

**Paper 2: Equity, Diversity and Social Justice in Music Education**

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When planning for this assignment, I began reflecting on my own personal experiences as a student and the music education I received growing up. As I have stated before, I was born and raised in East Boston, Massachusetts and having access to music education throughout my whole educational career in school was a privilege that I did not have. Coming from a lower in-come area, the schools I went to starting in second grade did not have a music program. It wasn't until I reached high school where music classes were offered again, and this was only because I was accepted with a full scholarship to a private high school in the Back Bay of Boston. As music educators, we must recognize that poverty is a serious social justice issue, and that some students are unable to attend the classes that we teach. "The results are visible when we take a serious reflexive look at who participates, and who does not, in typical school music programs" (Bradley, 2007). When it comes to Music Education, children growing up in poverty often have their voices silenced and may not feel deserving of programs and resources (Burnard, 2005). So, What can we as individuals do to help provide access to music education for children in poverty?

Taking a look back at my childhood in my community, the leaders and adults were aware of the lack of music education opportunities in East Boston, but the community was unfortunately dealing with more urgent issues. During the early 90's, Boston's youth homicide rate had skyrocketed to an all-time high. The murder rate in Boston, propelled by street gun crime, rose by half that year, from 100 to 152 (J.A, 2001). While the high was reached in 1990, the problems continued. Youth homicide rates remained at historically high levels and 15 percent of the survey of Boston junior high school students said they had missed school in the past month because they were scared. Communities were falling apart and Boston's youth were shut

in and isolated (J.A, 2001). In 1991, a woman named Madeline Steczynski could no longer sit back and watch this happen in her community. So as an individual she took matters into her own hands and decided to open up her home to kids from the community and began to teach them music. She wanted to provide them with a creative outlet that was not provided in schools, and hoped that this would positively effect the students lives (ZUMIX, 2020). She felt that music could connect Boston's youth and keep them safe and off the streets, with a goal that they would have music as a resource to help bring the community back together. At the end of that summer, she had asked the students to name the program, and they came up with the name ZUMIX. Then, she proceeded to ask them what ZUMIX meant to them and they said "ZUMIX is a family and that music should be crafted and shared by everyone" (ZUMIX, 2020). The students realized that they were not being fairly treated, by not receiving some of the same opportunities like students in wealthier areas. They understood the issues of equity and access in Music Education and realized that it should be a tool that everyone has access to. So I ask the question again, what can we as individuals do to help provide access to music education for children in poverty? Madeleine took action into her own hands because the leaders in her community could not provide solutions to the decaying nature of music education in schools, due to the lack of funding and priority. So, how can we as teachers combat these structural inequities in our classrooms? What does equity look like and sound like? How can we, as music educators, meet the needs of all our students?

These questions are not easy to answer and there is no true right answer, and it may be impossible to meet the specific needs of each student in our classrooms. So let us think of it from a different approach. What are these students missing, and what can we do in order to best

provide that in our classrooms? Empower your students! Let their voices be heard, represented and respected. Students should be able to explore their inner world, create clear ties with works of art, and develop new views of themselves and their environment (Howe, 2020). Students should feel like their voices are being heard, prioritized and validated. We as teachers should do our best to set up a safe classroom environment that allows the students to feel welcomed. “Teaching is as much about tearing down old structures and ways of thinking, as it is about coming new ideas, new forms of social interactions, new ways to be include, new ways to discuss inequality and distribute wealth and resources” (Love, 2009).

In my opinion, a classroom can not function unless there is a certain level of trust between the students and the teacher. In order to establish this trust, we as educators must get to know our students and share our story with them (Bowman, 2009). By allowing our students to get to know us as individuals, it creates an environment where they would feel more comfortable sharing things about themselves. Whether we want to believe it or not, music education is extremely political, because the politics that go along with Music Education are intrinsic to the practice itself. With that being said, I strongly believe that we must be aware of who we are in relation to our students to avoid perpetuating an entrenched power dynamic in the classroom. The political nature of music education is inherent due to ‘who’ is teaching and ‘who’ is learning, which is why it is important to get to know our students (Hess, 2019). Education in the United States is extremely political based off of who has the power. When taking a look at the United States Education System you have the: Federal Government, State Government, School District, School Administration, Teacher, Parents, then Students. Each group in a sense has its own power, but is limited and restricted by the group of people above them.

In certain districts, the lack of funding has depleted programs and in extreme cases has caused music programs to be terminated (CM-Workshop, 2013). In a survey conducted by Children's Music Workshop, they found that 1.3 million students still do not have access to a music class. (CM-Workshop, 2013). So why is it that music is being cut back even though there is want and need for it in these communities? There is research that proves that there is a high number of reductions in the funding and support of music programs even though the volume of students participating continues to grow. Parents and teachers believe that music is essential to the social and emotional education of a child (CM-Workshop, 2013). So if the parents and students want there to be music programs in schools, why are their voices still silent? Why has nothing changed over the years? Why do these communities have to rely on programs like ZUMIX to provide music education to their children? They want more high-quality school music programs, more trained teachers and more student instruments growth. They agree that poorer schools have been lagging behind affluent schools in the qualitative and quantity of music education programs (CM-Workshop, 2013). These budget cuts limit the students's musical experiences by not supporting school trips and workshops geared to help the students professional development. The lack of support given to these music programs causes the programs to become understaffed and underfunded to a point where it undermines the whole structure of the program which can lead to its demise (Burrack, Payne, Bazan & Hellman, 2014). Even when muted voices cry out, why is there no change? Why do we continue to turn a blind eye to this issue time and time again? What can we do moving forward to help establish change for the children in these areas highly effected by poverty? How can we better shape the world of music education, for students who grew up silenced just like me?

Personally, I find myself trying to push against these political stereotypes by creating classrooms that promote diversity and inclusion. I try and make my student's voices feel heard and try to validate their feelings, views and opinions. I also consider myself an activist for music education in the Boston area. I attend a lot of city meetings on how we can improve the situation for all of the silent voices of students. I want to stand up for them because I too was silenced. I donate to programs like ZUMIX that provide access to students in poverty. I want to make sure that programs like ZUMIX are receiving as much help that they can get because they provide students a place where they can join in on the wondrous journey of music. As an individual I do a lot of volunteer work in my community. I have volunteered in programs such as Berklee City Music, which enables youth from underserved communities to develop musically, academically, socially, and emotionally (Berklee, 2020). The program provides the tools and support needed to help it's students reach their fullest potential through theory/musicianship classes, ensembles, one-on-one instruction and mentoring, and performance opportunities (Berklee, 2020). I taught 2 ensembles and voice private lessons to students who grew up in similar circumstances like me. I am currently volunteering in a program at the Bradley School in East Boston, that is run through ZUMIX. The students at the Bradley do not have access to music in school, so they use ZUMIX as a partnership for music. These students, due to the pandemic, have not had any music classes since the fall of 2019. They do not have any music equipment provided to them at school, and ZUMIX is their only outlet to having access to music. In this 12 week volunteer program, we work with the students for an hour a day, Monday through Thursday and teach 8 classes from students enrolled in first through forth grade. Due to the hybrid setting and lack of funding we cannot provide all the students with instruments to take home, so we are leading them in a virtual

choir. Yes, it is not fair that these students do not have a chance to learn and play instruments, but at the same time having any sort of program is better than not having one at all. So I ask again, how can we as individuals address the issues of poverty and access, and how can we as individuals avoid these pitfalls? We can do our best as individuals to provide access to music, through community work, activism, volunteer work, and by empowering our current students and letting their voices be heard, respected and validated. As a teacher and individual who is passionate about access and equity in music education, I want to make sure that I am giving back to the communities and programs that helped raise me.

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