Towards cultural responsiveness in music instruction with black detained youth: an analytic autoethnography

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Towards cultural responsiveness in music instruction with black detained youth: an analytic autoethnography

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There is an increased interest in music instruction and research with incarcerated populations. Amid this attention is a need to learn more about how music teachers develop competencies for working with juvenile offenders and navigate this unfamiliar context, how they come to learn more about culturally diverse music, and how they become aware of cultural influences. Although the body of literature on music instruction within correctional settings continues to grow, more examples of a teacher's personal journey towards cultural responsiveness in correctional facilities is warranted. Using a framework for cultural responsiveness attributed to Ladson-Billings, this analytic autoethnographic research highlights the author's personal journey towards becoming culturally responsive to Black youth detained in the criminal court system in Chicago, IL. Qualitative data collected for two years were analysed for emergent themes related to achieving musical success, validating cultural competence, and developing critical consciousness. Findings support previous research about the influence that culture may have on music teaching and learning.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching; music composition; juvenile offenders; hip-hop music

Introduction

I am Black. I am male. I am incarcerated. These three statements reflect a narrative brought to us daily by media outlets and other venues of popular culture. The same narrative is also the sad reality for many of today's marginal citizens. In her seminal work, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness*, Alexander (2012) has argued that prisons represent a systematic form of economic and social disenfranchisement for people of colour, especially black men. This perspective raises an essential question: If current crime rates are reportedly at historic lows, then why have the rates of incarceration for men of colour increased drastically over the past three decades? Although people of colour make up about 30% of the overall US population, they account for over 60% of those imprisoned (Kerby 2013).

I am also Black and male, but unlike numerous others to whom the beginning three sentences apply, I found my way to jail by choice. For the past two years I have freely gone beyond the bars of the Chicago criminal court system to teach music composition to incarcerated youth and to conduct research in this setting. A desire

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for social justice and a deep-seated passion have sounded the clarion call that led me to the work of providing juvenile offenders with the music instruction[1] they unabashedly crave and so willingly deserve. An unwavering desire to bring voice to the musical creations of individuals silenced by the system has kept me committed to this important endeavour well beyond my initial experience as a graduate instructor during doctoral studies.

Several music education researchers have championed the impact of music instruction as a powerful tool in 'liberating' the detained (Abrahams, Rowland, and Kohler 2012; Cohen 2010; Hickey 2008; Shieh 2010). In a review of the literature about music instruction for imprisoned and detained youth, Daykin et al. (2011) reported that music could be a vital tool for helping these young people to cope, make meaning, and better manage their lives. Additionally, music has been found to be a way for expressing complicated emotions and contradictory thoughts (de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009), at the same time allowing incarcerated individuals a platform to communicate their hopes and dreams. These benefits highlight a pressing need for an education in music to be available to these marginal citizens.

Regarding music instruction in correctional settings, Cohen (2010, 3) has emphasised that there remains:

> an important need for more people to consider and examine issues surrounding this topic, such as the role of music in prison contexts, the relationships between offenders' musical experiences and broader social issues, such as offenders' obligations to society, to victims and to their families.

I have argued previously that a social justice framework must guide teachers' efforts when working with incarcerated youth if outcomes are to be worthwhile to the profession and for the students involved in these classes and music projects (Hickey and Thompson 2013). Connell (1989) warned that 'taking the standpoint of the least advantaged and understanding the real relationships and processes that generate advantage and disadvantage is essential in evaluating the practical consequences of any action that claims to embody the interests of the least advantaged' (125). To this end, teaching must be responsive to the cultural needs of students if learning is to be made more effective for them.

Conceptual framework

Culturally responsive pedagogies served as a conceptual frame for this research. Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally relevant teaching as 'a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes' (17–18). Gay (2000) stressed the importance of culturally responsive teaching by emphasising that this pedagogy uses 'the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them', further highlighting that the pedagogy 'teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming' (29). In a later text, Gay connected cultural relevance to teachers' practices, suggesting that the pedagogy '[uses] the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively' (Gay

2002, 106). Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified six strands that culturally responsive teachers demonstrate. Such a teacher:

> (a) is socioculturally conscious, that is, recognizes that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one's location in the social order; (b) has affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to overcome; (c) sees himself or herself as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsible to all students; (d) understands how learners construct knowledge and is capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction; (e) knows about the lives of his or her students; and (f) uses his or her knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar. (21)

Culturally responsive pedagogies have become vital to music classrooms and the music educators working within them. Some researchers assert that a more accurate picture is needed that would allow us to examine how music teachers develop the competencies needed for working in culturally diverse settings (Butler, Lind, and McKoy 2007). As an example of this development, Abril (2009) examined how a White, non-Hispanic music teacher responded to the cultural backgrounds of Hispanic students enrolled in the middle-school instrumental programme. The researcher found that concepts such as a 'musical and cultural *self* and *other'* (i.e. the teacher's two disconnected identities: a popular music identity outside of the classroom and a formal music education identity prominent in the classroom) informed the teacher's culturally responsive teaching practices and became sources of professional and personal tensions for the teacher. Abril (2009, 89) recommended that music educators who were interested in becoming more culturally responsive to the students they served should strongly 'rethink their usual practices [concerning] course offerings, pedagogy, interactions with students and parents while also giving more thought to 'the selected music and other materials used in instruction'.

But for many teachers – however accommodating they may wish to be – providing instruction that responds to the cultural needs of their students can prove problematic (Butler, Lind, and McKoy 2007; Kelly 2003; McKoy 2013). Butler, Lind, and McKoy (2007) highlighted Benham's (2003) personal reflection of his experience teaching middle-school string students, describing how he was viewed as a cultural *outsider* in his teaching setting. These authors noted that his 'teaching strategies and approaches that had been successful in other instructional environments were not effective with these students' (Butler, Lind, and McKoy 2007, 249). If we agree that culture matters in music teaching and learning, then culturally responsive pedagogies may be one way to provide music instruction that is meaningful and valid for all students. To this end, more research exploring effective teaching strategies and approaches for working in diverse teaching environments may provide a clearer picture of how music teachers develop these competencies.

Although the body of literature on music instruction within correctional settings continues to grow, more examples of a teacher's personal journey towards cultural responsiveness in correctional facilities is warranted (see Abrahams, Rowland, and Kohler 2012; Hickey 2008; and Shieh 2010 for more personal examples). How might this development of pedagogies for cultural responsiveness in the context of correctional facilities expand our notions of culturally responsive teaching practices?

Additionally, how could more research tracking the individual trajectories of teachers who have worked in the context of correctional facilities help the profession to understand what distinguishes these settings? Undoubtedly, working with detained youth requires effective, evidence-based strategies (Bittman, Dickson, and Coddington 2009). Similar to previous research about the influence culture may have on music instruction, (Abril 2009; Butler, Lind, & McKoy 2007), I argue that a teacher's strategies in correctional settings can only be effective when they are grounded in and relate to the culture of both the students and the neighbourhoods from which they come.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to highlight my journey towards being a culturally responsive music teacher within the context of a correctional facility. I do so by emphasising a specific pedagogical approach for teaching (culturally responsive pedagogies) used with a specific cultural group (Black detained youth). This article uses a framework for culturally responsive pedagogies attributed to Ladson-Billings (1995, 160), where she promoted three pillars for culturally relevant pedagogies as (1) experiences that help students achieve academic success, (2) experiences that validate students' cultural competence, and (3) experiences that assist students in developing critical consciousness.

Background and context

Journeys from the familiar to the unknown are almost always unsettling. I spent ten years developing a certain degree of competency in teaching choirs and general music. I enjoyed working with performing ensembles and felt comfortable in the structured and often whimsical environment of a choir room. My success as a teacher had stemmed from having a personality that invigorated students and became the hallmark of my teaching style. When I was asked by a professor during my doctoral studies if I might be interested in serving as her graduate assistant for a music composition project with incarcerated youth, I agreed to do so since I was interested in expanding my teaching experiences beyond performing ensembles to include more creative aspects of music making. Music composition had seemed a good fit for me, but working with detained youth sounded like an opportunity to leave my 'comfort zone' and take on a worthy endeavour (not to mention one that would be a good source of stories to tell at dinner parties!).

The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Centre (JTDC) housed 10–16-year-olds who had legal action pending in the Cook County courts or were being transferred from juvenile court jurisdiction to criminal court. The Chicago Youth Justice Data Project (2011) reported that an estimated 5271 young people were admitted to JTDC in 2010, of which 4800 were male and 468 were female (the report did not provide data about the discrepancy of the remaining three youth in their statistics). Of this total, approximately 83% of the detained youths self-identified as being Black and 11% self-identified as being Hispanic/Latino. Over 60% of these youths were 15 or 16 years old. Although they were detained for an average of 23 days, Casas (2011) highlighted that the average daily population at JTDC had

reached its lowest level in at least three decades, reporting an estimated population decrease from 325 in 2010 to less than 275 throughout the first quarter of 2011.

My faculty advisor informed me that we would work with two distinct inmate populations. The first group was in temporary detention, having committed minor offences. As a result, students in this group were highly transient, often detained from two days to two weeks or more. Those in the second group were called 'Automatic Transfers' because they had committed more egregious crimes and were awaiting transfer to a more permanent facility when they turned 17 years old and would no longer be considered juveniles.

Method

Research design

An analytic autoethnography served as the research design for this study. Ellis and Bochner (2000) described autoethnographic research as a 'study and procedure that connects the personal to the cultural' (739) where 'authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions' (Ellis 2004, 46). The researcher using an analytic autoethnographic approach is generally engaged with a social group, setting, or society as a full and dynamic member but holds a distinctly visible identity as a mindful researcher and social actor inside the ethnographic content (Maréchal 2010).

A characteristic of analytic autoethnographic research is the 'systematic, self-conscious introspection' that allows researchers to analyse their connections to, actions within, and interpretations of the research setting (Maréchal 2010, 43). Maréchal (2010) asserts, 'researchers' own feelings and experiences are included in the ethnographic narrative, made visible and regarded as important data for understanding the social world observed, yielding both self and social knowledge' (43). In addition to the visibility of the researcher's experiences and thoughts, the analysis also accounts for other informants and characters, thereby moving beyond the self of the writer solely (Anderson 2006).

An analytic autoethnography was chosen as the research design for this study because this methodology allowed me, as a researcher, to reflect on the extent to which my own experiences within this culture connect with and offer insights about the culture being studied and the development of culturally responsive pedagogies used. Certainly, teachers' theorised reflections that come from conducting their own research about their practice and perspectives can be very informative to any professional discipline (Zeichner and Tabachnick 1991). Despite the value of such reflective practice, evidence of autoethnographic approaches in music education research has remained minimal (Roulston 2007).

Data collection

Data were collected between September 2011 and June 2013 at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Centre. Data included site observations (Creswell 2012) and field notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) generated at the end of weekly music classes taught in ten-week cycles. Jottings (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) were made inconspicuously in a small journal to guard against any fleeting thoughts and used to generate field notes. Field notes sought to capture what

Schwab (1983) identified as the 'Four Commonplaces' in education: the teacher, the learner, the subject matter, and the context. I was interested in both the interactions of these commonplaces and how they functioned independently in this setting. Data were later analysed for emergent themes related to culturally responsive pedagogies. In this study, prolonged engagement in the field and peer debriefing were employed in order to manage the threats to trustworthiness of the research findings (Creswell 2012). Peer debriefing of data findings, for example, was especially helpful for understanding how my personal perspectives and values may have affected these findings (Spall 1998).

Within Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework I have interspersed actual examples taken from music composition lessons that occurred between 2011 and 2013 with juvenile offenders held in a detention centre in Chicago, IL. These examples are intended to help the reader better conceptualise cultural responsiveness within this particular context. Additionally, these examples are intended to be informative rather than to provide a rule of thumb applicable in all cases. Certainly, the experiences highlighted here represent only one aspect of the characteristics of inmates and their musical preferences and practices; the examples are not intended as stereotypical narratives relating to all inmates.

A caveat

I also make one caveat regarding racial and cultural perception that is essential to my core beliefs about any teacher moving from the familiar to the unknown, especially in cases where teachers differ from the students they serve in terms of race and/or culture. Although I shared the same race with the majority of these students, I was fully aware that stark differences remained regarding the cultures – both social and musical – with which we identified. For example, my refined middle-class upbringing was easily noticeable, and when I joked with friends about being from the 'hood', they quickly retorted that I must have meant the 'neighbourhood' (as in Mr Rogers' Neighbourhood implying a decidedly middle-class environment). Certainly, my lived experiences and background as a North Carolina native were extremely different from those of many of these students, who mostly hailed from the south and west sides of Chicago. Despite our shared race, I, like many of my teaching peers, had to develop the knowledge, skills and disposition needed to be an effective, culturally responsive teacher to these students. My own culture betrayed a lack of knowledge about the lived experiences of these students and their musical preferences, as well as cultural practices. Another example of this distinction was quite evident when I cut my dreadlocks after a year working in the facility. The boys laughed at me in a friendly way and were generally curious about my decision to rid myself of the outward cultural marker of blackness that had eased my access to these ethnically similar students and enabled me to enter their world, even when I did not quite understand that world fully. Other teachers may have experienced similar bouts of heightened awareness of cultural differences. To this end, the following represents my journey towards becoming culturally responsive in music instruction while working with students detained in the criminal justice system. Specific tenets of this research include achieving academic (music) success, validating cultural competence, and developing critical consciousness.

Findings

Experiences that help students achieve academic success

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that teaching should impact students' academic needs through 'literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills' (160). For the purposes of music education, substituting 'academic' with 'musical' in reference to success opens myriad discussions about the experiences of young people involved with music instruction. What does it mean to achieve musical success? How might the teaching context alter and expand conceptions of success? These questions about success were essential to how I would eventually assess student progress because I had no reference for what success might look like in this setting. If culturally responsive teachers use the ethnic and culturally diverse content of students in their curriculums (Gay 2002), then learning Western notation and Italian terminology associated with traditional music programmes seemed too removed from the cultural norms and practices of students detained in the criminal justice system. These detained students were more interested in developing production and recording skills, writing lyrics and performing. Reimer (2003) argued that music education ought to 'reflect the realities of our multimusical culture' (11). Rap and hip-hop music represent a part of the American musical tapestry that cannot be ignored. Composing lyrics, creating instrumental beats and using production skills to make compositions into quality musical products can all provide, in many ways, rich and meaningful musical experiences for many students.

The students I encountered demonstrated success in ways I had not anticipated. Their ability to discriminate among timbres of sounds according to the degree of their authenticity for the cultural aesthetic of hip-hop was highly developed. For example, during an entry-level activity, students were asked to find their favourite sounds in GarageBand and use these sounds to record a three-track composition. Students really enjoyed this activity since it represented for many of them their first experience using the GarageBand software and a first attempt at composing. I walked around and monitored, often showing students some of my favourite sounds. To my surprise, the guys quickly informed me that some of those sounds simply were not culturally legitimate within the particular style of rap for which they were composing. Many of these boys expressed concern that including those sounds in their music compositions could hinder the composition's overall appeal. In doing so, they demonstrated a refined ability to discriminate between musical subgenres. They were able to determine the strength and weakness of potential beats, narrative themes, and rap flows. They could access the potential success of music within the community and also within commercial markets. I validated their concerns and cultural competence, and in doing so, built trust and respect within the classroom. Gay (2002) suggested that one of the elements of culturally responsive teaching is 'demonstrating caring and building learning communities' (106). And since school can be an alien and hostile place for some racial and ethnically diverse students, establishing a learning community in the music classroom around respect and trust was essential to their perception of academic success.

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that culturally relevant teaching should be based upon high standards of excellence for the students served. She affirmed that cultural responsiveness means that teachers must attend to students' academic needs, even demanding and reinforcing academic excellence for students and not just

attempting to appease them. I will admit that my initial critiques of and standards for student work were less demanding than my later efforts, after my own confidence about working in this setting had increased. I tracked student progress biweekly by assessing the artistic merit of their work based on parameters developed by the local arts organisation to which my faculty advisor and I were members. Artistic merits included arts literacy (e.g. appropriate use of key vocabulary terms), arts making (e.g. appropriate, neat, and creative use of mediums), and interpretive and evaluation skills (e.g. discussion, analysis, and evaluation of music from an aesthetic perspective). I also conducted formative assessments of their work weekly by listening to and viewing their compositions in Garageband to determine what compositional elements were incorporated. Additionally, students assessed their own work by providing written reflections of their music compositions using a daily activities report form. These reflections uncovered what students felt had gone well with their work and also those areas that had been problematic. Data from these assessments indicated that many students had achieved and excelled in academic/ musical success in music composition.

Experiences that validate the cultural competence of students' experiences and communities

Using students' cultural backgrounds as a tool for learning is essential in culturally responsive pedagogies (Ladson-Billings 1995). Teachers must validate a student's culture and the competence of students' experiences and communities. One cultural component is the music preferences of students, which, for the students detained in JTDC, were largely rap and hip-hop styles. These styles are also consistent with related research regarding the music preferences for detained youth (Daykin et al. 2011). Norfleet (2006) defined the qualities of hip-hop, describing it as a form of creative expression, a sensibility, and an aesthetic, with rap music as 'the most celebrated component' (353) of hip-hop culture. Some researchers contend that young people may respond positively to rap music and hip-hop styles because these song forms reflect the cultural backgrounds of incarcerated individuals and constitute what they view as *their* music (Daykin et al. 2011). A connection to music as a form of identity was evident in the music preferences of Bobby,[2] a 15-year-old male from the Englewood neighbourhood of Chicago. Bobby expressed an interest in music and took to the music composition class right away. He came to class with a notebook filled with lyrics waiting to be recorded. It was difficult not to notice Bobby's music, for it contained many curse words and often included gang-related subject matters and made many promises that were not appropriate for school music education. In trying to address these ideas with Bobby and hoping to convince him to alter the themes within the music, he responded, 'That's just how my music is'. Bobby was not convinced that making his music 'nice' truly represented his music or his identity as an artist. I certainly did not want to send a message to Bobby or any other student that *their* music was subordinate to other styles, nor did I intend to trick them into exchanging their lyrics for texts deemed more socially and morally acceptable.

Another aspect of students' cultural competence was evident in their use of sampling, a technique used in hip-hop and rap music composition. Hip-hop artists have traditionally used the technique of digitally sampling pre-recorded music into

their new music creations (Rose 1994; Schloss 2004). According to Schloss (2004), 'looking at sampling as a discrete activity that individuals choose to engage in for specific reasons allows us to ask questions about who those individuals are, what their reasons may be, and what their choices can tell us about these questions' (51). Take, for instance, a conversation about sampling choices that I had with Dwayne, a detained 16-year-old African American male from Chicago's West Side. Dwayne informed me that he chose to sample portions of a rap song by Carl Terrell Mitchell, who raps under the alias of Twista, a Chicago-based rapper known for the speed of his rap flow. He explained further that this choice was a way to incorporate specific musical elements within his compositions and also to pay homage to Twista's music. I was certainly curious about Dwayne's compositional process, but I became more interested in learning what Dwayne's sampling choices uncovered about the multiple aspects of his identity and musical preferences. Sampling, in this sense, served not only as an important technique for music composition, but also as a means to better understand, as Schloss (2004) suggested, the identities of these students and the distinctions between musical preferences that are important for their peer groups. The same kind of identity-assertion through sampling was clearly evident in Jay-Z's writings (2010), in which he highlighted how sampling helped him and his peers to create and reconstruct the world in which they lived. He stated:

> We were kids without fathers … so we found our fathers on wax [music records that were originally wax cylinders] and on the streets and in history, and in a way, that was a gift. We got to pick and choose the ancestors who would inspire the world we were going to make for ourselves … Our fathers were gone, usually because they just bounced, but we took their old records and used them to build something fresh. (Jay-Z 2010, 255)

The process by which artists build something fresh is, according to Ploof (2012), the 'requisite outcome of sampling or appropriating words and images' (49). The compositional choices that students in my music composition class made – by appropriating narrative texts and musical imagery – painted a musical portrait of them as individuals and musical artists. These choices uncovered a body of knowledge about the artists with which students identify, the musical structures and sounds they prefer, and the meanings these choices infer about their musical personalities and creative pursuits. Using sampling as a methodological tool for inquiry into the music-making process made it possible to be 'concerned with the moral, social, and aesthetic standards that sample-based hip hop producers have articulated with regard to the music they produce' (Schloss 2004, 12).

Ploof (2012) warned, however, that these words and images 'can't simply be lifted from their original sources' (49). Rather, if these new musical pieces are to be something fresh, as Jay-Z (2010) suggested, then new works of art must incorporate them in meaningful ways that honour what came before them. Take, for example, a lesson on sampling techniques and choices that I taught. During the lesson, students explored the idea of meaningful and artistic appropriation of musical material of the tune 'It's a Hard Knock Life', from the 1982 movie version of the Broadway musical 'Annie', and Jay-Z's sampling of it in his 1998 single 'Hard Knock Life' (Ghetto Album). Jay-Z's adaptation of the song sampled the introduction and chorus from the movie version of 'Annie' to demonstrate the connection – whether ironically or

real – between the 'hard knock' lives of orphaned girls living in 1930s New York and his own contemporary life as a Black male in New York's inner city. Through this appropriation, Jay-Z was able to build something fresh musically that honoured the music and narrative structures of its musical predecessor. Exploring these connections became an important entry for students to think critically about achieving levels of quality and connection through sampling.

Students' musical preferences, compositional abilities, and aesthetic discrimination demonstrated their cultural competence and became valuable to their music education. Even when the narrative themes of students' musical compositions included curse words and were largely misogynous, I chose to use these topics as points of exploration, opening a dialogue that affirmed and validated students' thoughts and perspectives as legitimate sources of cultural knowledge. As Gay (2002) has asserted, teachers must validate students' cultural knowledge, which includes 'the traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions and relational patterns' of the ethnic groups with which they identify (107).

Experiences that assist students in developing critical consciousness

Inequities are real and a part of the lives of many of the young people I taught at JTDC. Many of these students faced a lack of resources, health care, and financial stability that youth in other communities experience and enjoy. In several cases, the lack of these vital resources limited the academic and social achievement for these students. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that students must 'develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities' (162).

Undoubtedly, music can be an important tool for developing a critical consciousness and for addressing and challenging societal inequities. Composing music, writing lyrics, choosing musical timbres and instrumental layers – all allow students a medium through which to identify the social ills and injustices within their communities and serve as a remedy for solving them. Additionally, the autonomy in music composition becomes as a unique platform for individual expression and creativity. Since the daily activities and decisions of these detained students are often made for them by guards charged to their care and well-being, the autonomy these young people experience through music composition serves as an important benefit for music education in correctional settings.

Despite these benefits, I have often wondered about the extent to which adolescents can be critically conscious. Are incarcerated youths able to create music that addresses social inequalities? This question has not yielded clear-cut answers because commercialism within the hip-hop industry and the narrative themes within this particular brand of hip-hop have overwhelmingly influenced the musical preferences of these students. The data from a brief survey that I gave to students to gather information about their demographics, previous musical experiences and listening and music preferences uncovered that an overwhelming majority of students in my music composition classes preferred commercial hip-hop music and the artists who perform in these genres. (These preference trends have been consistent for the entire two-year period that I have worked in this facility). Commercial rap and hip-hop artists like Lil Wayne, Wacka Flocka, and Chief Keef, to name a few, have been consistent favourites of these students and can be identified with what Rose (2008) termed the 'hip-hop

trinity', since the content of these commercial rap genres focuses exclusively on 'gangsta-pimp-ho' narratives. This emphasis has contributed to unprecedented criticism of the genre. Rose (2008) argued that the gangsta-pimp-ho trinity 'has been promoted and accepted to the point where it now dominates the genre's storytelling worldview' (4). I argue that current societal perceptions of rap music are no different than assertions outlined nearly 20 years ago by Rose (1994):

> [N]ews media attention on rap music seems fixated on instances of violence at rap concerts, rap producers' illegal use of musical samples, gangsta raps' lurid fantasies of cop killing and female dismemberment, and black nationalist rappers' suggestions that white people are the devils' disciples. (1)

Rose (2008) strongly condemned the influence of corporate interests in promoting socially destructive themes in hip-hop music, suggesting that, 'what began as a form of releasing and healing has become yet another lucrative but destructive economy for young poor black men' (58). She further posited that the sexist and violent tropes that have come to dominate commercial hip-hop have done so for the sole benefit of profit-minded record labels. Moreover, for a generation fully immersed in commercial hip-hop music, which seems bereft of the lyrical and emotional complexity of its predecessors, this argument certainly seems logical.

The impact of today's commercial rap music may be a powerful force against students being able to address societal issues. Although several huge commercial hip-hop artists have articulated and raised consciousness about social problems (see Kendrick Lamar, Lupe Fiasco, Nas, Common, Kanye West and Macklemore as examples of socially conscious rappers), I have found that students did not identify as readily with the socially conscious themes within these genres. One teaching lesson, for instance, aimed to help students use music to send a powerful message that could identify and explore remedies for issues within their communities and/or personal lives. My observation from previous classes made me realise that many students' lyrics were highly misogynistic and reflective of the narrative themes that appear in the work of the artists they preferred. During this lesson, I decided to play for them a few examples of socially conscious rap, hoping that the narrative themes of social awareness and promoting knowledge might pique my students' interest in alternative lyrical themes. Socially conscious rap, a sub-genre of hip-hop, emphasises the raising of the awareness and knowledge of individuals, as a way of bringing about social change. To this aim, narrative themes in socially conscious rap typically denounce violence, discrimination, and other related social ills. I played one of my personal favourites – 'Keep Your Head Up', by Tupac Shakur – for students and provided printed copies for them to read as they listened. After the song ended, I isolated a portion of Tupac's text that was a good example of providing a counter message about women that differed from the lyrics that were common in their preferences. These lyrics portrayed women as mothers to humanity, teachers for the community, and initial models for gender interactions. It is within this conceptualisation that Tupac questions the very foundation by which some men mistreat women, namely by raping and abusing women, and influencing their pro-choice politics.

Students were highly engaged in an analysis of the lyrics, and their responses seemed to indicate an understanding of Tupac's narrative themes in his composition. For example, Malik, a 15-year-old youth with dreadlocks who was not afraid of

voicing his opinion, said, 'Tupac is saying that we need to treat our women better'. Marcus, a 16-year-old from the Southside of Chicago, agreed with Malik, saying, 'Yeah, like how a lot of rappers be calling women bad names and stuff. That just ain't right'. I was so overjoyed that students were getting the objective of the lesson and starting to think critically about how music can address issues within the community. As students worked, however, I noticed that the raps they recorded still contained innuendos, stereotypical characterisations, and defamations of women. They certainly did not reflect the narrative paradigms that we addressed at the beginning of the lesson, although I specifically asked students to use these examples as models to guide their own compositions.

Since culturally responsive teaching 'use[s] the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively' (Gay 2002, 106), I sought to learn more about the commercial hip-hop and rap music of my students – not simply the music itself but also the issues it addressed. This important step armed me with the cultural knowledge needed to get students thinking more deeply and critically about the narrative themes within their composi- tions and how these themes might help to address problems such as economic disenfranchisement, educational inequities, lack of quality healthcare, and high crime rates. This approach allowed me to talk effectively with students about social ills that affected their communities and to be viewed as legitimately knowledgeable about their music. Gay (2002) highlighted the need for educators to develop a knowledge base of cultural diversity in terms of student populations and the content within curriculums.

Widening students' horizons regarding musical genres was part of my approach to get them thinking about social issues not apparent in some of their music preferences. Some researchers emphasise that music-making projects can widen horizons and address disadvantage by informing young people about cultural issues (Baker and Homan 2007; de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009). I decided that more awareness and exposure to social inequities found in a variety of musical genres like jazz, classical and socially conscious rap music was essential in this process. Since I wanted students' music compositions to address inequities found within society in ways that were more socially conscious, then more dialogue about the impact of commercial rap music had to occur more frequently. Rose (2008) emphasised that the distinction between the hip-hop trinity and socially conscious rap is 'not solely about the subject of the story being told but also about how and how often that story is told. What kind of community is being hoped for, what standard for treating others in one's community is being elevated and emulated?' (244). These questions have provided an unwavering philosophical grounding for my work in this setting, allowing me to hold true to my gut about how music instruction for detained students must yield outcomes that are poetic, powerful and meaningful.

Discussion

The present study sought to highlight my personal journey for developing culturally responsive pedagogies in music instruction with Black youth detained in a juvenile temporary detention centre. These theorised reflections highlight the importance of the influence culture might have on music teaching and learning in general, but even more so in the context of correctional facilities. In the present study, I was sensitive to and knowledgeable about how my own heritage, background, and experiences affected my

perceptions of students and their abilities. For example, I acknowledged the differences between my heritage and background as an African American male from the middle class and the students I served before working in this setting and continually throughout the duration of the study period. By doing so, I was able to move beyond merely acknowledging differences but fully attempting to understand how these differences might influence music teaching and learning. My experiences as a university-trained musician in Western classical music had not adequately prepared me to address the differences for performance practices across cultures. Certainly, my ideas about music that were shaped by my background and experiences in public school music instruction might have influenced how I responded to student musical creations in ways that were culturally appropriate within the specific subgenre of rap music in which they were creating. For example, my initial ideas about appropriate musical content in students' musical compositions were shaped to a large degree by my previous teaching experiences in public school. The tensions I experienced when censoring students' narrative themes often ran counter to what students viewed as cultural legitimacy in music making in a specific culture to which they identified. Additionally, these tensions were further emphasised because students believed that rapping about certain narrative themes as a way to demonstrate their competence of music making in the specific subgenre of rap music. Certainly, educational stakeholders may question the appropriateness of these narrative themes in the context of education.

Findings from this research study uncovered an interesting dilemma about using 'the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively' (Gay 2002, 106) as they related to two elements of Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework, validating cultural competence and developing critical consciousness, respectively. For instance, validating the cultural competence of students was challenging because their cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives were largely influenced by a subgenre of rap music that included, to a large degree, narrative themes that Rose (2008) called the hip-hop trinity, namely themes about gangster living, male-dominated power, and the objectification of women. Undoubtedly, these themes may be considered inappropriate content in many educational environments. In this teaching setting, however, these themes became a way to affirm the cultural competence that students brought with them to the learning environment.

Students' 'cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives' (Gay 2002, 106) became a way to promote their critical consciousness in music making. I sought to find ways to transfer themes about gangster living, male-dominated power, and the objectification of women as material to address larger questions about the role that music and musicians can play in being critically conscious in addressing social inequities. The ideological conflict between the musical cultures of these students and my professional obligation for determining appropriateness in educational content for the music classroom became a source of discord and tension for me as an emerging culturally responsive teacher. For example, I was torn between my need, on the one hand, to legitimate these young men's ideas about music composition without imposing my values upon them and, on the other hand, my role in getting them to think about music as an agent of social change. This tension raises unresolved questions that future instruction and research with this population may consider: where is the intersection of culturally responsive teaching and social activism in the context of correctional settings? What does this type of teaching

actually look like? Further, how will music teachers negotiate student cultural practices when they run counter to their individual beliefs about the purpose of music instruction in these contexts? The answers to these questions will be extremely important to the implications for music instruction, especially how music teachers will develop cultural competences for working in this particular setting, and how they will work in solidarity with these young people to use music as a means to address greater societal issues.

Although previous researchers assert that young people's attachment to specific genres may not be fixed (Daykin et al. 2011), findings in this current study revealed that mere awareness of and exposure to other music genres like jazz, classical and socially conscious rap music did not move students to use these styles as content in their compositions in more prominent ways. A reason for this limited use may be that using these genres was optional for students and a way to expand their knowledge of musical content beyond that with which they were familiar. Despite the limited incorporation of various musical genres and styles, exposure to these varied musical genres support previous research suggesting that music-making projects can widen horizons and address disadvantage by informing young people about cultural issues (Baker and Homan 2007; de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009).

Conclusion

The growing interest in music instruction and research with incarcerated populations is a positive sign that the profession is living up to its mission of being an education available for *all* students. Amid this growing interest is a need to learn more about how music teachers develop competencies for working with juvenile offenders and navigate this unfamiliar context, how they come to learn more about culturally diverse music, and how they become aware of cultural influences. In this view, preparing teachers to work effectively in culturally diverse contexts remains a challenge, particularly when the contexts – teaching environments such as detention centres and the cultures of the detainees within the criminal justice system – are extremely unfamiliar.

As I continue in this work, some things remain consistently true: I am still Black and I am still male. However, the perspectives attributed to my middle-class upbringing no longer serve as barriers to culturally incarcerate me. Rather, I am culturally responsive to students in ways I had not imagined possible. My own journey from the familiar into the unknown and my subsequent reflection upon that journey has been invaluable in my efforts to assist music educators to develop the competencies required for working in culturally diverse environments. To this end, the journey towards cultural responsiveness certainly has been 'liberating' for my detained students, and even more so for me.

Notes

1. The term 'instruction' is used throughout this paper to mean the action and practice of teaching, and not the teaching profession.
2. Names of students have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Notes on contributor

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