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From the Closet to the Band Room

Presentation Notes + Discussion Points

OVERVIEW

Privilege isn't a special commodity, but is a socialized strength we as educators must acknowledge in ourselves to generate true connections to our students and provide an equitable, mutually supportive safe space for them. Engage in more critical conversations/topics that must be acknowledged (that occur outside our space and affect our students) and help them acknowledge their truths as people. Once we do this, we can then assess our current curriculum, pedagogy, and self to provide our musicians with the highest, well-rounded education they deserve.

It's been a huge honor for me to be able to speak upon my experience as a queer, musician of color on this grand scale, and I hope these notes and discussion points will help you grow your perspective of yourself, (yourself) as an educator, and your students :)

THE "QUEER NARRATIVE"

"Queer Theory" : A sub-study of Sexuality Studies that rejects the hierarchical binaries used in our society b/c it's based on social construction. It recognizes the fluidity of gender and sexuality, and the role children take in performing gender as a means of construction & regulation.

- Our parents instill social constructs as a means to regulate and "fit in" to a "normal world," on top of forcing their perceptions of social constructs.

How Does This Affect the Music Space?

There are inherent biases that affect our own personal perception of the music space & music as a profession, especially against queer-identifying & non-conforming musicians.

- Inherent privilege in studying music as a cis-gendered, heterosexual, (and Caucasian) individual. Imagine once you've achieved all your hurdles in the meter race and having to get through several extras once you cross the finish line.
 - Due to this canon, you've probably felt seen.
- **"We've inherently failed our students the moment we limit their exposure to music based on their identity."**
 - **Lean in to the uncomfortability and Learn OURSELVES and not from others.**
 - Accessibility to **Quality** Music Education shouldn't be something extra, everyone should get it.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR PRIVILEGE

When we recognize a queer student's experience as being different from their cis-hetero peers, we see how "treating all students the same" can be detrimental.

- Similar to "I don't see color/race; You diminish the extra challenges these students face in a K-12 System that adorns and glorifies a Euro-Centric Heterosexual narrative.
- Empathy & solidarity from alliances w/ straight teachers, staff, and students are **NEEDED**.

There's more power in understanding that you don't understand, and being there for your students in the process.

- Being there FOR your students, NOT WITH THEM.
 - Not my place as I don't know their experience or the ways to be with them.

PRIVILEGES OF YOUR HETEROSEXUALITY

- To have your love for music dismissed as being "typical of people like you."
- To be just "a music teacher," and not "the *gay* music teacher."
- **To ignore whether people think you've converted a straight student to your "straight lifestyle."**

These are things LGBTQ+ Educators, even future educators like me, have to consider on a daily basis when we approach our jobs.

IMPOSING "HOMOSEXUAL DILEMMAS" (ENSEMBLE STANDARDS)

Connecting: "Relate musical ideas and works with varied context to deepen understanding."

- Would you acknowledge Benjamin Britten's 39-year relationship w/ Tenor Peter Pears, that served to develop 20th-Century Opera?
- In studying *Lincoln Portrait* by Aaron Copland, would you tell students that President Eisenhower not only removed it from being played at his inauguration due to McCarthyism(The Lavender Scare), but also because Copland was a homosexual?
- Would you discuss how Omar Thomas's "A Mother of a Revolution" was inspired by Marsha P. Johnson and the 1969 Stonewall Riots?
- Would you acknowledge that the most popular boy-girl love story in theatre, *West Side Story*, was the exclusive work of four gay American artists?

It is necessary to have our students know the full scope of our history. Not the cis-caucasian narrative we've grown to experience. Because not to include the contributions to music made by LGBTQ+ composers, conductors, educators, and performers means you completely ignore music in relation to history + culture to deepen understanding.

THE VALUE OF ESTABLISHING A “SAFE SPACE”

Why is it Important?

It places into the subconscious mind of a student that you, as the teacher, are ensuring their education comes first and are **willing to accept and teach anyone and everyone.** ALL students deserve the same amount of opportunities for growth and success, especially in music.

Moving From Avoidance to Empathy

One of the easiest default positions is to *agree to disagree* on issues. While this strategy allows for a truce of sorts, this approach is limited and often results in communication shutdown. Fearing confrontation, people may just avoid each other. Avoidance may then foster cliques and polarization that is antithetical to a cooperative learning environment. To move beyond avoidance, teachers can seek a more practical alternative by practicing and teaching empathy.

- Nursing Scholar Theresa Wiseman describes the four tenets of empathy to be:
 1. Be able to see the world as others see it.
 2. To be non-judgmental.
 3. To understand another person’s feelings.
 4. To communicate the understanding of that person’s feelings.

Help students understand (and improve your understanding) that it’s not your space to correct, object, or diminish someone else’s truth.

WHY IS “PLACE” IMPORTANT?

No space is “Neutral.”

Social justice & advocacy is not inherently embedded in a place but depends on the actions AND interactions that occur over time and in space. It’s like a “Positive-Criticism-Positive” Sandwich: **These actions build up, but you can never eat the sandwich to make it go away.**

In short... Places make us.

MOVING FROM “SAFE” TO “MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE” SPACES

As we consistently foster Safe Spaces in our music rooms, we can actively & successfully engage in critical topics in a “Mutually Supportive” space.

Engaging Students to Critically Think

Critical Thinking is an ACTIVE action, not a PASSIVE act. Giving the space for students to actively (and skillfully) conceptualize, analyze, and apply knowledge in the context of music. Students experience the World just as intensely as we do.

How do we do this?

Invite Students to be Critical.

1. “Plan a specific incident of intellectual dissonance.”
2. Find a balance between time spent on practicing skills/fundamentals in the same vein as critical thinking & action moments.

Inform to Truly Perform.

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- Teach through Contextualization.
 - **Don't Commodify/Exoticize "Otherness."**
 - The addition of non-western music/practices should not be romanticized.
 - The resources students need don't have to lay outside of the band room. It can come from conversations you have through your curriculum as well.

Foster a Pedagogy of Discomfort.

- Engaging your students to identify their own lived conditions (Whether it is of privilege to any extent or of adaptations) through the music may validate students that have had to adapt, and help others at least **mutually support** their peers in acknowledging their truth.
- Disassemble the hierarchy of "proper music" that builds a sense of superiority, Help students understand and recognize the people behind all practices of music.
 - Who were the people that played this music before 40 teenagers from America started playing it?

Don't Just "Add In" Repertoire outside of the Western European Canon. Consistently Integrate it Throughout Your Curriculum.

Focus on HOW the structure of "band" can become fluid and embrace previously unimagined possibilities without eliminating the rules & boundaries we were taught in undergrad.

WHAT CAN WE DO AS (FUTURE) EDUCATORS?

Connecting Beyond the Music

The first job as a director of ANY ensemble is to connect to the students. Taking the time to understand their needs and how to tap in and allow a space for them to grow and expand on new life concepts. All while guiding them to moral excellence. I believe that we have to continue to challenge our Ego in every aspect of life to prepare ourselves for the job as a Music Educator (It's not easy and it's not cute).

- Understand that there's a learning curve to every young teenager and every circumstance is different. At the end of the day, your goal is to challenge these students.

The learning and understanding comes from you and is the hardest portion that you have to acknowledge.

What Else is There to Do?

1. Acknowledge that our LGBTQ+ students are at a social disadvantage to engage in music the same way as their cis-heterosexual peers.
2. Verbally acknowledge that your band room is a safe space for ALL your students to excel as musicians. No place is "neutral."
 - Inform students of resources they can access on campus, online, etc. If they're not comfortable with coming to you.
3. Assess the current structures that bind our teaching pedagogy and don't be afraid to dig "Into the Unknown."

CONTINUE TO EDUCATE YOURSELF !

DISCUSSION POINTS

PRIVILEGE

- **What Forms of “Privilege” Do You Acknowledge Within Yourself/The Field of Music?**
 - **Material/Education:** Type of school attended, ensemble resources, individual upbringing and accessibility to resources, etc.
 - **Gender Identity + Sexual Orientation**
 - **“Passing”** : To be “White-Passing,” “Cis-Passing,” or “Straight-Passing”
- **How do we provide privilege to cis-gendered, heterosexual students and acknowledge the disparities our LGBTQ+ musicians experience**

CHALLENGE YOUR PHILOSOPHY

- Do students feel comfortable sharing their musical lives? What support do I need in order to incorporate students’ interests?
- How does the physical classroom environment welcome all types of learners and musicians?
- How do my language and gestures impact the spaces and interactions that students and I share?
- How can I give more agency to students during our interactions? What decisions do students want to make?
- Am I doing what I find meaningful or what students find meaningful?
- How do you show empathy to others (peers, students, family, etc.)? How do/can you teach empathy to your students?
- What kind(s) of social constructs have you been taught?
 - (A social construct is NOT raw facts about the world.)

CONNECTING TO STUDENTS

PRACTICE	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
Selecting Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What people, including those within my school, local, and global communities, do I typically exclude?● What musical practices, including those undertaken by the aforementioned individuals, do I tend to exclude?● How might I question & unglue the structures (class names, resources, curricula, and policies) that limit and solidify my practices?
Choosing What to Emphasize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What aspects of students, including their emotions and social nature, do I tend to ignore?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To what extent do I consider the unique differences that individual students bring to their musical endeavors?● How might my students and I engage in practices such as “mis-listening,” “mis-performing,” and “mis-creating?”● In what ways do I allow systems of organization to stagnate my emphases from day-to-day and year-to-year, and how might I empower myself to reimagine my actions?
Considering the Roles of Teachers & Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To what extent might my role involve differing <i>with</i> students?● How could I explain & demonstrate my own difference to students?● To what extent might my role include facilitating students’ journeying along divergent paths?● How might I balance & intermix movement toward pre-planned goals w/ wanderings in unplanned directions?