably goes back to my teacher sending me all over the place, because that grew into playing for churches. We moved from [the Midwest] to [the West Coast] for high school, but because I had that experience, I immediately started playing for the church and playing in the high school band. So it just became a part-time avocation. I did major in civil engineering when I first started college, but I stopped out and once I got back, I realized how important music was to me, and I switched my major. One of my brothers was a civil engineer, one of them was a chemical engineer and they'd said to me, "You know you're really good at math and science, you need to major in engineering. That's where the money is." (laughs) I am the youngest of all my brothers and sisters. [My older siblings] were like another set of parents, some of them. Some of them stuck with [music] a little more than others, but not as long as I have. Not even close.

I had stopped out [of college], as I've mentioned, and when I went back I had four kids under the age of 5 and I just felt, you know, if I am going to go back, I really should do what I enjoy. I've earned that! (laughs) So at that point it was a choice between music or architecture and the university had just ended their architecture program, so that simplified it. So my undergraduate degree was in music with a concentration in piano performance. I did not finish when I first went back. When I first went back, my oldest was in kindergarten and my youngest was one. I went [to the university] two quarters and I loved it and I was doing great in piano and everything, but I

had made a commitment to myself that I wouldn't keep my kids in daycare. I had a nanny and then something happened to her; she was assaulted in her own home and she was a basket case after that. I decided I would just stop out for a little while longer, and after that I studied part-time at another state college, and was finally able to go back when the kids were in elementary and middle school. Actually, middle school and high school was when I finished.

[In the meantime], I was the music director at Mariposa Christian Fellowship, which was a non-denominational church in a nearby town. I was a pianist for my bible study fellowship class. We went to a series of churches because we tended to move. I was the church pianist at a Baptist Church, and then the interim music director. And then I can't think of the Assembly of God church, I was the worship leader there. When my kids were in elementary school, I taught recorder in an after school class to the kids there. Then, when my younger kids entered this private international prep school called Lewis Academy, I was the after school music teacher there. I didn't even have a degree at that time; I just kept busy with music.

Well, I'll tell you the reason I even went back [to university], because after four kids, I really felt that I'd probably never finish my degree. I was a stay-at-home mom, and I thought I'd lost my mind. I was teaching the after school music class at Lewis, and they lost their school day music teacher. [They] told me that they'd love to have me take over that position, but that I needed at least a bachelor's degree, so it's at that point that I went back. So as I was finishing my bachelor's degree at Stanford, one of my professors said to me, "What are you going to now?" I said, "Well, now I'm going to go back and teach. I'm going to find a music teacher job." and he said, "You can't do that. I want you to enter the musicology program." And I enjoyed music history and those classes. I decided to try a Master's degree, so I applied to that program, and then they admitted me to the doctoral program, which was sort of unexpected. I couldn't finish my doctoral program there because my spouse took a job here in the Southeast, so we moved here and I did the Doctoral program in musicology at [a prestigious university nearby] instead.

I was pretty much at the top of all my classes. It came easy, I enjoyed it, and I was good at it. So when I was studying on the West Coast, I was studying 19th century piano music and I did a thesis on the Chopin Preludes. And when I came here I expected to continue working on 19th century piano music, but the whole racialized atmosphere just transformed the way I looked at the way I did music. My kids had all these friends from different places in the world in their networks and their circles, and here, one of my daughters was coming home from school crying saying, "Mom, my White friends say that I can't be friends with them if I'm friends with my Black friends. And the Black friends say I can't be with them if I'm going to have White friends." So I started to really look into what that was about. I got involved with schools, PTA, the school governance, School Improvement Plan, and all those things, and then I started to see how a disproportionate amount of African American students were in remedial courses and only a few were in the advanced placement courses where my kids were. Only a few were in the orchestra and the band where my kids were. I started to think about how my music could have an impact in these areas, so I started to think about changing my focus here from 19th century piano music.

So around that time, my childhood piano teacher passed away and my sister and I were asked to go through her personal effects, and there we found a gospel sheet music collection that was huge. From what I could ascertain at the time, it was larger than the collection at the Schomburg Center for Black Music Research in New York. It was larger than the collection at the Center for Black Music Research in Chicago. [Going through it] I started to see the networks that she was

in, so I decided to write my dissertation on the gospel music community in the metropolitan area [where I grew up], so it was a historical ethnography. [My sister and I] were not only her students, but because so many of my siblings had taken lessons from her, she was like a second mom to us, and this was my oldest sister who went with me to do this. We were considered family members, and we sat with the family at the memorial service. And they knew, you know, about my history in music and how important music was to me.

[My dissertation] was really about the social networks that were formed around this musical practice. And so there were three kinds of networks that I focused on. One is the apprenticeship networks that were at the heart of the genesis and the growth of the gospel music industry. Another network was the publishing networks, and I found that really fascinating because gospel music is an improvisatory practice, but gospel music exists - existed and still exists - at this intersection of printed music and improvisation, and there are some really interesting things that happen at that intersection. The third network is the actual performing networks and it was called 'A Gospel Highway' by Horace Boyer, in his book *The Golden Age of Gospel Music*. The Gospel Highway is this network of locales where the performing took place. And so part of my dissertation was showing sort of how these locales mapped onto the media associated with it.

So my dissertation work was the idea of the apprenticeship networks and the way that children were not only being groomed to learn music in general, but there was a very conscious effort to frame musicianship in terms of life skills and being prepared to navigate a racialized society successfully. The connection to actually founding TRIUMPH didn't come until later. While I was in graduate study [in the Southeast], a number of things happened. I identified this topic for my dissertation and I started writing grants, and one of them was the named instructorship at [my university]. [For this program] all of the graduate students can come up with a class that they want to teach, and they compete against all of the other grad students. I won the named instructorship and I created a class around gospel music, so I was the Mary Lou Williams instructor of music. As part of my class I brought in Grammy Award-winning artist Pastor Shirley Caesar. She spoke to my class. She spoke to groups on campus, and she did a concert. And this was all part of my instructorship. I also got the Howard Meyer Brown award on the basis of this new line of scholarship, and that's an award that supports minority musicologists. And then I got - toward the end of graduate study - I got a Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellowship, which took me to [a university in Massachusetts] for two years. That's how I got to Boston, teaching Black sacred music, [and] music of the African Diaspora. And while I was there I did a series called, *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing* and brought in Horace Boyer and other artists. We had a wonderful gospel music [festival]. I brought in local gospel music artists, singers, instrumentalists, the faculty, staff, students came [together] and sang. It was wonderful. Probably about seventy-five people. Then I taught another university [in Boston].

When I was teaching at my first placement in Massachusetts, I was a member of a community choir and I was one of the choir directors. Part of another event I organized there was *Ten Black Sacred Songs Every American Should Know*, and so I brought in the group I was performing with - the community choir - and did a pre-concert lecture. The choir performed those ten songs. And while I was in Boston I directed the Sacred Music Ensemble at an African Methodist Episcopal Church. I tend to forget a lot of things that I've done. I also was pianist for a local Baptist church in Boston for a while.

[TRIUMPH] came about because of a combination of things. My path is very much tied up with my life as a mother and my community work, so before I even finished the Ph.D. I was really wanting to start a music school. At that time and I sort of let peer pressure get the best of me. The Mellon post-doc opened up and all my colleagues across the country were saying, "Janice, you should apply for this! It has your name written all over it!" and I was like, "But I just want my music school!" and they said, "Well try it. See if you like academia." You know. So I did it. Then for the end of the post-doc I was thinking that that would be the time to do [start a school]. I was still spending my summers here the South because we had a house nearby, and so I pulled together a group of people here and they were very interested in doing it, but we didn't proceed for a variety of reasons. I went ahead and took another position in Boston, but it was always at the back of my mind, this new university was interested in the idea [of TRIUMPH] as well. And we talked about how we could bring it about there, but I ended up choosing to just launch it outside of the university setting. So when I left that university, I pulled together some community people and founded it.

So TRIUMPH got started in 2005 and it was really exploratory at first, because it wasn't clear exactly what we were going to do. We worked with at lots of schools in Boston. We worked at churches, a community choir, at some private settings and doing lots of different kinds of things. Then the financial crisis hit and we weren't really on our feet yet, and so, for me, it made a lot of sense to now come to go back down South. I really felt [TRIUMPH] could have the community support that it needed to thrive. Also, my son had said, "Mom! You've been saying you're going to come back [down South] and the grandkids are coming and we want you here." So it was really easy to just move it here. So now we're back.

At [the university where I did my Ph.D.] I had a class on Black Literature and one of the questions [the professor] put to us was, why? And of course this is at a time when not a lot of universities are studying Black lit, it's still contested - and so her question to us was: Why should we study Black literature? Lots of answers came out about how powerful it is, how interesting it is, how so many people value it, and her answer was, "No, no, no." So as I thought about it, I thought, "Well the real reason we should study it is because it exists." and she said, "Yes!" And that, to me, that's why we should do what we're doing. When a child learns music, by and large, they're getting little reduced pieces of European western music, and so they're being immersed in Eurocentric culture in so many ways. They're not seeing themselves reflected in [that music] at all. And so, with such a powerful tradition of music as *all* of the traditions that make up music of the African Diaspora, we really should be making opportunities for kids to learn it, just like they're learning other musics. Black music is at the center of popular culture all over the world. Why aren't we really learning it? Why aren't all of us really learning more about it?!

[Cultural responsiveness] obviously has to do with more than just the repertoire. It has to do with the way you teach it and the whole environment that you create around it. When I was directing a choir at an African Methodist Episcopal Church, the sacred music ensemble is considered the choir that does the classical anthems and the arranged spirituals, and then there is a gospel choir that did, you know, the gospel music. In a Black church, typically everyone understands that there are two different ways of learning [music]. You've got the gospel music, which is totally in the oral tradition, and then you've got these arranged spirituals, which are in the anthem tradition. That totally impacts what your choir rehearsal is like, because gospel music is more than just learning to sing the parts aurally. It's all about creating this atmosphere where people *can*

connect with each other. Gospel music is also about a different kind of human connection than you can get when you're singing classical anthems. If you shut it down, the music is gonna be different. It goes back to all these African values that make African Diasporic music what it is. We had a lesson about that this past weekend at our event. [Some students are] conscious and aware, but I find a lot of African American children are not really conscious of those sorts of concerns. So that's excellent.

So, just the other day TRIUMPH had a "Hip Hop Factory" workshop, where we collaborated with Musician Corps. They take AmeriCorps members with a musical background and give them training and place them at schools and non-profit organizations. So this past Saturday, they were doing a day of service, and they partnered with three non-profits, and TRIUMPH was one. They sent a musical group and several of the Musician Corps artists to give service. So our group was a musical collective that does Hip Hop, so they did DJing with the kids, song writing, and beat-making. They had a little recording studio. Then we gave a lesson on the roots of Hip Hop music, and part of that lesson was the kids making this tree, which identifies some of these African values. You'll see this tree is glued over the continent of Africa, and so these roots are the African values. Then the fruit is some of the ways these African values come out in music. We also specifically talked about the African values that contributed to Hip Hop and are visible in Hip Hop music. Every lesson that we have, we try to focus toward three outcomes: musical proficiency, cultural literacy, and resilience.

I think that for me, multiculturalism is about - from what I've read - intercultural understanding, generally. It sort of takes Western European culture as the center and says, let's look out from this center and see what else is out there, and dabble in it a little bit, and this will help us to understand others. So there's the idea of "us" and "them." Whereas, when you focus on a particular kind of music, the focus is more on, "this is who we are, and we need to understand ourselves better." In the case of music of the African Diaspora, the "we" is everyone, because this music is so important around the world; this is a global tradition. We get to redefine who we are, and we get to look out from another center. I also think that with the achievement gap being what it is - and African American children being on the far side of that gap - understanding who they are, what their history is, the impact that their own tradition is having on others [is vital]. That can't help but increase their personal power and help them bring tools to their own life education, school education, and all their experiences. It's about the whole child and not just about. You know, Jane Sapp said [something like], "Music is the voice of the intellect for minority kids, in particular." And that's just a cultural thing.

We actually have a rubric where every lesson has to have some musical performance. Then every lesson has to have some cultural literacy, and that's pretty clear. And then there's a resilience piece. So have looked at a whole broad array of youth development approaches: 21st century skills, character development, and resilience. We've come up with a core group of traits that we feel the kids need to learn. So for this lesson, it was that connection between the past and the future, but another lesson that will be leadership, and there's a whole bunch of different ones. We've mapped those out to the lessons to some degree, and the next step will be, I think, saying "You can choose any number of these to work into the lesson." That would be for the lesson developer to do. What I'm trying to do is set this up so we can actually have more lesson developers come in and be able to create lessons within this whole framework. When I first created the first set of lessons, *Music as Communication* was sort of the theme of the whole set

of lessons, and then you could trace that theme from the talking drums down through the other genres.

We focus on [grades] 2-5, but we find that even adults enjoy this. The Rape Crisis Center in town has asked us to do workshops with their women. One place wants us to do workshops with their senior citizens so we're definitely expanding out, and it's not taking our focus off of the youth obviously. I think it's a positive thing for other age groups to experience this, because it just increases the amount of affirmation youth are going to get.

Every time we create a lesson plan we draw from these nine values (spirituality, resilience, humanism, communalism, orality, personal style, realness, emotional vitality, and music & rhythm) to be specific about which on that lesson is going to delve more deeply into. The introductory lesson is extremely rich, and it gives us the foundation for everything that will occur in future lessons, so that all the future lessons can be linked back to this African Diaspora tree, where the roots are in Africa, and then the branches are hanging out over all these other continents. And so the seeds of this tree are being planted on other continents, and then there's a tree growing in each continent. We have two trees. One is the African Diaspora, and then this one is African-American music.

You know, I think when you talk about social justice, one of the most important aspect of that is access. So right now, kids are getting a very Eurocentric way of looking at music, and what we're doing is saying, there are many ways to look at music. Because music is all about what a community values. And so we learn what is valued in Western Classical music. And then we learn songs from other traditions. We learn practices from other traditions, but we don't always delve into what is *valuable* in that tradition, and how the music responds to that. And so these kinds of lesson allow us to dig down into the roots of African Diasporic music and understand it, I think, in a much more nuanced way.

Here on site, the programming is done in the Spirit Cafe and there are large tables. So they're seated at large tables. There's actually several different spaces in the room, so one space is tables where they're seated and they can do their activities comfortably, and then we have this at each table, so they have all their supplies. And then there's a stage in that space, so that's typically where they'll perform once they have learned what they're going to be performing. And then there's large open space where, you know, they'll dance or they'll do their movement or icebreaker or whatever. And then there's also space, there's a bench along the wall, so that's where they'll have their snack. And during the snack time we have a community time where we'll talk to each other about what's going on. One of the weeks we had our programming, there was a activist march in a city close by, and so we talked about that a little bit.

When I started this, I *was* the instructor, and I taught everything. I stayed up half the night creating what I was going to do with them. At one point we had about four or five Boston Public Schools, and you know, because I have four kids of my own, and all my kids are adults and I have grandchildren now, I think I sort of interact with them in sort of a grandmotherly way. I'm just there to support the instructor and to, you know, really help the kids. At this last event, there were several children I was helping put the tree together, and one of them, a couple of them couldn't really write. They didn't know their letters, and one of them was old enough - he should've known his letters. He should have been able to write his letters, but since he didn't, it was sort of an opportunity to coach him. So I'd write a letter and he could copy that. It's, you

know, it's really a literacy opportunity. We found that in Boston as well. One of the schools we worked at pre-empted the kids' reading class when they saw the amount of reading and writing that the kids would do in our program. I just have a passion for really seeing kids flourish and do work to the best of their ability. At the pilot back in February, I also picked up all the kids who needed transportation and took them home, and we would converse in the car about their lives, and a lot of times, kids just need that attention. They really love having someone to listen to them. You don't need to settle their problems; you just need to listen. I would lead the community time during the snack during the workshops. After a couple of classes, they were coming to hug me, and I'm thinking I haven't done anything, you know. (laughs) So, you know, I think what we're giving them, they value it so much.

Well, I am a member of the local public schools arts education advisory council. I think that's what it's called. I think it's a quarterly meeting. Basically, my goal is to be at the table in whatever groups I can, to make a contribution to the youth of the city. We now have a connection with the Links, which of course is one of the largest service organizations in the country. It's African American Women. And so we are having conversation about how we can serve the youth at the global scholars' academy. And we have [worked with] a number of churches. We've done programming for MusicKids. I think our profile in the community is starting to grow.

[Three months later]

You know, one of the main things that stood out for me in our conversations is identity. Obviously, my identity, you drew a lot out. I was amazed at what you were able to draw out, and of course the work we do is all about the identity of the children we work with - their educational identity, their cultural identity.

In particular, I think it's important for kids to understand - especially African American youth - to understand that, even though all these discourses are out there in society, the history of these musical traditions allows us to just explode those, and help kids to see themselves individually in more powerful ways, and as a group. So they can really have empowering ideas about us, as African Americans, as opposed to so many of the negative messages we get in society. Even just the idea that even though they hold a lot of power [is big], because [negative discourses are] so rampant. When you finally see the reality, it's just so starkly a lie! I think it makes for a huge paradigm shift, and that's what I mean about exploding these messages. To me, it can be such a sudden change when you can start to see what's real. That's one of those African Diasporic values - realness.

You know, I had a class - this is an interesting story. We were doing - this is an early version of the talking drums lesson - and we use a piece where in the introduction there are voices singing, and there's drumming. America is not familiar with talking drums, and we don't really make any distinctions, but then as the song goes on, you hear a clear call and response. Then as you consciously take note of what is being called, what the call is, what the response is, then you're primed to really notice when the response becomes a talking drum response and not a sung response, and you hear that the talking drum actually mimics and matches the language. So during this class, as we went through the call and responses step-by-step - the children, and there were a couple of moms there - their mouths just fell open. And they were just so appreciative of knowing how powerful this mode of communication is! They hadn't heard of it, they didn't know

it existed, and just to get in touch with their own cultural legacy! Oh man, the light bulbs went on. I love moments like that.

I want TRIUMPH to be a national organization. I would love to develop the curriculum on a national level, and what that means for me is somehow to be able to pull together music educators from all over the country - maybe from music education programs, professionals, scholars, performers, music educators, arrangers, and graphic design people - and really create a curriculum that has legs. [Something that] could support having programs on a national basis through partnerships or through many TRIUMPHs that get built around the country. I think the context that would make sense would be for TRIUMPH to have some sort of presence in the university - in sort of an applied ethnomusicology program. The business school at the university here has what they call the Client Consulting Practicum. So in a music department, or a music education program, obviously you can have students doing practica and they can learn the TRIUMPH approach and they can do that. I think even more meaningful that that would be to have a program where music education students are responding to client needs, not just following the protocols of music education programs. So say the community organization wanted to have a Black History Month program, or they wanted learn about a specific artist, or composer, or body of music. Then it would be the job of that music education student to respond to that, and the program in applied ethnomusicology would hopefully give them the ability to do that.

I think that it's important for there to be enough African American instructors teaching TRIUMPH that kids see themselves reflected and have role models. I also think it's important for White people, White music educators to become SO familiar with, you know, music of the African Diaspora that they can do that. We really want our teachers to be grounded in the traditions that they're teaching. So African drummers need to be Griots who know what they're doing. If you're teaching gospel, you need to have sung it, performed, it directed. You know - so same for a White instructor.

[My professor] asked us the question 'What is music?' - in our ethnomusicology class. What is music to me? You know, my music teacher growing up used to always say music is life, and I would have to agree with that. There is such a deep spirituality, in music, unlike any of the other arts. Music is kind of like water, it flows - it gets down into all the seams; it connects everything, and it lubricates everything. So for me, music really, it just enables you to think and solve problems, to get in touch with your inner genius. Music is all that. That's actually what I tell my piano families, and in various places where you can go online and sign up for my lessons. I tell people that music enables us to connect with our inner genius. [Music is connection and communication] to some degree; obviously it does that. But you can't do that unless you have a really good sense of who *you* are. Once you establish *your* identity, then your communication and connection to others is truer. More meaningful.

Well, you know, I'll tell you a little story. My piano teacher wrote inside the cover of every music book. "My hands, oh God, I offer thee." And I actually put that as the title of my dissertation. It was actually the title or the subtitle. That inscription just was so powerful for me, in the life I was living... (breaks off, begins crying) I was just a very, very poor child growing up in a very violent environment, and my parents wanted to protect me from that so badly, and there was no way they could protect me from that. I found such solace and hope in being able to sit down at the piano and create something. I created my *world* with music. That is absolutely



something I hope to do for my students, you know. My piano teacher made it very clear to us that not everyone who took lessons from her would be able to become a performer. So I've always felt that primarily for me, our program, is it's about that identity. It's about that identity. It's about engaging in music in such a way that it allows for a flow in your life. You can really believe that you can make all your dreams come true. You know, we talk about Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, and how you can't get to self-actualization at the top until you go through all of these steps, but for me music shoots you right to the top. Even if you can't live at the top, practicing music gives you the opportunity to see the top, to feel the top, to know that you can get there. So yeah, I want all our kids to experience that. Some of them, I'm sure will be amazing performers, but then their performing will be just that much more powerful because they know who they are in this world.

Maybe it has something to do with that connecting part, you know. For me, I'm not - I used to be a *really* religious person, but I'm not anymore. Now, I'm super spiritual. So, for me spirituality is about understanding our existence here, and the meaning behind that existence here. And since music helps you do that, in terms of yourself and in terms of your relationships with others - to me that's just the definition of spirituality. You know, I'm sure visual art does it for some people, but I think music does it for everybody. You know? When you're down, what do you do? You listen to music. When you're up, what do you do? You listen to music. (laughs) And if you were going to try to come up for a technical definition of music, you would end up encompassing so many sounds around you at every moment of the day, that you would almost have to say that there is some sort of - there's some sort of higher - there's some sort of a music of the spheres, or some sort of structure to the universe that's creating music. That's life! So because music is at the heart of cultures, and because we infuse so much meaning into music, and because we use music to construct our lives - then we have to view it, not just in terms of entertainment and technical education - but we have to view it in terms of our soul and our identity, and that implicates morality loosely defined. Not right and wrong, so much as what's right for me, and what's right for my community.

If we're talking about aesthetics, you know traditional musicology has sort of already defined what's beautiful and what's not, and obviously that's a very individual thing based on who you are and where you're coming from. So music education, I think, needs to be approached that way. Our education system wants to have a core and then we sort of look out at the margins from this core, and so our core, in this country, is Eurocentrism. I'm not sure how we get to the point where each child is his own core and can look out at others from that. But it would be, I think it would be wonderful if one day TRIUMPH could get to the point where what we're doing for music of the African Diaspora. We could do that for Native American music and Asian music and other musics, so that all youth can really understand.

## **Chapter 10: Sasha and Clyde Potter**

**Sasha and Clyde Potter** are both elementary arts specialists in music and visual arts, respectively. Though Clyde is not a music educator, he felt that his perspective as an arts specialist might provide interesting support and juxtaposition to Sasha's experience. Sasha is the elementary general music teacher at Oakview Elementary School in a suburban district. In providing identifying information Sasha stated, "I am an African American woman, but sometimes I go with just Black." Clyde is the elementary visual arts teacher at Aaron Douglas Elementary School in a neighboring urban district, where their family resides. Like Sasha, he qualified his identifying statement, "I guess I would say I'm an African American man, but race is a construct. I'm a human." Both Sasha and Clyde are in their late thirties.

### **Setting**

Sasha and Clyde invited me into their home for each of our interviews. They live in a small suburban development where homes are still being built. I parked on the street when I visited them, and the rest of the street was usually crowded with cars. It looked as though the one-car garage has been converted into living space, there is no overhead door, but a solid wall. On my first visit, Sasha answered the door with Rosita on her hip – Rosita is about 7-8 months old when I first met the family in August. Rosita was present throughout each of our three lengthy interviews; she contributed a good deal of chatter and sound to our transcripts and I've tried to write her in where possible. When I visited for the third interview in November, she was walking. There were several toys along the perimeter of the walls in the living room, and she explored them throughout the time we were together. One toy was a tiny piano, which she played

loudly and often. Another was small toy boom box that lights up and plays various songs. These songs were also present throughout the recordings. On the walls in the living room were several pieces of artwork – paintings, shadowboxes, mixed media, etc. Most depicted African American people, or text that challenged oppression. I learned early in the first interview that Clyde had done the majority of the artwork, and a few pieces were the work of his mother. During this same interview, I was given a tour of the artwork in the living room and the den. When I arrived for the second interview, the den area was full of boxed belongings, a drum set, a keyboard, etc. Clyde and Sasha explained to me that they were re-modeling their creative space (formerly the garage). They gave me a brief glimpse of the room, where they were creating a family art space. The back half of the room was designated for music making, and the front portion was a visual arts studio. At that point, early August, Clyde and Sasha were painting the walls and re-finishing the floor, and also constructing a countertop/desk space. When I returned in November, I noticed several changes in the space. First, all of the artwork in the living room and den had been completely replaced, as if the show at an art gallery had turned over. The den area was clear again, and at the end of the third interview, Sasha and Clyde offered to show me their completed creative space. They noted that they use the space all the time, and that there is room for the whole family. In the ‘music section’ there was a piano, a keyboard with a midi-converter and laptop attached, a drum set, and several small percussion instruments. In the front of the room there was a large desk, and two workspaces at a countertop along the wall. There were canvases, paints, rags, a sewing machine, and other media for use in artwork. There was even a small bouncing seat for Rosita. Clyde and Sasha recounted how just a few days ago, the family was all in the room working on various projects. They told me how their son enjoys improvising on the piano, while Sasha works on midi input for school. Their two teenage girls work on drawing

comics or painting at the work stations along the wall, or join Clyde at the larger desk. They said that Rosita enjoys playing the drums, which she can reach from her bouncing chair.

### **Sasha and Clyde's Story**

SASHA: I didn't know that people couldn't sing because everybody sang. So I just assumed that I could sing. And everybody always told me I could sing, and so I was a singer! (laughs) My dad played in bands the whole time I was growing up. So I went to band rehearsals with him, band practice. Everybody sang in church (laughs), so I think that's where [I really started performing]. I used to go to Sunday school, and we didn't call it Sunday school then. I forget what we called it, but all the kids went there and we always had our little performances to do. And so, I remember my first, the first solo that I remember, I was five and they gave me this solo called *Into My Heart* and I went home and practiced it and this was my first time where I stood up in front of people and everybody cheered and they were so supportive, and so after that I just had the bug. I just wanted to be in front of people like that all the time, because they gave me so much affirmation. And that's pretty much what happened. I started singing all the time. I know when I was really small my parents used to joke and say that I was singing before I was talking. (laughs) And at my wedding I made my dad cry because one of the songs they told me I sang was by Natalie Cole *Inseparable* and said that I couldn't talk, but I could say 'inseparable.' I would sing that song, so I sang it at my wedding for my dad, who nearly bawled. So yeah, it was just a natural part of our community and I was saying that even when we were kids we would always be, you know, dancing and all that. We'd be out in the neighborhood and we'd be planning dance steps just in case there was somewhere we were going to have to go to perform. Because Lord forbid you show up somewhere and didn't know the moves! And if you couldn't sing, if you were off-tune, if something didn't sound right everybody was very clear to let you know, "Ummm, no, uh-uh, that's not right!" You know and they would look at you. I remember there was this expectation that you were supposed to sing it right and get it right, but it was also...I wouldn't say there was any pressure. It was just a natural part of what it was that we did. You know, we got together and family, they would always ask us to stand up and sing. "Come over here and sing!!" That kind of thing. So because I was around it all the time...I think I was in communities - especially in school - where people weren't around it all the time and so it became, like, this special thing that I did, that other people didn't do.

And so I was always called to do the special performances, and called talented but I never had any formal lessons until I went to college. When I sang in college, my first voice teacher told me I should change my major, and that I should consider doing something else - that I wasn't a singer. And it was because I had never been classically trained. She was a White woman too, now that I think about it. My first voice teacher was a White lady at [the HBCU I attended] and fortunately I only had her for one year because, something happened. She left, and then my second voice teacher came in and that's my oldest daughter's godfather. That's the kind of relationship that we had. He has been that influential in my life. And he not only told me that it was ridiculous to think that I couldn't sing classically, but he helped me find my voice. He really helped me find my voice. And so, it went from there.

I think I am a performer by nature. I just love the stage. I wouldn't say I'm necessarily the most talented, you know, with the best voice, but I have enough to entertain. (laughs) And that's how I would categorize myself. I really miss it. I used to do it a lot more. I used to perform live a lot more and do a lot of really big shows. Since I got into education, I don't have the opportunity to do some of those things that I used to do. But, that's pretty much where I come from.

When I went to undergrad, I went as an international business law major. The reason why I did that is because I wanted to travel, and I was like, "International business law sounds like something that I could take somewhere." And the second reason I did it is because everybody told me I couldn't. [They said] you couldn't do music and make any money. I was a pretty good student in school; I had very good grades, got scholarships, and I felt like I was supposed to do something like *that* - like music wasn't viable enough. And so I had encouragement to do those things, but NOT to do the music. I was in [the international business] department for - I kid you not - maybe a week and it was so drab and so lifeless - so void of, I don't know, that kind of color. I just had to do something else, but I didn't go to music. I minored in music with a concentration in voice. I majored in English communication, and I enjoyed that. What ended up happening is I wanted to be in the music building so much, and even as a minor it requires so much. It was like a double major anyway. So I was taking as many classes as the majors were taking, so in four years I ended up graduating as a music major instead of a music minor. They were like, "Well, you can graduate in music." and I was like, "Oh! Ok!" So I ended up graduating in music. (laughs)

Afterwards my plan was that I was going to move to New York. I was going to be a performer. Oh my gosh, I was so green. My second voice teacher, he was there until my junior year, and then he moved to Iowa to another position and I had a third teacher who was excellent too. So I didn't know that he had been keeping up with this new voice teacher about me all that time to see what I was doing. So when I got ready to graduate, I had no plans for doing any Master's or any things like that. But he actually contacted me and said, "You know, if you come up here and keep studying with me, I'll get you a scholarship for your Master's." So I was like, "Well, ok." I guess I can go to New York by way of Iowa. So I went to Iowa and got my Master's in vocal performance and studied with him. That was a very different environment because of course I went to an HBCU and even then, the culture at the HBCU was very different than even it is now. It was very different from high school. High school was very polarized, very segregated. So I was like the only Black kid in most of my classes, and it was just... long story. And so, when I went to an HBCU it was a wonderful experience for me because I hadn't had that experience in education. And then I went to Iowa, which was...you know. By that time I think I was ready. I think if I had gone to Iowa for my undergraduate, I don't think I would've made it. When I went up there, my Afro was probably *that* big at that point, and I met people who had never met a Black person before in our country. There was this one girl in particular from Dubuque who told me, "You're the first Black person I've ever met." I was just like, "WOW!" It just blew my mind that even in our country there could be people who have never met a Black person!

Overall my experience there was very, very good, but there was a lot of racism and sexism that I experienced within my classes. So far as to where I had a teacher that told me that there was no way that I could even pass his class. And then no matter how much, or how hard I worked, or how much I studied, how much I practiced, and no matter what kind of performance I gave - I

would notice that my professors would always compliment the other students and talk to them and tell them about their performance and how good it was, and their technique and things like that. The only comments I would ever get was, "Oh, you looked beautiful. Your stage presence is so commanding. You're so beautiful on stage." So I was waiting for them to say, "Hey! You sound great!" But it never came! I never got that kind of compliment from anyone except my voice teacher who I had a previous relationship with at [the HBCU].

While I was [in Iowa] I was a graduate assistant, and one of my tasks was to help my voice teacher start an organization called the George Walker Society. George Walker was an African American composer. He only recently passed away. He was still alive when we were working on it, and the purpose of the organization on the campus was to try to recruit more students of color into the music department and also to bring some diversity into the program and to feature works by African American composers in particular. Out of the George Walker Society, another organization was born called the African American Art Song Alliance. [My voice teacher is] in California teaching now, but he has conferences and anybody who's anybody in African American classical music - opera, art song, composers, singers -they all come [to this conference]. It's a pretty incredible experience to go and to meet these people and to hear the music. The purpose of the alliance was to try to gather and to collect and keep, and to promote a lot of the music because, unfortunately, the majority of it has never been published. And so the only time you get to hear it is when these particular artists are doing it or performing it. The last major performance that I did was for that conference about two years ago in California.

My daughter was born in the middle of that [degree in Iowa] and I graduated and then I moved to the Southeast. I ended up moving there and wasn't doing anything musically. I was leasing apartments. And then I got depressed about that and said, "Uh! I want to perform!" especially after I had just finished all those degrees and been in school for so long. So there was an audition for a musical and dramatic society, and just on a whim, I did it! I happened to have the day off and pulled out some old music and blew the dust off of it. I said, "I think I can do this." And I had to find a monologue and I went and auditioned and they said, "Great! We have a scholarship for you." So me and my oldest daughter packed it up. She was about her size (pointing to Rosita), maybe a little older. We moved to New York! And I went up and did this program in [there]. And my whole purpose was I had been trying to get to New York, you know, all this time anyway, so you know...by way of, by way of... I finally got there through this program and was able to do some performing while I was there. It really connected me into [the network], so if you really wanted to do it, it was a great way to reconnect. I met some really interesting and creative people. Of course, performing with a child is very difficult, especially when they're that young, and so I needed some regular income. I started first substitute teaching and then came long-term subbing. And then next thing I know, I'm in the classroom full-time. And so the more I taught the less I performed.

I taught in the South Bronx for a while at a middle school. And then my full-time position was in a suburb of the city. Both of those communities, they had some similarities, but they were very different. The place where I taught full-time, probably 90% of the population was Puerto Rican and bilingual, and the previous school was predominately African American. After teaching there for so long, I came to a crossroads. And I had to decide, you know, if I am going to be teaching this much, do I really want to be that far away from family. My family lives here [in

this state], and I had a daughter to think about. You know, when we moved down here she was 7 or 8. I had to make a decision. Do I want to raise her up there or did I want to come down here? And I decided I wanted to come home and raise her near family instead of, you know, it was just the two of us up there. I have a lot of extended family here. Like, tons and tons and tons. I grew up in the western part of the state, so my mom is just a few hours away. And then my dad and my sister and brother live further south. So you know, it's a lot closer. When I was up there, I was lucky if I got to see everybody once a year.

I've been [at my current job] since I've been back. When I got my full-time position, it was contingent upon me getting my certification because I wasn't certified to teach music. So I was working and getting my certification at the same time. And when I finished it that's when I realized - I don't necessarily have to stay here. I went to the job fairs, they have these annual teacher job fairs. So I came down for the job fairs and got some leads. My first job offer was in about thirty minutes from here. I really wanted to get a job in [in the district where Clyde works], but at the time there wasn't anything that was really open. And then I interviewed in my current district, but kind of haphazardly. I was tired at that point. And so the job offer that would've been a commute came first, but I didn't like year-round schedule. And so when my current position opened up, I was very excited that I didn't have to do year-round schedule. And now I am even more happy about that.

So like I said before I didn't say, "I wanna grow up and be a teacher!" In fact it was quite the opposite. I did everything in my power not to go into the classroom because of my own experiences in school and I didn't want to be in the building. I didn't want to be a part of the culture or the climate of education based on my experience as a student, although I held teachers in very high regard. The teachers that I did appreciate and that I loved, I thought very highly of them. Almost like pastoring; they were called into what they did. So I felt like, for me to go into the classroom without that kind of calling or without that kind of commitment was sacrilegious. I just wasn't going to do it, and I didn't want to do it. I wanted to do the opposite. I wanted to go out and perform and do everything else. So when I did finally get into education, I felt like it was a calling when I did start. It was almost like, "Well, alright. I am going to do this." I went in resistant, but once I got in there, and once I started doing it...the need was just so great. You know, especially, I felt, especially for Black students and for students of color. And I felt like my presence was important. And I felt like I wanted to do what I was doing very, very well. And so, that, I think that's what kept me there, that sense of need. You have a venue right there. There's plenty of advocacy [opportunity] with the students, you know, with seeing what students need and how you can be effective and how you can influence them. It's all right there and you don't have to go look for it. If you're a teacher, you're surrounded by it every day. So I think that's kind of what's kept me there, what motivates me to work so hard and to give so much. So it wasn't necessarily that I went into education to be a teacher, but I'm still there because, when you're in it, you realize that the need is so great.

I was an exceptional student in school, but I feel like I was what they call a 'token kid.' I was the Black student that they put in the classes so that they could say that there was a Black kid that was in the classes. My school was pretty diverse. But when you went to the classroom, my classroom did not look like my neighborhood. And so the kids that I was in my neighborhood with, even though we went to the same school, I didn't see them during the school day in class.

They had their classes, and then I was the one kid that was, you know... So I faced a lot of animosity from kids, from other students, from Black students. I wasn't necessarily a part of the culture, and I wasn't included with the kids that I was going into classes with. It didn't affect me too negatively in that I had so much support around me from home and from my community; I was surrounded with support. So it didn't affect me negatively, in that sense, as far as my self-worth was concerned. But it was very difficult socially to navigate through all of that. And then also, I did feel like I had to work two, three times harder than the students I was in class with just to be acknowledged - just to be recognized. If I was going to compete, I had to be better than everybody else. I couldn't just do well; I had to do exceptionally well, and I worked very hard to do that. I worked very, very hard to stay on top of the game. So there were incidents...there was one incident in particular. It got to the point where whenever they needed a Black kid to do something, or say something or be seen, I was the one they chose. And I think people actually really felt like they validated what I had to say. They validated what I did, to the point to where what I said became very influential.

CLYDE: (laughs)

SASHA to CLYDE: You're laughing 'cause you know what I'm referring to I guess. (laughs) So they would ask me things, and if I would say something, it would quickly become a very public statement. So one year we had an issue, an incident where a teacher was fired and another White teacher was hired into a position and ended up teaching - even though that wasn't her area of expertise - she was teaching the Black history class.

CLYDE: Didn't you have an uncle or something who actually was qualified to teach, but they wouldn't hire him?

SASHA: He was teaching... no he wasn't...my uncle wasn't teaching at the school at the time, but he was a recent graduate. But [Black history] was his area of expertise and he applied for the job, and then he didn't get it, but this White lady who didn't have any experience teaching it got the position. She actually said, "I'm going to learn right along with the kids." So that was neither here nor there with me, I was like "Ehhh, whatever." I was doing my thing anyway. Didn't even plan to take the class. So they gave a Black history assembly and that was right around the time *Boyz n the Hood* was popular. Everything became about Black-on-Black violence and crime, and it got to the point where every Black History month became about talking about young people killing themselves and the disparities. So their assembly was very much about young people killing themselves and the disparities. And, you know, I didn't think it was very uplifting. But I didn't comment on it. So they came to me to validate the assembly. [They asked,] "What did you think?" and I said, "It was fine..." By "they" I mean other students, the teachers, the principal. Lots of people were asking my opinion, what did I think and so finally I did say something. I was like, "I just don't feel like the subject matter was really appropriate for Black History Month. I feel like there's other things we can spend this small time of the year to talk about. We talk about this all the time. We know there's violence. Anyway, it turned into this whole thing. The students in the class, which were predominately Black, got angry because they said that I wasn't supporting them in what they were doing. But the statement that I was making, I was actually making for them. So they got angry. The teacher in the class accused me of being racist against her, because was a White teacher. [She said] I was coming down on her being a White teacher



teaching an African American history class. So I had, I was being bullied. I had kids trying to jump me in the cafeteria, calling me all kinds of names. And you know, I was just maneuvering my way through it. And then finally, I was in my history with one of my favorite teachers, his class was amazing, and their history class was going at the same time across the hall. So this teacher came over and asked my teacher if she could talk with me for a few minutes. I thought teachers [would be] innocent enough. So my teacher excused me so I could go and speak with her. She asked me, would I come into her class and talk a little bit more about how I felt about the Black History assembly. And I'm thinking to myself that she would moderate in a fair way. You know, I didn't anticipate what I was walking into. So when I went in there, it became a yelling, screaming, shouting match. They just surrounded me *blasting*. And she sat at her desk and she allowed them to do this. I didn't so much as get a word out, and she never jumped in, she never stopped them. By the time they were done, I was a puddle of tears. I was completely just in shock at what had just happened. And I guess she sensed that she was wrong, because she let me stay behind. My history teacher came over and saw my condition and asked what happened. And he let me get myself together in his classroom. [They talked] and I don't know what they discussed, but she knew she was wrong. So after that experience, I decided I was going to write a paper. I was going to talk about Black History Month. So I did all this research, and went and pulled up Carter G. Woodson's papers and stuff to get his words on what he said the month was supposed to be for.

CLYDE: He's the founder...

SASHA: Yeah, he's the founder. And I wrote a paper and I gave it to my school newspaper to publish. So that paper ended up being in the city paper. And the next thing I know, I'm in the superintendent's office. That was my experience in school. The end result, at that time that led to me organizing a Black History assembly and I had community support to put that on. And we brought this lady called Brenda Whitewright...I'll never forget her. She was from Tennessee. She came in and laid it down for us. But we did poetry, we did some sketches on history and so it was a very different assembly. And after that, a few years later, when my brother came through, it became kind of like a tradition. My brother continued it.

I had a Latin teacher who had a grudge against me from middle school because I didn't sing in her event. Then I got her for a history class and in high school we had to do a paper on Christopher Columbus. So I wrote my paper on Christopher Columbus, but I used references that talked about Christopher Columbus from his other side. Not from his glamorized side. And so, when I turned in my paper, she gave me a C. I asked her why, because I had spent a lot of time on this research and paper and everything. And I wasn't a "C" student. She said my sources weren't credible, and so, I had to ask her, well, "Why are my sources not credible?" Why were her sources more credible than mine? And anyway, that ended up getting thwarted because my parents weren't going to let something like that happen. So they came in and I got that "C" letter grade changed to an "A" because there was nothing wrong with the paper other than she didn't agree with my sources.

CLYDE: I am a visual artist... that's all my work (pointing to art around living room). Let me see...my mom taught me very early. She was going to school to be an art teacher when she married my biological father, and then was pregnant with my older sister and she took some time

off from school and never went back. But that was what she was going to be. And actually I didn't even know that until I was in college, I believe. That she was actually going to school to be an art teacher. And she always just exposed me to art, taught me a little bit about printmaking when I was elementary school and had good art teachers in elementary and middle and *really* good art teachers in high school. And I was involved with a lot of arts. Mostly visual arts, but I had some music and a little bit of performing background as well. Like there were some acting classes that my mom put my older sister and I in when we were in middle school I believe. Yeah, I think it was middle school. And I bought a bass guitar with my money that I made from my first job when I was 14. And they...it's pretty much the same way it is now. The schools force you to go either visual art or music, so I went visual art. But I would always go and bother the band teacher after school, you know. I remember, like saying "Ok. I'm getting ready to buy a bass guitar, what should I get?" and "Can you give me something to learn?" and he was just like, "Why don't you just take my class?" and I was like, "I can't! I'm in art." But you know [I do] mostly visual art, but a little bit of music. I like writing. I am starting to get into writing a little more now. I wish I had done more as a kid because I would have been...I think I wouldn't have had as many hang-ups around writing as I have now. So I have to get over that stuff. I am hoping that our own kids don't have those same hang-ups. They can just do it. They don't know it, but that's why I am really making sure that they are really, really well-rounded in the arts so that they can go whichever way they want to go, if they should choose to stay in the family business. (laughs)

[One of my hang-ups with writing is] just getting it done, because I'm trying to do fictional work and so that's different. I mean, I have a really good background in writing essays and stuff, you know. I get too hung up in details. And what I keep trying to do is bring my art background to it. Like if this were a piece of art, how would I approach it? And I wouldn't get hung up on the little details because I would see the big picture for the piece, and I would know... Ok, I'm doing big picture stuff now, and I'm going to go back and refine, and refine it more, and get down into details. And that's good for anybody to know. So, but the thing is, with writing, I guess when I am writing certain things I feel like, am I going too far into this, you know? But I think I should just write. If it ends up being way too long and it's gets edited down to being, you know, one-third the size that I originally wrote, that's O.K. And a lot of writers talk about that, but it's weird when you're actually doing it.

[In] college, I was working in this program in Harlem. What was the name of it? Harlem Horizons Art Studio and it was located in the pediatrics wing of Harlem Hospital and the guy in charge of the program hired a guy who was an internationally known artist. I don't know if he was back then, but his name is Bryan Collier. He's done lots of children's books, the illustrations and stuff for them. So we would talk and stuff, and we were doing these murals on basketball courts and stuff around Harlem. So we were talking about, you know, what do you show? I said, "Do you try to get the kids to show pyramids and stuff like that? And sphinxes and stuff about African and Black history and all that?" And he said, "Well...if they want to." He said when he first started doing the mural with the kids he would try to have them incorporate stuff like that. But the thing is that they don't really know all about pyramids and things from Africa from history and all that. They don't necessarily identify with that right away, so you don't want to push that down their throat because then they're gonna not like it. He said, you know, interested in a spaceship or Pokémon or something like that, right? Yeah, you don't want to push something

down their throat and then they're like... "Oh, here come those people again, trying to make us draw pyramids and learn about Carter G. Woodson." You know, you've got to make it as much a part of their everyday culture as Pokémon and all that stuff.

I think there's a struggle too around cultural representation in more popular media that maybe this next generation will be able to have. For example we watch this show on TV with the kids, it's like one of our family shows, [it's called] *Once Upon a Time*. It's very Eurocentric though, as far as the stories that they pick to be part of it. Other than, like *Mulan*. That's one example of a non-European centered fairy tale that they based it on. They could put *Anansi* in there, they could put *Brer Rabbit*. They could put just any number of characters that are not Eurocentric. They could put *Kokopeli*, they could do stuff from Native American history, they could do stuff from Mexican history and all that. But they don't! They're trying to make money, and it's Disney, but why can't they broaden their horizons a little? You know, do a little education. Most kids know *Anansi*, so why not go ahead and put that in there. It's the grownups who might not know 'em. But by watching the show you could easily learn about [these stories] if they incorporated it. But that's just, like, one example of cultural representation through something artistic, right?

[You know]... I think education is kind of like abolitionist work. I think it's that important in that, you know it's laying a foundation for a stronger community and hopefully a smarter country. But it's, yeah it's really important. And it's really important that it not go the route that people are making millions off of it - like the Koch brothers. (laughs) You know, the companies that see it as a place to make millions of dollars as well as re-segregate society racially, culturally - haves and have-nots. I think that there's a piece of education that really could play into that. I mean there's all these studies that show about the number of prison beds being based off of third-grade reading scores and stuff like that. You know. And then they're making money off of these prisons and they're re-enslaving huge populations of people. You know, because when they outlawed slavery in the United States, they actually didn't. They outlawed it everywhere except in prison. So if you keep a whole population of people going to prison, then really you haven't outlawed it. You know, it's just that you're making an excuse to send people there. And I think that education is part of that excuse, you know, if they can show that they feel like there's some justification and they can *prove* that a group of people are dumber, inferior, you know... whatever it is they want to prove to justify harsher laws against people. And throwing the book at one group of people, while not throwing it at the other is...it's just not equity. And that's really not what this country is supposed to be about.

I think through the arts that we're able to show another thing that, you know, is a strength for our country. You know people always say that Americans are so creative and that's one of our biggest strengths and it's constantly getting cut. And I think that kids are turned off to the arts in different ways because of ways that it had been taught. And they're trying to shortchange it. So we really try not to shortchange it and give a really good showing of what it really could be. But then on the other hand, we haven't had any pay raises in the last seven years. No matter how hard we work, our paychecks not going to get any bigger. And then also, you know, so there's this balancing act as a teacher. You have to deal with giving the kids as high a quality [experience] as you can, while still having enough left to sustain yourself. You can't burn yourself out. I got to hear a speech by the lady who was in *Dangerous Minds*. This was the thing. The lady was a former U.S. Marine...the teacher. So, you know. She had her military money to fall back on. She

was single, she didn't have any kids at the time, you know. So she was able to really just put 100% and more into teaching, you know. Well what about us who are having trouble keeping the lights on and the cars paid for that get us to school. You know? Healthcare and food and everything. And there really is a balancing act that has to happen every month. And I talk to so many teachers who, you know, it's the same thing. So we've got to stay true to the profession, but also take care of ourselves and our own families. But yeah, I really see it as Sasha said, a calling, but also just very important in our society.

We were trying to go to the an activist rally two weeks ago. [We] couldn't do that one because I think that was the last week of school. And then the one last week we had our camp. And we actually started driving after camp was over, but the traffic was just so bad. Because the camp didn't end until 4:30 and by that time the traffic was just a parking lot on the highway. We had to turn around because Rosita was in the car and had we been able to get there in the kind of normal amount of time, we would've made it. But we had already been on the highway for a good 45 minutes and we were only halfway there. So we turned around and then we came back and watched it on live feed on the Internet. That was pretty neat. You should go as soon as you can, because I hear the legislators are so scared of us that that they're trying to have a very short session this year and be out within the next couple of weeks.

SASHA: I think the arts lends itself to equity in education. If the art teacher is willing to explore, and not just rely on what they know, because you can't know everything. You have to know enough. I think the first, the major thing is being an educator and knowing how to work with children. That's very important, but then secondary to that is outside of the skill that you have, outside of what you give to education. You have to be willing. You have to be humble and acknowledge that there are things that you don't know and you have to be willing to go there - to get that. You have to be an expert and you have to be a student.

CLYDE: I use a lot of media and pop culture in my classroom.

SASHA: I would say I use a lot too. I feel like I have to stay on top of the music. If I want them to perform other kinds of music that they're not as familiar with, I have to know about their music and I have to give them an opportunity to be able to perform that as well. I kind of use that as a way to gain their trust, because that lets them know they're not just doing what I want. It also makes me, as a music teacher, really examine pop music and find the things to appreciate. Because I'm finding, just like when we were little and people would say, "Ohh that music... I can't believe those kids are listening to that stuff!" I find myself doing the same thing. (laughs) So I search for good lyrics. I make them examine what they're singing. I look for, you know, the aesthetic value and point these things out to them. And my hope is that by examining their own music, and then by doing some of this other kind of music - doing other things, different styles - that this will help *enhance* the music that they create in the future. They will learn to appreciate more. I, for all the vocal music that I have studied and sang, I hated chorus in school. And it was because it wasn't diverse. I didn't like what they were singing. I didn't want to sing it. I thought that it was lame. And so now that I'm in that position, I don't want to be the lame chorus teacher (laughs) and so I work really hard to use what I know.

CLYDE: I always thought chorus was lame too...(everyone laughs)

SASHA: I use their music as a way to open the door so that they will trust me to *try* and *appreciate*. Not just try it, but learn to appreciate things that they don't listen to everyday.

CLYDE: My school, Aaron Douglas Elementary just voted to be an arts integrated school, so we're starting this summer. I think our training is the week before we normally go back in August. So we're doing all of this interesting stuff with scheduling and all that now. I think that from what they were saying is that the training is really not geared towards the arts teachers. It's more geared toward the classroom teachers teaching them how they can incorporate. So I'm hoping that it will make me more of a resource person as well. Because I would love for there to be more arts going on, I mean, you know... Hopefully that's what they voted for. (laughs)

SASHA: We have a jazz unit that we do every year that we call Blackbird's Party. It's so much fun. The kids always love it, the parents love it. We bring in guest artists that come in and perform with the kids. A lot of times in the past couple of years it's been a lot of faculty that's participated. We had a group from a nearby HBCU come. We had students from another university come one year. They didn't perform with us, but they came in and brought their instruments during a class when they were rehearsing. This year we had...this past year... the jazz combo from the high school and they played with the kids during the performance. And it's basically their opportunity... it's a little less structured. Well, it's structured in the sense that we have prepared material, but then we prepare the material so that they can improvise. So we play under them and they get a chance to actually have an opportunity to improvise in front of an audience with a real combo and so it's fun.

CLYDE: I think it's important to give the kids the freedom to create in their own way with their own voice and expression. And so I feel like I kind of guide them, but don't make them go a particular way, as far as their style goes. I think it's important not to crush any ideas that they have, and I'll hear from a lot of adults about bad experiences they had with art teachers and music teachers and I don't want to be that teacher. So I think that's why having kind of open-ended lessons is good, and usually I get some really high-quality work out of them in their own style. I think that's the key is that, you know, no matter where they are, I am going to try and look at their work and see how I can get them to go a little bit further. Maybe get them to think about something different. And we end up having some interesting discussions that are not planned too, because it's open-ended. I think that visual art is different than the performing arts in that way. I think with performing arts, you guys are usually teaching...well you do both, but there is a bigger emphasis in performing arts on reading material and playing it back. Whereas in visual art, that's nowhere near as big of a thing. There's no reading component to it and sometimes I wish there was because I think that, you know, it gives musicians and performing artists this common structure to go through. Like, these are standards. And so, you know, there's nothing like that in visual art. It's more like we're teaching them how to compose, and it's always about composing your own stuff.

SASHA: I feel that it's very important that I know who my allies are within the school. I think it's like any work environment or any relationship in general. We're all seeing the same kids. We don't all have the same motives. We don't all have the same objectives. We're not all coming from the same vantage point. I think in any work environment you have to be careful who you

share things with. You have to work on, you know, building the relationship because you have to *be* in a relationship. Because you're in the same school working with kids, so there's has to be a relationship with your co-workers, so that you can cooperate and get things done. Your work environment is very important because it affects your stress levels. I've been in situations where working with colleagues has been very stressful because of race, because of political/religious beliefs. Whatever it is, it creates tension. It creates stress. And then when you have to work with them, it's almost...you almost feel like you're working counter or against as opposed to working together. So there's people who you feel like you're definitely on the same page with. You make a mistake they're not going to just see the mistake, they're gonna see the process. It's great when you have administrators like that, who can see the process and support the process, and not just hammer the mistakes.

CLYDE: The specialist team at my school is really, really tight. And actually we're the team with the most people of color on it as well. AND we're the team that's been together the longest. You know, as far as teachers go, I've been at that school longer than anybody. Only the office staff, two people on the office staff have been there longer than me. And so we've got this really cool track record and I guess out of all those people - the science teacher and I, we really help center each other around stressful things.

SASHA: My [school] parents freely e-mail and they're just as quick, you know, they might be quick to criticize, but they're just as quick to compliment. If there's something they like, they let you know they like it because they want you to do it again. So that's how I know they really like Blackbird's Party. That's why it just became a regular thing. They love it, and the kids love it. It's fun.

We did an MLK assembly one year, and the teacher is retired now. There was this one fifth grade teacher who did poetry recitals. And she used to do every year at the MLK she would do this poem. The poem is very poignant, and she did it every year, but they always recited it. So one year we decided to make it a visual, and to record it. So we recorded the kids doing it and they added visual slides. So the kids helped choose pictures and they talked about it class and we even talked about it in music. And then they presented it at the MLK [assembly]. And at that time...I think they still do...all the grade levels came to that assembly except kindergarten. So we had first graders there, and the visuals, some of the parents thought were too strong for first graders. Particularly the slide where it showed shackles. There was a slave that had shackles and they thought that was too strong. I don't know, I think that's another cultural thing where, you know for Black parents, that wasn't a strong image at all. But for the White families, they felt it was too strong of an image to show, even in the context of the poem. [The poem] ended on a positive note, but there were points in the poem that were poignant. The [students] tried to pick pictures that were poignant to show what the poem was saying. So in that case, they didn't come directly to me. They went to the principal, and then the principal, the way she addressed it, she had me go through and explain the pictures with the poem again. And she did say, "Yeah, it is strong, but you know..." But it was kind of the point. Her solution - I didn't necessarily agree with - but, you know...I can cooperate. Her thing was from now on if we're going to do something like that we make it an older grades assembly and we don't let the younger grades come. So....

[T]hat's part of the problem, I feel, is that because it's so touchy - people make it such a touchy issue - the kids are finding out about it anyway. They're grappling with it. And one of the things they're talking about in my district trying to promote positive racial identity. I feel like when you don't talk about, you know... It's almost like before you can get to the good stuff, you gotta get through the gunk and all the confusion. And so you have to deal with the good and the bad, you know, in order to build a positive racial identity. And I think slavery affects the positive racial identity of White people just as much as it does Black people. A lot of White people have issues with their racial identity around that history. I see strong examples of how it is hurting our children of color by not being able to talk about these things at a very early age.

At our Blackbird's Party [one year] we had one little girl... and I knew exactly what her intention was. We talked about this in an equity meeting about impact - your intention versus impact. You might have intended one thing, but it might impact somebody in another way. We had this student, she was a fourth grader at the time, and I had never had anybody do this before, so I didn't know to anticipate it. She came dressed with her face painted black. She was trying to be a black bird, but it looked just like blackface. I saw it and my heart instantly dropped into my stomach. But you know when you're in the middle of a performance, you can't address everything. I was like, "(GASP) I hope nobody sees this." She was right in the back. Well, the impact was pretty strong. The Black parents were (makes face and sound to show anger/disgust). They all went to the principal. So the principal pulled this child aside after she came off stage and found her parents. She had no idea anything about blackface or stereotypes or anything like that. She was totally distraught; she had no idea what they were talking about or why her face being painted black was such a bad thing. Her parents played completely ignorant. Like they had no idea what blackface was, that they had never heard of it. And that's why they let their child come out the house looking like that. So anyway, they couldn't wash it off, whatever it was they put on her, so my principal sent her home in the middle of her performance. I didn't do it. I was still trying to do the performance. I thought that was really, really tacky. Because [the reaction] was, "Oh my God!"

So the next day, I decided to contact the parents. They didn't contact me, I looked for them and asked for their permission to talk to their child about what it was and the impact, and why it was such a big deal to some people. And the parents were very open to it. They trusted me to go ahead. And so I went and got her and we went out into the courtyard and we looked at pictures on the Internet. And I showed her exactly what it was and how it was hurtful and everything. And she totally absorbed it and she listened. And I told her, "You didn't do anything wrong. I understand you were trying to be a black bird." And I told her, "You know, sometimes we do things. We don't know if what we do or what we say can impact someone. Even if that's not your intent. It can impact someone in this kind of a way." And I was telling her it's the result of hurt. When someone's been hurt, things trigger. I told her this hurt a whole race of people, and it continues to hurt. It's like a scar or a scab. When you peel it off, it hurts. And she understood that, and she was fine after that. But the fact that they didn't explain it to her and they sent her home like that, I thought that caused more damage than anything. But it allowed us the opportunity to talk about something she might not have talked about otherwise or may not have ever known. So we talked about it as a faculty and I was just baffled at how so many of our faculty member said they had no idea that it was that kind of stereotyping and blah, blah, blah, and blackface, and blah. They played completely ignorant. And it's just hard for me, from where

I come from, to understand that kind of obliviousness. Just oblivious to something. And that's how I define White privilege, is the fact that you can be completely oblivious like that and just totally (gestures like something goes "over your head") not see it.

This is stuff that I also think about in terms of our family! Our babies! You know, making sure they have positive experiences in school. And it's funny being a teacher trying to balance your school calendar and then trying to balance all your kids school calendars too. So that...and my art! You know, what it is that I do! Having time to be able to practice what I teach! (laughs) That is very important. I'd say those are the two things for me. Being able to be an artist and not just a teacher. And you know, and of course, family is a priority. You know. And that's really tricky, trying to... 'cause you have your kids at school too. They're all your kids too. And so you want to make sure that what you're doing at the school is supporting them, but if your kids are not at that school, you know. If my performance and my daughter's performance are at the same time, I look at the calendar, I can't schedule a performance here if my daughter has a performance her school, or that school. Kamari, he's 11. Ella's 13 going on 14 this year. Angela's 14, she just turned 14. And then this one here [Rosita] is 9 months.

See this mess here? (gestures to packed boxes in the den area) That's what this is all about right now – practicing our crafts. It's like we sacrificed our creative space, and so we decided we didn't need to sacrifice that anymore. And so we're doing something about it. So we have a place to be creative and do what it is that we do at home where it's convenient. It'll be good for the kids too, they're creative beings as well. So it will be an inspiring place for them as well. I have been doing a little bit. I have been doing some community theater. Directing some community theater with a friend of mine here in town. At least once a year we do a family musical. And any chance I get to go and perform I try to. I just sang at a colleague's retirement party. Little things like that. I want to do a lot more. So finding that balance between being an excellent teacher and also being an excellent artist. That's the challenge.

CLYDE: I'm [also] trying to get back to being involved with activism more. Get back involved with teacher organizing stuff. I'm doing O.K. (laugh) You know, [it's] definitely a challenge having four kids that are here. And then another one too who's in college. I have a step-daughter from before and she's in college. But when she comes home, she's here. Not at this house, but at her mom's house or her grandma's house on her mom's side.

[Three months later]

CLYDE: My school year is very different. I think I told you last time you were here that we were starting this arts integration program and it's been very good. One of the goals of the program is to get classroom teachers to realize that they are arts teachers also, and that's been very powerful I think. Even just in our first couple months of doing it. So they're trying to incorporate different things into their lessons that are arts standards and things like that. From all of the arts too! Music, visual art, dance, theater, and I think - you know I've been trying to argue this for a long time - If they're teaching reading and writing, they're arts teachers anyway, because it's literacy and literature. [I feel like my interaction with the teachers has changed]. I think they're appreciating our training and perspective, and appreciating the arts more as a way to get children to engage and use their brains in different ways. Capture their imaginations, build their



imaginations. Other people are doing the training, but I will be eventually. And, in fact, Sasha is gonna come and help us with some trainings too.

SASHA: Now that he's talking, I remember there is something different going on at [my] school. I'm the chair of the equity team this year, and by way of, by way of, I ended up leading a meeting on culturally accurate curriculum. And culturally accurate strategies, of which I don't feel that I am an expert, but the meetings have been going fairly well.

I had a first grade teacher who, Columbus Day just passed, and we were talking about culturally accurate curriculum and a lot of people shy away from Columbus, and we talked about this in the meeting. I went to the library and pulled books to show them the various stories and how they're portrayed, and accurate stories. And so we're - I was going to the library to pull these books to show them. And then, you know, I haven't seen...I mean they celebrate every year, but I hadn't seen anybody go all out. So just coincidentally, this one first grade teacher went all out. She had kids dressed up like Columbus, and they had the big hats, and she did this whole thing in her classroom the day before I was going to give this presentation. So afterwards, I don't know how she felt, but I think she heard. I think she got the gist of it. You know, when we talk about having culturally accurate curriculum. A lot of times, they, coming from the music teacher...I don't think they always expect it to come from a specialist. I think sometimes I feel it would be better received if it were coming from another general ed. classroom teacher. [A different kind of] reception. I think sometimes, I don't know, there's this divide between what it is that we're teaching, and our purpose - and what it is that they're teaching and their purpose.

I think the response that I've gotten from parents that I'm most proud of, the thing that I hang on to, is they always say that when they come to a performance, they feel like their child is open to participate - whether they're good at it or not. They're excited to perform and excited to participate and that's because we try to create that kind of environment in our classroom. Where this is open to you, you can do this. It doesn't have to be right or wrong, it's an expression. There's an African Proverb that says, "If you can walk you dance, if you can talk you can sing."

CLYDE: I always add to that proverb and I say, "If you can write, you can draw."

SASHA: What is music to me? The last time somebody asked me that question, I wrote a whole...my philosophy of music education. I think in college. I wrote a whole article about it. I mean, I can get as philosophical as, you know, 'music is life!' or it could be as simple as it's just another mode of transportation - or communication. (laughs)

CLYDE: Whoa! Transportation. (laughs)

SASHA: I just did a lesson with the kids using the Leonard Bernstein concerts and he has this really clever way of explaining to the kids that music - there's this whole thing like - what does music mean!? He says, music doesn't mean anything. Music is just notes. He says, it doesn't mean anything until you assign it meaning. And, I mean, I think that in essence, it means different - one day it means one thing, another day it means another thing. But I think the reason why it's so valuable, it's like having a third arm or a second leg, or another pair of eyes, or two mouths. It's another way of being able to express yourself. But it's mainly expressing feeling. It's

a way to articulate emotion. I think, just because music has been part of my life in a meaningful way since I was as small as her (Rosita) - I think I identify myself with it. Part of how I identify who I am - is musical - in how I communicate, in how others see me. People see me as a musician; they see me as a singer. That's how they know me. They know me through my art. (Rosita is playing on a small piano throughout this section of interview.) I learned, you know, through music. I had musical intelligence. I can retain it, and I always used it as a way of expression. And I have memories that are associated with song and music, when I hear certain things and it automatically just takes me to where I was, what I was doing. Because that's what I used to do - I used to make mix tapes. "Ohhh, I'm feeling this way! I have to find all of the sad songs and put them on one tape so I can listen to them, or all the happy songs. These are my dance songs, or my driving songs." I used to do that all the time. Not so much anymore.

CLYDE: Well, like what Sasha was saying. I'm very similar with art. But even with, just all the arts, because I kind of dabble in a lot. Even music, writing, creating things like sets and stuff like that for stage. But with visual art, it definitely is the form of art that I am most confident in and able to do things that, I guess a lot of people can't do. I kind of feel like visual art is everything! You know, material things anyway that you can touch and see and feel and use. And then it makes a lot of other things possible, so you know, you design and re-design. So, the artist who designed this house, they're an artist. The people who put all this stuff together to create it, they're artists as well. They're craftsmen as well, like a musician reading music. Like an architect was the composer, I guess. So I try to zero in on a few different things that I can really be good at. You said music means nothing...

SASHA: It doesn't mean anything until someone assigns meaning to it. One song, you can listen to a song, and it can mean something to you, and you can make up a whole story. And it might not be the story that they intended for you to make up at all. But you assigned it this story; you gave it this meaning. Like when people hear songs from the Civil Rights movement. Some of those songs were written way before the Civil Rights movement. But they associate that because of the time, that's the meaning they've given it...the pictures that come up, the time period. But those songs were originally done, some of them, they were done for a whole 'nother purpose. They had a whole 'nother intention. It's interesting how you can re-invent...

CLYDE: New context...

SASHA: Music can have different contexts. Songs totally unrelated, just because it was playing at a certain time, you know? When something was happening to you. Has nothing to do with what the song is about, but you associate meaning with it. You attach it to this memory. Or it could be the same way with a piece of art. You could be in a particular place, and just because of that particular place, that particular visual image in your head, because of what you were experiencing at the time. You automatically attach that image to it.

CLYDE: Yeah, I think that the memories that we, you know, have in our heads and the pictures a lot of times can be turned into visual art, but also, I mean - you can assign that meaning to other things. Like you were saying, through music, a piece of poetry, a story, or anything. (Rosita plays songs on an electronic musical boombox toy throughout.) Oh yeah, our daughters were going to this camp - it was young writer's camp for girls. It was very small and the lady who runs

it, she is a pretty accomplished writer. And one of the things that she was really trying to make an impression on with the girls was that, just your everyday life - the things that you do, the thoughts that you have, the things that you see, your routines. All of that is research, in a way, for your art. You wake up in the morning and you go and work in the garden, or you go take a walk, or you see a little dog, the dog is being walked by this little kid, and you have a conversation with the little kid or something. All of that is, a situation that you could incorporate into your art.

SASHA: In a sense, people who understand arts, they have a consciousness - because it exists whether you want to acknowledge it or not. There's a consciousness that you have if you're an artist or if you appreciate art. People who say that they don't like art, or that they don't, "Well, I don't listen to music" or "I don't like art, visual art" that kind of thing. They say that. That doesn't mean that it's not around them all the time. It means that they don't have this consciousness.

CLYDE: Yeah, that consciousness.

SASHA: They don't have that consciousness where they don't see or acknowledge that it's with them every day.

CLYDE: Like you said, about the hip-hop education school, you know, it's embedded. You know a lot of times when the kids say, "I don't like art" Well you're wearing it! Your clothes were designed by an artist.

SASHA: Yeah, 'cause I always have those students who [when you] say, you know, what's your favorite song? [They say,] "I never listen to music, I never hear music." "Ever?" "No, there's no music in my house ever." "Really? You never hear music? Not even on the television on a commercial? Nothing? No sound at all?" (Throughout this entire exchange, Rosita is continuing to play music on her small boombox, highlighting Sasha's point that music should be and is present all around us.)

CLYDE: Yeah, people get so disconnected from their own lives, and then they don't recognize their culture. They don't recognize that movements are going on that they're a part of. Whether they're conscious that they're a part of it or not...I guess that's our job. Man, I wish I understood that even more. But from what I can tell, people don't view the things that they do as being important. They don't view them as being important enough to document. They don't view them as being important enough to appreciate and that is actually one of the big roles of art...any art... is to kind of shine that mirror back at you so that you can appreciate yourself. And if you can't, you know, then you just shine a different mirror. You do it in a different way until something catches somebody's attention. There was a Harlem Renaissance artist who actually, it was some of those writers who were really able to characterize what he was doing. But the writer basically said that what Aaron Douglas did was he helped Black people to appreciate their culture, and beauty and spirit and history in the face of very extreme oppression. And so that was the quote, I mean, he probably said it a little more succinctly - more poetic than that. But that was the point of what the quote was, and you think about that time the 20s, everything in the mainstream culture at that time was designed to continue the process of Jim Crow and even though slavery had ended a few decades before that, it was still the mindset - trying to degrade Black people. Aaron Douglas was the absolute opposite. It was about greatness, showing Black people

themselves in a whole different light. I think that's just a great example of the arts moving things. And then that pre-dates the Civil Rights Movement. You know - could the Civil Rights Movement have happened without the Harlem Renaissance and these other Renaissances that happened? I don't think so. And part of the whole reason that those Renaissances were important was to get people to see themselves and appreciate themselves in just a whole new way. You had dancers, you had musicians, you had writers, you had visual artists, you had fashion. I'm sure there were architects too, because there have been black architects involved with designing things since ...well, before the country. Before this was the United States!

SASHA: I think, simply put, imagine what it would be like if we didn't have [art] - if we weren't teaching it. I mean, looking at [art] as throughout history, as the movement. People have had those skills and been able to develop that in order to *move* society forward. Then, if we were to not have [art] anymore...if we were to give it up and try to do it without it, there's a consciousness that we stand to lose that would be detrimental in our society. And it can be as deep as a movement, or it can be just simply having that consciousness. Having that artistic consciousness. Being able to appreciate it, music for music's sake, art for art's sake. I think when you lose that kind of consciousness, then we lose the potential to keep moving forward. There's a big thing right now - growth model - encouraging students by acknowledging how they're growing as opposed to how they're passing or failing. So we obviously still have a lot of growing to do, as a human race, as a society, as a civilization and if we were to de-emphasize the role that music and art plays and that growth - if we were to de-emphasize it, if we were to do without it, if we were to stop teaching it, what would happen to the consciousness? How would that affect our society? And you know every day I think, especially as an elementary school teacher, I see how important it is to acknowledge that consciousness. Going back to the point that you were saying, letting kids look at themselves in the mirror and being able to articulate themselves in that way. Being able to see that this is something that they can do.

It is powerful to communicate through a piece of art - so much so that people are afraid of it. I had a song...In elementary school you battle with this all the time. I don't think you battle with this as much in middle school. Parents are willing to let you let kids, you know, kind of grapple with tough issues in middle school, high school. Elementary school, they're afraid to let kids grapple with challenging topics, especially around race and social justice. (Rosita is vocalizing and singing throughout.) And so there was this song that Alicia Keyes put out at the beginning of the year, *We are here*, and I thought that the message was appropriate - there were no bad words. But it was addressing some, you know, real issues that were going on not just in the United States, but around the world. I thought, "Hey this is great! I could work on this song with fifth graders and we could look at all these different issues." But the minute that I brought it up, just because of how powerful it was for it to be communicated that way - they get it really quickly in a song. And it's so succinct, and it addressed so many different things, that the other teachers were like, "You know, let's not do that this year." And they justified that by saying that one of the lyrics was...

CLYDE: "Let's talk about Gaza." It didn't say what to think. It didn't say what to say about Gaza. (Sasha laughs) But "Let's talk about Gaza." Right.

SASHA: That lyric alone negated it in our [school] community. And it had other issues in it too, but that was the one that they really were like, "No." We have some Israeli and Palestine students. And one of our teachers is Israeli. So one of the parents has specifically said that she doesn't want that topic to be raised or to have any talk about it. So this song was so powerful, just that one lyric, and I think that's the really cool thing. I think that's why we have to continue to teach, because you can communicate and you can break barriers just with a lyric.

CLYDE: I told her that she should teach it anyway and just say, screw it - but it's hard to be in that position as a teacher.

SASHA: Especially when you don't feel you have the allies.

CLYDE: Yeah, she's feeling very - attacked? Not attacked, but I guess a step away from being attacked.

SASHA: I just don't have the allies [this year]. The thing is, it's *easy* to do this stuff! It's easy to teach the kids. It's hard to teach the parents. The kids will, they'll go with it, and they'll ask the right questions, and they want to know. It's not the kids that have the issue; it's the adults. They're not ready to deal with it. So when the kids go home and they tell their parents about it, the parents *freak out* because they weren't ready to address it with them, and they automatically assume that in some way it's going to hurt their innocence. Well what I think it [really] does, is it's part of that movement. I think it moves us all forward, to get them thinking about these things and interacting with other children with a heightened awareness.

CLYDE: So it's disconnected. Again, you're disconnected from their own lives.

SASHA: There's this guard.

CLYDE: So at my school it just so happened that when I was bringing my art in from the van to put it into the gallery at the school, one of the pieces that I had was a portrait of Mike Brown. I just tried to make it look like him, but it's more of a comic/cartoon-y version. But it was supposed to be him - with his hands out like this (hands up), but the look on his face is kind of like, "Don't Shoot Me." All it says on the picture is "For Michael Brown," but it's kind of a charged piece politically. And that's in the show, but I hadn't hung the show yet, and I was kind of debating whether or not I should include it or not. So I asked this parent, "I've got this piece here, do you think this is too political?" For elementary school... this was the thing. We ended up having this big discussion and his daughter chimed in and she knew all about it. And she was bringing up other cases and things like that. And I didn't know it, but he's a writer. So he wrote this whole thing in his online blog that I guess he shares with other people. A couple days later, he sent me an e-mail and he was like, "Hey I wrote this thing and it was about our interaction." and I was like, "Oh! Ok." And we have this teacher at the school who, her husband is a cop. And I asked her, I said, "You know I've got this piece in the show and I didn't want to offend you and your husband by having it up." and I went back and forth in my head a lot, because there's like that activist piece of like, you know, "Screw them if they can't handle it!" But when she came to the door to pick up her kids that part of my brain didn't even come into play. It was like, "Hey, I've known you for a decade now and you know, I don't want to offend you." And we had a great

quick conversation. She said, "Oh no, that wouldn't offend me at all - or my husband. We know that there's good cops and bad cops, and that there's all this stuff that goes on!" And had I not asked her or had the piece, you know, I wouldn't have known that about her. So that gave me a whole new appreciation.

[This teacher and I] had a conversation too, I said, "You know, teachers - we're the same way. We have good ones and we have bad ones, and we make good choices and bad choices, and people view us as authority figures. Maybe a little differently that they view cops, but you know, there's definitely people that are like, "I hate teachers" and "I hate school and that whole institution" because they had bad experiences. And their parents had bad experiences and so on. And so we know what that's like too.

You know, for ourselves in the future, [Sasha and I are] trying to collaborate more. Like the other day, a friend of mine had recommended these cool books and she had them and I really liked the artwork in them, and so I ordered them. And I had just gotten them, picked them up, and Sasha was talking about this lesson idea about teaching instrumental composition to the children and soundscapes. And she was trying to get her head around how she could do it, and I said, "You know what, you could use these books!" Because these books, it's all artwork, but it tells a story, but there's no words in the books. And we ended up coming up with this whole cool unit around how to use these books and have it relate to composition and going back to that Leonard Bernstein idea of, you know, we give meaning to music. And you can come up with stories around it and everything. That was a fun collaboration. We also were trying to collaborate on just, other ways of bringing our arts together, and then doing that with our kids as well. We really would like to be at the same school, but we also want to get *out* of schools. So I think we'll probably get out of school quicker than we'll be able to get at the same school.

SASHA: My prayer for education right now is that people will protect the value of public education and the value of arts in public education. I think that to be a teacher right now is to be on the front lines of this great battle. That's what it feels like. Choosing to be an educator is choosing to understand that you don't have to go anywhere looking for a cause to stand for. It comes to you every day. You're on the front lines. Every day the cause walks through the door. And so, it's a battle, and that's what it feels like for me. And you know, I can't speak for all teachers, but I think that a lot would agree with me. It feels like every day you have to gear up, put on your armor, and here comes the battle. And it's not the children, but it's everything that comes in with the kids. And we're protecting them. We're not fighting them, the battle is we're trying to protect them. We're fighting everything else, trying to protect these kids, and I don't think that a lot of people understand what that means.

You know, we created art space in our house because nothing else is gonna create the space for us. We have to create the space ourselves. The reason why it's so important for me right now is that at school I need that space. I feel like as a teacher, if I'm gonna value it and I'm gonna have the kids value it and try to get them to create space for art, then I have to be practicing that. And I think in our day-to-day lives especially we forget to practice. You get caught up... you give, give, give, and if you give out, you have to put back in. Otherwise your art gets flat.

CLYDE: You know, and that is the *other thing* about being an art teacher. Like you say, we have to practice, we don't want our art to get flat. We, as the people who are trying to be the ones helping the children to understand their connection to their culture. Sometimes *we* lose that! I know I'm a very good elementary art teacher, and I could teach other kids too. But I just paid for this online course on figure drawing, and just in the very first lesson that I was going through, I realized that what I teach the kids is very simple, but there's this whole other level of expertise that I hadn't felt like I was connected to for a while - since I was in college. [Sometimes] I feel like, I need to make sure that I'm getting back to that. Even though I'm practicing and I'm creating this art that's, you know, been in galleries all around the country - I still have to keep on practicing and learning. And we have to stay connected. *We have to live it.*

SASHA: And our own kids are watching us. We have very creative children. And, you know, trying to ...I've struggled with the balance. My parents always told me, "I don't want you to be like me, I want you to be better than me." So, you know, my dad was a musician. He still is, but he used to be much more of a musician. But that was my exposure when I was little he was in bands. And then it got to the point, you know, when life got hard - when he got into that daily grind - he sacrificed his creativity. He sacrificed *that* part of his creativity and he never went back to it. And so, I always said, "I'm never gonna... I'll never do that! I'm never gonna do anything I don't wanna do." And then you grow up. And then life happens to you and you start to understand. So if you don't create that space, you stand to lose it. That's why, you know, it's a gift. And if you're gifted in that area, you have to use your gift. You have to exercise your gift. Or like the parable says - if you're given a gift, if you don't use and you just bury it, if you don't do anything with it - it can be taken. And so sometimes I deal with that because as a musician, I know the things that I've done. I've done some pretty incredible stuff - some pretty powerful stuff. And then you get in the classroom and there's another level of creativity. Teachers have to use creativity, and so if you don't practice that balance... That's another reason why I never wanted to teach. And when I was growing up, I even recognized that. I made up in my mind when I was in high school that I was never gonna be a teacher because I was looking at my music teachers. And I was expressing myself and doing all these musical things. And they were great musicians, they were teaching me, but they weren't practicing, and I never wanted to be like that. I wanted to be out there *doing*. So I made the decision very, very early that I would *never* be a teacher. And so I went through - I didn't even take the education course until after I finished my Master's degree. I didn't want to teach, because that was my perception - that teachers don't practice. You're either teaching or you're practicing; you're not doing both. Because the examples that I had, that's what my music teachers were doing. They weren't practicing. I never went to their concerts; I never saw *them* performing. They were always at our concerts getting us ready to perform. So that was their job. I didn't want to do that, I wanted to go out there and do it. So now that I'm in the classroom, you know, and I really appreciate and value my music teachers - they were phenomenal. Now that I'm a teacher myself, I know that it's very important to keep that door open, to make that space, and practice that other part of creativity. That other side of creativity. Not just the occasional creativity. Musical, artistic creativity.

CLYDE: And the other thing, too, I think we have to be careful of as practicing artists, and I don't know if the music field is like this, but in visual art I have run into just so many people who have gotten MFAs and just been through the art school process, that they feel like there's a certain amount of art school that is designed to challenge you in unhealthy ways. It's like the way

that the professor sometimes will teach, and what they're professing is that you are not good enough. It does something to you where you learn to play that game as an arts student, but then once you're out of school, you're now disconnected from what *you* think is creative and cool. And that kind of visceral thing that originally got you interested, now they've questioned you and interrogated you to the point where you don't even know what's real anymore, and like what you believe as an artist. The thing I always say to people is, "If you're gonna do the art school thing - don't forget - don't let them get in your head like that. Understand that they are just people with opinions too, and you're a person with opinions also. And just because they've maybe been here longer and had some more accomplishments than you, that doesn't make them any better or you any worse. So keep that in mind and don't lose yourself in the process."

SASHA: You have to say the same thing in education. You have to tell yourself - don't lose yourself in the process of teaching.



## **PART III: ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION**

### **Chapter 11: Possibilities**

Early in the process of planning this study, I made the decision to remove the official language of social justice from my recruiting materials, and from all interview prompts. I did this in an effort to avoid deductive analysis wherein participants would have been asked to overlay their experiences with the terminology of social justice education (Bell, 1997; Hackman, 2005). Instead, I hoped that participants would provide their own language for equity, as well as for inclusive aesthetic practices in music education. Maynes et al. (2008) stated that narrators use sophisticated logics to create stories for audiences. Each of my participants wove their personal narratives around specific themes that stood out as I analyzed the transcripts. Teachers are often experienced storytellers; their stories contain learning objectives and morals. Such was the case for my participants.

Using identity as a focal point, I found that participants described distinct themes that situated their personal stories as driving influences on their professional practice. Certainly, the single theme that I describe for each participant is but one of a constellation of possibilities. I've chosen to frame these themes as *enacted possibilities* for music education pedagogy aimed toward equity or liberation. Each of these possibilities are embodied and practiced by one or more of the participants in this study. In other words, the boundaries are neither clean, nor

helpful; the participants embody multiple possibilities at once. Though adamant about the possibility of more equitable practice in music education, participants also described a web of constraining factors that make it difficult – if not impossible – to deploy their full vision. These constraints will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 12, but it is of interest to note that constraining themes were translatable across cases. Whereas the participants described possibilities that were somewhat personal and distinct, they described *exceedingly* similar constraints.

### **Lee – Stories as Possibility**

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Lee is a storyteller. He has learned and lived in stories, and his work as a music educator uses storytelling to engage students. Oral tradition is a vital component of the heritage culture of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Though Lee describes his involvement with music as a personal quest taken up in his late teens, he recognizes that the storytelling tradition associated with local folk arts was significantly present in his young life.

You know, some people, they would go and talk about issues at the table. I don't remember talking; I remember stories. Some people hash out issues of the nation or whatever in the news, but I don't remember that, I just remember storytelling about people in the family. I do a lot of storytelling with my students. We do stories that are important to them and we share stories.

Here, Lee makes a direct connection between his experience with stories and the work he does in music education. He uses stories as a tool of engagement and connection.

In our interviews, Lee uses stories to illustrate his feelings at particular moments; the stories serve an educative purpose. There are a few identifiable story tropes that Lee employs in

his narrative. One such trope is stories that challenge stereotypes, such as the time when his father went to the bank after work to request a loan. In the story, his father's appearance and subsequent revelation of his account balance served to 'flip the script' on the bank employee and challenge the *hillbilly* stereotype. Lee also uses stories that spur curiosity or connection.

I tell these Jack tales. I don't know what kind of personal connection they would have with Jack other than he gets out of trouble some way. [Well], I guess they do have a personal connection with that, getting in trouble and getting out of it. Being the smallest one and being able to overcome things - bigger, larger, more influential people or monsters or whatever. I guess they do identify with that, I guess we all do.

Additionally, Lee holds that stories are most powerful when they are expressly relevant to the audience. He states that his teaching objectives are largely drawn from the interests of his students. For example, Lee noticed that his students had many questions about death after a season of sicknesses and deaths related to the coal industry in their county. From this, he designed a unit about funeral traditions in which he shared stories and songs, and helped the students to compose funeral songs of their own.

Lee also uses storytelling to make sense of experiences that elicit shame and confusion in his own life. In describing a moment of dissonance between his personal and professional identities, Lee explains the fear of losing his livelihood.

I am wearing this [Sexton Folk Arts Center] hat in a movie that's gone all the way around the world now. I forgot to take that damn hat off. I don't know. I just like that hat better, but I can't wear this hat when I'm doing something as publicly as a demonstration. I said something like, "Imagine a community that is economically bound to blowing up its own

mountains." The directors [at the center] told me, they just said, "Be careful of your attire at events."

This is but one of several stories that Lee shares wherein he describes reprimands from the board of the folk arts center.

The possibility of storytelling may be unique to music and arts education because the arts provide students with opportunities to tell their stories through various modes and media. Where one might not easily find the words to express a story, music and arts provide students with an extended set of options for representation and expression. Bell, Desai, and Irani (2013) stated, "[Storytelling] can support young people – particularly those most marginalized by race and class – to identify, talk back to, and imagine alternatives to stock stories about them and their communities that rationalize their subjugated position in society" (p. 16). Like Lee, students tell their stories for various purposes. For example, they may tell stories that counter dominant narratives or stock stories. Bell et al. describe stock stories as "the normalizing or hegemonic stories that support things as they are" (Bell et al., 2013, p. 16). Using arts - in this case music - to challenge and analyze the status quo can serve to "break through the crust" of internalized societal discourses so that students can imagine other possibilities. Similarly, students may tell stories that counter prevailing stereotypes about themselves and their peers. They may also tell stories as cathartic means to express feelings or experiences that are confusing, stressful, or traumatic. Most important is the idea that students are best able to engage with stories that express the things that *they* identify as important. This has distinct ramifications for music education curriculum in terms of both repertoire and pedagogy.

As will be discussed later in this chapter with Sasha and Clyde, teachers must also be given the opportunity to tell stories that *they* identify as important for their students. They must

be willing to assist students in processing a wide range of experiences – some of which are similar, and some that are opposite of their own. Bell et al. (2013) stated that willingness to examine stories across differences holds significant value for education aimed at equity.

A critical counter-storytelling community develops capacities of collaborative critique and provides a supportive environment in which to imagine and generate ideas for change.

Central to the creation of such a community are habits of dialogue across different social positions of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and other categories that mediate access to power and resources (Bell et al., 2013, p. 17).

Aside from the various types and purposes of stories, Lee implies that personal stories must be recognized as valuable discourse in the music classroom. In other words, stories are important; experiences are important; personal identity is important. This pedagogical mindset includes both students *and* teachers. If I see stories as inherently valuable, then my story is important, and yours must hold value as well. The centering of stories in the music classroom makes space for concepts such as student voice, and provides the music educator opportunities to discover topics and concerns that are relevant to their students. Music educators must be willing to follow where the stories lead. This may entail directing less time toward traditional music education activities in order to open up exploratory music spaces. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 13.

### **Michelle – Balance in Support of Possibility**

Michelle uses music as a tool to help her center, focus, and balance her emotions at difficult times. The work that she does is intense. There are lots of moments where she feels she needs to re-center herself.

[Music] is my balance. Because I'm in graduate school myself, it is something that I use to study to; it helps keep me focused while I'm studying. It's also a stress reliever. After I've had a long day at work, singing in the car with my daughter can kind of take my mind off what was problematic at work that day. So it also gives a sense of enjoyment - but more so balance than anything. I think that music serves the same purpose for our students. I think it can stimulate creativity, stimulate their thinking. In my experience [music] has brought a sense of peace to the classroom. So when they come in in the morning and there's some jazz playing, it automatically calms them down and helps get them focused and ready for the day. It clears their thoughts, so should they have to make challenging decisions, they're better able to do that because their mind is clear and not bogged down with issues from home that they could be thinking about, or a disagreement with a classmate.

Through this example, Michelle shows that her own experience with music as balance has become embedded in her pedagogy for students. She recognizes that young people must make challenging decisions, and that they have turmoil and disruptions in their lives that could interfere with their learning. By embedding music in her classroom, and throughout her daily life, Michelle models the use of music to relieve stress and release emotion.

Throughout her interviews, Michelle describes arts as embedded in her life, and in the curriculum at Kindred. As part of her mission as principal, Michelle hopes to implement more culturally relevant pedagogy. She works with Dr. Jones to develop her ideas and provide her teachers with a viable curriculum and pedagogy that will help them to implement this. She notes that culturally relevant pedagogy for her students, African-American students, means that arts are embedded throughout life, and when school separates it out as something discrete, part of

cultural life is forcibly removed. In a way, this embeddedness represents a type of curricular balance where all subjects and forms of knowledge are seen as valuable.

One story that Michelle shares is how students in the lunchroom use music before school. This is usually a time when teachers (typically) ask students to be quiet. It is worthwhile to compare Michelle's story to Dean's story of the morning ROTC formation. Rather than insisting that students be quiet and ordered in battalion formation, Michelle tells about her encouragement of students who make up raps and songs during the morning.

The majority of the students have a strong interest in music - a lot of it is hip-hop - and they'll turn anything into a rap. If you go in the cafeteria in the morning, [the students] would sit there and they're beating on the tables and they're rapping, but they're rapping about cereal, or what they're going to have for lunch later that day. And we let them do it, as long as they don't get too loud and out of control. We let them do it. But we have this one student, when he first came to us last year he struggled a lot in reading fluency, but ask him to freestyle rap, and he's the most fluent. He had a speech impediment as well as reading fluency issues, but you ask him to rap the last song he heard on the radio...he can do it no problem. You ask him to freestyle, rap about the outfit I have on, he can do it no problem. And I thought that was amazing.

Here, Michelle illustrates the effect that music can have in helping students to surmount learning challenges. The student in this example is able to enter a new discursive arena through his use of rap.

Michelle centers movement as part of her conception of music, focusing specifically on dance. She notes that her experiences with dance have helped her to process emotions at difficult times in her life.

[When] you're an adolescent and you've got all these hormones raging and, you know, you're coming into your own. You feel like you're more mature than what you really are. [Dance] was a great way to really hone in on my emotions. I remember having an argument with my boyfriend and going in my parent's basement, and I turned on this Janet Jackson song - no it was a Mariah Carey song - and I just danced that same song for over an hour. And I felt so much better after.

In this way, Michelle uses music as a catharsis of sorts. She uses it to move through and process her frustrations so that she can maintain focus on the work that she feels is important. She tells stories about how she uses music while she studies to help her focus. She also uses music in her office at the Kindred school to prepare her for the day, and also to help her think through difficult situations.

Increased consciousness is important to many social justice educators. Michelle's story tells us that self-care and balance become necessary in the face of increased consciousness where oppressive structures become visible. Michelle sees a great deal of important work for herself, but she also acknowledges that she must be able to give her best effort to that work. In describing self-care among teacher educators, Bettez (2008) noted, "a core component of social justice is promoting well-being. Any time we are not taking care of ourselves, we are working against our cause. Furthermore, we cannot be fully present for others if we do not take care of ourselves" (p. 289). Thus, self-care keeps Michelle focused on her goal of equity, and ready to do the work. Her story shows that music and dance can serve as important outlets for social justice educators and their students alike, as ways to engage in self-care of the body, mind, and spirit. Her love of dance and use of music throughout the day, originally taken up as leisure, serves a dual purpose of promoting her attention to self-care (Bettez, 2008).



Another important component of self-care is willingness to support and be supported by colleagues in critical communities. In making the move to Kindred School, Michelle sought out critical colleagues who have similar educational aims for students. This community was at first astonishing for Michelle, as she wondered “When does it get real around here?” referring to her expectation that school structure would likely present itself as oppositional to her aims. Now, as principal of the school, she recognizes that there’s a toll that weighs on her teachers as they attempt to do challenging social justice work. She details ways in which she supports her staff so that they may also do their best work with students. In this way, Michelle provides support and mentorship for a critical community of educators – and is willing to bear some of their load of responsibility.

#### **Amy - “Letting Go” as Possibility**

A significant portion of Amy’s story is spent speaking about her experience teaching music in Texas. In many ways, music education in Texas is firmly entrenched in the dominant narrative of music education. The professional development that Amy experienced there was readily available to teachers, and was both encouraged and supported by school administration. Additionally, workshops were often based on methodology derived from the latest music education research, and thus seemed to Amy to be on the cutting edge of music education practice. Music instruction in Texas – as well as the rest of the United States – is heavily reliant on the Kodaly and Orff methodologies. These methods are aimed at giving teachers significant tools for practice. Amy states several times that she wishes she could know and do more with these two methodologies. She feels that Orff specifically would help her to “do more of what [she wants] to do.”

In some ways, it seems that Amy believes that more development in dominant (or traditional) music pedagogies will help her to control or overcome the various constraints described by all participants in this study. However, this vision - wherein exact execution of an approved curriculum holds ‘answers’ - perpetuates the narrative that control over the constraints is possible. As noted above, Amy states that her professional development in Texas was mainly centered on curriculum and music education pedagogy. Now, in her new district, professional development centers on diversity and relationships. This is a stark contrast, and one that represents a significant shift in program aims.

In our interviews together, Amy often talks about her anxiety and nervousness, which she says stem from a desire “to do [her] job really, really well.” She notes a practice of centering herself each morning before school begins, giving herself time to breathe and “calm down” before she has to teach. In some sense, Amy feels an urgency to succeed in her teaching. This urgency is perhaps founded in the fact that she is simply not able to teach all of things necessary to be deemed a ‘successful’ music educator within the space of the dominant curriculum. Amy’s conception of a music education utopia is strongly linked to the idea of traditional success in the music classroom.

So I feel like I *can’t* teach what I’m supposed in the Texas terms - or in the music ed. world terms. I can’t do it. So I feel like I’m having to pay more attention to relationships with the kids, and between kids. I do pay more attention, I think, to equity and to fairness and to all of those things that *would be* extra to teaching music - but really are kind of at the center. I think more than anything, I’m having to deal with those things first and foremost, because I can’t do what I want with music. It can’t be that perfect utopian, perfect little Orff class or Kodaly class.

Somehow, amidst this intense pressure toward traditionally defined success in the music classroom, Amy says that she is most able to enjoy herself when she is able to “let go.” Specifically, she describes letting go of her ideal vision – her musical utopia – and immersing herself in the musical experience.

I had an experience yesterday, it was a very tough class, and I let go of that utopia thing that I was talking about and we had a play party. We did a song from Jamaica, and it was rhythmic and fun, and I had fun, the kids had fun. It was a very human, lovely experience. I think that made those kids better; it made me better, because there was love and happiness. It's been tough this year. Just a lot of challenges, and I've really been holding onto the fact that things aren't fair for my job here. I spent all this time creating this wonderful curriculum that I'm not able to teach. Yesterday was like, I was at the piano playing - and they were just doing - they were all on board. They were all participating. I don't know if that's because I let go, or if it was the make up of the class, but I think it was because I let go. And I started to just have fun, and it was just about the music.

“Letting go” is not easy for Amy, it's something that she notes she will have to practice, and would like to be able to do more often.

The field of American music education is remarkably homogenous in terms of pedagogy, repertoire, and curriculum. Traditional conceptions of success in the field are firmly grounded in music literacy, and performance-based practice or ensembles. These emphases have been promoted further by the National Standards of Music Education, released in the early 1990s. The curricula and corresponding instructional materials created based on these foci are then promoted as if one can hone their craft to such a degree that they will prevent typical teaching troubles

such as disengaged students or disruptive behavior issues. This narrative is not unique to music education, but is perhaps amplified and complicated by conservatory-style university music culture where one must practice obsessively with perfection as a looming goal. According to Hinchey (2004),

All educators need to start thinking much more consciously about classroom routines they've accepted as desirable or necessary without scrutinizing them, simply because they constitute 'what teachers do.' Given that assumptions produce behaviors and behaviors have consequences, educators need to make informed choices for themselves...teachers need to think for themselves in terms of what to believe about, what to offer, and how to treat the children who actually populate their classrooms.

(Hinchey, 2004, p. 6)

Teaching is not a monolithic venture that can be practiced in solitude. In other words, one cannot 'woodshed' teaching practice and pedagogy. From this, it is necessary to ask how pre-service music educators might be encouraged to look beyond these engrained narratives. How can we work to cultivate music teachers' disposition to see expansive possibilities?

Perhaps the most vital component of social justice pedagogies is the development of a critical, questioning stance. In other words, teaching students "to uncover, analyze, question and critique fundamental assumptions" (Hyttén, 2008, p. 192). It is at church, described on their website as a Christian emergent activist/missional church, where Amy is challenged to think in a critical manner. She states that her pastor has pushed congregants to think about privilege and "the least among us" in terms of systemic advantage and disadvantage. Amy is learning to reconcile the teachings of her church with her conceptions of people, relationships, systems, and schooling. In a sense, she is experiencing personal *and* professional development in that space.

This shift reintroduces her personal assumptions and identity to the conversation of what might be important for music education. Hytten stated, “It takes unlearning bad habits to get [teachers] to question these practices that seem so essential to the meaning of schooling, and to develop the practice of scrutinizing that which appears at first glance to be inevitable” (Hytten, 2008, p. 196). In this case, Amy is learning to question the structure of music education that initially believed to be “inevitable.” It is clear that Amy is still swayed by the promise of success contained in the traditional practices of music education; she still finds the idea of a music education utopia to be appealing. However, she also sees evidence that both her experience and that of her students are improved when she is able to let go of her utopian vision. In her current practice, her conceptions of successful music education are dissonant; she has mainly experienced frustration in holding tight to the prescribed narrative of what she *should* do in her classroom, but has now seen evidence that success may come by different means.

#### **Dean – “It’s not set in stone” – Possibility for Revelation and Evolution**

One technique that Dean describes using with his students is conversation and dialogue. He continually tells the students that their future is not fixed; the decisions they make are not final and that things are not “set in stone”. This same metaphor of the future being flexible and mutable also applies to Dean’s own journey. His thoughts and assumptions about equity are not yet set in stone. In his first conversation with me, Dean speaks about his success in working with students. He also describes how he has often diffused difficult situations or unpacked student frustrations by encouraging students to talk and discuss their concerns. He situates himself as the wise mediator who has answers to all of the student’s difficulties. He uses the phrase “Let’s talk” several times to describe interaction with his students. When he encourages students to talk about

what they're going through, he is bringing them down a path of self-reflection and dialogue, positioning student's personal identities as an evolving journey.

In Dean's story, he talks about experiences where his visions of equity were challenged, and oppressive systemic structures were revealed. These revelations are vital to Dean's experience, and highlight the fact that White teachers' conceptions of social justice may not encompass a full vision of reality. For Dean, these conceptions are based on privileged experiences, and corresponding success within the structure of school music education. As he hopes for the success of his students, he encourages them to talk about their former decisions and choices that they might make in the future. It is only when Dean transfers to his new school that he begins to see the systemic web of constraints that limit possibility for some students. His interaction with the ESL teacher highlights this moment where Dean realizes that not everyone thinks as he does.

You know, at my old school we had a lot of camaraderie and we were able to talk to each other about school issues or personal issues or just sharing things. Generally just having an open mind. Here, I literally have no one to talk to. There have been a lot of people who will just come up and start complaining, and there's this one teacher, she's an ESL teacher and she was talking about stereotypes for Hispanic males, and she was saying that everyone acts the same way. I said, "Well, that's not how my experiences have been working with Hispanic males." And you know, I tried to rationally explain these things to her and she just would not listen. I just finally gave up and that was that. "Ok fine, if you feel that way." It's very strange.

Previously, he was able to 'educate' his peers, and they were open and willing to expand their perspective. Now, he experiences resistance in the racist discourse of the ESL teacher.

Dean provides examples about times in his life when the world has opened up and been revealed in greater relief, or when he has realized that his picture of the world is not a complete picture. One such example is his work with the leadership camp.

I had traveled a good bit while I was in high school and a little bit in college, cause we would go on tour with the ensembles, but I had never really seen poverty before; had no idea. It was the first time that we had gone to a school. Usually we have programs at a university where kids come [to us], so this was the first time we had actually gone out into the community to do training. So I'm in a classroom and I'm the lead facilitator and I have one person assisting me. I got a room full of - I don't want to say alternative students - but it was shocking. There were students that had been arrested; there were students that were pregnant. It was eye-opening. I was never... we did not have that when I was in school, when I was in high school.

His experiences there opened up his eyes to challenges that people may face. In this situation, however, Dean still sees him self as a savior character. He still believes that with some effort, he can coach the students toward success.

In my third interview with Dean, he seemed angry, frustrated, and upset; his new job was not what he thought it would be. He also seemed upset that people were not as open as he had assumed. He hoped that his new colleagues would be *for* students as Amy describes, but instead found some teachers to be expressly *against* students.

[My new school] is very interesting. It is not what I expected it to be. There are ...I'm taking over after someone retired, and the past couple of years, he has not really done much of anything in regards to teaching. And I was told this well in advance, so I anticipated that, but a lot of the minority students were ignored, so I have a good number

of students who play really well, and then I have a handful of students who are completely lost to the world. I'm trying to balance the class of almost fifty, and there's a huge range of abilities to make sure that everyone is still engaged it's actually really difficult, but it's slowly getting better.

His discomfort echoes the pedagogy of discomfort described by Bettez (2011), in that he is “challenged to examine [his] values and beliefs through critical inquiry and self-reflection in order to understand how and why they perceive themselves and others in such ways” (p. 172). In our first meeting, Dean refers to students as ‘they’ and ‘them.’ As he reflects on his discussion with the teacher who puts down Latino students, he starts referring to his students as ‘us’ and “we.” This is a significant shift regarding Dean’s identity in relation to his students. Like Sasha and Clyde posit, he has expanded his consciousness and it is not a comfortable knowledge set. He is now able to see discourses that he previously believed to be liberal as harmful and oppressive. He may also begin to examine his own privilege, and consider more deeply how those privileges have conferred unearned advantages that his students cannot readily access. Just like his students, Dean’s perspective is not “set in stone.”

Willingness to change and respond to discourse is important to Dean’s story and is also a vital component of social justice education. The idea that your perspective can and should change is sometimes novel in music education, where tradition is strong and change is slow-going. Hytten (2008) suggested that open-mindedness is a desirable disposition for critical educators. This entails “learning to look at things from a distance and from different angles” and requires that we “habitually ask different questions, seek out viewpoints that we may not have considered, and hypothesize about alternatives” (Hytten, 2008, p. 190). When oppressive systems are revealed and one begins to see how these systems interact directly with the way that



personal identity has been constructed, anger and frustration can result, as evidenced by Dean's description of his colleagues at the new school. Referring to the work of Diller (as cited in Hytten, 2008), Hytten stated that open-mindedness "calls for us to be open to startling revelations of our own ignorance, and to be humble enough to use these experiences to expand our understanding of the world around us...the capacity to be *torpefied*" (Hytten, 2008, p. 190). Hytten further clarified the meaning behind the term, derived from the actions of the torpedo fish. She explained, "A torpedo fish is similar to an electric ray, a creature that when stepped on can jar a person with such strength as to knock them off their feet. Similarly, a torpefying learning experience is one that mentally knocks us over" (pp. 190-191). Though our third interview took place over the phone, Dean's frustration was audible. The capacity to be torpefied means that one must be willing to accept discomfort and ambiguity (Bettez, 2011), which is opposite from societal inclination to seek easy answers and avoid conflict. Now, writing several months later, I'm curious to know if Dean's perspective has continued to evolve.

### **Matthew – Possibilities for "Students Who Look Like Me"**

Throughout Matthew's story, he speaks about being in spaces where there are few other people who look like him. When he speaks about his first experience on the university campus for Project Launch, he notes that there are many people who look like him, but none of them want to go into music education.

As a singer, as a [college] student, I was obviously aware that in the classical field there are not a lot of African Americans. Even looking around at the population for the choirs, you know, probably one or two, and even when you do festivals and those experiences, you still don't see a lot of it. So I think that was a lot for me. I was like, "You know what, I want to do this so that this doesn't continue." I think that was a big reason for it.

During Matthew's first teaching assignment, he is quite successful in working with upper level choirs, but notices again that there are not many students in those spaces who look like him.

So one of the reasons why [I wanted to teach the lower groups] - it was a middle school and high school choral program and I taught the advanced middle-schoolers - I really enjoyed [the] singers, but I felt the kids that looked like me weren't in that group. There were some, but compared to the whole choral program, it wasn't enough to me.

With an eye toward recruiting students of color into the high school program, Matthew chose to teach what refers to as "the lower choirs." He sees this as a type of dedication that shows his commitment to showing students who "look like him" that they can find a space of belonging within music education.

Dedication is distinctly tied to Matthew's idea of teaching students who look like him. He sees that his position as an African American man, in a field where there are few African American men teaching music, is vital so that students may imagine themselves as future participants in the field.

One of the reasons why I chose to stay at my school was, number one: The school is made up of, I think fifty or close approximately 50/50 Hispanic and African American [students]. So these are students that look like me. I also, I had some very positive experiences with my students the first year and I think a part of that was a lot with the male students. I really felt like if I left, I would be doing a disservice to those kids. So that was a lot of my motivation to stay. So those kids could see, "Wow! There's someone that looks like me. There's another male teacher here!" I remember making the decision and after making the decision or actually meeting people and they say, "Where do you teach?" and they're like, "Why do you teach there when you could be teaching

somewhere else, more prestigious maybe?" And those were the reasons why I tell them.

You know, these kids look like me.

Just as Amy tied her conceptions of success in music to successful execution of the traditional music curriculum, there are also conceptions of upward mobility entangled in the dominant vision of success in music education. Rather than move to a more 'elite' middle or high school, Matthew resists these conceptions of success by dedicating himself to sustained long-term practice with beginning students at the elementary level.

Matthew describes his resistance as dedication. He chooses to stay at his school, where he admits there are significant issues. He notes that he feels that he is doing good work there, and his presence in *this* particular school is of vital importance.

Matthew's descriptions of interactions with students, parents, and the school community can be linked with the concept of fictive kinship. Cook (2010) wrote, "Fictive kinship refers to people not related by birth with whom a person shares essential reciprocal social and economic relationships" (p. 11). Matthew situates himself and his identity as firmly dedicated to his school community. He gives examples of visiting students' homes to update parents on progress, and driving his students to honor choir events when busses are not available. He also takes on mentorship of two boys each year, despite his busy schedule, and describes his pride in their growth both during and after elementary school. In this way, Matthew identifies with his students as concerned family member might. Cook further described fictive kinship in African American communities, "The essence of the African Americans' imagined community of fictive kin is its focus on the survival of the group rather than the individual. Moreover, fictive kinship encouraged an emphasis on the value of cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity" (p. 12). Each of these emphasized themes is present in Matthew's narrative, and serve as potential reasoning

for his decision to remain at Northfield. He believes that music holds a vital and worthy place in the African American community, and that his talents can inspire students who look like him and experience the world as he has.

Principles that Matthew describes as driving his practice in music education are remarkable similar to the five principles used by Walker (2001) to describe the beliefs that African American teachers held about their teaching in the 1940s through the 1960s.

These include,

...the importance of teachers having a relationship and familiarity with black communities, commitment to professional excellence regardless of extra work hours or work needed, the expansion of the notion of caring to encompass high expectations in and outside the classroom as well as supporting nonacademic needs as necessary, adapting curriculum to make it relevant to African American students, and using community and school supports as needed (as cited in Cook, 2010, p.11)

Every book and poster in Matthews's room features students of color. He explicitly describes having high expectations for every student, and admits that he spends a significant amount of personal time preparing good lessons for his students. Thus, Matthew's conception of dedication is strongly correlated with his vision of what an African American teacher *might* be able to do for students in the face of significant constraints and pressure to move into more (so-called) elite spaces of music education.

### **Janice – Possibilities for Re-Imagining Music Education**

There has always been great debate in music education over the formalist aesthetic philosophy that reigns in music education programs and teacher preparation. In TRIUMPH, Janice seeks to resist this philosophy, which is based primarily on Western European traditions.

Janice does not see the narrative of multiculturalism, prevalent in music education, as particularly helpful in this conversation.

I think that for me, multiculturalism is about - from what I've read - intercultural understanding, generally. It sort of takes Western European culture as the center and says, let's look out from this center and see what else is out there, and dabble in it a little bit, and this will help us to understand others. So there's the idea of 'us' and 'them.' Whereas, when you focus on a particular kind of music, the focus is more on, "this is who we are, and we need to understand ourselves better." In the case of music of the African Diaspora, the 'we' is everyone, because this music is so important around the world; this is a global tradition. We get to redefine who we are, and we get to look out from another center.

Thus, Janice's vision of her work is tied directly to student identity. Through her work, she hopes to affirm students through examination of their cultural heritage and history.

In TRIUMPH, Janice promotes a multi-pillar aesthetic of African Diasporic values including: spirituality, resilience, humanism, communalism, orality, personal style, realness, emotional vitality, and music and rhythm. While some of these pillars have parallels in the Western Formalist aesthetic of music, several are distinctly different. Thus, the social justice work done by Janice involves a distinct reimagining of the musical education landscape. It is also unique that the pillars are conceived as values; they are not just about beauty and feeling. This is not a novel reimagining of aesthetics in the larger global world. This is a purposeful re-engagement with African Diasporic values that have been rendered unimportant and illegible in traditional music education. In reintroducing these values back into the conversation of her music education classrooms, Janice is resisting the dominant philosophy of the field.

The genesis of TRIUMPH is related to Janice's own life and identity, specifically her experience with her childhood piano teacher. Reflecting on her relationship with this teacher, Janice describes how music allowed her to create her world and helped her to imagine other possibilities than the frustrations she was facing in her everyday life.

I was just a very, very poor child growing up in a very violent environment, and my parents wanted to protect me from that so badly, and there was no way they could protect me from that. I found such solace and hope in being able to sit down at the piano and create something. I created my world with music. And so I've always felt that primarily, for me, our program is about that identity. It's about engaging in music in such a way that it allows for a flow in your life. Even if you can't live at the top, practicing music gives you the opportunity to see the top, to feel the top, to know that you can get there.

Janice hopes that her work in music education can help her students to create an aesthetic world that is reflective of their own identities; where their values match the values of society. She also hopes to build a space of music education where the aesthetic presented is meaningful and legible to those who are asked to participate. Additionally, she hopes to encourage participation of those whose aesthetic has traditionally been deemed illegible in traditional music education. For Janice, music and arts are something that can help students to understand that they have potential, and a rich history; they can access visions of success and pride through music education. Janice believes that the value and potential of music education is of utmost importance, but actively reconstructs the field based on her critique and personal values.

The work that Janice does with TRIUMPH promotes the idea that students of color should be given the opportunity to see their values and racial identity constructed as 'good' through music education (Gustafson, 2009). Laing (2013) explained,

The capacity to conceive of or *imagine* the good is the chief element of freedom of thought, the underpinning of the fundamental human right to freedom of expression... Thus, in discussing the education of Black children, strengthening their capacity to envision a *good*, not only for themselves but also for the larger Black community should be key in any discussion of arts education and social justice (Laing, 2013, p. 178).

Thus, Janice sees possibility for socially just music pedagogy in providing a framework for musical connection, imagination, and uplift that counters prevailing Western Classical traditions and values. Laing (2013) refers to this type of program as a counter-narrative school, and outlines five commitments that counter-narratives schools take up:

1. Explicitly communicating stories of African American intelligence, achievement, and commitment to the African American community as a fundamental component of what it is to be African American.
2. Assist children in developing an opposition to a 'know your place identity'
3. Participation by the surrounding community in the development of the counter-narrative.
4. The development of an ethic of persistence.
5. The use of ritual, symbols, and protocols to create a 'figured world' (Laing, 2013, p. 183)

Each of these commitments is strongly reflected in Janice's descriptions of TRIUMPH, and drives her desire to expand the program. Just as Janice was given the opportunity to see alternative possibilities through music as a child, she uses the TRIUMPH curriculum as way to help students "see the top," if only temporarily. Summarizing this perspective, Laing posits,

Helping children to create artistic work of a quality that demonstrates an alternative present is central to their capacity to imagine and alternative future. Simultaneously, the African-centered artist must mine his or her particular art form for the skills and strategies that will allow children to both challenge and circumvent White supremacy with which they are *currently* confronted. (Laing, 2013, p. 178)

Janice, then, mobilizes music as an art form that invites students to explore their racial identity using values of the African Diaspora. Additionally, the nine values of TRIUMPH give students tools to critique and confront oppressive systems that do not recognize their values and identities as ‘good.’

### **Sasha and Clyde – Possibilities for Art as Consciousness and Movement**

Sasha and Clyde speak about music and visual art as consciousness-building, and as avenues that help students to build awareness of the larger world around them.

SASHA: In a sense, people who understand arts, they have a consciousness - because it exists whether you want to acknowledge it or not. There's a consciousness that you have if you're an artist or if you appreciate art. People who say that they don't like art, or that they don't [listen to music]...that kind of thing. They say that. That doesn't mean that it's not around them all the time. It means that they don't have this consciousness.

The consciousness Sasha describes does not simply refer to observing aesthetic principles in artwork or music. Rather, consciousness means being aware of the world around you, and aware of the things that you see, and how they affect you. This also involves seeing what has previously been obscured from your vision. Clyde adds to the discussion the idea that it is vital for individuals to be conscious of their own importance and value.



CLYDE: But from what I can tell, people don't view the things that they do as being important. They don't view them as being important enough to document. They don't view them as being important enough to appreciate and that is actually one of the big roles of art...any art... is to kind of shine that mirror back at you so that you can appreciate yourself. And if you can't, you know, then you just shine a different mirror. You do it in a different way until something catches somebody's attention.

He uses the Harlem Renaissance as an example to illustrate this position, describing the work of artist Aaron Douglas. “What Aaron Douglas did was he helped Black people to appreciate their culture, and beauty and spirit and history in the face of very extreme oppression.” In other words, Sasha and Clyde see art and music as a way to “shine the mirror” back on their students, and way to help them appreciate their rich histories, cultures, and traditions.

According to Hinchey (2004), critical educators are those who focus on questioning and dialogue. They look at structures and schooling traditions with a skeptical eye, and seek to question underlying epistemological assumptions. Furthermore, critical educators encourage their students to ask questions about which individuals benefit from current structures, and who does not. They take the stance that “the status quo always privileges one segment of society over another, and the goal of the critical theorist is to promote a more genuinely equitable society” (Hinchey, 2004, p. 14). This questioning works in service of expanding awareness or critical consciousness. There are easy parallels to be drawn here between the consciousness described by Sasha and Clyde, and the critical consciousness put forth in the work of Paulo Freire,

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be ‘in a situation.’ Only as this situation ceases itself as a dense enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they

can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation – only then can commitment exist. Humankind emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Intervention in reality – historical awareness itself – thus represents a step forward from emergence, and results from the conscientização of the situation. Conscientização is the deepening attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence. (Freire, 2000, p. 109)

Consciousness, then, is possible only when individuals emerge from “submersion” in discourses and ideologies that obscure the nature of hegemony and oppression. Sasha and Clyde believe that students can and should be encouraged to see beyond the smokescreens of narratives such as colorblindness and post-raciality.

Expanded awareness is not something that students pick up automatically. According to Sasha’s example, educators must scaffold expansive thinking and awareness for their students. In the example that she gives about the student who arrived at the concert in blackface, she makes a specific effort to dialogue with the student. Recognizing what the student had intended, Sasha conceived of her role as one who should help the student understand that blackface is racist and demeaning. She also uses the phrase “intent vs. impact” to help the student to understand that the things we do can have harmful effects in spite of our well-meaning intent. It is important to note that Sasha does not scold the child, but rather sees this as an instance where consciousness can be expanded.

Following the above example, consciousness is expanded in conversation and discourse. Forward movement, then, is possible when those who strive for critical consciousness recognize and hail others who are like-minded. When Clyde brings up Ferguson and Michael Brown with other teachers and parents, he engages them in building community consciousness whereby the

discussants realize that they have a critique of society in common – also termed a “critical community” (Bettez, 2008). Clyde’s conversation with a student’s father is especially illustrative here, because they identify a common stance of opposition to police violence, which then evolves into a blog post about politics within schools. Then, through conversation with a teacher whose husband is a police officer, Clyde finds another critical ally. According to Bettez (2008), “a key component of effective activist social justice teaching is creating strong support networks and encouraging our students to do the same. (p. 292). In these examples, Clyde provokes discourse with members of his school community by asking questions, and finding critical common ground.

It is important to note that in order to build critically conscious communities, folks must be open to the consideration that there is more to be known and revealed than is currently part of their awareness. Community-building does not come naturally to everyone, and is an acquired skill (Bettez, 2008). Sasha notes that her experiences have been different with children, parents, and colleagues. In her new capacity as diversity coordinator, Sasha does not experience this willingness from her colleagues. While some of her colleagues are willing to listen to her critique and advice, others remain resistant, and adhere to traditional and dominant teaching practices.

SASHA: I just don't have the allies [this year]...The thing is, it's *easy* to do this stuff! It's easy to teach the kids. It's hard to teach the parents. The kids will, they'll go with it, and they'll ask the right questions, and they want to know. It's not the kids that have the issue, it's the adults. They're not ready to deal with it. So when the kids go home and they tell their parents about it, the parents *freak out* because they weren't ready to address it with them, and they automatically assume that in some way it's going to hurt their innocence. I

think it moves us all forward, to get them thinking about these things and interacting with other children with a heightened awareness.

Thus, in order to expand consciousness, you must have peers that are willing to engage in expansive thinking.

### **Summary**

The themes presented in this chapter represent enacted possibilities for socially just teaching in the field of music education. Each possibility is unique, and distinctly drawn from the personal identities and experiences of participants. While there are some parallels to be drawn between possibilities, it is clear that participants centered their narratives on specific aims and conceptions of socially just practice. Music educators are, in some sense, apprenticed into performing, and the opportunity to share a narrative represents an opportunity to craft an impression, much like a conductor would shape phrasing in a piece of music. Overlaying each of these possibilities for socially just teaching, participants described a highly structured web of constraints that create boundaries for socially just teaching in music classrooms. This web of constraints will be discussed in detail in Chapter 12, and will outline both instrumental and conceptual constraints faced by participants in their teaching practice.

## Chapter 12: Instrumental and Conceptual Constraints

Each of the participants in this study approaches their practice with some level of critical consciousness. Becoming a socially just educator requires a heightened awareness of the world and a willingness to critique foundational assumptions and the status quo. In critiquing the field, it may be practical to identify perceived constraints or obstacles that serve to prevent music educators from employing socially just pedagogy. In this study, participants described a number of constraints, which can be divided into two categories: instrumental and conceptual constraints. In this case, *instrumental* refers to constraints that are based on concrete or abstract resources, and the associated support or deficit that the participants experience because of these constraints. A few examples of instrumental constraints discussed by participants are lack of time or monetary resources, scheduling, transportation, opportunity for interaction with colleagues, and availability of curricular materials that support critical equitable practice. Conceptual constraints are narratives or discourses that inform practice, or affect interaction with students, parents, administrations, and colleagues. Examples of these include the prevailing formalist aesthetic philosophy based in the Western Classical tradition, the traditional aims of schooling in general, and oppressive discourses such as racism, sexism, and heteronormativity. Additionally, lack of appropriate training in critical practice during teacher education programs combined with privileged life experiences may serve to constrain the ability of the music educators, rendering them ill-prepared to identify and critique their own practice.

It is important to note that conceptual constraints are broader and more complex than instrumental constraints. In fact, instrumental constraints are often the *result* of conceptual

constraints and the ideologies through which they are produced. For example, limited time and teaching resources for the arts can be directly tied to the implementation of neoliberal educational agendas that promote standardization and a core curriculum that excludes the arts. Thus, instrumental constraints may initially be the most visible as educators take up a critical stance. Narrative is particularly salient here, in that participants' life experience and positionality explicitly inform their ability or inability to recognize conceptual constraints.

In this chapter, I will first outline the instrumental constraints described by participants. In contrast to the individual themes presented in Chapter 11, these instrumental constraints were easily translatable across cases, and highlight the intensely homogenous structure of music education and schooling. A discussion of conceptual constraints will follow. These constraints were also translatable across cases, but were not present in *all* narratives. This is perhaps due to participants varying levels of critical consciousness. Some participants seem to be just beginning their journey toward more socially just practice, while others have more developed and nuanced critical conceptions of their work in music education.

### **Instrumental Constraints**

#### **Time.**

All participants described struggling to find enough time in their schedules to do everything they want to do. Constraints on their time stem from sources both inside and outside schooling, and balancing time between work and personal life seems to be a challenge. For those participants who teach music in school settings, there are multiple factors that present heightened demands on time. One of these factors is scheduling, which is complicated because of the subordinated role of 'special' content areas. Sasha and Amy both stated that they are not consulted in the scheduling process prior to the school year. This point will be discussed further

as a conceptual constraint, but it necessary to state here that leaving music educators out of the decision-making process for scheduling has a significant instrumental effect on their day-to-day practice. Music lessons, especially the active lessons described by most participants, require significant equipment set-up, and thus transitions between classes can be both demanding and time-consuming. Matthew, Sasha, and Amy all described having to reset the classroom multiple times a day, due to the fact that they are scheduled to see several grades throughout the day. In their descriptions, and Lee's as well, socially just music education must look different from traditional versions of schooling. None of the participants' classrooms had traditional rows of desks, and a few participants even resisted having students sit facing a conductor's podium. Lee described taking the time to set up an "atmosphere" of sharing, so that students could feel comfortable in creating musical experiences. These intentional plans and set-ups take a significant amount of time that is not always available for transitions between classes, especially when one sees six different grade levels back-to-back within the course of one day.

For Amy, time limitations are significant because of the size of her school. She is the only music educator for 900 students at Lakeview Elementary, and sees each student once every eight days. Sasha also faces similar time limitations. She stated,

[Y]ou only have forty-five minutes a week for each class. I think I did the math one time, and what you're trying to do is to teach a years' worth of curriculum in six or seven days. Something crazy like that, which is not possible...you can't! So that means that you have them for a week, you're teaching...you could just say one week. So in six weeks you're going to teach all the music in the curriculum that they need to know, expose them to all this stuff and do all these wonderful things and then send them off to middle school. Six weeks for six years. One week a year, and that's if you're lucky. That's if you don't have

any interruptions in your schedule. So when you think about it like that, it makes everything sound impossible. So I just kind of try to tune that out and remove the expectation of having to do that. And just focus on the joy of learning and the joy of teaching.

As discussed in Chapter 11, Amy does not find it as easy as Sasha does to “tune out” the expectation of having to teach everything in such a condensed manner.

A demanding school-day schedule can leave little time for self-care (Bettez, 2008). This is true for the larger field of education, but is compounded by the idea that the music educators studied have such significant set-up demands, and are often geographically isolated in school buildings. Participants described weighing their options, with self-care (visiting the restrooms, eating, interacting with colleagues, addressing concerns regarding students, etc.) often being subsumed by practical concerns such as classroom transitions and equipment set-up. Clyde described weighing his options in the face of such demands, which he noted are similar in a visual arts classroom.

It comes up a good amount of times, where something will happen in a class and you have to keep a kid after because they were messing up in one way or another. So you have to talk to them after class. Sometimes I'll even weigh it in my head, I'll say, "Ok, is talking to this kid more or less important than me getting time to eat my lunch." Because that's what will happen. I've got to go down, take the kid to the office, call somebody, and by the time it's all done, I missed my lunch. You know, you weigh that in your head. So I try to have consequences that don't involve me missing my lunch very often and I try to save that as a completely last resort.



Other participants described similar personal negotiations in terms of eating lunch in the faculty lounge, consulting with resources specialists, or even just visiting the restroom.

Three of the eight participants are assigned carpool duty at the end of each school day, outside of their regular classroom responsibilities. Because music teachers and other ‘specialists’ see every child in elementary schools, they know all the students’ names and are able locate them quickly when parents arrive to pick them up. Amy also posited that she was selected for this duty because of her study of languages in music teacher preparation equipped her to pronounce and recognize student names from various cultures. Most public school teachers must take on additional responsibilities in their schools, but carpool is one that is particularly demanding. In the following quote, Amy describes the pressure of this duty.

I'm the person who goes through the cars saying the names of the kids. The parents know me more for that [than for music]. And it's kind of a hassle because you have to face every type of weather. I'm out there every single day. But I also have gotten really good at it, and I know how to pronounce all the kids names, and I know parents' cars, and I know all the kids' faces. And it's given parents and me an opportunity to interact that we wouldn't have otherwise. 'Cause for parents, I've noticed any type of in and out transition is so important to them. They have the day to get through and kids to pick up - they're stressed out from coming from work. It's a huge event! It has to go smoothly for parents.

It is evident that Amy takes some pride in her ability to interact with parents in such an efficient manner during a high stress moment of the day. At the same time, carpool takes up a significant amount of her time every afternoon, and Amy wishes that another person could alternate duty with her.

Participants in this study also described significant demands on their time at school outside of regular school hours. In some cases, again, this was due to the geography of the school. Matthew's classroom is right near the main entrance, and MusicKids participants arrive at school with instruments, so his responsibility for supervision of students begins about one hour before his colleagues. Though he counts this time as beneficial to his students, it does make for an extended school day. Because there is such significant demand on his time throughout the school day, Matthew noted that this school year he has attempted to preserve his personal time by leaving school each day by six o'clock pm.

In the past I have stayed until 7:00... some nights 8:00 (laughing). This year I had the goal of getting out of there around 6:00. That mostly worked for the most part of the year, but there were some days that, you know, I had to stay a little bit later, and teachers are always like, "You're always the last one to leave!" and I was like "MusicKids ends at 4:30 and then I am waiting for parents around 5:00, and then I'm here doing work, just like you guys are doing after school." It just takes me another hour or two to finish. I don't want to say that I wanted to have "me" time, but that's kind of what it was. Just to, you know, to be professional. Meaning that I could do my work and then go home and just relax and feel confident that it's going to be alright for the next day.

As will be discussed below, responsibilities that extend the school day are also a conceptual constraint on two fronts. First, administrators assume that Matthew is willing to provide supervision for students before school officially starts with no corresponding compensation or stipend. Second, there is a discursive notion in the field that successful or worthy music educators *must* offer enrichment programs before or after school. Amy, for example, has asked her administrators to schedule a time during the school day for a fifth grade chorus to meet. Her

request was denied, and thus she decided to hold chorus before school once a week because she feels that the students deserve an ensemble experience. Sasha and Matthew also have instated a fifth grade choir program before school through similar processes.

While several of the participants struggle with time constraints in their practice, Lee actively resists claiming his identity as a “music educator” *because* he feels that music educators are exploited in terms of time.

I really avoided getting a teacher certificate. I saw what they were doing to 'em. A music teacher. They were just overworked. Seven or eight classes a day. I don't see how they did it. I know I couldn't do it. So I just stayed as an artist. I could've got paid more, but I don't think I would enjoy it.

Although Lee describes a number of time commitments throughout his day, he prefers to construct his own daily schedule rather than have it dictated by a school administrator. As will be discussed below, Janice also opts to act outside of traditional school music, thereby resisting some of the constraints presented by that paradigm.

High demands on time also serve to prevent arts teachers from engaging in the very artistic practices that led them to the profession in the first place. Dean, Amy, and Matthew all mentioned the desire to sing or play in an ensemble. Amy and Dean had recently ended their participation in community performing ensembles because they felt that the demands of rehearsals combined with their school responsibilities were too much. Janice also noted that she participates in her church choir, but would love the opportunity to do more. Sasha and Clyde describe similar difficulty in finding time to practice their music and art, but actively make space for creative work in their family life. Sasha explained why they had recently renovated their garage,

You know, we created art space in our house because nothing else is gonna create the space for us. We have to create the space ourselves. The reason why it's so important for me right now is that at school I need that space. I feel like as a teacher, if I'm gonna value it and I'm gonna have the kids value it and try to them to create space for art, then I have to be practicing that. And I think in our day-to-day lives especially we forget to practice. You get caught up... you give, give, give - and if you give out, you have to put back in. Otherwise your art gets flat.

Clyde agrees with Sasha and takes the argument further by stating that arts educators must model the idea that critically conscious arts practice requires constant openness to learning and improving.

Like you say, we have to practice, we don't want our art to get flat. We are the people who are trying to be the ones helping the children to understand their connection to their culture. Sometimes *we* lose that! I just paid for this online course on figure drawing, and just in the very first lesson that I was going through, I realized- you know - that what I teach the kids is very simple, but there's this whole other level of expertise that I hadn't felt like I was connected to for a while - since I was in college. [Sometimes] I feel like, I need to make sure that I'm getting back to that. I still have to keep on practicing and learning. And we have to stay connected. *We have to live it.*

Thus, Sasha and Clyde actively *claim* time for their art practice, despite pressure to use personal time for music and arts ventures related to school.

### **Transportation.**

Transportation seems to be an issue of concern for several of the participants, because the ability to attend enrichment programs or honor events is decided, in many cases, by parents'

ability to drive students to and from the event. Both Amy and Matthew, cited transportation as an issue distinctly tied to their own capacity to provide equitable experiences for their students.

Sasha, Matthew, and Amy all rehearse with their fifth grade choirs before school, and each noted that this was not their preference. In each case, the participants told me that they are able to include more students by scheduling the choir before the school day begins. Many parents can drop their children off before work, but are not available to pick students up after school. Even with this accommodation, students who, by necessity, ride the school bus are not able to participate in the before school choir. Matthew described the situation,

I think one of the things that kind of limits us in what we do is simply transportation - the kids having transportation to rehearsals. When I first got here, you know I was used to my other school. We would have morning rehearsals and afternoon rehearsals, but when I got here I realized that's not going to work. So I try to do everything during the day, and then working with the teachers as well. But if I can change something, I honestly would try to write a grant to get maybe a bus for our kids that would take them [home], so that they can stay after school, or bring them in the morning. A bus that would pick up any interested kid. So they could pick up all students so they could come in the mornings. I think transportation is a big area for us here.

For Matthew, this is a situation where he is willing to do more and willing to put in more time for the sake of the students. Despite high demands on his time, he wants to offer his students further opportunities. The students, he notes, are excited to participate and their parents would also love for them to attend. For a number of reasons, students are not able to get to the school rehearsals.

The district where both Amy and Matthew work hosts two select honor choir events throughout the year. Each teacher in the district is asked to select talented students for participation in these events. Amy and Matthew approach these constraints differently. In the quote below, Amy actually refers to Matthew in describing how transportation influences which students she chooses for these elite honor choir programs.

I know that there are also some really great performers at this school who won't get chosen simply because they won't ever be able to show up to any of these rehearsals! I think about another music teacher who is in my district. Actually, he's the one that took the Northfield elementary position, and he will participate in these programs, but he will only bring about three kids, and he actually drives them himself. So I think that's really to be applauded. But at the same time, he can only take three. So it's just, it's interesting the way that the district has kind of set us up for...for some failure in that sense. There is more that I can do though. It makes me feel guilty that I've kind of set up these programs, they're participating in them and really I'm not able to choose children strictly based on their talent.

Thus, Matthew opts to choose three students who he feels will most benefit from the event. Amy opts to include more students, bringing the most students of any school in the district. At the same time, she admits that she chooses students who she knows will have transportation to attend the rehearsals and concert, thus excluding several talented kids she feels are deserving of the opportunity.

### **Geographic Isolation in Schools.**

A common problem of participants who teach in traditional school settings is geographic isolation within the school building. Matthew, Sasha, Amy, and Dean all have classrooms that

are geographically separated from non-arts classrooms. In fact, Sasha's school is an open campus, and she is located in a completely separate building. Like Dean and Amy, she is positioned near other 'specials' classrooms such as physical education, art, and technology. Dean's large converted classroom, on the other hand, is centrally located, but the entrance is on a hall with few other classrooms. Furthermore, Dean is not geographically close to other arts teachers or specialists. All four of the participants described so far in this section noted that they found other elective teachers (also referred to as *specialists* or members of the *enhancement team*) to be allies in their schools. They face similar challenges, support each other, and are able to discuss concerns. Participants did not describe this same type of camaraderie with classroom teachers. In fact, due to the isolation of their classrooms, they rarely even *see* non-specialist teachers during the school day. For Amy and Sasha, students usually arrive at their classes under the supervision of a teaching assistant rather than the teacher, further distancing them from both the action and discourse of the larger school community.

### **Conceptual Constraints**

#### **Neoliberal agendas for education.**

Data collection for this study took place throughout the summer and fall of 2014, only four years after the official launch of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This atmosphere of high stakes testing and accountability is part of a neoliberal educational agenda that promotes a model of curricular standardization in the name of increasing performance on internationally benchmarked assessments (Zhao, 2012). Centering math, literacy, and science as core (read: tested) subjects serves to officially relegate music to subordinate status in the curriculum. This status is not a new phenomenon, but the high-pressure atmosphere created by such initiatives as the No Child Left Behind act of 2001 and the CCSS have effectively made this

subordinated status official and sanctioned. Instrumental constraints that stem from this agenda include reduced time for instruction and financial resources allocated to music education.

Music education has long been focused on advocacy projects that claim music as central to any well-balanced curriculum. The added pressure of high-stakes testing has heightened the urgency of this advocacy project, as arts programs are reduced or cut in order to reallocate funds to programs that will help students succeed on tests. Often, when music educators are asked to think in terms of activism, they see music as ‘oppressed’ and subordinated within the larger curriculum. This *siege mentality*, detailed by Gould (2012), promotes a “near obsessive focus on advocacy” and may limit the ways that music educators perceive of critique of the field (p. 82). In other words, critiquing the existing discourses of traditional music education may be perceived as an attack on an area of study that is already under siege, rather than a project that will help to promote equity.

### **School as Neutral or Non-Political.**

In tandem with the prevailing neoliberal agenda for education is the widespread myth that schooling is neutral or non-political. Hinchey (2004) outlined the many reasons why schooling is in fact political. She explained that one of the primary reasons for public schooling is to create loyal citizens who will maintain the status quo of capitalism. Thus, students must be taught to follow orders, yield to authority, adopt mainstream values, and be prepared for whatever menial work tasks are necessary “to keep daily life humming” (p. 11). Similarly, the initial aims of music in the public school curriculum in the United States were geared toward “civilizing” immigrants and promoting a “high culture” of music to replace the cultural practices brought from immigrants’ home countries (Gustafson, 2009).



The effect of this discursive myth for teachers and students in schools is that it can prevent educators from engaging in critical pedagogy that questions the status quo. Educators may seek to avoid critical practice for fear of intervention from administrators and parents, and thus not even attempt to address social issues and critique with students. Parents and administrators may also use this narrative of “separation of school and politics” as justification for opposing teacher attempts to engage students in critique. Sasha, for example, invited her students to discuss the lyrics of a popular song. She and Clyde discussed the fallout,

SASHA: And so there was this song that Alicia Keyes put out at the beginning of the year, *We are here* and I thought that the message was appropriate - there were no bad words. But it was addressing some, you know, real issues that were going on not just in the United States, but around the world. I thought, “Hey this is great! I could work on this song with fifth graders and we could look at all these different issues.” But the minute that I brought it up, just because of how powerful it was for it to be communicated that way - they get it really quickly in a song. And it's so succinct, and it addressed so many different things, that the other teachers were like...“You know, let's not do that this year.” And they justified that by saying that one of the lyrics was...

CLYDE: “Let's talk about Gaza.” It didn't say what to think. It didn't say what to say about Gaza (Sasha is laughing). But “Let's talk about Gaza.” right.

Clyde’s school atmosphere, however, is very different. He works in a neighboring county that seems to be more amenable to teacher activism, and his interactions with parents actually encourage him to include politically charged work in his classroom.

Michelle’s experience has even greater opportunity for political activism and social critique, since Kindred specifically includes “promotion of racial and socioeconomic diversity”

as a pillar of their mission statement. Their website also states that the educators at Kindred embark upon their mission with “an eye to the future of our village” implying their commitment to activism that promotes the well-being of all involved. In her professional practice, then, Michelle has specifically sought out a school environment that acknowledges schooling as political work, and works to help students build critical consciousness. Thus, the leadership at Kindred recognizes the myth of schooling as neutral, but actively resists the notion in their mission and day-to-day work. Lee, on the other hand, has been dressed down for combining his political work with his work for the center. Because his personal convictions about coal-mining conflict with the political commitments of the board, he does not feel comfortable enough to explicitly discuss his activist positions in the schools where he teaches. Thus, the discourse of schooling as neutral or non-political can constrain music education in terms of pedagogical choices, and assumes that music educators will leave their personal and political commitments aside when they enter the classroom.

### **Western Classical Music.**

Historically, music education in American schools has centered on the Western European classical tradition of music. Under this paradigm, music literacy is privileged over *doing* or participation in music (Elliot, 1995). Early training in music reading, ear training, and performance practice are aimed at creating solo or ensemble performers in the Western Classical tradition. As an unspoken component of this, students are trained to believe that musical practice involves very little movement, in the case of singing, or very specific movement in the case of instrumental performance. This also creates specific “types” of musical citizens and labels them as good (compliant), or bad (non-compliant) based on their assimilation of performance etiquette and practice (Gustafson, 2009). Janice resists this tradition completely through TRIUMPH, re-

organizing her practice based on an African Diasporic aesthetic situated in African values. Through this re-imagining of musical space, she seeks to promote positive racial identity of her African American students. Lee also seeks to promote positive identity of his students in relation to their heritage mountain culture. He still works within the frame of Western music, yet he resists the classical framework, opting instead to emphasize folk heritage music.

Aside from imposing limitations for appropriate practice, the tradition and aesthetic of Western Classical Music is overwhelmingly present in music teacher preparation program. This serves to limit curricular imagination of teachers who complete dominant pathways to music education teaching and licensure, and dictates a specific type of musical practice as a singular viable option. In simpler terms, music teachers are trained in a very specific mode of instruction that leaves little room for deviation. Nearly all participants in this study emphasized movement and play as integral to an inclusive, participatory music classroom. Amy, Dean, Sasha, and Matthew all believed that engaging students in playing instruments is one way that students can significantly engage in *doing* music. Amy, Sasha, and Matthew all use Orff-style mallet instruments to perform and improvise original musical creations. Matthew's students also have the opportunity to play a variety of stringed instruments through MusicKids, and he enjoys letting them "jam" and improvise in the mornings before school begins. He feels that students take pride in their ability to play these instruments, and thus engage in more enthusiastically in music practice.

Another consideration for music education regarding the Western Classical tradition of music is the valuing and de-valuing of specific styles and genres of music. Even when attempts are made to include multicultural repertoire selections, these are often still approached using the pedagogy and technique of Western Classical styles. Music that is born from oral traditions is

often transcribed and taught with a ‘notes first’ approach where students must read complicated rhythmic and melodic patterns that would be easier and more authentically learned through call-and-response. Furthermore, there is significant danger of appropriation when approaching the music of cultures that have not traditionally been included in the music curriculum.

### **Race, Privilege, and Consciousness.**

It is apparent from the stories shared by participants, that each has had to acknowledge dimensions of structural inequity at different points in their lives. For this study, this is particularly visible in participant experiences with race, racial identity, and racism. Without veering too far into staged theories of racial identity (Helms, 1990), it is important to note that music teachers come to the profession with varied experiences of race, and thus, varying levels of critical awareness. I note this, not only to point out that White teachers may not see their race, but also to acknowledge the experience of people of color who “tend to bring richer experiences and perspectives to multicultural teaching than do most white students, who dominate numerically” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 94). On top of this, music educators embark on their professional journey having experienced and understood various *dimensions* of race, ethnicity, and cultural positionalities.

Amy and Dean, who both identify as White and are of similar age, acknowledge a “sheltered” upbringing. They both began to see the world through a more critical lens in young adulthood, and are still working to understand how their racial identity informs their work with students in music education. Dean has been challenged to examine his White racial identity through his work with the leadership group, as well as through his own efforts to learn more about the issues that arise in the schools in which he teaches. Perhaps because of his background and talent in research, Dean has taken it upon himself to find articles and books on race and

poverty that can inform his practice. As discussed in Chapter 11, Amy is challenged to examine the world through a critical lens at church, where her pastor asks congregants to identify and name oppressive ideologies. In her classroom, Amy is reflexive about her own experience as a precocious young student.

[W]hen you have the little White girl who raises her hand and always knows all the answers - if you keep on calling on that person, and you keep on using them as an example, I feel like it starts to shift. The kids kind of can notice where their 'place' is in line and I don't think that's right. I don't want to give any kid an idea that "You are better than this other kid." You know? So any way I can, I'm trying to turn the tables. And that was me! I was that little White girl. I'm trying to be more conscious of that, and it was not in my consciousness even in Texas teaching, because it was never - I wasn't raised to be conscious of that.

Lee, the only other White participant, is significantly older than Dean and Amy, and has had more experiences that have pushed him to see structural inequality. He has also done a significant amount of training with activist organizations over the years, which have served to expand his critical awareness of racism and poverty.

In my own experience, I did not consider my racial identity until my first teaching placement at the age of twenty-four. The reality that a fourteen-year-old African American student opened my eyes to the presence of racism in music education speaks to the idea that students of color develop awareness of racist ideology long before their White peers. Sasha, for example, explained that her identity as an African American has informed her experience from a very early age.

I was an exceptional student in school, but I feel like I was what they call a "token kid." I was the Black student that they put in the classes so that they could say that there was a Black kid that was in the classes. My school was pretty diverse. But when you went to the classroom, my classroom did not look like my neighborhood. And so the kids that I was in my neighborhood with, even though we went to the same school, I didn't see them during the school day in class. So I faced a lot of animosity from kids, from other students, from Black students. I wasn't necessarily a part of the culture, and I wasn't included with the kids that I was going into classes with. It didn't affect me too negatively in that I had so much support around me from home and from my community; I was surrounded with support. So it didn't affect me negatively, in that sense, as far as my self-worth was concerned. But it was very difficult socially to navigate through all of that.

Sasha's early awareness of racism in her school and the effects that it had on her relationship with peers and teachers inform her approach toward social justice in her own classroom. Janice also alluded to the violent racialized atmosphere of her childhood hometown in the 1960s and described how music helped her to cope.

For many of the participants, early adulthood and college seem to be important learning moments, where they start to explore new contexts and locales. Sasha and Michelle, both opted to attend an Historically Black College or University (HBCU). In these settings, both women found an atmosphere that promoted and valued social consciousness, activism, and engagement. Additionally, they found inspiration and a feeling of well being in a community of students who shared some dimension of their own personal experience. Matthew, on the other hand, began to realize in college that there were very few people who "looked like him" in the field that he pursued. This recognition of the absence of people of color in university music programs is

indicative of discursive narratives and practices that serve to exclude people of color from the field.

Koza (2008) drew from personal observations working within a university music education program to theorize about a potential career tracking system that exists in the field of music education that privileges and commodifies certain identities – namely middle class White identities. She posited that the process of music admissions, which relies heavily on private study of classical repertoire and technique as prerequisite, represents a “construction of musical difference” that disadvantages students who cannot afford prior study as well as those who study musical styles outside of the Western Classical tradition. Undergraduate audition requirements for music education programs state clearly that students must be proficient in the classical tradition, sometimes blatantly stating that other musical styles such as jazz or gospel are unacceptable. Koza stated that these requirements, together, represent a social funding of race in the field of music education that materializes whiteness. This is of particular interest in considering how limited entry to the field may serve to exclude or de-value the experiences of people of color.

To summarize, the participants in this student experience a number of instrumental and conceptual constraints that limit their ability to realize a full vision of equitable and inclusive practice. In the face of constraints, however, it is clear that participants maintain some degree of agency. In Chapter 13, I discuss the space between these possibilities and constraints – a field of practice where the participants make agentic moves toward more socially just music education practice.

## Chapter 13:

### Agency in the Face of Constraints and The Cultural World of Music Education

In this study, I have presented a series of individual participant *possibilities* that are overlaid with a set of *constraints* that limit the educator's ability to practice socially just pedagogy. There is variation apparent in the way that participants engage with and seek to accept or resist these constraints. Thus, there exists a dynamic space of agency betwixt and between these possibilities and constraints, where music educators make moves to engage in socially just practice. Agency is defined by Holland and Lachicotte (in press) as "an emergent property of the coming together of history-in-person with a historically specific set of institutions and practices" as well as "a socioculturally mediated capacity of an actor to make a difference, to have effects *in*, if not *on*, a social world" (p. 2). For this study, participants' conceptions of agency regarding music education are tied to their personal identities and experiences; they derive cultural resources for activism and resistance through construction of their personal or intimate identities (Holland & Lachicotte, in press). In other words, participants' "intimate identities (senses of self) are crucial for organizing and mediating motivations and intentionality, for controlling and managing one's own behavior, and so, for having agency as an actor in the particular cultural world" (p. 6).

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) described figured worlds as fields of practice.

[Figured worlds] are complexes of meaning and action that are populated by a set of agents who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state as moved by



a specific set of forces. These cultural worlds – performed as they are by communities of practice against a horizon of meaning for interpreting acts, actors, and motivations become basic contexts for the agency of those who engage with them. (Holland and Lachicotte, in press, p. 6)

In this study, participants described the geography and structure of the figured world of music education. These descriptions included both instrumental and conceptual constraints, as well as discourses of success within the field. Each participant provided an outline of their daily practice that served to reinforce this heavily inscribed “horizon of meaning” by which their actions can be interpreted. Some of the participants consciously resist the constraints of this cultural world, rendering insider interpretations of their actions as dissonant with established norms and discourses in music education. Others attempted to remain legible against the “horizon of meaning” by which music educators are recognized. The possibilities described by participants outline a series of options for disruption and resistance when faced with structural and discursive constraints. Practice theory is particularly salient here, in that “as [practice theory] has evolved, [it] has come to recognize that structures not only constrain action, but at the same time enable agency, with the result that neither wholly docile subjects, nor unchanging structures are likely” (p. 2). For this study, participants described their agentic practice of music education as situated at the intersection of both possibility and constraint. A particular example of this is where Amy’s intense time limitations make it impossible for her to deliver the standard curriculum, and she must “let go” of that practice narrative in order for she and her students to experience an engaging and inclusive musical moments. Thus, the constraint enables Amy to see alternative options for music teaching.

Individuals engage differently in cultural worlds based on their own life experiences, as well as their membership or participation in other cultural worlds. There is no singular conception of a *socially just music educator* and, in considering cross-cultural comparisons of agentic practice, one must be careful not to obscure “the divers[ity], dynamism, contestation and multiple uses of collective notions of agency” that are present in cultures (Holland and Lachicotte, in press, p. 4). Further illustrating this point, Holland and Lachicotte (in press) referred to Ortner (2006), “Those who are dominated are likely to have their own projects and communities of practices, often set up on the ‘margins of power,’ which may lead them to orient differently to their domination, to cultivate resistance, activisms, and movements” (Holland and Lachicotte, in press, p. 8). As noted in Chapter 12, the five African American participants in this study did seem to take up different orientations toward their practice than the three White participants, perhaps *because* of their minoritized positions. In the musical life histories of Sasha, Clyde, Michelle, Matthew, and Janice it is clear that they were aware of systemic oppression and experienced it in their own lives at an earlier age than Amy, Dean, and Lee.

Ortner (2006) also suggested that agency has two *fields of meaning*: intentionality and power. Similarly, Campbell (2009) posited two types of agency including “the actor’s ability to initiate and maintain a program of action” and “an actor’s ability to act independently of the constraining power of social structure” (p. 407). Holland and Lachicotte (in press) pointed out, “while the first type is important to action within structures as well as without or against structures, it does not logically entail the second” (p. 9). This point is illustrated in that Amy and Dean see their work in social justice as a “program of action” that must function within the constrained cultural world of traditional music education. In a sense, their current level of critique stops short of recognizing conceptual constraints. Thus, recognizing the need for

socially just aims in music education does not necessarily entail recognizing hegemonic discourses and oppressive ideologies. This is not to say, however, that Amy and Dean will remain at this moment of understanding. In fact, both seem to be at a critical and reflexive learning juncture that could serve to expand their awareness of such discourses and ideologies. In contrast, Matthew's practice moves beyond intentionality to recognize that he is claiming both space and power in music education simply through his presence as an African American man. He also actively resists field-specific success narratives that imply that he should "move up" to more elite jobs due to his success at Northview. Sasha and Clyde feel that they can do more as a team; their agency would increase through their collective pursuit of socially just aims in visual art and music. They both agree, however, that they will likely get "out of schools" before they are able to work in the same school. Despite opportunities for limited agentic practice – what Holland and Lachicotte (in press) describe as *everyday agency* - the constraints presented by working in schools do not afford them the possibility of *transformative agency* or the capacity to change worlds (p.7).

Based on the work of Bourdieu, Holland and Lachicotte noted that symbolic power relations exist within figured worlds and serve to mediate agency.

[Symbolic power relations] operate in an ever-present micropolitics, positioning self vis-à-vis other in a negotiation for respect and recognition of one's symbolic capital – roughly one's collectively valued qualities, and thus of one's right to speak and be heard, to act and have one's actions be respected (in press, p. 7).

Within a field as strongly situated in tradition as music education, there are qualities, discourses, and actions that are hailed as meaningful and desirable. These micropolitics render those who resist a singular music educator *habitus*, for any number of reasons, as opponents of a larger

advocacy project that seeks to maintain or expand the place of music in school curriculum (Gould, 2012). The valued qualities of social justice educators are not necessarily recognized as valuable qualities within music education. Using an example from this study, critical consciousness is not a quality that is recognized as valuable for music educators. In fact, consciousness may be counter to the prevailing project of separating personal from professional identity in the field. It may be useful then to identify music education as an institution with a prevailing ideology.

Questions of power are usually salient when the actor's capacity is either greatly enhanced or, more common, disproportionately limited by sociohistorical institutions and ideologies that have accrued through political struggle over many years. The story of agency under such circumstances is often more about the weight of the institutions and reactive responses of skillful non-compliance. (Holland and Lachicotte, in press, p. 10)

Music educators, then, may see promise in working from the margins of music education, refusing to enter the field like Lee, or in re-imagining music and educational practice to specifically engage students and teachers in cultural critique and uplift as Michelle and Janice have done.

To summarize, each of the participants in this study makes agentic moves toward socially just practice of music education. Some seek to resist from within, working to mediate and resist constraints while still engaging a largely traditional atmosphere of schooling and music education. Others seek to create musical experiences for students outside the school setting through creation of independent organizations and programs, in an attempt to work outside of constraints present in that cultural world. Some specifically seek to re-claim music and artistic work as part of broader cultural history and practice. Personal experiences of participants, and

the resulting engagement in critique, mediate the degree to which they seek to resist or escape instrumental and conceptual constraints. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, focusing on participants' stories through personal narrative inquiry revealed the complex social dynamics of a commitment to social justice within the cultural world of music education (Maynes et al., 2008). These findings bear a number of implications for the field of music teacher education, and present a number of potential directions for future research, which will be described in the following sections.

### **Implications for Music Teacher Education**

The overall aim of this research was to study possibilities for more socially just practice in the field of music education. In order to train and mentor music educators that will be willing to take up such a task, there are several recommendations to be made for both university music teacher training programs, as well for practicing music educators. If pre-service music teachers receive training that presents a realistic view of both constraints and possibility in their future careers, they may be more likely to engage in critical practice. First, music teachers need contextually specific coursework on the social foundations of music education, and training in critical pedagogies situated in music education settings. In these courses, pre-service teachers could have the opportunity to explore their autobiographies in terms of both music *and* schooling. Through this exercise, they could situate their own experiences within hegemonic discourses, thus working toward a more critically conscious awareness of themselves and the politicized context of schooling. For student teaching practica, music education faculty could strategically select mentor teachers who model expansive and equitable visions of music education practice, where their personal identities are centered within professional practice. Both mentor teachers and university professors should consider how the valued dispositions and skills in music

education must shift to include social critique, and incorporation of student interests. Additionally, there must be shift in the types of curriculum and pedagogy that are valued as appropriate and meaningful. Each of these will be discussed in further detail below.

### **Social Foundations of Music Education.**

In order to help develop critical consciousness in pre-service music teachers, university preparations should, and often do, include a course in social foundations of education, or social justice in education. In these courses, students are asked to examine the historical purposes of schooling, and encouraged to recognize the hegemonic structures and discourses that contribute to systemic inequity. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), these courses are often situated outside of music departments, and pre-service teachers struggle to make explicit connections to music education contexts. Also, the position of such courses outside of the music program causes students to view the objectives presented by instructors as “tangential to the enterprise” of music education (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 38). Thus, examination of social justice issues is assigned lessened importance, especially in the face of urgings to perfect music performance technique through endless practice.

Gustafson (2009) pointed out that the initial purpose of school music was politically charged, and aimed at creating a homogenous “civilized” culture at a time of mass immigration. Pre-service music teachers must be challenged to recognize that music, in the context of schooling, is inherently political. Locating and contextualizing social foundations within music programs would model for students the idea that critique, activism, and inclusive practice have a place at the very center of music education practice. Furthermore, such courses can incorporate autobiographical examination as a component, so that students can view their own music and schooling experiences through the lens of social critique.

### **Autobiography.**

In centering identity and personal experience as vital to developing aims toward equity and social justice in music education, it will be necessary to allow pre-service teachers to examine their own autobiographies. Boyd, LaGarry, and Cain (2015) highlighted autobiographical work as integral to social foundations and social justice course objectives.

Educational autobiographies give pre-service teachers an opportunity to begin examining their assumptions about knowledge and how they believe it to be constructed. Describing the what, why, and how of past schooling experiences may help them to consider how this will affect future interactions with students who may experience schooling from different perspectives and positions. (Boyd, LaGarry, Cain, 2015, p. 6)

This examination is especially important in light of the varying early experiences and assumptions about music described by participants in this study. Furthermore, pre-service music teachers must have the opportunity to situate their own experiences within the larger discourses and systems that instructors work to reveal in social foundations courses.

### **Mentorship.**

In preparing critical music educators, it will be vital for pre-service music teachers to have examples and models of what music education with socially just aims can look like. First glimpses at the ‘professional’ realm of music education should, then, invite pre-service music teachers into spaces where such work is being done. Using Isbell’s (2008) terminology, secondary socialization should highlight expansive music education possibilities – both in school programs and in programs like TRIUMPH that take place outside of schools. Mentor teachers like the participants in this study should be strategically selected as models of social justice pedagogy, so that pre-service teachers are apprenticed into such practices, and experience music

education through a critical perspective prior to beginning their teaching careers. It may also be worthwhile to create practica options where students can apprentice in established organizations such as TRIUMPH and MusicKids, as well as in more traditional school settings. This would serve a dual purpose of engaging pre-service music educators with organizations that have critical aims, and also would provide extra assistance for programs and initiatives that are constantly seeking to expand funding.

### **Shift in Valued Dispositions.**

Gustafson (2009) described the oppressive tone of music classrooms and the engrained dispositions that music educators often perpetuate including control, order, and pushing for perfection. These dispositions together often create a musical space where students are either *exactly* right or else they are wrong. This binary serves to create legible music citizens who embody such concepts as a “good ear,” and statue-like non-moving posture (Gustafson, 2009). Nearly all participants in this study highlighted the importance of movement and dance as a component of socially just music education. Music teacher educators must be explicit in stating and promoting a range of valuable dispositions for equitable music education practice. Some of these dispositions include: a critical stance toward the traditional aims of schooling and music education; a desire to lift up and engage students through culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy that is based on student interests; the willingness to be flexible in terms of musical exploration; creativity in lesson planning; and a willingness to “let go” of power and allow students to lead in the classroom.

### **Shift in Valued Curriculum and Pedagogy.**

While music educators often pride themselves and the field as being committed to multicultural music, there still exists a lack of critical engagement with pedagogical materials



and curricular content. The intense focus on literacy and ear-training as the most important components of music education limits curricular options, and excludes musical practice stemming from oral traditions. As Elliot (1995) proposed, a sole focus on musical literacy pushes aside the cultural practice of *doing* music, and engaging in music-making. Rather than attempting to standardize music education, it will be helpful to consider pathways to establishing unique music programs and curricula that highlight a variety of possibilities for musical practice. There have recently been moves in the field promote larger emphasis on creating music through improvisation and composition. Such moves are promising, and demonstrate the recognition that *sole* emphasis on literacy and performance practice may not be viable for the field of music education in the long run. In order to support such a shift in curricular and pedagogical emphasis, it will be necessary to create new resources for music educators, and to provide collaborative learning and development opportunities for those already in practice.

### **Future Research Directions**

This research was approached as first step into examining how the personal identities of music educators may influence and inform their professional practice in service of social justice aims. Research into diverse primary socialization experiences, and personal identity of music teachers in general has largely been absent from the music education literature. The findings of this study indicate that the participants made agentic moves to promote socially just aims in their classrooms that were based on personal experiences that revealed systemic injustice. A potential direction for future research in this area will be to take the research beyond narrative, while still recognizing personal narrative and autobiographies as foundational to the research questions at hand. It will be worthwhile to continue to pursue research that investigates both the *identities* and *situated practice* of music educators who make agentic moves toward socially just practice. In

order to do this, researchers should observe these teachers in practice as they interact with students, parents, administrators, and colleagues. It will also be vital to examine critical, culturally relevant pedagogy in music classrooms that goes beyond multicultural repertoire choices.

Following the implications for music teacher education previously discussed in this chapter, there would be opportunity to design research that follows the path of pre-service teachers through apprenticeship and mentoring in purposefully selected practicum placements. Specifically, this research could examine how mentor teachers scaffold socially just pedagogical aims for their student teachers, and how those student teachers engage with or resist such discourses in their novice practice. Music education training programs at the university level are also necessary fields of future study. Just as music educators who identified as committed to socially just aims were selected for this study, it may be worthwhile to examine music teacher education programs that claim to promote socially just aims. Such programs may include those that differ from the traditional conservatory-style pedagogies, those that train pre-service teachers in styles outside of the Western Classical tradition such as popular music or jazz, or those that have historically produced educators who pursue socially just aims in their music education practice. Also of particular interest are music education programs situated in HBCUs, which have traditionally promoted activism, and engagement in critique of social inequity.

Researchers must be willing to envision music education as field that is much broader than it has traditionally been defined. This expanded view can help ensure that future research will include artists, activists, elders, and community members as knowledgeable music facilitators, mentors, and educators. Furthermore, this would allow researchers to study the cultural *worlds* of music, rather than just the singular rarefied cultural world of music education

that is described and resisted by participants in this study. Only through analytic inclusion of multiple musical modes, histories, and aesthetics will researchers be able to see that musical life and music education have become two very separate ventures.

We must also look to different loci to examine identity construction and socialization experiences, moving beyond conceptions of professional socialization that obscure and devalue inclusion of personal identity. In light of Koza's (2008) claims that a social funding of race, along with other gatekeeping technologies, serves to create homogenous cohorts of university music students, it follows that students in these cohorts would logically have similar primary socialization experiences. If one looks outside of university students to teachers in practice, it becomes clear that there is great diversity in primary socialization and experience with music, and thus significantly different ways that music educators take up social justice as a vital piece of music education. Additionally, it is necessary to take up further conceptual research in order to examine the political projects have kept the discourse of social justice in music education out of mainstream research and scholarship in the United States, while this topic has received significant attention in Canada (Gould, 2012), Britain (Green, 2008; Small, 1998) and Australia (Ballantyne & Mills, 2008).

## **Summary**

In the TFUMM report released by the College Music Association, previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the authors spoke of failure to change as a stumbling block for progress in music education.

Despite repeated calls for change to assure the relevance of curricular content and skill development to music outside the academy, the academy has remained isolated, resistant to change, and too frequently regressive rather than progressive in its approach to

undergraduate education. While surface change has occurred to some extent through additive means, (i.e., simply providing more courses, more requirements, and more elective opportunities), fundamental changes in priorities, values, perspectives, and implementation have not occurred. (TFUMM, 2014, p. 2)

Based on this observation, the TFUMM described their position in recommending progressive foundational change in the field.

TFUMM takes the position that improvisation and composition provide a stronger basis for education musicians today than the prevailing model of training performers in the interpretation of older works...TFUMM takes the position that, in a global society, students must experience, through study and direct participation, music of diverse cultures, generations, and social contexts, and that the primary locus for cultivation of a genuine, cross-cultural musical and social awareness is the infusion of diverse influences in the creative artistic voice. (p. 2-3)

The aims of this manifesto are laudable, and push music teacher educators at the university level to examine their own foundational assumptions about music education. However, the reasoning for progressive change seems to be largely grounded in the field remaining viable in a global economy. This may be a strategic political move on the part of authors, appealing to the siege mentality described by Gould (2012) by stating that the field may become defunct if the recommendations of TFUMM are not taken up. A glaring omission in the TFUMM manifesto, is the influence that music teacher identity may have in inspiring teachers to make agentic moves that claim music education as an inclusive, participatory space. There is potential for music teachers, such as those who participated in this study, to draw from lived

experiences in to make contributions to “broader educational and societal issues” (TFUMM, p. 10).

Underlying each of the implications and research directions listed in this chapter is the necessity of a major paradigmatic shift in the aims of music education, similar to the progressive change advocated by the TFUMM. Numerous scholars have described the need for such a shift, with participation and engagement at the center of such critiques (Abril, 2013; Allsup, 2003; Allsup & Shieh, 2012; Alperson, 1994; Bowman, 1994; Elliot, 1995; Gould, 2012; Gustafson, 2009; Jorgensen, 2002, 2003, Regelski, 1998). For participants in this study, the salient questions surrounding this shift involved asking *who* could possibly participate and be engaged more in music classrooms. *Who* must be invited into musical spaces that where they have not been welcomed before? *Whose* musical cultures are subjugated, appropriated, and denied in traditional music education? Participants also considered a range of possibilities for *how* to engage students in expansive participatory options and critique of social systems through music. These possibilities include storytelling, practicing and modeling balance for students, letting go of traditional success narratives, openness to revelation and evolution, claiming space for students and teachers of color in the field, re-envisioning the aesthetics and values of music education, and helping students to build critical consciousness in the service of movement forward. Participants also identified a series of instrumental constraints, which stem from conceptual constraints that overlay their practice in music education. The degree to which each participant resists or desires to resist these constraints is grounded in their positional identities and life experiences. In music education, these very identities have traditionally been pushed aside in favor of the development of professional music educator identity. The music educators in this study incorporate socially just aims in their classrooms through agentic moves that are enabled

*because* of their personal experiences and identities. This is an area that is rich with potential, and deserves further study in service of the field of music education incorporating more socially just aims and practices.

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