

URBAN MUSIC
EDUCATION

A Practical Guide for Teachers

Kate Fitzpatrick-Harnish

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHAPTER 2 Understanding Our Students



Equipped with an open, informed, and positive perspective on urban music education, we can move forward to the important task of better understanding the students we teach. Although our focus as music educators is on providing a comprehensive music education for our students,

there are other, important aspects of our students' lives that we need to know and understand. Among them is often the existence of a sizable opportunity gap between urban students and their peers in other school settings. In this chapter, I begin with an overview of research related to this "opportunity gap," followed by a discussion of the important concepts of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

Too often there are problematic gaps in achievement between student populations in urban schools and their peers in other settings. Researchers Kevin Welner and Prudence Carter (2013) have noted that

the persistent test score gaps in our schools include those between African Americans and Whites, between Latinos and Whites, between students in poverty and wealthier students, between children of parents with little formal education and with greater formal education, and between English learners and native English speakers. . . . Similar gaps exist for other important outcomes, such as rates of high school and college graduation. (pp. 2-3)

As urban teachers who care a great deal about maximizing the success of our students, we can be disheartened when we hear about these achievement gaps. However, as Welner and Carter point out, the modern day political and educational policy focus on gaps in *achievement* tends to obscure the existence of significant documented disparities in educational and economic *opportunity* between student groups according to skin color, ethnicity, language, and social class status. These disparities of opportunity include such important factors as "health, housing, nutrition, safety, and enriching experiences, in addition to opportunities provided through formal elementary and secondary school preparation" (2013, p. 3). Milner (2010) states:

I believe a focus on an achievement gap places too much blame and emphasis on students themselves as individuals and not enough attention on why gaps and disparities are commonplace in schools across the country. Opportunity, on the other hand, forces us to think about how systems, processes, and institutions are overtly and covertly designed to maintain the status quo and sustain depressingly complicated disparities in education. (p. 8)

Indeed, Irvine (2010) suggests that the perceived "achievement gap" is simply a result of other gaps that exist in modern education, such as

the teacher quality gap, the teacher training gap, the challenging curriculum gap, the school funding gap, the digital divide gap, the wealth and income gap, the employment opportunity gap, the affordable housing gap, the health care gap, the nutrition gap, the school integration gap, and the quality childcare gap." (p. xii)

The achievement "gap" that is noticed in student test scores, then, does not imply that something is "wrong" with students of color and other under-achieving groups. Instead, it may reveal that something is wrong with the opportunities and resources that they have been provided.

In the United States, public school is often viewed as being the "great equalizer"—a common resource provided to level the playing field for all children. Although differences in the availability of resources within schools that serve different communities have been frequently noted (Kozol, 1991), the inequalities that face children *before* they enter school are often overlooked. For example, Lee and Burkam (2002, p. 2) found the following in a large-scale study of a nationally representative sample of kindergarten students:

- Before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive score of children in the highest socioeconomic (SES) group is 60 percent above the scores of the lowest SES group.
 - Race and ethnicity are strongly associated with socioeconomic status, and differences in test scores between students of different races are apparent even in kindergarten. However, the differences in performance by race and ethnicity can be substantially explained by other variables, such as SES, family educational expectations, access to quality childcare, home reading, computer use, and television habits. Of all of these variables, "SES accounts for more of the unique variation in cognitive scores than any other factor by far."
 - Lower SES children begin school at kindergarten in substantially lower-quality elementary schools than their better-resourced counterparts, in terms of higher student achievement, more school resources, more qualified teachers, more positive teacher attitudes, and better neighborhood or school conditions. This reinforces the inequalities that develop even before children reach school age.
- Indeed, the opportunity gap may result not only from a lack of resources but also from differences in foundational experiences within society. For

example, Lareau (2011) found many commonalities in the ways that both lower-income and higher-income parents raise their children. However, she found striking differences in the ways that children were prepared to interact successfully with institutional structures (such as those found in schools) according to social class (defined by the parents' level of education and the family's income). In her study, children of highly formally educated and high-income parents exhibited substantially more involvement in organized activities from a younger age than did children of less well-educated and lower-income parents, giving them an early "edge" when it comes to learning the norms and rules of the school or institutional structure.

Understanding the opportunity gap allows us to reject many of the stereotypes and deficit language that we as urban teachers so frequently hear. Differences found between cultural groups in standardized test performance may obscure some very important inequalities within our system of education:

In America's meritocratic culture, the idea of a competition implies both fair play and deserved outcomes. The culture suggests that people . . . study hard in college and are rewarded with good jobs, where they continue to conscientiously apply themselves and, thus, accrue more and bigger rewards. But the fact that many middle-class youth work hard should not blind us to the underlying reality that the system is not fair. It is not neutral. It does not give all children equal opportunities. Not only do schools vary, but in schools and other institutions that sort children into positions in the stratification system, some cultural practices are simply privileged more than others. Our culture's nearly exclusive focus on individual choices renders invisible the key role of institutions. In America, social class backgrounds frame and transform individual actions. The life paths we pursue, thus, are neither equal nor freely chosen. (Laureau, 2011, p. 343).

TEACHING, LEARNING, AND THE "CULTURE OF POWER"

All educators hold certain expectations for their students, and for their behavior in particular, that likely originate in their own upbringing. Rules such as expectations for eye contact, strategies for the diffusion of tension, appropriate uses of humor, and guidelines for when it's appropriate to speak and when it's appropriate to stay silent are often "hidden" in our classrooms—that is, we do not usually explicitly post these rules on our walls or describe them to

our students. Instead, we just assume that others will hold the same values for particular behaviors that we do:

What constitutes acceptable behavior and appropriate discipline for students at home can be significantly different from the discipline and rules of behavior experienced in the classroom. Normal classroom behavior can be informed by different cultural frames, such as race, socioeconomics, language, or even geography. (Milner, 2010, p. 25)

Educators often misinterpret actions and behaviors within the classroom as being defiant or oppositional, when they are not intended as such. For example, Milner provides the example of a student who is used to "joking around" with family members when a conflict arises. Indeed, such joking may be seen as very welcome strategy within the family unit, as a means to de-escalate the situation or avoid a confrontation. A teacher, on the other hand, may consider this use of humor in the classroom rude and inappropriate, leading to a cultural conflict within the classroom. The teacher may also see this behavior as a challenge to his or her authority. The student is therefore punished for using a strategy that has been proven successful in his or her own home setting. See the next sidebar, Beyond First Glance, for examples of the ways that our panel has worked to ease tension with students.

Lisa Delpit has coined the term "culture of power" to describe the often hidden rules that educators and administrators expect students to follow in schools. Delpit describes this as follows:

(a) issues of power are enacted in classrooms; (b) there are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a "culture of power"; (c) the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power; (d) if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; and (e) those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (Delpit, 1995, p. 24)

According to Delpit, educators must make attempts to overtly articulate the "rules" of the classroom and the consequences for breaking them. Milner (2010) agrees:

For students to have a chance at success in the classroom, and thus in society, they must understand that they live in a system that can be oppressive and repressive. . . . Students almost always lose what I have come to call "cultural

SIDEBAR: BEYOND FIRST GLANCE

HOW DO YOU WORK WITH STUDENTS WHO CHALLENGE YOU?

Ramon

You have to remember that they sometimes have a bad day, too. They have problems at home, and they sometimes take it out on you. You have to realize that, okay, they're going through this, and it's my job to help. Sometimes I go, "Are you okay today?" They say, well, my Mom yelled at me and said this and that. And so . . . okay. That's why. I say, "I got you." And sometimes, as the teacher, you think it's your fault. They're not improving because of me. They don't care. But the reason why you're teaching is because you love kids and you want kids to be successful, so you have to keep at it. We're here in this profession to change kids' lives.

Martha

I think something that young teachers frequently do, as I did, is to label those kids as "bad," and not really see that there's a very different kid behind that behavior that really needs somebody to see beyond what they are putting out. I had a fifth grader this year who has special needs and who was notorious in the school. Everybody knew this kid, as he was always in trouble, especially in the younger years. He was labeled as a "bad" kid. But he had probably the best voice of any student I've ever had. So when we found that out, that was a pathway in . . . The fact that he could get up on the stage and sing, and his family could come and see him do something positive instead of all these negatives, that was a huge thing. With a kid like that, your instinct may be to sort of push back and try and clamp down on him, but maybe he's a kid who, if you challenge him, it's going to be worse than to walk away from the behavior. So that takes time to figure that out. Every kid's different.

Deanna

Every night when I go home, my job is to figure it out what could I be doing to better reach this child, or, how can I get other people in my building to really understand where this kid is coming from. Teachers sometimes come to me who have negative things to say about certain students, and I just can't agree with that. My question is always "what are you doing to make this a better situation for yourself?"

Eric

There is a young man in my program who is one of the "cool cats" in class. His brother was involved in gangs and was shot and killed, and because of all that he had been through, he had a sort of "rough and tough" exterior. But he was a really, really incredibly smart, sweet, thoughtful young

man. You would never see that from him in a large group setting. The way I learned more about him was just in little one on one conversations before and after class, just a kind word here and there, a question about his weekend, asking if he needed help with any of his subjects. He eventually warmed up to me, as he did to some other staff in our department. Everyone else in the building worried that he was going to end up dead or in jail. And they really missed out on the really fine qualities that he possessed. I think it's difficult to look past that rough exterior sometimes, but I think we just have to push to get past that with every student at every opportunity.

Victoria

I believe that students often act in a certain way because things are wrong at home. Maybe there's a divorce going on, or maybe they're being abused in some kind of way. I'll talk to another teacher and they'll say, well, this person acts up in my room. And I'll give them maybe a hint of what the child is going through at home and I'll talk with the child so that they'll do better. But if you were 16 years old today and you looked at the world and you saw all these people without jobs: engineers, people who work in the factory, and even teachers, if you're 16 years old or 15, why in the world would you keep on going to school? These other people went to school. They got college degrees. They were working for years, and they have nothing. People are losing jobs and homes, and it's in these children's minds. And they're like, why should I even do this? Why should I care? Why should I work hard? It's hard because, as a teacher, you sometimes get vulnerable because it seems like they are trying to hurt you. But it's not that they try to hurt you. High school students, no matter what, just like teenagers at home, they feel like they know more than you. When your children get to be 16 to 17 years old, they're going to feel like you're stupid and they're smarter than you no matter how many degrees you have. It just happens.

battles" in the classroom—mainly because students do not necessarily think, act, and live as their teachers do or as their teachers' biological children do. In short, it is irresponsible and simply unfair to expect students to behave in a way that has not been well explained to them. Teachers should not assume that students understand the culture of power; teachers must teach it! (p. 26)

While educators should help students understand the hidden rules related to the "culture of power," it is simultaneously important to encourage students to question its existence. Many students will encounter conflict between their own culture and the "culture of power" throughout their

lives. Being able to thoughtfully question power dynamics (Who is making the rules in this situation, and why have they been afforded the power to do so? Where do I fit in within this system? Does this system represent a just distribution of power, and, if not, how can it be changed?) provides students with a framework for navigating such situations throughout their lives.

CONSIDERING RACE, ETHNICITY, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

There are many aspects of our students' background and characteristics that are important to consider, but here I discuss three that tend to be mentioned with frequency by urban educators: race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Trying to consider the role of each of these in our own and our students' lives is important, but they are frequently misunderstood. It is important to realize that the terminology associated with race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status has changed frequently in past years and is likely to continue changing. If you are ever confused about what terminology to use with your students, parents, or colleagues, Sonia Nieto (2004) suggests two helpful criteria:

1. What do the people themselves want to be called?
2. What is the most accurate term? (p. 25)

Race

The concept of race is an important one for teachers to consider and understand, especially given the history and importance of race relations in the United States. First, it is important to understand that, as Sonia Nieto (2000) points out, the concept of race, in a strictly biological sense, does not exist at all: "There is no scientific evidence that so-called racial groups differ biologically or genetically in significant ways. Differences that do exist are primarily social; that is, they are based on one's experiences within a particular cultural group" (p. 27). However, the concept of race as it has been historically constructed is significant, in that this particular concept has been used to "oppress entire groups of people for their supposed differences" (p. 27).

Because educational opportunities and outcomes in the United States vary tremendously among students of different races (Bluestone,

Stevenson, & Williams, 2008; Orfield et al., 2004), it is important that music teachers consider and acknowledge issues of race. Despite this, many well-meaning teachers continue to state that they are "color-blind" or that they "do not see color" within their classrooms. This attitude toward race is problematic, according to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994):

Given the significance of race and color in American society, it is impossible to believe that a classroom teacher does not notice the race and ethnicity of the children she is teaching. Further, by claiming not to notice, the teacher is saying that she is dismissing one of the most salient features of the child's identity and that she does not account for it in her curricular planning and instruction. Saying we are aware of students' race and ethnic background is not the same as saying we treat students inequitably. . . . If teachers pretend not to see students' racial and ethnic differences, they are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs. (p. 33)

Similarly, according to Milner:

too many educators gloss over race as an important area of consideration in broader diversity discussions, for a variety of reasons: (1) They are uncomfortable talking about it, (2) they find it irrelevant to do so, (3) race is sometimes considered a taboo subject due to its horrific history for some in U.S. society, and (4) race is misunderstood by so many, both within and outside of education. (Milner, 2010, p. 7).

Acknowledging the role of race in our society allows us to recognize institutionalized disparities and inequities in educational settings, such as these:

- An overrepresentation of students of color in special education
- An underrepresentation of students of color in gifted education
- An over-referral of African American students to the office for disciplinary actions and consequences
- An overwhelming number of African American students who are expelled or suspended
- An underrepresentation of students of color in school-wide clubs, organizations, and other prestigious arenas, such as the school's homecoming court and student government
- An underrepresentation of faculty and staff of color in school positions, including professional staff, teaching, and leadership positions (Milner, 2010, p. 22)

To this list, I might also add an underrepresentation of students of color in music performance ensembles. In particular, in an analysis of national enrollment in school music ensembles, Elpus and Abril (2011) found these groups underrepresented: Hispanic students, students in the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status, native Spanish speakers, and students whose parents had earned a high school diploma or less.

To overcome these racial inequalities and prepare all students (including White students) to thrive in a multiracial society, Tatum (2007) suggests a multifaceted approach that she calls the "ABC's": *affirming identity, building community, and cultivating leadership*:

A, affirming identity, refers to the fact that students need to see themselves—important dimensions of their identity—reflected in the environment around them, in the curriculum, among faculty and staff, and in the faces of their classmates, to voice the feelings of invisibility or marginality that can undermine student success. B, building community, refers to the importance of creating a school community in which everyone has a sense of belonging, a community in which there are shared norms and values as well as a sense of common purpose that unites its members. C, cultivating leadership, refers to the role of education in preparing citizens for active participation in a democracy, and the assumption that leadership must come from all parts of our community. Leadership in the twenty-first century requires the ability to interact effectively with people from backgrounds different from one's own—an ability that requires real-life experience. (p. 22)

Ethnicity

Ethnicity differs in important ways from race. For example, as Sonia Nieto points out, "African Americans and Haitians are both Black. They share some basic cultural values and are both subjected to racist attitudes and behaviors in the United States. But the particular experiences, native language use, and ethnicity of each group is overlooked or even denied if we simply call them both Black rather than also identifying them ethnically" (p. 27). Nieto says that White people seldom think of themselves as ethnic—a term that is often reserved for

other, more easily identifiable groups. Nevertheless, the fact is that we are all ethnic, whether we choose to identify ourselves in this way or not. . . . Although Whiteness is an important factor, it hides more than it reveals: There is a tremendous diversity of ethnic backgrounds among Whites, and this is lost if race is the only identifier. (Nieto, 2000, p. 26)



Similarly, the terms Latino(a) and Hispanic are commonly used to refer to people of Latin American or Caribbean heritage. However, many Latino(a) students prefer to identify as being members of more specific cultural communities, such as being Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexican American, Dominican, or Salvadoran. The differences between these cultural groups can be profound; indeed, the native language of some Guatemalans is not Spanish, and many Dominicans have an African background (Nieto, 2000). The same can be said for students who are often referred to as Asian American but would prefer to identify as, for example, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, or Native Hawaiian. For us as music teachers, exploring our students' ethnicity can often

uncover musical traditions that could be shared within our classrooms. Because music is an important part of almost all cultures, we should see the ethnic background of our students as an important resource within our classroom.

We must also remember that many students within our schools may have limited English language proficiency. As a teacher who is sensitively attuned to your students' needs, you will want to find ways to support their language growth while providing numerous opportunities for musical success within your classroom. More resources on assisting English language learning (ELL) students can be found in Chapter 6. In the following list, I paraphrase Carlos Abril's (2003) helpful suggestions for music teachers looking to better support English language learning students in the music classroom:

1. *Show respect:* We need to foster positive experiences for our ELL students, being sensitive to include them in as many musical activities as possible, and sometimes offering them adapted nonverbal musical opportunities so as not to force them into activities for which they are expected to speak English.
2. *Get students involved:* Talk with your English language learning students via a school translator or another child who speaks the language in order to learn about their past experiences with music and to understand any challenges that they may be facing in your school. Maintain high expectations while understanding the complexity of learning both language and musical content at the same time. Allow opportunities for cooperative learning with peers.
3. *Study the culture:* Consider including aspects of your students' culture in the music curriculum, and work to select songs and experiences that respectfully depict the students' culture.
4. *Promote a safe learning environment:* Understand that most ELL students go through an initial phase of refusing to talk with teachers or peers. When ELL students do speak in music class, refrain from publicly correcting their pronunciation, and provide abundant praise when they make an effort to speak in English.
5. *Foster students' musical learning:* Use hand signs to represent certain musical terms or concepts, look for songs that use repetition, select some songs that use nonsense syllables, and have students learn songs on a neutral syllable before adding words. (pp. 40-43)

As we work to assist multilingual students in the music classroom, it is also important to be aware that these English language learners may

have very sophisticated linguistic skills in their native language or even in multiple languages. Rather than focus on what these students do not yet know in English, we can focus on providing the resources within our classroom that will help them build on their existing strengths and prior knowledge.

It is important that we as teachers work hard to understand and know our students. The next sidebar, Getting to Know Your Students, can provide examples of ways to do so.

SIDEBAR: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

HOW DO YOU FIND WAYS TO GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS?

Ramon

I work hard to know a lot about the students, including their families—the mom, the dad, the sister, the brother. I have a lot of siblings in the mariachi program, and we get to know them. We become a very important relationship person in the community, and the students get to feel like it's their second home when they're in our class. I get to know them because I ask the students. I have them do a lot of surveys. I ask them, what do you like about this program? What is your favorite part of this year? How have you grown? What song do you like to play? I ask these things just so I can have that feedback, because you don't have time to interview all the kids. You don't. You don't, but with their written feedback, it kind of tells you about them, what you have accomplished, and things you need to work on.

Martha

One of the first things I do is survey my students. I just get up and ask them questions and have them respond, and then I read all their answers about what music they listen to, what TV they watch, what kind of families they come from. I also do a lot of work in the beginning with family—where, what—because I am fascinated with the ethnic diversity of being in this New York school. I do a lot of activities to find out their cultural background and all that kind of stuff. I still always try and find new ways to know them better. When you're seeing them once a week, you just don't get the amount of time you'd like.

Deanna

It's important in any teaching environment to take the time to understand that each person is unique. I do a lot of transporting students,

so I know where my students live. I'm pretty involved in my students' lives and try to make things happen for them. Outside of the classroom, I try to touch base with people, especially if there's a feeling that there's a negative energy between us, which happens. I try to make sure when I see them in the hallway that I give them just a smile or something or a hug—anything like that can make things better.

Eric

I spend an inordinate amount of time getting to know them at the beginning of the year, especially with my beginners. Of course, we start doing music right away. But every day, we do something to get to know each other. My smallest classes are like 75 students, so it can be a challenge to get to know everybody. But they have to know each other, and they have to know me, and I have to know them. We spend lots of time with trust building games or team building games and activities that help them understand that we're all on the same page, and that we all have these wonderful shared experiences. At the same time, there's this tremendous diversity among us, despite the fact that 90 percent of them are Mexican immigrants. We talk about how to respect that diversity and why we are here, and they give lots of reflection on those things, too. I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year getting to know my students, and that continues throughout the year.

Victoria

In my program, we spend a lot of time together after school. We do fundraising, and I work with the children on the weekends. I also take some time for socializing with them and doing leadership training. Everybody also has to say hello to me when they come in the room every day. So, I spend a lot of one-on-one time with my students. I'll have small groups of leaders and officers over to my house, where we'll watch a leadership development video together. I do depend on them. I think that's one of the things that music does—we have our students at least one, two, three, or four years. We have a chance to get to know them and watch them evolve, so that's very important to me. My program is not just about music. It's about building people, and when you build people, you have a great band. When you have children who believe in themselves and learn to trust others and work with others, then you have a more successful program. So, if I see a kid who looks troubled, either I talk to them, I have a student talk to them, or I try and get a parent to listen to them, because they need to talk to somebody. You can prevent so many problems if you address a face.

Socioeconomic Status

The term "socioeconomic status" is a complex concept consisting of two interrelated aspects of a person's background: one that includes resources, such as education, income, and wealth, and the other that includes status or rank as a function of relative position in a hierarchy, such as social class (Krieger, Williams, & Moss, 1997). The poverty rates in urban areas are, in most cases, much higher than those in suburban areas, and the proportion of people living in poverty in urban areas is greater today than it was in the 1960s and 1970s (Bluestone, Stevenson, & Williams, 2008, p. 49). Because family income is highly correlated with education (p. 53), this is especially important for urban educators to consider.

Historically, educators have disagreed about the ways socioeconomic status, and poverty in particular, can be understood. For years, educational authors wrote about the concept of a "culture of poverty"—the idea that poor people share many similar characteristics, including beliefs, values, and behaviors. In reality, differences in values and beliefs among poor people are just as wide as among middle- and upper-class people. The "culture of poverty" narrative has led to many misunderstandings about individuals living with fewer financial resources. Paul Gorski (2008, p. 32) has highlighted four of these myths:

1. MYTH: Poor people are unmotivated and have weak work ethics.
The Reality: Poor people do not have weaker work ethics or lower levels of motivation than wealthier people (Iversen & Farber, 1996; Wilson, 1997). . . . According to the Economic Policy Institute (2002), poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their wealthier counterparts.
2. MYTH: Poor parents are uninvolved in their children's learning, largely because they do not value education.
The Reality: Low-income parents hold the same attitudes about education that wealthy parents do (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978). Low-income parents . . . are more likely to work multiple jobs, to work evenings, to have jobs without paid leave, and to be unable to afford child care and public transportation.
3. MYTH: Poor people are linguistically deficient.
The Reality: All people, regardless of the languages and language varieties they speak, use a full continuum of language registers (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semington, 2008). . . . What often are assumed to be deficient varieties of English (Appalachian varieties, perhaps, or what some refer to as Black English Vernacular) are no less sophisticated than so-called standard English.

4. MYTH: Poor people tend to abuse drugs and alcohol.
The Reality: Poor people are no more likely than their wealthier counterparts to abuse alcohol or drugs. Although drug sales are more visible in poor neighborhoods, drug use is equally distributed across poor, middle-class, and wealthy communities (Saxe, Kadushin, Tighe, Rindskopf, & Beveridge, 2001). Chen, Sheth, Krejci, and Wallace (2003) found that alcohol consumption is significantly higher among upper-middle-class white high school students than among poor black high school students. Their finding supports a history of research showing that alcohol abuse is far more prevalent among wealthy people than among poor people. (Diala, Muntaner, & Walrath, 2004; Galea, Ahern, Tracy, & Vlahov, 2007)

The issue of socioeconomic status may be especially relevant to music programs, as cuts in music program funding often result in music students having to pay special fees in addition to the traditional expenses of renting/purchasing instruments and purchasing music and equipment when they are not provided by the school. Unfortunately, the best predictors of the availability of music programs at the middle and high school levels are socioeconomic status and school size (C. Smith, 1997). These inequities among and within music programs are real and problematic, as Vincent Bates (2012) has observed:

School music, in particular, poses an array of added expenses that could contribute to unequal access and achievement. Families may not be able to afford musical instruments and accessories, instrument repair and maintenance, performance attire, private lessons, or transportation to and from special events. Single parents or those who work evenings will have less time to monitor and encourage music practice at home or to attend concerts. Lack of dental or medical care could affect students' abilities or desires to play wind instruments or to sign up for school choirs. (p. 34)

When talking with the teachers featured in this book, I found that all of them had used their own personal funds to help students do things such as buy food, clothing, computers, pay fees, and afford to attend music camps or other musical activities. Each discussed the tremendous effect that low socioeconomic status had on many of their students. Eric, for example, talked about the impact of poverty for his students on the South side of Chicago:

A lot of my students don't get enough to eat. They have difficulty with bus fares, so we find ways to support them to get to and from school, or to sing in an outside ensemble. Sometimes we find them scholarships to a local music program,

and we work to find the resources to get them there. The level of instability in some of my students' homes, to me, was staggering to see. I grew up in a very stable home with a very stable environment. I lived in one house my entire life. Our school has a 35 percent mobility rate. So, it's a big challenge.

As a new urban teacher, I didn't understand that the unspoken reason many of my students could not attend after-school rehearsals or other musical activities was because they needed to go to work to help contribute to the family's finances or babysit younger siblings while their parents worked a second or third job. Students are often ashamed or embarrassed to talk about a lack of resources, so we need to be responsive to and respectful of their needs. Other important issues related to socioeconomic status include homelessness and student transience/mobility, which can greatly affect a student's ability to learn in our classrooms. When we identify students who may be experiencing these issues or are otherwise in need of support, it is important that we recognize the important role that school staff such as counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, and social workers can play in assisting our students.

Race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are just three of many important issues that we need to consider with regard to our students' needs. These three important variables are often related to the opportunity gap that so many of our students experience due to pervasive and systematic inequities. While we focus on providing a comprehensive music education for our students, we must also be sure to remain informed about aspects of our students' lives and experiences that affect their learning.

CHAPTER 3

Contextually Specific Music Teaching

An Introduction

