ON THE JOURNEY TO BECOMING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE IN A HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR CLASSROOM: A WHITE WOMAN’S AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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ON THE JOURNEY TO BECOMING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE IN A HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR CLASSROOM: A WHITE WOMAN’S AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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Application of the culturally responsive teaching (CRT) initiative to practice may be challenging because each school community is unique. The individualized nature of CRT renders that research on successful CRT practices is only mildly, if at all, applicable to practicing teachers. As a result of these barriers, little is known about the process of becoming culturally responsive. The purpose of this study was to document my process in seeking to become a culturally responsive music educator.

Critical Race Theory shaped this study. The emphasis on white culture in public high school choir curricula does not reflect the diverse populations in music classrooms today. Many of these classrooms are led by white teachers like myself, requiring that we interrogate our race and how often it affects the learning environment in our classrooms.

Autoethnographic methods were used in this study. Three sources of data were gathered: my journal, lesson plans, and other teaching artifacts including student work. The data were then condensed into three stories: a) the story of me; b) the story of my teaching; c) the story of my students. Self-reflection, self-assessment, and self-analysis
took place through questioning which included: a) “How does my whiteness affect my teaching?” b) “How often were suggestions from scholarship used?” c) “How did my attempts at culturally responsive teaching affect my students?”

Through this work, I found that developing awareness of my whiteness, my biases, and assumptions, and how they influence my instructional choices was the most important step towards CRT. I often observed myself in a self-imposed binary: either I was ‘successful’ or ‘a failure’ at being culturally responsive. My disposition about CRT has changed because now I understand that teaching responsively is not a binary but a continuum. Each day I may exist in a different place on the continuum. Therefore, I will always be becoming culturally responsive.

An individual’s process of becoming culturally responsive can only be learned through autoethnographic techniques. Additional autoethnographies conducted by teachers who are attempting to become culturally responsive may assist in finding trends.
DEDICATION

For my daughter, Heidi.

Much of this dissertation was written with you in my belly or on my lap.

Thank you for keeping a watchful eye on my work!

I love you.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Race, ethnicity, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status are only a few of the characteristics that make up a teacher’s or student’s uniqueness. Researchers such as Ladson-Billings (1995a) and Gay (2002, 2010) have pioneered the culturally responsive teaching (CRT) initiative by bringing to our attention the importance of diversified teaching practices in order to cultivate a positive, safe, and rich learning environment for all students.

Music education scholars such as Abril (2006a), Butler, Lind, and McKoy (2007), and Goetze (2000) have described the process, benefits, and challenges of being culturally responsive, specifically in the music classroom. Despite the strategies and approaches suggested by these researchers and pedagogues, Lind and McKoy remind us that CRT cannot be achieved by following a series of steps or procedures (2016, p. 96). Being culturally responsive is a disposition or mindset. Suggestions from the research must be tailored to the needs of the students, community, families, and teacher.

Gay (2002), and Butler, Lind, and McKoy (2007) suggest that teachers often are unsure of how to provide effective instruction to students of cultures different from their own. This concern was apparent to me throughout my attempts at being culturally responsive. The intent of this study was to document one semester of a life-long journey in seeking to become culturally responsive in the high school choral classroom. This
study will inform my future teaching practices and help me to confront the fears and challenges that come with interrogating whiteness and adopting CRT.

**Background**

I teach choir in a small public high school on Long Island in New York. I work with students in ninth through twelfth-grade in a school that services seventh through twelfth-grade students. I have two mixed-gender choirs; one is non-auditioned and the other is auditioned. The choirs meet for rehearsal every day for forty minutes. In addition, the students participate in a sectional lesson each week. Students are pulled out of class on a rotating basis to participate in the sectional lesson.

According to the New York State Education Department (2017), in the 2016-2017 school year, 73% of the students at our school are white. At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, I collected data on the races, cultures, ethnicities, and religions that were represented specifically in my classroom in an effort to better understand them. The data yielded the following results: 55% percent of my students are white, and 31% of my students are Latino/a/x. Of my Latino/a/x students, all of them (100%) are either immigrants themselves or first-generation American. They come from homes that are bilingual or solely Spanish-speaking. Of the rest of my classroom, 5% are Chinese-American and 2% are Caribbean. Seven percent of my students are of Indian descent. These students come from homes that are either bilingual or solely Hindi speaking. Five percent of my students practice Judaism, another 2% practice Buddhism, and 5% practice Hinduism. Nineteen percent of students do not identify with a religion, while the remaining 69% practice some form of Christianity. As Ladson-Billings mentions in the
After making the decision to confront culturally responsive teaching, I began to ask myself questions including:

a) How am I addressing all of my students’ needs?

b) Am I addressing my students’ needs?

c) How do I know if I am addressing my students’ needs?

d) Do I know enough about their culture to address their needs?

e) How can I learn about their needs?

f) How does my prior knowledge affect how I view my students, and how I teach them? My stereotypes, biases, and assumptions?

g) How does my own culture affect how I view my students and how I teach them?

h) What is my culture?

From this spiral of questioning, it became clear to me that there was work that needed to be done on myself before I could move the focus to my students.

Frankenberg’s text (1993) encouraged me to interrogate myself to truly understand myself and my assumptions and knowledge about race and racism. At first, I struggled with the idea of centering this work around me in fear that I am taking the focus away from my students. However, I am missing a crucial step towards CRT: reflection within myself, the teacher. The purpose of this study is to understand my journey as a white teacher attempting to be culturally responsive in high school choir. My hope is that
my procedures and reflection will assist other novice culturally responsive teachers with how to navigate the sometimes confusing and intimidating scholarship that revolves around culturally responsive teaching in the classroom.

In addition to a thorough understanding of the self, a “becoming” culturally responsive teacher must have a deep understanding of the cultures prevalent in his/her classroom (Gay, 2002). I recognize that as a white, privileged person, I would likely struggle with trying to connect with and understand my students. Through this study, I intended to develop a better understanding of myself and my culture, discover more about the process of a white teacher becoming culturally responsive, and finally, learn its impact, if any, on my classroom.

**Rationale**

When discussing why culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in music is important, Lind and McKoy (2016) offer the following reasons: a) CRT helps to shed light on the intrinsic values of music, b) CRT may increase enrollment of students who are typically marginalized in music classes; c) CRT curriculum offers more opportunities for creation (composing, improvising) because the material is familiar and interesting; d) CRT may lead to increased diversity within the profession. In order to implement CRT, I must increase my cultural competence (Lind & McKoy, 2016) by developing a better understanding of my students’ cultures. Additionally, I must have a better understanding of my own culture and how it influences my teaching. Deepening understanding of the self as part of the process of becoming culturally responsive may help teachers who live in fear of the unknown to embrace CRT for the sake of these benefits.
Framework

The framework shaping this study is culturally responsive teaching. For the purposes of this project, the term “culturally responsive teaching” will be used in order to establish congruency with the main text that will be consulted throughout the analysis: *Culturally responsive teaching in music education: From understanding to application* (Lind & McKoy, 2016). However, other terms including culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy will be explored later.

Culturally responsive teaching derives from Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory stems from Critical Theory, whose place in education is first described in Freire’s landmark text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) through critical pedagogy. Freire describes critical pedagogy as the liberation of the oppressed by breaking the cycle of supporting Western-dominated education practices which ultimately serves to maintain white supremacy (Freire, 1970). In building from Freire’s ideas and connecting with issues surrounding race, Ladson-Billings reminds us “Critical Race Theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a white supremacist master script” (1998, p. 18). Furthermore, Delgado Burnal reminds us that this curriculum “devalues, misinterprets and omits the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of students of color” (2002, p. 105). The Western influence in high school performance ensemble curricula in public schools is evidence of Freire’s and Ladson-Billings’ theories, and justifies Delgado Burnal’s concerns.

Schmidt (2005) asks a series of questions about music education within Critical Race Theory, one of which is: “How can music education develop research that is focused on social-cultural-philosophical aspects, and that leads the profession to search
for educational and social equality?” (p. 10). Ladson-Billings reminds us that storytelling is an integral part of Critical Race Theory (1998, p. 8). It is through storytelling that I provide research intended to answer Schmidt’s question.

**Plan of Research**

This qualitative, autoethnographic study was conducted through journaling to understand the process of becoming culturally responsive, and collection of teaching artifacts such as lesson plans and student work. The intent was to bridge the gap between research and practice by providing potential insight into the process of becoming culturally responsive for a white woman in a high school choral classroom.

**Problem Statement**

As mentioned earlier, there is no recipe for culturally responsive teaching; it is a disposition (Lind & McKoy, 2016, p. 96). Due to the irrelevance of a step-by-step protocol, application of CRT in practice may be challenging. In addition, because of the specificity of culturally responsive teaching to each community, classroom, and student, research on successful CRT practices are only mildly, if at all, applicable to practicing teachers. As a result of these barriers, little is known about the process of becoming culturally responsive within oneself, or what makes a culturally responsive pedagogue. Knowledge and awareness of this process are needed in order for teachers to learn more about their own potential journeys towards culturally responsive teaching.
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to document my process in seeking to become a culturally aware and culturally responsive music educator. I did this through journaling while implementing scholarship-recommended CRT strategies in my practice with students for one semester.

Research Question

To uncover the nature of the process of becoming culturally aware and culturally responsive, the following research question was asked:

1. What is the process of becoming culturally aware and culturally responsive for me, a white female music teacher?
   a) What changes did I make in my teaching strategies?
      ▶ In my preparation? During class? In assignments?
   b) What changes occurred in my position/disposition?
   c) How have my perceptions of my students changed?
   d) What new questions do I have?

Research Methodology Overview

This qualitative, autoethnographic study employed extensive reading, reflecting, and journaling. The journaling is my own narrative as I reflected on my understanding of race and culture, and my experiences when attempting to be culturally responsive in my classroom. In addition to journaling, I reviewed lesson plans and other teaching artifacts including student work. The data collection took place over the course of one semester.
The data were then condensed into three stories: the story of me, the story of my teaching, and the story of my students. Ladson-Billings reminds us that storytelling is an integral part of Critical Race Theory (1998, p. 8). It is through storytelling that I interrogate my race while uncovering some of my biases and assumptions, reflect on my attempts at CRT, and learn about my students. More information about the methodology is provided in Chapter 3.
Chapter II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

According to the United States Department of Education’s 2016 report entitled “The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce,” 51% of students enrolled in public school were white during the 2011-2012 school year (United States Department of Education, 2016). The report projects that in the year 2024, this percentage will drop to 46%, further issuing a call for diversified teaching practices in the classroom. Although the demographics of classrooms in the United States are rapidly changing, the demographics of the education workforce are not. In the same year, there were significantly fewer black and Latino/a/x teachers than white teachers, at 7% and 8% respectively. It is clear from these data that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a necessity in order to best support all students in their learning. In her landmark article, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a) describes culturally responsive teaching simply as “good-teaching,” potentially challenging readers to consider whether or not they are “good teachers.” More than twenty years later, classrooms are becoming increasingly more diverse, possibly changing Ladson-Billings’ description of CRT from “good-teaching” to a mandate.

The purpose of this literature review is to summarize current and landmark research that supports the need for this study. In combing the literature on culturally responsive teaching, I discovered I was searching for the answers to two questions: “How does one define culture?” and “How does one execute culturally responsive teaching in
practice?” This literature review will serve to answer these two questions by exploring the themes of culture and culturally responsive teaching.

**Culture**

In her chapter, Gonzalez (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) encourages readers to peel back the layers of assumptions that come with the term “culture” and consider the concepts and theories that lie within. According to the American Psychological Association, culture is “the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes (i.e. sensation and perception, learning and memory, cognition, processing of information) and organizations” (2002, pp. 8-9). This definition challenges earlier ideas that culture is only biological by stating it is influenced by other conditions of one’s life including but not limited to socio-economic class, religion, gender, and age. In addition, external organizations such as community, work, and school can also influence one’s culture. In his book, *Primitive Culture* (1873/1958), Tylor defined culture (and civilization) as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 1). Tylor, an evolutionist, suggests that culture develops over time, suggesting that people are essentially born with a culture, and it is nurtured throughout their life by the environment they live in.

A new idea of culture was developed by Franz Boas (as cited by Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) in which historical context is considered, recognizing the possibility of multiple historically conditioned cultures that often borrowed from each other (Gonzalez,
This concept, known as cultural diffusion, further suggests there are external influences on one’s culture. If culture is influenced by external stimuli, then culture can be fluid, and therefore is not a determinant of one’s status in society.

Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, (2005) state Tylor’s and Boas’ ideas of culture have since been expanded on by other scholars. Banks (2008, p. 133) writes that culture is comprised of “The ideations, symbols, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are shared by a human group. Also, symbols, institutions, or other components of human societies that are created by human groups to meet their survival needs” (2008, p. 133). If symbols, institutions, and other components of human societies are part of one’s culture, then teachers must consider other characteristics of people such as gender, sexuality, age, generation, and so on as a part of one’s culture. Through his definition, Banks points out that cultures develop within groups of people that are not related biologically (i.e. within schools.) Therefore, school culture can have a large impact on student learning and should be a consideration for teachers’ when curricular and pedagogical choices are being made. Later in this chapter, culture as it relates to education will be explored.

Evolving definitions and understanding of the term “culture” may cause confusion about culture and how it influences the classroom. Gay (2010) reminds us that teachers who are culturally responsive have a deep knowledge of their students. Understanding one’s own culture first, particularly for white teachers, may assist them in the process of understanding other cultures.

**Whiteness as Culture**

Frankenberg (1993) opens her book with a compelling argument: “In a social context where white people have too often viewed themselves as nonracial or racially
neutral, it is crucial to look at the ‘racialness’ of white experience” (p. 1). Frankenberg describes whiteness from three different viewpoints: a) a location of structural privilege; b) a “standpoint,” or a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society; c) a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. Research shows that many white adults do not consider whiteness as race (Frankenberg, 1993; Marx, 2008). This is cause for concern because not acknowledging that white is a race enforces the assumption that white is normative and everyone else is “other.” Marx’s (2008) findings showed that teachers were able to relate with Latino/a/x students through personal experience, but not through culture or race. In addition, teachers were found to have strongly deficit views about Latino/a/x students' home lives and families, reinforcing the comparative nature of white culture. Ladson-Billings (2001) writes:

white middle-class prospective teachers have little or no understanding of their own culture. Notions of whiteness are taken for granted. They are rarely interrogated. But being white is not merely about biology. It is about choosing a system of privilege and power. (p. 96)

These unnamed practices become a standpoint for comparison, causing both a heightened sense of awareness and of judgment. Addressing whiteness as a race may remove whiteness as a comparative culture, and so working towards an anti-racist society.

Possibly in fear of recognizing or exposing white as the privileged culture, the color-blind theory came into existence (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013). Frankenberg (1993) describes color-blindness as:

the assertion that we are all the same under the skin; that, culturally, we are converging; that, materially we have the same chances in U.S. society; and that – the sting in the tail – any failure to achieve is therefore the fault of people of color themselves. (p. 14)
Frankenberg’s definition was echoed by Neville et al. (2013) by stating color-blindness exists in two ways: color-evasion, or the denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness, and power-evasion, or the denial of racism by emphasizing equal opportunities. Color-blind discourse has been used in an effort to confront racism and bring about anti-racism practices. However, it is important to recognize that color-blind discourse does, in fact, promote interracial tension and inequality by dismissing the marginalization that is inherent in American society. Color-blindness contradicts culturally responsive teaching in that it supports the current state of education in the United States whereby we enforce sameness by assimilating all students to conventional, Eurocentric teaching practices and ignore diversified strategies. Gay (2010) warns teachers that pleading ignorance of color, race, and ethnicity “breeds negative attitudes, anxiety, fears, and the seductive temptation to turn others into images of ourselves” (p. 23). Furthermore, color-blind mindset “denies the legitimacy of students’ heritage and race and often contributes to a cycle of misunderstanding that leads to unstated and unvented hostility between teachers and students, which often results in more misunderstanding and confrontations” (Jordan Irvine, 1991, p. 27). Denial of race and color, including whiteness, encourages sameness which stimulates assimilation practices. Recognizing white will help us to move towards a less racist society.

Frankenberg continues with “to speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism” (p. 6). To not name whiteness as a race is to assume its characteristics are normative and that white people are the “non-defined definers of other people” (p. 197), paving the way for comparisons and hierarchical systems. Understanding white practices and establishing whiteness as a culture may lead to
transformative relationships with white racial and cultural identities while engaging in anti-racist work and transforming the racial order (Frankenberg, 1993). Frankenberg suggests changing our discourse as one of the steps to establishing whiteness as a race. Using the term ‘Euro-American’ as a culture (similar to how we phrase African-American, Asian-American, etc.) will help to bring awareness of whiteness as a culture through dialogue. Asking questions such as: “Who is diverse?” and “Are Euro-Americans diverse?” (Lind & McKoy, 2016) may bring to the forefront issues of white dominance and challenge the word “diversity” altogether. The term “diversity” suggests that some people are designated diverse while others (whites) are not (p. 231). Although the term diversity is generally used with good intentions, discourse that separates whites from all other cultures, races, and ethnicities by recognizing them as “diverse” encourages racism. On the contrary, to recognize whiteness as a race is to establish white peoples’ equal (not higher) place among all races. Whiteness and race are inherently linked (Marx, 2008) because without racism, the idea of whiteness would not exist, and vice-versa (Ignatiev, 1997; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Roediger, 1991, 1999).

**Culture in Education**

The theory of culture has had a strong existence in education and education research in the United States. Rogoff (2003) suggests that Western education has been an institution that has influenced cultural change as a result of its attempt to assimilate the cultural practices of indigenous people. Much of formal education occurs in schools which are often culturally endorsed and regulated (Erickson, 2010; Pai, 1990). Researchers and practitioners who are actively fighting this Westernized system of education may find they are involved in an uphill battle in which they are challenging
these schools. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) suggested that as a result, there are no culturally neutral learning environments in existence.

In addition to the terms “race,” “color,” and “ethnicity,” current definitions of culture open up other characteristics of people that influence who they are, including socio-economic class. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) write: “poor students are sometimes viewed with a lens of deficiencies, substandard in their socialization practices, language practices, and orientation toward scholastic achievement” (p. 34). This mindset is known as “deficit thinking.” For a more extensive overview of deficit thinking that is beyond the scope of this paper, see Valencia’s book (1997) on the subject.

Derived from deficit thinking, the deficit model, which enforced the idea that “students who came from poor financial circumstances had no culture to speak of that would assist them in attaining academic success” (Lind & McKoy, 2016, p. 25), informed educational research and practice in the 1960s and is still prevalent in some practitioners’ minds and in some teacher education programs today. As an example, I recall when a University of Texas law professor publicly purported that in higher education, minoritized students are not academically competitive when compared to whites with this racist comment: “It is the result of primarily cultural effects. They have a culture that seems not to encourage achievement. Failure is not looked upon with disgrace” (Mattos, 1997). Despite such racist sentiment, this professor still maintains his teaching position at the university. His disturbing mindset is prevalent in many areas of education, including in music education, which is of special interest to this study. For example, on April 26, 2016, Michael Butera who was the Executive Director of Music Education for the National Association of Music Education (NAfME) at the time wrongly remarked:
“blacks and Latinos lack the keyboard skills needed for this field.” He continued with “music theory is too difficult for them as an area of study” (McCord, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Rosen, 2016). These two examples of poor conduct within educational institutions strengthen the call for awareness and understanding of all cultures including white culture and how this impacts our students in school.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The increase in representation of several cultures in United States classrooms has summoned the need for differentiated instruction from teachers in order to effectively engage all students. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) was developed in response to this change and continues to be a prevalent topic of research in education. Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as the use of cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. However, Lind and McKoy caution teachers about approaching culturally responsive teaching as a step-by-step process (2016). A series of steps would contradict the fundamental premise of CRT which calls for individualized instruction based on the student. The underlying assertion of CRT is that students bring funds of knowledge, strength, and contribution to their education which should be recognized by their teacher.

**An Annotated History of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The history of culturally responsive teaching can be traced back to the landmark Supreme Court decision of 1954 in the Brown v. Board of Education case which attempted to dissolve segregation in the United States and required a radical shift in educational policies (Lind & McKoy, 2016). Although a slow process, classrooms began
to see significant changes in classroom demographics and achievement (Banks, 2004). Ladson-Billings (1995a) brought to the forefront a common thread among new theories that were prevalent in the scholarship on cultural conflict and schooling in the 1980s. This commonality suggested that the intent of these theories was to “accommodate student culture to mainstream culture” (p. 467). In other words, to train students to adapt to the Eurocentric practices and curriculum of schools (Lind & McKoy, 2016). In the 21st century, many researchers including Gay (2010), Hale (2001), Nieto and Bode (2011), and Ladson-Billings (2005, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006) challenged assimilation while continuing to explore the cultural difference paradigm. In response, the culturally responsive teaching initiative came about.

The terminology used to describe what I refer to in this paper as “culturally responsive teaching” has undergone several improvements. Predecessors to this term include culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally compatible. “Culturally responsive” suggests a symbiotic relationship between home and community culture, whereas earlier terms perpetuated the idea of manipulating student cultures to fit the mainstream (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). This change in terminology shifted the focus from the teaching (with terms like appropriate, congruent, and compatible) to student-centered. Teachers would need to be responsive to their students’ unique backgrounds.

Ladson-Billings has since advanced the term “culturally responsive” (1995b) by proposing a new term, culturally relevant pedagogy, which names pedagogy that affirms students’ cultural identities while challenging inequities that exist in the education system. The term “relevant” has since been interrogated in the literature because it is possible for curriculum and pedagogy to be relevant without affirming identities and
challenging educational and societal norms (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). Paris (2012) offers the term “culturally sustaining pedagogy” which has a specific goal of sustaining pluralism in the classroom by bringing multilingualism and multiculturalism into practice. In a responsorial essay, Ladson-Billings (2014, p. 82) affirms that culturally sustaining pedagogy also pushes us to consider global identities rather than focus on one culture. Furthermore, another term, culturally revitalizing pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014) is meant to serve disappearing languages and cultures, such as indigenous cultures which must be revived (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 84) in order to be sustained.

Throughout this paper, the term “culturally responsive” will be used in order to establish congruency with the main text used for analysis: Lind and McKoy’s (2016) book entitled “Culturally responsive teaching in music education: From understanding to application.”

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Practice

According to Gay (2010), there are six integral features of culturally responsive teaching: a) validating; b) comprehensive; c) multidimensional; d) empowering; e) transformative; f) emancipatory. Culturally responsive teaching validates learners and learning processes acknowledging diversity and by addressing discontinuities between school and home (Lind & McKoy, 2016, p. 31). CRT is comprehensive in that it teaches to the whole child and does not limit itself to simply the acquisition of new information. CRT is multidimensional in that it addresses many facets of the learning process including curriculum content, the learning context, the classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments (Gay, 2010). CRT is empowering because it brings students to the forefront
of the learning process, and invites them not only to be academically competent but also
to become agents of change (Lind & McKoy, 2016). CRT can be transformative in that it
challenges traditional curricula and pedagogy through acts of reflection and inquiry.
Finally, CRT is emancipatory because it “lifts the veil of presumed absolute authority
from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools [and suggests that] no single version of truth is total and permanent” (Gay, 2010, p. 38).

Gay divides curriculum into three categories: formal, symbolic, and societal (Gay,
2002). Formal curriculum is described as the parts of teaching that are accepted by
administrations and other governing bodies of education. Lesson plans, unit plans, task
analyses, and curriculum scope and sequence are all examples of formal curricula.
Additionally, music scores are considered formal curriculum. Symbolic curricula are
visuals that are present in the classroom to enhance knowledge, skills, morals, and values.
Examples of symbolic curricula are images, symbols, icons, awards and celebrations
(Gay, 2002). The symbolic curriculum can be found on bulletin boards, classroom walls,
textbooks, folders, and desks. The third category, societal curriculum, is made up of the
perceived impressions about ethnic groups that are influenced by the media, societal
norms, and perhaps formal and symbolic curricula outside and inside schools. The
societal curriculum is often not controlled by the teacher because it is heavily influenced
by the world outside of the classroom. Awareness of the societal curriculum invites
teachers to challenge formal and symbolic curricula that contributes to the Eurocentric
societal curriculum that continuously oppresses traditionally marginalized people.

Gay suggests that a successful culturally responsive teacher must have a thorough
and deep understanding of the cultures prevalent in his/her classroom in order to
overcome the societal curriculum (Gay, 2002). In addition, the teacher must create classroom environments that are supportive of the learning styles of those cultures. European pedagogical practices are incongruent with those of many other cultures. For example, the discourse structure in United States classrooms in which students sit quietly and do not speak unless they receive permission from the teacher, termed “passive-receptive” by Kochman (1985), is contradictory to other communal structures of discourse (Gay, 2010) including the call-and-response structure of discourse that is natural for many African-Americans (Asante, 1998).

In addition to classroom environments, student-teacher relationships are also at risk. While sitting quietly, students are expected to pay attention. Nonverbal cues such as looking at the teacher with good posture are signs of attentiveness in a Euro-American classroom, contradicting other cultures such as the Apache culture in which making direct eye contact is perceived as staring and may cause resentment among students (Spring, 1995).

Contrary to the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching, American pedagogical styles are described by Freire (1970) as “bank-depositing.” In the “bank deposit” structure, teachers bestow their knowledge on students, as if they are making a knowledge “deposit” in the learners’ brains, causing missed opportunities for critical thinking and reflection while preserving the societal curriculum that places whites at the center and marginalizes other cultures. In his book, Freire makes the case for transformative, emancipatory learning as a replacement of “bank-deposit” teaching. As mentioned previously, culturally responsive teaching can potentially serve as a pathway towards emancipatory learning (Gay, 2010).
Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

The importance of culturally responsive teaching in music education is best described by Lind and McKoy (2016):

Music is personal; it is a part of who we are, and it is a part of who our students are. We work and teach in a subject area that is integrated into the human psyche, a subject area that is a rich and vibrant reflection of our humanness, yet our classrooms do not always reflect this vibrancy. (p. 144)

The domination of Western ideologies in music education minimize the potential for transformative learning in American music classrooms (Schmidt, 2005) because the traditional elitist teacher-student relationship in the classroom and ensemble settings does not allow for the necessary balanced relationship (Westwood, 2010). Schmidt (2005) writes: “Critical Pedagogy for Music Education is a perspective where students create new and personal challenges, and view music as something to be constantly questioned, changed and transformed” (p. 7). In order for students to have this experience in their music class, the power dynamics of their Western-influenced classrooms and ensembles must be interrogated.

Regelski questions whether Western-influenced music practices encourage life-long learning and music-making because they offer minimal room for reflection and critical thinking about music (2007). He writes that the Western tendency is to define musicianship only by the quality of the music (or performance) instead of the quality of the experience, potentially hindering young musicians from making music in the future. Culturally responsive teaching practices can help to redefine music programs by offering potentially transformative experiences that are culturally responsive while creating life-long learners and music-makers.
Lind and McKoy (2016) suggest several positive impacts culturally responsive teaching may have on music programs, beginning with the intrinsic value of music. Dirkx (1997) recognizes an intrinsic value of music: that it can be transformative. He remarks that music can be transformative because it engages the most intimate dimension of learning. He describes this dimension of learning as the “soul” (p. 82) and claims that music can connect us more deeply to ourselves and the world. In addition to the intrinsic values, Lind and McKoy (2016) reference other benefits of culturally responsive teaching in music including increased enrollment of students who are typically marginalized in music classes, more opportunities for creating (composing, improvising, arranging, etc.) because the material is more familiar and interesting to students, and the potential increase of typically under-represented cultures within the profession.

In agreement with Gay (2002), Butler, Lind, and McKoy (2007) suggest that teachers often are unsure of how to provide effective instruction to students of cultures that are different from their own. In an attempt to assist higher-education institutions, preservice teachers, and practicing teachers, Butler et al. (2007) proposed a conceptual model of how to attain equity and access in music education for students of all cultures.

Butler, Lind, and McKoy’s model consists of five leading domains: teacher, student, content, instruction, and context (2007). The teacher and student categories simply state the demographics of the two participants in the learning community. This information is necessary to decipher the tendencies of the teacher versus the needs of the student. The formal curriculum, or the content, includes program goals and objectives, repertoire, and performances. The instruction component consists of the symbolic curriculum in addition to adaptations the teacher makes in terms of teaching styles,
activities, and instructional materials. Context, the final domain, includes the societal curriculum. This domain includes classroom environment and ensemble structure in addition to the environmental characteristics that are not in control of the teacher.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) categorized CRT practices as “good teaching” and references a culturally-responsive musical experience African-American students had in their class. She discussed a culturally responsive teacher who allowed her students to bring in rap excerpts (as deemed appropriate by the standards of the school.) She used the students’ self-proclaimed interests and prior knowledge of rap to bridge their understanding of poetry while fostering academic achievement in language arts. Through this example, it is important to recognize that teachers should not assume that all African-American students have interest in or relate to rap music. Rather, the teacher in this example is being culturally responsive to the holistic child in front of them, not just the assumed race, by connecting with generational interests in addition to heritage and race where applicable. With this in mind, teachers and researchers must take caution in overgeneralizing characteristics of learning across cultures. In acknowledging fixed characteristics, we deny that traits may be inconsistent across people who comprise the culture in question (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Researchers examining cultural practices call for a cohesive and malleable lens on CRT (Gay, 2000).

Echoing the concerns of Frankenberg (1993), Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) caution readers that recognition of cultural differences can mistakenly lead to marginalization. If the practices in question differ from the dominant group, they may be considered less adequate. Another poor approach is to completely deny differences in
culture by establishing the practices of the dominant group as the norm. Culturally responsive teaching was developed in order to address just this.

In the literature on culturally responsive teaching in music education practice, two themes arise: curriculum and pedagogy. The following sections address some of the issues teachers face when experimenting with culturally responsive teaching in music.

**Curriculum.** Repertoire selection is typically seen as the nucleus of the curriculum for school music ensembles. The curriculum for music education has generally consisted of repertoire that traditionally hails from the Western classical music canon (Schippers, 2010). However, Gay’s demand for cultural responsiveness for all students is not satisfied by a curriculum that is representative of only one area of the world (2010, 2002).

As a result of the globalization phenomenon, school and administrative communities felt pressured to diversify their curriculum. In response, national symposia including at Yale University in 1963, Tanglewood in 1967, and Wesleyan in 1984 pioneered the topic of multicultural music. Many professional societies such as the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), International Society for Music Education (ISME), The College Music Society (CMS), and the American Orff-Schulwerk Association (AOSA) have presented conferences in which multicultural music has been a central theme (Lind & McKoy, 2016; Erwin et al, 2003).

Repertoire selection can be a gateway to exposure to music from other cultures. Introducing students to a variety of world musics and validating other cultures through instruction may prevent closed-mindedness (Erwin et al, 2003). The call for increased multicultural music in the curriculum has generated a burst of culturally varied repertoire
available for schools. However, the authenticity of these works should be called into question. The nature of the Westernized notation system does not accommodate the needs of many musics from other cultures. For those that have published, limited information about the compositions and the cultures they hail from are provided in the prefaces of the pieces (Goetze, 2000). Uninformed teachers may select repertoire that falsely represents a culture and reinforces stereotypes (Abril, 2006b). In his article, Abril presents guidelines to be followed when choosing multicultural music that requires high cultural validity and low bias (2006b). The author recognizes that it is challenging to undergo the rigorous selection process for each multicultural music selection, however tackling a few selections each year will assist the teacher in building a list of acceptable repertoire that will grow over time. In addition, the selection process will simplify for teachers who utilize it often.

Pressure on teachers to incorporate multicultural music in the curriculum may lead to quick decision-making that is not responsive. The results in a case study on a white teacher and her four elementary school students of Mexican descent found that the traditional Kodály methodology did not support the development of musical identities in the students (Kelly-McHale, 2013). When the teacher attempted to introduce Mexican repertoire into the curriculum, she chose songs that were in fact a Westernized perception of Mexican music, leading to an inauthentic experience. As a result, students were unable to make the connection between music in school and music at home (Kelly-McHale, 2013).

Abril (2013) brings to the forefront another issue concerning multicultural music in that multicultural music selections may potentially be unrelated to the students.
Programming music in order to provide a multicultural experience is not the same as programming music in response to student interests and culture, pointing out the difference between “multicultural music education” and culturally responsive teaching.

Once the repertoire has been selected, ensemble conductors must consider performance strategies in order to deliver an authentic experience for the students and the concert audience. Although the teacher may have gone through the rigorous process of selecting appropriate repertoire, they may teach the songs through a Westernized pedagogical lens. In choral singing, teachers frequently employ adaptations such as Western vocal technique and Western modes, meters, and vowels which may not be appropriate for songs that are not of European tradition (Goetze, 2000.) Goetze provides us with strategies to help teachers avoid this common practice: a) honor the culture by deferring to native musicians from the culture for pronunciations, translations, and performance recommendations; b) review a plethora of written and media sources; c) have students learn the music by the method employed within the culture (sometimes aurally); d) teach students about their voices and the many sounds they can make that are outside of the Western techniques; e) imitate visual aspects of the performance (movements and facial expressions where applicable); f) share information about the culture with students and audience members (Goetze, 2000). Many of these strategies are echoed in Lind and McKoy’s book (2016).

In a study on approaches to multicultural music education in an upper-elementary general music class, Abril discusses two different teaching strategies. Students were randomly assigned to either strategy, and after the seven-week unit, were given two writing prompts to determine newly acquired knowledge. Abril references one approach
that he calls “music content” (Abril, 2006a). Through this approach, students learn cultural music through the formal elements of music as characterized by Western ideals (notation and expressive elements). Abril mentions that this method is commonly the route that many teachers take in an effort to satisfy multicultural requirements within the framework of a typical Westernized music class. In reference to this method of teaching, Regelski (1998) raises concern that different cultures are merely being glossed over instead of being a central part of instruction.

The other approach tested by Abril was a constructivist strategy in which the repertoire was learned through a sociocultural context. Students were engaged in discourse about the multiple ways of music making and how prejudice and stereotypes may affect their listening (Abril, 2006a). Findings report that there were significant differences in knowledge between the two groups. The music content group were able to describe music concepts more effectively, while the sociocultural group was able to demonstrate more sociocultural knowledge. Affect was assessed through three domains: preference for music, difficulty or ease of performing songs, and preference for music instruction. All comments with the exception of three were positive. The three negative comments came from members of the “music content” group (Abril, 2006a). Music content should not be compromised when incorporating multicultural music education as was shown in this study. It is the educator’s responsibility to form a hybrid learning approach in which students are developing knowledge of musical elements in addition to a sociocultural understanding of musics from around the world.

Instrumental performers may encounter difficulty in accurately performing multicultural music because of limitations including instrument availability (Abril,
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2006b; Goetze, 2000). Teachers are advised to work around this barrier by having students imitate cultural sounds to the best of their ability as well as considering percussion pieces.

Since the coming of the multicultural music education movement and the importance of content and curriculum, a new emphasis on pedagogy was born. Teachers are called to instruct the cultural curriculum in the most authentic way possible, leading to the development of culturally responsive teaching.

Echoing Guiterrez and Rogoff (2003), Lind and McKoy (2016, p. 18) bring to the forefront some concerns of culturally responsive teaching in music education, starting with over-simplifying culture and its music. Generalizing about students based on their perceived race (e.g. assuming a person who is black is familiar with gospel music) not only brings to question the validity of the culturally responsive techniques being used but also, unfortunately, reinforces stereotypes. Teachers are reminded to carefully select repertoire and curricula that is truly representative of the students based on their identities, not on teachers’ perceptions.

**Pedagogy.** In a study conducted by Shaw (2014), three adolescent choristers who were experiencing culturally responsive teaching in their rehearsals were interviewed in an attempt to uncover student perceptions on this style of teaching. The students were members of a community choir in a multi-racial part of a midwestern, American city. This community had a high representation of Latino/a/x culture, prompting the choral director to implement CRT strategies. Previous research conducted with this teacher established the validity of his instruction based on Latino/a/x student success. The findings of this study report that the students’ perceptions circulated around three themes:
developing sociocultural competence, enhancing cultural validity, and expanding cultural horizons.

The teacher in this study, Mr. Moses,\(^1\) engaged in CRT by providing musical experiences that were representative of the students’ cultures. The students described these opportunities as having deepened their understanding and appreciation of their own cultures (Shaw, 2016) and enhancing their cultural validity. Interestingly, two of the students in this study mentioned their concerns that time constraints on the school year and cultural knowledge of the teacher pose barriers for culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. They also mention that CRT may be too limiting if students are directed to engage in music opportunities that are consistent only with their own culture. One of the interviewees, Shirin, remarked: “Why focus on what they [students] already know and are very familiar with [rather] than look at these whole undiscovered cultures and their music?” (p. 62). Another interviewee, Mateo, suggested: “It would be nice for them [teachers] to focus a little bit on your culture and then a lot more on other cultures, because as you learn about other cultures, you want to learn more about your culture” (p. 62). In addition to strengthening the desire to learn about one’s own culture, exposure to other cultures can assist students and teachers in achieving sociocultural competence while expanding cultural horizons. Mateo’s eagerness to learn other cultures echoes the thoughts of Ruud (1997) “…music becomes an area on which one can present oneself and one’s distinctive character in a positive way, and by doing that can read respect for one’s difference” (p. 165).

\(^1\) The names used in this study are pseudonyms.
In Shaw’s study, the teacher may have successfully established a culturally responsive classroom. However, as researchers remind us (Lind & McKoy, 2016; Abril, 2006b; Gay, 2010), most teachers do not know where to begin in their culturally responsive teaching journey, particularly white teachers. Music teachers must be aware that culturally responsive teaching cannot be achieved by following a series of steps or procedures (Lind & McKoy, 2016, p. 96). Culturally responsive teaching should be seen exactly for what it is called, responsive teaching: teaching practices that are flexible in accommodating many different students, are reflective of past teaching moments, and are malleable to present and future teaching moments. In a study by Hess (2017), four white elementary music teachers were examined as they critically engaged in issues of social justice, studied a broad range of music, and interrupted the Eurocentric paradigm of music education by questioning whether the Kodály, Orff-Schulwerk, Dalcroze, and Gordon pedagogies were the only acceptable pedagogies. The study found that although the teachers were committed to anti-racist teaching, there were still stumbling blocks including teachers’ unawareness of assumptions being made, reinforcement of white privilege, and repertoire programming that is not truly culturally responsive (i.e. programming an African-American song during black history month.) These findings are consistent with my experience in public school, and also with aspects of my teacher education courses.

Consistent with Frankenberg’s stance (1993), Schippers (2005) suggests one of the first steps to a culturally responsive classroom is a deep understanding of terminology frequently used during discourse about CRT, including the word “culture” which was discussed earlier. The terms “multicultural,” “intercultural,” “representational,”
“authenticity,” and “tradition” are other trivial words that teachers should clearly understand. Bradley (2007) warns teachers to be aware of the use of terms like these as “coded language” (p. 142) that is a vehicle for racism. Various descriptions of these terms are beyond the scope of this literature review; however, readers are encouraged to explore definitions provided by researchers including but not limited to Abril (2006b), Banks and Banks (2004), Schippers (2005), and Elliot (1995).

Furthermore, Lind and McKoy (2016) ask teachers to consider their “cultural competence” or their capacity to function effectively within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs presented by consumers and their communities (Crozz, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2015.) Understanding one’s cultural competence requires teachers to discover the assumptions, values, and biases that are embedded in our practice while expanding our worldview by learning about other cultures (Lind & McKoy, 2016). Teachers work in reflection and inquiry will likely have a large impact on their instruction.

Lind and McKoy (2016) suggest three ideas for becoming culturally responsive: 1) getting to know your students; 2) creating a supportive classroom; 3) creating a program and curriculum that is culturally responsive. The authors suggest strategies such as having students complete musical profiles at the beginning of the school year and engaging in informal conversations with students. In addition to getting to know their students, teachers must also create an environment that is conducive to culturally responsive teaching. Lind and McKoy (2016) suggest teachers should engage in the following when creating a supportive environment: 1) caring; 2) understanding communication; 3) high expectations; 4) learning communities. Teachers who care about
their students do not see their students as deficient or incapable. Teachers must understand and adapt to students’ communication methods. Lind and McKoy remind us of Hoffman’s (2011) observation in which students who were not white and Christian may experience frustration in music class. The conflict they may experience with Western music pedagogies possibly cause us to lose them. In order to avoid losing these students, teachers must respect, understand, and adapt their teaching to their communication styles. Teachers should also always have high expectations for all of their students and work collaboratively with their families and communities.

Lastly, Lind and McKoy (2016) remind us that repertoire is the nucleus of the curriculum and pedagogy by recommending that teachers make program and curricular choices that are based on the students existing knowledge. Echoing the sentiments from Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005), Lind and McKoy acknowledge that students arrive at school with prior knowledge and interests, or “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and teachers must act on these in order to maximize potential in learners. When teachers are not confident in the styles or genres of music being taught, teachers are encouraged to consult community members for guidance (Lind & McKoy, 2016; Abril, 2013; Goetz, 2000).

**Othering.** Curriculum and pedagogy make up the “what” and the “how” of culturally responsive teaching, yet the purpose of this study is ultimately to explore the “who.” “Othering” may offer a way to specifically examine the “who” of teaching by revealing the feelings surrounding the experiences of being othered and when othering others. The verb “othering” is defined by Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, and Suda (2012) as a personal, social, cultural, and historical experience involving: a) cultural and racial
ambiguity; b) categorization and labeling; c) hierarchical power dynamics; d) limited access to resources.

Misunderstanding and poor implementation of culturally responsive teaching renders the possibilities of othering the self (the teacher,) othering students, or othering cultures being presented through curriculum and pedagogy. Cresswell (1996) reminds us that “outsider is commonly the term used to describe people new to a place or people who do not know the ways of a place. The use of the term outsider indicates that a person does not properly understand the behavior expected of people in a town, region, or nation. Outsiders are often despised and suspected of being troublemakers. They are people ‘out of place’” (pp. 25-26). Teachers must approach teaching other cultures carefully so they do not create the feeling of “outsider” in the classroom. Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, and Suda (2012) acknowledge that schools have the power to other youth in a way that can be damaging to students and prevent them from creating meaningful academic identities.

Teachers must be aware of the concept of othering as it leads to marginalization. In an attempt to avoid Cresswell’s concerns of marginalization (1996), Benedict (2006) inspires teachers to otherize ourselves (and not students), possibly leading to a transformative experience. She writes “If our primary purpose as music educators is to improve the quality of life for all students, then taking on transformative pedagogy to advocate for social change, rather than relying on methodologies that suggest that the universal language of music transcends all, would enable us not only to develop our students’ capacities to participate fully in their musical cultures, but our own capacities to transform culture as well” (p. 12).
Conclusion

The evolution of the American music classroom from predominantly white to a representation of many cultures has influenced the need for diversified teaching practices. Pai (1990) writes:

Our society’s predominant worldview and cultural norms are so deeply ingrained in how we educate children that we seldom think about the possibility that there may be other different but equally legitimate and effective approaches to teaching and learning. In a society with as much sociocultural and racial diversity as the United States, the lack of this wonderment about alternative ways often results in unequal education and social injustice. (p. 229)

In response to poor performance patterns and the variability of achievement of marginalized groups as a result of unequal education and social injustice, “significant changes are needed in how African, Asian, Latino, and Native-American students are taught in U.S. Schools” (Gay, 2010, p. xiii).

In this chapter I reviewed the literature on two concepts that informed this study: culture and culturally responsive teaching. Issues with culture, including definitions of the term itself, and whiteness as a means of the creation and marginalization of “other,” were both highlighted. In addition, issues with culturally responsive teaching in theory and practice were reviewed. When discussing the education of black students, Jordan Irvine (1991) wrote:

By ignoring students’ most obvious physical characteristic, race, these teachers are also disregarding students’ unique cultural behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions – important factors that teachers should incorporate, not eliminate, in their instructional strategies and individualized approaches to learning. (p. 54)

Culturally responsive teaching is the vehicle through which teachers can cultivate anti-racist curriculum and pedagogies. I hope to transform my teaching practice into one that Ladson-Billings would call “good teaching” (1995a).
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

When discussing culturally responsive teaching in music education, McKoy, Lind, and Butler (2010) state that “the path to greater understanding is challenging; remedies are not readily apparent and the topic is sensitive in nature. If...we truly believe in music for every child, we must find ways to support teaching and learning for culturally diverse learners.” (p. 52). The purpose of this study was to document my journey in becoming culturally responsive so that I could support this endeavor. I engaged with this work through autoethnographic methods.

Denzin describes autoethnographic research as “performance-centered pedagogy that uses performance as a method of investigation, as a way of doing autoethnography, and as a method of understanding” (2014, p. 66). In addition to analyzing my understanding of culture (particularly my own culture) and how it affects me and my teaching, I interrogated my performance as teacher and how it affects my students. In an attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice, I implemented scholarship-suggested recommendations from Lind and McKoy (2016) and other readings while documenting, analyzing, and reflecting on my process of becoming culturally responsive. The iterative and cyclical nature of this work includes the following:

- New awareness about culture, assumptions, and biases discovered in the pilot study.

- Implication of practices as suggested by Lind and McKoy (2016).
• Continued growth in cultural understanding through further reading and reading analysis.

• Continued reflection and analysis of teaching practices through journaling.

It is through this learning cycle that I hope to improve my own practice.

**Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is the study of the self in relation to one or more cultural contexts (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). It entails entering oneself as the subject of interrogation, analysis, and critique (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Autoethnography is similar to other qualitative approaches such as ethnography, narrative inquiry, self-study, and hermeneutics in that they all examine how people understand relationships between humans and their sociocultural contexts (p. 6). However, the difference between these methods lies in the line of questioning each addresses. Questions including “What am I learning by examining my identities, power, privileges, and penalties within one or more cultural contexts?” are answered by autoethnography.

Researchers who write autoethnographies seek to produce thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). This is accomplished by identifying patterns of cultural experience and describing these patterns through storytelling. The storytelling narrative provides visibility of the researcher’s self; in this case, my whiteness (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 102) The autoethnographer attempts to make personal experience meaningful by reaching wider and more diverse audiences that traditional research usually disregards (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).
Autoethnography takes over twenty different forms (Hughes & Pennington, p. 16). They differ based on “how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher’s self and interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 279). The form of autoethnography used in this study is analytic autoethnography. Analytic autoethnography requires that “the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (Anderson, 2006, p. 375). In this study, the setting is the classroom and the “broader social phenomena” is culturally responsive teaching.

Rather than avoiding subjectivity, teachers are placing their pedagogy under the microscope when applying autoethnographic techniques. Furthermore, autoethnography embraces the conflict of writing against oneself as one finds oneself entrenched in the complications of one’s positions (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 10). This is evident in studies such as Pennington (2004). Pennington used autoethnography to position herself within her study. She intended to answer questions about how her pedagogy and her views of her students and their community changed as a result of high stakes testing. Similar to Pennington’s study, I also intend to position myself within the work. I hope to discover potential changes in myself after further understanding of culture and CRT, and exploration of my identity, power, and privilege, justifying autoethnographic tools.

Other studies that utilize autoethnographic methods are Romo (2005) and Winograd (2002). Winograd (2002) used autoethnography to further understand his
relationships with his students, and how he negotiates power in the classroom. Romo (2005) uses autoethnographic methods to discover the requirements of an educator who practices border pedagogy; a type of culturally responsive teaching specifically for border neighborhoods whose schools are comprised of a high population of Chicano/a and Latino/a/x students. Citing Bochner (1997) and Ellis and Bochner (2000), Romo writes “autoethnographic study allows for a rich vein of anecdotal information about schools, identity development, mentoring, and activism that traditional quantitative or ethnographic methodologies can miss” (2005, p. 194). Similar to Romo’s and Winograd’s work, this study requires interrogation of the self, which is not quantifiable or observable. The goal of autoethnography is to produce analytical texts that are accessible, that change us, and that change the world we live in (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764).

Butler, Lind, and McKoy’s (2007) model for culturally responsive teaching has five domains. One of these domains is the demographic of the teacher to better understand the tendencies of the teacher. Through autoethnography, I hope to learn more about my tendencies in instruction and beyond, and how they affect my students’ experiences in my class.

**Participant and Setting**

I am the only participant in this study. I teach in a small, public high school on Long Island in New York and I will serve as participant and researcher in this study. Teaching artifacts such as lesson plans and my journal are part of the data collection.

This study takes place within me. Therefore, it is not limited to just the school setting. Journaling and reflections on the journal occur inside and outside of the school
day. In addition, learning opportunities like reading and participation in professional
development occur outside of school hours. Since this is a study about me, the setting is
wherever I am when I am engaging and responding to the work.

**Pilot Study**

The pilot study took place during the spring semester of 2018. I participated in a
graduate course on culturally responsive teaching and investigated current and landmark
research that pertains to the topic. I also engaged in detailed journaling during this time.
Journal entries were made approximately three to four times a week. Entries were often
made as a response to a significant event at school or as a reflection about what I was
learning. I wrote during down time at school (hall duty, lunch periods, etc.), on the train
when traveling to and from graduate class, or at night before going to bed. These times
were chosen because they were generally times when I would be minimally interrupted.
According to Hess (2018), “Qualitative researchers now often include a self-interrogation
in the research text, thus recognizing that individuals produce knowledge within a
context,” (p. 1) in this case, the journal. During this pilot study, journaling was used as a
source of self-reflection and interrogation on issues surrounding cultural responsiveness,
such as cultural understanding, and my own biases and assumptions related to culture. In
addition, the journal is used to reflect on pedagogical choices made by recommendations
in the literature and newly discovered knowledge of race as it pertains to my students and
myself. Placing myself in the center of the study with intent to analyze theoretical
understanding is the epitome of analytic autoethnography. For the pilot study, I chose to
undertake a basic qualitative coding approach in order to orient myself to my own thinking.

In her book, Frankenberg (1993) discusses the personal encounters she experienced throughout her work on whiteness. While journaling, I, too, was required to confront my whiteness and identify the weaknesses I have in my cultural training including my understanding of cultures, my personal views on culture and race, and how these two things influence my teaching strategies and classroom environment. When coding the data, I was forced to look through two lenses: my own culture and whiteness, and my students’ culture. This allowed me to shift my method for the larger study planned for Fall. Grounded theory analysis techniques were utilized in the pilot study where codes emerged from the data that were not predetermined (Urquhart, 2013). I used Microsoft Word track changes and Microsoft Excel to organize the codes discovered in the data. From the pilot study journal, five codes emerged: Concerns, Pedagogy, Student Voice, Care, and Teacher Self-Awareness.

After axial and thematic coding, four themes appeared to me within my own concerns and experiences. The most frequent concerns apparent in the data referenced issues with trying to be culturally responsive in the classroom. For example, choosing repertoire that is culturally responsive yet authentic (journal entry, February 5th, 2018), and community response to pedagogical choices that challenge tradition (journal entry, February 16th, 2018). Other concerns from the writing circulate around themes of fear, self-doubt and needing help.

The second most prevalent code in the data was pedagogy. Lind and McKoy (2016) recommend getting to know your students and allowing them opportunities for
choice in the curriculum. Therefore, secondary themes concerning pedagogy include implementation of pedagogical suggestions from scholarship and from the students. For example, the entry dated February 5th, 2018 reads: “Imagine,’ ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and ‘We are the World’ were suggested by some students via their index cards.” These pieces were eventually programmed as part of the curriculum, serving as an example of the teacher incorporating student suggestions into the curriculum. In addition to implementing suggestions from scholarship and from the students, secondary codes within pedagogy showed opportunities for relevant learning and for informal assessment.

Student voice, the third most prominent code, showed examples of student suggestions, as well as positive reinforcement for the teacher. One notable suggestion from a student was evident in the entry from March 5th, 2018. Two students of mine who are originally from India expressed interest in learning a piece in Hindu. This was a piece that we had performed the year prior. In reflection of the conversation I had with these girls, I wrote:

One of the girls, who was in the middle school choir last year, mentioned that her father had attended the choir concert last year and noticed that our Hindi language was inaccurate (I tried really hard to be as accurate as possible, but there were obvious discrepancies, which doesn’t not surprise me as Hindi is not my native language.) In reflecting on Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) and the idea of Funds of Knowledge, I thought this would be a good opportunity to expand on a skillset that two students of mine have from their home-life by integrating it in the classroom. I decided to program the piece in addition to the music we have already selected. What’s one more piece?? I’ve also asked the girls to lead the lesson tomorrow by teaching us the correct way to pronounce the lyrics, since it is evident that they are much more capable than I! (journal entry, March 5th, 2018)

My whiteness had a deep effect on the performance of this piece the first time; so much so, that it truly resonated in a negative way with a family that speaks Hindi. Although it was difficult to hear that I had failed to provide my students an authentic, musical
experience the first time, I used this opportunity to bridge home-life and school-life together as recommended by Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) by utilizing my students’ funds of knowledge and having them lead the class in learning the Hindi lyrics.

Care, the fourth code, was evident in two ways with two themes revealed: care for students and care for self. Care for the students is evident in the entry dated February 15th, 2018: “At the end of rehearsal, I thanked one of my students in front of the class for suggesting this song on her index card a couple of weeks ago. She seemed proud and happy in that moment, and she is certainly a kid that could benefit from the positive recognition.” Care for myself appeared in the data as moments of rest. Additionally, throughout the journaling process, there were times when I found myself in a very emotional state, unsure of whether I was able to provide my students with the kind of music education they deserve. Noting when the students had something encouraging to say about my teaching and reading it back helped me to continue to interrogate my teaching without getting down on myself. An example of this is:

One student wrote ‘I love chorus because I love to sing and Mrs. Dissinger makes me feel comfortable with my voice.’ Another student wrote ‘I love how we go into depth and talk about the music. I learn so much from learning about it. We never did that in other music classes.’ This made me feel really good about my approach to teaching thus far. (Journal entry, February 2nd, 2018)

The fifth code is Teacher Self-Awareness, in which I engaged in or identified needs for teacher professional development, recognized strengths in myself, and became aware of microaggressions in my language that I needed to be addressed.

Data from the pilot study suggests that there are many challenges to becoming culturally responsive, imploring a need for the greater study. However, through this process I noticed that my journaling was only capturing external events happening inside
and outside my classroom. Internal discoveries, such as awareness of my biases and assumptions and how I reinforced white privilege in my classroom, were not present in the data. After this pilot study, I found myself in a similar position to the white elementary music teachers in Hess’ work (2017). Like them, I was committed to anti-racist teaching but I experienced several stumbling blocks. In order to truly understand this process, I would need to interrogate myself during and after these events, not just the events themselves, and include them as part of my data collection.

**Procedures**

The procedures for this work were shaped by the findings from the pilot study. Three sources of data were gathered during this study: my journal, lesson plans, and other teaching artifacts. Data yielded from these three sources were organized into three stories: a) the story of my self; b) the story of my teaching; c) the story of my students. The journal entries and the essays that were written based on the journal and other sources allowed me the opportunities to reflect on my experience in attempting culturally responsive teaching in my classroom. In addition to my own personal learning, the journal and the essays are two examples of teacher research that schools and universities can learn from (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990).

**Author Journaling**

Author data developed from continued journaling. The pilot study offered insight on potential challenges for my attempt to becoming culturally responsive in the high school choral classroom, generating a need for more information. In the journal, I reflected on happenings in the classroom, preparations for being culturally responsive,
reactions to readings, and other events and emotions. As a crucial piece of autoethnography, journaling allowed me to reflect and interrogate my pedagogical and curricular choices based on student knowledge, readings, and current events. In addition, to address the whole discovered in the pilot study, I examined my understanding of culture, identity, power and privilege (Hughes & Pennington, 2017) and how these paradigms affect my teaching in the journal.

Journaling took place three to four times a week. Each entry was of varying length; some only a few sentences and some several pages. I journaled about the teaching in both choirs and the rotating lessons. I also journaled about events and happenings outside of school hours that affected me and this work. Pseudonyms are used throughout the journal to protect student identity. As a full-time teacher, my schedule requires many hours outside of the school day for extra-curricular music activities as well as musical responsibilities for various ceremonies and celebrations. Therefore, I read and wrote during times that were convenient, and when I knew there would be minimal interruptions. The complete journal was twenty-eight typed pages in length.

Interrogation of myself occurred within and after the journaling process. Global reflections were my guide as I crafted my stories, beginning with themes in the work from the pilot study. In an effort to answer my own questions, the following prompts from Marx’s work were also considered: a) How I felt I could relate to my students; b) How I felt I could not relate to my students; c) Whether or not I was cognizant of my own Whiteness, and how it influenced my ability to relate to students (2008, p. 35). Through this line of inquiry, I better understand my process of becoming culturally responsive.
Lesson Plans and other Teaching Artifacts

I collected artifacts such as lesson plans, assessments, videos of myself teaching, and work I received from my students as part of regular instruction. Several of my lessons and assignments were inspired by recommendations from the Lind and McKoy text (2016). In addition, my instruction was often influenced by what I noticed in my reflections. Therefore, my instruction is reflexive rather than fixed. Lesson plans and assessments were examined by unit and analyzed in tandem with the reflections and journal entries from the corresponding dates (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110).

Research Plan

A key guiding process of autoethnography is problematizing or introducing counterevidence that challenges what individuals think they know about particular subjects (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Through interrogation of my journaling and by using texts (such as Marx 2008; and Lind & McKoy, 2016) to respond to, I uncovered new knowledge and learned about biases and assumptions that fuel the power and privilege that exists in my classroom. Through recommendations from the literature and analysis of lesson plans and my journal, I began the process of replacing those pedagogical and curricular choices with ones that are appropriate and relevant to my students. I also was forced to challenge assumptions I had about my students’ experiences in my classroom. Through this experience, I learned about how I could adjust my pedagogy and curriculum to meet their needs.
Data Analysis

Teaching and data collection concluded in December of 2018. Self-reflection, self-assessment, and self-analysis took place through questioning including: a) “How does my whiteness affect my teaching?”; b) “How often were suggestions from Lind and McKoy (2016) used?”; and c) “How did my attempts at culturally responsive teaching affect my students?” I chose the vignettes based on whether or not they could provide insight on any of these questions. Journal entries that provided information that was relevant to the three questions above were interrogated as isolated instances, and used to find potential themes across the data. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) suggest that:

Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. (p. 276)

After organizing the data from the journal into three stories, I compared and contrasted my experience to existing research as Ellis et al., (2001) suggest; research including Marx (2008), Lind and McKoy (2016), and new work such as Diangelo’s (2018) about white fragility. The units of analysis are the stories in my journal. Other teaching artifacts such as lesson plans were also included in the data analysis. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously so that the various sources of data would correspond with each other (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110). Instead of grounded theory (as used in the pilot study), I compared “vignettes, reflexivity, and introspection (Ellis, 1991) to ‘invoke’ readers to enter into the ‘emergent experience’ of doing and writing research” (Ronai, 1992, p. 12). I also conceived my identity as an ‘emergent process’ (Rambo, 2005, p. 583), and used
scholarship such as the Lind and McKoy (2016) text, as an important part of analysis (Ronai, 1995, 1996).

**Trustworthiness**

The narrative form that autoethnographic research takes challenges the conventional (i.e. positivist view of) truth, as truth may be flexible, interpreted differently amongst people, or within the same person over time (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Therefore, the meaning of terms such as reliability, validity, and generalizability are altered during autoethnographic study.

Reliability refers to the credibility of the autoethnographer (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). During this process, questions like: a)” Could the narrator have had the experiences described, given available ‘factual evidence’?”; b) “Does the narrator believe that this is actually what happened to her? (Bochner, 2002, p. 86)”; c) “Has the narrator taken ‘literary license’ to the point that the story is better viewed as fiction than a truthful account?” will be considered while journaling (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The cyclical process of teaching, writing, reflecting and adjusting reinforces my credibility throughout the study.

This study focuses on myself as teacher and my story of seeking to become a culturally responsive music teacher. The work uncovered the nature of my process towards becoming culturally responsive in my high school choir classroom. I hope the information generated can inform readers who wish to know more about my journey towards cultural awareness and responsiveness as a white teacher.
Chapter IV

DATA COLLECTION – THE THREE STORIES

Introduction

In order to become culturally responsive, teachers must expand their cultural competence, by getting to know our students’ culture as well as our own (Lind & McKoy, 2016, p. 99). In this chapter, I will attempt to explore my cultural competence through three stories: 1) the story of me; 2) the story of my teaching; 3) the story of my students. The stories are provided as an integral part of analytic autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 279).

The story of me is the story of my journey through learning about my whiteness and my understanding of culture. How this new knowledge has affected my pedagogy and curriculum will be told in my teaching story. The data for both of these stories are derived from my journal and teaching artifacts. Finally, the story of the students will be told through their multimodal projects, which were assigned at the end of the semester. More about this project will be explained later in this chapter. All of the student names are pseudonyms. Through these three stories, I intend to better understand my process of becoming culturally responsive in the classroom.

Story 1: The Story of my Self

This story is about me and what makes me, me. Before embarking on the journey towards writing this story, I never thought about my whiteness. I never thought of myself as being part of a culture or “cultural,” because I was white. Although I grew up in a
diverse neighborhood and went to a diverse school, I did not believe I contributed to the diversity, others did. I was the normative race, and all of the other races and ethnicities around me were different.

Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory of Cultural Production has three key aspects: field, capital, and habitus (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 102). Field refers to a specific social context, such as a classroom, community, or religion. Capital refers to the social value one holds (power or status) in the field. Capital can be determined by how one sees themselves, or how others see them. Habitus is the internal awareness of the person’s status and their responses to the status of others. In this story, the field is my classroom (and elsewhere in my anecdotes). In my classroom, I have established capital (power) because I am the teacher. That power is reinforced even just by the way I wrote “my classroom” in these past two sentences. My power is also established in other ways such as my age, education, and race. This story is about discovering my awareness of my race and status, as well as my responses to my students’ race, otherwise known as my habitus.

The Beginning

Before beginning this work, I decided to reflect on what I could remember about my experiences with racism. We never talked about racism in my home. I also do not recall talking about racism in school, except for the units about slavery and civil rights in social studies class. When we learned about racism in those classes, we only referred to it as an historical occurrence and mindset. I do not recall having ever talked about racism as an issue that still exists today.

As mentioned previously, I attended a school within a racially diverse district. Interestingly, however, when I consider my kindergarten through twelfth-grade
experience (and not just high school), I remember that my elementary school was almost entirely white. There are nine elementary schools and three middle schools that feed into the high school I attended. According to members of our community, I attended one of the “good” elementary schools. The existence of “good” elementary schools meant that there were also bad ones. Students were very aware of the perceived quality of each elementary school. I was unaware at the time, but when I think back to the schools and who attended them, I recognize that schools which were perceived as good, such as mine, were almost entirely white. Schools that were perceived as bad were attended by students of color.

Students were assigned to an elementary and middle school based on the neighborhood in which they lived. The white neighborhoods attended different schools than the black and Latino/a/x neighborhoods. So, when I say that I attended a diverse school, what I mean is that my school was only diverse in high school when all the students came together. By this time, however, groups of friends were already established. As a result, even though I went to a diverse school, all my friends were white.

From what I can recall, I had only one friend of a minoritized culture. Her dad was black and her mom Latina. We were very close. We even went on vacation with each other’s families. I will call her Lisa. My parents never talked about race with me, and I think it is because they subscribed to color-blindness and did not “see” race. My friendship with Lisa did not bother my parents; however, I do recall my mom once telling me that I was not allowed to listen to music Lisa would bring over, which was rap and hip-hop. We listened to it at her house, and often times with her parents. At the time, I
didn’t understand why her parents were ok with the music and mine were not. In hindsight, I believe my mom made assumptions that those genres of music were inappropriate without having listened to them.

If I had the opportunity to ask my mom about this now (she is deceased), I believe she would say that I was not allowed to listen to rap and hip-hop because it had curse-words and sometimes sexual content that she deemed inappropriate. Obviously, that is not true of all rap and hip-hop. I was allowed to listen to songs from my parents’ generation like “Maggie May” by Rod Stewart which was about an underage teen sleeping with his teacher, or artists like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera who strongly suggested sexuality in their music and videos. As for curse words, I often recall my dad working in the backyard to his classic rock mix which included songs like “Jet Airliner” from the Steve Miller Band, “Who Are You” by The Who, “The Bitch is Back” by Elton John, and “Highway to Hell” and “Hells Bells” by AC/DC. All of these songs have at least one word in them that I know my mom did not approve of us using, but this music was in the background of our home every weekend, and it was never a problem. At the time, I never asked questions about this.

The cultural divide made in my school as a result of zoning, and the unspoken assumptions made about cultures other than white culture, certainly would shape my understanding (or lack thereof) of culture for a long time after. After high school, I would go on to study music education at an institution that strongly privileged the Western music canon; that is, the music of western Europe which dominated in historical accounts by white men as far back as the 16th century. All of my classmates were white and had prior training in Western music, which was determined and ranked at an audition. The
music education program (which was 139 credits) only required one “World Music” course. A world music course is one that attempts to examine musics from other cultures. Few other options outside of Western music were offered as elective choices. I do not recall having any conversations about culture during my undergraduate studies, with the exception of the world music course, which interestingly was taught by a white teacher who never, to my knowledge, mentioned the term “whiteness.” I realize now that my experience was consistent with Diangelo’s idea that it is impossible for white people to understand racism because of the way we are taught it through our lived experiences (2008, p. 4). It would not be until graduate school that I would engage in meaningful conversations about race and culture, and where my culture would be questioned for the first time.

The Journey

I was initially inspired by Gay’s (2002) work on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) to conduct a study on what CRT would look like in a choral education classroom. My whiteness truly showed itself through my first line of inquiry: how teaching content from other cultures could benefit my white students. I rationalized this thought by thinking that if I could prove teaching music from other cultures was beneficial for my white students, then it could further justify the need for CRT in choir classrooms. I recognized my whiteness through the realization that I had proposed a project that a) places my white students at the center while taking away focus from marginalized students; b) would do so by way of content that belongs to these marginalized communities; c) presented an idea that the only way CRT could be valid is by justifying that it is beneficial for white students, and is not worthy of existing otherwise. It would
take several difficult and uncomfortable conversations with my professors, my peers of color, significant time reading about whiteness, and participation in a culturally responsive teaching course before I would realize how this idea continued to perpetuate white supremacy in the classrooms. My sponsor and I worked together to develop a new project that would require me to interrogate my culture and how it affects my attempts at culturally responsive teaching.

As previously discussed in the pilot study, when journaling about attempting culturally responsive teaching, the themes that were most prevalent (in order of frequency) were 1) Concerns including struggles with CRT, fear, and self-doubt; 2) Pedagogical choices; 3) Student Voice; and 4) Care. The least frequent theme to arise from the data was 5) Teacher Awareness. Within the Teacher Awareness code, moments of professional development and recognizing strengths in the self were found. In the entire journal, there was not one moment of reflection on my understanding of race and culture, or the role my whiteness plays in all aspects of my classroom. At this point in time, with the guidance of my graduate school faculty and some additional resources such as courses and literature, I began to interrogate my whiteness as a part of my journey to becoming culturally responsive.

In his study, Marx used the following questions to determine white teachers’ ability to relate to their Latino/a/x students:

a) How I felt I could relate to my students

b) How I felt I could not relate to my students

c) Whether or not I was cognizant of my own whiteness, and how it influenced my ability to relate to students (2008, p. 35).
I used this line of inquiry as a framework for interrogating my whiteness, beginning with cognizance.

**Cognizance**

Before reflecting on whether or not I was cognizant of my own whiteness when relating to students, I reflected on when I began recognizing my race at all. For a long time, I was not aware of my race or my actions and behaviors that perpetuated white supremacy. When I didn’t get into my top choice university and some students of color from my high school did, I credited their race and not their abilities. Microaggressions were a part of my everyday vernacular, such as “so and so (or myself) is the black sheep.” I would use microaggressions frequently in high school, and even in my own classroom, and some of my students would, too. I would be extra nice to people of color at work and outside of work as if they needed to be “taken care of” by me, and so I could prove to those around me that I was definitely not racist.

More recently, when my husband and I were at a Japanese restaurant, he filled out the credit card slip with the tip amount. He always asks me to approve it first, because I am a former bartender and waitress who generally tips well. He unknowingly tipped below the twenty percent that we usually give. After recognizing the error, I said to him, “Don’t worry about it, that’s fine.” In the car on the way home, I thought about how unusual it was for me to not change the tip to the full twenty percent. As I pondered this, I realized that if it were a white waitress at an American restaurant, I would have changed the tip. I believe that if it were a black waitress, I also would have changed the tip, perhaps because of my earlier realization that I am sometimes extra nice to people of color. I did not understand why it did not seem as important to me to tip the Japanese
waitress the same way. I had uncovered a bias that I have about the Asian community: I do not pay the same attention to them as I do the black or Latino/a/x community.

When confronted about race, I would (and still do at times) act defensively. I strongly believed I was not racist. As Diangelo describes as an assumption behind white fragility, I felt “racism can only be intentional; my not having intended racism cancels out the impact of my behavior” (2018, p. 121). I was blind to the racism that was happening in me and around me and ignorant to the effects I was having on others.

People who know me would probably agree that I am a very sensitive person. When I first began to learn about my whiteness and interrogate my thoughts, words, and actions, I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt for two reasons. First, I felt guilty that I had been unaware of how I had contributed to our racist society (and still do). Second, I felt immensely ashamed that I was radiating this white supremacy worldview in my classroom to my students through my curriculum and instruction. I consider myself an educated person: I went to college, graduate school, received good marks, worked several jobs, and was well-liked at work. I had even experienced some of my own personal traumas and hardships that served as great learning experiences. How could something so big get past me? Then I realized, this is white privilege. My whole life was based on several achievements that were accessed in the first place because of my race. I never saw this before. I am tremendously ashamed to admit this, but I did not come to this realization until December of 2017, at 30 years old.

I believed my new understanding of race and racism would have a strong impact on my seeking to become culturally responsive. I was so excited to present my work on culturally responsive teaching and whiteness to colleagues of mine. I felt at this point that
I really had it all figured out. I would not be outsmarted anymore by the societal structure that was secretly (or not so secretly) teaching racism and enforcing white supremacy.

After giving my presentation, I was questioned about my work. Many of the questions surrounded my ideas of interrogating myself and my race. In response to one of the questions, I shared a story about how a student that speaks Hindi and her family pointed out that I had incorrectly taught my class a Hindi song that was performed at a concert in front of an audience. While telling the story, I cried. I cried because I had so much guilt, and was embarrassed. Later, I realized that I had still managed to exercise my white privilege and fragility, even though in the moment I felt I was being genuine. Through my “white tears” (Accapadi, 2007) I had shifted the attention back to me and off minoritized communities, many of which were represented in the audience of this presentation.

Later that day, I wrote in my journal about how I had made the connection between my actions earlier and how they continue to perpetuate the cycle. This generated feelings of frustration. When I cried, that was a moment of real, genuine sadness. I did not want to cry. I was embarrassed that I cried, but I became overwhelmed by the guilt at that moment. Not to mention, I was putting myself and my teaching in the spotlight, opening both to criticism in my classroom by myself, my students, and my colleagues. And still, in this vulnerable moment, I was contributing to racism. “Was there anything I could do right? Or would every action I take and word I say be scrutinized?” (journal entry, October 23rd, 2018). I even went as far as to ask myself if this work was even worth doing, because “if I am racist and it is not possible to not be racist, then how could I be culturally responsive?” (journal entry, October 27th, 2018). If I have biases and
assumptions embedded in me, possibly forever, then how can I teach students equitably and fairly? Later on, I decided that yes, it was worth doing, because I would hopefully learn a lot about myself, and how I can make the experience in my classroom better for my students. No one is going to say to me “Wow, congratulations! You’ve figured out racism, and now we are all healed!” My whole life, I have been propelled by positive reinforcement. I am white and I am fragile. I needed to let go of the need for affirmation and open up to criticism in order for real change to occur in me and my teaching.

I decided I would continue to keep my whiteness, my Christian-ness, my straight-ness, and any other aspects about me that contribute to oppression, at the forefront of my mind while attempting to teach responsively. Then, a new thought surfaced after a particular incident. Each year, my students and I go caroling the day before the holiday break. This has been a tradition that stood long before I assumed the music teaching position at my school. Many of my students’ parents participated in it when they were students at our school and the community very much looks forward to us knocking on their doors.

This year, all of the students who are caroling happen to celebrate Christmas or Chanukah (we sing some Chanukah songs as well). However, when I looked at the underclassmen who would be eligible to participate in caroling the following year, I noticed some of the students did not celebrate Christmas or Chanukah. In an attempt to be responsive, I emailed one of these students whom I knew felt comfortable talking about religion. I wrote:

Hi, _________!
I have a question for you - please only answer if you feel comfortable answering!
I am going to recommend you for Chamber Singers next year. I hope you will be able to join us! I'd love to hear some of your thoughts on Chamber Singer's caroling. As someone who is part of a religion that is different from Christianity, I am curious about your stance on carols. Are you willing to participate in caroling? Do you have any thoughts or recommendations on how we can be more equitable in terms of recognizing various religions, and not so obviously privileging Christianity? Are there any other thoughts that you have about this?

Thanks!

MD (personal email exchange, November 16th, 2018)

The student replied:

Hi Mrs. Dissinger,

I love carols. (Like it could be the middle of June and I will be singing Jingle Bells.) The Chamber Singers Caroling is something that I think is really fun and festive. If Chambers Singers is included in my schedule next year, I would love to participate in the Chamber Singers Caroling.

I think that in order to be more inclusive we should include a song about Kwanzaa. I can look into songs about Kwanzaa and tell you what I find. I feel like there is not much I can say because I don't have any holidays that I celebrate during December.

Before you emailed me, I was actually going to recommend a song to add to the caroling program. It is called 12 Days of Christmas by Straight No Chaser. It isn't very inclusive but I just think that it is a cool song. Let me know what you think.

Thanks! (personal email exchange, November 17th, 2018)

I emailed her again to say thank you for her willingness to share her thoughts. Her comment that she sings carols in the middle of June makes me wonder if she considers carols as part of a religion, or perhaps something else since she does not practice the religion that Christmas carols are “assigned” to. She cited Jingle Bells in particular, which is a winter song and has no mention of Christmas in it. Later on in the email, she recommends a Christmas song by the trending a cappella group Straight No Chaser, further suggesting that Christmas carols may not necessarily have a religious connection.
for some students, but may be popular for other reasons, like the vocal groups and solo artists who cover them. The carols may possibly represent a season or even an entire musical genre. I would have to speak to the rest of my students so that I wouldn’t make assumptions.

After this failed attempt to become culturally responsive, I then wondered if I am continuing to perpetuate this cycle by “posing as the white person who saves the day by making sure her classroom is equitable for all.” (journal entry, November 16th, 2018). Someday, if this work is ever shared with others, will I be receiving credit, once again taking the focus away from minoritized people and putting it on me?

This spiral of questions worried me. I was worried about reading my journal (journal entry, November 30th, 2018). I was worried about having to face things that I would not like about myself and finding myself in a deep hole full of questions and unable to see the light.

Relating

In an attempt to relate with my students, on the first day of school, I passed out my yearly survey for them to fill out. I worried about whether or not my students from previous years enrolled in chorus again, and if not, why. I also worried about new students and whether or not they would like me (journal entry, September 3rd, 2018). Even though I am a relatively seasoned teacher and I have been in this particular teaching position for six years, I still have the same anxieties and concerns each first day of school. These concerns were always at the forefront of my mind when designing the beginning of the year survey. I asked questions about students’ interests so that I could engage with them. This year, I would do the same, but also ask questions about students’
race, ethnicity, religion, family life, etc. The survey can be seen in Appendix A. I hoped that this information would help me to understand my students better and inform my attempts at being culturally responsive in my teaching. Students only had to answer questions they felt comfortable with and could also opt to answer anonymously.

After compiling the data and recognizing how many cultures were represented in my classroom, I became fearful that I could not learn about all of them. I began to question: If I devoted every second to getting to know my students from other cultures, would it even possible to understand them because I am white? And if I decided to embark on this journey, how would I do it? Since I can’t travel to these places during the school year, if I read all of the literature, watched all of the videos and documentaries, listened to all of the music, would I then truly understand another culture? I decided the best way to learn about my students was to talk to my students. Although the survey provided some information, I would likely learn much more from being present with my students in conversation.

In order to engage with my students in this way, I needed to create an environment in which we could talk about race and I needed to acknowledge my own race. But I did not know much about my own race, because as mentioned before, I did not know I had a race. I was “normal,” and “normal” to me was raceless. I found myself asking the same line of questions when referring to my culture as I was earlier about my students’ cultures. How would I do this? If I read all the literature, listened to all of the music, watched all of the videos, will I understand whiteness? Diangelo (2018) states there are two Western ideologies that prevent whites from exploring our race: individualism and objectivity. Individualism is the idea that we are each unique and stand
apart from others. If we stand alone and not as part of greater social groups than there is no need to acknowledge never mind learn about our whiteness. Objectivity states that it is possible to be free of all bias (p. 9). Essentially, individualism has the potential to deny the existence of race, while objectivity denies racism. In order to learn about my whiteness, I needed to solicit the same approach with myself as I would with my students. I needed to have a “conversation” with myself, and I would do this through journaling and reflecting on my thoughts.

In addition to learning about my whiteness for my own enlightenment, if I am to be a culturally responsive teacher I must learn about my whiteness in order to be responsive to my white students. Addressing white as race means it cannot be excluded from culturally responsive teaching. When I first came to this realization, I thought it would be easy for me to relate to my white students because we share the same race. This assumption was challenged during a rehearsal the day after Columbus Day. We were working on a piece based on Native American culture (I say “based on” because it was written by a white man). This led to a discussion (brought up by students) about the current debate over whether or not to change the holiday to Indigenous Peoples’ Day. Afterward, Kelly (a pseudonym), a white freshman, approached me to tell me she did not agree with changing the holiday and that she was very uncomfortable in class talking about it (journal entry, October 9th, 2018). The conversation in class challenged white practices in schools that strongly favor only one side of the Christopher Columbus story. Furthermore, it challenged white people including Christopher Columbus and all who support the celebration of this holiday. I believe this student felt attacked by this conversation because of her race and her beliefs. I could relate to this student, because
this was me just a short time ago, and certainly I had felt this way when I was her age. I
had subscribed to the story we were taught: about how Christopher Columbus came to
America, made friends with the Native Americans and they all ate turkey together in
harmony on Thanksgiving. I not only could not, but I would not see past that. I loved
(and still love as long as it is not at the expense of others) tradition. Columbus Day was a
tradition and I was on board with it.

I did not know what to do in this instance with my student. After some thinking, I
decided to connect with this student simply by telling her I understood where she was
coming from. I told her how I at her age (and for much longer in life) also believed in the
tradition of Columbus Day. I encouraged her to keep an open mind and listen to her
classmates, then evaluate and make a personal decision on the matter. She agreed. The
conversation was pleasant and things seemed to resume as normal the next day.

I wondered: was I wrong for allowing the students to engage in this kind of
discussion? I believe in creating a space where all beliefs and opinions are respected but
this student could not share hers. Up until this point, I had failed to create an environment
in my classroom where we could have discussed race freely; there were students in my
class who were uncomfortable. I felt so inadequate as a teacher and so guilty that I caused
a student of mine to feel uncomfortable in my class, that I decided in the next few
rehearsals to “take a step back and work just on music” (journal entry, October 9th, 2018).

Later in the month, after rehearsing a piece by an LGBTQ composer we were
featuring, we engaged in an exercise where we worked together to learn different
terminology on sexuality and gender. Another student of mine, Alissa, approached me
with concerns about the topics. “She expressed her concerns to me, about how what we
are learning is a direct contradiction to the beliefs of her family and religion. She cried
because she felt isolated and alone in her values” (journal entry, October 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2018). I
lead this activity in an attempt to do something that was culturally responsive, but it had
made another student who did not identify with this culture upset. I could relate to this
student, too. I was brought up in the Catholic religion, which strongly represses sexuality.
I understood the guilt that she was feeling. I told her this. I gave her similar advice: listen
and keep an open mind.

When first beginning to write about this work, and considering Marx’ questions, I
thought that relating to my students would be where I would find comfort. However,
because I am a member of the white, Christian, straight, and cisgender majority, I found
that I was only able to relate to students like me. Relating to the students who are like me
opened my eyes to whom I used to be. It reminded me of the concerning thoughts and
behaviors I had exhorted before I had acknowledged my race and my role in racism.
Talking with them brought back real memories of fear, guilt, and inadequacy.

**Not Relating**

I would try to relate to all of my students to some degree, even though I knew
from scholarship that white teachers may not relate to their students of color (Marx,
2008). I journaled about some experiences where I could not relate to my students.

During a “prep” period, one of my students, Elizabeth (a pseudonym), came into
my office, crying. She told me that her family was being evicted from their home that
day. I did not know what to say. “I was so unhelpful” (journal entry, October 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2018),
and now I realize it was because I could not relate to her. My white, middle-class self
could not begin to understand her experience in being evicted and I certainly didn’t
understand other aspects of her culture as a young Latina in a low-income family. I told her I did not know what to do to help her.

This was a very upsetting experience for me. I appreciated Elizabeth feeling comfortable enough to talk to me about this but I did not know how to help her. All I could do was refer her to someone else. The obvious choice would be to seek out a guidance counselor or a social worker, which I suggested. A week later, Elizabeth came to tell me her family had found a place to live but the experience upset me for days afterward.

During another rehearsal, we sight-read and sang a piece called “Vencerá el amor” by Carlos Colón. I programmed this piece because there was a high representation of El Salvadorian culture in my classroom. Colón is from El Salvador. The song, originally written in Spanish, came with a translation. We debated about singing the song for the concert in Spanish, English, or both. Not to my surprise, the majority of English-speaking students asked that we perform the song in Spanish and English. They said performing the song in English also would give choristers and audience members who spoke English a way to connect and understand the song. I agreed with this idea. I made my agreement of this idea known to the class by supporting the English-speaking students with the premise that we need to consider our audience and all of our students’ families.

Many of the Spanish-speaking students were disappointed with me. Several of them asked me to reconsider. They requested that we “not overshadow the work with whiteness, and remain authentic to the work and sing it in Spanish” (journal entry, October 1st, 2018). I then realized I had made a mistake. I could not relate to my Spanish-
speaking students, never mind the feelings they must have had at that moment when I stood in front of the class and supported the English-speaking students in their endeavor to sing the song in English. Because I could not relate to them, I made a drastic mistake by encouraging white-washing in my classroom. Ultimately, I realized this mistake, and we sang the song in Spanish only. I apologized to my Spanish-speaking students for my actions. They graciously accepted.

The languages my students speak, their music interests and their learning preferences are just some of the additional informational items I learned through the survey I implemented at the beginning of the year. I was particularly interested in the answers from my minoritized students. One student, I will call him Shawn, was of particular interest to me because he was a new registrant for chorus and a male. We have had a male voice shortage in the choir program for several years, so I am always interested in hearing in new male voices. Shawn is black. I was excited to get to know him.

I had reached out to the middle school chorus teacher to ask her if she had any information about this student: Was he ever in chorus? If so, why did he drop? If he was not ever enrolled, did she know the reason? Perhaps, scheduling or some other external factor prevented him from participating? Did she know his family? The teacher recognized his name from general music, not chorus. She said she always had encouraged him to participate, but he was never interested. I was determined to make sure his experience in choir was a good one. I read his survey responses and learned that he was interested in rap, hip-hop, and pop music. He also mentioned that he liked to make beats and use technology to create music. I was so excited because I felt I had a great piece that
he would enjoy, “Hide and Seek” by Imogen Heap. The original performance of this song utilizes some current technologies for singers including auto-tune, voice changing technologies, sequencing, looping, etc. (journal entry, September 7th, 2018). I was very confident that this piece would interest him and help us to get started on the right foot (journal entry, September 5th, 2018).

Shawn came to the first rehearsal of this piece, then dropped the class the next day. I was so disappointed. In my journal, I wrote about how difficult it is for me to not take it personally when a student drops my class. I wrote about how I spoke with other colleagues who made me feel better about it by telling me it wasn’t my fault that he dropped. I then concluded the paragraph with “I guess you just can’t win them all” (journal entry, September 7th, 2018).

After reflection on this episode, I realized how badly I missed the mark. Here was a black student sharing his interests with me, and instead of acknowledging and learning about them and implementing them in the curriculum, I programmed another piece that I thought would be interesting to him, that was written and performed by a white female. I was so focused on the music, I did not see race. The piece I chose may have been similar to Shawn’s music, but it was a white version.

I made this choice somewhat consciously because I thought the music he liked didn’t have a place in my classroom. It was surely not “choral” music (white music). Programming music from the genres he recommended meant going against the choral “tradition” that had been engrained in my mind since I started singing in choir in seventh-grade. It would also go against the expectations of the school and community I teach in. I would likely receive pushback and perhaps I was afraid. The version I chose however had
an arrangement available that I had deemed as appropriate for the choir. It was a “safe” choice.

This was a horrible mistake. I lost a student who would have added great value to the program. Not only was he a male voice (which we needed because the balance in the choir was off), but he also may have brought funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) to our class that we all could have learned from. Here was another failed attempt at being culturally responsive; this one because I failed to see the intersection that race makes with music. I need to continue to interrogate race and racism, and how it exists in my classroom. Since whiteness is a part of me, I must continue to learn how it affects me, my teaching and my students.

**Story 2: The Story of my Teaching**

At the beginning of this journey towards becoming culturally responsive, I decided to use Lind and McKoy’s (2016) text on culturally responsive teaching in music education as a framework. Lind and McKoy (2016) recommend three categories of action for how teachers may become culturally responsive in their music classrooms: a) Get to know your students; b) Create an instructional environment that welcomes and values diversity; c) Acknowledge ethnic and cultural diversity in music instruction. This story is about my endeavors in attempting to achieve these three things in my high school chorus classroom.

**Getting to Know my Students**

To me, one of the most special parts about teaching music is that I often teach students for several years. At the secondary level, students may enroll in choir for several
years, granting me the opportunity to watch them grow over long periods of time. It is
amazing when I get to watch students enter high school as young ninth graders and leave
our school as matured young adults. Since I have the opportunity to spend more time with
my students than many other teachers, I develop strong relationships with many of them.
Many of them keep in touch with me after high school and I am always excited to hear
what is going on in their lives. When I read about Lind and McKoy’s recommendation of
“getting to know your students” (2016, p. 97), I considered that I might have already been
accomplishing this. I thought I knew my students and their families very well, better than
many other teachers. This was evident to me because many of them opened up to me
about personal and private issues often. Lind and McKoy suggest that knowing our
students inside and outside of the classroom will help us to better connect with them
through our instruction, likely making our teaching more effective. I believed I had
already been doing this to some degree, particularly in how I would approach students. I
even felt I had proof of this. For example, when a student came to me because she was
having a bad day, she told me she doesn’t feel like any other teachers understood her. She
continued by saying I was the only teacher she felt comfortable talking to (journal entry,
September 21st, 2018).

I believed that my positive relationships with my students were a strength of
mine. However, that does not make me a culturally responsive teacher. I think what I was
missing was using information that I gathered from my students to inform my instruction.
Early in the year, one of my students came out to me. I will call her Jennifer. Jennifer
would begin to slowly tell her family and friends and I was so honored that I was part of
that list. She told me she began to gain the confidence to come out partially because of
last year’s LGBTQIA+ music experience in choir. The experience she was referring to was circulated around the song “Bohemian Rhapsody” by Freddie Mercury. While learning this song for our pops concert, students engaged in conversation about the LGBTQIA+ community and how we may establish equity in music amongst sexualities and genders. This conversation then inspired a repertoire theme in which we would spotlight LGBTQIA+ composers the following school year. When Jennifer came out to me, she said she was nervous about telling some of her family because her sexuality went against their religious values. We began to speak about how important it is to educate people (particularly those that are straight and cisgender) about sexuality and gender as a step towards becoming allies to this community. I asked her if she would be okay if we engaged in an activity on LGBTQIA+ terminology during choir. She agreed.

The following day, I led an activity that I got from a graduate course in culturally responsive teaching. I printed up a list of 30 terms about sexuality and gender, along with their definitions, many of which I did not know myself. I cut the papers up and separated them. I handed them out to the students randomly and they had to work together to match the words with their correct definitions (journal entry, September 27th, 2018). The students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to work together on a puzzle-like activity. Afterward, we talked through some of the terms we were confused by. We worked through them together, because this information was new to me, too. Students who identified with this community answered questions openly and honestly. We also talked about why this activity was important. One student remarked: “We cannot truly become allies to LGBTQIA+ people if we don’t understand them.” This took the whole period, which was a struggle for me because all my years in music education I have been told
that we must run rehearsals a certain way, but after this “rehearsal,” Jennifer thanked me. It was worth “losing” one rehearsal to bring my students and me together while addressing a societal issue, and (perhaps unbeknownst to the rest of the students) making Jennifer feel good.

As recommended by Lind and McKoy (p. 100) and as mentioned previously, I implemented a survey at the beginning of the year to get to know my students’ culture and home life. The data showed that 31% of my students identified as Latino/a/x (journal entry, September 15th, 2018). This was the largest percentage next to white, which comprised 55% of my classroom. In an attempt to be responsive to my students’ cultures, I programmed a piece in Spanish by a Venezuelan composer entitled “En Silencio.” The Spanish-speaking students were excited to work on this piece, especially because they were going to be teaching the language to the choir (journal entry, October 2nd, 2018). I was looking forward to watching my students lead with their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). One of the students who would lead, I will call her Melissa, has a father who is a musician. Last year when we were learning another piece in Spanish, we had asked him to come in and work with us. The piece was in the style of salsa. Although I had done much research on salsa, I knew my whiteness would surely come through when attempting to teach it. After all, it certainly came through when I made any kind of attempt to play salsa. I was horrible! I didn’t want to do a disservice to the music or the culture. Melissa’s dad was thrilled at the opportunity and we had set a date for him to come to rehearsal. The week of the rehearsal, he told me he was unable to attend because he could not get off work. Melissa had told me her dad works a lot in order to support their family. He had told Melissa that he really wanted to be there but
their family needed the money. Of course, I understood, and we moved forward with the piece anyway. I had students, including Melissa, lead in areas such as learning the lyrics and rote teaching of the salsa rhythms. I also used recordings in an attempt to help my students learn the music authentically. At the concert, Melissa’s dad approached me and thanked me for the opportunity. I told him maybe some other time we could work something out.

In addition to getting to know the students through conversations and their survey, Lind and McKoy (2016) also recommend using other sources of information to learn about our students (p. 101). The people who know my students best are likely their parents. I used our “Back to School Night” as an opportunity to speak with parents about their children, and about music in their lives (journal entry, September 14th, 2018). I also collaborated with their prior teachers and guidance counselors. In addition, I attended outside of school events that my students participated in, such as open-mic nights, the high school drama, sporting events, honors society inductions, and church choir performances. All these sources helped me to gather additional information about my students which would later inform instruction.

When I first read the section on getting to know your students in the Lind and McKoy (2016) text, my first impression was that most of the suggestions were common sense. However, it took reading this section for me to realize that I was missing a crucial part as to why getting to know my students was important: allowing it to inform instruction. I believe that spending the time to get to know my students also shows them that I care. I care about them as people, not just as students. I don’t just have an interest in
them but in the things that make them who they are. My developing cultural competence shows my students that they are important.

**Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment**

Another crucial step towards culturally responsive teaching is creating a supportive classroom environment that welcomes and values diversity. The first suggestion for creating a supportive environment made by Lind and McKoy (2016, p. 106) is to critically evaluate the visual materials in my classroom. This task was easy to do this year because our classroom had been reconstructed over the summer. Therefore, all of my instructional materials were in boxes, ready to be sorted through. Much to my expectation, many of my posters showed white people playing Western instruments, and many of the quotes and paintings were from white authors and artists. I threw them all out. When deciding how to redecorate my classroom, I didn’t know where to begin. I left it bare.

Lind and McKoy also recommend that teachers videotape themselves and watch back so that we may critically analyze ourselves and our teaching (2016, p. 106). I did this on two separate occasions: once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end of the semester. I saw exactly what I had expected: a relatively “white” rehearsal (journal entry, September 19th, 2018). I led the students through the standard Western-influenced choir format: warm-up, sight-reading, rehearse sections, run through the piece. I knew it was going to be challenging for me to break the habit of teaching this way. After all, this is how all of my ensemble rehearsals (instrumental and vocal) were when I was growing up, and this is also how I was taught to run my rehearsals. The piece we were working on (Ave Verum Corpus by W.A. Mozart), was a part of the Western canon, and so my
teaching practices were validated this time. However, I know myself and my teaching, and I know that I am guilty of following this routine with repertoire that would be better served in a different way. I knew I would need to keep an eye on this in the future.

For a majority of the rehearsal, I had the students sitting in chairs and I was standing over them. This obviously reinforced the power that I have in the classroom. When I reflected on how to challenge the power dynamic that I had so clearly demonstrated by this, I didn’t know what to do because I knew my students wouldn’t want to stand for the entire rehearsal, and I certainly couldn’t sit the whole time because I needed to make my way to the piano, the board, etc. (journal entry, September 19th, 2018). Later on, I got an idea about repositioning the classroom. Instead of always having the ensemble lined up facing me, I decided to rehearse them in a multitude of ways. Because of the unpleasant habit, I addressed earlier in which I run each rehearsal the same way, all of the students knew the warm-ups pretty well. Therefore, I would have students lead them, and I would stand and sing with the choristers. When students taught the text to “En Silencio,” I sat with the singers and learned from our leaders. When we rehearsed “Hide and Seek” we sang in groups around the room and I was always integrated into one of them. When we sang “Take Your Joy” by Eve Beglarian, we sang in a circle because there was only one singer on a part and no need to be grouped. I was also integrated into the circle. For the remainder of the semester, I tried to be a part of the group as much as I could, instead of always the leader. In addition to becoming a part of the group instead of the head of the group, I was better able to assess each singer.

Another disappointment that I had from watching my teaching is that I very clearly focused my attention on the students in the center. I did not spend enough time
looking to the sides of the classroom. I also realized after looking carefully at the arrangement of the group that the majority of my strong singers were in the center. My newer students were seated to the sides of them. I knew I had not done this intentionally but could not understand how I did not notice that the arrangement so clearly privileged veteran choir members (journal entry, September 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2018). I was so shocked by this and spent considerable time thinking about it. I began to wonder if seating the students in this way stemmed from fear. One of my biggest fears at the beginning of the year is whether or not my students would like me (journal entry, September 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2018). Maybe I was afraid of interacting with the new students for this reason. I knew I felt comfortable with the students in the center, which is probably why I put them there. I immediately rearranged where my students sat and also reminded myself during rehearsal to be engaged with all parts of the ensemble.

Towards the end of the semester, I videotaped myself a second time. From this videotape, I learned that I still struggle with breaking habits (journal entry, November 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2018). It is very challenging for me to re-envision the choral rehearsal. My music education has been so strongly rooted in Western music and it is hard for me to get away from that. I read through some of my journal and realized that I made changes to my classroom routines only for specific activities that address diversity, like the LGBTQIA+ terminology exercise or when my Latino/a/x students taught the Spanish lyrics for “En Silencio.” I am afraid that teaching the way I had been taught to teach so often is suggesting that it is the normative way. Even though I am making attempts at being culturally responsive, major instructional changes are only happening a fraction of the
time. I worry that because of my whiteness, I can never create a learning environment that is truly equitable.

Strategies for Acknowledging Cultural Diversity in Music Instruction

Lind and McKoy’s first suggestion for this category is to listen to a radio station that I have never listened to before and focus on the music (2016, p. 111). So, I did (journal entry, November 25th, 2018). I listened to a local New York City hip-hop station. It took me some time, though, to find this station. As I sifted through the various listening options on Sirius XM and FM radio, I realized that there were virtually no ethnically diverse stations. White music was clearly privileged through the airwaves. Hip-hop music mostly performed by black musicians was the only option I could find. I often use the hooks (also known as the refrain) of hip-hop music and other contemporary pop styles as sight-reading exercises. The students see the sight-reading exercise as a puzzle and they seem more motivated to solve it because they know they will be familiar with the end result.

I try to use Western notation only for sight-reading exercises and for repertoire from the Western canon. We learn most other music aurally, as recommended by Lind and McKoy because new music is learned aurally in many cultural communities (2016, p. 112). I believe learning music aurally, particularly vocal music, is also part of white culture. When considering my white culture, I can recall several occasions when I learned music this way. Obviously, any songs that I had learned prior to learning how to read music were learned aurally. Additionally, throughout adulthood, I learned a lot of vocal music from listening on the radio or even in movies. I tend to dismiss this because of the
emphasis placed on reading music throughout my music education experience. This is evident by how often I highlight reading Western notation in my instruction.

Each semester, students write program notes for their concert as an opportunity for assessment. I had originally implemented this idea as a Performance-Based Assessment, an initiative my school district adopted in which students’ assessments would mimic “real life” evaluations. In the professional performance setting, musicians often include performance notes either in the printed program or as part of the performance. When I began implementing program note writing several years ago, the products I received from the students were mostly regurgitations of historical facts about the piece and the composer from the internet. As part of a list of recommendations of strategies for acknowledging ethnic and cultural diversity in music instruction, Lind and McKoy suggest song charts (2016, p. 112). Song charts help students connect themselves to the repertoire. The authors interviewed a high school choral director who designed a song chart for pieces in foreign languages. The song chart had four sections that students had to fill in: the text of the piece, a word-for-word translation of the text, a summary of the translation of the text, and how the text connected to the students’ lives. In an attempt to be culturally responsive, I had the students consider this final prompt of “how the text connected to the students’ lives.”

The following week, a student of mine whom I will call Natalie told me about a project she was doing for her art class. She said she was inspired by one of our pieces and asked if I had an extra copy of the music that she could use for the project (journal entry, November 2nd, 2018). I was so happy that Natalie was inspired by our repertoire and asked her if I could see the project once it was completed. She agreed. The next morning,
Natalie arrived at my classroom door with her digitally-enhanced photograph and it was beautiful. She told me it was not complete yet. She was unsure of a color scheme. It was black and white but she wanted to add color to it. She couldn’t decide on which color because she wanted the color(s) to be responsive to the music. She felt the music probably made people different ways and therefore see different colors (Journal entry, November 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2018). We decided together that she would survey the other choristers later that day to help inform her decision. At the end of rehearsal, Natalie explained her project to the class and asked that each singer who was willing to participate write down the color(s) they think about or see when they sing or listen to the song “Hide and Seek.” The students seemed very interested and were asking Natalie a lot of questions about her art. Natalie seemed proud and excited that she received such interest from her peers. Several students asked if she could bring in the completed project to show the class. She agreed. When the bell rang, she collected the answers, said thank you, and left the classroom with a big smile on her face.

Earlier in the semester, a student named Christina was also inspired by our repertoire and wrote her own song (journal entry, September 12\textsuperscript{th}, 2018). She performed it after school for me. She taught herself a piano part and sang along with her accompaniment. I was so amazed. I asked if she would feel comfortable performing the song for the class. She was tentative but ultimately agreed. The following day in rehearsal, Christina performed (journal entry, September 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2018). The students gave her a standing ovation.

Seeing Christina’s and Natalie’s work, and conversations with professors and colleagues about responsivity in the classroom, made me realize that requiring students to
write program notes is far from being culturally responsive. Even though they are sharing their own ideas about the repertoire and how it connects to them, they are doing it through a medium that is part of white performance traditions. I decided that I needed to give my students a more creative space to talk about themselves and their culture, the repertoire, and their experience in choir with me as their teacher, the way that Natalie did (journal entry, November 3rd, 2018). I decided to invite all of the students to participate in a multimodal project similar to what Natalie and Christina did. Students could create a piece of art, poetry, dance, song, spoken-word, meme, or any other piece of work that they connect with. I asked them to consider questions like: a) Do you feel supported in the classroom?; b) What do you think about the music we sing in choir?; c) What do you wish I knew about you?; d) What do you like about our class?; e) What would you change about our class? The information sheet that I handed out to the students can be seen in Appendix B. In addition to learning about my students, and how I can improve my teaching to better serve them, I would use the art to decorate my bare classroom so that the room is a true representation of who my students really are.

**Story 3: The Story of my Students**

This is the story of my students. I will tell this story through their end-of-semester projects. I was so impressed, by the creativity they displayed through their paintings, drawings, comics, collages, poetry, essays, original songs, playlists, raps, and videos. From their work, I learned about their experience so far in choir this semester as I attempted to be culturally responsive in the classroom. I was excited to review the
students’ work, but I was also nervous because I knew I had opened the door for criticism of myself and my teaching. I would need to put my ego aside and listen to my students.

I intend to use this information to help me inform future instruction, navigate my relationships and rapport with my students, and learn about how I can improve myself as teacher. This story will be divided into four parts: a) what students like about our class; b) what they dislike; c) what they have learned from our class; d) what I need to learn. Each section will spotlight responses given from students through their creative work. All student names will be pseudonyms.

**What they Like**

I will begin with what students like so far about our class. I am starting with this because I am human and hearing some positivity about my work makes it easier for me to open up to the criticism. Several students wrote about things they enjoyed in chorus. I will highlight some of them in this section.

Ashley (pseudonym), a sophomore, created a three-dimensional mask. She covered the mask with paper cut-outs of varying sizes representing all of the songs we have sung in choir. Ashley created this mask to show her approval of our repertoire. She writes: “This project displays an individual’s face being covered by our past and present repertoire, to represent the fact that music has consumed or engulfed my life for the better, while also illustrating that I will always be wrapped up in music!”

Nadine, a freshman, also expressed how much she enjoys the repertoire from our class through her project. She expanded on this by explaining her appreciation for the program note assignment. In her three-dimensional poster, the center figure is an owl. She writes: “The owl represents the audience watching and listening to us. And owls
always remind me of when they go ‘who?’ and it relates back to our program notes and us trying to make the audience know more about our songs.”

The program notes assignment is a platform for students to express their thoughts about the music. Discussions surrounding this assignment often become very personal. Roger is a Latino student who appreciates the Spanish-language music we program and the conversations that have derived from the program notes for these songs. Many of these conversations inevitably focus on race. He writes: “we talk about topics people may not feel comfortable talking about, that is what I like most about this class.” As a result of these conversations, Margo, a Latina student who is a senior, mentioned that she feels “liberated and represented during chorus.” Margo conveyed this feeling with a drawing of a face with acrylic and pastel pencils. She tried to “show a range of representation while at the same time challenging social norms.” She achieved this by moving away from the “normal” body aesthetic in her painting. Keenan, a senior, agreed with this sentiment and showed it through a meme. In his written explanation, he writes that I am the teacher who “listens to their opinions.”

Perhaps it is the deep level of discussion, in collaboration with the students’ shared opinions, that promotes a feeling of family in our choir. Tommy expresses this feeling through his rap. He spoke:

…Chilling and learning with Mrs. D, and hanging out with my chorus family; I always feel welcome in this class, where I can share my feelings and not feel harassed…
Chorus class has changed my life. What I’m trying to say is I’ve had many experiences like;
Meeting new peeps, Making new friends, And I’ll be real sad when all the fun end;
This rap is over and I hope you enjoyed, now make some noise for my other bass boys.
Tommy performed this rap in front of the class. At the conclusion of his performance, the students loudly applauded. Several students laughed and hugged each other. As I looked around at the class, I saw what Tommy described: a chorus family.

**What they would Change**

As part of her canvas project, Catherine (pseudonym) wrote several quotes including: “Music is healing and can help me in times,” and “Sometimes it has to just be you and music to feel better.” The connection that some students feel to music, in conjunction with the platform for discussion in class often evokes strong emotions expressed during rehearsal. Through her video project, Sharon reflects on one of the first days of class where we discussed the feelings of loneliness that the character in the song we were singing may have been feeling. Sharon, a freshman and new to the choir, cried on this day. She spoke of how she often felt lonely herself.

Through her video, which was an unscripted narrative directed at me as the audience, Sharon ponders about what she thinks is the purpose of music education. She believes how students can access emotions through music is what makes music education important and separates it from other subjects. She asked that I shift the objectives of the class to being more about “connecting and feeling.” She does not like that the overall objective of the class (as projected by the course syllabus) is a successful performance at the concert. She suggests: “I would love to have a day where we could just say what’s on our minds. There’s tons of stuff that I’m holding in, and I would love to pour it out to the class.”

In another video, Blair spoke about the same concerns. She mentioned how she hates solfeggio. She wishes we could do less solfeggio in class and more rote learning.
Another student, Celia, expressed her disappointment with the repertoire in her video, also an unscripted narrative. She asks that I consider “doing more pop music.” She says she likes the songs that we work on in class, but sometimes she “just wants to sing something fun.”

Cara made a newsletter. In the “opinion” section, she wrote about her disapproval of the placement process for the advanced choir. I took away the audition process and advanced students based on recommendation and contribution to the class. She wrote that taking away auditions is “almost a slap in the face” towards older students who did have to audition. Cara, a senior, continued with: “we still want the group to continue placing first in competition each year.”

**What they have Learned**

The student who generated the idea for this project, Natalie, centered her art on the idea of diversity. In a written explanation, she wrote:

Coming into a school where you feel singled out or not well heard, represented, or respected is very challenging. You look for something to hold onto for either comfort or at the very least where you least feel uncomfortable. Concert Choir has exceeded all of my expectations of a high school choir class… It is a group of people who are open minded and are willing to have discussions and uncomfortable conversations and make it work.

Natalie’s artwork is a photo of the music for one of our songs over piano keys. The picture is faded into the background of our school. The shading of the picture is mostly blue with some yellow, pink and purple. She decided on the colors, and how much of each color, based on the student responses when she posed the question to the class: “What color do you think of when you sing our repertoire?” Natalie connected the
responses of color with feelings. In her written explanation, she continued with the inspiration behind her work:

The diversity of the music is unreal, and pardon me if this sounds rude and like me just assuming, but I would have never guessed the repertoire (music in Spanish) would be able to connect with so many different people.

Natalie, who is Latina and Spanish-speaking herself, recognized that many students in our choir learned from the music that was in Spanish, not just the Spanish-speaking students.

Lisa also showed in her painting how she learned that music can evoke different emotions for different people. Lisa painted a Yin-Yang symbol, “representing different moods people feel towards the pieces.” Lisa wrote then decorated the background of the painting with various colors. She recreated the same experiment Natalie did, but instead with peers who are not in chorus. She wanted to get the listeners’ perspectives.

Continuing with the theme of diversity, another student named Samantha created a collage of LGBTQIA+ composers “who have been left out of the narrative for too long.” Samantha was inspired by the repertoire that we sang which spotlighted some composers from the LGBTQIA+ community. In response, she searched and learned about additional composers and musicians that we had not spoken about in class and featured them in her collage. She added Latin text to her artwork that translated to: “It is time for change. I am human, therefore nothing human is strange to me.” In her written explanation of her work, Samantha wrote: “As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, I am proud to be a part of our group.”

Melinda wrote a free-verse poem about how she overcame some of her fears in choir. Below is part of the poem:
Melinda, a freshman and new member of the choir, approached me on the first day of school to inform me that she suffers from severe anxiety, especially in school. Through this poem, she shared her thoughts about what she has learned about herself so far this year.

**What they want Me to Learn**

Instead of using words, some students showed me what they wanted me to see through pictures. One of my students, Christian, drew a comic strip. The comic strip showed several pictures of me standing tall in front of the classroom with the students sitting below me, faceless. He clearly showed me how I still have all of the power in the classroom, and the students are all below me, identity-less. The only words on the comic were the heading, which said: “This is for comedic purposes only, please don’t take offense!” Christian was afraid he would offend me by being truthful through his work.

Several other students shared personal struggles with me that they wish I knew about. In her video, Sherri said “I hold a lot of stuff in because I’ve been shut out in the
past. If you ever see me in class staring off in space practically in tears, I’m not doing it on purpose, I’m just pretty sad.” In another project, Margaret shared that she is a victim of domestic violence. In reference to songs about relationships, she wrote: “they speak out to me and sometimes make me upset due to my past and things that have happened.”

Elise submitted “The Old Guitarist” by Pablo Picasso, shaded in blue. She writes “the blue tone represents sadness because it reflects on my depression that follows me everywhere I go, including in school.” She continues:

This piece of art touches the many things I feel when I am in chorus. I don’t feel supported in the classroom because the alto section doesn’t sing out, and I often feel under pressure because I am the older student. I am not a confident singer at all, and it makes me feel bad, and judged… I don’t want anybody to think that I am just being lazy.

In addition to depression, Elise shared that she also suffers from anxiety and germaphobia.

Christa painted a timeline of several different colors to show her emotional journey through chorus from the beginning of the semester. She used green for the first day of school to show she was confused and lost, followed by purple for uncertainty or fear, then silver for anxiety.

In his essay, James wrote that he often feels uncomfortable when we have discussions in choir. In reference to talks about the topic of LGBTQIA+, he writes:

I couldn’t have been more uncomfortable because I believe in an unpopular opinion. I was entirely against the idea, but since my friends and society would possibly shun and criticize me for speaking against it, I kept quiet… I was terrified that all my friends had the same opinions on the topic and that I didn’t, and that it would lead to them hating me.

Rachel created a playlist to show the various feelings she has throughout rehearsal. She shared that she has anxiety induced asthma. Some of the stimulants of her
condition are large crowds (chorus is one of the largest classes offered at the school,) being called on, speaking or singing publicly, and anticipating an upcoming event (concerts.) Rachel is “afraid of failure, not looking good, and being judged.” The symptoms of this condition include overwhelming anxiety and chest pain. She enjoys being in chorus because she likes to sing, but there are several things about chorus that make it challenging for her to participate in.

**Epilogue**

Some students were compelled to share general thoughts about music through their work. Michelle created a piece of art with two hands of different skin colors folded together with the word “United” above them, and a lightbulb with the word “Ignited” above it. In her explanation, she wrote: “Chorus is United and Ignited, but also a million other things.”

Donna reminded me that “music is everywhere” through her collage of pictures of music around the school. Kylie painted a picture called “music comes from our hearts” to show how important music is to her. Elizabeth drew a picture of two roads; one is towards music and the other towards “the three ‘important’ subjects” (math, English, and science). In her drawing, several people walk down the path of several subjects, while only three people walk down the music path, symbolizing her and her two friends that she sits with in choir. Through an original song, Jessica showed that music “makes better people, not just better musicians.” In her explanation of the music, she mentions that “music is a superpower.” And finally, through her video, another student named Lexi said she is “proud of being a part of our choir.”
I was very moved by the students’ work. Through their creative projects, they conveyed to me that music is an important part of their lives. They also shared what they enjoyed about our class since I have implemented culturally responsive strategies, and offered ideas for how I could improve the course and my teaching. The intent of this chapter was to tell three stories: the story of me, the story of my teaching, and the story of my students. These three stories were told through data gathered in my journal and student projects. The following chapter will explore the findings about my culturally responsive teaching process based on these three stories.
Chapter V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

Schmidt (2005) asks a series of questions about music education, one of which is: “How can music education develop research that is focused on social-cultural-philosophical aspects, and that leads the profession to search for educational and social equality?” (p. 10). I will discuss the findings as they relate to each research question with the purpose of answering Schmidt’s call for insight into the search for educational and social equality in the classroom.

The vignettes from my journal provided visibility of myself and my whiteness (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 2). In this chapter, I will provide new stories as a part of autoethnography which will identify and describe patterns of my experience as they relate to the research questions (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The new stories present the data organized by the research questions. The patterns discovered are compared with the literature from Chapter 2.

Component 1: What changes did I make in my teaching strategies?

In this section, I will explore changes that were made in my teaching strategies based on what I observed in my practice. These observations were made through reflections in my journal. The observations have been divided into three different categories: changes in my preparation, during class, and in assignments.
**In my Preparation**

In looking over my stories, I notice some changes were made in how I would prepare to teach my class beginning with how I got to know my students. By implementing the survey as recommended by Lind and McKoy (2016), I was able to understand my students’ backgrounds better. As mentioned previously, I had always conducted a survey at the beginning of the year but I never asked questions that would possibly appear sensitive, such as those about culture, religion, or family. This would be the first time I would attempt to acquire such information from my students.

The survey did help me to get to know my students as Lind and McKoy (2016) indicates. However, I was still only able to relate to some of them. I felt I was unable to relate to students who came from different cultures than I. This was evident several times, including in my failed attempts to connect with Shawn, the African-American student, and Elizabeth, the Latina student who was homeless. The struggle I experienced with relating to my students because of differences in cultural background echoes the findings in Marx’s article (2008).

I was, however, able to connect with students who did come from the same race and religion as I. When Kelly came to me after class to tell me she was upset about how we questioned the celebration of Columbus Day, I understood her feeling of frustration. When I was her age, I also never questioned what we had been taught in regard to Columbus Day because questioning this long-lived tradition that has embedded itself so strongly in our country, our schools, and our culture would also mean questioning white culture and our ancestors.
On another occasion, when Alissa approached me to tell me of her concerns with spotlighting LGBTQIA+ composers, I understood her fear. Alissa and her family were strong Roman Catholics and believed that romance should only exist between a cis man and a cis woman. Alissa was confused because what we were discussing in class contradicted what she was learning at home and in church. I, having also grown up Catholic, could relate to how she was feeling. Another student, James, echoed Alissa’s concerns through his final project because of his religion. In his essay, he wrote: “I couldn’t have been more uncomfortable because I believe in an unpopular opinion” in reference to gender and sexuality. I was able to relate to James and Alissa because their thinking reflects the tradition in which I, too, was raised.

Getting to know my students enabled me to build relationships and rapport with them. It took some time for me to understand how the information I had acquired about them could help me to prepare for instruction. When I had attempted to use Shawn’s popular music preferences for programming repertoire, I learned that I had failed to see the intersection of race with music. I had programmed a piece that shared some similarities to the music Shawn expressed that he liked, but that was sung by a white female artist. I wanted to make his musical preferences work for me instead of him. I did not do this intentionally, but as Diangelo says in her book on white fragility, just because our racist acts are unintentional does not mean they are not racist (2018, p. 13). In reflection, I could have not made assumptions about him and possibly had better success with programming a piece that he was connected to in some way. If I didn’t know where to start, I could have just asked him.
When I went to speak with Shawn’s middle school music teacher, I missed an opportunity to speak directly with him. His former teacher had already developed her own opinions about him, which then caused me to be nervous around him (journal entry, September 4th, 2018). Asking questions and engaging in conversation is a part of getting to know my students. I felt that I failed to do this with Shawn because not only did I not take on a chance to engage in conversation with him, but I also allowed another teacher’s opinions to create assumptions about him that would affect how I interacted with him in my class. In looking back, I wonder if I had asked him questions, perhaps he would have felt more comfortable and remained a part of our class. If not, I may have at least discovered the real reason for why he dropped the class.

When one of my choirs engaged in conversations about LGBTQIA+ composers during class, I prepared a program that spotlighted several composers that we had discussed in response. This was an attempt at being culturally responsive in terms of gender and sexuality (Brockenbrough, 2014). We learned this music through Abril’s constructivist strategy (2006a) in which students learn music through discourse about the multiple ways of music making and how prejudice and stereotypes may affect their listening, thereby addressing the societal curriculum (Gay, 2002). Additionally, through this discourse we challenged the formal and symbolic music curriculum (Gay, 2002) that is mostly made up of music composed by white, straight, cis men. Contrary to the experience I had with Shawn, students were engaged with this repertoire. This was evident by their participation in rehearsal, their program notes, and their feedback. For her project, Samantha (a member of the LGBTQIA+ community), created a collage of LGBTQIA+ composers to demonstrate her approval of this repertoire. In a private
conversation, another student, Jennifer, told me that this repertoire is what inspired her to begin her process of coming out to her family and friends. This is perhaps evidence of what Lind and McKoy (2016) suggest; that students connect with music that represents them.

I chose repertoire based on racial representation in my class. When I saw from the survey that thirty-one percent (31%) of my students identified as Latino/a/x, I candidly learned through conversation with them that several of them were of Chilean descent. In response, I programmed a piece by a South-American composer. Margo, a Chilean student, shared through her painting and written explanation that she feels represented in chorus after singing this piece.

After learning the lyrics, we began to learn the melody of the song. I had planned to teach this song aurally, via call and response and listening to authentic performances. Teaching this way could also acknowledge 49% of the students’ preferred ways of learning, as determined by the survey (journal entry, September 15th, 2018). Through aural learning, I had hoped my students would experience authentic performances of the music from videos and recordings, as opposed to my understanding of the music. In a similar scenario during the pilot study, I had programmed a piece in Hindi because I had Hindi culture represented in my class. I had incorrectly taught the pronunciations of the Hindi lyrics, despite my efforts. I attribute this incorrect teaching to my whiteness. I was unable to get around my whiteness and authentically teach this piece because I do not speak Hindi. When I decided to program “En Silencio” the South American song, I wanted to be sure I did not make the same mistakes. I wanted to use my students’ funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) by having them lead the lesson in
addition to other resources such as recordings and videos (Goetze, 2000). Lind and McKoy suggest learning music aurally because music is learned this way in many cultural communities (2016, p. 112). Teaching “En Silencio” aurally not only capitalized on a pedagogy that my students enjoyed but also ensured that the instruction would be more authentic and less filtered through a white lens.

Lind and McKoy (2016, p. 106) suggest that we videotape ourselves teaching, watch it back, and reflect on how we can be better. In reflecting back on my journal and my stories now, I observe that I was privileging veteran choir members and neglecting newer members during instruction. In response to this, I would plan new seating arrangements for the class. Sometimes it would be as simple as switching the arrangement of voice parts. I would have students rotate rows, or even choose their own seat. Frequently mixing up the seating arrangements, a strategy explored in recent scholarship (Yi, 2018) helped me to engage with all of my students during instruction.

**During Class**

In my journal and my stories, I observe several changes in my instruction that happened during class time. The premise of cultural responsiveness is to be responsive to our students. Therefore, instructional changes occurred in the moment. As the semester went on, I would continue to learn more about my students by interacting with them and listening. Ideas would then develop in response to what I had learned, and the course of my teaching would change.

For example, while conducting the LGBTQIA+ terminology exercise, I realized that I myself did not know many of the terms. If I expected my students to know these terms in an effort to cultivate an environment in which all genders and sexualities may
feel represented in our class, then I, also, should know this terminology (Schippers, 2005). I inserted myself in the learning that day. I made it known to my students that most of these terms were new to me, too. We worked together to become more informed. Students who were members of this community stepped forward and led the class. Admitting that I did not know much about the LGBTQIA+ community and making myself a part of the learning was appreciated by students, particularly those who identify with LGBTQIA+ culture. In reference to coming out to her friends and family, Jennifer said she “gained the confidence she needed” after this work (journal entry, September 26th, 2018).

During another rehearsal, while learning “En Silencio,” Spanish-speaking students stepped forward and taught the lyrics while I sat back as a learner. By utilizing their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), students, who may not have normally had the opportunity to lead in my class, led their peers, and my non-Latina/o/x students and I learned how to properly and authentically sing the text of “En Silencio.”

On two separate occasions, students approached me with their own original music. One was a song and the other a rap. The day they presented me with their work, I encouraged them to perform for the class. When they performed, I joined the choir as part of the audience. At the conclusion of each performance (which took place on separate days) the student audience showed support, encouragement, and pride to their peers. They clapped and hugged each other. Some even cried. Their original work contributed to the strong comradery the members of our choir have with each other.

When students stepped in front of the classroom, I had the opportunity to see the student perspective. Some of my most memorable days of teaching were when I was not
teaching; I was listening and learning from my students. I need to do this more often, which was Christian’s message to me in his comic strip.

Christian’s comic strip, as well as the other project submissions, provided a lot of information to me in my journey towards becoming culturally responsive. These projects would not exist if not for several conversations with my colleagues and Natalie’s inspirational artwork. Natalie’s photo, as well as several other students’ projects, used colors to demonstrate to me the feelings she has in choir. Connecting other art forms with music, such as visual art, helped several students communicate about the emotions they were feeling during class.

**In Assignments**

Before embarking on this journey, I had only two formal assessments each semester: participation in the concert and program notes. During the first couple of years of assigning program notes, those that were submitted were not thought-out well. Student submissions were often plagiarized from various websites that were not necessarily credible. When I read Lind and McKoy’s suggestion of using “song charts” (2016, p. 112), I realized there were similarities between their idea and my program notes assignment. I decided to use characteristics of the song chart but would have students offer their ideas through a program note that would later be presented to the audience at our concert. Instead of listing facts about the music and the composer, students would write about how the music connected to them. Students writing about themselves generated several conversations about topics that, up until this point, were “sensitive” in my class. Examples of these topics are race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic class, which are all parts of one’s culture. I was able to learn more about my students through
the program notes. When they were presented, other students and audience members had the opportunity to learn more about them, too.

In addition to telling me about themselves through the program notes, students had the opportunity to share information with me through a multimodal project given at the end of the semester. Through my journey thus far towards becoming culturally responsive, I learned that writing answers down may not be the best way to convey information for some people. In an attempt to be responsive to my students’ strengths, I asked that they submit to me their work via any medium. The assignment can be seen in Appendix B. The students were very creative with their projects. They submitted insightful work including paintings, drawings, three-dimensional art, photographs, original songs, raps, poems, essays, and memes.

After seeing the students’ willingness to share so many personal things about themselves through the project, I considered how I can alter the survey given at the beginning of the year to yield more information about my students. The first “assignment” that students partake in during the school year is the survey. I put the word “assignment” in quotations because it is not graded. The survey is optional. Students can answer anonymously. In an explanation of Margo’s drawing of a human, she writes: “I am so, so grateful to have a teacher who genuinely cares about our opinions and culture and background.” This got me thinking that perhaps I need to demonstrate this “care” before I can so overtly ask students about their culture. I need to build trust (Diangelo, 2018, p. 147). Next year, I will not offer the survey on the first day of school.

Despite my efforts at redirecting the purpose of assignments, some students still had questions about the objective of the course. In her video, Sharon asked that we focus
less on the concert and more on the students, because “there’s tons of stuff that I’m holding in, and I would love to pour it out to the class.” Sharon feels that chorus is the only place she can do this because, to her, music strongly connects with emotion. As I reflect back and start to plan for next semester, I will continue to attempt to shift the focus of the class towards the needs of the students by tending to their needs more frequently during instruction, not just assessments.

**Component 2: What changes occurred in my position/disposition?**

When I first began this work, I had believed that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) was a step-by-step recipe, despite what the scholarship said (Gay, 2002, 2010; Lind & McKoy, 2016). Gay (2010) provided six features of CRT, and Lind and McKoy (2016) made several suggestions for how to implement CRT in the music classroom. I had thought that if I followed these steps, I would then carry the title of “culturally responsive teacher.”

I felt that I had experienced failure after implementing some of these strategies. For example, when I tried to program music based on student interests, I had failed to see the intersection of race with music when I thought I would intrigue a black male student who enjoyed contemporary pop music with a piece sung by a white female artist. Additionally, when my students began a discussion on whether or not to sing a South American, Spanish-language song with the English translation, I had privileged white culture by turning a blind eye to my Spanish-speaking students and deciding to teach the song in English.
From these failures, which perhaps can be seen as missteps as I become more culturally responsive, I began to understand why culturally responsive teaching is a disposition, a habit of mind, and not a recipe. In addition to each class and student being different, each teacher is different. Becoming culturally aware and culturally responsive will not be the same for every teacher, therefore it cannot be a prescribed process. Rather, I will continue to develop a mindset in which, with every pedagogical decision, I acknowledge and question my race, and observe how it alters my teaching to the disadvantage of my minoritized student population. A new mindset should inform my attempts at being culturally responsive. My whiteness was the determinant factor for why I was unable to relate to several of my students, and ultimately what led me to those missteps.

Also, through observing my stories about my instruction, I learned that despite the several warnings I have read about tokenizing culture, I am still guilty of it. Similar to the teachers’ approach to “cultural” music in Hess’ study (2017), I had brought up discussion and repertoire representing Native American culture only because it was Columbus Day. I was aware of the effects of tokenizing, such as programming an African-American song during Black History Month, before embarking on this study. However, a culture that is not as often in the spotlight, like Native American culture, only comes to my mind one time of year: during the Fall months when we celebrate Columbus Day and Thanksgiving. I must do more to address my biases about some of these less-often spoken about ethnicities. Furthermore, I must continue to address how I privilege white culture in my classroom through my curriculum and pedagogy.
My whiteness also helped me to relate to my students that are white. Furthermore, because of my intersectional identity as a white, straight, privileged person raised in the Catholic tradition, I was able to connect with them about things like resistance towards the LGBTQIA+ community and why it is important that we continue to celebrate Columbus Day. I saw in my story feelings of embarrassment and guilt over my whiteness (and these feelings still exist in me). Diangelo (2018, p. 119) mentions these feelings are part of white fragility. Connecting with these students over things that I did not like about myself was hard. It was hard because I was (and still am) in the process of changing my disposition on race that has been embedded in me since I was young. It is also hard because, in the position of teacher, I want to help my white students who may be growing up with the same misunderstanding of the privilege we have as a result of our educational and societal structure.

I have observed that my white fragility shows itself often, despite my new awareness of what it is. In addition to my feelings of embarrassment and guilt, my white fragility comes through when I decided to “take a step back and work just on music” (journal entry, October 9th, 2018) after experiencing discomfort when talking about race in class. I still convey white fragility, even as recently as when I wrote the previous chapter. When presenting the data from my students’ projects in Chapter 4, I felt the need to consider positive feedback first, to prepare me to be opened to the pending criticism. Requiring that criticism be given in a way that is sensitive towards me and my feelings (despite the fact that I am not the one who is oppressed) is a trait of white fragility (2018, p. 120), which I clearly possess.
Additionally, I learned that I am very afraid of not being well-liked by my students. I refer to this fear in several different journal entries, especially at the beginning of the school year when meeting new students. It has negatively impacted my teaching, which was evident through my initial seating arrangement. I sat only veteran choir members, whom I knew approved of me, in the center of the classroom. I believe I did this so that I could engage with them more than new students, whom I was unfamiliar with. I neglectfully sat new students to the sides.

While I have learned about my whiteness through reading and scholarship, most of what I learned about myself was through reflection. Reflecting on my experience growing up, I learned a lot about how I perpetuated the cycle of white supremacy through my curricular and pedagogical choices. I also learned why my biases and assumptions exist. Navigating uncomfortable moments in which my biases and assumptions revealed themselves, such as when I didn’t tip the Japanese woman the amount I usually would, would help me to address them. According to Diangelo (2018, p. 42) working through discomfort is how we learn. Discomfort lived in my classroom as well, even for my students. In his essay, my student Roger wrote: “we talk about topics people may not feel comfortable talking about, that is what I like most about this class.”

Awareness of my whiteness is helping me to better understand my position in our society. My privilege is further reinforced by my white fragility, which was evident through my a) assumption at the beginning of this study that I was not racist because I did not intentionally mean to be; and b) my “white woman’s tears” (Accapadi, 2007). during my presentation. One step I have taken to navigate my fragility is to take ownership of my mistakes, which I am doing through this work.
Component 3: How have my perceptions of my students changed?

Prior to this experience, I always thought each school year I got to know my students well. I put in more time doing so than several of my colleagues at school, and my students would often acknowledge my efforts. The responses from the new survey after implementing the recommendations from Lind and McKoy (2016) in combination with the students’ projects showed me there is so much about my students that I didn’t know. Several students in my class suffer from anxiety. Elise told me she feels unsupported in my class and pressured by me because she is an older choir member. I am grateful to know this information, so that I may change how I approach these students so that they may feel more comfortable in choir.

I have always been proud of my students for several reasons; however, reading back on my journal and seeing how much they have taught me this past semester has opened my eyes to how wonderful they all are. They have welcomed my attempts at being culturally responsive openly and have given me honest and meaningful feedback. They, themselves, have also embarked on their own journey by getting approval from the administration to start a social justice club after school. The student who proposed this idea was Michelle, the creator of the artwork entitled “United and Ignited” (journal entry, November 9th, 2018).

As mentioned previously, Jessica wrote a song based on her feeling that “music is a superpower.” I believe all of my students have superpowers, not just because of the music they make, but because of who they are and where they came from.
Conclusion

The data from this study expanded on the findings from the pilot study. Five codes had emerged from the pilot study: Concerns, Pedagogy, Student Voice, Care, and Teacher Self-Awareness. These themes continued to emerge throughout my journal. Concern was evident several times, such as for Shawn and my Latina student who was homeless. Pedagogical changes based on recommendations from the literature were frequently reflected upon, such as teaching music aurally. I incorporated student voice into my instruction, such as when my Latino/a/x students led our class in learning the lyrics for “En Silencio.” I displayed care for my students, particularly when I programmed LGBTQIA+ composers in response to student interest in establishing equity in our music and representation of this community in my class. In my pilot study, I displayed emotional investment and care for students. However, it is through this work that I displayed “culturally relevant caring” (Parsons, 2005) by allowing the care that I had for them to inspire changes to my instruction.

Teacher Self-Awareness was the least prevalent code in the pilot study. However, in this journal, interrogation of myself was frequent. The trajectory of this work changed from a focus on external factors such as pedagogy and curriculum to an internal focus on my understanding of my culture, my biases and assumptions, and my students.
Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Answering the Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to understand and interrogate my process of becoming culturally aware and culturally responsive. I intended to do this by implementing recommendations made by scholarship into my curriculum and pedagogy, particularly from Lind and McKoy’s book on culturally responsive teaching in music education (2016). I then journaled about my experiences over the course of a semester. At the end of the semester, I invited my students to participate in a multimodal project. I planned this project so students could provide me feedback about the class and my teaching. Through my journal, my lesson plan book, and the student projects, I collected data to answer the various components of the research question: What is the process of becoming culturally aware and culturally responsive for me, a white female music teacher?

Component 1: What changes did I make in my teaching strategies?

The first attempts at becoming culturally responsive were through planning and preparing instruction. While designing lessons during the semester, the following steps were the most helpful to me:

a) Getting to know my students well.

b) Programming repertoire based on who they are and their interests (and not what I perceive them to be.)
c) Planning to teach aurally when applicable.

d) Videotaping myself and reflecting on my teaching.

Responsive teaching requires flexibility in the classroom. Student feedback suggested that the following changes made while instruction was occurring were effective:

a) Inserting myself as part of the learning experience.

b) Encouraging students with funds of knowledge that are relevant to the content to lead.

c) Incorporating student-generated ideas and original work.

Additionally, students felt represented in the classroom because of the following changes to assignments:

a) Encouraging student voice in the assignments instead of reproducing facts.

b) Not requiring that assignment submissions be only in written form.

c) Revisions to the survey as recommended by Lind and McKoy (2016), including the questions asked and how and when the survey is implemented.

To continue my journey towards becoming culturally responsive, I decorated our classroom with my students’ final project submissions: their artwork and their writing. This helps me prepare for future lessons while serving as a reminder of who my students really are.

**Component 2: What changes occurred in my position/disposition?**

I initially believed that I could become a culturally responsive teacher if I followed the recommendations provided by scholarship, despite the authors’ warnings
that being culturally responsive is not a step-by-step recipe (Lind & McKoy, 2016). I implemented several of these suggestions as part of my instruction and experienced failure. I did not see the intersection between race and music when I ignorantly programmed a piece by a white female artist to spark the interest of a black male student or when I agreed with my English-speaking students that we should sing the Spanish-language song by way of the English translation. In both of these instances, I took away musical experiences that my minoritized students could connect with in order to accommodate my whiteness.

These failed attempts helped me to realize that in order to be truly culturally responsive, I would need to implement the strategies suggested by scholarship while attempting to maintain an anti-racist agenda. As a white, privileged person, I would not be able to do this easily, because I am racist through enculturation. I would need to continue to work to address my biases and assumptions, and how my whiteness comes through my instruction despite my conscious efforts towards an equitable curriculum and pedagogy.

While reflecting in myself, my words and my actions, I have learned that my white fragility shows itself often. Additionally, I have a fear of not being well-liked by my students. This fear is so extreme, that it has prevented me from taking steps towards becoming culturally responsive at times. For example, when reflecting on Shawn dropping my class, I mentioned that I could have asked questions in order to make a connection with him. When I reflected on this further, I realized that there was nothing stopping me from talking with him, even after he dropped my class. He was still enrolled in our school, and I could have easily found the time to connect with him. It was my fear
of rejection from a student that stopped me. I was afraid to hear what he really had to say about me and my class. I could have learned a lot from speaking with him. Moving forward, I must compartmentalize my fear of rejection and think and act beyond it.

I noticed in my data that I often observed myself in a self-imposed binary: either I was ‘successful’ or ‘a failure.’ To me, a ‘successful’ teacher is one who makes connections with her students, provides them with a safe learning environment, establishes an equitable curriculum, and makes lasting impressions as a result of these characteristics. Lessons, performances, actions, and choices that fall below this level of success were considered a failure to me. There is evidence in my journal that shows how this binary exists for me in other spaces, such as my understanding of “good” and “bad” schools in the community I grew up in. Additionally, this binary was present when I began this work because I thought of the very act of being culturally responsive as a binary: either I am or I am not.

My disposition about CRT has changed because now I understand that teaching responsively is not a binary but a continuum. CRT is an individualized process that occurs over time. Some teaching days will be better or worse than others. On any given day, I may find myself anywhere on the continuum. My missteps, which often occur because of my race and privilege, are not failures. Rather, they are opportunities to continue to learn about my culture, my students’ cultures and my instruction, so that I may find myself higher on the continuum the next time I teach.

**Component 3: How have my perceptions of my students changed?**

Through my attempts at culturally responsive instruction, I have learned that my students connect with work that is about them. My LGBTQIA+ students, my Latina/o/x
students, and my Hindi-speaking students took initiative in the learning process and expressed in conversation and through their projects that they felt represented, similar to the findings in Shaw’s study (2016). In my attempts at culturally responsive assignments, I learned that my students have a lot to say, as long as I am willing to hear it. Through their work, I have learned a lot about them, most of which I would not know if I did not change the framework of the assignments. I am honored that my students had enough trust in me to share what they want me to know.

I have also learned that my students are open to learning about each other. When Jessica and Tommy shared their original song and rap with the class, there were several emotions from the audience of students; some applauded and some cried. Additionally, my students are committed to helping me learn. They are committed to helping me learn more about them and more about me and my teaching. They were honest in their work so that I may grow from their feedback. It is because of this commitment to each other and to learning that I realized Tommy was right when he said our choir is like a family.

Component 4: What new questions do I have?

As mentioned previously, several of my missteps were a result of my whiteness. However, some of my actions and choices were a result of my educational and musical upbringing. For example, when I incorrectly taught the piece that was in Hindi, I was simply following procedures that I experienced throughout my choral training and my music teacher preparation courses. Therefore, it is likely that this mis-step occurred as a result of not just my whiteness, but also my prior musical experiences. In reflection, one new question that I have is:
a) How do music teachers’ prior music experiences affect their attempts at culturally responsive teaching?

Perhaps the most inhibiting feeling I have experienced throughout this work was fear. I feel that I would be more inclined to take risks in my instruction if I did not have fear of acceptance from my students (journal entry, September 3rd, 2018), their families (October 17th, 2018) and peers (journal entry, November 6th, 2018), and fear of veering away from expectations set forth by my administration (journal entry, October 24th, 2018) and standards (journal entry, October 18th, 2018). Therefore, another new question I have is:

b) How do I (or others) navigate culturally responsive teaching within traditional student/teacher evaluative frameworks? In other words, if concerts continue in the European traditions, learning standards and professional development continue to privilege white curricula and pedagogy, and administrators are required to ensure that we are administering these traditions, curricula, and pedagogy, what space does that leave for culturally responsive teaching?

I have these fears because at this time all of my administrators are white. Several of my colleagues are also white, and their musical backgrounds are embedded in Western music culture. After conversations with them, such as the one I had at a workshop (journal entry, November 6th, 2018) I do not believe they (and some administrators) understand how their whiteness affects their teaching. Therefore, my next question is:

c) How do I (or others) navigate culturally responsive teaching with white students, families, colleagues, administrators, and systems who are not ready to receive it?
I have enacted my white fragility several times during the course of this study. Many of those times were with students. Some were with my students of color, and some were with white students. When my white students told me, they felt uncomfortable in my class because of our conversation about Columbus Day or because LGBTQIA+ culture goes against their religion, my response was “listen and keep an open mind” (journal entries, October 9th, 2018 and October 22nd, 2018). I struggled to answer this question because what was being discussed in class were contradictory to what was being taught in their homes. Part of being culturally responsive is making connections between instruction and students’ family and home life (Lind & McKoy, 2016). This thought process raised the final question I want to mention here:

d) How do I navigate sensitive topics surrounding culture with young students in class and individually, particularly when the topic being addressed is contradictory to their culture and/or beliefs?

Unexpected Discoveries

In her book, Gay (2010) discusses the six integral factors of culturally responsive teaching: a) validating; b) comprehensive; c) multidimensional; d) empowering; e) transformative; f) emancipatory. The ultimate goal of CRT is for students to experience these elements of learning in the classroom. I do not believe I am at the point on the CRT continuum where my students are experiencing all of these stages. However, I do believe that through this work, I have experienced all of them. I have validated and acknowledged culture and diversity in my classroom and within me. This work was comprehensive and multidimensional in that I considered factors in CRT other than
instruction, such as my students and me. This work was empowering because I experienced small victories in CRT while engaging in an autoethnographic process that will help me continue to grow. This work was transformative because it has changed me and how I think about culture, whiteness, myself, my students, and teaching at large. Lastly, this work is emancipatory, because it has freed me from the sociocultural paradigms that I have grown up in by giving me the courage and strength to challenge and change my role in privileging white culture in my classroom.

An individual’s own process of becoming culturally responsive can only be learned through autoethnographic techniques. In order to understand students’ culture, one’s own culture, and how they affect instruction, one must spend considerable time reflecting on themselves and their work. As mentioned previously, in order to be truly culturally responsive, I must increase my awareness of the biases and assumptions that have developed as a result of my whiteness. My whiteness, in addition to my societal upbringing, will be a part of me forever. The combination of these two forces makes it unlikely that I could be an infallible culturally responsive teacher. Therefore, I have accepted that I may never fully be. I will continue to evolve. The process will never be finished for me. Rather, I will always be “becoming;” becoming aware, becoming responsive.

**Continuing the Work**

Research that explores the new questions discussed in the previous section may help to provide clarity within some of the challenges of culturally responsive teaching. In addition, autoethnographies conducted by other teachers who are attempting to become
culturally responsive may assist in finding trends. I believe it is not only white teachers but all teachers who need to do the work on themselves before attempting to become culturally responsive. Although we could learn a great deal from the autoethnographies of teachers of color, it is especially important for white teachers to engage in this work because we teach in a system that privileges white and European practices. The existence of several stories of white teachers engaging in this work may ease the fear of some teachers who wish to become culturally responsive. Additionally, these stories can be used in teacher preparation programs to help guide new teachers in culturally responsive teaching from the start of their careers.

In order to embark on this work, several contributing factors needed to be in place. First, I needed to have access to the literature, coursework and professional development on culturally responsive teaching. These resources provided me with a place to begin. The literature provided me with an overview and strategies for CRT, and the coursework and professional development opportunities allowed me to engage in discourse to deepen my learning and ask questions.

My supportive team was of the utmost importance during this study. As part of the dissertation process at the institution I attend, students participate in a doctoral seminar. During this seminar, students engage in each other’s work by providing feedback throughout the dissertation process. All of the students in the seminar were musicians and teachers, and several of them are of color. The suggestions and feedback I received from them were essential when attempting to uncover some of my biases and assumptions. Additionally, the feedback I received from my advisor, committee members, and other faculty helped me to craft this work.
Being open to feedback is crucial in order to make progress towards becoming culturally responsive. This was challenging for me because oftentimes the feedback was about me, not just external issues such as teaching methods. As Diangelo says in her book, it is hard to hear things that we do not like about ourselves (2018, p. 119). I struggled (and still do) with letting go of the feelings that I have as part of my white fragility. Some of these feelings were guilt, embarrassment, anger, frustration, sadness, fear, and defensiveness. However, by working through these emotions and accepting feedback from my peers, particularly those of color, I was able to make important steps towards learning about myself, my understanding of culture, my biases and assumptions, and my teaching.

**Hopes for the Future**

This study is a story about me, therefore it is not generalizable. I embarked on this journey to improve my own teaching, which I believe I have done. Becoming aware of my culture, my whiteness, and how it persuades my curricular and pedagogical choices, is perhaps my most important step towards becoming culturally responsive. Through the interrogation of my whiteness, I have uncovered some of my biases and assumptions about culture, and now I can work on them. I have presented evidence of how my whiteness and my biases and assumptions have at times hindered my ability to relate to my students of color because I struggled with implementing pedagogy and curriculum that they could connect to. Therefore, in order to be truly culturally responsive, I must continue to increase my awareness of my biases and assumptions that have developed as a result of my whiteness and my societal upbringing. I will continue to strive towards
being a culturally responsive teacher, and I hope this work will inspire other teachers to do the same.

**Final Reflection**

My process of becoming culturally responsive is this: learn, try, reflect, learn more. I learned from my students and scholarship. Then I tried the suggestions. I reflected on my steps and missteps with help from my students who were willing to provide me with feedback. I then learned again from those reflections. This is a cyclical process, and I intend to continue the cycle of learning, trying, and reflecting.

The cyclical process will never end. Even as I wrote this paper it continues to circle forward. For example, in the second paragraph on page 88, I wrote:

For example, when I tried to program music based on student interests, I had failed to see the intersection of race with music when I thought I would intrigue a black male student who enjoyed contemporary pop music with a piece sung by a white female artist.

When I first wrote this sentence, I had written “black boy” instead of “black male student.” I had informalized black culture by using this term, while in the same sentence used “white female artist,” perceived to be a more “proper” term to describe a white person. In a dissertation where I am writing about cultural awareness and responsivity, my racial biases still appeared. Thankfully, a colleague of mine pointed this out to me. The cycle of learning repeated itself in the writing after this study was technically complete, proving that this learning is life-long and will never be truly finished.

I learned a great deal about my teaching through this work. There are several characteristics of my teaching that I must work on. Aside from continuing to try to establish a more equitable curriculum and pedagogy through culturally responsive
teaching, I must also respond to my students’ feedback. I must make sure to give my students equal attention, circulate around the room instead of remaining in a stance of power in front of the class, and change the primary objectives of the course to be about my students instead of the concerts.

I also learned a great deal about myself through this work. I have begun the journey towards learning about my culture and my whiteness. I have uncovered things that I do not like about myself, such as biases and assumptions about non-white cultures and how often I privilege white culture in my classroom. However, I am inspired by Diangelo’s remark: “Yes, it’s uncomfortable to be confronted with an aspect of ourselves that we don’t like, but we can’t change what we refuse to see” (2018, p. 42). The work presented in this dissertation is only the beginning, and I look forward to a life-long journey of learning.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: Student Survey

Name (or anonymous!): __________________________

Ensemble: _______________________

**Please only answer questions you feel comfortable answering.**

What kind of music do you enjoy listening to?

What kind of music do you enjoy learning in choir?

How do you prefer to learn music?

Which cultures, ethnicities, races, and/or religions do you identify with?

Does music play a role in your family?

What languages do you speak?

Why are you taking this class?

What goals do you have for yourself for this year? (In this class!)

Please list anything that I can do this year to make your experience in choir a positive and meaningful one!
APPENDIX B: Project Assignment

Multimodal Choir Project

THIS ASSIGNMENT IS DUE ON: Friday, November 30th at the end of the school day

PURPOSE: As part of our journey together to become informed choristers and advocates for a better world through music, and in reflection of our year together thus far, it is crucial to explore how it is that we have come to see the connection between music and the world as we do. In addition, I encourage you to think about your needs in choir, whether they are being met or not, and how I can serve you better in class.

PROMPT: How has your choir experience been so far this year?

Additional questions to help you design your project may include:

1. Do you feel supported in the classroom?
   a. How? Can you give me an example?
2. What do you think about the music we sing in choir?
3. What do you wish I knew about you?
4. What do you like about our class?
5. What would you change about our class?

OBJECTIVE: Through this project, I intend to learn more about you and how I can make your experience in choir a meaningful one. To build upon the survey administered in the beginning year, this project will allow me to continue to develop a deeper understanding of your needs and experiences.

TASK: This non-print assignment asks that you represent your individual journey in choir through art (i.e. painting, collage, series of photos, artifact, meme), performance (i.e. spoken word, song, dance), or video or audio (i.e. iMovie, YouTube video, webcast, podcast, etc.).

GUIDELINES: Choose the medium that you feel most comfortable with, that is unique to you, and that will best express your thoughts on our choir class. In addition to your project, please also include a description of your work that includes why you chose this medium, and how it represents your journey thus far in choir. This description need not be more than one page.

SUBMISSION: Projects and write-ups may be submitted via google classroom, e-mailed, or hard copy.