THE BLACK MUSIC TEACHER:

A Reflection on Values-Forward Approaches to Overcoming Systemic Barriers

CREATIVE GENERATION

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents, cont.

Artistic Components

Understanding a Reflection

Conducting a reflection is a research and documentation process designed to elevate knowledge from both knowledge contributors and observers in the process. The process begins by documenting the perspectives of the knowledge contributors—or those who are sharing their perspectives about a given topic—in the inquiry and concludes with a qualitative analysis through the lens of the observer to draw conclusions and recommend actions.

Creative Generation is committed to publishing reflections as part of its work producing new and honoring existing forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, while dismantling systemic barriers to sharing and learning.

This reflection is organized into the following sections:

- **Introduction:** This introductory section provides details and context around the specific question or observation being explored, the methods of data collection and analysis, and any specific limitations.
- **Key Findings:** This section presents themes identified throughout the inquiry, providing context and texture via amplification of diverse contributor voices and connection to additional resources.
- **Call to Action:** This section described actionable steps which can be taken by the reader to employ learning from the inquiry.

Introduction

Being a Black, Queer, woman in the music world, surrounded by leaders who do not reflect my identities, sparked my undying passion for using my voice for the arts. Throughout my journey to becoming a music educator, my Black friends, colleagues, mentors, and sponsors, continuously helped me to find ways to use my voice as a tool of hope, empathy, and freedom - and to spark joy. These identities and relationships - as well as my student teaching experience - influenced the development of my capstone project, Amplifying the Voices of Black Pedagogy[1], a component of Creative Generation's Summer Residency Program[2].

From 2017-2019, I served as Vice President and then President of the North Carolina Music Educators Association (NCMEA) Collegiate Section. Our conference theme, under Jonathan Hamiel's[3] tutelage, was 'Redefining Success'. During the term of presidency, I oversaw creating a stage for underrepresented schools and programs and creating a scholarship for collegiate students to attend conferences. One of my greatest accomplishments was inviting programs which have historically not been asked to attend conferences, but have phenomenal success with retention, community engagement, and programming. It was imperative that I collaborate with Johnathan to find programs that weren't defined by what success historically looked like for NCMEA, but rather what reflected success in their communities.

This experience formed a fierce determination in me to amplify the voices of Black educators to uncover the challenges they faced in our profession and the strategies employed to overcome them. In my project, I interviewed eight Black, licensed music educators in both North and South Carolina to explore their arts education ecosystems, specifically in the public school system from their intergenerational perspectives. It was imperative in this process to hear from in-service teachers, from emerging practitioners to elders, to make meaning of what influences Black pedagogy, their perspectives on systemic barriers impacting the music classroom, and what they need from the community.

From my own experience as a leader, I understood that many traditional pathways of music education led us to the very challenges we, as Black, licensed, music educators face today. The same goes for research methods, so I employed my own abilities to determine the most appropriate and empowering methods to conduct these interviews and address my research question.

What I learned was powerful. First, the methods we use as music educators (or even as researchers seeking to understand systems change that impacts music education) are often outdated. Our responsiveness and perseverance is what makes us stand out and can be employed to revolutionize our practices. Be it in the classroom or beyond, the values we carry in our work support us in driving the change we wish to see in pedagogy, practice, and even policy. As a community of practice in North and South Carolina, Black music educators have developed values-forward approaches to overcoming the barriers they face grounded in their Black identity and responsive practices.
This project explored the arts education ecosystems of North and South Carolina, specifically

1 Find this project here: https://www.creative-generation.org/announcement/announcing-2023-summer-capstone-project-by-summer-resident-destiny-king
2 Learn more here: https://www.creative-generation.org/residency
3 Learn more about Jonathan here: https://www.ncmea.net/about/ncmea-board/meet-the-board-2020/jonathan-hamiel/

Executive Summary

in the public education system, from the intergenerational perspectives of licensed Black music educators, with varying years of experience. The research and documentation sought to explore the lived experiences of in-service, licensed Black educators in the Carolinas and how we can amplify those stories.

From the preliminary reviews of similar research conducted at the intersection of music education and race, the approach focused on identifying the barriers often faced by Black, licensed music educators in the Carolinas and the approaches they utilized to address them. As such, the process knowingly focused on the long term and intertwined the history of schooling with the impacts of such societal challenges like redlining and gentrification, and the demographics of the students and educators. This work intentionally amplified the voices of music educators through narrative storytelling to document evidence of the systemic issues and responses which arise through Black pedagogy in music education.

According to participants in this inquiry, the largest systemic barriers facing music education were the long term impacts of zoning and redlining. "Exclusionary zoning" is a legacy of racial injustice in the United States and directly impacts teachers and their classrooms. We see this intertwined with the discriminatory practice of redlining that continues the same legacy through the original mapping processes which socially exclude Black residents with justifications as "risky investments" dating back to the New Deal era. In the music classroom, teachers are especially seeing the impacts of these racially unjust practices within funding, accessibility to enhanced programming, and the perceptions placed upon the schools and students.

The Black music teacher takes on the approach of "another way" when thinking about their pedagogy. From each participant, I found three things to be synonymous in significance: giving students autonomy over learning, focusing on representation (and knowing this might look different for each class), and holding space for each other, from teacher to student.

As I held interviews with Black, licensed music educators in North and South Carolina, tears were shed and hearts were poured from interviewee to interviewer in our shared love for kids and music education. Words are an artform within itself, and my own research and documentation process to intertwine words with my own artmaking to explore the converging meaning of others was exciting and thrilling. Ultimately the process pushed my creativity into new bounds. From this, I was able to illuminate revolutionary findings by creating art and mixing audio through collaboration.

It was apparent in the interviews that the barriers faced by Black, licensed music educators in North and South Carolina were consistent and not different from the systemic barriers identified in similar studies of this population. However, the "another way" approach employed by these educators is what sets them apart. Further, in my own process, I was able to uncover the primary factor in the responsiveness and perseverance that were fueled by their values. Each educator identified their values, which enabled their Black pedagogy that, in turn, formulated their approach to overcoming the systemic barriers they faced. To make sense of the values identified, I engaged in a music- and visual art-based process, which resulted in

unique artifacts representing my findings; see the analysis and findings on page 13.

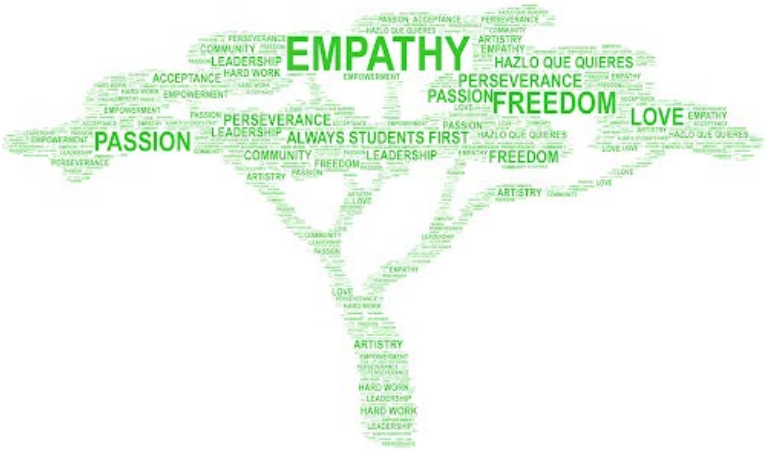
This is how we—as Black, licensed music educators in the public school system—move forward: strength in our values, inform our approaches, and then we overcome the barriers.

This work does not diminish the values of educators who do not identify as Black, but does amplify a different approach that Black educators in this inquiry found to be true within their pedagogy and experiences.

Through empathetic teaching, fostering individual expression, advocating for representation, and holding space for one another, Black music teachers enrich the lives of their students and contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic educational landscape. The values fostered by these educators are represented in the image below. To learn more about these findings and the arts-based process, see page 23.

As we look ahead to the upcoming school year and beyond, let us heed the call to connect, engage, and learn from the experiences shared. By embracing diverse pedagogies and celebrating the power of music to bridge cultures, nurture self-confidence, and inspire growth, we can collectively shape a future where every student is seen, heard, and empowered to reach their full potential.

"They [students] are very smart, and they have so much good potential if they have the right people on their team." - Emerging Educator from Guilford County, North Carolina



Process & Methods

As an emerging music educator, culturally responsive teaching is a concept that is relatively new in research, but is being integrated into education studies from such scholars and educators like Zaretta Hammond and Dr. Constance McKoy. As such, this was adopted as the framework for the initial research and design of the documentation protocols employed through this inquiry. Exploring culturally responsive interview practices was essential before engaging with the sample of Black, licensed, intergenerational music educators, especially noting the prevalence of intersectional identities throughout this population.

To inform my process, I focused on a broad swath of community-led research practices. I selected two articles to guide the design, which explore how to interview holistically, investigate your own biases, and explore how you can circulate this information in the communities you're seeking to serve, through African American and Indigenous worldviews. I also examined the Wallace Foundation's In-Depth Interview model[4] as a framework to implement these broader philosophies.

In short, the design was exploratory and descriptive. These methods aimed to give voice to in-service educators by sharing their lived experiences and implications for the future. Further, the interview and documentation protocols were semi-structured, qualitative interviews to provide guided and flexible questioning. Each interview was conducted by myself to allow for comfortability and individual expression.

Below please find brief summaries of the predicating research, which informed the resulting design.

Racial Differences in African American Interviews

The feminist perspective on qualitative research pushes the notion of power to the forefront of discussions between the interviewer and interviewee. Rather than trying to dig to find the "value-free, objective ideal," we must recognize we all carry value that influences the way we hear, think, and interpret stories with others and the issues that we study. This has widely been the norm for how we walk into interviews that has, for too long, catered to white male subjectivity. While white feminists focus on the unique standpoint of women, Black feminists argue an elitism that is imposing a white lens as the universal standard[5].

So, in my documentation protocol, I began generating questions that focused on affirming and embracing belonging, authenticity, and cultural pride. This concluded in reworking the framing of each question and the pacing of each interview.

4 See the model here: https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/documents/workbook-e-indepth-interviews.pdf
5 Learn more about this approach here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266853542_Racial_Difference_in_Engaging_Recruiting_and_Interviewing_African_American_Women_in_Qualitative_Resarch

Indigenous Knowledge and Culturally Responsive Interviewing Practices

Traditionally, knowledge in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities is orally transmitted, contributing to its communal ownership and local orientation. It is deeply rooted in tradition, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the people.

One crucial consideration is understanding the internal hierarchies of information circulation within these communities. Recognizing how knowledge is disseminated and valued among community members can significantly impact how we approach interviews and research respectfully and responsibly[6]. For example, if we were interested in the perspective of Black teachers in the American South, it's essential to contemplate how the deliverables will be accessible and available to the community of Black teachers in the American South. This consideration ensures that the outcomes of the research are shared in a manner that respects their cultural values and preferences.

Moreover, embracing diversity goes beyond merely acknowledging different perspectives; it entails acknowledging varying systems of circulation, community priorities, ontologies, and modes of adoption. By recognizing and embracing this diversity, we can create a more inclusive and meaningful research experience for everyone involved.

So, I curated songs throughout this work and pushed my creativity to disseminate the inquiries of this work.

Wallace Foundation Framework on In-depth Interviews

In the pursuit of meaning making and impactful research, my focus was to be discovery-oriented, open-minded, and to explore the depth of the interviewee's point of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives. These in-depth interviews offer valuable insights allowing participants to open up on a personal level, but require a skilled interviewee to leave less room for bias.

Analysis can be time consuming and challenging, but in this process, data is collected faster and questions can be altered and added in real time. The interview guide allows for a comprehensive understanding of our subjects and lays the foundation for guiding our purpose, participant selection, and information circulation. The aim is to uncover valuable insights and enable intricate knowledge for chosen interviewees.

So, I made sure interviews were 1-on-1, that I prepared probing questions to where I believed the conversation might lead us, and made sure the interviewee's comfortability led the conversation.

6 Learn more about this approach here: https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdf/10.1086/605382

Culturally Responsive Interviews

In the quest for culturally responsive interviews, this exploration led me to embrace the significance of understanding my own cultural awareness and fostering empathy.

Read more in this blog titled, "Pursuing Culturally Responsive Interviews"

To capture the lived experiences of marginalized communities, I had to first engage in critical self-reflection, recognizing the impact of power dynamics in the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

By drawing inspiration from feminist perspectives and community-led research practices, I then approached interviews with Black women and Indigenous communities with context, texture, and cultural sensitivity. Emphasizing collaboration and Indigenous involvement, I sought to ensure appropriateness and establish respectful research relationships.

Finally, the Wallace Foundation's In-Depth Interview Process shaped the approach, enabling me to uncover valuable insights and explore the depths of each participant's perspectives.

In total, I selected an intentionally intergeneration sample of individuals who met the following criteria:

- Identified as Black
- Worked in the public school system in North or South Carolina
- Were credentialed by the following processes:
    - Held a degree in K-12 music education
    - Had completed an edTPA portfolio
    - Achieved passing scores on their licensure test in North Carolina or South Carolina
- From this process, interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of eight individuals who had experience ranging from 2 to 20 years in the music classroom, and worked in a diversity of settings including as general music teachers, band directors, and orchestra teachers.
- Four identified as elder educators, with five or more years of experience in the public school system
- Four identified as emerging educators, with less than 5, but at least one, year(s) of teaching
- Five were based in North Carolina, while three were based in South Carolina

Individual interviews were conducted via Zoom. Interviewees shared consent for their conversation to be recorded and for the audio and transcription to be utilized. Each interview and reflective memos were written for each participant. Notes were taken based on important takeaways from each conversation.

Analysis Protocol

Arts-based processing allowed for two deliverables of visual art and an audio mixing soundscape to allow for deeper reflection in the values interviewees outlined to be true in their music identity. Created using Wordificator, a typographic art tool, I used the outline of an acacia tree for the viewing of each value. Green was used as a symbol of growth and new beginnings which encompass and reflect the values accumulated in the acacia tree.

To break barriers of accessibility in visual art, I was encouraged by the movement that is Free Little Art Galleries (F.L.A.G.) in creating a soundscape that mixed the spoken values consented from interviewees and a nature soundscape recorded. Each interviewee was asked to record their three values mentioned in the initial interview in whichever order felt right to them and to not be too far nor too close to the microphone. Inflection and pacing was up for interpretation by the interviewee. Participants who did not record on their devices gave consent to use audio from the initial interview.

Key Findings

The core focus of this inquiry was to explore the arts education ecosystems in North Carolina and South Carolina by amplifying the voices of music educators through narrative storytelling to document evidence of the systemic issues that arise and the Black pedagogy in music education.

Across the board, participants shared two intertwined systemic barriers of zoning and redlining that impact their students. Educators see a shift in how the community perceives schools and marginalized populations in historically redlined neighborhoods. The negative perceptions impact funding and accessibility to enhanced programming, ultimately preventing a culturally rich and well-rounded education.

Educators eagerly shared their pedagogical approaches which they used to overcome these barriers. Common themes emerged with a focus on leading through empathy, giving students autonomy over their learning, and giving a global and representative curriculum to students in the classroom. As a result, participants noted that students are more engaged, begin to take initiative in music activities, and are more confident in their music capabilities. Teachers also found through leading with a student-led perspective in their pedagogy that classes had less behavioral problems and creativity soared in more collaborative spaces with peers.

As drivers of this change, participants noted their values as essential to realizing these approaches to change. We can learn from educators who are taking on other art forms to build relationships and, from there, create opportunities for cultural relevance in the classroom.

Inspired by the participants' creativity in the classroom, I was encouraged to process our dialogue sessions through music, push the boundaries of my own comfortability, and to make meaning of this work. Taking inspiration from visual art was important to break barriers in accessibility of art and sharing information in more creative forms.

Systemic Barriers Impacting the Music Classroom

Described in the next few sections is the acacia tree, seen right. This represents the many values shared by inquiry participants. Similarly, I crafted a soundscape embodying those values and the words of educators throughout this process. Together, they illustrate and amplify the greatest and most resounding learning from this inquiry: when we find strength in our values, we inform our approaches and we are able to overcome the systemic barriers in our path.

"Of Our New Day Begun" by Omar Thomas

Creative Generation believes that arts-based practices honor existing and produce new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, while dismantling systemic barriers to sharing and learning. For the following section of findings, consider listening to "Of Our New Day Begun" by Omar Thomas for an enhanced reading and learning experience.
This section outlines the systemic barriers impacting music education as elevated through the preliminary research ahead of this inquiry and amplifying the voices of Black, licensed educators throughout the inquiry.

It describes the following:

- The Impact of Zoning, including available funding, accessibility to enhanced programming, and the perceptions of schools in Black neighborhoods.
- The Lack of Diversity in Leadership, especially of Black music educators in marginalized and rural communities, and how success can (and should) be defined.

Zoning: Funding, Accessibility to Enhanced Programming, & Perceptions

"It gets to be a system of the haves and have nots."
- Elder Educator from Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, North Carolina

The biggest takeaway from our dialogue sessions, across the board, was the most influential and historic systemic barrier: zoning. Merriam-Webster defines zoning as, "the act or process of partitioning a city, town, or borough into zones reserved for different purposes (such as residence or business); the set of ordinances by which such zones are established and regulated." According to the U.S. Congress' Joint Economic Committee's 2019 report, Zoned Out, "School zoning and residential zoning regulation directly impact the type and price of homes associated with schools, and as a result can positively or negatively impact access to opportunity... Education policy often highlights the relationship between school zoning and access to opportunity." It is broadly understood that this type of 'exclusionary zoning' is a legacy of racial injustice in the United States. This circumstance, from each teacher's perspective, is the most impactful barrier to access to music education in the classroom, school, and district.

In North Carolina and South Carolina, the education systems, as governed by the State Board of Education and State Department of Education, are divided into districts. Within each district there is zoning, decided by local government, which largely determines where students will attend school in terms of proximity to their homes. There is an exception for magnet schools, which allow students to attend from varying districts and zones.

For Guilford County, where I currently reside, you can find each zoning map for elementary, middle, and high school, alongside the feeder zones, which show how each grade school typically feeds into one another in their zone. Zoning directly intertwines with the historical legacy of redlining, shaping districts and neighborhoods in profound ways. Redlining is a discriminatory practice that determined low-income housing as "risky investments," which primarily consisted of Black residents. Although redlining maps come from the New-Deal era, this directly impacts neighborhoods today. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) shared Brown University's recently working paper[7] that found formally redlined neighborhoods and schools have, "significantly less per-pupil revenues, larger shares of Black and non-white bodies, less diverse student populations, and lower average test scores

7 Learn more here: https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai21-363.pdf

compared with those neighborhoods that were not redlined." Because of this, we begin to see intertwined results of redlining in the public school system that directly affect funding, accessibility, and the perceptions of schools—and this directly impacts access to music education.

Funding

According to participants in this inquiry, funding is where teachers find themselves juggling at the beginning, throughout, and end of the school year. Depending on your classroom, and speciality, this can mean buying a new tuba for the band room, building props for an upcoming musical theater program, or a sound system for the music room. Often, teachers find themselves applying for grants or using their own money to purchase equipment for the classroom. This does not include other essentials that make up a classroom such as wall decor and stationery (dry erase markers, pencils, sheet protectors).

Accessibility to Enhanced Programming

In the music classrooms of the participants of this inquiry, it was reported that inequitable allocation of resources causes low teacher retention, a lack of diverse programming, and inaccessible extended learning opportunities. It's clear that an abundance of resources is associated with not-redlined districts and historically privileged/gentrified neighborhoods.

One educator has seen this, first hand, in New Hanover County, North Carolina, where a school resides between the generational wealth and generational public housing. At this school, an International Baccalaureate and dual immersion program grown by teachers for the students and community was taken to another school because of "greed in the public education system," the educator shares. As a result, the students who came from generational poverty and benefited from the enhanced programming, but couldn't move to a new school to follow the program, ended back where they began: with a lack of opportunity for advancement in a program with low resources and less programming.

Perception

According to participants in this inquiry, the lack of funding and accessibility to programs leads to negative perceptions from an array of stakeholders, including the administration and students themselves.

A Black educator from Wake County, North Carolina shared a story of her school's "data dig" mid-school year showing that three out of the four Black boys in Kindergarten were on track to fail. There were only two Black educators in the room of maybe seven educators speaking about the data. The educator seeking answers immediately began to ask clarifying questions as to why this was happening and what they could do to help, but the other educators in the room seemed eager to move on and not acknowledge this statistic, almost as if it's expected. The educator expressed,

> *"You want to tell me, Black boys, who are constantly the subgroup of subgroups, in their first year of institutionalized learning, all of them but one are below grade level and no one is panicking. Nobody is like 'The house is on fire!?'"*

The educator had looked at the only other Black educator in the room and asked, "Why is this happening?" and she responded with, "This is where we are."

Being complacent in the current circumstances of the education system that is negatively impacting students only continues the cycle of students not reaching their highest potential; this feeds into the historic systems of harm in place today. In the minds of inquiry participants, this mindset feeds into the perceptions parents begin to have about schools, the students that attend them, and the educational programs being offered in comparison to other schools. One educator in Richland County, South Carolina expresses, "If you want this type of experience, you go to this high school, or if you don't want to be around these students, you have to go to this high school." They further explain how the word "ghetto" is typically used to describe schools with a high population of Black and Brown students. Because of this, this educator focuses on tearing down these barriers that are preventing all students from reaching success:

> *"I make sure that as an educator, as Black music educator, for sure, that I'm not really focusing on perceptions, or that I'm making that our story... Regardless of how you learn, where you come from, how you grow up, or how much money you have... you still have an opportunity to be successful, and you still have an opportunity to see yourself in a higher regard. I still have high standards for you and you can still have high standards for yourself and you know it."*

Lack of Diversity in Leadership Impacting Marginalized and Rural Communities

> *"The deck is stacked against, but understand it wasn't stacked for you."*
> *- Elder Educator from Spartanburg, South Carolina*

Appointing leadership that unites people is a difficult feat in organizations that have often pushed away, whether intentionally or unintentionally, marginalized communities. More often than not, we see our leaders in our music education association conferences, coming from the more affluent areas of the state. With affluent areas comes more resources, bigger programs, and more students who are showing face at clinics like the All County, All State, and All District, and well-known music festivals during the summer.

One elder educator from Chapel Hill-Carrboro County, North Carolina, shares more about the historic demographic of students at clinics:

> *"Well, you know, what happens is sometimes you just don't see a very diverse group of people when you have that, because if you come from a school that's very affluent, and that has kids that got private lessons, kids have all the resources they need, then that's it." He continues, "These are the same folks that are always in the meetings, and they're the most vocal. They are the same people who we miraculously seem to nominate as our presidents or as our leaders. In the end, the issue ends up being that the teachers and schools that are doing a phenomenal job don't get the accolades because their success might not be a Superior at MPA (Music Performance Assessment) playing Grade 6 music or having 10 or 15 people at All State. Because of this cycle of leadership being within the same zones and affluency, you get a lot of bitterness and resentfulness."*

According to participants, there's a cycle that exists and, as we begin to acknowledge what redefining success means, we need to analyze what success looks like now and what we want leadership, professional development, and mentorship to look like in the future.

One elder educator from Spartanburg, South Carolina shared that he feels privileged because if you are from certain circles, or you move to certain circles, then you're expected to achieve and be on this trajectory. Why are we focused on the extreme success stories of, ultimately, Black educators and their students (who are typically mostly low-income, marginalized communities) rather than asking what we can do to provide the resources needed at each school? How can we redefine success in a historically predominantly white organization? These are the questions we should ask ourselves as conference attendees, members, educators, and ultimately, as leaders of young minds.

Redefining Success

While my focus on redefining success within the NCMEA Collegiate Section was a pivotal step towards inclusivity and community engagement, it's essential to recognize that this challenge extends beyond our association. These challenges echo the sentiments expressed during my tenure at NCMEA, reinforcing the need for a more inclusive approach across various music educator associations. The importance of representation and meaningful community engagement has become increasingly evident in these contexts.

This challenge isn't isolated to NMCEA, but was also reflected in the South Carolina Music Educators Association (SCMEA) as well, according to inquiry participants. One elder educator shared that the association is focusing on the importance of representation and how the organization can better serve the communities that have often been left out. He shares that he is directly calling leaders asking:

> *"Look, I get it, we haven't served your communities or you. So, what can we do to make that happen? How can we bring SCMEA to you? How can we serve you first, so that, in turn, you will come to the conference?"*

Now, this isn't a story about the beautiful memories created or my success stories in leadership, but is shared to show ways we can reach out to our communities that do not define their own classrooms into one definition of success. For many teachers in this inquiry, success doesn't look like top scores at your music performance assessment (MPA), but focuses on the individual growth and development of the community in the music room.

One elder educator shares, "success looks like graduation and getting through the school year." He has "family chats" with students where they have open dialogue and focuses on teaching the students "life every day." Another emerging educator from Guilford County, North Carolina, describes success looking like, "doing what they need." She noticed within her first year of teaching that students responded by having a good time, which meant building relationships with what her kids enjoyed.

Human-Centered Approaches

Creative Generation believes that arts-based practices produce new and honoring existing forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, while dismantling systemic barriers to sharing and learning.

For the following section of findings, consider listening to "Young, Gifted, and Black" by Nina Simone for an enhanced reading and learning experience.

This section outlines the approaches taken by Black, licensed music educators in North and South Carolina to overcome the systemic barriers described in the previous section.

It describes the following:

- Leading through Empathy, especially how Black music educators utilize *The Platinum Rule* and challenge Western pedagogy.
- Autonomy Over Learning, especially through representation and the act of holding space for each other.

Leading Through Empathy

"You're a music educator, but you teach people through music."
- Elder educator from Spartanburg, South Carolina

Recently, I attended a presentation from a colleague, which emphasized, "there's another way" to go about things. In thinking about the responses from the participants in this inquiry on the values and pedagogy of the Black music teacher, I want to emphasize that this work does not diminish the values of teachers who do not identify as Black, but does amplify a different approach that Black teachers in this capstone found to be true within their pedagogy.

The Platinum Rule

A common theme across the values of interviewees in this inquiry was leading with empathy in the music classroom. For many educators, this falls under the "platinum rule" to treating others as they want to be treated. One educator explains, "I make sure that I'm being very empathetic to students that I have in my classroom, and I'm being aware, in a way, kind of being socially aware of what type of instruction strategies work, and then what doesn't, or what types of phrases work for some students, and what type of phrases do not."

As Black educators, many interviewees expressed how it is a huge responsibility to take on teaching the young minds of Black children. One educator from Spartanburg, South Carolina, shares, *"It's a huge responsibility, but I welcome that now."* You have to be vulnerable enough to create a safe space for them, learn how to handle emotions as they're always watching, and be mindful of body language when speaking and not speaking to students.

An educator from Richland County, South Carolina shares a story of a young girl who came into the band room distraught since she had just got into a huge argument with one of her friends. She brought that energy into the classroom and he immediately noticed her

demeanor. The educator took her outside and said, *"Hey, I see you are distraught and that you're a little bit on edge. What can we do to make sure that you feel comfortable in the next 40 minutes?"* He mentions that it takes focusing on lowering your tone, making sure your tone and face is in a way that is concerning, but not sarcastic or apathetic. You're making sure you're listening and that your posture is in a way where she feels invited. This makes a huge difference in how students will be able to respond. Using this social emotional learning (SEL) technique to deescalate a situation helped her calm down and get through class.

Through a transformative encounter, an educator from New Hanover County, North Carolina, experienced a profound shift in her approach towards boy singers in the elementary setting. This shift resonated deeply with the challenges traditionally associated with boy singers as they navigate the transition of their voices. Teachers often grapple with the task of placing them on a vocal part in the chorus, given the complexities that arise as their voices begin to shift. This changed her entire perspective on how she sees them, how she treats them, how she speaks about them, and how she speaks to them. Because of recognizing where the issue lies in her own approach, even as a Black educator, she was able to begin truly leading with empathy and meeting her students where they are. Over the course of three years, she was able to triple the number of boys in her classroom. She was not only able to bring in boy singers, but she would be the one to bring in the most boy singers at district events who had to be selected to attend. Not only did she want to bring in more boy singers, but she wanted to diversify the group of boy singers, so half of that group that she tripled in size were people of color.

The Result of Challenging Western Pedagogy

There have been instances where Black pedagogy is questioned, particularly when Black educators seek to teach students about Black music or when teaching in an Afro-centric lens in the music classroom. One educator shares, she felt her pedagogy was questioned during a final evaluation with her white principal. During this meeting, she explained that her approach primarily focused on an Afrocentric lens and that it was culturally responsive and generationally relevant to the students who primarily were Black and Brown. She gave an example when teaching about Rock n' Roll, for instance, instead of only speaking about Elvis, she talked about Sister Rosetta Tharpe. She was a Black woman who grew up in the church, learning electric guitar, and this is her style of picking. Immediately, the white principal's response was, "But, why not through a Eurocentric lens?" In the room was also the white art teacher who was an ally in the room for her to reiterate and emphasize the importance of Afrocentric teaching considering the demographics of the school. She didn't speak for her, but spoke up for her and that truly is "a great example of being true ally."

When challenging the system, there is a risk of losing resources for your classroom, and ultimately your students, or your job security. An educator from Guilford County, North Carolina expresses that her Title I high school had only three Black educators, including herself. Two of them were laid off with the explanation of "budget cuts" and "you weren't meeting our expectations." The teachers who were laid off received their notices after the teachers began shaking things up by advocating for the students. She expressed, "It's the fact we are recognizing those barriers that y'all are putting in place, because y'all are not letting

these students improve their behavior because you see them and act at once... and it would break my heart when you would see the student actively trying and they're still being put in that box right. There's that bias right? And they get into the idea of, well, I'm not good enough, anyway, so I might as well just keep it going, right?"

Autonomy Over Learning through Individual Expression

"Always students first." - Elder educator from New Hanover County, North Carolina

As we approach the upcoming school year, *I implore all music educators to find ways to connect with your students at the beginning of the year and continue those practices throughout the year.* The music-making will happen, but you first need to create opportunities for community building. For each new class coming in, focus on building relationships by finding at least one thing each student enjoys. Of course, keeping in mind this will take time as you teach many students, but students will feel seen and heard by seeing their teacher remember their favorite basketball team or that you followed up with how their dance competition went this past weekend.

A way that one educator from Guilford County, North Carolina had her students express themselves outside of music is through art. In her first year of teaching, she found old instruments in her classroom and let her students paint them. This past summer, her kids painted the polls in the classroom, so that all her children could see themselves. "It's not just, 'Oh, Miss Williams said this is ours,' but, *'No, we made this our home,* and when you come in here you better act like you [have] some sense, and even if Miss Williams is gone, you know this is our house, and this is how we act.'"

I also encourage you to find ways other students might be engaging in other classes if you see they do not engage in music class. An educator from Spartanburg, South Carolina, shared that one of her students was incredibly gifted at making intricate designs with paper and typically found themselves making them in her class. Instead of immediately dismissing him and categorizing him as someone who doesn't participate in the classroom, she asked him and his teachers what he enjoyed doing, and how we can find ways to encourage his creativity, but also pay attention in class. This led to the teachers funding his attendance to a camp that specialized in design. Showing that they valued his work and encouraged his designs, but also wanted him to check out and engage in other subjects, helped him begin to participate in class. Another success story was from an educator in New Hanover, North Carolina, who was bringing in a Flamenco group for her students that were primarily Black and Brown, and seeing a student who didn't engage fully in her class come to life singing and dancing with this group. She expresses how transformative this was for her to see the importance of providing resources and tools for her students to engage and be successful.

What we want for our students is for them to be seen and we can use music as a tool to do just that. A Black educator from Guilford County, North Carolina expresses this sentiment perfectly, "Eventually, towards the end of the year, they make their little mistakes and take a deep breath, say 'I got this.'" It was exactly what she wanted for them to learn and to really ask, "Are you going to accept yourself?" and "Are you going to love yourself?"

Representation Matters

"They call me Ms. Maughn, but they're getting Solange."
- Solange Maughn, Guilford County, North Carolina

For many students in rural areas, you're unlikely to have Black teachers throughout your primary education. *Two out of the four elder educators shared that their first Black teacher, who wasn't a gym teacher, coach, or adjunct faculty, wasn't until college.* In the 2017-18 National Center for Educational Statistics, we see similar and unsurprising results: 79% percent of public school teachers were white and non-Hispanic, about 9% were Hispanic of any race, and 7% were Black and non-Hispanic. In schools where the majority of students were white, over 90% of teachers were white. At the same time, in schools where the majority of students were not white, the majority of teachers tended to be white.[8]

Looking at the data, it's imperative that we have Black teachers in the classroom and we continue to provide resources on mentorship and diverse field experiences for pre-service music educators. This means general higher wages, reinstating additional pay for teachers with master's degrees, providing more professional development opportunities, community wellness spaces for teachers, and trust teaching non-Western traditions in the classroom.

Black music pedagogy is unique to the individual, but three educators specifically share that it's built on *cultural relevance and relationships.* One elder educator, who for many students is their first Black teacher, let alone first Black male teacher, shares that one mentor of his would tell him, "Your work isn't your work. Your work is your service to your community, service to those kids." This was the moment he realized his purpose of serving his students goes way beyond teaching notes on the page and even beyond the classroom. "At the end of the day," one educator emphasizes, "A whole note is a whole note, whether you're doing the whole note to Lizzo, or whether you're doing it to Debussy, so being able to understand on how to make it culturally relevant to the students that you're teaching has a lot to do with it."

An Afro-Panamanian educator from Guilford County, North Carolina, shares that her Black music pedagogy is unique to the individual and her philosophy stems from diversifying her playing. She grew up with having Black and Latin music which shaped her as a musician. When she heard something she liked playing, she began playing it back. She always had the mindset of, "You hear something and you want to do that right, so you want to apply it to your instrument." When she first arrived at her 6th grade class and began teaching the basics, such as learning quarter notes, quarter rests, she asked her students to pick the D string with their rhythm worksheet. As the class was playing, she realized that "TWINNEM" by Coi Leray[9] was in the same key. This led her to pull up the instrumental on her projector and have students pluck their D string to the beat of the song, almost like their own unique metronome. Knowing the demographic and music taste of her students, she immediately had buy in.

A powerful story from an educator who identifies as a Black woman from Spartanburg, South Carolina, shared how representation is incredibly important for students to see themselves in the people they consider role models in their education. She describes herself as "very very single" and how she has been a representation of a strong woman and not having relationships.

8 See the report here: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020103/index.asp#:~:text=In%20the%202017%E2%80%9318%20school,were%20Black%20and%20non%2DHispanic.
9 Watch the music video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNCkUEeUFy0

She emphasizes that this isn't the most important and it's great that her colleagues are married and have kids. *She didn't realize how strong her impact of being this strong independent woman had on students, especially young girls, until her colleague told her*. Her colleague told her that she loves that she shares that part of herself with the kids because there is a little girl who watches her mom move her and her sisters in and out with this man and that man. She continues to share that it's really important to know that, if she chooses, that she can be childless and she can wait for a man to treat her the way she deserves and wants to be treated. "There's a lot of little girls who are watching their moms go through unhealthy situations, and they don't think that you're normal and you're well adjusted, and that you're cool and you are not sacrificing. They see you still doing things, still going on your trips. You're scuba diving. You're hiking up mountains. You're living a cool life and some man is not treating you wrong... *you're showing them that you can be enough.*"

Holding Space for Each Other

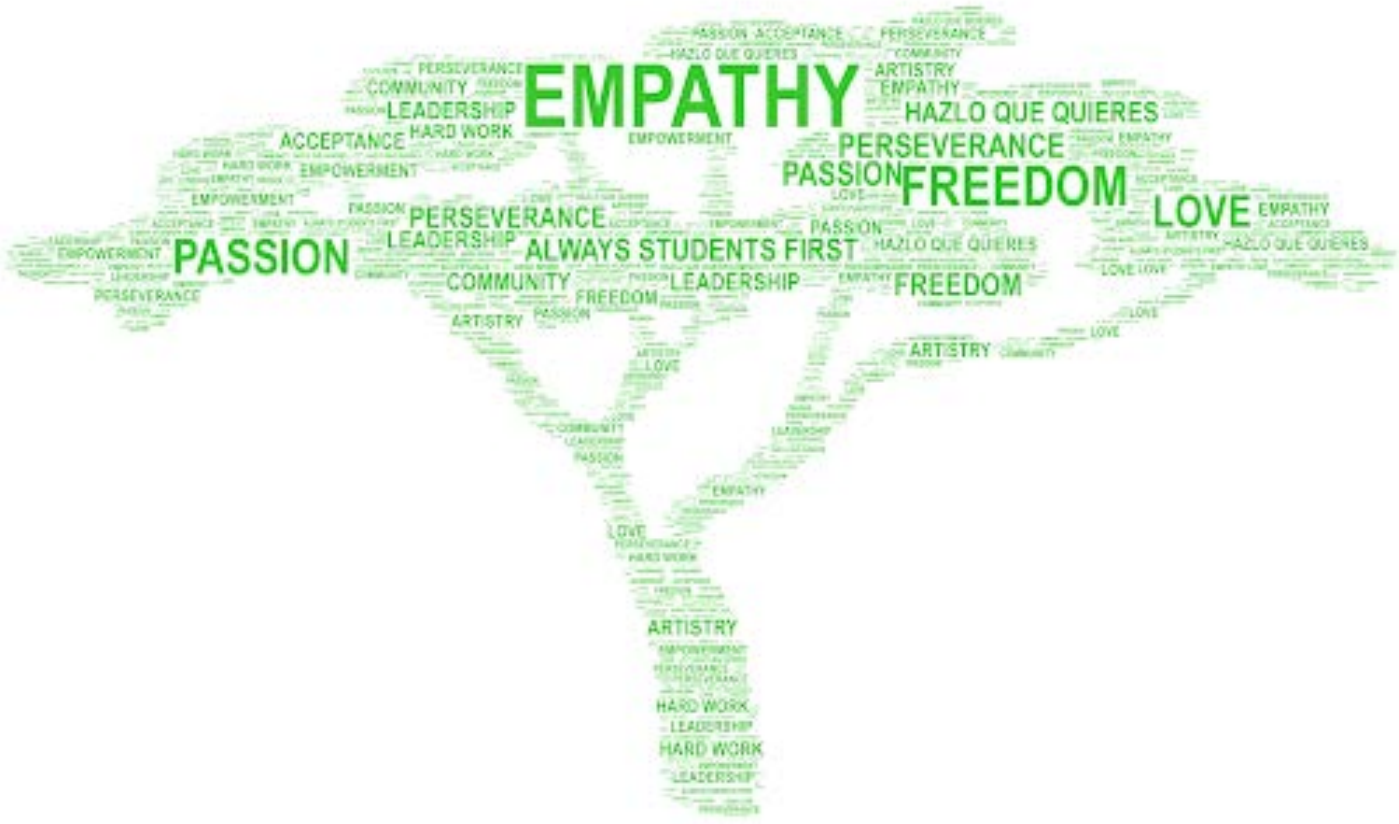
Listening. Leading with Empathy. Taking ownership in your own prejudice and biases. Being an ally. Giving space for comfort and wellness. These are the ways you can serve Black teachers and marginalized teachers in the rural American South. Below are a few resources on Black affinity spaces and community wellness.

- Minority Band Directors Association
- Black Orchestra Network
- Listen Up! Facebook Group
- HEARTogether Podcast
- Balanced Black Girl Podcast
- Black Educators Matter: Project 500 Podcast

Values

Creative Generation believes that arts-based practices honor existing and produce new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, while dismantling systemic barriers to sharing and learning.

For the following section of findings, consider listening to this soundscape and viewing the below image for an enhanced learning experience.



This section outlines the values Black, licensed music educators in North and South Carolina have honed, which underpin their approaches to overcome the systemic barriers, all of which have been described in the previous sections.

Romanticizing Words and Exploration

I've always been fascinated by words. The strength words hold in every capacity in everyday life. The privilege that comes with words and its weight on our heart, body, and soul. As an avid reader, I find myself consumed by words despite being at a loss in expressing my needs, wants, and worries at times. This may stem from romanticizing life, or from being a Cancer zodiac sign, but I think the symbolism that comes from words, in its most raw and authentic form, is truly, heart-wrenchingly beautiful. Circling back to art to make meaning and process the dialogue sessions was imperative to my creating this work.

As represented in the visualization of the Acacia tree, filled with words of value to participants in this inquiry, I found the most common values from participants were as follows:

- Empathy
- Empowerment
- Artistry
- Hazlo que quieres
- Love
- Freedom
- Acceptance
- Hard work
- Always students first
- Passion
- Perseverance
- Leadership
- Community

Overwhelmingly, the participants in this inquiry credited their values as the underpinning driver of their approaches to overcoming the systemic barriers facing music education. Rather than a traditional descriptive definition of each, I explored what these values—represented by the words shared by music educators—meant in the visual and musical forms of meaning making.

Symbolism in Visual Art

Visual art is an artform that truly expresses the fundamental human experience, so I began with an application of visual art as a means to extrapolate meaning from the auditory (turned literary) descriptions provided in the documentation process.

As I was brainstorming ways to express the values each interviewee expressed to be true in their music identity, I was reminded of my days of making blackout poetry (which was popular during my middle school days and is a unique artform that crosses over visual art, poetry, and crafting) with friends and thought creating a word bubble through a free generator, Wordificator[10], would be perfect for this project. However, I wanted to find a common theme found in the values each educator shared for this word bubble to take a new shape.

Through this process, I observed the resonating themes to be *perseverance* and *integrity*. Embodying the principles of culturally responsive interviewing, I began to critically reflect

10 Check out the tool here: https://www.wordificator.com/

on why this resonated with me. These values reminded me of a cherished film from my childhood, *The Lion King*, which frequently features acacia trees. Finding the strength and resilience in the acacia trees and knowing these same values are true for music educators, and all educators alike, was what solidified choosing the acacia tree as the symbol of holding the values together.

I chose the color green as it represents new life and growth, which immediately made me think of the kids that make each educator who they are and serve as the reason they're in this profession.

Trees serve as elders in nature because of their wisdom and strength. I came to think more meaningfully how nature has played a pivotal role in my life through Valerie HD Killebrew's, *Earth Elders*, in Creative Generation's "Redefining Eldership" blog series which helped me rework how I view trees and their importance in nature and to the human spirit.

Building a Nature Soundscape

In the interview protocol, I curated after pursuing culturally responsive literature, I asked interviewees, "In three words, how would you describe the values you hold true as an educator?"

Many educators shared similar values of empathy, hard work, and community, but there were also strong values such as "unconditional love," "always students first," and "hazlo que quieres" (English translation: do what you want). Thinking back to the symbolism from the acacia tree, I wanted to try creating a soundscape that incorporated the values of interviewees with pure audio from nature.

My partner, Jaye, is a media studies major and an expert in all the things that come with audio mixing, so I came to them with the idea and thus began this project of creating a natural soundscape. My partner and I met in marching band, so we have always connected through music, but through wind repertory primarily. Learning one of their art forms through this soundscape turned into a passion project for music, words, and art. The soundscape is meant to be heard alongside reading the values of acacia tree to have as a visual aid.

The audio mixing comes from nature sounds recording in a local park in the afternoon and free resource audio of nature sounds. We began by cutting the audio of each interviewee and seeing what gelled well together in varying sequences. A non-negotiable was making sure each value was clearly heard as each value is said by each interviewee either from voice recordings or cutting the values section from our Zoom session. The only parameters given was to say their values slowly, but make it as natural as possible, and to be at a distance that isn't too far or too close to the microphone. This allowed for freedom in inflection, which truly makes the soundscape come to life. In the recording, you will hear one crow (out of few who were harboring nearby) who decided to let their presence be known in the recording by crowing frequently during our recording session. Rather than removing the crow from the audio, I thought back to spirituality and how my family holds true that seeing more than one crow is a symbol of wisdom and overall a good omen. Because of this, I decided to leave this in, but to also serve as an open interpretation of what this can mean for you and what comes up for you as you listen.

Creating Curated Playlists

A love language of mine is experiencing music together. Whether this is attending a concert, or making a playlist that reminds of you, I enjoy the shared experiences of music. I curated playlists for all people to experience, whether their taste is in wind band, orchestra, choral, or chamber music. The playlists are not solely music I knew initially, but came from talking with colleagues who found each of these pieces as moving, authentic, and powerful. All pieces center around social justice, with many coming out of personal or shared experiences. I recognize the playlist isn't exhaustive, but it does give listeners a starting point to composers whose work is dedicated to social justice and reform.

Experiencing Art in Your Neighborhood

In 2020, following the civil unrest ignited by multiple Black deaths related to police brutality and racial discrimination, we found a lack of celebration and joy in media and scholarship. From this inquiry, we can deduce by rejecting the status quo that violence and hate is normal, is an act of resistance in itself to white supremacy. The interview brief found ways for interviewees to share Black joy, success, and celebration, in order to share love and laughter with one another, and it's imperative that we, as human beings, persevere through prioritizing our own wellness. Take part in the first steps of activism that begin by uplifting and shining on all aspects of your life that are beautiful, affirming, and practice self-love.

To create a future that is not defined by trauma-inflicted context, let's find solidarity by finding ways to experience art to expand your own creativity. I implore you to explore what art was like in the days you freely expressed yourself, which may have shown up in your childhood or in phases in adulthood. Whatever this means for you, go back to that art form and see what comes up for you and how this can make meaning of the "adult work" you do now.

Through making sense of this very project, I found that I do not have to be defined by perfectionism or professionalism. Art is messy and not linear. When I explored spaces that did not make me feel defined was exactly how art was made and what made this project come into fruition.

As you expand your artistic horizons, don't be afraid to share with others your projects. Too often, we find ourselves questioning what is good enough, but you have the freedom to be creative in your work. Here's to making meaning through art and unlocking creative expression.

Call to Action

For many Black people in the United States, feeling seen and safe in fitness and health spaces, is far from the norm. Creating spaces of wellness for Black communities, by Black communities, especially when reading works that speak directly about historic and systemic barriers that affect us, is a difficult feat. When tackled with calls to action, in whatever form this takes, I tend to feel overwhelmed by all the work that needs to be done, no matter how "small" the first steps might be. Sometimes, it takes letting information settle and truly reflecting before taking action. This "producer" mindset can be taxing and detrimental to your emotional and mental wellbeing if not nurtured.

In this space, I encourage you to take time to find a piece below and give space to reflect– whether through meditation, journaling, or taking a walk outside. I encourage you to ask yourself:

- What are the systemic barriers you face in your work?
- What approaches have you developed in your pedagogy to overcome them?
- What values underpin these approaches?

As you move this work into practice, you may consider some of the pieces I curated in the following section.

Socially Responsive Pieces

"When we enlarge our view of the world, we deepen our understanding of our own lives."
- Yo-Yo Ma

Throughout this project, I had the opportunity to explore numerous pieces, which advance these goals. The pieces below are focused on social justice and reform, not all pertaining to education, but include powerful, transformative moments that speak the heart, body, and soul.

Please note that some pieces are denoted with an asterisk (*), as they contain sensitive content; please read program notes before implementing in your classroom.

Wind Repertoire

- Some treasures are heavy with human tears by John Mackey
- trail of tears by James Barnes
- They Shall Run and Be Free by Brant Karrick
- An American Elegy by Frank Ticheli
- A Mother of a Revolution! by Omar Thomas
- Into the Sun by Jodie Blackshaw
- Last Breaths by Armando Bayolo*

Chamber Works

- The Cartography Project by the Kennedy Center, Social Impact
    - The Road Ahead by Carlos Simon
    - A Progeny of Perpetual Independence by Liz Gre
    - Breonna's Lullaby by Derek Douglas Carter
    - Pretty Girl by Jens Ibson
    - Anthem for GO by Jessica Mays
    - Ahead of Time by Nathaniel Heyder
    - Mo(u)ning by B.E. Boykin

Choral Compositions

- The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed by Joel Thompson*
- The Kindness of Strangers with music by Chris Hutchings, poem by Brian Bilston
- Earth Song by Frank Ticheli
- Let My Love Be Heard by Jake Runested
- The Caged Bird Sings for Freedom by Jake Runested
- March of the Women by Ethel Smyth & Cicely Hamilton
- Justice Choir Songbook

Orchestral Pieces

- Fanfare for Uncommon Times by Valerie Coleman
- We Shall Overcome performed by Shades of Yale
- Symphony No.2, "Song of a new Race" by William Grant Still
- Negro Folk Symphony by William Levi Dawson
- Of Our New Day Begun (for Orchestra) by Omar Thomas
- Divided by Jessie Montgomery
- I Have Something to Say by Jessie Montgomery

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