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# Student perceptions and attitudes regarding the diversity of music in their high school band classroom

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES REGARDING THE DIVERSITY  
OF MUSIC IN THEIR HIGH SCHOOL BAND CLASSROOM

by

Nathan Westlund

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A Thesis Presented to

EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
MASTER OF MUSIC  
IN MUSIC EDUCATION

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**MASTER'S THESIS**

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## **Abstract**

Though much research has been published on the benefits, importance, and teacher perceptions of multicultural music education, fewer investigations have examined student perceptions and attitudes on this topic. Most notably, the author perceived a lack of such research at the high school level. The purpose of this study was to investigate student perception of and attitudes toward the diversity of music in high school band programs. This qualitative investigation involves a case study approach, using interview technique. It seeks to answer the following questions: (a) what are high school band students' perceptions of diversity in their school band curriculum, and (b) what are high school band students' attitudes toward diversity in their school band curriculum? The sample of convenience included three students recruited from the researcher's private music studio. Each student was interviewed individually, using open-ended questions. Results were analyzed for trends and discrepancies that provided a foundation for further discussion. Information gained from this report may be valuable to school band directors as they make decisions on multicultural curriculum design and implementation.

## Preface

This investigation is a very personal study for me. I have been interested in the music of other cultures for as long as I can remember, and have always seen it as an important part of music education. Indeed, I believe the study of other cultures is crucial in all forms of education. As technology develops, the Internet expands, and communication becomes easier, our world appears to get smaller. However, it is my observation that our knowledge of other cultures and their traditions is growing much slower than modern technology might lead us to believe. Students are able to find a vast amount of information from a device in the palm of their hands, yet may or may not be sure what much of it means.

I believe that deliberate multicultural education serves as a way to guide students carefully through at least a small portion of knowledge outside of any predominant culture. It also aims to provide students with some familiarity with and understanding of cultural context, historical background, and meaning. This study was largely designed to inform my own teaching, to give myself a better idea of what some students are thinking in this area and of how they might approach music from other cultures. I hope to use this information to influence my teaching decisions in order to give my students the best possible preparation for an ever-shrinking world. So, what better way to improve my teaching, than to talk to those who are most affected by it? Three of my private music students graciously volunteered to

participate with me in this journey, and already have taught me more than they realize.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the study and outlines much of the preparation that went into it. Matters discussed here include the need for the study, research questions, sample population, research design, instrument design, researcher bias and theoretical framework, philosophical assumptions, limitations, and definitions.

### **Background**

As the cultural diversity of the population of the USA continues to grow, multiculturalism in education is increasingly discussed by teachers, school administrators, and politicians. Multicultural music education has many advocates, as is evidenced by the large amount of literature published on the subject. A multicultural approach to education may provide students with experiences that go far beyond the walls of the classroom, may provide them with social and cultural experiences that they might not otherwise receive, and may connect them to a strong community (Swanwick, 1992). Some authors have debated and expanded on views presented by Swanwick, concluding that it is not enough to simply hear music of other cultures, but that students should learn how to perform, interpret, and create that music as authentically as possible, without rearranging or reinterpreting the music in an inappropriate manner (Vulliamy & Shepherd, 1985). A number of

studies suggest that teachers should be trained in world music education and be able to teach songs to young students in the language of each song's country of origin. Through learning songs of other cultures, it is suggested that students are experiencing a more thorough music education while also studying language (Campbell, 1993).

Mark (1998) described the movement toward a culturally diverse musical education as being partly in response to USA immigration issues in the 1900s. According to Mark, during the time prior to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, schools were trying to assimilate and "Americanize" students whose families had immigrated to the USA from another country. Mark explains that, as most of the music teachers were familiar with Western European music, the music education programs were almost exclusively in this style. He describes the teachers generally using method books that did not include music from any other cultures and, when they did, these songs had been rearranged using the Western European style of composing, effectively stripping the music of its ethnic qualities (Mark, 1998). Eventually, folk dance returned to physical education, which in turn brought about the use of a wider diversity of folk music in music classes, including several manuals of folk songs written as authentically as possible (Volk, 1994). Volk identified a rise in the use and study of Native American and Eastern European music, as well as the inclusion of ethnic folk music in text and method books during this same period of time.

The importance of including multicultural experiences within music education is well documented (Manning, 1989, Mark, 1998, Okoye-Johnson, 2011, Volk, 1994, etc.). In an Australian study of students from grade six to ten, pairs of students were interviewed and one student described consuming music of other cultures as a way to relate to other countries, cultures, and musical traditions (Nethsinghe, 2012). The students were found to be aware of links between musical traditions and the influences that one culture has on another's music. Additionally, Nethsinghe found that students were able to identify their musical experiences as shaping their personalities and self-identity. Based on the results of Nethsinghe's study, it can be inferred that when students learn about their culture and about cultures around the world, they learn more about themselves and how they identify with the world around them. Furthermore, Nethsinghe explains how students view their experiences with music of varying cultures differently, and that students' perceptions of this cultural interaction are important considerations in developing and teaching a multicultural music curriculum.

### **Need for the Study**

Much research has been published on the use of multicultural music as it pertains to philosophy, curriculum design, and teaching methods. However, there has been less focus on the perceptions of high school students in regard to studying

music of diverse cultures. Therefore, this study seeks to elaborate on the existing research and provide more evidence on this topic.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to investigate high school band student perception of diversity in the school band curriculum and their attitudes toward this.

### **Significance of the Study**

By providing a few examples of student perspectives on multicultural music in their high school band experience, this report may inform school band directors who are making decisions about multiculturalism in their band programs. It is anticipated that this study might inspire further exploration of student voice on the topic. Together with the abundance of published research in the field, it is hoped that this study will inform broader discussions on multiculturalism and respect for diversity in the music classroom regarding all issues related to culture, including race, sexual orientation, gender, and the broad range of subcultures that might exist.

### **Research Questions**

This investigation aimed to answer these questions:

What are high school band students' perceptions of diversity in their school band curriculum?

What are high school band students' attitudes toward diversity in their school band curriculum?

### **Sample Population**

The sample population for this study is a sample of convenience, as all three participants take private music lessons with the researcher. All the students are enrolled in public high schools, and are participating members in their school band programs. Five students met the initial requirements, but only three submitted their consent forms on time to participate in the study.

### **Research Design**

This case study follows an interview research template where each participant was asked open-ended questions in an individual face-to-face interview with the researcher. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis and discussion.

### **Instrument**

Each interview was conducted using the same template of preliminary questions and prompts. As this study follows an emergent design, additional prompts and questions occurred as they arose from student responses during the interview process.

### **Bias and Philosophical Frameworks**

The researcher admits his bias toward respecting diverse cultures and supporting the importance of multicultural music education in public schools. Additionally, the researcher maintains a theoretical framework aligned with critical race theory as it applies to promoting respect for cultural diversity (Creswell, 2013). The researcher was careful to construct survey questions that would not reflect personal bias or attempt to sway student responses in a specific direction. Upon collecting the results and drawing conclusions, the researcher endeavored to report findings as accurately and impartially as possible while not being swayed by his personal bias.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

There are two philosophical assumptions associated with this study. First, there is an ontological assumption, which Creswell (2013) defines as how the “issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics.” For this study, ontological assumptions were made that student responses would vary and that a range of perceptions and attitudes would be reported. There is also a methodological assumption that this study would follow an emergent design “shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2013). Each interview started with a pre-structured group of questions, but additional questions and prompts were used as needed during the interview process. Furthermore,

analysis of data from open-ended questions was not predetermined, but developed as responses were analyzed.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited by the fact that it investigates perceptions of three students from one private music studio. Additionally, it is limited to what the students articulated in the interviews and does not necessarily reflect their entire experience or views. This might also include a discrepancy in how each student defines multiculturalism in the band curriculum. Due to the small sample size, results are not generalizable to the students' school districts as a whole. Finally, since these students have been studying with the researcher for one to two years, they may reflect views that were influenced by the researcher over time.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are provided to clarify the use of these terms throughout this document:

*Multicultural Music Education:* teaching music from diverse cultures

*Socio-cultural music education:* the practice of including historical and cultural context/background when teaching a piece of music

*Student Voice:* the perspectives of students

## **Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature**

### **Introduction**

In public school music education over the last several decades, the inclusion of multiculturalism has been explored in the research literature in many ways. Multiculturalism continues to be a popular subject among researchers, teachers, teacher trainers, and policy makers. The idea of including music of cultures other than Western classical music in US public school music programs started gaining momentum in the 1960s, during the Civil Rights Movement (Mark, 1998). It is the researcher's opinion that, in the modern educational system, teaching music from a multicultural perspective is critical to addressing the needs of a diverse student population and providing all students with a well-rounded education and appreciation of diverse cultures. This review surveys a number of perspectives on the historical development of multicultural music education. Additionally, it covers the benefits of a multicultural music curriculum, teacher preparation, curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and teacher perspectives.

### **The Historical Development of Multicultural Music Education in the USA**

In reviewing perspectives on multicultural music education, a basic exploration of where traditions have originated and how the concept of multicultural music education evolved will be informative. While there is an abundance of

literature dealing with the development of this educational perspective, this section focuses on a selection of perspectives the author considers important.

Starting in the 1830s, immigrants to the USA constituted a massive workforce that included members of many nationalities (Mark 1998). Between 1900 and 1916, Social Darwinism was a philosophy accepted by many citizens of the USA and eventually led to the restriction of immigrant populations in order to keep the USA “pure” (Volk, 1994). Essentially, Americans were beginning to fear racial dilution. In order to combat this phenomenon, the American school system started to “Americanize” the students of immigrant families, and began the process of assimilating these children into the American culture (Mark, 1998). Of course, this act of assimilation meant that the cultures (including musical cultures) of some students were being marginalized. Thankfully, as described by Volk (1993), an interest in world musics started emerging in the 1920s. At this time, the music textbooks used in schools started incorporating songs from the Native American and African American traditions and folk dancing was added to the curriculum. Additionally, more English and French folk melodies were being included as well. This act of broadening the spectrum of cultural music in texts was intended to help immigrant children feel more at home when they heard their own melodies. However, often these songs were given English lyrics and were not properly transcribed, causing them to lose much of their authenticity, as these songs were designed for historical value, not cultural awareness (Volk 1994).

In the 1960s, music education was forever changed by the influence of the Civil Rights Movement. The idea of multiculturalism rose to reject the old ideas of assimilation and a unified American identity (Mark 1998). It was about this time that Jazz music started making its way into the music classroom, changing the traditional values held by many music educators (Mark 1987). In his article, Mark draws on the creation of the National Association of Jazz Educators in 1968 as a turning point for the profession, showing that Jazz had a place in the curriculum and that rejecting jazz as a legitimate area of study was, as Mark states, “no longer fashionable” (p.20). What is important to note is that Jazz is a tradition that comes from the African American culture, and therefore we must view the acceptance of Jazz in education as a major achievement for multicultural music education at the time.

Volk’s (1993) review of the development of multicultural music education describes a sudden outpouring of attention being given to the subject. Music education conferences began giving access to presentations, workshops, and summer courses focusing on multicultural music. In 1971, the first issue of the *Music Educators Journal* was published that was devoted entirely to the music of the African American culture. By the mid 1980s, music educators were being challenged by the journal to stop ignoring the cultural diversity of their classrooms and include in their curriculum the musical traditions their students brought with them (Volk, 1993). The growth of diversity in classrooms became evident when, in 1995, it was claimed that the majority of students in California’s schools were Hispanic

(Campbell, 1993). It has also been noted by Manning (1989) that even prior to the 1990s, the estimation was that diverse cultural groups would continue increasing in size and all indications pointed to the overall American population becoming more culturally diverse. Based on this small collection of articles it is easy to see that, historically, multicultural education has only been around for a relatively short time and that its development occurred rapidly. Today, the influence of this movement is apparent in the more frequent inclusion of gamelan ensembles, steel drum bands (Mark, 1998), mariachi bands, marimba groups, and drum circles in public school curricula.

### **Benefits of a Multicultural Education**

Once the Civil Rights Movement impacted the popularization of multicultural education, studies began examining potential benefits of this in the arts. Examples follow of indications that schools using a multicultural curriculum see a positive influence on their students both academically and socially.

In his 2006 study, Abril examined the effect of multicultural music instruction on learning outcomes in the fifth grade. His study looked at differences between a concept-based approach versus a sociocultural approach. Some of these approaches involved cultural lenses addressing challenging topics, such as prejudice and stereotypes in music, as well as cultural background and terminology used in music (Abril, 2006). As a result of the sociocultural education, students were found

to be able to define cultural context, identify prejudices and stereotypes, form social identities, and compare cultures. The study also saw these students discussing and articulating their knowledge at a much higher level than those who just learned Western musical concepts. However, this approach did not affect the students' perceptions of their own musical abilities. The author suggests that it is remarkable that fifth-grade students were able to articulate and define prejudices and stereotypes in music, which appears a very mature achievement for that age group. As evidence of this, one student is quoted defining stereotypes as "kind of like judging a book by its cover and not looking at what is inside before making a decision." Another student says, "if you judge people or maybe music before you know it then you are being prejudice. [sic]" However, Abril also notes that it's important not to assume that multicultural experiences alone are sufficient to promote tolerance and acceptance (Abril, 2006). While this may be true, Abril's report suggests that multicultural education does provide a framework for developing those traits.

Research has shown that students who receive a multicultural music education can, indeed, develop tolerance and respect for other cultures (Nethsinghe, 2012). After teaching students using a multicultural approach, Nethisinghe conducted interviews and was presented with evidence that his students were developing a wide appreciation for music of other cultures as well as cultural respect, tolerance, and self-identity. One of his students said,

you don't realize it, but every other culture is interrelated to your own if you think about it. Like looking back at our old music we had very traditional instruments and stuff but with the newer instruments and the styles that have been brought through from other cultures, our music has developed as well. (p. 388)

Nethisinghe quotes another student, "if you stick to one type [of music], you know you will become narrow minded" (p. 389). These students are showing an ability to think critically about their music traditions and the influences that music from various cultures has on their own. These students are learning to construct their own ideals and identities. One explained, "I am different to others because I have been influenced by the music that I listen to and the TV that I watch and I've got a broader knowledge... where others don't" (p. 389).

Other studies have found similar results that help confirm the beneficial nature of a multicultural education. Burnett (2005) writes that multicultural music education allows students to acquire greater musical flexibility, it draws attention to the nature of music itself, increases student racial and cultural sensitivity, and provides students with knowledge of the world around them. It has also been said that multicultural music education, which provides authentic experiences, ensures that adolescents develop feelings of security and acceptance (Manning, 1989). In the author's view, multicultural education involving the use of folk music provides a sociological function that links children to their cultures and can capture their

imagination. Additionally, folk musics can help bridge the gap between rural and urban children by providing them with a common experience (NKetia, 1967). Further evidence supporting the construction of personal identity and value is present by Swanwick (1992). He goes on to state that, while cultural background is immaterial to performing at a high level of achievement, he hopes experiences from various cultures are included for the benefits they do provide. Finally, Okoye-Johnson (2011) found that a multicultural approach has been found to be effective in improving racial attitudes, in both urban and rural areas, as long as it meets the academic needs, and aligns with the cultural background, of the students. He further claims that multicultural education is a powerful tool that can present accurate pictures of diverse cultures: racial, ethnic, and social. Additionally, while his study did not focus on this aspect, Okoye-Johnson also found a positive correlation between multicultural education and academic achievement. While the evidence presented here only represents a small portion of the available literature, the trend indicates that multicultural education has a positive influence in not only the music classroom, but in other academic fields as well.

### **Teacher Preparation and Curriculum Design**

While the literature largely promotes multicultural music education as a valuable and worthwhile pursuit, there are still those who hesitate to include it in their curriculum because of a perceived lack of specific instruction in the school

system regarding practices and philosophies behind a multicultural curriculum (Norman, 1999). How can educators and administrators expect teachers to include multicultural elements in their curriculum if they are not given any guidelines? This issue has been raised and addressed many times. According to one study, it is possible for teachers to complete their training with little or no exposure to students of diverse backgrounds (Huerta, 1999). This study examined a teacher preparation faculty in Utah and found that the staff was having a difficult time designing a multicultural framework because of the numerous strategies, views, and sometimes conflicting definitions of what multicultural education is. Huerta explains that some members of the faculty resisted the integration of multicultural education because they couldn't understand how the standards affected their department. He quotes one educator as saying, "until I'm specifically told by my chair to teach multicultural education, I won't do it because all I care about is getting good evaluations." This educator was apparently not alone, as his view was reportedly shared by many in the department, particularly those involved with science and mathematics. Huerta found that the central conflict for the faculty was whether society's changing demographics required a complete reformation of teacher preparation programs. In the end, Huerta calls for multicultural education to be part of the faculty research agenda and states that advocates of multicultural education need to clearly show the difference it makes in cross-cultural relationships and academic achievement.

Fortunately, experience with multicultural music planning has been found to have a positive effect on preservice teachers' attitudes and willingness to incorporate music of other cultures into their curriculum (Teicher, 1997). Some preservice elementary teachers in Teicher's study were selected to go through a preparation program involving a wide variety of hands-on experience in preparing and planning a multicultural music curriculum. Teicher reported that, throughout the course of this study, these preservice teachers made significant gains in their willingness to teach music of other cultures, though the greatest gains were seen by those already open to the idea of multicultural education. Interestingly, he found no change in the teachers' perceived preparedness to teach a multicultural curriculum, as they still found it difficult to plan. Due to this outcome, Teicher proposes that pre-service training should include several opportunities for teachers to have hands-on experience planning for multicultural education, and that teacher-trainers should do more than simply present lessons and ideas. As with any new concept or idea, providing hands-on experience and the opportunity to participate in the creation of lessons for teaching music of many cultures seems critical to increasing the willingness of teachers to integrate multicultural education into their classrooms.

Other authors echo these recommendations, as well as calling for more action from teachers and educators in preparing and implementing multicultural music curricula. For example, Manning (1989) writes that educators must not only learn about other cultures; they must also develop the skills needed to function in a

multicultural setting. Additionally, Manning calls for a curricular focus that includes skills in analysis and critical thinking, and addresses the multiple learning styles of different cultures. However, he notes that teachers need to be careful about proclaiming that they have a strong multicultural program when, in reality, it might be fractured and not fulfilling its purpose. Achieving a well-balanced curriculum should include working with other specialists, such as social studies teachers, and creating thematic study units around a culture and its music that ties to world events (Burnett, 2005). Burnett further suggests that this might include the avoidance of Western terms when learning about new cultures and stressing authenticity in multicultural performances. Another resource music teachers might take advantage of is the population of ethnomusicologists (Campbell, 1993). Campbell concludes that, as hiring practices in schools may not yield teachers trained in multicultural music education, music teachers should be looking for specialists trained in world music, especially in elementary schools. Campbell's other recommendations include using various resources outside of textbooks, including teaching songs from a diverse group of cultures in their original language, songbooks, recordings, video, and visits from ethnomusicologists or members of a particular culture. These authors illustrate the fact that it's not simply enough to play music from another culture, but that learning about the culture, providing authentic performances, and accounting for cultural differences of students within the classroom are also critical to having a successful multicultural program.

### **Pedagogical Approaches to Multicultural Music Education**

The use of folk music in the classroom serves an important sociological function because it links children to their own cultures (NKetia, 1967). According to Nketia's views, music education is not only concerned with the students acquiring musical knowledge and skills, but learning about musical values. He suggests that incorporating folk music into the curriculum must be considered a valid way to widen the cultural knowledge of students. He believes that music educators do not all seem to have come to terms with the use or importance of folk music. The author believes that it is counterproductive for educators to ignore the folk music of prevalent student cultures, especially when students in their classroom likely grew up learning their own cultural folk songs. The folk music of a culture represents not only the culture's heritage, but also its musical language, be it instrumental music, vocal music, or dance (NKetia, 1967). Folklorists use similar approaches to teaching about other cultures, even outside of music, as teaching folklore (and it can be argued this goes for folk music as well) takes a human-relations approach to education that demonstrates tolerance and strives to reduce stereotypes (Hamer, 2000). The author suggests that the study of folklore is "inherently empowering" due to the attention to individuals and communities that operate outside institutional power. Hamer also defines the focus of multicultural education as "broadening the range of peoples represented in textbooks and curricula for all disciplines" and argues that this resonates with most of the work within the discipline of folklore. He

suggests that folk music, like folklore, seems an obvious choice as content of a multicultural curriculum. However, he suggests that certain educators might have an aversion to its inclusion if they lack concrete guidelines for its use.

Another style of music that is commonly ignored in schools is popular music. In a series of articles, several authors argue back and forth about the importance of popular music in the curriculum and its sociological function within a classroom setting. Swanwick (1984a) argues that the views presented in Vulliamy's previous works (cited in Swanwick, 1984a), are from an outsider's perspective and therefore he misjudges the use of popular music and African American music in education by saying it has been underestimated by music teachers. Swanwick also makes the argument that Vulliamy believes that simply changing the criteria in music education to account for popular music would "automatically legitimize" its use in schools. Vulliamy and Shepard later refute this claim in their response to Swanwick's criticisms (Vulliamy & Shepherd, 1984). These authors argue that, while they view popular and African American music as providing a social function in the music classroom, they also view these styles as legitimate musics that are worth studying, and that they play a significant role in cultural identity. They highlight a problem with African American, popular, and jazz musicians only learning music by rote, arguing that most music conservatories would not accept students who did not read music. In his next response, Swanwick (1984b) addresses the idea of the meaning of music in a social and educational context and claims that music education is the

“development of the range and control of sound itself” and that students should explore the significance of music through its sound, structure, and expression, no matter the culture. Swanwick concludes that African-American music has an important part to play in a cross-cultural educational policy. In the final response from Vulliamy and Shepherd (1985), they make the point that including world music in education should involve exposing students to a range of different music so they can learn to appreciate and evaluate the music’s cultural and moral significance. They stress that, while cultural transformation is inevitably going to happen, authentic performances are valuable and worth attempting for their social significance. Their views confirm the idea of music serving a vital function in social contexts that had been promoted by NKetia in 1967.

Several models have been created for approaches to multicultural education. Some are based on the view that cultural music is not needed and that, instead, music in schools should be primarily offered in the Western style, to establish classical traditions everywhere (Boyce-Tillman, 1997). Other views described by Boyce-Tillman include (a) using some ethnic and subculture music for providing inspiration, (b) studying other cultures but keeping them distinct and separate from each other, (c) including only the contemporary music of cultures, as including traditional cultural heritage might be seen as an “impediment to progress,” (d) selecting repertoire from the largest minority groups in the community, (e) topic-based instruction that selects music based on a single theme, (f) selecting music to

focus on certain musical concepts, (g) selecting music from various cultures for its perceived intrinsic properties, and (h) the idea of dynamic multiculturalism that ties everything together and allows students to develop ideas about music both academically and socially. Boyce-Tillman recognizes each approach as having its own set of benefits and challenges; however, the final approach seems to offer the most all-encompassing method of teaching music from other cultures. She goes on to propose that certain questions can be asked about music from any culture to define its place in the classroom such as: “What does it make you feel? Are there any influences from other cultures? What is it that makes this particular piece unique?” Finally, Boyce-Tillman discusses a method for analyzing music from other cultures by looking at the music’s *materials*, *expression*, *formal structure*, and *value*. This method is directly reflected in Swanwick’s (1992) article, though he replaces the term “formal structure” with “form.” Here, he analyzes various descriptions of music and divides the experiences and reviews using this format. In this work, he concludes that discussion in the classroom should be essentially the discourse of criticism that allows students to take reflective action. This could be seen as another approach to multicultural music education, as students could be doing critical analysis to find the significance of music in the classroom for everything they play and perform. Not only does this allow students to create their own informed view of differing music cultures, but it also lets them experience the music from other cultures in an

objective way where they can then compare and contrast what they hear and experience.

Another study shows the effects of language, familiarity, and teaching method on fifth-grade students in regards to their attitudes and preferences toward songs in different languages (Abril, 2005). This study used a sociocultural approach to music education, and the students involved with the sociocultural group reportedly displayed significantly more positive attitudes toward music in other languages, though they still preferred those sung in English overall. Students were documented as making statements including, “If the language was mine I would like it,” and “I like hearing that language” (p.47). Abril found that “by facilitating children’s [understanding] of other cultures, forms of communication, personal biases, musical stereotypes, and prejudice, children may develop an increased openness to unfamiliar components of a song” (p.48). However, the results indicated that the language barrier possibly impacts students’ attitudes toward the music. Therefore, Abril advocates that teachers who use songs in foreign languages in their curricula should start with the languages most familiar to the students and slowly advance to those less familiar. Based on this evidence, the author suggests that the use of foreign languages in the classroom could potentially help students who speak those languages feel more welcome. For instance, if the classroom had Russian students and the teacher introduced songs in Russian, those students would not only feel represented, but would have a way to connect with the other students because they

know the language and might help interpret the lyrics for students who do not speak Russian.

A similar study investigated the effects of instruction in American Indian music on musical achievement in grade 4 students (Edwards, 1998). Each of the four treatment groups received an American Indian music unit presented through a different approach. The achievement results indicate that fourth-grade children are able to achieve a variety of content and skills through various approaches to multicultural music education. The findings show that all four treatment groups far exceeded the control group in the quality and amount of responses regarding cultural awareness, sensitivity, and value, as well as regarding the more basic levels of musical content, concepts, skills, and attitudes. The study also found that the groups that used authentic instruments gave more positive responses than the groups that did not use the instruments. Through this study, Edwards drew the conclusion that fourth-grade students are more than capable of understanding cultural differences and perceptions, and make strong achievements when they are involved in multicultural music education.

The multiple pedagogical approaches apparent in studies reviewed here provide a glimpse of how varied approaches are necessary when integrating diverse cultures into classroom music education. The author suggests that traditional Western approaches to education cannot be uniformly applied to other cultures and

that respect is needed for the educational approaches inherent within the musical practices of those cultures.

### **Teacher Perceptions of Multicultural Music Education**

Teachers play an important role in designing curriculum and modifying instructional approaches in ways that address the diversity needs of students in the classroom. Because of this, it is important to understand how teachers perceive multicultural education. A major consideration proposed by Sleeter (1994) is the idea that the USA is so large and spread out, it is possible for teachers to go through life and never come into close contact with victims of oppression (Sleeter, 1994). In Sleeter's study, twenty-six teachers were interviewed about their perception of multicultural education and there were four main outcomes. First, seven teachers saw multicultural education as irrelevant to their goals and subscribed to a "color blind" philosophy in which they may not acknowledge race or ethnicity at all. All of these teachers were white, with two being male and five being female. Second, six teachers saw multicultural education as addressing human relations, with goals to help students get along, which would increase academic achievement and facilitate student comfort in thinking about race and color. All were white women. The third group of eight teachers saw it as preparing students to survive in a hostile environment and fostering empathy for cultural struggles with goals to develop self-esteem and supporting the individual in daily life. One of these teachers was African

American and the demographics of the rest are not mentioned. Lastly, five teachers saw multicultural education as hard to categorize and shared views about not sheltering students from the realities of their situations and a goal to teach students what is morally right. Again, demographics were not provided other than one was a white female teacher and one was African American. Sleeter reports that, throughout the interviews, it became apparent that those who saw little to no value in multicultural education were generally conservative in their political views, and those who were proponents of multicultural education held more liberal views, and most of the teachers had little or no experience with civil rights movements. This author suggests that this shows a potential link among social status, race, and gender when looking at how teachers perceive multicultural education. The author also notes that it appears that none of the teachers who saw multiculturalism as irrelevant were from a culturally diverse background. These results are not generalizable, but they might suggest that further research needs to be conducted on lack of exposure to oppression and attitude to multicultural education.

A further study looking at perceptions of teachers proposed that multicultural music education is not only about the content, but also about the process and recipients (Norman, 1999). Norman's study looks at perceptions of multicultural music education from a sampling of music faculty: nine educators from a background of choral or instrumental music, and in some cases, both. The results indicate that all but one of these teachers thought that there were benefits associated

with multicultural education. These benefits included sensitivity and respect, tolerance, cross-cultural understanding, achievement and self-esteem, motivation to study music, variety in programming, positive audience response, and increased funding through grants. However, these teachers also came up with a list of potential problems with multicultural education: the faculty does not have adequate background; there is too little time to incorporate music from other cultures; this may be an inappropriate attempt to preserve musical traditions which are being abandoned in their own culture; children don't like the music; singing in other languages is difficult for children; and printing music from aural traditions is not always accurate. Norman highlighted that the teacher who noted no benefits also mentioned some additional problems with multicultural education: too much emphasis on non-musical aspects; the emphasis on difference makes divisions among cultures more apparent; and it threatens the Western art tradition. However, authors promoting multiculturalism are not stating that we should do away with the Western tradition, but instead suggesting that cultural music should be included alongside traditional education. Also, while the issues presented are real, there is little evidence to support the idea that multicultural music education threatens the Western tradition, and the benefits previously discussed align with the perceived benefits recognized by these teachers.

## **Conclusion**

Multicultural education in the school curriculum remains an important issue today, and the field has been rapidly developing since the early 1900s (Mark, 1998; Volk, 1993). As music of other cultures was increasingly introduced into the curriculum, researchers and proponents of multicultural music education started looking for the benefits it provided students and many approaches were developed to take on this task. As evidenced by this review, teaching from a multicultural perspective is considered by many to be extremely beneficial in addressing the needs of diverse student populations and helping students develop diverse perspectives and appreciation for diverse cultures (Abril, 2006; Nethsinghe, 2012; Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Additionally, there seems to be a discrepancy regarding teacher training, where some teachers do not receive necessary preparation to lead their students in this direction, and those who do find it extremely beneficial (Huerta, 1999; Teicher, 1997). Sleeter (1994) and Norman (1999) indicate that while there may still be some teachers that disagree, a seemingly large majority feels that multicultural education is beneficial to students, and support its continued use in public schools. The author of this document suggests that, as the population diversity in the USA increases, so does the importance of giving status to students' unique cultural backgrounds and including the music of their cultures in the music classroom. Furthermore, he suggests that teachers not already doing so might consider stepping outside of

traditional Western classical repertoire, embracing the diverse musical backgrounds of the American people, as well as cultures outside its borders.

This summary of some perspectives on the subject of multicultural music education is presented against a lack of research addressing student perceptions thereof. Future research needs to explore student thoughts and views of what multicultural music education is and what it means to them. It needs to look at the direct benefits to students, as perceived by them. It is this author's belief that real change will come when there is demand for diversity from the students themselves. This includes not only incorporating music of ethnic cultures, but also music of an ever-growing pool of contemporary musical subcultures, such as alternative or hip hop music, as well as different student populations such as LGBTQ students, and those not currently enrolled in music courses. By examining student voice, it is anticipated that this study will provide some insight into student thoughts and personal ideas about the inclusion of music from other cultures in their high school band curricula.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides detail on the methodology of this case study, which involved interviewing high school band students on their perceptions of multicultural music in the band classroom. The methodology, consent forms, interview template, and all required documentation were approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research on May 10, 2016.

### **Study design**

This investigation involved a qualitative case-study approach that included interview technique. Creswell (2013) describes such an approach as appropriate for detailed descriptive investigations of individual experiences and voice.

### **Sample population**

The study population involved a sample of convenience, with all participants being students from the private music studio of the researcher. In alignment with Creswell's (2013) description of the appropriateness of samples of convenience, this population was selected for its ease of access. The participants all met the same preliminary criteria which included 1) enrollment in at least one concert band ensemble at a public high school and 2) strong proficiency in the English language.

All students from this studio submitted consent and assent forms in order to be included in this study, and only those who submitted these forms were allowed to participate. Each participant is registered at a different high school within the same district.

### **Recruitment**

Prior to the interviews, all five potential participants meeting the inclusion criteria were contacted via a recruitment letter and consent form which was sent home for the students and parents to review and sign. The letter explained the nature and purpose of the project, the expectations of the participants, and that the interviews with students would be audio recorded. It also explained that students retained the right to refuse participation, the right to withdraw from the study at any time, the right to confidentiality in the interview transcripts and reports, and the right to view the final results of the research. All parties were informed that the names of students, their teachers, schools, and school districts would remain anonymous in the transcriptions of data and in the final report. Additionally, students were informed that there were minimal anticipated risks or benefits to this study, and that participation was completely voluntary. All students who returned the signed consent form by the requested deadline were included in the study. Once the consent forms were received, the researcher set up a time to conduct the interview at each student's convenience.

**Instrument**

The instrument for this study was a pre-scripted list of open-ended questions for the interviews. As suggested by Creswell (2013), care was taken to use a style of language that was suitable for a high school student. The interview followed an emergent design, which is described by Creswell (2013) as evolving as the study continues. In alignment with these views, each interview started with the same set of initial questions, and potentially led to additional questions, such as prompts for more detail, or spontaneous ideas based on student responses.

**Data collection**

Interviews took place with each participant in a face-to-face setting in the same studio where private music lessons were usually held with the student. At the start of each interview, the students were reminded that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, but that all identifying names and audio recordings would be excluded from the final report. Each student was reminded of participant rights and invited to ask any questions pertaining to the research procedure. Once any questions were answered, the interview started and the audio recording was activated. No time-limit was set for the interviews, but each one took between 20 and 30 minutes.

The audio recorded data was stored in a password-protected cloud storage facility labeled only with a number to protect the confidentiality of the data. After

each interview was completed, the recorded interview was transcribed, numerically coded, and stored in the same password-protected cloud storage drive.

### **Data analysis**

Once the interviews were transcribed, data analysis commenced. All analysis of data was coded and entered into a computer spreadsheet, allowing the researcher to compare the results. Identification of data categories followed an emergent design because the researcher expected to see unanticipated answers and views expressed by the students. All data were analyzed for trends and disparities in the results. Using the process described by Creswell (2013) as “restorying,” the researcher wrote a narrative account of each student’s perspective that led to further discussion in the conclusion. All names were changed in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

In this chapter, results of the case study investigating perceptions of three students on multiculturalism in their high school band programs are reported in narrative style. The reader is reminded that each student was given a substitute name in order to protect privacy. For similar reasons, some titles of musical works have been omitted so that no school might be identified by deduction. Some works, such as the Holst *Second Suite*, and Chicago's *25 or 6 to 4*, were deemed commonly performed by schools in the district, and therefore would not likely render a school identifiable. The three students in this study are all private students of the researcher, who have studied with him on a weekly basis for about two years. All play low brass instruments in their high school concert band classes and all three are white and male.

### Results

The following section includes a narrative of the three interviews, separated by student. The results are presented in this way to better represent the students' responses. The first student is referred to as John. He is a freshman in high school, and has been playing in his school band since the start of the year. The second student is known as Max, and he is a sophomore who has been in his program for

two years. The last student is a junior with three years of high school band experience, and is named Arthur for the purposes of this investigation.

### **John**

Having played in his high school band class for only one year, John provides the outlook of a student who is new to his program. When asked about his experience of playing music from other cultures in his high school band, he gave several examples from various regions of the world. For each, John provided as many details about the piece as he could remember.

John first mentioned a piece with Middle Eastern influences, which he described as sounding very spiritual, with a chant-like quality to it. John recalled that his band director had provided some brief historical and cultural context about the piece, but he wasn't able to remember specific details about what they had discussed. John also mentioned that he did not recall his director giving the class any performance tips, or any indication of how to play in the cultural style of this music. John also discussed a programmatic Russian piece, depicting the life of a soldier whom the Russian government had fictitiously created. While he wasn't aware of the time period, John was able to relate the story of the soldier and describe the music to the story. John discussed two Scottish pieces, showing particular interest in one of them. While the piece John mentioned is known to be played by bands across the country, to him, it was very special. "It's our favorite song, honestly," he said. "I can

probably say that for the entire band, honestly... everyone in the band loves it.”

When asked why, John responded by telling how it is a traditional piece at his school that is used during their graduation ceremony. Graduating seniors in the band have the opportunity to step out of line and play this one final piece with their band. John spoke fondly of this, and acknowledged the significance of the piece within his own school’s culture. Additionally, he was able to accurately describe the story of the two Scottish bothers, about whom the song is written. The second piece John discussed was one based on a story from German folklore. He recounted the story of “...two daughters who were gifted with... a kind of sight.” In this story, John said the two sisters shared a similar power, but “one was branded as a saint, and the other was branded as a witch.” The piece, he said, started softly, but then built to a point where he could feel the angry mobs chasing after the witch. These two pieces share a similar theme of sacrifice, trial, and death, which John was able to recognize.

After discussing these pieces, John expressed his desire to play more music from world cultures, because he enjoys knowing the background of a piece, especially when it comes from a country outside of America. However, he also expressed that while his class had discussed some of these pieces in class, including the history and cultural backgrounds, there were some that he still felt he didn’t know as well. He spoke of his desire to learn about the origin of the music, the context of the story, and information on the composer. In addition to this, he wanted to see more music from other cultures, especially music from cultures that he hasn’t

played yet. While he didn't mention specific cultures he wanted to study, John thought it would be "fun" to step outside of the traditional school music and try something new.

During the next section of the interview, John was challenged to think about what genres of music he had studied, and how that experience affected his enjoyment of the band program. He gave several examples of music that came from genres outside of the western classical tradition. First, he recalled playing a "modification" [arrangement], of the jazz standard *When the Saints Go Marching In*. He connected this piece to the African American tradition of jazz, and enjoyed playing this arrangement, but didn't remember any significant details about the origins or history of the music. John also discussed playing several pop, rock, and movie tunes during the football and basketball seasons, when his band was focused on pep band music. This included traditional Christmas songs such as *Sleigh Ride*. He talked about music that portrayed the story of Moby Dick, and how it was reflective of American folk music and included a section where the members of the band would sing a few lines of text.

John then drew attention back to the Middle Eastern repertoire that he had mentioned previously, and linked the work to sacred music. When talking about this piece again, he said that it was very calming, and created a sense of relaxation within the band that was difficult for him to describe. He stated that it felt like "...going into a church and listening to one song, and then... it just kind of makes you feel calm."

His observations led him to mention thinking he had experienced something ‘extra-musical’ that was apparently significant enough for him to hold onto that memory.

As the interview came to a close, John stated that he believes studying music from other cultures is very important, because the students are able to “get something” out of the experience. To him, it was more than just playing music, but also getting to know more about a culture and trying to recognize how the composer was feeling when writing the music. He reported enjoying exploring options outside of the American standards, and feeling that it’s important for band directors to allow their students to have this experience. In his own words, John said that “it just feels amazing” to interpret cultural music authentically, as you think that culture would do, and he can see why some tunes “become traditional.” John related experiencing a feeling of significance of the music when he performed music from other cultures in a way that he described as very profound.

### **Max**

As a sophomore in high school, Max has had two years of high school band. At the time of the interview, Max was enrolled in the second band at his school. However, he proudly reported having successfully auditioned for the top band, and that he will participate in that ensemble in the coming school year. During his interview, Max provided the perspective of working with both his teacher and student teacher in the second band ensemble.

Max spoke about several pieces that he had studied throughout his time in the concert band, the first being a piece that took inspiration from the rhythmic drumming of Africa. He recalled the percussion section using traditional djembe drums, about which he had learned from his teacher. These drums, according to Max, were used extensively for ceremonies, though he was not able to recall what type of ceremony they had discussed in class. The drums, he said, made the entire piece feel celebratory, and he noted that the percussion section's use of the djembe is what made it feel this way. The second piece Max discussed was an arrangement of *Shipping Off to Boston* by the band *Dropkick Murphys*. When they played this in their band class, he didn't feel like he was given enough context or background of the piece, stating that his teacher had only shared the music video with them. However, he reported enjoying the music for its Celtic-rock influences, but did not enjoy his part because it was not particularly exciting, as he never got to play anything melodic. He then recalled another piece his high school band had worked on that was a collection of English folk music. He felt as though this piece had a better part for his instrument, which made it more enjoyable. Max reported he was also able to learn more about his own instrument. His director specifically told his class that the baritone is a prominent instrument in England, and he stated that he enjoyed the melodies and intricacies of his part in this piece due to this cultural difference in arranging. Outside of this, Max said that he did not recall his class discussing the folk songs in any further depth. However, once they had played this

piece for several months, Max said the enjoyment wore off and it became stale. He stated that, due to this, it was not as exciting for him to play as it was in the beginning.

This was all the music that Max could remember studying from other countries in his concert band, but he did recall one piece they played that reflected the Native American culture. Max was careful to note that he wasn't positive that this particular work was strictly Native American, but he was able to see influences in the music that led him to believe it was associated with that culture. His inferences are also backed by remembering that the piece was based on a tribal ritual dance, though he did not remember discussing the piece in great detail during class. Max reported wondering if this could be, in part, due to the fact that this piece was under the direction of the student teacher at the time. Max said, "Maybe if we were working with Mr. [Band Director], who has more experience, he would have... might have done a better job of making sure that we have the story." The story and context are something that Max described as "level four concepts," and said that these are topics they are used to discussing in class. Overall, Max expressed that he enjoyed playing music from cultures outside of his own, and has a desire to learn more. During the interview Max specifically stated that he would like to study music from Asian cultures, because it seemed to him to be very unique compared with much of the music he had previously studied and heard.

In the second portion of the interview, Max reported on several genres of music that he played in his high school band. He recalled playing jazz-influenced Christmas music in his middle school band. While this falls outside of his high school band career, it was something that he was able to remember doing without any prompting. The first genre that Max discussed regarding high school was something he considered to be popular music. He admitted not knowing very much about the rock and popular music genres, but did report playing songs such as *25 or 6 to 4*, *Louie Louie*, and *Jungle Boogie* with his school pep band in the fall. He stated that this music was faster, more exciting, and had “cool” baritone parts that were fun to play. His reasoning was that these parts resembled the bass line, and in his opinion were the “backbone” of these arrangements. Finally, Max spent several minutes discussing movie soundtrack music, as his band class was working on an arrangement of *The Lion King*. This medley, Max said, included several songs from the movie, and he was able to describe many cultural and genre-based elements of the music. Portions of this piece, according to Max, were influenced by jazz and the blues. Upon further discussion, he realized that the jazz influences, as well as the topic and locations in the movie, were heavily based on the African culture. Max had not made this connection earlier in the interview when discussing music from Africa, but was able to come to this conclusion later. Max reported enjoying this music due to the contrasting sections, tempo changes, style changes, and familiarity with the music.

Variety was a word Max used often, and he explained this as the major reason behind his view that it is important to teach music from other cultures to high school band classes. He said the use of cultural variety can help students “broaden their horizons” and “be more accepting of other cultures if they know their music.” When asked to explain this thought, Max said that music helps students make connections to other cultures, stating that if students enjoy a culture’s music, “they could be interested in other aspects of [that] culture.” Max stated again that he wants to learn music from other cultures to increase variety within the band program. He reported that playing the same styles of music for several months at a time gets “stale,” and in his opinion, studying music from other cultures could help alleviate this problem.

### **Arthur**

Finishing up his junior year in high school, Arthur is a trombone player who has been active in his high school band for three years, including the pep band and marching band. Arthur has spent time in both bands at his high school, but is currently playing in the top, audition-based wind ensemble. This gives Arthur many experiences to draw upon as he discusses music from other cultures in his high school band classes.

Arthur recalled playing two pieces of music with African roots, and he chose one to discuss during the interview. This piece, according to Arthur, was percussion

oriented with a strong drum beat from the djembe drums. He described the piece as being very rhythmic, with little focus on melody or accompaniment. The band, as he recalled, was supposed to listen to the drums for the beat as they provided the foundation upon which the music was built. Arthur recalled his band director discussing the drums being the centerpiece of African music, used in all types of songs for ceremonies, celebrations, and daily life. “The drums,” he said, “were the heart and soul of every song.” He could not, however, remember discussing anything about the culture other than its use of drums and rhythmic patterns. He also reported making a connection between this piece, and a piece he remembered playing of Cuban origin, saying that both were heavily reliant on drum beats. This was all he could recall about the Cuban piece, however, as it was something he had played much earlier. Arthur remembered playing two pieces from Western Europe; one from Scotland or Ireland, and the other was a traditional band piece from England. The first piece, which he described as Celtic, struck him as something very different from the normal repertoire he was used to playing. Though he could not remember whether this piece was of Scottish or Irish origin, he observed that it was “gloomier” than music they normally performed. Arthur expressed his view that this piece was written by someone who was from a different culture because he felt as though it was composed from a different perspective of musical tradition. He described this piece being easily identifiable as non-American. Though he does not remember his band director ever talking about this piece in terms of historical or cultural context, it

stood out to him as something very different. Of all of the pieces he remembered and discussed, his personal favorite was Gustav Holst's *Second Suite for Band*. This, according to Arthur, was due to the piece showcasing several different musical styles that provided contrast throughout the movements. Not only was Arthur able to recall information about the way each movement sounded, but he conveyed an understanding that each had a unique style. He specifically drew attention to the second and fourth movements, stating that *A Song Without Words* was very solemn, while the fourth movement, *Fantasy on the Dargason*, reflected a Celtic-influenced jig. Going even further, Arthur discussed Holst as a composer. Holst, Arthur said, "had originally composed this piece for band, but hadn't released it for band until, I believe it was 1922... the original was for orchestra, and that was released in 1911." So, not only was Arthur able to discuss the cultural context of the piece to a certain degree, he was also able to report on significant dates and various orchestrations of the suite by Holst.

When discussing subcultures within America, Arthur reported playing a piece of music heavily influenced by events in Native American history. Arthur reported seeing this piece as a musical depiction of a Native American tribe that was intercepted in its travels by a group of US cavalry. Arthur explained that the music started with a Native American melody that was peaceful and reflected "how they used to do things in the old days." The music then turned darker and more frantic as "...everything is going off. Shots are being fired." In the end, Arthur remembered his

teacher discussing how these soldiers returned home after killing the entire tribe, and were awarded with medals for their service. Arthur told this story with only the facts as he knew them, and did not pass judgment on either side.

Arthur then reported that he enjoyed playing all of these pieces, because they were something other than a commonly played John Philip Sousa march. Sousa marches, according to Arthur, are pieces that he enjoys playing, but they become very repetitive. Due to this repetitive nature, he finds himself looking for something new and exciting. He enjoys having variety in his band's repertoire. Even though Arthur was able to recount several stories, he still discussed a desire to learn more about the cultural and historical background of the music he plays. His reasoning for this, is that his class "as a band, could expand on the story that the piece is trying to tell." In other words, Arthur says his desire to expand on context is so he may better interpret the musicality of a piece. Along with this desire, Arthur also expressed a desire to play music from a variety of other cultures, including Baltic, Germanic, and Russian music. His reasoning was simply because he likes the way it sounds. Arthur reported that the music he has heard from these cultures is attractive because it sounds dramatic, and can change at any given moment.

As Arthur reflected on his study of music from genres other than Western Classical, he was able to come up with several examples. First, he discussed a piece that he believes was an arrangement of electronic music for band. Though he was not able to report the title of the piece, or the composer, he stated that the percussion

section used several “weird gadgets” to achieve desired affects, specifically the sound of thunder. Similar to the African and Cuban pieces he discussed earlier, this piece was focused on the percussion section, while the band served as an accompaniment and backdrop. Second, Arthur remembered playing popular classic rock tunes such as *25 or 6 to 4*, *Superstition*, *Louie Louie*, and *Frankenstein*. He reported enjoying this music because the songs had catchy melodies, and were simply fun to play. Arthur was also quick to mention that while familiarity helped with his enjoyment of these pieces, he enjoys all music equally if it’s fun to play. He discussed his interest in composers such as Bach, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner. Bach, he said, was part of their standard repertoire in his high school band class. They have a routine of playing various Bach chorales during their daily warm-ups. These chorales serve several purposes for Arthur’s band. First, they use them to tune and get everyone playing. Then, his band director splits them into groups that play the chorales individually. Finally, the entire band plays the chorale one last time, during which Arthur said they focus on making the music sound as beautiful as they can.

To Arthur, playing music of other cultures is an important part of high school band. He expressed being concerned that, if they continue to play only music by American composers, that will be the only music they know. However, by playing music from other countries and cultures, Arthur explained that this would keep band fun, and they could work on playing the music in a way that portrays the story of that culture correctly. Arthur reported not wanting to stick to one culture, but instead

branch out and experience variety in his band's repertoire. He stated: "Right now, I feel like most of our pieces, until our last concert, are pretty generic. They're your typical high school band type of pieces, but every so often we do get this serious piece that is from a different culture, and I think it'd be cool to have... more British, Scottish, Irish music. Scandinavian, and then German and Russian music." Arthur's desire was reportedly to see more variety in his high school band's, otherwise "typical," repertoire.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter involved a restorying of the narratives determined within each case study. The author diligently presented all perspectives shared by the students in the individual interviews, telling the story of each of these students as they recounted their experiences in their high school bands, and articulated their attitudes toward multicultural music education.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief summary of the results on student perceptions regarding and attitudes toward experiencing music from other cultures in their high school band curriculum. This is followed by a discussion of the results, in which the researcher offers his observations and impressions obtained during the interviews, comments on the results, and draws comparisons between the three interviews. Here, the researcher offers connections and conclusions, while highlighting specific points of interest. In this discussion of results, the findings were interpreted through a philosophical lens that multicultural education is important in public school music programs. Care was taken, however, to analyze the data and report the results without bias in an effort to provide an accurate and unbiased interpretation of student voice. Finally, the researcher suggests possible implications for music education and ideas for further research.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate high school band students' perceptions and attitudes toward including music from other cultures in their band programs. The investigation involved three case studies with a population sample of convenience. Names of the three participating high school band students were

changed to protect their identities. Each of the students reported learning a range of music from different countries and genres in their band programs, with varying degrees of historical and cultural information being provided by teachers.

Furthermore, each reported a positive attitude toward band programs being multicultural and an awareness of the importance of doing so.

### **Discussion**

This discussion first addresses each student's individual perspective, and then follows with comparisons among the three.

#### **John**

When discussing music from other cultures, John expressed obvious excitement and enthusiasm as he recalled each piece that he remembered playing. This was made evident in his facial expressions, gestures, and his animated tone of voice. John mentioned the Middle Eastern piece several times through the interview, connecting it not only to culture, but also specifically to religion and spirituality. It was apparent that this music had a profound impact on John, as he mentioned words such as "spiritual," "calming," "church," "chant," and "relaxed." It is clear that while playing this piece, John got something out of it that was more than simply studying the music. His perception of this piece took him outside of the technical aspects of the music, and allowed him to experience a connection to the music that, according

to his description, was an almost elevated state of reality. Similarly, John talked fondly about *the Scottish song he played*, and it was again apparent that his school, and band members, found this traditional folk song to be a powerful and moving piece. He presented a view that this music holds significance to the students who are graduating, and John, even as a freshman, appeared able to empathize with this attitude. However, even though John was able to discuss much of the meaning he felt through this music, he also expressed his perception of insufficient cultural and historical background being provided by the teacher for the pieces. John had a difficult time remembering what, if anything, they had discussed in class and was only able to recall details about the pieces that meant the most to him, or that he remembered enjoying. This lack of detail led John to express a desire to learn more about the music he plays, especially when it comes from another culture with which he is unfamiliar, such as information on the composer, the time period in which it was composed, and the context of the story the piece is telling.

When John discussed musical genres, his words to describe the pieces he played were “on the fun side” and “not serious.” He repeatedly expressed his enjoyment of playing music that was outside of the traditional band repertoire. While this did include music from *Fall Out Boy*, *Star Wars*, and Christmas tunes, the genres he mentioned also included traditional folk music, jazz, and sacred music.

When asked about the importance of playing music from other cultures in his high school band class, John began his answer with the phrase “I think it’s really

important...” As John gave his answer, it was apparent that he believes students can get something *more* out of experiencing music from other cultures. John made the profound statement that performing music from other cultures is “like getting into the culture a little,” which he described as trying to feel what the composer felt. This high-level connection to the music was unexpected to the researcher, and reflected a deeper understanding of cultural significance than had been imagined. To John, it didn’t matter what culture they explored, he simply wanted to learn more about music from around the world. This attitude shows a genuine curiosity about the musical world outside of the USA, and a strong desire to learn.

### **Max**

Max approached his interview much more factually than did John and Arthur. He preferred at first to discuss what specific music they played and to explore talking about the musical work itself. He was the only student to discuss his instrumental part, which provided a very interesting perspective. However, when prompted, Max opened up and shared what he thought without hesitation.

Max listed several pieces he had played that were influenced by other cultures. However, he had trouble coming up with memories of any cultural or historical contexts for these, offering limited information that he had remembered discussing in class. His references pertained more to the musical elements of the repertoire. In discussion of their African piece, Max mentioned the use of the djembe

drums, and how these provided the music with a style that sounded characteristically African, but he could not offer further details. Similarly, when discussing the piece from England, he did not offer cultural background on the folksong melodies in that piece, but he did talk about the history of his instrument, and how it plays a more prominent musical role in England. The same holds true for the other two pieces he discussed. He remembered simply seeing the music video of the original band performing the one piece, and he could do no more than surmise that the second piece was from Native American culture. This might have been for various reasons, though Max did mention having a student teacher who didn't seem to give as much historical/cultural background as his regular band director would have done. However, this might also be because Max is currently enrolled in the second, non-audition band at his school which is typically considered "less skilled" and, in the researcher's own experience, might typically not receive the same detailed instruction as the auditioned wind ensemble. Notably, Max then expressed a desire to learn more about music from other cultures. He said he would like to see more variety in his high school band classroom, and specifically mentioned wanting to play music from Asian cultures. He found this to be unique music that varies greatly from what he is used to playing. The researcher inferred that Max might have been referring to the use of scales and timbres in Asian music that are different from Western music. While was not able to identify further reasons why, he appeared to

understand that the music has sounds that are characteristically different and that draw his attention.

Max talked about several genres, including popular music, rock, jazz, and movie soundtracks that provided some variety throughout the school year. But he also noted that if they kept rehearsing and performing the music for too long, it would eventually become stale, even if it appeared fun and different at first. A very interesting part of this discussion centered on his band playing a medley of music from *The Lion King*. When Max talked about this piece, he broke it down into sections, describing the various tempos and musical styles, and naming the tunes from the movie that were included in the arrangement. Upon further discussion, and some prompting, Max concluded that this piece not only included influences of jazz music, but most likely contained many influences from African culture due to the content and context of the movie itself.

When asked if playing music from other cultures was important, Max's perspective was that not only is it important, it provides variety, broadens students' horizons, and can help them become more accepting of other cultures. His reasoning was sound. Experiencing music from another culture could easily lead to a student becoming curious about other aspects of that culture, outside of the music. Max was coming to his own conclusion that this experience could lead to a thirst for more knowledge, and a curiosity to learn. However, Max's reference to musical variety was something he apparently felt very strongly about as well. He proposed that

introducing new cultures and genres of music would keep band more interesting, and therefore more fun.

### **Arthur**

Arthur was able to provide a unique perspective, as he has played in his high school band program for three years, and has played in both the concert band and wind ensemble. In his interview, Arthur was visibly happy to share his experiences, and often provided very detailed answers with little prompting. He was enthusiastic about the subject of the interview, and had to be limited to one piece per culture in his discussion because he could remember several pieces from certain cultures during his time at high school.

Similar to the other interviews, Arthur provided as much information as he remembered when discussing the cultural and historical contexts of each piece. He used descriptive words and phrases, such as “heart and soul” when describing the drums of Africa, and always responded positively when asked about his enjoyment of the music. Arthur’s perspective of the Celtic repertoire his band performed was the most intriguing. He couldn’t remember if the music was from Ireland or Scotland, but he did recall thinking the composer must have come from that Celtic culture, as the music sounded characteristic of that region. It was, to him, as though the music was truly originating from and immersed in the culture of the area, and not an approximation of the music by an American composer. He felt the same about the

Holst suite. Arthur differentiated each movement during the interview, and tried to describe the culture and feelings he got from each of them. This indicated to the researcher that Arthur likely has a very open mind toward this music, and appears to be making a conscious effort to think deeply about what he plays. He also expressed a desire to know the story behind the music, as was evident in his discussion of the piece he described as being influenced by Native American themes. He was quick to tell the story, and knew many details about the piece's background, or at least what he thought it was trying to portray. Arthur made the mental link between the music and scenes from the story with ease. Considering the enthusiasm of his responses, it was unsurprising when Arthur reported having a very positive attitude toward this music, stating that he enjoyed it and would like to play more. Several times, he highlighted a desire to learn new music and avoid overplaying more familiar music such as Sousa marches. Finally, Arthur's most intriguing answer came in the form of musical interpretation. Whether knowingly or not, Arthur appears to be curious and desiring to know more about a culture, so that he can accurately portray and perform its music.

Arthur expressed a similar attitude when discussing genres of music. He repeatedly said how much he enjoyed playing music like *25 or 6 to 4* and the chorales by Bach. The researcher found it interesting that Arthur didn't appear to care if he was familiar with the music or not. According to Arthur, the more important aspect is that the music is fun and interesting. As long as there is variety to

keep his attention, Arthur appeared to enjoy any music from any culture and genre. He specifically mentioned a desire to play more music by Bach, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner. While he didn't say this explicitly, the snippets of discussions indicate that Arthur's wish list includes performing religious music, ballet, opera, symphonies, German baroque music, German romantic music, and Russian music.

It came as no surprise to the researcher when Arthur expressed his view that playing music from other cultures is as an important part of his musical education. Again, Arthur focused on the variety and the allure of the "new" when he discussed the contrast of overplaying music by American composers. His perspective appeared to be that music from other cultures allows him to explore their stories in order to more accurately perform their music. Additionally, Arthur's attitude toward the study of additional cultures yielded not only a positive response, but a list of cultures, such as Scandinavian, Scottish, Irish, English, German, Russian, and Baltic as ones he would be interested in studying. Throughout the interview process, Arthur maintained a positive attitude and offered interesting insights into his beliefs about the use of music from other cultures.

### **Comparison of data**

In analyzing the three narratives, the researcher was impressed that each student appeared to use critical thinking, providing support for his answers with

well-articulated examples, and displaying an apparent understanding of the implications of his ideas in conversations that followed.

To the researcher's surprise, the results were similar among each student. The reports of the three case studies indicated a number of overlaps, while there were also a few differences between them. Each of the three students reported having played repertoire in their high school bands that spanned a variety of cultures and genres. All three reported playing some form of Celtic music and a range of music from other Western European countries, such as England and Germany. Mention was made of Russia and the Middle East by only one student, and Africa was mentioned by two. The only American subcultures mentioned were jazz and Native American music.

All three students reported enjoying the experience of playing music from other cultures. While their specific answers and experiences varied to some extent, all three students expressed a desire to learn more repertoire from diverse cultures around the world, most especially for the sake of experiencing variety. The author found it intriguing that three students from three different band programs all wished they were presented with more variety in the music that they play. All of them mentioned some form of boredom with standard repertoire as a reason, but they all provided some musical reasons as well.

The researcher noted during the analysis that there were some broad cultural representations from various parts of the world that appeared to be missing

altogether from their reported repertoire. For example, none of these students reported playing any music from Asian, Eastern European, Indian, Mexican, South American, or Scandinavian cultures. The students responded with positive attitudes toward the idea of playing music from additional cultures, and included lists of additional cultures they would like to see in their repertoire. It was not surprising to the researcher, then, that this list included Asian, Eastern European, Baltic, and Russian pieces, as these were the least frequently reported as performed by the students.

The discussion then moved away from geographically-based musical cultures, to musical subcultures associated with genres. All three students reported performing genres besides Western classical music in their bands, referring mostly to popular or rock music. Electronic music, jazz, sacred music, folk music, and movie soundtracks also were mentioned. The researcher noted that no student reported playing any American country music, and that electronic music was by far the least-discussed of any genres that were mentioned.

Analysis of their accounts indicates that the amount of information on the historical and cultural contexts of this repertoire given by the teachers varied in each case. In some cases, this information appeared to be more extensive, while in others, the students were unable to recall any contextual or background information being given. For Max, this was also potentially attributed to the fact that he had a student

teacher at the time who may not have addressed this issue in the way that his full-time band director usually would have done.

Additionally, all three students expressed similar positive attitudes toward multicultural music education. They all expressed their enjoyment while playing music from diverse cultures and genres. The students all expressed the view that studying music from other cultures is an important part of music education. The reasoning for this varied among the students, including what they referred to as their enjoyment of the music; a simple desire for more variety; understanding of the musical interpretation; acceptance of other cultures; a thirst for knowledge due to their personal curiosity; and a desire to know more about the world around them. Throughout the interviews, these students regularly reported enjoying the break from “tradition” when performing music that was new and different. It became apparent to the researcher that these three students share some similar perspectives on musical diversity. Not only did the three report their belief in the importance of multicultural music education, they all expressed needing more multicultural music in order to satisfy their curiosity and desire to learn. Additionally, they all reported that playing music from other cultures provides new experiences, and a chance for them to learn about the music beyond the notes on the page. Each student responded positively toward the idea of expanding their musical experience.

Some additional trends and differences became evident during data analysis. Firstly (and understandably), the older the student was in this study, the more

experiences in high school band were described. It is a reasonable assumption that the longer students stay in their band program, the more exposure to music of other cultures they might experience, as each year the teacher might be providing the students with an additional range of music.

### **Implications for Music Education**

Knowledge gained through this study may be valuable in informing music educators interested in designing and implementing multicultural education programs. These students all expressed that their band programs could benefit from additional music spanning other cultures and genres. These students suggest that their music selection gets stale, especially when played for several months at a time, and that having this new music would help keep the program more exciting. This in turn, could be a draw to keep more students in band programs that are shrinking. Potentially, some band classes could be shrinking due in part to students feeling bored and recognizing a lack of variety. These student perspectives suggest that, by expanding the musical repertoire of a band program, the students involved will have more fun playing and performing.

Secondly, this study could influence the way teachers approach teaching music from other cultures. While all three students did report receiving cultural and historical background for some of their pieces, they all reported desiring more. However, it is important to note here that this may not be the fault of the teacher. It

could be that each of these students' band directors gave detailed information on each of the pieces they played. This study does not take into account student attendance, nor does it attempt to state that these students have infallible attention spans and memory. It could simply be that they do not remember, or were not paying attention. This is something that can also not just be assumed, however, as these students may have heard every word their teacher said, had perfect attendance, and never received any more detail than they reported.

None of these case study results is generalizable. While not every school caters to the same demographics, talent levels, and volume of students, band directors might find that experimenting with additional music from other cultures and genres may be helpful in garnering further student interest in their program and maintaining student enrollment. The overwhelmingly positive student experiences and attitudes expressed in these three case studies toward multicultural music education are certainly encouraging.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The researcher suggests the need for nation-wide or world-wide investigations of student perceptions of, and attitudes toward, multiculturalism in music education. Together, these studies might build a picture of trends across the nation and around the globe. Additional studies might also investigate program diversity in orchestra and choir programs, to see if these students have a different

perspective from those in band programs. Specific research might address the cultures and subcultures of the student populations within music classrooms and how that is addressed in music education programs. Future studies may also take into account the musical tastes and desires of students not currently or previously enrolled in formal public school music programs, and of the curricular diversity needed to attract them into our public school music programs. Additionally, it might be interesting to examine band repertoire in music publications in the USA to see what publishers offer in terms of multicultural band literature. A study of this nature might focus on diverse nationalities of composers and/or on North American composers writing in the style of other cultures. It is acknowledged that some of the pieces discussed in this study might involve the latter. Studies might also examine values in performing diverse ethnic music on traditional band instruments, considering the inherent impact on the authenticity of the sound. Finally, studies might focus on a broad range of diversity issues beyond multiculturalism in curricula, paying particular attention to special-needs students, LGBTQ students, etc.

## **Conclusion**

Analysis of these three case studies has provided the researcher with valuable insights that will inform his own teaching practices. It is hoped that the results might also inform music teachers considering the implementation or expansion of a multicultural curriculum. It is apparent from the results that there are students in the

USA who are increasingly interested in learning about music from cultures around the world, and showing a desire and curiosity to learn music beyond what is traditionally offered in high school band programs. The researcher suggests that multiculturalism in music education is a topic worthy of on-going examination, and that implementation of diverse programs may contribute toward the success of band programs and toward the recruitment of non-traditional students. It is anticipated that this study might inspire further focus on student voice in high school band programs, leading to a better understanding of what students want out of their school music programs. After all, the researcher suggests that school music education essentially serves the students and the life-long musical journeys on which they embark with family, friends, and peers through the art of sound.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Parent Permission and Student Consent Letter**

[PRINTED ON EWU MUSIC DEPARTMENT LETTERHEAD]

#### **Consent Form**

*Student Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding the Diversity of Music in Their High School Band Classroom*

Nathan Westlund, Graduate Student, EWU Music Department, 509.205.1021  
Dr. Sheila Woodward: supervisor

#### **Purpose and Benefits**

The purpose of this study will be to investigate high school band student perception of diversity in the curriculum and their attitudes towards this. The results of this study may benefit music teachers looking to expand upon the cultural and musical diversity in their classrooms.

#### **Procedures**

After consent has been gathered through the signing of this form, each participant will individually schedule a time with the researcher for their interview. Unless otherwise requested, the interview will take place at the normal location for studio lessons. The interview process should take no more than 30 minutes. Please be aware that the interviews will be audio recorded (no video). Washington State law provides that private conversations may not be recorded, intercepted, or divulged without permission of the individual(s) involved. For your reference, sample questions are provided below:

- How important do you think it is to play music of countries and cultures from around the world?
- Did your band director tell you about any historical or cultural context of the piece while you were learning the music?

Throughout the course of the interview, students are free not to answer any questions which they find objectionable. There will be no consequences for not answering questions of this nature.

#### **Risk, Stress or Discomfort**



## **Appendix B:**

### **Interview Template**

Interview Subject Number: \_\_\_\_\_

*This form serves as a guideline to the interview process. It is anticipated that additional questions or prompts may be needed during the interview and will be emergent based on the responses of the students.*

#### **Demographics:**

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Year in High School:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

#### **Script:**

*Hello! In our interview today we will be discussing musical diversity in your high school classroom. As a reminder, all names of students, teachers, schools, and others will be taken out of the final report to protect your privacy. Do you have any questions about the interview before we proceed?*

#### **Questions:**

First, I'd like to know if you have studied any music repertoire from a country other than the USA in your high school band class. I'm going to list a number of countries, and you can tell me if you remember playing music from that country. It's okay if you are not sure.

*For each region that the student remembers playing music from, the following questions will be asked:*

- Can you describe a piece that you remember from [country/region]?
- Did your band director tell you about any historical or cultural context of the piece while you were learning the music?
- Additional prompts may be needed.

Prompts:

- Asia
- Africa
- Eastern Europe (Hungary, Baltic States, etc.)
- India
- Mexico and South America
- Middle East (Israel, Palestine, Iraq, etc.)
- Russia
- Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, Finland, etc.)
- Western Europe (England, France, Germany, Scotland, etc.)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Next, what about music from cultures within the USA such as...

- African American
- Native American

*Questions to be used depending on student responses:*

- So, did you enjoy playing these pieces and learning about the other cultures?
- Do you wish you had learned more about the pieces you were studying?
- Would you have liked to learn music from any of these cultures?
- Improvised questions as needed.

Have you studied any genres other than Western Classical in your high school band class?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If yes, which genres of music have you studied?

*For each genre the student remembers playing, the following questions will be asked:*

- Can you describe the music you played from this genre?
- Did you enjoy playing [genre] in your band class?
- Additional prompts may be needed.

Prompt:

- Country
- Electronic
- Folk/World
- Jazz
- Popular
- Rock
- Sacred
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Closing Questions:**

How important do you think it is to play music of countries and cultures from around the world? Please explain your answer.

Would you like to study more music from other countries and cultures in your band class? If so, what kind of music would you like to see more of?

**VITA**

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