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# Teaching Music to Immigrant and Refugee Students in American Music Classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore what music teachers of refugee and immigrant students in the Western New York area are doing to include this population within their music classrooms. This is a qualitative multiple case study, with the purpose of finding out as much information possible from three participants who teach music to immigrant and refugee students. The three participants teach across different musical contexts, including middle school general music in an urban setting, elementary general music in a suburban setting, and elementary through high school strings in an afterschool urban setting. This study sought to find similarities between methods that these music educators used within the classroom, with the purpose of informing instruction for other music educators who teach immigrant and refugee students.

*Keywords: music education, immigrant, refugee*

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo

Teaching Music to Immigrant and Refugee Students in American Music Classrooms

A Thesis in Music Education

by

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of the Requirements  
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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Within my first few years of music teaching, I have had the pleasure of working with many immigrant and refugee students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade, in a urban general music setting. As I finish my second year of teaching, I find this topic to be essential to developing teaching practices that are beneficial to all students. Most of these students require intensive English as a New Language (ENL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) services during their transition into the United States. This period of change can be very difficult for children, and often times they feel isolated from their peers (Marsh, 2012). I hoped to look into this as a research topic to see how I can best assist students during this time of their lives, and how I can better communicate with them. Within music education, we have the opportunity to communicate without words. With this great asset, students who do not speak the same language as anyone else in the room can still take away important lessons, that they can carry through into other classes.

It is nearly impossible to watch the news in current times without hearing about the refugee crisis. Millions of people are trying to seek refuge and asylum, due to political unrest and war. These issues are affecting many countries in Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and the United States. Unfortunately, many of the people who are being forced out of their homeland are children. More than half of the world's displaced population is under the age of eighteen (Marsh, 2012). Many of these children have been through traumatic situations, and are often put into another country abruptly, often times one in which they know nothing about. With this comes behavior problems, feelings of isolation, a lingual disconnect, as well as a feeling of inadequacy.

Although music may not have been a formal subject that these students previously took in their home country, it can serve as an aid in the transition of the student, assistance with literacy, a means of communication, and emotional support (Baker & Jones, 2007). It may also provide a way for students to keep the music and culture from their home country alive (Jin, 2016).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore what music teachers of refugee students are doing to include immigrant and refugee children in music classrooms. With students who have faced great trauma in their lives, music may be the safe place that they seek. This multiple case study looks into the techniques that music educators in the field are utilizing with refugee and immigrant populations.

1. What are the experiences of music teachers who interact with immigrant and refugee children in their music classroom?
2. What can teachers who interact with immigrant and refugee children do to create culturally responsive music environments for their students?
3. What can teachers who interact with immigrant and refugee children share with other teachers?

### **Definitions**

**Formal Music Learning:** Education that occurs within an organized and structured environment, that is explicitly designated as having goals or standards to achieve. (Vitale, 2011) .

**Immigrant:** A person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence. (Immigrant, 2018).

**Refugee:** A person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution.

(Refugee, 2018).

Although these terms are often used interchangeably, they mean very different things. A refugee does not leave by choice, but because danger has been presented. An immigrant was able to leave by choice. This will be distinguished throughout the study.

The following definition was retrieved from the Brown University website:

**Culturally Responsive Teaching:** A pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings,1994).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### Challenges of Immigrant and Refugee Students

Immigrant and refugee students who are immersed in the American education system face many challenges. Some of those issues include many problems that newly arrived children face, including depression, difficulties with concentration, disruptive behavior, learning difficulties, and lack of self-esteem (Baker & Jones, 2007). Students who cannot speak English are often seen as having a deficit, and are thought to have less of an ability to seek educational goals (Frimberger, 2016). This can lead to lowered self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy. Children that have migrated to a new country do not just have difficulties with school and the new language: they also often times have issues with peer relationships, difficulty with pleasing family culture and following the new culture they are a part of, perceived racism, and demoralization (Henderson, Cain, Istvandy, & Lakhani, 2017). All of these struggles can affect a student's ability succeed in an academic setting.

When the families of refugee and immigrant children suffer, the children can suffer in school as a result. Incoming refugee and asylum seekers and their families often have trouble with employment/educational barriers, medical challenges, language barriers, social services and legal challenges (Wiseman & O'Gorman, 2017). Many refugee and immigrant children have had an interrupted education as a result of those struggles (Crawford, 2016). Due to the difficulty it takes to get accepted into a new country, students may have been out of school for years. The process of being accepted into a new country is often time consuming, dependent on the new host countries policies regarding migration and the rate in which other families are trying to migrate. The ability to fund their trip to a new country may also hinder a families' migration

process. Although refugee students may lack in some areas of our idea of western education, they exceed in other areas above grade level (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Their strengths need to be considered just as much as their weaknesses. For some students, their strength may be music, if not an area where they can simply express themselves.

### **Methods for Teaching Immigrant and Refugee Students**

Some pedagogical approaches have already been researched regarding methods to teach immigrant and refugee students. These methods include ways to communicate with students and techniques to incorporate cultural identity into instruction. Students have the ability to compose and create musical ideas without words, which can be their way to first communicate with peers and teachers. (Howell, 2011). Students can feel more comfortable when different musical elements are given already, and they can choose which ones to alter. For example, some students may feel more comfortable when asked to compose a melody using only the notes C4, D4, E4, F4 and G4, using only quarter notes and quarter rests in 4/4 time. This may be more comfortable to them than asking a student to just simple “compose a melody” with unlimited options at first, because it offers some key guidelines to experiment within. This avoids any uncertainty if they are not completing the assignment as expected. This provides a good amount of guidance and freedom for students to feel comfortable with creating music in a formal setting for the first time. As time goes on, composing music as a group can also be therapeutic, as students are creating something together, regardless of country of origin or language. This can relieve feelings of isolation and create a sense of community (Howell, 2011).

A public high school in Australia, which is also a country with a high refugee population, has implemented the program Home of Expressive Arts in Learning (HEAL) (Quinlan, Schweitzer, Khawaja, & Griffin, 2016). This program portrays music education as not only an

educational service, but a mental and emotional aide as well. HEAL combines properties of music therapy and art therapy to assist immigrant and refugee students in their time of transitioning to a new home. They have found that this model has alleviated the stressors that these students have faced, and helped them to better cope with their personal struggles. With support and supplemental assistance from all areas of a refugee or immigrant student's education, students are much more likely to succeed.

The Refugee Action Support (RAS) program is an interventional tool that is used to promote literacy in refugee high school students in Australia. (Naidoo, 2011). RAS believes that literacy should be available to anyone, regardless of previous education and personal circumstance. This program trains volunteers to go into high schools and assist students on a one-on-one basis with literacy acquisition skills. These services may not be already provided by the school based on funding, which is a great asset for students who need more assistance with literacy. This allows students to learn the English language at a beginning level, before being placed into a mainstream music classroom. It has been found to increase literacy in schools where it has been implemented, and has increased the success of students that are later placed in mainstream classrooms. This model can be replicated in other subject areas as well, as so many classes are constructed in a way that depends on the students' literacy. Students may need one-on-one assistance to be comfortable in a full class.

### **Music Educator Perspectives on Teaching Refugee and Immigrant Students**

In the Broeske-Danielsen study (2007), a music community trip that Norwegian teachers take to a Palestinian refugee camp in South Lebanon is reflected upon. Student teachers go on this trip to inform their instruction with working with migrant populations. At the end of the program, the students use a variety of instruments and music technology to create a concert for

the camp. This model allows music educators to get hands-on experience with this population, before even reaching the field. It is important for educators to seek out what types of music are relevant in cultures, because the stereotypes regarding world music are often not true. (Jin, 2016). Being misinformed about the type of music a student is interested in could be a detriment in the educator's ability to connect with the student.

### **Benefits of Formal Music Education for Immigrant and Refugee Students**

The benefits of formal music education on students that have been through traumatic experiences have such a positive effect on their mental health and social wellbeing (Frankenberg, Fries, Friedrich, Roden, Kreutz, & Bongard, 2016). Children and teenagers feel very strongly about the music that they choose to listen to. Students form a relationship in some respects with the music they consume, and that relationship is a safe one that they are able to rely on (Cheong-Clinch, 2009). Many refugee and immigrant students may lack these types of relationships with their environment. Music classes can expand upon this feeling of safety. A safe formal music environment is an essential way for students to explore these relationships and create new musical connections that they can relate to and build upon.

Younger children can also reap the benefits of music when in a new country. Children often bring "playground" games from their home country, and teach them to other students during free time (Marsh, 2016). This brings a sense of belonging, since students feel that they are contributing to their peers. Musical games are a great way to give younger students the opportunity to make friends. Playing in a musical way allows children to feel a sense of social synchrony, when all they knew before was uncertainty (Marsh, 2016). Music is widespread among all human societies, it acts as an effective mean of emotional regulation, and music learning can transfer to general cognitive and emotional development (Frankenberg, Fries,

Friedrich, Roden, Kreutz, & Bongard, 2016). Due to the versatility and internationally widespread importance of music, it is the perfect subject to relate to and understand students from different cultures and countries.

“When teachers play music that corresponds with the geographical and cultural backgrounds of a diverse group of students, those students have often been assumed to feel included or culturally recognized” (Karlsen, 2013). Allowing all students to engage in diverse music allows for the building of a culturally responsive classroom, where students become understanding and accepting of cultures that are not their own. When a teacher gets to know the music of a student’s culture, they get to understand where the student comes from and build a bond of respect with the student. This also assists in the creation of a culturally responsive classroom, which has been found to benefit ethnically diverse classrooms (Gay, 2002). Geneva Gay has said, “The academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters.” Students can often times relate more to music from their home countries, and what is familiar to them feels safe to them. Creating a classroom that is accepting of all of the students’ cultural backgrounds is essential to create a safe and effective music classroom. Music can be a class where students feel that they are being heard and understood, because the music of their culture is being recognized as equal to the music of the culture and the country that they are in. Since music is a part of every culture, it should be possible to find repertoire from any country that a student is from. It also would be possible to ask students what songs they know from their homeland.

Language acquisition can be heightened from a formal music education for ENL and ESL students. In a study conducted by Patscheke, Dege and Schwarzer (2016), a significant positive effect of phonological skills was found for immigrant children placed in music classes, compared

to those placed in the control group of gym classes. Since musical training and language share neural responses and use similar information processing, there is thought to be a strong connection between these two skills. Music can also be a stimulating break in the middle of a challenging day for these students, where students feel they are not actively focusing on learning a new language, although they are still building these skills. It allows them to get a break from trying to understand the new information in a new language, and offers a different way to process all of the new information (Skidmore, 2016).

### **Social Responsibility of Music Educators**

All of the students that educators teach are diverse and different in their own ways. These differences compromise who these students are, as well as the challenges they may face. Music education is often times connected with social justice, since music is interconnected with other aspects of life (Jorgensen, 2007). Having a want for social justice for all of our students helps them to feel understood and cared for. It allows them to focus on their learning when they have trusted adults around them.

Music educators are also responsible for incorporating music from around the world into their classroom, so students can become familiar with musical aspects of different cultures. Just as ethnomusicologists study the music of other cultures, when teachers include other cultures in the classroom, students receive a widened perspective on the world around them.

“Ethnomusicologists have been committed to the study of music in culture and as culture, even as they gear their teaching, principally on university faculties, to culture-specific and cross-cultural comparative systems of musical thoughts and behaviors. Music educators are intent on seeking best practice for the development of musical skills and understandings of specific musical repertoires and genres, while also leading their K-12 students to the meta-view of the

phenomenon of music in the larger world” (Campbell, 2003).

## **Chapter III**

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This is a qualitative multiple case study. A case study is research that involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). In this research, the bounded system is teaching music to immigrant and refugee students in Western New York. A collective, or multiple case study is used in this research to gain varying perspectives from different settings (suburban and urban) (Creswell, 2007). The reasoning for choosing this type of study is to gain as much information possible from practicing educators on the techniques and methods they use to teach immigrant and refugee students, without any constraints on possible answers. To gain varying perspectives in this research study, urban and suburban contexts were researched, as were formal and informal music teaching contexts. With the flexibility gained through open-ended questions, unfiltered insight into these issues are able to be recorded as part of the research. The detail with the responses from participants could not have been attained through other research methods, such as through surveys or multiple-choice responses.

The goal was to gain information on teaching practices that work within the field, find similarities of techniques used within urban and suburban settings, and to inform instruction for other music educators that teach similar populations. The data was then analyzed and similar answers between all teaching contexts were determined, so the most common similarities can be applied across teaching contexts. With a case study and guided interview questions, the participants can freely speak about the subject, and share their own experiences without needing to fit certain criteria.

## Participants

Three music educators (N=3) were selected for this study through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher “to select individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, 125). The teaching contexts of the participants varied across suburban and urban settings, which is why it was determined that purposeful sampling would be ideal. For this study, it was deemed important that both urban and suburban contexts were studied, to see if teaching practices of this population varied over contexts. All of the educators chosen have high rates of immigrant and refugee populations, and have experiences of incorporating music into students’ lives that have just entered United States within the past year. Educators were observed, but the children were not interviewed or studied.

Upon approval from the International Review Board, two music teachers were invited to participate in this research through an email invitation. As a practicing music teacher with refugee and immigrant students, the researcher also served as a research participant (Creswell, 2007). The researcher sent an email as an initial contact with the participants, and gauged their interest in participating in the study. A date and time was set to conduct the observation and interview.

In Case Study One, Kate<sup>1</sup>, has 29 years of experience with teaching within a school setting, and currently teaches Pre-K through 5th grade in a suburban school. She has been in this current placement for the last 17 years. This participant has immigrant and refugee students within every grade level that she teaches, as well as in nearly every one of her classes.

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<sup>1</sup> To maintain anonymity, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym.

In Case Study Two, Jessica, has been teaching private string lessons professionally for 15 years, and has been teaching at her current organization for 3.5 years. Nearly every student that this participant teaches in a newly arrived immigrant or refugee, as this is her organization's mission statement. Jessica teaches students in a large after school program at an urban public school with a high immigrant and refugee population.

In Case Study Three, the researcher Sarah, is a new teacher, with two years teaching experience in urban settings. In particular, she has had the opportunity to work with immigrant and refugee children mostly within the 2017-2018 school year. She has one class in each grade, out of three classes, that consist of ENL and ESL students, who are often newly arrived immigrants and refugees into the United States. The researcher teaches kindergarten and middle school general music.

## **Procedure**

The participants were first observed teaching a class by the researcher, so the researcher could gain an understanding of the context of the classroom. The observation was of a typical class for the participant, in the setting that they normally teach in. The researcher tried to disturb the environment as little as possible, to get an accurate understanding for how the class functions. The observations varied from general music to string lessons, in accordance with the participants' typical class schedule. Specific notes were made about the physical environment and procedures during the class time. This was audio recorded through a laptop computer, with the permission of the participant and school administration, to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions.

The participants were then interviewed about their teaching contexts using the one-on-one interview method. This method allows for participants to voice their opinions and thoughts in a conversational setting (Creswell, 2007, 133). An interview protocol with all of the open-ended interview questions were provided to participants.

Participants were asked demographic questions about their school setting, including:

1. What is the minority population at your school?
2. What is the percentage of low-income students that attend your school?
3. What is the refugee and immigrant population percentage at your school?
4. What country/region do most of your refugee and immigrant students come from?
5. How many years have you been teaching?

After knowledge is gained on the classroom setting and procedures, more in-depth questions were delved into regarding the participants' specific practices. With permission, these interviews were audio recorded using a laptop, to ensure that transcriptions were as accurate as possible.

Questions that these participants were asked included:

1. Why do you believe that music education is important to refugee and immigrant populations?
2. What have you experienced and learned from working with immigrant and refugee populations?
3. What are the greatest challenges that you have faced while teaching music to immigrant and refugee populations?

4. What are the potential outcomes and goals of music education for refugee and immigrant students?
5. How do you create a culturally responsive music classroom?
6. How do you make students from all cultural backgrounds feel comfortable in an American music setting?
7. What are some techniques that you use to communicate musically with students who do not speak the same language as you?
8. What is some advice that you can share with other music teachers who teach this population?
9. What other information from personal experiences do you have to offer that would be beneficial to this research?

### **Data Analysis**

Classroom observation and interview audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions of the interviews include everything that was said between the researcher and the participants, including any significant changes or events that had happened within the space of the interviews. The researcher completed a self-interview prior to interviewing the other participants, which was taken into account during the data analysis.

Transcriptions were analyzed using a grounded theory data analysis procedure. The procedure consists of three phases; the open coding phase, the axial coding phase, and the selective coding phase. In the open coding phase, the text is examined for categories of information. These categories are broken down into subcategories which are called properties. A single category is looked into as the main point of interest for the research. In the axial coding phase, connections between categories are made, to explain the central theme. In the selective

coding phase, statements that interrelate the categories are created (Creswell, 2007, 160). Due to the qualitative nature of this study and the open-ended questions that participants were asked, the researcher was not looking for a single answer. All variants of answers to questions were accepted as important and valid information.

These findings were then summarized and concluded in a way that is concise and clear for other educators to understand and implement within their own classrooms and teaching contexts. Differing answers were also noted, and it are be discussed later on in this study if these differences can be attributed to geographical settings. It is intended that other educators, within music and other subject areas, will be able to gain insight on the effective ways to teach immigrant and refugee students.

The research was presented to the participants, so that they could gain teaching practices from the other researchers involved in the study. This research can be used by music educators to reflect on their practices, and to contemplate and implement practices that may better suit their students.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

While analyzing the data, several themes emerged from the three case studies. Although the participants varied across teaching contexts, some techniques that music educators found important were valued among all participants. The themes were as follows:

1. Viewing music as universal
2. Using physical cues and gestures in teaching
3. Selecting culturally vast repertoire
4. Creating a Safe Classroom Environment with a Mutual Respect for All Cultures

These themes revolve around the culture within the classroom, as well as techniques that are beneficial for immigrant and refugee students.

#### Viewing Music as Universal

The participants agreed that one of the greatest attributes of music is that it is universal, which makes it a key component in the education of immigrant and refugee students. Kate mentioned that kids have a natural response to music, regardless of where it originates from. A student does not need to speak a certain language to feel an emotion from listening to a piece of music. Participant one stated, “they always say that music is the universal language and I think that’s because every culture has their own music traditions and their own music language. And I think kids just naturally respond to music no matter what culture it comes from, so I like to do a lot of music from around the world and I like to kind of foster a global community within my classroom because I have kids from everywhere.” Jessica mentioned a particular scenario that they were able to witness which demonstrates this. Jessica accounts for a moment when a child

heard a Brahms's movement, and was able to identify that it made him think of love. Even though the child was shy and did not fully acquire the English language yet at this point, he was able to gather and verbalize a sound emotion and feeling of what he thought of in the piece of music. In the self-interview, the researcher also mentions music as being universal, in the sense that nearly all cultures have music for some purpose within their society. Music can be found anywhere, which makes it accessible to all students, regardless of a formal musical background. Sarah also commented on the universal quality of music, and that all students can make connections to music, regardless of where they are from.

### **Using Physical Cues and Gestures in Teaching**

It was unanimous across case studies that using gestures and physical cues is key with teaching immigrant and refugee students. So much of teaching music is physical, which allows this ideology to fit perfectly within the framework of music education. When teaching instruments, much of what is taught can be physically demonstrated on an instrument, and vocal music can be taught through demonstration through vocal technique. Some concepts in music education can be taught through lectures, but it is often more productive to teach these concepts through showing, and practicing.

Kate explains that reassuring smiles often works within their classroom, and that students are often able to mirror techniques that she is showing them. Small gestures, like a smile to let the student know they are doing something correctly, can mean a lot to that student and give them confidence in their abilities. Since music is such a skill-based subject, mirroring skills would be beneficial to native English speakers in the classroom as well, as opposed to more lecture-based lesson structures.

Jessica describes how note reading is not originally taught in their music classes, due to this very reason. Jessica's music classes are based primarily on ear training, where students only need to know a limited amount of numbers and letters in the English language. This takes the confusion out of trying to interpret music and English writing from a piece of paper, and allows students to hear the note names in their head while they are playing. In terms of using the English language versus as opposed to demonstrating, Jessica has said, "As I've said a couple of times, it's a physical thing that we are doing so even if the words, like to like 'hold a bow' for example, is quite complicated. If we say too much, 'bend your thumb' or 'curl your pinky' or 'do this' it's easier to just have an assistant go and kind of rearrange so we use a lot of, you know, touch, to help. To illustrate a point." Jessica makes the point that often words get in the way of instruction that has the potential to be physical.

Jessica also mentions that too many words can get in the way of what the teacher is asking the student to do. Many times, instead of explaining how a student needs to change their hand position on a bow, the participant rearranges the student's fingers to an accurate position. With this technique, students have the accurate position, and they are able to commit the feeling of a proper bow hold to memory. Sarah described in the self-interview that pointing motions, to signify whose turn it is to perform within a song or exercise, are a natural way to keep the flow of an exercise going without words that may confuse students. Sarah also mentioned the use of solfege hand signs as a way to signify pitch, without using written music. Physical cues, eye contact, and descriptive facial expressions can all be used in place of the English language when teaching certain lessons within music. This should be used to the students advantage, and allows ENL and ESL students to learn on an equal playing field as native English-speaking students.

## Selecting Culturally Vast Repertoire

Music educators have the capability to ensure that all student feel represented while selecting repertoire for the classroom and concerts. There is a considerable amount of repertoire of various genres from many different countries, although it may take some research. Kate, Jessica and the Sarah teach students at different levels and within different contexts, which allows for a multi-dimensional perspective.

Kate, who teaches general music at an exclusively elementary level, utilizes “hello songs” with her students’ native languages as a constant way to reinforce culture within music class. This exercise allows native English speakers to get to know newly arrived immigrant and refugee students on a deeper level, and allows the immigrant and refugee students to feel that they are understood and accepted by their classmates. Kate also incorporates music into the lesson from the cultures of their students. In particular, Kate has many students from Asia. Their classes spend some time focusing on the Chinese New Year as a way to represent the Chinese students. Kate had mentioned that finding repertoire that is level-appropriate for an elementary level can be challenging. Asking these students for recommendations of music they listen to, that originates from their home country, may allow for a simpler way to acquire ethnic songs.

Although finding repertoire from various countries may be difficult, Kate commented on how they find these resources; “I have had to research a lot of music from around the world because there’s no cookie cutter music education plan that uses music from everywhere, so there’s maybe a Hebrew song here and you know, some of the tradition folk music that were used to within our own American culture, but to get those kids who are from other regions that are not typical of most populations, you really have to just go online and look up their music, I’ve sometimes had the parents email me links to things that they think will be appropriate.”

Sarah's self-interview notes that asking students for repertoire that is meaningful to them can often build relationships with the students, while also gaining information on world music for the classroom. Sarah stated in the self-interview, "In middle school general music, I expose the students to music from all cultures, as well as American Folk music. Students are able to compare and contrast the styles, and realize that there needs to be a respect for all types of music. Students are expected to be respectful of all cultures, and that in turn, their peers respect them as well. I try to listen and take student suggestions as much as I can and incorporate these into class and performances."

Jessica teaches elementary and secondary string instruments, in an ensemble setting. Jessica has noted that popular melodies in American culture, like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" have little to no significance to students who did not grow up in an English-speaking country. Simple melodies from a students' home country may have much more significance, and the community response can be much greater from this kind of repertoire. Jessica mentions that the reason they put on these public performances is for the community, so it is important to know the audience as well as the performers. Jessica also mentions the importance of music that excites the students. For example, an immigrant or refugee student may still be able to recognize the theme song for *Star Wars*, since *Star Wars* has built a global reputation and name. Students from all countries may be able to appreciate this melody, and enjoy practicing and playing that piece.

### **Creating a Safe Classroom Environment with a Mutual Respect for All Cultures**

For many educators, this seems like it would be common sense to incorporate into a classroom. However, it takes dedication and consistency to create a learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves, and where all students understand that mutual respect for culture is vital and nonnegotiable. Sarah's self-interview reflects this importance through the

idea that often native English-speaking students can feel uncomfortable in an environment where they are asked to openly express themselves in front of their peers, and that this feeling may be intensified for immigrant and refugee students who are unsure of their new surroundings. With a consistently positive environment that allows students to make mistakes, students feel more comfortable to express themselves musically.

In Case Study One, Kate brings up the importance of teaching cultural acceptance, even in classes without immigrant and refugee students. All students can benefit from learning about other cultures, and from viewing them as equally important to their own. Kate mentions that incorporating stories that go along with the music from other cultures, as well as facts about other parts of the world, help students to build these connections to their own culture. By fostering a community of sensitivity and acceptance of all cultural music, a community is established within the classroom of respect. This creates a norm, and students understand the importance of staying within this, as it benefits everyone involved. Kate mentions, “I would say, if you are teaching all students to show kindness and respect for all cultures, that just travels beyond boundaries. Just to make sure everyone has that respect for cultural traditions, celebrations. Incorporating stories in music from all over. Even if you have a homogeneous class of all the same- you should be doing that anyway. I mean, that’s just something that everyone should be doing, no matter what.”

In Jessica’s teaching context, they create a safe environment through small group lessons, where students feel comfortable to make errors, before they join the large ensemble. This allows the students to experiment with learning the repertoire in a safe environment. As Jessica mentions, learning something new, as a new instrument, puts a student in a very vulnerable situation. Thus, it is important that they feel they can make errors without feeling judged for

doing so. Jessica details the importance of incorporating folk music from other cultures. Students can understand that they are performing music because it holds meaning to other musicians within their ensemble, just as the ensemble learned music that was culturally significant to them. This basis of mutual respect allows musicians to thrive within their ensembles.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The findings of this research is similar to the findings of some of the research within the literature review, however, it seems to focus more on techniques and ways to inform instruction of immigrant and refugee children. This is due to the structure of the research, as it focuses on the music educators, rather than solely on the immigrant and refugee students. This research has honed in on techniques and important aspects of what a culturally diverse music classroom should look like, so all students are able to succeed. In particular, the physical cues and gestures can be used by other music educators to better assist students that do not speak English. All classrooms, even classrooms with little to no immigrant and refugee students can benefit from a culturally responsive environment.

It has been found in some of the reviewed literature that immigrant and refugee children sometimes struggle with behavior difficulties, due to their new setting (Baker & Jones, 2007). In the case study conducted with Kate, they have observed the opposite, stating, “Actually, most of my ENL kids are the ones who are the best behaved. I think because they want to fit in, they will mimic what the other children are doing in most cases and try to fit in.”

Research within the literature review has noted that students have the ability to communicate without words, and are able to communicate musically in a way that anyone present can understand (Howell, 2011). Within the case studies, the participants found this as well. As Jessica mentioned, words often get in the way of what they are trying to accomplish within a rehearsal.

As Karlsen was previously noted for saying, “When teachers play music that corresponds with the geographical and cultural backgrounds of a diverse group of students, those students

have often been assumed to feel included or culturally recognized”. All of the participants found this to be true and spoke of this within their interviews, as incorporating world music benefitted every student within the classroom, regardless of cultural background.

### **Implications for the Field**

This series of case studies was able to identify similar practices, across very different teaching contexts. As a step in teaching immigrant and refugee students as they newly arrive to classrooms in the United States, it can be noted that the participants in this study chose to not use written notation as their primary way of teaching music, across all age groups. Many of the themes found within this research have also been discussed in similar studies, which intensifies the importance of the techniques used for music educators.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, it seems to be common sense that creating a safe learning environment is essential to teaching effectively. However, it can be challenging to incorporate music from all types of cultures, while also preparing students for concerts and events, and staying within line of a curriculum and learning standards. Students can gain knowledge, acceptance, and understanding for those around them when different cultures are represented within a music lesson. It may take some effort to locate some ethnic music, but students definitely benefit from this in a way that is only possible through world music.

### **Limitations of Study**

This research did not include any study of the students themselves, or their response to the way they were learning the music. The only responses were those that could be gauged through observation, and through what the participants noticed in their instruction. Another limitation of the study involves the amount of time that participants were observed. To keep all

of the data conditions as similar as possible, the researcher only observed 45 minute classes of both of the participants. There were more classes to be viewed with both participants, with different grade levels.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The series of case studies conducted focused mostly on teaching music by ear, and the appreciation of music. This research did not delve into techniques for teaching immigrant and refugee students how to read written music, which would be a plausible next step in this progression. With written music, less physical cues and mirroring can be used to teaching these concepts. It would be beneficial to see the techniques of teaching where written notation is essential for student understanding.

Research that records a series of student songs, as they recall from their home countries, would also be beneficial to music educators and their students. Many countries have strong aural traditions, where songs are passed down, but not recorded and available on the internet. This would allow music educators access to another resource for discovering musical repertoire from other countries. More students would be able to be represented from countries that have music that is difficult to research. This research would be even more interesting if translations were made available as well, so the purpose and intent of the song could be discussed.

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### Case Study One: Observation of Kate

Students come into the room and quietly sit on their assigned letters and rows.

Teacher picks one student to get a thunder tube.

Which students are here today? Ignores talking by students.

“Put the zero on your head”

Explanation of what will be happening today.

“Hands Up, Hands Down” hello song. Students practice different poses.

Teacher demonstrates what movements she wants to see from students. Students observe and look to other students to see what she should be doing. Student picks up on cues like “stop” as it is in beat with the song.

Transition with thunder tube. Point to teacher.

“Dishes and Wishes” : Gives out triangles to students who are sitting quietly and were participating in the chant.

What would your wish be for the B section? Our song is like a sandwich, with B in the middle.

Transition with the thunder tube. Point to teacher.

Watch what it looks like when I think this rhythm in my head.

What are the names of the notes? Think them in your head, then put the du days with clapping.

ENL student watches other students intently.

“We feel rests, but we don’t hear them”

Who makes a lot of mistakes? It’s okay to make mistakes here.

“I hope I get a Letter”

Students perform whatever rhythm was on the letter for the class on the drum. The student has to perform it for the class and then the other students guess that rhythm.

Line up by row colors to end class.

### Case Study One: Kate's Interview

RESEARCHER:

Why do you believe music education is important to refugee and immigrant populations?

KATE:

Well, they always say that music is the universal language and I think that's because every culture has their own music traditions and their own music language. And I think kids just naturally respond to music no matter what culture it comes from, so I like to do a lot of music from around the world and I like to kind of foster a global community within my classroom because I have kids from everywhere. So one of the things I love to do is incorporate, like, hello songs that use the word 'hello' but in every language we can come up with and have the kids put input into that so that their language is represented. Um. and it just helps them to feel included right away.

RESEARCHER:

Great.

KATE:

And I just do that several times throughout the year. Especially if you have a new kiddo that is just brand new to the building.

RESEARCHER:

That makes sense.

KATE:

So it just, kind of, right away helps them see that this is, you know, that every culture is important.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah.

KATE:

And we try to include as many as possible.

RESEARCHER:

How- um. What is the greatest population of immigrant and refugee students that you currently have?

KATE:

I should check the ENL report but I believe it's somewhere around a quarter-

RESEARCHER:

Wow.

KATE:

Of our student body. Yeah, so it's pretty- and some classes are more heavily ENL than others. Some teachers request ENL classes so they'll have mostly ENL kids and other times it's not necessarily the teacher wouldn't request it, but it's just there's not as many for whatever reason, but there is always at least one or two in every class.

RESEARCHER :

What do you find to be the, um, greatest population of different languages that are spoken among your students currently?

KATE:

Um, it' so diverse. I don't even know that there is one particular language that's prevalent.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah.

KATE:

It's really from all over. WE have a lot of Chinese students.

RESEARCHER:

Uh-huh.

KATE:

But they don't stay long. They usually come and go. Um. Those kids are mostly here because their parents are in the UB faculty and so, I don't know, for whatever reason they tend to come and go.

RESEARCHER:

That's interesting.

KATE:

And I'm not sure why.

RESEARCHER:

Gotcha.

KATE:

But I try to do a unit in Chinese music here and there.

RESEARCHER:

Great. What have you experienced and learned from working with immigrant and refugee populations?

KATE:

I have had to research a lot of music from around the world because there's no cookie cutter music education plan that uses music from everywhere, so there's maybe a Hebrew song here and a, you know, some of the tradition folk music that were used to within our own American culture, but to get those kids who are from other regions that are not typical of most populations, you really have to just go online and look up their music, get, I've sometime had the parents email me links to things that they think will be appropriate. Um. A lot of times the kids will ask me, 'Do you have music from my country?' It's kind of a challenge. It's not always that you can find something that is easy enough for kids at the elementary level to relate to and it also has to, um, it has to enhance the learning objects overall that you're doing to so.

RESEARCHER:

Okay, great. Sorry, I just had a question and I lost it. Do you find that the kids are very eager to share with you songs from their cultures?

KATE:

Yes.

RESEARCHER:

They are really excited to bring that to you.

KATE:

I think that's very motivational.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah.

KATE:

You can do it. Sometimes I struggle to find enough to capture everyone and i always feel bad if there's a kid, we still haven't done your thing or whatever. It might even take until next year, but we will get it in there.

RESEARCHER:

We will get there. How do you find the other students react to hearing songs that-

KATE:

I think that's the beauty of elementary, that there so open-minded to everything.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah.

KATE:

Like, you can pretty much put anything on their plate and they will try it because they haven't developed their likes and dislikes-

RESEARCHER:

Yeah, that's true.

KATE:

- very much yet so their a little more open than older kids. And you just have to foster the, um, the respect for other cultures.

RESEARCHER:

Sure.

KATE:

Right from the beginning and if they are used to it than it doesn't even ...

RESEARCHER:

Doesn't phase them.

KATE:

Doesn't phase them at all. Because they're used to it.

RESEARCHER:

Great. What are the greatest challenges that you have faced while teaching music to immigrant and refugee populations?

KATE:

I think that, yeah, finding their music. Being able to incorporate it takes a lot of extra time and creativity and also some of the communication skills that are difficult when they are new to this country. Getting to know them despite the language barrier. Those are my biggest challenges I'm guessing.

RESEARCHER:

I find that when I work with some immigrant and refugee populations, that I do have some behavioral issues when it comes to them getting bored during class. How do you combat issues with attention and then acting out?

KATE:

Actually, most of my ENL kids are the ones who are the best behaved. I think because they want to fit in, they will mimic what the other children are doing in most cases and try to fit in. Occasionally, I will get a kid who really is testing the rules and things like that, but I just, be the same. Discipline, structure, as I would have for any kid. And then they finally learn. You know, maybe they'll get to play the instruments if they are good.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah, for sure. What are the potential outcomes and goals of music education for immigrant and refugee students?

KATE:

I actually think. Let's see. I was thinking specifically about that.

RESEARCHER:

I think it's question number four.

KATE:

Oh, yeah. So with all of my students, I have the same objectives. You know, the skills, music literacy, being a sensitive ensemble player for the instruments. Music knowledge and skills may open doors and facilitate further enjoyment of music. So it's nice for them to just have the same skills as every other person.

RESEARCHER:

Definitely.

KATE:

Like I said, it's the universal language. Whatever skills there are learning in this culture will transfer to music of their own culture in one way or another and we're all learning from each other in that way, so.

RESEARCHER:

Great. Awesome. How do you create a culturally responsive music classroom?

KATE:

I like to have the greeting songs that incorporates many languages with the word 'Hello' including many percussion instruments from around the world and different cultures. I do units that feature folk music and folk stories from different cultures and I like to highlight music from celebrations of different cultures such as Kwanzaa or Chinese new year, Hanukkah or Cinco de Mayo or something like that so that we're all celebrating using those different cultures. It just helps them feel at home at any part of the world.

RESEARCHER:

Great. Have you found that students that typically come in from other countries that they have taken formal music classes in their home countries? Or is that uncommon?

KATE:

I think it's uncommon at this age. Because it's just not many kids are taking lessons yet. Until fourth grade. And even if they are, it might just be piano or things that are the traditional instruments. I've noticed sometimes that parents have skills in other instruments that they will tell me about and then I will sometimes have the parents come in and show those different instruments that we don't even have in this culture, and that's real neat.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah, that's great. I'm sure the kids love that. How do you make children from all cultural backgrounds feel comfortable in an American music setting?

KATE:

Just showcasing the many different cultures throughout the year, but also incorporating the traditional American folk music and patriotic songs for all students to learn and we like to compare and contrast those folk styles whenever we can and if it's an older grade level that can have that cognitive discussion about the different styles. But just incorporating all of that.

RESEARCHER:

Great. I find that sometimes with the refugee students that I have, they are so used to, you know, sitting at a desk to learn that getting them up, getting them moving makes them a little bit uncomfortable at first. So that's definitely something that, a struggle that I face with the younger grades and music, at least, because they're out of desks, they're moving around, they're dancing, they're singing, and they're not used to doing that in the structure of school. So that's definitely-

KATE:

Yeah, that's something that I try to foster right from pre-k and kindergarten, so that they're used to that.

RESEARCHER:

Used to moving around.

KATE:

Yeah.

RESEARCHER:

What are some techniques that you use to communicate musically with students who do not speak the same language as you?

KATE:

I used a lot of body language, reassuring smiles, showing, mirroring techniques. Sometimes I will pair a student with another student if they speak the same language in common. If the other student has more. More English language skills. If they're more fluent in English. And then I do have a translation app on my phone which I have had occasionally had to use if there's really a kid that's needing specific instructions. And that's usually a behavior issue thing, like they just need to learn what 'sit down' means. I'll say it in your language. And that sometimes has been helpful.

RESEARCHER:

Good, good. What is some advice you can share with other music teachers who teach this population?

KATE:

Get to know your students as much as possible, one on one. Find out their interests. Take an interest in their culture and their music, and their traditions. And try and incorporate music from other countries whenever it can fit into your curriculum. And to just do that as often as possible. Those relationships are critical with any child from anywhere.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah. Speaking on those relationships, have you ever needed to, for any reason, had to reach out to a parent of a refugee or immigrant child?

KATE:

If I do, it's mostly just to let them know like, there's a chorus concert coming or here's a recorder you could buy. Something like that. A note that would go home and you really want to make sure the parent understands. And in that case, I would take the letter to the ENL teachers and have them translate it for the new family, or whatever else I could think of. Sometimes there's another kids who can facilitate or another teacher that can facilitate. Yeah.

RESEARCHER:

What other information, from personal experiences, do you have to offer that would be beneficial to this research?

KATE:

I would say, if you are teaching all students to show kindness and respect for all cultures, that just travels beyond boundaries. Just to make sure everyone has that respect for cultural traditions, celebrations. Incorporating stories in music from all over. Even if you have a homogeneous class of all the same- you should be doing that anyway. I mean, that's just something that everyone should be doing, no matter what. It'll just help all the American students to learn how to respond, in a good way, to foreign students and it helps the foreign students to feel at home in a classroom.

RESEARCHER:

Definitely. Is there anything else that you'd like to share?

KATE:

Come anytime.

RESEARCHER:

Thank you.

KATE:

And I always appreciate if you have any ideas for different cultural things I can be doing. If you come up with good songs, anything like that, I love hearing what other teachers are doing too.

RESEARCHER:

Great. Well, thank you.

## Case Study Two: Observation of Jessica

Warm ups as a whole group. All students of all levels are together. Students worked on rhythm exercises, and notation.

- All students were engaged by asking everyone to stomp together.
  - Working on precision with rhythm.
- Words like “jello” and “Mississippi” are assigned to rhythms so students can hear how they should sound. After they can speak it correctly, they are asked to clap it without speaking.

Cello Room: 4 students.

- Dry erase boards with staves. Teacher wrote the letter as well as said the letter that she wanted students to draw on the staff.
- Demonstrated what she wanted from students, and asked the same style of questions once they understood the directions.
- Teacher then did this the opposite way, and drew a note and asked students what that note was.
- Teacher used very positive language. With an incorrect answer, she said things like “Close!”
- Increased in difficulty while continuing very clear and visual directions for what she was looking for.
- When one student had finished before everyone else, the teacher asked the student to play what the other students were writing.
- Whenever giving a direction, the teacher visually shows what she is looking for (i.e. when wanting students to use their entire bows, she pointed to the frog and the tip in a sweeping motion.”

Beginning Violin Room: 12 students.

- Plucking on the A and D string. Students come up individually and read the music from a score while other students watch.
  - Students work on plucking the D major scale.
- Checking bow hands. Have students speak “down” and “up” when practicing bowing on their shoulders.

Advanced Violin Room: 5 students.

- Simplified the score of the piece so it was accessible to students.
- Played the excerpt with 1-2 students at a time to ensure everyone was getting it.

Group rehearsal for last 20 minutes:

- More advanced students were placed directly behind the beginning violinists.
- One teacher plays with each group of students.

- The younger students do not have music in front of them, but play from memory and from what they see from their teacher.
- Much of the younger students' parts focus around basic technique.
- Teacher played the melody on the piano to help students with hearing their line.

## Case Study Two: Jessica's Interview

RESEARCHER:

Hello. Thank you for meeting with me today. Why do you believe that music education is important in refugee and immigrant populations?

JESSICA:

You know, I think for us at Buffalo Strings Works ours is that. It is- I guess our hope is that we can provide a place for newcomers to the city and to the country to feel at home and to feel welcome and to feel a part of a community and our way to do that is through music and, you know, it's that cliché, which we certainly use, is that music is a universal language. And, you know, with our children and their families coming from all over the world and learning English for the first time, I think, I hope that it's a refreshing change and a relief that they don't have to have a firm grasp of English in order to learn to play an instrument, you know. What we do can be very physical. The way we teach can be physical. Certainly, we use words, but, you know, we also employ a number of strategies that aren't language based.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah. How did the Idea of Buffalo String Works come about?

JESSICA:

Well, [colleague's name], our executive director, [colleague's name] and I were- we were both playing a concert at Public School 45, international school and we were playing for, at that time, the music teacher, [insert associate's name], her music classes. And we played a Brahms's piano quartet. I remember and we were just really struck in particular by the students there. That they were so excited in a way that was very refreshing and almost breathed a new life into our love of music and they were so eager to want to play themselves and I've told this story a lot, that we played this Brahms's movement, it must've been a slow movement, or something, and we asked the students what it made them think of. And this little boy who had been hiding, sort of under a desk, he stuck his head out and he said that it sounds like love. We just thought, you know, for a seven or eight year old, little kids, to be able to be touched in that way and that deeply by music, like, you don't usually have kids speaking in that way about music. It really meant something to them. So we walked away that day, the three of us, [colleague's name], [colleague's name], and myself thought, 'Okay, let's just start something and see what happens.' And, you know, none of us come to Buffalo String Works with any kind of nonprofit administrative experience at all. Like, we're educators, we're performers. So I think we've been a little bit surprised in having found ourselves here and we really love what we do. And for me, it's really fun for me to learn, pretty much on a daily basis, all these new skills of running an organization.

RESEARCHER:

That's great. What have you experienced and learned from working with immigrant and refugee populations?

JESSICA:

I think right off the bat we were kind of, I guess, I can't think of what the right word is, but we were met with hurdles that we hadn't expected. With us growing up in, you know, sort of middle

class families with some means, we hadn't thought of things like students needing transportation to and from classes. We thought that the kids could get home after classes and we were totally wrong. You know, that first semester, we ended up kind of scrambling and getting a number of volunteer drivers to drive seventeen kids home after violin class. So that was something that we needed to figure out. You know, a combination of logistics and partnerships with after school programs, but also just kind of making that expectation known to families who are able to drive. The other thing is obviously a language barrier and in a lot of way a cultural barrier and even the socioeconomic barriers so, you know, we thought in our first concert, 'Oh, parents will come see their kids play because our parents came to see us play.' but we didn't realize the parents don't have a , some of them, don't have a way of getting to their concerts, some of them didn't even know their kids were playing in a concert because we had trouble communicating that, or that their parents may be working multiple jobs and simply unavailable, you know, to be able to come to a concert. So those were things that, you know, were still that we've been learning to work with and were trying to find ways of strengthening our community past our students. Including our parents, including our teachers. Trying to figure out way to make it easier for parents to come to us. Easier for parents to understand what's happening in classes and what their kids are doing.

RESEARCHER:

Great. What are- So you talked about this a little, the greatest challenges you have faced when teaching music to immigrant and refugee populations. Do you ever feel, like, one way that you teach something isn't how every child learns in that setting because of the language?

JESSICA:

Yeah, definitely. Because our students certainly have a range of language capabilities. So some of them are young enough to have been born here in Buffalo, their parents are refugees, but, you know, they were born here. And others, particularly our oldest, our high school students, they are very much newcomers, having come in the last year. And any given classroom will have that range, so we kind of figure out, you know, yeah, we- although we teach in a group class so there is sort of a generalized teaching approach, we make sure that the classes are small enough that there are still. Attention can be given to individual students. We also general speaking, have a lead teacher teaching at the front of the room and then an assistant in the room who can then help, again, with individual attention. But, you know, I definitely have a class of only three kids in my charter school session. One student really struggles with English, The other two, are stronger, but because there's only three it's easy for me to address, you know, his needs and I think it also kind of builds bonds between the students because then they can help each other like, we have siblings in classes sometimes and it's nice to see that they will kind of help each other and support each other and we try to promote a very positive and healthy, fun learning environment. And as you know being a musician, it's about making mistakes, you know? And so we, you know we try to make that a comfortable place for people- for kids to kind of put themselves out there and it's okay, you know, whatever level they are at.

RESEARCHER:

Yeah, it was great seeing the beginning violin.

JESSICA:

Oh, yeah!

RESEARCHER:

Just how positive everyone was to the kids. And they were just so supportive of everyone else. When I was in third grade, I don't think I would have the guts to go up there and play something in front of a whole class of other kids, but they felt so comfortable because it was the building of the culture in that space.

JESSICA:

Yeah, I'm glad to hear that, yeah.

RESEARCHER:

It was just great to see.

JESSICA:

Yeah, we definitely work really hard to do that.

RESEARCHER:

It was just a really nice environment. What are the potential outcomes and goals of music education for refugee and immigrant students?

JESSICA:

So, you know certainly there are the kind of measurable outcomes like better attendance in school, you know, that they do better learning English or learning languages that because they're using it in different ways. You know, that their math skills improve so there's all of that but I think for us, like, what's more important is that socially they become more confident. More, not only with their peers, making new friends, but also with us and adults and feeling that they can have a group of people who they can trust and that they can come to. You know, because I think learning music is so personal. It's very intimate, you know, as I was saying, I mean, we're physically in touch with students, you know, we get very close and it is about being vulnerable and admitting that you don't know how to do something. For them to do that and to be okay with their friends or with teachers kind of helping them, it's a really big step, I think, socially. We actually just had our first summer camp this last summer in August, and we asked the kids to write short responses for us. Mostly so that we can know what they enjoyed and what we can do better next time, how we could change the curriculum. I think what we were most struck by were the number of kids who said they loved the violin, that they love the snacks and everything, but that they made new friends. You know, because it was. Our kids spend like from five years old to now seventeen and they go to different school and also in different grades so they don't always, you know, they may not be super close. So it was- we felt really honored actually that we could be a place for kids to get to know each other and really enjoy each other and form these new friendships.

RESEARCHER:

Especially when they are coming to a new country.

JESSICA:

Yeah.

RESEARCHER:

To have that sense of community.

JESSICA:

Right, exactly.

RESEARCHER:

How do you create a culturally responsive music classroom?

JESSICA:

That's a great question. So when we first started Buffalo String Works [colleague's name], [colleague's name], and myself were all trained in the traditional western ways and learning western repertoire, and you know, we knew the Suzuki method and that's how we started our kids. We realized very quickly that songs like Twinkle or Old McDonald like really mean very little to not only our students, but also to their families. And in the spirit of trying to involve parents more and to inspire parents and family members, we felt it was very important for the kids to be learning music from their home countries. So that a parent might hear the kid practicing and say 'Oh, that actually sounds familiar.' you know, and it's not yet another alienating thing like, you know, like a piece of music that means nothing, and they don't understand, and doesn't sound familiar. So we make a very very big effort to be sure that our repertoire includes music from all over the world, you know, we- when the kids sign up we always ask what country they are from so that we can find music from that area of the world and now, I want to say that our repertoire probably is- seventy percent of it is from all over. So depending on the semester, you know, last semester, we did quite a bit of music from Burma and Nepal. So it was probably close to ninety percent of what we were working on in the fall semester.

RESEARCHER:

That's great.

JESSICA:

Yeah, and certainly we balance that out. You know, with western music and we use some music from some of the teaching books they use in the public schools. Like Essential Elements. We also do use some Suzuki repertoire and yeah, I think, yeah, those two plus the world folk music.

RESEARCHER:

Now, do you find though that there are some students that come with any musical knowledge from their home countries?

JESSICA:

Yes, in our high school class we have a violist who had learned to play, I think, in a refugee camp in Thailand. That someone had given her a viola and so she had some skills and some prior knowledge. As far as I know, none of our other students came with specific violin, viola, or cello knowledge. However, a couple of them do take lessons in guitar elsewhere. I know that, I think,

one of them is able to take piano lessons, you know, again from an outside source. And of course, they all have their general music classes at school.

RESEARCHER:

How do you make students from all cultural backgrounds feel comfortable in an American music setting?

JESSICA:

Well I guess, yeah, we try to expose them to music from his country but we also make sure a large portion of the music we teach is relevant to them and to their families. Yeah. I'm really happy to hear from our students. We have ask, 'Oh, what's your favorite piece?' and more often than not it's a piece from their country and for that very reason they tell us it's because it's Burmese.

RESEARCHER:

It's interesting that we learn music in such an out of the box kind of way compared to how all other subject areas we're sitting in front of a desk, we take notes, we take a test on it So when I teach some students, especially general music, with like the little ones, kindergarten, first grade, that age, and you ask them to dance in front of other kids they just look at you like you're crazy at first, you know? It's interesting to teach a different way of learning. What are some techniques you use to communicate musically with students who do not speak the same language as you.

JESSICA:

So, well one thing we do is. Our kids don't read music. We only just started teaching note reading, as you just witnessed. And so up until this point all they really have to know in order to be able to play a piece is, first of all, we teach primarily by ear. But then we have something we call BSW notation. And essentially it's a finger number from one to four as we for violin, viola . and cello, we use one, two, three, four. First finger, second finger, third finger, fourth finger. And then the letter name for what string you're on. So if you're- So twinkle for example, it would be A,A,E,E so zero, zero, zero, zero because it's open strings, no fingers and then the letter A under for the A string and then E when you switch to E string. So it's A, A, E, E, One, One, E. With the first thing on the E string. So then there's a letter under that. So that way they only need to know one through four and they need to know four letters. So that's how we notate things for them. You know, if we, you know, we also trained our teachers and trained ourselves, to speak in very simple sentences. Very short sentences with clear directives, not too many adjectives or explanations. Not only because English isn't their first language but also because, you know, kids don't need- they don't want to hear a bunch of explanations. So we just, you know, we've just been trying to work with our students- our teachers on that. So that's another thing that we consciously think very hard about. And then, you know, we also might, as I've said a couple of times, it's a physical thing that we are doing so even if the words, like to like 'hold a bow' for example, is quite complicated. If we say too much, 'bend your thumb' or 'Curl your pinky' or 'do this' it's easier to just have an assistant go and kind of rearrange so we use a lot of, you know, touch, to help. To illustrate a point.

RESEARCHER:

What is some advice that you could share with other music teachers who teach this population?

JESSICA:

Hmm, I think that what has been the most helpful to us has certainly been the repertoire choice, that- that's made a big difference in making sure we're choosing music that is meaningful and that- of course that can mean choosing music from each student's country but also just generally speaking choosing music that excites our kids and which requires us to really understand each child. Because we have- we have two girls who are really really keen, they practice at home, you know, they are so excited to learn, that they want to learn this Suzuki book. Their goal is to learn the whole first book by the end of the semester. So for them, that's working. For other students, I know for our cellists, you know, I don't know if it's sort of gender specific, but they happen to be three boys and they really want to learn the Star Wars, Darth Vader theme. Right? So you know, that's something we are going to teach them this semester. So we try to, we try to accommodate those kids of request because we don't get them often, you know the kids- the kids have been really very respectful and somewhat quiet and they don't really know to somewhat tell us, but if they do take the time and have the courage to let us know what they'd like to play, we try to make it happen. We also have asked the parents to give us suggestion. So for example, one really successful piece has been the Burmese water festival and I guess it's a song that is played, or sung, at the new year and in Burma, it typically- they might follow the lunar calendar, so it typically takes place in February. So there's a water festival here in Buffalo, but it takes place in June because that's the only time you can really be spraying water at people, you can't really be doing that in February, so we play it at their water festival last June, I think. And we played this song and it's a song that everybody knows and that everyone can sing along to. So, I guess, just making sure we're listening to our students and parents, and paying attention to our community and because that's why we're doing it. We're not here necessarily to turn out the next Joshua Bell or anything. We're here to be part of the community so we try very hard to incorporate as much as we can. Suggestions from all of our students and teachers and parents. So that's been helpful for us and I think, aside from that, I mean, just sort of the general- the general skills of being a teacher of listening. Of being adaptable. Of, you know, of being- having good timing. Those things apply, no matter what population you're working with.

RESEARCHER:

And my last question is, what other information, from personal experiences, do you have to offer that would be beneficial to the research?

JESSICA:

I don't know. I think that- I guess that the research specifically working with the refugee population, is that what you mean?

RESEARCHER:

Yes.

JESSICA:

So I think that for us, what have- what we've been working very hard on and our goal from the very beginning has been forming partnerships and so whether that means partnerships with schools or other, kind of like minded organizations, whether they be artistically driven or you know some of the refugee resettlement agencies, or local foundations, you know. I think the

more that we reach out to people, the more that we try to let people know what we're doing, and try to find ways of working together that has been very helpful. I think most recently initiative was to bring Dakota, a group from New York City, to Buffalo and that was mostly spearheaded by Buffalo Dream Works and mostly financed by Buffalo Dream Works, however the Buffalo Public School district and Buff State both helped, you know, to some degree. Not only on the financial aspect of it, but the hosting of the ensemble. And so that felt like a really wonderful way of working together, you know? And I think everyone benefited from it. And, you know, so I think, you know, for us, that's when we feel the most successful. You know, when we are really forming good partnerships. We found that, I mean, for us the refugee population has been really inspiring and has made it absolutely worthwhile for us to be doing this kind of work. For them and they have been very appreciative and they have seen the value in what we do and our parents are starting to tell other parents about what we are doing and encouraging other families to join the program and I think that's meant a lot to us.

RESEARCHER:

Well thank you so much for letting me interview you and your organization. It was a great experience to do that,

JESSICA:

Yeah, of course.

### Case Study Three: Self-Interview Responses by Sarah

Why do you believe that music education is important to refugee and immigrant populations?

Music education can be understood, appreciated and beneficial to all students, regardless of the language they speak. It seems that this is why music is considered to be so universal. Nearly all cultures have music, in a secular, political or religious sense. It is often familiarized to students in an informal way throughout their childhood. Therefore, even if children did not have access to education in their home countries, they typically have been exposed to music to some extent.

When coming to a new country, with all new customs and ways of living, music can be the connecting bridge for students to feel more comfortable in their new surroundings. Students can feel discouraged with all of the new information between school and society, and music can be a familiar thing to grasp onto. It becomes very accessible to students who have not yet acquired the new language of the country they live in, due to the ability for teacher's to use more physical cues than some other core classes. For a child's emotional health, it also serves as a way of expression and stress relief. I believe that music classes, in particular, are an invaluable tool for students to feel comfortable in their new country, to feel a sense of community with a safe classroom setting, and to feel that they are able to express themselves.

What have you experienced and learned from working with immigrant and refugee populations?

At the school that I am currently a middle school and kindergarten music teacher, I have the opportunity to work with many immigrant and refugee students. I've learned that it is often times helpful to pair new immigrant students with another student who speaks their first language and has been in the United States longer, when at all possible. This seems to ease the new student, and makes the material more accessible to them.

I've found that physical cues over verbal cues allow students to understand the teacher, and that fewer words are often better. Students are able to process physical cues quicker and more effectively than if they were given a long, descriptive sentence that they may not know all the words within. With the kindergarten immigrant and refugee students, I demonstrate what I would like them to do first, and then often have them pair up with me so I can ensure they understand.

What are the greatest challenges that you have faced while teaching music to immigrant and refugee populations?

One of the biggest challenges that I have noticed is that sometimes, students feel overwhelmed and don't give their full effort. To combat this, I spend extra time with these students, and make sure they have non-English visuals and physical cues. I have also noticed that some students are apprehensive to participate in certain musical activities, such as improvisation, at first. Creating a

safe learning environment is key in these situations, as students will be more apt to participate in these vulnerable musical situations when they feel it is okay for them to make a mistake.

Communicating concerns with parents is often a challenge as well. When I need to communicate an event or concern with a parent or guardian of an immigrant or refugee child, I ask a staff member to translate, when possible. If this is not an option, sometimes an older student or an older sibling of the child is able to communicate more efficiently with the parents.

What are the potential outcomes and goals of music education for refugee and immigrant students?

The main goal for immigrant and refugee students in my classroom is to feel a sense of community, and that they belong in the class. It's my goal that they feel safe to express themselves, and that they feel that they don't need to be proficient in English to be successful. As an outcome, I hope that students feel more confident in their abilities, and their role within the classroom. This may lead to these students performing better within other classes, since mathematical and literacy skills can be strengthened through music.

How do you create a culturally responsive music classroom?

I incorporate music of my students' home cultures whenever I can. In Kindergarten, students will sing "Hello" to each other in their home languages, and their peers have learned from these students. This builds a mutual respect between students, and everyone feels represented. By incorporating music from all types of ethnic backgrounds, students become used to the different sounds and learn to be accepting of every culture's music. Every so often, kindergarten earns a "Show and Tell" day, where they sing a song that they did not learn in school. Some students sing songs they hear on the radio, but other students sing songs that they learn in their home country. It becomes a learning experience for all of us when this takes place, myself included.

In middle school general music, I expose the students to music from all cultures, as well as American Folk music. Students are able to compare and contrast the styles, and realize that there needs to be a respect for all types of music. Students are expected to be respectful of all cultures, and that in turn, their peers will respect them as well. I try to listen and take student suggestions as much as I can and incorporate these into class and performances. In the back of my classroom, I have a "song wall". Students can anonymously post what songs they want me to listen to on post-it notes, although some choose to write their name with the song. This gives me an idea of what students enjoying listening to, and gives me ideas on what activities we can do that include ethnic music.

How do you make students from all cultural backgrounds feel comfortable in an American music setting?

By incorporating music for a student's home country, I believe they feel more at home in the classroom, and that they feel the material is instantly more accessible to them. With classes with large ENL and ESL populations, I try to do as much physical demonstration as possible, with using as little words as possible. I think this helps to make students feel more comfortable, and that they are able to take ownership over their learning.

It is important to build a classroom culture where it is subconsciously known that music from all cultures is equally important and relevant. If a culture of respect for all ethnic music is built, students will inherently feel more comfortable, and more likely to share and participate in music-making.

What are some techniques that you use to communicate musically with students who do not speak the same language as you?

I find that solfege hand symbols and syllables work very well with sight reading, since the syllables are easy to remember and the pitches can be physically seen. Gestures are also very helpful. Students can easily understand that when the teacher is pointing to themselves, that they are demonstrating. When a teacher makes eye contact with a student, breathes in and points to them, the student knows it is their turn.

When an immigrant or refugee student is having a difficult time understand a direction, I have another student demonstrate what I'm asking, when the situation permits. Other times, it is very beneficial to have another student who speaks their language explain to them what they need to do, when this is available.

What is some advice that you can share with other music teachers who teach this population?

My advice for other teachers of immigrant and refugee children is to get to know the type of musical background the student comes from, and research the music of their culture. This means so much to these students, and can make them instantly feel more comfortable in the music classroom.

I think that creating a musical environment that is centered around respect and acceptance of others is also essential for a healthy classroom environment. Students who are familiar with the school, language and country often feel scared to express themselves in front of peers. This is a natural feeling, that is often intensified for vulnerable student populations. It seems that teachers need to diligently work with immigrant and refugee students to make them feel that they are in a safe environment to express themselves.

What other information from personal experiences do you have to offer that would be beneficial to this research?

From my own experience, I have seen how excited immigrant and refugee students get when they are able to make connections in music class, and understand the concepts we are learning about. For some students, it may be the only subject they are excelling in at first, due to the fact that music is its own written language. Music education should not be discounted to just a stress-relieving class, although this is an outcome of music. It has so many benefits, especially for this student population.