Middle-class Music Making? Social Class, "Race," and their Intersections in the Practice of School Popular Music

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Abstract

This article explores how social class, "race," and their intersections manifest in Finnish popular music education (PME) through an exploration of popular music practices in one upper elementary music classroom where I worked as a teacher-researcher. By engaging with systems reflexivity, I illustrate how social class, racialization, and their intersections work together with the social system of PME to maintain inequalities. I argue that in the popular music classroom, identity work is especially required from the students who belong to racialized and lower-class groups. Furthermore, I argue that PME (re)produces a Eurocentric practice of *school popular music* that favors middle-classness and Whiteness. I suggest that moving towards genuinely multivocal and democratic music education entails questioning popular music as an eminent democracy maker. Alternatively, democracy might be fostered

by considering the intersectional identities of the students—a process for which systems reflexivity serves as a useful tool.

Introduction

In this article, I challenge the idea of popular music as the answer to inequalities in music education. The uncritical stance towards popular music education's (henceforth PME) capacity to enhance democracy in music education and for music teachers to acknowledge the experiences of students has led to cherishing it as a dominant educational practice. This dominance is relatively apparent in the Finnish context, with the country currently being well-known and internationally respected for having established high-quality PME in music teacher education (e.g., Allsup, 2011). The democracy argument derives from the notion according to which PME brings students' "own" music and their interests to the heart of the learning process, hence strengthening the voices of students in the educational context (e.g., Allsup, 2011; Cremata, 2017; Green, 2006; Väkevä, 2006). This notion, however, assumes that students are a homogenous group with similar interests and, thus, may neglect the multiplicity of student identities and their potential unequal positionings in the classroom. In other words, if democracy is understood as an opportunity for expressing different identities and "inhabited by pluralism" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 34), as it is understood here, treating teenagers as a unified group becomes questionable. This raises the following questions: how could PME benefit music education by truly inhabiting pluralism? and how might scholars and educators better recognize the complex identity work students need to do in order to challenge underlying unification trends?

I explore the conditions for democracy in PME through an inquiry that I conducted as a White, middle-class music teacher-researcher in a Finnish upper elementary music classroom with 22 students from diverse backgrounds. At the beginning of my teacher-researcher journey, I had certain practical starting points that I believed contributed to democratic teaching practice, such as asking the students to compile the list of songs to be practiced during our lessons. During the research process, however, it became clear to me that strengthening democracy required a much more profound inquiry into how systemic exclusion might take place in the music classroom. Hence, to highlight the entangled and intersectional identities of the students, this article explores democratic processes in one context of PME in Finland by taking intersectionality as its starting point to acknowledge that identities are diverse and overlapping (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Grzanka, 2014). The article therefore contributes to earlier critical research on PME which has shown that—despite the democracy argument—inequalities do exist in the field of PME (e.g., Björck, 2011; Bylica et al., 2019; Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Kallio, 2015; Kallio & Väkevä, 2017).

To direct the critical gaze towards my own teaching, in this article I utilize systems reflexivity which helps scholars and educators "to look beyond the boundaries of art and even education to conceive and grasp opportunities for 'systematic interventions'" (Westerlund et al., 2021, p. 3; see also Midgley, 2000). In other words, I look at PME from a systems perspective (e.g., Midgley, 2000; Westerlund et al., 2021) and acknowledge PME's interactional classroom context as a micro-level social system that is intertwined with the macro-level social system (Westerlund et al., 2021) of Finnish society and its related hierarchies. This perspective is taken as a key to understanding inequalities more profoundly and holistically, and it exceeds the typical frameworks used in music teacher education programs. Overall, I use systems reflexivity to call for systems change—that is, for more equal and democratic music education.

In this article, the intersectional lens is adjusted to focus on social class and racialization. I thus acknowledge that "race" and social class often intersect in educational systems (see also Peltola, 2020) and, furthermore, in the practice of popular music in schools. The article concludes by questioning earlier claims of popular music as democratic, stating that democracy in PME is not primarily a question of music style—instead, it is dependent on how the teacher negotiates popular music with the students by means of systems reflexivity.

The Finnish context

Finnish school, social class, and "race"

Finnish school system has been celebrated internationally for its remarkable success in equalizing learning outcomes and reinforcing societal democracy via education (Peltola, 2020). Finnish school system is undoubtedly the cornerstone of the welfare state, and Finland appears to have succeeded in supporting each student's growth towards a more equal and democratic society. Recent statistics, however, show a diminishing capacity of Finnish schools to promote equal opportunities and reduce the gap between students (OECD, 2019). One example of this is related to residential and school segregation that, within the last two decades, "has been identified in the Finnish context as a new, growing challenge to providing equal educational opportunities" (Peltola, 2020, p. 97). The growing phenomenon of school segregation not just in Finland but internationally has been shown to increase the vulnerabilities of both lower-class and minoritized groups and, thus, school segregation is a challenge. This is especially the case for working class students and students with ethnic minority backgrounds (Peltola, 2020; see also Putnam, 2015). Furthermore, acknowledging that "privilege in terms of resources to choose both a residential area and a school follows social class divides, and that racialization in education and in society has consequences to people's social class position" (Peltola, 2020, p. 98), points to a salient intersection between class and "race" in school segregation.

Although the discussion of social class in Finnish schools mainly focuses on school segregation, it is, however, important to note that class differences also exist inside each school. Hence, there is

> a need to understand and examine segregation not only in terms of differences *between* schools but as a phenomenon that manifests in varying ways *inside* schools, in official school practices, and at the level of informal school and peer relationships. (Peltola, 2020, p. 110)

Despite this, the concept of class is absent in Finnish curricular texts in a way rather similar to gender in the 1990s, an issue which previously led to underestimating gender inequality in the school context (Lahelma, 2011). The obmutescence of gender did not make gender differences nonexistent, nor will it do so with respect to social class. Rather, at its worst, the obmutescence of class may even reinforce class inequality through an ignorance towards such structural inequalities.

The same obmutescence applies to "race." In Finnish discourse, the term "ethnicity" is often used instead of "race." In the more than 1200 pages of the Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014), however, the term "ethnic" only appears twice (p. 26; p. 211), while the terms "ethnicity" and "race" are not mentioned at all. None of these three terms appear in the music curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014), which instead mentions "cultural diversity" (p. 1227) and "cultural heritage" (p. 1233). Thus, the connection between "race," students''everyday lives, and music often remains undiscussable (see e.g., Hess, 2017). Despite the absence of these terms in official documents and changes in their manifestation through the decades, differences due to social class and "race" continue to exist in Finnish society and the Finnish educational system, and these differences shape the everyday life and school experiences of students. It is therefore necessary to consider social class and "race" in the social system of music education and in PME.

PME in Finland

In Finnish school music education, teaching practices rely heavily on popular music. Music classrooms are equipped with electronic guitars, basses, drums, synthesizers, and microphones for singing. Hence, music learning happens through active participation in music making, which is often carried out in a popular music band (e.g., Westerlund, 2006). The successful and extensive use of PME in Finnish schools has led it to become a hegemonic and internationally recognized system (e.g., Allsup, 2011). This strong position has been further supported by PME research that claims that popular music is teenagers' "own" music (e.g., Bennett, 2000; Väkevä, 2006) and therefore inherently democratic.

This democracy argument has, however, been questioned by more recent research that argues, for example, that the popular music played in school does not necessarily represent students' "own" music (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010). Researchers have also questioned the understanding that teenagers are a uniform group with similar musical interests (Kallio & Väkevä, 2017). Moreover, although popular music band instruments are relatively adaptable for students with differing musical abilities, when students enter school, they already possess diverse starting levels and perceptions about their capabilities. For example, whereas middle-class children are likely to identify with the surrounding culture of the school, working-class children often move "from a context largely dominated by restricted code use to one where access to elaboration is prerequisite to success" (Wright & Davies, 2010, p. 47). Hence, assuming popular music to be inherently democratic may bypass the interactional context of the music classroom in which students participate from different musical starting points and with different cultural capacities. In considering this oversimplification of democracy in PME, Kallio (2017) asked: "How might we broaden our ideas of who constitutes the *we* of the school community to enact the ideals of democratic participation?" (p. 166, italics in original)

Recent critical research on PME in Finland has also highlighted that 1) in the context of the music classroom the democratic potential of popular music is dependent on the educational context, not on the music style per se (Koskela & Leppänen, 2020); 2) music teachers engage in "political processes of legitimation and exclusion in popular repertoire selection" (Kallio, 2015); and, as already argued, 3) assuming popular music to be students' "own" music perceives teenagers as a homogenous group and therefore obscures the differences that produce inequalities (Koskela et al., 2021). Together, these critiques place the widely accepted democracy argument that has been used to justify PME for decades thereby supporting the current hegemonic status of PME in Finnish schools in new light by implicating that popular music, as any music, becomes recontextualized in the social system of PME. In my teaching context, this kind of recontextualization happened as I asked the students to assemble a list of songs to be played during the lessons. While the making of this list was something I considered at the time to be a democratic act, this was an assumption that I later came to question.

Theoretical framework

Intersectionality, social class, and racialization

In this article, I use intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Grzanka, 2014) as a theoretical and analytical lens. Intersectionality theorizes identities through the study of "multiple dimensions of inequality and developing ways to resist and challenge these various forms of oppression" (Grzanka, 2014, p. xv). Intersectionality has thus helped me to

understand how the "dimensions of inequality co-construct one another" (Grzanka, 2014, p. xiii). In this article, I focus on the dimensions of social class, "race," and their intersections.

In the 1970s, social class was a dominant topic in the social sciences, however, in later decades it "almost disappeared from the agendas of feminism and cultural theory" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 2). Nevertheless, in recent years, questions concerning class have been brought back into the discussion also in the field of music. Class issues have been discussed both with respect to classical music (e.g., Bull, 2019; Dyndahl, 2021) and popular music by focusing, for example, on the perspectives of taste (e.g., Michelsen, 2020), the history of and literature on rock music (e.g., McDonald, 2020), and the implications of the inclusion or exclusion of popular music for students in different class positions (e.g., Butler & Wright, 2020). In this article, social class is brought into focus by regarding it as a specific power structure in which middle-classness and the bourgeoisie are dominant and hegemonic positions within the school institution. Furthermore, the middle-class is here acknowledged to carry socio-cultural capital or, as Skeggs (1997) has named it, "respectability," which is "usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it" and, on the other hand, "rarely recognized as an issue by those who are positioned with it, who are normalized with it, and who do not have to prove it" (p. 1).

I recognize the multidimensionality of identities by looking at how social class intersects with racialization. By racialization I am referring to the relational processes that produce "race" and exemplify Whiteness as a normative power position that is invisible to White people themselves whilst it sets the norm for everyone else (see e.g., Ahmed, 2007). "Race" is written in quotation marks throughout this article to highlight an anti-essentialist stance, emphasize the process of racialization, and underscore that Whiteness, too, is a "race." Furthermore, I use the word "race" to avoid what Hess (2017) has argued to be "increasingly apparent" in the field of music education research, namely "that when our field is asked to speak of race…we begin to speak in euphemisms" (p. 16). In this study, I recognize that class struggle and "race" struggle may be intersectional and, thus, cause experiences of accumulative and systemic inequalities. Finally, in this study I acknowledge that, as democracy entails the possibility of conflict as a prerequisite to genuinely cherishing pluralism (Mouffe, 2000), class and "race" struggles are needed to work towards a more democratic educational system and are therefore also integral in PME.

Research questions

Based on the theoretical starting points above, this study recognizes that while Finnish schools and education undoubtedly produce equity in society, they are also part of larger societal processes that cause not just desired but also undesired consequences, such as racism, inequality, and class hierarchies. To understand how such inequalities work together with and

within the social system of PME, I ask: How do social class, "race", and their intersections manifest in PME in Finland, and what kinds of unequal hierarchies are reproduced amongst PME students?

Data generation

The study took place in one upper elementary school (grades 7–9, ages 13–15) in a relatively large city in southern Finland. The optional music group – which was part of the educational program – was attended by students from different home classes, and thus included students from both the elective and non-elective classes in the school. In line with the practices of Finnish school music teaching, the lessons focused on PME practices. The Finnish music curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014) encourages teachers to include students in decision-making processes, thus the content of the course was planned in collaboration with the students. Accordingly, I started the process by asking the students to anonymously write down the songs they wished to play and sing in class during the course. I then chose one song for each lesson and arranged the songs to meet the technical level of the group.

The data were generated during the school year 2016-17 and included 21 lessons (75 minutes each) in which I worked as a music teacher-researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). During this period, I kept a teacher-researcher journal, videotaped six of the lessons, and analyzed the 22 popular music songs selected by the students. In addition, 14 interviews (app. 20-85 min, 6 in pairs, 8 individually) were conducted. The class included 23 students of whom one did not give their permission to participate in the research, and two did not want to be interviewed. The interview questions were divided into four thematic categories: 1) the student's personal musical preferences; 2) music and family; 3) music and friends; and 4) music lessons and music at school.

Ethical considerations

Clear power relations existed between me (interviewer and teacher) and the interviewees (underaged students) (e.g., Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). Hence, when analyzing the interviews, I kept in mind that the students responded not only to the questions of a researcher, but also to those of their teacher. The familiarity established through the teacher-student relationship might have contributed to trust building, however, students might have also omitted certain issues or details from their answers because I was their teacher. Furthermore—as I considered the students to be not only research *participants* but also research *partners*—at the end of the school year, I invited the students to watch excerpts of the videotaped lessons with me and share their interpretations to "strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others" (Bolton, 2010, p. 13). By bringing the voices of students

into the interpretation process, I wished to ensure that they were active research partners not merely sources of "data."

Students were informed that participating in the research would not require them to participate in the interviews, that the interviews would be conducted outside of the lessons either alone or together with a classmate, and that their choice to participate or not would not influence their evaluation or grading. I also reminded the students throughout the process that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time (see Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2019, p. 9). Written permission was granted from the school principals, the students, and—because the students were all underaged—their guardians. As one of the students declined their participation, the video camera was used only on days that they were absent or in a way that ensured that they did not appear in the video recording. Anonymity of the research participants was ensured by using common Anglo-Saxon names as pseudonyms and by changing and/or effacing details such as information about home country or nationality.

Analysis

The data were analyzed by using qualitative content analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). McCall's (2005) intercategorical approach to intersectionality, which "requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups" (p. 1773), was the starting point for deductively coding the interview transcriptions. During the analysis, I looked for codes under the categories of "gender," "culture," "social class," and "students' thoughts about music" and color-coded the interviews according to these codes. I chose the category of "culture" because I considered it to include different music cultures as well as observations related to cultural identity and "race." Importantly, I do not consider "culture" and "race" to be synonyms, instead, I used "culture" as an umbrella term to recognize students' thoughts about, for example, diverse musics, diversity, and the processes of racialization. I focused not only on the words of the interviewees, but also on how the students talked about each other—that is, on the inter-subjective reality that produced the school culture. The intercategorical approach to intersectionality (McCall, 2005) was utilized to consider how the constructs of social class and "race" intersected in the interviews. Finally, the "thinking with theory" approach, which here means "thinking methodologically and philosophically together" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. vii) and negotiating "how the theory and data constitute or make one another" (p. 6), was utilized from the viewpoint of intersectionality. Thinking with intersectionality opened new possibilities to unprecedented approaches by underscoring how knowledge is "proliferated rather than foreclosed and simplified" (p. vii). Finally, to strengthen the reflexivity (e.g., Callaway, 1992; Hertz, 1997) of the analysis, I reflected the findings against my teacher-researcher journal.

Middle-class music learners

Based on the students' descriptions of their everyday lives during the interviews, I was able to determine some aspects of their families' socio-economic status and social class. I did not ask directly about the class position of their families, however, the interviews explored students' possibilities to participate in expensive hobbies, their families' musical resources, and how the students perceived their options in the future. For instance, one of the students mentioned her family's trip to Paris to attend an Alicia Keys concert when asked to share an example of a musical leisure-time activity, whereas another student told me that she had traveled abroad (to the neighboring country of Sweden) only once in her life. Such a difference between the experiences of these students suggests an opportunity gap (Putnam, 2015) based on the economic situation of each student's family. Although social class is not only about money, economic wealth undoubtedly creates possibilities for fulfilling middle-class ideals such as traveling and attending expensive concerts or music hobbies.

When asking about parents' musical interests, one student told me that his family would go to the opera many times a year and that they often traveled to the national Savonlinna opera festival together, whereas another student told me that his father's musical interests manifested at home when he listened to a Finnish comedy band from the 1990s. These examples indicate different access to social and cultural resources between the students. Attending an expensive opera festival adheres to "respectable," class-related taste (e.g., Skeggs, 1997) that "might be conceived as a field of culture" (Michelsen, 2020, p. 14). Contradictorily, in the case of the 1990s comedy band, commercial music's ability to entertain is emphasized over authenticity and artistic sophistication and, thus, such genres are "the least privileged, as folk or art values may be compromised for the sake of mass appeal or providing 'cheap' pleasures" (McDonald, 2020, p. 436; see also Frith, 1996).

In all, there was a rather clear distinction between the elective group and non-elective group students. Students from the elective group had educated parents and mentioned classical composers by name, listened to classical music more often, went to concerts, traveled abroad with their families, and had expensive hobbies. They also expressed how a lack of a musical hobby was not a question of money, but a choice based on personal interest. Thus, not surprisingly, middle-class children possessed musical skills gained from paid tuition outside of school more often than their working-class peers. Yet, although fulfilling middle-classness entails wealth, it is also more than economics; it is a power position which defines what is "respectable," normative, and worth pursuing (Skeggs, 1997). This is also the case when it comes to music learning.

Unlike social class, skin color is visible, and the process of racialization is based on the identity negotiation against the White norm (e.g., Ahmed, 2007). For this reason, I did not

need to interpret the interviews from the perspective of "race" to gain knowledge about the students' positions. The interviews did, however, reveal that the students and the parents who had moved to Finland from other countries listened to music from their home countries and cultures. Furthermore, some of the students explained that, whereas their parents listened to "old" music from their home country, they themselves enjoyed listening to popular music in their first language. Although I acknowledge that "race" is not a synonymous with lingual identity, in the context of a music classroom, the lyrics and, hence, the language of the songs have an important role. For example, the students explicitly mentioned the music in their first language as their "own," however, such music was not present in the list of songs suggested by students for study in the music lessons, nor did the students want to bring such music into the music classroom. I return to this issue later in this article.

Middle-class school culture in the (popular) music classroom

Ada and Kate were White girls[1] who studied in the elective class. They were interviewed together. Either one or both of their parents were originally from Anglo-Saxon countries. During the interview, it became clear that the girls' families had a reasonably stable economic situation and that the girls had opportunities to participate in hobbies of their choice. They had money to travel, and they were encouraged to take part in cultural activities outside of school. These characteristics hint at middle-classness, however, I did not ask about the class position directly and the interpretations about the social class of the students are made by me as a teacher-researcher. When the girls were asked if the cultural diversity of the school was observable and in what ways, they described that it sometimes felt embarrassing to be associated with this particular school because, as Ada stated, it is "just so noisy you know." Both girls associated noise and a certain kind of unruly behavior with the fact that there were so many immigrants in the school, illustrating "how the narratives constructing 'us' and 'them' took shape" (Peltola, 2020, p. 133).

Previous educational research has put forth the concept of the *normal student* – that is, an educational and cultural idea of a student whose characteristics are based on Whiteness and middle-class standards (Riitaoja, 2013). This idea of normalcy was visible in the interview with Ada and Kate. For example, the girls recollected their previous music lessons and how the teacher did not require participation in the musical activities. They explained how they finally felt so bored that they decided that "we just have to get our act together" and started to actively volunteer to play and sing. Such a decision was possible because both girls felt comfortable singing using microphones and playing the instruments in the music classroom –

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[1] In the interviews, the students were asked to define their genders and gender definitions in this article are based on their answers.

they possessed musical skills which I, as their teacher, had become aware of during our lessons. The girls had also participated in extra-curricular music tuition outside of school which—in addition to the middle-class norms that support active participation in school (e.g., Peltola, 2020)—gave them courage to participate in music making in a school context as well. Furthermore, the girls expressed disappointment towards their teacher through a criticism of the final grades they received in the class: "But we did not get the grade ten." The grading scale in Finland is 4-10, with ten being the highest. This criticism implies that the girls possessed self-confidence in terms of studying and, hence, a "preference of middle-class academic orientation" (Peltola, 2020, p. 109).

The girls' account demonstrates their familiarity with school culture, which requires respectable behavior and middle-class codes such as easy adaptation to the system of school, active participation, and academic self-esteem. Their ability to master such codes aligns with Wright and Davies' (2010) argument that middle-class children are "likely to experience little disjunction between the linguistic, knowledge and control codes used in their education and those experienced at home" (p. 47). Furthermore, the interview indicates that if the music teacher lacks the reflexivity necessary to question the concept of normal student (Riitaoja, 2013), the practices of PME tend to favor students who already possess musical skills—that is, students like Ada and Kate—and whose families have sufficient resources to encourage their children to participate in musical hobbies outside of school, and who often belong to the middle-class.

Mechanisms of othering in PME repertoire

Jeff, George, and Zack were three boys who had moved to Finland as children. They all spoke something other than Finnish or English as their first language, and they enjoyed listening to music in their first languages outside of school. Jeff, for example, mentioned that he shared Arabic music with his cousins. In the interviews, however, there were many examples of how these three boys intentionally excluded such musical preferences from curricular activities. When asking Jeff and George if they would like to play some music in their first languages in the lessons, Jeff laughed and said no, because "no one would know how to pronounce the words" and he "would not have wanted that." George also laughed and said: "I don't think so." When I asked Zack if he ever came to think about adding any songs of his mother tongue to the list, he said that he did not, because "it would have been kind of a bad thing." When I inquired into what he meant, he said that such songs would not sound like "all the modern songs" and that any song of his mother tongue would thus be too distinguishable.

From the perspective of inequalities and democracy, it is unsettling that the students chose to leave out music from cultures other than Finnish or Anglo-American cultures as they did not see them to fit with the understandings of normalcy in the PME repertoire. This phenomenon

of freeing oneself from identity work (Saether, 2008) by voluntarily excluding the music of their home culture from music lessons is also visible in earlier music education research (e.g., Karlsen, 2012; Saether, 2008). Moreover, this phenomenon clearly contradicts earlier PME research which specifically claims that popular music is students' "own" music (e.g. Allsup, 2011; Väkevä, 2006): indeed, the interviews with Jeff, George, and Zack oppose this claim by showing, for example, that from the viewpoint of a racialized student, adding a song that is not in English or Finnish to the repertoire would be "a bad thing" because "it doesn't sound at all like a modern song".

According to earlier research, when students were asked to describe the music they played and sang in music lessons, the answers confirmed that repertoires were dominated by popular music (e.g., Karlsen, 2012). Furthermore, even when students were asked to include their own music in lessons, they brought mainstream popular music despite this potentially differing from the kind of music they really listened to outside of lessons (Karlsen, 2012). The interviews with Jeff, George, and Zack support these findings by suggesting that students recognize the somewhat restrictive and narrow "genre" of *school popular music* as a precondition of the social system of PME and adjust themselves to it by effacing their cultural identities and, therefore, "race." Finally, the interview responses suggest that the students have an understanding of what is "normal" in music lessons and feel that diverging from this would be too distinguishable and, thus, undesirable. When asking Zack, for example, if it would have been different to add a non-English song if everyone else would have chosen something other than Finnish or English as well, he said:

> Then it would have been normal, because if I add alone then everyone else would be against me. If everybody adds and I do it as well, then there would be no one against no one. Then it would be the same for everyone.

Zack's answer suggests that in this particular context, the above-described genre of school popular music does not include diverse cultural elements and, therefore, bringing something in a language other than English or Finnish to the lessons would potentially lead to othering based on the student's "race."

Intersections of social class and "race" in PME practices

The content of the music lessons with the studied group consisted of the list of 22 songs assembled by the students. All the songs were in English, which indicates that instead of cherishing the diverse and intersecting identities of the music classroom, emphasizing popular music in the lessons tends to favor Anglo-Saxon and North American traditions in a rather exclusive manner. This was an issue which became clear in the interviews with Jeff, George, and Zack. Furthermore, the interview with Ada and Kate showed that possessing cultural and

social resources—such as an ability to play an instrument or being able to adapt to the system of school—makes it easier to actively participate in the practices of the PME lessons and, thus, to fulfill the middle-class and White ideal of the normal student (Riitaoja, 2013) in the context of the music classroom.

Based on these observations, school popular music is not "just" a genre – it is also a practice which may exclude students' diverse and intersecting identities and favors middle-class resources and eurocentrism as a starting point for musical participation. Hence, identity work with respect to the normative expectations of school popular music is especially required from the students who belong to lower classes, ethnic minorities, or both (see also Peltola, 2020). Moreover, such requirements expand the opportunity gap (Putnam, 2015) between students – a notion which requires systems reflexivity from the music teacher to genuinely encourage the cherishing of intersecting identities in PME.

Discussion

As a micro-level social system, the music classroom reflects the hierarchical structures of the macro-level systems of society (e. g. Westerlund et al., 2021). This means that middle-class and White hegemonies are inevitably present in the social interaction of the music classroom and, thus, need to be acknowledged in order to make space for diversity. In this article, I have explored social class and "race" through and with intersectionality and, finally, brought them together to highlight the White and middle-class hegemony in PME. Instead of pretending that such hegemonic structures do not exist, the teacher should therefore consider how to bring critical voices to the school and to music classrooms, and how to better pay attention to marginalized identities that are being suppressed. In such work, intersectionality is a valuable lens.

In the context of this study, my own critical considerations began by recognizing that asking the students to contribute their "own" music to the lessons was not an innocent act. Rather, my invitation led the students to suggest songs that conformed to the homogeneous genre of school popular music, and, as shown in this article, the students described how their suggestions did not necessarily represent their intersectional identities. For example, although Jeff, George, and Zack described music in their first language as their "own" during the interviews, they did not want to bring this music to the lessons because they felt that it would not suit the repertoire. My invitation, therefore, led to an effacing of the multiplicity in the classroom, instead of recognizing it as a starting point for music learning thus loading emotional work for the students to handle.

What could I have done differently, then, to make room for the intersectional identities of the students? One possibility is that I could have rephrased the assignment. For instance, I could

have asked the students to bring an unexpected piece of music or one that they were unfamiliar with to the lessons. While such tasks would not have eliminated the hierarchical structures, they may have helped the students to look at PME from a wider perspective, perhaps even directing their gaze beyond the micro-level social system of PME to the macro-level social system of Finnish society (Westerlund et al., 2021). Additionally, rephrasing the assignment may have helped me, the teacher, and the students to better recognize and challenge our normative expectations. As Hess (2017) argues, music teachers need to "center issues of race and racism in their daily praxis, both inside and outside the classroom" (p. 35). In other words, (White) teachers should be encouraged to consider their privilege and to listen to the experiences of their students—especially the students who are marginalized.

Acknowledging the intersectional identities of the students requires vigilance from the teacher, who will have to challenge themself to make room for diversity and cherish confrontational classroom negotiations. Cherishing such diversity and conflicts is a prerequisite for democracy (e.g., Mouffe, 2000) that entails tolerating feelings of discomfort and incompleteness. Such (emotional) work should, however, be primarily required from the teacher, not from the students, who are not responsible for democratizing education. Through music teachers' commitment to such work, we might move closer to genuinely multivocal, diverse, and democratic music education—whether enacted via popular music or not.

Conclusion

Using intersectionality as a theoretical lens, I have explored how social class, racialization, and their intersections work together with the social system of PME to produce inequalities. Through this intersectional lens, I suggested that popular music in Finnish music classrooms manifests as a Eurocentric genre of school popular music that favors middle-classness and Whiteness and, can lead to othering based on students' social class and/or "race." As a result, in PME, identity work is required especially from the racialized and/or lower-class students. Given that Sweden and Norway use a similar PME approach, this might also be the case in other Nordic countries. Furthermore, as some schools in the UK, Australia, and Canada are adapting Green's (e. g., 2006) informal learning approach in music education, the critical stances presented in this study may also have relevance in those contexts.

With and through this argument, I wish to contribute to a new understanding of PME, an understanding which questions previous claims made by music education researchers that popular music in itself makes music education democratic. Such a claim can lead to blindness towards social class as well as to "race-related silences" (e.g., Hess, 2017, p. 16), which may reinforce Whiteness as hegemonic (Hess, 2017). Popular music (or any other musical genre for that matter) cannot automatically produce any social goods such as democracy. Instead,

democracy needs to be enhanced by fostering diversity and opening possibilities for conflict, which is understood as an integral part of genuinely democratic music education.

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