“Black Teacher Baggage”: Black Music Education Majors at a Predominantly White Institution

Adam J. Kruse
Michigan State University
Society for Music Teacher Education
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Race Issues in Teacher Education

**General Teacher Education**
- Institutional racism
- “Stereotype Threat” (Steele, 1997)
- Silencing of students and teachers of color
- Connections to socioeconomic status
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995)

**Music Teacher Education**
- Underrepresented racial diversity (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Hewitt & Thompson, 2006)
- Identifying and challenging White privilege
- Teaching setting preferences
This multiple case study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of two Black music education majors enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the American Midwest. Specific research questions addressed in this study included:

1. How does racial identity relate to these students’ experiences in music education?
2. How do these students perceive racial issues in music education and their positions within the field?
Methodology

- DESIGN: Multiple case study
- DATA COLLECTION: Semi-structured interviews
- DATA ANALYSIS: Transcription, coding, member checks, and peer review
- FRAMEWORK: Critical Race Theory, Race as a socially constructed tool for critical analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2005; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Tate, 1997)
- LENS: Limitations of a White male perspective
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<thead>
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<th>Large Midwestern University (LMU)</th>
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<td><strong>Undergraduate students of color:</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate music education majors of color:</strong></td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty members of color:</strong></td>
<td>22%</td>
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<td><strong>Music education faculty members of color:</strong></td>
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Participants

Danielle

- Senior Music Education Major (double bassist/vocalist)
- From a large city in the Southeast
- Used to diverse school populations
Participants

Eddie

- Senior Music Education Major (percussionist)
- From a small town in the Midwest
- Used to being in the extreme minority
Danielle

[Black] definitely is a spectrum [and] I’m definitely a lot farther to whatever the non-Black side is...I personally don’t consider myself less Black, but I think from my family’s perspective, I think because, uh, I’m in a mostly White university, doing well, studying something atypical for a Black student...my family sees [that] as more White than Black...It gets sticky sometimes, um, because again, I don’t see that as any less Black or White than they would, but it can get sticky when, when they say things like, “Oh, you’re going to that White school now.”
Findings: Racial Identity

Danielle

In the most obvious way, I definitely feel more Black in [musical] contexts because I stick out like a sore thumb... in a choir or orchestra of all or mostly White and Asian musicians to have the one Black chick over in the corner with the afro, you know? Like, [laughs] you know, most eyes sort of are drawn to that pretty quickly... Other than that, I would say that I, I feel in academic settings probably more White because I’m doing what a bunch of White kids are doing... Sort of the context where I have more things in common culturally and socially with White kids in an academic context than I do with some of my family back at home.
Eddie

For me, being Black is being Black...It’s not degrees of Black. I don’t like that terminology...So, the ultimate degree of Black is what then? So, we go to the other spectrum. If I’m not Black, then that makes me what?...It bothers me, like the whole degrees of Black. No. Black is Black...When we take it to like, the n\textsuperscript{th} degree, and say like the Black, Black, Black people, who are they? Are those the people who are on the streets shooting up people and going to jail? Because if that’s the ultimate Black person, I’m happy to be on this side of the spectrum.
Findings: Racial Identity

Eddie

Some kids in school, like in high school [would say], “Man, I’m blacker than you are, [Eddie].”...Well, you know, they sag their jeans lower, they know more rap songs than I do...It’s not about being blacker, cause then like, the alternative is being a White Black person, which isn’t, it isn’t the deal...What if I was, if I were White and I grew up in [a large city]? Perfect example: kid in percussion studio...White kid, grew up in [a large city], went to like, Black schools. He comes in and he dresses and talks like he came from [a large city] and had a bunch of Black friends. Now what are we gonna say about him? Is he Blacker than me? Well no, because he’s White. Duh.
Specifically in like, orchestra settings, it wasn’t so different for me because even in my high school, most of the orchestra kids were White students...It had been that way most of my life growing up in orchestra and music situations, so I was pretty used to that...In most of my [teacher education] classes I’ve still been one of the only, or the only Black student in the class...So, I definitely was more aware of my being one of the only, or the only Black person in those classes.
My first years here [at LMU] I was a lot more shy in my classes. I think I felt like I, I drew enough attention to myself just because, just being, looking different, being the only Black person in the class. I felt like - I don’t know if this is exactly true or just my own paranoia - but I remember feeling like, “Oh, I am drawing enough attention to myself by just being here.” So, I was a lot more, um, hesitant to speak in those classes...Whenever I was in a context where it seems like people didn’t think I was going to do as well as the people around me, um, that’s when I shied away and that was when I was less willing to participate and be more outspoken about my thoughts and things like that.
I’ve gotten used to being the minority, and being accustomed to not seeing many dark faces. So, coming here to [LMU] was nothing new...I went to a White Catholic school when I was like, I don’t know five years old and that’s like, all I’ve known my entire life. Like, walking into a classroom full of White people with a White teacher is just like, “Well, here we are again.”...I walk into the band room first day of Symphony Band, “There’s no Black people in here. OK, cool. [Pause] The usual.”
Danielle

It wasn’t necessarily difficult to see myself as a teacher, it was just difficult for me to see where I would end up teaching... I had a hard time envisioning what kinds of people I would be teaching... I always like, thought it was easier to envision... a White teacher in a predominantly Black school or non-White school, and it was much harder to think of a Black teacher in a mostly White school... Think of all the like, teacher hero movies... Those are all White teachers in Black contexts, or minority contexts. That’s just like, just what we see. That’s sort of the unspoken expectation.
Danielle

I don’t necessarily carry that [Black music teacher] baggage for myself. ‘Cause I mean, there’s all sorts of expectations that you’re gonna teach a certain style of music, or you’re gonna communicate with the kids in a certain way, or you’re gonna dress in a certain way…I mean, it’s true that I’m gonna be a teacher and I’m gonna be Black and I’m gonna be a woman and you know, all those things, but I’m not necessarily gonna be a “Black female teacher” ‘cause…I feel like once I put all of those things together, I have a big suitcase that I have to pick up of baggage that I have to carry with me everywhere. Um, so, I don’t necessarily think of myself in that way…I feel like “music teacher” is enough.
Eddie

I don’t see myself as a Black band director... We gotta move to a point where that doesn’t matter. You know what I’m saying? Where I’m not the Black band director. Where it’s like, that’s not even a thing. I don’t see myself as a Black band director. And hopefully, my students and no one else will see – I mean, I know that’s not going to be the case... I don’t wanna, you know, make it like, “I’m the Black band director, so let’s make a Black person club about it.” ‘Cause that’s, that’s not what it’s about. Right? I feel like that’s even more [of] a problem. The point is to not have a Black people club at all.
Danielle

When I first came in to college, I just wanted to teach in a urban setting and student teach in a urban setting...I think I just could relate to it...Some of it might have been that since I was a Black musician I felt like I needed to teach in a Black environment. I think at the time, I thought that’s what would have made the most sense for me. I don't necessarily think that now. I could see myself teaching almost anywhere...I don’t necessarily see a difference in the kids, in their need for good role models and their need for music ed[ucation]...There’s just as many suburban White kids in need as there are poor Black kids in need.
Eddie

It’s not that I wouldn’t want to [teach in an urban school], you know? It’s just…it’s always nicer to be in some place nice. If I could recreate [LMU] at a high school, that’s what I would do...If it were mostly Black kids, that’d be awesome. I don’t know, same awesome it would be if it were mostly White kids. Not really a difference. I mean, I wouldn’t teach any differently.
Interviewer: Do you think you’re better prepared to teach music classes with a high population of minority students compared to your colleagues?

Eddie: I would say yes, because our skin is uh, brown...

Danielle: Yeah.

Eddie: Right?

Danielle: Definitely, it would be easier for us to earn the trust points with the kids.

Eddie: Exactly...
Eddie: But after that, it’s like, I mean – Really, what I’ve, what I’ve learned in my brief career as a music educator is that I mean, it’s not really about your skin – I mean, skin color, blah. You know? I mean, if you show that you care about the students, then regardless of whether you’re White, or Black, or Asian, or whatever, like, “Whoever this person is, he cares about me,” You know what I’m saying? So, they’re much more willing to, to hear what you have to say, to go with you, you know? But as far as like, you know, walking into an all-Black classroom, I mean, I’d probably get more like, “OK, I’ll listen to this guy,” than you know, the White guy sitting next to me.
Danielle: I agree. I mean, you [Eddie] might have an easier time at the beginning, but you still have to be a skilled teacher and know how to connect to those kids like, in that specific context in order to keep ‘em engaged. So, I don’t think it’s any different from any other teacher. You [interviewer] would probably have a harder time maybe initiating in a class like that, but in the long run, we’d probably have the same odds. If I’m a crappy teacher, I’m gonna have a crappy year.
Interviewer: Some people make arguments about living in a post-racial society where we should all be colorblind, and that kind of stuff. I’m wondering if you two think that race matters. Does race still mean something?

Danielle: I think it’s, it’s too far of a swing in the other direction to say that, that race is totally irrelevant. ‘Cause I mean, you know, it does mean something that me and [Eddie] look different from almost every other music ed[ucation] major at this school.
Eddie: I think it’ll stop meaning something when we stop making it mean something. . . I feel like that’s, that’s far off. And I honestly don’t think that’s ever gonna happen because, [Danielle: Right] we’re not colorblind... When there stops being a negative connotation with being Black, then there will stop being like, then it will stop meaning as much when Black people are successful at things that [Danielle: Right] you know, are predominantly White.


Eddie: ...clearly we’re not there yet.
Discussion

• Race matters

• Race is not universal, race is not binary

• Varying ways to experience minority status

• Racial Identity/Teacher Identity

• Familiarity vs. Similarity
Racial identity is complex, flexible, and contextual.

Racial minority status can affect students’ academic experiences in different ways.

Race can have a complicated relationship to teacher identity.
Thank you!

Adam J. Kruse
Michigan State University
kruseaj@gmail.com