SPACES OF INSPIRATION, AFFIRMATION, AND RESISTANCE: AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC TEACHERS' RACIALLY AND CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF BEING A TEACHER

by

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Abstract

Spaces of Inspiration, Affirmation, and Resistance: African-American Music Teachers' Racially and Culturally Inclusive Experiences and Perceptions of Being a Teacher

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The experiences and perspectives of music teachers of color should be included and validated as being an integral part of understanding what it means to be a music teacher. Many current practices for preparing and developing music educators are implemented within a framework that is deceptively considered to be culturally, theoretically, and politically neutral. The experiences and narratives of music educators of color may help to inform current thinking and understanding surrounding the professional experiences of music teachers. My dissertation study seeks to amplify the voices of African-American music teachers by illuminating how their experiences within racially and culturally inclusive spaces have influenced their perceptions of what it means to be a teacher. I employed theories within a critical race paradigm to provide inclusive, authentic contexts for the often-silenced stories of participants to be told and constructed, while allowing participants to create definitions and representations of what it means to be a music teacher. Using life history and collective memory methodologies, I elicited the valued, insider knowledge of three African-American music teachers who have had influential experiences within artistic communities of resistance. Thematic analysis was employed to explore narrative content and to attend to nuanced and collective understandings among individuals and groups. Findings of this study indicated the possibilities of music teacher

narratives to serve as epistemological and pedagogical resources for pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development.

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Chapter I: Locating and Situating the Experiences of African-American Music Teachers

Introduction

The arts have the unique capacity to provide individuals with alternative spaces for expressing themselves and envisioning different ways of understanding. Marginalized and underserved students, in particular, are often drawn to the arts as a safe space for renewal and a refuge from the hostile, exclusionary practices that occur in schools. Therefore, arts educators need to develop the capacity to embody a critical multicultural consciousness and a sociopolitical activist approach to teaching. My project first will address how cultural values and perceptions are influential in determining what and whose knowledge is privileged in music education. Then, I will provide a space for the perspectives of African-American music teachers to be amplified by illuminating experiences that are uniquely linked to who they perceive themselves to be and how they construct, negotiate, and navigate their understandings of what it means to be a teacher. Finally, the knowledge acquired from the experiences of participants will contribute to the reframing of the sociopolitical and sociocultural expectations of K-12 music teacher education.

Background

In 1972, 200 African-American music educators gathered in Atlanta, GA for a call to action during the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) biennial meeting. These educators spoke out against the underrepresentation of minorities in prominent MENC positions and the overall inattentiveness to issues that were particularly of interest to African-American music teachers (e.g. African-American composers and historically Black music genres) (NASPAAM, 2013). This meeting was the beginning of the MENC Black Caucus, a group of

Black music educators who hoped to build more inclusive spaces by informing the visible, intellectual, and musical presence and perspectives of MENC. During this same year, MENC decided to act towards what was deemed as culturally and racially exclusive professional practices and formed the Minority Concerns Commission (MCC) (Gangware, 1975). In the initial statement of goals and objectives, the MCC sought to create opportunities for musical representation through authentic cultural music instructional materials and performances. They wanted to collaborate with music teacher education programs and influence research agendas to address minority concerns. The most imminent goal was to involve more minority music educators in the programming and planning of MENC organizational activities.

While the organization previously named MENC, now renamed the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME), has made advancements towards authentically diverse opportunities in music education, work still needs to be done. More critically informed approaches to thinking about teaching are needed in order to transform the very conservative ideologies that are often perpetuated within the field of music teacher education. The conservative values entrenched in music teacher education manifest at music college/university auditions where the classical canon is predominantly deemed as the measurement of or marker for musical proficiency and within traditional conservatory-style music coursework that privileges the Western trained musical ear (Koza, 2008). These values can be found when pre-service teachers enter the profession ill-prepared to teach and learn in culturally and racially diverse communities. Within a critical multicultural way of understanding music teacher education, the perspectives of many cultural groups and communities are affirmed through the way that music is taught, learned, and valued.

Statement of Purpose

Current practices for preparing and developing music educators are often implemented within a framework that is deceptively considered to be culturally, theoretically, and politically neutral. This neutral framework is a normative space where discourses surrounding accepted exclusionary practices and ideals are perpetuated and where the beliefs and perceptions of others outside of this space are subjugated and/or silenced, creating hostile environments for individuals and groups who hold different racial, cultural, and sociopolitical values (Bradley, 2007). I would like to examine how the narratives of African-American music teachers may help to inform current thinking and understanding surrounding the professional experiences of teachers. I am very interested in the notion of developing teachers to embrace an embodied, multicultural consciousness that fosters critical critique as opposed to one that conveys a superficial worldview of cultural competence. Two concepts are especially important here in terms of examining sociocultural contexts of teacher development and perceptions of professional experiences: cultural competence and critique. Cultural competence is defined as retaining one's own culture while being academically successful. Additionally, critique involves developing the consciousness of teachers to become social change agents (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Music educators are better able to engage in experiences that are needed for embodying cultural competence within the context of nurturing intellectual spaces and supportive physical places. These experiences are meant to be transformative, changing not only a teacher's instructional strategies but also his/her philosophical beliefs regarding the purpose his/her role as a teacher. One example of a transformative musical space is the use of the aesthetic, artistic, and political frameworks of the Black church gospel choir, as one aspect of many, in interpreting and performing a classical choral work such as Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus". Another example

would be an African-American composer using the traditional space of Western classical music composition in order to convey a message that is specific to his/her cultural traditions and values (but can translate to a larger audience) by transforming and transgressing that space to serve as a mediator between cultures (as opposed to a perpetuator of exclusionary practices). One example of this can be found in William Grant Still's "Afro-American Symphony No. 1" which incorporated blues harmonies within the genre of classical music.

Furthermore, audience members within this space continue the transformative process by blurring the lines separating the space that mediates the traditionally desired distance between audience and performer(s). In African American communities, for example, audience members are encouraged to give enthusiastic praise and applause to performers and both on-stage and off-stage interaction between audience members and performers are welcomed at the end of a performance. A transformational musical space allows its participants/members to build and embody a repertoire of professional musician discourses that infuse their cultural values, knowledge and practices within the traditional classical music canon. They are also building a community that serves as a place of renewal and affirmation.

Structure of the Dissertation

My study illuminated the experiences of teachers of color that are uniquely linked to who they perceive themselves to be and how they would like to be perceived by others. This research addressed how the perceptions and experiences of African-American music teachers are influential in determining what and whose knowledge is valued. Here, I will outline a description of this study. In this introductory chapter, I outlined the background for the study, presented my personal interests that have shaped my initial research thought processes, and

engaged the bodies of literature that have helped to frame my project. Chapter II evokes critical race paradigms to provide a context for viewing the racial and cultural contexts of music education and the lived experiences of teachers of color. I used critical race theory, bell hooks' notion of homeplace and Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist epistemology as analytical and theoretical lenses for viewing salient issues of race and social equity. Chapter III provides an explanation of the combined methodologies of life history and collective memory along with the selection criteria, data collection and analysis, and validation criteria. I explained how my interpretation and use of life history is framed as collections of lived experiences told as stories and counter-stories. Chapter IV presents the teaching life histories of three African-American music teachers in their own words. Chapter V presents an analysis of the individual teachers' narratives and the thematic concepts that emerge across a synthesis of the group's narratives. Finally, Chapter VI addresses the theoretical and empirical implications of the research findings and suggests new perspectives for music teacher education programs.

Personal Interest and Inspiration

As an African-American music teacher and researcher, I have personal and professional vested interests in this topic. This project is more than a means to an end for me. It is also my way of engaging in intellectual political activism. The desire to pursue this project stems from my own frustrations of not seeing cultural and racial perspectives similar to my own as valid in the knowledge construction processes of what it means to be a teacher. My research is intended to serve as a counter-story to belief systems that only privilege one way of understanding. Therefore, this type of research provides much needed insight into the effective recruitment, preparation, and development of teachers to meet the needs of multicultural teaching and

learning communities. Research using teacher narratives is also important in order to begin to understand and prepare educators for the widening cultural and socioeconomic differences between the predominant backgrounds of most urban teachers and the backgrounds of urban student populations.

My interpretations of an artistic, musical, homeplace are shaped, in part, by my own childhood experiences participating within a community of resistance. Of course, I did not initially realize the sociopolitical context of my participation in a junior music program for middle and high school students based at a Historically Black University and could not appropriate the language to describe it at the time. However, I was aware that it was inspiring to be in a rehearsal space where others looked like me, had similar cultural backgrounds, and shared a passion for creating music. The simple fact of being Black didn't connect us; rather, it was the unspoken recognition and respect that we had for each other's ideological struggles as Black Americans, residents of mostly Black[1] neighborhoods, and classical music performers who also negotiated and navigated many other conflicting social and cultural identities. In this safe place, I performed classical music for the first time by a composer who was not old, White, or dead (conversely, he was middle-aged, Black, and very much alive), and the experience directly affirmed that classical music wasn't the only musical genre that sounded good on the violin. (I remember listening in admiration as my violin teacher improvising over rhythm and blues harmonies).

I was able to freely drop cultural codes among my peers (and some of my teachers) without fear of being alienated or dismissed as unintelligent. This world was a comfortable and nurturing one. But even at the time, it seemed too different from the other world that I lived in as

1 I use the words Black and African-American synonymously when referring to my own interpretations and experiences.

a novice classical musician to seem real enough to be sustained. At the time, I did feel a great sense of freedom in knowing that I did not have to self-silence the qualities that were associated with my culture. Yet, something that I didn't realize at the time is that artistic communities such as the one I experienced exist not only to provide necessary social, cultural, and political resources but to give individual members agency to impart self-healing, to provide opportunities for others to heal, and to foster communal practices.

As I progressed within the profession of music education, I began to wonder how my previous experiences in an artistic-community of resistance had shaped my concepts and ideas of what a teacher should be and what a teacher should do. I thought of how my colleagues' experiences may be different or similar to my own and how these experiences are embodied as cultural and professional values. I also wondered how teachers' perceptions about teaching are influenced by their everyday interactions with others and the emergent meanings via these human or lived experiences.

Research Questions

My own experiences as an African-American and as a music teacher have influenced the passion and invested interest that I have in exploring the ways that music/arts teacher education professional development can be informed by the personal and professional experiences of Black music teachers. More specifically, I am interested in the ways in which racially and culturally inclusive music learning and teaching spaces have inspired their engagement in music, reaffirmed their cultural sense of self, and provided strategies for resisting forces which are hostile towards their cultural well-being. My study addressed the following questions:

1. In what ways have classically trained African-American teachers music teachers been supported within racially and culturally inclusive artistic spaces?
2. How are these experiences used by African-American music teachers to shape their thinking on and perceptions of what it means to be a teacher?

Study Delimitations and Limitations

There are several delimitations and limitations in my research study. I chose to focus on experienced African-American music teachers. I initially wanted to interview at least one teacher who was in the earlier phase of his or her career. However, a higher response rate of experienced teachers limited the range of generational representation and participation in this study. Another delimitation is that only African-American music teachers were selected as participants and as representations of teachers of color. I decided to impose this limitation so that I could incorporate my own experiences and speak from a place of cultural familiarity as a researcher-participant.

Literature Review

My dissertation project is informed by bodies of research literature that helped to frame my research on the lived experiences and perceptions of Black music teachers. My principle focus was not necessarily the methodologies or the research designs of the selected literature. I placed my focus on the discourses that have been engaged and constructed in order to attend to privileging matters of race, storytelling, and the perspectives of teachers of color. Congruently, I also examined how the experiences of music teachers have theoretically been framed both through lenses that are commonly perceived as neutral (or commonsensical), as well as lenses

that, in some way, analyze the cultural and social contexts of being a music teacher as it aligns with issues of race and social equity. Current music education research often silence the authentic first person accounts and perspectives of Black music teachers, or undermines them by creating a monolithic, imagined entity of the definition of "teachers of color" without placing this term and concept within a more nuanced context of the cultural groups and individuals that comprise members of these groups. The analysis of the perspectives of teachers of color in music education research is often glossed over or given an under theorized critique that is not attentive or validating of the uniquely affirming experiences of resistance and inspiration.

Therefore, the purpose of this literature review was to begin the process of analyzing and critiquing current empirical studies pertaining to topics surrounding several educator lenses of viewing and narrating one's sense of self. I have constructed three major themes that I will use to categorize the current research literature: (1) the lived experiences of teachers of color (2) music educator musical/professional lenses of experience and (3) music educator culturally critical/professional lenses of experience. For my first category, I provide examples of how the perspectives of teachers of color have the capacity to offer unique and alternate ways of understanding the values and beliefs that influence our experiences and senses of self. For my second category, I focused on the binary of the musical self and the professional self that has occupied a prevalent place in music teacher research and portends to be culture free or neutral. And my final category includes examples of research in music teacher education that has focused on issues of social equity against unjust beliefs and practices.

Lived Experiences of Teachers of Color

As it is for those of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is important for African-American teachers to reflect upon experiences based on how they occur and develop among

individuals as well as collectively within the communities in which we live. This phenomenon of naming and analyzing lived experiences provides a space for privileging everyday experience over simply conceptualizing what the experiences of people of color should be framed within an imagined universal notion. The academic and professional experiences and standpoint of teachers of color serve to affirm and validate thoughts and experiences on how race affects teacher perceptions of self and the learning community (Dixson & Dingus 2008; Foster, 1997; Jay, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 2005).

A study conducted by Ladson-Billings (2005) focused on the struggles and triumphs of her fellow colleagues of color. The purpose of this study was to document and analyze the experiences of Black teacher educators in White institutions and the negotiations and paths that have informed their careers. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven professors from various predominantly White institutions and analyzed using portraiture. Each interview was aligned with an historical Black figure and a narrative was constructed from this pairing using portraiture methodology. Interview participants collectively expressed their frustrations and challenges as Black scholars in mostly White institutions. Some of their reflections included being accosted for their research being "too Black" or not Black enough and having to be experts in the area of Black studies. Ladson-Billings' research makes a case for the need to create more racially equitable and inclusive places and spaces in the professoriate and other areas of higher education.

Although Ladson-Billings' work with her colleagues focused on higher education, inclusive professional spaces are equally important for elementary and secondary educators as well. This transformation of what is valued in formalized spaces of teaching and learning is informed by the unique standpoint of teachers of color in a study conducted by Dixson and

Dingus (2008). Their research documented the often disregarded socio-political, professional work of Black educators by analyzing how gender, race and class informed the pedagogy of Black educators. Dixson and Dingus also investigated the specific implicit and explicit political frameworks shaping the pedagogies of four African-American teachers located in a medium-sized Midwestern city school district. Using Black Feminist Theory as a theoretical framework, the authors developed five themes to describe the political work that the teachers engaged in - Teaching as a Lifestyle and a Public Service, Discipline as Expectations for Excellence, Teaching as Othermothering, Relationship Building, and Race, Class, and Gender Awareness. Dixson and Dingus stated that African-American teachers "wage political battles on a daily basis" and suggested further research on the relationship between identity construction and political activism.

Both studies addressed the absence of historically marginalized voices in constructing the way that educational researchers have focused on how we think about schooling and the way we think about educators from a critical, sociocultural lens. This specific lens or way of analyzing the literature also attended to issues of power and positionality of constructed knowledge. In other words, the researchers critically responded to the question, "whose knowledge is valued and/or who determines what knowledge is privileged or 'official'" (Apple, 1993)?

Gomez, Rodriguez, and Agosto (2008) conducted a two-year longitudinal study that included life history cases studies of Latino/a pre-service teachers. The case selected for this specific study focused on one Latino and one Latina prospective teacher who were elementary education majors at a large Midwestern university. The researchers explored the unique knowledge and experiences that Latino/a teacher candidates bring to their teacher education programs, the many ways that Latinos negotiate their experiences within the context of these

programs and the university, and the implications of these unique experiences for teacher educators. From the findings, the authors proposed five dimensions for teacher educators to consider in creating more equitable programs/policies: whom we hire as teacher educators, how we model classroom pedagogy for students, how we help all prospective teachers excavate their identities, how prospective teachers' language skills and cultural backgrounds are taken into account on campus and in school experiences, and how we deploy experiences with various cultural communities for prospective teachers. Other findings suggested that pre-service teachers be given the opportunity to continuously reflect upon their personal identities and to explore how their identities shape their interactions with others.

Dingus (2008) studied professional teacher socialization that occurred within three African-American, intergenerational teaching families. Three women from each family were interviewed using life history methodology in order to explore the influence of familial relationships on shaping their thoughts and understandings of what it means to be an African-American teacher. Two of Dingus' findings were that study participants believed teaching to be "political work" inclusive of individual and collective responsibilities and a stable, respectable, profession that provided a space of autonomy and resistance from agricultural and service labor. Her third and final finding, "ironies of progress", was specific to third generation participants who had to negotiate the conflicts between family legacies (such as attending the historically black college or university of their parents), more diverse educational and professional opportunities than previous generations (choosing to stay on the traditional professional path or choosing another), and the present-day notions of the teaching profession (juxtaposed with the interpretations of previous generations) (617).

Both studies (Gomez et. al. and Dingus) illustrated the importance of conducting more research that conveys diverse perspectives within the field of teacher education and connects the cultural and familial backgrounds of teachers from diverse backgrounds to their work as professionals.

Music Educator Musical/Professional Lenses of Experience

The research literature in music education is comprised of two principle themes: the musical/professional lenses of music educators and the culturally/critical professional lenses of music educators. Dollof's study (1999) investigated how music teacher roles and identities are constructed through images and the social imagination. Doloff used the drawings and narratives of undergraduate and graduate music education students in order to analyze how students constructed images and theories of teaching and being a teacher. She found that student drawings of what they perceived as an "ideal" teacher reflected their personal direct and vicarious experiences. Undergraduate students, regardless of gender, were mostly inclined to draw a picture of a female teacher who displayed characteristics of a well-organized, "caring," "compassionate," and in-control professional.

Dollof discovered that the images provided by her undergraduate students did not necessarily reflect how they saw themselves within the role of being a teacher but instead reflected idealized notions of what they should become. Conversely, graduate student drawings tended to address "some level of chaos" that was connected to their images of "an 'out-of-control' ideal teacher" and reflected on their thoughts of how elements such as school budget, workload, and class size constraints have an impact on their abilities to be highly effective teachers. Dollof's findings addressed the notion that defining what a music teacher is or could be requires a rejection of static, restricted identities and an embrace of the dynamic elements of

forming identities. Dollof's study also illustrated how examining images of being a teacher can be used as a tool for the development of professional identity.

Bernard (2009) analyzed the narrative of a "typical" pre-service music educator, extracted from a set of narratives collected from students enrolled in a Boston University graduate music teacher education program. The 'narrative revealed "underlying assumptions" that pre-service teachers (in the larger study and in this representative case) hold about music teaching, music learning, and music making. One major assumption was that "good music teachers are passionate," "non-judgmental," and create learning spaces for students to fully share ideas and engage in discussions. Other major assumptions were that "good music learning and music making" requires perseverance, a goal of perfection, the ability to "step outside of oneself and leave one's thinking behind," an ability to find "inspiration in unlikely places, and the ability to communicate effectively. The findings concluded that pre-service music teacher narratives and acts of reflecting upon past experiences can inform their professional identity construction processes and can help them to develop strategies to support their students more effectively.

Another study explored how musikdidaktik, a term for the act of music teaching and learning in Nordic countries, can provide a space for identity construction (Ferm, 2008). Phenomenological interviews were conducted with seven musikdidaktik professors and three groups of pre-service music educators. Specific areas of inquiry surrounding musikdidaktik included identity formation, the distinction and connections between processes of identity formation, and the direct links between developed competences as a result of these processes to employability were developed by the researchers to guide the study. The results showed that reflecting upon experiences, learning, and goals helped to inform students' professional identity

development and increased awareness of identity formation processes. The professors who participated were focused on developing reflective pre-service music educators.

Georgii-Hemming (2006) documented how the experiences and thoughts of five teachers expressed their understanding of music as a school subject within social, educational, and musical contexts. Life histories were constructed for each of the five music teachers who taught in an upper secondary school in Sweden. The two main themes that emerged from the study were the teachers' understanding of music and music-making within the classroom as an "activity, craft, [and] bringer of joy" rather than primarily driven by the students' technical skills and the emphasis on student-centered or individual pupil-centered teaching and learning. Most teacher-participants felt that developing the individual student to be responsible and an active participant in collaborative activities supported values such as freedom of choice and individual expression. The results of the study concluded that the personal, music experiences of teachers helped to inform how and what they teach their students.

Stegman (2007) proposed to "explore the content of reflective dialogues between student teachers in music and their cooperating teachers, as well as to understand the effects of reflective dialogue on professional development." Six student teachers and six cooperating teachers from a medium-size Midwestern state university participated in eight reflection sessions and three interview sessions over either 10 or 16 week term (the term reflected the student's course requirements). The researcher guided the study by asking about the content of student teachers' reflections over the student teaching term, the degree to which dialogue with an experienced teacher was useful in initiating and supporting reflection on the part of the student teachers and the existence of a relationship between student teachers' developing practice and their reflective dialogue with the cooperating teacher with whom they worked. Stegman found that while the

initial reflections of student teacher-participants focused on the technical aspects of teaching, more critical, context-specific reflections consequently emerged over the course of a semester. However, intersecting issues of race, class, and gender were not specifically addressed or considered as possible frameworks in this study or any of the previously mentioned research.

Music Educator Culturally Critical/Professional Lenses of Experience

There are very few studies in music education which critically examine the relationships and intersections between teachers' racial, ethnic, gender, class identities and their perceptions and experiences as music teachers. Bradley, Golner, & Hanson (2007) conducted a study that analyzed data from three dialogues of a White professor and two White graduate students participating in a class entitled 'Race Issues in Music Teaching' at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Throughout the fifteen week course, the research participants examined notions of Whiteness in education and reflected on their own reactions to the concept. Research findings showed that the two students' previous academic, teacher training experiences inadequately prepared them to teach using a multicultural approach and to understand how race is socially constructed from White ideologies. Through journaling and class discussions, the researcher-participants were able to construct and reflect upon narratives based on their previous and current experiences.

Younker and Hickey (2007), two university music education professors, conducted another study that used narratives as a tool for analyzing teacher professional experiences. Using a social justice conceptual framework, they constructed and analyzed their own music teacher educator narratives derived from four school-based music classroom scenarios. One professor reflected on research observation experiences at an elementary school in Chicago and a junior high band class in suburban Chicago. The other professor reflected on her research

experiences in a suburban elementary school in Michigan and an elementary music classroom in Budapest, Hungary. The researchers framed their critiques by asking how issues of equity inform music teaching and learning and what it means to teach music through the lens of social justice.

The researchers concluded that power relations in music education programs and systems should be examined and social justice can be enacted through agency and self-evaluation. The researchers demonstrated how power relations among the social actors (e.g. teachers, students) and the sociopolitical contexts in which these actors negotiated their constructions of self emerged and continually shifted between the local level of the individual (e.g. the teacher) and the institutional level (e.g. the classroom and school music program). This study also demonstrated that authentic, social justice in music education requires the experiential knowledge of a participatory, democratic community of learners and the redefinition of music education as "a discipline of inquiry, rather than a system of methodologies or craft" (226).

Emmanuel's case study (2005) examined the narratives of five pre-service teachers (all female, four White and one biracial – White and Latina) who completed an immersion internship experience in an urban, culturally diverse Detroit (MI) public school. She focused on the participants' personal conceptualizations regarding teaching and interactions with students of color before, during and after the pre-service teachers lived in the urban community where they taught and participated in a seminar in multicultural competence. Emmanuel found that the pre-service teachers' pre-internship views about the transferring of knowledge to students shifted over the course of the internship to the notion of teaching students as whole persons. As a result of the internship, the research participants expressed a greater awareness of racial slurs and

offensive/oppressive language, their own biases, and the sociopolitical responsibility that they had as teachers.

The current empirical research on music experiences and identity, while beginning to examine how racial experiences shape music teachers and teacher education, has not adequately analyzed the identity navigation and negotiation processes of music teachers of color and how their experiences may inform teacher education epistemology and policy. In order to develop a framework that focuses on the professional experiences of music teachers of color, the sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts in which these experiences take place need to be addressed.

In addition, the field of music educational research lacks an adequate scope of studies addressing intersecting issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Race, Whiteness, and social justice are often silenced issues in music education classrooms and among music education professionals and hinders educators from developing a multicultural consciousness (Bradley, Golner, & Hanson, S., 2007; Emmanuel, 2005; Younker & Hickey, 2007). My proposed research is intended to contribute to the current literature by focusing on counter-narratives (from a marginalized standpoint) that address how perceptions and cultural values are influential in determining what and whose knowledge is valued and taught. As the research on teacher experiences has shown, teachers of color often bring a different set of values and standpoints to teaching and learning, and this research has broadened our understanding of teacher education policy and practice. In a similar vein, my research will contribute to the current literature by illuminating how the experiences of music teachers of color have shaped their professional interpretations of self, and how this 'insider-outsider' knowledge can inform the field of music teacher education.

I intend to contribute to the research on music teacher education by presenting teacher narratives that are interpreted in collaboration with the participants, i.e., African-American music teachers. This contribution seeks to complicate the prevalent binary frameworks that have guided most empirical music education research on how music educators navigate and reconcile the various aspects of their personal and professional experiences and the sociopolitical landscapes in which these experiences are situated. My dissertation research shows that many tensions exist and often takes precedence over the push-pull of the musician-educator debate and that in some communities of color (and other marginalized communities) this dialogue is part of a larger dialogue of racial and sociopolitical culture.

Summary of Literature Review and Significance of Proposed Research

While my literature review indicated that educational researchers have written about teaching as a political act among educators of color, this framework needs to be explored further within the context of music teacher education programs. A shift in the ways of understanding that guide arts teacher preparation and development would first begin with a greater awareness and critique of unjust power structures as interpreted from a marginalized standpoint. A critique of the Western, patriarchal paradigm that often dictates the framework of pre-service and in-service teacher programs would allow a space to illuminate different sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives and attend to more authentic and comprehensive ways of knowing. Music teacher education preparation and professional development curricula and pedagogical approaches would serve to empower pre-service and in-service teachers with the awareness that cultural competency and critical critique are not end products but ever, evolving processes that are informed by lived experiences.

Summary

My research was conducted to explore the possibilities for music teacher narratives to serve as epistemological and pedagogical resources. This particular use of narratives also attends to the importance of the past and ongoing processes of becoming a teacher. Using a critical lens to define music education would help to deconstruct traditional roles and power relations of knowledge construction and privilege the knowledge of music teachers of color. The implications of integrating the knowledge and experiences of music educators of color reaches beyond the potential contributions that this study can make to music teacher education programs and classrooms and may provide another pathway for greater dialogue and action towards equity in K-12 arts education.

Chapter II: Theorizing the Experiences of African-American Music Teachers

Conceptual Framework

The narratives of music teachers of color have the potential to be compelling illustrations of how knowledge and power are constructed. Narratives can also speak to/against illusionary concepts of a universal aesthetic interpretation and way of understanding and can address dominant ideologies that seek to discredit individuals and communities with differing cultural and sociopolitical values. These cognitive dissonances of knowledge and power are inherent in the landscape of educational discourse and in the ways that teachers perceive themselves. My emphasis on narratives and counter-stories are drawn from the work of critical theorists who have provided a foundation for further analysis of cultural and social differences.

The specific critical theoretical frameworks that helped to conceptualize and informed my study are rooted in contexts of lived experiences, storytelling, and narrative formation. In this section, I will outline my use of theory and the specific attributes of each selected theory that align with my proposed research. I will also use several prominent lenses in order to shape my conceptual framework of music teacher experiences and artistic communities of resistance as a resource. The sociopolitical context in which music teacher education has been conceptualized will be addressed in this section by emphasizing the equity constructs of race, class, and gender along with a contextual lens for analyzing power relations. The theoretical concepts of safe spaces, hush harbors, homeplace will be interpreted and emphasized within a critical race paradigm for its capacity to influence the perceptions and experiences of African-American teachers. I will begin by providing a brief overview of critical theories that have shaped my thinking on teacher experience, narratives, and the act of telling one's story.

Critical Social Theory

Critical social theory (CST) was developed in order to critique status quo, western/capitalist, and patriarchal ideologies that are often perpetuated in the policies and practices of traditional social, political, and educational systems (Leonardo, 2009). Zeus Leonardo (2009) states that "critical social theory is a multidisciplinary framework with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge" and "promoting criticism as the defining aspect of a quality education" (p. 13). Notions and dynamics of power are of specific relevancy within critical social theory in addition to a call for social justice. Giroux (1988) believed that one shift in power could come about through transformative education and respecting the teacher as "an intellectual" and "cultural worker". In Giroux's framework, teachers are not just complicit technicians but also have valid knowledge that can be honed to create policy, create curricula, and develop pedagogies that serve to critique and transform inequitable social structures and ideologies. The knowledge that teachers possess are rooted in their personal and professional experiences. Through teacher narratives and counter-stories, varied and unique perspectives are moved from the margins of educational discourse and placed in the center. Exploring one's personal experiences through the framework of CST provides a space "to question, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge in the interest of emancipation from ideologies that subvert critique (Leonardo, 2009, p. 15).

Critical Race Theory

The specific critical theoretical frameworks that helped to shape my thinking on the lived experiences of Black music teachers are based in contexts of storytelling and narrative formation. Critical race theory (CRT) provides an epistemological and activist space for countering social

and political injustices and constructing narratives that are attentive to issues of race. Critical race theorists believe that the discourse of race is embedded in the societal fabric of the United States. Therefore, many existing inequitable and unjust social structures and practices are attributed to the racism inherent in the social fabric. CRT has its origins in U.S. legal studies where the need to "challenge traditional claims of legal neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, meritocracy" was in direct opposition to the "self-interest of dominant groups in American (U.S.) society" (Ladson-Billings and Tate/Delgado, 1995, p.52). One strategy for providing an alternate way of understanding was the use and telling of stories by individuals and groups who had previously been silenced or marginalized. This act of testimony (or bearing witness) allowed individuals to address the often painful issues of race within the dominant frameworks of the legal system. Although CRT was initially used to articulate the Black/White binary of race, its tenets have been reinterpreted to be inclusive of other marginalized groups who have been racialized within a discourse of power and White privilege (e.g. LatCrit, AsianCrit, DisCrit, etc.)

While critical social theory has provided an epistemological and activist space for countering social and political injustices and constructing narratives of transformation, the main premise of this theory is not fully attentive to specific issues regarding gender and race. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been used in educational research to analyze issues of race within the context of schooling and has provided a framework for people of color to affirm their experiences through testimonial narratives and storytelling. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) addressed storytelling and the significance of 'voice' in critical race theory as being "interpretive structures by which we impose order on experience and it on us" (57). Storytelling is a cultural tool (i. e. form of mediating and meaning-making) in the on-going process of making meaning out of experiences which captures the self in a particular time and space

(Roceur, 1984; Goodson, 2008). Ladson-Billings and Tate stated that the notion of "voice" or "naming one's own reality" within a CRT frame work is essential for providing "a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice" (p. 58). They continued to explain that the "voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system" and "without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (p. 58). Through teacher narratives and counter-stories, varied and alternate perspectives are moved from the margins of educational discourse and placed in the center.

Adrienne Dixson (2012) wrote a personal narrative detailing two pivotal moments in her early development as a musician that were racially marked. Dixson explained how her flute teacher at the time once suggested that her lips needed to be smaller in order to achieve a better sound. Another incident occurred when she presented a report on African-American composer, William Grant Still. While her peers chose to report on more well-known composers, Dixson's selection prompted her flute instructor to ask for evidence of her research sources. None of her peers endured the same level of scrutiny for their presentations.

Through her personal narrative, Dixson demonstrated how CRT and the counter-stories of teachers of color can help educators to "interrogate the Whiteness of music" and "to disrupt these biases and beliefs that can sometimes have devastating effects on students' spirits and love for music" (Dixson, 2012, p. 9). Dixson's narrative also is a call for action for music educators who teach early childhood through graduate school (and professional development) as the societal issues of inequity and Whiteness can be found within every aspect of teaching and learning music.

The narratives constructed out of the stories that African-American teachers tell regarding their intersecting cultural, political, and professional experiences address inequities in schooling practices and policy. Audrey Thompson (1998) stated that "such truth-telling narrative functions are important for all people, but perhaps particularly so for oppressed peoples, whose stories are likely to be misshapen beyond all recognition by the time that they appear in mainstream media - if they ever appear at all" (538). Therefore, CRT scholars "believe and utilize personal narratives and stories as valid forms of evidence" to counteract dominant framings and have referenced these accounts as "counterstories"/counter-stories or "counternarratives (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 10; DeCuir and Dixson, 2004, p. 27). The "voice" that permeates from these stories can at times represent one person's journey or the collective stories of a group of individuals. However, in a CRT framework, these voices often speak to the commonly shared experiences of being silenced and represent resilient acts of resistance within racially and culturally hostile spaces.

While a critique of race issues and injustices are salient to my project, a stronger influence of feminist theory is needed to analyze in greater depth how the intersections of race and gender evoke issues of inequity that race theories alone do not. Therefore, I turn to feminist theories in order to provide an even richer, perspective of these issues as they aligned with the lived experiences of music teachers of color and my study.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory serves to place commonly shared oppressions and lived experiences of women at the center of knowledge construction. It also was developed to critique patriarchal,

status-quo ways of understanding gender and power relations within traditional social and institutional structures.

One specific aspect of feminist theory emphasizes the notion of care. Nel Noddings (2002) developed a theory of care that individuals should base ethical and moral decisions on the preservation or care of another. More specifically, the relationship between the "carer" and the "cared-for" requires that the "carer" recognizes a moral need to care and acts upon that need, which in turn creates an awareness of reciprocity in the one being "cared-for" (Noddings, p. 19). Noddings theorized that educators (the carers) teach acts of caring to their students through *modeling*, demonstrate the relational properties of caring through *dialogue*, provide opportunities for both the carer and the cared-for to *practice* acts of care, and encourage a sustained bidirectional effort of care (*confirmation*).

While it is clear that care theory provides some level of reciprocity in the relationship of the carer and the cared-for, this established binary also speaks to issues of power within a carer/cared-for relationship and within teaching - a profession that is largely populated by women-carers. This juxtaposition is interpreted through superficially universal spaces that situate the act of caring in a place of innocence or cultural neutrality. However, individuals are culturally inscribed and therefore, enact their ways of knowing, understanding, and being as informed by their values and belief systems. Also, Noddings' theory does not offer a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which gender intersects with and complicates power relations and issues related to race and class.

Black Feminist Theory

Prescribed notions of teacher experiences are based in part by raced, classed, and gendered ways of understanding and knowing. Black Feminist Theory, in particular, provides a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which gender intersects with and complicates power relations and issues related to race and class. Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) conceptual framework of intersectionality addresses how individual categories of social differences (such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and dis/ability) are situated within a matrix of power where the positionalities of these categories shift. This concept of intersectionality sits in contrast to a pure CRT framework, but also complements the greater paradigm of critiquing race by demonstrating how the experiences and commonalities shared by members of African-American communities in the United States can be different among individuals and smaller groups within these communities as well as other communities of color.

Collins outlined four realms of understanding that provide lenses for examining social differences within the intersecting contexts of class, race and gender: lived experiences as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability. These four realms can provide contexts for thinking about one's purpose as a teacher, for telling one's story and for forming a narrative based in one's cultural, ethnic, and racial experiences.

Lived Experiences as Criterion of Meaning. When bell hooks (1990) proclaimed, "I know of what I speak," she was affirming her experiential knowledge as valid and vital to understanding and meaning-making processes (p. 46). hooks was also affirming the importance of one's own cultural and theoretical point of view in constructing experiential narratives, individual voices within collective groups, and 'insider-within' status of Black women (Collins, 2000). It is important for educators to be attentive to the dynamic discourses that contextualize

how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences. This includes the voices of the inter-groups (the smaller distinguished groups within a larger group, e.g. Black Latinos or African Caribbean-Americans intergroups that are often placed under the larger group umbrella of the Black or African-American community). These inter-group perspectives should be considered with respect to their implications for larger groups' narratives. Individuals often negotiate and renegotiate meanings based on the social context in which they are constructed.

Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims. A dialogue that engages this form of critical examination can begin to address silenced voices and create more equitable social structures that serve as a space for analyzing how knowledge is constructed and enacted (Collins, 2000). This dialogue could also include conversations about how being an educator is enacted within an ideological body. In other words, how does saying that one is an educator not only present different systems of ideals and perceptions but also engage embodiments of actions, contexts, beliefs, values and perceptions of what it means to be a teacher?

The Ethic of Caring. Collins (2000) stated that three main components of an ethic of caring include the "individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy" (p. 264). It is through these components that highlighting the uniqueness of the individual is celebrated and seen as an integral part within the larger community, connecting emotions with dialogue is valued, and understanding the experiences of others creates pathways of knowing.

Audrey Thompson (1998) used Collins' epistemology to explore how teachers of color have come to understand and implement the ethics of care in day-to-day interactions with students. She asserted that:

caring means bringing about justice for the next generation, and justice means creating

> the kinds of conditions under which all people can flourish. In the Black social activist tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, love is intrinsically tied to justice. Love and caring do not step back from the world in order to return to innocence but step out into the world in order to change it (p. 533).

King's famous written words, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," is still a directive for individuals to demonstrate their level of caring by actively making society a more just and safe place for all people (King, 1963). Thompson also emphasized that:

> the kind of work involved in Black women's caring activities, accordingly, is hard to categorize in the public/private sphere terms often applied to White or colorblind caring, for the work of caring here is understood to include not only emotional labor, but also political labor, physical labor, and intellectual labor (as in the work of educational uplift) (p. 533)

Thompson's concept of Black women's caring demonstrates why ideologies, curricula, and pedagogies based in seemingly neutral, universal or color-blind concepts, do not support caring for those who do not appropriate universal ideals (i.e. traditional feminist notions) of caring .

The Ethic of Personal Accountability. Collins (2000) asserted that "knowledge claims" or what individuals express as their standpoint(s) is a reflection of their values and beliefs (p. 265). Taking ownership of knowledge claims is valued as an authentic proclamation of one's perspectives. This tenet of Black feminist epistemology is most rooted in the convergence of personal and public spaces. Personal spaces include cultural, racial, and gendered issues that are often subjugated in public discourse. Often times, discourse in public spaces hides the personal and perpetuates an illusion of indifference where public spaces are presented as objective, commonsensical, and without specific biases. Thompson (1998) also addressed issues of

personal accountability by stating: "African American students cannot trust teachers who (wittingly or unwittingly) lie to them about racism, ignore Black achievements, gloss over slavery and segregation, or confine the study of Black history and culture to Black History Month" (p. 540).

Inclusive Spaces and Means of Resistance

At the core of the previously discussed theories is the call to critique and resist knowledge that has been exclusive of marginalized voices and sanitized as the uncontested universal truth. The different narrating and experience formation processes of music teachers of color are dynamically formed and informed by the specific spaces in which they are interpreted, or in other words, the sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts that situate how individuals perceive themselves during particular points in time and space. People whose beliefs are silenced by dominant ideas and practices often create ways to negotiate and navigate their situations by developing strategies of resistance. These strategies may be great or small in scope, internal (private) or external (public) in practice, but significant and necessary for the preservation and renewal of self and the validation of one's own experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58).

In order to address some of the ways that acts of resistance have been strategized by people of racially marginalized communities, I will discuss three particular interpretations of narrative spaces with specific historical and cultural significance for African-Americans in the United States – hush harbors, safe spaces, and homeplace (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1990; Kynard, 2010).

Hush harbors and Safe Spaces

During the centuries of slavery in the United States, hush harbors were organically created gathering sites for many Black slaves and freed Black men. Carmen Kynard (2010) defined hush harbors as "African-American sites of resistance that functioned as "hidey" spaces for multiple literacies that were officially banned via institutional and state structures that prohibited African-American humanity during slavery" (Kynard p. 33/Cornelius 1999; Morris, 1992; Nunley, 2006). Kynard and her former university students (all African-American women) used "generative virtual spaces" or sustained email exchanges as collaborative, present-day hush harbors. In this space, Kynard and her students were free to talk about issues and concerns that were specific to their cultural and racial backgrounds.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) stated that "safe spaces" are "social spaces where Black women can speak freely" (p. 100). In order for these spaces to be safe, it is necessary for the group directly being served to be inclusive for the engagement of authentic dialogue to occur among its group members. This requirement enables individuals to work out their values, beliefs, and perceptions and overall sense of self in a private space before re-entering the public sphere. Collins stated that the exclusive, cultural work occurring in safe spaces is a step towards "a more inclusionary, just society" for it is in these spaces that greater clarity of one's place in the world and one's experiences are made more meaningful in relation to others whether or not they share similar cultural values (p. 110).

Homeplace

bell hooks (born Gloria Watkins) grew up in the segregated South where racism, White domination, and Jim Crow were alive and well. She has recalled the childhood trips to visit her grandparents as journeys of excitement, anguish, and anxiety. The feelings of anxiety and anguish were a result of walking past the houses of prejudiced White faces whose presence

reminded her of White power's reign. Conversely, her feelings of excitement and relief emerged once she reached her destination – her grandmother's house. In describing her grandmother's house, hooks (1990) recalls a homeplace where the body and soul could be nurtured.

Homeplace can be defined as a site of resistance to dominant ideologies that negate and devalue the experiences and very being of people of color and other marginalized groups (hooks, 1990). bell hooks also addressed the social, cultural, and political dimensions of homeplace by stating:

> This task of homeplace was not simply a matter of Black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of White supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that 'homeplace', most often created and kept by Black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits. This task of making a homeplace, of making home a community of resistance, has been shared by Black women globally, especially Black women in White supremacist societies (pp. 42-43).

The safe places and communities of resistances provided sanctuaries to the hostility of the outside or dominant world that constantly marginalized all things Black and aggressively suppressed efforts of liberation.

One's homeplace can be an abundant resource for people of color and teachers of color. It proposes to do and be many things for and with the collaborative efforts of its members who rely on its existence for their well-being. In order to understand the depth of valuable resources

that are maintained within a homeplace, I will outline three dimensions in which I perceive homeplace is rooted and constructed.

Homeplace occupies a physical place. hooks counter-narrated middle-class Western notions of home by stating that the locations of homeplace were based on the spiritual and political agendas of Black women and not the actual property. hooks explained:

> It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance (p. 47).

Physical space was needed to attend to holistic efforts of healing and to serve as shelter for a community of resistance. Places such as "a slave hut" or "a wooden shack" may not have been architecturally sound structures and stability of time spent/lived in one location was often times uncertain. However, the physical space allowed for the private dialogue and private affirming sessions that could only occur inside a safe space constructed for these purposes.

Homeplace is an epistemological space. Here, I will place emphasis on the concepts of epistemological space and physical space (and/or physical place) and the elision of this dichotomy. As previously mentioned, place constitutes a physical structure in which to gather, commune, and heal. Conversely, space connotes a knowledge production resource that is more fluid and dialectical. This space is where a person of color negotiates and navigates their dialogical selves and collective identities. This space also is where identities are positioned or repositioned as a rebuttal to the forced ordering imposed by dominant 'outsider' hegemonic forces. In this safe epistemological space, sociopolitical identities and multiple selves can coexist and be nurtured. Although place and space are distinct concepts, the tenets of place and

space are interdependent and connected. This bond allows for the holistic, cyclical nature of healing to manifest.

Homeplace is an ontological space. In a homeplace, a communal spirit permeates and Western patriarchal proclivities to individualist thinking are shunned. To be clear, individuals and uniqueness are recognized and valued in a homeplace but not at the expense of destroying the collaborative efforts for a healthy community of resistance to sustain and maintain itself. The two entities of individualism and collectivism may at times have conflict and resolution but are not designed to be positioned against each other but with each other. The discourse that contextualizes homeplace is informed by notions of care and survival. hooks (1990) stated that "homeplace represented a place where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects; where we could be affirmed in our minds, and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation; where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside public world" (p. 42).

In turn, this discourse creates a way of being with a homeplace that reflects its purpose of healing and political activism. Membership within a homeplace constitutes the responsibilities of valuing and caring for members who may or may not be biological, family, but are still considered as family ("fictive kin") (Thompson, 1998). Homeplace is where strategies for encountering the dominant ideological world can be honed and issues of justice and injustices are delineated.

Domains and Positions of Power

The lived experiences of African-American teachers are often nurtured and continue to grow within racially and culturally inclusive spaces. The strategies that are developed within these spaces to combat and counter dominant standpoints can be used to empower teachers to be more conscious of the political context of teaching, especially when it comes to educating

marginalized students. Furthermore, the stories and narratives of teachers' lives are made more powerful by the context in which these collective personal accounts are told. The discourses that surround narratives are situated in different structures of power that inform how teachers define themselves and how they are perceived by others. In order to understand the greater framework in which issues surrounding homeplace and personal experiences are situated, I will refer to Patricia Collins' (2000) Black feminist epistemology and interpretation of power.

Domains of Power. Collins stated that the notion of power is approached in two major ways (p. 274). One concept of power is based on the premise that groups hold varying degrees of power and that the most powerful groups oppress the least powerful groups. A different approach to power positions it "as an intangible entity that circulates within a particular matrix of domination and to which individuals stand in varying relationships" (p. 274). Although these two approaches are usually positioned in opposition of each other, both are conversely, dialectic and "complementary" to each other as they collectively provide a wider lens for examining power (p. 275).

Within the matrix of domination, four domains of power are integral to Black feminist theory: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. The structural domain is the space and social mechanism where oppression is organized and the illusion of neutrality in educational discourse is perpetuated. Teacher education programs are social structures that serve as official entities of validating teacher ideologies and practice while often perpetuating traditional western, patriarchal notions of teaching and being a teacher.

The disciplinary domain manages oppression by maintaining the notion of the compliant, docile body that is made to be complacent within the structural domain of power. "Insider resistance" or working from within the system in order to change the system disrupts the

operations of the disciplinary domain (Collins, 2000). Teacher education and professional development programs subject individuals through a process of socialization or becoming a teacher that doesn't always attend to the multiple experiences informed by race, culture, class and gender. Therefore, policies and practices are carried out that are designed to serve the interests of the dominant culture.

The hegemonic domain justifies oppression and maintains traditional paradigms as accepted forms of knowledge and a "common sense" system of ideas (p. 284). It is a "critical site for not just fending off hegemonic ideas from dominant culture, but in crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge that fosters changed consciousness" (p. 285). In the hegemonic domain, acceptance of static dominant ideologies is countered in the practices of self-authorship, narrating experiences, and the developing of other strategies for resistance and transformative social change. In this space, educators can envision and interpret the act of teaching as political and use their culturally inscribed beliefs and values to reinterpret and resist current marginalizing practices and policies in schools.

The interpersonal domain is the context and space in which power relations and oppression influence everyday discourse and lived experiences. Individuals reflect on and examine the ways that they have been oppressed and the privileges that they possess. The everyday social relationships that individuals have with one another serve to perpetuate or transform power structures. The perceptions that are held by education professionals and educational researchers regarding people of color and their unique perspectives are reflected in these day-to-day social exchanges. In this space, the residual effects of oppression are evident in the lack of diversity and invisibility of marginalized, lived experiences within music teacher programs, musical organizations, and music education research.

Although many different layers of understanding of an individual's professional and personal perceptions about teaching within various domains of power exist, I will focus on three specific categories of experiences that help to inform a teacher's professional sense of self: the racialized-cultural experience, the professional-educator experience, and the artistic-musical experience. The concept of racialized-cultural experience is situated within a paradigm that racialized and cultural values and beliefs provide music and other teachers of color with a knowledge that is uniquely attained through lived experiences as a person of color. Additionally, the professional-educator experience considers the political and personal aspects of teaching that often create contradictions between the cultural values of music teachers of color and the requirements of the profession. Finally, the artistic-musician experience provides a space for unique ways to approach and interpret perceptions of self as an artist and/or a musician, often times, using alternative frameworks as spaces for expression.

Summary

The theories that have been outlined in this chapter were used to frame my study of life histories in several ways. Critical race theory provided a framework for using storytelling and first person accounts as a way of understanding teacher experiences. Black feminist theory not only served as my researcher's lens but was also used to attend to intersectionality and domains of power in which teacher experiences are situated. Finally, the notions of safe spaces, hush harbors, and homeplace helped to define and interpret the racially and culturally inclusive music teaching and learning spaces narrated by participants.

The experiences of music teachers as placed within various sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts have the capacity to shape their perceptions of what it means to be a

teacher. Academic and professional experiences also provide specific spaces in which professional identities are socially constructed and negotiated. The three categories of experiences chosen for my study (i.e. racialized-cultural, professional-educator, and artistic-musician) are often navigated and negotiated by music teachers of color within social structures and hegemonic systems of power that are hostile to the cultivation and nurturing of one's sense of self. Music teachers of color who have these experiences often can provide informative narratives that speak to the notion of resistance to these more dominant frameworks of power. I am particularly focused on how the voices of music teachers of color may inform music teacher education epistemologies (how in-service and pre-service teachers are developed) and address the development of more equitable and inclusive professional spaces. Music educators of color have the unique standpoint of being members of historically, marginalized and underrepresented cultural and racial groups and therefore have the capacity to be holders of valued knowledge that can be used as a resource for transforming thinking and understandings about music teacher education and professional development.

Chapter III: Life History and Collective Memory Methodologies

African-American teachers who have experiences within traditional music education programs (especially in predominantly White institutions of higher education) have often navigated and negotiated social structures that are not always welcoming of the cultural knowledge of marginalized communities of color. As a result of this hostility, teachers of color are often challenged by a perceived need to silence or disavow integral parts of their cultural and racial selves within learning spaces where the Western culture of competition and technical perfection may stand in direct opposition to the sense of community and collective collaboration that is valued within some communities of color. The expectation to conform to a restrictive

model of what a teacher should be makes it especially challenging for Black teachers who have learned alternate ways of understanding music and music education from their engagement within inclusive and/or informal music teaching and learning spaces. Analyzing the life histories of African-American music teachers presents new possibilities for music teacher education by illustrating how experiences beyond and prior to teacher education preparation programs help to shape authentic definitions and perceptions of being a teacher.

To learn how African-American music teachers think about teaching and learning and navigate traditional educational and professional spaces, I focused on three specific categories of lived experiences that help to inform the perspectives of arts/music educators of color: the racialized-cultural experience, the professional-educator experience, and the artistic-musical experience.

In order to explore the stories and contexts of teacher professional experiences, I focused on the following research questions:

1) In what ways have classically trained African-American teachers music teachers been supported within racially and culturally inclusive artistic spaces?
2) How are these experiences used by African-American music teachers to shape their thinking on and perceptions of what it means to be a teacher?

I used life history and collective memory methodologies to draw upon the teachers' valued, insider knowledge and to provide a dialogical space for teachers to tell their often-silenced stories and construct narratives. This approach to understanding the concreteness of lived experiences aligned with my theoretical framework by allowing participants to create and recreate their own representations of their particular stories and experiences as they navigate

different domains of power. In the following sections, I will discuss my interpretation of the life history and collective memory methodologies and how I intended to use them for my research.

Life History Methodology

"Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness" (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). Life history methodology is a way to analyze the meanings embedded in stories told by individuals and can be defined as a qualitative research method where the researcher collects specific aspects of a research participant's life story and contextualizes this narrative to reflect the various socio-cultural and socio-political discourses/experiences that surround/situate the narrator's lived experiences (Goodson, 2008). More specifically, a life story or personal narrative is "life as told by the person who lived and experienced it" and a life history "involves the story teller telling the story and the researcher work(ing) with the storyteller collaboratively to produce the inter-textual and inter-contextual account" (Goodson 2005/Goodson & Choi, 2008, p.24). "Thus biographical studies following a life history approach capture not only the person's/ personal experiences but also the systemic contexts in which the lived experiences are located." (24).

The use of life history methodology as an inquiry and analytical framework in teacher education and development research has greatly been shaped by the work of Ivor Goodson. Goodson and Choi (2008) noted that "a study with life history and collective memory methods [discussed below] involves subjective/ inter-subjective as well as contextual/ inter-contextual data interpretation" (p. 9). They used a combination of these two methods to study teacher professionalism among twelve beginning teachers over a period of two years. Collected data consisted of "five face-to-face semi-structured life history interview-conversations" between the

researcher and the participant and an average of four telephone interview-conversations that were conducted between the face-to-face interviews (7). Contextual data included "informants' annual journal writing; interviews with the colleagues of the informants; questionnaires completed by the informants' students; information about the novices; and workplace contexts (7)."

Goodson and Choi found that the remembered first-hand accounts of the teachers were not merely a description of previous events and experiences, but also an aid to their perception of what it meant to be a teacher: "In other words, the recollections are the lived realities as experienced by the beginners since remembering is "'embodied'" within us as a part of who we are" (Shotter, 1990, p.135/Goodson and Choi, 2005). The teachers involved constructed their identities, in part, through the acts of storytelling and participated "as contributors to the shared community memory" on being a teacher and on teaching. The participants of the study were also recognized as "collective beings" who were "subject to shared opportunities and constraints at a particular time and space." Goodson and Choi further articulated that their use of collective memory helped them to "see the shared patterns of teachers' identities as professional teachers and their relations with the contexts in which they were collectively situated" (p. 8).

Collective Memory Methodology

While the life history method provided a framework in Goodson & Choi's study to develop narratives, it lacked the possibility of being used for cross-case analysis or group synthesis. To conduct a cross-case analysis, Goodson & Choi employed collective memory methodology which enabled them to connect the individual experiences and narratives of teachers to collectively informed concepts of teacher professionalism and the culture of

beginning teachers. I also used life history and collective memory methodologies in order to explore the subjective and inter-subjective data to compare, contrast and synthesize individual and collectively shared perceptions and experiences of being a music teacher of color.

The work of Maurice Halbwachs informs my understanding of collective memory as a social construction that occurs within a group membership and among group members. Halbwachs (1952/1992) asserted that "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember" (48/22). Collective memory methodology extends the purpose of life history methodology by creating a space for the researcher to examine the collective perspectives which emerge across group life histories.

Lewis A. Coser (1992) elaborated Halbwachs' assertion and stated that:

> It follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society. Social classes, families, associations, corporations, armies, and trade unions all have distinctive memories that their members have constructed, often over long periods of time. It is, of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past (22).

Remembering or recreating the past through collective memory work requires the individual group member to engage in a practice of "selecting meaning (through the act of remembering and forgetting)" and framing the "representation" of their narratives (McLeod & Thomson, 2009, p. 29). In this regard, "memory is always a discursive production" that is specific to the time and place in which it was/is (re)created" and is dependent on both the individual perspective as well as the group in which the individual represents (27). The historical and social contexts in which

one's memories are situated also informs how these memories are enacted, revisited (or recalled), and reinterpreted by the individual.

Halbwachs also made an important distinction between historical and autobiographical memory (Coser, 1992). Historical memory is created through the engagement with written, visual, or auditory texts used to develop a grand narrative, indirectly experienced by the individual. This narrative and indirect experience is often "kept alive through commemorations, festive enactment, and the like" such as the celebration of July 4th as Independence Day (23). In contrast, autobiographical memory is dependent on an individual's previous direct and personal experiences (23). An elision of lines between historical and autobiographical memory can occur when indirect events have very real capacities for shaping a person's perceptions and beliefs. While both forms of memory can take very material forms as meaning-making cultural tools within a human experience, my project placed an emphasis on the unique, personal, and nuanced perceptions within autobiographical memories.

Combined Life History and Collective Memory Methodologies

By conducting life history interviews and using life history methodology, I focused my questions around specific themes while allowing space for a more open-ended conversation. The narratives constructed as a result of interviewing and collaborating with -participants were important to my research for several reasons. First, participants who are often marginalized and underrepresented in educational research literature were given the opportunity for their unique experiences to influence aspects of educational research by creating life histories which will be used to inform policies. Second, my and the participants' analysis of their narratives allowed for mediation between the life stories of each individual participant and the sociocultural, political,

and educational discourses that contextualized their experiences. And lastly, patterns that emerged in teacher narratives of music teachers of color provided a way of generating different perspectives to better understand the complexities of navigating, negotiating and constructing personal and professional experiences for the purpose of teacher education and professional development.

Collective memory provided a space that "politicizes the act of remembering by situating memories within the matrix of social practices" while identifying shared commonalities among and across groups of individuals (Hill, 2009, p. 100). Goodson and Choi (2008) explained that the life stories told by the individual participants in their study congruently with the researcher's interpretation of these stories as "collective memories" made it "possible to tap into both the subjectivity of individual informants' role negotiations and the connection to the intersubjectivity of the teachers' role negotiations as a collective group" (p. 25). Therefore, the researchers concluded that "the capacity of the combined method for locating the wider collective contexts of collective members thus helps us to make the transition from sponsoring individual voices to reflection about systemic issues" (p. 25). For my study, I analyzed how past memories and experiences helped to shape the participants' perceptions of self (in terms of what it means to be a music teacher) and their group memberships such as being a music teacher of color. I also used the deductive categories of experience outlined in my theoretical framework and inductive life history themes retrieved from the participants' experiences as "memory texts" or "the variety of forms through which the past is represented in the public sphere" from which participants elicited more nuanced recollections of their experiences (Hill, 2009, p. 100). The participants' responses to the interview questions illustrated how they choose to present private, internal interpretations of their experiences within the more "public" context of a collaborative interview.

Data Collection

Research data consisted of audio recorded, semi-structured, life history interviews collected over the course three months. The research participants for this project were chosen through community nomination[2] using the assistance of contacts in local New York City metropolitan area. I contacted six teachers and three of those teachers were selected based on their availability to participate in the interview process and their ability to meet the study's criteria. Two to three interviews were conducted with each participant and each interview was approximately 1.5 hours in length (Elliot, 2005; Seidman, 2006, p. 17). More specifically, one participant had an extended second interview that was over 2 hours in length in lieu of a third interview while the other two participants each had three interviews. One of the participants' set of interviews was completed via videoconference (i.e. two via Skype) and by phone (for the second interview) due to work, performance, and school schedules that did not permit in-person meetings. However, the other two participants' interviews were conducted in-person.

I interviewed three African-American music teachers who identified with the multiple experiences being addressed in this project (i.e. racial/cultural, professional/educator, and artistic/musical) and described how membership within racially and culturally inclusive musical spaces has influenced their perceptions and interpretations of what it means to be a teacher. Other criteria that were used to select the participants of this study included: having formal classical music training within a university teacher education program and working as a public or private school teacher for any grade(s) between pre-kindergarten and 12th.

[2] Michelle Foster (1997) defined community nomination as a participant selection process where the contact information of teachers is directly provided by members of the African-American educator professional community.

In addition, I explored a diverse range of perspectives that can be derived from interviewing music teachers who serve school-aged youth in different contexts. Some contexts would be considered more formal such as a full-time high school choral director while others could be defined as less formal such as church youth choir director or a teaching artist within a community music organization. I selected one male and two female participants who have at least ten years of experience teaching music. My decision to select these three participants was influenced by teacher retention studies indicating that educators who achieve five years or more of teaching have navigated certain crossroads presented to them toward the direction of becoming experienced professional educators (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2010).

My choice to use Black feminist and homeplace theoretical frameworks may initially elicit the presumption that all of my participants are African-American women. However, I included one African-American male teacher who met the criteria listed above. The use of Black feminist and homeplace theoretical frameworks were deemed appropriate for examining how power and positionality influenced the participants' perceptions and interpretations of their experiences, and served as a means to interrogate gendered, as well as raced experiences in participants' lives. Black feminist and homeplace theories are used as analytical lenses for the life histories of teachers whose identities and experiences are scarcely included in the literature on teacher education and music teacher education in particular.

After receiving the names of potential participants, the selected teachers were informed of the length of the interview by phone/email and asked to choose a location, day, and time for each interview. Informed consent forms with details confirming confidentiality and the right to stop participation at any time were distributed to potential participants prior to their scheduled

interviews. These forms were further explained and collected on the day of the interview. Upon the completion of each interview transcript (generated from the audio-taped interview), participants had the opportunity to review interview summaries in order to check for understanding and affirm meanings that emerged from the initial analysis.

The first interview was an overall biographical interview that addressed as many questions as possible regarding the participant's cultural background, childhood, musicianship experiences, and adulthood (see Appendix B). The second interview used the milestones and turning points expressed by the participant in order to situate the interviewee's experience within the larger sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical landscape of each story (see Appendix C). Upon the completion of each interview transcript (generated from the audio-taped interview), participants had the opportunity to review interview summaries in order to check for understanding and affirm meanings that emerge from the initial analysis. Collaboratively constructed timelines were developed to delve deeper into the contexts and meaning of significant experiences. Each participant was asked to talk more about their thoughts on what it means to be a music teacher as it relates to their past shared experiences, their present circumstances and their visions for the future (see Appendix D).

The Participants

The pseudonyms chosen for the three participants in this study are Susan Williams, James Thompson, and Alicia Smith. All of the participants have worked or currently work in the New York City metropolitan area and identify as being members of the larger African-American community. Susan has over 30 years of teaching experience and retired in 2010. She has experience teaching pre-kindergarten through high school music appreciation in the greater New

York City metropolitan area. Her musical development was nurtured at an early age by her family and within the music department of a Historically Black University (HBCU).

James is a choral music director and church choir director. Prior to retiring in 2013, he taught public middle school and high school chorus and is still actively directing high school choral ensembles. Before becoming a professional music educator (and even before attending college), he began as a church choir director at a large, Black Baptist church where he developed a lifelong appreciation for sacred classical music.

Alicia has over 10 years of teaching experience and currently is a public middle school band director. Her background as a biracial (half-Black and half-White) provided a uniquely nuanced dimension on what it means to be an African-American music teacher. The interactions and friendships that Alicia has had with her fellow performing arts colleagues (who are mostly African-American women) have also helped to shape her thoughts on being a teacher of color.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis allows the researcher to find emergent themes and focus on the specific content within the teacher narratives. I used thematic analysis to analyze the life histories constructed from the participants' interview transcripts (Reismann, 2008). More specifically, I examined how racially and culturally inclusive spaces have shaped the teachers' perceptions of their raced, musical and professional /education experiences, the current sociopolitical contexts in which each narrative was situated, , and the ways in which each teacher attended to the status quo, pseudo-neutral narratives of being a music teacher.

The data analysis focused on deductive categories that emerged from exploring the three categories of experiences (artistic-musical, racialized-cultural, and professional-educator) within the participants' personal narratives, the role of inclusive spaces in framing teacher perspectives, and the contextualization of the participants' experiences as they were aligned with the current research literature (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). I also focused on unique, nuanced, inductive categories that emerged from the interview transcripts. I then conducted a synthesis of the life histories in order to make claims about collective knowledge and experiences.

The cyclical and dialectical qualities of narrative research required that processes of data collection and data analysis are approached concurrently. Therefore, the participants worked with me as co-constructors and interpreters of their narratives during the research process. A one-page interview summary was created by the researcher after each interview and shared with each participant to attend to issues of validation and trustworthiness (Mishler, 2010). This collaborative effort provided an opportunity for participants to negotiate the meanings and interpretations which emerged from the data by talking back (or theorizing back) to the analysis and provided a collective understanding among our individual perspectives. The computer software program, ATLAS.ti, was used as an assistive tool for organizing data thematically from interview transcripts. Upon completion of the final data analysis process, I created and disseminated a final document (that included the life history and interview summaries) to all research participants and gave them the opportunity to provide feedback.

Validity, Validation, and Trustworthiness

Researcher bias and reactivity were evident validity threats in my research (Maxwell, 2005). My biases are that I am a teacher of color and have had influential experiences within an

artistic community of resistance. Therefore, my background can be seen as being the reason why I lean towards certain beliefs about the importance of unique values and perceptions in shaping music teacher professional experiences. Also, since I am an educator/researcher who worked with other educators for this project, there was a validity threat of reactivity. There was a possibility that teacher participants may have 'performed' the act of being interviewed in a certain way because they wanted their profession to look good to a larger audience, they wanted to represent themselves only in a positive light, they wanted to tell a 'worthwhile' story, and/or they wanted to be helpful in making the research project a success.

For my project, I conducted two to three long interviews with each research participant. Multiple interviews enabled me to get more authentic and consistent narratives that reflect how a participant contextualized and interpreted their experiences (Seidman, 2006). As previously stated, participants were selected through a process of community nomination and this process helped to assure that the selected participants would adequately reflect the themes and goals of this research project.

Maxwell (2005) stated that "internal generalizability refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied, while external generalizability refers to its generalizability beyond that setting or group" (p. 115). While my research is not intended to create a broad or specific generalization regarding the experiences of music teachers of color, my intention is that the impact of this research will have broader implications for understanding how this type of study can inform teacher education and professional development. Therefore, I do anticipate a significant level of internal generalizability. There is also a possibility for the results of my study to extend the knowledge regarding music educators' identities and encourage further study to examine the influences of religion, sexuality, disability, and other unique standpoints on

professional teacher experiences. I also anticipated that the intersubjective nature of collective memory methodology would allow for external generalizability since the life histories of the participants were situated within the experiences of other teachers (as represented in current education literature).

Since I conducted life history interviews, I needed to make an epistemological shift between traditional concepts of validity in research and more "inquiry-based" concepts of validation and trustworthiness (Mishler, 2010). Mishler stated that validation can be redefined as:

> the process(es) through which we make claims for and evaluate the 'trustworthiness' of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations. The essential criterion for such judgment is the degree to which we can rely on the concepts, methods, and inferences of a study, or tradition of inquiry, as the basis for our own theorizing and empirical research (p. 290).

He also addressed trustworthiness: "Since social worlds are endlessly being remade as norms and practices change, it is clear that judgments of trustworthiness may change with time, even when addressed to the 'same' findings" (p. 291). Therefore, it was particularly important to attend to the individual meanings and interpretations that each participant contributed to my study. Furthermore, interpretations and meanings that were shared by many members of the larger African-American community were indicated as such while not essentializing the responses of the participants. This reciprocal, co-interpreting relationship that I established with participants helped to define specific criteria for validation and trustworthiness specific to this research project.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined my research plan and provided rationales using combined life history and collective memory methodologies. I also explained the specific methods of personal narrative, counter-stories, life histories, and memory texts that were used for a thematic analysis of individual participant and group lived accounts. Chapter IV will present the teaching life histories of the three participants in their own words.

Chapter IV: The Life Histories of Three Music Teachers

Introduction

This chapter presents the teaching life histories of three African-American music teachers. The participants who have chosen to share their experiences have all engaged in spaces (i.e. physical, spiritual, and/or emotional spaces) that have inspired and affirmed their racial, cultural, musical, and professional development and well-being. These inclusive spaces have also provided opportunities for resisting status quo perspectives and perceptions of what it means to be a music teacher that may or may not align with their own values and interpretations. The act of storytelling and sharing first-hand accounts of one's experiences serves to disrupt restrictive and exclusive ways of understanding the many experiences of what it means to be a teacher. The life histories explored in this chapter are also important as "context is in part informed by positionality and thus, the perspective of the teller" (Dixson, 2012, p. 3).

The following sections of this chapter are the life histories of the participants' – Susan, James, and Alicia – narrated and documented as they were recorded and transcribed for the interview process. I did a minimal amount of editing for the purposes of clarification, maintaining the anonymity of people and places (by using pseudonyms), and providing fluidity within each life history. I also attended to any directions from the participants to modify or delete any part of their stories. Each life history is preceded by a brief introduction of the particular teacher who shared his/her experiences.

Susan Williams

As I rang the doorbell and stood in front of Susan's home to meet her for the first time, I noticed a small plaque that read "Bless this house as much as possible". This made me smile

especially because of the obligatory addition of the phrase "….as much as possible". Growing up in Southeastern Virginia, I saw many requests for the bestowment of blessings in the homes of family members and friends. So the sense of instant familiarity from reading that particular message served as a greeting even before Susan opened the door to warmly welcome me into her home. It was not long into our first interview before I discovered that Susan, like me, was a transplanted Southerner. She began by telling me about growing up as the daughter of two educators who placed strong values on faith, education, and music appreciation.

Family and early life experiences

My parents were both educators. My father was a minister and a building principal and my mother was a teacher. Somewhere along the line, the women in my mother's family learned to appreciate a piano being in the house. There was a piano in our house, but my mother didn't play. There was a piano in her cousin's house, but she didn't play. But they all saw that their daughters played.

From the time I was about three years old, I'd come home from church and I would tinkle out the hymns. My parents were not different from other parents of that time. They didn't do a lot of talking in front of us but they paid attention and they saw what was going on.

I remember we lived in a house where the usual living quarters were closed off from the dining room, the living room, and the foyer, and so it was nothing for all of those doors to be closed. It was a Saturday and mama kept sending me into the dining room and I kept going. I don't remember when I saw the new piano that they had bought and sneaked into the house. And I spent a lot of time with that piano. It's right there, I've carried it everywhere I've moved. But I'm not playing it anymore.

I grew up in a place and at a time when women were still expected to be in charge of childrearing, and especially of girls. And it was just me and my sister. So we spent most of our growing up time with my mom. My father was out and about most of the time. We had some terrific times on Christmas night because he was the only parent awake. It was years before I realized why that was the only night in the year that my mother went to bed first. That's because she had done everything to get us ready for that day from the shopping to the wrapping to the cooking and the cleaning. Christmas night ended up being a night with my dad. Even though we didn't see and spend as much time growing up with my dad as we did with my mother, he was always there.

It was a nurturing environment. It was a language-filled environment. It was a literature-filled environment. In fact, my sister and I are still the only people that I know who had the "Great Books of the Western World" with the Children's Edition. It was nothing for my parents, especially my father, to go out and come home with boxes filled with books. I think it's good to know that I'm 65, and both of my parents were college educated. My father's parents were literate and they were one generation removed from slavery. It was not strange at all for us to see my father, in particular, reading. A lot of that was getting ready for Sunday sermons. My father was the orator and writer in the family.

My mother was loving, kind, and strict. She had the statement, "Now, Susan, my policy is set". And she stood by it. I was in Norwood University before I knew that she wasn't the only one in the world to have a policy. [laughing] Governments had policies. She's still one of the few people who I remember having used the word "never" and kept it. If she said she never was going to do it, then she didn't do that ever again. And it provided me and my sister, I think, with a clear understanding of what was and what was not acceptable.

My parents were both servants in the community. I remember after my father passed, a high school acquaintance told me how my father bought uniforms for the entire children's baseball team. I didn't even know that when it happened. But he was determined that they be represented correctly. I had no idea.

I remember that my parents prepared the church basement for Sunday school classes. And one Friday night I said, "Well, maybe now we can get our parents back". They never said anything, but they heard that.

My father did inspirational radio shows and my mother was connected with Southtown College. There was a state Baptist camp there. I remember her riding around town trying to get parents to say yes, their children could go because she would take them. I got to the point where I didn't want to go. I don't know why. Well, it didn't make any difference. I still had to go. And now in retrospect, I see why. I think that both my sister and I grew up understanding what it took to have a strong family. And that the function of the family was to, A) preserve itself, and B) work for the preservation of the community. And that's what we still do.

Early educational background and experiences

My educational background started in kindergarten, which today is no big deal. But when I was three, four,and five years old, that was a really big deal. And, then again, I guess it's not a surprise, because both of my parents were college educated, and that was also a very big deal a long time ago. So from kindergarten to elementary school, we always had a lot of books in the house.

The best teachers I ever had were all Black. It was they who were truly an extension of my mother and my father. I still remember Hattie Peters who insisted that we know how many

time zones there were on the planet. I remember Barnett, Harold Barnett. He made us memorize the Declaration of Independence. "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve….". And you had to memorize it, you had to recite it, and you had to write it. I misspelled separate, and he took off for that. I put an 'e' where there should have been another 'a'. I'll never forget that. But those teachers, they did a phenomenal job with us.

I thought I was a pretty good student. Like a lot of kids, I got excited when I got to high school. I didn't have a good year during my second year in high school. Each one of my grades fell one letter grade, and so my father made a comment to me indicating that couldn't go on. In high school, you were required to take four classes a year. For the first two years, I took five classes, which meant that I was on the track for an early graduation, which was not on my agenda. So for my junior year, I decided that the thing to do if I wanted to be sure to graduate with my class was to not take English. And that's what I did. I got myself back on track and graduated from high school as Salutatorian.

I decided that I wanted to go to Norwood University, which was Norwood College at that time, so I sent them an application. The only problem was that was the only application I sent. I didn't send to any other school. My mother went to college nearby, as did my father. So when it came time for me to go to college, he couldn't understand why I wouldn't go to either one of the colleges where there was family currency. No. I'm getting away from 'currency' [laughing]. I'm going to go to a place where I can get home when I get ready and where I can limit visits. And that's where I went.

Early musical experiences

My first piano teacher was Ramona Bell. She was the daughter of my mother's friend and my mother's friend was a piano teacher. Ramona had graduated with a music degree from Town University and had come back to teach choral music at the high school. On the side, she gave piano lessons and I studied in the John Thompson series. I don't even know anybody else who went for piano lessons with her. We didn't have things like recitals.

I don't remember singing that much in church children's choir – I'm sure I did – but I do remember playing for the choirs after I got to that skill level and at the high school level. I remember competing in a talent program sponsored by a local Black Fraternity chapter.

We always had concerts in the high school choir. In fact, before I got to high school, there was music teacher there who pulled together all of the elementary schools and the high school – because we didn't have a middle school at that time – and we did a Christmas performance where the elementary school kids did a choral speaking of a passage of scripture, "And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor".

It was awesome. Every year, there was a spring concert at the high school, so that were five years of spring concerts. There was also a Christmas concert, so that was two major concerts every year.

The thing that cemented my plan to be a music teacher was the year Ramona Bell took the high school choir to participate in the state choral competitions. I remember that when it was time for us to sing we were singing "He Watches Over Israel". Another choir on the stage sang Alleluia, by Randall Thompson, and my mouth still drops when I hear that. I had no idea you could take one word and do that much music with it.

For the most part, the other experiences that I had were as an observer. I was a typical teenager at that time enjoying the music of the '50s and the '60s. Etta James was my first

favorite performer. I remember being in the car and the radio – when the car was on, and this man was singing, "Don't know much about history, don't know much biology, don't know much about the math I took," and my Dad said, "Well, he doesn't know much about anything, does he". [laughing] I will never forget that.

My sister and I used to harmonize sometimes singing in the car. Sometimes I'd take the high part, she'd take the low, and then we'd switch in the middle of the song. The music of late '50s and early '60s, yeah, that was it, when harmony was king. The development of the Shirelles, the Supremes, the Temptations with – oh, god, what was his name – who had that tenor voice to die for (Eddie Kendricks). Awesome music. I remember being in elementary school and we had a program, and sixth grade boy sang "Sixteen Candles." Ah! Oh, my goodness. The girls went crazy. I was also in the band during the last semester of my senior year. My sister played saxophone so we had that kind of thing going on in the house.

Norwood University – HBCU

Of course, my acceptance was the last one to come in my high school graduating class. I graduated on June 4, 1965; and the next Friday, I received a letter from Norwood University dated the following Tuesday to be there the day before that. I said, "I can't go to college over the weekend". And my father said, "You're going to get out of here".

So I went to a summer program, and I had already decided to major in music. I had started music piano lessons when I was third grade; and I had spent time as a church musician as a teenager, and accompanying the school choir on some selections.

My parents and my sister drove me to the summer program. I knew how long it was going to take my parents to get home. So I gave them enough time to get home before I called

my mother. I was crying my eyes out. I didn't want to stay in that ugly dormitory building. They told me there were all kind of animals running around at night. I didn't know anybody there. "Come get me". I'll never forget the tone that my mother took with me. She was her firmest ever. She made me ashamed I had called her and I stopped crying then. And I know she went in her room, and cried because of what it took from her for me to understand I had to do this. And I did.

So I went to Norwood. My intention was to become a public school music teacher. Moses Harris, a Norwood grad, had finished his Master's and returned as the choral director. It was a wonderful experience – of course, until I did my senior recital. And my friend and I did our senior recitals together on February 28th, and then we were through. It was so funny that we got a B in choir that semester. Moses told us that they're never going to let any other seniors have recitals that early.

Norwood was so nurturing that starting at 11:30 the night before last, one of my college friends in the music program and I started emailing each other, and we just went back-and-forth. We had a beautiful campus. There was a strong, competent, student-centered faculty. They were demanding, they had a standard of excellence, they had high expectations, and you just fell in love. I didn't have difficulty with the course content; it just made sense to me. It just gave a name to the things that came together in my head.

I remember that during my second year at Norwood, Moses asked me maybe my second year if things didn't work out for me in the music program, what would I do? I said, "Go home". And he said, "Why?" I said, "I came here to be a music teacher". And it never dawned on me that I couldn't do that. It never dawned on me that I wouldn't do that.

Norwood was an extension of what I had already encountered at home, in our church, and in our community. A lot of what I encountered was because I was Reverend Williams'

daughter. I recognize that now, but I didn't know that then because I just thought I was, you know, bright.

We had choir rehearsal in the evenings after dinner, and I ended up being a first alto in the concert choir my second semester of freshman year, which is unheard of, because freshmen weren't supposed to travel. We used to walk out on stage past Moses Harris, the Director, and he would give us our pitch as we walked by. We always filled in the risers in interesting patterns. Sometimes we'd go to the center and the people in the back row would have led in and they would go up the center steps, and then they'd go out like that. When all of us were in place, he would come out, he would bow to the audience, and he'd come up with his hand up, and that was the upbeat for the first song. We'd come in on pitch in harmony. We had been referred to as a vocal organ.

In rehearsal, the tenors stood behind the altos; and when they would sing an F or an A, we'd forget our parts. [laughing] And it was just gorgeous. The basses – I still now, when I do teach choral music, I always start at the bass and work up, you know. You don't build anything from the top down.

Moses Harris was born in the wrong time. He is a phenomenal arranger of Black spirituals, African American spirituals. His arrangement of one such piece is historic already. - you have to stop what you're doing to listen. And there are a couple of places where people do that on YouTube. He had several arrangements of other pieces– that were awesome, awesome. He should have been born at the time of William Dawson.

The first time I remember singing in a choir where the music that we were producing was so pretty I was in tears was when – I think it was William Dawson. An old man came to conduct

our choir singing "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel," and by the time we got to the part where [Singing] – the wheel had motion. It was awesome, awesome.

We did that and we did a lot of other things at Norwood. I tried to bring what I learned at Norwood with me to the different programs where I taught. We did the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Alleluia". In my church choirs, I tried to do a lot of the religious music that we had done at Norwood. I did pieces from "The Gospel Mass" by Robert Wray, and I tried to introduce that to where I am now. I have to work a little harder to make that introduction come, because people can't get past the beginnings of the "Credo" in "The Gospel Mass". But I think that they are capable of a more expanded repertoire of church music than they are used to. I also think God gets tired of monotony like everybody else.

My best friends from the Norwood Choir and I all went in as freshmen. Dee was there for the summer program. In September, Mary came. Her father was a college professor of music in the South. Tammy came from the Midwest and she could sing, so it was the four of us. Dee and Tammy sang soprano, Mary and I were first altos, and all of us were walking between two buildings late one night. That night, Tammy and Dee learned to sing alto. Well, God, help us all. They thought it was the best thing since sliced bread.

Mary became a music teacher and she used bells as her instrument of choice in teaching. So she had bell choirs that performed great music at a high level. Tammy taught elementary school, but she still performs at a high level with African American music where you have orchestras in accompaniment. Dee sings – at least she sang in one of the choirs at Woodlake, a large church in her area. I sang with them one-half a year, because my son was in the choir and Dee was in the choir. Dee still has her voice. When we were all at Norwood, Moses had a vocal

strategy that I hadn't seen before and haven't seen since, where he would bring the whole choir to a full crescendo, and he'd cut the whole choir off and leave Dee on a high A. Awesome.

At Norwood I treasured that which was mine. And I think maybe that's the crux of the matter. Maybe that's the crucial element - That which you treasure you take care of and you share and you push forward and pull forward at the same time. And if you don't treasure it, it means nothing to you. So it's okay with you if anything happens to it. And when you treasure it, it's not okay for just anything to happen to it.

Teaching and Education Leadership Experiences

They had interviews on campus for music teachers just about everywhere because that was coming into – that was 1969, and there was a lot of racial unrest in the country around that time. So this place that I had never heard of was looking for music teachers; and I interviewed and got the job on the spot. I went to a place called New Upton, and I taught Music Appreciation in the middle school. I taught Music Appreciation in the high school. I stayed there nearly 20 years and ended up in educational administration.

My first teaching job in New Upton was in a building maybe three years from demolition. It was very old, but it had been fairly well kept. And it was clean. Because of the school community, the music program was good. The children were expected to succeed and the children produced. And so when they found that I could do that with chorus, it was okay for me. I was invited into homes on both sides of the tracks by the parents. And things worked out fairly well.

The only discouragement that I encountered in my professional career was at the hands of other music teachers. When I was a music teacher in New Upton, we had monthly music

teachers meetings. And it was a gripe session for the senior teachers. And I felt them chipping away at what I thought I could do. So I stopped going to the meetings. Nobody ever said anything to me, but I didn't go anymore. They griped about everything you can think of. We can't teach these children this. We have too many classes. We have children in our programs who don't want to learn music. We have children who can't read music. Well, what do you think that your class is for? So I just stopped going to the meetings.

The school where I taught had one of the strongest building administrators I had ever worked under. He knew what the heck he was doing. He knew people, he knew kids, and he knew what worked for them. I remember the day that the science teachers left a kid at the place of the science fieldtrip. I can still hear him roaring all over the building. There were some things you just did not do. And he carried himself that way, and it didn't matter who you were. If you crossed that line, you knew you were going to face him.

My first day at that school was the first day that they had black students bussed there. An English teacher whose name was also Susan, said in the first meeting of all of the teachers, "Why don't you let Susan take those students?" And that was the beginning of the first day of my first year. I didn't say anything at the meeting, but I did make my assessment of that situation known to the principal after the meeting. I went to my classroom, which was on the bottom floor next to industrial arts, and I did my thing. I remember seeing the face of the custodian at the window on a regular basis and I realized he was the spy. What he saw was okay, so I stayed. I was the only black teacher in the building.

The children who came off the bus were Black. I think of one. He was in my class sitting behind the nicest white Italian girl. And I heard a thump. So I turned around to see that he had hit her with all his force in her back with his fist for no reason at all. None whatsoever. Well, he

was suspended. And that was my indication as to how angry some of them were just because they were there. I finally deduced that we, as a people, we were wrong, in my thinking, to put integration on the backs of our children. That's what I learned. We sent babies thinking that it would make a difference, and what we did was scar our babies. I don't know any other people in history who have done that. Everybody else has used their young men. Their young men have taken the fight. And we put it on our babies. Not right. It's no wonder.

During the 1970s, there was a financial crisis of sorts in all public schools. And they used to show a file film of me in my new classroom because we had moved from the old building into a brand new building. The discussion from the news reporter was on the budget cuts that the school district would have to make. I calculated at one time I had 126 students over the course of the year; and then in a couple of years, it was down to 92. That didn't seem to bother anybody. I said, "Okay". The fact is that the numbers of kids in Music Appreciation were drastically dropping. There were mandates in place from Leave No Child Behind; and if a kid was not doing well in English or Math, they were taken out of the music program in order to give them extra help in those areas. So my numbers were dropping.

And I looked at that picture one particular day, and it dawned on me they're talking about cutting art, music, and industrial arts. Of the teachers in those three classes, I am the one who is least likely to find a job in another field. Home economics teachers could be nutritionists and this, that, and the other. The teacher of industrial arts could go into business for himself building houses, doing all kinds of things. But my terminology was that nobody needed a used music teacher. With that piece of information in my head, I prepared myself to teach computer applications to adult learners.

I had tried programming, and I decided I did not have the level of exactitude to sit there and make sure every code went the way it was supposed to go. But I could take my teaching ability, and I could match it with how computer applications worked and be able to teach, especially adult learners. That gave me an addition to my voice, that I didn't teach just music. I was able to relate music to this and to that and to the – and help kids cross boundaries that might have been set. Because I decided if you put a computer in a classroom with a kid and walk out, when you come back, the child can use it. So in 1984, I joined other teachers from around the country at a six-week program at Stanford in California that taught educators how to teach and use computers from" take out of the box" to word processor and spreadsheet programs.

It was a wonderful experience. It was there that I learned that it takes an average of fourteen years for new information to reach the classroom teacher. I made up in my mind that would never be the case for me. Nobody would ever say I was that far behind.

The original title for my new position in New Upton was computer application support specialist. Until we realized that the acronym for that was ASS, so we changed it [laughing]. I guess it's good to say computer applications instructor. It was an advantage and a disadvantage that I brought with me from New Upton to Renylake. The advantage was that I saw and I had had experiences in schools that were child centered and with a high degree of teacher competence. And so when I ended up at a school that was not child centered and that did not have a high number of qualified teachers, things did not work out well in that setting.

The superintendent sent for me one day while I was out in the field, and I went to his office and he said – we had our little beginning conversation and what not – and then he said, "You don't have any courses in Education Administration," and I went, "Mmm, he's been looking at my record and talking". So that was my signal to go back to school. I loved going to school,

and so I did; had a wonderful experience at State University, and went into education as a School Administrative Intern. Had a horrible experience; was just in tears, traumatized. These kinds of things sometimes happen more often than not, they do. I ended up leaving New Upton to go to Evergreen as an Assistant Principal. Stayed there for just over a year, and then the superintendent there invited me to come here to take a principalship in the New York City Suburb of Renylake and I did that.

Experiences as a school principal

They expected the strategies that they had used successfully to also work on me. The unfortunate piece about me going into that school was that a first-year building principal should never have gone there. That's a place where you go when you're at the beginning of the second half of your professional tenure because you had the things under your belt that you can just rely on. And I was just learning that – it's a wonder I did that, stayed as long as I did, because I had heard when I got there about the man that was hired in the position and did not stay until school opened.

His idea was that it would have been to the advantage of parents who were among the poorest on in the area for their children to wear school uniforms. And the parents went berserk. It would also have given me the guts to tell the superintendent no. When he called us into his office for a meeting and said that he wanted blocked scheduling in place in September. I should have told him no, but I didn't know enough to think that I could say no to a superintendent. And it didn't work. Then I went back to the classroom.

Back to the Music Classroom

And so when I moved from administration back into the classroom here in Renylake, I went back as a music teacher at different levels. The students in my classroom were the same. And I guess that was because I was the same, except for my first year back in the classroom. My first year was a horror. I had a combination of students that you give to a teacher when you want to push that teacher out of the building. The teachers used to look with sorrow when the students were headed to my room. They were awful. I still don't like them. Learning was the last thing on their agenda. They were the most street wise children I had ever taught. They came to me in large numbers. They were the largest groups I ever taught there in that district. And it was the most paperwork-driven school district that I have worked at. I had as many as 26 in a classroom. That was located in one quarter of the band room when the band wasn't practicing. It was not a happy time.

I finally realized that there was nothing I could do that was going to make it palatable for both me and those kids. When I started, we were required to have lesson plans written for five days in a week. We were required to have regular assessments. And I ended up spending all day on Sunday getting the plans together for the week. And it didn't matter. And it became clear as a bell that you cannot teach children who are just totally unreceptive.

And it would be one thing if it was one or two or three of them. It was three-quarters of the class. They were ugly, mean-spirited kids. That was the only time in my life kids threw paper wads at me. I had never encountered anybody who had that happen as a teacher. When that class was over, one of them happened to be in the hallway with me when kids from my current class were talking about the fact that I was going to take them on a field trip. And that kid said to me why didn't you ever take us on a fieldtrip? And I said, "I wouldn't take your class down the hall. You don't take people places who don't know how to act". I'm sure there were a lot of

people who wouldn't have said that. I'm not one of them, number one. And number two, every once in a while a person who is acting out needs to hear the crystal clear truth. When they're not in the center of that kind of behavior, they can kind of see. I think the only way to break that, to have counteracted that was to break that group up. And that wouldn't have happened in that school because the school was responsible for putting that group together. They knew those kids. They had been in that building at least two years. Some of them were repeaters, so they had been there for longer than that.

I had students for ten week cycles. But in the end of the year, those kids were gone out of the building. And in two years, the principal was gone. And then who came in? The only new principal that I've ever worked under who did not have a learning curve when she got there, by that I mean, she knew what she was doing, and she came with an excellent background. She had done her administrative internship with very highly respected teacher educators and educational leadership professors.

But it was so phenomenal that that administrator had 100% support from the Union representatives. In fact, this principal is still invited to faculty Christmas parties. It was an amazing collaboration based on mutual respect. I say that was a very good year. At the end of the year, somebody came over the PA system and said, we're having a potluck lunch on such and such a day. And that's the only announcement that was made. On the day of the potluck dinner, there was so much food, it went all the way around the gym and doubled backed down the center of the gym. It was awesome. But it never happened again.

One position was absolutely the most enjoyable job I ever had in my life. It was teaching music and movement to four and five-year-olds. It was just incredible. Many of the children were recent arrivals from Spanish-speaking countries. So I ended up, in retrospect, teaching

them English through songs. I ended up teaching them directions from the songs that were taught.

I was always a person who valued constructive and honest feedback, so it still brings a smile to my heart when I remember that the songs we were preparing for the Halloween program, the kids would sing them on the bus the way home. I thought that was better than anything that an administrator could have put in print, because that let everybody know. It was that everybody knows what I'm doing; I don't know what they're doing. But it was fun, it was fun.

I developed my teacher and my teaching voice. I could be here [at home] writing my lesson plans and I could tell which questions which children would ask, and I could build that information into the lesson. I guess by the time I started my second year teaching in Renylake, I had become what I thought was "my best" teacher. It was a music appreciation program to seventh and eighth grade students in an urban setting. There were a good number of Hispanic children there, but they had been in the country long enough that they were like all the rest of the kids, with the sneakers and the pants. I realized that the seventh grade class was a really crucial class. They were still receptive. They were not totally focused on their social development at that point. It was coming, but it hadn't completely settled in.

There was also a program of choral music, string program, and a band in the building; so I wasn't responsible for teaching music performance. And I developed the notion that musical performance is important; but most people will be musical consumers, and I nurtured that particular part of instruction. I presumed that I could expose them to things in a way that might not be so receptive if they had been exposed to it in a different setting or if they had the choice and took the initiative to get into it themselves.

I was surprised that there were so few students who had been to Broadway shows living this close to Broadway. I didn't have enough calendar time to go through any one or two Broadway shows completely so I decided I would do bits and pieces of different ones that I thought would be meaningful to them.

We did "The King and I" with Yul Brynner. We did Fiddler on the Roof, and I always introduced that one with these words: "Oh, let me tell you about my friend, Tevye". Their favorite was – "If I Were a Rich Man". And we did several like that. I also believed that I could help them in the development of listening and thinking. In order to do that, I found free piano schools for beginning students online and I made a booklet of those songs. Every kid in the classroom had to play those songs. I had one, two, maybe four pianos, and then I began to get in keyboards.

The most phenomenal total music program that I was exposed to as a teacher was at Evergreen High School. They had a concert band, they didn't have marching band – concert band, string orchestra, string quartet, and every level and type of performing choral group that you could imagine. The year that I was there in the spring for the spring concert, the orchestra began with "The William Tell Overture"; and when the cellists got busy at the end of it, the applause started from the back of the auditorium and moved forward – awesome.

They had a Broadway caliber show that they did for four or five nights. The program there was just astronomical. Since that was the case, the choral program was put on the same level as the specialty courses – AP English, the AP Languages – because these are all courses in a schedule that only happened one time in the course of the day. All of those children, including the music students, were scheduled first, and then the rest of it was built. So that's how they got around that.

Evergreen High School is literally down the hill from Evergreen College. It was the only high school in the community. When I went there for an interview, I went to – I was instructed to go to Building H. I said, "Okay, I'll go to Building H". And then on my way home after the interview, I said, "If that's Building H, they've got A, B,…". It was beautiful setting.

I divided the kids up on the instruments, and the kids who didn't have the instrument on Monday would have it on Tuesday. There was one kid, he went on Monday; and on Tuesday, he was indignant that he couldn't go again. I did my best explaining, "You went on yesterday when I said those who went on yesterday would not be able to go today, so those who didn't go yesterday could go". And the last straw for him was to say to me, "Well, I'm doing this for you". I still laugh. That was obviously to me a comment that he had heard at home and he decided that he would try that and it just backfired. Oh, I laughed. "I'm just doing this for you," and know that nothing could have been farther from the truth. But I was happy with that kind of reaction, because that let me know how determined he was.

We started off with things that were the equivalent of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"; and the last piece that they learned was about four measures of a Bach fugue. Everybody that went to high school from that class would walk by a piano and play that tune. And I learned that the students in my school, as urban as they tried to present themselves – which was nothing like what you might imagine in some really tough urban schools, it wasn't that kind of school – they loved Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata". They would just, "Wooooo," when that came on.

On August 8, 2008 at 8:00, I will never forget where I was. I was sitting on that sofa watching TV, and I saw the opening of the Olympic ceremony in Beijing; just the most phenomenal piece of entertainment ever. I got right up when it was over, and I went to the computer, and I ordered the DVD, and I showed them that. There's a lot of music in there that's

very different. And I remember one kid in my class who was ashamed to be an American after seeing and hearing that performance, and I just let him know, "There's nothing to be ashamed of, except that you don't know that this kind of thing is out there, and that's why I'm exposing it to you". And that went over very, very well.

I also did country and western. I made them do a little math to calculate how many people in this country do not live in urban settings; and if they don't, then what kind of music are these people listening to. And I had one kid who would take my chair and find a piece of country and western music and he'd just be sitting in front of the speakers reared back – perfect. I would never stop that kind of thing, because that lets me know that his musical world is expanding – job well done.

My student demographic started off being predominately white. And as the country browned, so did my classes. I remember when I changed schools to become an administrative intern. And new arrivals from Vietnam came with their children, and their children came to the school of my new placement. The teachers went berserk. They asked, "How can you expect me to teach children who don't speak English" I found ways to communicate with them. I found that a kind look and a smile mean the same thing in every language. I got them to teach me to say simple things like hello. That was in New Upton.

When I went to Renylake, and at the same school where I had my absolute best professional experience, there was the cleanest, most preciously-dressed little girl you ever want to see. But she was the only child in the building who spoke Haitian Creole and she used to just stand by the wall. Her mother had absolutely shined her to come to school to send the message somebody cares about her. There was one woman in the building on the staff who spoke Haitian

Creole and English. But she couldn't spend her whole day with that little girl. It still saddens me to think of that little girl.

People from other countries who live in such a horrible situation that they decided they are going to come here to make a better life, they don't think what that's going to mean to their children because the story starts off like the ones I have just talked about. But the story for their children ends up like the stories for children in this country, which is what most people don't want. But that's what their children learn. They learn how to be a child from their peers. They have one persona in public, and they have a different one at home. The parents think that the self that they see is the only one that's operating. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I guess if there was conflict while I was in the classroom, I didn't know it. I didn't have – I had effective strategies for classroom control. I had lessons that went from bell to bell. So I wasn't a problem for administrators when I was a teacher, so they left me alone, which allowed me to do what I thought was important in my classroom. But once I came out of the classroom, in my second position as an administrative intern, it was my job to go over the report cards of the Kindergarten and first grade teachers before they went out to the children.

I discovered that when children came to school reading on level, teachers held them back until the children who came in reading below level caught up. I don't know if doing that makes the teachers look better, but it did make their job easier. That was a hard pill for me to swallow. It was what went on in that classroom that she was responsible for. Every child that came in reading on level in September was still on that level in January. I was not crazy, and I know what I saw.

I had decided many, many years ago that I was going to get a doctorate. I had walked away after I had done all of the course work in a different Ph.D. program at another university;

not because of anything that happened there, but it was another period of profound disappointment and angst. So after I recovered from that experience, I applied for Wellston; and that was a very good move for me.

I had gone into Wellston with the content of my dissertation question in place. I was going to research the degree to which educational administrators used the findings from the brain-music connection to inform the decisions that they made for educational instruction and outcomes. And I kept that in my head for two years out of a three-year program. And then the third year, I realized nobody was going to read that.

I changed my content to something that I thought would get some attention. My dissertation investigated the results of three factors that affect the high school graduation rates of African-American males.

When I got to that point, the chairperson of the department called me in for a meeting. He said that he was looking at the statistics of the participation of African-American males in colleges and universities. And it was so low, that it was nowhere near the representation of their part in the population as a whole. And I said to him in typical Susan Williams' fashion, "If they are not there, then to me, the first question is, 'Are they getting out of high school?'" And that's where I focused my study.

A lot of times when research is done, especially about us, people ask questions that end up demeaning and degrading the research. These students do well because their parents did this. These students don't do well because they live in this neighborhood. And I took my research out of that realm so they couldn't ask those questions, and I did my research kind of like they research for polio. "If you are in this population and these things happen, this is your result," you know. It has nothing to do with the immediate forces acting on your life.

So my population came from the United States Census, and I went through 34 years of African-American males between the ages of 17 to 19, because to me, that's when most people think that you should graduate from high school. I found out that researchers use from 19 to 24. People don't consider generally consider high school graduates to be age 24, even though we know that happens. So that was the group that I looked at for those years.

By the time I got through my dissertation, it was right there. The longer kids stay in school in this country, the further behind they get. I found that in three sources. The last one I found was the results of the tests that are given to kids in the countries that are members of the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). When the fourth graders take the test in this country, they score higher at fourth grade than the eighth graders score at the eighth grade test, than the juniors score when they in eleventh grade. The longer they stay in school, the further behind they get. That's not their fault. We're supposed to see, just like the airline company, that if these are the passengers that leave at takeoff, they're supposed to be on the plane when we land [laughing]. We don't do that.

I had developed the notion that my job was a teacher and that I was responsible for introducing them to something that they had not experienced rather than reviewing that, which they already knew. And that seemed to work well. It did work really well. I had some eighth grade classes one year straight out of heaven. I would come in with the eighth graders, and I would tell them and show them what they had to do on the piano, and when I finished, I would say, "Rehearsal time". I discovered I had to move to the other side of the room when I said rehearsal time because they would rush me. I'd be in the way between them and the piano, and I'd have to move so I wouldn't get run over. I loved it.

One day I said to them it's your choice. I've been working you really hard. Your choice now is opera or popular music. They looked at me like I was crazy. And they said opera. And I was just tickled pink until I was half way home in the car reviewing the day, and I said, you don't know why they said opera. So the next day when they came in, that was the first thing on my agenda. I could have made up the answer, but I wanted their answer. And so I asked them the question. They looked at me like I was crazy. And they said, we can learn popular music any time. I introduced them to "Carmen". It was awesome. It was awesome. So I guess that was my payment for that other class that was such a horror. At least that's how I took it.

The biggest change in the school was the stellar principal. A lot of people say that good starts from the bottom and works up. And I guess there are times that that happens. But there are times that you've got to have the change take place at the top. And she was awesome. She was awesome.

She had already earned her doctorate from a well-respected educational leadership program. And she knew what the heck she was doing. It didn't matter who you were. It didn't matter what your background was. It didn't matter how long you had been in the classroom. And I guess kind of, that's how I learned, as a child, that it doesn't matter that you're Black, it doesn't matter that we're in a poor community. This is the standard. And that's what I carried in all of those classes, except that one from my first year back in the classroom; because that was too far removed from my experience. If I had come from their background, then maybe I could have had a better result. But I didn't. And I did not hear good reports on any of them. And maybe it's that good news does not travel, but the bad news surely traveled fast. The sad part was that when I heard it, I wasn't surprised. We need to do better than that with our children.

The school did not make them that way. They just showed that side of themselves when they were there.

Thoughts on being a teacher and a Black teacher

I think that I became a teacher of music rather than a musician who was a teacher because of my background and my exposure. I came from a background of very strong teachers. My father's mother was a teacher. My mother was a teacher. My father had been a teacher. I think there are things that non-teachers miss that are second nature to teachers. You don't give directions to a child and then don't ever look back to see if they're doing it. It's not the follow-through of just the child to do what you said. It's also your follow-through to determine whether or not and the degree to which that child did what you said. And once children learn that you have that little skill, there are some games they don't play anymore.

I remember, one kid walked into my class for the first time, and he said, "I hate music," as he walked passed me in the doorway. And I pulled him aside and said, "What did you get for Christmas?" and he talked about the drum set and other things that played music. I said, "You said you hate what?" That was his wakeup call to me and mine to him. And we got along fine. You're not going to tell me you hate music if you got your parents to spend that kind of money for you for Christmas. But it also told me what kind of experiences he had had previously in music programs.

I think that one of the reasons you need teachers of color in a music classroom is that sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes you have teachers who think that the music of their culture is superior. The child with the blonde hair and the blue eyes is not the best child in your classroom. She's one of the children in your classroom, and all of them are equal. But if you

gear your instruction in your class to what you can expect from her, then all of your other children are going to assess her. My sons raised me, so I can attach myself to boys, as well as girls in a classroom. I can attach myself to girls because I was one. And I can attach myself to boys because my boys did a good job of teaching me.

It would satisfy me if my former students consumed more than one kind of music. And sometimes to consume one kind of music, leads to another kind of music. And I would want that to happen. It would satisfy me if they recognize the tunes that they were exposed to in my class. Oh, yeah, Mrs. Williams taught us that. We did that in Mrs. Williams' class. That's okay. It would satisfy me if they saw the need for at least an equal amount of instruction for their children. But it's not up to me.

I think that excellence in education at large depends on the understanding that it's all connected - that it's not just music over here and science over there and English over here. I used to tell my students, in this class, we still communicate in English, so you're going to have to write, spell, and speak the same way you do in your English classes. And that the definition of a paragraph is not five sentences. I think the worst thing we did in education at large is to compartmentalize things. And as long as they stay compartmentalized, there are going to be those who think that assessment will determine excellence. And I disagree.

I think it's important for all children to have exposure to all cultures. That was one of the reasons for buying and showing the Opening Ceremony in Beijing. It's nice to believe that home is special, but it's not nice to believe that home is more special than everywhere else. I don't think it'll happen because it does not profit the nation for its children to know just what the nation does. I think that parents of color have got to do a better job of preparing their kids for

what happens in the nation. There is something amiss where there are only sons of Hispanics and African Americans being shot by the police. There's got to be a conversation about that.

We see the inroads that other musicians have made across lines, across races, across continents; they're showing us how to do it. And it's not a matter of one culture's enculturation of other cultures in itself. It's a teacher who's comfortable in whatever his or herself is, being willing to expand that and share that with others. And if you don't, then we just keep this monotony going on.

So what makes it authentic, I think, is the level of participation. If the students are simply receiving the information; not authentic. If the students are performing, that's a higher degree of authentication. And if Chinese students are performing Mariachi music for their parents and the parents of Mexican students, that's authentic. But then, again, I don't know if you can get all of that in. I would like to think so. I would like to think so because I'm sure going if you perform my music, especially if it's somebody else performing my music.

Somebody sent me a wonderful email with a white-collared choir singing "And I Die" on an airplane. The stewardess was in tears. Gorgeous a cappella. It's hard to find people who sing arranged spirituals anymore. And looking for these people is an outgrowth of treasuring what's mine. It's also given me a lot of grief in the month of February when there are those who think that's a celebration we should share. And I would like to think so too, but there's too many of us who don't know it. And I'm not so sure what you bring to my celebration. If I can't have control over that, then why don't you sit in the audience. Let me show you. Let me tell you.

It's not just true for them. It's true for us too because I am always surprised when I find somebody who knows teacakes. They don't know our cuisine. They think that African American history centers around Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. But our children played games.

And we don't share those games anymore. And well, who's going to know that? Who's going to know our spirituals if we don't sing them? I will go to your celebration of St. Patrick. I'll wear a little green. But I want to be on the sidelines because that's your celebration. I want the same courtesy.

Faith and spirituality

I guess one of the best ways for me to answer a question about spirituality and teaching is to tell you about an incident that occurred during an eighth grade class. A big fella in the back of the room asked, "Mrs. Williams, are you a Christian?" I said, "Yes". And then I went on with the lesson. The next day I asked him, "Why did you ask me that?" He said, "Because you're the only teacher that doesn't curse in class". I did, but they didn't know it. My curse was "God BLESS America!!" [laughing]. And nobody ever picked it up. When those words came out of my mouth, I was up there. And that kind of got me back down.

I have had the unmitigated gall to take Him at His word, and He has never failed me. In fact, He's been much better to me than I've been to myself and it's been that kind of thing all my life. So my faith is very, very strong. I'm not one of those who you ever have to think is going to be standing on the corner. I'm not loud. I just walk the talk. Do I have room for growth? Yep. Do I know some of my weaknesses? Yep. The girl still has a temper that's a little bit too quick [laughing]. Ask the man at the bank who asked me if my husband was around. He'll never make that mistake again. And nobody, but him and the people I told know what happened. Because when you come out of Norwood, you can handle yourself in a very effective way and nobody knows it, but you.

I guess we had the same qualities at Norwood that you would find in a convent. First, we are here because we believe and share. Second, we are here to show you by all we say and do that this is what we believe. And as my mother used to say, "… and while you're here, this is my policy."

I think the places that are most successful are those that don't give a lot of credence to where you came from and how you got here. They give their credence to how you are while you're here. And it could be that there's a way to pull that together. I'm pressed to believe that it would happen from the bottom up. That's the kind of thing that happens from the top down. I think it can happen in a school where you have that kind of school leadership. It always happens when you have that kind of thinking in a community because that's what the community demands.

You have to be in a situation where you have the authority to remove the incompetent. You can't spend your time trying to justify removal of personnel that everybody knows is incompetent. People have to know not to even apply here if you don't want to – if you really don't want to work. Children have to be taught at home the kinds of things you absolutely have to tell. If this went on in your classroom today, you must go home and tell your mother.

Parents have to be taught there are some conversations that don't need to take place in front of children because when they do, especially if it's about an unhappiness with a building personnel, then those children act differently in front of that personnel because 'I know how my mother feels about you'. Parents have to know their children. They have to be receptive for people to tell them about their children. And that was easy in my small hometown. I don't know if that kind of thing can be replicated because people presume there's something wrong with you or you have some ulterior motive if you are telling them something about their children. And it couldn't possibly be that this information is something I think you might want to know; which is

how I used to start my conversations with parents. That puts them in a position where they have to listen to me. I don't have bad news. And I could just not tell you, and you'd be worse off because of it. But I'm going to say, "I thought you might want to know this".

James Thompson

James was the first teacher that I interviewed for this project. I was excited to meet him because he was so supportive from the start of the interview process. From our initial email conversations, I discovered that he recently retired and had taught in the New York City Public Schools for over thirty years but still remained active as a church choir director, a choral director, and a choral clinician. I also learned that his engagement within his church from childhood through adulthood strongly guided his musical, professional, and life paths. Once our first interview began, I was not surprised by the rich experiences that he recounted. At one point during the interview process, I remarked to him that I knew that he would have some great stories to share based on his varied teaching and schooling experiences in New York City.

Family and early life

I am a native of Brooklyn and that's basically where I grew up. I have lived in Brooklyn all my life except when I went away to school, and I still live here. My music nurturing started in elementary school. I didn't have instruction but we had assembly every week. I am a product of Brown versus the Board of Education and when I was six years old my brother and I were bussed from Brooklyn into a highly populated White area and school in Queens – PS 300. That particular school was run very well, had a thriving PTA, and did a whole lot of things.

They had assemblies every week and we sang. That's what I noticed I just loved to sing.

In the assemblies, the teacher led the children and we would sing all these songs like the "Star-Spangled Banner". We would even go down stairs on Flag Day and sing in the auditorium or in the gym area. The class just lined up with the teachers and sang songs about the flag which I loved. I didn't have any music lessons in my elementary school, then I graduated sixth grade and went on to junior high school. It was junior high school 400 and there I didn't have any music as well. But I was always interested in the chorus. I really don't know how my class programs but instead of music, we had art which was drawing or fine art.

I was interested in the music in that particular building and Mary Stein, a Jewish lady, was the chorus teacher. I wanted to know who lead their music so I went upstairs to the music room just to meet her. I told her, "Well, you know I do sing, I liked sing" and she asked me to come back and sing for her. So when she heard me sing, she immediately wanted me to be in the chorus. She was able to change my schedule and I began singing in the chorus. I sang in two groups in High School. The Madrigal, select chorus and Mixed chorus which was about 90-100 students. The select chorus sang for a number of venues outside the school which included singing holiday carols for the neighborhood bank. This was a memorable experience.

My two brothers are deceased now it's just me and my two sisters. My sisters really were not interested in singing and my brothers weren't either. The only interest my older brother had was how my voice was going to make us some money. My father was not interested in having me become involved in music at all. I don't know. He had his own perspective of what that might be. From his point of view he might have felt it was not something he could not foresee for me, as a future career. I don't know why. He allowed my brother and me to join the boy scouts at the Episcopal Church near our home. It was there too that the scout master singled me out for having a beautiful voice and deemed me to be the song bird of the troop. I was in charge of

leading the troop when we sang.

My father was a good hard working man and I as well as my siblings loved him dearly, but we were always struggling about that fact. My friends wanted me to go sing in the neighborhood talent shows which were always on a Friday night. I would have to figure out when my father was going to come home and when he was going to go to sleep so that I could go out, and participate with our group. So, we played those cat and mouse games, but I was basically a very obedient child because my father had a temper I did not want to meet.

I was always interested in doing some kind of theater around the house. I would always get my sisters to help me and I would always give them parts to play. My grandmother was the one who took care of us and she was our audience. She would lie on the bed and we would do our parts. That was experience of family for me. My father never participated in any of our "artistic" ventures. I don't even know that my father knows to this day, rest his soul, that we even did that. But my sisters cooperated and after a while they just got sick of me and so they said, "No, we are not doing that anymore".

Where I lived, there were not a lot of single families. There just weren't. There were both parents in a lot of the homes and we played with a lot of the children who were brothers and sisters in stable homes on the block. It was a school yard right across the street from us and a lot of us would gather over there. I mean even my father decided that because my mother left it would be my grandmother, my father's mother, who would be the stabilizer in the home when he was not there. I mean the Clarkes across Street, the Careys down the block, the Stillmans – a lot of people on our block. For some reason if you went into the next block, there was something else going on down there. It wasn't what was going on between our blocks.

From what I could see there was a lot of violence going on drugs down the block. This

little boy named Doug; he would take a Brown paper bag and sniff glue. That was the big thing I mean I never did it, my sisters my brothers and sisters never did it, but that's how they got high. Some of the bigger fellas would do, I think it was heroin. That wasn't out in the open and even if they approached us they seemed to be very respectful of the fact that they didn't want us to know what they were doing that they were doing it. But nowadays it's blatant. Growing up, I never really thought that because I was Black, I needed to do all this stuff. I think I had a different perspective of what other people were doing.

My high school teacher, Ms. Mary Stein, was the one who encouraged me to do City Chorus as a chorister back when I was 16 or 17 years old and it was just the most wonderful experience for me. There were all of these high school students that came from all over the city. And I mean they took in about 275 kids for the chorus. It was such a memorable experience for me. Also the conductor, Mr. Mark Fraiser, was just such an impressive conductor and so passionate about what he did. It was just indelible on my spirit.

When I graduated from high school, I thought that I wanted to be a psychologist because for some reason I really understood people and I was trying to help people. I thought that would be a good position. The other thing was my grandmother wanted me to be a doctor and I didn't know about a medical doctor but I said, "Well, at least if I can be a psychologist". She always said, "you'll make a lot of money, James". So, I went on to a local four-year college but I was struggling. At some point, they decided to make it into a two-year college so my program was thrown out. I was still in love with music so I went on to Northeast University. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in music.

Deciding to be a music teacher

Because of the church that I had gone to and because of our religious growth, when I went to Northeast University, I didn't go as music education major. I went as a church music major. At the beginning of my second year, I talked to my advisor and to the Dean and they said, "You know, that's all well and good but you have to think about the fact that you have to be really good at either being a director or an organist and there's no set salary for every church. It would depend on the church that you go to". More than likely, it's sad to say, most of the White churches pay a better salary. Even some of the smaller White churches pay better salaries for church musicians.

So I decided that maybe music education would be the best prospect for me. I used some of the courses that I had from my first year and I used the rest of the three years to build up everything that I needed for a music education degree. That's when I decided that I was going to be a music teacher. As I thought about it, Mrs. Richards was a music teacher although she taught privately. Also, Mary Stein was a music teacher and she was an inspiration as well because she was a very good teacher and pianist. I just felt maybe I could do it too and it would be more lucrative than being a church musician although that's what I am now. I am both.

Early education through University experiences

My University didn't have an Opera group as they do now but of course, you sang in your choral group every day at 11 o'clock. I did sing with a separate group that was formed by the African-American students and they were doing spirituals and some European pieces like, "The Last words of David". Sometimes, we sang the "Battle Hymn of Republic" at the neighboring high schools. We called ourselves the NU Spiritual Ensemble. That was the only other musical outlet that I had at Northeast University because I was very focused on getting my lessons and

my courses down. There might have been some other things going on during the weekend that I probably could have participated in but I was always in New York. So I guess you could say being in New York was my outlet.

I remember my second grade teacher who was a bigot, believe it or not. But when I was in her class, I thought that she was a good teacher. Her name was Mrs. Dowell. We had wooden desks, the desk was attached to the chair. We would sit at the desk while she would come down the aisles every morning as she said, "Show me your hands and show me your feet. Show me your teeth". She made us show her our nails, this way and that way, and our feet. She would even look at our hair. She just wanted to see that we had shoes and that they were clean and all that. I guess at the time, I really liked that you know. I guess it's either that was a part of her home training or either that was part of what she figured she should do to make sure that children weren't being neglected.

After I graduated and went on to junior high school, I went back to my elementary school to visit. She was putting up a bulletin board and she was standing on a little stool. I said, "Hello, Mrs. Dowell". She never turned around. She knew that it was me I guess because of my African-American voice. Then she said, "Oh, hi" and that's all she said. I watched her put up the board and I said, "Well, it was nice seeing you. Bye." and that was it. She never even turned around. I just got that impression that maybe she didn't like me and then I thought maybe she was having a bad day. I don't know. I'm trying to give her the benefit of the doubt and maybe I'm wrong for calling her a bigot but it seems that you would have a little bit more respect for the person who remembered you as his second grade teacher. I was now in seventh grade, you know.

I know one time, Mrs. Dowell wrote a note home, during the time when my mother and father were together, and she wrote it in the back of my notebook. It was in red ink, I remember

because my mother read it and she got very upset. I think I got a whuppin' for it. I really didn't know what I had done but I know my father went out and got me a new notebook.

Growing up, I would hang with kids in my junior high school but I was the more solemn one. I remember Nathan, Rodney, Darrell, and several others – they were radicals. Nathan and I got along very well because he wanted to do a lot of singing and he would sometimes say, "Come on, James, let's just tune something". I remember we were going upstairs one day and Nathan said, "Hold my books". There was a little White boy that was going up the stairs and Nathan took and pulled the boys legs from under him. I said, "Oh my God". And of course, because we were all together, the little boy said, "They did it!" I didn't even know what he (Nathan) was going to do. But they pulled us all into the principal's office. We all received letters. Our parents had to come to explain the reason for our behavior. Whatever I saw my friends doing; I was always the sorry one standing back. But I still wanted to hang with them because I liked them. Nowadays these kids are very vindictive. Some will even bring a gun into school and fight. The things that scare a lot of students are the gangs that have developed and are prevalent in the schools.

Michael Jackson really gave me a lot of inspiration because I loved his voice and because I could sing, I would try to imitate his sound. There were a couple of boys on my block who wanted to create a group. We sang songs from a few of the male groups who were famous; The Temptations, Sonic five, The Jackson Five, The Isley Brothers, and many others. Our favorite group was the Temptations. There were five of us. I was one of the lead singers and we called ourselves, "The Five Hearts of Harmony". We dressed up, in the same outfits made by one of the parents. We practiced at each other's houses, except mine. After we felt we were ready, my brother signed us up for talent shows at different schools in the area. My brother was

our managing agent. As the record played, and the volume down low, we sang along and would perform our steps or moved if you will. That went on with me for about two years; I think I was about 12 or 13 years old when I started with the group. We were all around the same age. A couple of them might have been a little bit older than me, maybe one or two years but no real age difference.

I was going to church every Sunday and I was just so drawn to the music that I was hearing from my church that I just decided one day that this singing popular stuff was not for me. The guys came to my house one day to practice and I said, "No, guys, I'm going to drop out of the group". After I said that it was like we were going to a fight. I'm serious. They wouldn't let me close the door, they said, "What are you talking about? No, hold on, hold on. I'll go and get so and so". My brother was the one sort of managing the group but I was firm about my decision. One of the other guys came back to me and said, "Well, let me just talk to him". His name was Paul Simmons and he came in the house and said, "Now, you come out to my house". His mom fixed us dinner and everything and Paul said, "Now, listen, listen, listen. I know you want to go to church and stuff, but we can do both". But I was determined. No, that's not going to interfere and so I thanked his mother and thanked Paul. He told the other guys, "Whatever James wants to do". There was another boy in the group named Louis, he was like my singing rival. The group decided who was going to do the solos and I don't think Louis' voice was as nice as mine, but he had a nice voice. They seemed to love mine better, nonetheless after that, I just started in the church full-time.

On being Black, African-American

Collegetown itself is, of course is predominately White. This particular school, Northeast

University, was funded and founded by members of the Presbyterian churches. It's a private school, and I was one of the 5% of Blacks who were there. I remember there was one lady from South Africa, her name was Grace. I think she got some kind of grant to be there and to learn all that she could to bring back to South Africa and be the organist of her church. But for the most part, the Black students there were from the United States. There may have been one or two from the Caribbean. Culturally, I didn't have a problem, because I had already gone to White schools. We got along fine. In college I had some Black roommates. One young man, Emmanuel, I think that was his name, seem to be wasting his time. He spent a lot of time in activities other than going to class and studying for class. He was also a ladies man and did much entertaining with the girls. Eventually, he just dropped out. But I really didn't have a problem. I could see that if you were not in tune with that particular type culture, if you're not in tune with the way they do things, that you would struggle or you would be uncomfortable. I really liked being at this college and wanted to succeed.

Believe it or not, I don't consider or label myself a "Black person" even though I'm of color. I love my people. I would do whatever I can first for them. But for some reason, my mind seems to be in another area when it comes to music and maybe even different types of culture, you know? Well, I consider myself an African-American because I know that my roots are in Africa somewhere. I know that I was born here in America and through the Black Diaspora of all that we've gone through and all the colors that we are, there's a good mixture of Caucasian blood in me in me from my ancestry. I know that has caused a good portion of my makeup, and I just cannot consider myself a "Black" person. African-American, that pinpoints it somewhat to the extent of what I am.

I don't have any problems calling myself "Black," or even referring to the point of "We

are Black people". But if I'm on a professional level and I'm talking about my particular profile as a person, it's always going to be African-American. That's basically how I stand in front of the classroom. I mean I know I'm a Black man and I mean my features and my speech and all that goes along with it. But I try to convey to the students that we are people, and we're human beings, we're trying to develop ourselves to the best possible plateau of intelligence that we can, and use all of our resources.

Sometimes I just think if you categorize yourself into one area, you become so myopic that that's all you see, and sometimes children become like that as well: "Oh, we Black". No, you're a human being first of all. Other than any kind of color, you're first a human being with intelligence and all that, and you try to develop yourself as much as you can.

I would introduce my students to a lot of African culture too. We went to see Alvin Ailey and they would always have African dance. We went to City Center and they had some African things there. I didn't have the idea that whatever was Black was insignificant – never that. I just wanted to introduce them to other things so they would be able to make a choice for themselves. Because if you don't know, you really can't say, "Oh, is that something I should know?" You don't have the option.

I've always had respect for those kids that are Black or African-American that really have strived really hard and tried to achieve as much as they can. Every time I see a good-looking African-American woman or man, I feel proud that they could come up and be successful.

As a teacher, you know you do what you can. You try to be a role model and let them know there are bigger and better things to do. Sometimes a lot of them have self-esteem issues. It doesn't necessarily have to do with race; it has to do with something that's going on within them that they don't feel confident about themselves.

So I guess just to sum it up, the fact that I'm saying that I'm Black really has nothing to do with me. I mean I think, I'm a person. I think I've realized the world. Really, I have categorized myself as an African-American. I have no problem with saying "Black" and even calling myself "Black" if it's pertinent. It doesn't mean that much to me. But I just think that there's so much more that I can offer that I can see that the kids would enjoy and be exposed to, and I think that's more beneficial to them. I never let that particular term get in the way. I mean, I don't really have anything against the term, but don't box me into that talk because I think I'm much broader than that. I think the term "African-American" sort of sets it correct.

Church and musical experiences within the church

I think I started going to church about the age of nine. The church that I grew up in was a large and very conservative Black Baptist church in Brooklyn, three blocks from my house. And almost to the point of saying it was a very prestigious church as well because several prominent speakers would come and speak and even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came in and spoke.

It was a congregational church originally, but they somewhat abandoned it and our pastor, Rev. Louis Johns bought it, refurbished it, and we became a very thriving Black church, still there today. There was a variety of music of music sung there but it seems like the strongest music there classical sacred music.

I wanted to learn how to play the organ and so I went over to our church's senior choir director, Mrs. Richards and told her. And she said, "Well, you have to learn to play the piano". So there began the relationship with her. I went to her house because she didn't live to far from the church and neither from me, and we made a little pact. I told her I didn't have any money. I

didn't even have a piano to practice. She said that if I would come and practice on the piano every day for two hours, she would give me free piano lessons. The other thing was that I would have to sweep her yard or do other little household chores that she needed done because when I started taking piano from her, she must have been in her 70s. So there began my formal piano training, while still singing in the chorus.

I was 14 years old. It was the transition from junior high school and high school and she was one of the most excellent teachers. I learned later that she had studied abroad with Nadia Boulanger in Europe. Three blocks from my house, my church and to her house. I'm telling you, she was top notch. Also, she was an African-American, but originally from the Caribbean. So, there I had a piano teacher who taught me and I was in high school learning to sing. My high school teacher saw that I was interested in piano lessons and she started giving me a few piano lessons.

When I was about 17, it seemed as though I possibly had whatever was needed to be a music director and a music leader for the children's choir at my church. So I started leading the children's choir at the age of 17. The lady that was leading the choir just asked me by chance, because she knew I was taking music from Mrs. Richards. So I got up and did whatever I did to keep them together and here we are 33 years later and I'm still directing the children's choir. It happened like that. But the church and Mrs. Richards have definitely been the greatest portions of my musical foundation.

Going into college, I just really felt very strong musically. Mrs. Richards was such an excellent piano teacher. I was playing and she taught basically just classical things. She didn't teach popular stuff. It was all classical and maybe even Spanish classical things. She taught Bach and we had to play the scales and she taught some ear training. She just really gave me

such a firm foundation that even when I went to college, I was somewhat prepared even though I hadn't taken any formal music courses. I didn't take theory, didn't take sight reading, and I didn't know much about music history. I knew some composers because of the works that Ms. Richards did at the church.

Mrs. Richards was determined that every single year, she was going to do a performance of Handel's "Messiah". So she did the Christmas portion during the Christmas time and then she did the Easter portion, which of course is Two and Three during the Passion season and it was quite strange because I didn't know anything about that. But I would always want to hear it.

When I went to church, she would always to the Easter portion 5 o'clock in the evening. The church was quite empty. But the choir loft is full, I mean, 60 people up there singing this work and even out in this large church, you might have had maybe 30 people to come to hear this particular performance. That didn't matter to her. She was determined she was going to do it. And over the years, they had just developed such an appreciation for that kind of music because of the consistency and standard set by Mrs. Richards.

I went on to Northeast University and she was also the one that sort of helped to prepare me, because I didn't know what the test was going to be like. It was an aural test. There was no writing. They just wanted to hear what my ear was, but she gave me some writing and she did test my ear. So I got in.

I mean from the age of 14 on to when I graduated from Northeast University, Mrs. Richards was always there. I would constantly communicate with her. Even though she wasn't giving me lessons daily, I communicated with her and she was always so encouraging. I mean when I first started lessons, I would be sitting at the piano playing my little Bach piece. One of the other children's parents was at the church one day and she pointed me out, "Look how James

is playing his Bach" in front of the other children. And I would think, "Are you trying to get me killed?"

She was very encouraging to me. She sent me to other churches to play. Once she thought I could handle the choir, she would always tell me, "This church needs a musician, James". I played for several churches, still while at new Baptist, but it was only for one or two Sundays out of the month since the children's choir only sang twice month. But she was the one.

I think after a couple years, I think it happened one Christmas, Mrs. Richards got ill and this was an early morning service for Christmas and the pastor called me and said, we need someone to play the organ. I had to be ready at 6 o'clock in the morning. I said my prayers, and I got up and played the organ and it was just so well received. Mrs. Richards was having heart problems and she was in a nursing home and so they used me for two years to direct the senior choir. And it went well, they were very receptive to me. They knew me and they liked me. So I just pulled out and played the music that Mrs. Richards had taught them. Richards had taught them, I just pulled it out and played it.

Well, there has been a change musically at my church, new Baptist and I wasn't retired when this change happened, but still playing the organ and the minister that is there, he wanted more up-tempo music. He wanted praise music and not so much anthems and spirituals. So the choir that I was directing, basically from Mrs. Richards time, they sang anthems. They sang beautiful hymns and spirituals and major works like the Messiah and The Holy City. Well, he really wasn't pleased with that, he hired some people to come in and then he asked me not to play certain things so they could play. I would only play this and I would only play that.
So, it was December of 2009, I believe. It was the last Sunday of the month and he called me into his office. Actually didn't call me, he felt really challenged at times and would not approach

me on a personal level. It always had to be public. He wouldn't sit down one on one and talk to me. He had everybody in the room. I felt that if they wanted to do something like this, what could I do stop them. I'm changing my clothes and I'm wondering why he's standing around watching me. He wanted to make sure that I came down to the office where he was so that he could dismiss me. And in the office, he had the head Deaconess, the head of the trustee board, some other guy who supported him, the head Deacon, and me.

The pastor proceeded to tell me that the church is moving in a different direction musically and that they would no longer need my services. I knew that this was coming for some time; it wasn't a surprise to me. I was just shocked that he could not come to me as a person first of all. This was a church that I grew up in. I never had any conflicts with him, as far as me and him personally. There had been conflicts as to how he has done things in the church. And I have tried to approach him on that, but aside from the music – no conflicts.

So he said, he would give me six months' severance pay and that will be effective immediately and he thanked me for my service. I asked him a couple of questions. I asked him, "Well, what direction is the church moving into and why is it that you can't integrate me into it?" And he said, "Well, we are going to disband all of the choirs". And that was just some kind of thing that he was saying so they could get rid of me, because I think he was afraid to deal with me one on one for some reason. So I didn't even press the issue, because of my faith in God, because of who I am, and because of the people who have nurtured me in that church. And you know, the Bible tells me in Matthew, "Blessed are the peacemakers". And I believe that. I know I haven't done anything wrong to him. I know that as far as what I have done musically in that church it might not have been exemplary, maybe even the way I wanted, but it has been to the standard of where we have done things on a high level.

I am not ashamed of anything that we have done, but you know, that was his character, and just to point out a little bit more about him. Before he dismissed me, I think it was like a year prior to this, there were several members in the church complaining about the way he was administering the church. There was a group of people, about 30 people; these were staunch members, really, members that had been in the church all my life just about. They came up with a list of things that they wanted to talk to him about just wanted to have a meeting with them. He refused to meet with them. So when this happened to me, they were really shocked and they had put that on their list. And I said, "No, I'm not going to fool around with it". I'm still connected with the church, I give my offering and that's it. My connection with the church began when I was 8 years old attending Sunday school. I was the president of the youth fellowship and president of the young people's choir. Whatever they needed me to do, I was there; very, very involved in the church and basically grew up and was nurtured by the people there. So I can't severe my ties from them.

They had a meeting this past Friday and someone just brought me back news that they were doing so much hollering in this business meeting. It's like this guy really does not know what he's doing with this church. This is a large Black Baptist church and at one time it was very conservative. It was in the Baptist convention and this church was considered the model. People would look to this church.

He has really torn down that status for us. He's very, very afraid to deal with people. He won't deal with you one on one. He has to have an intercessory person talk to you. And there is a lot going on. He's an intelligent guy and he preaches well. He's not a pastor, but he preaches well. He graduated from an Ivy League school, and he just doesn't understand how to administer this type of church. Whatever he's doing, it's what he is comfortable with because it

works for him.

I think I have been very lucky because some churches try to perform major choral works but they don't have the forces. They don't have the people, first of all. They don't have the type of competent musicians that can do it. They don't have the outlet, maybe even resources to do it. My church had all Steinway pianos and two of them still remained there, so they had been there since I was a child. I had the opportunity to purchase two other Steinway pianos since I was there as music director.

We had a pipe organ. It was not the greatest pipe organ but it made such a beautiful sounded. It lasted my lifetime, at least about 30 years, in the shape that it was in before had to go. I was very fortunate to have belonged to a church that really did some extensive choral works.

Well, the most impact it had on me was the worship service. The hymns that we sung and how they were sung. My church originally had five major singing groups. The same the senior choir which was top group they sang every Sunday. Then there was the gospel chorus, but their sound wasn't a traditional gospel sound. It was a more trained sound, but they did sing gospel stuff. The director of the choir was also there for about 30 years and she was very intelligent. She was psychologist and she studied a lot of stuff, but she arranged a lot of the gospel music I really was quite unique and they were very effective.

Then there was another gospel choir that named themselves after the pastor. They were called the John Wilkins Chorus. They also sang gospel music that tended to be more contemporary. They sang a lot old stuff too but the director there, he arranged a lot of their music and they flourished. They had at least about 40, 50 members in their choir as well. Then there was the young people's choir and they sang during my time. When I started, they began

singing more Negro spirituals, mostly on the second and fourth Sundays. The director there developed the choir up to about 80 members and it stayed that way. The young people's choir remained that way for about 10 years. Then they started to decline. I don't know what happened.

The senior choir sang mostly anthems every Sunday. They sang one or two spirituals, but they were mostly anthems. Anthems are basically taken scripturally from the Bible and they're usually sung in a European style four part harmony. And usually, the type of voice that is used to sing an anthem is a more operatic trained voice and that's what she taught them. Most of them really gravitated towards learning that style.

Another gospel chorus in the church brought groups in from Chicago and did concerts. And there again they didn't sing all this rocking back and forth or down-home gospel, it was more classical type of singing. They did sing gospel but you could tell that it was in a particular style. Large groups came and they had a good fellowship with a lot of churches in the community as well.

At about the age of 12, I started to really become involved in the music of my church. I taking piano lessons from Mrs. Richards and I guess my consistency from about 12 to 14 was okay, "I'll come but I'm not going to stay two hours". I had fallen off but Mrs. Richards wasn't taking any nonsense. Then I decided, "I'm going to stick to it". I was very consistent, every day I had to go and practice. She was just so kind; because I thought if I didn't come back that she wouldn't accept me again. But she was very gracious and so when I was about 14 years old I went to her and said, "I would like to sing in the choir". She looked at me as if I was crazy and said, "what which you look like up there with all those old people?" So, I just waited, and sang with my little group on the side. I think I was about 15 years old I went to the young people's choir. That group wasn't as large as it was supposed to be when I started singing with them.

And I mean, they didn't do very well. I mean there might have been six or seven of us on a Sunday morning when we sang with the director there, Julia Post, who is still alive and she's doing very well. Julia found out that I had somewhat of a nice voice and she wanted me to sing some of these solos and some of them were a little more contemporary stuff, if I can remember. It really wasn't the kind of stuff that I like, but she felt as though it was great, so I did it.

I used some of that technique from my singing group, The Hearts of Harmony, to sing that music. I really didn't like it. I wanted to sing in the choir because I liked the kind of music that they sang. It was more classical and I just loved the music. I stayed with the young people's choir and the pastor appointed another director. The new director took over the group and it flourished to about 80 members. For about 10 years, I sang with that group as well. We did concerts in the church. And the director also sang base in senior choir. So he had some of the class. So he had some. So he had more of a classical sort of musical approach as well.

We sang spirituals because I think that's what he sang when he was in college. It was good because it brought another aspect to the church that would help us remember some of the music of our ancestors. We sang every second and fourth Sunday. We did several concerts at the church, which included anthems from the Scriptures and from these great composers. We did one or two contemporary gospel songs, but we never did any big gospel numbers.

We sang "Precious Lord" by Tommy Dorsey and "Through it All" by Andrae Crouch. Those are the only two gospel songs that we sang. Everything else was spirituals or either anthems during our concert.

Program eventually fell and I went on to Northeast University. I was still singing with the young people's choir during that ten-year period and he was still director. The choir came down a bit because young people transition to go places. They were still singing every second

and fourth Sunday, but after 10 years, the director decided that he wanted to resign, so he did. Different directors sort of took over the group and at that time, I had graduated from Northeast University.

We had a new minister because Rev. Wilkins had passed away in 1979. Our new minister's name was Dr. George Miller and he was from Dallas, Texas. He was the former Dean of Faith College which is no more, but very astute man and seemed like he was from a prominent family. So it's 1982 and I graduated from Northeast. I'm just sitting in the audience not with the young people's choir and he just felt that I could take over the young people's choir, so he appointed me that their director. I sort of tried to carry on in the tradition of spirituals. And I tried to bring in maybe some contemporary things because I just felt the young people wanted to do it. And I could introduce it in a way that could easily be melded into our church service.

I stayed with the young people and while I was with them, Mrs. Richards got ill. One Christmas morning, Rev. Miller called me and asked if I could play for the early morning Christmas service at 6 o'clock. He told me that the senior choir was singing a piece from the from Handel's Messiah. I hadn't practiced with them. And I hadn't gone over it. But I had been playing, just practicing on my own. So I consented to do that. At that time, I was still with the young people's choir as director and now filling in for Mrs. Richards. So after that, Mrs. Richards couldn't come back and the pastor just asked me to stay on.

I have always loved a wonderful choral sound. Sometimes I would select pieces that did not have solos some of them would be a little bit annoyed and ask, "Who is the soloist?" I would have to tell them, "Well, the song doesn't have a solo". There were a lot of soloists in the choir we developed under Mrs. Richards and they did very well. I worked with them even as we were preparing to sing their choral pieces. I really felt that a lot of them would get in the choir

because they wanted to sing a solo, because they wanted their particular voices featured.

There is a piece called "Inflammatus," it is in C minor and the soprano comes in on a very high note. Several sopranos could have sung it but I only wanted one because I knew that's what she sang and I loved her voice. She was just standing flat footed and coming in on this high G as we got to the end. The choir could come in and then she would go back. At the end of the piece, she had to go up to a very high C and hold it and she did it effortlessly. It was just so wonderful.

Regarding solo opportunities and teaching in church

When I was a very small boy, about eight or nine years old, we used to have an evening service called, the Lords Supper. It would start about 6 o'clock sometimes at 7:00 and that was pretty late in the neighborhood. They would go to about 9:30 or maybe 8:30; not that long. During the communion part of the service, the lights would go down and people were invited to come over to senior choir loft and sing solos.

It might have been four or five soloists coming over. Even from the gospel chorus, maybe from the young people's choir, or from the senior choir. If you want to sing, you had to talk to Mrs. Richards because everyone had to come over there and she would play whatever it was you were going to sing. I think that was sort of the thing that really helped the groups grow because they knew they could feature their voices. Everybody just thinks that they just have the most wonderful voice.

I always have thought that it really helped the music ministry because people thought that they would get an opportunity to sing even if it was one song in the choir during Sunday service they knew that they could have an opportunity during this communion service, which was really

one night a month. That's a very important part, people join the choir, and I think part of it is because they want to feature their voices. If you join the choir, I'm looking for you to add to the whole choral group sound. But I am sensitive to the fact that someone might want to sing a solo.

Because the other thing about it is, they all volunteer their time and so to compensate for the fact if you want if you are going to come out and you really feel as though you're going to commit yourself, I can at least give you something. That will make you feel as though okay, I am part of the group and I do have a connection here. If the voice is correct, then it works as well. Sometimes, if the voice is not as good as it's supposed to be, you work with it, he tell them what to do, and he developed it. I know that's true even now with the church group that I'm working with now.

So as far as soloists are concerned, that really helped me because as I think about the group now, there were a lot of soloists in the senior choir and a lot of soloists in the gospel chorus. We didn't have that many in the young people's choir, believe it or not there are a few that popped up from time to time. We didn't have a lot of soloists in the children's choir that I directed but in John Wilkins chorus, they had a lot of soloists which seemed to be the trend for a lot of gospel music. Nonetheless, I do think it was an important part of building the group.

But my whole aspect was, I want a very balanced cohesive choral sound and I really got that from the senior choir because of the people were committed to the type of music that we were singing and the number people that I had in the group. At the time I took over, 1988 or 89, there were about 50 strong. On Sunday morning, we had with have no less than about 40 people singing I'm sure and they stayed pretty much committed.

A lot of choir members were familiar with music and a lot of them knew that some of the symbols were what some of the symbols were because they would always have their music in

front of them. They could sort of follow, if I was teaching them, the most of it was by rote. I couldn't say, "Here's your music, I'm going to help you along. Sight read your parts". That just doesn't happen in most Black churches.

I told him that there are three things you have to understand first before you can accomplish a piece of music. If there are words, you have to get the words and they probably knew that. But then the words go along with the rhythm. You have to figure out what the rhythm is to the piece. And then the last thing, it shouldn't be the last thing, but the other thing is the melody. Those three things are essential to really accomplishing a piece before you can start making music with it.

So one of those variables was that they could read the music read the words. But I would always say, okay, let's see if we can figure out the words with the rhythm, because if you can do that, then the melody will come. So that was sort of a building block and for the most part, most of them picked up those things very easily. I would say; some of them might have been reading. Most of it, I'll say was rote though. I would have to play it or either I would have to sing. Once they got the notes, I would have to sing for them how I wanted the sound to come out. Some of them would sing with a closed sound and I was just so fortunate that I could model a falsetto voice and not even sing falsetto. I'm a tenor and I still have to some extent, a very good soprano voice and it almost sounds like a woman.

When the sopranos would sing, I would hear what they were doing what they were doing and be able to say, "No, more support" or "I want this and this type of sound". I would model for them and then it would happen. Sometimes, they were not giving enough energy. I would have to give them vocal techniques like telling them to take a breath here and then continue or to watch the comma. They loved it and would respond very quickly because they were used to it

from Mrs. Richards.

I would do the same thing with the tenors, the basses, and altos. The senior choir had a wonderful male section. I mean, the basses and the tenors were just simply wonderful when I first started with them. They all responded very nicely and I just had to make sure I could play this stuff on the organ. So I would have to practice but we together and we had a very good relationship.

I really thank God. I think it's because of my relationship with the church and trying to build my spiritual relationship with God that he has always been in my corner. I've been very fortunate. I'm very thankful, I really am. I've not had a poor career at all. I did a lot of things I think have impacted children's lives, and I'm still involved with teaching children choral music.

I met this one boy in high school, he was not a student in my school, but I met him as I was leaving; he's in another school in the same building. He started singing, I liked his voice, and I asked him to come and sing in my church choir up in Harlem. When he first came, he was a little disoriented but he had a nice voice and with the little budget I had, I tried to give the kids a little bit of money if they sacrificed and came. I found that he wasn't keeping up, so I dismissed him. But he kept in touch, and he said, "Mr. Thompson, I still want to come and sing with you".

I just got off the phone with them. I think it was Saturday he called me and said that he has a learning disability and that he's finished high school now. He's in college and he has dyslexia with numbers which surprised me. But I said, "well, how are you going how are you doing with English?" "Oh, Mr. Thompson, I got an A+ in music and in English". A lot of people have problems with dyslexia and reading, but he had it with numbers but it seems like he still has the tenacity to continue to go ahead. But he's still struggling with it, and I know it must be frustrating for him. He's another one that should be in music.

Mentors

I know I spoke a lot about Mrs. Richards, who was really, I mean she was my mentor and confidante and everything, but Ms. Pulley was on a different caliber than Ms. Richards. I mean she came from out of Chicago and she was one of these teachers that was very well versed in a lot of music. Not that Mrs. Richards didn't love music but her thing was basically classical music and mostly sacred classical music.

Ms. Richards was a very, very spiritual woman. I mean she would get down on her knees and pray up a storm anyway think that God was going to come up from the heavens. I'm serious. Mrs. Pulley, although very, very powerfully spiritual as well, was much more the level of excellence – not that Mrs. Richards wasn't. Mrs. Pulley was younger than Mrs. Richards but she was determined that she was going to perfect everything and her teaching methods were so that they were just so easily accessible when it came to choral music. Her tactics were "if you use this, you'll have instant results".

It became and still, today, as we are still friends and colleagues, her methods of teaching are just very useful. I've also used certain methods that she's talked about with the City Chorus. Methods for when a problem comes up if you're trying to get a certain tone, use this; or things that I've seen her do down through the years.

Public School Teaching Experiences

There was a parent from my church school choir that called me and said, "Mr. Thompson, I know you graduated from college". I was taking teaching as my degree so she said, "We need a teacher at our school". And the public school system and I said, "I don't know if I want to start

teaching right away but I went to meet the principal and she seemed to like me. She said, "Well, we had a fourth grade class that we would like for you to cover for two weeks". After I started looking around I said, "Okay, I can do two weeks" and then I'll be out of there. It wasn't within my license because I had a music license. I was teaching every single fourth grade subject right out of college with a music degree; social studies, English, math, science, and whatever else had to be taught.

I was really geared up to teach music. I had taken the test from the Board of Education for music, passed that, passed the interview test, and took the performance test. I said, "Okay, I'm ready". And to have to go into the classroom and teach fourth grade, something that I wasn't even prepared for, was frustrating. It was disappointing. The only thing I thought about it was, okay, I can bring a paycheck home. I was living with my father still at that time so I could save up some money.

The only person that really helped to prepare me was a woman my church. Back to my church again, it was such a resource to me. She was quite a teacher. She was a Ph.D. and she befriended me. We went down to the dining room of our church after Sunday service, and she sat down with me for about 2 1/2 hours and laid out everything that I was supposed to do that Sunday evening, Monday, and the next day before I even went into the classroom. I was responsible for teaching the students test taking skills and had to learn how to help them in that way. I asked her, "What do I do? How do you handle a common branch classroom?"; because, I wasn't prepared for that. And after that, I was going home every day writing lesson plans and thinking these two weeks will go pretty quickly.

Most music classrooms are departmentalized; you come in and teach music from one class to the next. But I acclimated to what I needed to do. The kids did pretty well. I had to

develop two reading groups. One reading group was independent. I had to figure out what activity they were going to do and they had to do it while I was sitting with the other group, actually reading with them. I said to myself, I hope I'm doing this right.

In that year, the public school system had a layoff of 1700 teachers and I was one of them, but I didn't lose a day of work because the principal called her principal-friend at another school. I met with him and when the new term started, I was back down there still working. I've never been out a day's work for 30 years I have taught.

There was a teacher in the school where I was teaching second and third grade she was a Caribbean lady. I don't know how we got connected or if someone said told her that the guy down there has a music degree. But she was upstairs teaching special education and she told me about a junior high school that needed a music teacher because a music teacher was leaving. I went over there and I had the interview and that's how I started over there because Mrs. Baker liked me and she's very supportive. I stayed at the junior high school for 18 years.

So I was teaching their second and third grade common branch subjects. And this particular junior high school was one of the more political schools that really started the decentralization of all these districts in the city. The Board of Education only consisted of seven people; seven men hired all the teachers in New York City. That was the Board of Education. The Board of Education was dissolved when Mayor Bloomberg came and took over, then it became the Department of Education. That wasn't until he came in a couple years after.

I went to this junior high school, I.S. 440, and it was running pretty well. It was about 2000 students in there and they want me to teach music. Assistant principal, Mrs. Baker, who was doing the hiring, was a graduate of Bridgeford College. She did music, she played, and she had even held down the position before I got there. And you know, she was very, very supportive.

Whatever I wanted, she really tried to support me. So here I am now, beginning to teach music. Almost 8 years after I graduated, but it's okay, you got to live, you know.

I'm trying to think of what I'm doing in the church during those eight years. I know that I was directing the children's choir and singing with the young people's choir so that pretty much was the extent of my musical perspective then but as I started teaching junior high school, I established the class. I think I have nine classes and some were double periods and it became a bit much. I asked the assistant principal, Mrs. Baker, if I could only have one class. I had over 60 students in my class. I really didn't have my class management for that large amount of students up to par. Northeast University really did not prepare me for urban teaching. I student taught in a city environment. But it was still an ideal situation, the supervising teacher was there and there were never 60 kids in a classroom. From an urban setting like that to this one in Brooklyn, and these kids were hard knock, it was very different. If you don't have your stuff together right away, you can be overwhelmed. But as the years grew, I developed a stronger classroom management and it became much easier for me.

Through the course of those 18 years, we initially just had regular music classes, I would say for the first five years; classes just doing singing and general music. Then, Mrs. Baker took over as principal and she wanted the whole school grouped into mini schools with different themes. It was the media school, media communication, technology, computers and all that. Performing arts, and she had another school, there were four mini schools.

She had each of us to audition the kids within the building at that time, to figure out what they wanted to do and what, and what their strengths were. So we grouped them within the mini schools. There were four classes in each school. After the first coordinator of the mini school left, Mrs. Baker appointed me as a new coordinator. I stayed the coordinator for about nine

years. Each year, one of our biggest goals was to do something collaborative. So, of course going back to my sisters at my childhood home, I wanted everyone to do a musical.

So that included the art teacher, the drama teacher, and I was doing music. We had to coordinate all of that so we could prepare for this particular musical and we were pretty successful. Our first musical was "Oliver" and I just love the music in "Oliver". As I researched it and as we were getting ready to do it, I noticed that there was another school in Brooklyn doing "Oliver". They had beautiful scenery, and they had so much money that what were they going to do with that scenery? They were just going to throw it out. So, I went and I asked them if I could have the scenery. Since I knew that they did these musicals every year and that they did a different set of designs every year. I brought all the scenery over to my school and the kids, the school, and the parents loved it. Even the custodians said, "Oh my God, it's beautiful". They gave us the costumes as well. I couldn't believe it all we had to do was make sure that the kids could fit them. And with these kids, you know, they made it work.

One year we did "The King and I" and that play required that the kids wore these particular costumes from the Orient. I told Mrs. Baker, that we needed these costumes. So Mrs. Baker put together a group of about five teachers and there was an old typing room that we weren't using anymore, because then they had brought in the computers, and she set the teachers up in this room with sewing machines. They were all down there making these costumes for all these kids that we wanted and she always makes a joke about it. She said, "The sweat shop is downstairs where the teachers are making things". I never forgot about that. I really enjoyed the musicals even with some of the struggles of some of the kids it really brought them together. It brought them to a high level and I run into some of the students now.

I was going to church one Sunday in August and a cop was standing on the corner and he

recognized me and said, "Stop for a second, Mister". And I said, "What? What did I do?" He was a big guy. He said, "Aren't you Mr. Thompson?" I looked up and said, "Where do I know you from?" And he said, "You don't remember me? I was the lion when we did the Wiz". It's just so wonderful that a lot of them have done pretty well. And I think being in involved in music really helped to build some of their character to some extent.

After the 18 years, they started messing around and excessing teachers. I was excessed and found a job at a high school in Manhattan and this was like a utopia. It really was. The principal that hired me, his name was Edward Saunders.

Edward Saunders was such a wonderful person. He loved music and he loved classical music. He liked popular music too, but when he was in school he did a lot of singing so he loved a large chorus. After I gave him my resume, he wanted to know if I could build up a chorus and he had a small group of really advanced piano students that he wanted me to work with as well. I told him that would be fine. He had a whole new piano lab equipped with 20 new pianos, benches, and earphones. I started teaching the kids that I had in my piano class and then before the end of the second semester, the kids wanted to learn to play the guitar.

I didn't have a lot of guitars. I only had acoustical guitars and so he went out to the music store and brought me a class set of 30 electrical guitars. That was like unheard of, so I was like in heaven. Then I told Mr. Saunders, I don't play guitar. He said, "That's okay, Mr. Thompson". He went out and hired NYC guitar studio teachers to come in my classroom during my regular class time with them. I split the class up into three groups and they taught them. I think they were getting these funds to start these small schools so he had a lot of money that he had to spend. He loved music so that's what he spent it on.

He was a great principal and so supportive, the students that I had in that high school,

they were just wonderful. And they were so respectful because when I taught junior high school, you understand the fact that they're going through puberty and things like that, but those junior high school kids, they were, some of them were mean. They were nasty and very disrespectful and it took a lot of my effort to get them to do what I wanted them to do.

High school students

The only thing that the high school kids did not want to do, which was one of my loves, was they really did not want to sing. It was the hardest thing to get them to sing. It was a struggle. They would do it, because I wanted them too, but the sounds that I would get out of them were just not, it didn't thrill me at all. We had to do some things. I did a lot of popular stuff with them. I didn't do a lot of classical works because that would've been a stretch for them. They were mostly Latino children and they were serious about their learning.

They were serious about education. I didn't have any kinds of problems like I had with the junior high school kids. One or two might crop up, but with what I had learned, I could take care of that in the class without any problem and just go on. They seemed to be very inquisitive. They would ask me questions about things that we are doing in the lesson, which really blew my mind because in the junior high school, if you don't stay on pace and stay right with the kids, whether they asked the questions or not, you lose them. You might get one or two kids asking, "Mr. Thompson, what about this here?" But the high school kids, they would ask questions. The first class that I had at the high school, must have been an accelerated class. They asked me so many questions. I had that class every school year that I was there till they graduated. That was my best class and I still stay in contact with them now through Facebook. I took them to.

I took them to a piano concert and Yo-Yo Ma performed. One boy actually, there were

two boys. One was very subdued, very smart, but he wasn't so sold on playing the piano. But I convinced him. He became my best piano player. I convinced him to just take his time, as I would sit with them almost like a private lesson, while I gave the assignment. He could really get that one on one lesson. The other kid that I was talking about, his name was Robbie. He was like okay, "I'm going to throw darts at this teacher every chance I get". He wasn't disrespectful but he really challenged me. So I would say, "Play this piano". He would say, "Me?" So he came up and he was another one. He was the one that took to the classical stuff. I couldn't believe it. I mean, he would bring me things so that I could teach him. I was really, really impressed with those kids, and I was almost sorry, when they left, I was really sorry. I said, "It's time for me to go".

Teaching Junior high

I didn't have a chorus at first, I taught vocal music. I did a lot of general music teaching and taught different elements and concepts of music. We would do some singing because the way I was taught in secondary methods at school is that you always start off with a song. Any song you start off with you can teach just about any particular element or whatever you want to teach music. So for instance, a dotted eighth rhythm with a sixteenth, you can find a particular song and then focus on our rhythm. The kids began to feel that rhythm, so that when they see it, they know it. I would teach them how to read music and I would teach those different songs, how to breathe and the concept behind why the song was in the music books that we used.

Some of the kids may have had music in the feeder schools, some had better music programs some had none, but the time when they were coming in, I would try to do a little survey. I would always ask them to fill out this paper and tell me if they sang in the chorus, if they played

an instrument, if so, how long? What instrument? I would just try and get an overview. Some of them had some experiences. Most of them had experiences playing the recorder. These were all elementary school students coming into junior high.

One or two might have taken a private lesson but that was very rare. No one ever came to me knowing how to play the piano proficiently, which is very surprising. Drums were very common. Everyone knew how to bang on something. Every time they said, "Mr. Thompson, I know how to play the drums". I'd say, "Oh, that's just so wonderful. Now what else can you do?" I didn't mean to demean it, but it was like, thank God I'm bombarded with people who know how to play the drums. But you know, some of them knew how to play the trumpet, which was surprising. I didn't have any instruments at my hand that I could set up a group with. So all I had to do was just learn this information and go into the music that I could teach them and the choral stuff.

I found out two years later after I started teaching at the junior high school, that there was a whole band room downstairs. Mrs. Baker didn't tell me that. She said that she wanted me to do general music and maybe choral singing because that was my expertise. At one time, they had this band and the man that was there was a very good band teacher. He taught band downstairs but there was no more band down there after he left. I went down there and I was surprised. I saw basses, cellos, and violins. I saw instruments that were broken up. I saw clarinets, and saxophones, and then I saw music books. It was a music storage room. So, I saw these violins and I attempted to take about 10 of the violins from downstairs up to the chorus room on the third floor.

For a year, I attempted to have a violin program. I just found that it wasn't working because I didn't have enough time to get the violins together and the principal was giving me too

many kids. I had 60 kids in the room with 10 violins and that's not going to work. When kids see other kids doing something, they want to know when it's going to be there turn. So she revised my program. She would only give me one class at a time. It sort of worked out for a while, but I didn't have enough skill myself on the violin to really work out some of their problems so I had to constantly look things up. But I was interested in the violin and the fact that we had them down there.

So I got enough training to help with the little problems that some of them were having, I worked it out and we did a little performance at school. It was one, and that was it. Mrs. Baker, the assistant principal, she was very impressed. So I had them on stage in a little semicircle and we played about five songs. I wanted to see if I could develop that more, but then Mrs. Baker wanted to start the mini schools.

As a music teacher, you are dealing with the development of the child. It's not just about singing. It's also about getting to class on time and it's about kids keeping their grades up if they want to participate in certain performances. There were some techniques that I would transfer from church school, but school was totally different. There was a more rigid schedule. I had time set to get certain things done and because they were children, you always have to deal with whatever kind of discipline problems, if there were any and there usually were in at the junior high school. I always had to fight my way through that. At church, I'm just making the comparison; there were no problems discipline wise. Never even have to tell them to stop talking. They were totally focused.

Which made me begin to even be more creative and dig more into my technique bag because then I can give them more myself. The school, if I wanted to bring them to the highest level of whatever, I had to deal with discipline problems. Some kids were always willing to

cooperate and do whatever I tell them to. Some would do it for a little bit and then decide that's enough. I would see that peripherally and try to bring them back or they would start acting up and then I would have to stop and deal with that because I could not let that go on and escalate in the classroom.

At this particular school, it became very frustrating and I had to find a way to accomplish what I wanted to do. For the mini school, I just told Mrs. Baker that we had to audition kids that really wanted to be in music. Specifically, they had to understand that they would develop into a chorus. And for the most part, I did get a lot of kids that were interested in the chorus. I tried to explain to them what being in a chorus was. I was trying to develop them into parts singing, which is difficult, so we just started singing in unison first. Then we broke off into singing rounds, this group is going to start and then you all are going to come in and you all you are going to start with them. And they are going to keep going but you are going to go and you will finish last. Then I would give them little techniques of whatever they need to do to become independent singers in group. It sort of worked. It was working. We did a concert.

I may have had two groups on the performing arts, so that's four classes and then they were rotated. They would come twice a week. But I would always combine them. To develop something, to get something going they felt that we should have at least one double period during the week. It sort of worked out, the kids cooperated and we sang. Now the type of music that I selected for them was a little bit more secular. I would have preferred to do all sacred music, but that wouldn't have jived with the kids. They might have liked it, but then it was public school and the idea of public school is to have a whole well rounded kid as far as ethnicity and multicultural awareness and so I selected pieces that were different.

I selected one piece by Tina Turner; "Big Wheels Keep on Turning/Proud Mary". We

did a Michael Jackson song. I would put in some classical things. I think I did a Handel piece from "Judas Maccabees", "Hallelujah" and they liked that. They did it in three parts and I was very pleased with what they tried to do with it. So, we did classical. We did some spirituals like, "Plenty Good Room". We did the popular stuff and I did a little Spanish song with them as well. It worked out nicely. Now that was our concert for maybe the beginning part of the year, up to Christmas. Maybe we did some Christmas things in there as well. The second part of the year, we would really focus on the musical selection do as a performing arts and that's where we all came together. There were auditions for that. We would show the kids whatever musical we had selected to do and our people would see what they had to do as far as scenery and whatever props and all that. Drama had to decide what they wanted to do. I had to figure out who would be the best singers, the lead singers, the principles, and what the chorus could do. The dancers had to add whatever dance ensembles that came up in the group. It became a little convoluted as well because some of these kids had many talents, so we had to sometimes exchange kids.

Sometimes I just decided, I didn't care what they thought, everybody was going to sing. Everybody came into my room and we did certain pieces that the whole cast was just going to sing at certain points in the musical, even if they were dancing or whatever. But it sort of worked out. And it was sort of tough because some kids would not adhere to some of the schedules that we wanted. Some of them would not go home and practice; it seems like an arduous situation with some of them. But somehow these musicals came off and the school seemed to be very pleased and we raised a lot of money with them. I think for about 9 or 10 years, it really worked well. It really did. We did a number of musicals.

I noticed it as I was teaching middle school, which is a good portion of my experience of teaching, that a lot of the students, I think about their social and economic background a lot of

them were very unexposed to a lot of things just in the borough, and then in the whole city, let alone that there was something more extensive outside of this country. I was always interested in trying to introduce kids to a lot of stuff, and I would take them on a lot of trips – whatever I could, even if it cost them a little bit, wherever we could go I would take them. We would even walk down to Rockefeller Center to give them some exposure as to what goes on during Christmas time. We went to the Alvin Ailey dances and would take the train sometimes into Manhattan. Some of them didn't even know how to take the train into Manhattan.

I thought part of my experience as a teacher was to help them to understand this enormous city that we lived in, which is one of the greatest cities, if not the greatest city in the world. A lot of them came from poor backgrounds, which sometimes would impede a lot of things when it came to teaching. But it was a lot of exposure. I mean sometimes we would take the school bus and going across the bridge, I'd ask them, "What bridge is this?" And they didn't even know – just know the names. So we'd just talk about stuff.

We took them to Canada once. Well, we took the kids to Canada well, we took the kids in our mini school. This I had all my teachers the – the art teacher and the drama teacher and whoever else went with us, a couple of other chaperones – and soon as the kids got to the hotel, they started jumping up and down on the beds like they had no sense at all. I couldn't believe it. They had just got into the room. I stepped out for a second to speak to a teacher about something. Here they are jumping up and down on the bed. This boy jumped up and down on the bed so hard that he fell off the bed and dislocated his shoulder. Now we just got here now, we just got here.

I couldn't believe it. His name was Naveen and one of my better students from the musical. He played the artful dodger in the musical. And here this kid had dislocated his

shoulder. We had been in the hotel no more than 10 minutes. So, "what are we supposed to do, Mr. Thompson?" Well, he has to go to the hospital. But we're in Canada. We're not citizens of Canada. So I had to take him myself. I had to go back across the border into the United States to a hospital that was there that would serve him, where he had some kind of coverage. Now, I think we left the hotel probably maybe around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We get into the hospital and the doctors examine him. They couldn't do anything to him without his mother's permission because they wanted to give him morphine. I had all of the medical releases forms with me, but because of this particular drug, I want to make sure that this kid didn't come up with some kind of addiction or whatever. So I said, "You call his mother and you get him a specific release to administer this drug to him". So they called her and they gave him the morphine because, if they put his shoulder back it was going to be painful. So I think the procedure took about 45 minutes and they had his shoulder back in place and put a brace on it.

This was around 1 o'clock in the morning now. All that time, we're waiting and waiting and waiting. And he told me, "Mr. Thompson, I have to go to the bathroom". I said, "Well go". He said, "No, I need some help". I said, "Well, What do you want me to help you do?" I said, "I am not holding anything". I was trying to stay clam with him because of his injury but when he asked me about that I think I lost it a little. So, he went on to the bathroom and he sort of made it out, because the first thing that I thought was that, no, my job is not going out the window for you and your nonsense, getting up here 10 minutes into the trip and dislocating your shoulder. No. No. So they gave him the medicine and he rested in the hospital for about half an hour. I called a cab and they took us back to the hotel. We didn't get back there until 12 hours later, because we didn't get back to the hotel until about 4 o'clock in the morning. The kids were sort of asleep and people were ready to get up and go. I said, "You're going to go and get some rest".

This trip was really a reward because of what they had done in the musical. This trip was really a reward because they had done such a wonderful job in a musical. And I just like to travel. So the teachers talked about it and this was before 9/11. So the fact that we could go out of the country was great. So we would always take the kids to Six Flags Great Adventures every year. It was meant to be just a fun trip to let them enjoy themselves at the end of the year. Most of the tests were done and the performances were over. And the trip was just to let them know, "We're looking out for you and we want you to have a good time". After 9/11, we couldn't go to Six Flags. They wouldn't let us go. They definitely wouldn't let us go out of the country.

Now, prior to even after we went to Canada, we decided to take the kids to Washington, DC which is a shorter trip. I think that was a day trip. We went down to Washington and there was there were no incidents there, thank God. We visited a lot of museums there and they were astonished that all the museums were free period especially that this is the Smithsonian. A lot of the kids, either the parents want to do it and they don't have the time, or they just become so involved in their own little ghetto communities that they don't see that there is a bigger whole.

Well, because of the musicals that we had we could subsidize their trip. They would have to pay something, but we could subsidize the amount, whatever the cost was and we took a good portion of kids. For a musical, we raised about $3500 and most of it went to these trips or to subsidize Great Adventures. We always used to go to Great Adventures, and sometimes we'd have money left over for next year for costumes or whatever supplies we needed. The kids came up with the rest of the money. We gave them a payment plan, and we thought it was nominal. Most of them came up with it.

Teaching at the High School

A lot of the high school teachers came from very, very good schools and they were serious. They were as strategic as to what they wanted to accomplish, they were getting these kids stuff left and right. They were kicking their butts with this stuff. I think some of the class would come down to music lab thinking, "Oh, we're going to chill. No, you're not going to chill in here" because I was determined that they are going to be at a high level as well, and I'm challenging them to read music, to listen to things, and give me feedback. But even with them, they were still respectful. I mean if I ever have to stop and said, I've had enough, they all go, "Oh, let's see what he's talking about". So they were going to pay attention now. I never really got into any kind of back-and-forth altercations with them. The other thing that was good about my particular high school was that they set up a detention if you have a problem. They all got embarrassed if they have to go up there.

The two guys that were up there were like bouncers. I mean they were not playing with them but they were respectful of the kids. They didn't holler at them, they would just say "Go there and sit down. Take out some work to do." It was the quietest room in the building. But as I went up there sometimes, it wasn't full. I mean you might have had four or five kids in there. Most of the kids understood, "Look, you're here to learn. You've got to do what you're supposed". There were probably some more serious problems I don't know about. But my classroom was in the basement. My school was on the fourth floor.

On the first floor and on the basement floor was another school. Second floor was another school. Third floor was another school. My school was on the fourth floor. And kids had to come downstairs to music in my classroom. I can't say that there were very serious problems. I think I only called two parents while I was teaching there. One parent came up for this young man. He just kept acting out and he threw something in my room. I said, "Well,

that's it now you don't come back until you bring your mother up".

So he came back the next day and I said, "Where's your mother?" And he said, "You was serious?" I said, "You go upstairs to detention. You bring your mother up". He came back the third day, "She said she can't". I told him, "Well , then you can't come back in here". His mother came up there I think a week later. Beautiful lady, beautiful hair and dressed so wonderfully, and here he is standing behind her. She didn't raise her voice, and I spoke to her. I said, "Well, you know, he's been trying in the classroom but he threw something in my class in that first row, put me in danger, put my kids in danger, and disrespected my classroom".

All she did was look at and he just put his head down like he was so ashamed. Then she looked back and she said, "Mr. Thompson, I'm sorry". I told her, "I was sorry that I'm sorry that you had to take off work to come up here". She said to him, "I want you to apologize." It was just so wonderful and the kid and I are friends today. It was just so funny because he thought I was not going to go to that extent to call his mother. That was the only parent I really think that I had to have come up to resolve that issue. If you told a kid he was messing up and you were going to call his parent, a lot of them would straighten up. I think I called two parents on the phone and left a message, when the kid came back, it was nothing, you know. "I would like to speak to you about your kid's behavior" or whatever. But it was so minimal.

But the social issues in high school are much, much more diminished than they are in junior high school, and I had to deal with much, much less. Was really a joy teaching high school and if I had to teach, if it was mandatory for me to teach another five years, it would be very easy for me. I enjoyed what I was doing. I was able to really develop my craft even more.

I can go into the kinds of things I knew that I wanted to bring out where in junior high school, if you prepared a lesson you see what you want to get through sometimes if you can get

into the lesson, other things are able to come to you like these teachable moments where you can really develop and enrich things. But if you're constantly hammered with all these interruptions, it's like, "Okay, let's just get this done".

It really, really happened for me while teaching in high school. I was very happy there; I really was. The other thing that just made it so wonderful was the principals I had. The first principal, Mr. Saunders, he was just a golden gem for me. He provided all the utilities that I needed, the piano lab, and the guitars. I went out and I bought the recorders myself, but if I needed books then the school provided. I mean the schools even paid for me to go to conventions not in one year, two years, but three years. They paid for the hotel and paid for the transportation. I'm telling you I was in heaven. I really was and I was just so thankful. I just cannot believe, and I really believe, that God had blessed me and put me in that situation.

There were several times that I had to step outside that role of being what people might perceive as a teacher, but this one particular time sticks in my mind because when I think about it, it might have gotten a parent in trouble, I might have gotten in trouble myself. But in my chorus class, I was teaching the boys their parts. Everybody had to sit close together and so the boys would always start talking about this one little kid. Cute little Black boy and he had the best voice. They would always start talking about how he smelled. You try to ignore this stuff because you don't want the kid to feel ostracized in any kind of way, but I could tell that the kid had a very strong urine smell on him. So, I would listen to what they were saying and play it down. "Be quiet; don't start talking about each other".

It just happened too many times. So he was about to leave one time and I dismissed the class one by one letting them think that they all weren't behaving and I left him last. I spoke to the door and I asked him, "Do you have clean clothes at home? Is your mom home?" He told me,

that he took his clothes out of the hamper. And I said, "well, why do you do that?" And he said because I don't have anything else clean to wear. I started to call his mother, which is what I probably should have done, but being the kind of empathetic person that I am; I just went out and bought him new clothes. At the time I had some extra money and I just went out and figured the kid's size. I bought him some brand-new underpants and four shirts. I got him some socks and I think that was it. They weren't open I just took the box and I wrapped the box up with wrapping paper so that the other kids wouldn't see it.

When he came in for chorus, I said, "Now you come back at the end of the day. I have something for you". So he came back and I gave him the box.. I didn't want him to have to be carrying it around. He went home and I think he was absent one day. The next time I saw him, this kid had a haircut, and his face was just glowing like oils were coming from his skin. He had on new clothes. He did not smell. And I said, "Oh, you look very nice". And the boys in the class stopped ostracizing. This was pure neglect. The child was coming to school every day smelling and looking like this. That she was not taking care of him and you know, then I said, for my own self somebody could have thought I was trying to mess around with the kid which was not the case at all. I just felt very bad for him. The thing about it made me feel very bad. I needed him to sing because he had such a nice voice. I think it was a signal to the mother; I better take better care of my kid.

So that was one of the biggest times when I really stepped outside of my world as a teacher, my traditional role as a teacher. I mean there have been other things. I have talked to kid's parents. I mean one kid, his name was Terrence Mitchell. Wonderful kid, sticks in my mind. He was very cooperative very musical, and wanted to learn the piano. He would ask me, "Mr. Thompson, are you going to teach me the piano?"

His parents both died over an overdose of drugs. So his grandmother and grandfather were taking care of him. His grandmother would take no nonsense, but she was right there with him. I could just tell her anything and Terrence never stop stepped out of line. All I would have to say is, "How's grandma?" And he'd say, "Awe, Mr. Thompson". But I knew that this was one case where this kid is going to make it.

Believe it or not, I was on a boat ride one time and I'm sitting there talking to my friends. He walks up behind me and says. Terrance walks up behind me and says, "Mr. Thompson". I couldn't believe it. I started talking to him and asked him what he was doing. He told me he was a postman working for the post office. And I said, "How many kids do you havet?" He told me, "Oh, Mr. Thompson, five". He was a good kid though and I left and said to him, "Give me your grandma's number so I can talk to her". A lot of them came from, they did definitely did not come from middle class families.

It was something that I expected. I didn't expect to work with kids who were affluent at all. I expected that because of the area that the school was in that most of these kids were going to be at the level of either poor or poverty, however that didn't take away from talent. A lot of them had talent. Some of them might have come in and you had to motivate them in certain ways and bring out the fact of what you can do through music and try to help them understand that you can still make it.

I would share with them, I might have shared all of them, but maybe one or two times, I might share with them the fact that as I was growing up, I was on welfare. My grandmother raised me and my father was a taxi cab driver who worked every night. At that time, he was not making a lot of money but he had four children but we never went into drugs. Certain things happen, but we all sort of made it to some extent.

They look at you and they say, "Well, how did you get here?" So once you open up that shade and let them see the fact that you came from the same circumstances a lot of them are coming (from your lips?). Because a lot of them, they all had to bring in letters to get free lunch passes and all that. They think that you come came from this very affluent family and that you are rich. They think your father and mother had no problems. If they really knew the story behind me, they would really be shocked.

I didn't reveal everything, but I would tell them that I was on welfare, and it wasn't for a little while. I have to go down face to face with my father. I was ashamed, but I went on down there because my father asked us to go, because I had to, but you know, I just decided I'm not going to have to do this the rest of my life. I'm going to do what I have to. And I shared that with them and it really helped. It really did help.

Qualities of a good teacher

I would do theater type of things in my house growing up and I look back and now think, why in the world did I do that? I would just see what my brothers and my sisters were doing. I look at the names on a piece of paper and whatever little bit of money I would say, "Okay, he was good and so he gets a check" and I would give him a dollar. I'm serious. I would keep this list on top of a closet and I wonder why I did things like that. And then I was working in a camp in upstate New York and the director as he looked at me, he would always give us our evaluations the end, he started off my evaluation as father James as though I'm trying to take care of everybody. As a teacher, you can't separate yourself. Especially, because you care about the kids, you want them to do well, and you want to do whatever you can to help them to progress. I saw a lot of kids who were disruptive, but you can look beyond that even with the

music and you can see how that can be incorporated into their talent, if you can show them how to be a little bit more disciplined. I have seen that even at the high school level.

I feel that the kind of person that you are you will bring into the classroom, and that's where it starts. It will probably come from your background it will start from your family and from how you were treated and all that. Now, some people might have been treated wrong in their family and then they will reverse that and come into the classroom, see the needs of others, and go beyond how they were treated. And I understand that, "You know, I was treated like that, but I'm going to treat y'all like this". As a public school teacher, I think that you, first of all, have to be concerned about the kids, whoever they are – White, Black, Indian, or whatever you have to be concerned about the fact that they're young people that they're looking to you to help them to grow and to gain knowledge so that they can be successful in the world.

You have to present yourself as professional as possible. You have to approach them with the fact that whatever I'm teaching you, you can attain it. Don't try to teach down to them so that they can come up to higher levels, because a lot of them, believe it or not, a lot of them bring a lot of talent to the classroom. You present one thing and then you have to present it another way, and then you might have to present a different way because they don't understand. That's what a teacher does, use different tactics so that the kids understand, but keep presenting it on the same level. Challenge them with whatever concepts or whatever skills you're trying to teach them, so that they will feel, "Oh, I can do it," and they will evolve knowing that they can meet and overcome challenges.

I think that you should never curse at children in a classroom. I'm a Christian and I would always cringe even if I heard a child curse. I would always try to make them feel like they had done something wrong, or try to help them to understand the shame that they were creating

even talking to me like that and I'll tell them. I have never really cursed at my middle school classes. I might have once said to them, "Sit your asses down" because I was mad after I've told them five times. Sometimes you feel like that's the only way they're going to understand you. Then I'll say to the rest the class, "Please forgive me for saying that, because some of you did not deserve to hear that. Some of you are just very obnoxious, not listening, and causing me to lose my composure when we're trying to do certain things". They understood. They knew that Mr. Thompson is not going to curse. He always speaks to us respectfully and tries to encourage us.

Even when I check my papers, I don't put Xs on the paper because I think that's a negative thing. I'll circle it and I'll check whatever's correct. I'll circle it for you to look at it and check it to see what it's supposed to be, but I never used Xs. I think you have to bring the most positive attitude, the best skills, to the classroom because the kids need you. The kids need to know that you are their best resource for whatever subject that you're trying to teach them, and that they can rely on you for information that they need so they can be successful.

Qualities of a good teacher are that you have to be prepared. Qualities of good teacher are that you have to be able to pace your lessons so that the kids will be able to get it. You have to be well prepared, well planned. Don't come to the classroom and try to "wing" your way through a lesson, even if you think that you know it well enough. And help kids understand that there is a process in learning, that everything doesn't come all of a sudden, that there are certain stages that you have to develop to get to the final outcome of a certain level of understanding.

Time yourself. Be able to make yourself available for the kids that they will be able to come to you if they have problems. Be encouraging and be positive, be the best kind of role model that you can for them. Try to help them to develop socially.

Teaching life lessons in junior high school

Sometimes they have disputes, and you try to help them to understand how you solve these disputes in the classroom, because I told them sometime the class was just a small community of what the larger world is, and everyone brings something into the classroom. You all are unique and you're all different. Sometimes you have differences with what you think and how you do things; that's the way the world is. The world is very diverse and if you come up against someone that you have problems with you shouldn't fight. You should try to understand.

A lot of them, and it's really just a shame, a lot of Black children that I've taught, really have a lot of problems with each other. They have a lot of problems when it comes to getting along with each other, and that was one of the main problems that I had in my classroom. There was always some kind of friction going on if they weren't paying attention to me. They had tuned out what I was talking about and wanted to focus on someone else, or either something else. Then there was this friction that would happen, maybe when my back was turned, or maybe I did something and they did something, or they would signal, whatever. Then an argument would break out. Then maybe they would bring this to the classroom.

There was just too much violence. There's too much anger. They just didn't seem to know how to get along with each other at a young age, and it is really sad it was really sad. It really impedes them on the social level as far as how to get along with each other as a culture, let alone as people and let alone as humans. These particular Black children, I'm telling you, I've seen it down through my years of teaching. I mean I won't say that maybe Puerto Ricans or maybe White children or Asians have the same problem, but it's much less than I've dealt with a lot of Black children from inner-city school system. This was almost like the heart of Brooklyn where I was teaching. So was it was a prime area for children to try to get along. But I'm telling

you there were fights outside my classroom. I mean not that it didn't happen in my class. They would bring stuff.

They would go down to the lunchroom, and after lunch seemed like would be when most of the incidents happened because they didn't know how to interact with each other or they didn't like each other or this one thought they were better when this one was– all this kind of stuff. You have to sort of really settle the class and get through that and bring them to the level of "I want y'all to try to get along". And sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't, because whatever you said to them might have quelled them in your classroom, but when the outside when they got outside, now it's on and then they're going to fight. That was one of the main reasons why the junior high school where I taught was disbanded.

They phased out this particular school because I would say in the last six years that I was there, there was a fight every day at 3 o'clock and it wasn't just some little fist fight. I mean these kids had bottles and stuff. It was just ridiculous. Sometimes teachers were afraid to go out as they were leaving, I mean these hordes of children out the street running up and down.

Some of the kids just seemed to be so, so angry. I mean I just couldn't get to the heart of it. I noticed that if I was teaching and something happened, I had to deal with it if I thought that this was becoming something that was spreading around, I would just stop teaching and start talking about social issues. I would talk to them about how people get along and the kinds of qualities that you need to develop yourself as a person not to just learn things, but just to get along in the world. I would tell them if you constantly are in friction with someone, you're going to live a frustrated life.

We had a career day and I was in one of the classes. They were doing forensic science. One of the kids asked, "What do you do when the people die?" So they told them how they cut

them open and all to find out what was going on with them. Then one kid blurted out in the class, "Oh, that's what happened to that Marcus". This kid I remember he came into my classroom; he was Caribbean, a little Black kid with dark skin. When he came to the door he actually bowed to me. I mean he actually stood there very politely and bowed. He wasn't in our school no more than a year before they turned this kid into I don't know what.

He had developed a different character and then he was out there selling drugs. And during this career day class, I found out they killed him. I could not believe it. I sat there in total shock. I said, "Do you mean to tell me that kid has been shot dead?" And the kids said, "Yeah, he gone Mr. Thompson". The first couple weeks that I had him in my class, he was so respectful. I thought, the kid has come over from the Caribbean and these kids have acclimated him into the world that they think it's supposed to be. Now, the poor child is dead. I would not have known it had not been for someone in this class and because of the forensic thing that this guy was talking about.

So that became a lot of stuff where even the principal was talking about, "You can't wear these certain colors". But those gangs are very prominent, and they had a lot of clout. But I would be very careful. This one kid I was talking about, I made him sit in front of the room so I could watch him. I didn't really have a problem with him. He seemed to have a little bit of respect for me. But if he thought he had to get to someone, I would have to manage him as well. One of the teachers told me, "Well, you know, his father is the head of the gang". I said, "The father is the head of the gang?" I said, "Oh, my God". Gangs were just prevalent in these schools.

The social aspect of a lot of these kids – I'll say Black children – really has to do with a lot of their progress. It really does. Even some of the better kids that come out of some of the

nicer homes where the family is functioning well, they can be so acclimated and so pulled into the trench of these other kids, it's really sad. It really is causing a lot of children to be afraid. Some of them are afraid to go school. Some of them are afraid to approach certain kids and it really is a problem still today. I didn't let that deter me from thinking, "I don't care what they're doing. This is where we're trying to go".

During one rehearsal for our first play, "Oliver," we were practicing our 'bows and thank yous' to the audience. And they just didn't understand. You just don't come out on the stage acting like you haven't been rehearsed as to what to do. I was trying to tell them but there was just so much talking. I was becoming so frustrated because I'm at the piano. We had the drama teacher who was really in charge but she was doing what she could. I said, "Now, go upstairs and get Ms. Fauntleroy". Now, Ms. Fauntleroy was one of those teachers that had decided, "I don't care. I will cuss you out". She came down and said, "All of you come out here and sit in the auditorium". So they came out. She explained to them nicely. Then I told her, I said, "Now, this is how I want him to come out". So she had them all backstage – because we didn't have a lot of teachers backstage monitoring them and that was a problem too. They came out and people applauded. I said, "That's what I wanted to happen".

Now, it took that kind of attitude, that kind of disposition, and that kind of "If you don't do like I said," for them to understand. That's what they respected. I was nice to them because they knew I wasn't going to curse at them. I raised my voice and they would listen, but then that would only last but for so long because they know I'm trying to get this stuff done.

I was determined. That was our first play, "Oliver", and it turned out very nicely. And the next eight that we did over the next eight years were even better. It's still struggling, but I was determined. And you know something? These musicals that involved so many kids; I mean

almost thousands of kids, really have made quite an impact on them. They really, really have.

Just this past Friday, I went to the doctor's office and I saw this young lady, very stout, short, little Black young girl. She said, "Mr. Thompson". So then she turned around as we were walking back to the office. She says, "You look familiar. Did you teach music?" I said, "Yeah". She was one of my students. Now here she is a medical professional and she's going to take my blood pressure and she was one of my students.

One of the biggest struggles for African-American children is to be able to get along with each other and to socially be in a place where they can say, "Okay, let me just get along or try to work with this person," or "maybe I can ignore this". I told them at some points, "You know, you're willing to fight each other but what if you put that effort into struggling through your studies. Because not just in music are you not doing well; some of them are doing poorly in math and reading because they were putting so much effort into not focusing. Fight with the books. I'm trying to understand. Ask the teacher. That was the other thing about a lot of kids, they never asked me a lot of questions. If I presented something, they never asked me a lot of questions about it. They would accept everything I said to be true. They weren't inquisitive enough.

Most of the kids I taught in high school were Latino children. Basically even my school was mostly Latino children. I found a totally different character and disposition. There were less fights, from what I saw. They were older. They know now that this is the last couple years of their schooling. They know now that the diploma will mean something and that they have to work for that. It was a different culture and now they're with a mixture of children. I mean there were also Asians and there were Blacks.

That's always been my biggest thing that students want to learn. You can really grab

them if they know that you are there to help them with whatever they're struggling through. It just really hasn't happened. I know they're breaking down a lot of these middle schools the classroom is really what they need to break down. Should be no more than 12 to 15 kids and even smaller than that.

It could be different in music. You could probably put more in music depending on the kids' behavior. But academically, as I went around to a lot of the classes of the different teachers, because I would just go around the building talking to teachers and sort of sitting in the classroom watching them, they could be more effective with a smaller group of children. I've always felt that a lot of the administration and even the Mayor has not decided that you can do more with 15 or 12 kids.

Because I would tell the class, "Everyone has their own idiosyncrasies". Everyone has that particular thing they need for a teacher to focus on. You can teach a concept and everyone will synthesize it differently. You don't know how they're synthesizing it, but they will understand it. Hopefully, you will all understand it the same way. But the teacher has to really individualize for each student so that they all will understand it.

Alicia Smith

My first phone conversation with Alicia began with us talking about her musical experiences and how the relationships with her colleagues, mostly women of color, have provided a racially and artistically inclusive space for her to develop as a person and as a teacher. Alicia and I are about the same age so we were able to easily build a rapport supported by the experience of growing up in the same generation. She has been a band teacher for over ten years and has taught in rural, suburban, and city schools. Alicia's narrative presents a unique

perspective of the hybridity of being biracial (half-White and half-Black) and identifying as an African-American.

Family and early Experiences

I was adopted at two months old and raised in a multicultural family. My birth parents were Black and White, so I knew growing up that I was biracial, African American and Caucasian. My adopted parents are Caucasian, and I was raised mostly by my mom and my grandma who's also Caucasian. I have mixed siblings; two brothers from Latin America. One looks Spanish and one's darker Indian, straight Black hair. My older sister who's also biracial is half –Black and half-White. I have a sister the same age as me who was adopted, but we're biologically second cousins. However, we just recently found out that she's actually biracial, because we just found her birth parents. So we're both biracial, but she grew up thinking she was White even though she had a feeling she was mixed. We did confirm that she and I are African American, White, and Native American Indian. I also have a younger brother, my adopted mom's biological son, who's also Caucasian. I grew up in that family setting, but that was probably the most culturally diverse setting I had growing up. I was mostly raised in a small, conservative, majority Caucasian town in the Pennsylvania. When I went to elementary, middle school, and high school, there were maybe one or two people of color, me being one of them. I had no teachers of color.

The goal was always to fit in. Obviously it was hard. I think I got along a lot with people because it was one of the ways that made it easier to fit in. I always was able to be around different groups of people and get along with all of them. I was kind of a chameleon. Since I knew that a lot of people in my town didn't have interactions with people of color, I felt the

pressure to be a certain way. I felt the pressure of having to be a good example and be the opposite of the negative stereotypes people I lived with or went to school with believed, which in the end, I think, has helped me with my work ethic. I always strive to be the opposite of whatever people around me think people of color were like.

I just placed the feeling of having to represent for people of color on myself. Then after getting a job in the area where I grew up, I was the only minority teacher, so I took that role even more seriously. I think in middle school, I unconsciously did it and high school probably a little less unconsciously, but it wasn't a main focus. But definitely when I became a teacher and the only one of color, I realized that I was representing a race and that these kids were going to go out and make decisions. If I was the only person of color that they knew, I wanted to make sure I was a good representation.

High school was where I first really knew of a lot of racism around me. I had maybe one or two people in middle school who would make fun of me because I had an afro and no one else did. In high school, I really noticed it because there was a group called The Boys that went to our school and the majority of The Boys were African American. There were maybe 8 to 10 boys from that group and it led to a lot of negative feelings towards Black men because these guys were always in trouble and in fights. Now interestingly enough I have friends who wanted to do a sit-in and get the kids out of the school, and I'm like wait, "How can you say you're racist? We're friends". They said, "Well, it's different". My friends focused on whatever made me different; if it was that I was a girl or that I tried to conform. But I think a lot of stereotypes came from the guys from the boys' home plus from parents where I grew up. Because I lived in a very small area with farmers and just people who didn't really get out a lot, which I know is a stereotype of people in small towns. A lot of my friends back home have parents who are racist

and they would tell me that. They would say, "We can be friends but I can't have you over" or "Oh, my parents aren't racist but I can never date a Black guy". So I slowly got the picture.

This summer, I found my biological mom. I grew up thinking that my mom was White and my dad was Black. I found out that she is Black and it's changed my perception as well as the importance of knowing my heritage and history. I think most people relate to the mother figure the most. So I grew up thinking, "My biological mom is White and my adopted mom is White," so I don't want to say I didn't care to know because I always want to know more. But it wasn't a priority.

But now that I am realizing my racial background – and my sister is realizing that she's actually half Black also which was ironic since she was always interested in African-American history from a young age, I really want to know my history and how it affects who I am as a teacher. I think just being around people who know about your history and then you not knowing, it's upsetting to me. As an adult, I need to do it. I've got a need to know.

Early musical experiences

I went to a different elementary school for kindergarten up to the beginning of fourth grade. I loved my music teacher, Ms. Clarke. She always let me take the autoharp home. I do remember always loving music and singing in class. I took the autoharp home every week when I could, and my mom always asked me, "Why do you keep bringing instruments home?" She was worried that I'd break it or something. When I was in fifth grade, the music teacher came to talk about starting an instrument, and my best friend and a lot of people I hung out with started playing an instrument. I thought that I should do an instrument since everybody else is doing an instrument. So I picked the clarinet because my friend picked the clarinet, and I can remember everyone who played the clarinet. By the end of the year, my friends quit because our band

director was horrible and he should've been fired, but my mom said, "Oh no, you're not quitting, we bought it". So, I stayed with it. I don't even remember even hearing the clarinet prior to playing it but I loved music class. My first band teacher, Mr. Landsman, was a trumpet player, and I don't ever remember him standing in front of the group conducting. He sat in with the band and played trumpet.

I remember my first performance, who it was with, and the piece of music that we played. And I want to say it was in sixth grade I had a duet at my first concert with my friend Jessica Clemens who's passed since, but we played this clarinet duet, "March in G". I know I have it somewhere, the piece of paper, because I knew that piece. At that moment, I realized that this is something I'm going to probably be able to do well in, and I liked people complimenting. Thank God the performance went well or I probably would've never touched it again.

I don't remember ever saying that I loved the clarinet; I hardly say it now. But I decided to, or my mom made me continue. By the time I got to middle school, even though it actually began in elementary school, I did well in music. I loved music and always participated in class. In my middle school, I realized that maybe I'm good. I could pick things up fast and I enjoyed it even though it wasn't 'cool' I didn't want to be the band dork, so I'd play basketball and be friends with the cheerleaders and everybody else because I'm was still trying to fit in, have fun, and be cool.

When I was in middle school, I loved listening to music on the radio. I remember Town Music Store, you could buy three singles for $10.00, and that's what I saved my allowance for. So I listened to what was on the radio, what everyone was listening to in middle school and high school. I don't remember in elementary having a diverse range of music or music in the house. I think one of the reasons I even gravitated more towards music is it was my way of dealing. If

things were crazy in the house, which they usually were, I'd be in my room listening to music or making a mixed tape. But I didn't listen to classical music until I had to in college.

In middle school band, I remember that we did some pop music like "Groovy Kind of Love". I kept all that. I have my first folder of all that music. I knew that I really wanted to learn and I'd do whatever I had to do to learn it. We didn't have money for private lessons, so I learned by ear. My band director in middle school was my band director through 12th grade, and he was and still is a role model for me. He's a Caucasian male, but also was like a father figure. I didn't have a father growing up, and he was a big reason I went into music education, because it was the consistency of having the same supportive teacher for five years in a row. That was huge.

From elementary to middle school I just remember it wasn't a choice of mine that I was allowed to quit, so I was like okay whatever. I enjoyed it, so I kept playing. It was like a club activity period that we had band afterschool. My sister went to Catholic school and was in the marching band color guard. I got the chance to be a runner, and that was another pivotal moment of my life because I loved marching band. I was on time and I took being a runner seriously. There was a high school student named Karen who was a drum major. A person of color, and I thought she was so cool, because she was leading the band and I wanted to do what she was doing. I continued to help so that I could be around her that year. My mom did daycare, and I remember that she and I used to always go over to my sister's rehearsals and watch the very last ten minutes when they practiced. In middle school I continued to play, and I did well. I didn't make band seem like it was my life, because that was uncool.

I'm very competitive, so when there were chair auditions, I'd do what I had to do to be first. If I had to go home to practice and learn, I would do it but I wouldn't tell anybody because

that would be uncool. I would just showed up, "Oh wow first chair" or "second chair". The kids were talking. They would say, "Wow, she looks like she's not serious but she must be good". So I didn't really have a plan to go to college for music. As a freshman I was in marching band. It was a great experience. The two drum majors were the coolest, most popular people in the band. (laughing) I played in high school but still had my friends on the side. People in high school were more mature. Once you got through middle school that was half the battle. In middle school, kids want to question why you are in band, why are you doing this. So in high school I did marching band, and that took a significant amount of time. My best friend was in gymnastics, so she never hung out at school. She always had to go home and go to the gym. And then I had friends who played in the band as well as cheerleaders and football players. So it was going well; it was smooth.

During my freshman year, I decided to try out for drum major for the next year - not a big deal. People said to me, "Why would you audition for being a drum major? You can't get it". I'd say, "Oh yeah, I know, I'm just doing it for the experience". But I thought, "I can be as good as these other people". I used to go to the drum major practices and rehearsals and I would make sure that I would give a little bit, because I knew people were watching me. Being a person of color, everyone's always watching me. I knew that I was setting myself up if I really thought I had a chance, but there's a part of me saying, "I want to surprise them". So 14 people auditioned and I became a drum major as a sophomore. That was a big deal, because people were like, "What?!" They didn't know that I would go home and then practice crescendos, decrescendos when they weren't looking. Then I'd come in and even I know I surprised the staff. They were kind of questioning, and I later found out from a student teacher - I was always best

friends with the music student teachers - that I actually got cut first but they put me in second because I was a sophomore.

I took band so seriously. During study halls, I'd ask Mr. Glaser if I could write passes out. Some friends would come down during third period. By that time, I was like the band secretary. And believe it or not I never thought any time during ninth through the beginning of twelfth grade that I'd go to college for music. I didn't like practicing. I never had lessons. I didn't think I was that great. I did well on chair auditions and I was drum major because I worked hard to do that, but I didn't think music was an option for me. I've never seen a person of color be a music teacher. I was always going to be an elementary school teacher or a social worker; those were my two things. How did I not know I was going to be a music teacher? So it's interesting now to look back. I think being a drum major was a big part of really wanting to continue in music. But I always thought I wasn't good enough. I knew I was going to end up going to the local college and I didn't want to. State college was good; I just didn't want to stay home. I waited until the last minute to audition and would have had to do it as an undeclared major. Mr. Glaser asked me why I was not going for music. I said, "I don't practice, I'm not that good, I've never had private lessons". And he said, "We can get you a teacher" and before I knew it he got me a teacher. I auditioned and I made it into the music department. I couldn't believe it. But I kind of hated it. I hated the unrealistic parts of the college experience, because I was out doing private lessons but doing this book work that I couldn't stand, so I realized that if I can just get through the book work, I'm going to love teaching. But I already knew that I loved teaching.

I had Mr. Landsman in elementary for fifth and sixth, and then Mr. Glaser 7th through 12th grades. Mr. Glaser had two little boys that are now in their 20s, which is so weird, because

I used to babysit them. By the time I was in high school, I was like part of the family. I went to holiday gatherings and to the birthday parties for the boys. They would take me out for my birthday. I just really ended up connecting with their family and spending a lot of time with them. He was very encouraging. He was a percussionist, and I liked percussion too. I loved the drums, but I remember my mom saying we're never getting drums. We have six kids; there were no drums (laughing). So I decided to stick with the clarinet.

Mr. Glaser, let me play mallets and play in a percussion ensemble. I think that he gave me opportunities to show that I was actually better than I realized. He saw something that now I plainly see that of course I love music; I don't know why I didn't see that earlier. He saw my love for music or maybe ability to teach. I did like teaching other kids how to play and teaching marching band. I loved that aspect. And I was a leader. Now I look back band camp, leadership camps, I remember that I was a good student. I just I didn't realize it for whatever reason. But I knew that he always believed in me. For auditions, I would make sure that I'd be good because one I don't like being at the bottom and I'm competitive. But there was a part of me saying I don't want to disappoint because he has a standard set for me.

University experiences

I didn't end up going in undeclared because before school started Mr. Glaser got me the best clarinet teacher in the area to give me some lessons. I ended up auditioning for the music department and getting in, which is like a small miracle. State University had a great education program, but the music program was going through a lot of ups and downs. It's where my high school band director went I believe. A lot of the area high school band directors went to State University, and it was a good music school when they all went but it was going through a lot of changes. I was in a crazy state because I took care of my grandmother when I was in college,

and lived at home. There was only one other student, Lauren and I. We were the only music students who didn't live on campus, and we had all these different classes that were worth one credit point and professors who I don't think have ever taught K-12.

So college wasn't fun for me. When I hear other people talk about college days, I'm thinking, "I was counting on the days I'd get out". I knew I was good on the clarinet, but I didn't really care for my clarinet professor. I always get along with people. I make myself get along with people. For the first time in my life I realized I really can't stand somebody, and he happens to be the clarinet professor. I kept in contact with my high school band director and he suggested that I take lessons with a different clarinet player who lived in our area. He told me, that way at least you are still playing and you like it. There were times in college where I didn't even know if I was going to make it through. I wasn't a great singer; sight singer? Nope. Theory, uh… I was just hitting all these road blocks. Plus, I was taking care of my grandmother because she had a stroke and was sick, and I was also helping financially.

I also had 20 to 30 private students throughout college every year, I taught children's choir at the church up the street and I did marching band, two or three marching bands at a time. So I was crazy busy and a lot of professors told me, "You're doing too much outside of school; you need to focus on in school". But outside of school is what kept me in it. I was like okay I love doing what I do and if I have to get a piece of paper to say that, I guess I've got to suck it up and get this piece of paper. So I didn't find college, the music professors to be as kind or understanding. I thought they were also out of touch with teaching and kids. I had a lot of professors who had never taught or taught K – 12 for like six months. So they're teaching me how to teach music? And I'm thinking, "You're Urban Education? Have you taught Urban Education successfully?"

I don't know if I was a little too confident, but I was working with a lot of marching bands. I was out there doing it, and they're saying this won't work, this won't work, but I found it working. So college was frustrating to me, I hated it and I almost didn't survive it. So getting out was number one.

I think the most preparation that I got in my college program what it helped me with and what I learned with studying in college and learning from the clarinet professor who I didn't care for were ways I would never teach, things I wouldn't do. I realized that I could learn from bad teachers things I would never do, things I'd never say to students. I could tell he gave up on me and I understand he was upset that I would go to another teacher outside of college and take lessons. I told him I wasn't feeling I was learning in the style that he was trying to teach me. And so he didn't come to my junior or senior recital, which I think is rude. I paid for private lessons. I pay for those classes even though he cancelled half of them, like every other day, which is fine because I didn't really want to go and play for him. He gave me A's, but it just showed me another way that I would never teach. A lot of students get on my nerves and maybe I was that for him, but I have never given up. I would never give up on a student. I'm getting paid still to be there. I paid for those classes. He still should have showed up.

He was there for five years, of course the five years I was there. I went to professors and complained about him higher up, and they said, "Alicia, he's internationally known". I remember saying, "I don't care that he's internationally known. I live in Rudland, PA; I don't care what his resume is. He's not teaching me".

One day, the clarinet professor called me into the office and told me that he wasn't getting tenure and he knows it's because he's Asian. He was basically asking me to join with his crusade of saying how the music department is racist. Which was ironic, because I'm thinking

actually you're not getting tenure because you suck. It's not because you're Asian, maybe but I doubt it. So I just let him talk and I never responded to him. They ended up firing him of course when I graduated. I found out they eventually hired the teacher that I was going to see on the side for clarinet lessons. When I was a student there, they told me not to see her because she didn't have a doctorate at the time. I felt isn't it crazy I hear people sit around and talk about who they studied with and my eyes well up and feel like I'm going to cry. I had a horrible experience and if anything it's prepared me with having to multitask and work harder.

My hardest professor was my music theory professor. We still talk back and forth a little bit here and there, because I'm into advocating for urban education now and trying to get them to realize that urban education isn't having one person of color teach a class; that's not urban education. So he knows I'm in New York now, and it's interesting how the tables have turned. So I feel like college probably didn't prepare me with the knowledge that I needed, but I understand they can't do everything. In music there's so much to learn; I understand that. But I appreciated getting out into the field early. We got out once a week for ten weeks I think for sophomore year. Then we had junior block and student teaching, for senior year.

In junior block, you were supposed to go and observe a teacher for a couple of weeks. However, my friend and I were in the city school, so I was thinking that this will be fun; this is a different aspect. My friend was thinking this will not be fun, because she was from a small little town down and was afraid to go to the city. I told her that out of all people to go to the city with at least you're with me. So she was terrified actually. It was kind of like to me, "Well, what are you terrified of; I think it's going to be fun".

We went in and it was really chaos. I think we were supposed to maybe grade papers, take notes, or put a bulletin board up if the teacher needed us to do that. There was a horrible

music teacher and he had no class discipline, no class control. Kids were everywhere; it was crazy. There was a parent who came in and sat on the teacher's desk, cussing people out. My friend, she started crying on the first day, and I just realized that I didn't know if I could be in the city. We were asked then to give tests. Test kids! The teacher said, "Okay, if the eighth graders don't pass the test they can't go forward. I said, "Whoa". So I looked at my friend, I said, "I'm not failing any eighth grader; who am I?" I'm supposed to be photocopying and grading these packets of work that the kids were supposed to work on for say, ten weeks and it's the last week and these kids have nothing done. It was just like we were thrown in.

My friend and I grew up in Rudland County, a small rural grassland area. Most of the people who went to State University also grew up there. Some were out of state but not a lot. The city school that we went to was like any other city school, and that was my first realization that, "Oh, okay things are a little different in the city". It was out of control; it was like a circus.

Teaching experiences – outside of New York City

After I graduated from college, I got a job offer like in a different area than I was looking towards. It was what I was used to, majority White, upper middle class school in a different city. My mom told me that she didn't want me to move and leave the area. My grandmother had passed, so I don't know. I guess my mom just didn't want me moving away but I wanted to get away. The only reason I didn't go away for college was so that I could take care of my grandmother and so she wouldn't have to go to a nursing home. My high school band director called me in the summer and told me that there was a position on staff where I went to school and that I should apply. I told him, "Oh no, I'm moving away. I got this job, it's cool".

So then he ended up talking to my mom, and before I knew it I was resigning from this job that I thought I would've liked even though it was filling the shoes of someone who was really good in classroom piano, which I wasn't. And I ended up going to work at my high school alma mater, which I swore that I would never do because I wanted to go away to college and I couldn't do that. By this time my grandmother had passed and I did not want to be at home. But I ended up going to my alma mater, being the only Black teacher. It was even weirder because my colleagues were my former teachers.

I was a traveling teacher in six different schools. During that year, I had a falling out with Mr. Glaser. I was unhappy, and he realized I was unhappy but I don't think he understood why, because I think he looked at it as, "I groomed you for this position and I want you to take over the band when I retire" type of thing and "Why are you unhappy?" So we ended up not talking a lot that year, and it was just not a good year. I ended up getting another offer and that was in the school I stayed at for nine years across town. That was Greenland which had an amazing music program.

At Greenland, it was actually cool to be in the band in that school. A third of the kids were in band; homecoming court was all band kids. So I was like, "What, there's life like this?" (laughing). So I thought, I don't think I'm good enough for this school. How can they need me because this is Greenland, right? This is the best music school in the area. And I ended up taking a long-term sub position there and loved the contract for the long-term sub; loved it. I do think people were watching and seeing how I would be because I actually worked with the marching band the year prior. I helped out a little bit, I went to a couple things, and people liked me. You put your time in and then they realize if they start to like you or not, right. And we're on a streak where it's good and they liked me. I worked hard and I think that's one thing people

noticed first, I'm a hard worker, but I like to have fun. That's probably the only neat thing I miss about teaching in Pennsylvania was I was near the elite groups, but I don't miss it to a degree, because I love what I'm doing now.

At Greenland, there were five kids who I suddenly became their friend no matter what because we knew we looked alike. They didn't know my background. They gravitated towards me because I was a person of color. And yeah, it was sad for them. In college we did a survey where you have to write down how many male teachers you had, how many female teachers, and I had no teachers of color throughout college. Even now I'm thinking have I ever had a professor of color? I don't think I have and you know I'm working on my second master's. So I'm wondering, how is that possible? So I'm not just someone for them but representing for everyone of color on a larger scale.

As the first Black teacher in the school, I got comments from students and it was interesting. Like one of the most interesting ones and I still laugh about it even though some people, like at the hair salon, didn't think it's funny. A boy in fifth grade just started asking me questions. He said, "I like your hair". I said, "Oh, thanks". Then he asked me, "Is that how they do their hair in the ghetto?" And I said, "Oh, maybe, I don't know. I don't live in the ghetto. Actually I live right down the street on Durham Road, do you know where that is?" He said, "Yeah". He looked so confused as if he was thinking; she doesn't live in the ghetto? Yeah, he watches movies. That's the only other interaction with people of color that he's had and unfortunately the movies he watches did not portray people of color in positive ways.

Another job opening happened at the school in Greenland and the principal called me down and said, "We can't give you band but do you want to be in the classroom, would you take classroom vocal?" Yes. I was already packed and ready to start teaching. So I ended up

doing middle school vocal music. Then at the end of the year, I got back to the band, and I was there for 2009.

In 2009, I left there and went to an independent school in Delaware for a long-term sub position. This was totally different. I guess independent schools have more leeway with money. And all you have to do is show a receipt and they process it and the money would show. There was also this feeling of home. There were no bells. It was carpeted. Everyone knew everyone. I remember asking, "Why are there kids walking around with no passes?" They said, "They just go". I said, "Wait, wait. The kids are allowed to just go to the bathroom without a pass?" and they said, "Yeah, like why wouldn't they?" I thought to myself, I don't have to wear a badge? I don't have to sign in and put my fingerprint somewhere? Everyone knows everyone. There's carpet. It was so relaxing. It was actually a healing place for me because leaving Pennsylvania was a bit traumatic. I had to leave Greenland due to a personal and professional conflict that I had with an administrator. Then I went to this school and I had less stress. I also had less money but I had less stress. There were no union meetings where you felt like it was us and them. It was everyone for everyone.

I looked around and there were some people of color. Not a lot". I don't know. I'm still processing it all. And then with kids, the kids' biggest stress was grades. How do I get a 95? How do I get a 96? Cheating, that was our biggest problem because of the pressure to do well. Now, where I'm teaching in Brooklyn, I sometimes feel that I'd be happy if a kid would at least cheat and do their homework instead of doing nothing at all.

At this private school in Delaware, I'd never seen this type of living or these types of houses. There was like one person of color in each grade. It was a college prep school for three-year-olds up to high school. The five-year-olds had yoga teachers. But I'd always wanted

to go to New York. I had no connections here, but I met somebody who told me that there was a job opening in New Jersey. I got a call in New Jersey and I got a call in New York, interviewed the same week for both of them. I was hoping for the New York one.

Working for a nonprofit organization

My first teaching job in New York was through a nonprofit organization called MakeMusic. For me, working for a nonprofit was no benefits and less pay. You get paid a certain amount and when you didn't work you didn't get paid. They provided professional development that we had to attend and training that we had to attend but I felt less supported than I do as a public school teacher. I thought also with the nonprofit that we were able to build closer relationships with our colleagues. In the schools, a lot of people go in the classroom and shut their door. I feel more isolated which is something I have to get used to.

I was at two different schools, and the one elementary school was in the South Bronx. It was so hard to start a program there too. It was like 99 percent poverty, 90 percent Spanish speaking only. I think the program MakeMusic is amazing, but they didn't provide the support the teachers needed for two programs in predominantly, non-English speaking schools. It was so frustrating.

There were a lot of Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Mexican kids and almost every type of Spanish culture. The school was K to five. I taught fourth and fifth, beginning band and a lot of kids would come up and say hi to me or just hug me and I noticed that kids really felt comfortable with me. I've always been able to relate to kids but here it was different because I looked like them and it was comforting to me and to them. A lot of the teachers in the school

were – at least half were White probably and maybe one or two Spanish teachers. It wasn't a lot of mixed races, cultures, and ethnicities in the elementary school.

One day, I was in one school when a kid looked at me and said, "Hey, what color are you? I said, "I'm half Black and half White". He said, "Oh cool, just like Obama. That happened out of the blue, I couldn't believe it. Now a majority of the kids in this school were Spanish, Black, or mixed, but like a random kid asked me that. All right cool, just like Obama. Okay, do you want to be in the band?

If you look like your kids, you probably have a better chance of getting their attention, even though it was hard because I never taught city before and just the discipline aspect of it was challenging. So I think just the comfort level of me being around kids who are more comfortable with me plus I was more comfortable with myself made a difference. I came up with a city teaching type persona.

These kids didn't realize I never taught inner-city or didn't grow up in the setting that they'd grown up in with people looking like them. But I had this other side of me that I could pull from and pretend that – and I would joke with my friends like, "I had to be ghetto today". They don't realize like I'm from a small rural town. But it worked because I look like them.

I also realized that even though I didn't grow up and didn't relate to people of color or feel like I was Black enough like some would say, it didn't matter because kids just wanted other people to look like them, relate to them, and help them to feel more comfortable. I felt that growing up, all the things we went through were a lot of the things students in the city have to overcome; One-parent family, living with your grandmother, drama always going on at home. We had it; you name it we had it. So I could relate.

Teaching experiences in Brooklyn

I'm finally settled in a school in Brooklyn, majority African American. I tell my friends back home about the different races of our faculty and they are surprised. So I'm just trying to educate my friends who have no idea. They've never been out of their small circle of suburbia and realized, okay, there's a lot more we could be teaching and different ways of teaching. I didn't even know about certain types of music until I got here. I had no idea what Soca music was or Bachata. How can I have a master's in music, working on a second master's and I've never heard of Soca music?

One of the big things now is modern rock bands. I never thought I'd be teaching a rock band class. I have 35 kids on guitar, electric guitar. I didn't even know guitar before I moved here, and now, "Oh, you're one of the best rock band teachers". What! I'm reaching kids through different ways and my philosophy of music education that I wrote a million times in college has changed drastically.

In Brooklyn, at the school where I teach now, one dance teacher is African-American and would not consider herself African-American. She does not like being called African-American. She considers herself Black and she's from the Caribbean. I had no idea so I'm just learning all this and I can ask them because they're women of color who know that I don't know but I'm trying to learn.

I mean from never seeing people from different parts of the world, I want to know where you're from and what it's like there. So the same with the situation I'm in now to a degree. I'm in Brooklyn. It is an all free lunch type school. It was a Title I school but now it's universal which means it's free lunch but somehow kids have a little bit more money and you don't get all the cuts and you don't get all the extra funding that a Title I school does. The majority is

African-American but there are kids from all over the world in the school. There is also a racial mix of teachers but I'm thinking we have no Black male teachers. We have teachers from the Middle East. We have Latina/o and Asian teachers.

The performing arts department is all women – five women. One is a White woman from Ireland and then four of us are of Black or of African descent. So, it's cool that we're all women. Our assistant principal is African-American. Our former principal was an African-American woman. It was the first time I've ever had anyone in a leadership role in my life that's an African-American. I can't believe that I went through elementary, middle, high school, five years of undergraduate, four years of graduate, another two or three years of graduate and never had a Black African-American teacher. And that thought never had occurred to me until I moved to New York. The one long-term, six-year, relationship I had was with a guy who is African-American. He was always aware that every time we went somewhere in Rudland that we were the only people of color. I never noticed it really until I started dating him because I was just used to it.

The oldest dance teacher, Denise, is African-American and she looks amazing. Evelyn Simpson is also a dance teacher and she's been at the school for 20 years. Her program is amazing. She's from Trinidad. Ellen is our drama teacher who is originally from Ireland. Imani is from the Bahamas. She and I are both in our 30's. Imani, Evelyn and Denise all have locs. I always joke about getting locs and they're like, "Are you sure? It's a big deal". I'm like, "Oh is really that big?" One of them said it took her 15 years to decide. "Oh, maybe I'll wait. Maybe it's a bigger deal than I realized". And then there's me, half-White and half-Black from rural Pennsylvania. I recently found out that I am half Irish and told them, "I can't wait for Saint Patrick's Day. I'm celebrating".

It's an interesting mix and it's nice that we're all women and we can talk about anything. I can ask them anything. We have a lot of similarities. We all are artists. We get along because we're women and we're all passionate. Denise came in last year as a first-year teacher there. We all write curriculum together.

Evelyn's been around for a long time and she's seen the ups and downs in the school system. Ellen has been there forever with them because she's the oldest and she's ready to retire. I was interviewed on February 7, 2010 as a long-term sub. I got in and taught a course for a year, then went back to teaching rock band and concert band. So this will be my second full year.

Spending time with colleagues and convincing Mom about New York City

We do get together outside of school. I have a comfort level talking to Evelyn with things because she has a young kid. And when my mom first came to New York, I said, "Okay, Evelyn, can we visit you?" Because my mom thinks New York is like what she sees on "Law and Order". I needed my mom to realize that there are normal people up here. Everyone's not crazy.

So it really made my mom feel comfortable when she met Evelyn and we went out to eat with them. It was my mom and my 7 year-old niece. This was two years ago when I first moved here and my mom loved Evelyn and they got along. I knew she would. Evelyn's a great person my mom, she's Caucasian and believes everything she sees on TV. Even just walking by the school and the development and she see things spray painted. She's like, "Oh, I think you should come back home and look for teaching jobs. I'm sure you could get a job". "Mom, it's not that bad".

So we went to an indoor play space for kids. My niece played and then my mom got to know Evelyn. My mom doesn't have many people of color as friends, if any, other than my old

hairdresser. So it's important for her to realize that I have a support system here. And even though she's not used to or comfortable with people of color or the communities of color, she was able to feel better about me living here and teaching here and realizes okay, she knows Evelyn now.

We were all really close with the principal who just retired, Ms. Waverly. She hired me and I feel as though I owe her because there was a hiring freeze at the time. As a department, we decided to take out the principal to celebrate her retirement. So just going out with them and talking school and just hearing stories that we have in common is something that we do outside of school.

I just try to take it in and just to listen to how they react and what they've learned about the school system. In my past experiences, I was usually the one who was keeping the conversation going and getting people together. Now, I'm trying to listen and get as much as I can from older women who have been through it. Denise, the dance teacher just came in. I really admire the way she presents herself. She's just professional. I was in on her interview and I knew that they really liked her.

She's a professional Black woman and I don't see that a lot – not that Evelyn and Imani aren't. It just that she carries herself differently and I just admire and respect that and the way she talks. She's able to keep her emotions in check. I'm struggling with this, sometimes I'm ready to go off like an angry rocket. I told Denise several times that I wish that I could speak and communicate like her. She told me that it took her many years and that she used cognitive therapy. I told her that I was looking for a therapist. And she said, "No, I'm not joking". I asked her, "Can we talk a little bit about that later?" She said, "Yeah".

So later, she told me about someone that she sees occasionally. She said, "Just moving and I've had so many different things in my life that have happened in the last three or four years that one of the things I wanted to do last year is make sure that I'm in check emotionally, spiritually, financially, physically - all the above". So I've actually made goals for myself in that aspect because I do want to A) live an authentic life and B) enjoy my life but also have balance in my life. My job was my life. One day my job wasn't there and it was a bit traumatic. But I was able to talk with Denise on a personal, non-judgmental level which I really appreciated.

There is this thinking in the band world where when somebody knows something they want to keep themselves because, "Oh, I want to be the best". You know? They don't want to share. The band field and conducting world is mostly White males and there's this competitiveness. On a personal note that she shares that with me, I admire and respect the way she's able to not get angry, bite her tongue, or say something that needs to be said in a professional manner. I love that, you know?

I'm trying to take what I can from each of these women and then build my program because building it in Pennsylvania or even Delaware is drastically different than trying to build it here; everything is different. The cultural situation, what works for inner-city New York would not work for rural Pennsylvania even how you talk to students. I never really thought how good it is that I've had experiences in different teaching environments. I have to not forget that because I think that it's important.

School concerts and working together to program the concerts are always a big deal for us. Especially for African-American celebration concerts, we all actively participate because we think it's important. I think I look at Black history month differently now and not just because I'm now teaching at a predominantly, Black school. Growing up in Rudland, we celebrated

Martin Luther King Day. That was it growing up. I didn't know who Ruby Bridges was until I heard the kids at school read a poem about her and read up on it myself. I had no idea of the story behind it.

The school where I teach was founded by an African-American woman who built it for young girls of color in a disadvantaged socioeconomic area. So that was a primary role of the school at first. I also learned that the majority of the faculty used to be minority women. It has shifted; however, there was an original intent that our school would always have Black women as leaders just to keep that traditional alive. The three principals prior to the current principal were all African-American women. However, this year we got a new principal. She is White which had a lot of people – I don't want to say scared but alerted.

Maybe, because they were under the impression that our school must be changing and that we're not going by the original intent of school even though the school now is also for boys and girls. So it's interesting to hear people talk about it to me without knowing that I have White family members and my mom is White. I think if they knew more about my background, they wouldn't have said certain things. I can't think of anything specific, but I think they would have been more sensitive to how they worded their concerns.

The school now has a mix of all races. I do think probably half of our faculty are Black women. The school student population is mostly African-American and Black Caribbean students; however there are many others I want to say the majority of the school is still African-American base. It's always been good, it's always been known as a good school. I think because it was founded as a school for gifted and talented minority girls.

It is a choice middle school so kids anywhere in the city can come in. They used to have to take an exam to get because it's considered gifted and talented and a performing arts school.

Testing has not been working for some. Testing has not been working for whatever reason. I think the tests originally changed from harder to a little bit easier, I'm not sure. Now they're doing interviews and looking at report cards. Hopefully they can make it more performing arts-based and have kids start auditioning in a year or two. The concern over testing has made that kind of not the focus right now.

There have been so many changes over the years for band. Some of these kids in eighth grade have had five different band teachers, four in the last two years. I never even thought that I would have a public school teaching position and not have a budget. I don't have a budget. I buy my own alcohol for the kids to wipe their mouthpieces off because they share them. No one told me that this could be a possibility. Someone could say to me, "Why would you go and pay for stuff for the class when you didn't get preapproved because you're not going to get the money back". I know that I but I needed reeds. I've asked and they don't come. So I am going to get them. The good news is that I have money to do it now. When I first moved to New York City and taught in the inner-city, the kids didn't have any money and neither did I. I have on record all the kids who owe me money. If they buy reeds or mouthpieces for me I pay for them upfront. Well, basically that mouthpiece cost $46. You know, what you are going to do, what if you don't get it back? Then, I guess I don't get it back. I'm hoping I do.

So this is the first year they're having me as a band teacher. Next year will be the second year, so I will get to have students more than once but kids still don't realize the goal is to have you commit through eighth grade, because our programming isn't working so that it can happen. So, they're shoving things against it. We'll see what happens next year.

A friend of mine, Jessica Jones, runs the jazz program at my school. She's Caucasian and is married to an African-American man. They both grew up in California and they been together

for 25 years. She knows all this stuff about Black history. And I said, "How do you know all this stuff about Black history?" Because she's White and I'm thinking she knows more than me and it's a little upsetting.

I'm realizing it's my own responsibility as an adult to learn. She asked me, "Well, how is it that you know so little?" I grew up in a mixed family. My mom is White, my brother is White. But in the school, if I got a chapter on Black history I was lucky. So I got a chapter on jazz. I'm learning about jazz now.

My first master's degree was in music education and it was 32 credits from different colleges in music education, so master's equivalency. But the master's I'm working on now is for wind conducting where there are very few African-Americans that are noted, let alone role models, let alone women.

Jessica was telling me about California when integration happened, and when the Black Panthers came to her school. I have so much to do and to learn. It's interesting to me. Even finding out my biological mother was Black. I always grew up thinking she was Caucasian. I found out that she is Black and it's changed my perception as well as the importance of knowing my heritage and history.

I think just knowing other African-Americans in the performing arts is something I've never had experience with before so they each bring their own personalities as well as their cultural background into it. One of the teachers teaches the steel pan drum. I've never even heard the steel pan before I moved to New York and worked at the school and her experience in the Caribbean growing up there and the culture, it's just opened up a whole new world to me.

The kids just love it, and it's a type of music they never really listened to before or even knew about before. I can't believe. I'm like, "how come I'm a band teacher and I don't know that

there is this type of music out there and the culture that goes with?" She's from Trinidad and just the work ethic there as well as she's a dancer and moved to New York pretty early in her life, and she still visits and has family from Trinidad that comes to visit her. These are parts of the world I don't really know about. She has made me aware of the different types of foods like beef patties, cocoa bread, the music, and the culture and the people. So, she's constantly taking me to different places, teaching me about her culture and food, and dance. She also teaches basic ballet but she has taken me to different world music events with African drumming and other types of music.

Denise grew up in upstate New York so she had a different experience. I just love watching my colleagues interact because I've never really seen minority adults in a positive way, just because I haven't been around minority adults. So, there are just so many different areas that have widened my perspective about the performing arts, what these women bring to our school and how they teach.

I don't celebrate Kwanzaa or wear African attire but I now feel more comfortable knowing why I don't. Even though it's not part of what I know to be my culture, I now understand it and respect it. I didn't grow up with it but it's explained well by my colleagues.

I think about the whole idea of being called "African" or "African-American" versus "Black". I had this discussion with my colleagues because I just assumed everyone of dark color was African-American when I was in Rudland. But Evelyn is from the Caribbean and she told me that she can't stand when people call her African-American. She's not from Africa; she's from the Caribbean and she gets offended if people consider her African-American. On the other hand, Imani doesn't mind being called African-American because she says her ancestors were from Africa not from an island. So, that whole discussion enlightened me.

Imani took me to the Schomburg Library of Black Culture. I didn't even know there was such a thing but we went to a discussion about the cultural shift in Africa and the topic called Black versus African-American came up during this discussion. People were very heated and I was just confused at first that I had no idea that there was so much turmoil still over what people were called. It just opened up my mind a lot of that discussion and about how I feel. Even though I didn't really know my roots before finding my biological mother six months ago, I consider myself African-American. Now I know I am part African-American, as well as Irish and Native-American. I'm comfortable with saying African-American and I am not offended if someone says Black, even though technically I'm not the color of the crayon black. But I can see both sides of the conversation now. I try to be more sensitive when I talk to students and adults. Before, if I didn't know, I would just say Black. Now I know that some people find that term very offensive. It is good to know.

Something I've never even realized or even once talked about during college was that we didn't have urban music education. Now there's a separate track for elementary education and urban education but it's different. I thought I was a great teacher when I taught at Greenland but I had everything I needed and I had kids who were prepared to learn. Now, I have nothing at my school. Everything I have, I bought. I remember going in the first day; there was no chalk. I thought, wait a second I thought I was a good teacher. Oh wait, I had everything I needed. If I ever write a book it's going to be called, "So You Think You Can Teach". I'm thinking about the best teachers where I grew up and wondering how it would be different for them if they had to teach in an urban environment; in a school with where the typical student was not White and middle-class.

For the New York City Department of Education, teaching is a business and you don't work a minute over contract. If you're late one minute, we take your card and you have to clock it in. We count how many minutes you're late. It's unbelievable the business aspect of it and how many people have gotten sucked into, "Oh, no, that's not in my contract". When I went to my first union meeting for New York City and I thought I was going to war. I honestly left with anxiety and I went to and told her I was stressed out. It's like you going to war. I like the majority of my administration. But the big thing is you don't trust anyone. That upsets me. In Pennsylvania, I trusted and maybe shouldn't have, but there was more of a friendly interaction for the administration and staff. Here it's us and them. "It's not in the contract," that's not how I grew up. I guess if I would have grown up in this type of system then this would not be so foreign to me, but I lived at my school. I was there morning and night to do what I had to do. I knew all the custodians and they knew me.

People understand even when I'm saying, "Well, I'm going to try and see if I can get my contract amended so I can have more kids in my class than 35". That's something my Department is like, "You shouldn't do that. That's going to ruin it for the team". So the union aspect definitely is a hindrance to kids exceeding. But it saves your job if you have a crazy person as a supervisor administrator.

Here in New York, you mind your own business. So it's nice that we have our colleagues and we like each other. Some people are actually trying to change that we don't have department meetings because some departments don't like meeting with each other. And we were thinking, "We like each other". When summer happens, happy hour is going to be at my place. I'm serious, two blocks from school and everyone knows we're going to get together at least once or twice after each payday; especially if department meetings are canceled.

So, I kind of knew this going in. My friend, Sabrina, who's been in the New York City school system for at least five years before I came here, told me, "Don't do it". She told me that I had a perfect spot already. And I was crazy for doing it. I think even with all warnings you don't believe it until you're actually in it.

I think good teaching is good teaching, and that's my number-one thing. You have to be a good teacher. But I do think it does play a role in the type students you teach because I know that I can be more lax to a degree and I don't even know if that's good in the way. I'd act and say things in a more politically correct way for a class of mostly White students. I was more concerned about representing a whole race, as well as teaching in the school, where I was the minority. And now I look at that as not part of the problem. I don't have to also be your only role model of a Black woman, so maybe I feel a little less stress, but I don't know if that's good or bad.

In the first couple of years, I felt like I had to prove myself in the other settings to work harder for them to accept me. I was a hard worker, I worked hard now but I don't have to work as hard for them to realize I'm a hard worker. Some people would say, "Well, she's a good teacher for a Black woman", that kind of thing. Instead of saying, "She's a good teacher". I had to exceed their expectations in order to be good. That might be my own personal problem too. I don't know.

I moved to New York and this is the situation I'm in, where conducting is a luxury that usually means that you have a band that can play. It seems a little bit out of reach now to a degree or not out of reach but unnecessary, right now to continue that degree. It will help me as a professional, obviously, but to conduct you have to have good musicians.

So right now my schooling's on hold, one, because New York City goes until the end of June 20 and this conducting degree starts June 19. I was warned by my principal who hired me not to take the last days off even for school, before I get tenure because it would be a reason for me to get in fact unsatisfactory rating and potentially not get tenure. So that was enough to hold me, but in the back of my mind and as I deal with all these different things going on at school, my personal life, and finding my biological mother, which has, I think so a void of the not so good feeling and trying to always excel and do better, along with decisions linked to where I am right now. That's probably the only thing I miss about teaching in Pennsylvania was I was near the elite groups and I don't miss it to a degree, because I love what I'm doing, but when you have no money in a school budget, no money to go to conventions and to hear these great bands play.

I don't know where the next place is that I'm looking. My goal 10 years ago was up in New York. I'm here, now I'm still looking for the next part, now what? Where do I want to go now? What is my mission now? Right now I think my number-one mission is to make a great program at school and so that's what I'm focusing on. If I can finish this degree, I'm going to try, because one, I've done two thirds of it; two, I hate not finishing anything; and three, education's important to me and being qualified is important to me, even though in my head I know that I'm qualified. Some people need to see that you have that piece of paper, even though I feel there are a lot of people who are qualified or more qualified that don't have a piece of paper or master's or doctorate.

Qualities of a good teacher

You have to care. That's one thing. You have to be able to work hard, so I always think of the quote, "Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care". I think

that's so true. I worked with this teacher who had an amazing resume, perfect pitch, great musician, a great organizer, but he couldn't relate to the middle school kids and he didn't understand why they didn't get it. They didn't know how good he was but I related to the kids even though I didn't have all these things that he had. But it's the kind of thing where I really cared about them. So I think that's important. Kids can sense that you want to be there or not, and if you don't, they'll make your life hell. I think.

I think you have to be a hard worker. I thought I worked hard before, but I'm working hard now. You have to be patient not just with them but with yourself, and basically I'm working on that a lot. In many areas of my life I need it, patience. I think a lot of teachers in the city and other places need to understand how many kids are grieving and understanding how that affects them as kids and students.

I worked in hospice with my mom when I was back home in Pennsylvania. My mom's done grieving workshops. After experiencing that, I realized that a lot of kids that are acting out, kids who withdrawn, or who are always in trouble are grieving losses, and that's something we don't ever learn about or talk about in trying to help kids. Whether it's a loss to divorce or loss of self from trying to be immune to city life, I think we don't realize how much it affects them. I think teachers have to be more sensitive to kids and their emotions and we will begin to understand and be empathetic or sympathetic.

You also have to be fair, firm, and consistent. That is hard sometimes because fair for one student is not fair in the eyes of another student. It's important to know what we believe is fair and to not fluctuate in our beliefs, I guess, to a degree. But, then again, flexibility's another thing you need to be an excellent teacher. I'm thinking, "I better be able to be flexible, because if kids can't do A, we're not going to get to B". In my mind it's going to work perfectly but

consistently with discipline. If you let one kid get away with something then you better be prepared to let others do the same.

I was always good with discipline. I maybe shied away from the city at first after that incident of being thrown in during junior block and it was hell. It was like out of control. But now I feel more comfortable than I've ever felt. I'm helping them but they also don't realize that they're helping me because now I'm in an environment, not just New York City, but in a school setting where I'm comfortable in my skin. I'm not worried about what my hair looks like today, because everyone else's hair looks like mine. I love being a positive role model. There are some days I'm like, "oh, I don't want to work, but I love my job". I can't imagine if you don't love your job and then you wake up and have a bad day. At least I love what I do, right? And I think that I make a difference.

In college, I thought, "You're going to go into teaching and music". Well, there are so many other aspects. You're social worker. I'm a repair person. I have to know all this about electronics when I'm trying to set stuff up and all the new technology. Teaching is the easy part. All the other stuff, most of it is not.

You have to be there for them, be consistent, and be flexible. You have to be over prepared. I see some of my students more than their parents do. I tell them all that I want my own kids one day because they ask, "Why don't you have kids?" They know I love kids. I tell them, "Because I have 167. You are my kids". I really think of my students as my kids and they know that I'm looking out for them in the long haul. A good teacher also has to know that there is a time that you have to be a friend sometimes and not only a friend to them but there are times when a student needs more than someone reprimanding but someone like a mentor.

Financially, in the city, you have to be prepared to pay out of pocket if you want things. We don't really have a budget and are not given any money. The only way we're financially supported in our program is being paid by our salary. Even though my job should not be my life, my job is the majority of my life and I know that things would change with a family. One of the reasons that I don't want to want to have a family right now is because I do feel the kids need more than what some teachers are able to give or maybe even want to give.

The first time that I think my values may have been challenged or shifted in some way was probably when I came to the city. Just things are a lot different than they were in Pennsylvania, and I think most of my values were probably the same as school where I taught back then, along with the parents. I guess I've learned to realize that I can't control what the schools want, as an employee I have to do what they want me to do.

For example, the ideas of how we discipline students, what is disciplined and what's not disciplined. The fact that kids come late to school every day drives me nuts and that kids know it's just okay because there's no punishment. Writing kids up for certain things, then nothing happens. It's one of those things, I'm the employee. If I don't like it, I can quit but that's not going to happen. So I have to learn to adjust and keep my mouth shut or try to have my own consequences that fall within the appropriate way of discipline. And that's hard. I constantly tell them I don't care what goes on outside this classroom; these are my rules. I want to have expectations. I tell them, "I'm going to be hard on you, a C is a C which is average, and I'm not going to give you a B unless you are above average".

The subjects are important, but life lessons are also important. Part of sharing my values is making sure that these kids know life lessons. So if I have to stop teaching, which has happened many times, and ask them, "How can we talk about music if we have to go back

because somebody's not doing their job?" I tell them, "Somebody's not doing their job. I don't know if it's a parent. I don't know if it's grandparents. I don't know if its aunts, uncles, or your teachers but the fact that you act a certain way or you do this certain thing or you swear or talk like this and think it's okay, it's not okay. When you get outside these doors, it's not going to be okay".

Some of the folks we have, they got pretty tough and stuff, but why do these kids not know certain things? So, I want to walk a tight line, I think, of how I word things, how I discipline students, that's within the code of conduct, and the students' rights but it's frustrating. Students have more rights than teachers and that's not going to change any time soon. The goal is to have them respect me enough that they listen to me. Now I'm going on two years in February and they are seeing, "She's not going anywhere. She's consistent. She does the work". The kids see that I'm working hard. So that had kids expecting more and when I try to talk with them or give them lessons about life, some of them actually listen.

I hope that after they leave my program, they will at least appreciate music because they're going to be consumers. They could be our bosses. They could be the ones cutting music budgets. I talk to my kids about getting into college and how to get there because some of them say that they are not going. When I asked them why, they would tell me that it's too expensive. Well so what? I tell them I'm still paying for my first degree. So what? That's what loans are for. The fact that you've decided no school, "I'm not going to college". What are you going to do the rest of your life?

So, my big thing is to try to get their minds open to it. Many people go to college who don't have the money. I always knew I was going to college. I never knew how I was going to pay for it; I hadn't thought about it. I'm still paying for it now. A lot of kids ask me is college

hard. I tell them it's as hard as middle school is for you now. It's going to be as hard as high school is for you then. If you keep going through the process, it's the same thing. It's not all of a sudden you're stuck in college without the million things that you've learned prior. Yeah, it's hard but so is life.

How I teach today is how I taught 10 years ago to different students, so I don't relax. I think it's so important to be a positive role model and be the best at what I do. I constantly am just observing and talking to the people I admire most and putting myself around different people and feeling more comfortable to question them to find out why they are the way they are – is it a cultural thing? Is it a color thing? What are other people's points of views? I'm able to tell them where I'm coming from and am okay with it and then they are usually excited to share.

Summary

The life histories presented in this chapter are a representation of the different ways that three African-American music teachers have navigated and negotiated their experiences. Susan, James, and Alicia shared different stories yet illustrated a strong interconnectedness to the inclusive spaces that they described and to how these spaces have informed their thoughts on what it means to be a teacher. For Chapter V, I discuss and explore the themes that emerged from each life history and across narratives.

Chapter V: Analyzing and Contextualizing the Life Histories

Introduction

For this chapter, I analyzed the teaching life histories of each participant and specifically focused on experiences within racially and culturally inclusive spaces that have been supportive of their development as a music educator. I also explored how these particular experiences, as narrated by the participant, have informed their perceptions on what it means to be a teacher. Each life history was analyzed for themes that are specific to the individual teacher's experiences. Shared commonalities that occur across the participants' life histories were identified and examined to understand similar ways of understanding the influence of inclusive spaces on being a teacher. Finally, the three categories of experiences used to frame this project – racial/cultural, professional/educator, and artistic/musical – were used to situate the participants' narratives among the experiences of others within shared racial, professional, music teaching communities as presented in the research literature.

Overview of Analysis

As stated in Chapter III, the use of thematic analysis helped to frame how life histories not only reflect the experiences of the storyteller or narrator but are also informed and represented through processes of social construction (via researcher collaboration, shared experiences, and contextualized experiences). Within this methodological framework, I used the analytical tools of life histories (i.e. an individual's first-hand accounts, narratives, stories, and counterstories presented in the form of a life history) and collective memory (and even more specifically memory texts). To further organize the process of analyzing the data, each life history was considered a case and both individual and cross case analyses were conducted to

identify themes that were specific to particular individual teachers as well as themes and experiences that emerged across life histories. Finally, collective memory was used to examine the participants' narrated experiences by situating them congruently with how others who share similar experiences have had their ways of understanding and knowing documented in education and historical research.

Individual Analysis

The first research question for this study asked the following: In what ways have classically trained African-American teachers music teachers been supported within racially and culturally inclusive artistic spaces? In order to explore this question, I used the method of life history interviews to document the many ways that the three participants narrated their experiences. This section provides an analysis of each participant's life history in order to identify themes that emerged and how these themes begin to address the first research question.

Susan Williams

Susan narrated experiences of engaging within her church, being a member of her high school chorus, and singing in the Norwood University choral program as being inclusive spaces for her social, cultural, and musical development. Her childhood was in part, framed by the prominent presence of her church in her and her family's lives. Since her father was a minister, Susan began hearing and being inspired by the music of her church at an early age. In her life history, Susan described how she would "tinkle out hymns" on the piano from the age of three. Her mother's side of the family valued the presence of a piano in the house which made it possible to explore and experiment with the sounds that she heard even before formal instruction.

The high school that Susan attended had a well-established choral program that served as an inclusive space for her and an inspiration for pursuing the career path of a music educator. In this space, Susan was taught by an African-American music teacher (who also taught her piano) who introduced her to choral works through their performances. Susan recalled attending a state choral competition to perform "He Watches over Israel" and hearing another choir perform, "Alleluia." She stated, "I had no idea you could take one word and do that much music with it."

More than the previously discussed inclusive spaces, Norwood University (NU) and the NU Choir were pivotal in shaping her thoughts on being a teacher. This space, as Susan remembered and narrated it, is similar to hooks' notion of homeplace in that the university is a physical place, and that this place was a resource for understanding ways of knowing and ways of being an African-American, a teacher, and a musician. For example, Susan described how Moses Harris taught the choir members that the anticipation of the first note was equally integral to the experience of hearing and seeing a performance. Susan stated that the choir members would "fill the risers in interesting patterns" and that Moses would give them their pitches as they walked past him. During her time at Norwood, the choir sang classical repertoire as well as spirituals. She fondly recalled the friendships made at Norwood that she still maintains today and how Norwood was similar to a "convent" because of the expectations of the community to do well and take care of each other in the process. Susan's description of Norwood aligns with hooks' proclamation that homeplace serves to "heal the wounds" of past social injustices and to nurture one's spirit (hooks, 1990, p. 42-43).

Also similar to homeplace, Susan described Norwood as a nurturing place that provided a space to be formally trained as a musician (through classical repertoire) while allowing her to "treasure" her cultural well-being as well (through peer and faculty interactions and the music of

her culture. She stated that Norwood was an "extension of home" and emphasized a culture of support that was first developed through her experiences within her church and her family's appreciation for music education. Susan's life history indicated that her church served as her initial opportunity to perform while sustaining a knowledge and understanding of her racial and cultural background. Like Norwood, Susan's earlier musical experiences within the inclusive spaces of her church and her family provided additional resources toward her perceptions of who she was or envisioned herself to be as an African-American, a musician, and a future teacher.

James Thompson

The members of New Baptist were an extension of family for James and provided him much support and encouragement during his early growth as a musician. He was able to develop his musicianship within a racially and culturally nurturing environment. James' sustained connection with his church throughout the decades is indicative of the values and activities of a homeplace.

James was initially introduced to sacred music in a Black Baptist church (New Baptist) that was located three blocks from his home and served as an inclusive space for his cultural, musical, and professional development. As a young observer and singer, James developed a love for sacred classical music and the sound of the choir while attending church and eventually participating as a choir member. He met and studied piano at his church with Mrs. Richards who was also an African-American. Mrs. Richards was not only a rich source of knowledge within this inclusive space but she also remained James' mentor after he graduated from high school. He recalled that Mrs. Richards offered him piano lessons in exchange for doing various household chores at her home. He also credited her for providing opportunities for him to direct

choirs at other churches (in addition to his church) and for preparing him for college entry examinations.

James was given the opportunity to engage in various musical capacities within New Baptist Church's music ministry. He also appreciated being able to hear and perform spirituals even though he preferred classical sacred music. He stated that "it was good" for the church to serve as a platform that helped the congregation "remember" the "music of our ancestors." He sang with the several different choirs from childhood to adulthood and also directed choirs. He also learned many techniques for preparing a choir from Mrs. Richards. For example, James described how he approached teaching a piece of music by rote as many church choir members learn by rote, leading the choir to first learn the words, then the rhythm, and finally melody or harmony depending on the vocal part. His church's sustained presence in his life has served to provide many personal, profession, and cultural development opportunities that were not available in the same capacity in more formal music learning spaces.

Alicia Smith

Alicia's narration of an inclusive space detailed her relationships with her fellow performing arts colleagues at the middle school where she teaches band. She stated in her life history that she and her colleagues get along because they are women who are passionate about what they do. Four of the five women are African-American/Black and one woman is White. Alicia's life history revealed that they all shared the same commitment to educate their mostly Black students about their culture. The importance of programming and teaching musical content that has historical origins within Black communities is a form of linking notions of care to actions of justice (Collins, 2000; Thompson, 1998). This finding was supported by the fact

that African-American celebrations concerts are collaboratively programmed events that are a "big deal" for Alicia and her colleagues.

Another example that Alicia and her colleagues created a "safe space" and a "hush-harbor" through their sustained friendships is supported by the cultural experiences and dialogue in which they have collectively engaged. Imani introduced Alicia to the Schomburg Library of Black Culture and to a specific part of the African-American community that identifies both with their ethnic and racial identities (Imani and Evelyn are both of African descent and from Trinidad and the Bahamas, respectively). Both Imani and Evelyn have enabled Alicia to think about the nuanced ways in which race is constructed and more specifically, how race is labeled. For example, Alicia recalled that she was "enlightened" by the conversations with her colleagues regarding the nuances of race and how people choose name themselves.

One finding that supports the notion of care (Collins, 2000) within Alicia's circle of colleagues was Denise's willingness to share her experiences with cognitive therapy. Alicia appreciated that Denise shared in a "non-judgmental way" what is a very personal topic for many. In her life history, Alicia stated that Denise's approach was in stark contrast to what often happens in the competitive "band world where when somebody knows something they want to keep it to themselves." Overall, Alicia's strong bonds with her colleagues gave her the intellectual, cultural, and personal support that enabled her to develop as a professional music educator.

Alicia recounted that she and her colleagues aspired to be role models to their students and that she achieved this goal, in part, by integrating the teaching of "life lessons" into her role as a music teacher. Her self-imposed responsibility of representing to her students the favorable possibilities of being an African-American served as a way of resisting a traditional, culturally-

neutral approach of being a music educator. This approach placed Alicia's thoughts on being a music teacher within a larger social context and is consistent with the values expressed and shared within her particular inclusive space.

Cross-Case Analysis

Using cross-case thematic analysis, I illustrated ways in which participant narratives about inclusive spaces are presented as evidence to support the second research question: How are these experiences used by African-American music teachers to shape their thinking on and perceptions of what it means to be a teacher? What follows is a discussion about the themes that emerged across the three life histories presented in Chapter 4 along with a summation of the most prominent themes.

The first two life histories presented in Chapter 4 reflected one of the first generations directly influenced by the landmark case of Brown vs. The Board of Education. Both Susan and James were affected by this legislative decision in very different ways. Susan continued to learn in predominantly Black schools with Black teachers and commented in her second life history interview that:

> At one point, they used to put the pictures of all of the newly hires in the newspaper; but when they stopped hiring Black folk and they thought that there might be one or two Black folks out there who would recognize that as if the first thing that Black folks learn or taught to count is Black folk, then they stopped putting all pictures of newly hired teachers in the local newspaper. The best teachers I ever had were all Black. It was they who were truly an extension of my mother and my father.

Her first experiences with being in an integrated school were as a teacher and that is where she formed the opinion that the burden of racial equality should not have been placed "on the backs of our children." She stated that using children to further the cause of integration did not necessarily make the "difference" that was intended but did emotionally "scar" the children who suffered the most because of their negative experiences with school integration. Like hooks (1990), Susan's experiences in segregated environments provided an abundance of resources and opportunities that nurtured her professional, racial/cultural and artistic selves.

On the other hand, James attended integrated schools from an early age and reflected on his experiences positively in his life history. He recalled that the fact that he didn't "only see Black faces every day" and was introduced to a culture outside of his own contributed to his ability to understand and realize the world in a more comprehensive way. James' early opportunities in integrated schools also made for an easier transition from high school to a predominantly White university than other African-American students in similar circumstances may or may not have had. In his life history, James remembered one of his African-American roommates who had a difficult time adjusting to the social and academic culture of the university that they attended and stated: "I could see that if you were not in tune with that particular type culture, if you're not in tune with the way they do things, that you would struggle or you would be uncomfortable." By the time James had entered college, he was fully acclimated to the privileged ways of understanding, knowing, and being within the dominant culture of a predominantly White university.

James' earlier schooling experiences provided a foundation for learning about power relations within the structural domains of his integrated Queens schools, the disciplinary domains of the policies and curricula (both official and hidden) that within these schools, and the

procedures implemented in order to maintain the dominant school community's values. Through his relationships with teachers and peers, James was also able to learn about differences and similarities in racial power relations more directly through the interpersonal relationships that he had with his teachers and peers.

All of the participants perceived their students as having the potential for academic and musical success. Both James and Alicia had years of experience teaching students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as well as students of color. Even though James recalled that his middle school students had many challenges socioeconomically and emotionally, he felt that this did not take away from their talent. He contended that as a teacher "you can look beyond that even with the music and you can see how that can be incorporated into their talent, if you can show them how to be a little bit more disciplined." Alicia also believed that students needed the correct guidance, a teacher with a strong unwavering work ethic, and access to necessary resources to succeed. James' and Alicia's perspectives echoed the belief that teachers should approach the notion of care from an authentic position of preparing students of color for a society that often views them and their cultures unfavorably and/or with hostility (Thompson, 1998).

The three participants revealed in their life histories the importance of providing access for a meaningful and purposeful music education for their students. Alicia purchased supplies for her band even though there was a real possibility of not receiving money in return so that students could be actively engaged in her class in spite of financial hardship. Another example is illustrated in Susan's life history when she talked about introducing different musical genres to her students who were mostly going to be mostly "consumers" and informed listeners of music after their formal schooling. The notion of a teacher who is culturally and racially informed, infuses that knowledge into who s/he is as a teacher, and is knowledgeable about and caring for

students, was evident across the three life histories and aligned with the theory of care articulated within the tenets of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000). .

As stated in their life histories, the participants supported self-affirmation and self-preservation among their students (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). For example, James had shared with some of his mostly Black middle school students that he grew up on welfare for many years and that they should not let that deter them from setting and achieving goals. Alicia also stated that it was easier for her to develop a "city persona" when talking to her students because she experienced a similarly less idyllic family situation when she was growing up. She felt that being a role model for her students helped to promote a more positive and well-rounded example of an African-American. On the topic of only privileging one way of understanding over another Susan asserted:

> I think that one of the reasons you need teachers of color in a music classroom is that sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes you have teachers who think that the music of their culture is superior. The child with the blonde hair and the blue eyes is not the best child in your classroom. She's one of the children in your classroom, and all of them are equal. But if you gear your instruction in your class to what you can expect from her, then all of your other children are going to assess her.

Susan's thought addressed looking critically at what and whose knowledge is perceived as acceptable in order for not only White students but all students to be able to be academically and musically successful without having to use Whiteness as the unit of measurement (Leonardo, 2009). The participants' life histories indicate that their lived experiences have provided opportunities to engage in life meaning making processes and explore different ways of understanding their lives using their experiences as interpretive lenses (Collins, 2000).

A significant number of themes emerged within the individual life histories and across all three life histories that addressed the second research question. Overall, each of the three participants shared similar experiences within their narratives that included:

1) Embracing a culturally-informed teacher self and relying on faith/belief in oneself and their students to achieve goals and be successful

2) Providing access to a meaningful and purposeful music education for their students

3) Developing a nurtured community of learners and thinkers within the classroom who are or will be prepared to navigate life's challenges

4) Attending to the life, home, and/or community values of the students within the classroom

5) Nurturing student self-affirmation and self-preservation, as strategies of resistance, through academic, social, and cultural achievement

5) Being a positive, non-stereotypical example of negatively perceived and prescribed societal notions of what it means to be African-American/Black.

Collective Memory

In the following section, I explored how the moments, stories, and experiences narrated by the participants are used as memory texts to explore their perceptions historically, socially, and culturally as situated in the research and historical literature. I used the three categories of experience stated in Chapter II – racial/cultural, professional/educator, and artistic/musical – as deductive themes to identify and organize memory texts found within participant narratives.

Being an African-American

All of the participants indicated their awareness of a negative societal perception of being African-American as opposed to the cultural affirmation that occurs in inclusive spaces. From their life histories, the teachers narrated examples of how racial markers (e.g. hair texture and speech) and the racialized body of being Black are perceived as "a problem" or a being and a culture that stands in direct opposition to more dominant, White, middle class values that are often the privileged cultural unit of measurement (DuBois, 1903, p. 1). To counternarrate the negative perceptions of being Black/African-American, all of the teachers placed an emphasis on envisioning themselves as role models that their students could learn from and be inspired by. Alicia was especially insistent about this point since, unlike the other two participants, she did not have a mentor or teacher of color growing up.

On the other hand, the participants also recalled experiences and a way of thinking that indicated the need to affirm one's racial and/or cultural self as part of being a professional educator, even if it is didn't align with how a music teacher may traditionally be perceived (see Dolloff, 1999). For example, James expressed that even though his undergraduate education did not prepare him for teaching in an urban environment, he understood the importance of giving students the opportunity to choose who they were and how they wanted to be perceived as African-American so that 'choices' would not be imposed upon them. Susan's experiences at Norwood University and Alicia's inclusive space of being with her colleagues have both served to affirm the participants' racial/cultural and professional educator selves and provided spaces to negotiate their statuses as 'insider-outsiders' (Collins, 2000).

Being a Professional Educator

Some of the experiences narrated by the participants offered a counternarrative or a disruption of the restrictive, culturally-neutral (or culturally deficient) ways of thinking about being a teacher and, in contrast, intricately linked being a teacher to who they are as people. Both Alicia and James stated that their undergraduate music teacher education programs did not prepare them to teach in urban environments or with urban populations. Also, Susan's recollections of having a class of students who had severe challenges with formal schooling indicate that her prior experiences may not have prepared her for what she encountered. (Although, it may be fair to say that what she encountered would have been challenging for any teacher, experienced or not, without the support of the school's administration).

As stated in Chapter I, current music education literature has not adequately examined the perspectives of being a music educator through the lenses of people of color. James stated in his life history, "You can't separate yourself" from your role as a teacher." However, the lack of literature about African-American music teachers and other music teachers of color indicate that the field is not adequately attending to the ways in which some educators may approach their positions as teachers from a culturally and racially informed vantage point.

Being a Classically-Trained Musician

The participants of this study are graduates of university music teacher education programs where Western Classical music is used and required as a point of entry. This requirement may restrict potential students who are musically talented from entering the profession of music education (Koza, 2008). For those university music students who are successful at navigating the audition process, subsequent studies that continue to only or

primarily privilege one genre of music as the standard disregards the many other ways that music educators may perceive their roles within the profession.

The participants perceived music as being situated within larger social contexts and therefore, holding many different meanings and purposes than what they might have learned as pre-service educators. Alicia used music as a way of coping and "dealing" when things at home were "crazy." James preferred sacred classical music not only because of his love for a "wonderful choral sound" but also because it was a way to reaffirm is faith. Susan also practiced her faith through music, specifically by singing in and accompanying church choirs. All of the participants of this study narrated experiences that indicated their realization of using their positions as educators to envision music through sociocultural and sociopolitical lenses.

Conclusions

The evidence provided in the individual teaching life histories analyzed for this study, and particularly the participants' narrated experiences, supported the following conclusions:

1) Inclusive spaces provided opportunities for racial and cultural affirmation and self-preservation to converge with more formally acquired ways of knowing and understanding what it meant to the participants to be a teacher.

2) Inclusive spaces offered opportunities to navigate and negotiate one's sense of self as a professional educator, an artist/musician, and an African-American in order to authentically form different ways of knowing and understanding.

The cross-case and collective memory analyses of the participants' life histories support the following conclusions:

1) Being a teacher meant being a positive role model and offering alternate ways of thinking about and preparing for social, cultural, and academic success.

2) Being a teacher meant situating one's knowledge of music and ways of thinking about being a teacher within social and culturally informed contexts.

3) Inclusive spaces had been a resource of knowledge that was not as easily attained or accessible for the participants within more formal music learning and teaching spaces.

Overall, the findings presented here reveal various ways in which African-American music teachers have been supported in racially and culturally inclusive music teaching and learning spaces and how their experiences within these spaces have informed their thoughts on what it means to be a teacher. I discuss the potential implications and directions for further research in Chapter IV.

Chapter VI: (Re)Framing and (Re)Directing Future Research

Introduction

In order to tell a story, teachers who serve as co-narrators must reflect on past lived experiences by using collective memories to link and contextualize events and social interactions. This study focused on the narratives of three African-American music teachers and how racially and culturally inclusive music learning and teaching spaces have informed their thoughts on what it means to be a teacher. Through sharing their stories the participants of this study – James, Susan, and Alicia - not only reflected on their past, personal and professional experiences but also projected visions and constructed narratives for the future of music teacher researcher based on their reflections.

For this chapter, the texts articulated in each life history are used to identify prominent themes to inform interpretations of how issues of racial, cultural, and social equity are negotiated within music teacher education theory, research, philosophy, and practice. The use of life histories and collective memory methodology also allowed for an examination of text that focused on the convergence of the individual and collective artist-educator-racialized experiences as described by each teacher. The life histories presented in Chapter 4 created spaces to examine social constructions of understanding and contextualizing teacher experiences about their perceptions of what it means to be a teacher. The purpose of this chapter is to provide implications and recommendations for further research and policy concerns and my own reflections regarding my involvement in this study.

Implications for Music Teacher Education: Theoretical Inquiry

While educational researchers have written about teaching as a political act among educators of color (Dixon and Dingus, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2005), this framework has barely permeated the surface of music teacher education programs. A paradigmatic shift in the epistemologies that guide music teacher preparation and development would first begin with a greater awareness and critique of unjust power structures as interpreted from a marginalized standpoint. A critique of the Western, patriarchal paradigm that often dictates the framework of pre-service and in-service teacher programs would allow a space to illuminate different sociocultural and political perspectives.

A new paradigm for music teacher education would infuse renewable and sustainable strategies for combating unjust practices and beliefs. These strategies would be used to counter everyday racial microaggressions and dysconscious racist practices that are often unacknowledged and unchallenged by educators (King, 1991; Sue, 2010). Educators in this new paradigm would embody sociocultural and political perspectives to converge theoretical and pedagogical practices and move beyond the cyclical reflective process of praxis toward the core of one's educational ideology, in other words, an individual teacher's beliefs about what teaching is and what a teacher should be. In order to achieve this goal, an infusion of different learning and teaching styles is necessary along with the approach of not judging other forms of knowledge acquisition as inferior to the currently accepted frameworks. Multicultural music education would move beyond teaching tolerance and understanding of others via the study of world music and move into the realm of using the knowledge that is contributed by different communities to create a pedagogy and curriculum that reflects the backgrounds of the students we serve and will provide a space for community members to become co-authors of new approaches to learning.

The life histories examined for this project conveyed different ways of understanding race, culture, and teacher thinking that were conceived from the participants' experiences and the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in which these experiences are situated. The findings of this research project indicated that the individual perspectives of African-American music teachers, congruently with the commonly shared understandings of the larger African-American communities, should be authentically included in the discourse of professional music teacher education.

An inclusive policy for implementing a critical, multicultural social justice education within a music teacher education curriculum would serve to empower pre-service teachers with the awareness that cultural competency and critical critique are not end products but ever, evolving processes. This approach is an epistemological shift from the fixed notions of culture and directed towards the development of educators who embrace embodied multicultural consciousnesses and practices.

Policy makers and stakeholders who have the capacity to imagine new possibilities for music teacher education recognize that identities are not rigidly static but fluid, nuanced constructs that help to shape authentic definitions and perceptions of being a teacher. While certain sets of collective knowledge help to establish distinctions among cultures, individual community members hold multiple perspectives and various intergroup memberships that create dynamic spaces for shaping perceptions of the discourses surrounding teacher thinking. Establishing authentic multidirectional connections among educational professionals, government law and policy makers, and the surrounding communities would help to deconstruct traditional roles and power relations of knowledge construction and foster beliefs in equally privileged knowledge among all community members.

The three life histories of this study are evidence that African-American music teachers can have different perspectives and perceptions of what it means to be a teacher as individuals while also accepting shared values within the larger racial, cultural, and artistic communities in which they hold memberships. The findings of this study revealed the need for more music teacher education programs to adequately address the diverse range of thoughts and understandings that surround being a music teacher.

The perpetuation of education as property in U. S. capitalist society is based on classed, raced, and economic notions of who is entitled to be educated (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A larger, radical, systemic change also needs to occur in order to (re)construct social structures that will create a more equitable and inclusive society. This type of massive shift would inherently affect educational policy and arts education reform. Public policy and social structures influence what teachers are expected to learn, how they are prepared, and how knowledge is constructed in U. S. capitalist society. A cultural political economy approach would examine how arts teacher education policy and arts education policy are informed within cultural and sociopolitical discourses (Anyon, 2005, Dumas & Anyon, 2006). This approach would address the cultural and economic forces that influence support for or opposition to arts education, the power relations that are enacted, and the cultural factors that influence access to necessary intellectual and monetary resources. In this new paradigm, music teacher education and development programs would transform traditionally accepted beliefs and strategies for developing teachers and cultivate educators who are equipped to be integral partners in developing and implementing policies that reflect the virtues and values of a safe, inclusive teaching and learning community. For the participants' of this study, inclusive spaces provided

invaluable opportunities to reaffirm their cultural, musical, and racial selves and served to disrupt any culturally-neutral prescribed policies regarding teacher development and professionalism.

Implications and Recommendations for Music Teacher Education Policy

In music, the silences that occur prior to, in between, and after musical sequences of sound are just as important as the actual musical sounds themselves. These silences serve many functions based on the context in which they are situated (Bresler, 2005). Silences have the capacity to establish points of reflection, connect points of entry (and exit), and mediate between thoughts and ideas. They can mark the end of a larger musical phrase and the beginning of another or resolve entire works of music. In this sense, silences are not really silent but hold valuable information for understanding and communicating expressive ideas through music.

Allan (2008) described policy discourse analysis as an approach to "uncover policy silences and make visible the powerful discourses framing policy initiatives". Within these silences are the perspectives of marginalized communities who often hold other ways of thinking about issues of difference. The varied perspectives and values of marginalized communities could inform how music teacher education programs are developed and sustained. Policy discourse analysis employs conceptual lenses for examining positions and sources of power critically attending to whose perspectives and/or values are being silenced and to the audiences being addressed.

"Hegemonic policy arenas" such as racial equity, class equity, and gender equity are spaces where power can be examined through a critical policy discourse lens (Marshall 2000, 128/Allan 2008, 45). Educational researchers who conduct this type of analysis are required to be aware of one's positionality and commitment to reflexivity (Allan, 54). "As discourse, policy

produces subject positions that contribute to shaping identities. Policy discourse analysis examines the subject positions constructed via policy as a means of learning how policy contributes to shaping subjectivity" (Allan, 31). Educational researchers who are open to listening to silences and acting upon them engage in a process of recognizing and respecting the context and nuanced meanings that exist in the development of people of color. This ideological perspective provides an alternative approach to prescribed notions of how a teacher should think and what a teacher should be which influences how an individual perceives herself/himself. Thinking in more systemic contexts, this conceptual lens allows teacher education programs to constantly be informed by more inclusive social and public policy instead of imposing ill-fitted, ethnocentric, and malignant views of formal schooling on learning and teaching communities.

Music educators are usually trained within a restrictive Western, humanist, classical tradition of understanding and teaching music that has been accepted as the universal approach. Schools of music and music departments at colleges and universities place high value on 'traditional' knowledge and regard social, cultural, and political issues as secondary or not applicable to what music teacher education programs primarily set out to achieve. The results of this study indicate that issues of social difference and social equity are integral parts of understanding what it means to be a teacher and need to be addressed in music teacher education programs as one set of lenses through which African-American music teachers (and other members of marginalized groups) view and interpret themselves as educators.

The discourse that surrounds traditional university music admissions is situated within a system of power that privileges and maintains White, middle-class, heterosexual values and Eurocentric aesthetics. Structures of power and the individuals who maintain this power create a hierarchy of what constitutes acceptable repertoire for an audition. Meanwhile, many schools

and colleges of music continue to convey conservative values that are not reflective of the experiences of students of color and other marginalized groups (Koza, 2008; Palmer, 2011).

Julia Koza (2008) expressed several concerns with regard to status quo ideologies and practices that are maintained in university music programs. She first identified that:

> students who do not speak the primary musical language will never be admitted to schools of music such as mine [University of Wisconsin-Madison], even though they are excellent musicians according to a different set of standards and could offer significant gifts to K-12 students. This exclusion affects not only the cultural diversity of the music teaching population but also the ability of K-12 programs to provide what Ladson-Billings calls culturally relevant pedagogy and content (149).

I would extend this point further by stating that these practices also hinders the process of moving the theoretical rhetoric and dialogue of equity and access to a movement of social action and change.

Jean Anyon (2005) specifies that "raising people's consciousness about their oppression through reflection and talk is not enough: Physical and emotional support for actual participation in public contention is required" (p. 11). Being a full embodied member of the discourses that speaks to underrepresented values and perspectives will allow teachers to authentically engage in meaningful ways. Furthermore, university music programs must provide a teaching and learning environment that is conducive to this new paradigm for becoming a teacher.

Koza also addressed issues of race and class and emphasized that "the affluence gap has a racial pattern" and the "admissions process becomes a racially discriminatory practice" (148). In speaking about her direct experiences with the choral music auditions at the University of Wisconsin- Madison, Koza expressed the concern that:

> universities such as mine may be failing to adequately educate the students who speak only the privileged musical language. Unless they change once they get a job, these students, in their desire to be good teachers, are likely to perpetuate a musical mono-lingualism that will foster a vast cultural divide between themselves and many of their students" (149).

These are valid and real points of contention as the majority of all U.S. public school teachers are White, middle-class women while their students are mostly from different cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2009; NCTAF, 2000).

Therefore, more spaces are necessary for music teachers of color to share their perspectives, to actively and authentically participate in practices that have a direct effect on them and the students that they teach or will teach, and to collaborate with others in the field of music teacher education research and policy. The narratives and life histories of music teachers of color have the potential to provide alternately authentic and/or a particularly nuanced vintage points of social reality because of the disempowered statuses of the narrators. Dvora Yanow (1999) outlined four steps in interpretive policy analysis that may provide an analytical framework for using teacher narrative texts as policy "artifacts" and the experiences of music teachers of color as resources for policy reform:

> 1. Identify the artifacts (language, objects, acts) that are significant carriers of meaning for a given policy issue, as perceived by policy-relevant actors and interpretive communities.
>
> 2. Identify communities of meaning/interpretation/speech/practice that are relevant to the policy issue under analysis.

3. Identify the "discourse": the specific meanings being communicated through specific artifact and their entailments (in thought, speech, and act).

4. Identify the points of conflict and their conceptual sources (affective, cognitive, and/or moral) that reflect different interpretations of different communities (22).

"Policy relevant" groups or "interpretive communities" of music teachers of color have the possibility to (re)frame existing and (re)direct future policy across racial and political landscapes (Yanow, 1999, p. 10). These interpretive communities often hold 'insider-outsider' perspectives and are a source for meaningful cultural understandings (Collins, 2000, Yanow, 1999).

Embracing the notion of teaching as a political act prepares teachers to be sociopolitical activists within critical multicultural frameworks. My policy advice includes initiatives that can occur at the national, school, and community/interpersonal levels:

1. Listen to the perspectives of marginalized others to define and develop teacher education policy, practices, curricula, and experiences (e.g. interpretive communities – Yanow, 1999). This has to be an authentically, collaborative effort in order to be successful and meaningful for all involved.

2. Seek out and emulate and/or draw inspiration from successful models of equity. Locate the spaces and places where authentic cultural diversity and equity are implemented and infused into the everyday discourse of the community.

3. Explore why certain values are important to particular communities and how they go about achieving their goals. Acquire an awareness that all models are imperfect even though some are in alignment with what is perceived as normal or common (status quo) beliefs and practices.

4. Support the development of direct outreach opportunities by the National Association of Music Education (NAfME) to teachers instead of just having contact at formal conferences and

meetings. This includes going to the communities where there are teachers who are working with marginalized populations to reach out to them, as opposed to holding a conference and expecting these teachers to be willing and able to attend.

5. Conduct more longitudinal empirical studies on university programs, policy reform, and individuals within these arenas.

6. Create more immersion requirements and opportunities. While some opportunities exist, more teacher education programs should modify their practicum and student teaching experiences to incorporate more in-depth community involvement and interaction through community immersion.

Future Direction for Research

My prior experiences as a music teacher and as an African-American woman guided my focus to document the life histories of African-American music teachers. While the theoretical construct of intersectionality was present in this study future studies may examine other issues of social differences and spaces of marginalization placing more salient foci on class, gender, sexuality, disability, religion and/or other nuanced concepts of race. A larger sample size may provide future research studies with more varied ranges of experiences and with different perspectives on what is means to be a music teacher of color and/or from other groups who are underrepresented in music teacher education and professional development research. An analysis of the perspectives of music teachers who were formally educated at university music teacher education programs that privilege non-classical musical genres and pedagogical approaches may provide alternate narratives on the expectations and responsibilities of being a music teacher. Finally, future studies that use both qualitative and quantitative methodologies

and methods may offer the potential to examine a greater and more comprehensive scope of teacher perspectives.

Conclusion: Researcher's Reflections

Upon beginning this project, I was very aware that my own experiences would serve as lenses for interpreting and analyzing the data that I collected from the three teachers who participated in this project. I knew that I would not only make my biases explicit from the start but also immerse myself fully into this project as a researcher in order to present a more authentic, accountable, representation of research about African-American music teachers. Including my perspectives and interpretations collaboratively with the participants' narratives helped me to minimize the distance between them and me that is often perpetuated in traditional objective-driven, scientific inquiry. To be clear, I am cognizant of the power relations between a researcher and a participant that are inherent within a study such as the one conducted for this dissertation. I realize that it was ultimately my decision to provide the final analysis and final narratives that emerged from this study. However, I attempted to alleviate this inevitable situation by creating an atmosphere of support through the use of community nomination and the act of sharing my own experiences with participants to convey to them my purpose and intent for doing this project.

Each of the three participants favorably expressed that they were happy with their decision to participate. Alicia told me that sharing her past experiences for this study had helped her to reflect more on her teaching practice. Susan shared that she hadn't thought of some of the memories that she recounted with me in many years and that although she was initially hesitant to participate due to the time commitment necessary, she was glad that she did. James was

especially enthusiastic about the fact that I was an African-American woman pursing a Ph.D. and stated that he was happy to offer to help and share his stories. As a researcher, I found their responses validating but also as an African-American woman and former middle and high school music teacher, I felt as if I'd chosen a path of inquiry that would not only be appreciated by others but could possibly make a necessary contribution to the current literature and research on music teacher thinking and perspectives.

Appendix A

Research Questions and Methods Chart

Spaces of Inspiration, Affirmation, and Resistance: African-American Music Teachers' Racially and Culturally Inclusive Experiences and Perceptions of Being a Teacher

Research Questions	**Method(s)**
1) In what ways have classically trained African-American teachers music teachers been supported within racially and culturally inclusive artistic spaces?	Life History Interviews First Interview: Open-ended, autobiographical questions will be used to outline broader themes within each teaching life history.
2) How are these experiences used by African-American music teachers to shape their thinking on and perceptions of what it means to be a teacher?	Life History Interviews Second Interview: Interactive 'Timelines' reflecting milestones, 'first' moments, and other experiences are co-created by the researcher and teacher-participant to get a more nuanced account of the 'stories' told and to align them with professional experiences. Particular attention will be paid to events/experiences related to the question. Third Interview: Continue to further contextualize the stories told by the participants.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

First Interview

The first interview will begin with basic demographical questions such as: Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What is your cultural/ethnic background? When were you born?

I will then ask questions in order to create a foundation for constructing a life history.

1. What is your educational background? What is your professional/teaching background?

2. What instrument(s) do you play and/or what vocal part do you play/sing? Was this your first instrument? If not, what instrument/vocal part did you start with initially?

3. How did you come to play your particular instrument?

4. What was the first or one of the first pieces of music that you performed? What other musical pieces are particularly memorable from your earlier music-making experiences? Why do you think that these particular experiences are most important to you?

5. Describe your first experiences as a performer. When did you begin to feel like a musician?

6. What types of ensembles have you previously and currently performed/perform in?

7. What other opportunities did you have during your childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood to develop your individual musicianship skills?

8. What kind of opportunities did you have during your childhood to observe experienced artists and musicians perform? How did these experiences affect you?

9. In what ways, if any, were you ever discouraged as a musician in your earlier experiences? How did you rebound from this/these experience(s)?

10. What type of music did you listen to as child? What were some of your favorite songs? What did you like about them?

11. In what ways, did your cultural upbringing reflect and influence your earlier and current musical preferences (both as someone who engages in music-making and someone who listens to others)?

12. Tell me about your first music teacher. What do you remember most about him/her? What did he/she do to connect you to/with music? What other qualities did he/she have that helped you to develop an interest in music?

13. Tell me about you first experiences learning how to teach and your college/university teacher education preparation program(s). What kinds of courses did you take in your undergraduate and/or graduate studies that best prepared you for becoming a teacher?

14. In what ways, if any, did your undergraduate and/or graduate program prepare you for learning about and teaching within culturally and racially diverse environments?

15. In what ways, if any, did your own cultural, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds influence your initial ideas of what it meant to be a teacher?

Second Interview

I will ask participants to review and provide feedback on a one-page summary of the first interview.
I will construct a timeline based on the responses from the first interview and any supplementary documents that align with these responses. The participant and I will 'fill-in' or complete the timeline in the second interview.

2. Additionally, I will use information from the first interview to construct follow-up questions for subsequent interviews. These questions will elicit deeper responses regarding pivotal moments and milestones that have shaped the participant experiences. For example, I will examine thick descriptions of what it was like to perform for the first time, to receive the first instrument, to be perceived as a musician, etc., to develop additional questions about the experiences.

In addition, I will probe experiences that relate to the ways in which participants have enacted concepts of homeplace to navigate racially hostile professional environments.

Third Interview

This interview will place an emphasis on the participants' more recent reflections of how their past experiences influence their current thoughts on what it means to be a music teacher.

1. Why did you choose to become a music educator?

2. Are there any unique qualities that a music educator must display in order to be an effective music educator? What are some factors/elements that have influenced your expectations?

3. Describe your first informal (e.g. teaching a friend or sibling) and formal experiences as a music teacher. What are some of your most memorable moments and lessons learned from these experiences?

4. How, if at all, does your cultural heritage and background influence your values and beliefs?

5. How do these values and beliefs influence who you are as a teacher?

6. How do you handle possible conflicts between what you feel you should be doing as a teacher and what the curriculum and/or administration dictate that you should be doing?

7. Describe how the specific types of non-traditional and traditional music performing and learning spaces that you have participated in have influenced your ideas of what it means to be a teacher.

8. In what ways were learning and teaching in these non-traditional spaces similar or different from your Western, classical musical training?

9. How did/do these non-traditional spaces reflect your cultural values and beliefs?

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