



**Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education; Strategies to Increase Engagement  
and Interest in Middle School General Music Through Multiculturalism, Student**

**Background and Diversity**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and implement the ideas and strategies into a general music classroom at the Middle School level. The hopeful outcome of this study was to see if using CRT in a diverse School District would help raise the interest and engagement levels the students have towards music class. In this study, students were surveyed at the beginning, middle, and end of a 45 day quarter to track their engagement and interest in the course. Data was collected throughout the 45 day period in order to see if students truly do respond well to Culturally Responsive Teaching within two schools that have a large population of Latinx students. As a result of the study, CRT is a helpful tool to use in the general music classroom for engagement and interest purposes, but it is certainly not the only pedagogy that would help culturally diverse students.

*Acknowledgements*

*For my students, who never cease to amaze me despite all the challenges the world throws at them. Miss Frye is SO proud of you.*

*To my family and partner, for reminding me that I am enough. For always pushing me to accomplish my goals.*

*To all the minority groups, you deserve equality and the same education as everyone else.*

**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	pg. ii
Acknowledgments .....	pg. iii
Table of Contents .....	pg. iv
Chapter 1: Introduction - Purpose of Study and Rationale.....	pg. 1
Chapter 2: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Multiculturalism in Music Education.....	pg. 3
Chapter 3: Detail of Study and Research Findings.....	pg. 15
Chapter 4: Conclusions and Reflections.....	pg. 31
References.....	pg. 36
Appendices.....	pg. 39

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction - Purpose of Study and Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to investigate Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and implement the ideas and strategies into a general music classroom at the Middle School level. For this study, students were surveyed multiple times throughout a 45 school day cycle to assess the level of engagement and interest in their general music class. The first survey took place before implementing CRT and again after. The study was conducted on 7th grade students in the Hazleton Area School District (HASD) from two of the Elementary/Middle Schools. Throughout the 45 days, CRT strategies were implemented to engage the 7th grade students during their required general music classes. While students in HASD are required to take music class in middle school, not all of them play an instrument or sing, causing them to not be engaged or interested in general music class.

Within the two schools in HASD, there is a large population of students who are born in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, who are typically first generation Americans. Many of the other students typically have family from these Latin American and Caribbean countries as well. Students join classes in HASD all throughout the year because their family moves to America or moved there from another city. Because of this, it can be more difficult to engage the students, especially if they are struggling with the transition, cultural differences, and language. In combination with music class being required, cultural differences, language barriers, and much more, students can show a lack of interest. Does this lack of engagement and interest in music class come from their different cultures and home lives? How can music educators help culturally diverse students feel engaged in what they are learning? What teaching strategies could make a difference for these students? All students deserve the same opportunities and

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

education no matter where they come from, how they were brought up, what language they speak, or what the color of their skin is. While research shows that CRT has benefits to students of color, does it help increase their engagement and interest levels in music education?

Culturally Responsive Teaching is defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them [the students]” (Gay, p. 31. 2010). This is a style of teaching that should flourish in a school with ethnically diverse students such as HASD. According to Hazleton Area School District’s website, “In the 2019-2020 school year, the District's population was approximately 12,000 with a minority population of 56% Latinx. The economically disadvantaged student population was 56.89%; English Language Learners were approximately 20.25% of the student population. There are nineteen languages spoken in our schools. Spanish accounts for the largest percentage of the 19 languages” (“About Us.”, n.d). At the two Elementary/Middle Schools in HASD that the study focuses on, you will find a higher percentage of Latinx population and English Language Learners. 81% of the students at both Elementary/Middle Schools are Hispanic (“About Us.”, n.d).

With the vast diversity within the Hazleton Area School District, CRT could be a factor in gaining more interest within the general music classrooms, specifically for 7th and 8th grade students. In the following chapters you will find research on CRT, the strategies implemented into a 7th grade music classroom, and the results found from surveying these students.



## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

### **Chapter 2: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Multiculturalism in Music Education**

Throughout the years, educators have had to constantly adapt to changes in curriculum, changes in standards, new teaching pedagogies, new rules set by administration, increased diversity of the student population, and most recently, teaching during a pandemic. With education constantly evolving, how can the educator make sure they are meeting the needs of the student? Specifically, in the Hazleton Area School District, where the population is 56% Latinx, 56.89% economically disadvantaged, and 20.25% English Language Learners, how can an educator of such diverse students make sure that every student is engaged in class? Maybe there isn't one correct answer. However, in a school district as diverse as the HASD, it is incredibly important to consider the cultures of the students. More specifically for this study, how can a music educator, in a district that requires its 7th and 8th grade students to take general music, make sure that they are engaging all students and not just a select group of students.

Culture has impacted education in America for many years now. Cultures have evolved, curriculums have changed, but most importantly the educational system has attempted to adjust to a variety of cultures in order to help students succeed in school. A huge success for multiculturalism happened with the passing of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which made multicultural education a legal requirement for educators in America. While multiculturalism wasn't new to education in America, the passing of this Act helped clarify the intent of multicultural education (Mark, 2014).

Within this act, Title IX and Title VII further clarified the statement of multiculturalism in education. Title IX declared that schools and other institutions need to provide students the

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

opportunity to learn about their own heritage and the heritages of other ethnicities in school. In addition to this Title, another section, Title VII of the Education Amendments Act, declared the intent to eliminate minority group segregation and discrimination among students and faculty (Mark, 2014). These huge steps in education came shortly after the Civil Rights Movement, which impacted general education and music education for years to come.

The Civil Rights Movement was a time in history in which the American people fought for equal rights for minorities, specifically the Black community. Not only did this impact how minorities were treated, but it also changed music education for good. During the Civil Rights Movement, popular arts and popular music became more recognized in American Education. What was referred to as “youth culture” started to gain popularity which led to different styles of clothing, music, and overall lifestyle changes. With Black communities gaining equality, so did Black culture and Black music. For example, jazz music gained a place in American Education. It wasn’t until the Civil Rights Movement that Jazz became part of music education in schools or even offered in college programs. Finally, different styles of music were being included in music curricula across the country. With the Civil Rights Movement, it was clear that the culture of minority groups started to finally be recognized by the majority of the population. This was just a small step in the right direction for minority groups (Mark, 2008).

With all of the changes happening due to the Civil Rights Movement, we started to see a push to use more “youth culture” and “popular music” in music education throughout America. In the summer of 1967, Music Educators National Conference (MENC) sponsored the Tanglewood Symposium in Tanglewood, Massachusetts. It was at this conference that an official declaration, The Tanglewood Declaration, made the statement to promote the use of popular

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

music and culture in music education curricula. The Tanglewood Declaration also made a statement to recognize the value of all different styles of music. It is here that we started to see more multicultural ideas used in music education curricula.

Even before the Civil Rights Movement, many other historical events impacted the use of culture in education. These events date back all the way to the beginning of immigration to the United States. Initially, European immigrants came over in larger portions. Because of this, teachers were trained to teach traditional Western music. However, in the first half of the 20th century, there was an increase in Latin American immigrants. This diversified the population of the United States and American schools. While the Civil Rights Movement wasn't the only historical event to impact education, it was a very significant one. The Civil Rights Movement and The Immigration Act of 1965 began to open the door for equality and more immigrants. Campbell, a music professor who focuses on World Music Pedagogy, points out in multiple of her books that the arts, such as music, tend to change and grow with the changing demographics in the United States (Campbell 2016, as cited by Abril and Gault 2016). History has, and will continue to change the course of music. Most recently in 2020, the United States started seeing the Black Lives Matter movement. This has not only impacted the Black community and the American population, but also music and music education. Musicians have already begun creating music highlighting the injustice against the Black community and inequality for minorities. Students, youth, minorities and many more are turning towards music to heal. Music educators are re-evaluating the songs they use in their classroom to make sure they are appropriate and updated. Some teachers have stopped using certain folk songs that were used in

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

their curriculum because they represent the Black community poorly. A large cultural event like this is affecting music education now and will continue into the future.

In his article, Abril (2013) writes that “general music teachers have considered culture in the curriculum since the beginning of music education” (p.3). Although music education faces constant challenges of its importance, one of the main advocating points is that music educators aim to teach the whole student. Music may face criticism because it is not a core subject like Math or ELA, however it provides the students a safe and creative environment to learn. Part of teaching the whole student should include their culture. In order to teach the whole student and properly engage them in music class, we must take a look at how culture affects the learner.

One pedagogy specifically stands out when considering a culturally diverse group of students. This pedagogy is referred to as; Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). The idea of CRT can be defined as “an approach to teaching that considers the role of culture in every aspect of teaching and learning so that student learning is made more relevant, meaningful and effective” (Abril, 2013, p. 2). Two of the founding figures of CRT, Dr. Gay and Dr. Ladson-Billings, have been incorporating CRT into education as early as the 1990s. However, in 2021, where we have a large population of minority students, the Black Lives Matter movement, and a pandemic that has caused anti-Asian hate, it is more important than ever for educators to learn about and incorporate CRT into their classroom.

One of the original theorists of CRT, sometimes referred to as culturally relevant teaching, Dr. Ladson-Billings, is an American educator who went through the Philadelphia School District. She went on to become a distinguished professor of Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin and the president of the American Educational Research Association

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

(AERA) from 2005-2006. Dr. Ladson-Billings is a researcher and advocate for African-American Education (n.a, 2021).

Dr. Ladson-Billings brought to light the idea of the culturally responsive pedagogy, or a way of teaching that engages students whose cultures and ways of life are not typically the “normal” or mainstream. While her research was based on only African American students, many researchers have extended this idea to include other non-mainstream groups such as LGBTQ+, English Language Learners, lower socioeconomic groups, etc. From her research, Dr. Ladson-Billings was able to create three goals for educators to create a culturally responsive/culturally relevant learning environment. She refers to these as a triangle (see appendix A), the triangle includes; academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-politically/critical consciousness.

- For academic achievement, teachers must stop focusing on the test scores and focus on individual student growth. Take notice of where they start and see where they end.
- For cultural competence, teachers need to help students become fluent or knowledgeable in a culture other than their own. Students must develop a positive cultural identity.
- For socio-political/critical consciousness, students must be provided an environment in which they can critically respond to current events going on in the world.

Dr. Ladson-Billings believes that if educators continue to do these three concepts with their students that we are not only empowering them intellectually, but it will also have a positive impact on them emotionally, socially, and politically (Ladson-Billings 1995).

Recently, on June 30th, 2020, Dr. Ladson-Billings was a speaker at a Zoom Conference with PBS Wisconsin Education. Her topic was “Building Culturally Relevant Schools Post-

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

Pandemic”. In the hour plus that she spoke, she covered the importance of CRT and how education needs to change post-pandemic. Not only did she cover the coronavirus pandemic, but she also spoke about the racism pandemic. Dr. Ladson-Billings was able to take relevant and meaningful topics about 2020/2021 and connect them to a pedagogy she has been researching since 1989. One thing is certain, schools need to re-evaluate not just how they are teaching, but rather WHO they are teaching post-pandemic. As Dr. Ladson-Billings stated, students have gone through not one pandemic, but two, Covid-19 and racism. Administrators and educators cannot fully rely on test scores, but rather need to take a look at the growth of each individual student (WIECB, 2020).

Another big name in CRT is Dr. Gay. She is a Professor of Education at the University of Washington. Much like Dr. Ladson-Billings, she is known for her work and research for minorities in education. She is also the author of the book; “Culturally Responsive Teaching; Theory, Research, and Practice” (Gay, p. 350, 2018).

While Dr. Ladson-Billings believes that the main point of CRT is to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, Dr. Gay adds that CRT is validating and affirming to students. In her writing and research, Dr. Gay suggests five reasons that CRT is validating and affirming to students. They are as follows;

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and one another's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (Gay, pp. 31-32, 2010).

Dr. Gay strives to find the balance between caring and growth amongst students. While educators need to care for the students, this cannot be their sole focus. Educators must find a balance between caring for the students and their learning growth. One way Dr. Gay suggests creating a balance is by getting to know your students and creating an environment to fit their culture and individuality. Typically in our schooling system, there is a large achievement or success gap for children of color compared to those who are caucasian. Dr. Gay states that “Culturally responsive teaching defies conventions of traditional educational practices with respect to ethnic students of color” (Gay, pp. 41, 2018). The findings and research on CRT from Dr. Ladson-Billings and Dr. Gay have shown how effective and positive the pedagogy can be while teaching students of color and students from a variety of cultures. They present the idea of not just multiculturalism in the classroom, but rather responding to the culture of the students in the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Multiculturalism may work hand in hand, however, they are not the same thing. Multiculturalism should be looked at as WHAT is being taught while CRT should be looked at WHO is being taught. Multiculturalism can be incorporated in CRT, however, CRT focuses on who the learner is. CRT provides students and teachers with the

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

opportunity to learn. It builds on the strengths of students, it allows them to focus on their individuality, and allows them to feel validated within their culture. Educators can always think about the what, but in order to have student growth, the who is what needs to be focused on (Walter 2017).

Ideas such as choosing music from specific cultures are not necessarily considered culturally responsive. It is culturally inclusive and multicultural, however, it does not directly correlate to the students and cultures represented in the classroom. Often, educators take a multicultural approach to teaching. This approach acknowledges cultures in the curriculum such as music of the world, but it typically only touches on one culture at a time. This is a very static view of cultures in education. In order to move towards a culturally responsive approach, educators must take a look at an intercultural approach. This type of approach provides an opportunity to view and compare and contrast a variety of cultures against each other. This allows room for multiple cultural perspectives. Students who were born in Puerto Rico may have different experiences than students who were born in the Dominican Republic. Each student has their own life experiences and background knowledge. As educators, it is important to look at these differences and use them to your advantage. When becoming a culturally responsive educator, educators should not just touch on the material or curriculum being taught, but rather build off of the students' cultures and prior experiences (Abril and Gault 2016).

While CRT is a legitimate classroom pedagogy, it still comes down to a very simple idea; RESPECT. In his column for National Association for Music Education (NAfME), Robison addresses the importance of respect in a culturally responsive general music classroom. Robison's logic comes from the idea that it can take a long time to understand what respect is



## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

and what it can look like, however, respect is the common denominator among different cultures and their customs. Respect can be as simple as pronouncing a student's name correctly. When teachers have students from another country, or a name that is not very common, it is important to call the child by the right name instead of giving the student a nickname to make it easier or calling them by an English version of their name. In addition, other ways of showing respect is to not stereotype the student. It is important to understand their culture and their customs, but remember that everyone is different and the educator should not expect or assume the student will behave a certain way because of their race or ethnicity. Make sure when communicating with students to always clarify with them what is expected of them and vice versa. Clarification can be key with students who are unfamiliar with the customs and language. Finally, as an act of respect, it is imperative that teachers reflect upon their biases, whether they are clear or subconscious biases. Educators should try to stay away from favoritism, especially based on race or gender. In addition, educators should avoid showing hate towards a group of students. But most importantly, educators should respect their students and create a safe environment for them, leave room for communication, reflection, and growth. Mutual respect can make a huge difference in a culturally responsive classroom (Robison, 2020).

Culturally Responsive Teaching and learning is especially important in Middle Grades, where the student is still in a developmental stage in their life. Middle School students range in age from 11 to 14, which is categorized as early adolescence, or, the developmental period between the ages of 10 and 15. During this time period in a child's life, they are going through many changes, not just physically, but also emotionally, psychologically, morally, and cognitively (Scales, 2010). When working with young adolescents, it is vital that a middle

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

school educator understands what impacts race, ethnicity, gender, culture, family, community, environment, and much more have on a child. To be developmentally responsive to young adolescents, and help them succeed in the classroom, educators should try to be culturally responsive. To young adolescents, culture is a huge part of who they are and will continue to be an important part of their life as the years go by. Because of this, educators should advocate for all their students, every student, especially marginalized identities (Harrison et al, 2019).

In order to be culturally responsive educators and create a culturally responsive movement for young adolescents, educators need to stop trying to define “normal”. In today’s society there are so many marginalized students. If educators continue to look for “normal” and typical behaviors of young adolescents, it creates at risk, or atypical learners (Bringar et al, 2019). Instead, Hurd et al. (2019), provide educators with alternate, and culturally responsive practices to support youth with marginalized identities. These strategies are listed below:

- Encourage individual expression.
- Create spaces of active and stimulating learning tied to authentic assessments.
- Create non-white spaces for all marginalized and nonoritized youth.
- Scaffold connections to students’ lives and identities
- Provide for comprehensive discussions and curriculum surrounding race, moral issues, empathy, lgbtq+, etc.
- Insist on safe, inclusive, gender-equitable, and non-discriminatory learning communities and environments that are not punitive or harmful to youth.
- Encourage genuine and high expectations against demands for competition and standardization.

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

- Organize school and community events for democratic service, social action, and restorative justice.
- Restructure teacher training, professional development, and school leadership for approaches that draw on total, ecological middle school concepts.
- create innovative and sustainable partnerships with local community-based organizations and colleges.
- Secure external funding to support democratic programs and equitable instruction.
- Educate and work with the community for equitable schooling practices, policies, and enhanced living spaces.
- Avoid the “savior mentality” or idea that teachers are saving poor, marginalized youth to fix them. Instead, find ways to contribute and engage with the local youth and community (p.39).

Music education has the potential to do all of the above and be naturally culturally responsive. When defining culture, one of the key indicators is music. When giving ideas and strategies of incorporating culture into the class, Dr. Gay mentions the importance of music. Music and movement can be used as a teaching technique to teach African American culture. Students of color, specifically African American students, perform and respond better in school with movements and music (Gay, 2018).

Every single student that walks into the music room is unique. And with every student, whether or not they realize it, their culture is their identity and sense of place in the world. As a music educator, there is an advantage of seeing the students' cultures through music, and this must be taken advantage of. Educators should work with the students rather than teaching at

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

them. They should think about their own culture and compare it to the student's culture. In addition educators should; keep an open mind, see how the students interact with each other, what their hobbies are, what type of music they like and incorporate these into the music classroom. It is important to use music that the students can connect to, teach about composers that allow the students to see themselves and set up the classroom to help your students feel seen and heard. Students should feel that their opinion and their needs are valued. These are some of the few things that music educators can do to set up a culturally responsive classroom. However, the most important strategies to remember are to make sure the music activities used in class promote community and a place where the students can share their ideas. It is the responsibility of the music educator to make sure it is a safe environment for ALL students, and never forget to care about your students and their needs, while also pushing them to grow academically (Wiens, 2015).

Make sure there is time for self reflection and growth for not just the students, but especially the educator. It is okay to notice some subconscious bias towards the students, however, it is important for educators to address their subconscious bias for the students. Middle School is an age where students are deeply affected by their teachers as role models, and this is the perfect time to show them that someone cares about them.

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

### **Chapter 3: Detail of Study/Research Findings**

Dr. Gay and Dr. Ladson-Billings have proven that CRT can have a positive effect on a variety of students and their education, however, this study was completed with the student's engagement and interest levels in music class in mind. The purpose of this study was to use the strategies that researchers such as Dr. Gay and Dr. Ladson-Billings outlined and see if they would raise the level of engagement and interest in a 7th grade music class.

Creating a culturally responsive classroom environment will not happen overnight. Becoming a culturally responsive teacher involves research, practice, and reflection. Similar to becoming an ally to a minority group, it does not happen immediately, and you need to work hard to show the minority group that you support them. To set up the study, the classroom was transformed into a culturally responsive environment by the teacher showing consistent respect towards the students. Other strategies included; building a strong teacher-student relationship, getting to know and use the student's interests into lessons, getting to know the student's previous experiences, and pronouncing their names correctly (even if they are difficult). As well, adding culture and diversity into the lesson plans, and making sure the lessons were student-centered are great strategies to include in a culturally responsive classroom.

In this culturally responsive classroom setting, students could see poster's that represented diversity in the classroom, students were able to learn about the teacher's own culture and background experiences and had an open environment to safely share their stories. Some student's came out as gay, some students come out as trans, and some students came out to the teacher as non-binary. For this study to work, the students needed to feel like they were safe. This can and should take weeks, not days. To become a culturally responsive teacher, one must

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

be flexible and open for change. Respect and caring can go a long way for young adolescent students, but can it help increase their engagement and interest levels in music class?

Throughout this study, 7th grade students from two middle schools were observed during the second and third quarters of the 2020-2021 school year. Students met for 50 minute periods, every day, for a 45 school day rotation. Throughout the study, students were completely virtual, and learning from their own homes on Microsoft Teams.

To improve the study's research, two different methods were used at each of the two schools. At School 1, one to three students from each of the six general music classes were selected to complete a survey at the end of their 45 school day rotation of music class. The students were unaware that they were part of a study and were selected once the teacher knew who they were as students. Twelve students participated in the study. Amongst these students, six identified as female, five as male, and one identified as non-binary. In addition, three students were white, seven were hispanic, and two were multi-racial. Students met once as a group at the end of the Quarter 2 to discuss their experiences in a culturally responsive music classroom, and once individually with the teacher.

Students were all given the same survey to express their level of engagement during music class as it correlated with CRT. Students were told a shortened version of the definition of CRT prior to completing their survey. Post survey, students had the opportunity to explain their answers in an individual interview.

The main purpose of the focus group at School 1 was to gather information to help set up for the next quarter of students. While the students were very helpful, there was an unfair advantage and potential bias to the teacher being able to select the student's after getting to know

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

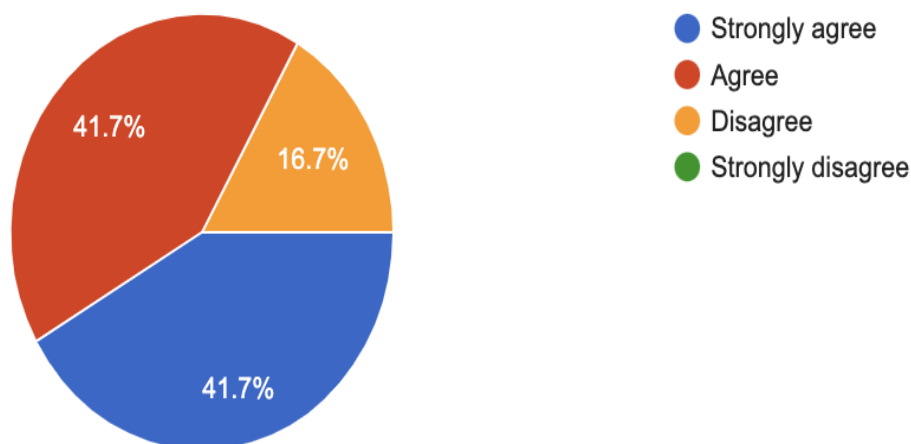
them. However, the study from School 1 was still very positive. The main question asked to the students in their survey was; do you feel more interested and more engaged during music class when your culture and music interests are incorporated into class? This was presented to the students as a statement in which they had to select if they *strongly agreed*, *agreed*, *disagreed*, or *strongly disagreed*. In Figure 1 below, the breakdown of the responses pointed to the majority of students finding themselves more engaged when culture is incorporated into class. 83.4% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while only 16.7% disagreed. In addition, there were no students who strongly disagreed.

**Figure 1:**

*Results of Statement 1 - School 1*

Based on your current experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music class when Miss Frye incorporates my culture and music interests.

12 responses



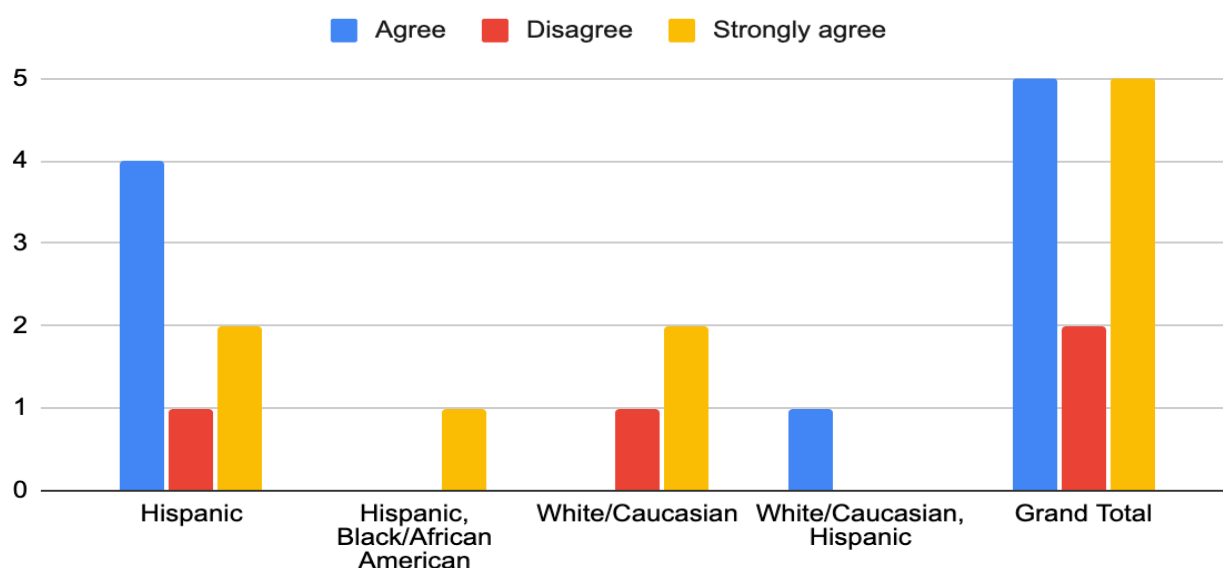
## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

To break this statement down even further, take a look at the race breakdown amongst the students. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the races. Only one student of color and one caucasian student disagreed with the statement. In addition, the majority of Hispanic students agreed with the statement.

**Figure 2**

*Race Breakdown - School 1*

I find myself more interested and more engaged during music class when Miss Frye incorporates my cultures and music int...



Because School 1 was just an introduction to incorporating CRT into the classroom, students were interviewed after the study to gain a better understanding as to why they selected the responses in the survey. You can find the full interview transcript with Student A in Appendix B and the full interview transcript of Student B in Appendix C. These two students gave some valuable information when it came to CRT. One challenge that occurred during the study was having a caucasian educator try to inform students of color about culture. While



## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

people who are caucasian do in fact have their own culture, it can be difficult for students of color to learn about culture and diversity from someone who is not the same race or ethnicity as them. During the interview, students were asked about their stance on learning about culture and music from a caucasian educator. Most students gave a short “yes” or “no” answer, while two students elaborated more on the topic. Student A said; “Not really, it's really interesting because you are really educated. When my White friends talk about my culture, they don’t talk about it the way you do.” Student B had a similar response with; “It doesn’t affect the way I learn. Anyone can teach it if they are informed and learn the correct information. Even if you are White you still have culture.” Both Student A and B mentioned that their teacher should look into incorporating the student’s music interests into class more often to create a more engaging and culturally responsive environment for all students.

At School 2, 7th grade students were introduced to the study at the very beginning of their 45 day music class cycle. One to five students per class were selected at random, representing the six class periods of music at School 2. There were a variety of students selected based on their class period, gender identity, and race. The focus group does an excellent job of representing the actual percentages in the entire 7th grade at School 2. Eighteen total students participated in the study. Amongst these students; eight identified as female, nine identified as male, and two identified as non-binary. In addition, five students were white, twelve hispanic, and two were multi-racial.

For the study, students were given a survey, once at the beginning, middle, and end of the third quarter. Each time, the survey was the same to see if their engagement levels increased throughout the quarter. In addition, students met in a focus group during lunch five times

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

throughout the quarter. Students were given a chance to express their thoughts, concerns, and questions about music class. This feedback was utilized throughout the quarter to improve the culturally responsive environment in the classroom.

Throughout the quarter, the focus group was surveyed three times, at the beginning of the quarter, after Unit I (halfway through), and after Unit II (at the end of the quarter). The survey asked a variety of questions on whether or not the teacher was creating a culturally responsive classroom environment. After each survey was given, the students met as a focus group to discuss with the teacher their concerns and explanations as to why they selected certain responses. Again, this information was utilized to adjust the lesson plans and classroom environment. The students were made aware that their responses would not affect their grade in any way, and because of this, there was a lot of honesty and constructive feedback.

In the surveys, students were asked the same questions each time to see how their responses changed or varied over the course of the quarter. The questions asked in the survey can be seen in Appendix D. In addition to the questions asked, there was also a final question asked in the third and final survey to gauge their overall feeling of the music class. This question can also be seen in Appendix D.

In the information below you will see the breakdown of responses for each question. Some of the results may be affected by the pandemic, but unfortunately, there was no way to avoid the uncertainty that was the 2020-2021 school year. Hazleton Area School District remained completely virtual until the fourth quarter, meaning that these results were all based off of students learning from Microsoft Teams for a 45 school day rotation.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

Students were selected immediately at the beginning of the third quarter and took the first survey a week into class. These results were purely based on first impressions of what they had experienced only a week in. The second round of the survey questions were taken right after Unit I, now the students have more information to base their responses on. The survey was sent out one final time at the end of Unit II, by this point, the student's had completed the majority of their work for 7th grade music class. Unit I focused on composers throughout different time periods and different places in the world. Student's ended the unit by completing a project in which they had to research a composer or songwriter of their choice and create a PowerPoint. Unit II focused on World Music, students learned about music from America, France, Ireland, and India. At the end of the unit, students researched a country of their choice and created a PowerPoint based on the culture and music of that country. Below is a breakdown of the study findings.

The first statement in the survey was; I find myself interested and engaged during music class. The students had the option to select: *strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree*. In Figure 3, it shows how their responses changed over the three times taking the survey.

In the start of the quarter, it seemed that 94.5% of the students were interested and engaged in music class. While that percentage stays the same after Unit I, there is a shift from strongly agrees to mostly just agrees. Finally, at the end of Unit II, the percentage of engaged students dropped to 88.9%. In a small study like this, 11.1% was only two of the eighteen students who did not find themselves interested or engaged in music. While the percentage of students did drop, the percentage of strongly agreed went from 22.2% in Unit I to 33.3% by the end of Unit II.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

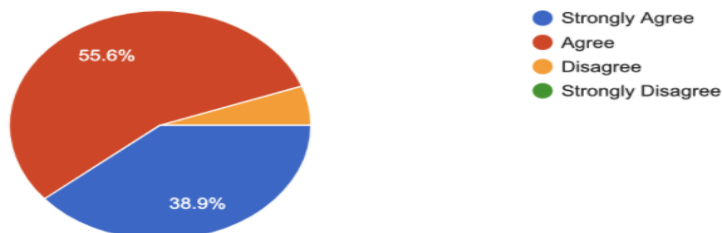
**Figure 3**

*Statement 1 Results - School 2*

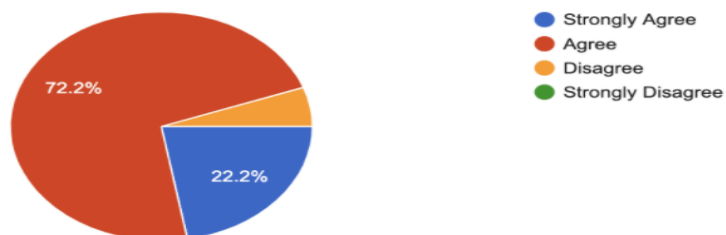
Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself interested and engaged during music class.

18 responses

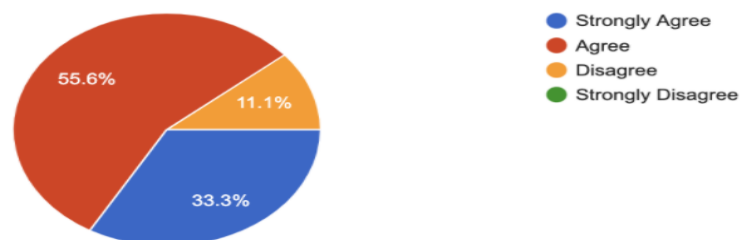
**Beginning**



**Unit 1**



**Unit 2**



The second statement in the survey was: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music class when Miss Frye incorporates my culture and music interests. Again, students were able to *strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree*. In Figure 4 below, it shows the results from this statement.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

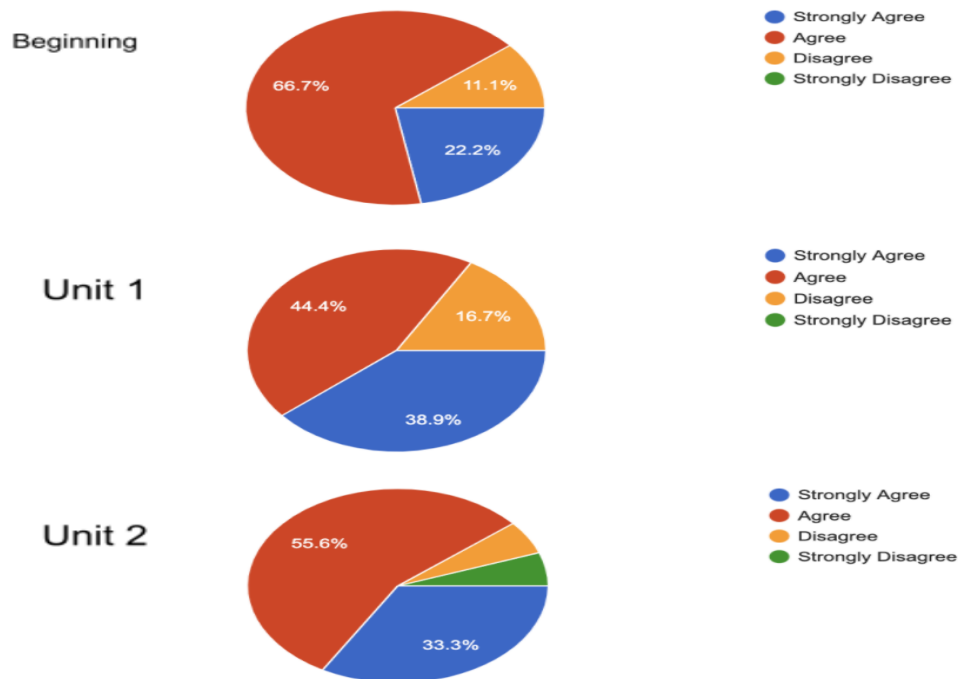
At the start of the quarter, results show that 88.9% of students either strongly agree or agree with this statement. While in Unit I, there is an increase in disagree, there is also an increase with strongly agree. The final survey after Unit II shows growth in strongly agree responses from the beginning of the quarter (22.2%) to the end of the quarter (33.3%), but there is also one student who strongly disagrees with the statement as well.

**Figure 4**

*Statement 2 Results - School 2*

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music class when Miss Frye incorporates my culture and music interests.

18 responses



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

The third statement was: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because Miss Frye has created an inclusive, non-discriminating classroom environment. Below, Figure 5 will show the results breakdown.

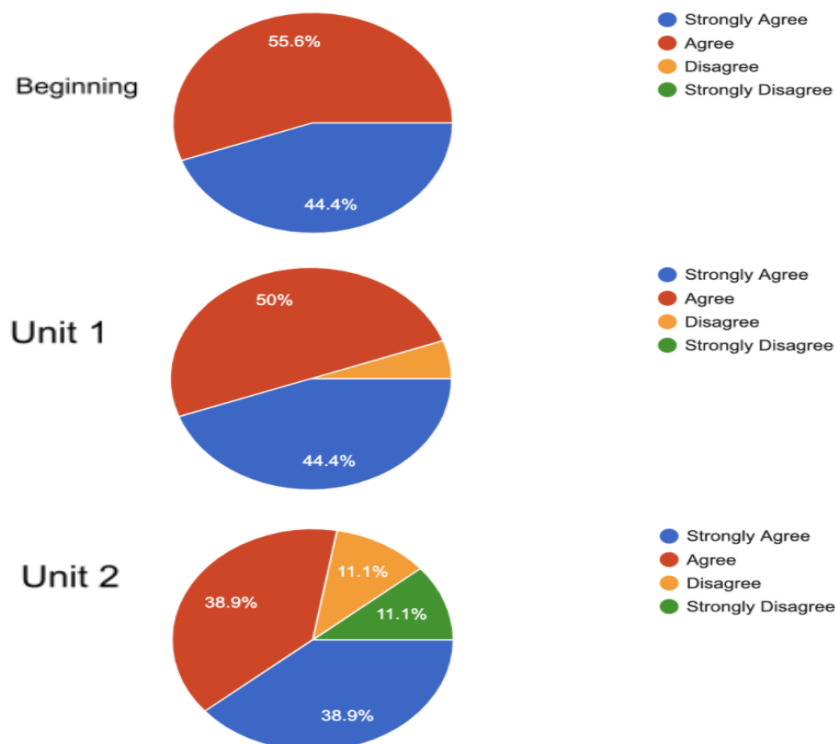
At the start of the quarter, 100% of the students agreed or strongly agreed. However, as the quarter progressed there was a slight increase in disagreement, and finally 11.1%, or two students, strongly disagreed. There was a decrease from 100% agreement to only 77.8% agreement at the end of Unit II.

**Figure 5**

*Statement 3 Results - School 2*

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because Miss Frye has created an inclusive, non-discriminating, classroom environment.

18 responses



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

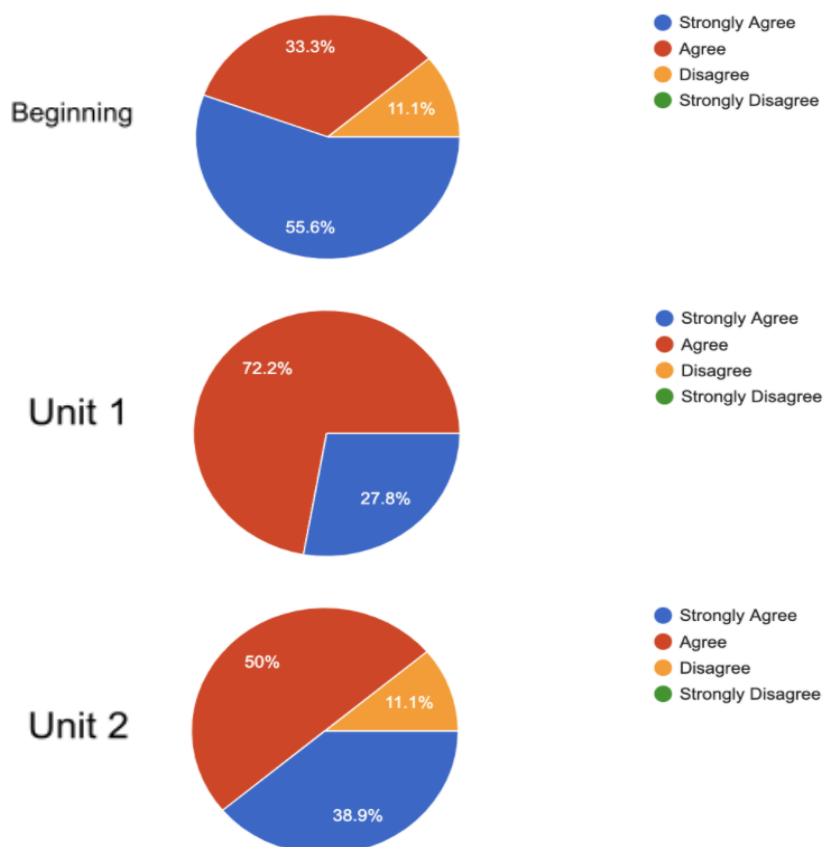
Statement four in the student survey was: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because of the relationship Miss Frye has built with her students. Figure 6 shows the results from the survey.

At the start, only 11.1% percent of the students disagreed with this statement. By the end of Unit I, the percentage went down to 0%. However, after Unit II, the percentage of students who disagreed went back up to 11.1%.

**Figure 6**  
*Statement 4 Results - School 2*

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because of the relationship Miss Frye has built with her students.

18 responses



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

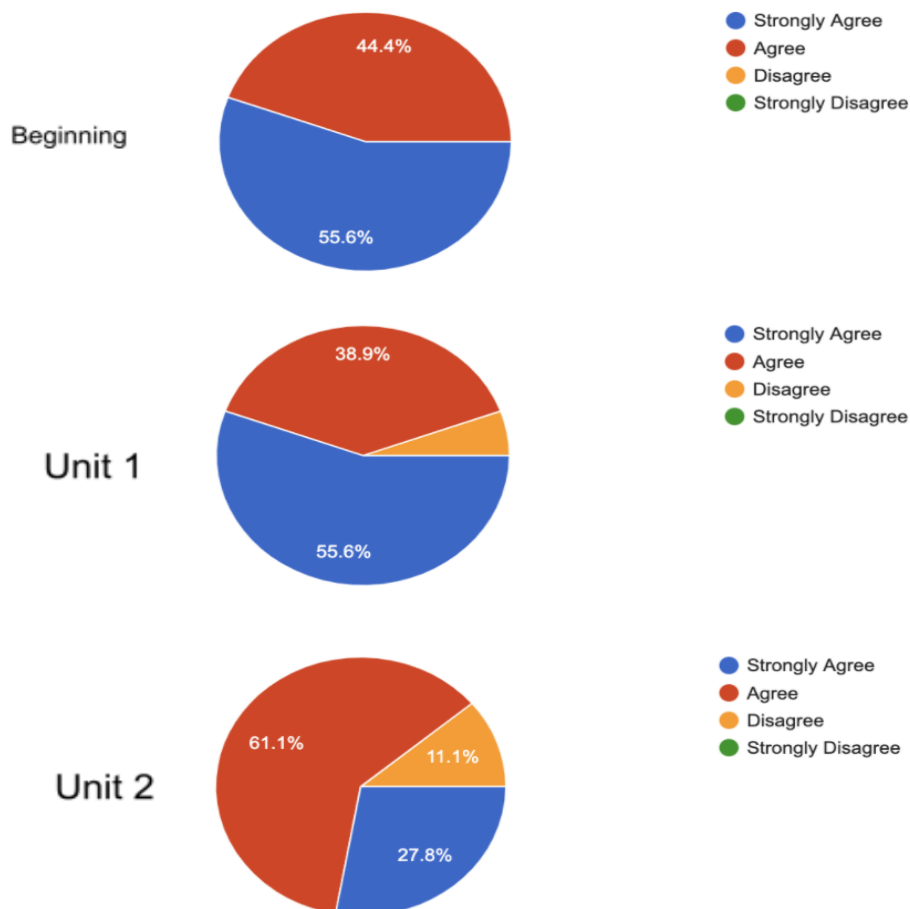
Statement five in the student survey was: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because Miss Frye makes class relevant, meaningful, and effective. Figure 7 shows the results from the survey

Similar to the prior statements, as the quarter moved on the percentage of students who disagreed with the statement increased to 11.1% from 0%. Once again, in a study so small this is only two students out of eighteen total students, which means a large percentage of students (88.9%) still agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

**Figure 7**  
*Statement 5 Results - School 2*

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because Miss Frye makes class relevant, meaningful, and effective.

18 responses





## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

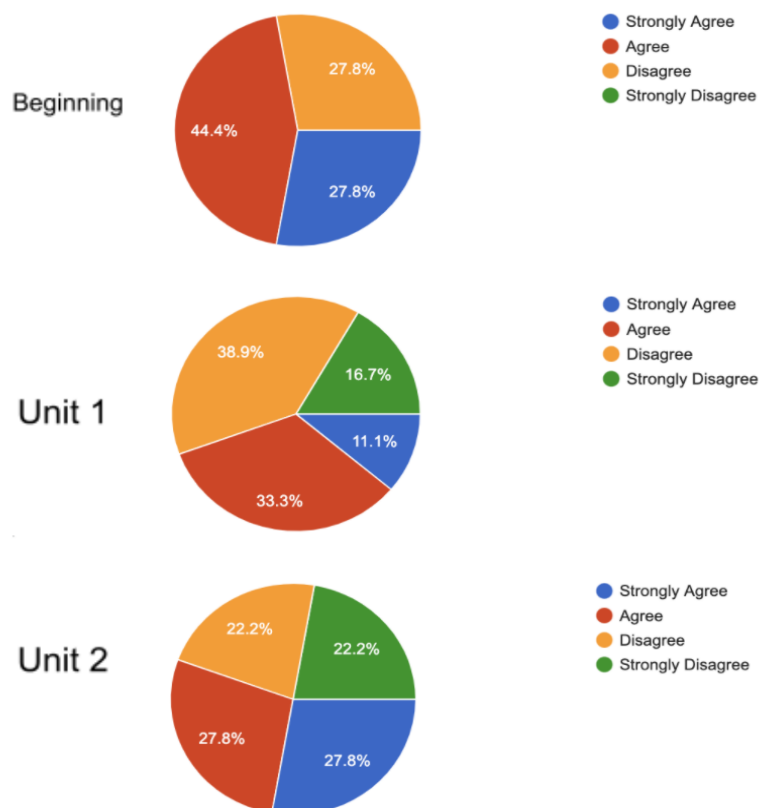
Statement six in the student survey was: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because I am held to a high standard. The results of this statement were by far the most varied in the entire study. Figure 8 shows the results from the survey.

From the start, 27.8% of students already disagreed with this statement. As the quarter moved along, the percentage grew to 55.6% of students either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement after Unit I. After Unit II, that percentage lowered to 44.4%, however, the amount of students who strongly disagreed increased to 22.2%. The results for this statement immediately had a negative reaction with the students and continued to get worse throughout the quarter.

**Figure 8**  
*Statement 6 Results - School 2*

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because I am held to a high standard.

18 responses



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

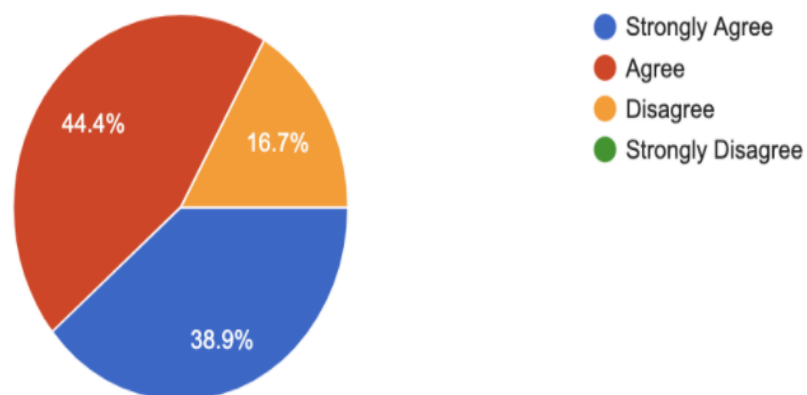
To wrap up the surveys with the students, one final question was asked in addition to the set of six questions they had seen before. The statement for the students was: I felt more engaged and interested in music this Quarter because of the culturally accepting and centered environment that was created in class. In Figure 9 below you will see the results.

**Figure 9**

*Final Question Results - School 2*

Based on your experience in 7th Grade music this Quarter, select a response to the following statement: I felt more engaged and interested in music this Quarter because of the culturally accepting and centered environment that was created in class.

18 responses



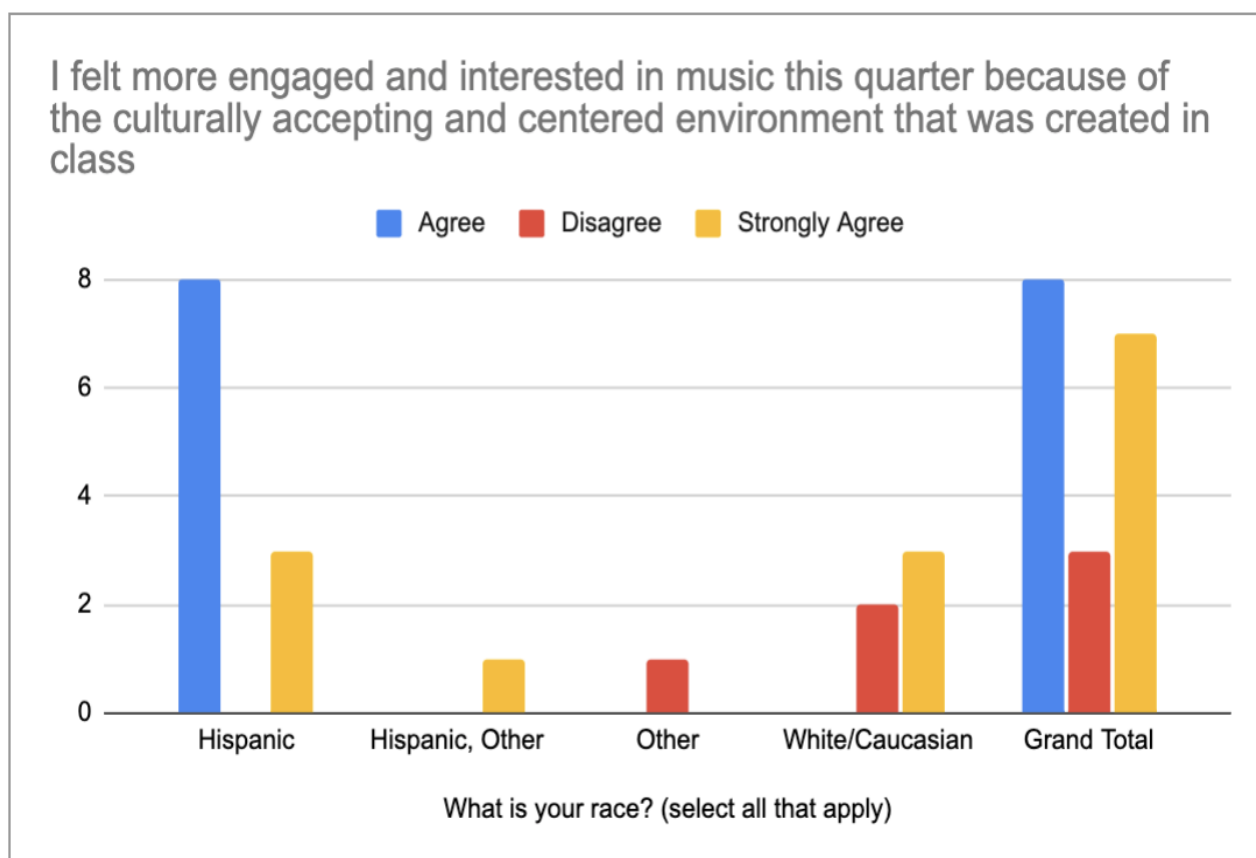
Out of the eighteen students, 83.3% of them either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement above. While 16.7% of the students disagreed with the statement, there were no responses that ended with a strongly disagree. The majority of the students felt that this

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

culturally responsive environment created throughout the quarter allowed them to be more engaged in their music class. To take this question one step further, the responses to this survey question are broken down in Figure 10 below by race. Below, Figure 10 shows that 100% of students who were Hispanic either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This concludes that the three students who disagreed were all white/caucasian students or multi-racial.

**Figure 10**

*Race Breakdown - School 2*



While the results of this study are useful and beneficial to music educators, it is still important to take into consideration the many factors that could have altered the results; do the students play an instrument, do they like to sing, what is their gender identity, what is their race,

**Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

etc. While the focus groups had a similar make up of the entire demographics at each school, the results could still be off because of virtual learning. Creating a culturally responsive teaching environment was made difficult this year because of this, however, these studies still showed positive impacts on the students, even through a computer screen.

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

### **Chapter 4: Conclusions and Reflections**

The goal of this study was to see if the students felt more engaged and interested in their general music class when Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies were implemented into the classroom. As a teacher who works with such a diverse group of students, I wanted to make sure that I was connecting with all of my students. I wasn't sure how easy it would be to have students, of all different races and ethnicities, trust me as a white teacher to teach them while incorporating such an important pedagogy. I made it my goal to focus on getting to know the students and making sure everyone felt safe and included in my classroom.

In the past four years at the two schools that I teach at, I realized how difficult learning must be for my students. I would always get frustrated that all the "bad kids" who didn't do their work, didn't understand me, and weren't interested in my class at all. I did a lot of growing as a teacher and I realized that these kids are not bad at all. I also discovered that they aren't being rude or mean, but rather, realized how different our cultures and life experiences must be. A lot of them learned English as a second language, some still struggle with English, and some move from a different country to Hazleton in the middle of the school year. These kids are just trying their best to get by. I noticed that while my district does the best they can to accommodate these students, I was truly never trained on how to teach them. Instead of getting frustrated, I decided to research on my own the best way to teach culturally diverse students. This is when I discovered what Culturally Responsive Teaching is. Most of the research I found out in the world of CRT focused on closing the achievement gap between minority students and White students. However, I personally believe this "gap" is based on how well we expect White students to do over students of color. So instead of focusing on the achievement gap, I decided

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

to focus on getting the students engaged and interested in general music class, a class they are required to take.

Creating a safe and culturally responsive environment in my classroom while working with students virtually, rather than in person was a challenge. Typically I would set my classroom seats up in either groups or even a circle in order to make all the students feel equal. I would always have decorations up in my room to show the work of past students, or even the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rican flags. Unfortunately this wasn't possible in a virtual setting. The students were only truly able to see myself and a few pictures behind me. I used this to my advantage and made sure I showed my classroom motto and logo in the background. "Have fun. Music is for everyone." (See Appendix E). I created this with the idea of what I had learned in a previous class at The University of the Arts with Lori Schwartz Reichl. Something I'll carry with me for the rest of my career that was taught in that class was that students need mirrors. Not a literal mirror, but something they could see that shows they too can do music. I wanted my students to know that Latinx people can in fact be musicians because music is for EVERYONE, regardless of race, ethnicity, or musical background. In addition, I also had a sign that said I am a safe person for anyone of color, LGBTQ+ community, etc. (See Appendix F). I wanted to make sure my students knew I was a safe person for them and kept that communication open.

As far as the curriculum content during the quarter, I decided to switch up my units to make them more relevant to my students. I based Unit I on composers from around the world and different times throughout history. I was able to incorporate music from a variety of countries in which my students come from. I was also able to incorporate rap and pop music into

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

the curriculum. This was the most popular request that came from my students when I met with them. They constantly ask to learn about more relevant music in class rather than music from Beethoven or Mozart. We were still able to learn the information in the curriculum, but make it more engaging to the current students. With Unit II, I focused on World Music in hopes to get the students more involved in music from different cultures. The students learned about music and culture from countries of their choice. Rather than select the countries myself, I found that the students were more interested when they had the choice. For example, instead of choosing Puerto Rico or even Dominican Republic where most of the students have family, a large portion of students decided to select Japan because they watch a lot of anime and like anime music.

When taking a look at the data from all the surveys, we can see that interest and engagement levels started to decrease from Unit I into Unit II. While the majority of students still found themselves engaged and more importantly, engaged because of CRT strategies, you can also notice the number of strongly agrees and agrees drop into disagrees and even strongly disagree. After analyzing this data, it is clear that CRT is not all about making sure the curriculum is about culture, but rather about being culturally responsive to the students in the classroom. It is not enough for a teacher to just include culture in the classroom, but rather, teachers should create an inclusive environment that makes every student feel welcome and safe.

Looking at the data, from my perspective, I noticed that most students did feel more engaged and interested in music when they felt their culture being incorporated into class. Unit I may have felt more relevant to them because they were able to learn about song writers they actually listen to outside of class. Or maybe it was because I really emphasized the importance of equality and culture at the beginning of the quarter, but didn't remind them as much about it

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

towards the end of the quarter. The students could have liked the beginning of the quarter more and were burnt out by the end of the quarter. There could be many reasons that we see a decrease in engagement/interest in class from Unit I to Unit II. If I could do the study again, I probably would have asked the students throughout the quarter if they were feeling burnt out or just losing interest in the lessons being taught. Regardless of the reasoning behind the drop in interest from Unit I to Unit II, in the end, 88.9% of students found themselves engaged and interested in music class this year. In addition, 83.3% of the students said they were more engaged and interested in music class this year because of the culturally responsive environment and teaching strategies incorporated into class.

To conclude this study, I found that students did in fact respond well to the CRT while I incorporated it into my music class. However, I also realized that it takes much more than thinking about culture. This pedagogy requires you to focus on your students and their past experiences. It requires you to expand your curriculum beyond your own culture and focus on who you are teaching. Educators everywhere need to learn more about culture, especially in 2021 as we see a rise of awareness for diversity and equality in America. It will take much more than 45 school days to find the perfect balance between caring and growth of the students. However, in such a short period of time, I personally saw a positive impact on my students, even in the toughest school year we've ever experienced.

To anyone who reads this, please reflect upon yourself as an educator. Even the most accepting teachers can still have a subconscious bias. Even the most flexible teachers can still struggle to be culturally responsive with all of their students. I encourage all of the administrators in my life to research it as well, in hopes that we can help minority students all



**Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

across the country become engaged in not just music class, but all of school. CRT might not be the only teaching strategy to increase the engagement levels of minority students, but it certainly is a good start.

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**Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education**

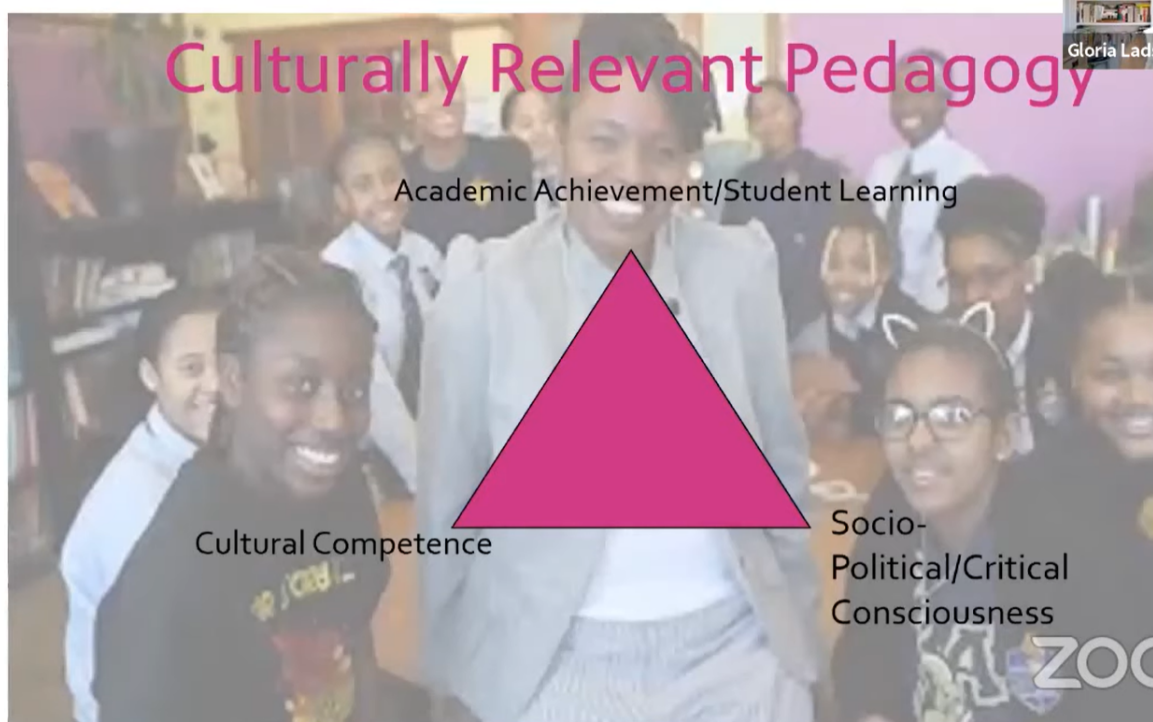
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## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

### APPENDICES

#### Appendix A:

*Dr. Ladson-Billings Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Triangle*



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

### Appendix B:

#### *Interview with Student A*

#### **Interview with Student A**

Was English your first language? If not, what was and how has it affected you in school?

- I was born in DR, it was technically not. I've been speaking english as long as i've been speaking spanish. Yeah it has affected me in my reading and writing. I have dyslexia because I travel from DR to America a lot.

Have you gone to school in a country other than the USA before? If so, how did school compare/contrast to school in Hazleton?

- Yes, in the DR. It's very different. I am really grateful that we get to have music class. We don't have music or art class in DR.

How do you think culture (specifically your own family culture) has affected the way you learn in school?

- No

Do you find that all of your teachers are aware of the cultural diversity in our classes at Heights Terrace. If so, do they incorporate your culture into the class? How?

- Yeah they always try their best to translate. No, science sometimes.

In the survey you answered a variety of questions about culture and your engagement in music class. The majority of students (84%) answered that they feel more engaged in music class when culture is incorporated into class. Why do you feel more engaged when culture is incorporated in class?

- I like learning about other cultures. When my own culture is involved I like to see what other people say about it.

Does seeing people like you (not white men) make you feel more interested in music?

- Yeah, when we were doing our projects, I was trying to find a female because there aren't a lot of female show cased.

Is it difficult for you to learn about cultural music from a white teacher?

- Not really, it's really interesting because you are really educated. When my white friends talk about my culture, they don't talk about it the way you do.

What could Miss Frye do better to engage the wide diversity of students in her classes?

- Not really, you're doing a good job. You really help me.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

### Appendix C:

#### *Interview with Student B*

##### **Interview with Student B**

Was English your first language? If not, what was and how has it affected you in school?

- Yes, however I also speak Bulgarian. This has not affected my learning at all.

Have you gone to school in a country other than the USA before? If so, how did school compare/contrast to school in Hazleton?

- No

How do you think culture (specifically your own family culture) has affected the way you learn in school?

- No it really has not.

Do you find that all of your teachers are aware of the cultural diversity in our classes at Heights Terrace. If so, do they incorporate your culture into the class? How?

- Yes I think they are aware.
- Yes and no, I do notice that emails are in both english and spanish. They don't think about any other cultures (bulgarian, arabic, etc.)

In the survey you answered a variety of questions about culture and your engagement in music class. The majority of students (84%) answered that they feel more engaged in music class when culture is incorporated into class. Why do you feel more engaged when culture is incorporated in class?

- I find it interesting to learn about other cultures. But it really depends on your learning style. I like to be informed about other cultures.

What would help you be most engaged and interested in music class?

- I think music is interesting. You are really good at making class interesting. Its great that we are not just learning about American culture and music. You seem to be incorporating a lot of cultures.

Does seeing people like you (not white men) make you feel more interested in music?

- See above.

Is it difficult for you to learn about cultural music from a white teacher?

- It doesn't affect the way I learn. Anyone can teach it if they are informed and learn the correct information. Even if you are White you still have culture.

What could Miss Frye do better to engage the wide diversity of students in her classes?

- Find out everyone's music interests.

## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

### Appendix D:

#### *School 2 Survey Questions*

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself interested and engaged during music class.

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music class when Miss Frye incorporates my culture and music interests.

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because Miss Frye has created an inclusive, non-discriminating, classroom environment.

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because of the relationship Miss Frye has built with her students.

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because Miss Frye makes class relevant, meaningful, and effective.

Based on your CURRENT experience in 7th Grade Music Class, select a response to the following statement: I find myself more interested and more engaged during music because I am held to a high standard.

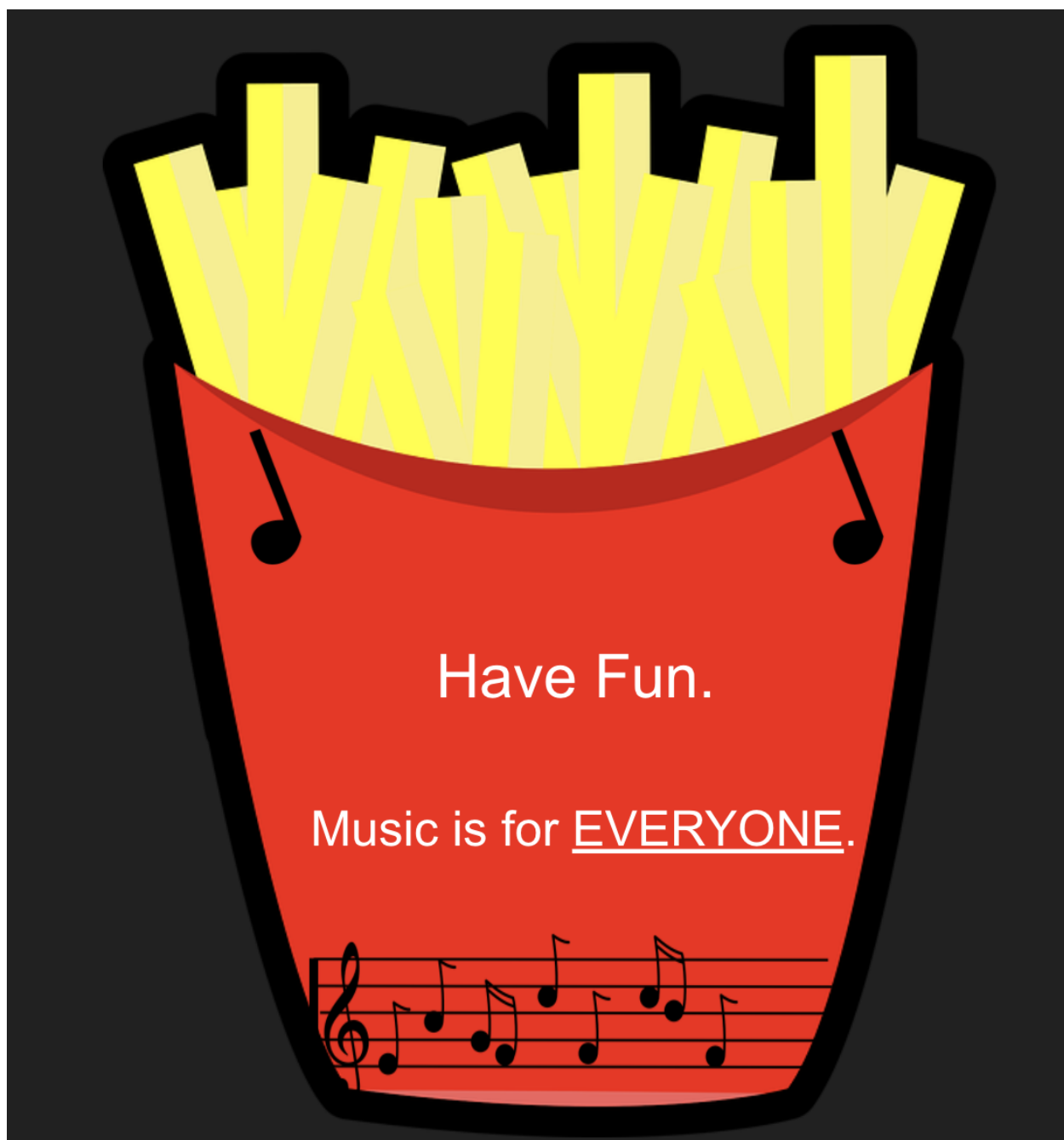
Based on your experience in 7th Grade music this Quarter, select a response to the following statement: I felt more engaged and interested in music this Quarter because of the culturally accepting and centered environment that was created in class.



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

### Appendix E:

#### *Classroom Motto/Logo*



## Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education

### Appendix F:

#### *Classroom Poster*



