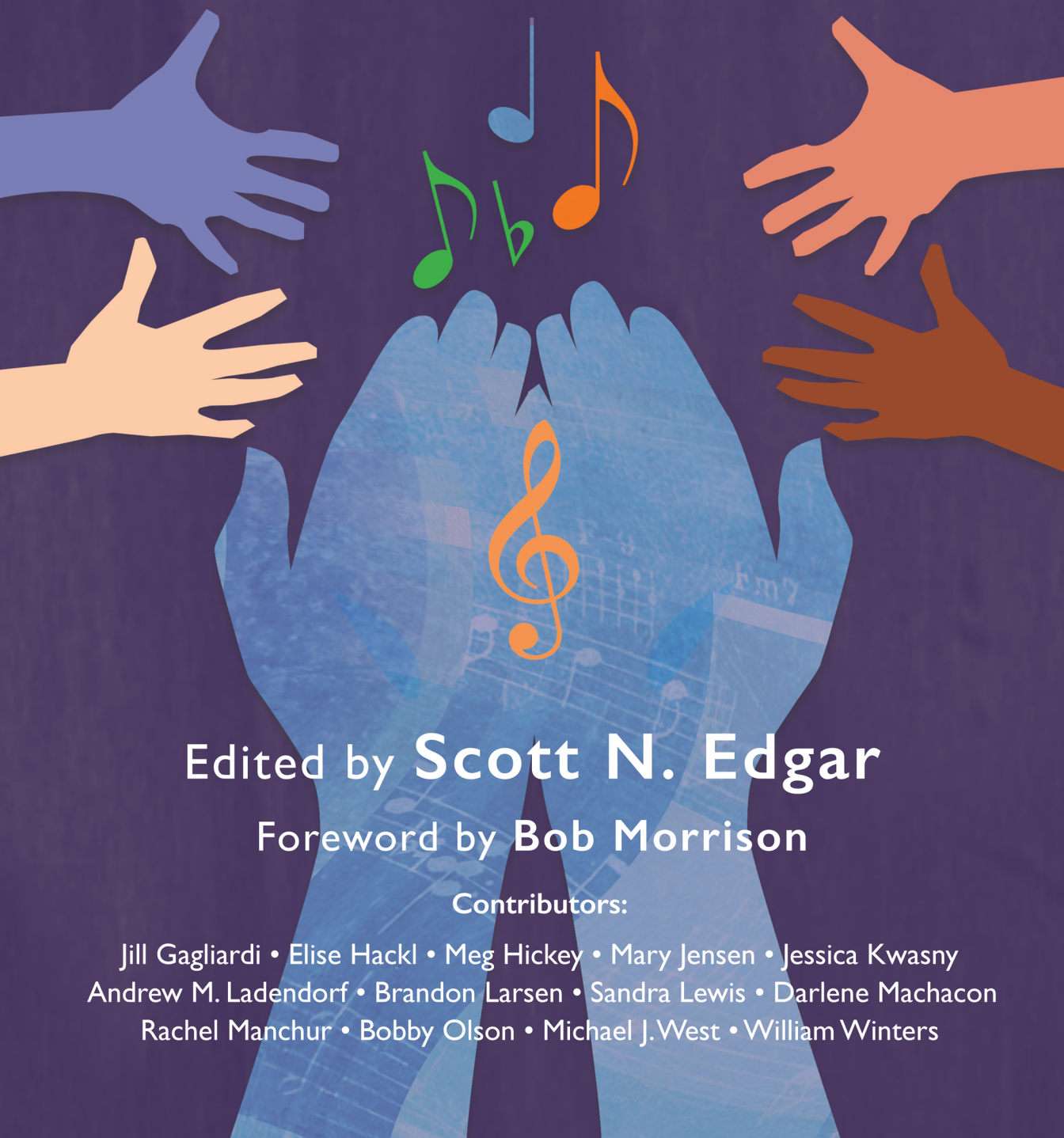


Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning

Teaching Music with Heart

ELEMENTARY • MIDDLE SCHOOL • HIGH SCHOOL



Edited by **Scott N. Edgar**

Foreword by **Bob Morrison**

Contributors:

Jill Gagliardi • Elise Hackl • Meg Hickey • Mary Jensen • Jessica Kwasny
Andrew M. Ladendorf • Brandon Larsen • Sandra Lewis • Darlene Machacon
Rachel Manchur • Bobby Olson • Michael J. West • William Winters

**Portraits of Music Education and
Social Emotional Learning**
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EDITED BY

SCOTT N. EDGAR



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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to all students and teachers who feel voiceless.
May Social Emotional Learning and music be a portal to embrace
diversity and for everyone to have a cherished voice.*

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FOREWORD

Bob Morrison

CEO Quadrant Research

There is no question that Social Emotional Learning (SEL), in the educational environment, has grown exponentially. SEL was already an emerging educational priority over the past several years as school leaders confronted the ever-increasing signs of stress and trauma our students are experiencing. Alarming rises in teen suicide (which are now appearing in our middle schools and high schools), social media shaming, ghosting, peer pressure, and school shootings have all contributed to what is clearly a mental health crisis in our schools. All of this was occurring pre-COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only further exacerbated these issues due to missed milestones (graduations, concerts, proms, trips, sports activities, travel) and even the questions regarding career aspirations and finding a successful pathway to their passion in life.

The confluence of student mental health, well-being, and the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust SEL front and center. This has given rise to the question: How do we best address SEL in our schools?

We need to look no further than the report “A Nation at Hope” from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development convened by the Aspen Institute. The report presented a series of recommendations, including: “Change instruction to teach students social, emotional, and cognitive skills; embed these skills in academics and school-wide practices.” This is key. For SEL to be *effective*, it must be *embedded* in the curriculum.

So, what does this have to do with music? Music and arts education have extraordinary abilities to activate SEL in our students. One of the “founding fathers” of SEL, Dr. Maurice Elias, recently said, “I believe everyone will soon come to realize that our arts educators are the secret weapon to implementation of social-emotional

learning in our schools.” If SEL is now an educational priority, and for it to be effective, it must be embedded, and if arts educators are the secret weapons, then the only remaining question is: How?

This is where *Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: Teaching Music with Heart* comes in! Dr. Scott Edgar has emerged as the leading authority on music education and Social Emotional Learning. He literally wrote the book on it: *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music*.

I have had the distinct honor to collaborate with Scott on a number of professional learning sessions, magazine articles, research projects, and advocacy materials, all highlighting the intersection of music and arts education and SEL. Most profoundly, we have co-created The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning (ArtsEdSEL). He brings all of his experiences to bear in this book to move us beyond the theoretical and into real-world examples of practical implementation of SEL across all aspects of music education. By drawing on his research and then finding some of today’s leading practitioners to share their examples, this book pulls back the curtain on how to effectively and intentionally embed SEL into the music room.

These music educators cover the gamut from elementary general music and choir through middle school vocal and instrumental classes and into high school band, orchestra, and choir programs, providing real examples of classroom implementation that everyone may learn from.

Through these shared experiences from today’s practitioners, others may learn and find greater success in their classrooms by bringing the powerful combination of SEL and music education to their students.

With this new book, Scott—along with the contributing educators Darlene, Mary, Jessica, Rachel, Jill, Meg, Andrew, Bill, Brandon, Sandra, Bobby, Mike, and Elise—have done the field of music education a tremendous service. These are the pioneers. They provide a clarity of vision and practicality of implementation to empower others to embed SEL in their own music rooms and unleash the transformative benefits of an SEL-infused musical environment for students.

There is no question in my mind that *Portraits of Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: Teaching Music with Heart* will become one of the seminal texts in music education, helping to accelerate the process of embedding SEL into our schools. Music classrooms around the world will be littered with well-worn, dog-eared copies.

And our students will be better for it.

PREFACE

Scott N. Edgar

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained attention and increased implementation at the national, state, and district levels of education. This momentum was accelerated exponentially by the COVID-19 pandemic and the tangible experiences of systemic racism. SEL was around before the pandemic and will be around long after. Our current reality highlights the challenges we are all facing and the ever-present need for skills to confront them. SEL at its heart gives us skills to respond to challenges instead of reacting to them. At the time this book was written (summer of 2020), we were in the heat of the pandemic and navigating a world that does not value everyone's voice equally. All authors in this book approach SEL from a culturally responsive lens. Social Emotional Learning can be a portal to teach anti-racism and to value everyone regardless of demographic. SEL and music, together, provide an accessible entry point to have difficult discussions and to teach our students the necessary skills to navigate these challenging times.

I have not encountered a single teacher who disagrees with the philosophy and tenets of SEL; however, several major roadblocks exist that prevent teachers from implementing it with fidelity.

- **District/state mandates:** Districts are mandating SEL inclusion at an increasing rate due to its research-supported success to increase both academic success and social-emotional competencies (as well as the extreme need for students to have these skills). These mandates come with inconsistent levels of support. Some districts support SEL implementation with a very high level of professional development; however, I have encountered many teachers who feel they are being asked to “just do it.” Whenever there is a mandate without support it often results in a lack of implementation, or compliance, at best. This is what results in SEL being

included in the pile of “one more thing” or the “flavor of the day” initiative. Schools must provide adequate professional development so teachers can learn how to make SEL musical (MSEL).

- **Relevance:** SEL implementation is often relegated to advisory periods, separated out from academic schoolwork. This often results in scripted lessons that lack authenticity, that can be seen as awkward, and that can lead to teachers and students resenting the experience. Teachers see it as a waste of time and students roll their eyes. This type of implementation not only results in ineffective SEL work, but also creates a stigma so that those doing great, organic work have an uphill battle calling it SEL. SEL needs to be intentionally embedded into academic courses for students and teachers to see the relevance. It should never feel like SEL is disrupting the flow of music. It should be part of what we do, and it needs to be musical.
- **Lack of time:** Most music teachers wish they had more time. To ask music teachers to add SEL into their curriculum can feel like we are asking them to take precious moments away from their musical instruction. SEL cannot add minutes to the day; however, it can make those minutes more effective. If SEL is made musical, multiple objectives can be achieved simultaneously. SEL is not distracting from music; it is the music. Once students begin to develop high levels of self- and social-awareness and are implementing responsible decision-making, many of the challenges that music teachers encounter become non-issues. The efficiency, personal attachment, and accountability are all taken to the next level—the music teaching becomes easier and the music becomes better!

Over the course of the past decade, I have had the privilege of providing MSEL professional development to thousands of music teachers across the country. During this time, I have been awestruck by the amazing work these teachers are doing once they go back to their classrooms. Their stories need to be told. It is relatively easy to write and present ways to integrate SEL into the music classroom; however, actual implementation is often hard. Students are not used to this type of engagement, resulting in pushback. Teachers try an idea, it does not work well the first time, and they abandon the work. Teachers start off trying these ideas, and then the pressure of the performance mounts and instruction goes back to what has always been done.

The teacher-authors of this book persevered, showed resilience, and found organic implementation of MSEL in their classrooms.

Not all classroom environments work the same way; therefore, implementation must be flexible and varied. Not all ages or classrooms find it comfortable to write a reflection necessitating varied modalities to reflect. Others may not feel comfortable creating or moving. The work presented in *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music* and the follow-up workbook (both available from GIA Publications) represents a template. Cutting and pasting any of these activities or ideas stands a very strong chance of failing. I am not in your classroom and do not know your students. Everything needs to be adapted, tweaked, and made relevant for you and your students. This book attempts to share the stories and adaptations of teachers doing this great work! Some of these teachers share ideas or concepts that may contradict something I have written—I love this! This is the reality of implementing something as personal as SEL. These teachers have found balance, relevance, and effectiveness based on the templates.

The first three parts of the book are organized based on the age of the students the teacher teaches: elementary, middle school, high school. The final section includes a chapter that addresses adapting many of the activities in this book for students with special needs. These teachers have diverse areas they teach which helps diversify their perspective. We tried to cast the net wide so that as many perspectives and situations as possible could be accounted for. I hope many resonate with you.

Part 1: Elementary

- Chapter 1: Mary Jensen—Alice Gustafson School, general music and choir (Illinois)
- Chapter 2: Jessica Kwasny—Field Elementary School and Emerson Middle School, general music (Illinois)
- Chapter 3: Rachel Manchur—Community Consolidated School District 15/Winston Campus Elementary School, choir and general music (Illinois)

Part 2: Middle School

- Chapter 4: Jill Gagliardi—Village Elementary School, band (New Jersey)
- Chapter 5: Meg Hickey—Old Orchard Junior High, choir and general music (Illinois)

- Chapter 6: Andrew M. Ladendorf—Glen Crest Middle School, orchestra (Illinois)
- Chapter 7: William Winters—Blackhawk Middle School, band (Illinois)

Part 3: High School

- Chapter 8: Brandon Larsen—Herriman High School, band (Utah)
- Chapter 9: Sandra Lewis—Henry M. Gunn High School, band and orchestra (California)
- Chapter 10: Bobby Olson—Round Lake High School, choir (Illinois)
- Chapter 11: Michael J. West—Round Lake High School, band (Illinois)

Part 4: Adapting SEL for All Musicians

- Chapter 12: Elise Hackl—Community Consolidated School District 15, adaptive music teacher (Illinois)

Shortly after all of the chapters had been submitted for publication, we were tangibly reminded of the racial injustice that exists in our country by the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Social Emotional Learning, having been touted as an essential part of moving students from trauma back to classrooms and schools, is now highlighted as both an essential lever for anti-racism and a potential instrument to silence students' voices—especially our Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian (BBIA) students—simultaneously. The key difference is implementing SEL in a culturally responsive/relevant way that meets all of our students' needs and amplifies their voices. I approached Darlene Machacon to write a full chapter as an introduction to this book addressing how SEL needs to be responsive, now more than ever. SEL that is not culturally responsive really is not SEL at all. All chapters need to be read through this essential perspective. When SEL is culturally responsive, it then becomes transformative Social Emotional Learning and a tool for equity.

Each music teacher/author was given as much freedom to explore and present their work as possible; however, to maintain some level of consistency from chapter to chapter, they were each asked to:

- Describe their setting and themselves.
- Describe unique elements associated with their teaching (grade level, special education, ensemble, etc.).

- Describe their philosophy of SEL.
- Describe what SEL looks like in their music classroom.
- Provide detailed activities they have adapted for their classroom.
- Describe their journey and challenges implementing SEL.
- Describe results (musical, social, and emotional) they have experienced since starting SEL in their classroom.

These exceptional music teachers have navigated the challenges of mandates, relevance, and time to embed SEL into their classrooms, but more importantly to help their students become more self-aware, socially aware, and to make responsible decisions through musical instruction. I am inspired by their work and hope their interpretations help everyone implement these ideas in a way that works best for you and your students.

INTRODUCTION

AVOIDING THE POTENTIAL TO DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD: AN INTRODUCTION TO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND ANTI-RACIST SEL IN MUSIC EDUCATION

*Darlene Machacon
Garden Grove Unified School District
Orange County, California*

INTRODUCTION

“Who are you and where are you from?” My name is Darlene Machacon, and I am from the San Francisco Bay Area. “No, really. Who are you? What is your story and where are you really from?” I am a cisgender Filipina music educator who fought the stereotype of only pursuing a career in the engineering or medical field. I was born in the United States. No, I am not fluent in Tagalog (the language of the Philippines). Yes, I do love lumpia (spring rolls). Yes, I am really Asian. No, I am not that good at math, and I do not own a karaoke machine.

I was six or seven years old. I begged my parents to buy the VHS of Disney’s animated version of Mulan when it first came out. What? An Asian Disney princess? We popped it in the VCR and I was mesmerized to see someone on the screen who looked closely like me, as opposed to the mostly blonde princesses from earlier films. I remember clutching onto my blonde Barbie doll as I watched the scene when Mulan sang “Reflection.” What was even more surreal was seeing the look on my parents’ faces when they

immediately recognized Mulan’s singing voice. The voice was Lea Salonga, a Filipina actress and singer known for her role in Miss Saigon and the first Asian woman to win a Tony Award. It was in that moment that both my parents and I knew—we saw ourselves represented in a world dominated by Whiteness. In a world where the news, movies, books, and TV shows were of majority White faces and voices, this was a shock. I finally saw me (sort of). But it wasn’t enough.

Parts of my life as a daughter of immigrant parents consisted of culture clashes. As a child growing up in a society that had different ideals than my family’s culture, I often could not find myself resonating with some of the stories these White families on TV were talking about.

I begin my introduction this way because I believe it is important to know who I am and where I am coming from. I believe the beginning of any relationship is getting to know about each other. Examples of facts can be a short professional biography and where I grew up: all facts typically found on a social media profile. Through the interweaving of my personal stories, my hope is that we will understand beyond the basic definition of what SEL is in our music classrooms.

I am currently writing this at the beginning of fall 2020, while we are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Quarantine weight is no joke, my daily outfits always include a facemask accessory, and my hands are constantly dry from hand sanitizer and washing hands for twenty seconds. People want to “cancel 2020.” And now “SEL” has grown to be more of a buzzword as districts are seeing the need now more than ever. As SEL is becoming more widely implemented, the chance of misunderstanding SEL has also grown more common among educators.

Franklin Willis, a Tennessee music educator and teacher consultant, has an apparel company with T-shirts that say “More Than A Music Teacher.” I have often heard the phrase “but I’m *just* a music teacher” as a reason for not engaging in other parts of education that have “nothing to do” with our traditional viewpoints of traditionally Eurocentric-focused music education. But the reality is we do more than just teach rounds, how to tune a clarinet, sing in three parts, and play an ostinato on a metallophone. How many times have we found ourselves listening to our students’ stories, putting Band-Aids on scraped knees, communicating with parents, designing and organizing fundraisers just so we can have uniforms,

and advocating for our program? We do more than just teach. Yes, SEL is what we feel is needed because we are living in these “unprecedented times” (a phrase I have heard more times recently than I have ever heard before). As of now, we know there is a vaccine in the works for COVID-19. But according to Vice President Kamala Harris, there is another virus: “This virus has no eyes, and yet it knows exactly how we see each other—and how we treat each other. And let’s be clear: there is no vaccine for racism. We’ve gotta do the work.”

Before we unpack how SEL needs to be culturally responsive, I will guide us into what we may think SEL is. We may have watched one webinar, read a few blog posts, and our school district may have mentioned it. I will also mention the specific viewpoint I am seeing SEL from—and it is not exactly going to be a smooth ride for some of us. As a music teacher of color, my voice is not always amplified. And I am not here to downplay the hard issues. There may be some points I mention that may challenge teaching philosophies. Maybe there will be some statements that will strike a nerve. And that is okay. Keep reading.

I also want us to be aware that I too am someone who is learning and unlearning just like everyone else. I may get some things wrong. I may write this introduction, look back on it a few years down the road, and perhaps even cringe at myself. But that is all right because it is all a part of the journey. We tell our students that mistakes are okay, and I believe that writing this introduction is part of modeling that skill set for them. Reaching tenure does not mean that we have stopped learning how to teach music. Our students are changing; our world is changing. Education needs to catch up.

In the following chapters, we will see work from amazing educators with lesson plans and ideas ready for you to use in your music classroom. Think of this chapter as a starting reflection—an opportunity to challenge teaching ideas, questions to start conversations with other colleagues, a jumping point for research, and most importantly, a different lens to see SEL embedded in the music classroom. I like to think of the lessons I present later in the chapter as inspiration nuggets. Take the ideas and adapt them to how you can make it work for your unique group of future leaders.

Get ready to pause if you need to. Underline, highlight, and circle. Add question marks. Try jotting “Google this later.” Feel free to agree or disagree. But let’s tell ourselves to keep an open mind and be ready to be challenged, just like how we encourage our students to do so in their learning.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF SEL

“So . . . how are you feeling today?” This question is the most common way to first execute SEL in any classroom—giving space for students to express and validate their emotions. The unfortunate fact is some educational institutions focus on one competency from the Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), such as self-awareness, and view SEL as a means of behavior management, or a way for students to comply with already structured regulations that are already hindering students, especially students of color. When it comes to looking into new ways of “doing education,” it is sometimes forgotten that there are systems that are already in place such as the school-to-prison pipeline.

Some of us who may not be too familiar with SEL may think, “Of course, another acronym for us educators to know.” But behind every teacher’s acronym is a “why.” Before jumping on the SEL bandwagon, we must remember to critically reflect on how this buzzword is related to how we can transform music education in a world living during *and* after the COVID-19 pandemic. Any education buzzword, or at least anything new in education overall, can somehow tie itself to education in the arts. Let us ask ourselves why there is always “another thing.” Society is constantly evolving, so our people are changing. Technology is moving rapidly; social media is picking up like it never did before. Our kids are changing, so our education must catch up and change along with our students.

There are three myths I want to address regarding using SEL in the music classroom. The first myth is that it is all about “being in your feels,” which is what many of our young students would say. Self-awareness of emotions is only one component of overall SEL. Understanding emotions in music is just the first step. Comparing a protest song from the ’70s to the lyrics of “Freedom” by Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar in 2016 is also an SEL-based activity. Simply assigning students to circle their preferred emoji on a worksheet does not cement that we are implementing SEL.

The second myth is that it is all about mindfulness and breathing. As musicians, we are trained to take breaths in utilizing our voices and in playing instruments. Our very scores even include breath marks. Numerous studies have shown how mindfulness affects better performance on objective tasks that require an extensive concentration span, helps with emotion regulation, and reduces feelings of stress (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009). Incorporating mindfulness can be as simple as using the

first three minutes of class to set the tone. I have seen this effectively implemented when I teach a general music class right after lunchtime when my students run into the room all hot and sweaty from the playground. Calming their bodies down as an opener helps set the tone for the music room as we prepare for the lesson of the day.

The third myth is that music is, in fact, SEL. While music lessons can be used to implement SEL, music is not SEL. I have heard some teachers mention, “Music is already social and emotional learning.” They use this statement as a sort of “cop-out” answer to defend why they are not digging into what SEL really is. When people ask me what music is to me, my brain goes through a million definitions. I could either go the theoretical and philosophical route or stick with a few simple words. That is just how powerful music is. It is the same thing with SEL. There cannot be an assumption that it already works simply because we teach music.

Early in the school year, I ask my students why they love (or do not love) music. Many of their answers are “Music gets me excited!” or “I love music because it helps me calm down when I’m stressed.” Music education is not automatically SEL just because it makes someone calm. We are not putting the checkbox in “I did my SEL requirement today!” if a student tells us that they love music because it makes them “hyped” or lowers their anxiety. Music has the means to be used as a tool for SEL, but saying “we already do SEL just by teaching music” is not enough. There is so much more to our music instruction, and there is so much more to SEL.

Many administrators and teachers claim that SEL is great for schools and say that our students need it. There is no denying that, especially in a pandemic. But there is an important word I would like us to focus on. I want to say that SEL has the *potential* to be beneficial for students. Any new strategy or educational buzzword can be done, but if it is executed with a misaligned purpose or without biases in check, then our SEL practices could do more harm than good in the classroom.

While we may already be familiar with the benefits of SEL, let us ask ourselves this question: Why are we even bothering to try to use SEL in our classroom? Why should we even consider it? Because at the core of it all, we the teachers care for our students. When we care for students, we care for their whole being. As cliché as it sounds, we must continue to remind ourselves of our “why” of teaching in the first place. As we care for whole students, we must fully realize that we value each student’s culture, their background, their history, their skin tone, their race, their ethnicity, their gender, their social class—their humanness.

I have to constantly think about my greater purpose of teaching music, and teaching in the fall of 2020 is putting me in the position of a first-year teacher all over again. When I reflect on my core values as a music educator, I think back to my earliest memories of experiencing music, whether it was basking in the soaring harmonies of a beautiful symphony, singing alto with my high school choir, or finally feeling the tug of that beautiful melodic phrase or the rhythmic urgency of that hip hop beat. Music connects us to our own humanity. Music sees no boundaries. And yet there are systems that make it seem like there are. I encountered a boundary when I was only limited to playing pieces from the Western canon for my music school audition, for example.

How we instruct music and incorporate SEL strategies could unfortunately define the barriers for our students, limiting us to truly reaching out to all culturally and linguistically diverse students. If something that is mentioned in the next several paragraphs tugs at the heart a different way or makes the stomach churn, this is my reminder to pause and take a deep breath. Put a mental sticky note on that. Be curious about those feelings later. Part of being a lifelong learner is also carving out the space to learn and unlearn.

A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LENS: BUT WHAT IS CULTURE?

A few years ago, a colleague invited me to Culture Night at her elementary school. When I walked through the gates, a mixture of carne asada and pho smells were in the air. Mexican and Vietnamese flags were draped in front of buildings. I saw some students dressed in traditional Vietnamese or Mexican clothing, and mariachi music played over the speaker, followed by some K-pop.

I also once gave a professional development session on cultural responsiveness in music. At the end of my presentation, one person asked, "Where can I find good Vietnamese songs for my own students since they don't know Vietnamese folk songs themselves?" They had completely missed the point.

The two scenarios described above represent just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding culture. Unfortunately, this is all some of us think culture is. Culture is more than the food we eat or the clothes we wear. Before looking into

cultural responsiveness in music education, we must first comprehend that there are three layers to culture.

In Zaretta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015), she discusses surface culture, shallow culture, and deep culture. The first layer of culture is surface culture. This includes observable aspects such as food, dress, music, and holidays. The next layer is shallow culture, which describes norms such as respect for elders or how to enter a home. Shallow culture consists of unspoken cultural norms such as personal space, nonverbal communication, and courtesy. This is also the level where some behaviors could be seen as disrespectful. As a child who grew up with many other Filipino families, I remember I would always find it odd when some of my non-Filipino friends would wear their shoes around the house when I was used to having Filipino family parties of everyone leaving their shoes at the door. Another Filipino custom is "blessing" elders, which we call *mano* or *pagmamano*. Whenever I would see someone else's grandma (*lola*) or grandpa (*lolo*), I would hold their hand and place their knuckles gently on my forehead as a sign of respect when greeting them. I remember being confused as a kid when it was not expected for me to do that with my non-Filipino friends' grandparents. I distinctly remember assuming that it was rude to not do it at all.

The culture that we will be focusing on in this chapter is deep culture, which is how people view the world. As defined by Zaretta Hammond (2015), deep culture is the "tacit knowledge and unconscious assumptions that govern our worldview" (p. 23). At the root of all cultures are common values, practices, and worldviews, which are the universal patterns across cultures. These are then cultural archetypes. One common cultural archetype is how a group is connected to collectivism or individualism. The two main cultural categories are individualist and collectivist cultures (Hammond, 2015).

Individualism	Collectivism
Focused on independence and individual achievement	Focused on interdependence and group success
Emphasizes self-reliance and the belief that one is supposed to take care of himself to get ahead	Emphasizes reliance on the collective wisdom or resources of the group and the belief that group members take care of each other to get ahead
Learning happens through individual study and reading	Learning happens through group interaction and dialogue
Individual contributions and status are important	Group dynamics and harmony are important
Competitive	Collaborative
Technical/Analytical	Relational

Table Source: (Hammond, 2015)

This chart gives a basic overview of the differences between individualism and collectivism. One cultural archetype is not “better” than the other, but it is important to see how a lack of understanding of both cultures can easily lead to misunderstandings in a myriad of situations.

The reality is that the majority of the world consists of collectivist cultures. According to the Cultural Dimensions Index, the United States scores the highest in terms of carrying traits of individualism (*Individualism*, n.d.). The Cultural Dimensions Index was created by cultural psychologist Geert Hofstede. Countries are evaluated on a 100-point scale in seven dimensions. One dimension is the level of individualism within a society. At the high end of the scale are extremely individualist cultures (self-oriented, individual effort favored in business and learning, competition over cooperation) while a lower number signals a more collectivist culture (group orientation, relationships essential to business and learning, and cooperation over competition).

Country	Score	Country	Score
United States	91	United Arab Emirates	38
Australia	90	Turkey	37
United Kingdom	89	Uruguay	36
Netherlands	80	Greece	35
New Zealand	79	Philippines	32
Italy	76	Mexico	30
Belgium	75	Tanzania	27
Denmark	74	Ethiopia	27
France	71	Kenya	27
Sweden	71	Portugal	27
Ireland	70	Zambia	27
Norway	69	Malaysia	26
Switzerland	68	Hong Kong	25
Germany	67	Chile	23
South Africa	65	China	20
Finland	63	Ghana	20
Poland	60	Nigeria	20
Czech Republic	58	Sierra Leone	20
Austria	55	Singapore	20
Hungary	55	Thailand	20
Israel	54	El Salvador	19
Spain	51	South Korea	18
India	48	Taiwan	17
Argentina	41	Peru	16
Japan	41	Costa Rica	15
Iran	41	Indonesia	14
Jamaica	39	Pakistan	14
Brazil	38	Colombia	13
Egypt	38	Venezuela	12
Iraq	38	Panama	11
Kuwait	38	Ecuador	8
Lebanon	38	Guatemala	6
Saudi Arabia	38		

Table Source: (Hofstede et al., 2010)

When I see on this chart where the Philippines is ranked, I can see where a lot of my culture and family values show more collectivism, while still displaying a few shades of individualism (which could be due some influence from American and European colonization).

Have we taken the time to analyze our own upbringing and how that plays a factor into our own bias? Now let us think of our classrooms. What main cultural archetypes exist in our rehearsal space? What cultural archetype do we most likely relate to? Is our teaching practice centered more for students from an individualist culture or a collectivist culture? Do our routines, methods, and strategies fit all cultures?

What is a common experience for children of immigrant parents who live in the United States, a highly individualist society based on the Cultural Dimensions Index? I would call this a culture clash. As someone who grew up in a collectivist culture at home and was surrounded by individualist-centered media and society, I see both sides clearly and how the two cultures conflicted with one another numerous times in my life growing up. The unfortunate reality is that even our education system, including some elements of our music education system, is tailored for individualistic folks—in other words, White culture.

THE CLASH

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” “I want to be an artist! It’s my dream.” As a child growing up, the TV shows I watched focused on the self. “You must follow your heart and go after your dreams.” The story books I read were about individuals that centered on the fulfillment of their own passions regardless of whatever stands in their way. I remember presenting my career “dreams,” followed up with: “Why? You need to think about getting a high-paying job for your future family. I work so hard for you to have many opportunities here. Don’t think about yourself so much—think about how you can provide.” Devastating . . . but it made sense to me. Knowing that my immigrant parents moved to the United States, it gave a different kind of pressure to reconsider what I truly wanted for myself. Seeking my own personal dream didn’t make sense, maybe even unthinkable. Others’ needs had to come before my own.

SEL is intended to serve the bass singer who sits in the third row, the flautist with the kinky hair, the musician who still needs to work on their articulation. Its purpose is to guide the whole human; an essential part of being seen as a human is one's culture. This deep understanding of culture is crucial in how we can truly understand and connect with our culturally and linguistically diverse students in our music classrooms and beyond.

Clink. Clank. Plunk! My piano lessons growing up were focused heavily on reading the notes, rhythms, dynamics, and phrases. Towards the end of finally polishing the piece to accuracy, my piano teacher asked me, "Okay, now put some emotion into it." I proceeded to play with emotion. Or at least I thought I did. "There was no emotion," she told me. In my head, I thought, "But I did all the phrasing, I played with accuracy, I even tried to slightly sway back and forth to make it look like I was adding some meaning to it. What do you mean emotion?" My teacher then attempted to plant pictures in my head like "play as if you're Mick Jagger" or "that you're really angry about losing a valuable item." As I learned more with her, I realized that thinking about emoting my music performance meant I was almost finished with the piece.

I remember teaching an advanced piano student years later and found myself conducting the exact thing—talking about the emotion of the piece at the very end. The student ended up playing "the same way" and I could not figure out why. I later shifted it to talking about the emotions when introducing the piece, and it made the biggest difference in my student. During her senior piano recital, her grandparent approached me and said, "Before she came to you, she played like a robot. Now I finally hear something from her."

My lesson experience as a piano student myself made me wonder why emotions had to be addressed "at the very end" of the music learning process. Why does accuracy of the score have to come first before actually showing the meaning of music? How come the human connection of the music part has to be the cherry on top, that I have to work hard at mastering the theoretical part before showing the emotion? Why was there a disconnect there?

Another part of understanding this deep culture is seeing the collectivist and individualist perceptions of emotions. Self-awareness in SEL includes identifying emotions. Although this is a good way to first implement SEL in the music classroom, lacking cultural awareness could potentially lead to misunderstandings. If teachers are being prepared to teach diverse students, they must also be cognizant of how emotions are perceived differently around the world.

A major difference is between Western and Eastern nations. Studies show that the way White persons in America value their emotions varies from how some individuals of Asian descent see their emotions. “Collectivism stresses the importance of the community, while individualism is focused on the rights and concerns of each person. Where unity and selflessness are valued traits in collectivist cultures, independence and personal identity are highly stressed in individualistic cultures” (Cherry, 2020). Many Asian cultures lean towards the collectivist approach of making personal choices, including experiencing emotions, that affect the family and the rest of the community. Emotions tend to be suppressed, in fear that their relationships with other people and overall reputation will be affected. Sometimes emotions are seen as “for the weak.” While children from European American cultures may be encouraged to speak up and express their emotions, some people of Asian American cultures deem it as less appropriate to express, especially down emotions. Restricting emotions is relatively normative and automated in some Asian American cultures (Butler et al., 2009).

Another important consideration is how high arousal and low arousal emotions are used in relation to interaction with others. High arousal emotions include anger, annoyance, fear, and excitement, while low arousal emotions include boredom, depression, relaxation, and peace. Research suggests that people of Western culture try to use high arousal emotions to influence others. They find this ideal and effective. This contrasts with some Asian cultures that adjust and conform to others by using low arousal emotions (Lim, 2016). When educators teach students from a different culture other than the dominant culture to express their emotions in their academic work, it is important to take the cultural perceptions of emotions into consideration. Otherwise, even strategies with good intentions could lead to discomfort and confusion, resulting in a response that educators may not necessarily look for. Music teachers must be mindful as well as validate these cultural differences in emotions.

To this day I still hear sentences along the lines of, “Of course you took piano lessons as a kid. You’re Asian!” One part of understanding culture that holds dear

to my heart, particularly with our diverse Asian population, is the model minority myth, which “perpetuates a narrative in which Asian American children are whiz kids or musical geniuses” (Blackburn, S.-S, 2019). It views the success of all Asian Americans as due to their talent and their hardworking nature. While it sounds like a positive stereotype at first, this is a dangerous assumption for students, families, and teachers. With this premise in mind, educators may believe that all students of Asian descent are already good at school so they should not need additional help, leading to the belief that failure to achieve is a lack of effort. Stereotypes like this are dangerous because they also filter into how we educators see our students, but we also get a peek of what their family life is like as they absorb this myth themselves.

Although I have grown out of this negative self-image, I cannot deny that I am a product of this myth. I was raised in a culture that believed I was supposed to be good at everything. Peers at school would question why I dropped out of honors math my freshman year. (“But you’re Asian! How could you get a B in Algebra?”) I felt I had not just failed as a student; I had failed in who I was as a Filipino, the daughter of immigrant parents.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). According to the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt), “cultural responsiveness is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures.” This teaching believes that all students can learn and that one’s culture is essential to learning, as the way we process information is based on our cultures. Its role also prepares students to be effective collaborators and communicators with different cultures and backgrounds in the twenty-first-century workforce. Students are at the center of their learning, positive interactions are created with families, and the teacher plays the role as facilitator. Research suggests that when our content ignores student behavioral norms and communication, it can provoke student resistance (Olneck, 1995).

If we are not familiar with CRT, we may immediately think we are already being “culturally responsive” by teaching Spanish folk songs, integrating African drumming ensembles, or assigning project-based assignments. After looking at what kind of culture is emphasized here, this is more than checking off that box of accomplishing so-called multicultural choices. It is a mindset. It is more than simply telling kids they need to have resilience. It is designing a variety of opportunities and

conditions for success for children from all backgrounds while simultaneously being respectful of their cultures. Since this is a shift in perspective, we must ask ourselves as educators if we are also committed to transforming. Part of change also includes challenging how we music teachers have been taught in the past.

THE CHALLENGES OF EUROCENTRIC MUSIC EDUCATION

My story of how I auditioned for music school is not like most. I had not taken private piano lessons for a few years before I started and could barely play through my Chopin waltz for my audition tape. During my high school years, I was heavily involved in my church's worship band. Learning how to navigate a digital keyboard while reading handwritten guitar chord charts (and somehow translating them into a piano accompaniment that I somehow made up on the spot) deepened my musicianship in a way that traditional classical piano lessons never taught me. When I saw that the music program I wanted to audition for didn't accept that style of playing, I initially felt stuck. How come my overall musicianship was based on my memorization of a Mozart piano sonata? For a few years, I then based my worth as a musician on my knowledge and technical skills of Classical piano repertoire and nineteenth-century Western music theory.

Fast forward several years later and I remember having a conversation with one of the musicians from a church worship band. He grew up in a musical family and knew how to pick up any instrument: bass, guitar, drums. I remember he mentioned that he didn't think he was a "real musician" because he did not know how to read and name notes on the music staff. I had to stop him and say, "You have more musicianship skills than some of my classically trained colleagues. You can make music, right? You are a musician."

Many of us were required to audition with works from the Western canon. We studied Western techniques and performed Western works. Music curriculum is highly focused on teaching Western notational literacy and how to use solfege, another system originating from Europe. AP Music Theory exams test students on how well they can analyze a score from the nineteenth century and if they can tell the compositional differences between Baroque and Classical styles.

As we look closely at our music curriculum and repertoire choices, Eurocentric music education dominates not just conservatories but K–12 music programs as well. The focus on Western notational literacy and receiving superior ratings in spring festivals based on a specific rubric and a specific style are just a few examples of what makes a music program look “successful.” These ensembles and programs have the invisible and long-term intention to prepare as many students as they can for the possibility of majoring in music when, in reality, there is a small percentage of students in our classrooms who are actually interested in wanting to pursue a career focused on a Eurocentric music approach.

I will be clear: I love classical music and I love making music theory fun for my students. But the gap I am seeing is this: If students cannot tie their music material to the music material outside of the classroom, then how can they connect with it? Or is our concept of learning music just “to know” for the sake of knowing?

Our students already immerse themselves in music. They listen to music on the radio, they dance to trends from TikTok, they listen to music when they are stressed, they want exciting music when they are playing their favorite video games. The reality is that most students engage with music that is composed through digital audio workstations. I am not saying that we need to learn a popular dance from a social media platform to feel connected with students, nor we should replace our entire music curriculum with a music tech course using Soundtrap. But our main focus on tall vowels and long phrases will not resonate with the majority of our students, especially if they cannot connect it with the digital music they experience outside of the classroom.

We also cannot carry the assumption that we know students’ interests just by looking up the American Top 40 radio hits. For my upper grades, I aim to get a survey of music student interest at the beginning of the year. Many times, I am surprised to know that my students’ favorite artists are often music artists I have never heard of. They range from YouTube artists to indie musicians. I even have students who say they “do not like music” at all, which could be an indication of what their understanding of music is.

If our teaching philosophies and mission statements mention something along the lines of “music is for all,” this implies that music education has the responsibility of meeting students where they are at. It must include valuing the music selections that our students choose. Our job as music educators should be to encourage them to draw connections from their score to the tunes they stream on Spotify.

We see that some traditional music education programs with a focus on Western music theory do not truly reflect the mainstream and relevant music that the majority of culturally and linguistically diverse students actually love outside of music class. When was the last time we checked if the material we teach resonated with the humans in front of us? Do we have the data to support this? Oftentimes, elementary general music programs make sure kids know the “great composers,” know how to play “Hot Cross Buns” on plastic recorders, or know how to sing and sign folk songs. Although there is nothing wrong with teaching elementary music in this manner (and yes, I find myself teaching about Bach and helping students with the fingerings of “B” through a song about bread), what can be detrimental is creating the classroom environment with only traditional Western music that the teacher “thinks” the kids should know rather than seeking out what the kids actually want to learn and how they learn. This emphasis on Western music theory application with the goal of kids being well-equipped for performing in choral and instrumental ensembles in the secondary level then likely leads to an environment that continues the tradition of reading notation and (most likely) performing works in a repertoire that mostly consists of dead (or alive) White (and maybe even mostly male) composers. In other words, are our music education practices only tailored for weeding out those who would potentially major in music?

When students do not know Western music theory, they view themselves as “less of a musician.” This is a contrast to the musicians our students look up to. They could be individuals who may not be able to sight-read a Beethoven piano sonata but have the ability to create infectious beats on a digital audio workstation or can improvise beautiful melodies on the keyboard or jam out to a wide variety of genres on a drum kit. Have we thought about how we could have a potential big-time music producer in our classes? Or a famous guitar player in a band? Or a singer? How do we unlock those potential gifts in our students? Is bugging them to perfectly name all the notes on the treble clef staff going to guide them towards that path?

Here is a challenge for us: If we could sincerely examine our repertoire and curriculum and draw direct connections to the music our students actually listen to, could we honestly say there is a match? Do we have actual data (Google forms, exit tickets, a show of hands) that demonstrates our students can see that our music is relevant to their personal lives? How can we say that music connects us to who we really are if our BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian) communities do not see themselves represented in White musicians? How can our culturally and

linguistically diverse students relate to our music if a large percentage of our music content's culture emphasizes White culture?

We say music can unite us and bring us to the core of our humanity. But what if the selective choices in our music curriculum and lack of action in the classroom creates a disconnect with our students?

SEL THROUGH AN ANTI-RACIST LENS

When COVID-19 slowly started coming to the United States, I heard statements from people saying, "Avoid Chinese people" or "It's the Chinese virus!" I remember hearing one of my Vietnamese students sneeze, immediately followed by another student pointing and calling them, "Coronavirus!" I remember being in the car as a child and hearing statements like, "Make sure to close your window. There's a Black guy close by."

I realize that addressing race in music education is a controversial topic. Maybe some will agree with me, and maybe some will be intrigued. Maybe some will not believe race is relevant to the conversation and put this book down. I want us to think back to our "why" of teaching. Our students already see the news and social media about race, and it is more imperative than ever that our SEL practices must be seen through an anti-racist lens. But how is this related to education, let alone SEL?

The sad reality is that teaching the skill sets of SEL without an understanding of cultures and an examination of internal and external bias has the potential to rob our BBIA students of their lived experiences and to emphasize that they must be part of White culture. With this "colorblind" perspective, students are not truly seen for who they are. When we deny that racism is real for our BBIA students, we deny their experiences and invalidate their pain from those situations where they have been mistreated due to the color of their skin.

Without taking race into consideration, it is implied that the differences from our students' diverse backgrounds are simply deficits (Caven, 2020). Avoiding conversations about race with our young people unintentionally gives the message that people from another race are not valued. SEL practices that ignore the effects of systemic racism on our students show that their social and emotional challenges are "just their fault," instead of seeing that it is a product of oppression (Caven, 2020). And yet some of us still run away from the idea of talking about race or

think it's "too political." Some of us may be hesitant in how to bring topics like this into our classroom, let alone our rehearsals. The excuse I sometimes hear is that children are too young to talk about race and that people are not born racist. Although the latter is true, the former is not. It is never too early to mention that racism is real. Research has shown that children can recognize racism as early as six to nine months old (Lee et al., 2017).

Why bother to look through an anti-racist lens? I have encountered instances where organizations give excuses for *not* actively promoting anti-racism because they would much rather "take their time in the reflection process" without explicit statements on *how* anti-racism will be promoted. The question to ask ourselves is: How will administration promote anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) professional development? There is no tangible way to prove that we are anti-racist enough. There is no certificate training to frame on our walls to prove that we are an anti-racist educator. It is lifetime work, a slow and steady journey moving forward. We will mess up, but the fear of making a mistake should not stop us.

As we do careful examination of ourselves in anti-racism, implementing SEL right away without true reflection on our biases, privilege, and power (as well as the biases, privileges, and powers of our students) could actually perpetuate the White dominant culture over marginalized students. For example, one SEL assignment could be to have students write down how they see themselves, which is an example of self-awareness. The initial intent is to have students write positive self-talk. But what if your student cannot immediately think of one? The truth is we base how we view ourselves on how the world sees us. What if a student of color writes that they are not pretty because their skin is too dark? What if another student says they don't feel safe when a cop car is behind them on the road? Since our brains have a negative bias, it is possible these SEL activities could unlock these internalized oppressive thoughts. This can be avoided if there is a reassurance that all students are welcomed and seen in the classroom. Instead of simply promoting a positive identity, how do we promote positive racial identity while helping White students understand what White privilege looks like while showing a positive way of being White?

Another potential pitfall is how social awareness is addressed. Addressing SEL through the lens of equity and social justice includes being aware of the actual oppression that happens among different people groups, that not everyone is treated fairly in a variety of circumstances, that different parts of history emphasize the victories from White people while simultaneously hiding the pain from other

people groups. Social awareness is more than just celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month and learning about culture. It is seeing the realities of how in society and in history it has not always been that way.

When we push to see SEL through this lens, we are not only aware of the possibility of harm from SEL, we are also advocating for more than our students' overall well-being. We are advocating for them to be seen and celebrated as who they are and the histories they carry on their backs. It is not sugarcoating things as they are but acknowledging things as they are and talking about the celebrations of the BBIA.

Dena Simmons said that SEL faces the risk of becoming “white supremacy with a hug” (Madda, 2019) and could even perpetuate that our BBIA children have social and emotional problems and therefore need to be fixed to this “White” version of what “normal” and “success” look like. Resist the temptation to use SEL just because we need better classroom management. We cannot come with the perspective that SEL in music is done because “certain children” with deficits need it.

Anti-racism in music education is not limited to designing supposed diverse repertoire or getting rid of songs with minstrel roots. We can never “arrive” at our destination of being anti-racist—because there is none. It is lifelong work. We must continue the journey by engaging in conversations that address how music history and the present world in our classrooms are ways to promote systemic racism. I have mentioned earlier how our music teaching must genuinely connect with our students. Our SEL practices, more than ever, must have the same intention. We must value and uphold our students' lived experiences as evidence-based practices for our SEL implementation to ensure that our practices truly benefit the families of both our BBIA and White students (Devaney, 2020).¹

We may be thinking, “Wait, so SEL has so much more work to do then, right?” Enter SEL 2.0: Transformative SEL and new standards.

SEL 2.0

CASEL's goal is for SEL to advance equity and to be used as a lever for excellence (CASEL, 2020). According to the CASEL website, transformative SEL is “anchored

¹ For more information on unpacking how to be anti-racist, I highly recommend reading the following books: *How to Be Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi and *So You Wanna Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo. I would also encourage reading other works written specifically by people of color.

in the notion of justice-oriented citizenship, with issues of culture, identity, agency, belonging, and engagement explored as relevant expressions of the five core SEL competencies” (CASEL, 2020). With more realizations of the clashes between the dominant culture and the cultures of our students, it was time for SEL to address these issues. Transformative SEL builds on relationships that are centered on appreciating everyone’s similarities and differences, emphasizes looking at the roots of inequity, and works on collaborative efforts to solve problems in the community and society (Saavedra & Nolan, 2018).

Because transformative SEL advances equity and excellence, there is a connection among the concepts of racial/ethnic identity, academic identity, and disciplinary identification (Bell et al., 2017) According to a study by Chavous et al. (2003), research has found that when Black students have a positive idea of their racial identity, this supports their academic success and can lessen school-based discrimination. It is recommended that the key component of self-awareness include communal values and a positive ethnic/racial identity, especially for students whose cultures have been diminished historically (Jagers et al., 2018).

As we tie this to our music classrooms, I would like us to think “care” over “content.” When we sit down during the summer to plan out the year, the question that we must continue to ask ourselves throughout the year is this: How do we ensure that students feel valued every time they enter the music classroom? When our material and repertoire selections are prioritized over understanding how students feel seen, our classrooms give the message that it is more important for students to be compliant and to “know music.” With transformative SEL, we can bring cultural integration, community building, promotion of ethnic/racial identity development, integration of equity content, and project-based experiential learning. Our content area has the unique position to already be performing many of these aspects. Some may argue that we are already creating opportunities to build community in our classes. But is it possible that our students deserve more than simple icebreakers and beginning-of-the-year retreats for bonding purposes?

An example of using transformative SEL in music is using these reflective questions:

- What are concrete examples in our curricular materials where students can still feel valued as a music maker without having prior understanding of Western musical notation and concepts?

- Do they see themselves in the music they experience? Why or why not?
- How do we encourage students to wonder about their preferred music genres and styles?
- How do we collect the data we use about our students to design meaningful musical concepts that tie into their lives beyond the ensemble?
- How is their identity tied to their music? Have they explored how music is valued within their own cultural sphere? How does a musician's racial identity play into their music? How can students connect with other musicians' stories of racial/ethnic identities?
- Have we thought about the historical and cultural context of students' music education? What about their access to music? Have they explored why they connect to some music and why they do not? Do they think music should be available for all students? Where do they get those ideas from?

Asking these questions allows us to open up discussions with ourselves, our colleagues, and our students about how we can advocate for their own programs by digging deep into the issues of their own music and education. When transformative SEL is weaved seamlessly and intentionally into our music lessons, students will realize that the music class is not only a place to know the correct notes, the accurate rhythms, and the right facts. It is more than a location where they perform folk dances or play in an ensemble. This is our way to advocate that music is truly *for* and *about* them when we tailor our learning environments to center around who they are, not what we initially think they “should be.”

So far we have learned about understanding culture on a deeper level, examined our music practices and its Western focus, the relevance of our teaching, the urgency to see SEL through an anti-racist lens, and the recent focus on transformative SEL. We are realizing that part of having a more culturally responsive SEL approach in music is truly understanding the White dominant nature of music education. In order to push for SEL in music to be culturally responsive and anti-racist, it is absolutely crucial to look at ourselves as music educators and how this impacts our teaching philosophies, our curriculum, and our repertoire choices. Otherwise, both our content and our SEL implementation are perpetuating a cycle that hurts instead of helps students.

THE INTERNAL WORK: SELF-REFLECTION

Teaching is more than a typical 9:00–5:00 job. Our duty as music educators is not to merely spread an appreciation and joy of music but to promote and prepare responsible citizens who will thrive in society. Just like how we cannot teach someone how to ride a bike unless we can ride a bike ourselves, we cannot effectively implement an anti-racist and culturally responsive SEL approach in our music classroom without taking the time to have honest and raw conversations with ourselves. What does SEL look like for us adults?

SEL's mindset is not about fixing individuals nor is it a “one size fits all” approach. Educators must do the work to see the various cultural and contextual influences in our students and realize that what may work for one child may not work for another. It is important that we not only understand the benefits of SEL in students but also see how it benefits us as educators.

Our adult SEL practice must include consistent reflection, promoting of a sense of belonging in the workplace, monitoring our overall well-being, checking in on school climate, and advocating for cultural awareness. As we embark on what it means to be an anti-racist music educator, we must not be afraid to outline our biases, prejudices, and power in the classroom. Nobody wants to admit they are racist or intentionally insensitive, but sometimes we can be unaware of the impact of our choices, regardless of the intention. What can be damaging to students is refusing to acknowledge the impact our biases can have and ignoring how it can trickle into our treatment of students. Let us normalize discomfort, especially if it points towards justice and liberation. Our explicit and implicit biases must be identified in order to actively do the work to dismantle systems of oppression so that *all* students can feel they are important. Examples of questions to ask ourselves are: What does our deep culture look like? How does our shallow and surface culture shape who we are? Does it differ from our students? How does this compare or contrast with your students' culture? Does your culture affect how you see others' cultures? How does my racial identity connect with another person's racial identity? Are we aware of the white supremacy traits that show up in our teaching? Does hearing “white supremacy” scare us? Have we unpacked why this is uncomfortable for us?

The possibility that our music education is presented in a White racial frame is also an element to be considered as part of this reflective process. There is a

dominant narrative in music education that Eurocentric and Western traditional methods define the excellence of music programs and musicianship. Take a close look at curriculum charts, sample lesson plans, and scope and sequence charts. Are there racist implications behind them? Are we choosing our personal comfort, convenience, and worship of “history preservation” over emotional and racial trauma that our songs and pieces could bring to students? Who are the voices always amplified in our storybooks and our chosen composers list? Do they match the experiences and backgrounds of our students? How does this promote a sense of belonging for our students? If the majority of our students are of the dominant culture, how do we promote a worldview that does not exoticize other people groups?

At this point, there may be some readers who say they see music as “already” SEL. If we simply reproduce the activities in *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music* by Dr. Scott N. Edgar without taking the time to get to know students’ cultures, backgrounds, and preferred music styles, and if we continue to prioritize dead White guy music and White voices as the core of our curriculum while also ignoring chances to practice SEL in our own thoughts and decisions, then SEL in music is perpetuating the oppressive cycle and uplifting traits of white supremacy. We have not completed doing the work by simply tossing all the repertoire with racist roots. How are we actively still learning, engaging in self-reflection, and challenging other music practices? How do we invite our students to join in with us?

THE EXTERNAL WORK: THE CLASSROOM

My first year of teaching was not my easiest year. Kindergarten music was (and still is) one of my favorite grades at the time, but the most challenging grades for me to teach were fifth and sixth grade. I couldn’t figure it out at first. I thought I had engaging lessons. I knew what trends the kids were into, but I did not understand how I could balance being “in the know” and being respected as a young teacher who barely hit five feet tall.

Then it hit me. For the first six years of their life, they had another music teacher for all of their elementary years and then I came in. They had no idea who I was. And I had no idea who they were. My lessons at the beginning of the year immediately jumped into the content. I wanted

to “just teach music,” but I quickly saw that I had to shift my focus in effective relationship building.

I remember we did a quiet listening activity with some breathing. It came out of nowhere and it just did not resonate with the kids. They were not used to that; I didn’t prepare them. They giggled because they did not know my purpose of taking the time to make deep breaths. When I expressed my frustration to a few veteran teachers, most of the advice I was given was, “You just gotta be tough on them” or “Of course it’s challenging because you don’t know them. That is the way it is.”

When thinking of the ideal music classroom, many of us think of two words: safe space. After attending a conference by the Embracing Equity organization, I have been challenged to rephrase those words into something else, to transform our classrooms into a “*brave* space.” This is an environment where students not only trust one another but also realize that they are seen for who they are and will feel supported when they persevere. A brave space includes having difficult conversations, a willingness to undo prior learning, deep listening, and an embrace of discomfort. Before tackling tough topics, it is essential to cultivate a music classroom culture grounded in mutual respect and trust. Instead of plunging right into the music content, try prioritizing community building over content building. There is time to reteach a rhythmic or melodic concept, but it is a challenge to try to recreate that positive classroom culture midway through the year.

I challenge us to write down what that would specifically look like in our music classrooms. Do we welcome mistakes as learning opportunities? How do we treat mistakes in the classroom? Do we openly make mistakes in front of our students? It is not enough to tell students to have resilience, especially when they are trying to do so in a society that has systems of injustice against them. In my weekly half-hour general music classes, this can be tough. I realized that every small thing we do—whether it’s the pictures on our wall, the voices we amplify in our literature, or the songs we choose—tells our students if they are welcome in our music-making space or not. But having aesthetic posters does not equate to an effective student-teacher partnership either. Do we welcome their input? Have we tried something new in front of our students with the knowledge that we may not get it right the first time? Have we shared our humanity with them? Do they just see us as teachers, or as humans first?

Practice going through routines where they practice being respectful beyond just being kind. Show examples through storytelling and videos. This foundation is absolutely essential. As a general music teacher with a limited amount of instructional time, this is possible. It is all about what we prioritize in our music classes. Does the tone we set at the beginning of the year promote an inclusive community with conversations and examples of what equity looks like? This includes being open to having those conversations as further discussion points. When we help students empathize, understand injustice, and care about equity, we are amplifying each culture's experiences and validating them (Song, 2020).

If someone I did not trust were to ask me to share how I felt about a certain topic, I would automatically guard my feelings. Personally, I would think to myself, "This person does not know me so I am going to be as neutral as possible." This is the same with relationship building. According to Gordon B. Hinckley, we can't build a great building on a weak foundation. When students first meet who we are, we cannot expect them to already self-identify their emotions for us in a worksheet. This is where trust needs to be the first step done in any classroom, especially before SEL is implemented.

If we teach in an elementary music setting, I challenge us to look beyond labeling "literature" as the music scores. Children's literature can be an effective tool to not only instruct musical concepts but also discuss ideas of equity and race. One idea is to create a simple melody to go with a few words or to sing a simple phrase after each page that teaches a melodic or rhythmic concept. After going through the literature, examples of discussion can be identifying the issues in the story or analyzing how people were treated. Finding a literature balance is crucial to making sure students feel seen. Not all books about Black characters should solely be about skin color. Try avoiding literature that falls into the trap of stereotyping.

In order to promote a music education that connects with our students, our music history teaching should not be limited to those from the Western canon. Accurate historical descriptions of how people were oppressed should not be limited to Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month or Native American Heritage Month. The only time we acknowledge people from a different racial group should not be only within those allotted months. An example of how to tie this to music is to celebrate musicians who look like the students and to be transparent about the musicians' experiences, especially when it is related to racial identity. For example, start with asking students to pretend they were all new students at a new school or

in a new music class. Ask them how they would want to feel. Then ask how they would feel if they were instead put down because they looked different or did not quite understand music. After preparing students for this perspective, introduce a story. An example storybook for elementary classes would be *Dancing Hands* by Margarita Engle. This book tells the story of Teresa Carreño, who endured hardship after immigrating and had the honor of being invited to play the piano for Abraham Lincoln. Questions can revolve around the treatment of her family when they first arrived. Talk about how Abraham Lincoln saw her for her piano talent and did not turn her down because she was not White.

While it is essential to not Whitewash history, try avoiding “amplifying” marginalized people groups by starting off celebrations with stories of oppression. A designated month such as Black History Month is meant to be a joyous remembrance of important people and events in the history of the African diaspora, not a reminder of racist trauma, and especially not a reminder that discrimination still happens today. An example of an activity *not* to do is kicking off February with an analysis of “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday in a K–12 environment. This can give the presumption that a song like this defines all Black history in America. Traumatizing students with material of this nature without establishing trust with students along the way (as well as not prioritizing Black stories of joy) may not transform students into compassionate people, and a call of careful judgment must be made on the teacher. When seeking out advice to assess if certain lesson activities are appropriate from a specific racial group, it is of utmost importance to center the voices, opinions, and experiences of the very people from that group. Individuals from the dominant culture should consider this when doing their own research.

It is also crucial to demonstrate to students that we do not have all the answers. Difficult work includes making mistakes, and both students and teachers will not get the “right answer” the first time. Let us realize that it is all right to admit to students that we are learning together. When students see this raw effort in the learning partnership, they will be more willing to be understanding. Let students know that we are learning to also unpack the systems of music education too.

Oftentimes, teachers fear mentioning race to avoid confrontation. Liz Kleinrock (2019) describes how when one of her students made a racially insensitive remark she used the situation as an opportunity to not shame the student but to question where the ignorance may have come from. She used questions such as, “What

was your intent by making that comment?” or “How do you think it makes your classmates feel when you use that word?” By taking the time to explain why we need to learn about racism in the first place, students can be held accountable instead of being put down.

As music teachers, we may sometimes put our “performer mindset” forward and expect to carry perfection in our practice. Sometimes we are expected to get rhythms and notes accurate, to perform with the right tone and intonation at the first try. Unfortunately, if we continue to uphold this perception of what a music teacher is, our students are less likely to connect with us, as this paints the picture that these students will never be “good enough” for the music teacher—the perfectionist. Let us show students that we are learners just like them.

ASK. OUR. STUDENTS.

“I don’t know what kind of songs they like.” “What are some examples of current musicians I can make posters of?” “How do I know if they’re enjoying what I’m teaching?”

Students feel seen when we give them space to express their likes *and* dislikes. I give space for students to explain why they do not like music. As much as it can be a shocker (gasp, who could hate music), this is important to consider if that student’s “perception” of music is only through music class and they have yet to make the connection that music is everywhere.

I give students the opportunity to say they dislike something. One example is a game of “bop vs. flop,” an idea I got from music teacher Juliana Dueñas. This is a fun warm-up activity that can work online or through in-person teaching. I create a Spotify playlist with a mix of top hits from the past twenty years, and I play the first twenty seconds of each song. Students listen to the song and immediately make an opinion about it without caring what their peers think, which is part of the SEL competency of self-awareness. From that activity, I immediately get a quick scan of students’ music preferences. Think of other ways students can bring their own music to the classroom. When we do an activity, ask for their reviews. Let them give class activities a star rating. What could the music teacher improve on? When students are invited to be a part of the learning process, they take more ownership of their own education.

SUGGESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS FOR MUSIC SEL

Dr. Scott N. Edgar categorizes the SEL competencies into three different components: self, others, and decisions. The following are some points to consider in each component. Dr. Edgar has broadened self-others-decisions to account for transformative SEL by embracing identity-belonging-agency as tangible translations.

1. SELF (IDENTITY)

- We know that the understanding of emotions varies from culture to culture. Is our SEL choice in emotion identification keeping this cultural difference in mind?
- How do we promote to families who do not see the “point” of mindfulness when students could be using their time to get better at core academics?
- How do our music SEL activities encourage collaboration with peers and family?
- How do we create trust before students are allowed to share?
- After that trust is built, value their emotions. Avoid resorting to commands such as “calm down.” Instead try “Hey, how are you feeling right now?” It is okay to not be okay. We cannot expect our students to be like adults; they also need time to process.
- Make expressing emotions an option for students. They are not obligated to always express their feelings when they choose not to share.
- We are not expected to be therapists, but our responsibility is to ensure our students feel safe and seen. Read the temperature of the situation when it is time to bring in a mental health professional and other administration.
- Literature can be used to show that all voices and all stories matter. What is in our library right now?
- Storytelling is powerful. Students can deeply reflect on the music material when they hear stories and listen to songs with rich messages. I have asked what they think the message is with vivid music videos that tell stories. Use discussion about other musicians’ lives as a model in how they can talk about themselves. Use stories of BBIA musicians and acknowledge their struggles and celebrate their victories. Avoid emphasizing stories of oppression and uplift victories celebrating differences. Self-awareness can

include identifying with positive musical influences and seeing how they have made a difference in the industry and in society. Show that children of color can thrive even when their identity is undervalued. Self-management can understand how racism and inequity in music impacts our emotional responses and how we can use those emotions to enact positive change.

- Engage students in self-awareness as musicians themselves. Dena Simmons (2019) points out that if we do not recognize our own power, we may be unaware when it is abused.

2. OTHERS (BELONGING)

- Taking on different perspectives and appreciating diverse cultures is not the end of the story. Leading students to be aware of the inequities in music education and the music industry while valuing ethnic diversity acknowledges the pain of oppression and avoids “otherness.”
- An example of literature is *Intersectional Allies* by Carolyn Choi and Chelsea Johnson. I use this for older students to talk about differences. We talk about who we are and how this defines us. I then tie this to images of students they already know. How do they relate to the musicians? Can they find connections between themselves and the artists they choose? What about the artists you choose for them?
- What are the different roles music has played in social justice issues? How does this connect to current events? What types of music can be done to promote these messages?
- How do we encourage working with family members?
- Understanding healthy relationships with others can include learning how to navigate challenging situations by participating in healthy and safe dialogue. This includes discussing what it truly means to create safety in relationships with one another. Conversations like this are especially essential in ensemble work.

3. DECISIONS (AGENCY)

- How can we be inspired to make decisions based on other musicians whose stories have made change?

- How do we turn concerts beyond just a performance with a holiday theme? What topics can we lead our audience to aware of?
- How can we create their reflection journals to help move forward with a new task they want to personally work on?
- Ask your students their honest feedback about your activities. Ask if they felt comfortable with it or if it felt weird. Did it feel like busywork? Did they feel comfortable sharing? How did they feel when they took the time to engage in SEL practices?

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Let's look at a few of the activities listed in Dr. Scott N. Edgar's book and reframe them:

- **Soundtrack of My Life:** This is a good example to do at the beginning of the year as an assessment of what students love. Encourage students to put any music (that is school appropriate) they like. Start taking note of any trends. If a student "doesn't know what songs they like," have an option to ask a family member what their favorite musical singer or group is. Students thrive off choice. One year, I noticed that a lot of my students' parents loved Celine Dion. I have used this information as a way to do fun games with my students, and we have taken the time to explore her.
- **Emotions:** Start simple and provide a space. Build trust. Show that you are actively creating a safe space. Ensure that students are valued. Slowly start adding more to their vocabulary. If they cannot share more, that is okay. The more we push students to share beyond what they are comfortable sharing, the less likely they will open up in the future. Provide journaling options and allow some students to explore different options to express.

ONE FINAL DEEP BREATH

This is meant to be messy work. Anticipating perfection in the first steps of implementation is unrealistic. If we are still hesitant, then what does it have to take for us to fully realize that what we have been trained to teach may not actually work for our students? How many more examples of injustice do our students need to keep seeing before we start making the change in our classrooms?

In an education that is systematically built not to provide equity for all students, we must do the work to make sure everyone is valued for who they are. Writing lesson plans and rehearsal plans can be time consuming. We write the adaptations, the materials, the standards, the learning objectives. As much as we want to focus on the “what,” what learning objective should be at the very forefront of each lesson? “Students will be able to know that they are loved, that they matter, that they are seen.”

Let us not hold onto guilt from our past choices but instead look at them as learning points for us to move forward. Let us be committed to being prepared to help facilitate conversations where we see students as more than a percussionist or a soprano. Let us acknowledge that this marathon includes undoing a system that has been ingrained in our education. We cannot afford to continue ignoring the injustice that deeply affects our students.

As we continue to actively reflect on how SEL can influence our music rooms, I want to remind us that it is more than an opportunity for us to reach our students, to connect with them, to shape them into the future leaders of our society. We teachers often remind ourselves about our “why.” In this case, what is our “more”?

Because we are more than music teachers.

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