

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND *INCLUSION*

Diversity in Music

Who? What? When? Where? Why?

By Leah Claiborne



I am so pleased to welcome you to MTNA's first column that is dedicated to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in music teaching. In this column, music educators will find helpful resources for creating a more diverse, equitable and inclusive field in music teaching for the independent studio, community music school and higher education. Before we can commit ourselves in partnering together to do this important work, we have to ask ourselves:

What exactly is DEI and how does it affect me as a music educator?

The best starting point for all music educators is to take inventory of our teaching before we begin a new academic year by asking ourselves the following questions in the hopes of deepening our understanding.

What?: What Are We Trying To Diversify?

The challenge with the topic of diversity is not only is it so large, but it means something different to each individual. I often find many people believe *diversity* is synonymous with *change*, and we all know how scary change can be. However, I like to think of diversity as being synonymous with *variety*. The end goal of DEI work is not a quest to change our field, but to simply bring more variety and voices into all aspects of our music teaching. This could include bringing diversity to our student demographic, diversity to our teaching repertoire, diversity to our programming, diversity to our pedagogical techniques or diversity to our professional networks. Resources for each of these topics will be discussed in great detail in upcoming issues. For now, what can you do?

Action Step: Decide today what diversity means specifically to you and your music teaching. Commit to the understanding that diversifying our field *will* create change, but the end goal is to create more variety, which ultimately creates even more beauty in music education that can be appreciated by more people.

Who?: Who Is In My Studio?

Who is the largest demographic in your teaching studio? This is not just about racial

diversity but also includes generational and/or socio-economical diversity.

Action Step: Once this is identified, we have to ask ourselves why this is the case and if this is an area in which you wish to help diversify so that our studios are more representative of what America looks like. Is this something you care about? Why or why not? (See *Where* for tips)

Where?: Where Are My Students Coming From?

America is still segregated when we look at where certain groups of people live. We often attract what is most conveniently in our close proximity (or where we choose to do recruiting). Often, if we broaden our reach ever so slightly, we will find that an entirely different community is very close to our studio, music school or university.

Action Step: Build continual relationships—not just partnerships and certainly not flag-

ships—with other communities. Once trusted and proven relationships are created first, your network for recruitment will be possible.

When?: When Do You Choose To Show Up?

These areas represent the areas in your life where you choose to invest your time. This could be particular families, specific organizations or responding to certain offers/musical engagements.

Action Steps: Start aligning yourself and your time with broader networks. This will allow you to be in networks with diverse mindsets that will help you continue to fuel and shape a diverse studio that is authentic to who you are.

Why?: Why Are We Teaching?

This might seem like an easy question, but when was the last time you asked yourself this question, and have you allowed yourself the space to change your viewpoint?

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Do you only want a competitive studio? Do you only want to give an entry point of music appreciation? Do you only want to build community? Who says you can only have one type of studio? Why not have a little of all things?

Action Step: By being open to changing the *why* behind all that we do as music educators, it requires us to be adaptable to meeting the needs of various types of students who come through our doors. It also gives more purpose knowing that we are making a difference in our field, community, professional spaces and academically.

No matter who we are or where we are in the world, we each have the obligation to examine why we choose to teach and the impact of what we choose to teach the next generation. I hope you choose to partner alongside us to make powerful changes that will shape the next generation of musicians for the better.

Leah Claiborne is assistant professor of music at the University of the District of Columbia. She holds a BA degree from the Manhattan School of Music and MM and DMA degrees from the University of Michigan.



Let us know

what areas of diversity you have chosen to incorporate in your studio, community music school or higher educational institution based on this article. Send 125 words or less to amt@mtna.org with DEI Column in the subject line.



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