

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE MUSICAL THEATRE PRODUCTION
FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE IDENTITIES

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Dr. Wendy L. Sims, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This dissertation comprises three projects that were designed to investigate the integration of Geneva Gay’s culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach into high school musical theatre production. First, I completed a review of the literature to examine the challenges associated with multiculturalism in school musical productions and to explore the potential applications and implications of CRT in theatre and choral education that can be applied to musical theatre production. For the second investigation, I undertook a qualitative study to investigate the lived experiences of music and theatre teachers before, during, and after casting high school students with diverse identities in musicals. Themes emerged from interviews with music teachers ($n = 5$) and theatre teachers ($n = 2$) including (a) *students’ identities* and (b) *students’ skills*. The findings indicated that participants utilized the “identities conscious casting” approach when making casting decisions. It also uncovered that this emphasis on inclusivity and diversity in the casting process was linked to both prior-to-casting and post-casting processes. The third investigation is a survey study through which I explored how music teachers integrate the CRT approach into their high school musical productions. Analysis of the responses ($N = 119$) revealed that participants prioritized and integrated cultural awareness, which related to Gay’s CRT principle, within the various stages of their musical theatre

productions, encompassing musical selection, materials preparation, and rehearsal processes, despite encountering some challenges. Results from these three projects indicated that participants integrated Gay's (2002) five key elements to implement CRT into their musical productions, fostering diversity, and inclusivity, as well as enhancing the overall presentation of the musical.

Chapter One

Introduction

Musical theatre has long been a popular activity for students of all ages, with many schools worldwide offering it as either an extracurricular or integrated part of their curriculum. Its appeal lies in the combination of song, dance, acting, and spoken dialogue, providing students with a holistic understanding of interdisciplinary arts. Moreover, participating in musicals has been associated with enhancements in students' self-esteem (Kokx, 2017; Perrine, 1989), self-concept (K. J. Roberts, 2007), social competency (Chaiwanichsiri, 2016, 2017; Ogden, 2008; Pérez-Aldeguer, 2013), and musical achievement (Chaiwanichsiri, 2017; K. J. Roberts, 2007). For some, participation in musical theatre becomes a transformative experience (Stokes, 2010).

Given the growing diversity of students' backgrounds and identities in contemporary society (L. S. Davis, 2021; NCES, 2023), along with the inherent complexity of musical productions, producing a musical can pose challenges in terms of diversity, inclusivity, as well as cultural interpretation and representation. Although participating in musicals from various cultures or featuring characters from different cultural groups can help students better understand those cultures and their own identities, doing so without being aware of cultural nuances can lead to cultural appropriation (Agustin, 2018; Wolf, 2020). Consequently, cultural consciousness has become one of the crucial components in preparing educators, especially preservice music teachers, to conduct a musical (Marshall, 2019).

In the United States, there has been a notable effort in many schools to embrace multiculturalism, which celebrates and values cultural diversity, across curricula and

extracurricular activities such as musical theatre. Still, as monoculturalism and Eurocentrism have been so deeply ingrained in the U.S. educational system for decades, many scholars, educators, and organizations have continued to provide some guidelines or approaches to facilitate the integration of multiculturalism into the curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2013). One prominent approach that emerged from this dilemma and has been employed in arts education is *culturally responsive teaching* (CRT; Gay, 2018). CRT empowers teachers to use their cultural knowledge in a way that is pertinent and effective for students from a variety of diverse backgrounds and identities.

Despite the fact that there are several studies on producing musicals in school settings for middle school students (Streeter, 2016) and high school students (Fields, 1970; Janicki, 1982) that have taken some aspects of culture into consideration, I found that there is only one unpublished manuscript that emphasizes the social commentary of the musicals (Grob, 2021), and two studies related to inclusive musical production (Cacciola-Price, 2023; Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020). Still, none of these specifically delve into the utilization of CRT in musical production.

In light of this, the focus of my dissertation was to investigate the viability of incorporating the CRT approach into the realm of musical theatre production. The primary goal of this research was to gather pertinent information from existing literature as well as insights from music and theatre teachers in order to: (a) provide a comprehensive literature review that examines the challenges associated with multiculturalism in school musical theatre productions, as well as explores the applications and implications of CRT in the domains of theatre and choral education that can be applied to musical theatre production; (b) undertake a qualitative research to

examine the experiences of music and theatre teachers concerning casting high school students with diverse identities in a musical, along with casting-related processes; and (c) conduct a survey study to investigate how music teachers integrate strategies related to CRT principles into their musical theatre productions.

Background of the Problem

Cultural appropriation is a term that refers to the exploitation or oppression of objects, elements, and creative or artistic forms of one culture (subordinated/marginalized culture) by members of another culture (dominant culture) (Rogers, 2006; Young, 2005, 2010). This includes using parts of their cultures such as—their traditions, clothes, dance, music, and so forth—without permission and authorization.

Musical theatre, while celebrated for its ability to entertain and inspire, has not been exempt from the complex issues of cultural appropriation. This art form often incorporates elements from diverse cultures, such as their stories, music, and traditions. Unfortunately, there have been instances where these elements were adopted, altered, or misinterpreted without consent, compensation, and due respect to their cultural significance (Hoffman, 2020; Pao, 2010; Swain, 2002). These incidents have raised valid concerns regarding the perpetuation of stereotypes, the eradication of authentic voices, and the reinforcement of power imbalances within the industry. Despite directors having control over casting decisions and the overall representation of a musical, the occurrence of cultural appropriation issues remains prevalent and often draws criticism from actors and reviewers. Such appropriation can also manifest in different ways, including the storyline of the musical (libretto), the casting choices made, and the overall interpretation and representation of the show.

Pseudo-Diversity Musicals

For decades, numerous musicals have portrayed or drawn inspiration from stories of diverse cultural groups and countries. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all of these musicals accurately represent the traditions and cultural nuances of the societies they depict (Grob, 2021; Hoffman, 2020; Livingston, 2020; Ponti, 2010; Swain, 2002). In some cases, cultural elements may be simplified, exaggerated, altered, or appropriated to align more closely with the narrative or to make them more appealing to a broader audience of their time (Hoffman, 2020). The term used to describe this phenomenon, as articulated by Gentry (2017), is *pseudo-diversity*. For instance, in the case of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *The King and I*, Rodgers (2002) provided an explanation for his creative choices, stating:

In composing the score...Not only would I have been incapable of creating anything authentically Siamese, but even if I could, I wouldn't have done it. Western audiences are not attuned to the sounds of tinkling bells, high nasal strings, and percussive gongs, and would not find this kind of music attractive. If a composer is to reach his audience emotionally...he must reach the people through sounds they can relate to. (pp. 273-274)

One of the challenges arises from the fact that there has been a lack of musicals written by or for underrepresented groups. As Hoffman (2014) noted, "The musical, with few exceptions, is written *by* white people, *for* white people, and is *about* white people. From its creators to its consumers, the musical firmly reflects a white outlook on American life" (p. 5). Consequently, there has been a concerted effort to encourage playwrights, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to develop and submit

more diverse and inclusive narratives that celebrate their own cultures (nycplaywrights, 2023).

This similar movement has led to the emergence of several recent musicals, featuring stories that represent underrepresented groups or are written by playwrights who belong to those communities. Notable examples include *KPOP* the first Broadway musical exploring Korean culture and the KPOP industry, written by a Korean American playwright, with one of the composers also being the first Asian American female composer on Broadway (Yam, 2022); *Fun Home*, an LGBTQ+ themes musical based on Alison Bechdel's graphic autobiography that delves into her journey of self-discovery and coming to terms with her sexuality as lesbian while reflecting on her complex relationship with her gay father (McNulty, 2017); and *Waitress*, a show led by three strong female characters as well as created by an all-female creative team (Kao, 2016).

Casting Challenges - Who Should Tell the Stories?

One of the primary challenges that contributes to the issues of cultural appropriation in musical theatre is the lack of minority representation in the musical itself and on the stage (AAPAC, 2021; Gentry, 2017). When certain communities, races, ethnicities, and identities are underrepresented or excluded from the story or via casting decisions, it leads to a limited portrayal of diverse experiences and perspectives on stage. The lack of minority performers can be traced back to the late 1940s when MGM dealt with racial tension by erasing minorities in their integrated musical films, while Twentieth Century Fox, even though attempting to create space for these minority performers, did so in a problematic and stereotypical way (Griffin, 2002).

Discrimination in the casting process can potentially lead to cultural appropriation in two ways: (a) when actors from dominant cultures are cast in roles that require specific cultural identities and backgrounds or cast in roles that could be played by other minority groups (neutral roles), or (b) when actors from a minority group are cast to portray the character in a stereotypical way (Agustin, 2018; Hoffman, 2020; Pao, 2010). An example of controversy in this regard is the casting of Jonathan Pryce, a white British actor, as The Engineer, a role originally intended for a Eurasian character, in the 1989 version of *Miss Saigon* (Pao, 2010). As highlighted by Pao (2010), it became one of the “most highly publicized controversies over contemporary casting practices...” (p. 43) as non-traditional casting was also used as a point of argument against the Actors’ Equity Association (AEA). Ultimately, the AEA approved Pryce to play the role again in the 1990 Broadway production, but with the condition that Asian American actors would be hired as understudies and prepared to assume the role after Pryce’s departure.

Although there has been an increase in the representation of Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) actors, disparities persist. According to the Asian American Performers Action Coalition’s (AAPAC, 2021) report for the 2018-2019 season, 58.9% of the actors on Broadway musicals were White, 30.5% of the actors were Black, and 80% of all lead roles went to White actors. This issue extends beyond underrepresented racial actors and also impacts other marginalized groups, including underrepresented ethnicities actors (Bakare, 2019), female actors (Geier, 2018), non-binary or transgender actors (Lovelock, 2019; Mack, 2022; McGill et al., 2022), and disabled actors (Kataja, 2020).

Despite the necessity for actors with specific cultural backgrounds and identities in many roles, it remains crucial for directors and casting teams to avoid casting actors

based solely on their appearance (typecasting), or for the sake of tokenism. Instead, they should adopt a *non-traditional casting* approach. Originating from the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP) in 1986, this approach advocates for considering actors from diverse backgrounds, including ethnic, female, or disabled individuals, for roles where race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability are not integral to the development of the characters or the plays (C. T. Davis & Newman, 1988). Non-traditional casting can be categorized into color-blind casting, societal casting, conceptual casting, and cross-cultural casting. However, criticism of non-traditional casting, particularly color-blind casting, has arisen due to concerns about potential color-blind racism (Rodríguez, 2013). To address these concerns, a new subcategory called *color-conscious casting* emerged, which considers the race and ethnicity of actors and celebrates their cultural identities while providing equal opportunities in the theater (Gelt, 2022; Hopkins, 2018; Jadhvani, 2014; Rodríguez, 2013). Currently, this approach has evolved into *identity-conscious casting*, where all aspects of actors' identities are considered (Jadhvani, 2021).

In 2015, one of the musicals that used color-conscious casting and became a global phenomenon was *Hamilton* (Sowa, 2020). Lin-Manuel Miranda and his team purposely cast actors of various ethnic backgrounds, including Black, Asian, Puerto Rican, and mixed-race descent, to portray historical figures who were predominantly white. While there were some critics of the color-conscious casting, the overall impact of the musical has been transformative. *Hamilton* ignited conversations about representation, diversity, and the reimagining of historical narratives. It also inspired other artists and creators to explore new ways of storytelling and challenged the conventional boundaries of what a Broadway musical could be.

Inauthentic Interpretation and Representation of the Musical

Once a musical has been chosen and the characters have been cast, the way in which the musical is interpreted and represented becomes crucial in determining whether cultural appropriation occurs (Livingston, 2020; Swain, 2002). How cultural elements are portrayed and showcased can either honor and celebrate a culture or perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misunderstandings. Cultural appropriation often arises when the production team and actors lack a comprehensive understanding of the culture being depicted. One of the underlying factors is the lack of diversity within the production team, particularly in the role of the director. According to AAPAC's (2021) report, 81.3% of directors were White, and many of them also directed shows written by people of color (POC) (Brewer, 2019). In an interview conducted by Nicole Brewer (2019), a Black actor who participated in a POC play directed by a white director, revealed that the problems arose when "the director...ignore specifics of race and direct the piece in spite of their racial difference. This type of thinking can create a rehearsal process ripe with unchecked microaggressions from the white director to the actors of color" (para. 9). Another problem occurs when performers portray characters in stereotypical ways and employ inappropriate accents or styles when speaking or singing (Hoffman, 2020; Ponti, 2010).

The case of *The King and I* musical illustrates the consequences of misrepresentation. Despite its widespread success and numerous awards worldwide, the musical remains banned in Thailand, the country in which the story is set (Phungsoondara, 2020). The ban is a result of the musical's inauthentic portrayal of Siam (now Thailand) during that time, particularly in its depiction of King Mongkut or King Rama IV as a barbaric king with broken English (Chaiwanichsiri, 2022; Ponti, 2010). Several authors have identified *The*

King and I as a problematic musical due to its associations with sexism, racism, orientalism, and the promotion of American supremacy during the Cold War (Chaiwanichsiri, 2022; Kappelmann, 2016; McConachie, 1994).

Hence, in many musical revivals, particularly of musicals from the Golden Age period (1940s–1950s), there has been a deliberate endeavor to enhance authenticity and ensure an accurate depiction of the cultures. To achieve this, directors and production teams involved in producing shows by Rodgers and Hammerstein, for instance, actively sought the guidance of culture bearers, reinterpreted the material, and incorporated additional cultural elements into their shows (Livingston, 2020). These collaborative endeavors aim to present a more faithful representation of the culture being portrayed, acknowledging the importance of cultural consultation and reinterpretation in creating a richer and more authentic theatrical experience.

Preventing Cultural Appropriation in School Musicals

Musical theatre has become a well-established annual extracurricular activity in many high schools in the United States. It offers students a platform to explore the world of performing arts and express themselves creatively (K. J. Roberts, 2007). However, without proper awareness, teachers as well as students may unknowingly perpetuate harmful stereotypes and engage in cultural appropriation within their productions. Given that in the school setting teachers only have a specific group of students to work with, selecting, casting, and rehearsing the musical is even more challenging, especially when considering the increasing diversity of the student population (Wolf, 2020). According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023), the number of students of color in schools has been rising, and it is projected to continue increasing,

with a decrease in the percentage of white students from 45 to 42 percent between fall 2021 and fall 2031. Therefore, teachers not only need to find suitable musicals and roles that match the abilities of the students but also need to take into account the students' diverse backgrounds when selecting and producing a musical (Marshall, 2019; Wolf, 2020). Additionally, they have the responsibility of ensuring that students understand the cultural aspects of the musical and are able to interpret and represent it appropriately (Hindemith, 2009; Rahman et al., 2021).

One approach that can assist teachers in achieving these goals is Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) model. By employing CRT, teachers can develop an understanding of the students' diverse backgrounds and create a caring environment where they can learn and appreciate their own and other cultures. As a result, this approach has the potential to foster an inclusive and diverse theatrical space while raising students' cultural consciousness about the musical they are participating in.

Problem and Purpose

Cultural appropriation and misrepresentation in musical theatre is an important concern that continues to persist, despite the industry's progress in addressing these challenges. This appropriation can occur in the storyline, casting choices, and overall representation of a musical. The lack of diversity in both the creative teams and the representation on stage contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and power imbalances within the industry (Brewer, 2019; Hoffman, 2020; Reyes, 2022). Although strides have been made toward incorporating diverse and inclusive narratives and employing several conscious casting approaches (Jadhvani, 2021; nycplaywrights, 2023; Syler & Banks, 2019), challenges persist in accurately interpreting and representing cultures within

musicals (Agustin, 2018; Swain, 2002). These concerns extend to school settings as well, particularly when it comes to selecting, casting, and rehearsing musicals with a limited pool of students from diverse backgrounds and identities (Marshall, 2019; Wolf, 2020).

Recognizing the need for addressing these issues, this study focuses on the potential of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as an approach that could mitigate cultural appropriation in musical theatre production. As noted, CRT is an educational approach that prioritizes multiculturalism and diversity, incorporating students' diverse backgrounds and experiences to enhance learning outcomes (Gay, 2015, 2018). To effectively implement CRT, Gay (2002) proposed five elements that are essential for constructing lessons and using teaching methods that align with the students' diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs: (a) developing a cultural diversity knowledge base, (b) designing culturally relevant curricula, (c) demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, (d) using cross-cultural communications, and (e) applying cultural congruity in classroom instruction.

Despite the extensive application of CRT in the field of choral music (Bennett, 2022; Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Kastner & Menon, 2019; Kwanza, 2021; Palkki, 2015; Rubinstein, 2020; Shaw, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019; Spradley, 2013) as well as theatre (Baskerville, 2009; Carroll, 2016; Daniels, 2021; Feinberg, 2020; Filippone, 2020; Ngo, 2017; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Scott, 2021; Troxel & Kandel-Cisco, 2015) there is a notable gap in research regarding its application within the realm of musical theatre. Thus, in this study, I utilized CRT as a guideline to examine approaches used in theatre and choral education that could be transferred to musical theatre production, as well as explored how teachers

integrate CRT in their high school musical theatre production. Specifically, I was seeking to examine how CRT can enhance diversity and inclusivity as well as cultural interpretation and representation in school musicals. By investigating the potential applications and implications of CRT in this context, I aimed to provide valuable guidelines for educators and practitioners involved in producing inclusive musical theatre production for all students.

Research Question

The following primary research question guided my investigation: What were high school teachers' attitudes, strategies, experiences, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions in creating culturally inclusive musical theatre experiences for students from diverse backgrounds and identities, guided by CRT? Research questions specific to the three studies that comprise this dissertation will be included in the chapter for each project.

Research Plan

To address the overarching research questions, I reviewed the extant literature on multiculturalism issues in school musical theatre production, the transition from multicultural education to culturally responsive teaching (CRT), and the utilization of CRT in theatre and choral education fields. By synthesizing the theories and findings from these sources, I identified the applications and implications of CRT that could transfer to musical theatre production and practices. Subsequently, through two distinct studies, I investigated the casting-related process as well as the musical selection, material preparation, and rehearsing process in high school musical productions to explore the strategies and approaches that the teachers used in relation to CRT, which could be used to develop guidelines to create more diverse and inclusive production as

well as prevent cultural appropriation. Therefore, this dissertation consists of three related investigations.

For the first investigation, I completed a comprehensive review of existing literature to examine the multiculturalism challenges that arise in school musical productions and explore how CRT could be utilized to address and mitigate these challenges. The review and synthesis of literature served as a foundation for the subsequent investigations, providing a theoretical and conceptual framework to guide the research process.

The second investigation is a qualitative study in which I explored the casting and related processes in high school productions. I sought to delve into the lived experiences of music and theatre teachers involved in casting, examining their decision-making processes and how they selected roles for diverse students, along with other processes that were pertinent to the casting process. The findings may contribute to the development of guidelines and recommendations for teachers, directors, and administrators in high school musical productions to foster diverse and inclusive casting practices and representation of the cast.

A survey study focusing on teachers' integration of CRT in their musical theatre productions comprises the third investigation. The objective was to understand how music teachers incorporate strategies related to CRT principles into their musical selection, material preparation, and instructional methods during rehearsal in order to promote cultural awareness in their teaching. By learning how music teachers currently incorporate CRT into these processes, with this investigation I aimed to provide practical recommendations and guidelines for teachers, educators, and directors in enhancing their

cultural awareness and responsiveness in their musical productions, particularly when teaching the students to interpret and represent the songs in the musical.

The concluding chapter of my dissertation offers a concise recapitulation of the principal findings, a synthesis of the outcomes directed at addressing the primary research question, and implications for both educators and potential future research endeavors. The research findings and recommendations presented in this chapter serve as suggestions and guidelines to inform the practices of educators, ultimately promoting greater inclusivity and diversity in the realm of musical theatre.

Importance of the Study

These investigations will provide valuable insights into the integration of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) into high school musical theatre production. By examining the perceptions and experiences of music and theatre teachers throughout various stages, including selecting the musical, material preparations, pre-auditions, casting, and the rehearsal process, this research seeks to enhance our understanding of how CRT can be applied throughout the entire production process. The findings from these studies will not only contribute to existing knowledge but also inform practices and suggestions aimed at fostering diversity, inclusivity, and cultural awareness within musical theatre education. Ideally, educators and practitioners can utilize this information as guidelines to enhance the overall production experience for all students, promoting a culturally responsive approach to musical theatre education.

Definitions

The following definitions were used in this study:

1. School musical theatre production: A multifaceted process comprising stages such as musical selection, auditions, material preparation, rehearsals, technical coordination, and performance. It offers students opportunities for skill development, teamwork, and self-expression (Rajan, 2019).
2. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT): An educational approach developed by Geneva Gay (2002, 2015, 2018), emphasizing the integration of students' diverse backgrounds and experiences into the teaching to foster a positive learning environment as well as make the learning process more relevant to and effective for them.
3. Cultural awareness: For this dissertation, cultural awareness is related to CRT and refers to the recognition, comprehension, and appreciation of the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities of the students participating in musical productions, as well as the communities they represent. It entails comprehending the cultural influences and perspectives embedded in the repertoire and emphasizing the authentic and respectful portrayal of these cultures on stage.
4. Cultural appropriation: When actors are miscast for roles requiring specific cultural backgrounds or when cultural elements in the musical are misrepresented or stereotypically portrayed (Hoffman, 2020; Rogers, 2006; Young, 2005, 2010). This undermines the authenticity of the culture depicted and perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

5. Culture bearer: An individual or group that actively preserves, promotes, and shares the cultural heritage, traditions, and practices of a particular community or group. Within the realm of music education, this would be a musician who has been trained and invited to represent the musical traditions of their cultural group that extend “beyond the expertise and experience of the music teacher” (P. S. Campbell, 2002, p. 30).
6. Students with/from diverse backgrounds and identities: For this dissertation, this term encompasses students who come from diverse backgrounds or possess diverse cultural identities, which include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, language, and disability (Cushner et al., 2006). Additionally, it includes personal identities such as individual personality and self-concept (Schwartz, 2001).
7. Students’ intersectionality: Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. In an educational setting, it means the intersection and overlapping of students’ various identities, including race, gender identity, class, and other identities, which collectively shape their perspectives and experiences of discrimination and privilege (Tefera et al., 2018).
8. Typecasting or traditional casting: A process of casting the actors based on their types such as appearance or personality, often aligning with specific stereotypes or roles they have previously portrayed rather than their ability (Catron & Shattuck, 2016; Wojcik, 2003).
9. Pre-casting: The process of determining roles or assigning parts to individuals before formal auditions take place, often based on predetermined criteria such as skill level, experience, or suitability for specific roles (Catron & Shattuck, 2016).

10. Identity-conscious casting: A casting process that considers actors' identities, including aspects such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, and so forth, to ensure authentic and inclusive representation on stage (Jadhvani, 2021).
11. Theatre/drama teacher: For this dissertation, the terms "theatre" and "drama" teacher are used interchangeably to refer to teachers who teach drama or theatre classes as well as those involved in directing, producing, and teaching students in musical theatre production within a school setting.

Chapter Two

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Musical Theatre Production:

A Review of Literature

In the United States, musical theatre has become a staple in many schools' annual events, particularly at the high school level, due to its interdisciplinary nature and its potential to be a transformative experience for students (Stokes, 2010). In today's society, however, the presence of increasingly diverse student backgrounds and identities makes producing musicals more challenging, as it requires greater attention to diversity, inclusivity, cultural interpretation, and representation. Failing to recognize the diverse identities of students and lacking a comprehensive understanding of the cultural importance within the musical can result in perpetuating stereotypes and engaging in cultural appropriation (Hoffman, 2020; Pao, 2010; Swain, 2002; Wolf, 2020). Consequently, it's essential to prioritize cultural awareness and sensitivity when preparing teachers, particularly preservice music teachers, to direct and produce a musical (Marshall, 2019).

Gay's (2015, 2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is one of the approaches that emerged from multicultural education and focuses on acknowledging students from diverse backgrounds, and creating an inclusive space where they can achieve while learning to respect their own and other cultures. This approach, in turn, has the potential to facilitate the development of a more diverse and inclusive musical production.

Nevertheless, in my literature search, I found limited research in a school setting that considers certain cultural aspects within the musical production (Fields, 1970; Grob, 2021; Janicki, 1982; Streeter, 2016). The related literature on CRT appears to be predominantly focused on the choral field (Bennett, 2022; Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019;

Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Kastner & Menon, 2019; Kwanza, 2021; Palkki, 2015; Rubinstein, 2020; Shaw, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019; Spradley, 2013) and theatre field (Baskerville, 2009; Carroll, 2016; Daniels, 2021; Feinberg, 2020; Filippone, 2020; Ngo, 2017; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Scott, 2021; Troxel & Kandel-Cisco, 2015) with none focusing on musical theatre production. In light of this, it was necessary to start by reviewing the literature on CRT in relation to theatre and choral education.

The purpose of this literature review was to (1) address multiculturalism issues in school musical theatre production, (2) provide an overview of the transition from multicultural education to CRT, (3) scrutinize the implementation of CRT in theatre and choral education realms, and (4) assess the potential applications and ramifications that could be transferred from these two domains to musical theatre production.

Multiculturalism Challenges in School Musical Theatre Productions

School musical theatre programs have demonstrated the ability to promote students' musical and social competence, yet there are persistent controversies surrounding cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. Even in professional productions where directors wield considerable control over casting and presentation, these issues often arise and draw criticism from actors and reviewers alike (Agustin, 2018; Rojas, 2022). This challenge is further compounded in school productions, where teachers must navigate the intricate process of selecting a musical, casting roles, and managing the rehearsal process with a limited pool of students (Wolf, 2020).

Selecting the Musicals

The choice of the musical is a crucial initial step in the production. Despite the fact that musicals always represent or reflect some cultural discourse and issues, producing a show for students from diverse backgrounds and their communities can pose a challenge. For instance, numerous musicals—such as *Showboat*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Miss Saigon*, and *Hamilton*—are based on stories from various races, cultures, or countries, but not all of them accurately portray the characters and cultures (Hoffman, 2020; Livingston, 2020; Ponti, 2010; Swain, 2002). Many musicals also feature controversial and sensitive themes, including gender, societal, and political attitudes and issues such as mental health, addiction, war, and so forth (Morgan, 2021). Ponti (2010) highlighted that “...with the American musical, it is impossible to avoid questions of race and gender discrimination, especially in those musicals that overtly deal with race as a theme” (pp. 26–27). Besides, the musicals might not reflect the demographic of the students, including their gender identities, races, and ethnicities (Wolf, 2020). Therefore, teachers may need to consider not only a musical that is age-appropriate, suits the number of students, and aligns with their skills in singing, acting, and dancing, but also the cultural aspects of the musicals and the diverse backgrounds and identities of their students.

Casting Process

In musical theatre, casting is one of the most important and divisive processes. In one of the quotes documented by Wolf (2020), a non-Latinx student playing the Latina lead character Nina in the musical *In the Heights*, said the following:

I was really disappointed that there weren't more Latinx students cast in Leads. On the flip side, I think [Pioneer Theatre Guild] is taking a good step towards diversity. The cast has roughly a 70 percent majority of people of color acting in the show....
(p. 108)

This quote raises a question about how teachers should approach casting. Should they cast the students based solely on race or appearance, which is the traditional casting approach or typecast, or should they be more open to diversity? In response to these questions, teachers could adopt the casting approach that considers the skills and suitability of students for roles, striving to ensure diversity and inclusivity in the production while avoiding stereotypes or cultural appropriation.

Musical Interpretation and Representation

Musical theatre possesses the remarkable ability to transport audiences to any time and place. One of the essential elements that can depict the setting and story of a musical is the song (music and lyrics). Nevertheless, interpreting and representing a musical number, especially one that is related to other cultures, without proper understanding can be problematic (Hindemith, 2009; Rahman et al., 2021). One such challenge is grasping the context of the song. To comprehend the context, students need to explore and understand the song's backstory, the characters, and the circumstances (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Hindemith, 2009; Moore & Bergman, 2016; K. J. Roberts, 2007). For example, students performing songs from *Fiddler on the Roof* must understand Jewish culture, traditions, and circumstances to deliver a meaningful performance. Another crucial aspect is the singing style. With songs in musicals encompassing a wide array of genres and musical traditions from around the world, there

are diverse approaches to singing them, involving different vocal techniques and accents (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016). For instance, a student who portrays Eliza in *My Fair Lady* needs to sing “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely?” with a Cockney accent to authentically represent her character. Accordingly, to interpret and represent the song, music teachers might go beyond teaching students the musical aspects and also delve into the cultural nuances embedded within the songs.

Multicultural Education to Culturally Responsive Teaching

The United States has a long history of cultural diversity; still, it was not until after the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s that multiculturalism was incorporated into U.S. legislation and became part of the educational system (Banks, 1993; Mark & Madura, 2014; Sultanova, 2016). *Multicultural education* aims to reform the structure of the school system so that students of all races, ethnicities, languages, cultures, and socioeconomic groups can have equal opportunities to be successful in their academic studies (Banks & Banks, 2013; Sleeter & Grant, 2008). It also intends to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they would need to survive in a culturally diverse society, including an understanding of cultural differences as well as the principles of equity, equality, and justice (Sleeter & Grant, 2008). Despite many years of efforts to integrate multiculturalism into the educational system, there continue to be issues related to the achievement gap between white students and students of color, which contributes to higher dropout rates for students of color (J. R. Campbell et al., 2000; Osher et al., 2004). One of the leading causes has been teachers’ limited understanding of students of color’s backgrounds, especially African American students, resulting in their misrepresentation as less competent or mentally deficient and their placement in special

education classes (Jordan, 2005; Kreskow, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2000). As a result, many scholars have attempted to explain or analyze the phenomenon under the concept of *deficit thinking* or *cultural deficit*, which portrays students from historically oppressed groups as deficient (Bloom et al., 1965; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Valencia, 2012), while others have developed theories and approaches, known as asset-based pedagogies, to refute the paradigm with the main objective of raising educators' awareness of cultural differences and strengthening their ability to teach students of color (Gay, 2000, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Paris & Alim, 2017). One of the important models that developed in the education field to help with these problems is culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The term *culturally responsive teaching* (CRT) was initially coined by Cazden and Leggett (1981), but it wasn't until Geneva Gay's (2000, 2010, 2018) book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, that the term became popularized. However, Gay's model was essentially expanded from the culturally relevant pedagogy that was proposed in the early 1990s by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b). *Culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP) is a "theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 469). Ladson-Billings discovered that many African American students were having academic difficulties not due to lack of talent but because they felt left out and had lost their cultural identities. Therefore, she constructed the CRP model based on critical race theory, anthropologist and sociolinguist

studies, and her three-year research on exemplary teachers of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2006). The CRP model consists of three criteria that students need to experience or develop: (a) *academic achievement*, which is a success that goes beyond students' test scores and instead emphasizes their intellectual and moral development as well as their capacity to solve problems; (b) *cultural competence*, which refers to the skill that can foster students to understand and value their cultural identities while being open to other cultures; and (c) *sociopolitical/critical consciousness*, which denotes the students' ability to use their knowledge to better comprehend and analyze their social position and context as well as solve real-world issues. Ladson-Billings also advised teachers to consider the notions of *self and others*, *knowledge*, and *social relations* to successfully implement the pedagogy across these three domains.

Although Gay's CRT approach is based on Ladson-Billings's CRP model and shares some similarities, they have different areas of emphasis. While Ladson-Billings's CRP model focuses on the *pedagogy* that influences teachers' perceptions and dispositions in order to teach students from diverse backgrounds, Gay's CRT framework emphasizes the *praxis* or the doing of teaching that can create a culturally responsive classroom (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Vavrus, 2008). Gay's emphasis on praxis stems from her recognition that the greatest barrier for teachers would be translating theory into practice.

Gay (2018) defined CRT as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 36). She identified eight characteristics of CRT associated with student learning outcomes: validating,

comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. These attributes not only take into account the diverse backgrounds of the students to support their academic success, but they also encourage the students to respect their own and other cultures, be free from preconceived notions and prescriptive knowledge, as well as be aware of social injustices so that they can become active social advocates. To prepare teachers, especially pre-service teachers, Gay (2002) proposed five essential elements they need to be able to implement CRT: (a) *developing a cultural diversity knowledge base*, which refers to having a thorough understanding and knowledge of ethnic and cultural diversity in order to meet ethnically diverse students' needs; (b) *designing culturally relevant curricula*, which entails developing a curriculum that offers opportunities to teach cultural diversity and appropriately represents the culture. The three types of curricula that can be employed are a *formal, symbolic, and societal* curriculum; (c) *demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community*, which means to care *for* (action-oriented) and to develop partnerships with ethnically diverse students while also adopting *cultural scaffolding* strategy to help them construct their knowledge from their own backgrounds and experiences; (d) *cross-cultural communications*, which involves appreciating, understanding and encoding different or *communal communication styles* of ethnically diverse students in order to adjust to their needs; and (e) *cultural congruity in classroom instruction*, which refers to matching the teaching style to ethnically diverse students' learning styles as well as creating *pedagogical bridges* that construct students new knowledge from their prior knowledge.

Gay's CRT approach has become the foundation of other scholarly research and has been applied in all disciplines (Vavrus, 2008). Some researchers merged CRT with CRP and other related models to form the umbrella terminology of *culturally relevant education* (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dover, 2013) and *culturally responsive education* (CRE; Bond, 2017), or to develop a new conceptual framework such as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Nevertheless, as Gay (2018) concluded:

Although called by many different names including *culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, contextualized, synchronized, and responsive*, the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students, and how this can be done, are virtually identical. (p. 36)

Despite Gay's (2013) initial focus on CRT for racially and ethnically diverse students, attributed to her expertise, she further emphasized the need for teachers to understand "how and why culture and difference are essential ideologies and foundations of culturally responsive teaching" (p. 60). Her approach to CRT, thus, extends to students with diverse cultures and differences. This diversity, as she noted in one of her articles, "is more race-, ethnic-, and language-based in some countries than in others, while the existence of gender, class, and ability differences, both among and within groups, transcends national boundaries in fact but not kind" (Gay, 2015, p. 128). Hence, in using CRT, it is crucial for teachers to truly comprehend students' diverse backgrounds and experiences, acknowledge and integrate them into academic content, and construct and adjust their instructional methods to meet their needs.

Gay's model provides a practical approach to teaching as well as offers step-by-step guidance for teachers to create culturally responsive classrooms. Therefore, I am using CRT as a framework to analyze and explore its application in theatre and choral practices, and to identify transferable strategies for musical theatre production.

Culturally Responsive Theatre Education

Despite the fact that there is a substantial body of research on multiculturalism, diversity and inclusivity in theatre education and production, only several studies explicitly focused on CRT. These studies can be separated into two groups. In the first group, theatre or drama teachers employed CRT as a tool to foster cultural and sociopolitical competence. Applied theatre with youth participatory action research (YPAR; Troxel & Kandel-Cisco, 2015) or without YPAR (Filippone, 2020; Ngo, 2017) was used in an effort to change students' perceptions of themselves. It became a space to give students the confidence to voice out about issues that are relevant to their lives and give them a sense of agency. Several theatrical performances were also utilized as CRT platforms to educate audiences and students on the importance of other cultures or controversial topics, such as social challenges of the community along the Mexico/US Border (Schroeder-Arce, 2014a), Latin culture (Schroeder-Arce, 2014b), and the past experiences of incarcerated individuals (Daniels, 2021). A teacher (Baskerville, 2009) or pre-service teachers (Scott, 2021) used theatre as a tool to deepen their understanding of particular cultures in order to implement CRT approach in their classrooms as well.

In the second group of studies, CRT was employed as a framework to construct a theatre curriculum or production. It served as the basis for researchers to construct a CRT-based theatre curriculum to support diverse upper elementary students (Feinberg,

2020) and to design a multicultural theatre program for undergraduates in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Rodríguez, 2013). In the context of theatre production, CRT was utilized to create a culturally responsive directing practice (Carroll, 2016). It was also adapted for use in both theatrical production and education, manifesting as culturally responsive artistry and culturally responsive theatre education, respectively (Schroeder-Arce, 2014b).

To examine the utilization of the CRT approach in theatre practice in theatre practice, I utilized Gay's (2002, 2018) CRT model to analyze different approaches and teaching methods from relevant literature that could be used as a guide for each stage of the theatrical process.

According to Gay (2002, 2015, 2018), understanding and acknowledging students' diverse backgrounds is imperative in CRT. Therefore, before choosing or producing any play, teachers may need to have a thorough understanding of students' diverse backgrounds, including age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status. Then, as stated by Lazarus (2012), teachers can ask themselves questions such as "Who is my program for? Who is being served and excluded? Whose voice history, culture, language, aesthetics, and perspective are being heard? Whose material do we study, develop and produce" (p. 123), to aid them in reflecting on how to choose plays that will meet the needs of their students and broaden their cultural knowledge.

Choosing Culturally Responsive Play

Similar to choosing culturally responsive content and material in the curricula, teachers might need to be conscious and have a thorough understanding of the cultural

context of a play before choosing it (Gay, 2002). Given that theatre can be a place to reinforce or question societal preconceptions, teachers may need to first analyze and choose a play that accurately depicts students or other cultural groups without stereotyping them or misrepresenting their cultures (Gay, 1999, 2002; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b). As Gay (1999) stated, theatre should be a place where “diverse peoples can claim their voices, choose how they wish to speak...and have a great deal of freedom to employ multiple voices to exemplify the multi-dimensionalities of their cultures and experiences” (p. 25).

To achieve this, teachers can select a play written by members of their cultural groups (Schroeder-Arce, 2014a; E. P. Walker, 1994) or a play that appropriately represents those groups (Carroll, 2016). In line with Gay’s (2002, 2018) CRT principle and Rodríguez’s (2013) recommendations, teachers can also begin the season by choosing a play that portrays the students’ diverse backgrounds to build bridges between their home and theatre cultures. Then, to encourage students to honor and respect both their own and at least one another’s cultural heritage, teachers can choose different plays during different seasons, providing students an opportunity to participate in plays representing other cultural groups. Aside from choosing a play that reflects diverse cultural groups, teachers should not be reluctant to consider choosing a play that addresses social issues or controversial topics—including racial prejudices, oppression, LGBTQIA+, and so on—given that they are realities students face both inside and outside of school (Gay, 1999; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2015). Gay (2002) highlighted that “Culturally responsive teaching ...deal[s] directly with controversy; studying a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups; contextualizing issues within

race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspective” (p. 108). Thus, it could assist students in understanding and examining the social injustices that various racial and ethnic individuals or groups experience in order to foster their social consciousness and help them become active advocates for social justice and equality. Regardless, teachers may need to consider the students’ ages, as certain plays may not be suitable for particular age groups, especially younger students (Price, n.d.)

Non-Traditional Casting to Identity-Conscious Casting

Casting stands as one of the processes that can either exclude or include students in the production. Given the importance of inclusivity for students from diverse backgrounds and identities within Gay’s (2018) CRT, teachers could approach casting with mindfulness and openness. Prioritizing the inclusion of students from underrepresented groups is essential to ensure a production that is inclusive and representative, while also being cautious to avoid perpetuating stereotypes and engaging in cultural appropriation.

In the industry, the evolution towards a more diverse and inclusive production has involved a shift from traditional casting or typecasting to non-traditional casting, and more recently, to identity-conscious casting. In 1986, the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP), now known as the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts, was established to promote multiculturalism and challenge traditional casting practices (Pao, 2010). Led by an advocacy group headed by Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman, NTCP aimed to foster inclusivity in theater. *Non-traditional casting* was defined by Actors’ Equity as “the casting of ethnic and female performers in roles where race, ethnicity, or gender are not germane to the character’s or play’s development. (The NTCP later expanded this

definition to include performers with disabilities.)” (Newman, 1989). It can be separated into four categories, including (a) *color-blind casting*, in which the role is assigned to the best actor regardless of their race or ethnicity; (b) *societal casting*, in which an ethnic, female, or actor with disabilities is cast to play their role in the society; (c) *conceptual casting*, in which an ethnic, female or disabled actor is cast in order to create greater resonance for that role; and (d) *cross-cultural casting*, in which the entire cast is shifted from one culture to another such as an all-African American cast (C. T. Davis & Newman, 1988; Pao, 2010).

Nonetheless, there has been a lot of opposition to non-traditional casting, particularly color-blind casting, due to concerns that it may contribute to Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) theory of *color-blind racism*, a concept particularly relevant in theatre practices where individuals claim not to see or acknowledge racial differences (Rodríguez, 2013). This opposition arises from instances such as having an all-white cast in a play with characters of different races (Rodríguez, 2013) or casting actors of color in stereotypical ways (Gay, 1999; Pao, 2010). As a result, a new subcategory known as color-conscious casting was created. *Color-conscious casting* is different from other subcategories because it takes into account the race and ethnicity of actors, embraces their cultural identities, and gives them equal opportunities in the theatre (Jadhvani, 2014; Rodríguez, 2013). It became the new approach that has been used in the industry for several years to replace color-blind casting. One of the shows that successfully applied a color-conscious casting approach was *Hamilton* (Sowa, 2020).

In addition to color-conscious casting, several scholars have advocated for broader changes in casting practices regarding other identities such as body type, gender

identity, and disability. For example, actress Stephanie Lexis promoted Broadway body positivity (Hall, 2023), while Donovan's (2019, 2023) study underscored the importance of considering actors with non-conforming bodies, such as those who are fat, deaf, have disabilities, or are gay. This challenges the conventional *Broadway body* ideal, which demands hyper-fit bodies alongside high acting, dancing, and singing abilities.

In line with the NTCP, although some theaters have made themselves more accessible to disabled actors (DeVault, 2019), there has been a call for the theatre industry to provide disabled actors more opportunities, not only for roles as characters with disabilities but also for other roles that best utilize their talents (Sandahl, 2019). Despite the challenges that may come with casting disabled actors, it is essential to offer them equal opportunities and accessibility, as their performances can create new ways of collaboration and understanding between disabled and non-disabled actors, and inspire audiences (Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020; Sandahl, 2019). This inclusivity can bring about a substantial shift not only in the music industry but also in the other performance industries. For instance, Ali Stroker's historic Tony Award win as the first actress using a wheelchair inspired other disabled actors and individuals with disabilities to pursue their dreams in the entertainment industry (News 9, 2019).

Consequently, *open casting*, which considers actors for roles regardless of their gender, race, age, or body type, has been used or encouraged to offer more opportunities for actors with diverse identities (Catron & Shattuck, 2016; Schechner, 2010). According to Schechner (2010), this approach could benefit both performers and audiences by viewing these identities "not as 'biological destinies' but as flexible, historically conditioned performative circumstances" (p. 30). Another casting approach recently

established to consciously cast actors with diverse identities is “identity-conscious casting” (Jadhvani, 2021, para. 1). This approach considers an actor’s identity factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, body type, and disability when casting for roles, allowing them to fully embrace their identity within their characters. It’s essential to note that these identities are interconnected, so when evaluating them for a role, their intersectionality should also be taken into consideration.

In a school setting, to provide more opportunities to students with diverse identities and ensure their inclusion in productions, teachers can acknowledge the intersectionality of students’ diverse identities and embrace identity-conscious casting. Lavina Jadhvani’s three questions (2014), originally designed for color-conscious casting, can also serve as valuable guidance to teachers when making casting decisions for other identities: “1) What story does this racially conscious casting tell? 2) Is the new story appropriately complex? and 3) Do I have the right players to tell this story?” (para. 4). By using these questions, teachers can ensure that their casting choices are deliberate and purposeful, resulting in a more inclusive theatre experience for their students and audiences.

Culturally Responsive Theatre Rehearsals

Rehearsal stands as the pivotal process in production, providing teachers and students with an opportunity to truly engage, interact, and learn from one another. Teachers may strive to create a safe space for all students, while also employing effective strategies to foster students’ comprehension of the cultural aspects embedded within the play.

Safe and Caring Theatrical Space

To create a safe space, Carroll (2016) suggested utilizing Gay's concept of culturally responsive caring, which is action oriented. According to Gay (2002), "Culturally responsive caring also places teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence" (p. 52). Thus, teachers can employ caring-in-action to transform the theater into a safe space where students with diverse backgrounds and identities can share and discuss their perspectives and opinions about their own and other cultures as well as difficult subjects like social justice and equity.

Prepare Students' Cultural Understanding of the Play

According to Gay (1999), "Through drama, it is possible that diverse students can gain self-control and be empowered through self-definition and self-presentation. Through experiencing other peoples' living drama, they can find out more about these 'others' perceptions and interpretations of the world" (p. 28). Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to explore both their own identities and those of their characters, alongside understanding the social context and its importance and relevance to their lives. To achieve this, teachers can utilize Gay's (2002) idea regarding culturally relevant curricula to provide the materials and other resources that can deepen students' understanding of the culture within the play (Carroll, 2016). Additionally, employing acting methods such as Stanislavski's (1936) *given circumstances* technique (which will be discussed further in a subsequent section of this chapter) can aid students in

comprehending and accurately portraying their characters (characterization) within the specific cultural and situational context.

Culturally Relevant Script and Resources. Carroll's (2016) study utilized Gay's (2002) concept of culturally relevant curricula, including a formal, symbolic, and societal curriculum, to view the script and make production choices for her show, *Tomás*. Despite the fact that Carroll was making her choice based on how she could teach the audience about cultural context, this can be transferred to how teachers can use the script to discuss cultural context with the students as well as prepare related materials and resources for the show. The content within the *formal plans/curriculum* can refer back to the script of a play (Carroll, 2016). Once a culturally appropriate play is selected, the teachers should consider examining the script to identify cultural contexts that can be explored with students. Subsequently, they can present and discuss it with the students to deepen their understanding of the subject matter within the play (Gay, 2018; Rodríguez, 2013). *Symbolic curriculum*, borrowed from the work of Cortés and incorporated into Gay's framework, encompasses images, symbols, languages, dialects, traditions, or artifacts specific to the culture represented in the play (Carroll, 2016). Teachers may need to make sure that they include all the materials that accurately display the culture and its values when discussing with students and incorporating them into the show. For instance, Carroll (2016) realized that she should keep the German dialect in the show even though the story only features one character with German heritage because it was important for the audience with German ancestry. *Societal curriculum* refers to the representation of people or events in mass media. However, because this portrayal can be manipulated by the media, it can have a detrimental effect on everything from how the costume designer

creates the outfits to how the performers play the characters in stereotypical ways (Carroll, 2016). Therefore, it is vital that teachers encourage their students to break free from their preconceived notions of what they have seen in the media in order to explore and develop a new idea and be able to appropriately portray the characters from that culture. Stanislavski's given circumstances and Emeka's re-image techniques can also be applied to accomplish this goal.

Stanislavski's Given Circumstances and Emeka's Re-image Techniques.

Stanislavski's (1936) *given circumstances* is a technique to assist the actors in being themselves while portraying the characters that may be vastly different from them, in order to avoid false acting. As Stanislavski stated (1936), "Always act in your own person... The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting" (p. 167). To achieve this, actors can ask themselves seven fundamental questions: (a) *who am I?* signifies who I am in the story, what are my traits, my relationship, and the values my character holds; (b) *where am I?* denotes the location where the situation takes place and how I feel about it; (c) *what time is it?* refers to the time and/or date that the incident occurs; (d) *what do I want?* means what do I want in this scene, what is my objective/goal; (e) *why do I want it?* indicates the motivation behind the goal; (f) *how will I get it?* refers to how or what action I need to take to get what I want; and (g) *what must I overcome?* means what obstacles stop me from achieving my goal. By asking and answering these questions, students can understand the essential details and characteristics of their characters, enabling them to compare or relate their own identities with the character's as well as grasp the essence of the situation and motivations behind the character's actions. This

process aligns with Gay's (2018) CRT approach, enabling students to draw connections between the characters and situations in the text and their own lives and experiences. This facilitates their ability to acknowledge and respect both their own values and beliefs and those of others.

Emeka's (2019) re-imaging technique, originally intended to assist actors of color in portraying characters from plays authored by White or European playwrights, can also be applied when students undertake roles that differ from their own identities, especially concerning race and ethnicity. She proposed:

reinterpreting the text through a black or brown experience; finding ways to support that interpretation with creative and historical cultural references; and using archetypes to help actors shape characters that can transform the expectations of both artists and audiences. (Emeka, 2019, p. 37)

Overall, there are several strategies teachers can use to implement CRT in theatre practice to cultivate students' cultural and sociopolitical competency. This entails not only acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of students but also creating a supportive and collaborative space where students can share and learn about their own and others' cultures while also getting the opportunity to perform in suitable roles. To accomplish this, teachers can begin by selecting a play that initially resonates with the students' cultures or identities then gradually expand to include others', while ensuring that the play accurately portrays the cultural or sociopolitical events. Additionally, teachers can employ an identity-conscious casting process, thoroughly prepare the cultural information, and encourage students to deepen their understanding of the context and characters they portray using acting techniques such as Stanislavski's given

circumstances. These strategies can also be applied to musical theatre production to address issues like typecasting and misrepresentation in the musical, as well as promote diversity and inclusivity within the productions.

Culturally Responsive Choral Education

The integration of multiculturalism in the school music curriculum began in the 1960s, similar to other disciplines (Mark & Madura, 2014). Still, it wasn't until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century that music educators and researchers began to focus on the use of CRT (Walter, 2018). As a result, there have been relatively few studies on the application of CRT in choral education. What has been published can be categorized into two groups. The first group of studies focuses on the teachers' preparation and practice. Findings from multiple studies indicated that CRT, which emphasizes students' needs and strengths, served as an important foundation for teachers to successfully incorporate contextual knowledge into their choral practice (Dissinger, 2019; Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2015; Spradley, 2013). Contextual knowledge, in this circumstance, refers to teachers' profound understanding of their students' diverse experiences and identities, alongside their own practical knowledge. This integration spanned various processes, such as selecting suitable repertoire, programming the concert, designing and aligning instructional approaches, and managing student recruitment and retention. These processes entailed teachers acknowledging and affirming students' diverse backgrounds and identities, involving them in practice, and caring for them while being mindful of their own biases and assumptions. Similarly, there are several studies that employed CRT-incorporating models, such as the CRE model (Gilliam, 2021) and Brown-Jeffy and Cooper's conceptual framework for CRP (Kwanza,

2021), which supported the importance of these findings. It should be noted that many processes involved the support staff, including the administrative team and board of directors, so collaboration between teachers and staff was essential throughout these processes to support and cultivate a culturally responsive community (Karapetian, 2017).

The second group of studies focused on students' perceptions, experiences, and recommendations stemming from their encounters. According to these studies, students expressed that CRT fostered a sense of community (Palkki, 2015) and strengthened the connection between the song they learned and their cultural identities, deepening their understanding and respect for their own and others' cultures (Palkki, 2015; Shaw, 2016). This was facilitated by the opportunity to explore various aspects of language, vocal styles, and other facets of their own and other cultures through a multicultural or diverse selection of repertoires. Teachers were suggested to be mindful and select repertoire that students can connect with, relate to, or represent their cultures (Palkki, 2015), rather than choosing pieces solely from a publisher's catalog (Palkki, 2015) or specific cultures based on potentially misguided assumptions (Shaw, 2016). They could also take into account repertoire that conveys a positive message and that the families of the students and people in the community can enjoy and relate to (Palkki, 2015).

In addition to the research studies, there is a review of the literature on culturally diverse choral music and its practice (Bennett, 2022) as well as a book (Shaw, 2019) and several practitioner articles discussing and suggesting various ways to implement the CRT approach in choral rehearsals (Kastner & Menon, 2019; Shaw, 2012, 2017), classrooms (Bond, 2014), or both (Rubinstein, 2020). Even though there are few studies

and articles, these approaches can be utilized as guidelines for integrating Gay's CRT principle into choral practice.

Knowing Students' Diverse Backgrounds and Musical Backgrounds

Gay's (2002, 2015, 2018) CRT places students' needs and strengths at the center of the approach. The foremost responsibility for teachers, therefore, is to truly understand and acknowledge their students' diverse backgrounds and identities, such as ethnicity, race, religion, language, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and disability as well as musical experiences and identities. As noted by Bond (2014), "One [teacher] cannot, therefore, make assumptions based on one facet of his or her multicultural students" (p. 10). To ensure inclusivity in choir participation, teachers may consider not only current students who are already choir members but also the entire student population of the school (Bond, 2014). This is because there may be various reasons why some students choose not to participate in the choir, including concerns about repertoire selection. Hence, before selecting repertoire or teaching students, teachers may need to have a deep understanding of how students experience and engage with their musical cultures inside and outside of the classroom (McKoy, 2019). To accomplish this, teachers can develop a survey (Dissinger, 2019; Shaw, 2012) or ask students to write about their musical backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and preferences (Abril, 2013) or their views on the music that they listen to (Lum & Campbell, 2009). Teachers can also propose an activity that creates an opportunity to speak with students' parents in order to learn more about students' musical culture and their lives at home (Dissinger, 2019).

Choosing Culturally Responsive Repertoire

Nowadays, there is a wide range of repertoire from diverse cultures to choose from that can promote cultural diversity, although, as Walker (2020) noted, “It is not enough to perform songs in different languages and feel that it suffices for culturally responsive teaching” (p. 57). Therefore, when selecting repertoire, there are several things that teachers may need to consider in addition to the musical elements, concepts, and language of the song.

Culturally Relevant Repertoire

Teachers can select music that is relevant and related to students’ cultural backgrounds and identities as well as their musical cultures. To do so, Shaw (2012) translated Gay’s CRT principle into a series of inquiries for teachers to consider while selecting the repertoire, including “What music would build upon my students’ prior experiences? What pieces would capitalize on their cultural knowledge? What selections could my students experience through their preferred learning styles? Which would showcase their culturally informed performance styles?” (p. 76). The repertoire, therefore, may initially comprise music that students are already familiar with or that connects to their musical cultures (Palkki, 2015), before introducing other pieces that facilitate understanding of other cultures as well as other social and political contexts (Bond, 2014; Gay, 2002). According to Abril (2013), “Music selected for the culturally responsive classroom does not have to be representative of students’ cultures and ethnic heritages...as long as the teacher assists students to make connections between their musical cultures and those beyond their experiences...” (p. 9). This could involve selecting appropriate popular songs that address current issues or align with students’

preferences (Kastner & Menon, 2019), songs that reflect students' culture of reference that may be different from their cultural heritage (Shaw, 2012), or songs composed by underrepresented composers such as composers of color, women composers, composers with disability, and LGBTQ+/non-binary composers (Institute for Composer Diversity, n.d.). In addition, teachers can choose a diverse repertoire that resonates with them, allowing them to convey their appreciation and affection to the students (Karapetian, 2017). This approach, consistent with Gay's (2018) CRT principle, can aid students in comprehending their own identities and feeling more comfortable expressing themselves, such as being a member of the LGBTQ+ community (Dissinger, 2019). It can also enable them to develop respect for both their own and others' cultures while cultivating their sociopolitical competence. Still, as noted previously, teachers may need to be cautious of making assumptions about students' backgrounds and identities and instead rely on surveys or inquiries about their musical and cultural experiences. For instance, assuming that all Hispanic students can sing Spanish songs can be problematic and lead to misunderstandings (Shaw, 2012).

Culturally Valid Repertoire

Once teachers have compiled a list of repertoire, according to Gay's (2002) notion of relevant curricula criteria, it becomes their responsibility to review these songs and ensure that they can promote students' social competence and not perpetuate stereotypes or give a false representation of cultures (Shaw, 2012). Abril (2006) proposed three major domains that teachers need to consider: cultural validity, bias, and practicality. He advised that a repertoire should have *high cultural validity* and *low bias*, reflecting the characteristics of the represented culture without resorting to stereotypical words or

arrangement. To select culturally valid repertoire, Abril (2006) recommended teachers select repertoire (a) from reputable and trustworthy publishers who uphold high standards for their multicultural materials; (b) from a musician, performer, arranger, or composer who is a culture bearer or has a profound understanding of that culture; (c) that provides background materials such as history, politics, game, dance, or language translation; (d) that has recordings, demonstrating culture bearer performances. Teachers can also do a validity check by consulting with colleagues, a culture bearer in the community, a professor who has experience with that musical culture (Abril, 2006; Karapetian, 2017), or even their own students (Shaw, 2012). Shaw (2012) also made note of the fact that, in today's technologically advanced age, it is possible to communicate with experts via videoconference, which can be recorded and shown to the class with permission. Even so, as not all culturally valid repertoire is bias-free, and vice versa, teachers may need to assess pieces independently (Abril, 2006). These approaches also help prevent *cultural appropriation* (Cho, 2015), which occurs when the dominating culture represents, takes, or uses elements and artistic forms of subordinate cultures without consent, compensation, or understanding, and thus exploits them (Rogers, 2006). Additionally, *practicality* pertains to how these pieces can be employed in practice and curriculum (Abril, 2006). Teachers may need to explore new instrumentation and voicing to meet the students' needs, avoid performing certain pieces that may not be suitable for the school and the community (Abril, 2006; Cho, 2015), and consider how these selections can be effectively integrated into the curriculum. As Abril concluded (2006), "cultural validity, bias, and practicality ensure the integrity of your selections" (p. 45).

Culturally Responsive Choral Rehearsal

Repertoire serves as one of the primary tools in rehearsals to foster students' cultural competency. However, even with careful selection, the effectiveness of the repertoire can be compromised if the teaching methods do not align with the diverse learning styles of both the originating culture and students. According to Gay (2002), successfully applying CRT in practice involves three key elements: demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, utilizing cross-cultural communication, and ensuring cultural congruence.

Caring and Supportive Choral Rehearsal Space

To create a caring and supportive choral rehearsal space, teachers may need to first respect and be considerate of students' cultural backgrounds (Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012). They should also consider creating a positive and safe learning environment where students can make mistakes, ask questions, give opinions, discuss, collaborate, or share with one another (Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Palkki, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). The topics of the conversation may include their lives, both their own and others' cultures, as well as relevant societal concerns (Karapetian, 2017; Spradley, 2013).

To foster a partnership with students and cultivate a culturally responsive community, teachers can actively involve students in the rehearsal process. This includes allowing them to translate, interpret, and discuss the context of the repertoire based on their own understanding (Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019; Karapetian, 2017). Teachers can also empower students by providing opportunities for them to take on leadership roles or act as experts, sharing their cultural experiences or teaching their native languages within

the repertoire (Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012).

Moreover, encouraging students to participate in decision-making processes (Bond, 2014; Spradley, 2013), and engaging them in various cultural activities can further strengthen their connection to the material (Karapetian, 2017). These approaches empower students to support each other in comprehending the meanings and contexts of the songs, enhancing their understanding and performance.

Cross-Cultural Communication to Cross-Cultural Singing

Cross-cultural communication involves understanding the communication styles of students from diverse backgrounds. As Gay (2002) indicated, teachers need to know their “linguistic structures...as well as contextual factors, cultural nuances, discourse features, logic and rhythm, delivery, vocabulary usage, role relationships of speakers and listeners, intonation, gestures, and body movements” (p. 111). During choral practice, this relates to how musicians from different cultures perform their pieces. Teachers may need to ensure that they teach students to sing and present songs in a manner typical of diverse cultures (Shaw, 2012, 2015; Yoo, 2017). For instance, compared with European vocal norms, the traditional Chinese singing style has a more nasal tone and higher pitches whereas African American singing style is more chest dominant and throaty (Yoo, 2017). Teachers can also use reliable sources to gain a thorough understanding of the languages, singing styles, timbres, techniques, and the manner in which songs are performed before sharing or letting the students explore them (Goetze, 2000; Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). Consulting experts or culture bearers in the community, inviting them to meet with students (Goetze, 2000; Yoo, 2017), or involving students who are members of the culture (Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012) can be beneficial. By exposing students to

various singing styles, they not only become more receptive to different musical traditions but also develop the ability to switch between them (Shaw, 2012). Shaw (2016) related this ability to the sociolinguistic concept of *code switching* between languages. Nonetheless, teachers may have to ensure that students approach different singing styles in a proper and healthy way. Additionally, teachers can use traditional instruments instead of Western instruments and incorporate traditional folk dance or movement to enhance cultural performances (Yoo, 2017)

Culturally Congruity in Choral Practice

Cultural congruity in choral practice involves aligning teaching styles with how students from diverse backgrounds or members of that culture would be taught and learn the music (Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). It becomes the teachers' responsibility to decide whether to teach the music orally or from notation to create a culturally valid experience for the students. For instance, many African and Asian songs have been taught and transmitted orally (Yoo, 2017). In this case, teachers may need to teach the music orally/aurally rather than providing students with a music sheet to read from (Shaw, 2012). As Bond (2014) stated, "Oral/aural literacy is a necessary component of music literacy and must stand alongside notational literacy in importance. A director can transmit this view by teaching in the oral/aural tradition, especially when culturally appropriate for the selected repertoire..." (p.12). Regardless, it remains important to teach students to be able to read the notation so they can participate in other ensembles or enter college (Shaw, 2012). According to this, teachers should consider choosing the appropriate teaching style that promotes students' musical and cultural competency, while also preparing them for broader musical experiences.

Integrating CRT in choral practice involves similar approaches to theatre practice, such as creating a supportive and collaborative space while considering students' diverse backgrounds. However, in choral practice, teachers may also need to consider students' musical backgrounds and preferences. The repertoire should be culturally valid, low bias, and practical as well as enable students to connect with their cultures or other cultures beyond their life experiences. To perform songs with a deep understanding of cultural and musical traditions, students could be encouraged to assist one another in comprehending the songs' meanings and contexts. Teachers can also teach songs using the learning and singing style of the culture they originate from. These approaches can be transferred to musical theatre production, aiding in the interpretation of song context and singing style. Additionally, they contribute to establishing an inclusive and respectful environment that appreciates and celebrates diverse cultures and musical traditions.

Culturally Responsive Musical Theatre Production:

Applications and Implications from Theatrical and Choral Practices

Research on musical theatre has highlighted numerous cultural challenges and barriers throughout the production process, from selecting the musical to casting and rehearsals. To address these issues and promote diversity, inclusivity, equity, and accessibility for students of diverse backgrounds, Gay's (2002, 2015, 2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) offers a promising approach. However, there is currently a lack of research examining the application of CRT specifically in the context of musical theatre. Given the close relationship between theatre, choral practices, and musical theatre, strategies from these related fields can be leveraged to develop a more culturally responsive musical theatre production.

In response to Gay's (2002) CRT model, before choosing a musical, it is essential for teachers to be aware of their students' diverse backgrounds including their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status. They may need to comprehend students' musical experiences and how they engage with them, as well (McKoy, 2019). Similar to choir practices, teachers can gather this information by distributing surveys or directly asking students (Abril, 2006; Dissinger, 2019; Shaw, 2012).

Choosing Culturally Responsive Musicals

Once teachers become familiar with students' cultural backgrounds, akin to practices in both theatre and choir, they can choose a musical that reflects students' cultural groups (Carroll, 2016; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b) or bridges their understanding between their own and other cultures (Abril, 2013). This may involve diversifying show selections across seasons to represent various cultural groups or ensuring a balance between works by minority and non-minority writers (Rodríguez, 2013). Teachers can also explore a musical that introduces students to social issues or controversial topics to promote students' sociopolitical competence (Dissinger, 2019; Gay, 1999; Kastner & Menon, 2019; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2015; Shaw, 2012).

According to Gay's (2002) concept of culturally relevant curricula, teachers should also consider students' age as well as choose a musical that accurately depicts the racial, ethnic, gender, or other cultural groups and does not stereotype them (Gay, 1999; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b). To do so and avoid cultural appropriation, teachers can select a musical (a) from a reliable company that has an understanding of different cultures (Abril, 2006); (b) that was written and composed by a member of that

ethnic or cultural group (Abril, 2006; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b; E. P. Walker, 1994); or (c) that appropriately represents the identity or cultural group (Carroll, 2016). According to this, teachers can obtain a license from several companies that tailor their musicals to the needs of students at different school levels, such as Music Theatre International (MTI, n.d.) and Concord Theatricals (n.d.), which offer collections such as The Rodgers & Hammerstein collection, The Tams-Witmark collection, and The Andrew Lloyd Webber collection. MTI (n.d.) also offers Show Kit®, which includes many tools as well as a remark on the casting and cultural features of the musicals. That being said, to determine the appropriateness of a musical, teachers not only need to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the culture and context within the musical, but they should also consider consulting with an expert, a culture bearer (Abril, 2006; Karapetian, 2017), or their students who are from those cultures (Shaw, 2012). Alongside licensed musicals, teachers can also create their own musical that is musically and culturally appropriate for a specific student group (Bobetsky, 2009), using resources such as Cohen & Rosenhaus's (2016) book, *Writing Musical Theater*, or seeking assistance from individuals belonging to the relevant cultural groups.

Despite the importance of selecting a culturally responsive musical to address cultural barriers and foster students' self-identity and cultural competence, teachers might need to also ensure that the chosen musical aligns with students' abilities and vocal range, and is suitable for the school and community (Abril, 2006; Cho, 2015; Marshall, 2019). Essentially, teachers could strive for musicals that, in line with Abril's (2006) recommendations for cultural repertoire, demonstrate “[high] cultural validity, [low] bias, and practicality” (p. 45). Teachers might also consider other factors such as music and

technical aspects, budget, costumes, and audience appeal when selecting the musical (Lee, 1983; Marshall, 2019).

Identity-Conscious Casting

In the theatre literature review, the casting approach aligned with Gay's CRT model and conducive to fostering inclusivity is identity-conscious casting. This method takes into account not only the races and ethnicities of students but also other identities such as gender identities, religions, language, and disabilities (Jadhvani, 2021). To implement this approach effectively, teachers might aim to ensure equal opportunities for all students and choose roles that not only promote their diverse identities but also allow them to showcase their abilities. They may also refer to Jadhvani's (2014) three questions (previously mentioned in the non-traditional casting to identity-conscious section) to further clarify their decision. This can increase the representation of students with diverse identities in the show and allow them to showcase their talents on the stage.

Preparing Culturally Relevant Materials

To prepare cultural materials and make a culturally related choice in production, teachers can utilize Gay's (2002) culturally relevant curricula, which consist of a formal, symbolic, and societal curriculum (Carroll, 2016). The libretto and score of the show are content in the *formal plans/curriculum*. After teachers analyze and choose the musical, they could examine the libretto and music to determine what cultural context they can impart and discuss with the students to help them understand the music and traditions of a particular cultural group or identity (Carroll, 2016; Rodríguez, 2013). Subsequently, as cultural materials and symbols in the show are part of a *symbolic curriculum*, teachers may need to ensure that they prepare the materials in a way that authentically represents

the cultures and keep the important essence of that culture such as languages, dialects, or traditions of those cultures (Carroll, 2016). Lastly, as the *societal curriculum* refers to how people or events are portrayed in the media, teachers may have to encourage the students to let go of preconceived notions gleaned from the media and explore the culture by themselves in order to accurately portray their characters in that particular culture (Carroll, 2016).

Culturally Responsive Musical Rehearsal

There are a number of things that students need to learn and comprehend for each of the three major components of a musical—acting, singing, and dancing—during the rehearsal process. According to the literature reviewed, one of the most important things in cultivating a culturally responsive learning environment in theatrical and choral settings is to create a safe and caring space for all students. Teachers may allow the students to freely communicate, engage in discussion, and learn about one another as well as their own and other cultures (Carroll, 2016; Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Palkki, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). They can also engage the students in the rehearsal by letting them initiate discussions, lead the activities, or assist one another in comprehending the context and the music of a musical (Bond, 2014; Karapetian, 2017; Rodríguez, 2013; Spradley, 2013). In this literature study, the two types of rehearsals addressed would be acting and singing/music rehearsals.

Acting through Song

Despite the fact that, in certain musicals, song and spoken dialogue are separate, they are intrinsically linked because songs are generally utilized to enhance the dialogue or heighten the scene (Church, 2015). Accordingly, teachers should consider how to

assist the students in understanding the culture being portrayed, their character, and the circumstances while teaching them songs with the appropriate interpretation and vocal styles.

Scene and Song Interpretation. One of the techniques that can be used as a CRT tool to help the students with their characters and interpret songs is Stanislavski's (1936) given circumstances technique. This technique encourages students to be their authentic selves while playing their role, even if the character differs from their own identities. The teachers can employ this strategy by having the students answer questions to find out more about the characteristics and beliefs of their characters. These questions include inquiries about who the characters are and their relationships, the setting or circumstances and the time period they are in, their objectives and courses of action in each situation, and the obstacles they need to overcome. These questions will not only deepen students' comprehension of the song's context and subtext but also guide their research and discussions about their characters and cultural situations, facilitating authentic portrayal (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016; Stanislavsky, 1936). As students remain true to themselves while performing, they can also learn to connect their own cultural knowledge and experiences to the background and circumstances of a character (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016). As a result, they can gain a better understanding and appreciation of both their own and the culture of the character (Gay, 2002). For instance, students who play characters from their own ethnicity can share and discuss their culture and traditions, while students who portray characters from other ethnicities can discuss their experiences and how those cultures differ from their own. Teachers can also use Emeka's (2019) re-image of characters to help students interpret

the text through the lens of their own cultural experiences. In addition to scene and song interpretation, another important thing that could represent the character and their culture is their dialects or singing styles.

Teaching Dialect and Vocal Style. In musical theatre, not only there are various musical genres ranging from classical to pop and hip-hop, but some of the musicals are also influenced by other cultures or countries' traditions (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016). To accurately depict the character and their cultures, aligning with Gay's (2002) notion of cross-cultural communications, teachers can first analyze and identify the dialect and vocal style used by certain characters and the entire show, especially those with a foreign language or dialect from a specific country or area (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016). They may also strive to ensure that the students speak as well as sing and perform the songs in the style that people of that culture would ordinarily do. For instance, in the opening of "Circle of Life" from *The Lion King*, the students need to be able to sing in Swahili with an African vocal style. Teachers can either teach the students the proper prosody, articulation, singing techniques and style, and timbre on their own (Yoo, 2017) or invite a culture bearer, an expert (Cho, 2015; Goetze, 2000), or a student who is from that culture to teach them (Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012). Importantly, teachers might need to ensure that students perform diverse vocal styles in a proper and healthy manner (Shaw, 2012). Additionally, in accordance with Gay's (2002) ideas regarding cultural congruity, teachers may consider teaching in the style in which people from that culture would be taught to further enhance students' cultural experiences (Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017).

In conclusion, musical theatre stands as a popular activity for students, offering an enjoyable and entertaining environment that can foster self-identity, social skills, and musical proficiency. However, there is a limited body of research that emphasizes the cultural aspect of the musical, despite being a critical issue in many productions. Based on the literature review, I propose that CRT strategies from theatre and choral practices could effectively be applied to musical theatre production. This application could create a culturally responsive and inclusive environment for all students while enhancing their cultural and sociopolitical competencies. Even so, there are a number of factors that teachers still need to take into consideration, including choosing culturally relevant musicals, applying identity-conscious casting, and creating a safe rehearsal space. Gaining a deeper understanding and reaffirming how these strategies can be effectively implemented in real-world settings requires further research. Specifically, investigating the experiences and perspectives of teachers regarding these factors is necessary to provide valuable information and inform best practices in musical theatre education.

Chapter Three

Music and Theatre Teachers' Experiences with Identity-Conscious Casting in High School Musical Productions

Casting is a crucial process in musical theatre production, yet it can also be a contentious process, especially in school settings where teachers have a limited group of students to choose from (Wolf, 2020). An important consideration in this process is how teachers approach casting: Should they adhere to the traditional casting approach (typecasting) or be more open to diversity? This issue becomes even more pronounced in the United States, where student identities have become increasingly diverse, such as a growing number of students of color (POC; NCES, 2023) and diverse gender identities (L. S. Davis, 2021). One approach that concerns students' diverse backgrounds and could address this issue is Geneva Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach. In the context of theatre, the non-traditional casting approach that aligns with the concept of CRT and could foster diversity and inclusivity is "identity-conscious casting" (Jadhvani, 2021, para. 1). This approach goes beyond considering only race and ethnicity, encompassing factors such as gender identity, sexuality, body type, and disability.

Despite the importance of this issue in the casting process, I found that there is limited research within the field of musical theatre (Accetta, 2013; Donovan, 2019; Savage, 2020), and there is no research on the experiences of teachers in this regard. The purpose of this study was to shed light on the importance and impact of casting students with diverse identities in high school musical productions. Ultimately, this research may have practical implications for musical and theatre directors, educators, and casting professionals, as it could encourage more inclusive casting practices and offer guidelines

to mitigate typecasting. Additionally, the study may contribute to policy changes in this field.

The casting process is a critical decision-making stage that impacts the quality of musical productions. Over the years, a persistent issue within casting has been the lack of underrepresented performers on stage. This occurs when actors from dominant cultures are cast in roles that could or should be portrayed by individuals from minority groups (Agustin, 2018; Hoffman, 2020; Pao, 2010). Such practices can contribute to cultural appropriation and perpetuate a lack of diversity in the performing arts. In school settings, where the pool of students to choose from is limited, the casting process becomes particularly challenging for teachers (Wolf, 2020). Not only do they need to select roles that align with students' skills, but also with their identities. To address these challenges, a shift from traditional casting to identity-conscious casting is imperative.

Traditional Casting to Identity-Conscious Casting

Traditional casting, also known as typecasting, involves selecting actors based on their perceived suitability for a character's appearance (Wojcik, 2003). While it may be suitable for certain productions, such as *The King and I* musical, where actors' appearances need to align with Thai or Southeast Asian characters due to the setting of the story, exclusive reliance on typecasting can perpetuate stereotypes, limit actors' opportunities, and contribute to a lack of diversity on stage (Donovan, 2019; Stamatiou, 2020). In response to these concerns, the concept of *non-traditional casting* was established in 1968 as an alternative approach. This approach, advocated by the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP), (now the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts), aimed to cast actors from diverse ethnic backgrounds, female actors, or actors with disabilities in

roles where attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, or physical abilities are not central to the development of the characters or the play (C. T. Davis & Newman, 1988). Within non-traditional casting approaches, *color-blind casting* gained recognition in the industry as it prioritizes actors' skills over their race or ethnicity (Pao, 2010). Nevertheless, despite good intentions to increase diversity, according to Rodríguez (2013), it can inadvertently lead to Bonilla-Silva's (2014) theory of *color-blind racism*, where people claim not to see race or avoid discussing it, potentially overlooking the experiences of people of color (POC) and perpetuating racial disparities. POC actors not only risk being cast for tokenism or to fulfill diversity quotas without substantive roles to showcase their talents, but non-White roles might also be assigned to White actors, further perpetuating racial disparities. To address these challenges, color-blind casting was replaced by color-conscious casting (Gelt, 2022; Hopkins, 2018), a concept that has expanded into other casting processes including "identity-conscious casting" (Jadhvani, 2021, para. 1). This approach encompasses not only actors' races and ethnicities but also other facets of their identities.

Identity-Conscious Casting

Identity-conscious casting differs from other non-traditional casting approaches because it considers the races and ethnicities of the actors as well as their body types, gender identities, sexualities, and physical or cognitive abilities (Jadhvani, 2021). Therefore, to effectively cast students with diverse identities in a school setting, teachers, who have the power in the decision making, need to possess a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of students' identities and intersectionality, beyond their skills. This intersectionality may include the overlapping of the cultural identity encompassing ethnicity/nationality, social class, sex/gender, health, age, geographic

region, sexuality, religion, social status, language, ability/disability, and race (Cushner et al., 2006) as well as the personal identity such as individual personality and self-concept (Schwartz, 2001).

Color-Conscious Casting

As aforementioned, color-conscious casting has replaced the color-blind casting approach, addressing the oversight of diverse identities and experiences (Gelt, 2022; Hopkins, 2018). It offers actors from various racial and ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to authentically portray characters or tell stories that reflect their own experiences. A prominent example of successful color-conscious casting is evident in the musical *Hamilton*, where non-White actors were intentionally cast to depict White historical figures (Mena, 2022). This casting decision was grounded in the musical's focus on America's immigrant Founding Fathers and Lin-Manuel Miranda's vision for this as "the story of America [immigrants] then, told by America [immigrants] now" (Arivett, 2020). This choice transformed the musical into a potent political statement that extended beyond the boundaries of Broadway (Umehira, 2016). Therefore, in school settings, to implement color-conscious casting, teachers need to thoroughly understand the characters' cultural identities, and consciously assess whether it is essential for characters to be portrayed by students of specific races or ethnicities. To achieve this, teachers can utilize different approaches. For instance, they can employ Jadhvani's (2014) three questions to navigate color-conscious casting, evaluating who would be appropriate for specific roles in the story and whether race is relevant. These questions include: "1) What story does this racially conscious casting tell? 2) Is the new story appropriately complex? and 3) Do I have the right players to tell this story?" (Jadhvani,

2014). Another strategy is to select musicals that feature *neutral roles*, which can be played by any actors regardless of their identities (Catron & Shattuck, 2016)

Gender-Conscious Casting and Vocal Considerations

The practice of cross-gender casting, where actors portray characters of a different gender than their own, has deep historical roots dating back to ancient Greece and has been notably present in Shakespearean plays and Broadway productions (Gray, 2023). This tradition extends to school settings, often due to an abundance of female students auditioning, resulting in them taking on male roles (Peterson & O'Connor, 2010). However, in today's society, marked by increasingly diverse gender identities, adopting what I would call a "gender-conscious casting" approach has become vital. This approach goes beyond cross-gender casting to ensure that actors of all gender identities can portray diverse characters, including their own gender identities, on stage, addressing the issue of cisgender actors often playing queer roles in musicals (Cerniglia, 2022; Kessler, 2023; Mack, 2022; Rodrigues, 2019). In the school context, Hishon (2020) suggests four steps for teachers to embrace this approach: (a) discuss character genders' impact and students' role preferences; b) choose gender-neutral musicals; (c) consider gender-expansive casting (with playwright approval); and (d) cast students beyond male/female binary, including those who identify as genderfluid, transgender, cisgender, agender, non-binary, or genderqueer. This approach can be empowering, as exemplified by Elliot Wiley, a trans boy who expressed, "...I was myself both onstage and off. It wasn't like when I took off the costume; I had to stop going by male pronouns" (Schlemmer, 2019).

Even so, teachers should consider the students' vocal range and identities when they are portraying characters of a different gender. Because gender identity is inextricably

linked with vocal identity (Lipson, 2013; Monks, 2003), it can be problematic when a student's voice does not match the character's range, even if they are playing the appropriate gender. For example, in a pilot interview for this study¹, a teacher reported that a trans boy who played Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* struggled to sing Gaston's song because it was too low for his vocal range, and he did not want to sing the octave higher as it did not match his gender identity. According to this, teachers not only need to consider casting students with suitable genders but also their vocal range and identities.

Body and Appearance Conscious Casting

In 2023, there has been a notable shift towards redefining beauty standards and promoting body positivity, largely due to the efforts of activist Stephanie Lexis and her Broadway Body Positivity Project (Hall, 2023). Lexis's initiatives include the proposal of Bill INT 0209, designed to combat discrimination based on an individual's height or weight in New York City. Furthermore, her project collaborates with colleges nationwide and regional theatres to address concerns related to student body image and to shift perceptions among educators in casting. This heightened attention to body type stems from the growing recognition that the traditional notion of the Broadway Body presents problems. The *Broadway Body*, as described by Donovan (2023), imposes specific criteria on performers, including being "hyper-fit, muscular, tall, conventionally attractive, exceptionally able triple-threat performer (one highly skilled in acting, dancing, and singing)" (para. 3). Consequently, it tends to promote narrow and unrealistic

¹ Anonymous pilot interview, April 5, 2023.

beauty standards and excludes talented performers who may not fit this idealized physical mold (Donovan, 2023; Hall, 2023). This matter is especially important in a school setting where students from ages 8–18 are concerned about their body image, especially girls (Byrne, 2022). To address this issue, teachers can ensure that students of all body types and appearance are given opportunities to play diverse roles and showcase their talent. An inspiring example can be found in Olney Theatre’s production of *Beauty and the Beast*, where Jade Jones, a self-identified Black, non-binary, and plus-sized woman, portrayed Belle (Colosi, 2021). This approach succeeded because despite Jones not conforming to the typical Disney character image, the director recognized that Jones’s attributes as a “ferocious, smart, and vulnerable actor” were a perfect match for Belle’s character (Colosi, 2021). This example highlights the transformative impact of embracing body-conscious casting, challenging conventional norms, and enhancing the theatre experience for all.

Disability Conscious Casting

Despite some progress, which includes the establishment of more theatres dedicated to disabled actors (DeVault, 2019) and increased casting of actors with disability in various productions, the disabled community remains one of the most underrepresented groups in performing arts, with some disabled roles still going to non-disabled actors (Kataja, 2020). In schools, students with special needs encompass a wide spectrum, including physical disabilities that may be apparent, and cognitive or developmental disabilities that may not be visible (Cacciola-Price, 2023). It is crucial to emphasize that being disabled should not limit students with special needs to playing specific roles; they should be provided with more opportunities, not only for disabled

characters but also for roles that showcase their talents (Sandahl, 2019). Teachers, therefore, play a pivotal role in choosing a musical that features characters with special needs or giving students with special needs opportunities to be part of the production while accommodating their specific needs with the help of their friends and families (Cacciola-Price, 2023; Hishon, 2018). A remarkable example is professional actress Ali Stroker, who played the role of Ado Annie in *Oklahoma*, a role traditionally reserved for able-bodied actors. She made history by becoming the first female actor in a wheelchair to win a Tony Award (News 9, 2019). Such inclusive casting not only inspires audiences but also fosters new forms of collaboration between disabled and non-disabled/able-bodied actors (Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020; Sandahl, 2019).

Religion and Beliefs Conscious Casting

Religion and beliefs, unlike more visible identities such as race and body type, often rely on specific attire for identification, making them susceptible to appropriation. Controversy often arises in the musical and entertainment industries when actors are cast in roles tied to a particular religion or belief system. One prominent debate revolves around *Jewface* casting, where non-Jewish actors (gentile) portray Jewish characters, often altering their makeup, features, and accent, or resorting to stereotypical portrayal (Hajdenberg, 2023; Tobin, 2023). However, this does not imply that Jewish actors should solely play Jewish roles, or vice versa. Playwright-director Patrick Marber articulated, “I want us Jews to be liberal-minded and generous. I think a gentile can play a Jew and a Jew can play a gentile. I don’t like it when someone plays a Jew and gets it wrong” (Nathan, 2022, para. 7). Given that Jewish people are an ethnoreligious group with distinct traditions, rituals, and beliefs, depicting these roles without a deep understanding can

perpetuate stereotypes and lead to cultural appropriation (Saval, 2021). In educational settings, if teachers decide to stage a show related to a specific religion or belief, they may have to ensure both they and their students possess the requisite understanding and sensitivity. Efforts should be made to cast students who align with that religion or belief, while also refraining from casting students in roles that conflict with their personal religious or belief affiliations.

Given these considerations, for the production to be truly inclusive and cultivate students' self-awareness and their understanding of others, teachers should adopt identity-conscious casting, while being mindful of the students' intersectionality of these various identities. This approach should inform every stage related to the casting process, from script reading, character analysis, and auditions stage to the final casting decisions. Two notable resources are Catron and Shattuck's (2016) *The Director's Vision: Play Direction from Analysis to Production* and Rajan's (2019) *Musical Theater in Schools: Purpose, Process, Performance*. In relation to this research, the former book covers processes related to casting such as play analysis, character breakdown, the audition process, typecasting, educational casting, as well as *open casting*, which concerns actors' race, ethnicity, and gender identity. Conversely, the latter book focuses on the production of musicals across different school levels, providing guidance on selecting productions with specific themes like culture and race, navigating the audition process, and casting from a limited pool of students. It also includes a section dedicated to discussing the portrayal of race in musicals. An insightful research study that explores the casting process in this regard is Savage's (2020) thesis. This research not only analyzed casting practices and potential challenges in casting youth performers, utilizing theories like Lev Vygotsky's

zone of proximal development, but also offers a valuable tool for assessing young actors during auditions and when making casting decisions. Even though this research can be related to identity-conscious casting, it was based on Savage's own experience. Therefore, to gain insights into teachers' personal experiences and perceptions in this regard, further investigation is needed.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to delve into the preparatory and decision-making processes associated with casting students with diverse identities in high school musical productions. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate music and theatre teachers' experiences, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions before, during, and after the casting process. The research questions in this contribution were:

RQ1: How did music and theatre teachers prepare for the casting process prior to casting students with diverse identities?

RQ2: How did music and theatre teachers make decisions when casting students with diverse identities?

RQ3: What experiences, perceptions, and challenges did music and theatre teachers encounter before, during, and after casting students with diverse identities, and what suggestions would they offer to other teachers?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach (Bradshaw et al., 2017) to investigate the firsthand experiences of music and theatre teachers from different schools regarding the casting of high school students and related processes in musical

productions. Grounded in ontological perspectives within the interpretative framework of social constructivism, I aimed to understand the multiple realities of how individuals interacted with and experienced their world (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In essence, this study aimed to delve into the diverse experiences and realities of music and theatre teachers engaged in the casting-related process within the context of high school musical productions, shedding light on their experiences, strategies, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions before, during, and after casting students with diverse identities.

Positionality

In this study, my positionality holds relevance due to my involvement in the casting process as both a performer and a teacher. As an Asian-presenting actor from Thailand, I encountered typecasting and roles that did not match my own background, such as being cast to portray a Chinese student. While I valued these experiences, they revealed limitations in the roles I could explore. Conversely, as a choir teacher, I had the chance to create a musical called *The Frog Kingdom* for choir students in grades four to six at a Thai school. Unlike my personal experiences, the musicals featured neutral roles, allowing students to choose the roles they desired. Through these experiences, I have come to realize the importance of the casting process, particularly in a school setting where roles may be limited and specific to certain groups of students. I understand that the way one is cast can potentially impact their self-perception, just as it did for me.

Participants

This study utilized a two-step sampling approach. The initial strategy was purposive sampling, which helped select participants with relevant experience and the ability to provide insights into the research questions and the phenomenon under

investigation (Creswell, 2014). Subsequently, snowball sampling was employed, where participants from the pilot study referred the researcher to other eligible teachers, thus expanding the pool of potential participants (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Participants were selected based on specific criteria: they must have been music or theatre teachers involved in casting high school students for musicals at least twice in the past five years. Before collecting their information via *Qualtrics*, the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval consent form (see Appendix B) and screening questions on the electronic survey were employed to ensure participants' willingness and eligibility. A description of the seven participants in this study is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Pseudonyms	Teaching Position	Roles in the Production	Year Involved in Musical	School Location	School Size	State
Sarah	Choir Teacher	Music/Theatre Director	> 10 years	Suburban	Large	IL
Alex	Choir/Music Teacher	Music Director	16 years	Suburban	Large	MO
Ethan	Choir Teacher	Music/Theatre Director	> 25 years	Suburban	Large	FL
Lauren	Vocal/Choir/K-12 Music Teacher	Music/Theatre Director	20 years	Rural	Small	MO
Maya	Music/Musical Theatre Teacher	Music Director	2 years	Rural	*Small	PA
Emily	Theatre Teacher	Theatre Director	10 years	Suburban	Large	MO
Jason	Theatre Teacher	Theatre Director	2 years	Small City	Medium	OR

Note. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities. Small = Fewer than 500 students, Medium = 500-1000 students, Large = More than 1,000 students

* = All-girls school

Data Collection and Procedures

The data collection process took place during the 2023 academic year. The primary data source involved conducting individual interviews with music or theatre teachers from various schools who met specific selection criteria. As Yin (2018) noted, an interview is “one of the most important sources of case study evidence” (p. 18). To ensure clarity and depth of understanding, the teachers were requested to answer follow-up questions and provide additional documents. By utilizing multiple data sources, I aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teachers’ experiences and perspectives related to casting students from different backgrounds in musicals.

Individual Interviews

The individual interviews were carried out with either a music or theatre teacher (see Appendix D for the complete protocol). In this study, both music and theatre teachers were chosen to gather diverse insights from their fields, offering a comprehensive understanding of how teachers navigated the casting process in school musical productions, spanning from the prior-to-casting to post-casting phases. This exploration encompassed their approaches, strategies, personal experiences, and suggestions.

Each individual interview followed a semi-structured interview format with predetermined questions. This approach was chosen to help participants explore their experiences while maintaining focus on the research topic, as recommended by prior research (Morse & Field, 1996; Robson, 2009). However, it was essential to ensure that the conversation did not revolve exclusively around the predetermined questions but allowed for the participants to lead the conversation.

To develop an individual interview protocol, I piloted the protocol with two former music teachers and one musical theatre teacher involved in the casting process for musicals. Their feedback was used to revise and add questions to the final protocol for this research.

All interviews were conducted through Zoom, with each session lasting from 60 to 90 minutes. Zoom's recording feature was utilized to capture the video files. Additionally, I engaged in reflection on the conversations and recorded memos following each interview.

Follow-Up Questions and Additional Documents

Following the interview, participants were given access to a private online folder. This folder contained a Word document (see Appendix E) where participants shared their thoughts or details that were not covered during the interview as well as specified the names of roles, along with the ethnicities and gender identities of the students cast in their most recent musicals. Additionally, participants could upload relevant documents to the folder, such as public artifacts (e.g., musical program notes), an audition form, and a casting sheet, to supplement the data collected from the interviews (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2009). The program notes provided information about the musical. The audition form offered insights into the types of information sought from the students during the audition process, while the casting form outlined the criteria used by teachers to assess and select students for particular roles. This online folder functioned as a collaborative platform, enriching the depth of the data collected. These additional thoughts and documents were then cross-referenced with the interview transcriptions, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the casting and decision-making process.

Recruitment and Ethical Considerations

After the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study (see Appendix A), the recruitment process commenced. Recruitment information, along with an online screening link (see Appendix C), was posted on several online platforms. Potential participants who consented to the study and met the predetermined screening criteria were then invited via email before the interview. These invitations included a brief study description and an IRB-approved consent form. Additionally, participants were requested to seek permission from their schools' administrators regarding their participation and determine if any specific permissions were required from the school district for their involvement. This proactive measure ensured compliance with both school and IRB policies and procedures. All participants obtained approval from their school administrators, although some received approval with specific conditions. They were prohibited from sharing details such as information about camera systems and security, specific information about students and staff, as well as specific details about the district.

To ensure ethical research practices, I also adhered to the guidelines outlined by Creswell and Poth (2016), reminding the participants of the research purpose and the details in the consent form prior to the interviews. Throughout the interview process, I avoided leading questions and handled sensitive information with care. Participants' and schools' identities, as well as confidentiality and privacy, were protected by consistently using pseudonyms for all participants and any students they mentioned by name.

Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, the interviews underwent a systematic process of transcription, analysis, and interpretation, following Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method. The video recordings of the interviews conducted via *Zoom* were transcribed using *Dovetail* and I personally reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. During the initial open coding phase, I highlighted and extracted key phrases and keywords using the same program. These extracted codes served as the preliminary interpretations of the interview data. To ensure rigor and accuracy, a thorough cross-checking process was implemented to verify and validate the coded data. Subsequently, these codes were categorized into distinct categories, which served as the foundation for identifying emerging themes aligned with the culturally responsive teaching framework. Throughout the process, memos were used to document ideas and thought processes.

Additionally, both within-case and cross-case analyses between groups of music and theatre teachers were employed to provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

In this study, maintaining rigor and trustworthiness was of utmost importance. To ensure the quality of the qualitative research, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, which mirrors the quantitative evaluation criteria of validity and reliability, encompassing credibility (internal validity), dependability (reliability), confirmability (objectivity), and transferability (generalizability). Various strategies were employed to establish these criteria.

To enhance transparency, I utilized a purposive sampling strategy (Forero et al., 2018) as well as provided detailed and comprehensive descriptions of participants and the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Grbich, 2007). The use of thick descriptions also contributed to increased transferability. Rigor and credibility of the study were further reinforced through triangulation using multiple sources, integrating data from interviews and additional documents. To address and acknowledge personal biases, I leveraged my positionality to supplement the data. I also practiced member checking by reaffirming participants' responses during the interview (Dibley et al., 2020) and having participants validate the interpreted findings (Stake, 1995). Peer debriefing with an external reviewer familiar with the phenomena was undertaken to assess the coding and interpretation of data. Participants' verbatim quotes were incorporated into the research report to validate interpretations and strengthen findings. Additionally, I established the connections between the findings and existing literature to underscore their applicability in broader contexts, thereby enhancing transferability. Alongside these measures, a reflective journal was consistently maintained to foster self-reflection (Beck, 1993) while the audit trail of decisions made throughout the research was utilized to help readers understand the researcher's choices, improving dependability and confirmability.

Findings

The findings were gathered from individual interviews conducted with five music teachers and two theatre teachers. Initially, responses within each group were analyzed independently before being cross-analyzed to discern similarities and differences in casting practices between the music and theatre departments. Due to the substantial

overlap in the analysis between music and theatre teachers across several domains, their findings were amalgamated and reported collectively.

Throughout the analysis, various factors were found to be influential in both the preparation and decision-making processes regarding casting. However, two primary themes that related to the students and relevant to the focus of this research on identity-conscious casting were: *Students' Identities* and *Students' Skills*.

Theme One: Students' Identities

Students' identities encompassed aspects of personal identity, such as individual traits and self-concept, as well as considerations of cultural identity, including race and ethnicity, gender identity, body type and appearance, disability, and religion. This also included international and exchange students from other countries. To gain an understanding of how participants navigated each stage in the musical preparation process and its connection to casting in this regard, four subthemes emerged: (a) *Selecting Musicals that Reflect Students' Identities*, (b) *Recruiting and Holding Open Auditions for All*, (c) *Acknowledging Students' Identities and Role Preferences Through an Audition Form*, and (d) *Who Tells the Story: Consciously Casting Students with Diverse Identities*.

Subtheme: Selecting Musicals that Reflect Students' Identities

During the musical selection phase, participants normally have the opportunity to choose one or two musicals to produce each year. As revealed in the interview, this process emerged as one of the most important aspects of the production, closely linked with the casting process, as it heavily influenced the types of roles available for the limited pool of students available.

In the context of cultural identity, participants considered whether shows would be appropriate for their students to portray specific characters. Lauren, for instance, addressed gender considerations, saying, "...we looked at *Mean Girls*, the reasoning behind that was, we were kind of low in our numbers of boys." Religion arose as a factor as well. Jason mentioned, "I try to pick shows that don't really touch on religion." Notably, students' races and ethnicities were the most highlighted. On one side, participants from schools or programs where the majority are students of color (SOC) sought musicals that could represent their students' races and ethnicities. Sarah articulated:

...we have a huge Arabic population [and] a lot of variety of cultures and backgrounds in our program that when I am casting, I want to be fair. There are only a few shows that you absolutely have this type of cast. So, when we are choosing a show, I'm thinking about who we have, who are they, what are they capable of, and then how are they going to fit into [the show].

Emily, who formerly taught at a predominately Black or African American school, reflected, "I did shows like *A Raisin in the Sun* and was able to dig into some shows that were very heavily from the perspective of someone who was Black in America."

Meanwhile, participants from predominantly White (PDW) schools or programs strived to include musicals featuring characters with diverse identities or themes focused on diversity, while ensuring they avoided cultural appropriation. This endeavor, however, posed some challenges, as exemplified by Lauren's statement: "...in our thespian group, we have one African American and everyone else...I mean, I would love to do *Hairspray*. I just don't have the African American students that want to be involved in the theatre."

Ethan further elaborated "...there are roles that can go either way and there are some that cannot, especially when something like race is integral to the plot." Emily also remarked, "...unfortunately, by default., so many shows are just written through the White perspective." Despite these challenges, Alex, acknowledging an increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds in his PDW school, shared his viewpoint and suggestions:

I'm all for doing something [a show] that's a little bit more diverse in the cultures. But then, if the cast is calling for people of color to make up a certain large amount of the chorus and you don't have a lot of students who are persons of color, I feel like that would be a show I'd maybe stay away from. But there are definitely shows where you can look and there's a decent mix of the diversity of students you have. But that is definitely something to put a lot of thought into before picking the show.

Emily, while also considering shows with more diverse characters and themes, expressed hesitation due to perceived constraints within her district: "...a lot of more modern shows that represent a more representative community or characters are ones that I probably wouldn't touch because we're in a very conservative district." Similarly, Jason had to collaborate with his administrative team to ensure that the selected show adhered to the school board's standards for validity and avoidance of controversial content. He detailed some of their concerns:

Is what the kids are doing leaning more conservative-leaning? More liberal? Does the [show] focus on things like LGBTQ issues or issues of race or gender or sexuality, that kind of thing? And would that be considered controversial to the

community? Would the community be like, no, this is inappropriate for high school?

Consequently, participants opted for shows with *neutral roles*, which, as Emily explained, “can be played by any and every [student]” regardless of their backgrounds and identities. This inclusivity extended to shows with large ensembles. For instance, Ethan suggested *Urine Town*, which largely involves an ensemble cast, and Alex recommended, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Guys and Dolls*, or *The Wizard of Oz*, which can accommodate an unlimited number of students in the chorus.

Despite these considerations, in order to consciously select a show for their students, all participants stressed the importance of immersing themselves in the script and the libretto. On the one hand, Emily pointed out, “...a lot of shows have a character that is heavily defined by the culture or ethnicity, either the show as a whole requires many people who are from that culture or ethnicity to represent like *West Side Story* and *Hairspray*.” On the other hand, Ethan, expressed, “If ethnicity isn’t part of it [the story], then don’t look at it.” Thus, as Ethan summed up: “I think everybody should look at the script. The color of a kid’s skin doesn’t tell the story unless it’s in the book.”

Even so, participants were cautious not to pre-cast students. Ethan firmly stated, “I never, ever, ever pre-cast a show.” Emily reiterated this stance, elaborating:

[When] I pick a show, I’ll think about the people that most likely will audition and could I cast it if these are the only people who show up?... And then I do my best to just then throw that out the window because I don’t wanna ever pre-cast a show or be like this role is this person’s role.

In essence, echoing the sentiments of all the participants, Sarah stated, “Choosing a musical by looking at the group of kids that you have is like a surefire way to be successful...But then also allowing yourself to be pleasantly surprised in the process.” Several musicals these teachers had produced in the past two to five years were *Mean Girls*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Alice by Heart*, *Rock of Ages*, and *Twelfth Night (Taub)* (see Appendix F).

Subtheme: Recruiting and Holding Open Auditions for All

The recruitment statement for auditions plays a pivotal role in the casting process as it determines which students have the opportunity to audition and participate in the show. Participants were unanimous about holding an open audition. As Ethan emphasized, we allowed “anybody [any student], any grade [in high school level], and don’t have to be in chorus or in any fine arts class,” to participate. This inclusive approach extended to “a transfer student from another school or maybe a freshman class that’s really strong that you might not know that well,” as articulated by Alex. Emily and Maya welcomed international students to participate as well, with Emily sharing an anecdote: “I have a student right now who is here from Japan, and she is so excited.”

Participants not only employed diverse recruitment strategies, such as leveraging online platforms like Instagram or utilizing traditional approaches like creating bulletin boards, distributing flyers, and making announcements, but they also endeavored to create additional events to ensure that they would have a larger pool of students with diverse identities in the auditions and potentially join their upcoming musicals. For instance, Sarah produced *Legally Blonde* as a 24-hour musical for high school students. She observed, “...most of those kids that were in that show last year were here, auditioned

again in the fall. So, it was really nice to have this other recruiting thing.” Both Sarah and Alex also arranged a soft opening show for middle school students to attend and ask the cast questions. Alex pointed out, “It’s a great way to get [middle school] kids interested in auditioning...to get younger kids to come and see the high school productions and want to be in it themselves when they’re in high school.”

Subtheme: Acknowledging Students’ Identities and Role Preferences Through an Audition Form

Several participants chose to utilize Google Forms or Classroom to allow students to sign up and provide their information online instead of using a paper audition form. Sarah took another step, asking students to upload their photos. She explained, “They take a picture of themselves that day and then upload it and it’s required on the form so they can’t turn it in without it.” This picture was helpful for her team this past production as they had a lot of freshmen students whom they did not know yet.

The audition form served as a valuable tool for many participants to collect students’ information, particularly their cultural identities, role preferences, and comfortability, which they otherwise may not be able to determine. Maya, similar to other participants, stated:

...we asked [for] names, nicknames, [and] pronouns. We did ask them what they were auditioning for? What did your choir teacher think your vocal range was? What shows have you been in before? If not any shows, what music experience have you been in before? Musical or play experience? What roles did you have in that? What are any potential scheduling conflicts? Are there any roles that you for

any reason would feel truly uncomfortable playing? We wanted to make sure the kids could opt out if they were really uncomfortable with that.

In terms of role preferences, like several participants, Alex said the theatre teachers included the following question in the audition form: “Is there only one role you’re interested in, or are you only interested in the title role? Would you also be interested in a chorus [ensemble] role?” This was to open opportunities for them if they did not get the lead roles. Nonetheless, Emily highlighted a challenge regarding gender identities, stating, “Our district, teachers are not allowed to ask students for their pronouns anymore.” As a result, she needed to find alternative ways to understand her students’ gender identities such as using a Secret Santa game. Many participants also did not inquire about students’ races and ethnicities. Sarah noted, “Our audition form [asks for] their gender identity, but I know the ethnicity one is not on there.”

That being said, Sarah continued to stress the importance of the audition form in the casting process, especially if the show is culturally related, explaining:

In the spring, we’re doing something [a show] that is multicultural, [so] it would be important to know. And we have seen like other productions in our area that they’re not casting the right kind of person in that specific role. And I feel like that’s something that is easy to not do. If you’re asking questions, Who are you? How do you identify? What is your ethnicity? How do you culturally identify yourself? Like, it should be easy to cast appropriately.

Subtheme: Who Tells the Story: Consciously Casting Students with Diverse Identities

After the audition process, participants collaborated with other teachers or staff, such as their music teacher or theatre teacher counterpart, band director, assistant director,

choreographers, stage manager, and technicians, to make casting decisions. Some participants utilized character breakdown sheets or familiarized themselves with all the characters even before the audition stage. Sarah described:

I usually have a list of all the characters within the show. And a breakdown of what each character is. I also try to familiarize myself with all of these characters and the show before I actually do the production [and] auditions. So, that way in the casting process, I'm not missing small parts or missing the true intention of a character and accidentally casting the wrong type of kid because I'm unfamiliar. I try to avoid that by going through the whole thing.

During the casting process, all participants took into account students' identities—ranging from race and ethnicity to gender identity, body type and appearance, disability, religion, personal traits, and language (specifically relevant for international students). Some participants also shared positive experiences, challenges, and recommendations specific to each identity.

Race and Ethnicity. In casting students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, participants unanimously agreed that it depends on the specific roles. Ethan articulated this sentiment: “It completely depends on the show. I'm not gonna have a Caucasian girl be Tuptim in *King and I*, I'm not gonna miscast something that needs to have a specific race or ethnicity. I'm not gonna do that.” For roles that did not require specific racial or ethnic characteristics or were neutral in this regard, Emily, like other participants, employed what she referred to as “blind” or “color-blind” casting.

Shaping New Perspectives on Characters' Races and Ethnicities and Cultural

Sharing. Some participants shared positive experiences related to casting students from diverse races and ethnicities. For instance, Alex recounted casting a student of color (SOC) as Cinderella in *Into the Woods*, highlighting not only that she was cast because of her musical ability but because it also stretched her as an actress and brought a unique perspective to the role. He highlighted:

...her cultural background actually made it really cool and [provided a] different take on the show, especially everyone's seen it [this role] with Anna Kendrick [sic], and it's like you see a different actress and a different take on this... I think everyone was super impressed. It's exciting to see Cinderella [as] someone surprises [them].

Jason also talked about giving opportunities to SOC in lead roles in *Mamma Mia!*, saying, "Two of my principals here are Hispanic or Latino. And then one of them is a Pacific Islander." Sarah added in the *Rock of Ages* production, "We do have a handful of Arabic students who are in the production among the cast. And then there's a lot of Hispanic students that are just in and among the cast." From the cast list she provided, it was evident that there were also African American students and all of them were playing the lead roles. Emily said when she did *A Raisin in the Sun*, her Black or African American students also portrayed their own races and ethnicity. By including students from diverse races and ethnicities, Maya pointed out that students also learned to share their cultures. She noted:

Hispanic girls liked to teach the other kids how to say certain things in Spanish. So, in our downtime, they might be talking about something related to the show and the [other] kids would be like, how do you say that in Spanish?

Miscast Roles or Abilities. Despite this, participants also encountered negative incidents and challenges, particularly when they were not the ones responsible for preparing or choosing the show. On the one hand, they faced situations where students possessed the necessary singing and dancing skills but did not match the races and ethnicities of the characters. For example, Emily shared her experience of teaching at predominantly Black or African American schools, where her choir and previous theatre teacher chose *West Side Story*, a musical depicting the conflict between Puerto Rican (Sharks) and White (Jets) teenage street gangs. These students had been prepared for three years before Emily became their director. Consequently, while she attempted to cast them based on their abilities, she faced accusations that she selected them based on their color. Emily stated that:

...many of the people [strong vocal students] who were cast as the Sharks were lighter skinned and many of the people [strong dancer students] that were cast as the Jets were darker skinned and they all thought I did it on purpose. I look back on it now and I'm like I would never even touch that show now.

Maya also emphasized the lack of diversity in her community compared to her school, recalling, "A local community group put on *Peter Pan* and had a bunch of students who were White and played the Native Americans...They don't get as much exposure. So, there are some conversations that aren't being had that should be had."

On the other hand, the teachers they collaborated with had cast students who matched the characters' identities, despite lacking the necessary performance skills. Sarah shared that, in her previous position, "...the director would just want to cast whoever she thought would be a good character, and kids would be uncomfortable, and they would be scared, and they wouldn't know how to count, and they didn't really want to sing."

Additionally, Ethan shared his story of typecasting the students and expressed regret over his decision. He stated:

I don't know if I would ever do *Avenue Q* again because of Christmas Eve. That's a tough racial stereotype right there. The girl that I had play Christmas Eve [has] a very small percentage of Asian heritage, but she certainly did not present Asian. I wish I'd had that back. In retrospect, that's the casting that I'm ashamed of.

Essentially, all participants endeavored to ensure that the roles aligned with their students' races and ethnicities. As mentioned by Emily:

One thing I need to be better about is really thinking about, do I have some opportunities to showcase my students in a way that can culturally honor [them] without doing another *West Side Story* and having someone play something that they shouldn't play.

Even so, Alex added, "...you don't want to create more divisions...if I cast a student who's from a more of a minority, you don't want the people from the majority going, oh well, he just got that because he is fill-in-the-blank ethnicity."

Gender Identity. As gender identity is not always externally visible, it poses a unique consideration compared to races and ethnicities. The majority of the participants agreed that as long as students felt comfortable in their roles and could portray believable characters, they could play characters of any gender identity. Alex noted:

I think it's pretty typical that you get more girls [who] come out to audition for a show than boys. In the current world we live in, we've got a large number of transgender students, which I don't find to be problematic in terms of female roles versus male roles. I think a good actor historically can play any gender. But then you definitely have to keep in mind, if it's a transgender student, would they feel comfortable playing a specific female role, or the gender of that character in the context of the show? Does the gender even matter? If so, then you could go any direction you want to with that...I like that in theatre, we try things in different lights and different ways of playing a character. I think it's a cool opportunity.

Sarah shared her practice of casting non-binary students in roles they feel comfortable with, ensuring their identity is respected in the casting process, stating, "...if they want to be like who they want to be, then they can. I am making a lot of those considerations in casting as well, like, who are they and what are they comfortable doing?" This applies particularly to Maya who taught at an all-girls school. She expressed one of the biggest concerns was to make sure that not only were the students comfortable with the roles, but they also consented to play the scene they were in, saying, "...every single time there was a kiss, the acting teacher asked those two girls privately, are you comfortable if we run the kiss today?"

Still, Lauren, whose school is in a rural area, held a slightly different opinion due to the limited number of boys in the production. She shared:

One of the boys did ask whether or not I would consider him for a female role.

And I said, well, 'I'm gonna tell you right now, no. I probably won't because I am sure, I need you to be a guy. You can try out for a girl's part, but what I'm gonna tell you is, I got enough girls to cover the girl's parts'...Usually, when we have to change, we have to ask a girl to be a boy.

Diverse Casting Strategies. Some participants discussed their experiences casting students with diverse gender identities in various scenarios using different strategies. The first involved casting students in a role that could be played by any gender or a gender-neutral role. Lauren, for instance, chose a female student to play Snoopy based on her character and abilities, stating, "We did that because of her ability, for what she could sing and act. We felt like that was the character that she was the strongest on." In the second scenario, participants cast students, particularly those who were transgender or non-binary, according to their gender identity. Maya, having an all-girls cast, recalled her cast list for *Into the Woods*, noting, "...as far as gender identity, the Stewart and the mysterious man, I think just those two are two students who identify with he/him pronoun." She added, "It really did fit with characters that we could see them... We weren't going to put any kids in a role that was going to make them feel any sort of questioning [and] uncomfortable." Emily also shared her experience, saying:

I've had some students who are trans in the past and have cast them according to their identity...It's so weird to choose a role for students who are non-binary because most shows are not written in a gender-neutral manner...I do my best to

try to cast according to how they present themselves, try to pay attention to that, and then sometimes they'll tell me. But I try to honor that.

The third scenario involved cross-gender or swapped genders for lead roles. As noted earlier, Maya had an all-girls cast in *Into the Woods*, requiring them to portray all roles. She specified that except for Stewart and the mysterious man, "Cinderella's Prince identifies with she/they pronouns, and the rest of them [including the male lead characters] identify with she/her."

Fourth was a scenario where the participants cast transgender or non-binary students in a role that matched their gender assigned at birth but not their gender identities. One instance arose due to a lack of roles with diverse gender identities in a show, as Jason shared, "I had a non-binary student in our production of *Footloose*, [who] plays the best friend. The character itself falls in love with the local cowgirl...They played heteronormative very well, which really surprised me." Another instance occurred when a student lacked certain skills but could effectively portray the role, as explained by Lauren: "I have this guy [student] that kind of tends to be non-binary as [Jason], the jock in the school...We picked him for that character because Jason doesn't sing, and he's kind of pitchy, [but] his acting was so good."

In the last scenario, some participants cast cis-gender students in transgender or non-binary roles due to the absence of students with specific gender identities. Lauren recounted a situation from *Mean Girls*:

We had our boy that played Damien [a gay character] this year. Absolutely amazing and not gay at all. In fact, we kind of pulled back some of that side of the

story and made it more like he was quirky because he didn't want that label and we were okay with that.

In conclusion, as Emily observed, "It's such a weird time to be doing theatre right now. Because people are so sensitive and they're looking for things to be upset about whenever it comes to things like gender. So, I'm constantly aware of that." This underscored the need for teachers to be mindful and attentive when casting students with diverse gender identities.

Vocal Challenges, and Suggestions. One important challenge that emerged in casting students with diverse gender identities was when their vocal range and abilities did not match their gender identities. Maya faced this issue because all her students were girls, necessitating a focus on vocal range when selecting musicals. Alex addressed two aspects with some suggestions. Firstly, when female students portrayed male roles or vice versa, he suggested adjusting the vocal range by saying, "Can you take it [the music] down an octave [or] can you take it up an octave...you have to look at making those options where you're taking a historical male role and having a female play it.". Secondly, regarding transgender students, he pondered, "...you know [if] their voice fits in a vocal role that's typically for a soprano or a mezzo-soprano or does it fit better for a tenor or bass?" He also advised:

If you're picking a student who's transgender or who I identify as a male who's playing a female role. Some vocal roles work where the transgender person [or] someone who's coming from a lower voice persuasion can flip into falsetto. But, if they're going through hormonal therapy, you definitely have to keep that in consideration What is their current vocal range? Where is it gonna be in three

months? Because a lot of times you'll cast the show in August, and it doesn't go up until the beginning of November [or] end of October. So those are definite challenges.”

Overall, participants revealed diverse approaches in casting students' diverse gender identities. Some focused on prioritizing students' comfort and alignment with their gender identity, while others adhered more closely to traditional gender expectations. Diverse casting scenarios were discussed, such as casting students regardless of gender norms, matching roles with non-binary or transgender students, and swapping genders for lead roles. Vocal challenges arose when students' vocal ranges did not align with their gender identities, requiring adjustments and considerations. The discussions underscored the importance of sensitivity and flexibility in casting students with diverse gender identities within the musicals.

Body Type and Appearance. Similar to race and ethnicity, participants concurred that they would only consider specific body types if it was essential or specified in the script. Lauren remarked, “Do I look at their body types? No, I don't. [But] now when we did *Into the Woods*, we had to make sure that Little Red was smaller. We did look at height and stuff.” Maya, like other participants, also cited Tracy Turnblad [the lead character in *Hairspray*] as an example, stating, “She needs to be a plus-size character, that's part of her story. And so, to put a little bitty kid into that role wouldn't be appropriate.” This also applies to students' appearance. Jason stated, “When casting, I normally don't focus on what they look like. I focus on what they bring to the part.”

Empowerment Experiences. Participants shared their positive experiences of having students with diverse body types in their casts. Jason noted in the latest show,

Mamma Mia!: “Our leading lady is a plus-size actress who has not had a big opportunity to shine, and she has a voice that I have never encountered in a high school student... So that has been a really positive surprise.” Similarly, Sarah cast, as she expressed it, a “bigger girl,” in the role of Donna for the same show, recalling her conversation with the student’s mother: “...her mother was like, ‘she was so excited to get this role...thank you for giving her this opportunity. She never had a role like that before.’” Sarah also added, “She was incredible. She brought the house down.” Alex recounted an anecdote from his experience directing *Bonnie and Clyde*, where a student with burn scars hesitated to accept a Bonnie role with potentially revealing costumes. He shared, “...she came up to us after being cast and said, ‘I have burn marks on my body...if you don’t want me to play this role, I’ll totally understand.’” Despite her initial hesitation, she excelled in the role, demonstrating that perceived limitations can be overcome. Alex reflected on this transformative power of theatre, noting, “It’s just fun as a teacher to see someone’s self-identity and their self-confidence take such a huge boost by being given an opportunity.”

It was evident from the interviews that students were quite conscious about their body type and appearance, underscoring the importance of inclusivity and empowerment in the theatre community, where opportunities for expression can transcend physical attributes.

Students with Special Needs. When discussing students with special needs, the participants typically focused on two categories: physical disabilities, or cognitive and developmental disabilities. Regarding students with physical disabilities, mobility emerged as a primary concern. Emily noted, “...the main thing that I consider with that is just movement. If there’s a character where it’s part of their character that they do like a

big tap dance number, then that would factor into a certain extent...” If not, she continued “I have a student who’s doing my show right now that switches between a walker and a wheelchair.” For those with cognitive disabilities or developmental disabilities such as autism, the approach varies based on the students’ abilities to manage themselves or their placement on the autism spectrum. In cases where students possess comparable abilities to their peers, albeit with some assistance, they are often considered for roles aligned with their identity. Maya explained, “The students that we had with special needs were at the same level of acting ability as everybody else. So, I would say not really, we didn’t need to consider that [when casting them].” Lauren added, “I actually have an autistic student that was in the show, and I cast him because he’s a beautiful singer and he’s a very high-functioning autistic. I was so proud of him. I’m ready to cast him again. He was wonderful.” However, if they lack certain abilities, they are typically assigned roles they can handle independently or with assistance. Ethan provided an example with one of his students, “We cast him and gave him as much as we knew that he could handle. He had his little few lines and was proud as can be.” Overall, the majority of students with cognitive or developmental disabilities were cast in ensemble roles or as part of the crew to give them opportunities to be part of the musical.

Positive Experiences Within and Outside the Production. Several participants recounted uplifting stories involving students with special needs in their productions. Emily shared her experience with a student who needed to use a wheelchair or walker when they performed at the [City] High School Musical Theatre Awards, expressing:

It was so cool to see a girl with a walker coming out on stage and being part of it [the medley]. And watching as Lily is holding Mia’s hand to get her to her part.

And then Mia is just up there singing her heart out and just seeing representation in our cast was really beautiful.

Sarah also shared about one of the students who played Protester Number Four, observing, “He followed everybody around. He would mirror what everybody else was doing. And by the time he was done, he made friends with everybody.” Despite feeling tired during the production week, on opening night, the student expressed the range of emotions he experienced, stating “I’m so excited, but I’m really nervous.” Sarah further reflected on his journey, telling him, “It’s different than anything you’re ever gonna do ever. So, I’m glad you got to do it.”

According to these experiences, the most valuable thing that many participants mentioned about having students with special needs in their production was how other students assisted their peers. Maya stated, “The kids were really supportive of accommodating [students with special needs]. It seemed like they started to pick up on how we, as the adults, handled it and they started mimicking that and realizing, oh, I can help. That’s really cool to watch.”

Moreover, involving students with special needs in productions can benefit them beyond the stage. Lauren shared her experience with a student with autism, stating:

he gets frustrated when things are not exactly right the first time [or] he can’t do it the first time. So, once he was able to get past that, it’s actually made him much calmer even in my classroom at handling the chaos sometimes because of what he did [on stage]. That’s what I loved, seeing them grow as humans.

Suggestions on Stage Performance. Participants offered suggestions for facilitating the inclusion of students with special needs on stage. Emily, who has worked

with students with Down syndrome and other disabilities, recommended establishing relationships between characters in the storyline to facilitate support for the students. She stated, “One of the other students, we imagined that they were sisters in the show. She would come out and hold her [the student with special needs] hand and be part of it that way.” Lauren emphasized the importance of providing clear directions, saying, “...he was kind of all over, everywhere. So, we had to give him certain jobs and this is what you do.” She also stressed the importance of ensuring the students’ comfort and well-being on stage, recalling a situation during a parent preview night where her autistic student brought a stress ball on stage due to nerves. Despite this, she prioritized their success, saying:

I could have cared less if he had it in his hand, even the rest of the show, because as far as I’m concerned, I want these kids to be successful and I’m gonna work with whatever they give me and try to bring out the best in them.

Casting students with special needs requires careful consideration of their unique abilities and challenges, whether physical or cognitive/development. Despite these challenges, inclusive theater environments provide opportunities for growth, support, and development beyond the stage. Peers often play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity, and clear communication and support are essential for ensuring the success of students with special needs in the productions. These experiences underscore the transformative impact of inclusivity in musical production.

Religion and Beliefs. Religion and beliefs can be a sensitive subject to navigate, particularly when it comes to theatrical roles. Many participants found it necessary to ensure that the roles did not conflict with their students' religious beliefs as well as their families and community. Jason highlighted:

I have a lot of students who come from very faith-centric backgrounds. So, a lot of the casting that I have to do is, how does this work with their faith out off stage? And trying to kind of balance how they can play that character and not betray their faith or their religious leaning or that kind of thing, which I found really interesting. And I think a lot of, are you comfortable with on-stage intimacy? or that kind of thing.

Sarah, in a similar situation, advised involving the students and their parents in such discussions. Reflecting on an instance where one of the lead students, whose father held strong Christian beliefs, asked whether he could be shirtless on stage, she shared:

I was like, okay, 'if your dad's okay with it.' And he asked his dad, [and] his dad said yes... If I know that parents will not be ok with it, then I'll be like, 'You need to ask them first because I'm not going to say yes to you. And then your parents gonna be like, how come you did this?'

In the end, Sarah recounted that the student's father expressed immense pride in his son, approaching her and saying, "I never would have thought that he had this opportunity. Thank you so much...I'm getting emotional."

Another consideration was understanding the students' religious practices. Sarah, who had many Arabic students, shared her experience regarding their fasting period, as she also needed to provide their meals. She elaborated, "...sometimes [their fasting

period] falls on our competition series...So we ask, what do you need? What do we provide to you?...We have to navigate when they're fasting, when they break their fast, what they can eat when they're not fasting." Ethan mentioned the necessity to recast a role due to a student's inability to perform on the show dates because of religious beliefs, stating, "He's Jehovah's Witness and can't do anything between sundown Friday and sundown on Saturday."

These explorations of religious considerations in the casting process underscored the importance of respecting and accommodating students' religious beliefs and practices. Through open communication and engagement with students and parents, teachers could ensure that casting decisions align with individual beliefs and preferences, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment. By actively considering students' religious practices, the students could participate in productions without concerns, contributing to a more inclusive environment.

Personal Traits. Participants acknowledged that while they were familiar with the personalities of their students, these traits might not always determine which characters they would get in the show. Recognizing this, many participants aimed to cast students based on their abilities to portray a range of characters, regardless of their personal traits. Thus, roles assigned to students may or may not align with their personal traits, as Emily pointed out:

There was a girl a couple of years ago that was like the shy, most anxious person. But when this girl got on stage, it was like a switch turned on. If I had paid more attention to her character traits off stage, I might not have put her in some of the roles she got because she could be bold and strong in her choices on stage...On

the flip side, there's a kid who's auditioning for a character that's incredibly pompous and arrogant [and] this kid is pompous and arrogant in real life and I'm expecting he's gonna do a fantastic job. So, their character traits don't factor in much as far as what I expect that they can do with a character.

Several participants noted that the roles assigned to students might not always align with their preferences, but they provided new opportunities for them to delve into characters that could suit them better. Lauren recounted an incident where a boy was cast to play Schroeder despite wanting to portray Snoopy. She recalled, "He brought the house down. 2500 students screaming at the top of their lungs when he did "Beethoven Day" ...After he accepted it, he was like, 'I realize why I'm in this character,' ...there was nobody else that could be Schroeder."

Hence, casting decisions were guided not solely by students' personal traits but by their capacity to portray a diverse range of characters effectively. This approach enabled students to transcend their usual personas and embrace new roles, highlighting the transformative potential of theatre in fostering personal growth and exploration.

International Students. When casting students from other countries, there were two distinct aspects considered by the teachers. On one hand, if there was no language barrier, students would be cast according to their identities and skills, aligned with a character in the show, as mentioned by Maya: "We had an international student [who is here for one year]. She literally arrived at school two days before auditions started and she got the lead role." On the other hand, if there was a language barrier, Emily described providing support to students in overcoming this and having them in a show, stating, "We've also had foreign exchange students who have been in our shows for the past

couple of years. So, [we're] working through some language barriers." For some students, this became an exciting new experience, as Emily stated, "...in other countries, it's not a given that you're doing theater at your school that you have."

In conclusion, all participants demonstrated a commitment to taking into account students' identities when casting, especially for roles with specific identity requirements. Furthermore, when flexibility allowed, they embraced inclusivity by casting all students, regardless of their identities and backgrounds. As Maya aptly stated, "Being open-minded about shows where you can be open-minded." Many participants advocated for a shift away from preconceived notions of roles and societal expectations. Ethan said:

Teachers should open their eyes to what's in front of them and not look at the way you know a show sometimes...Oh, Laurie's gotta look like this. Curly's gotta look like this. It doesn't have to be. Read the script over and over again and come up with what the needs are for the role...Don't infer things.

Emily agreed with the sentiment, saying, "I think directors needed to not be so married to the social, to the source material...just allow for creativity and allow for thinking outside the box because I don't think theater should feel exclusive. I feel like it should be very inclusive as much as possible."

Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of not pigeonholing students or pre-casting them. According to Emily, "...I think one thing that's worked is creating as much opportunity for students to show me who they are instead of to prove something I already know about them." Jason elaborated:

I think it is important to consider their identity. But I think the most important factor other than considering their identity is, how can they bring their identity or

their culture or their faith or whatever to the already established part. Are they able to play that comfortably as opposed to someone who might not be a traditional leading man? So, if they're whip-smart and super funny, but they might be on the autism spectrum, that shouldn't stop them from playing Romeo, Evan Hansen, [or] being in *Mamma Mia!* That should be utilized as a gift, not as a burden.

Emily further suggested opening ensemble roles to all students, regardless of their identities, to foster inclusivity. She stated, "...even if they might not be the best singer or they might not have the ability to be mobile on stage...how can you make that happen without excluding them." These efforts not only contributed to a more inclusive production but also as Emily remarked:

it can change their [students'] opinion of what professionalism looks like. I think some people think this needs to be a cut program and you only take the best of the best and it needs to be this. Just [think] how much value can be brought to the stage whenever you have as much diversity as possible.

Maya underscored the responsibility that teachers have to ensure proper representation in their productions. She stated:

...who's supposed to be represented in that show...especially when we're dealing with kids...it's our responsibility as educators to make sure we're not putting a student in a position where they're accidentally culturally appropriating and not realizing it. I think that's really important.

Theme Two: Students' Skills

Student skills encompass singing, dancing, and acting skills as well as directability. To comprehend how participants prepare, approach, and make casting decisions in this regard, three subthemes, similar to students' identities, emerged: (a) Selecting Musicals that Match Students' Skills; (b) Preparing Students' Skills for the Auditions; and (c) Casting Based on Students' Skills and Comfortability

Subthemes: Selecting Musicals that Match Students' Skills

Ethan, echoing sentiments shared by other participants, underscored the importance of selecting shows that aligned with students' skills and abilities. He explained, "...when I'm looking at shows, I'm like, how about this? I don't have somebody [students] that can do that...I don't have tap dancers so I'm not doing it. Those are the sorts of things I look at." This entailed evaluating, as Lauren noted, "what the strengths are of our group [students], what our [their] weaknesses are." Singing skills were also a focal point for many participants. Sarah stated, "This is a musical, kids have to sing...they have to be comfortable singing." Maya, teaching at an all-girls school, further emphasized that "picking a show [is] very specific because we're dealing with certain vocal ranges." As a result, several participants preferred not to produce certain musicals. For instance, Emily mentioned:

Into the Woods has so many roles that have to have really strong voices. I don't think I would have picked that show for our program and we've got a really strong program...I do think about the students that I have and make sure that we could pull off.

Both theatre teachers also adopted a similar approach, while collaborating closely with the music director on the music aspects. Jason stated, “I also collaborated with our band and our choir teacher to see what worked musically with who we had musically.” Emily, as a theatre teacher, however, took another step further by selecting a show that challenged students’ acting skills, saying, “It [*Bright Star*] had major challenges for the students for their acting.”

That being said, similar to how they dealt with the students’ identities, participants ensured that they did not pre-cast the show. As articulated by Alex:

...ethically you don’t want to pre-cast the whole show before you’ve given the students a chance to audition. But then again, the flip side of that is, you don’t want to pick a show that’s not gonna fit the ability of your student.

Subthemes: Preparing Students’ Skills for the Auditions

This stage was focused on preparing students for their auditions and was directly related to enhancing and refining their skills. Some participants took proactive measures to prepare the students before the audition. For example, Sarah, at the end of the school year, compiled an audition packet for the students so they could prepare themselves during the summer. She explained:

I put together one or two 32-bar cuts of a song for each solo character [and] one 32-bar section of an ensemble piece for students who don’t want to audition to be a soloist... I’ll cut scenes for reading...I usually purchase a practice track app or something that they’ll have access to over the summer.

These song cuts included challenging parts from the show to help students progress, along with alternative options if a part was too difficult.

Both Sarah and Alex arranged a workshop for students before the audition. Alex explained, "...we did a workshop where I taught the general audition song and then the choreographer taught about a minute or so of a choreographed number from the show." Emily organized a choreography workshop for the students, as well.

On the other hand, some participants chose to teach the students on the day of the audition or refrained from involvement altogether. Ethan stated:

I teach everything on the spot because I have kids that are fortunate enough to have parents that can afford private lessons for them, and I have some kids that aren't in that situation...I don't want economic barriers to get in the way of somebody's success.

Subthemes: Casting Based on Students' Skills and Comfortability

In the casting process, when the shows or characters were not culture or identity-specific, Alex, similar to other participants, underscored the importance of prioritizing students' skills and abilities. He expressed, "...if the plot isn't necessarily hinged on that person's cultural background, then I feel like it should be open to anyone and we should definitely, try to as much as possible cast because of musical, acting, [and] dancing ability." These skills and abilities, however, still needed to align with the requirements outlined in the character breakdown sheet. As Emily stated, "I want her to try for the other female role, but it's lower than she normally sings. So that's part of the character breakdown where I'm gonna have to see. Can she even hit this?"

Some participants took on specific roles as music or theater directors, while others took on multiple roles, and then collaborated with other teachers or community members when auditioning and casting the students. For instance, Maya, as a music teacher, stated,

“I know what I was looking for vocally... for the acting teacher, it was really big to see if they could take direction [within] the moment and if they could alter.” Alex, like several music teacher participants, also mentioned their involvement in assisting theater teachers with music-related decisions. He explained, “I’ve seen my drama teachers lean on me, especially when they’re not musicians, knowing what are the high notes in this role for this character?... What kind of voice does this kid have? How high can they sing for?” Lauren took an additional step, saying, “We do bring in a local community person to help with the auditions.” Collaboration, therefore, was crucial in making casting decisions, particularly when seeking input on unfamiliar areas.

Given that they were casting musicals, participants prioritized singing skills the most, followed closely by acting skills. Jason articulated, “I usually focus primarily on can they sing. If not, can they sing passively enough that if I were to throw them a solo song, they could do it comfortably and do I believe them in their acting audition?”

Regarding the students’ singing skills, participants considered students’ vocal range and stamina. Maya raised the question, “Is their comfortable vocal range good for the character, as in, they can practice in this role for months.” This concern was especially relevant for cross-gender roles and transgender students, especially those undergoing hormonal therapy, as highlighted by Alex in the discussion reported previously (in the students’ gender identity theme section). He also elaborated on vocal stamina, saying:

If it’s between two kids, if one’s got the stronger voice, I’ll definitely make a push tactfully. But it is a musical, it’s not a straight play, so we do need to consider how well these kids will be able to sing night after night, especially because you go

into a show week, and you've been rehearsing every night for the last two weeks.

And then you're doing four or five shows in a row. It just takes a lot of stamina where you really wanna make sure that vocally, they're in the right role.

For the ensemble roles, some participants assessed whether or not the students could blend well with each other. Emily, for instance, stated, "We brought in the group of six. They sang together the ensemble song... We need to hear if their voices can blend."

When assessing acting skills, participants prioritized the believability of the character portrayed by the students, their emotions, and their ability to take direction effectively. Lauren stated, "I look more at their singing voice and what they do theatrically, whether I believe them as the character." Beyond believability, Jason also added, "I take into consideration from the assistant director and stage manager, more of the social/emotional side of casting them."

During callbacks, the focus shifted to evaluating students' chemistry and comfort levels. Emily noted, "...for instance, in the show, there's a love triangle... I'll be trying to look for chemistry, which is hard. But it's like, do I believe that they love each other? Do I buy that?" Jason further considered the students' comfort level, stating:

I have on my casting sheet [and asked them], are you comfortable with on-stage intimacy, for example, handholding, on-stage kissing... And if they say no, I don't really pry. I'm like if it were like a peck on the cheek [or] a quick kiss on the lips, are you okay? So, I really put the ball and the onus on them because they're gonna know if they're most comfortable way more than I ever will.

Regarding dance skills, participants acknowledged the importance but placed less emphasis on this, especially if the show didn't demand extensive dancing. Lauren shared,

“We ask, are you teachable? But we kind of expect all of our kids to be able to do some minimal choreography. So, we don’t do choreography that is like really difficult, or we just expect them to learn it.” Some participants simply needed assurance that the students could move well, as Sarah stated, “I do need to know that they can move and they can follow directions, but other than that, they’re gonna dance like they’re all gonna dance.”

Additionally, to avoid pre-casting and give opportunities to all students, many participants based their decisions on how the students performed on the audition day. As Sarah elaborated, “I got to the audition, there were handful [of students] that weren’t able to do what I thought that they were capable of, but there were others that auditioned that had never auditioned for a musical before that were capable.” Jason confirmed, “I mainly focus on what they bring in the audition, and if they bring something remarkable or at least workable into an audition that will be a big factor.”

In relation to future casting, some of the participants suggested several approaches for the audition that could affect their casting decision. Alex suggested having an entry-level audition, saying, “having it be more simple so that kids can come in, and also with that, you’ll get more kids who might not come out because they’re scared of the audition process.” Other participants suggested telling the students to choose a song that could showcase their character without copying from Broadway actors. According to Jason, “I’d rather them sing some sort of contemporary song or something that’s their authentic voice as opposed to a carbon copy of someone that they’ve heard on the radio or on YouTube...Jeremy Jordan belting A B...that’s just not realistic.”

In essence, while students' singing skills hold substantial weight in the casting process, participants also emphasized the importance of helping students understand that talent alone is not the sole determinant of success. As Alex pointed out:

Talent is not real. I say skill is real. I think it's much more clear in music....Just trying to push them to work on their skill set and then if they don't get what they want, you can go back and say, we need to work on your dancing a little bit and you're a low alto and all of the leads are high sopranos...Give them the reason of how they can grow their abilities.

Discussions and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to shed light on the importance and impact of casting by uncovering how music and theatre teachers prepare for casting and make casting decisions for students with diverse identities for their high school productions. The study aimed to answer three research questions: (RQ1) How did music and theatre teachers prepare for the casting process prior to casting students with diverse identities? (RQ2) How did music and theatre teachers make decisions when casting students with diverse identities? (RQ3) What experiences, perceptions, and challenges did music and theatre teachers encounter before, during, and after casting students with diverse identities, and what suggestions would they offer to other teachers?

The key themes that emerged in the cases between music and theater teachers were: (a) Students' Identities; and (b) Students' Skills. These factors were considered by the participants throughout various processes from selecting musicals to making casting decisions. To address the research questions, I separated the discussion into the prior-to-

casting and casting stages, in the order of how the participants normally conduct these processes.

Prior-to-Casting Process (RQ1, RQ3): Participants' Strategies, Experiences, Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions Regarding Musical Selection and Pre-Audition Processes

Although the aim to make casting more diverse and inclusive was evident during the decision-making stage, both participant interviews and previous literature (Catron & Shattuck, 2016; Rajan, 2019) suggested that the process begins even before the casting stage.

Selecting Musicals that Reflect Students' Identities and Skills

The theme of selecting musicals emerged unexpectedly to me, contrary to my initial expectations that teachers might not have the autonomy to choose the shows. Through the interviews, however, it became clear that participants had the opportunity to select musicals themselves once or twice a year, albeit still requiring approval from the school administrator and conforming with board of education policies.

Participants agreed that selecting a musical required careful consideration of their student pool, taking into account both their identities and skills. Although not specifically mentioning students' identities and skills, Rajan (2019) noted, "The reality is that by the time we select the show, we also have a general idea of our student population" (p. 111). While some participants considered students' gender imbalance in their program or made efforts to avoid selecting musicals with religious aspects, their primary concern revolved around the students' races and ethnicities to prevent cultural appropriation and stereotypes,

given that race is one of the most visible identities on and off stage (Alcoff, 2006; Hoffman, 2020).

The findings revealed different perspectives among participants from schools where the majority are the students are of color (SOC) and those from predominantly White (PDW) schools. On the one hand, participants from schools where the majority are SOC chose or tried to find a musical that could appropriately represent students' races and ethnicities. On the other hand, participants from PDW schools struggled to incorporate musicals with diverse characters and themes while avoiding perpetuating stereotypes or cultural appropriation. A major challenge was the lack of representation of SOC to authentically portray roles requiring specific racial or ethnic backgrounds. Despite this, some participants suggested seeking out shows that offer diversity without necessarily requiring a large cast or ensemble of people of color (POC), or those focusing on diversity-related themes, both of which could be found in newer Broadway shows. Still, they needed to ensure that the chosen show aligned with the values of the school and its community, particularly in conservative districts (Wolf, 2020).

These concerns regarding students' identities, particularly their races and ethnicities, were in line with previous literature (Cerniglia, 2022; Rajan, 2019). When the central themes or characters of the shows required specific races and ethnicities, it was deemed preferable to have students of those races or ethnicities portray these characters, particularly in shows from the Golden Age era that were written from a White male perspective for White audiences (Hoffman, 2020). This influenced participants from PDW schools' decisions to avoid producing musicals like *Hairspray* and *West Side Story*, where the central themes revolved around specific races and ethnicities. Cerniglia (2022),

however, emphasized that authors and licensors of racially themed musicals have provided guidance and tools to help producers tackle casting and representational issues. This includes the option to select alternative shows that can be more appropriately cast and produced within their specific communities. Accordingly, participants preferred or chose shows featuring *neutral roles* or roles with no specific character descriptions, allowing any student to portray them regardless of their backgrounds and identities (Catron & Shattuck, 2016; Cerniglia, 2022; Rajan, 2019). This preference extended to shows with large ensembles, which offered more opportunities for student involvement. Crucially, participants suggested that the key to consciously selecting a show that aligned with students' identities was to immerse themselves into the book and libretto to thoroughly understand these characters' identities and backgrounds.

Following their examination of the students' identities, participants assessed whether they had students who might be able to sing the parts comfortably. This prioritization of singing skills was in line with several studies (Howard, 1990; Lee, 1983; A. L. Roberts, 2012). This assessment was particularly crucial with an all-girl school with limitations on vocal ranges. Participants considered the students' dancing, as well, if required prominently in the musicals. Specifically, a theatre teacher participant considered selecting a musical that challenges students' acting skills.

Given these considerations on students' identities and skills in selecting the musicals, participants also ensured not to pre-cast students for the show by reserving roles for specific individuals. Instead, they kept the roles open for all students who might be suitable for the roles on audition day, as pre-casting is considered an unethical practice (Catron & Shattuck, 2016).

Overall, in a school setting, the selection of a musical is closely tied to the casting process, influencing the roles accessible to the limited pool of students. Nonetheless, while school musicals provide a platform for students to embody diverse characters, teachers may have to ensure that students can authentically portray these roles without appropriating them.

Pre-Audition Process: Importance of Holding Open Auditions, Preparing Students for the Audition, and Using Audition Forms When Casting Students with Diverse Identities and Skills

The audition criteria specified on the recruitment posters play an important role in determining which students have the opportunity to audition and participate in the show. Given that all participants held open auditions, they opened more opportunities for any high school students to participate, which is also “popular in education and community theatre” (Catron & Shattuck, 2016, p. 149). These students also included international and exchange students. Many participants, therefore, utilized diverse methods to recruit students. These initiatives aimed to ensure they had a diverse pool of students participating in the auditions and joining their musical productions.

Regarding the audition form, several participants used digital platforms like Google Forms or Classroom, allowing students to sign up and submit their audition forms and photos electronically. The audition form served as a comprehensive tool for gathering students’ information ranging from their names, contact information, and skills to their identities such as their pronouns, role preferences, and comfortability, which might not be able to determine. Despite challenges related to gender identity inquiries in some conservative districts, participants emphasized the importance of understanding students’

backgrounds and identities for appropriate casting, particularly in culturally related shows. This acknowledgment of students' identities and their preferences aligned with Gay's (2002) concept of developing a cultural diversity knowledge base as well as with previous scholarship on selecting music repertoire for students (Abril, 2013; Dissinger, 2019; Shaw, 2012). However, in this context, the focus was specifically on the role of the student in the casting process.

During the audition preparation stage, participants adopted two distinct approaches. Some participants focused on enhancing students' skills and readiness before the audition day by taking proactive measures, aligning with Harms' (2017) blog on *Running Successful Auditions*. Conversely, other participants prioritized fairness by teaching all necessary material on the audition day itself to mitigate economic disparities in preparation resources or maintain distance from the process to avoid any perception of bias.

According to the findings, the audition process in musical theatre production is a multifaceted endeavor aimed at providing equal opportunities for all students to showcase their talents. From recruitment strategies to audition preparation and the use of audition forms, the focus remains on fostering inclusivity and recognizing students' diverse identities and preferences.

Hence, in a school setting with a limited pool of students, the processes preceding casting—ranging from selecting the musical to managing audition forms—become crucial as they are linked to the casting process. This differs from the industry, where directors and casting teams have the freedom to cast anyone who they think is suitable to play the role. Consequently, teachers may wish to ensure that each stage of preparation

helps contribute to a more diverse and inclusive casting process, ultimately leading to a production that is representative and equitable for students with diverse identities.

Casting Process (RQ2, RQ3): Participants' Strategies, Experiences, Perceptions, Challenges, and Suggestions on Casting Students with Diverse Identities and Skills

The casting process plays a vital role in determining how characters are represented in a musical, whether it is done respectfully and authentically or perpetuates stereotypes and inappropriate portrayals. It also involves ensuring adequate representation on stage, encompassing diverse identities and experiences.

During the casting process, while some participants assumed multiple roles as both music and theatre directors, in line with existing research (Howard, 1990; A. L. Roberts, 2012), collaboration among teachers from various disciplines, staff, and community members was essential to ensure a comprehensive assessment of students' capabilities, especially outside their areas of expertise. Aligned with previous research (Savage, 2020), some participants utilized character breakdown sheets or familiarized themselves with the story and the characters even before to audition process to ensure they did not miss any detail and miscast the students.

Students' Identities

Participants shared their experiences, challenges, and suggestions regarding the casting of students with diverse identities, encompassing factors such as race and ethnicity, gender identity, body type and appearance, religion, and personal traits. They also addressed the inclusion of international students and accommodation of students with special needs in the casting process.

Race and Ethnicity. Participants emphasized the importance of aligning students' identities with character roles, particularly in cases where specific racial or ethnic backgrounds were essential. However, for roles not explicitly tied to race or ethnicity, participants advocated for color-blind casting or casting based on students' skills and abilities. As highlighted by several scholars (Gelt, 2022; Jadhvani, 2014; Rodríguez, 2013), participants' consideration of students' races and ethnicities, rather than solely casting based on their skills and abilities, reflected a color-conscious casting approach.

Challenges, however, emerged when students were miscast or typecast. Miscasting occurred when students either lacked necessary skills despite matching the characters' identity or possessed skills but did not match specific racial or ethnic attributes, and often occurred when another teacher or director, who used to work with the participants, cast the students without taking their identities and skills into account. According to Rodríguez (2013), the latter scenario resonated with Bonilla Silvia's (2014) theory of color-blind racism regarding naturalization. Regarding typecasting, one participant shared regret over engaging in this practice early in their career, highlighting the potential negative impact of typecasting on perpetuating stereotypes, as suggested by the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP) (Pao, 2010). Despite these challenges, participants strived to ensure that roles aligned with students' race and ethnicity, particularly when explicitly written in the script or character breakdown sheet, while also making concerted efforts to avoid perpetuating stereotypes within their productions. Moreover, they were mindful not to cast students solely based on their minority group status, thus avoiding tokenism and upholding principles of inclusion and diversity.

Gender Identity. Given that gender identities are not always externally visible (McDonald, 2010), casting considerations differ from those of students' race and ethnicity. In line with Hishon (2020), most participants concurred that students should be able to play roles of any gender identity as long as they could portray the characters convincingly and comfortably. Cross-gender roles, for example, could also be seen within historical practices (Gray, 2023). The primary concern remained the comfort of the students, which was particularly crucial for those attending all-girls schools or identifying as transgender or non-binary. This concern was heightened, especially in intimate scenes such as kissing. However, a participant from a school in a rural area, due to a shortage of male actors, expressed reluctance to cast boys in female roles; if a gender change was necessary, they preferred assigning a female student to a male character (Peterson & O'Connor, 2010). That being said, licensors—representatives of the authors—noted that while teachers have the freedom to cast students in any role, the gender of the characters must remain consistent with how they were originally written (Cerniglia, 2022).

Five distinct casting approaches emerged from participants' experiences regarding casting students with diverse gender identities. The first approach entailed casting students in *gender-neutral* roles where gender was not pertinent to the storyline (Cerniglia, 2022; Hishon, 2020). Roles were assigned based on students' skills and abilities. According to Cerniglia (2022), this approach was further shifted by Disney to *gender-flexible*, allowing for the adaptation of personal pronouns to match the actor's gender identities. The second approach involved casting students based on their gender identities (Hishon, 2020), which presented challenges in finding suitable roles for transgender or non-binary students. Aligned with ProductionPro's (2019) report, where

only 0.27% of 365 titled characters, were nonbinary plural characters. The third approach included employing cross-gender or gender-swapped casting for lead roles when appropriate, which has been used since ancient Greece (Gray, 2023). In the fourth approach, transgender or non-binary students were cast in roles matching their gender assigned at birth but not their gender identities, due to role inadequacy or lack of specific skills. The last approach involved casting cisgender students in non-binary roles due to the absence of students with specific gender identities.

Although the last two approaches were utilized due to limited student availability and skillsets, they are generally avoided in industries like Broadway to provide authentic opportunities for non-binary or transgender individuals (Langenfeld, 2020; Rodrigues, 2019; Segalov, 2018). Consistent with these concerns, the participants underscored the importance for teachers to approach casting with increased mindfulness and attentiveness when working with students of diverse gender identities.

Challenges on vocal range discrepancies were addressed as well, particularly when the students' vocal ranges and abilities did not align with their gender identities. While some participants considered the students' vocal range and abilities when choosing the musical, one provided perceptions into addressing this challenge, offering two suggestions; adjusting vocal ranges, and for transgender students, he urged considering their vocal suitability for soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, or bass roles, particularly with hormonal therapy effects (Lipson, 2013).

Overall, teachers need to be sensitive and mindful when casting students with diverse gender identities, by giving them roles that align with their gender identities that they can portray and sing comfortably.

Body Type and Appearance. Participants emphasized that, much like considerations for race and ethnicity, specific body types were only considered when deemed essential or explicitly specified in the script (Donovan, 2019). Their experiences highlighted that students often have a heightened awareness of their body types and appearance as compared with the teachers. Their inclusive practices aligned with the work of the founder of Broadway Body Positivity Project, who stated, “Talent is not limited by body size” (Hall, 2023, para. 5)—and I would also add, “and appearance.”

Students with Special Needs. When casting the students with special needs the participants discussed both physical and cognitive/developmental disabilities (Cacciola-Price, 2023). They underscored the importance of ensuring that students with disabilities can access the stage comfortably by themselves or with the assistance of others (Duke, 2019). Their approaches resonated with Sandahl’s (2019) and Hishon’s (2018) recommendation that students with special needs should be given an opportunity to play roles in which they could show their talents. Most of the students with special needs were also cast in ensemble roles or as part of the crew to involve them in the production (Cacciola-Price, 2023; Hishon, 2018).

Participants shared several positive experiences of having them involved in the production. Consistent with previous literature (Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020; Sandahl, 2019), they underscored the supportive atmosphere fostered between non-disabled students and those with special needs, and described how being part of the production helped improve their socioemotional functions (Corbett et al., 2011)

Participants offered several suggestions to support students with special needs in their stage performances. They emphasized the importance of giving clear directions to

students with special needs and stressed the importance of ensuring that they feel as comfortable as possible on stage, suggestions that aligned with Cacciola-Price's (2023) research. According to this, teachers may need to ensure that students with special needs are given equal opportunities as non-disabled students to take on specific roles if they possess the same level of skills and talents. There should be a focus on fostering a supportive environment among students and demonstrating a commitment to their success and personal development. As stated by Hishon (2018), "Focus on what your students can do, rather than on what they can't do" (para. 6).

Religion and Beliefs. As religion and beliefs are a sensitive topic, participants emphasized the need to ensure that the roles assigned to the students aligned with their faith as well as their families and community. They recommended having open discussions with both students and their parents regarding various aspects of the roles, including character traits, scenes such as on-stage intimacy, or specific attire, and the need to understand and accommodate students' religious practices, such as fasting periods. Given that religion and belief are nonvisible, therefore, teachers might inquire about students' and their families' religious or belief preferences before casting them in a show.

Personal Traits. Participants acknowledged that students' personalities did not always dictate the roles they were assigned in the show. Instead, they cast students based on their skills and how they portray the characters during auditions. All participants stressed that when choosing musicals, teachers should refrain from pre-casting altogether, fostering a more open and adaptable casting process.

International Students. When casting international students, participants considered two main factors. If there was no language barrier, they were cast according to their identities and skills, aligned with the characters. However, if language barriers existed, a participant provided support and included them in the show to offer experiences they may not have had in their home countries. These strategies not only open opportunities for international students but also enrich their overall experience.

Students' Skills and Comfortability

When specific identities were integral to the characters, participants considered students' skills and abilities alongside their identities. However, if identity was not crucial to the roles, they stressed aligning students' skills and abilities with character requirements.

During the casting process, participants prioritized students' singing skills, followed by acting and dancing, mirroring the typical order seen in middle and secondary school productions, where dancing was often excluded from the audition process (Rajan, 2019). When assessing singing skills, participants considered vocal range, ability, and stamina, ensuring students could perform comfortably without risking vocal damage, especially in roles unsuitable for their vocal range. Aligning with several educators (Lee, 1983; White, 1978), participants suggested rearranging the music for the students to be more comfortable. For ensemble roles, harmonizing abilities were prioritized (Rajan, 2019).

Evaluating acting prowess entailed assessing students' believability, emotional depth, and responsiveness to direction (Catron & Shattuck, 2016). Those who excelled in these aspects were considered for lead role callbacks, where chemistry and comfort levels were further assessed (Catron & Shattuck, 2016; Rajan, 2019). While dance skills were

acknowledged, they were given less emphasis unless the show demanded extensive choreography (Janicki, 1982; Rajan, 2019).

In addition to considering students' identities and skills during the casting process, participants aimed to avoid preconceived notions and pre-casting by basing decisions solely on audition performance, providing equal opportunities for all students to showcase their skills. Future suggestions included opening ensemble roles to all students, implementing entry-level auditions, encouraging song choices that reflected students' authentic voices, and emphasizing the importance of skills over talents and the potential for continuous improvement.

In summary, participants placed importance on students' identities, skills, and comfort levels when determining casting choices. For roles with specific identity requirements, students' identities were prioritized alongside their skills and abilities. Meanwhile, for roles without such specifications, all students were considered equally based on their alignment with the role's demands in singing, acting, and dancing. Emphasizing the importance of avoiding pre-casting, participants remained open-minded to all auditioning students, thereby fostering diversity and inclusivity while providing opportunities for unrecognized talents. Even so, this commitment extended beyond casting into the post-casting phase, where participants ensured a supportive environment for all students, particularly those with special needs, after they were cast in the show. Therefore, it is evident that the comprehensive approach to casting and post-casting support was essential in fostering true diversity and inclusivity within the production.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although the findings from this qualitative study do not represent the entire population of music and theatre teachers, they can provide valuable guidelines for teachers aiming to create more diverse and inclusive musical productions. These insights not only focus on casting students according to their identities and skills but also emphasize the importance of authentically representing characters on stage. The study revealed various challenges as well as strategies used by teachers when casting students with diverse identities, suggesting a need for further research concentrating on how teachers cast and provide support for students of each identity. For instance, conducting research on students with diverse gender identities, especially concerning the vocal challenges faced by non-binary or transgender students, could assist teachers in understanding how to accommodate students when casting roles that align with their identities but not their vocal range or comfort.

Furthermore, the casting process was found to be interconnected with various processes both prior to and post-casting; these processes warrant further exploration. Prior to the casting process, musical selection became the most important process to determine whether students with diverse identities would be able to be cast appropriately, particularly when the characters were specific to certain identities. Research into how to select musicals that cater to students with diverse identities could expand opportunities for these students. Similarly, the audition form proved to be a valuable tool for teachers to understand students' identities, preferences, and comfort levels, particularly when they were unfamiliar with the students. Exploring how to design audition forms to better grasp

students' identities would facilitate casting decisions and subsequent support for students throughout the production process.

Concerning post-casting processes, it is essential to recognize that casting students with diverse identities does not automatically guarantee an inclusive production. The participants discussed the need to provide ongoing support and care for these students after the casting process. Research on teachers' experiences and how they support students with diverse identities participating in musicals could offer insights to help create a supportive environment for all students.

Inclusivity also entails ensuring that the students authentically portray the characters they are cast as, thereby avoiding perpetuating stereotypes and cultural appropriation. Research on how teachers prepare students to understand and authentically perform their characters, including vocal techniques used for singing musical songs, could help identify successful practices and provide useful guidelines.

Additionally, while some participants shared their experiences of casting and working with students with diverse identities in their production, the perspectives of the students themselves should be considered. Research on diverse students' experiences and perspectives on the casting process or within the production would provide a deeper understanding of their feelings and highlight important considerations for teachers working on musical theatre production.

Conclusion

The qualitative study examined music and theatre teachers' approaches related to casting students with diverse identities in their high school musical productions. Findings indicated that achieving a diverse and inclusive casting and production process necessitates holistic consideration, encompassing not only casting but also the preparatory and follow-up stages.

Participants demonstrated a dedicated approach to the casting process that prioritized students' identities, skills, and comfort levels. Despite facing challenges, they remained committed to acknowledging the diverse identities of students, encompassing factors such as race and ethnicity, gender identities, disability, body type and appearance, religion, personal traits, and language. When roles required specific identity characteristics, participants prioritized aligning students' identities with character descriptions, however, in instances where there were no identity specifications, casting decisions were based on students' skills and abilities, ensuring equal opportunity for all students regardless of their backgrounds. Importantly, these teachers emphasized remaining open-minded and refraining from pre-casting students, thereby providing opportunities for all students to showcase skills they may not have previously shown. Through these practices, teachers embraced Jadhvani's (2021) identity-conscious casting approach, fostering a diverse and inclusive production environment to create an environment where every student feels valued and empowered.

Chapter Four

High School Music Teacher's Attitudes and Practices Regarding

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Musical Theatre Production

Cultural awareness plays a crucial role in accurately depicting the story of the musical (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016), particularly in high school productions. In the current educational landscape, marked by increasingly diverse backgrounds and identities of the students (L. S. Davis, 2021; NCES, 2023) with a heightened societal awareness (associated with “woke culture;” Gil, 2023), addressing cultural nuances and navigating them proficiently becomes imperative.

When teaching students to sing and perform in a musical, especially the stage chorus or ensemble, distinct considerations and approaches emerge compared to a choral ensemble setting (Burfeind, 2021; Sanderson, 2015). While both settings necessitate vocal and musical training and some understanding of the songs' backgrounds, instructing students in a musical extends beyond the technical aspects. It requires guiding students to embody the characters they are portraying and effectively communicate the characters' desires and emotions. This is because music and songs in a musical are inextricably linked to the story, often enhancing the dialogue, and intensifying the scenes whether through singing or dancing (Church, 2015). Consequently, not only does the musical need to accurately depict the culture within, but students also need to have a thorough understanding of the songs' context and the narrative to authentically communicate and connect with the storyline, enabling them to accurately represent the culture and story.

Geneva Gay's (2002, 2015, 2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) serves as an effective approach to promoting cultural understanding, awareness, and inclusivity. By incorporating CRT in the school musical practices, teachers can establish an environment that acknowledges students from diverse backgrounds, empowering them to respect and value their own and others' backgrounds and identities. This, in turn, may assist students in better portraying characters and using appropriate singing styles while avoiding stereotypes or cultural misappropriation.

Nevertheless, there is limited research on CRT in the context of musical theatre; most relevant studies focus on the theatre (Baskerville, 2009; Carroll, 2016; Daniels, 2021; Feinberg, 2020; Filippone, 2020; Ngo, 2017; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Scott, 2021; Troxel & Kandel-Cisco, 2015), choral ensembles (Bennett, 2022; Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Kastner & Menon, 2019; Kwanza, 2021; Palkki, 2015; Rubinstein, 2020; Shaw, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019), and singing world music (Allan, 2022). Hence, this survey study aimed to delve into how music teachers incorporate CRT into their musical theatre productions, covering aspects such as musical selection, material preparation, and rehearsal processes, while also examining their attitudes, perspectives, challenges, and recommendations in this regard.

Cultural Discourse and Directional Approach in Musical Theatre

Musical theatre has a rich history of reflecting and engaging with cultural discourse (Morgan, 2021). Through the integration of storytelling, music, lyrics, and characters, musicals have often served as a platform to address important historical

events, social and political issues, or explore different cultures (Jones, 2003). However, to accurately convey these narratives, the director plays a pivotal role.

This shift in directorial approach becomes evident as our societal understanding of various cultures expands. Directors have become more conscious of cultural elements in musical production, particularly when reproducing musicals from the Golden Age period (1940s-1960s), which were often crafted with White male perspectives for predominantly White audiences (Hoffman, 2020). An illustrative example is *The King and I*, a highly successful musical that initially faced criticism for its inauthentic portrayal of Siam, now Thailand (Chantasingh, 1999; Miller, 1999). In a revival directed by Bartlett Sher, efforts were made to address some of these concerns. The production integrated some Thai musical elements and ensured that the cast, predominantly composed of Asian-Americans, gained a deep understanding of 19th-century Thailand (Lunden, 2015). Moreover, in my interview with Kulkornpat (Kunaree) Menard, a former Tuptim in *The King and I* West End & Japan Tour in 2019, she highlighted the production's dedication to integrating Thai sense and traditions (Chaiwanichsiri, 2022). For instance, as the sole Thai individual born and raised in Thailand among the cast, she was provided with the opportunity to teach the proper way to perform the Thai mode of salutation and share insights behind the story with the cast.

In school productions, teachers who take on the role of directors or music directors play a crucial role in ensuring the accurate portrayal of the musical (Church, 2015; Marshall, 2019). They may need to assist students in understanding the contextual nuances of the musical and guide them on character portrayal and singing techniques.

The CRT approach could help teachers be aware of cultural aspects and transfer them to students in musical theatre practices.

Culturally Responsive Musical Production: From Selection to Rehearsal

Given the scarcity of research on CRT in the realm of musical theatre, the existing literature and studies regarding CRT in this section were drawn from choral and theatre practices. The descriptions of possible applications and implementation within the context of musical theatre are my own ideas.

Musical Selection

The process of selecting a musical is integral to the incorporation of cultural awareness, given that each musical has distinct stories and often demands a specific cast with particular abilities. Prior to making a choice, according to Gay's (2002) guidelines for developing a cultural knowledge base and related literature, teachers need to have a thorough knowledge of the students' diverse backgrounds and musical experiences (McKoy, 2019; Savage, 2020; Shaw, 2012) as well as possess a comprehensive understanding of the stories and cultural context embedded within the libretto and score (Carroll, 2016). Similar to selecting choral music and theatre practices, it is imperative to choose a musical that is appropriate for students' age as well as resonates with their experiences and cultural backgrounds (Carroll, 2016; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b; Shaw, 2012). This entails choosing a musical that facilitates the exploration of both students' own and diverse cultures or delves into complex themes and issues, fostering a comprehensive and enriching learning experience (Gay, 1999; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2015).

Furthermore, guided by Gay's (2002) concept of designing culturally relevant curricula, teachers may wish to ensure that the chosen musical accurately represents the

cultural groups involved and avoid perpetuating stereotypes (Gay, 1999; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b). To achieve this, teachers can select a culturally valid musical from reputable licensing companies that comprehend various cultures, tailoring the musicals to diverse student groups (Abril, 2006). Examples include Concord Theatricals (n.d.), Music Theatre International (MTI, n.d.), and Theatrical Rights Worldwide (n.d.). Alternatively, they may choose a musical written or composed by members of specific cultural groups (Abril, 2006; Schroeder-Arce, 2014a; E. P. Walker, 1994) or create their own musical tailored for their student body (Bobetsky, 2009; Cohen & Rosenhaus, 2016). Despite this, teachers may still need to assess the musical they select to minimize bias and ensure practicality, considering factors such as students' skills, vocal range, and appropriateness for the school and community (Abril, 2006; Cho, 2015; Marshall, 2019). Ultimately, akin to Abril's (2006) recommendations on selecting multicultural music and materials, teachers have to seek musicals that exhibit "[high] cultural validity, [low] bias, and practicality" (p.45).

Once the musical selection is made, and the cast is finalized, the rehearsal process takes center stage. Crucially, students need to understand their characters, along with the context and cultural background of the songs and the musical, to accurately portray them on stage (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016). Teachers, therefore, hold a responsibility to not only prepare materials to help with their understanding but also cultivate a rehearsal environment that promotes success in this regard.

Musical Material Preparation

To prepare materials, teachers can draw upon Gay's (2002) model for culturally relevant curricula, which encompasses a formal, symbolic, and societal curriculum. In a

musical, the libretto and score serve as the textbooks used in the *formal plans/curriculum*. Teachers should consider analyzing these materials to identify cultural contexts that can be discussed with students, deepening their understanding of music and associated traditions (Carroll, 2016; Rodríguez, 2013). Moving to the *symbolic curriculum*, teachers may need to ensure the accurate representation of cultures in the materials or props used as well as preserve essential elements such as languages, dialects, and traditions of those cultures for an authentic portrayal of the musical (Carroll, 2016). Finally, in the *societal curriculum*, teachers can encourage students to challenge media-derived preconceptions, promoting independent exploration of cultures for accurate character portrayal (Carroll, 2016). Integrating Gay's culturally relevant curricula into musical material preparation not only serves educational content goals but also promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity, fostering inclusivity and meaningful learning experiences in musical theatre education.

Creating a Caring Space

To provide a culturally responsive space, as advocated by Gay (2002), teachers should consider establishing a safe and caring atmosphere where students feel comfortable sharing and discussing their perspectives and opinions about their own and other cultures (Karapetian, 2017; Spradley, 2013). This inclusive space should also encourage conversations about difficult subjects or relevant societal concerns. Moreover, teachers may strive to cultivate a learning community where students are acknowledged and empowered to actively participate in initiating discussions, leading activities (Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012), and supporting each other in understanding, interpreting, and representing the context and music of a musical

(Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019). This approach not only enhances students' sense of ownership but also contributes to a more authentic and culturally rich musical production.

Teaching and Performing Musical Songs

Songs' Context Interpretation. To authentically represent the songs in the musical, similar to singing multicultural repertoires, students may need to understand not only the contextual meaning of the song but also have a deep awareness of their roles, circumstances, and the historical and cultural context within the musical (Cho, 2015; Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016; Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). Gay (2002), suggested that teachers can utilize culturally relevant material they prepare or create to aid students in their comprehension.

In addition to this, teachers can employ various acting techniques to support students in this process. One such method is Stanislavski's (1936) *given circumstances* technique. By prompting students to answer seven key questions—Who am I? Where am I? What time is it? What do I want? Why do I want it? How will I get it? What must I overcome? —they can gain a profound understanding of their characters, personal and cultural connections, the essence of the situation, and motivations behind the characters' actions. Another valuable method is Emeka's (2019) re-imaging of characters, which involves reinterpreting the text through the lens of their own ethnic experience and supporting that interpretation using creative and historical cultural references and archetypes. By employing these acting methods, students can enhance their connection to the characters they portray while comparing or relating their own identities, infusing authenticity and cultural depth into their performances.

Vocal Styles and Techniques. Musical theatre encompasses a wide array of vocal styles, spanning from classical to jazz, rock, pop, hip-hop, and various others, reflecting characters from diverse countries and cultures (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016). Performers in musical theatre must showcase versatility, adapting their voices to suit various roles and musical genres. In line with Gay's (2002) ideas about cross-cultural communications, teachers need to be attuned to the vocal style and requirements of each character to appropriately teach or guide the students. This consideration extends to foreign languages and dialects from specific countries or areas used in a musical. Teachers may choose to teach prosody, articulation, singing techniques, and style independently (Yoo, 2017) or seek guidance from culture bearers, experts (Cho, 2015; Goetze, 2000), or their students who are from that cultural group (Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012). The utmost focus, nonetheless, remains on ensuring students perform diverse vocal styles in a proper and healthy manner, prioritizing vocal health while effectively conveying the essence of the characters and story (Shaw, 2012).

Teaching Styles. Aligned with Gay's (2002) notion of cultural congruity in classroom instruction, when teaching songs, teachers may need to instruct in a manner that resonates with students' learning styles as well as the way people from that culture would typically be taught (Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). This decision can involve choosing between oral/aural instruction or utilizing musical notation. It becomes the responsibility of teachers to decide the most effective approach, aiming to enhance students' musical understanding while creating a culturally valid experience for them.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this survey study was to investigate how music teachers apply strategies consistent with the culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach in the selection of musicals, as well as in the preparation, instruction, and guidance of students in interpreting and representing musical songs. This investigation also examined teachers' attitudes and perspectives, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations in this regard. The study was guided by four research questions:

RQ1: Which aspects pertaining to culturally responsive teaching did teachers consider important when making decisions about which musical to choose?

RQ2: When preparing materials, rehearsing, and teaching a musical's songs, what culturally responsive strategies and materials were teachers likely to use?

RQ3: What were the benefits, challenges, and suggestions identified by the teachers regarding the integration of culturally responsive teaching into musical theatre productions?

Method

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, enabling the examination of teachers' attitudes and practices (Creswell, 2012). To gather the data, I used an online survey in the form of a researcher-constructed questionnaire.

Participants

The target population for this study was music teachers in the U.S. with a minimum of two years of experience teaching soloists and chorus/ensembles in high school-level musicals. This two-year requirement aimed to enhance the validity of the study's findings. With a minimum of two years of experience, teachers would have had

the opportunity to participate in at least two productions, reflect on and adapt their teaching methods, and establish consistent approaches.

The Instruments

The study utilized a researcher-designed survey anchored in Gay's (2002) five essential elements in preparing teachers to integrate CRT (see Appendix J). The survey drew insights from a prior study on how choral teachers utilized world choral music pedagogy in choral music education courses (Mbugua, 2022) and literature on implementing culturally responsive approaches in choral practices (Bennett, 2022; Shaw, 2012). It was also adapted from established scales, including the Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparedness Scale (CRTPS; Hsiao, 2015) and the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE; Siwatu, 2007). This survey served as the primary instrument for data collection and was made available to participants through *Qualtrics*.

The survey was separated into five parts: (a) Demographic Information, (b) Choosing a Musical, (c) Cultural Awareness in Material Preparation, (d) Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals, and (e) Perceptions and Challenges in Cultural Awareness Integration. It also consisted of questions presented in various formats, including Likert-type scale responses and open-ended comments. In the survey, the term "cultural awareness" was employed instead of "culturally responsive teaching," because that term has a specific definition and usage, which probably would not be familiar to most of the teachers.

To improve the survey's validity, I conducted a pilot test with music education graduate students as well as musical theatre and choir teachers (Creswell, 2012). The goal was to get their feedback and ensure that the survey's clarity, question phrasing, and

technical aspects were well-refined. After incorporating the necessary revisions, I sought approval from the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) by submitting the research purpose, procedure, and the finalized survey instrument.

Data Collection

Upon receiving IRB approval (see Appendix G), I used the National Association for Music Education's (NAfME) survey assistance program to distribute the survey. Following approval by the Society for Research in Music Education (SRME) executive committee, emails adhering to NAfME guidelines were sent to by NAfME to 10,000 high school choral teachers in the U.S. who were randomly selected from the NAfME database of members indicating that they taught choral music. These emails included a recruitment script and an electronic link to access the survey (Appendix I). A week later, the same invitation was reiterated to the same members. To improve response rates, I also posted the recruitment script with a survey link to relevant online and social media platforms.

To confirm participants' willingness and eligibility, the survey presented the IRB-approved consent form (see Appendix H) along with two screening questions. Once participants provided consent and passed the screening, they were directed to the main survey. All data collected were securely stored on the Mizzou *Qualtrics* Portal, a password-protected hypertext transfer protocol secure site (HTTPS).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and participant responses. For

open-ended comments, a coding process identified emerging themes and patterns in the written responses, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

Results

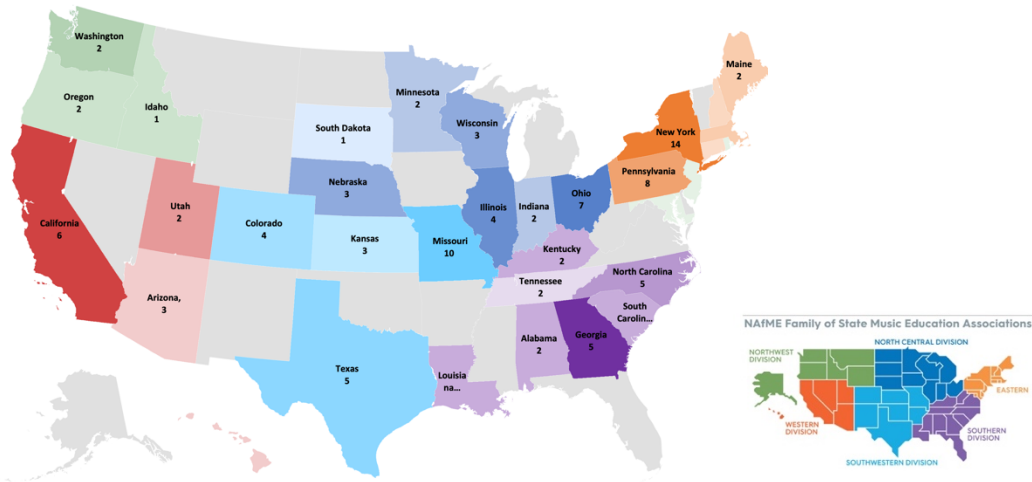
A total of 212 responses were collected through *Qualtrics*. Of these responses, 154 passed the screening process, 119 completed at least one section of the questionnaire, and 102 participants fully completed the questionnaire. The responses of 17 participants who did not finish the survey were still included in the sections to which they responded completely. There were 31 participants who responded to the open-ended comments and suggestions sections.

Demographics of Participants in Quantitative Analysis

Among the 119 participants, the *Qualtrics* IP location indicated that responses were sourced from various states across all six regions defined by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) Divisions, as illustrated in Figure 1. Specifically, 35 participants (29%) were from the Eastern region, 26 (22%) from the North Central region, 22 (19%) from the Southwestern region, 19 (16%) from the Southern region, 12 (10%) from the West region, and 5 (4%) from Northwestern region.

Figure 1

Geographical Distribution of Survey Responses Across Six Regions



Note. The intensity of the gradient reflects the concentration of responses from each state within the six regions (Eastern = orange, North Central = dark blue, Southwestern = light blue, Southern = purple, West region = red, Northwestern = green)

Out of 119 participants, the data revealed that 74 (62%) were female, 40 (34%) were male, and 5 (4%) chose not to disclose their gender. In terms of ethnicity, the majority identified as White alone, non-Hispanic ($n = 103$, 86%), while other ethnicities each constituted less than 3%. Regarding teaching roles, the most common role was as a choral teacher ($n = 87$, 73%). Eight (7%) participants were musical theatre teachers, while other positions made up less than 2%. Nevertheless, 18 (15%) participants held two or more roles, including those listed and others they filled in including AP music theory teacher, pianist, department chair, guitar and piano teacher. See further details in Table 2.

Table 2*Participants' Genders, Ethnicities, and Teaching Positions*

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	74	62
Male	40	34
Non-binary / third gender	0	0
Prefer not to say	5	4
Race/Ethnicity		
White alone, non-Hispanic	103	86
Asian alone, non-Hispanic	4	3
Hispanic or Latino	3	3
Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic	2	2
Two or More Races	2	2
Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic	1	1
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic	0	0
Prefer not to answer	4	3
Teaching Position		
Choral Teacher	87	73
Musical Theatre Teacher	8	7
Band Teacher	3	2
Private Vocal Teacher	2	2
General Music Teacher	1	1
Orchestral Teacher	0	0
Two or More	18	15

Note. $n = 119$

The participants' years of involvement in school musical productions spanned from 2 to 50 years ($M = 12.96$, $SD = 9.24$), aligning with the research requirement for teachers to possess a minimum of 2 years of experience. Of 119 participants, 77 (65%) embraced more than two roles in productions. In their roles as music teachers, prevalent positions included music director ($n = 99$, 85%) and vocal coach ($n = 77$, 66%).

Additionally, some participants assumed responsibilities in theater direction, choreography, and "other" roles such as producer, artistic director, and pianist (see Table 3).

Table 3*Participants' Year of Involvement and Production Roles in School Musical Productions*

Variables	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Year of Involvement	2	50	12.96	9.24
Variables			<i>n</i>	%
Production Role				
Music Director			99	85
Vocal Coach			77	66
Theater Director			36	31
Choreographer			18	15
Other			12	10

Note. $n = 119$; Total sum of production roles is greater than 100% due to some participants' serving in multiple roles.

The average percentage of students' races/ethnicities in participants' school musicals was collected to gain insight into the diversity and representation within the productions. The participants responded to a list obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), indicating that overall, the majority of students participating in the musicals were White, non-Hispanic students ($M = 70.24\%$, $SD = 28.17$). However, there was considerable variability among schools, with some having exclusively White students while others had none. The average percentage of Hispanic students and Black or African American students participating in the show was approximately the same, 10.50% ($SD = 16.43$) and 10.45% ($SD = 13.24$) respectively. For other races/ethnicities, participation was less than 6% on average. Nonetheless, although there was a low total percentage of Asian alone, non-Hispanic students, one production included a cast composed of more than 75% Asian students. See Table 4 for further details.

Table 4*Average Percentage of Students' Races/Ethnicities in Participants' School Musical**Productions*

Category	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Average Percentage of Students' Races/Ethnicities			
White alone, non-Hispanic	0–100%	70.24%	28.17
Hispanic or Latino	0–89%	10.50%	16.43
Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic	0–70%	10.45%	13.24
Asian alone, non-Hispanic	0–75%	5.53%	11.63
Two or More Races, non-Hispanic	0–50%	2.02%	6.46
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic	0–10%	0.74%	2.02
Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic	0–20%	0.51%	2.29

Note. $n = 119$; Range = the lowest to the highest percentage of students' ethnicities that could be in the production.

Demographics of Participants Who Responded to the Open-Ended Comments

Among the 31 participants who provided comments that were included in the content analysis, 22 (71%) were female and 9 (29%) were male. Regarding ethnicity, 32 (97%) were White alone, non-Hispanic, and one (3%) was Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic. The majority were choral teachers ($n = 19$, 61%), three (10%) were musical theatre teachers, and one (3%) was a vocal teacher. Eight (25%) of these participants held two or more roles. Only five (15%) were affiliated with a production where there were more than 50% of students with diverse backgrounds.

Descriptive and Content Analysis

Descriptive analysis was employed to examine the quantitative data from 119 participants who completed at least one section of the questionnaire. Content analysis was utilized to analyze comments and suggestions provided by 31 participants. Varying

participant completion rates for each section of the survey resulted in different total numbers for some analyses, which will be indicated when the data are reported.

The data were categorized into four sections, corresponding to the questionnaire. As mentioned in the instrumentation section, I considered the term “cultural awareness” used in this section to be synonymous with culturally responsive teaching. For each section, participants rated the questions on a five-point Likert-type scale (*1 = not at all important/very unlikely/strongly disagree, 5 = very important/very likely/strongly agree*). They also had the option to choose *does not apply*, which was excluded from the calculations. Additionally, participants could provide comments and suggestions for each section. These are the responses that were used for the content analysis (See Appendix K).

Choosing a Musical

The data gathered in this section were intended to reveal the considerations that music teachers took into account and the extent to which they integrated cultural awareness when choosing musicals for their students. Participants who did not select the musical themselves had the option to skip this section. Consequently, out of the 119 participants, 104 (87%) completed these items, with 18 providing comments and suggestions.

Participants were presented with a list of items that might be considered when choosing a musical and asked to rate each item’s importance on a scale of *1 = not at all important* to *5 = very important*. Findings revealed four key considerations: performance considerations, audience appeal, logistics considerations, and educational and cultural aspects. Performance considerations, particularly students’ singing abilities, received the highest rating, with 99% of the responses either rating it as *important* or *very important*.

Interestingly, considerations related to education and culture were perceived as less important, especially when compared with performance-related factors, with the students' diverse backgrounds ranking the lowest. Further details can be found in Table 5.

Table 5
Important Considerations When Choosing Musicals

Considerations	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 104	
	NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Performance Considerations								
Students' singing abilities	0%	0%	0%	1%	33%	66%	4.65	0.50
Story and theme	0%	0%	3%	6%	48%	43%	4.32	0.71
Cast size	0%	0%	4%	8%	51%	37%	4.22	0.75
Musical score and song	0%	1%	4%	8%	53%	34%	4.15	0.80
Students' acting abilities	1%	0%	3%	13%	57%	26%	4.07	0.72
Students' dancing abilities	1%	0%	9%	31%	43%	16%	3.68	0.85
Audience Appeal								
Audience appeal	1%	3%	6%	12%	49%	29%	3.96	0.96
Logistical Considerations								
Time and rehearsal period	1%	5%	6%	19%	43%	26%	3.81	1.05
Budget and resources	0%	5%	12%	12%	40%	31%	3.81	1.14
Production/technical requirements	0%	0%	12%	20%	45%	23%	3.80	0.93
Educational and Cultural Aspects								
Cultural and social sensitivity	0%	0%	7%	22%	47%	24%	3.88	0.85
Educational value	0%	3%	10%	27%	34%	26%	3.71	1.05
Students' diverse backgrounds	2%	6%	11%	21%	43%	17%	3.57	1.09

Participants were then presented with a list of statements regarding incorporating cultural awareness when choosing a musical and asked to rate each statement's likeliness on a scale of 1 = *very unlikely* to 5 = *very likely*. The data revealed that choosing a musical that aligns with students' age and maturity received the highest rating, with 92% of the responses either rating it as *likely* or *very likely*. The second and third highest ratings were given to choosing a musical from reliable companies with cultural understanding, and

accurately depicting specific cultural groups, with 80% and 60% of respondents either rating them as *likely* or *very likely*, respectively. Participants took other considerations into account but, they were mostly rated as *neutral* or *likely* (refer to Table 6). Creating their own musical to cater to students with diverse backgrounds received the lowest rating, with 80% of the responses either rating this as *very unlikely* or *does not apply*.

Table 6

The Likelihood of Incorporating Cultural Awareness When Choosing a Musical

Statements	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 104	
	NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I choose a musical that...								
is appropriate for the age and maturity level of the students.	1%	0%	2%	5%	31%	61%	4.53	0.68
comes from a reliable company that has a cultural understanding.	1%	2%	2%	11%	32%	52%	4.31	0.90
accurately depicts specific cultural groups and does not stereotype them.	2%	1%	3%	24%	36%	34%	4.01	0.90
is relevant to students' cultural background	1%	1%	6%	39%	42%	11%	3.56	0.80
bridges students' understanding and appreciation for their own and other cultures.	0%	2%	9%	34%	44%	11%	3.55	0.88
introduces students to social issues or controversial topics.	1%	9%	18%	20%	33%	19%	3.36	1.23
the students prefer.	5%	8%	8%	38%	31%	10%	3.30	1.04
is written and composed by a member of that cultural group within the show.	2%	8%	11%	46%	27%	6%	3.11	0.96
I prefer to create my own musical to cater to students with diverse backgrounds.	30%	55%	7%	5%	3%	0%	1.36	0.79
Overall Mean							3.46	0.91

The analysis of 18 open-ended comments related to this section of the questionnaire further elucidated the quantitative data for the detailed content analysis.

Many comments emphasized choosing a musical that aligns with students' strengths and skill sets. Participant 16 noted that "if the show was vocally too difficult, we could not do it" while another chose the show after they auditioned students. Some participants stressed the need for variety in styles, genres, and periods of musicals that often incorporate flexible casting to allow students to explore and provide opportunities for diverse students and talents to shine and grow or choose the musical that could be played by students of any background.

Despite the relatively low rating of the questionnaire item regarding consideration of students' diverse backgrounds, some participants wrote that it was a crucial yet challenging factor to address, primarily due to the majority of their students being White. Participant 17 explained, "We have a very high percentage of White students. Therefore, *Hairspray*, *Once on This Island*, *West Side Story*, etc., are musicals we never even consider doing." Some participants acknowledged that many shows were written from a White male perspective, so it was difficult to find musicals that reflected students' culture. Several made an effort to choose shows that would expose their students to diverse cultures or those that do not necessarily require a large number of BIPOC roles. Participant 27 expressed, "...we work to bring cultural and societal awareness to students partly by exposing them to stories that are different from their own, [while] not culturally appropriating material." In instances where a musical was deemed culturally inappropriate, some participants reported that they took the opportunity to educate students on its historical context and subsequent changes. In one school where the majority of students are students of color (SOC), the participant noted that the choice of musicals aimed to reflect and celebrate their diverse student body, stating, "We are doing

In the Heights so that we can showcase our minority groups and let them feel more seen” (Participant 7). A participant who taught in a Catholic school noted that they needed to make sure the content was consistent with the school’s belief system.

Cultural Awareness in Material Preparation

This section was intended to reveal information about how music teachers integrate cultural awareness when preparing materials for students to understand the cultural context within the musical. Out of 119 participants, 117 (98%) completed this section, while 16 provided related comments and suggestions.

Participants were presented with a list of statements regarding incorporating cultural awareness in material preparation and asked to rate each item’s likeliness on a scale of 1 = *very unlikely* to 5 = *very likely*. The results revealed that at least 60% of responses to each statement on this scale indicated that participants were *likely* or *very likely* to incorporate the elements listed in their musical preparation (see Table 7). The highest-rated statement, with a mean rating of 4.15 ($SD = .92$), was reviewing the libretto and music to determine the cultural and historical context necessary for student preparation. Even the lowest-rated statement in this list, checking the cultural accuracy of the materials with culture bearers or experts, was rated *likely* or *very likely* by 62% of the participants.

Table 7*The Likelihood of Incorporating Cultural Awareness in Material Preparation*

I...	Statements	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 117	
		NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	review the libretto and music to determine the cultural and historical context I need to prepare for the students.	3%	2%	5%	9%	42%	39%	4.15	0.92
	make sure that the prepared information comes from reliable resources devoid of stereotypes or cultural misrepresentation.	2%	0%	4%	18%	35%	41%	4.14	0.87
	ensure that people or events that are portrayed in the image or media used accurately depict the originated culture.	0%	2%	2%	19%	47%	30%	4.01	0.87
	prepare materials that genuinely represent the cultures and preserve their essential elements	3%	1%	9%	21%	34%	32%	3.92	0.99
	check the cultural accuracy of the information and materials with culture bearers or experts.	3%	2%	5%	28%	41%	21%	3.77	0.91
Overall Mean								4.00	0.91

The analysis of 16 participants' open-ended comments revealed two overarching themes: *Cultural Authenticity in Material Preparation*, which closely aligned with the quantitative data, and *Challenges and Constraints in Cultural Material Preparation*. Participants underscored the pivotal role of cultural authenticity and awareness in the material preparation process, emphasizing the need for a thorough understanding of the cultural, social, and religious background within the materials or libretto. Participant 2 highlighted, "Hav[ing] a thorough knowledge of the materials and a willing mind—interpretation can be a huge influence on the way the story...is portrayed." Some participants created study guides or provided culturally accurate materials and activities

for their students, ensuring an authentic representation of the culture, particularly when the show depicted a specific culture or tradition. For instance, Participant 17 shared, “We just finished a run of *Fiddler on the Roof Jr.* and made sure that every detail was authentic to the Jewish faith, right down to the number of tassels on their clothes.” Additionally, several participants sought out culture bearers, such as “a student, parent, community member, or a hired professional musician” for firsthand knowledge, or recommended inviting them to meet the cast.

Numerous participants expressed concerns about the challenges and constraints they face when researching and preparing cultural materials. Some cited constraints such as a lack of time for research or the belief that it was not within their role to do so. Participant 21 stated, “I’m often unlikely to consider these because I’m usually given a score and told to teach the parts. I’m not typically involved in the dramaturg.”

Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals

This section was included to assess how extensively music teachers integrate cultural awareness into musical rehearsals in three primary areas: interpreting the songs’ context, performing musical songs, and creating an inclusive rehearsal space. Among 119 participants, 103 (87%) completed the items. Participants were presented with a list of statements regarding incorporating cultural awareness in musical rehearsals and asked to rate their likeliness of using each strategy on a scale of 1 = *very unlikely* to 5 = *very likely*.

Interpreting the Songs’ Context. This segment centered on examining the likelihood of participants employing various approaches to guide students in interpreting their characters, the storyline, and the cultural context of songs. The findings indicated that at least 80% of the participants were *very* or *very likely* to assist students in three

areas: understanding their characters through acting methods that prompt self-inquiry, fostering their personal interpretations, and guiding them in addressing potential stereotypes or misrepresentations within songs. Participants gave a high rating for utilizing various materials and providing assistance in other aspects as well, albeit with a lower rating compared to the aforementioned areas (see Table 8). The lowest mean rating was in engaging culture bearers or experts ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.22$), almost half of a rating scale point lower than the other items, although 47% of the participants either rated it as *likely* or *very likely*.

Table 8

The Likelihood of Incorporating Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals (Interpreting the Songs' Context)

Statements	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 103	
	NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I... assist students in character understanding through acting techniques that prompt inquiries	1%	1%	4%	9%	24%	61%	4.42	0.88
encourage students to bring their own interpretations to their characterizations, while maintaining cultural authenticity in their song performances.	0%	0%	6%	6%	42%	46%	4.29	0.82
guide students in addressing potential stereotypes or misrepresentations within songs.	0%	0%	4%	9%	46%	41%	4.24	0.77
provide opportunities for students to research their characters' cultural background.	1%	2%	4%	17%	35%	41%	4.10	0.96
use prepared cultural materials to help students in interpretation.	3%	1%	4%	18%	43%	31%	4.02	0.88
encourage students to share their understanding of the songs' cultural and historical context.	1%	4%	2%	23%	35%	35%	3.96	1.01
invite culture bearers/experts to explain the songs' cultural context.	1%	10%	14%	28%	28%	19%	3.31	1.22
Overall Mean							4.05	0.94

The analysis of nine comments and suggestions in this section aligned with the quantitative data across various areas and can be grouped into two main themes: *Cultural Interpretation and Character Study* and *Challenges and Perspectives on Cultural Learning*. Some participants utilized materials they prepared such as character study sheets, while others guided students in interpreting shows with complex themes and issues. Some participants, despite their desire to engage in more research and educational

activities with students, chose to encourage independent student research due to the time-intensive nature of this process for the teacher.

Differing viewpoints emerged regarding cultural learning. While one participant advocated for students to learn from culture bearers, another faced challenges in locating them. As stressed by Participant 23, “We are not in a very culturally diverse region, so it is difficult to find ethnic representatives.”

Performing Musical Songs. The focus of this area was on evaluating the likelihood of teachers preparing and aiding students in pronouncing lyrics and singing diverse vocal styles to authentically perform musical songs. The highest rating was for ensuring students perform diverse vocal styles in a proper and healthy manner, with 93% of the responses either rating it as *likely* or *very likely* (see Table 9). Participants were also *likely* or *very likely* to personally instruct students on the pronunciation and vocal styles of a specific culture (more than 70% likelihood), rather than seeking guidance from culture bearers or experts for pronunciation (65% likelihood) or asking culture bearers to teach the students (41% likelihood). The action rated the lowest was matching teaching styles with cultural learning norms. The mean of 3.05 ($SD = 1.17$) reflects that almost the same percentage of responses were in the *likely* categories (21%) as the *unlikely* categories (24%), with almost as many participants rating this strategy as *neutral* (30%).

Table 9

The Likelihood of Incorporating Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals (Performing Musical Songs)

Statements	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 103	
	NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I... make sure that students perform diverse vocal styles in a proper and healthy manner.	2%	0%	2%	3%	18%	75%	4.69	0.63
teach the pronunciation of specific words/dialects in the songs.	1%	0%	4%	8%	31%	56%	4.41	0.80
teach the songs using the vocal styles and techniques typical of the respective culture.	5%	2%	2%	18%	37%	36%	4.08	0.92
ask culture bearers/experts to instruct how to pronounce some words/dialects in the songs.	1%	5%	7%	22%	35%	30%	3.79	1.10
ask culture bearers/experts to teach the vocal styles and techniques they use in their culture.	4%	10%	16%	29%	27%	14%	3.22	1.19
match the teaching styles with how members of that culture would typically learn the song	3%	9%	24%	30%	21%	13%	3.05	1.17
Overall Mean							3.88	0.97

The analysis of seven open-ended comments provided further depth into the quantitative data, revealing three central themes: *Balancing Cultural Sensitivity and Vocal Health, Linguistic and Pronunciation Teaching and Challenges*, and *Diverse Teaching Methods*. In line with the quantitative findings, participants consistently prioritized ensuring that students could perform in a vocally healthy manner and within their individual abilities. The emphasis was on avoiding the imposition of a specific cultural singing style if students were unable to authentically replicate it vocally. Participant 9 emphasized this by stating, “It is important to me that students perform in a

manner that fits their abilities and not attempt to duplicate a performance or style of culture that they cannot replicate authentically, which might be viewed by an audience as inappropriate.” In situations where participants taught students vocal styles from other cultures, they aimed to provide stylistic guidance using terms that the students could comprehend. As articulated by Participant 21, “I wouldn’t tell students to sing with a more African American sound; I would encourage them to use more chest voice as it matches the energy of the song.”

Many participants encountered challenges with the language, despite the high rating in the quantitative data. While Participant 7 utilized an International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) that was encoded from the culture bearer to teach the students diction and pronunciation, Participant 4 noted that “it often gets in the way of telling the story if the students do not have linguistic control.” Some participants in rural areas also faced difficulty in finding an expert to assist them.

Although matching teaching styles with how members of a particular culture would be taught received the lowest score, participants reported a variety of teaching approaches. Some participants adopted a dual approach, teaching music using both notation and rote, or aligned teaching methods with the style familiar to the students (see Table 8 for more details).

Creating an Inclusive Rehearsal Space. This section of the questionnaire explored the likeliness of participants employing various approaches to create an inclusive environment for students from diverse backgrounds, thereby enhancing their understanding of the cultural context and facilitating the interpretation and authentic representation of the musical songs. The results revealed that at least 65% of responses to each statement on

this scale indicated that participants were *likely* or *very likely* to incorporate the elements listed in creating an inclusive rehearsal space in musical rehearsal (see Table 10). The highest rating, at 95%, was fostering a positive and safe learning space for students from diverse backgrounds. The lowest rating, at 65%, was providing opportunities for students who are not from the cultural group to exchange experiences.

Table 10

The Likelihood of Incorporating Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals (Creating an Inclusive Rehearsal Space)

I...	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 103	
	NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
create a positive and safe learning space that acknowledges and includes students from diverse backgrounds.	1%	0%	1%	3%	28%	67%	4.63	0.60
provide opportunities for students who are part of that culture to discuss their culture and traditions.	2%	1%	3%	9%	36%	49%	4.33	0.84
encourage collaboration among students in understanding the context and music of a musical	0%	0%	2%	10%	43%	45%	4.32	0.73
let the students initiate discussions	0%	0%	4%	15%	43%	38%	4.15	0.82
seek input from students by inviting their opinions and suggestions.	0%	1%	12%	13%	37%	37%	3.97	1.03
allow the students to lead the activities.	0%	3%	7%	16%	42%	32%	3.93	1.01
provide opportunities for students who are NOT part of those cultures to share their experiences and explore differences or similarities	1%	0%	15%	19%	42%	23%	3.75	0.98
Overall Mean							4.15	0.87

In alignment with the quantitative data, the analysis of seven open-ended comments identified two prominent themes: *Cultivating a “Brave Space” for Inclusive*

Learning and Navigating the Dynamics of Student Expression and Engagement. Many participants emphasized the importance of establishing a positive and safe learning environment or a “brave space.” This term, mentioned by one participant, denotes a space where students feel free to share their experiences and discuss challenging topics. As Participant 19 asserted, “It shouldn’t matter what cultural background a student is, a good teacher includes everyone and provides opportunities for all...The teachers who don’t need to reevaluate their profession.”

Many participants advocated for fostering student leadership through group discussions. Participant 4 contributed a nuanced perspective, recognizing the variability in student experiences and the broader context, stating, “It depends largely on the students, their journeys, where the school and the world is at that moment in time. Sometimes explication of your culture can be empowering [or] exhausting.”

Perceptions and Challenges in Cultural Awareness Integration

In this section, I sought to reveal the participants’ perceptions regarding the use of cultural awareness approaches during rehearsals and to pinpoint the challenges they faced when employing such techniques. Of all 119 participants, 102 (86%) completed the items and 10 offered open-ended comments.

Participants were presented with a list of statements regarding perceptions and challenges in incorporating cultural awareness in musical rehearsal and asked to rate each item’s likeliness on a scale of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* (see Table 11). The data indicated that at least 88% of participants *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that cultural awareness integration leads to a richer understanding and appreciation of students from diverse backgrounds, promotes a greater appreciation of students’ own identities and

cultures, and enhances student engagement. The ratings indicated that the greatest challenge was accessing culturally diverse materials and resources, with 58% of the responses in the *agree* or *strongly agree* categories, while the other two challenges received ratings below 50%.

Table 11

Perceptions and Challenges in Cultural Awareness Integration

Statements	Percentage for Each Response on the 5-point Scale						<i>n</i> = 102	
	NA	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Perceptions								
Cultural awareness teaching leads to a richer understanding and appreciation of students from diverse backgrounds.	0%	0%	0%	4%	39%	57%	4.53	0.58
Cultural awareness teaching promotes a greater appreciation of students' own identities and cultures.	0%	0%	0%	10%	36%	54%	4.44	0.67
Cultural awareness teaching enhances student engagement.	0%	1%	2%	9%	46%	42%	4.26	0.78
Challenges								
I have faced challenges in accessing culturally diverse materials and resources	4%	11%	8%	19%	39%	19%	3.48	1.22
It is hard to find culture bearers/experts.	2%	8%	14%	26%	29%	21%	3.42	1.20
It is challenging to balance the demands of teaching traditional musical techniques with the integration of cultural awareness practices.	1%	11%	11%	30%	36%	11%	3.26	1.14
Overall Mean							3.88	0.95

The analysis of 10 open-ended comments suggested two primary themes that further explained the participants' perceptions: *Benefits of Cultural Awareness Activities*

and *Challenges in Integrating Cultural Awareness*. Despite acknowledging the inherent challenges and the taxing nature of cultural awareness efforts, participants described the benefits derived from such endeavors. Participant 16 expressed, “Cultural awareness activities increase the team mentality and enable you to get more done in [a] shorter time because there are less interpersonal conflicts. It’s also just better for everyone involved because it creates a culture of learning and openness.” Adding depth to this perspective, Participant 2 shared the benefit of having a cultural background that is different from the student body, where 75% are students of color, saying, “I have to be intentional in thinking outside of the box...when considering cultural awareness. I’ve found that it brings so much more variety to our productions...” Participant 4 also encapsulated this sentiment, stating:

It is only a challenge to incorporate an awareness of other people’s lived experiences if you are rigid or scared. If you can acknowledge inherent bias without judgment, acknowledge your mistakes, use appropriate pronouns for students and chosen names, you create a safe space. If actors see themselves in a story at any time over the four years of high school, you create a safe space.

These challenges in integrating cultural awareness related to the school/community setting and the difficulty of engaging culture bearers/experts. Participants noted the difficulty in authentically representing students from diverse cultural backgrounds due to the lack of racial diversity in their schools or in their communities, and expressed the desire to “avoid tokenism.” Engaging culture bearers can be central to authentic cultural awareness, yet participants articulated challenges associated with this endeavor. Some participants highlighted that this was primarily a challenge when they

chose a musical or repertoire that didn't match the cultures of the surrounding community. The financial aspect was identified as a substantial hurdle in effectively engaging culture bearers. As Participant 26 stressed, "We have a limited budget. If funds were not an issue, we would probably bring in people to help with cultural awareness."

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how teachers integrate culturally responsive teaching (CRT) principles in the musical selection, material preparation, and rehearsal process, along with examining their perceptions, challenges, and suggestions. The discussion is organized into three distinct sections, each corresponding to a specific research question.

RQ1: Which Aspects Pertaining to Culturally Responsive Teaching Did Teachers Consider Important When Making Decisions About Which Musical to Choose?

Based on the findings of this study, there were four primary considerations that participants considered to be important when choosing musicals: performance considerations, audience appeal, logistical aspects, and educational and cultural factors. Even though ratings for all considerations indicated that they were considered important, the highest rating was on performance considerations, especially students' singing abilities. Participants' comments also affirmed that they preferred a musical that aligns with students' strengths and skill sets, especially their vocals. This was in line with existing research highlighting the importance of students' skills and vocal demand in the selection process (Lee, 1983; Wolf, 2020). Educational and cultural aspects were rated as less important, particularly students' diverse backgrounds, which ranked the lowest. This may underscore the need for music teachers to give greater consideration to students'

diverse backgrounds when selecting musicals to be consistent with the focus of culturally responsive teaching (CRT).

Regarding the integration of cultural awareness when selecting musicals, selecting a musical suitable for students' age and maturity garnered the highest rating. Following this, selecting productions from culturally-sensitive companies and ensuring accurate depiction of cultural groups without resorting to stereotypes also received high ratings. These align with recommendations in the literature (Gay, 1999, 2002; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b), as well as Abril's (2006) concept of choosing a high cultural validity and low bias repertoire, in this case, a musical. Moreover, participants were also somewhat inclined, with *neutral* or *likely* ratings, to select a show that is relevant to students' cultural backgrounds as well as can bridge their understanding and appreciation of their own and other cultures, a process promoted by several scholars (Abril, 2013; Carroll, 2016; Rodríguez, 2013; Schroeder-Arce, 2014b). Although creating an original musical tailored to students' diverse backgrounds would be one way to address these various issues, as proposed by Bobetsky (2009), it is not surprising that teachers did not rate this item highly, as it would be a very difficult and time-consuming undertaking.

In essence, the study revealed that these music teachers integrated cultural awareness when selecting musicals. Their knowledge about students' diverse backgrounds and the chosen musicals resonated with Gay's (2002) concept of developing a cultural diversity knowledge base, while intentionally choosing culturally responsive musicals reflected Gay's (2002) emphasis on culturally relevant curricula.

**RQ2: When Preparing Materials, Rehearsing, and Teaching a Musical's Songs,
What Culturally Responsive Strategies and Materials Were Teachers Likely to Use?**

The findings revealed a high likelihood of implementing cultural awareness in the teacher's preparation of materials. The highest response was observed for examining cultural and historical contexts in both libretto and music. Participants indicated that thorough understanding could enhance cultural interpretation (Carroll, 2016; Rodríguez, 2013). Similar to Carroll's (2016) findings, participants stressed the importance of sourcing and preparing materials from reliable sources and ensuring that they represent the originated cultures. Some participants took proactive measures by creating study guides, providing materials, and developing activities to enrich students' cultural understanding. Although the rating for verifying information and materials' accuracy with culture bearers or experts was the lowest, some participants did report engaging with culture bearers, seeking insights from them for firsthand knowledge, or involving them in meetings with the cast. This approach aligns with the transformative aim of changing students' preconceptions about certain cultures as they are depicted in the media, and enhancing students' understanding of the cultures they are portraying (Carroll, 2016).

The data indicated the three approaches to learning about a song's context that were the most highly to be employed. The approach receiving the highest rating involved guiding students in understanding the characters using acting methods that asked several questions. Participants also utilized tools like character study sheets to support the students in this process. This approach, consistent with Stanislavski's (1936) given circumstances technique, can assist students in understanding not only their characters' identities and relationships but also the setting and circumstances depicted in the songs,

including their goals, obstacles, and how they can overcome them. Fostering students' personal interpretations and assisting them in exploring songs' cultural contexts, particularly those with complex themes, were also strategies very likely to be used by these teachers. These three approaches, which aim to help performers understand their characters, context, and the subtext of the text or songs they perform, ensure historical accuracy, and help them bring their own identity to portray believable and truthful characters, are consistent with recommendations of several scholars (Cho, 2015; Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016; Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). Another strategy that received relatively high likelihood ratings was incorporating independent student research, underscoring teachers' commitment to providing students with opportunities for independent exploration of the cultural elements embedded in the songs, consistent with practices recommended by Gay (2002).

One important aspect of preparing the songs for a musical is guiding the students to perform diverse vocal styles properly and healthily within their abilities (Shaw, 2012), and responses to that strategy received a high rating. This includes avoiding singing in cultural styles that cannot be authentically and vocally replicated but still, participants were highly likely to teach students the authentic singing style and technique specific to a given culture, including pronunciation and dialects. Some participants suggested using vocal terms understandable to the students or employed the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) encoded from the culture bearer when faced with unfamiliar languages. This approach was in line with recommendations from the literature (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016; Yoo, 2017) because it helps make the student's character portrayal believable, especially in musicals specific to a certain culture or period. This

may involve teaching specific articulation, inflection, and singing techniques. Although aligning teaching styles with the culture's traditional methods of teaching received the lowest score, some participants did incorporate both notation and aural/oral teaching, or aligned the teaching style with students' familiar learning styles (Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017).

Providing for an inclusive learning environment is important for implementing culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). The findings revealed that the highest rating in this category was given to fostering a safe, or as one participant described it, a "brave space" for all students. This was closely followed by empowering students, particularly those from a cultural group reflected in the musical, to openly share their experiences and engage in discussions on challenging topics, as indicated in a comment. These activities align with practices recommended in previous research studies (Carroll, 2016; Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). There were high ratings on aspects such as promoting student leadership, and input and collaboration within the rehearsal space, as well, consonant with the writings found in the extant literature (Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Spradley, 2013).

These approaches to material preparation are consistent with Gay's (2002) ideas regarding culturally relevant curricula. Analyzing the libretto and music relates to planning what she called the *formal curriculum*, while the creation of study guides, materials, or activities on specific cultures aligns with preparing the *symbolic curriculum*. Involving culture bearers or experts contributes to the *societal curriculum*, helping students transcend preconceived notions and fostering a deeper understanding of diverse cultures portrayed in the musical theatre context. Furthermore, teaching students to understand and perform songs in a manner consistent with the cultural norms of diverse

communities corresponded to Gay's (2002) delineation of cross-cultural communication. Despite the prioritization of students' vocal health and abilities, teachers bear the responsibility of guiding students to understand how people in specific cultures performed or attempted to perform in a healthy manner. Additionally, the alignment of teaching styles with those of the respective cultures reflected Gay's (2002) emphasis on cultural congruity. This tailored approach contributed to a culturally responsive learning experience, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse ways of learning. Lastly, the initiatives to establish an inclusive environment aligned closely with Gay's (2002) concept of demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community. These practices not only ensure that students feel acknowledged and can collaborate effectively but also contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of both their own culture and that of the characters they portray. Ultimately, this can help the students in interpreting and representing the musical songs.

RQ3: What Were the Benefits, Challenges, and Suggestions Identified by the Teachers Regarding the Integration of Culturally Responsive Teaching Into Musical Theatre Productions?

The study revealed that participants held a highly positive perception regarding the integration of cultural awareness into musical theatre teaching, as indicated by the high ratings for most of the items. The highest rating was for enhancing student understanding, followed by fostering an appreciation for diverse identities and improving engagement. In their comments, they noted other benefits such as improving team

mentality, reducing interpersonal conflicts, and fostering a culture of learning and openness.

These benefits of integrating cultural awareness could also be observed throughout the process from selecting the musical to rehearsal processes. The findings led me to the conclusion that choosing a musical that is culturally valid and resonates with students' identities and abilities can foster inclusivity and diversity both in the production and overall representation of the musical. When teachers thoroughly understand the cultural context of the musical, they can prepare and provide appropriate cultural materials from reliable sources for their students. These materials, whether they are study guides or various activities, can help students more deeply understand the cultural context and accurately interpret and perform the songs. Assisting students with interpreting the songs in a musical, including the text and subtext, can enable them to accurately portray the characters and the story, avoiding stereotypes. Teaching them to perform in a style that aligns with the story and the culture embedded in the musical not only can enhance the authenticity of the performance, particularly in certain cultures and time periods, but can also enrich the educational experience for students. The better they grasp these characters and contexts and are able to sing in the proper style, the more believable their portrayal becomes. Consequently, this improves the representation of the musical.

Challenges were also noted, although the survey items related to challenges did not receive low ratings, indicating that they may not have been insurmountable. The greatest challenge was in acquiring culturally relevant materials, followed by engaging culture bearers and balancing between teaching traditional musical techniques and incorporating cultural awareness practices. Engaging culture bearers for cultural learning,

as advocated by some authors (Cho, 2015; Goetze, 2000), proved challenging when the chosen musicals did not align with the cultural context of the surrounding community, when participants were situated in a rural area where locating them was difficult, or when budgetary constraints. Moreover, comments revealed the differing preferences between participants with a predominantly White (PDW) student cast and participants with a majority of students of color (SOC) cast. Those with a PDW student cast attempted to find musicals featuring diverse characters or cultures to expose students to diversity, while those with a majority of SOC cast sought musicals that could celebrate and authentically represent their cultures. Furthermore, participants in PDW schools reported facing challenges in representing musicals with diverse cultural backgrounds due to limited racial and ethnic diversity among students. Finding a musical that focused on a diversity-themed that allowed students to authentically portray characters from diverse cultural backgrounds posed challenges, particularly when avoiding tokenism. Moreover, addressing cultural issues in communities with minimal diversity added complexity to navigating and responding to cultural nuances. Religious considerations also played a role, emphasizing alignment with schools' teachings. Furthermore, some participants felt this was beyond their role as music directors.

Implications

The findings underscored that participants' approach and strategies, spanning from musical selection to materials preparation and rehearsal processes, aligned with Gay's (2002) five essential elements of implementing culturally responsive teaching. These results suggested that teachers should consider choosing culturally relevant musicals that either resonate with students or explore diverse cultural perspectives. This

ensures that students have ample opportunities to engage with and understand their own and other cultures while participating in productions that accurately represent cultural diversity. Throughout the rehearsal process, teachers can either facilitate or let the students interpret the songs' context using culturally responsive materials while teaching them diverse vocal styles that reflect the cultural group within the musical in a respectful and healthy manner. They may also need to establish a space where students can collaborate, discuss, and share their interpretations to further promote cultural appreciation, allowing them to accurately represent their characters and the cultural context within the musical without stereotyping. Overall, these practices served as a guideline for music teachers and other educators in the related field for developing diverse and inclusive musical productions that facilitate authentic interpretation and representation of cultural nuances within the show.

Limitations

Several limitations should be evaluated. The sample size is small and the response rate low, which may not adequately represent all high school music teachers in the United States or may represent participant bias if the topic of the survey was either consistent or inconsistent with their perspective on cultural responsiveness in schools. Additionally, the number of participants completing the survey decreased with each successive section, possibly due to its length, raising concerns about data reliability. Nevertheless, the information gathered has provided valuable insights into how this national sample of music teachers incorporated culturally responsive teaching into their musical productions, along with their perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for several processes.

Future Research Recommendations

As musical theatre education strives to become more inclusive and culturally aware, it is imperative to explore understand, and eventually evaluate the practices employed by music teachers in integrating cultural awareness. While this research provided information about how music teachers integrate cultural awareness into several stages of musical production, there were gaps and limitations that warrant further investigation.

One recommendation is to undertake in-depth qualitative interviews with music teachers to provide additional context for the survey results and build on the qualitative dimension of the research provided by responses to the open-ended questions. This approach could provide richer insights into the nuanced approaches and experiences of music teachers in integrating cultural awareness at each stage of the musical theatre production process.

Conducting inferential statistical analyses with a larger participant pool would be enlightening, for example, to explore such variables as correlations between the number of diverse students in a school and the teachers' considerations of students' diverse backgrounds when choosing or preparing a musical or determine whether length of experience working with musicals might be related to a teachers' responses. Additionally, a replication with a larger sample size could enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing cultural awareness in music teaching practices.

The exploration of casting dynamics would be informative. Investigating how teachers consciously cast students to represent characters in alignment with cultural

awareness goals will shed light on decision-making dynamics in cultural representation during casting (see Chapter 3).

Extending the research to other countries with diverse populations would enhance understanding of how cultural awareness is integrated into musical theatre education across different cultural contexts. This comparative approach would contribute more comprehensive knowledge of global practices in the field.

Conclusion

This study delved into the integration of the culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach by music teachers in their musical productions. In this increasingly diverse society, marked by a multitude of student identities (L. S. Davis, 2021; NCES, 2023), addressing potential issues related to cultural representation has become more critical than ever. The music teachers who responded to this survey tended to prioritize and integrate cultural awareness within the various stages of their musical theatre productions, encompassing musical selection, materials preparation, and rehearsal processes. These practices aligned closely with the five key elements of Gay's (2002) model, essential for the implementation of CRT, which were also integrated into related research in theatrical and choral practices. These endeavors not only foster understanding, challenge stereotypes, and empower students but also illuminate diverse voices. Through prioritizing cultural awareness, music theatre practices can be woven into vibrant tapestries of shared humanity, resonating far beyond the final curtain call.

Chapter Five

Summary and Conclusions

Musical theatre, as an interdisciplinary art form, has become an annual event for many schools, drawing substantial interest from students, particularly those in high school. For some students, participation in these productions marks a transformative experience, fostering self-exploration and lasting friendships or even igniting aspirations for a career as a musical theatre teacher (Stokes, 2010) or professional in the field (The Jimmy Awards, 2019). However, if teachers who work on the musical do not understand the cultural nuances, or take into account the diverse identities of students, there is a risk of perpetuating stereotypes, engaging in cultural appropriation, and misrepresenting diverse perspectives (Hoffman, 2020; Pao, 2010; Swain, 2002; Wolf, 2020).

While it remains imperative to ensure equitable opportunities for all students to engage in this meaningful endeavor, the limited student pool within a school setting amplifies the challenge of selecting appropriate musicals, casting roles, and interpreting and portraying them accurately (Wolf, 2020). This task is further complicated in today's society with the increasing number of students with diverse backgrounds and identities (L. S. Davis, 2021; NCES, 2023).

Gay's (2002, 2015, 2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) stands out as a fundamental framework for teachers in creating curriculum and materials by taking into consideration students' diverse backgrounds, especially in terms of race and ethnicity. Through implementing CRT, teachers can create an environment where students not only feel recognized but also develop an appreciation for their own culture and those of others. This framework also has the potential to enhance inclusivity and diversity within musical

theatre practices. However, I have encountered limited research on the cultural aspects (Fields, 1970; Janicki, 1982; Streeter, 2016) and inclusivity of diverse students (Cacciola-Price, 2023; Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020) within the musical theatre realm in school settings, and found no research on CRT in this regard.

Research Questions and Method

The main purpose of this study was to explore the integration of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) into high school musical theatre production. The following primary research question guided my investigation: What were high school teachers' attitudes, strategies, experiences, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions in creating culturally inclusive musical theatre experiences for students from diverse backgrounds and identities, guided by CRT? To address these inquiries, I conducted a comprehensive literature review on the applications and implications of CRT in theatrical and choral practices that could be transferred to musical theatre production (Chapter 2), followed by a qualitative study involving five high school music teachers and two theatre teachers focusing on casting students with diverse identities (Chapter 3), and finally, a survey of high school music teachers regarding the integration of cultural awareness in musical theatre practices, particularly concerning song interpretation and representation (Chapter 4). The subsequent sections delineate the major findings and recommendations based on each of these research components.

Summary of Major Findings

Literature Review of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Musical Theatre

Production

Given the lack of literature in the area, I reviewed the CRT literature from two related fields, choral music and theatre, to make applications and transfer to musical theatre production. Each stage of the musical production process was examined, including selecting the musical, casting students, preparing musical materials, and interpreting and performing the musical songs.

Based on the literature reviewed, I concluded that the initial step for teachers, before even choosing the musical, is to comprehend their students' diverse backgrounds and identities, including factors such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, and socioeconomic status. Teachers can select a musical that resonates with these diverse identities, as well as with their performance abilities to foster cultural understanding and appreciation or promote sociopolitical competence. Crucially, the selected musical should possess "[high] cultural validity, [low] bias, and practicality" (Abril, 2006, p. 45). This entails coming from reliable sources that accurately represent cultural groups without resorting to stereotypes, validating authenticity through consultation with a culture bearer if possible, and ensuring suitability for performance in the school or community settings.

During the casting process, teachers can adopt "identity-conscious casting" (Jadhvani, 2021, para. 1). This inclusive method moves beyond color-conscious casting and departs from color-blind casting, which overlooks racial distinctions. It ensures that roles are aligned not only with students' racial and ethnic backgrounds but also with their other identities such as religion, gender identity, and disability.

In the preparation stage, teachers could align their material preparation with Gay's (2002) concept of culturally relevant curricula, as advocated by Carroll's (2016) *Culturally Responsive Directing Practice*. For the *formal plans/curriculum*, they might need to strive to thoroughly grasp the cultural aspects of the libretto and music. In addressing the *symbolic curriculum*, teachers might need to ensure that the materials and cultural symbols like the language used authentically represent the cultural groups. Finally, concerning the *societal curriculum*, they can encourage students to release any preconceived notions acquired from the media.

During rehearsals, creating a supportive and safe space where students can freely discuss and learn about various cultures is crucial. Encouraging mutual support and assistance among students is equally important. It is essential that students interpret and authentically perform songs in a manner that respects the originating culture. Teachers can utilize various acting techniques, such as Stanislavski's (1936) given circumstances method and Emeka's (2019) character re-imaging, to help students understand the nuances of different characters and situations to develop their multi-cultural competencies. Regarding dialect and vocal techniques, teachers may need to ensure that students speak, sing, and perform songs in a manner consistent with the cultural norms of the represented culture, either through direct instruction or guidance from a culture bearer or expert. It is important to prioritize proper and healthy vocal practices during performances. Additionally, teachers may consider adopting teaching styles that align with traditional methods from the represented culture, to achieve cultural congruity (Gay, 2002).

It seems reasonable to conclude that implementing these CRT strategies could lead to diverse and inclusive high school musical productions. However, research specific to musical theatre is still needed to understand the implications of these recommendations and assess their effectiveness based on real-life experiences and perspectives of teachers and students.

Music and Theatre Teachers' Experiences with Identity-Conscious Casting in High School Musical Productions

In this study, I employed a qualitative descriptive study design to delve into the planning and decision-making phases related to casting students with diverse backgrounds in high school musical productions. The primary objective was to examine the experiences, perceptions, challenges, and recommendations of music and theatre teachers throughout the stages preceding, during, and following the casting process. Participants ($N = 7$) were five music teachers and two theatre teachers, who had experience casting students with diverse identities two times in the past five years and collaborating with their music or theatre counterparts.

Although the focus of this research was initially on casting decisions, the findings revealed that within a school setting, due to the limited pool of students, in order to cast students and make the production more diverse and inclusive the casting process was intrinsically linked to the preparation prior to the actual casting, and to the post-casting stage. Two key themes that emerged as the most important factors throughout these processes were: *Students' Identities* and *Students' Skills*.

Before the casting process, the selection of the musical became the process that determined who could be part of the show. Participants considered the identities and

skills of the students' pool before selecting the show, ensuring that the majority of the interested students could audition for certain roles and be part of the production. While students' skills, particularly in singing, were crucial, many participants were concerned about students' identities, especially their races and ethnicities. Those from schools or programs with a majority of students of color (SOC) sought musicals that could authentically represent their students' racial and ethnic backgrounds. Conversely, participants from predominantly White (PDW) schools or programs aimed to integrate diverse themes and characters while avoiding cultural appropriation. Some suggested using musicals with smaller ensembles or casts of people of color (POC) or diversity-related themes to achieve this. The musicals were chosen to align with school and community values, particularly in conservative districts. All participants favored shows with *neutral roles*, allowing any student to portray them regardless of cultural background. This preference extended to shows with large ensembles, providing more opportunities for student involvement. Participants stressed the importance of immersing themselves in the book to ensure alignment of students' identities and abilities with the character, while also emphasizing the avoidance of pre-casting and keeping opportunities open for students who might be more suitable for roles who show up on the audition day.

Similar to musical selection, the pre-audition process helped open opportunities for students and allowed participants to learn about students' identities and preferences. All participants held open auditions, ensuring that every student had the chance to audition, and utilized various recruitment channels to encourage a diverse range of students to participate. Audition forms were used to gather information on students' identities, role preferences, and comfort levels. Some participants prepared audition

packets and organized workshops to enhance students' singing and dancing skills, thus improving their chances of success in the audition. However, others preferred to provide instruction on the audition day itself to mitigate economic disparities in preparation or allowed students to practice independently to avoid any perception of bias.

During the casting process, all participants made a point to consider students' identities, especially when specific identities were outlined on the character breakdown sheet. When there were no specific identity requirements, casting decisions were instead based on students' skills and abilities suitable for the role, as well as their comfort level. This encompassed factors such as vocal abilities, stamina to sing in the required range throughout the production, believability and emotional depth as a character, responsiveness to direction, chemistry with other characters, and comfort levels with specific scenes, particularly intimate ones. Dance skills were taken into account only if the show required them.

Participants shared the importance of casting students with diverse identities and including them in the show, despite encountering some challenges. By authentically casting students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in roles that diverge from conventional norms—such as casting SOC in a role previously played by a White actor—without resorting to stereotypes or miscasting, new perspectives were brought to both the students and the audience. Allowing students to portray roles aligned with their own race and ethnicity also provided them with the opportunity to authentically represent themselves. The participants recounted that the inclusion of students from diverse races and ethnicities facilitated cultural exchange among cast members.

Regarding gender identity, participants generally agreed that students could play any gender identity, even if not their own, convincingly and comfortably. This paves the way for the exploration of various casting strategies such as “gender-neutral casting,” “gender-flexible casting” (Cerniglia, 2022, p. 458), and “cross-gender casting” (Gray, 2023, para. 10). Importantly, several participants mentioned a strategy that provided opportunities for non-binary and transgender students to explore themselves involved casting them in roles that aligned with their gender identities. However, a challenge arose when these students needed to sing in a role that did not match their vocal range, particularly among transgender students undergoing hormonal therapy. In response, some participants made efforts to ensure the student could sing comfortably throughout rehearsals and performances.

Participants identified benefits of casting students with various diverse characteristics. Most of these benefits accrued during the post-casting stage, once the roles had been assigned. They noted that assigning a character with traits similar to the students’ might assist them in their understanding of the character, while having students portray characters with differing traits from their own offered them opportunities to explore a wider range of characters. Providing opportunities for students whose bodies and appearance differed from how characters are portrayed in media or on Broadway to play lead roles in productions allowed them to confidently showcase their talents. By casting students with diverse religions and beliefs that might not correspond to the character being portrayed, sometimes in consultation with their parents, participants gained insights and understanding, and new perspectives, which opened up opportunities for the students. Involving international students, especially those whose first language is

not English, provided them with unique opportunities they may not have had in their home countries, although assistance with language barriers may be required.

For students with special needs, whether physical or cognitive/developmental disabilities, involvement in the production not only provided them with opportunities to perform and overcome anxiety but also cultivated a supportive community among the non-disabled students, extending beyond the production. The teachers and the other cast members learned how to accommodate these students on and off stage.

Overall, participants employed “identity-conscious casting” (Jadhvani, 2021, para. 1) to cast the students with diverse identities. They discussed the experiences, challenges, and suggestions regarding the casting process and having students with diverse identities in the production. Participants recognized the importance of all stages of the casting process to enhance inclusivity and diversity.

High School Music Teacher’s Attitudes and Practices Regarding Culturally Responsive Teaching in Musical Theatre Production

I conducted a survey of music teachers to explore how they incorporated strategies related to Gay’s (2002, 2015, 2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach into their high school musical productions. This exploration encompassed the selection, preparation, and rehearsal stages, as well as the music teachers’ perceptions, challenges, and suggestions regarding this integration. In the survey itself, I used the term “cultural awareness,” which likely was more familiar to many of the participants than CRT. The target population was music teachers in the U.S. with a minimum of two years of experience teaching and rehearsing students in high school-level musicals. One hundred and nineteen participants completed at least one section of the questionnaire.

These participants represented diverse geographical locations, spanning various states across all six regions defined by the NAFME Divisions.

I was interested in learning what elements were considered and how CRT was integrated into the process of selecting the musical. Responses indicated that the key considerations included performance aspects, audience appeal, logistics, and educational and cultural elements. Students' singing abilities was the most highly rated criteria.

Participants were most likely to choose a musical that was age- and maturity-appropriate and came from reputable culturally sensitive companies when considering cultural awareness, or in this case, CRT, in the selection process. They were likely to consider choosing a musical that was relevant to students' diverse backgrounds and could bridge their understanding and appreciation of their own and other cultures. Few participants expressed a likelihood of creating their own musical to align with students with diverse backgrounds, however.

Participants rated their usage of various culturally responsive strategies and materials in their preparation as well as rehearsal processes, including interpreting the songs' context, guiding musical performances, and creating an inclusive environment. Findings revealed that in the material preparation process, participants were most likely to analyze the cultural and historical contexts in both the libretto and music in order to prepare material to assist students with cultural interpretation. While they were also likely to use reliable sources to create study guides or provide culturally accurate materials and activities, engagement with culture bearers or experts was less common. However, based on participant comments, those who did engage culture bearers asked them for firsthand insights or invited them to meet with the cast.

In interpreting the songs' context, the results highlighted several key practices that were highly rated. Participants were most likely to guide students on characterization using acting techniques that asked specific questions. Some utilized tools like character study sheets. Similarly, there was a notable likelihood of encouraging students to share their own interpretations with cultural authenticity and assisting them in addressing potential stereotypes within songs. This included those with complex themes. While there was a lower rating for independent student research, participants commented on using them when there were time constraints in rehearsal. Despite advocacy for involving culture bearers, the rating was the lowest among the practices examined.

To help guide students' musical performances, participants were most likely to have students perform diverse vocal styles in a proper and healthy manner within their abilities, with some comments recommending avoiding attempts to sing in cultural styles that cannot be replicated authentically or vocally. In instances where participants needed to teach the students pronunciation and vocal styles specific to certain cultures, like teaching songs' context, they were more likely to handle the teaching themselves than seek the culture bearers or experts, due to challenges in finding them. Recommendations included simplifying vocal terms for student comprehension or using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) encoded from a culture bearer's performance. Although aligning teaching methods with traditional cultural approaches received the lowest rating, some participants integrated both notation and rote teaching or adapted their teaching style to align with students' familiar learning methods.

To create an inclusive environment, fostering a safe space for all students regardless of their backgrounds received the highest rating. Participants were also highly

likely to encourage the students to share their thoughts, collaborate, and discuss, and to promote an environment that facilitated student leadership and expression. Some comments underscored the importance of ensuring that the context was relevant to the students, their school, and the contemporary world, further emphasizing the importance of these in fostering inclusivity.

Participants were asked about their perceptions and challenges regarding the integration of cultural awareness into musical theatre teaching. Their high ratings highlighted the potential of incorporating CRT into the process of preparing a musical to enhance student understanding and appreciation for diverse identities, as well as increase engagement. These teachers identified additional benefits such as improving team mentality, reducing interpersonal conflicts, fostering a culture of learning and openness, and bringing new perspectives to productions. After analyzing the findings, I also arrived at the conclusion that numerous benefits are inherent throughout this process. Choosing culturally relevant musicals based on students' identities and skills can enhance inclusivity and diversity in both production and overall representation. Teachers who understand the cultural context can provide appropriate materials and activities, deepening students' understanding and interpretation of the songs' context and the use of diverse vocal styles. This ensures an accurate portrayal of characters and stories, avoiding stereotypes and enhancing authenticity. As a result, this enriches the educational experience and improves the overall representation of the musical.

However, challenges emerged, with the greatest challenge being accessing culturally relevant materials, followed by engaging culture bearers and balancing between teaching traditional musical techniques and incorporating cultural awareness

practices. Engaging cultural experts proved challenging when chosen musicals did not align with the cultural context of the local community, the location of their schools, or due to financial limitations. Some participants teaching in PDW schools commented that they encountered hurdles in authentically depicting musicals with diverse cultural backgrounds, given the lack of racial diversity in their school communities. Searching for a musical that embraces diversity and ensures authentic depictions of characters from diverse backgrounds, while also avoiding tokenism, proved challenging.

In essence, participants integrated cultural awareness within the various stages of their musical theatre productions, encompassing musical selection, materials preparation, and rehearsal processes. These practices were closely aligned with the five key elements Gay (2002) described as essential for preparing teachers to implement CRT, and incorporated into related research in theatrical and choral practices. Although participants were most likely to consider singing skills when they chose the musical, they were still likely to choose musicals that aligned with students' identities, particularly their races and ethnicities. This understanding of students' diverse backgrounds and chosen musicals resonated with the development of a cultural diversity knowledge base element. Choosing a culturally responsive musical and materials to teach the students contributed to the culturally relevant curricula element. Teaching students to understand and perform songs in a manner consistent with the cultural norms demonstrated a cross-cultural communication element, while adapting teaching styles to match cultural and student learning preferences corresponded to a cultural congruity in classroom instruction element. Creating a safe and inclusive environment for sharing and collaboration reflected the demonstration of cultural caring and building a learning community.

Discussions and Implications

The central focus of this dissertation was to explore how teachers incorporate culturally responsive teaching (CRT) into their musical theatre productions. Both the qualitative study (Chapter 3) and the survey study (Chapter 4) revealed that music teacher participants demonstrated a dedication to integrating CRT into their high school musical theatre productions. This dedication was evident in various processes, including the selection of musicals, pre-auditions, casting, material preparation, and rehearsal processes, all intending to create a diverse and inclusive space for students with diverse backgrounds and identities. Insights from theatre teacher participants in the qualitative study supported these findings.

Culturally Responsive Musical Selection

In the musical selection process, findings from both the qualitative study and survey study uncovered that participants considered the pool of available students, taking into account their identities and skills when choosing a musical. However, participants prioritized these considerations differently. In the survey research, participants were most likely to select musicals based on performance aspects, with the majority giving importance to students' singing abilities (Howard, 1990; Marshall, 2019; Roberts, 2012). They gave lesser consideration to educational and cultural aspects, particularly students' diverse backgrounds. Conversely, participants from the qualitative study stressed the importance of considering students' identities and backgrounds, especially their races and ethnicities, as a primary consideration before assessing their skills. The primary reason could be attributed to the nature of musicals; if students lack singing abilities, staging a show becomes challenging. Hence, participants responding to the survey may place

greater importance on evaluating students' singing prowess, given its immediate measurability. Secondly, considering race is one of the most visible identities on stage, and the majority of the survey respondents taught predominantly White students, they may lean towards selecting shows with fewer characters representing diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, emphasizing skill over diversity. In contrast, many participants in the qualitative research had experienced or were aware of the increasing diversity within their programs. This awareness, coupled with a thorough exploration of this aspect, may lead them to prioritize selecting a musical that authentically represented their students' race and ethnicity as well as other identities.

Overall, as students' identities continue to diversify, it is imperative for teachers to choose musicals that align with their students' identities and skills. Teachers could also consider exploring musicals with themes centered on diversity, featuring characters from varied backgrounds, or offering neutral roles (Cerniglia, 2022). This ensures an accurate representation of the diversity within the student body as well as promotes students' understanding and respect for their own and different cultures. However, it is essential that these musicals authentically portray the cultures they originate from, while avoiding stereotypes and cultural appropriation. These practices align with Gay's (2002) emphasis of culturally relevant curricula and the selection of culturally valid repertoire (Abril, 2006).

Pre-Audition Tools and Strategies for Inclusive Productions

The findings from the qualitative study prompted me to conclude that many strategies and tools used in the pre-audition process can be employed to promote diversity and inclusivity within casting procedures. The implementation of open auditions without specific criteria can open up more opportunities for high school students of all

identities and skills to participate (Catron & Shattuck, 2016). Various recruitment channels, both online and offline, can be used to further attract students with diverse identities and skills to audition and potentially be part of the production. This includes reaching out to middle school students to come and watch the show and be inspired to participate. Teachers can utilize an audition form as a tool to gather students' identities, role preferences, and comfort level information, enabling them to cast students in roles that resonate with their identities and comfortability (Abril, 2013; Gay, 2002, 2018; Rodríguez, 2013; Shaw, 2012). Audition preparation can serve as a process to hone students' skills ahead of their actual auditions, thereby enhancing their readiness and potential for success on audition day (Harms, 2017). Hence, this inclusive approach contributes to a more equitable and enriching experience for all students in the casting process.

Conscious Casting on Students' Identities and Skills

The findings of the qualitative study revealed that all participants embraced identity-conscious casting, taking into account various aspects of students' identities when making casting decisions (Jadhvani, 2021). These identities included race and ethnicity, gender identity, body type and appearance, religion and beliefs, personal traits, and languages.

Based on these results, I recommended that to employ identity-conscious casting, teachers should consider two cases. In instances where the musical requires a character with a specific identity as outlined in the character breakdown sheet, teachers should consider casting students who align with that particular identity. Conversely, when no specific requirements exist, casting decisions should be based on how well students meet

the roles' demands in singing, acting, and dancing skills. This assessment encompasses factors such as vocal range and stamina, believability, emotional depth, directorial aptitude, chemistry with other cast members, and comfort level, particularly in intimate scenes (Catron & Shattuck, 2016; Rajan, 2019).

Despite this, teachers may need to remain open-minded, avoiding pre-casting, and discard preconceived notions (Catron & Shattuck, 2016). These approaches not only promote inclusivity but also provide opportunities for students to portray roles that resonate with their identities and abilities.

The Implications of Casting Students with Diverse Identity

I reflected on the data related to participants' experiences, challenges, and suggestions regarding casting students with diverse identities. Based on this, as well as the related literature, I created actionable implications for each identity category.

When working with students of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is important for teachers to accurately identify their race and ethnicity and assign roles that authentically reflect these identities, while steering clear of stereotypes or misrepresentation. Students should be given the opportunity to audition for roles that are open to interpretation regardless of race and ethnicity. Allowing them to demonstrate their skills and abilities in roles such as these can foster confidence and fresh perspectives for both the students and the audience. This approach aligns with the principles of color-conscious casting (Gelt, 2022; Jadhvani, 2014; Rodríguez, 2013).

As a person's gender identity is not necessarily observable, it is important for teachers to learn about and understand students' gender identities before making casting decisions (McDonald, 2010). Although participants agreed that students can portray any

gender identity, teachers need to understand that they cannot alter the gender of the characters within the story without the authors' permission (Cerniglia, 2022; Hishon, 2020). Therefore, when characters have specific gender identities, teachers can consider using cross-gender casting (Gray, 2023) or aligning students with the characters' gender identities. While the latter is a traditional approach, it differs with transgender or non-binary students. In such cases, teachers might strive to assign transgender or non-binary roles to them, allowing them to explore and authentically represent their own gender identities (Hishon, 2020). However, the primary concern when employing these roles that may not align with their vocal range is ensuring that they can sing their parts comfortably throughout the entire show, especially for transgender students undergoing hormonal therapy (Lipson, 2013). Teachers can assist them by adjusting the keys higher or lower as needed. In an instance where gender is not specified in the storyline, teachers can adopt gender-neutral or gender-flexible casting approaches (Cerniglia, 2022; Hishon, 2020) to cast any students, irrespective of their gender identities.

Teachers should only consider specific body types and appearances if they are explicitly mentioned or crucial to the script. Otherwise, students should have the chance to portray any role. Allowing students to take on diverse roles can enhance confidence in their skills rather than being overly concerned about their appearance, considering that high school students often grapple with body image issues (Byrne, 2022).

When engaging with students with special needs, teachers not only need to take into account their identities and skills during the casting process but also consider how to accommodate them once they are part of the production. Students with physical abilities who retain some level of mobility or can move with assistance could be cast in roles that

align with their other identities. Students with cognitive/developmental disabilities could be cast based on their self-management skills or placement on the autism spectrum. If they can perform with some assistance, roles should be assigned according to their other identities, allowing them to showcase their skills within the scope of their abilities (Cacciola-Price, 2023; Hishon, 2018). In both cases, teachers should consider assigning non-disabled students to assist them on stage when needed, while ensuring that they are comfortable on and off stage (Hishon, 2018). This includes making sure that physical space is accessible to all of them.

Involving students with diverse religious beliefs requires teachers to consider not only the students' personal convictions but also those of their families before assigning them roles. The characters, attires, and scenes they participate in should align with their religious values and beliefs, ensuring that their participation in the production is respectful and in harmony with their faith. This involves discussing with their parents and accommodating them after they have been cast.

Students' personal traits should not be used to dictate which characters they could or should portray. Instead, they should be cast based on their identities and how well they embody the character traits required for the roles.

For international students, teachers may wish to cast them according to their identities and skills. However, if they have some language barrier, teachers might need to assist them in portraying certain roles effectively.

Although I discussed implications for various identities separately, teachers should also consider the intersectionality of students and cast them in a manner that acknowledges and honors the complexity of their identities. This approach promotes a

more authentic portrayal of characters and fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where every student feels valued and represented.

Ensuring diversity and inclusivity in a production requires more than just the casting process. As previously mentioned, students with special needs and students with certain religions may still require continued assistance and accommodations from teachers and their peers. This approach not only supports the involvement of students with disabilities but also fosters a supportive environment between non-disabled students and their peers with special needs (Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020; Sandahl, 2019).

Furthermore, to respectfully portray the characters and musical songs, students should have a deep understanding of the cultural context within the musical, as well as the cultures and identities of the characters they portray. It is the responsibility of teachers to integrate cultural awareness into several processes to assist students in their understanding. This includes musical selection, material preparation, and the rehearsal process, as highlighted in the survey research. However, since musical selection has already been discussed in the previous section, the focus here would be on the other two processes related to the survey study.

Preparing Culturally Relevant Materials to Create Culturally Responsive Musical Rehearsals

Based on the findings, I concluded that material preparation becomes the process whereby the teachers can prepare their cultural understanding as well as materials and activities that could assist the students in interpreting and representing the songs in the rehearsals. The findings indicated that participants integrated cultural awareness into the material preparation process, aligning with Gay's (2002) notion of culturally relevant

curricula, which encompasses a formal, symbolic, and societal curriculum. To achieve this, teachers might first analyze and thoroughly understand the cultural and historical contexts embedded within the libretto and music (Carroll, 2016). They can leverage this understanding to develop study guides, materials, or activities, drawing information from reliable sources that accurately represent the originated cultural group (Carroll, 2016; Gay, 2002; Rodríguez, 2013). To verify the information, they may seek culture bearers or experts or invite them to meet the cast as well. Such involvement could enable students to surpass preconceived notions and foster a more profound understanding of the diverse cultures portrayed within the context of musical theatre (Carroll, 2016).

The findings underscored that integrating cultural awareness into musical rehearsals can ensure authentic performances and foster inclusivity, consistent with Gay's (2002) concept of demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community. This includes creating an environment where students feel seen, heard, and valued, and learn to appreciate their own and other cultures within the musical. This approach not only can enhance the quality of the performance but also promote empathy, respect, and appreciation for diverse cultures among students.

To accomplish this, teachers can employ materials or activities they prepare to guide the students in interpreting and representing the songs. They can use acting methods questions or tools like character study sheets to aid students in character understanding or characterization (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016; Stanislavsky, 1936). Teachers can also teach, or have the students explore, the cultural contexts of songs, particularly those with complex themes (Cho, 2015; Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016; Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). This may involve independent

student research, particularly when time constraints are present (Gay, 2002). The more students understand their character and the cultural context within the musical, the better they can present a believable character and provide a more accurate representation of the culture within the musical (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016).

When guiding the students to perform the song, teachers can apply their knowledge and expertise to help the singers develop proficiency in different vocal styles while ensuring that they use proper vocal techniques in a healthy manner. This may involve seeking assistance from cultural experts (Karapetian, 2017; Shaw, 2012) or using resources such as the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) that teachers encode themselves based on guidance from culture bearers. To enrich students' cultural experiences, teachers can also utilize teaching styles native to the culture being represented, including both notation and rote teaching methods, or adapt teaching styles to match students' learning styles (Gay, 2002; Shaw, 2012; Yoo, 2017). Teaching students through different vocal styles and utilizing teaching methods specific to various cultures can enhance students' understanding of those cultures. This approach enables students to employ more authentic vocal styles, leading to a more accurate representation of the culture or genre of the musical on stage (Dal Vera & Deer, 2015; Moore & Bergman, 2016).

To ensure that all students develop a consistent cultural understanding, interpretation, and appreciation for diverse cultures, including their own, teachers can create a safe space where students can openly share and discuss their experiences and challenging topics (Carroll, 2016; Dissinger, 2019; Gilliam, 2021; Karapetian, 2017; Palkki, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, 2018). This environment should encourage student

collaboration, leadership, and self-expression (Bond, 2014; Dissinger, 2019; Karapetian, 2017; Spradley, 2013). Through these collaborative efforts and discussions, students not only gain insight into their own characters but also develop a shared mindset and interpretation, particularly during scenes performed together (Church, 2015).

Benefits and Challenges of Integrating Culturally Responsive Teaching Approach in Musical Theatre Production

According to findings from both the qualitative and survey studies, integrating CRT into musical theatre production offers benefits that teachers may find advantageous. Survey participants indicated that integrating cultural awareness into productions could enhance students' comprehension and appreciation of diverse cultures and identities and improve engagement among the students. Additional benefits, such as promoting teamwork, mitigating interpersonal conflicts, nurturing a culture of learning and openness, and introducing fresh perspectives to productions, were also noted. This phenomenon, similar to findings in the qualitative study, became more evident when participants produced a musical with themes centered on diversity or featured characters from diverse backgrounds and identities, or when students with diverse identities participated in the production. For instance, when incorporating students of color (SOC) in the production, participants not only had to select a suitable musical for them but also had to creatively consider which characters they could authentically portray. This innovative approach brought a new perspective to both students and the audience, fostering cultural learning and sharing among students involved in the production. Choosing a musical and casting the students based on their identities and abilities can indeed create a diverse and inclusive production. Furthermore, as I conclude from the

survey results, there are other benefits along the processes. For instance, preparing or creating materials from reliable sources with a profound understanding of the cultural context within the musical can aid teachers in better assisting the students in interpreting and representing the songs. Teaching the students to perform using vocal styles and teaching methods that align with the cultural group can also help the students create authentic performances and enhance their experiences. With this understanding, students can better portray their characters, making them more believable and enhancing the overall representation of the musical.

Some challenges noted by the participants may also resonate with other teachers. These challenges encompass obtaining culturally relevant materials, engaging with culture bearers/experts, and selecting a musical with diverse themes or characters while avoiding cultural appropriation. To address these challenges, teachers can begin by consulting materials provided by licensing companies such as Music Theatre International (MTI, n.d.), which provides information on the cultural aspects of various shows. They can also explore information on the organization websites of relevant cultural groups. Engaging culture bearers/experts could be difficult when the chosen musicals do not align with the cultural context of their community, or when there are budgetary constraints. According to Shaw (2012), in today's technologically-advanced era, teachers can contact the culture bearers/experts via videoconference. Recordings of these interactions can then be shared with the class with proper permissions.

Additionally, participants in predominantly White (PDW) schools or programs from both studies underscored the difficulties in authentically representing musicals with diverse cultural backgrounds. Limited racial diversity in schools posed obstacles in finding

suitable musicals and ensuring authentic portrayals without resorting to tokenism. Some suggestions from participants that teachers can consider include selecting a musical that offers diversity without requiring a large cast or ensemble of people of color.

Alternatively, they can opt for a musical with more neutral roles. Both options could be found in newer musicals or in musicals with changes in character descriptions, such as Disney musicals (Cerniglia, 2022).

Moving forward, it is essential for teachers to maintain their efforts in prioritizing cultural sensitivity and understanding, as well as recognizing the importance of creating enriching musical experiences for students from diverse backgrounds and identities. This ongoing commitment will contribute to creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment for all students involved in musical productions.

Recommendation for Future Research

Several recommendations emerge based on the methods and findings of the two empirical studies. Due to the small sample size in both studies, conducting future research with a larger number of participants, especially in the survey study, could enhance the overall representation of the population and improve the generalizability of the findings. With a larger sample size, researchers can also perform inferential statistical analyses to examine selected variables in more depth, such as exploring correlations between the number of diverse students in a school and teachers' considerations of students' diverse backgrounds or cultural awareness, when choosing or preparing musicals.

Building on open-ended comments in survey research, qualitative interviews with music teachers could provide in-depth information on how they integrate CRT into each process of the musical theatre production.

The qualitative study focused on the overall casting-related process involving students with diverse identities. More in-depth study of the experiences of teachers working with students of various specific identities could offer invaluable insights into how teachers can cast and provide support for all students.

The casting process was found to be linked to several processes occurring before and after the actual casting was undertaken. Research about aspects such as how to select a proper musical for students with diverse identities or accommodate them after they are part of the show could help open opportunities for students to participate and optimize their potential to be successful.

Both research studies were conducted from teachers' perspectives. It seems that it would be important and valuable to explore the students' experiences and perspectives. Findings could aid educators in understanding the students' viewpoints, feelings, and preferences, thereby enhancing the possibility of providing a positive experience for everyone involved in a school musical production.

Conclusion

Through my data collection and analysis, it became apparent that participants embraced Gay's (2002, 2015, 2018) model of culturally responsive teaching, which takes into account students' diverse backgrounds and identities when planning for and implementing instruction. This entailed implementing identity-conscious casting and integrating cultural awareness throughout the production processes, thereby fostering

more diverse and inclusive experiences for students and enhancing their multicultural competencies.

In essence, the cornerstone of producing a more diverse and inclusive musical in a school setting is different from industry norms, and rests on holistic considerations. This begins with selecting a musical that either aligns with the students' identities and skills, and/or exposes them to different cultures, all while avoiding the preconceived notions associated with pre-casting, cultural appropriation, or exploitation. Casting could reflect this consideration through the implementation of identity-conscious casting, which prioritizes students' identities and abilities, particularly when assigning roles with specific cultural or identity-related contexts. The rehearsal environment plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of inclusivity, ensuring that each student feels empowered to contribute and is valued for their unique perspective. It is essential that students not only feel recognized and included but also learn to appreciate and respect their own culture as well as the cultures of others. This involves accommodating students' needs and preferences while preparing cultural materials and activities with a profound understanding to assist them in interpreting and representing the musical songs. In addition to this, teaching diverse vocal styles and utilizing instructional techniques derived from the cultural context of the musical enriches students' experiences and understanding. Students could have opportunities to lead, collaborate effectively, and share their interpretations and insights. As they develop a deeper understanding and proficiency in singing with diverse vocal styles, they become better equipped to portray believable characters, both individually and collectively.

These approaches not only serve as a guideline for teachers, educators, and practitioners to create an authentic representation of the musical as a whole but also offer students a transformative journey of cultural exploration and self-discovery. By embracing diversity, fostering inclusivity, and celebrating cultural richness, we not only create captivating musical productions but also nurture a generation of empathetic, culturally aware individuals poised to make a meaningful impact on the world. Together, we can create spaces where every voice is heard, every culture is celebrated, and every student is empowered to shine.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval for Qualitative Research



**Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia**

FWA Number: 00002876

IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

310 Jesse Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

October 12, 2023

Principal Investigator: Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri
Department: School of Music

Your IRB Application to project entitled Culturally Responsive Casting in Musicals: A Multiple-Case Study of Casting High School Students was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2097670
IRB Review Number	396326
Initial Application Approval Date	October 12, 2023
IRB Expiration Date	October 12, 2024
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
HIPAA Category	No HIPAA
	Informed Consent & Assent - Consent (Exempt Studies Only): #666653
	Other Study Documents - Focus Group Protocol: #665103
Approved Documents	Other Study Documents - Follow-Up Letter/Communication to Participant: #665101
	Other Study Documents - Interview Questions: #665102
	Other Study Documents - Pre-Screener: #667328
	Recruitment Materials - Recruitment Script: #667318

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All study changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
3. Major noncompliance must be reported to the MU IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of the research team becoming aware of the deviation. Major noncompliance are deviations that caused harm or have the potential to cause harm to research subjects or others, and have or may have affected subject's rights, safety, and/or welfare. Please refer to the MU IRB Noncompliance policy for additional details.

4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please view the [MU Business Policy and Procedure Manual](#).

Please view the [MU HRPP/IRB policies](#) describing IRB exempt and other requirements.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in a Research Study (Qualitative Research)

Project Title: Culturally Responsive Casting in Musicals: A Multiple-Case Study of Casting High School Students

Principal Investigator/Researcher: Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri
IRB Reference Number: 2097670 MU

You are being invited to take part in a research project. You must be 18 years of age or older. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop being in this study at any time. The purpose of this research project is to gain insight into the importance and influence of casting decisions by exploring how teachers make selections for high school students in their school musical productions. You are being asked to participate in a recorded individual interview, each lasting from 60 to 90 minutes, with the potential for follow-up questions. Additionally, you will be requested to provide relevant documents related to the casting process as well as read and validate the interpreted findings. Your participation should last up to one school semester. No compensation will be provided. The information you provide will be kept confidential and you, your school, and students will not be identified in any way in reports of this research. All data will be also securely stored and used for research purposes only.

If you have questions about this study, you can contact the University of Missouri researcher at Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri, 573-XXX-XXXX, or xxxxxx@umsystem.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu.

You can ask the researcher to provide you with a copy of this consent for your records, or you can save a copy of this consent if it has already been provided to you. We appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.

Appendix C

Recruitment Script and Screening Questions Form

Recruitment Script

Calling all music and drama teachers in the United States! (if allowed)

I am a current doctoral candidate in Music Education at the University of Missouri–Columbia, working on a research study that focuses on decisions made in the process of casting students in high school musical productions. I am seeking participants to help illuminate the thoughts and processes used by high school music and drama teachers when making casting decisions for high school musicals, with an emphasis on students with diverse characteristics.

As a participant, you will engage in an individual interview and a pair-group interview with your theatre/music counterpart, each lasting from 60 to 90 minutes, with the potential for follow-up questions. Additionally, you will be requested to provide relevant documents related to the casting process as well as read and validate the interpreted findings. The research will take place during the first semester of this school year. By sharing your expertise, unique insights, and perspectives, we aspire to unveil valuable casting strategies that empower students and celebrate their talents on stage.

To join the study, you should either be 1) a music teacher collaborating with a drama teacher or 2) a drama teacher collaborating with a music teacher in the casting process of a musical. Additionally, you must have been involved in casting high school students for musicals at least two times in the past five years.

To express your interest in being part of this research, kindly click “Screening Questions” below. The responses to these questions will determine your eligibility, and enable you to sign up for the study if you are eligible. If you have any questions or would like more information, please send me an email at: xxxxxx@umsystem.edu.

Screening Questions

Your privacy and confidentiality will be respected, and you, your school, or students will not be identified in any way in reports of this research, and all data will be securely stored and used for research purposes only.

Sincerely,
Apinorn (Nikké) Chaiwanichsiri

Screening Questions Form

We greatly appreciate your interest in participating in this research study. Kindly complete the following information and respond to the questions below:

Consent Form (Appendix B)

Do you consent to voluntarily participate in this research study?

- No
 Yes

- **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in our research.

- **If Yes is selected**

1. Please indicate your role:

- Music Teacher
 Drama Teacher
-

- **If Music Teacher is selected**

2. Have you been involved in casting high school students for musicals at least two times in the past five years?

- No
 Yes
-

- **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in our research.

- **If Yes is selected**

3. How long have you been casting high school students in musicals? (Please enter the number of years)

4. Have you been working with a drama teacher when casting the students?

No

Yes

-
- **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in our research.

-
- **If Yes is selected**

5. Do you believe it would be possible to include your drama teacher as a participant in the study?

No

Yes

-
- **If Yes or No is selected**

Please enter your information:

Full Name _____

Email Address: _____

School Name _____

City _____

State _____

What is the location of your school?

Urban

Suburban

Small City

Rural

Others (Please specify)

What is the enrollment size of your school? Please choose the option that best represents the number of students at your school:

- Small (fewer than 500 students)
- Medium (500-1,000 students)
- Large (more than 1,000 students)

Thank you for sharing your information. We will send the research details via the email address you have provided. If you have any inquiries, please don't hesitate to reach out to xxxxxx@umsystem.edu.

○ **If Drama Teacher is selected**

2. Have you been involved in casting high school students for musicals at least two times in the past three years?

- No
- Yes

○ **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in our research.

○ **If Yes is selected**

3. How long have you been casting high school students? (Please enter the number)

4. Have you been working with a music teacher when casting the students?

- No
- Yes

● **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in our research.

● **If Yes is selected**

5. Do you believe it would be possible to include your music teacher as a participant in the study?

- No
- Yes

• **If Yes or No is selected**

Please enter your information:

- Full Name _____
- Email Address: _____
- School Name _____
- City _____
- State _____

What is the location of your school?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Small City
- Rural
- Others (Please specify)

What is the enrollment size of your school? Please choose the option that best represents the number of students at your school:

- Small (fewer than 500 students)
- Medium (500-1,000 students)
- Large (more than 1,000 students)

Thank you for sharing your information. We will send the research details via the email address you have provided. If you have any inquiries, please don't hesitate to reach out to xxxxxx@umsystem.edu.

Appendix D

Individual Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Position of Interviewee:

Introduction:

I invited you here today because I believe you have valuable insights to share about your experiences of casting high school students in musical production. My hope is that by the end of our conversation, I will have a better understanding of your experiences and perspectives as well as suggestions on the casting process.

Before we begin, in accordance with the details provided in the consent form, I would like to inform you again that our interview will be recorded and kept confidential. The duration is expected to be approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Please feel free to let me know if you require a break at any point during the conversation. Also, you are free to decline to answer any questions or end the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable or for any other reasons.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we proceed with the interview?

Demographic Questions:

- 1) Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
 - a. What is your position in the school (music/drama teacher)?
- 2) How often does your high school present a musical production?
- 3) What are some of the musicals that have been produced in the past 3-5 years?
- 4) What position or role do you hold in the musical production (director, music director, etc.)? How long (or how many times) have you taken on this role?
 - = prompts

Before Casting Process Questions

- 1) How have you been involved in casting decisions?

- 2) To cast the students, you need to know what musical you are putting on each year, what are some of the factors you use to consider when selecting the musical for the productions? (story/themes, cast size, students' skills, etc.)
 - a. What characteristics of the students do you consider?
 - vocal ability, acting ability, dancing ability, cultural background, . . .
 - b. Is there a process in place for students to have a say in choosing the musical? How are they involved in the decision-making process?
- 3) Once the musical is decided, what is your process for recruiting and auditioning students for the production?

Recruiting process

- Who can participate in the audition? Is it an open audition?
- What grade level should they be?
- How many students are you expecting in the audition?

Audition process

- a. What do you do on the audition day?
 - Do you have an audition form? Can you describe it a little and would it be possible to send it to me after our interview?
 - Do students get to choose their roles?
 - What elements do you usually audition first (Singing/Acting/Dancing)? Why?
 - Do you audition for double cast/understudies?
 - Do you have callbacks for the students?

Casting Process Questions

- 1) After an audition, how do you approach the casting process?
 - a. Are there any specific questions you typically ask yourself when making casting decisions?
 - b. What are the key factors you consider when evaluating students' auditions for different roles in the musical? How do these factors influence your casting decisions?
 - Do you consider students' abilities (Singing/Acting/Dancing) in the casting process? If so, how do you assess these abilities or you do have any form to access?

Singing

- Vocal Range and Type

- Pitch/ Intonation
- Diction
- Acting through song

Acting

- Voice Acting (Diction/Projection)
- Characterization

Dancing

- Movement/Dance ability

Mind

- Text Understanding
 - Take direction/make choices
- c. In addition to talent and abilities, do you consider students' cultural backgrounds in the casting process? Do you consider inclusivity and provide opportunities for a diverse range of students?
- *Trait matching*
 - Do they need to play specific roles that match their appearance? or can they play different roles? Why?
 - i. Body Types (Height/Weight)
 - ii. Races
 - iii. Ethnicities
 - iv. Gender identities
 - v. Special needs/disabilities
 - *Cross casting*
 - What if it's a neutral role? Do you ever consider cross-casting students, if so, how do you assess their suitability for such roles?

2) How would you describe your students participating in the production in terms of cultural backgrounds? Or can you send me the names of the roles or characters and specify the ethnicities and gender identities of the students cast in those roles?

- Do you have more girls/boys in the production?
 - Girl__ Boy__
- Do you have students who identify as non-binary?
 - Non-binary__
- What are some of the ethnicities of your students? Are they mostly (____)?

In the blank

- White __/African American __/Hispanic __/
Asian __/Pacific Islander __/Other races __

- Do you have students with special needs? Yes ___ No ___
(If yes, please describe if you feel comfortable with that)

Challenges and Positive Incidents When Casting Diverse Students:

Challenges Incidents

- 1) Have you encountered any challenging interactions or incidents while casting students with different (___)? How did you handle it, and what were the outcomes?

In the blank

- Body types (Different weight and height)/ Races/ Ethnicities/ Gender identities/ Students with special needs
- 2) How do you address any concerns or feedback from students or their parents regarding casting decisions?
 - Students/Parents with different cultural backgrounds.
 - 3) Have there been any instances in which you felt you had to cast students for specific roles (typecast) or cast students in a role that didn't align with their identities? If so, can you tell me about the experiences? For example: I usually typecast to play an Asian role.
 - What were the reasons for making such decisions?
 - How did you feel about this?

Positive Incidents

- 4) Were there any meaningful incidents or interactions regarding casting the students with different (___)? How did these experiences positively impact the production?

In the blank

- Body types (Different weight and height)/ Races/ Ethnicities/ Gender identities/ Students with special needs
- 5) What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of casting students with diverse backgrounds in musical productions?

Conscious Casting Perceptions and Suggestions

- 1) Do you think it is important to cast the students by considering their race and ethnicity as well as their body types, gender identities, and disability? Have your thoughts changed over the years, and if so, how and why?

2) What would you do or suggest to make the casting process better for students of different cultural backgrounds?

- Body types (Different weight and height)
- Races
- Ethnicities
- Gender identities
- Students with special needs

Conclusion

1) Is there anything else you want to add about your casting decision or process?

Closing:

Thank you for your time and valuable information. After our interview, I will send you a link to a Microsoft OneDrive folder.

Inside this folder, you will find a Word Document where you can add any additional thoughts you may have. You can also use this document to fill in the names of the roles or characters and specify the ethnicities and gender identities of the students who were cast in those roles. This folder will also be the place where you can upload the documents that are related to your casting process. If you are not sure about what to share, there will be a guiding list included in the Word Document.

Do you have any other questions?
Once again, thank you very much!

Appendix E

Follow-Up Questions and Additional Documents

Demographic Information (Your information will be kept confidential and will only be accessible to the research team):

- Your Pseudonym:
- School Name:
- Musical Production Role:

1. Please feel free to share any additional insights or information that you believe is important and may not have had the chance to mention during the interview.
2. Please fill in the names of the roles or characters and specify the ethnicities and gender identities of the students who were cast in these roles.

Name of the Musical:		
Roles or characters' name	Students' Ethnicities	Students' Gender Identities

3. Please upload any related documents that you use in the casting process, including a blank audition rubric/form, a blank casting sheet, program notes for musicals, and any written notes (If applicable, provide any materials that you believe would help us understand your casting procedures better)

Appendix F

Complete List of the Musicals the Participants Had Produced

Over the Past Three to Five Years

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Alice by Heart</i> | 16. <i>Once upon a mattress</i> (2) |
| 2. <i>Bright Star</i> | 17. <i>Pippins</i> |
| 3. <i>Chicago</i> | 18. <i>Rent</i> (School Edition) |
| 4. <i>Cinderella</i> | 19. <i>Rock of Ages</i> |
| 5. <i>Crazy For you</i> | 20. <i>School of Rock</i> |
| 6. <i>Disaster!</i> | 21. <i>Seussical</i> |
| 7. <i>Eighties Jukebox Musical</i> | 22. <i>The 25th annual Putnam County</i> |
| 8. <i>Footloose</i> (2) | <i>Spelling Bee</i> |
| 9. <i>Godspell</i> (2) | 23. <i>The Drowsy Chaperone</i> |
| 10. <i>I'll Do Anything for You</i> | 24. <i>The Pirates of Penzance</i> |
| 11. <i>Into the Woods</i> (4) | 25. <i>The Who's Tommy</i> |
| 12. <i>Little Shop of Horrors</i> (3) | 26. <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> |
| 13. <i>Mamma Mia!</i> (5) | 27. <i>Twelfth Night</i> (Taub) |
| 14. <i>Matilda</i> | 28. <i>Urine Town</i> (2) |
| 15. <i>Mean Girls</i> | 29. <i>You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown</i> |

() = Number of participants who produced the same show.

Appendix G

IRB Approval for Survey Research



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia
FWA Number: 00002876
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

310 Jesse Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

October 10, 2023

Principal Investigator: Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri
Department: School of Music

Your IRB Application to project entitled Cultural Awareness in Musical Theatre Teaching: Interpretation and Representation of Musical Theatre Songs was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2098076
IRB Review Number	397374
Initial Application Approval Date	October 10, 2023
IRB Expiration Date	October 10, 2024
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(i)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
HIPAA Category	No HIPAA
Approved Documents	Informed Consent & Assent - Consent (Exempt Studies Only): #666657 Other Study Documents - Instruments (i.e. surveys): #665106 Recruitment Materials - Recruitment Script: #665105

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All study changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
3. Major noncompliance must be reported to the MU IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of the research team becoming aware of the deviation. Major noncompliance are deviations that caused harm or have the potential to cause harm to research subjects or others, and have or may have affected subject's rights, safety, and/or welfare. Please refer to the MU IRB Noncompliance policy for additional details.
4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please view the [MU Business Policy and Procedure Manual](#).

Please view the [MU HRPP/IRB policies](#) describing IRB exempt and other requirements.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

Appendix H

Consent to Participate in a Research Study (Survey Research)

Project Title: Cultural Awareness in Musical Theatre Teaching: Interpretation and Representation of Musical Theatre Songs

Principal Investigator/Researcher: Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri
IRB Reference Number: 2098076 MU

You are being invited to take part in a research project. You must be 18 years of age or older. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop being in this study at any time. The purpose of this survey study is to investigate how music teachers apply cultural awareness, both before and during their musical rehearsal practices, with a particular focus on how they select the musical as well as prepare, instruct, and guide students in the interpretation and representation of musical songs. This investigation also examines teachers' perspectives, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations regarding the integration of cultural awareness into their musical productions. You are being asked to complete the survey which will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. There is no compensation provided for participation. The information you provide will be confidential because the survey responses are anonymous and no identifying information will be collected. An employee's decision about research participation will not affect (favorably or unfavorably) performance evaluations, career advancement, or other employment-related decisions made by peers or supervisors. If you have questions about this study, you can contact the University of Missouri researcher at Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri, 573-XXX-XXXX, or xxxxxx@umsystem.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu.

You can ask the researcher to provide you with a copy of this consent for your records, or you can save a copy of this consent if it has already been provided to you. We appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.

Appendix I

Recruitment Script

Dear all music teachers,

I am a current doctoral candidate in Music Education at the University of Missouri-Columbia. My research study seeks to investigate how music teachers apply cultural awareness, both before and during their musical rehearsal practices, with a particular focus on how they select the musical as well as prepare, instruct, and guide students in the interpretation and representation of musical songs. This investigation also examines teachers' perspectives, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations regarding the integration of cultural awareness into their musical productions.

The goal of this research is to understand the current state of cultural awareness implementation in musical theatre teaching. These findings may inform strategies and approaches for enhancing cultural understanding and inclusivity within this educational context, ultimately contributing to more meaningful and equitable musical productions.

To participate in this study, you are kindly invited if you are 1) a current music teacher in the United States with 2) at least two years of experience in rehearsing and teaching soloists and ensemble/chorus in high school-level musicals.

We deeply appreciate your time and commitment. If you choose to participate in this anonymous survey and share your practices, please click on the "SURVEY" link provided below. The survey will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

SURVEY

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me via email at xxxxxx@umsystem.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this research.

Apinporn (Nikké) Chaiwanichsiri

Appendix J

Survey

Culturally Awareness in Musical Theatre Teaching

Thank you for participating in this survey on cultural awareness in musical theatre teaching. Your responses will help us understand the practices and perspectives of educators in creating inclusive and diverse musical experiences for students in the context of musical theatre. Please answer the following questions honestly and indicate your level of likeliness and agreement with each statement on a Likert scale.

Consent Form

Do you consent to voluntarily participate in this research study?

- No
- Yes

- **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in our research.

- **If Yes is selected**

Are you a music teacher in the United States?

- No
- Yes

- **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in the study. While you may not meet the specific criteria for this particular study, we appreciate your engagement and encourage you to consider participating in our research in the future. Your interest and support are valuable to us.

- **If Yes is selected**

Do you have **at least two years** of experience in rehearsing and teaching soloists and ensemble/chorus in **high school-level** musicals?

- No
- Yes

- **If No is selected**

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in the study. While you may not meet the specific criteria for this particular study, we appreciate your engagement and encourage you to consider participating in our research in the future. Your interest and support are valuable to us.

- **If Yes is selected**

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your race/ethnicity?

- White alone, non-Hispanic
 - Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic
 - Asian alone, non-Hispanic
 - Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic (please specify)

 - Two or More Races, alone, non-Hispanic (please specify)

 - Prefer not to answer.
-

2. What is your gender identity?

- Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary / third gender
 - Prefer not to say.
-

3. What is your teaching position at the **high school level**?

- General music teacher
 - Choir teacher
 - Band teacher
 - Orchestral teacher
 - Musical theatre teacher
-

4. What is your role in the musical theatre rehearsal process? (Please check all that apply)

- Music Director
 - Drama Director
 - Choreographer
 - Vocal Coach
 - Other (Please specify)
-

5. How many years have you been involved in **high-school level** musical production?

6. What is the approximate race/ethnic composition of the students you primarily work within the musical? (Please provide percentages that add up to 100%)

- _____ White alone, non-Hispanic
 - _____ Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic
 - _____ Asian alone, non-Hispanic
 - _____ Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic
 - _____ Hispanic or Latino
 - _____ Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic (please specify) _____
 - _____ Two or More Races, alone, non-Hispanic (please specify) _____
-

7. Have you ever been involved in the process of choosing the musical for high school students?

- No
- Yes
-

If No is selected it will jump to Section 3: Prepare Culturally Responsive Materials

If yes is selected it will jump to Section 2: Choosing Musicals

Section 2: Choosing a Musical

2.1 Please rate the following factors based on **their importance when choosing a musical**.

	Does not apply (N/A)	Not at all important (1)	Slightly important (2)	Neutral (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)
1. Story and themes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Diverse backgrounds of the students (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Students' singing abilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Students' dancing abilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Students' acting abilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Educational value	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Cast size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Musical score and song (orchestration complexity, vocal range, and musical style)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Time and rehearsal period	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Production/technical requirements (set design, costumes, lighting, and sound elements)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Budget and resources (e.g., cost of licensing and royalties for the musical)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Audience appeal (resonate with the target audience)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Cultural and social sensitivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2.2 Please rate the likeliness of the following statements in terms of what you consider when you are **choosing the musical**.

I choose a musical that...

	Does not apply (N/A)	Very unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Very likely (5)
1. is relevant to students' cultural background (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. bridges students' understanding and appreciation for both their own and other cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. introduces students to social issues or controversial topics to promote their sociopolitical competence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. is appropriate for the age and maturity level of the student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. accurately depict the culture of that racial, ethnic, or gender group and does not stereotype them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. comes from a reliable company that has an understanding of different cultures (such as Music Theatre International, Rodgers & Hammerstein Theatre Library, and Tams Witmark).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. is written and composed by a member of that cultural group within the show.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. the students prefer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I prefer to create my own musical to cater to students with diverse backgrounds.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments and/or suggestions **on choosing a musical**:

Section 3: Cultural Awareness in Material Preparation

Please rate the likeliness of the following statements on what you consider when you are preparing **materials** to aid students in interpreting and representing the musical songs:

I...

	Does not apply (N/A)	Very Unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Very likely (5)
1. go through the libretto and music in order to determine the cultural and/or historical context I need to prepare for the students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. make sure that the prepared information comes from reliable resources that do not perpetuate stereotypes or misrepresent the cultures (e.g., organization website, research paper, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. prepare materials, such as images and songs, that genuinely represent the cultures and preserve their essential elements, which may include languages, dialects, and traditions unique to those cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. ensure that people or events that are portrayed in the image and/or media used accurately depict the originated culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. check the cultural accuracy of the information and materials with cultural bearers and/or experts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments and/or suggestions on **preparing the materials** to aid students in interpreting and representing the songs:

Section 4: Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals

Please rate the likeliness of the following statements based on your experience when you are **rehearsing and teaching** the students to interpret and represent the songs during the rehearsal:

4.1 Interpreting Songs' Context

I...

	Does not apply (N/A)	Very Unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Very likely (5)
1. use the cultural materials I prepared to help students interpret the cultural and/or historical context within the songs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. guide students in addressing potential stereotypes or misrepresentations present in the songs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. invite cultural bearers/experts to explain songs and how they relate to their culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. encourage students to explore and share their understanding of the song's cultural and/or historical context.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. assist the students in understanding the characters they portray using acting methods that prompt inquiries such as Who am I? Where am I? What time is it? What do I want? How will I get it? What must I overcome?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. provide opportunities for students to research and learn about the cultural and historical backgrounds of the characters they portray, especially those based on real individuals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. encourage students to bring their own interpretations and personal experiences to their characterizations, all while upholding cultural authenticity during their performances of the songs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments and/or suggestions on **rehearsing and teaching the students to interpret and represent the cultural and historical context** of the musical songs:

Section 4: Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals

Please rate the likeliness of the following statements based on your experience when you are **rehearsing and teaching** the students to interpret and represent the songs during the rehearsal:

4.2 Performing Musical Songs

I...

	Does not apply (N/A)	Very Unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Very likely (5)
1. teach songs using the vocal styles and techniques that people of that culture would normally use (e.g., use the “African American” vocal style with more chest voice or belting technique in the “Circle of Life” song from The Lion King).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. ask culture bearers/experts to guide and/or teach the vocal styles and techniques that they would normally use when they sing their cultural’ songs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. teach the pronunciation of some of the words/dialects in the songs (e.g., teach “French” pronunciation in the songs “Belle” from Beauty and the Beast or “cockney” accent in “Wouldn’t it be Lovely” song from My Fair Lady).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. ask culture bearers/experts to guide and/or teach how to pronunciation of some of the words/dialects in the songs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. match the teaching styles with how members of that culture would be taught and learn the song (e.g., many African and Asian songs have been taught and transmitted orally not by reading notation).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. make sure that students perform diverse vocal styles in a proper and healthy manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments and/or suggestions on **choosing and teaching different vocal styles and accents/pronunciation when performing different musical songs:**

Section 4: Cultural Awareness in Musical Rehearsals

Please rate the likeliness of the following statements based on your experience when you are **rehearsing and teaching** the students to interpret and represent the songs during the rehearsal:

4.3 Creating Inclusive Rehearsal Space

I...

	Does not apply (N/A)	Very Unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Very likely (5)
1. create a positive and safe learning space, ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds are acknowledged and included during the musical theatre rehearsals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. seek the input of students by asking for their opinions and suggestions during rehearsals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. let the students initiate discussions and lead the activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. allow the students to lead the activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. encourage the students to help one another in comprehending the context and the music of a musical.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. provide opportunities for students who are part of that culture to discuss their culture and traditions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. provide opportunities for students who are NOT part of those cultures to discuss their experiences and how those cultures differ or are similar to their own.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments and suggestions **on creating an inclusive rehearsal space:**

Section 5: Perceptions and Challenges in Cultural Awareness Integration

Please rate your agreement with the following statement in terms of **your perceptions and challenges** when incorporating cultural awareness in teaching musical theatre:

	Does not apply (N/A)	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1. Cultural awareness enhances student engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Culturally awareness teaching leads to a greater appreciation of students' own identities and/or cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Culturally awareness leads to a richer understanding and appreciation of students of diverse cultures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I have faced challenges in accessing culturally diverse materials and resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. It is hard to find cultural bearers/experts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. It is challenging to balance the demands of teaching traditional musical techniques with the incorporation of culturally responsive practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments on your **perception and/or challenges** when incorporating cultural awareness in teaching musical theatre:

Appendix K

Participants' Open-Ended Comments

Pt	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Teaching Position	Production Role	Percentage of Students of Color in the Production	Additional comments and/or suggestions on choosing a musical:	Additional comments and/or suggestions on preparing the materials to aid students in interpreting and representing the songs:	Additional comments and/or suggestions on rehearsing and teaching the students to interpret and represent the cultural and historical context of the musical songs:	Additional comments and suggestions on creating an inclusive rehearsal environment:	Additional comments on your perspective and/or challenges when incorporating when incorporating cultural awareness in teaching musical theater:
P1	White alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Choral Teacher	Music Director	60	Picking diverse musicals that reflect students' culture is very important (as well as creating a safe space for students to explore their own cultures as well) but it is VERY difficult to do so when so many of the shows written on are still centered from white-male perspectives. But we are trying!				
P2	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	75	Have a thorough knowledge of the materials and a strong understanding of the cultural context of the songs. The production can be a huge influence on the students' perception of both the complete themes and issues students performers and audience.	Leave room for interpretation and providing, especially for shows with complex themes and issues.			As someone who is not of the same background as the majority of my students, I have found that I have to be intentional in thinking outside of the box/my own perspective when considering cultural awareness in my curriculum. I have found that over the years show to set the environment of respect and appreciation first ahead of introducing materials, coaches etc.
P3	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	70	Honestly, if it seems like it might not be a great fit for our students, I can't think of a high school director who has time to do loads of research on these types.				
P4	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Department Chair and music teacher	Music Director	66	We consider also the four-year trajectory a student could have. We would ideally like them to experience theater that they see themselves in and theater that helps them know others.	While teaching an event can leave the context of the story being told, it doesn't do much to honor the individual actor or help them act - it often gets in the way of the linguistic context. So I am torn on this. Also, I am deeply torn on the idea of having cultural bearers read anything. This is a very hard to answer this questions on a Likert scale.	It depends largely on the students, their journey, where the school and the world is at that moment in time. Sometimes you create a safe space. If you use appropriate pronouns for students and chosen names, you create a safe space. If you see them as a person, you create a safe space. If you are high school, you create a safe space.		
P5	White alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Choral Teacher	Vocal Coach	50			Teaching style is in context of what the students are accustomed to as well.		
P6	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Upper School Music Theory, Private Voice & Piano	Vocal Coach	49	In selecting choral and solo repertoire, if I do not know the student, I seek out a culture coach, a student, parent, community, or hired professional musician...with intent to build a relationship and represent. When this has not been possible, we have removed repertoire from our concert. Often, things happen in the other direction...we seek out students, parents, community members, and hired professional musicians.	I do not do much in the way of preparing students to interpret and represent the culture that does not belong to me as I would strongly prefer for students to hear from those who bear the culture.	"Safe" is a tough word. We are aiming for able to speak about their experiences and contexts with the knowledge that it may be messy and difficult.	When we choose repertoire out of our existing list, we are often looking for something that is finding culture bearers. When we operate the other way around (trying to find people to match our repertoire), it gets trickier.	
P7	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	43	This year we are doing In the Heights so that we can showcase our minority groups and let them feel more seen. We also have students from the community come in to show us why they are coming to teach about their families' culture. It's very cool!	We just finished a run of Fiddler on the Roof, and made sure that every detail was authentic to the Jewish faith, right down to the number of tassels on their clothes.	If a language is not my native tongue, I do not lead the teaching of the language. However, I DO teach IPA as a system to help students learn the pronunciation of words that we learn from native speakers of the language. We are working to mix both music reading and rote (call-and-response)	Being so culturally aware in the process of a musical is taxing, but is beneficial. I wouldn't say I am 100% being as aware as I could be, but I would say that I try to provide that well-considered evidence for the students in the preparation.	
P9	White alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Musical Theatre Teacher	More than one	35	I prefer choosing a musical that best matches the skill set of the students likely to participate and one that they can be successful in performing.	By its nature theater is not always intended to represent accurate portrayals of races and cultures in a way that is respectful and accurate. It is the performer to provide that nuance. Depending on the show the level of accuracy inherently may vary.	It is important to me that students perform in a manner that fits their abilities and not over-represent. I want to see a representation of culture that they cannot replicate authenticity and which might be viewed by an audience as inappropriate.		
P10	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	30	Gives many students varied opportunities to grow, but flexible casting.				

Base/ Ethnicity	Gender Identities	Teaching Position	Production Role	Percentage of Students of Color in the Productions	Additional comments and/or suggestions on choosing a musical:	Additional comments and/or suggestions on preparing the materials to aid students in interpreting and representing the songs:	Additional comments and/or suggestions on rehearsal and teaching different social styles and accents when performing different musical songs:	Additional comments and suggestions on creating an inclusive rehearsal environment:	Additional comments on your perception and/or challenges you experience when incorporating cultural awareness in teaching musical theatre:
P11 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	30	I consider the students who are likely to audition, and I have a variety over the course of their high school theatre careers, so they get a wide range of styles, genres, and time periods.				
P12 Black/African American alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Musical Theatre Teacher	More than one	30					
P13 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Musical Theatre Teacher	Theatre Director	25	In choosing a musical, I try to choose something from a different genre every year. If there is something that is inappropriate culturally for our time, I give the students a lesson in history in which we discuss why it was written the way it was and why it is chosen.	I make a study guide for the students that includes information about the cultures that are represented, that they understand their characters before rehearsing scenes.	I have several character study sheets that we go through at the first two rehearsals so that they understand their characters before rehearsing scenes.		My proximity to a university makes it easier to find experts in different cultures.
P14 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	23	I want to select shows that plays to the strengths and personality of the students who audition. We do two rounds of auditions and the first is on neutral materials. From this first round we select our show.	Reach out to local experts for firsthand knowledge and/or invite those experts to meet with cast members.			
P15 White alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Chorus, Orchestra and General Music Teacher	More than one	20		Since we license from MTH or other agencies we are limited in what we can do if aspects of the show are inauthentic.			
P16 White alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Choral Teacher	More than one	20	The biggest consideration was always whether the roles/parts were singable by our students - if the show was vocally too difficult, we could not do it.	This was often more the "absence" of cultural identities in the themes of the show - how do we navigate a traditionally "all white" show written by dead white men with our multicultural/multiracial students.	I would have liked to do more research/educational things with show rehearsals, but often student absences and lack of enough time to rehearse would impede this being done independently by students.	We were constantly working to promote student leadership, creativity, and voice in the process, including cast small and large group discussions on their impressions of the show.	Cultural awareness activities increases the team mentality, and enables you to get more done in shorter time because there are less interpersonal conflicts. It's also just better for everyone and openness - both important for the functioning of the theatre.
P17 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choir & Musical Theater	More than one	18	We have a very high percentage of "white" students. Therefore, "Hairpray", "Once on This Island", "West Side Story" etc. are musicals we never even consider doing.				
P18 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	More than one	15	I get to have a voice on a team of teachers who get to be the best. My answers reflect multiple priorities of our team.				
P19 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Choral Teacher	Vocal Coach	10					
P20 White alone, non- Hispanic	Female	Band, Choir, Guitar, General Music	Music Director	10	For us, we choose musicals that are funny and entertaining. Everything else I listed as important is still true, but it has to be funny and it has to be enjoyable for the audience.				
P21 White alone, non- Hispanic	Male	Choral, Band, Orchestra teacher	Music Director	10	I've often had to consider these because I'm usually given as a core and told to teach the parts I'm not typically involved in the dramaturgy.				

Race/ Ethnicity	Gender Identities	Teaching Position	Production Role	Percentage of Students of Color in the Productions	Additional comments and/or suggestions on choosing a musical:	Additional comments and/or suggestions on preparing the materials to aid students in interpreting and representing the songs:	Additional comments and/or suggestions on choosing and teaching different vocal styles and accents when performing different musical songs:	Additional comments and suggestions on creating an inclusive rehearsal environment:	Additional comments on your perception and/or challenges when incorporating when incorporating cultural awareness in teaching musical theatre:
P22	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Musical Theatre Teacher	More than one	9					
P23	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Choral Teacher	Theatre Director	7					
P24	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Choral Teacher	Musical Director	5	Because of our majority white population, we do not select musicals that specifically need large numbers of BIPOC in order to be culturally and socially representative. We explore many different styles of music within our musical ensembles in respectful, authentic ways.	My collegiate programs prepared me well to do this kind of preparation.			
P25	White alone, non- Hispanic	Male Choral Teacher	More than one	5	Show should be appropriate				
P26	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Choral Teacher	Musical Director	5	Our primary concern is the students' interest in a show. We are trying to rebuild a small program.				
P27	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Choral Teacher	More than one	3	The factors that are important in choosing a musical vary from year to year. For example, there are years when we are more focused on audience appeal if we know we need to sell a lot of tickets to recoup our budget. We also try to offer a rotation of styles and genres to expose our students to different types of musicals. We also try to offer students and we allow different students to shine. This could mean considering cultural backgrounds, voice types, special performance skills, etc. Since we do not have a diverse school community, we work to bring cultural and societal awareness to our students. We try to offer different types of musicals from their own, but it can be a fine line to walk to ensure we are not culturally appropriating material.				
P28	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Vocal Coach	Vocal Coach	40	I think the question about accurate depiction and not stereotyping is actually ridiculous. It's theatre. Almost everything is a type, stereotype, trope. Nellie Forbush. Stupid white country girl. Lanette in Oklahoma - same. It's what propels the industry. Take our ability to make fun of ourselves and our own culture. We're not afraid to be silly, but also, trying to find things my Indian clients want to sing is HARD. Broadway is not helping them out at all!	How is one to check out the cultural accuracy w/ the bearers really? So you have ITT and you've done all the research including what comes w/ the show. What exactly does checking w/ culture bearers mean? Go to the DFC? I'm not sure this concept is always reasonable.	I find it unnecessary and possibly offensive to say, as question I seems to imply, that (again with Hairpray) - hey, the colored ensemble can sound more authentically black w/ more chest voice. No. I would not do that. I would ask for vocal change as appropriate. I would not label them racially. I'm just very unsertain.	Question I'm not likely to only use my own thoughts and research. Other teachers, students, resources. I think the culture bearer staff borders on (take Hairpray) is it that black woman's job to come tell you about her life to make you smarter? All I'm doing is being a teacher. I would be unlikely to label them racially.	I find it unnecessary and possibly offensive to say, as question I seems to imply, that (again with Hairpray) - hey, the colored ensemble can sound more authentically black w/ more chest voice. No. I would not do that. I would ask for vocal change as appropriate. I would not label them racially.
P29	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Choral Teacher	Vocal Coach	7	It is important that students understand the background of the cultural, social, and religious reasoning for creating the piece of music!				
P30	White alone, non- Hispanic	Female Choir and Theatre	More than one	30	Have not yet chosen musical where a real people-group was represented.				
P31	White alone, non- Hispanic	Male Choral Teacher	Vocal Coach	10	I teach at Catholic school, so our musicals must not contain things that go against Catholic teachings.				

Vita

Apinporn Chaiwanichsiri is a music educator, researcher, and performer, originally from Thailand. She completed her PhD in Music Education at the University of Missouri in the spring of 2024. She obtained her Master of Education degree in Music Education from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand in 2017. She also holds a Bachelor of Music in Music Theatre from the Australian Institute of Music, Australia (2014), and a Bachelor of Science in Applied Chemistry from Chulalongkorn University (2011). At the University of Missouri, as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, Dr. Chaiwanichsiri taught an asynchronous online course, Introduction to World Music, for non-music major students, where she took the initiative to create and integrate lectures on Thai music. She also taught private vocal lessons for the Community Music Program and served as a judge for the Mid-Missouri NATS Students Auditions in 2024. Prior to perusing her PhD, her teaching experience spanned both undergraduate and K-12 levels. Dr. Chaiwanichsiri's research endeavors, rooted in the commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment, have focused on interdisciplinary arts (musical theatre), culturally responsive teaching, and educational transformation. She has presented her research at state conferences in the U.S. and international symposia in Thailand. She was also invited to be a panelist at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music International Symposium in 2020. Recent presentations include poster presentations at Missouri Music Educator Association Conference (2022-2024), and a session presentation at the Southeast Missouri State University Music Education Colloquium in 2023. As a performer, she won first prize, Mid-Missouri NATS Students Auditions in Musical Theatre (adult category) in 2022.