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Shifting the Margins: Music Educators' Self-Reported Inclusion Practices for Marginalized Students in Southeastern Public High Schools

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ABSTRACT

There exists a significant underrepresentation of racial minorities, low-income students, and English Language Learners (ELLs) in the average American music program (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Hoffman, 2011). Factors that perpetuate this underrepresentation include cultural homogeneity of music educators, and a Eurocentric approach to music education that does not validate the musical skills of students from other cultures. This study examines the self-reported inclusion, diversification, and accommodation strategies of public high school music teachers in the southeastern United States. This study explores what measures music educators are taking to combat underrepresentation, and to what extent they are prioritizing inclusion. This study seeks to understand the role of the music educator in directing marginalized groups into music programs. Music educators, of any music class taught, from roughly fifteen of the largest public high schools in twelve southeastern states were recruited to share their experiences in an online survey. Results indicated that, although there was a theme of deeper commitment to including low-income students, music educators lack a sufficient toolbox of accommodation strategies for marginalized groups. These findings could possibly direct music educators toward designing equitable public music curricula that is equipped to serve all students in future classrooms. These findings also implicate that reforms in conventional music programs toward student-service, rather than product-centered, may increase diversity in participants.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine strategies of public high school music teachers in 12 southeastern states that aim to include marginalized groups in music instruction. The national demographics of music classes do not represent the national general student populations (Elpus & Abril, 2011). Therefore, this study explored the following questions: (1) Are music educators making *any* effort to create music programs that accurately reflect the demographics for that school? (2) If so, *what* are music educators doing to make accommodations for ELLs, low-income students, and racial minorities, and to what *extent*?

An improvement plan toward equitable music education can be most efficiently established if the existing common practices are recorded and understood. Additionally, information regarding the current status of

access in music education will guide us educators toward developing both in-service praxis and music teacher education curriculum.

Social Justice in Education

Few teacher education programs are deeply committed to social justice issues in teacher education, and teacher education programs have inconsistent definitions of social justice and inconsistent approaches to applying that to education (Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017). Social justice, according to Gewirtz (1998), is based on ideas and actions that disrupt systems perpetuating marginalization and exclusion. The result of educators being ignorant to the nature of the systems that create inequality include a perpetuation of that inequality. To disrupt inequality, educators must understand it and understand its causes. This is why social justice should not be considered merely a humanities subject. Each educator holds the responsibility to always be asking:

what can we do as music educators to disrupt systems that funnel marginalized groups *away* from music education programs?

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), is an approach to identity politics that states that all aspects of one's identity influence each other. When looking to create equity in circumstances of oppression, it is necessary to consider how those identities, and their respective oppressions, are inherently blended and interwoven. This study is premised on an intersectional approach to music education. These questions and goals are based on the belief that all individuals, regardless of race, social class, religion, gender, or ability, deserve access to quality music education.

The oppression that occurs in public schools regarding access to music classrooms involves not only race, class, ability, and ethnicity (including first language), but every combination of each of those factors as experienced by the individual. Intersectionality recognizes that a female student who is an undocumented Hispanic immigrant moving to the United States in the past year, has very limited English proficiency in a school where English is the only language of instruction, and comes from a low-income household will face a different set of academic challenges that call for a different toolbox of strategies than would be appropriate for a White female student from a low-income household who speaks English as a first language in the same school.

When speaking of music education in public schools, the appropriate toolbox of strategies for classroom teachers cannot be a relevant issue if oppression prevents access in the first place. It first becomes a matter of music enrollment, which is the foremost issue this study will examine.

Intersectionality is an excellent tool to understand how a combination of oppressions inhibits one's access to music instruction in public schools. For instance, the aforementioned Hispanic student's new immigrant status affects her class, as her parents struggle to find and keep work to financially support the family. Her class then affects her

academic achievement, as she struggles to manage taking care of her four small siblings (her parents are constantly working) while maintaining a level of academic achievement comparable to that of her previous high school. Her ethnicity also inhibits her success, as she must take a remedial English language class. Because she must take this remedial course to be able to succeed in this English-speaking high school, and this course happens to conflict with every elective music class offered at her school, music education is out of the question at least until she obtains English proficiency. Then it very well may be a matter of catching up in core classes: social studies, sciences, and literature.

Intersectionality serves as a reminder that the oppressions that prevent equity do not exist in a vacuum. An oppression from one identity can and will perpetuate an oppression from another. Our responsibility as music educators, then, is to have an intimate understanding of oppression as it manifests in the lives of our students so that we may know how to eliminate the barriers it creates in our classrooms.

Marginalized Groups

The results of a study by Elpus and Abril (published in 2011, using data from 2002 and 2004) lays the foundation of this study by providing estimates for cultural demographics of high school music students in the United States. The authors concluded that ELLs, low-income students, and racial minorities are underrepresented in public high school music programs nationwide.

English Language Learners

Hispanics are the largest group of ELLs and the fastest growing student population in American public schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). The NCES reported that 9.4 percent of high school students in the United States were ELLs in 2014-15, which is a smaller figure than the 10 percent that Elpus and Abril (2011) reported for ELL music students. However, the authors note in their methods that Hispanics and Asians were deliberately oversampled to ensure that they were adequately represented in the study. The researchers noted that, regarding this

oversampling, reported results ought to be considered estimates.

Students of Low Socioeconomic Status

The proportion of students of low socioeconomic status, “low SES students,” in music classrooms are incongruent with nationwide demographics of all students. In 2013, 50 percent of all students in America were considered low income (SEF, 2006), while 17 percent of music students were within the lowest socioeconomic quartile in 2004. For 11 of the 12 states included in this study, over 50 percent of students came from low-income households (determined by eligibility for free or reduced lunch) in 2015. The only state involved in this study that did not have over half of its public school students from a low-income household is Virginia, with 39 percent. The average percentage of all low-income public school students from the states involved in this study is 57.4 percent (SEF, 2015).

Racial Minorities

Schools with high racial minority populations are less likely to offer music courses (Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017). Sixty-five percent of music students in American high schools were white in 2004, while in 2013, 50 percent of all American public school students were white, making them only slightly overrepresented in nationwide music programs (Elpus & Abril, 2011; NCES, 2014). This survey will record the following races of music students and the music teacher: White/Caucasian, African American/Black, Asian, two races, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and other. This survey will also record the number of students who are Hispanic/Latino.

Limitations of these Sources

Several of these studies provide information on student demographics that may be considered slightly outdated. The cultural demographics provided by Elpus and Abril were for high school students in 2002 and 2004, over a decade from the time of this study. NCES (2017) reported a fall in White public school student enrollment from 2004 to 2014, from 58 percent to 50 percent. NCES also reported a 1 percent decrease in Black student enrollment, a 6 percent increase in Hispanic enrollment, a 1 percent increase in

Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment, no change in American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment, and a 1 percent increase in mixed-race enrollment. The projected distribution also reported a decline in White enrollment and an increase in minority enrollment in the next 12 years, excluding Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students.

Contributing Factors of Inequities in Music Education

Cultural Homogeneity of Music Teacher Education

When homogeneous groups are placed in a majority position, they tend to perpetuate traditional values. . . . Inflexibility and stagnation often result not only in practice but also in training new recruit. (White, 1967, p. 10)

Past research has examined questions such as “What factors are perpetuating the cultural disparity of music students?” Another facet of the issue of underrepresentation is the even deeper cultural homogeneity of the population of those *pursuing music as a profession* and those who train music teacher candidates. According to demographic information collected from Praxis II™ music tests, music educator candidates are 86.02 percent White, and 95 percent of candidates spoke English as their first language (Elpus, 2015).

Salvador and Kelly-McHale found that “10 percent to 20 percent of [post-secondary music teacher educators] asserted that they had no interest in teaching social justice topics, that it was irrelevant, and that it was not their job...” (2017). In the same study, over half of these respondents approached education with the belief that all students will succeed should they receive the same treatment and make sufficient effort.

Culturally sensitive music educators understand that one’s culture heavily influences one’s learning processes (Butler, Lind, & McKoy, 2007). The implications of a predominantly white music educator force in the United States include a perpetuation of inequity and limited access music education, especially if no reforms in music teacher education are created or effective in shaping

candidates into culturally sensitive educators. Twenty-four percent of undergraduate music teacher education programs offer no course to prepare music teachers to work with exceptional populations (Salvador, 2010).

There exists a pervasive, traditionally narrow scope of what is considered musical competence in Western classical music pedagogy. This includes, for example, the culturally inconsistent practice of learning a gospel piece by sight-reading from notation. Considering gospel is often learned aurally, those who identify with the culture of gospel may have lost an opportunity to engage in their culture in a way that is natural and appropriate for them (Shaw, 2012). Moore (1993) found that pre-service and in-service music teachers alike lack an understanding of the relationship between culture and learning, ignoring those factors in instruction. Additionally, individuals who receive music education in suburban, middle-class schools prefer to teach in suburban, middle-class schools, further suggesting a lack of confidence in music teachers' ability to teach across cultures (Kelly, 2003).

METHODS

Participants

A survey was administered electronically using Qualtrics, a web-based survey creation software, to public high school music educators in the states of West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. These participants were not only teachers of ensembles such as band, orchestra, and chorus, but also other courses such as music theory, music appreciation, guitar, and piano.

The education site, Startclass by Graphiq™ (<https://www.startclass.com>) was used to select participating schools and to collect information for those schools. Graphiq is a "semantic technology company that instantly delivers deep insights from the world's data," designed for researchers, journalists, and enterprise (Retrieved from <https://www.graphiq.com/>). Startclass provided information for public (and private)

schools regarding race/ethnicity, socioeconomic breakdown, gender distribution, state testing results, English Language Learner (ELL) populations, learning disability populations, bullying, absenteeism, teacher experience, district information including expenditures and revenue, and free/reduced lunch eligibility. Startclass also provided contextual information regarding the cost of living of that city, state and district averages for each aspect, and an overall, one-out-of-ten "Startclass Rating."

To recruit participants, Startclass' enrollment information was used. The names of roughly twenty of each state's largest schools were entered into a table. The email addresses of music educators at those schools were then collected from the high school's website staff directory. This table was preserved as the email addresses were then transferred to Qualtrics contacts, so that the email address could be matched with a school if need be.

Many public school websites did not make teacher name, subject taught, and email address easily available. For some schools, a staff directory could not be found. These schools were eliminated from the participant pool. Since many schools categorized teachers by department, it was often unclear which teachers on that webpage were teaching music. In the scenario that there was no information to distinguish a fine arts teacher as a music teacher, each fine arts teacher was added to the contact list for that high school. The very first statement of the participation invitation email aimed to target only music educators: "If you have received this email, it is because you have been chosen as a music educator teaching in a public school in the southeast. If this description does not fit you, please disregard and delete this email."

A total of 567 contacts were invited to participate from a total of 174 schools in 12 states.

Survey

The survey provided between 31 and 51 questions, depending on responses to questions that prompted follow-up questions. The questions were sorted into two categories: director/school basic information and accommodation and inclusion efforts.

The first section recorded basic information, including name of the teacher, the name of his/her school, the state in which it is located, and the gender, age group, race, and ethnicity of the teacher.

The second sections provided open-ended response fields for teachers to describe their accommodation and inclusion efforts for ELL students and students with financial limitations. The participants were also asked to describe their efforts to attract and recruit racial minorities, if applicable.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Percentages are used to quantify basic information of participants. Open-ended responses regarding recruitment were divided into four groups: feeder programs, performances/trips, reputation, and student-oriented outreach.

Of the 567 individuals contacted, 28 responses were recorded, yielding a response rate of 4.9 percent. Not all of these responses were complete, and some responses were completely empty. Of the 12 states selected, 23 percent of respondents were from Alabama. Five participants were from Mississippi; 3 from Tennessee; 2 from Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and South Carolina; 1 from Virginia and Arkansas; and 0 from Louisiana. 53.85 percent of participants were male, while 46.15 percent were female (see figure 1). Most participants were between the 56-60 and 41-45 age ranges (see figure 2.) 85.19 percent of participants were White/Caucasian, 3.7 percent were Black/African American, 3.7 percent chose not to answer, and 7.41 percent chose other (see figure 3). Of the “other” responses, one participant entered “Half White/Half Japanese” into the text field and the other entered “Human.” One participant was Hispanic and of Cuban descent.

General Recruitment Strategies

54 percent of participants chose to share their recruitment practices. The responses were organized into four categories: feeder programs, performances/trips, reputation, and student-oriented outreach. 66 percent

mentioned that they used a feeder program, visiting middle schools to encourage enrollment in music classes. 33 percent used performances and trips to entice students to enroll into their ensemble. 26 percent relied on reputation to attract new members, with at least one participant implying they exclusively rely on their reputation to attract members. 26 percent asked their students to recruit their friends. It is important to note that these percentages indicate the frequency of method, and that participants could have used more than one method.

Racial Minority Recruitment

When asked if they make concerted efforts to attract and recruit racial minorities, 71 percent said they do not. The 29 percent who claimed they made concerted efforts to attract racial minorities were provided an open-ended text field to describe their recruitment methods. 3 of the 4 open-ended responses claimed to use variety in music to attract racial minorities, while one stated: “I invite everyone to join the choir, my Varsity and Jr. Varsity choirs are racially balanced.”

English Learner Inclusion Efforts

When asked if they implemented accommodations for ELLs in their music classes, 57.14 percent said they did while 42.86 percent said they did not. Two responses indicated that they followed what was administered by their mentoring teacher, while one response was more in-depth: “I work with their main teacher to see what their specific needs are. The beauty of music literacy is that most of my students are new to the process so the playing field is even. We incorporate technology into the efforts, and also try to learn a song in their language (ESL) or from their culture- even if it is a unison folk song. Creates a positive climate for the others as well.”

Low SES Students

When asked to share their accommodations efforts for students with financial limitations, 53 percent of respondents mentioned the use of booster club funds, 24 percent arranged transportation for students for rehearsals and performances, and 24 percent claimed to use fundraising to support students with financial limitations. Other methods mentioned include grants, donations, private

instruction, and fee waivers. One participant said that they provide free instruments, instrument repairs, and free food to their students. 43 percent of participants responded to this question.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the following questions: Are music educators making *any* effort to create music programs that accurately reflect the demographics for that school? If so, *what* are music educators doing to make accommodations for ELLs, low-income students, and racial minorities, and to what *extent*?

The results of this study suggested that, while some music educators are making some efforts to include racial minorities, low-income students, and English learners, an alarming percentage of music educators are not. Regarding the *extent* of accommodations for these marginalized groups, it is, in most cases, inadequate. Few music educators who participated in this study seemed to have a holistic appreciation for the nature of marginalization, how it manifests in a music classroom, and how to combat it. For instance, a music teacher incorporated technology into English learner instruction and performed music in their native language. One teacher implied a dedication to including low-income students, stating “We never let financial issues affect student participation.”

From the responses regarding inclusion, there existed a general theme of a deeper commitment for students who are financially disadvantaged than those who are English learners or those who are racial minorities. Rather than it be a matter of apathy toward certain groups, it seemed likely that music teachers have a larger toolbox of practices to include low-income students, and a smaller toolbox of inclusion practices for English learners and racial minorities.

It is a norm among high school music educators to focus less on the process and potential of learning music and more on the product, i.e. the concert or state festival competition. *We have to produce an excellent product. We have to distinguish ourselves as a program of*

superiority. We need to perform challenging repertoire. Our students need to sound good.

If that is at the center of the director’s agenda, then diversifying the music classroom is not likely to be a priority. At that point, it becomes less about the cultural composition of the ensemble and more about 1) the size of the ensemble and 2) Eurocentric musical skill of its members. If a music director is playing a numbers game for the most musically-literate teenagers, that naturally excludes students who, by consequence of their culture, have not developed cultural capital appropriate for the often elitist field of “concert music.”

This raises a new set of questions that cannot go unexamined if we are to understand this issue of cultural underrepresentation. First, what are we hoping to achieve with music education in our public high schools? Second, in what ways are we helping our students grow as musicians? Third, are we honoring students’ inherent musicality, or invalidating it by measuring their skills exclusively with Eurocentric standards of musicianship? Fourth, are we placing the musical development of the student first, or are we prioritizing our reputation in the field of music education? Finally, considering the culture disparities that exist in high school music ensembles and the professional music sphere, are we creating a music culture in our classroom that attracts all students, or only a certain demographic?

When we create a music class culture that is focused less on the concert-ready product and more on a contemporary idea of music’s *universal* potential for enrichment, we may find that students feel they have more to contribute in a music class. In other words, our exclusive adherence to *concert* music traditions may be an outdated approach to music education. Perhaps if, and when, exceptional groups exist more frequently in the music classroom, we will be forced to expand the limited toolbox of accommodations. The underrepresentation could be a direct cause for the lack of inclusion practices we have ready to implement. The less students to accommodate for, the less experience making accommodations.

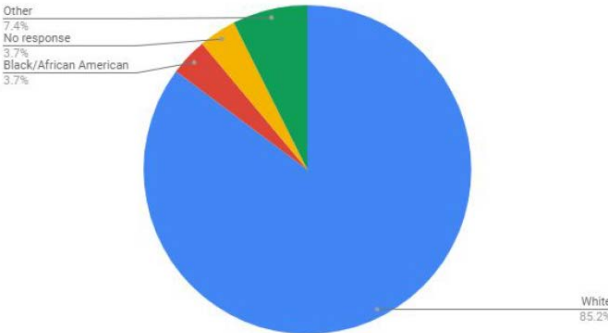
Teachers bear a responsibility of being innovators, lifelong learners, and compassionate leaders. Embedded within this modern teacher is an appreciation for the lives of our students, how they differ from our own, and an intersectional awareness of social issues that inhibit our students' ability to learn. Our interest should not end with the students who are already enrolling in our classes, who are proficient sight-readers and love Bach. We carry an obligation to serve every young person in our communities. Perhaps it is time for music education to evolve.

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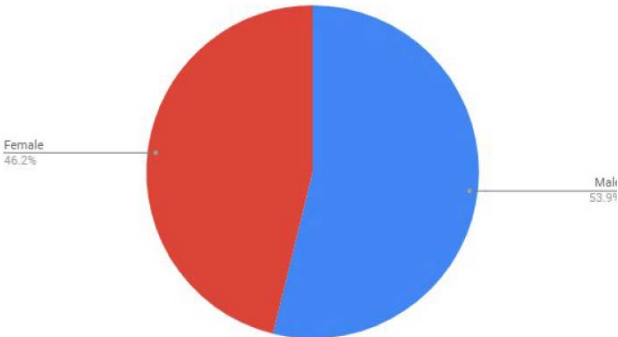
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APPENDIX 1

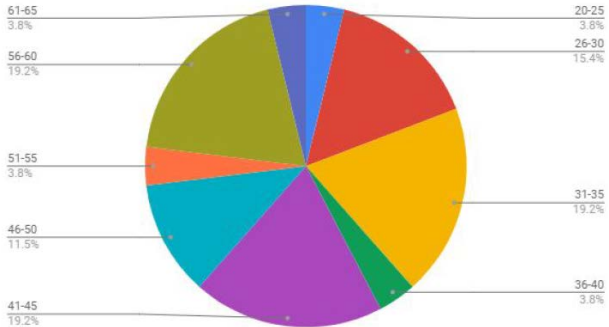
Race of participants



Gender of participants



Age range of participants



Age range	Choice Count
20-25	1
26-30	4
31-35	5
36-40	1
41-45	5
46-50	3
51-55	1
56-60	5
61-65	1