

Representation Matters

by Kaitlin Beck

Music is many things—history, language, science, math, culture, and more. As music educators, it is imperative that our teaching empowers students as learners, music makers, and people. Our students deserve to see themselves in the material we teach, the books we share, and the music we create together.

Throughout my education, I have almost exclusively studied the traditions of Western music, an experience that I am sure is similar to many of your own. Aside from one World Music Cultures course at the collegiate level, I did gain much knowledge of music that is not, frankly, white and male and European. What troubled me most about my lack of non-Western music exposure, and still does, is how reinforces Western music as king and everything else as lesser. And in the middle of the 2019-2020 school year, I decided now was as good of a time as any to start the work of investigating the ways in which my teaching is not reflective of the diversity represented in my classroom.

This work truly began after several conversations with one of my college music professors regarding his sabbatical research on antiracism. After attending a NAFME webinar called “Making Good Choices: How Can Teachers Better Research Repertoire for the Classroom?” and digging through some texts on critical race theory, I knew it was time to make some changes. The webinar especially was enlightening from a music education standpoint; hosted by staff from the nonprofit, Decolonizing the Music Room, I learned how to start researching the music I bring into my classroom and find ways to integrate it respectfully. I also encountered a hard, but necessary realization, that some of the music, activities, and dances that I have been teaching in my classroom have connections to minstrelsy and perpetuating stereotypes of black, brown, and indigenous peoples (bbip). Obviously, it is not our intent to teach anything that could be harmful to our students, but we must acknowledge the impact it has AND when we know better, do better. As a privileged white woman and educator, it is imperative that I seek out opportunities to learn about the ways in which I can amplify the voices of others that have been marginalized.

If you are interested in doing this work, I’ve listed some resources from a variety of sources below that helped me get started. After starting this work, do I have all the answers? Of course not (and I wouldn’t want to because that would mean the learning is done). Is this work time consuming and hard? Yes. Is it worthwhile to do as an ally and educator of bbip? Yes. Will you mess up? Yes, but keep going. The most important part is to keep going and to do better when you know better.

Resources

-Making Good Choices: How Can Teachers Better Research Repertoire for the Classroom,

<https://vimeo.com/419122217>

-Decolonizing the Music Room Website, <https://decolonizingthemusicroom.com/>

-Jump Jim Joe by Andrew Ellingsen, <https://decolonizingthemusicroom.com/songs-%26-stories/f/jump-jim-joe>

-**Books:** *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi; *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo; *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander; *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin Diangelo

-**Films and TV:** 13th (Ava DuVernay), I am Not Your Negro (James Baldwin), The Hate U Give (George Tillman Jr.), When They See Us (Ava DuVernay)

-**Podcasts:** 1619 (New York Times), About Race, Code Switch (NPR), Momentum: A Race Forward Podcast

-**Music educators to follow:** @littleupbeatclass, @musicwithmrsdunc, @fwillismusic, @thaswrong

-**Justice organizations to follow:** @blkivesmatter, @eji_org, @splcenter, @aclu_natiwide, @aclufne