Equity and access in music education: conceptualizing culture as barriers to and supports for music learning

By: Abby Butler, Vicki L. Lind, and Constance L. McKoy

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Abstract:
A conceptual model designed specifically for the investigation of issues surrounding race, ethnicity and culture in relation to music learning will best serve our profession as we attempt to understand how these issues may impact music learning among diverse populations. This paper proposes such a model, depicted as a concept map, featuring five primary categories: teacher, student, content, instruction, and context. Focusing research according to this model will serve to categorize current knowledge, clarify factors and constructs involving music learning, and formulate predictions of specific learning outcomes, thereby facilitating the development of hypotheses and theories that support a research agenda devoted to examining the barriers to and support for music learning as influenced by race, culture and ethnicity.

Article:
This research is set against the backdrop of rapidly changing school demographics (Shin, 2005). It is hard to imagine any teacher, school, or program unaffected by an increasingly pluralistic and interconnected world. Given that music has socially constructed meanings, and represents one of several expressive forms through which diverse cultures may be known, and given that music is a source of cultural identity for many racial and ethnic groups, expanding research in multicultural music education to encompass the same areas of inquiry as multiculturalism in general education would seem entirely appropriate and necessary. General education has long held as primary the significance of culture as a lens through which to identify, examine, and critically analyze theories and variables affecting the kind and extent of educational equity and access.

The *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (Banks & Banks, 2004) defines multicultural education as 'a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principles, theories and paradigms … ' (p. xii). The purpose of this paper is to explore educational equity in relationship to music education. If we agree that culture matters, we must consider the multiple contexts of students when designing learning experiences and conducting research. As there are myriad factors influencing music learning, identifying those variables essential to the learning process and conceptually framing their relationships within the context of culture would be beneficial to the development of a research agenda based on social justice and equity.

Need for a conceptual model

What are the functions and purposes that a conceptual model might serve for the specific research agenda that we propose? First, conceptual models can operate as organizing structures; they are a way to categorize current knowledge gained from previous research. Additionally, the organizational character of a conceptual model allows for the possible integration of areas of knowledge that, formerly, were separated. A conceptual model illustrating the influence of culture on music learning would provide an organizational context in which extant research may be located.

Second, conceptual models are a way of mapping reality; they provide a means to specify components comprising a process or phenomenon, and allow for the investigation of possible relationships among and between phenomenological components. Moreover, codifying component relationships within a process allows for the prediction of specific outcomes. A conceptual model is, as Tuckman (1999) has observed, 'a complex proposal of all the variables and their interconnections that make a particular outcome, such as learning … happen' (p. 32). Accordingly, such a model would clarify the factors and constructs comprising the music learning process, suggest relationships between and among them, and permit the formulation of predictions of specific learning outcomes as influenced by race, ethnicity, and culture.

Third, because models (as distinguished from maps) represent actions and processes rather than mere representations of objects, the construction of a conceptual model may suggest specific research problems and questions, thereby facilitating the formulation of hypotheses and theories that can guide research. Edwards (1992) noted that although the goal of research is to explain observed relationships, the variables of interest are often selected based upon a theory about one or more relationships, whether or not the theory is explicitly stated. Consequently, models are visual representations of the theory that forms the foundation for a specific research endeavor.

Beyond the benefit of providing a means to communicate theory, models can 'tell us how to follow a procedural regimen or show us hypothesized relationships and causal patterns. They enhance our ability to speculate about processes, consider alternatives, and develop hypotheses' (Edwards, 1992, p. 39). Herein lies perhaps the most potent and compelling rationale for the development of a conceptual model: its dynamic and generative potential. A conceptual model has the capacity to serve as a tool for researchers to use in reconsidering findings, and refining and reshaping theory based upon new information. Thus, the true value of a conceptual model is determined not by its capacity to remain static and unyielding to change, but by its capacity to generate research that will ensure its continued evolution.

Our proposed model consists of five broad categories: teacher, student, content, instruction, and context (see Figure 1). Each category represents dimensions or constructs that, by virtue of being impacted or affected by culture, may serve as barriers to or supports for music learning among diverse student populations. What follows is an explanation of each category with supportive references to current work. While each of the five categories is discussed separately, in reality the boundaries between them are often fuzzy, and it is not uncommon for factors from one category to influence or interact with those from one or more of the other categories.
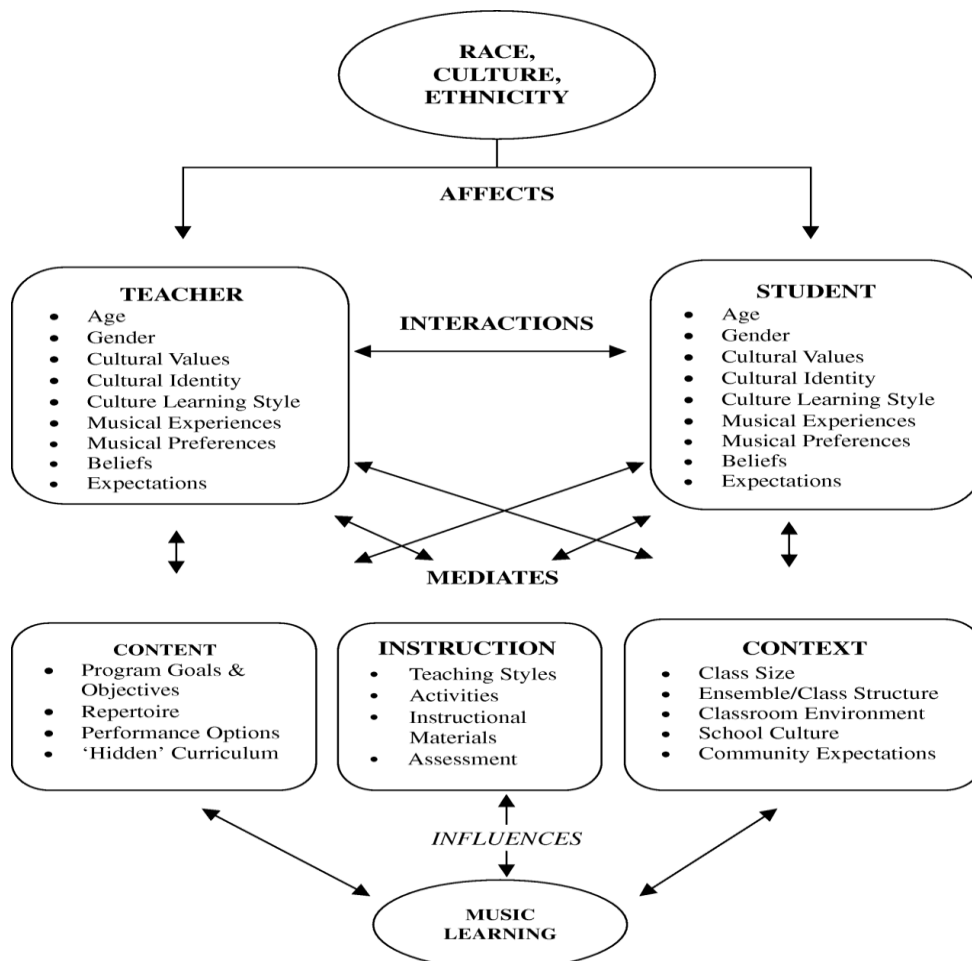
Figure 1. . Proposed conceptual model

Teacher

Proponents of multicultural education insist that the increasing diversity of public school student populations requires teachers who are sensitive to and knowledgeable about the influence of culture on learning (Banks, 1994; Gay, 1994, 2002; 1995; Noel, 2000; Nieto, 2004). Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified six traits that culturally responsive teachers exhibit. Such teachers (1) are socio-culturally conscious, that is, they recognize that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one's location in the social order, (2) have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, rather than viewing difference as problems to overcome, (3) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change, (4) understand that learners construct knowledge in numerous and overlapping ways, (5) know about the background of their students' lives, and (6) use this background knowledge to design instruction that builds on what students already know, while stretching them beyond the familiar.

In order to understand how research can help teachers acquire these competencies, we need to have a more complete picture of the factors that may affect the development of such competencies. Recent research in teacher education indicates that many pre- and in-service teachers are unaware of and non-responsive to the ways in which cultural differences impact student learning and achievement (Moore, 1993). Early research in music education examining both pre- and in-service teachers' attitudes about multicultural music instruction revealed that, although music teachers believe in the value of incorporating music of various cultures, often they are unsure how to provide that instruction effectively (Norman, 1994; Young, 1996). This uncertainty remains an on-going concern, despite an increase in the number of undergraduate courses in multicultural music.

Research also suggests that students in teacher preparation programs often lack a commitment to teach in schools with culturally diverse populations, preferring to teach in monocultural educational settings (Wiggins & Follo, 1999; Bradfield-Kreider, 2001; Dieker *et al.*, 2002; Nierman *et al.*, 2002). Kelly (2003) found that pre-service music teachers whose pre-college music experiences were in suburban middle class schools expressed a preference for teaching in environments that are similar to their own background. McKoy (2006) found that pre-service music teachers were ambivalent regarding their preference for teaching in culturally diverse schools, despite their claims that they believed in the value of multicultural music instruction, recognized race and ethnicity as influential factors in music and learning style preferences, and were comfortable with teaching in racially and ethnically diverse educational environments.

According to research on teacher education, teacher beliefs, orientations, and commitment can significantly influence what pre-service educators learn in their teacher training programs (Foster, 1995; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Gollnick, 1996; Marshall, 1999; Gay & Howard, 2000; Bradfield-Kreider, 2001; Thorsén, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Kelly, 2003). It follows that the more teachers understand about how their own cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities influence their attitudes about other cultural groups, the more open they may be to recognizing the significance of culture and ethnicity as factors critical to teaching and learning.

Of necessity, research on culturally responsive teaching must explore the role of teacher attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations as mediating factors. Howard (1999) claims, 'Too often we expect White teachers to be what they have not learned to be, namely, multiculturally competent people' (p. 4). Emmanuel (2003) found that pre-service teachers involved in an immersion experience designed to increase their intercultural competence, gained a new understanding of the word 'multicultural'. They became more cognizant of the varying forms of diversity, leading them to re-conceptualize teaching as a bi-directional transmission process between teacher and students.

Likewise, gender also functions as a factor influenced by culture, particularly in the field of music education. Researchers on gender have focused attention to how cultural stereotypes regarding gender roles are perpetuated (Citron, 1993; Morton, 1996; Green, 1997; Howe, 1998; Gould, 2005). Consequently, these factors are significant to considerations of how pre- and in-service music teachers' attitudes about gender roles affect their own career choices, as well as their expectations for students.

Student

Students as well as teachers bring a wide variety of personal experiences to the classroom. Understanding how students' musical experiences are mediated by culture is critical for educators interested in maximizing student learning. Since one of the principle goals of music education is to develop in learners an appreciation for a variety of musical styles and genres, current investigations focus primarily on preference, age, gender, ethnicity and/or race (Appleton, 1971; Meadows, 1971; James, 1974; McCrary, 1993; McCrary & Gauthier, 1995). Results from these studies support the description of LeBlanc (1987) on how listener characteristics, such as gender, ethnic group identity, and age, are manifested in the development of music preference. While important, these variables are not the only factors affecting music learning.

Not only will educators need to know about their students' musical backgrounds, they will need to understand how variables, such as learning style preference and racial identity, might interact with race and culture to affect music learning. Hale (1986, 1994, 2001) explored the roots, culture and learning styles of African American children. While she applied her findings to subject areas other than music, her research may help music teachers understand the unique needs of their African American students. In turn, that knowledge may help them design learning experiences that better meet the needs of *all* their students. In *Culture, style and the educative process*, Shade (1997) examines the cognitive styles of African American, Native American, Hmong, and Mexican American students, while developing teaching strategies that address cultural learning styles.

Identity development is also an important aspect of education, and one that is mediated by one's racial, social, and cultural background. A complex phenomenon, identity development is also connected to issues surrounding self-esteem and peer group influences. Tatum (1997) explains the development of racial identity in her book *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* Again, understanding how issues surrounding race, identity, and self-esteem affect their students, as well as how these issues impact music teaching and learning, will assist music teachers to better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse study population.

Content

Curricular decisions revolve around what is to be taught. These decisions, in turn, are based on prior choices regarding goals and objectives of the music program. Since these decisions may result in choices that may include or exclude certain populations, they are an important part of any conceptual model dealing with issues of race, culture, and ethnicity. Decisions about repertoire, types of ensembles, and related music activities can also serve as either barriers to or support for music learning of diverse populations. For instance, Arabic students whose parents prohibit them from playing instruments because of their religious beliefs would be severely disadvantaged in a music program revolving around band and orchestra.

In general education, three broad approaches to multicultural education may be drawn from the literature: (1) teaching content about cultural pluralism, (2) teaching culturally different students, and (3) using cultural pluralism to teach other academic subjects and intellectual skills (Gay, 1994). Of the three, the latter approach is most commonly used. Primarily content-centered, this approach has been employed most frequently in social studies, language arts, and fine arts. Numerous resources are available for teachers interested in incorporating world musics into their classroom experiences, and indeed, understanding the music of other cultures constitutes one of the National Standards for Music Education (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994).

However, studies conducted to examine the status of public school multicultural music education programs reveal instructional curricula that are often cursory and superficial. These approaches are typically connected to world holidays and celebrations with little attention given to cultural context or musical authenticity, and with little or no emphasis on the functional context of the music, and the unique aesthetic value system that informs its tradition (Palmer, 1975, 1992; Yudkin, 1990; Robinson, 1996). These results underscore the need to develop instructional curricula that (1) encourage the development of multiculturalism in music as a component of the curriculum, rather than as an adjunct to it, (2) are analogous to the transmission procedures and functional contexts of the cultures being studied, and (3) incorporate the aesthetic value systems of the cultures within which the music operates.

In general education, a hierarchical approach to multicultural education, described by Banks (1994), incorporates some of these criteria. In this approach, multicultural education may occur across four levels of increasing complexity: (1) contribution, (2) additive, (3) transformation, and (4) social action. The more complex levels, transformation and social action, are the most inclusive, but may require significant restructuring of the curriculum. Accordingly, these two higher levels involve changing established assumptions about what constitutes pertinent instructional content guiding the development of education curricula. These changes include designing curricula that *extend* cultural understandings, and provide opportunities for students to 'take personal, social, and civic actions related to the concepts, problems, and issues they have studied' (Banks, 1994, p. 27) In a similar vein, Elliott (1989) describes a typology of music curricula based upon six multicultural ideologies originally formulated by Pratte (1979) advocating 'dynamic multiculturalism' as a model that preserves the integrity of a given musical tradition, yet is open to unfamiliar values, procedures, and behaviors necessary to understand said tradition.

Instruction

In addition to research investigating issues related to content, it is important to consider how music instruction is presented. The variety and kinds of learning activities coupled with the teacher's instructional style may directly affect students' involvement and success in the music program. Students from different cultural backgrounds may not be comfortable with certain activities or modes of presentation. Research that helps us understand how children from diverse cultural backgrounds respond to different types of musical activities and instructional approaches will allow music teachers to develop pedagogical practices in line with culturally responsive teaching.

In her book *Learning while Black*, Hale (2001) argues for a culturally appropriate pedagogy designed to motivate and empower African American students by structuring learning experiences that support African American ways of learning. These learning strategies include an array of activities that speak to oral learning and oral literacy, emphasize the creative arts, and feature a kinesthetic and affective orientation. Since these strategies complement those often used in the music classroom, research investigating their efficacy in promoting positive music learning experiences for African American students would be welcome.

Hale also describes how community settings relate to educational opportunities. Many of the students in urban settings come from communities that value collaboration. Hale describes how the competitive environment that dominates many classrooms may be at direct odds with the family and community values of a vast number of students. Other educators who advocate culturally responsive instruction echo the need for a collaborative environment, where students work together assisting, supporting, and encouraging one another (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Foster, 1995; Irvine & Foster, 1996). Research in music education also supports the effectiveness of a more collaborative, less competitive approach (Lind, 1999; Lind & Butler, 2003).

Context

The context of classroom environments remains an important variable to consider. Teachers who know their students and know how to develop learning activities that capitalize on their interests and strengths are much more likely to create a positive learning environment (Gay, 2000). Cochran-Smith (2004) points out that teachers must also be willing to acknowledge, value, and work from the cultural and linguistic resources their students bring as well. In contrast, a lack of teacher concern or interest in students is a major factor in student alienation (Arroyo *et al*., 1999). Clearly, creating a positive classroom environment requires teachers to make an effort to get to know their students, and, most importantly, create a learning environment that conveys a belief in their students' ability to learn (Baum *et al*., 1995; McLeod, 1996; Delpit, 2002).

In general education, Byrd *et al*. (1996) found that teachers who were task-oriented and set clear goals for classroom discipline, while democratically giving students choices, were best able to relate to non-Anglo students. In music education, Lind and Butler (2003) found a relationship between African American participation in choral ensembles and classroom environment. Programs that were less rigid, did not emphasize rules, order, and organization, and did not focus on internal competition, tended to have a higher percentage of African American student participation. Lind (1999) found similar results when investigating the relationship between classroom environment and Hispanic student enrollment in choral programs. Accordingly, Hispanic students were more apt to participate in choral programs that were perceived as less competitive and more collaborative, and that evidenced a lower degree of teacher control.

Unfortunately, creating a supportive classroom environment may be complicated when there are significant differences between a student's culture and that of the school. Differences in language use and interpersonal interactions may cause teachers to misread students' aptitudes, intent, or abilities (Delpit, 1995). Teachers may also establish classroom environments and/or use teaching styles that are at odds with the cultural norms. Given that the teaching force remains predominantly White, female, and upwardly mobile, while the student population is becoming increasingly diverse, problems arising from differences between the two will likely continue, if not escalate (Ducette *et al*., 1996).

These differences are also apparent in music education. Reeder-Lundquist (2002) notes that pre-service music teachers are often expected to function successfully within educational environments that exhibit social, historical, and aesthetic contexts, dissimilar from the contexts for which they are being prepared in music teacher education programs. Barry (1996) and Benham (2003), respectively, chronicled the experiences of student teachers in educational environments that did not mirror the contexts of their music teaching preparation classes. Barry noted that pre-service teachers' questionnaire responses indicated an increase in comfort with teaching in multicultural educational environments as a consequence of receiving special training in multicultural music instruction; yet their field notes and reflections evidenced a different experience in a school where the majority of students were African American. Pre-service teachers expressed frustrations related primarily to cultural differences between themselves and their students. Barry (1996) concluded that students' difficulty in translating their knowledge into culturally responsive teaching was due, in part, to the cultural differences between their college classroom environment and that of their practicum school.

In discussing his experiences teaching an inner city elementary string class, Benham (2003) described how his students viewed him as a cultural 'outsider'. Moreover, he discovered that teaching strategies and approaches that had been successful in other instructional environments were not effective for these students. By gradually developing an awareness of the norms, expectations, and values of the school and community in which he taught, Benham was able to communicate with his students more effectively.

Certainly, cultural differences, between teacher and students, within the student population, or between the school and community present unique educational challenges affecting classroom environment. Given the importance of the context in which learning occurs, and the various ways race, ethnicity, gender, and culture may affect the creation of a successful, supportive and positive classroom environment, a research agenda that builds on the interaction of these disparate and complex variables will help teachers to be more effective in this area.

Summary

As stated earlier, one of the most powerful and compelling rationales for developing a conceptual model is that it allows us to think about a process, consider alternative ideas, and develop hypotheses within complex systems. As our profession continues to develop a research agenda focused on equity, social justice, and music learning, we must find ways to think deeply about how the issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and culture might mediate music learning. This conceptual model can serve as a catalyst for collaborative conversations and research agendas.

This research is presented with an understanding that conceptual models are fluid. Not only are conceptual models capable of informing research, they must also be informed *by* the research. As we continue to work in this area, our understanding about how multiple cultures can serve as mediating factors to music learning will grow. At the same time, we know the system being studied (education) will change. The student population and teaching force will become increasingly diverse, and expectations for learning will continue to shift as new policies and procedures are implemented. The conceptual model must reflect not only the new knowledge gained through systematic and focused research, but also the changes in schooling and music learning. It is our hope that the proposed conceptual model will help organize existing research and clarify what we already know, facilitate conversations, and direct our thinking about music education in new ways, and serve to move the research agenda forward as we strive to find ways to provide equitable education to an increasingly diverse student population.

Notes on contributors

Abby Butler is Associate Professor of Vocal Music Education at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

Vicki R. Lind is Assistant Professor of Music Education at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Constance L. McKoy is Assistant Professor with the Music Research Institute in the School of Music at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

All three authors contributed equally to this work.

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