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Breaking with Silence: Using a Music Classroom to Empower and Engage

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Breaking with Silence: Using a Music Classroom to Empower and Engage

A Training Course-Linked Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership, & Management at SIT Graduate
Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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Abstract

This Course-Linked Capstone in training focuses on SIT Graduate Institute coursework from Training Design in Experiential Learning and Training of Trainers: Ethics & Intercultural Design. I present a reflective analysis of my experience incorporating social justice pedagogies into a music classroom. Through the analysis, I explore the questions, how do people of dominant identities enter into spaces that are not explicitly about creating change and still enable social change to occur? Secondly, how can teaching music connect to changing society? This study occurs over a six-month period at Vermont Academy in Saxtons River Vermont and takes place within the school's vocal ensemble and voice lesson programs. The study explores how a teacher's shift in values and awareness impact their efficacy to implement teaching strategies and design curricula grounded in principles of democratic education. The methods include: the application of engaged pedagogy, shared power, critical thinking, self-expression, and imagination; reflections on each practice; and guiding insights to deepen each practice in the future. Conclusions include lessons learned, next steps for social justice music teaching and beyond, and questions to ponder for the field of music education, social justice educators, and all practitioners interested in creating attitudinal change.

Key words: social justice education, music education, engaged pedagogy, critical pedagogy, hegemony, shared power, attitudinal change.

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Introduction

In 2017, I was driving across the country on my way to Arizona on my first musical tour. It was January, and it was the first weeks of Donald Trump's presidency. My partner and I listened solemnly to the news as Trump's insidious travel ban unfolded. I had just left my job at refugee services, and as I listened, a flurry of my Middle Eastern colleagues, friends, and students' faces came into my mind. Will they be safe? What can I do? How can I help? Can we turn back so I can go back to work and fix this mess? In utter despair, I made phone calls, I asked if they were alright, I offered to start raising money; yet, deep inside I was aware that I was driving through the middle of the desert, and there was nothing tangible I could do. From this point on, I tried to imbue our shows with as much social and political messages I could—to offer some peace, to question, maybe even to call to action. But, my attempts felt spotty. Ultimately, I believed music was not enough, and I did not have what it took to use music to create political and social change.

What am I Studying, and Why does it Matter?

Now, as a music teacher at a private boarding school, I am faced with the same questions: can I be an instigator of social change within this unexpected venue? How can music be a part of it? For most of my life, I have associated change initiatives as taking place within certain types of spaces - social studies classes, diversity trainings, and organizations working to alleviate poverty. I am not alone in my associations; as Lisa DeLorenzo states in, *Giving Voice to Democracy in Music Education* (2016), "Teachers might determine that issues of democracy and social justice belong exclusively to the social studies curriculum. Music teachers, in particular, often focus primarily on the aesthetic properties of music with little or no connection to social

justice” (p. 4). The notion of social justice as *belonging* to certain disciplines has caused me to question: can a society truly change if efforts to impact perceptions and attitudes only take place within these expected spaces? Secondly, aspects of who I am may impact my efficacy in social change efforts. My privileged identities as a white, North American, upper middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied person mean I may not notice how who I am impacts an environment.

Based on these factors, I explore the question:

How do people of dominant identities enter into spaces that are not explicitly about creating change and still enable change to happen? In my case, how can a white, middle class, North American woman enter into an elite boarding school music classroom and contribute to creating social change?

I probe deeper into this question by more specifically examining:

How is teaching music connected to changing society?

For the scope of this capstone, I am defining social change as internal and interpersonal shifts in awareness and attitudinal understanding among 15 students, and fundamentally, within myself. I am concerned with reflecting on changes in my own values in order to understand how my internal changes impact my outer work as a practitioner. I follow the journey of my shifts in values and awareness, both pre and post SIT on-campus study, by specifically exploring my confidence as a social justice music educator, my belief in the power of music in changing society, and my recognition of how aspects of my identity impact my work. I explore how my own shifts in values and understandings impact my effectiveness as an educator to implement teaching strategies and design curricula that deepens students’ capacity to share power, to question what is, and to imagine other ways of being. When students sense that their voice is vital to a group’s success, this understanding has the potential to shape how a student will engage with the world.

My ultimate objective is to create a music classroom that is a microcosm of a more just society. Yet, what does this more just society look like? My vision for a better world is rooted in Adams, Bell, & Griffin's definition of social justice:

Social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a community that is [co-created] to meet the members' needs. Social justice includes a vision of a society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. (2007, p. 1)

As a result, social justice *education* requires teaching individuals how to analyze what inhibits people from fully participating in society by examining systems of oppression and engaging students in interrupting oppressive patterns in themselves and in institutions (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 2). Thus, my practice as a social justice music educator aims to embody the process and the product of creating a social order in which all people are safe, emotionally cared for, and capable of equally participating in a democratic classroom.

Where Does this Study Take Place?

This study is situated at Vermont Academy, a small secondary boarding school located in Saxtons River Vermont. With approximately 150 students ranging from 9th-12th grade, the school's mission is to develop confident, active learners and respectful citizens who think critically and make a positive difference in the global community. Eighty percent of the students live on campus whereas twenty percent are day students. Twenty five percent of the student body is international coming from seventeen different countries, and seventy five percent of the student body is domestic, coming from twenty different states. The school is a traditional boarding school, costing \$58,541 per year for boarding students and \$31,702 for day students.

As the part time vocal instructor, my role includes leading vocal ensemble, teaching private voice lessons, teaching a course on the voice as part of a required Ninth Grade Arts course, and directing the music for the school musical. None of the groups are auditioned, resulting in a wide range of talent and commitment among students. As vocal ensemble is the only year-long course I teach, it is my main focus throughout this analysis; however, I will occasionally weave in insights and observations from other courses as well. Within vocal ensemble, there are 15 students. Seven identify as male, seven identify as female, and one identifies as non-binary and uses male pronouns. Demographically speaking, three students are from China, one student is from Botswana, one student is African American from New York City, and nine students are white from Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, and Arizona. The course is a credit bearing course that meets two times a week for 40 minutes, with an optional third rehearsal once a week. There are five performances throughout the academic year.

How am I Studying This?

Since my time at SIT, I have been enthralled by Freire's (1998) concept of praxis, the continuous movement between theory, practice, and reflection, or in hook's words, "action and reflection on the world in order to change it" (1994, p. 14). The notion of praxis has informed how I have organized this paper into the following sections:

Section 1: noticing what is: In order to teach in a manner that cares for the soul of others, I start with caring for my own soul by noticing what is. I reflect on how stories of socialization have shaped my values into who I am in the moment of arrival at Vermont Academy.

Section 2: engaging with what is: When a teacher is actively engaging in the pursuit of understanding their socialization in order to break free from it, they then can begin the process of engaging with others in a way that is also transformational. This section is concerned with 1)

theory, regarding principles of democratic education, 2) my practice applying engaged democratic principles, and 3) my reflections and insights to deepen each practice in the future.

Section 3: imagining “what could be”: In the final section of the paper, I explore my overarching shifts in attitudes/awareness. I then synthesize what I have learned from my practice to envision what an improved social justice music teaching practice could look like and how these insights could apply to my future work beyond Vermont Academy. Finally, the product of this reflective analysis is simply more questions for the field of music education, for social justice educators, for all humans concerned with the craft of attitudinal change.

Section 1: Noticing “What Is”

We all carry a story. These stories impact how we show up in a space and how we exist as educators. To grow from these stories, I call on bell hook’s concept of self-actualization, a deep care and commitment to the growth of one’s own well-being--emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually (1994, p. 13). My capacity to develop begins with understanding and noticing how I’ve been socialized. According to Adams and Zuniga in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, socialization is “the lifelong process by which we inherit and replicate the dominant norms and frameworks of our society and learn to accept them as “common sense.” (2007, p. 105). The result is the internalization of values that are socially rooted and historically developed and can result in silence, anger, self-hatred, guilt, collusion, ignorance, lack of reality etc...(2007, p. 107). Below, I explore two salient socialized narratives in my attempts to, “be a teacher that is also a presence....that can reflect upon itself, that knows itself as a presence, that can intervene, can transform, can speak of what it does, but that can also take stock of, compare, evaluate, give

value to, decide, break with, and dream” (Freire, 1998, p. 26). Through a deeper concern and care for who I am, I begin the process of my own breaking apart and liberation.

The Doubting Musician

My inherent love of music.

I have loved to sing and write songs for as long as I can remember. When I was 7, I wrote my first musical, which I performed on my parent’s hay wagon. I quickly found that something transformative and mysterious happened to me internally when I made music. I can remember the first time I experienced a sense of “flow” during the Franklin County choir; we spent two days singing for sixteen hours. When my mother picked me up, I sang the entire way home. She asked incredulously why I wasn’t sick of singing, and I couldn’t fathom wanting to stop. By sixth grade, my identity was formed as a “singer” when I became the lead in the school play. I wore this title with honor, and throughout my entire schooling experience, I experimented with every type of vocal music that I could be a part of from chamber music, madrigals, jazz, and acapella to musicals and funk.

My socialization as a young musician.

My loving and open family were not musicians and did not understand what they were supposed to do with their daughter’s passion for music; the social norms were unclear. They looked towards outside experts to help form expectations on the right way to involve their child in music. They were open to supporting my interests, yet I was an anomaly that no one could quite understand. This is where my value for the arts began to form: questioning, unsure, reliant on other external experts to tell my family and me what was “right.”

Turning to experts in music meant classical piano lessons, school bands, and learning Broadway musicals. These schools of music reinforced the narrative that there are expert

musicians, and my job was to learn how to perfectly perform other composers' music. In high school, I joined a select singing group that traveled the country. This group was my sense of home, and it served as the foundation for my music knowledge. For all of its strengths, I unknowingly received an in-depth traditional music education. Music scholar Paul Woodford (2016) contends that traditional music education is characterized by the creation of expert musicians only, as schools today are extensions of a capitalist system, primarily interested in producing people with skills to grow the economy. He argues that the focus on creating expert musicians means many music teachers become "obsessed with performance above all else," which reduces music education to "anodyne banality, indoctrination, or entertainment" (2016, p. 55).

My music education reflects Woodford's description; our choir worked towards perfection for the sake of performance, and we sang entertaining repertoire mostly based in the Western cannon and written by white men. All of the composers and music teachers I was exposed to had received degrees in music. As a college student, I grappled with my self-worth as a "lesser trained" musician. I would sit at the piano and come up with songs, writing lyrics on scraps of paper. However, because I had only been taught choral music, I thought the correct way to write music was to compose musical scores. Since I didn't know how, I thought I was inept and didn't share anything I created. Thirteen years later, as a musician and music teacher, I grapple with the narratives my own education left me with: I did not receive a degree in music or music education. Therefore, I am not as worthy as other musicians and music educators.

Breaking with socialization.

With no role models or guides, I followed an internal desire to break with my idea that I "didn't know how" to write music. My senior year of college, I began to learn the guitar, which

introduced me to folk music. Unlike classical music, this musical language was written for the masses to understand and access through basic chord charts. There was less of an emphasis on experts and perfection, and songs were often learned aurally. This realization sparked the beginning in my confidence to share songs.

Writing songs became a transformative process in which I could express my inner life to the world. Despite feeling vulnerable, I noticed the songs I considered imperfect still had the capacity to move people. Now eight years later, I have toured the United States, led songwriting workshops, recorded an album, and played at some of the United States revered folk venues. In each step, I have never stopped questioning my worth as a musician, yet I have learned to give myself over to trying. Breaking away from the stories of what is a “worthy musician” is a continuous process, a narrative that must be revisited in each new musical venture I take part of.

The Social Change Professional

Socialization of what is “social change”.

My value system of what is effective social change began forming in childhood. My parents worked in poverty law and land conservation, thus I grew up to respect professions in making change to imperfect systems and structures. My commitment and value for creating structural change was reinforced through the institutions I came into contact with: cultural exchange programs, my high schools global studies program, and my university. I traveled with my high school global studies program to South Africa where I witnessed stark inequality between the private schools and the schools in Soweto slums. I left the program with a fervent passion to reform educational systems. The cultural program I enrolled in during the summers in high school, Amigos De Las Americas, took me to Panama and Mexico, where I participated in building latrines, planting trees, and constructing community centers. SIT’s study abroad

program to Bolivia solidified my interest in creating a self-designed major in Development and Social Change, where I focused on taking an interdisciplinary look at how to eradicate poverty. One of my first jobs out of college was as the Assistant Director for the State of Maine's refugee resettlement program. My purpose was to impact policy throughout the state of Maine on how refugees are resettled and how interpreters are trained.

As a result, my love for music and my passion for social change grew as two separate paths: I was happiest when involved in music, yet somewhere in my value system, I had grown to believe that music wasn't enough to effectively impact the dire condition of society. In my family, my education, and in my work, I had never witnessed music playing a vital role in "helping," "fixing," or "solving" the structural problems I felt committed to *change*.

Breaking with Socialization.

In spite of my doubts that music plays a role in social change, I experimented. At Maine's resettlement program, I started a refugee choir. When I left Refugee Services and became an ESOL teacher, I experimented with working part time, touring in the winter, and running a singing group at the school. After two years of working part-time as a teacher and part-time as a musician, my two passions left me feeling split and confused.

Finally, I enrolled in SIT with the intention of unifying the teacher, leader, and musician in myself into a career that was both emotionally and financially sustainable *and* contributed to social change. However, I did not enroll expecting to unravel my intricate relationship with music or my complex relationship with the word *change*. I came expecting to find models for how to put music to work to change society in ways I deemed "effective" and "impactful."

The academic portion of my SIT experience, using Kurt Lewin's (1951) terms, unfroze me, as I began to embrace the value of arts in social change. The most fundamental shift that took

place was my realization that the type of change I was interested in was shifting people's attitudes. Indeed my own attitude shifted, and I began to recognize how attitudinal change is a fundamental component to the massive overhaul of social structures I longed to influence. As Ryland White poignantly told me, “soft skills” - or skills in raising awareness and changing attitudes- are the mortar between the bricks, holding the “hard skills” in place. We cannot write new laws in poverty reduction if the people at the table do not know how to communicate, work as a team, and think creatively. I found a new understanding that the arts are a tool to teach these emotionally based skills. Music teaches deep listening, vulnerability and risk taking, all of which are fundamental to groups working to change society.

I also began to realize how being “impactful” and “effective” is influenced by how my identity impacts those I work with. I wrote in a reflection in May 2018, “I came to SIT wanting to work with refugees or low-income folks. Who am I to want to “help” those who are different than me and “in need?” I had questioned this before, but how I define diversity had changed. A group of white upper middle class women is filled with diversity if diversity is defined as different ways of being in the world. I realized due to my own privileges, my efforts to influence or change someone’s attitude may be most effective working with people who think and look like myself.

Further, in my search to unify the leader, educator, and artist into one cohesive professional, my frame shifted, as I realized the *role* I play in society is less important than *how I exist* in whatever position I fill. Instead of asking myself, “what is my profession?,” the question shifted to, in whatever profession I’m in, how do I continue to ask myself, “What am I working for?” I realized that I came to graduate school to begin to finally accept that I will never be one thing, one neatly defined profession, and maybe that is a good thing.

Social Change Music Educator

I arrived to Vermont Academy with these new glistening realizations in my mind, yet putting them into practice put everything back into question. Am I good enough? I still held onto the notion that I was not trained to be a music educator and therefore was not capable of performing my job at the standard I had experienced as a student. In practice, the question returned: the world is in dire conditions; is teaching music at a boarding school enough? In practice, I held onto old residue of what change looked like and beliefs of what venues and populations are part of the conversation. I was embarrassed to tell people what my practicum was, afraid for being judged it was unrelated to social transformation. On paper, I believed in the role of arts in changing society, but in practice, it didn't feel revolutionary. As a white woman walking into a boarding school music classroom, I didn't *feel* part of social change on a daily basis. Thus, when I arrived to Vermont Academy the question emerged, *how* is teaching music at a boarding school related to social change? Is it truly? My work is an interrogation of this question within the spirit of Freire's notion of "unfinishedness", a permanent process of searching, an unending state of curiosity.

Section 2: Engaging with "What Is"

"Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply" (hooks, 1994, p. 22).

Theory: Democratic Music Education

In the spirit of hook's words, I brought my commitment to self-actualization to my work at Vermont Academy, hoping that my unending searching would engage students in their own journey "to live full and deep lives." My searching process began by brainstorming how teaching music was connected to societal change. I revisited my guiding principles as a social

justice educator, which I developed during my coursework in *Training of Trainers: Ethics and Design*. I highlighted particular areas that seemed relevant to my position including engaged pedagogy, shared power (co-creation), critical reflection, and attitudinal change through the arts.

I was also curious how music educators had interfaced with social justice teaching pedagogies. I found that an emerging body of literature had begun to link the practice of music teaching to social justice, often referred to as *democratic music education* by progressive educational scholars (DeLorenzo, 2016, p. 1). In their work, scholars illustrate how they interpret the term *democracy* as a socially constructed concept, cultivated by the human imagination and therefore in the constant state of becoming. Their definition includes the faith that all people have the capacity to become participating citizens (Dewey, DE Lorenzo, Michelle, Jacobowitz, 2016). I would like to note, as democracy is a western cultural construct, it is by no means the only form of effective social order; however, as this practice takes place in a U.S. context, I will focus solely on democratic principles.

Yet what does democratic music education look like in practice? Music educator Lisa Delorenzo argues that making music has the potential to serve as a microcosm of a democratic society. She argues that music provides “an aural canvas for people to question, respond, or affirm that which affects our democracy so deeply” (2016, p. 7). The practice of bringing people together to create music provides opportunities to discuss the conditions of society from which music emerges. According to Delorenzo, the characteristics of a democratic music classroom include: shared decision making, responsible action for the betterment of society as a whole, mutual goal setting, representations of diverse points of view, discussions of music as a part of culture, facilitation of critical thinking, and *freedom of expression* (2016, p. 2).

Scholar David Elliot further argues that when dispositions and discussions lead to a music classroom that reflects a microcosm of a democratic society, then music teachers are taking part in preparing *artistic citizens*, individuals who “put their music making to work to facilitate and create positive social and cultural transformations” (2016, p. 15). Music educators have the opportunity to show students how music has historically contributed to democratic society and to inspire students to use music for change. Throughout time, music has been used to raise social awareness through protests, such as apartheid and the civil rights movement; for active resistance, such as occupy wall street; and for solidarity around the world, such as international AIDS concerts (Delorenzo, 2016). It is the music teacher’s responsibility to bring these examples into the classroom and provide students with the opportunity to *imagine* how they might actively use music in their lives and communities.

Practice: Democratic Education Case Studies

After immersing myself in the literature of democratic music education, my guiding principles as a social justice *music* educator expanded to include:

- Engaged pedagogy
- Shared power (co-creation)
- Critical thinking around identities
- Self-expression
- Imagination

Below, I put these guiding theoretical principles into practice through a series of case studies. The examples chosen are not exhaustive, yet they were carefully selected to represent my insights towards social justice music teaching. In order to generate new knowledge on how to put democratic music education into practice, I mimic the basic structure the experiential learning cycle, as developed by David Kolb in the 1980s. As a person experiences something new, reflects upon it, integrates it into their worldview, and experiments through further action,

new knowledge and understandings emerge (Smith, 2010). For my own purposes, I have simplified these stages into: theory, description of what happened, reflection on what happened, and insights for how the theory/practice will guide my future work.

Engaged pedagogy.

Theory.

“There is an aspect of our work that is sacred; we believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the soul of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.” (hooks, 1994, p. 13)

When I first read this quote in the course *TOT: Ethics and Design*, I felt bell hook’s had articulated something I had long believed but never quite verbalized: teaching is a spiritual act, and it is rooted in a concern for the soul of the learner. When I arrived to Vermont Academy, I was eager to practice holistically teaching students “not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge for how to live in the world” (hooks, 1994, p. 15).

Bell hooks argues that knowing the whole student creates the conditions for the student and teacher to begin to examine teaching and learning to transgress. The classroom becomes a space for transgression when students and educators add a curious, compassionate, and critical lens to their work. As Freire states, when curiosity becomes capable of self-criticism, “Ingenuous curiosity becomes epistemological curiosity... It is precisely because curiosity does not automatically become critical that one of the essential tasks of progressive educational praxis is the promotion of a curiosity that is critical, bold, and adventurous” (Freire, 1998, p. 45). Thus, when the student and teacher know one another, it creates the conditions for the student to become curious and open to learning. Only then can scholars’ concepts of a “democratic education” begin in which power dynamics are re-examined, imaginations have space to explore, and the status quo can be openly questioned.

Description, reflection, and insights.

With hook's words echoing in my mind, my primary concern as a new music teacher was to ensure that I holistically knew the students to establish the content of the class around what was relevant to their lives. On the first day of school, I handed out a needs assessment (which for their purposes was entitled, Vocal Ensemble Sign Up Sheet) to learn about the needs, aspirations, and lives of my students. I received half filled out sheets. I also gave them a brief introduction about myself and my learning objectives for the group. I rushed through this, as it was the first day of school, and students seemed uncomfortable and quiet. I handed out the Vocal Ensemble Sign Up Sheet in the last two minutes and asked students to bring it back to me, which resulted in getting only a few back (see Appendix B for Vocal Ensemble Sign Up Sheet and Fall Trimester Day One Lesson Plan). At the beginning of the winter trimester, I handed out a similar assessment asking students about challenges or goals they would like to reach during vocal ensemble. Most students didn't answer this question, or said they wanted to sing a solo (see Appendix D for Group Norms/ Needs Assessment). I also organized a field trip over the holidays to listen to a local choir. 5 of the fifteen students chose to come. On a daily basis, to understand the emotional wellbeing of the group, I aimed to be casually "around" to inquire how things were going. Students would open up to me most during this time; I would hear they are hungry, they broke up with a boyfriend, and they had a lot of homework. By asking each student, I usually could read the overarching mood of the group, and sometimes, adjust my lesson accordingly.

Overall, I witnessed collegial and positive group energy; however, when it came time to actively engage students in elements of a democratic classroom, such as making decisions collectively, students completely disengaged. In one instance, to decide the repertoire for the

winter trimester, I led a discussion to decide if the group wanted to learn an extra challenging song that one of the students had recommended. I told students, “We have 5 weeks until our next performance. As a group, do you want to take on this challenging piece of music, in which you may need to do a little work outside of ensemble, or would you like to perform a couple of easier songs, which would not be as stressful?” I explained that I wanted it to be a collective decision. The group was silent. No one wanted to give any input. When I asked them to all close their eyes and vote, they expressed their opinion, which strongly favored taking on the challenge. I noticed I felt pressure for it to be efficient conversation, as we didn’t have much time to practice.

In reflecting on hook’s notion of caring for the soul of students, I now recognize that engaged pedagogy requires that the students know *each other* in order to “teach to transgress”, or, in this case, to engage in collective decisions. At the beginning of the year, I was so overwhelmed by the musical tasks before me, I did not take much time for community building activities. I focused on me knowing the students and them knowing me. As a result, some of the students knew each other deeply from other areas of life, and others hardly knew anyone, which created a power imbalance among students and made some unable to fully open up in challenging group conversations. Also, my attempts to ensure the content of the course was relevant to students’ lives were haphazard. I did not always leave enough time to complete the needs assessments, and as a result, they were not always an effective tool to get to know my students and build curriculum around their interests. Furthermore, although I typically asked students how they were doing, I did not always alter lessons and curriculum based off of what I was hearing. Under time constraints and pressure from performances, I often fell into a pattern of sticking to my lesson plan regardless of their state and making most of the decisions for the group.

My attempts to apply engaged pedagogy brought to light the theory's nuances, which will guide my future work. First, my experience illustrates how engaged pedagogy requires thoughtful scaffolding. Community-building must be multidirectional in which all parties get to know each other. Well-rounded community building creates the conditions for students to open themselves to engage in conversations that are "critical, bold, and adventurous" (Freire, 1998, p. 45), such as making a collective decision about the repertoire. Secondly, I now recognize how the goal of engaged pedagogy is for the *student*, not just the teacher, to understand that the purpose of the course goes beyond the content and includes skills in how to exist in the world. My remaining question is: *How do you unfreeze participants to become invested in taking over their learning?*

Shared power.

Theory.

"It was only as I began to interrogate my fear of "power"- the way that fear was related to power...where I had so often seen those with class power coerce, abuse, and dominate those without- that I began to understand that power was not itself negative. It depended what one did with it." (hooks, 1994, p. 187)

After my coursework in *TOT: Ethics and Design*, I left reflecting on hook's interrogation of the word "power", and I began to question how I choose to use power in a classroom. Hook's comment that power itself is not inherently negative, reminded me of Delorenzo's definition of democratic education where sharing power is fundamental to a classroom. Yet, what does sharing power look like? VeneKlasen and Miller's (2007) model helps to distinguish different expressions of power:

Power Over is seen as a win-lose kind of relationship. Having power involves taking it from someone else, and then, using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it.

Power With has to do with finding common ground among different interests and building collective strength.

Power To refers to the unique potential of every person to shape his or her life and world. When based on mutual support, it opens up the possibilities of joint action, or power with.

Power Within has to do with a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge; it includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others. Power within is the capacity to imagine and have hope; it affirms the common human search for dignity and fulfillment (p. 45)

I was particularly drawn to VeneKlasen and Miller's concept of *power within*, which connects back to engaged pedagogy; every student is actively participating because they understand their own value and the value of the group. Within this paradigm, everyone is a learner, and everyone helps to shape the trajectory of learning. As an educator, raised in a system where the teacher holds the power, what does it look like to cultivate power within each group member? At the beginning of Vermont Academy's school year, I designed learning objectives for vocal ensemble (see Appendix A for more information on Yearlong PGO's), which guided my attempts to break through traditional power structures. Below I reflect on two of my attempts towards shared power through practices in group norms and student driven rehearsals.

Norms: Description, Reflection, Insights.

At the beginning of the school year, I introduced the concept of creating group norms and framed them as a collective document where students would decide how they wanted the space to be run. The following trimester, I created a second handout that included the group norms from the fall. I asked students how they felt they were doing in upholding these norms, and if there was anything they would like to add or change. I also made a note that I would be sharing their answers with the group without their names attached, as it served the whole group to know

the needs of their classmates. Sharing students' responses was an attempt at distancing myself from the position of power and allowing students to care for one another as a group.

The following week, I typed up students responses, and we discussed the patterns that emerged (see Appendix C for Group Norms/Needs Assessment & Student Responses). Students noticed that most people were happy, there was a high concern for the amount of side conversations, attendance was an issue, and there was a desire for more sophistication in the music. Based on the discussion of what patterns they saw, I posed the question: "What do you want to do collectively about side conversations?" The responses I received were, "We come here to relax," "This takes place during H block, which is not a real class period so people feel more chill," "It's not realistic to have no side conversations." I repeated what I was hearing and posed the question, "Many of you said in your questionnaire you wanted more sophistication. How do we balance the desires for sophistication with relaxation?" Students were silent. Then they started posing ideas for dealing with side talk. Overall, four of the 15 students participated in the conversation.

In light of applying VeneKlasen and Miller's theories of power, the Student Responses to Group Norms, as referenced in appendix C, mirrored the framework of *power with* in which students find common ground among their differing needs, such as sophistication versus relaxation. This practice illustrates my movement as an educator in creating a democratic classroom, as the capacity to find common ground among different desires is essential to democratic life.

My practice also illustrates that I have not yet fully accomplished *power within*, especially on a personal level. As the trimester came towards a close, I noticed there were no side conversations in the group. Doing sophisticated music resulted in rehearsals not always

being “fun.” I believe I went overboard in the direction of “sophistication” and am left with the question, how do I return to the cultivation of relaxation? After all, if I was truly listening, students were telling me, that is why many of them attend the class. I am left with a tension, *how can I cultivate relaxation in others when I don't feel it myself?* In practice, I am constantly aware of the fact we have five more rehearsals before we are standing in front of 200 people. I perceive that my coworkers will judge me that what students perform is a reflection of my worth as a musician and educator. Yet, relaxation is what our group mutually decided on as a goal. My fear of judgement illustrates my on-going journey of learning to trust that I am capable of cultivating relaxation and meeting the institutions expectations.

These insights on how I use power in the classroom will guide my future work. Before starting any form of group work, I hope to practice noticing, what I am thinking about? Am I connected to my own sense of power and ease that comes from making music? My future work is to practice connecting with my own *power within* as a musician and educator. When I believe in myself, I am more able to listen and respond to the needs of the participants, and as a result, I am more likely to connect to their own sense of self-worth. When all of us, the teacher and the students, connect to our sense of power, we will naturally meet the outside expectations of the institution.

Student Driven Rehearsals: Description, Reflection, Insights.

To further interrupt the traditional power dynamics in the classroom, I decided to experiment with student driven rehearsals during the optional rehearsal period on Wednesdays, a system for students to choose the songs through discussion and voting. By creating space for one student to lead rehearsals and a second student to lead warmups, my goal was to connect students

to their self-worth, raise their awareness of what they are capable of, and to decenter myself from the position of power (see Appendix E for more information on Student Driven Rehearsals).

What took place was far from what I expected. First, students chose extraordinarily challenging songs that would take longer than the three rehearsals periods I had designated to learn the songs. However, because they were so excited about the songs they had chosen, I decided to change the repertoire for the rest of the year and incorporate them. I did not anticipate, however, that the leaders did not know how to teach the songs they brought to the group; therefore, I had to learn them, and then schedule time with the leader to teach the song to them. Also, although students appeared excited, they did not show up to the optional student led rehearsals for the first month, including the students who volunteered to lead the group. After a month of cajoling people to come, I was one rehearsal away from ending the entire project when a group of six students showed up. When they were finally in the room with the music in their hands, I witnessed something magical take place. The students barely looked at me; they turned to each other to warm up and to learn the song. They talked to each other and made group decisions about how they wanted to practice. By the second rehearsal like this, they were so invested they did not want to leave to go to lunch. This is in stark contrast to when I was in control of rehearsals; they were always aware of the time and ready to leave.

In addition to student driven rehearsals, I have also used the technique of “sectionals” during the regular mandatory rehearsal periods in order to decenter myself from the position of power and to cultivate leadership within the group. Before rehearsal, I recorded myself singing and playing each of the separate parts. Then, I attached the recordings in an email to the students. During rehearsal, students got in groups with their singing parts- alto, soprano, and tenor- opened up the recording, and taught themselves their part, using the recordings as a guide. Observing

sectionals, I witnessed students staying engaged longer compared to typical rehearsals where they lose their attention, as I teach each section their part. I observed students working collaboratively as a group to listen and repeat their part. As a group, they had to discuss what they were doing well and what needed to be repeated. Naturally certain people helped to facilitate the group discussion when it got side tracked. When I walked in to help students, they didn't need me.

My movement as an educator has been noticing that cultivating *power within* participants requires patience and letting go of control. I created the structure and the system for the students to take over, and I felt nervous; it felt like a risk to deviate from what I was used to. I had to wait for them to recognize the value of the opportunity before them. At first, when the student led rehearsals floundered, I didn't trust them to pull it together, and I believe they also did not trust each other to lead a rehearsal. Yet, I resisted my urge to step in and take over. This practice has been a poignant lesson that shifting power structures within any group takes time, trust and commitment.

The insights I have gained from applying VeneKlasen and Miller (2007) expression of *power with* and *power within* will guide my future work in numerous ways. In my next attempts, I hope to facilitate students processing these collaborative experiences in order to learn from them. I can pose questions such as, what lessons can you take from this? How might you apply what you have learned in this group work to other areas of your life? Processing the experience is necessary for students to apply this experience of shared power to other spaces, and thus for choir to connect to attitudinal changes needed for effective democratic society.

Identities: race and gender.

Theory.

“[Teaching] implies both the reproduction of dominant ideologies and its unmasking” (Freire, 1998, p. 90).

The discussion of power is incomplete without addressing how identities impact power dynamics in a room. Who does the teacher give voice to and who may be kept silent due to the teacher’s social conditioning? In *TOT: Ethics and Design*, I was struck by Freire’s warning to be careful to not unconsciously spread dominant ideologies, encapsulated in Gramsci’s concept of hegemony:

Hegemony is domination that takes place not only through coercion but also through voluntary consent of both the dominated and the dominators, those who are advantaged because of the oppression of others. Hegemony is the reproduction of this unconscious acceptance and business as usual attitude. (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 2007, p. 10)

Taking this definition to heart means that the work of a social justice educator is to examine how one’s identity impacts their work *and* to make concrete actions to break with hegemonic practices. My exposure to the concept of hegemony in *TOT: Ethics and Design* caused me to examine how *who I am* is infused with certain power dynamics that are continuously impacting those around me. As such, I have the choice to examine how being an economically privileged, white, cis gender female feeds into my work. Freire’s (1998) response to break with hegemonic practices is to acknowledge that one’s very presence is a political. He states, “In this sense, I ought to transmit to the students my capacity to analyze, to compare, to evaluate, to decide, to opt, to break with. My capacity to be just, to practice justice, to have a political presence. (p. 90)

In efforts to understand my politicized presence, I first explore how my racial identity impacts the classroom. Robin DiAngelo (2018) contends in her book *White Fragility* that white people fail to recognize how racism is a system in which we were all socialized. White peoples' work, is to interrogate white culture, how being white shapes our perspectives, experiences, and responses. She names common privileges white people in the United States tend to have in common that often go unnoticed: 1) I was born into a culture in which I belonged racially, 2) I belong when I look at my teachers, counselors, and classmates, 3) In virtually every context deemed normal, prestigious or neutral, I belong racially (2018, p. 53). She goes on to explain white privilege includes "the permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement" (2018, p. 113). As a white educator, I'm left with a resounding truth: if my race goes unexamined, unmentioned, and unnamed, even in a music class, I am complicit in the perpetuation of perceived normality, whiteness as the defacto status quo.

Lisa DeLorenzo (2016) further examines the role of race in music education in *Is There A Color Line in Music Education*. In music education programs, she notices that music educators often confuse multicultural texts, songs, and resources as anti-racist work. According to DeLorenzo, multiculturalism focuses on commonalities, anti-racist work focuses on hierarchies of power (2016, p. 186). DiAngelo and DeLorenzo's work leave me with the question: *How can I actively seek to interrupt racism in music teaching? How can I ensure I am not doing lip service to discussions of race and instead engage with race in a way that is systematic and addresses power?* I first examine how white privilege impacts my teaching practices and subsequently how whiteness impacts my curriculum.

Race: Description, Reflection, Insights.

In regards to how my race impacts my practice, I started by noticing my feeling of racial belonging at Vermont Academy. There are three faculty of color out of forty staff members. In vocal ensemble, there are five students of color within a group of 15 students, which is a significantly higher percentage. Furthermore, I notice how I feel nervous to talk about race in class because it is a mixed classroom and I don't want to "mess up." I don't want a student of color to feel uncomfortable, and I don't want to unintentionally create more resistance in white students. Also, I fear students will think it's strange to talk about race in music class. Therefore, I notice how I don't *want* to bring it up. This is a piece of my privilege; the choice to avoid the topic.

I begin to also notice where I am silent about race. During the fall concert, I introduced the songs to the audience, and I explained that the first two songs were written by the African American woman, Faya Torre Thompson. I explained that the third song we performed was written by Joanne Hammily, but I did not mention her race because she was white. A few weeks later, I noticed my omission as a sign of how I am socialized to not notice whiteness as a race, but to notice people of color as the deviation from what's normal. To break with my conditioning, I brought up my observation to the choir. I briefly mentioned that I made a mistake because I've been socialized not to think of being white as a race. They responded with silence and a few head nods.

The second part of my practice has been to examine how whiteness impacts my curriculum. I wrote a mini lesson, as it was incorporated within the music lesson, on the song *Lift Every Voice and Sing* for the choir's performance during black history month. I had planned to start the conversation with a reflection on black history month, whose history we consider

normal, and whose history we leave for a specific holiday. This would be followed by a deeper discussion of the social context of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, followed by a discussion of the meanings of the lyrics and what we want to convey to our audience (see Appendix F for more information on Martin Luther King Day Mini Lesson Plan).

The minute I began the conversation, I realized the sequencing of the lesson was not scaffolded well for risk. It was jarring to transition between rehearsing a song to asking questions around why white history is considered the norm. On the spot, I changed the order of the lesson and started by discussing the historical context of the song and its lyrical meaning. After discussing the meaning of the song, I jumped immediately into reading the following quote: “Until we are able to break the silence that maintains music education’s complicity in perpetuating racism by leaving whiteness the undisturbed and the undisputed cultural norm our concerns about social justice in music education will amount to little more than lip service” (DeLorenzo, 2016, p. 185). The one African American student said, “I wasn’t going to say anything, but that was what was on my mind.” She was animated. Another student built off her comment that we only learn white male history. I was running out of time, and the conversation ended. Overall the conversation lasted 12 minutes, and I heard from seven students, about half of the group.

My movement as an educator around race has not been straightforward. In reflecting on Gramsci’s definition of hegemony as the “reproduction of this unconscious acceptance and business as usual attitude” (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 2007, p. 10), before I began my coursework at SIT, I often noticed the racial makeup of an institution, but I didn’t have practices to address race. Now, the area in which I have shifted has been actively naming how whiteness is impacting my teaching, such as sharing my mistakes with the group. Naming my mistakes reflects Freire’s

argument that teachers can break hegemonic practices by modeling to students how “to analyze, to compare, to evaluate, to decide, to opt, to break with” (1998, p. 90).

In regards to how whiteness impacts my curriculum I made movement in openly trying to address “whiteness as normal” in the context of black history month. After reading DiAngelo’s definition of white privilege as “the permission to escape or avoid any challenges” (2018, p. 113), I made a commitment to myself to talk about race, which in the past I may have glossed over to keep the group comfortable. Yet, within the MLK Day mini lesson, my attempt felt forced. I was left questioning, *what does it mean to be uncomfortable as the facilitator? What is my lack of comfort telling me? Is my lack of comfort the necessary way to feel to break with hegemony? Or is my lack of comfort a warning signal telling me something is not working?* For example, I noticed about half of the students weren’t engaged; I missed some step in the process to make this a conversation they are all invested in. Or, in the midst of trying to learn a song, 10-15 minutes isn’t sufficient time to have a meaningful conversation. Furthermore, I did not provide enough context for the quote I read. I did not transition into why I was talking about whiteness as normal. *Is it worth having a challenging conversation if the conditions for an open discussion are not in place?*

It is clear to me that I have not yet accomplished teaching music in a way that systematically interrupts racism. My efforts may still be at the stage of what Delorenzo calls “lip service.” Yet these insights from applying critical racial pedagogies will guide how I scaffold, assess risk, pose questions, and set obtainable learning objectives in my future work. I now recognize that one of the challenges of doing social justice work within a class with a distinct content objective, such as music, is scaffolding social justice objectives into the conversation. Compared to a diversity training where discussions of race are the clear content objective, in

music class, I do not have the luxury of blocks of time to have conversations about race. Instead, I have to weave the vocabulary, the trust, and the question posing into other content areas carefully over time.

Now, I also understand how systematic racial pedagogy begins by building off of the practices discussed in engaged pedagogy. We must have a strong community where there is a sense of trust before we can have difficult conversations. I need to ask myself the question, how do I know my group is ready to have a challenging conversation? Facilitating a discussion on what it means to step outside one's comfort zone and practice bravery may enable participants to feel more ready to enter into challenging discussions.

Reflecting on Freire's argument that a teacher's presence is inherently political, I also hope to practice being explicit in why I bring up identities such as race, as they influence the learning space whether we address them or not. I can do this by engaging students in the practice of questioning by asking them, what identities influence this song? For students who may find it strange to talk about identities in music class, ask them, where do they consider it "normal" to have discussion regarding identities, such as race? What happens when we only talk about race in certain classes? Finally, I need to pay attention to how sensitive I am to ensuring everyone in the group is comfortable and notice how my own sensitivity can get in my way of having a challenging conversation. I cannot wait to bring up issues of race until I am ready to get it perfectly right, but I do need to reflect on why I'm doing it, how I'm doing it, and the impact it has on the students.

Gender: Description, Reflection, Insights.

Another identity that impacts how I teach is my identity as a cis gender female. My gender identity embodies heteronormative gender roles. Catalano, McCarthy, and Shlasko

explain in Adam, Bell and Griffin's *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* that "gender roles (or rules) instruct us as to how we should look and act, form our expectations for relationships and career possibilities, and even influence how we are supposed to think and what we are supposed to be good at" (2007, p. 222). Because my gender and sexual identities follow within societal norms, I don't think about gender or sexuality frequently, and as a result, I am at risk of upholding hegemonic norms around gender and sexuality.

One day during vocal ensemble, I realized I had divided the chorus by gender, with men singing the bass and tenor parts and the females singing alto and soprano. In this particular song the melody was the same for each part and didn't require lower or higher voices, yet I had maintained the gender groups, explicitly referencing the "male entrance" and "female entrances." I noticed that the one transgender student stood in the space between the men and women. All of a sudden, I realized that I was perpetuating a deeply ingrained notion of how to divide a choir, using gender binaries; my language was upholding an old system of division and exile. Afterwards, I approached the student and I said, "I just want to acknowledge that I recognize vocal ensemble is a space highly divided by gender and I want to work on changing that." I felt nervous; I was taking a risk and potentially making the student uncomfortable by bringing up something close to his identity. He responded with excitement, "Yeah it is! But, I totally get why it has to be...men and women just have different voices so it makes sense they have to sing different parts. And it's cool you even noticed that." When it came time to learn our next song, I explicitly said, "I don't want to support gender binaries, but it's hard sometimes as it depends on what people can sing vocally." To my surprise, the students very quickly offered to sing different parts. Now, they often organically inquire to sing different parts based on who is capable of singing what.

Naming gender binaries has been another example in my movement as an educator to break with hegemonic teaching practices. However, practicing Freire's notion of politicized teaching has not come easily to me. I have had to fight my social conditioning to "be neutral" and "make everyone comfortable." After my one comment, I was pleasantly surprised how quickly students changed the group dynamic. Yet, I also have noticed my inclination to say, "I checked off the gender box" and consider my work done. I have expected the students to remember the comments I made on gender norms in the fall in the winter. I am noticing that truly changing the culture of the group means revisiting who sings what for every song until breaking hegemonic practices become a collective responsibility.

These insights will guide how I approach gender in my future work with groups. During the on-campus phase of SIT, I intellectually understood that systemic politicized teaching required forming new habits; now I am slowly learning how to embody this practice. When planning curriculum, I must think through a gendered lens: how will the songs I choose allow people to easily switch parts? In my language, I hope to no longer refer to sections of a group by their gender. Over time, I must consistently remind the group to question if they have divided themselves along gendered lines. Next year, to further break out of traditional gender norms, I hope to incorporate songs by queer and transgender composers to enable queer and transgender students to see themselves in the music they sing. In the future, I hope that embodying politicized teaching creates a new standard of what is considered "normal" within a group.

Freedom of expression.

Theory.

“ To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body”
(Linklater, 2006, p. 8).

During the on-campus phase of SIT, I noticed a common thread between my experiences in refugee services, ESOL, and music; my work has always been grounded in facilitating people’s self-expression. When I worked at Refugee Services, I co-authored a study looking at the most common reasons recent refugees left their homes. Among factors such instability and violence, participants responded that they “left their homes because they were silenced” (Haskell, Storrow, 2014 p. 1). This finding connects to scholar Kristin Linklater’s (2006) belief that there's something intrinsic in humans to want to communicate their truth and express themselves. Delorenzo goes further that this *freedom of expression* is the foundation of democracy (Delorenzo 2016). Now, in my new position as a voice teacher, I am drawn to teach about the voice beyond the scope of singing to include all ways humans use their voice to express their inner self to connect to the wider world.

Yet, as Freire writes, we are part of a culture of silencing that inhibits freedom of expression in order to maintain oppression. In *Undoing the Silence*, Louise Dunlap (2007) reflects on how a culture of silence is one in which students repeat their professors ideas, musicians sing other people’s words and mimic their sound, people with little schooling internalize a sense of worthlessness and do not think their ideas are worth advocating for, and privileged people strive to be polite and to sound educated. She writes: “Each time we don’t act on an urge to write [or sing] we add another layer to our habits of silence, burying more deeply our power of voice, and losing touch with the active expression that nourishes our sense of hope and grounds democracy” (2007, p. 3). Linklater’s work, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, has been

instrumental in the field of vocal studies to undo the voice's habitual patterns of silencing. For Linklater, the goal of teaching the voice is to remove physical, emotional, and intellectual habits that inhibit the voice's free expression. Similar to hook's discussion of self-actualization, Linklater describes how some of our habitual patterns have served us in our lives, yet our work is to understand what are they, and what truth of self-expression lie behind them. In my own practice, I began to question, how do I notice where I have been silenced in order to freely express my own voice? *How does my own liberation impact my capacity to teach voice in a liberating manner to students?*

Description, Reflection, Insights.

To undo conditioning around my voice, I first started by paying attention to my own patterns of what I have been taught to believe sounds "good." Recently, I walked into the New England Youth Theater and heard students belting a show tune using an operatic singing style. Hearing this immediately triggered my thought: "This is what I'm supposed to be teaching my students to sound like. I don't know how to teach this. I'm doing it wrong." I have witnessed my students also fall into habits of what is considered "right." At the beginning of the trimester, I asked each student what they wanted to get out of our time together. The answers included, "To perform, to work on diction, to increase my range." These answers reflect traditional understandings of the purpose behind studying voice. What I'm really hearing is: students are unable to articulate why exactly they want to spend an hour every week studying *their* voices.

From noticing where both myself and my students are conditioned, we can begin to interrupt these patterns. To deepen my understanding of my voice, I used Linklater's practice of drawing a picture entitled "this is my voice as it is now" and a second picture entitled, "this is my voice as I would like it to be." The next step included eliciting words from the image and writing

a “poem to my voice.” In the poem and the image of my voice, I noticed a mix of emotions: pressure to be perfect, trying too hard, striving, compartmentalized, yet passionate, gentle, and powerful.

How does my relationship to my voice impact how I teach voice to others? At the beginning of the school year, I bought a book of traditional vocal exercises and began replicating exactly how I was given voice lessons: the teacher teaches a vocal exercise, watches the student perform it, and then critiques what they heard. I noticed this tendency towards “perfection” that I was replicating by making students repeat the phrase until they got it perfect. Yet, I wrestled with my internalized understanding that there is a perfect way to sing, and I started to experiment with a new way of teaching. The following trimester, I asked one of my vocal students to study the Linklater technique *with* me, not *from* me. We read a chapter together every week and practiced exercises in body awareness, breathing, and imagery with the explicit goal to remove emotional and physical blocks within our voices. With another student, I noticed she mentioned she had tried to write a song. Instead of following my plan to practice vocal drills, I asked her if she’d be willing to share it. She told me she has never shared anything she had written with anyone before. She was judged by her family and friends for being sensitive and wanting to write songs; she was supposed to be a tough jock. Eventually she shared her song, and her voice lessons evolved into a practice of songwriting.

In reflection, Linklater’s techniques to find “what truth of self-expression lie behind [habitual patterns]” has helped me to *begin* to break through my conditioning as a voice educator. Although I haven’t had the confidence to let go of traditional vocal training with all of my students, as some have been deeply conditioned to want to sound a certain way, my experiments with two students illustrate that I am beginning to shift my practice. I have started to

notice that undoing my own “habits of silence” (Dunlap, 2007) is done in tandem with my students. I am not done liberating my own voice, yet this should not stop me from taking risks to try to work with students to connect with their own free sound.

These insights into the theory and practice of teaching voice will guide how I facilitate others’ self-expression in the future. Delorenzo, Dunlap, and Linklater’s scholarship around the voice has helped me to articulate that *freedom of expression* is fundamentally linked to democracy, and teaching voice is connected to freedom of expression. My next step is to interrogate how my teaching practices can enable the *students* to understand that studying voice is linked to building more democratic communities. What might these practice look like? I can explicitly tell students: “We meet once a week for 40 minutes to talk about your voice. This is a sacred opportunity to tap into something personal and profound about yourself. This instrument is uniquely yours. How do you want to use it? What do you want to express?” Then, I must deeply listen to their answers. Once I understand what the student wants to express, I can begin to tailor the lessons around their interests. I also have to expose students to different forms of self-expression outside of what they are accustomed to. I can expose them to other ways humans have used their voice in spoken word, slam poetry, hip hop, and chanting. I can share songs I have written, songs for healing, and songs for social movements. Even if students don’t have the answers yet for how they want to express their voice, hopefully voice lessons can plant the seed for them to imagine their voice as vital to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities.

Imagination.***Theory.***

Scholar Maxime Green adds another component of a democratic education, the cultivation of the imagination. She contends that arts education, including music, cultivates a “passion for the possible” (1995, p. 3). Music education builds the capacity to imagine, which is a fundamental attribute for a democratic society. In order to imagine “what might be”, she claims we must put *art* at the center, as the arts provide space for imaginative and critical thought (1995, p.6). Green’s conviction felt like an invitation to me as an educator to see if I could use my classroom as a space to cultivate this *passion for the possible*. However, in most schools, the opportunity to use music class as a time to cultivate the imagination is typically lost. According to Michel Patrick Wall and Jennifer Kingma Wall in *Improvising to Learn*, “The constant pressure of preparing for concerts, participation in competitions, and honors band auditions, and performing at school functions leaves little time for creative music making activities (2016, p. 126). Throughout my time at Vermont Academy, I have begun to observe a dynamic within myself, my students, and the institution in which we prioritize the performance, the end goal, more than the creative and imaginative process itself.

Description, Reflection, Insights.

The emphasis on the product over the creative process has been evident in the structure of Vermont Academy’s arts department schedule. The vocal ensemble is scheduled to perform every six weeks. The vocal ensemble is given one hour and twenty minutes a week to practice, during H block. This block is also used for advisory meetings, the time in which students are supposed to seek important guidance on their wellbeing, academics, and college. Because choir is scheduled at the same time as advisory, students are often pulled out of rehearsal for

mandatory meetings. The school calendar has left little time for the ensemble to practice. Due to these structural constraints, the time we do have together becomes a time to force notes into students' heads, memorize lyrics, and perform. Rehearsals sometimes mirror Freire's notion of the banking system of education, leaving little time to build a community and have discussions. Yet, I notice my own complicity in focusing on the product of the ensemble over the process, as goal oriented and product based education was how I was taught music.

In attempts to break with my conditioning, at times, I have tried to incorporate space for students to use their imagination to engage with the music. To do this, I have consciously decided to not predetermine how the song should go. In the fall trimester, when we focused on simple folk songs, I asked the group how the songs should be structured. When we experimented with more complex songs, at times I asked students where there should be volume changes, instead of assuming I had the answers for how to make the song sound "good." I also solicited their opinion on what they hear in a song that needs to be changed. I did not omitted my voice entirely from the discussion; however, I wanted to ensure that it is not just my voice shaping the process of learning the songs.

In reflection, my attempts to share the creative process with students illustrates my shift as an educator away from goal oriented teaching to trusting my students to take creative risks together. However, although my intention was for the students to awaken their imaginations, I have had to fight with my strong conditioning to have a prescribed plan. Like the director style of facilitation, it is simply more efficient for me to tell students my vision. Additionally, when I *did* ask for students' input, their responses were also inconsistent. When students shared their vision, the group tended to go along with whoever had the courage to say something. At times, they have nothing to say. Music scholars Michel Patrick Wall and Jennifer Kingma Wall's experience

reflects a similar dynamic where the teacher's habits of sharing their creative ideas sequesters the growth of the students' imagination. They write: "I found that they (students) needed constant direction during rehearsals, and were often not able to create or even interpret music on their own...they had not learned to be music makers" (2016, p. 128). Wall's observation has made me realize that I need to practice consistently creating space for the students' imaginations to shape the music.

Green's argument that the arts cultivate the imaginative skills necessary to re-think society has been a revolutionary idea for me as a social justice music educator. Yet, my practice illustrates I am at the beginning of understanding how this concept will play out in my classroom, especially within the time constraints I must work within. These insights have left me considering how I define success. Can a group and myself withstand the consequence of not being as polished because more peoples' voices were part of the creation process? *Am I teaching groups to sound perfect, or am I teaching them how to be music creators?* Secondly, I hope to develop teaching practices that enables the students to understand and value the importance of their own imagination. I can explain to them that that I want them to become music makers. However, for a group to truly grasp the central role imagination can play in shaping society, students must experience and process the impact of creative group work.

Section 3: Imagining "What Could Be"

Next Steps: Vocal Ensemble and Beyond

The opportunity to lead Vermont Academy's vocal ensemble and voice lessons has been an ideal training ground for me to put my guiding theoretical principles into practice. In my future, I hope to carry these lessons beyond the walls of Vermont Academy. Whether I am

leading a community organization or teaching any subject matter, these insights will guide my practice in whatever context I find myself within.

A common thread throughout these case studies has been that an inconsistent foundation in engaged pedagogy resulted in inconsistent critical conversations around power, voice, and race. In looking back on Appendix A, *Vocal Ensemble Year Long PGO's*, my objectives for *how* to “create a community where all members experience a sense of belonging” was ambiguous. Also, I was not thinking about how my objectives of co-creating community, critical reflection, and attitudinal growth *connected* to each other in practice. For next year, I have outlined scaffolded goals in Appendix G *Improved Year Long Vocal Ensemble Learning Objectives*, where I will focus on deepening my engaged pedagogical practices by building a deeper capacity for the whole group to know each other. Beyond vocal ensemble, I now recognize that in whatever work I find myself in, a **co-created community creates the conditions for participants to engage in critical conversations.**

My experiences have also taught me that interrupting hegemonic practices in teaching requires 1) considering time parameters 2) careful scaffolding 3) in depth preparation 4) explicit and consistent intentions 4) bravery and 5) creating space for conscientization, the process of participants to become aware of what they have learned. Theoretically, I thought I knew many of these lessons before I began my practicum. Embodying these practices however, is an art form that I will grapple with throughout my life in whatever context I am working in.

Regarding restructuring time, the question arises, *how much time is needed to do attitudinal work?* I now understand that an educator/trainer can begin creating attitudinal change within whatever amount of time they are given *only if* the learning goals are set appropriately. In the case of Vermont Academy, if I am not granted more classroom hours, I will need to create

more streamlined and obtainable musical and attitudinal learning objectives. In terms of careful scaffolding, this year, my learning objectives around race and culture were not scaffolded according to risk. This has taught me that before I engage groups in challenging conversations, I need to ask myself how will I know the group is ready to have a challenging conversation? In regards to preparation, first, I have to notice practices I want to interrupt. Then, I have to prepare what I am going to say and do to frame my practice differently. For example, when starting a new song, I have to select repertoire thinking, will this song be accessible to non-binary students who want to experiment singing different parts? Regarding clarity and coherence, I have to be explicit in my intentions. This requires me to break through my conditioning to always create peace. In reflecting Freire's notion of coherence, it is essential for participants to witness the teacher struggling to practice being consistent in upholding the goals and practices they outlined. Interrupting my social conditioning also requires bravery. Throughout these case studies, I observed, and often overcame, my fear of messing up. My future practice requires remembering that I am learning in tandem with my participants; I am never "finished." And finally, in regards to processing, in order for participants to undergo a shift in their attitude or awareness, they need to process this new experience. They need to reflect on what it means to have experienced shared power, questioning race and gender norms, expressing their true voice, and using their imagination. Only after participants become aware of what they are doing can skills from a course, such as choir, extrapolate to become a behavioral attribute that breaks through a hegemonic practice and contributes to a democratic society.

Overarching Learnings and Shifts in Understandings

What are my values and understandings now as a result of these practices? Attempting to apply engaged democratic principles to a music classroom has changed my outlook on myself as

a musician and social justice educator. I have also begun to understand this experience as merely a new beginning, which will serve as the foundation for my next attempts.

Returning to the question I posed to myself at the beginning of the reflective practice:

How do people of dominant identities enter into privileged environments that are not explicitly about creating change and still facilitate change to occur?

This practice has proven that *any* space can serve as an opportunity to interrupt hegemonic norms. The practice of teaching for social justice must adapt and shift according to the environment. In a class where there are distinct content objectives, such as a music class, a math class, or a science class, the educator has to scaffold the conversation differently than a class on social identities. For instance, I have to build the vocabulary, the trust, and the bravery into music lessons slowly in order for race to be a conversation we can discuss openly in the context of a song. Social justice pedagogies have to be woven into music content carefully and over time.

I have also learned how to engage in the practice of noticing what Louis Dunlap refers to as the knots “layered together with tangled strands from many aspects of our culture... where the deeply personal impulses are reinforced by institutions” (2007, p. 16). I have begun to notice how these knots show up in my work. I have witnessed myself uphold whiteness as the norm when introducing songs, breaking down singing parts into gender binaries, and rushing through uncomfortable conversations. Yet, hegemonic practices are only transformed when we interrupt them; I have learned how to practice naming my mistakes, and I have challenged myself to explicitly tell students what I believe. However, I see how my work is far from done. Raising my awareness of my identities as a white cis gender woman makes me painfully aware of other aspects within myself that remain unexamined: as a native English speaker, how is English impacting the language learners in the group? As an able bodied person, I have unintentionally

forgotten to ask the administration if my students have any disabilities. This past six months have been a moment of unfreezing, realizing the vast size of the ocean I just entered and will be swimming in for a long time.

In answering the question, *how is teaching music connected to changing society*, attempting to apply engaged democratic principles to my teaching has shown me that I am capable of simultaneously learning how to be a music teacher and a social justice educator. These two roles *are* one. As Freire states, “What I need as a teacher to do is to experience the dynamic unity between teaching contents and the process of knowing” (1994, p. 112). In my case, the content is music and social justice pedagogies are the process that embraces and holds the music we learn. For once, the bifurcation in myself, the musician and the social justice advocate, are united, and I can begin to accept that I am one being.

I have also learned that I am good enough as a musician. I have witnessed myself teaching groups to make music together, which has begun to heal a wound in my self-confidence. I have been vulnerable with the students, telling them what I can and cannot do as a musician, without degrading myself, and I have felt that they accept me as I am. I am beginning the slow process of internalizing that one does not need to become trained or an expert to “know” something.

This experience has also opened my understanding that music is truly an essential component to social change. In the few short months I have been at Vermont Academy, I have witnessed microbial level shifts in students. I saw students’ voices begin to shape the group in choosing, leading, and critiquing songs. I witnessed small moments of self-expression when a student chose to share a song she wrote and when group members debated if choir’s goal should be sophistication or relaxation. I listened to a student realize that she doesn’t want to sound like

anyone else, after drawing a picture of what she imagines her voice to look like. She stated, “I thought I hated my voice, but now I can see that I like the voice I already have.” I noticed students critically questioning what is normal when they chose to change the gender makeup of singing parts. In one student’s end of the year reflection, she wrote that the moment she remembered most from the trimester was discussing race on MLK day. Also, a teacher mentioned that one of my students had written a reflection paper about race in music after our conversation. Although we have yet to process how experiences in vocal ensemble inform other areas of their life, I hope that these practices have begun the slow process of shifting them in some way.

More importantly, I now understand how these curricular decisions and specific teaching practices have the *potential* to build a group in which participants can practice honest dialogue, exercise their imagination, think critically about the norms upheld in any group space, and can recognize music class as an opportunity to break through them. I no longer believe I can measure all of these learnings in students over the course of six months. Instead, I have shifted away from trying to objectively understand the power of music in social change. In understanding the role of music in society, I am left reflecting on a story told by Tamara Reps Freeman (2016) in *Music of the Holocaust*. She describes how concerts were held clandestinely in unused latrines; prisoners risked their one meal of the day and potentially their lives just to hear 15 minutes of music hidden in a bathroom. For any individuals looking to assess the impact of music, let us ponder why people have risked their lives to hear music for 15 minutes. Let us reflect on Einstein’s statement, as quoted in *Why do We Educate in a Democracy*, that “not everything we count counts and not everything that counts can be counted” (2016, p.37). There is something inestimable and intrinsic connecting music to human life. I now understand more fully my

responsibility as a music educator and a musician is to connect people with the immeasurable power that is music.

Implications for other Trainers

The product of my attempts to incorporate social justice teaching pedagogies into a music classroom is simply more questions. My hope is that my questions not only pertain to my own experience, but to all attempts to educate towards justice. My questions for other trainers are as follows:

- How do we effectively advocate for changing the structures that impinge on our capacity to fully realize our social justice learning objectives? If we cannot change the conditions in which we are working, what can we change?
- How can we reframe our understanding of time, in my case, to take a more longitudinal approach to scaffolding attitudinal learning objectives to fit the time parameters we must work within?
- What role does urgency place in attitudinal change? The conditions of society are dire and urgent, yet changing the way people think and behave is slow. As practitioners concerned with changing attitudes, how can we be patient and expansive in our understanding of how long change takes?
- How do you know a group is ready to engage in a challenging conversation? What does it look like?
- How do you honor your learning objectives as a social justice educator *and* the learning objectives of your students, especially if your objectives contradict? In my case, I had the clear objective to teach critical thinking around whiteness. The students' objectives were

to relax and experience joy. If a space is truly co-created, how can you have your own agenda that participants did not agree to?

- How do you unfreeze participants to want to share power? I have noticed, it is easier for them to be a passive learner. How do we make participants invested in taking over their learning?
- Finally, in social justice work, how do you balance disturbing hegemonic norms, thus creating a time of dis-ease, with facilitating a sense of peace, relaxation, and joy?

Final Reflections

“What if it truly doesn’t matter what you do, but how you do whatever you do? How would this change what you choose to do with your life? What if there is no need to change, no need to try to transform yourself into someone who is more compassionate, more present, more loving or wise? How would this affect all the places in your life where you are endlessly trying to be better? What if the question is not why am I so infrequently the person I really want to be, but why do I so infrequently want to be the person I really am? How would this change what you think you have to learn?” —Anonymous

My hope is that this is the beginning of my journey of learning how to be the person that I already am: a musician, an educator, a person in love with the world and deeply suffering from its pain. What I aspire to learn significantly changes when I begin to accept myself for who I am. I am already a person capable of cultivating peace through music; I sometimes forget in search of trying to achieve something else. I am someone with a deep desire to foster peace within groups, so much so that sometimes, I lose track that I also have the capacity to challenge people and the skill to return to a place of love. I am already a person who strives to be impactful; my desire for impact is rooted in my love for humanity and my belief in our capacity to grow. In my passion to change “what is”, I can forget to practice silence, to sit with students until students are ready, to be patient. I am an economically privileged cis gender white woman from the United States. Within my desire to break down hegemonic practices, what would it look like to accept myself,

to even want to be me? How do I practice seeing the opportunity I have before me to notice the oppressor in myself and to engage in the process of interruption in all of spaces I occupy?

My hope is that this work is not only pertinent to those interested in teaching music, in “what I am doing”, but this reflection pertains to all practitioners concerned with questions of *how* to perceive *all* spaces as opportunities to contribute to social change. Most importantly, I hope this reflection contributes to all people searching to build a life grounded in what brings one joy and striving for a life that leaves the world slightly better than how we found it. This is my story of working with one small choir to uncover ways of being that no longer not serve us, and to break through to imagine, to question, to give voice to, to experience peace.

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Appendix A

Vocal Ensemble Year Long PGO's *Written in September, 2018*

Purpose: The purpose of this course is to utilize group singing as a tool to strengthen the behavioral attributes needed for a more socially just society

Goals: This course focuses on students co-creating a community, which will enable them to reflect critically on the cultural context of songs and what it means to have a voice. Through this process, students develop emotional intelligence in areas such as vulnerability, risk taking, and self-expression, all of which are attributes needed for a more socially just society.

Objectives: The end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Work with classmates to create a community where all members experience a sense of belonging
2. Reflect on how their voice played a role in designing how the group was run
3. Analyze the cultural context of songs
4. Articulate what it means to have a voice
5. Discuss as a group how they would like to use this “collective voice”
6. Acknowledge areas of personal growth in areas such as, taking risks and expressing oneself

Some Basic Sequencing Ideas:

- 1) September:
 - a) Low to high risk: start by having fun/ building community
- 2) October:
 - a) Student driven curriculum: expose them to a series of songs and let them vote
- 3) December:
 - a) Begin discussing cultural context of each song in more depth
- 4) January:
 - a) Begin discussions of what it means to have a voice as a group
 - b) Assess where the group is at

Appendix B

Vocal Ensemble Sign Up Sheet

1. Name and preferred pronouns:

2. Languages you speak:

3. Where do you call home:

4. Tell me about your singing past:

5. What music do you listen to?

6. What is your favorite musical experience you can remember?

7. What inspired you sign up for vocal ensemble?

8. What are your hopes for vocal ensemble this year?

Fall Trimester, Day One Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- *Students will be able to say everyone's name*
- *Students will know my background and and basic objectives for the course*
- *Students will experience a sense of fun through singing 2 easy songs*
- *Students are familiarized with the daily ritual of announcements, warm ups, singing*
- *Students will express their interests and needs to me through a signup sheet*

AGENDA**Name Games (10 mins)**

- Go around and say name and where you're from
- Name whip

Introduction Me (3 mins)

- Tell you about myself and my thoughts about this choir we are about to create
- I do not have a traditional path to music:
 - Classical foundation (high school-- chamber music, madrigals, musicals);
 - Final year of college I realized I would have to make music on my own so I learned the guitar and started to write my own songs
 - Past 8 years I have been working as a singer songwriter
 - Simultaneously my day job has been working with refugees in resettlement as a writing teacher. I led a refugee choir for 3 years.
 - So I've been working as a musician, educator, and in immigrant rights.
 - Right now I'm weaving those three things together in a masters in intercultural education where I'm examining how to incorporate the arts and music into curriculum.
 - This is a new adventure for me. We will all make mistakes together and have fun in the process!

My Goals for the group (3 mins)

- Expose you to many musical traditions
- Work hard a make something we are proud of
- Trust each other, create a sense of family
- Fall in love with singing
- Reflect on the music we sing
- Create this experience together; I'm going to give you lots of agency to make decisions because this space is yours, I'm the facilitator
- This is not your traditional choir experience, but I hope it's even better, even if it gets messy at times

Singing Warm Up: (5 mins)

- Sirens
- I'm going to lift my sister up without words on mmm (hold first note)

Songs: (15 mins)

- I'm going to lift my sister up, key of C
- Rise up old flame, key of C

Hand out signup sheet

Appendix C

Winter Trimester Day One Lesson Plan

Objectives:

- *Students will be able to articulate their personal goals for vocal ensemble (in the Group Norms/ Needs Assessment handout)*
- *Students will be able to identify how they would like the group to function (expressed in Group Norms/ Needs Assessment handout)*
- *Students will understand my goals to incorporate social justice teaching practices into the ensemble and decide whether or not they would like to participate in my reflective analysis*

AGENDA

Description of masters (5 mins)

- I am in a master's program where my focus is on incorporating social justice teaching pedagogies into a musical teaching classroom. I am a learner, and I'm trying out brand new teaching ideas, and then writing about them to become the best educator I can. You are all part of that journey- I am actively learning from you.
- I hope that incorporating specific concepts into vocal ensemble:
 - Empower students: Making music in a group is an opportunity to serve as a microcosm for how we want democratic society to function.
 - This means we share power, and we collectively create what we want this ensemble to be, instead of the traditional model where I am the authority and you passively follow whatever my vision is: it is more risky and may get messy. How I want to do this is through student led rehearsals, opportunities for you to lead warm ups, and sharing making decisions for how songs should be shaped
 - Increases students' awareness of attitudinal changes within themselves:
 - The arts are an opportunity to take risks, be vulnerable, express your voice, and build self-confidence. All of these skills will serve you in any area of your life. I want us to work on consciously growing these attitudinal skills. Through goal setting/ surveys we will see if we can assess change.
 - Deepen students' critical thinking skills
 - Singing is an opportunity to think about whose perspectives are we giving voice to when we sing; how is music a reflection of a culture, and what does that mean for us as a culturally diverse group to give voice to someone's else's narrative?
- **How Student Run Rehearsals will work: (10 mins)**
 - *Go over handout*
- **Hand out Group Norms/ Needs Assessment (10 mins)**
 - *Go over handout*

Appendix D

Group Norms/ Student Needs Assessment:

1. These were the group norms we created in September to help make choir a fun and high quality community: **** NOTE: I will be sharing your answer below for this question with group without your names attached. It serves all of us to know the groups' collective needs and goals in order to support each other to make our aspirations become a reality. If there is something you do not want shared with the group, and only with me, please make a note of it, and I will respect that fully.**

1. Respect: help each other out with the music and say positive things
2. No phones
3. No side conversations
4. Enthusiasm (taping your feet?!)
5. Believe in each other
6. Be encouraging
7. Come on time/ email Ms. Storrow if you have to miss a rehearsal

How do you feel like you did in upholding these norms?

How do you feel like the group did?

Are there any changes you or additions you would like to make for the upcoming trimester?

2. In vocal ensemble, we are doing much more than just singing. We are practicing skills that can benefit us in numerous settings in life such as 1) deeply listening to one another 2) expressing our voice 3) taking risks 4) building confidence. Set an intention of a challenge, risk, or goal you would like to reach during vocal ensemble. It could be *anything* from sharing your opinions more in rehearsal, listening more to the people in your section, to performing a solo. I'm sure you can think of many more things! **(I will not share this answer with the group).**
3. Do you feel like your voice matters in this group? If so, in what ways, and how do you know? If not, explain more. You can interpret this question as either your speaking or singing voice. **(I will not share this answer with the group)**

4. From last trimester, what moments or group discussions stuck with you the most? (**I will not share this answer with the group**).

Student Responses to Group Norms/ Needs Assessment:
12/10

Upholding Group Norms:

1. The group can easily be distracted and chaotic but overall we're pretty ok
2. Pretty good we are respectful of each other
3. Need a little bit of work on "no side conversations" and coming on time/emailing Ms. Storrow if you have to miss
4. I try to be respectful of all this, although I occasionally engage in side conversation
5. Lots of side conversations but choir has always been like this
6. Too much talking and bad attendance
7. I think we all did well, but could be even better. Along with no side conversations, we should be better at stopping the side conversations and refocus
8. Pretty well. Maybe need to work on being encouraging. We need to reduce side conversations and be more respectful
9. The group is a wonderful environment for singing. I really like our environment like it is.
10. We did well in all except "no side conversations" and "enthusiasm." This is the best I've heard a VA choir mesh!!
11. Most people are happy

Changes for This Trimester:

- More challenging songs
- We are heading in the right direction; with more skill, maybe harder and more sophisticated pieces could be on the agenda
- More full length songs with harmonies
- More belting, big songs!

Appendix E

Student Driven Rehearsals

Description

This is an opportunity to explore and develop your musical skills in leading a singing group and selecting repertoire that meets the interests and skill of your group. Through this opportunity, you will cultivate excellent skills in leadership, group management, and musicality that can serve you in college music groups and beyond.

Week 12/11- 12/14: Take this time to research songs you may be interested in singing for this trimester

Week 12/17-12/21: By **Monday 12/17, email me** the song you are interested in doing:

- Considerations you should think about when selecting a song:
 - Can the group learn the basics of the song in 3-4 rehearsals?
 - What is the vocal range in the piece, and does it fit with the voice range of our group?
 - What is the instrumentation like? Is it something we can do acapella or with basic guitar/piano?
 - Do you have sheet music for the piece? *If not, I most likely can find it

- **Weds, 12/19:**
 - Meet to select songs and sign up for one section to commit to
 - You'll be asked to vote for your top 2 that you'd like to be involved in
 - *As a note, seniors going abroad may get preference as this may be their last opportunity!

Song Voting Sheet Handout

- a) Your name: _____
- b) What role you want during Weds. rehearsals? **You can circle more than 1 role.**
(However, you may only get the opportunity to do 1 role this trimester, and try a different role another trimester!)
- i) Lead a song
 - ii) Lead warmups
 - iii) Submit a song for the group to sing
 - iv) I can't come on Weds.
 - v) Participate as a singer
- c) If you choose to participate as a singer, can you commit to come to one of the following chunks of time? Circle the block of time, that is easiest for you to commit to.

Student 1

Week 1: 1/9/19

Week 2: 1/16/19

Week 3 1/23/19

Week 6: 1/30/19 (MLK concert 1/21)

Student 2

Week 4: 2/6/19

Week 5: 2/13/19

Week 6: 2/20/19 (Winter Cabaret 2/22)

Week 7: 2/27/19

Week 8: 3/6/19

Choosing Songs:

- d) Write your:
1. Number one choice _____
 2. Number two choice _____
 3. Number three choice _____
 4. I can't come on Weds _____

Appendix F

Martin Luther King Day Mini Lesson Plan

15 minute lesson within musical rehearsal

Purpose: Use songs to spark conversation around what is considered “the norm” in society

Goal: Students think critically about the meaning of a song in social context

Objective:

- *Students are able to reflect on how they learn about black history compared to white history in their lives*
- *Students are able to articulate how the lyrics of Lift Every Voice and Sing connects to past and current social conditions*

AGENDA

1) Setting the frame of the Martin Luther King Day Holiday and Black History Month:

- Introduction:
 - January is Black history month, and we are preparing to add music to the school’s MLK day celebration. I think MLK day and Black history month are extremely important holidays. They provide us with an opportunity to reflect on how we learn about black history throughout the rest of the year.
- Group discussion:
 - **Note: Talking about race can feel scary at times; we are mixed race group. I’m a white teacher; race is in the news a lot right now. But the only way we are going to get better as a society is if we talk about it-- this is a loving place to practice, and practice even making some mistakes, which is part of our learning! If you feel uncomfortable; feeling uncomfortable is natural and ok; it doesn’t mean something is bad or wrong-- it can mean we are working through something challenging.*
- Discussion Points:
 - During school, do you feel like have learned black history, or do you feel like you have learned history from the perspective of white authors, people, and teachers?
 - Do you feel like white history is considered the norm? If so, why?
 - It interesting to observe whose history we consider the “normal” history, and whose history society delegates for one month and a one day holiday
- Quote that illustrates this point:
 - *“Until we are able to break the silence that maintains music education’s complicity in perpetuating racism by leaving whiteness the undisturbed and the undisputed cultural norm our concerns about social justice in music education will amount to little more than lip service” Lisa DeLorenzo*

2) Civil Rights Songs History: Each of these songs started with a composer compelled to tell a story, to address an injustice, to express a point of view, to start a conversation.

- **Lift every voice and sing:** <https://youtu.be/RTuRsQ7Zf9A>
 - The Black National Anthem, but how did it become that?

- First written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson, it was performed for the first time by 500 school children in celebration of President Lincoln's Birthday in 1900 in Jacksonville, FL.
- He was a lyricist, poet, international diplomat, civil rights activist, and an important voice in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.
- The poem was set to music by Johnson's brother, and soon adopted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as its official song.
- Today “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is one of the most cherished songs of the African American Civil Rights Movement
- **Group Discussion:**
 - Take a moment and read through the lyrics
 - What lines of this song stand out to you?
 - One of the lines that resonates to me most is-- “sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us”
 - What has the dark past taught you in your fight for equity and justice?
 - **What message do we as a choir want to communicate to the audience through this song?**

If extra time discuss:

- **We shall overcome:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfKtvertvKM&t=91s>.
 - Anthem of the civil rights movement:
 - In 1947, two of the union members from South Carolina traveled to the town of Montagne, Tenn., for a workshop at the Highlander Folk Center.
 - Blacks and whites had been meeting together about labor issues at the Highlander for many years.
 - It was believed at Highlander that the people who have the problems are the ones who have the answers.
 - It was important to talk together, and especially to sing

Resources:

Lift Every Voice and Sing:

- <https://pages.stolaf.edu/americanmusic/2017/10/07/lift-every-voice-and-sing-a-brief-history/>

We Shall Overcome:

- <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/05/we-shall-overcome/392837/>
- <https://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome>

Appendix G

Improved Year Long Vocal Ensemble Learning Objectives

**Objectives are scaffolded according to risk, and may be spread out over months, trimesters or years depending when the assessments show that students are engaged and ready to move to the next level of difficulty*

1) **Shared power** (also referred to as co-creation)

a) *Activities:*

- i) Community building, such as speed dating, affirmation circles, and field trips
- ii) Group norms, which are revisited periodically
- iii) Student led activities, such as student led rehearsals and sectionals
- iv) Group decision-making, such as student input into repertoire, and how songs are shaped

b) *Assessment:*

- i) Students reflect on if their voice mattered in shaping decisions in the group in an end of the trimester reflection
- ii) Teacher observes student participation in group discussions

2) **Critical thinking** (*Level 1: Noticing culture*)

a) *Activities:*

- i) Teacher chooses a song from both western and non-western composers

b) *Assessment:*

- i) Students can identify culture artifacts within both western and non-western songs in group conversation
- ii) Students can verbalize how *all* music a reflection of a culture in an end of the trimester reflection

3) **Critical thinking** (*Level 2: Noticing power*)

a) *Activities:*

- i) Teacher chooses a song that reflects systems of power and oppression, such as a song about race/gender or written by someone of a different race non-conforming gender

b) *Assessment:*

- i) Students can verbalize how music reflects power dynamics in society within a group discussion and in an end of the trimester reflection

4) **Critical thinking** (*Level 3: How do questions of culture and power apply to you?*)

a) *Activities*

- i) Students give input on what songs we should sing next, how we want to sing them, and where we want to perform them.

b) *Assessment*

- i) Students can verbalize how they want to use their voice in group discussion and in written reflection

5) As a result of these activities, students develop democratic behavior by:

- a) Taking risks in conversations
- b) Listening deeply
- c) Express oneself emotionally, analytically, and creatively
- d) Using one's imagination to imagine what could be