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Final Response

As a music educator, I know that my job is to teach students music. However, I know that there is a lot more to the job. Humans are relational creatures, so in this socialized world, learning must foster relationships. We also have a unique story; an identity (positionality). Aware of these natural phenomena, a thoughtful educator must not only think objectively about educating but facilitate learning by seeing each student with unique abilities and needs. Learning gets interrupted when students feel that they are not viable contributors to the learning process. They can't learn about themselves or music if they are not given an opportunity to express their voice. Inclusion is the path that connects students to their learning environment. Including involves being part of the collective, while maintaining your individual positionality. There are many strategies I learned in this course that can help me create a positive inclusive learning environment. It is important to understand that inclusion is not a race. There is no finish line or trophy to be won for successful inclusion. It is a process, and we continue to learn more and more about inclusion. Educators are lifelong learners, and this ethos has a moral component that applies to all of us as humans. We all are lifelong learners, in our various capacities. As a learner, what are some inclusive strategies I can apply to my role as a music educator?

One strategy is to be aware of the stereotypes and language we use as teachers. This must be primary in addressing classroom engagement. Our stereotypes of others inform the language we use. It develops my beliefs before getting to know your students; it already puts a label on them, so they feel they must remove their individuality. Negative stereotypes affect behavior. Racial stereotypes lead to dominant/ privileged groups of people to behave unjustly towards

minorities (ex. law enforcement and black/brown citizens). Privilege also informs our stereotypes of others. According to Sensoy & DiAngelo, “many aspects of our privilege are intertwined into our very identities and personalities—how we see ourselves in relation to those around us and thus how we interact with them” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 100). In discussing privilege, it is important to understand the meaning of a dominant group. Dominant groups enjoy certain rights and freedoms at the expense of others. Intersectionality means we all exist in a dominant group in some form of social structure: whether it be race, gender, abled bodied, etc. It is important as educators to humble ourselves and understand our privilege in order to avoid negative stereotypes and an environment of social oppression in the classroom. A dominant group uses stereotypes to classify behaviour as ‘normal’. In the teaching world, educators use their privilege to discuss what is ‘normal’ learning in curriculums. Sensoy & DiAngelo state, “...normal itself is socially constructed (Campbell, 2012). Normal is the line drawn around an arbitrary set of ideas a group determines as acceptable in a given place and time” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 85). When discussing ‘normal’, we need to examine what that means to people with learning disabilities and impairments. People with ASD or other disabilities are classified as not ‘normal’ by dominant groups. The language used to describe them are weird, incapable of socially connecting, incompetent, etc. Even positive stereotypes like people with autism are ‘savants’ or positive language like they are ‘warm’ still can be exclusive and exerting privilege. The rationale is that people with privilege can use the positive stories and experiences ASD individuals have and tell it from their perspective. This is a form of exclusion. Lastly, stereotypes are enforced by the language we speak. In the article *Autistic people’s perspectives on stereotypes: An interpretative phenomenological analysis*, autistic people were asked about other’s preconceptions about them. Bob, Margaret and Steven (who are participants

in this study), indicate that language like ‘weird’ or ‘you’ creates an exclusive environment and boundaries (perimeters) that they embrace (Treweek et al., 2019, p. 763). Removing our preconceived attitudes (stereotypes), and understanding our privilege helps us create honest and inclusive language, which improves classroom engagement.

Once we are aware of our privilege, stereotypes, and language, we can focus on the concept of spaces for dialogue (communication) and participation (involvement). Dialogue helps great spaces for ‘wonderment’. Although, we are taught that in order to have inclusive dialogue, we have to be neutral; avoid controversy. Chapter 11 from *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, states:

...schools have to educate students about the nation’s social history; provide a multitude of perspectives; foster critical thinking and perspective taking; enhance students’ stamina for engaging with challenging ideas; and improve students’ ability to engage with research, raise critical questions, evaluate alternative explanations, tolerate ambiguity, and foster collaboration. Without these skills, young people are ill equipped to advance a socially just, democratic nation state. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p.186)

We have to be careful of the language we use when dialoguing, but it doesn’t mean we have to be neutral or avoid controversy. Our positionality represents our individuality and our privilege. This means that we all think differently and should not be ashamed or afraid to be different, while understanding the dynamics of our privilege. Educators need to reflect and commit to creating dialogue that is open to new perspectives and deepening cross-cultural relationships, instead of winners and losers’ debates.

Participation is essential for creating an inclusive classroom. Many articles and guest lectures in this course provide strategies that can help music educators succeed in student

involvement. Dr. Donald DeVito, music director at Rawlings Elementary Center for Fine Arts, wrote an article and gave a lecture on his many inclusive strategies. “The Rawlings approach developed in this project report documented student cultural identity through a variety of assessment means and techniques” (DeVito et al., 2020, p. 2). In a music setting, DeVito would involve his students in a cultural music exchange with people from different countries. He would use cameras and other technology to bring different cultures into the classroom. He will also research the cultural history in his community and provide historical context (background information) on different communities. He stressed that this is important in avoiding appropriation by being intentional about creating personal experiences within different cultures. I learned that DeVito assesses not on how well students exchange their culture or identity, but their *responsiveness* to cultural experiences. Educators need to provide meaningful cultural learning, in order for students to avoid making assumptions.

What does music do differently than talking? Music is a place where people can express what they cannot put into words. I learned this from Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell. She is a professor and music therapist that explores the topic of community music therapy and participatory performance. The traditional music therapy world is reluctant to explore new practices outside of the clinical realm (how clients respond to the music), however Michell states that the clients respond better when they have an outlet to express themselves musically. The “Coffee House” is a participatory performance event that is highlighted in Michell’s article. Music therapy is not using music to achieve non-musical goals (Mitchell, 2019, p.3), but instead to achieve musical goals. Community music therapist seek to use performance to address the needs of their clients. “Where participation, rather than aesthetic standard, defines success, anyone can participate, and the atmosphere is undeniably supportive” (Mitchell, 2019, p. 7). Participatory performance is not

about judging musical quality and performers, but to overcome anxiety and increase self-efficacy through collaborative musicking. Educators are not music therapist, but we need to ask: In what way can participatory performance help students at our school? Music educators should offer opportunities away from the assessments and structured performances, to contribute to community music making. Dr. Michell quotes Jon Hawkes (community musician), that “the ultimate function of music is to connect the people who are playing it rather than to communicate to an audience of passive observers” (Mitchell, 2019, p. 8).

In conclusion, music educators must see that there is more to the job of just teaching music. We must daily reflect on how we can improve on meaningful inclusion in the classroom. Roundtable talks and dialoguing with students, are great ways to get a framework on their thinking (positionality). Push the boundaries of discussion; be intentional and avoid neutrality. Understand your privilege and seek artistic truth through preparation (understanding context). Be aware of your own stereotypes and language and look for ways to engage students meaningfully.

References

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