

# An Investigation of Culturally Responsive Teaching Activities for Preservice Music Teachers

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## Abstract

The principle of equal opportunity in music education is a foundational belief of the National Association for Music Education (2020). However, researchers suggest that factors such as race and ethnicity (Lind, 1999; Walker & Hamann, 1995) affect both perceptions of ability (Kozol, 2005; Pole, 1993), equity, and access in music. Researchers also indicate that preservice teachers' own racial and cultural backgrounds and previous experiences have a major influence in their development (Kuman & Hamer, 2012; Kelly, 2003). These prejudices may reflect learned cultural tenets which are challenging to overcome because they become embedded in our thinking processes (Renzetti & Curran, 2000). To break the cycle of these inherent biases in music programs, music teacher educators should explicitly guide preservice teachers through strategies for culturally responsive pedagogy.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) was to investigate five preservice music teachers' (PMTs) experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy activities in a university undergraduate choral methods course. Students participated in various activities across a seven-lesson unit that reflected McKoy's (2020) model of culturally relevant pedagogy instructional strategies for PMTs. Participants' activity reflections, class-generated documents/transcripts, researcher's self-reflections, and a post-unit focus group interview served as data sources for triangulation (Patton, 2015). Data were coded and grouped in a multi-cycle process according to emergent themes (Miles et al., 2014) and member checking was used to ensure validity (Patton, 2015).

Findings revealed that participants benefited both personally and professionally from the activities of the study. Participants strengthened their awareness of culturally generated inequalities, began to recognize their own inherent biases, and gained an increased level of self-efficacy in their ability to discuss racial, ethnic, and cultural issues in their future classrooms. Findings also revealed that while participants gained an increased understanding of social justice in general, this understanding was at a more cursory level. Participants understood the need to engage in CRT practices but lacked clarity of how to specifically accomplish this in their future classrooms. This result parallels extant literature stating that incorporating CRT and diversity into teacher education programs seems to remain at a more general and base level (Bond & Russell, 2019, Siwatu, 2011, Siwatu, 2007) suggesting that PMTs should receive more diversity training during their collegiate experience (Robinson, 2017).

Although designed for preservice teachers, the process and activities of this study can easily be adapted for in-service teachers to utilize with their students. By engaging in culturally relevant instructional strategies, music educators at any phase of their career can help our students examine more deeply the complexities of culturally situated expression.

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## Culturally Relevant Teaching Activities Study-Specific Descriptions

These 6 activities are described in considerable detail in McKoy's (2020) chapter from *The Oxford Handbook of Preservice Music Teacher Education in the United States*. For this 7-unit study, the first class period was an introductory lesson/discussion to set up the study and process. Each subsequent class period involved the following 6 activities with class discussion either immediately after or throughout. The activities were scheduled in the listed order for pedagogical and practical reasons. For each activity, I have provided a small description beyond McCoy's (2020) text noting the details specific for this study—when diverging from McCoy's provided description.

### 1. Privilege Walk

We took a hypothetical walk. Since this was the first activity and I was building rapport with participants, I felt it was necessary to avoid any potential personal exposure that is associated with this activity. We “took” the walk but kept a numerical tally of our privilege or marginalization privately instead of physically stepping. After the activity, all scores were collected and read aloud anonymously. The activity's modification did not seem to negatively impact the process nor the subsequent discussion.

### 2. Mapping the Matrix of Domination/Oppression

### 3. Interrogating Culture and Musical Hegemony

The breadth of activity and supplemental questions was edited due to time constraints. While we were unable to discuss all questions during our class time, the overarching thrust of the activity remained the same.

### 4. Musical Autoethnography

### 5. Aural Musical Learning

For this activity, I taught by rote a 3-part vocal work called “Oh, Lord, We Praise You” from the African American gospel musical tradition. We learned this piece call-and-response with no notation.

### 6. Community Engagement

Due to the limited nature of our study, this activity was a modified version of the “community walk.” We explored the residential neighborhood surrounding our music building. In our situation, this activity needed to fit within a typical 50-minute class period. With such a limited amount of time, I scouted six specific locations and had short informal discussions with residents ahead of time. During the activity, participants examined the location and expressed their assumptions or ideas as to who might live there (age/ages, ethnic origins, socioeconomic status, professions, religious affiliation, etc.). This allowed the participants a greater realization of their own inherent biases and stereotypes. During the activity, I was able to inform the participants about my informal conversations with residents and validate or challenge their preconceived ideas of their community.