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## “You Got To Know Us”: A Hopeful Model for Music Education in Urban Schools

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### Abstract

*Urban schools, and the students and teachers within, are often characterized by a metanarrative of deficit and crisis, causing the complex realities of urban education to remain unclear behind a wall of assumptions and stereotypes. Within music education, urban schools have received limited but increasing attention from researchers. However, voices from practitioners are often missing from this dialogue, and the extant scholarly dialogue has had a very limited effect on music teacher education. In this article, five music educators with a combined thirty years of experience in urban schools examine aspects of their experiences in the light of critical pedagogy in an attempt to disrupt the metanarrative of deficit, crisis, and decline that continues to surround urban music education. By promoting the lived-stories of successful urban music students, teachers, and programs, the authors hope to situate urban music education as a site of renewal, reform, and meaningful learning. This paper emerged from a panel discussion regarding promising practices in secondary general music with urban youth that took place at the New Directions in Music Education conference held at Michigan State University in October of 2011.*

*Keywords:* urban education, urban music education, teacher education, critical pedagogy

In the United States, the contemporary public discourse about education has increasingly centered on a deficit or crisis model, arguably beginning with Sputnik<sup>1</sup> and culminating in the current policy environment shaped by factors such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere is this perception of deficit, crisis, and decline more prevalent than in discussions surrounding urban public schools—institutions that have become increasingly and disproportionately segregated (or re-segregated) by class and race (Fruchter, 2007). This deficit-centered view of urban public schools has become the dominant metanarrative accepted by many people and furthered by politicians and policymakers—a metanarrative that views urban schools predominantly in terms of pathology, stagnation, and decline. In this view, urban public school teachers are viewed as lazy, incompetent, unionized hacks or as glorified martyrs (Moore, 2007) and “white knights” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 123) who come to save urban public students from their disadvantaged surroundings but rarely stay very long. Urban youth and the teachers who serve them remain largely misrepresented, misunderstood, and invisible to many Americans behind a wall of assumptions and stereotypes, both negative and positive, that fail to express the complex realities that make up urban public education.

Within music education, urban schools have attracted increased attention recently, including a two-volume book set (Frierson-Campbell, 2006) that begins with a comprehensive overview of the literature on urban music education to date. Despite the gradual flowering of interest among music education scholars, it is still true that to date, “the extant literature provides a limited understanding of an extremely dynamic teaching context” (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 230).

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<sup>1</sup> In 1957, the Soviet Union successfully launched the first man-made satellite into orbit. The American response to this included much agonizing over the quality of our educational system, particularly in terms of math and science.

<sup>2</sup> NCLB was the 2001 reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB led to a dramatic expansion of standardized testing in American public schools, the creation of statewide systems to sort and rate schools, and sanctions against schools failing to make “adequate yearly progress” in improving student scores on standardized tests. Race to the Top is a 2009 program that, while offering states some increased flexibility, largely continued the policies of NCLB.

Further, what scholarship there is does not seem to have affected teacher training; urban teachers report they feel unprepared by their university training to teach in high minority, low socioeconomic status urban schools (Harris, 2009). The profession at large does not often hear the voice of music educators in urban schools, even though “the music teachers who deal with the realities of urban schooling on a daily basis are in many ways the experts” (Frierson-Campbell, 2006, p. xiv).

The current metanarrative regarding urban schools has clearly influenced music education. Many music educators still view programs in urban schools through a deficit model when compared to the suburban experience that, consciously or unconsciously, they see as normative. They see significant factors such as unusually large or small classes, scarcity of parent volunteers, ensembles that may not compete or travel, and ensembles that may not match the dominant pattern of instrumentation, genre, or style; often they judge these programs, implicitly or explicitly, as deficient. Clearly, teachers in urban schools face many significant challenges, which might also include a lack of resources, sometimes chaotic school climates, a student body much more likely to struggle with the effects of poverty (Fruchter, 2007), and administrators and policymakers who focus on tested subjects.

However, focusing only on these challenges gives an incomplete view, one not necessarily useful for the profession. Even as exponents of critical pedagogy bewail music educators’ resistance to change (Schmidt, 2005), urban schools can and should lead the way in new and revitalized approaches to music for all learners. Best practices within urban schools and the transformational journey we found necessary as teachers seeking to achieve success in such contexts can and should serve as a model for the profession at large.

This paper emerged from a panel discussion regarding promising practices in secondary general music with urban youth that took place at the New Directions in Music Education conference held at Michigan State University in October of 2011. Our goal was to share our stories in order to disrupt the metanarrative of deficit and decline that continues to surround music teaching and learning in urban environments. As Sandra Stauffer (2012) charged at MayDay Colloquium 24:

If we want change, we need to start telling different stories. We would like to blame our reticence to change, to tell a different story on someone else—NASM, the state accrediting agency, the curriculum document, the administrators, the teachers—just about anyone but ourselves. If we want a different story, we need to tell the hundred stories of teachers who have changed. We have a professional responsibility to help them know that they are not alone, and to help them make *these* stories of music education present in the educational imaginary. Finally, we work with beginning teachers, and we worry about teacher identities. We tell them a story...one that does not serve them well. A story that they will be prepared. Maybe we should tell stories of self-making, of re-making and replacing ourselves. Of preparation as a constantly evolving teacher story. Maybe then transformation can be the norm. (p. 11)

Inspired by Stauffer's (2012) provocation above, we offer our stories "of self-making, of re-making and replacing ourselves" (p. 11) in order to develop a new narrative—one of transformation of self, classroom, and field that emerged from our 30 collective years of successful experience teaching in urban environments. Hope for a better way can come from practitioners, whose "optimism is not grounded in a facile naïveté that raises expectations disconnected from reality" (Kincheloe, Hayes, Rose, & Anderson, 2006, p. xvii).

When each of us first began teaching music in urban settings, we quickly had to shed what Regelski (2005) called "the pedagogy and curricular assumptions of the conservatory paradigm of musical training" (p. 24) in order to "use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse cultures to make learning more appropriate and effective for urban students" (Frierson-Campbell, 2006, p. xiv). Largely through intuition and trial and error, we searched for new and improved ways to "reach" our students and arrived at practices that, in many respects, resemble the principles of critical pedagogy in education (Apple, 1982; Freire,

1970; Giroux, 1997; Illich, 1971; Lamb, 1996; McLaren, 1994, 1999) and music education (Abrahams 2004, 2005; Allsup, 2004; Colwell, 2005; Regelski, 1998, 2004, 2005; Schmidt, 2005). More specifically, our individual planning processes came to resemble Abrahams' (2005) four questions:

When planning instruction, critical pedagogues, like all excellent teachers, ask four questions: Who am I? Who are my students? What might they become? What might we become together? Clearly, there are no pat answers. In the context of their own teaching situations, teachers will answer them differently. (p. 10)

In this paper, we use examples from our own classrooms and our own journeys to explore key principles of critical pedagogy in terms of these four questions and posit implications for teacher training. Thus, we use our “marginal” status as urban music educators, as Benedict (2007) urges, as a means to critique prevailing assumptions and paradigms. We strive to disrupt the metanarrative of crisis, scarcity, and decline that defines teaching music in urban settings so we may recast urban music education as fertile ground for transformation, experimentation, and renewal.

### **Who Am I?**

The question “Who am I?” solicits different answers in different contexts. According to Turino (2008), self and identity are not the same. Self is the overarching term, while “identity involves the *partial* selection of habits and attributes used to represent oneself to oneself and to others by oneself and by others; the emphasis on certain habits and traits is relative to specific situations” (Turino, 2008, p. 95). Thus, identity is fluid and contextual—shaped by the people, places, and situations in which we move. Many studies have focused on the formation of a “music teacher identity” in preservice teachers (Benyon, 1998; Bernard, 2006; Brewer, 2010; Conway, Eros, Pellegrino, & West, 2010; Haston & Russell 2011; Isbell, 2008; MacArthur,

2005; Ryan, 2010), and some have focused on identity development among in-service teachers (Bernard, 2004; Eyre, 2009; Frierson-Campbell, 2004; Russell, 2012; Scheib, 2006).

The question of identity may become particularly acute for beginning teachers in urban schools, since many teachers come from middle class backgrounds, have limited experience with people of other races or ethnic groups, and have what Burdell (2006) considered limited understanding of their position and its privileges. Martin (2005) pointed out that:

There is evidence to suggest that many teacher-education students regard their positionalities as fixed and normative. As primarily middle class, heterosexual women from European–American backgrounds, teacher–education students are rarely given opportunities to investigate these positionalities.... students must acknowledge that we are all raced, classed, and gendered, and that these identities are relational, complex and fluid. (p. 9)

Successful teachers of urban students come to understand this and discover new positionalities as they interact with their students as each of us did during our work in urban settings. We encountered situations, needs, and challenges that were very different from our previous experiences and from the expectations inherent in our training. Most significantly and early on, we had to experience particularly strong instances of being “othered,” as students tested both our skills and our commitment to them. Nasim, who was used to being very much an “other” in American society as an Iranian, was amused when students repeatedly asked her questions in Spanish on her first day. She realized later that students made sense of her appearance using their prior experience and knowledge—categorizing her as a young Hispanic female, even though she saw herself as a Persian female with Middle Eastern features. The exact eye-opening moment varied for each of us. Matt realized, through hearing of his students’ experiences, that, unlike some of them, he could walk comfortably into any convenience store, movie theater, or school without being judged with suspicion by members of another race or ethnicity. Frank realized, in a class discussion, that he was the only person in the room without a friend or relative involved with the criminal justice system. These revelatory moments, among others, sparked reflection on

the advantages we had enjoyed since birth as well as the assumptions and values that lay behind our training as musicians and music educators. All of these experiences led us to embark on a path of self-deprogramming because of a strong desire to engage our students and meet their needs.

Our efforts at self-deprogramming took a variety of forms, even for the same teacher at different times: focusing on the process and product of music making, working to build a caring community with our students, allowing our students to co-pilot the direction of the class with us, or learning as much about our students as possible. We found that, through accepting our students for who they were, most of our students were extremely accepting of who we were. Knowing very little about the histories and lived experiences of our students, we all came to understand a real need for mechanisms and activities that could: 1) explore the multitude of intersecting identities found in each setting, 2) draw on our individual and collective experiences, and 3) encourage collaboration and creativity. One such mechanism that Brent developed in his first year at an urban middle school was an activity he called “the music identity project” (Talbot, 2012).

In the music identity project, participants used PowerPoint to showcase their preferences and interests in music and to describe how their selections reflected their identities. Students and teachers created top ten lists of their favorite songs. Participants chose one song from their top ten lists that they thought best represented who they were as a person. They then analyzed and shared this song with the group, describing not only important musical features of the song (i.e., lyrics, form, texture, instrumentation, mode, meter, etc.), but were also encouraged to articulate how the piece they chose reflected aspects of their own identities and histories. What resulted from this project and others like it was an eclectic mix of musics and cultures. Engaging with

such activities allowed participants to explore stereotypes as well as to compare and contrast music and personality traits. It provided space for students and teachers to critically reflect on their choices and on their orientations toward a variety of musical genres, systems, and ways of knowing. In addition, it aided the teacher—and all curriculum stakeholders—in developing and providing more meaningful and diverse offerings.

Insights gained from this project led naturally to discussions on how we contribute to and are impacted by nationalism, globalization, marketing, branding, censorship, racism, misogyny, sexism, and homophobia. We were able to examine how our participation as consumers of music is tied to an industry that promotes or exploits and privileges or disadvantages certain types of people(s), their music(s), and their culture(s) in order to guarantee a profit (McCarthy, Hudak, Miklaucic, & Saukko, 1999). We were also able to understand how music and music education serves as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas and ideologies. This ultimately encouraged each of us to explore ways in which we could make listening choices, engage with music, and create music that better represented our histories, values, and identities as teachers, as students, and as a class.

### **Who Are My Students?**

Our students attended classes within a variety of learning environments, ranging from a juvenile temporary detention center to public middle and high schools. They defined themselves as strong, independent characters that were ready to challenge everything. From a young age, many of our students were aware of how members of the dominant, white, middle-class society portrayed blacks<sup>3</sup> and Hispanics on television and in film, and the future difficulty they faced when seeking employment, bank loans, or respect from authorities including teachers, police, and government officials. Despite these challenges unduly given to them, most of our students

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<sup>3</sup> Including African–Americans and others with African ancestry.



came to the classroom eager to learn. They enthusiastically approached us, often saying exactly what they thought and felt. What they explicitly asked of us, more than anything, was to know and show that we cared about them, what they were interested in, and that they would not feel abruptly abandoned by us, as they may have felt in the past due to a high rate of teacher turnover.

As urban music educators, we diligently sought to provide them with a classroom environment that valued students' needs, desires, views, and expectations. This was a learning process for us, one that eventually helped us realize that our students had much to teach us. We had to realize that we were not the only educators in the room—a realization that went against much of our professional preparation as teachers. In the end, we each found that embracing this reality allowed us to establish music classroom environments devoid of the inequalities that students would otherwise expect. We took the time to get to know them and found that this was often reciprocated. Through this relationship, we began to visualize our students differently. Their position in the classroom was not solely a receiver of information, but as “students-teachers” (Freire, 1970, p. 93). Likewise, a dialogical relationship that could “only be achieved through communication” (Freire, 1970, p. 168) was necessary to support our students' eagerness to learn about their favorite music topics, trends, and ideals. Our corresponding development as “teacher-students” (Freire, 1970, p. 93) became clear to us, and we began to see a clearer picture of who our students were.

While this view of the student–teacher relationship can be helpful in many educational contexts, it was vital for success in our schools, because many students simply would not succeed or even comply with basic requests, instructions, procedures, and routines if they felt the teacher did not know them or value their perspective. This is not to say that our classrooms always resembled progressive or democratic classrooms; as we will discuss later, part of our

growth as teachers involved knowing when we had to be in charge and when we needed to get out of the way. A subtle stance between traditional and progressive orientations, similar to that of Delpit's (1995), characterized much of our work.

In considering the development of the student–teacher relationship, we began to ask, “Who are our students *in* music?” and began to value the musical knowledge, skills, and preferences they brought to our classrooms. One answer to this question involved their relationship with music- and media-related technology. We understood that “students of today do not know a world without the digital technologies associated with music making and listening” (Wise, Greenwood, & Davis, 2011, p. 118). We discovered that our students were fully engaged with the current digital media trends, as evidenced by our encounters with them during passing time in the hallways and classrooms as they used their iPods and cell phones, for example. Their musical engagements, such as the creation of ringtones and personalized playlists, were of special interest to us. These provided us with a critical perspective of our students, similar to research findings by Luehmann (2009), who found such observations to be “influential in changing how youth facilitators ‘saw’ their students” (p. 63). Our students did not just use digital music technology, but engaged with it creatively. Many music educators discount such desires, knowledge, and skills, analogous to how many teachers treat students’ existing cultural competence (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

We quickly found that students gravitated towards any digital music media resources we had, ranging from the simplest radio to a computer lab. Their interests defined their persistent inquiries, ranging from listening to the radio to writing what they called “beats.” Indeed, digital media and music creation went hand in hand. It was a trend they considered relevant in their environment and definitive of being “cool.” When given the opportunity to compose music

digitally, they identified as composers, although not by that actual name. Instead, they acknowledged themselves as “mixers,” “music builders,” and “beat makers.” They looked up to relatives and friends who operated in the same capacity; creating their own music in do-it-yourself studios in homes throughout the city. Their intimate knowledge of drum machines, recording equipment, and various computer software programs resonated with us. Whatever identity label they took on as creators of music assisted by digital music technology, it was imperative for us not to dismiss, rank, or rename their title. Instead, we recognized this identity “as a way of articulating what [the student] knows and is able to do” (Burnard, 2005, p. 274). As our students educated us, we learned that the terms mixer, music builder, and beat maker broadened the meaning of the term composer. While our students certainly had things to learn, they often brought a rich understanding of some aspects of music to the table, however distinct it might have been to our own—even seen in such simple things as their differing use of the term “beat.”

Like many teenagers, our students were often quirky, rowdy, hilarious, and fun, as well as occasionally disrespectful to themselves, each other, and their teachers. We saw that most of our students could easily be musical, creative, and genuinely enthusiastic learners if we reached out to them in the right way. Even our most challenging students—those dealing intimately with violence, crime, or pathology in their lives—often wished our classroom to be a safe space where they could find respite from the challenges in their lives.

All of us found that relationships were very important to our students; for example, Frank found this seemed to be much more the case than in his previous suburban teaching assignments. Indeed, such relationships were a prerequisite to engaged and meaningful learning. Matt offered a poignant illustration of this from his first year of teaching:

After college, I accepted a position as a high school music teacher in an urban school district. Many of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, and more than 80% belonged to a minority race or ethnicity. At our first jazz band rehearsal one student said he did not want to work with me and asked to leave. Many other students expressed the same sentiment. I pleaded with them to give me a chance, at least until the winter concert. The first few months of rehearsal were frustrating, however the winter concert was an incredible success. My students returned to rehearsal after the winter concert with a renewed spirit, smiling and excited to play. I smiled back and told the students, "I think the biggest difference between today and the first rehearsal is you all got to know me." A student replied, "No, Mr. Clauhs, you got to know us. That is the difference."

This story has many intriguing implications. The students initially greeted their new teacher with largely negative, even hostile, feelings on the first day, before he had said or done much of anything. This sort of reaction is not uncommon, since many urban students are used to teachers leaving, sometimes even midyear, and perceive varying levels of commitment based at least in part on nonverbal factors. When this occurs, it can sometimes be helpful to talk about assumptions or snap judgments, and how helpful or destructive they can be—a topic with which urban students often have significant experience.

Matt persevered and demonstrated his care and concern for students in many ways, conscious and unconscious, taking steps to get to know them as individuals and build relationships. This required transparency and a certain degree of vulnerability on his part. Matt did get to know his students, but they also revised their snap judgments of him as the semester progressed. Getting to know people as individuals and forming a healthy, vibrant learning community is a mutual effort. Although a wide variety of personalities and instructional styles are successful in the urban classroom, one must be "real." The first step towards success as an urban teacher involves building trusting relationships with students. As part of this process, critical pedagogy demands that teachers shake off the deeply flawed "banking model" of education (Friere, 1970) and recognize that students have prior knowledge and skills.

### **Who Might We Become As Individuals?**

We have slightly rephrased Abrahams' question from "Who might they become?" to include both students and teacher, since an examination of the potentialities for change is important on both sides: "Critical pedagogy is concerned not only with the students and the change that occurs in them as a result of the learning, but also with the change that occurs in the teacher" (Abrahams, 2005, p. 6). It is important that both students and teacher intellectualize and critically examine how music mirrors the power structures inherent in the worlds in which we live. Examining our students' potentialities, based on who they are, what interests and motivates them, their current and past musical involvement, and the prior knowledge and skills they bring to our music classes is a prerequisite to successful learning and teaching—so is examining our own potentialities as teachers.

Many of our students had to assume very adult responsibilities in terms of childcare for younger siblings or substantial part-time work at a very young age—life responsibilities that could easily place limits on what they could become. Strikingly, one of Frank's students was named legal guardian for her three younger siblings on her 18th birthday—a student who he described as one of the strongest and kindest human beings he has had privilege to know. Many of our students had, in some respects, more life responsibilities than we did, even though we were adults. Some were clearly interested in college, some interested in skilled trades, and some unsure. Many worked and went on to college part-time, and a few received generous scholarships to prestigious institutions. Many of our students wanted to be producers or rappers, to keep playing in garage bands, to continue learning the piano, and to keep singing; some wanted to create and lead music programs in their community. Quite a few did so, and a number

of them ended up singing in competitive college choirs. We also saw former students drop out of college, remain in low-paying, low-security jobs, or become pregnant at a relatively young age.

As much as seeing some students succeed, musically and otherwise, gratified us, seeing some of our students succumb to challenges and pathologies was a source of great frustration for us. Despite our best efforts, and sometimes intensive and sustained effort with a particular student, we and our colleagues were all too often unable to break the cycle of poverty, low self-esteem, and low expectations. This experience parallels that of many urban educators who find that, while an influential teacher can change a student's life, the impact of out-of-school factors is often greater than any simplistic "no excuses" model will allow. Holistic and systemic efforts, such as that provided by the Harlem Children's Zone or proposed by the Broader, Bolder Approach (Economic Policy Institute, 2013) are needed to complement the efforts of individual teachers.

Nasim viewed her students, who were detained in a juvenile detention facility, as creative young people who were often enthusiastic about learning. They found a creative outlet to cope with their everyday predicaments and the challenging lives ahead of them. Some even felt comfortable enough to use their life stories, in all their complexity, in the music they composed. Eventually, some of the students aspired to become music professionals, be it as an instrumentalist, a hip hop artist, a DJ, a producer, or in other ways. Like all of us, she hoped that our students would become better musicians and people, not defined in terms learned in conservatory, but in a much broader way. Musicians who could create music and understand how patterns work together; ones who pushed the boundaries of music, were willing to move and groove, and mix diverse sounds and styles together; ones who used music to communicate, to tell stories of personal and community struggle, and offer ways forward. Her goals were very similar

to those held by others engaged in music education within penal facilities, such as Abrahams, Rowland, and Kohler (2012) or Cohen (2007, 2008).

As teachers, we also reflected on what we could or might become. We broadened our musical and pedagogical skills each year, becoming more flexible and extending ourselves far beyond our training in such areas as improvisation, world music, popular music history and criticism, and technology, as well as navigation across cultural norms and customs. We had to learn how to facilitate and model mature discussion of issues including sexuality, gender, race, and inequality—essential for developing a new learning community built on mutual respect and understanding.

While the musical, pedagogical, and human growth we engaged in was a worthy project, Elliott (1995) pointed out that there are limits on how multi-musical anyone can become. We had to ask ourselves: What am I able and not able to teach, based on my skill set and knowledge? Further, what do I feel passionate about and wish to share with my students? We also had to ask ourselves what was sustainable personally in terms of our approach to our profession. Sustainability was an issue for many of our programs because of the hours required to achieve our goals. Many of us began our careers in urban schools and wondered how we might balance our family or personal lives with a job that required so much commitment. For example, Frank served as the choral, band, and general music teacher in a small magnet high school. Ultimately, despite his success in and joy derived from this environment, he chose to leave after seven years. He felt that the best next step for the program was to aggressively grow the jazz band and music technology/songwriting components, but his areas of expertise and primary interests were as a classically trained choral conductor. By contrast, Tim increasingly began to see himself as a

technology specialist and composer—or to use his students’ terminology, a “music builder”—despite his original career plan to teach band in a rural or suburban environment.

### **What Might We Become Together?**

Through the personal transformations of our students and ourselves emerged strong communities of learners where everyone operated as mentors and mentees. In our classrooms, we developed cultures of our own, born of our differences in musical preferences and our storied lives. In Brent’s classroom, students taught each other ballroom dancing styles from a variety of cultures before ultimately inventing a new form of ballroom dancing that represented the unique culture of the music class. Our classrooms became safe and welcoming spaces to create new collective stories using our own experiences, illuminating the needs in our communities and offering new visions for our music programs. Students had a voice in redefining the purpose of music education in our schools. For students and teachers, music became more important than festivals, chair placements, and college scholarships; music was now about telling our new collective stories and changing the way people see the world.

Our learning communities were different in every course and every semester, reflecting the diversity of our students’ experiences and interests. However, one of the cornerstones of each of our new learning communities was safety. In order for our students to teach us and learn from us, they had to feel safe. Our classrooms became what Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) called “a home away from home” (p. 203) and relationships with our students resembled that of a family more than a traditional school. Not only did we learn together, but also we ate together, solved problems together, and comforted each other. These relationships with our students became life-long and much stronger than each of us could have imagined.



While the democratic process was an important element in the planning and process of our students' work, we all found there were times when students needed more direction and authority from us as teachers. Our rules, structure, and instruction often made students feel more comfortable in our learning spaces. The exact group of students involved, their needs on a particular day, and the nature of the specific musical activities taking place required different power-sharing approaches to teaching and learning. Some of our students explicitly indicated to other teachers they felt safe in our classrooms amid sometimes chaotic school and neighborhood environments struggling with violence. We believe the structure of our activities played a significant role in establishing this safe learning environment. When a young person died violently in students' neighborhoods, music teaching often became secondary to intense group dialogue.

The process became much more important than the final product in these new learning communities, a sharp contrast from the focus on festivals, competitions, and seasonal concerts so often characteristic of secondary music education. Instead, we focused on the habits of the students and teachers, our histories, identities, values, and changing perceptions.

### **Implications for Preservice Teacher Education**

In order to develop a hopeful pedagogy, one that breaks the cycles of frustration, misunderstanding, and power struggles in many urban music classrooms, we must design new frameworks that challenge the traditional paradigm of music education and teacher preparation. As a field of practitioners, we need to examine our assumptions about music and urban students while learning to apply our skills, education, and training to often unfamiliar contexts. Preservice teachers need to have the opportunity to deconstruct familiar pedagogical approaches and synthesize them in a variety of learning environments. Many programs currently prepare

preservice teachers for a one-size-fits-all approach to music teaching, while effective teachers must be flexible as both musicians and as educators. Programs must help teacher candidates consider all settings, but also help them discern the settings in which they can be most effective. Onore (2006) pointed out that urban teachers “must be committed to teaching those whom they may not know, but whom they nevertheless neither fear nor wish to save.” (p. 209). Many candidates must “demonstrate a willingness to reflect on their privilege, a desire to interrogate the limitations of their experiences, and the capacity to view the inner cities and their residents through the lens of hopefulness and meaningful potential” (Onore, 2006, p. 209).

Abrahams (2005) and Schmidt (2005) suggest Critical Pedagogy for Music Education (CPME) allows for real learning to take place in the music classroom, as students and teachers engage in interactive problem solving and dialogue that builds upon preexisting knowledge. Together, students and their teachers can achieve critical consciousness, or “conscientization” (Freire, 1970), when students and teachers develop an in-depth understanding of the world and realize oppressive acts that limit their potential for gaining new knowledge. Part of conscientization involves students and teachers taking action against oppression. Therefore, teaching with critical pedagogy in mind involves identifying attitudes within music education that may oppress or disengage urban students, such as a view of school music as a power struggle between “our music” and “their music.”

Critical pedagogy provides a framework for music educators to engage in discourse on race and diversity, however it would best be paired with opportunities to work in model urban classrooms. Through careful reflection on teaching practices and examination of assumptions about music learning, preservice teachers might better understand the social and political factors that influence their students’ lives. It will take time and serious commitment on behalf of music

teacher education programs to prepare educators who graduate with the skills needed to be effective in urban centers. Since music education is important for all children, college music education programs should consider how an increasingly diverse student population requires different skill sets for the next generation of music teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding discussion of our own music education practices within urban settings offers a candid portrait of environments challenged by assumptions. We found a conceptual framework that both reflected and informed our experiences by answering the four questions posed by Abrahams (2005): “Who am I,” “Who are my students,” “What might they become (or who might we become as individuals),” and “What might we become together?” Together we became what music education could be: an inclusive, liberating, and fruitful classroom environment that reflected the students’ broader musical lives. To access students’ prior knowledge and skills, honor musics that they found meaningful, and enable them to meet new challenges required us to listen and establish communicative relationships. These relationships also transformed what we as teachers knew, what we accomplished, and the models of teaching to which we were attached. Music teachers must critically examine their own formal education and teacher education, searching for social biases and ideologies that have been perpetuated therein, in order to engage students through discourse of social issues surrounding race, gender, sexuality, ability, and inequality. When music teachers critically examine their educational histories and identities in this way, they become more self-aware and enabled to see the constraints that exist on music teaching. Such awareness is vital if music teachers are to break free from those constraints and construct a flexible and relevant music curriculum.

In order to prepare effective music teachers for urban schools, teacher training programs must produce flexible, creative, and musically eclectic music educators who are able to listen, honor, and incorporate students' voices. Through our national and state music educator conferences, festivals, and competitions, we have perpetuated a dominant ideology of music education that emphasizes certain aspects of the western European approach to music and minimizes or largely ignores other genres and approaches to making music, including much of what is meaningful or significant for many urban students. Delpit (1993) examined the consequences of replacing minority student discourse with mainstream discourse, a practice that leaves minority students disenfranchised and less likely to achieve. While Delpit (1995) clearly believed it is important to give minority students the tools they need to succeed in society, including mainstream discourse, she made it clear that teachers must value students' existing expertise, including language. Consciously or unconsciously, many educators who devalue minority students' existing knowledge and skills do so from a deficit model perspective rooted in assumptions of inferiority.

Delpit (1993, 1995) reminds us that all students enter our classrooms with existing expertise, and this is something of which all music educators must be mindful. Instead of viewing our urban music students, particularly minority students, from a deficit model perspective, we should celebrate their strengths and show respect for the musical traditions that each individual student values. In turn, our students will have hope that they might actually learn something from their school music program. As teachers' hope for student achievement and students' hope for a meaningful music program increases, our music programs will gain strength and relevancy.

We also need to share the stories of our programs. Goldberg (2006), in the only discussion of arts education within an expansive, two-volume set of books on urban education, cited successful arts programs, but the only arts specialists she mentioned worked in an arts-focused charter school. Credentialed music specialists are doing important work in urban schools nationwide, and we must share the best of this work with the rest of our profession. In this paper, we have told different stories that emerged from student and teacher voices—stories of “self-making, of re-making and replacing ourselves” (Stauffer, 2012, p. 11). Through sharing these stories, we have recognized how the traditional music education paradigm has largely ignored the needs of urban schools, and we hope to promote the lived stories of successful urban music students, teachers, and programs. We are hopeful that our stories encourage qualified music teachers to seek and maintain employment in urban centers. Using a critical framework to “get to know” self, teacher, student, classroom, and field can be central to the process of change, to creating more liberatory spaces, and to raising marginalized voices as models for a hopeful future.

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