

Developing Relevant, Responsive and Purposeful Pedagogical Practices

A reflection and action guide for music educators

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Strong communities do not happen by accident

Learning, creativity, and leadership thrive when people feel respected, supported, meaningfully connected, and able to participate fully.

Begin with culture, climate, and community

Culture	Climate	Community
What we value • Shared values and traditions • What is celebrated and encouraged • Whose voices and contributions matter	How it feels to be here • Welcome, fairness, and transparency • Communication and collaboration • Well-being, trust, and psychological safety	Why people stay and invest • Feeling valued, seen, and essential • Authentic participation and belonging • Connection, ownership, and leadership

Quick alignment check

[] CULTURE We can name the values and behaviors we celebrate.	[] CULTURE Multiple traditions, identities, and paths to excellence are honored.
[] CLIMATE Expectations are clear, feedback supports growth, and communication is transparent.	[] CLIMATE People can ask questions, make mistakes, and seek support without shame.
[] COMMUNITY Students have meaningful pathways for voice, ownership, and leadership.	[] COMMUNITY People feel valued, seen, essential, and connected to the success of the whole.

Commitment statement

We cultivate a strong culture, a healthy climate, and a genuine sense of community because excellence thrives when people are respected, supported, and meaningfully connected.

Build the Conditions for Learning

Align values, daily experience, and participation

Culture in practice

- Honor multiple traditions and lived experiences.
- Value different pathways to excellence and leadership.
- Encourage curiosity, respect, and shared responsibility.
- Recognize culture as dynamic and community-shaped.

Climate in practice

- Pair clear expectations with care and accountability.
- Offer constructive, growth-oriented feedback.
- Notice power dynamics, access, and hidden barriers.
- Support learning and well-being proactively.

Community in practice

- Create pathways for voice, ownership, and leadership.
- Invite participation without pressure to diminish identity.
- Build relationships rooted in respect and accountability.
- Show how individual success strengthens the whole.

How the three work together

1. Culture sets the values

What do we say matters? What do our choices actually reward?

2. Climate shapes daily experience

How do people experience expectations, feedback, access, and care?

3. Community sustains engagement

Do people feel essential, connected, empowered, and responsible to the whole?

4. Alignment strengthens excellence

Are our values, experiences, and structures reinforcing the same purpose?

Learning-space snapshot: Think - Pair - Share

Rate culture, climate, and community from 1 (needs focused attention) to 5 (consistently strong). Identify a moment that shaped someone's experience and name one action that could strengthen alignment.

Belonging, Difference, and Participation

Create space for challenge, authenticity, and growth

Belonging expands risk-taking

When learners believe they are valued and supported, they are more willing to ask questions, make mistakes, experiment, lead, and persist.

Three concepts that support intentional practice

Targeted universalism	Intersectionality	Intercultural development
Set a shared goal, then use targeted supports so people with different starting points can reach it.	Attend to overlapping identities and systems. One strategy will not address every barrier or experience.	Move from noticing difference toward understanding, acceptance, and adaptation across cultural contexts.

Covering: the pressure to hide or diminish identity

Covering can occur when a person changes or suppresses parts of identity to fit dominant expectations, gain access, or avoid stereotypes.

Type	What it can look like
Appearance	Changing appearance, mannerisms, or self-presentation to match dominant expectations.
Affiliation	Avoiding identity-related behaviors, traditions, or topics to blend in.
Advocacy	Withholding support for one's own group to avoid being seen as biased or difficult.
Association	Distancing from people with shared identities to avoid stereotypes.

Notice without diagnosing

Possible signs include code-switching, self-silencing, avoiding identity-related topics, minimizing physical or emotional needs, discomfort with visibility, or withdrawing from peers. Treat these as invitations to listen and reduce unnecessary pressure - not as labels.

Self-reflection

When have I or someone I observed felt pressure to cover language, appearance, beliefs, health, needs, or mannerisms? How did that affect confidence, expression, or participation?

Three Pedagogical Lenses

Relevant, responsive, and purposeful by design

These lenses work together. Relevance creates connection, responsiveness shapes how we teach, and purpose clarifies why the learning matters.

Lens	What it asks of us	Planning question
Relevant	Connects learning to students' lives, interests, identities, communities, and the world beyond the classroom.	<i>Why does this matter to these learners now?</i>
Responsive	Uses cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance practices to shape instruction.	<i>What do I need to notice, learn, and adapt?</i>
Purposeful	Aligns repertoire, methods, and assessment with clear musical, human, and community outcomes.	<i>What should students know, do, feel, or carry forward?</i>

Culturally relevant pedagogy: three commitments

Academic success Teach the musical knowledge and skills students need to grow and achieve.	Cultural competence Help students understand their own and others' cultural identities and practices.	Critical consciousness Invite students to recognize, question, and respond to inequities and dominant narratives.
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Affirm and empower

Culturally relevant pedagogy is more than adding diverse content or creating an entertaining activity. It must support strong learning, affirm cultural identity, and help students think critically about the world.

Guiding questions for planning and reflection

☐ Whose knowledge, stories, and performance practices are centered?	☐ What prior experiences or cultural assets can students bring into the learning?
☐ What musical objectives are explicit and assessable?	☐ Where are the entry points for learners with different needs and starting places?
☐ How will students exercise voice, choice, ownership, or leadership?	☐ What context is necessary to avoid stereotypes, tokenism, or incomplete narratives?
☐ How might this learning build cultural competence or critical inquiry?	☐ What evidence will show that students felt challenged, supported, and able to participate?

A useful distinction

Relevant asks, "Does this connect?" Responsive asks, "How should I adapt?" Purposeful asks, "What meaningful destination guides these choices?"

A Music Learning Design Canvas

Move from good intentions to teachable decisions

1. Musical destination	What knowledge, skill, artistry, or understanding should students develop? _____
2. Learner connection	How does the content connect to students' identities, interests, communities, or current world? _____
3. Cultural context	Whose tradition is represented? What voices, histories, and sources are needed for responsible study? _____
4. Responsive pathways	What multiple ways can students enter, explore, practice, demonstrate, and lead? _____
5. Belonging and access	What barriers might exist? What targeted supports, choices, or accommodations will make full participation possible? _____
6. Inquiry and impact	What questions invite comparison, critique, reflection, empathy, or action beyond technical accuracy? _____
7. Evidence of learning	What will students create, perform, explain, reflect on, or apply to show growth? _____

Possible pathways through a piece or tradition

Pathway	Possible application
Technique	Pitch, rhythm, diction, phrasing, tone, ensemble skill, notation, movement, or improvisation.
Context	Learn from culture-bearers and credible sources; explore language, function, history, and performance practice.
Connection	Compare musical ideas across students' listening lives and multiple traditions without treating one as the default.
Inquiry	Ask who created the music, why it matters, what stories are missing, and how power shaped its transmission.
Action	Use performance, discussion, composition, collaboration, or service to connect learning with community needs.

Avoid the "tourist curriculum"

Do not stop at food, festivals, famous people, or a single representative work. Pair musical skill-building with credible context, varied voices, cultural nuance, and opportunities for sustained learning.

Put It Into Practice

A 30-day experiment in purposeful change

Four weeks of focused action

Week	Focus	Practice	My commitment
1	Observe	Audit who speaks, who leads, what is celebrated, and where barriers appear.	_____
2	Listen	Invite student perspectives and learn more about the people, traditions, and contexts represented.	_____
3	Redesign	Revise one lesson, rehearsal habit, resource, or assessment using the three pedagogical lenses.	_____
4	Reflect + sustain	Review evidence of learning and belonging. Keep, adapt, or replace the practice intentionally.	_____

One practice I will intentionally change

Choose one lesson, rehearsal habit, phrase, resource, or assessment. What shifts in learning, confidence, communication, belonging, or engagement will you watch for?

Affirmations, challenges, and questions

Affirmation	Challenge	Question
What is already helping students learn, belong, and contribute? _____	What assumption, habit, resource, or barrier needs to be reconsidered? _____	What do I need to ask, learn, or investigate before deciding what comes next? _____

Closing commitment

Awareness creates choice. Choice creates learning spaces where rigor, artistry, belonging, and responsibility strengthen one another.

Concepts to explore: Gloria Ladson-Billings • Geneva Gay • John A. Powell • Kimberlé Crenshaw • Intercultural Development Continuum

Explore more resources: www.drderrickfox.com