Una Noche de Música: Sustaining Our Students' Culture

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Abstract

Students in the music classroom are more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before. Latinx students are the fastest growing population. Often, these students are neglected through deficit-based pedagogical practices with regard to their cultural and linguistic practices; however, other research into asset-based pedagogical practices such as community cultural wealth and culturally sustaining pedagogy can allow for more equitable and just music education. Accessing community cultural wealth with regard to aspirational, navigational, social, resistant, and especially familial and linguistic capital can lead to better outcomes for students. Incorporating a Noche de Música [Night of Music] at a school allows for families to demonstrate their capacity to cocreate music-based and language-based literacies among faculty, students, and their families. This can include culturally sustaining pedagogical practices that lovingly affirm and sustain students' language, culture, and history through folk songs, folk tales, and multimodal approaches to communication.

Keywords

community cultural wealth, culturally sustaining pedagogy, English Language Learners, ELL, family engagement, music education

Teaching requires us to value each student in our classroom. Without the acknowledgement of the people in our classrooms, we teach in the ways we have been taught rather than learning with our students. We teach in a majority minority nation in which our students come from a variety of cultural backgrounds (see Table 1). One demographic that is ever increasing is that of the Latinx community who are the indigenous, and settler people and diaspora of Latin America (Bauman, 2017). This group of people is traditionally underrepresented in music education (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lorah et al., 2014), but this does not have to be the case. The purpose of this article is to show one way of leveraging family support within the Latinx community from a *community cultural wealth* framework (Yosso, 2005) through a culturally sustaining pedagogy lens (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Many view the Latinx community through a deficit-based lens (Lorah et al., 2014; Walker & Hamann, 1995; Wilson, 2017) rather than an asset-based lens (García & Wei, 2014; González & Moll, 2002; Yosso, 2005). When students are viewed as vessels to be filled with knowledge (deficit-based), many educators can resort to a banking model of education, in "which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" knowledge rather than critically analyze what they know (asset-based; Freire, 2018, p. 72). This

does not have to be the case. Even though Freire's work comes from the 20th century, it continues to be relevant during the 21st century with regard to general education (Kirylo, 2020), bilingual education (Darder, 2012), and music education (Coppola, 2021). His work necessitates learning not only within the school building but also beyond.

The school walls do not contain every asset needed for education as a whole, and especially music education. Latinx communities offer unique assets including their value of participatory music and their strong connection to culture-specific performing groups such as mariachi, ballet *folklórico*, or *los matachines*. These cultural touchstones offer not only valuable assets for schools but also demonstrate how the Latinx community can build power, or capital, through their music knowledge.

Community Cultural Wealth

One asset-based approach to education is *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). *Community cultural wealth*

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Table 1. 2018–2019 Student Race/Ethnicity Data From the National Center for Education Statistics (2020).

American Indian/Alaska native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic	White	Hawaiian native	Two or more races
1.04%	5.24%	15.05%	27.51%	46.71%	0.43%	4.02%

marks a shift away from deficit-based notions of Communities of Color and rather focuses on the numerous cultural knowledges, skills, abilities, and social connections that they have instead. One way to understand this is through the notion of capital or one's work (labor) represented in another form. Bourdieu (1986) defined three types of capital—economic, cultural, and social. Many are familiar with economic capital as it is quantifiable as money; however, cultural capital and social capital are more abstract. Cultural capital can be defined as the skills, abilities, beliefs, and objects that are of value to a particular culture—most often the dominant culture. Social capital are the social connections that one has within their network such as the relationships between a parent and their child's teacher, the school secretary, or another parent in the class. These forms of capital guide deficit-based forms of education because they view the lack of some aspect of people as the reason for failure in schooling (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Community cultural wealth flips the idea of students lacking skills and focuses instead on the assets that students and their families have. This is not a new idea in music education, but much of the literature deals with teacher preparation instead of practical applications (Schmidt & McCall, 2013; Vasil & McCall, 2018). The following is a short description of the main tenets of *community cultural wealth*. These include aspirational, navigational, social, resistant, familial, and linguistic capitals (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital is the ability to persevere even when real or perceived barriers may exist. Navigational capital is the ability to work within institutions that may include systemic bias toward an individual. Social capital directly connects with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of the social connections a person has. Resistant capital includes the knowledge and skills gained through an understanding of inequalities within institutions. Yosso (2005) described familial capital as "those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin [also translated as family]) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79). Linguistic capital includes the linguistic repertoires of an individual, as well as the multimodal ways he or she can communicate including through visual art, literature, and music. Engaging familial and linguistic capitals can connect Latinx students to school and, more directly, music education.

For example, Lozada remembers his family leveraging their familial and social capitals to bring their Mexican culture to the elementary school for holidays such as Mexican Independence Day (September 16th) or Cinco de Mayo (May 5th). His parents would bring local ballet *folklórico* and mariachi groups from neighboring high schools, Mexican restauranteurs, and come dressed in traditional indigenous clothing such as the huipil. While this cultural practice may have been a step forward when it was done in the 1990s, it must be noted that these types of practices can lead to tokenism rather than social justice. One way to reject tokenism is to allow students to leverage their linguistic capital as culture bearers.

Oftentimes, music teachers leverage culture bearers to inform their practice. One group of people that can serve as them are our students. Many students have deep cultural and linguistic capitals in their respective cultural and language groups. They can serve as culture bearers in teaching songs and music games from their cultures as well as be the language experts when learning to pronounce words. Caution must be used when offering the opportunity for students to be culture bearers because often some people view culture groups through what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie referred to as a single story (TED, 2009). Single stories are instances in which individuals view a certain group of people from one point of view rather than understanding the richness of the various stories from the culture. While these anecdotal examples provide ways to include *community cultural wealth* in the music classroom, the literature provides additional ways.

A *community cultural wealth* approach has been shown to affect the outcome of Latinx college students (Pérez, 2017), Black college students (Jayakumar et al., 2013), and academics of color (Martinez et al., 2017), but its application to the music classroom could not be found in the extant literature. Given that connecting families to the classroom through a *community cultural wealth* model can affect student achievement (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011), engaging families' *community cultural wealth* in the music classroom is important to developing a culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Involving our students with the curriculum through the use of *community cultural wealth*, especially using familial and linguistic capitals, can be beneficial. This can also be seen as a way to ask students and their families "to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1).

In order to reject such an agenda, teachers must learn to focus on using school for racial justice and social transformation by sustaining what they love (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014). This is culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy includes lovingly affirming and sustaining students' "languages, literacies, cultures, and histories" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). Each has a place in music education. Taking a critical approach to which songs we teach is important for understanding how we can sustain our students' language. The languages that we use to teach can foster a raciolinguistic attitude that marginalizes students of color (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). To counteract this possibility, we chose to conduct our project in our students' native language, Spanish, which established their linguistic abilities as assets rather than deficits.

Each of these areas of culturally sustaining pedagogy (languages, literacies, cultures, and histories) can be accessed through the family and their funds of knowledge (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; González et al., 2005). Funds of knowledge is an understanding that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (González et al., 2005, pp. ix-x). When we understand families as funds of knowledge, we can begin to make progress in the ways that we teach Latinx children in the music classroom.

One example form the literature is Ward's (2017) family folk song project. Ward detailed how to sustain languages, literacies, culture, and histories of the local community through this project. She gave a thorough understanding of how to develop the project in a way that used the family as a resource and created a product of a song collection of all the local folk songs. Her example included many songs that are common in music education literature such as "Are You Sleeping," but also included diverse examples from different language communities. The important thing to note is that these were the songs of her community. The families provided the literature through their funds of knowledge. While this example provides a detailed account of how to apply these theories, it looks at the application of culturally sustaining pedagogies broadly and not from a certain community such as the Latinx community.

The family is a valuable source of knowledge especially with regard to schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; González & Moll, 2002; Yosso, 2005), yet do music educators really fully access this fund of knowledge? Robison (2020) noticed how connecting with families can improve classroom management issues, but what if we used families to enhance instruction? Una noche de música [a night of music] can do that.

Una Noche de Música: A Way to Connect With Families

Una Noche de Música was a facet of a larger, Department of Education sponsored project called PIONERAS (Professional Improvement through Optimization of Native-language Education and the Realization of Academic/familial Symbiosis), which focused on the training of preservice and in-service teachers in order to foster an asset-based approach to bilingual education with a focus on family involvement. PIONERAS is a 2.2 million dollar grant-funded project through the Office of English Language Acquisition and strives to serve the academic, linguistic, and community needs of Spanish/English bilinguals. A foundational notion of the project is that music-based and language-based literacies are interconnected (Hansen et al., 2014). The Noche de Música grew out of the idea that families can develop both music-based and language-based literacies within the home as we know that families are a valuable source of knowledge, especially those from Communities of Color (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; González et al., 2005; Yosso, 2005).

To advocate for a culturally sustaining pedagogy, Spanish was the language of communication so that we could battle the raciolinguistic attitude that could have happened if English was the language of communication (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Raciolinguistics is "reframing language diversity in education away from a discourse of appropriateness toward one that seeks to denaturalize standardized linguistic categories" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 149). Because the district's bilingual department identified issues with family engagement for their Spanish-speaking families, we focused on Spanish language materials rather than a bilingual format. If this had been conducted in English or bilingually, it would have excluded many families from participating, would have perpetuated the idea that the families had nothing to add to the conversation, and would have gone against the idea of *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). In developing and carrying out the project solely in Spanish, we aimed to affirm the families' funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002) as well as to lovingly sustain their culture and language (Alim & Paris, 2017).

The project was a presentation and demonstration for families about using music in the home to foster both music-based and language-based literacies in the home language and took place in the winter of 2019. Parents helped each other understand how language skills helped to develop academic skills, which resulted in the accession of each other's social capital (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992;

González & Moll, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The music connected directly to their culture by connecting with the variety of ways of knowing Spanish including the Mexican, Latin American, Puerto Rican, and Spanish cultures, which accessed the families' cultural capital.

Participants in the event included families of bilingual elementary school children, district staff, future teachers, and teachers involved in PIONERAS. The majority of the students in the schools hailed from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and other Central American nations, much like some of the authors of this article. The students came with a variety of linguistic backgrounds, but all of them had strong linguistic repertoires that included Spanish. While our focus was on the elementary-aged students, families brought younger and older children as well who also participated in the music making, which made the event more family-oriented and affirmed the knowledge and ability of all.

The authors played a variety of roles including leading the event, organizing the event, and completing administrative tasks related to the event. In addition, the active presenters were Puerto Rican and Mexican American. While it may have been effective to have the university faculty present their work to the families, we chose Latinx music teachers to lead the Noche de Música because they could serve as both experts and learners. Many families may have viewed them as experts in music-based literacy, but not necessarily language-based literacy. This might have created a space for families to view their linguistic and cultural capital as assets.

With all participants in place, the district's bilingual department offered us a physical space in their new building to conduct our Noche de Música where we could provide food for the families. If you have ever been to a Mexican family's home, you will know that food is central to family. Laura Esquivel's (1992) *Like Water for Chocolate* provides an example in literature about how food, family, and emotions are all intertwined. Beyond food, we created a family-like atmosphere by having musical instruments, puppets, drawing materials, and music playing when the families arrived. For us, we aimed to create an environment much like the family gatherings we experienced throughout our childhoods in Mexico and Puerto Rico.

After families had the chance to mingle and eat, we started by thanking all of the parties present for their part in making Noche de Música possible, especially the parents. From there, we continued by bringing the children into the open space in the room to participate in singing games, folk tales, and other arts-based literacy activities. Some of the activities are described below.

Even though there were a myriad of Spanish-speaking cultures, the local community had a particular need for connecting its culture, so materials were selected that served as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" to the lives of these particular children (Bishop, 1990, p. ix; see Appendix A, available in the online supplement material, for resources specific to Spanish-speaking cultures). We chose the folk songs, folktales, and poems that reflected our students' languages, literacies, cultures, and histories. Although it may seem that the materials are from the general music education canon, we purposefully chose broadly known repertoire that would serve as a means for families to see themselves as assets to their children's education.

Singing Games

One of the ways in which culture was affirmed was by using songs and games from these families. Many folk songs including "*La víbora de la mar* [*The Sea Snake*]," "*Que llueva* [*Let It Rain*]," "*El coqui* [*The Tree Frog*]," and "*El burrito enfermo* [*The Sick Donkey*]" were performed with the families. These songs affirmed the cultures of Mexico, Spain, Puerto Rico, and Latin America, respectively (for a list of resources including these examples, among others, see Appendix A, available in the online supplement material).

While many may know "La víbora de la mar" from its inclusion in many general music textbooks, they may not know the deep cultural significance of this song. In Mexico, this singing game is one played not only by children but also by adults. It is common for men and women to participate in the game separately at weddings much like they participate in a garter and bouquet toss in other cultures. Traditionally, the game is with the bride and groom standing over a chair with the groom holding the bride's veil to create a bridge. A leader, usually the best man or maid of honor, gathers people around the room to create a line in which all hold the next person in line's hand to create *la víbora*. We used this song to model the importance of Latinx culture and connect families' funds of knowledge with the work they could do to foster both music-based and language-based literacies.

Songs like "Que llueva" and "El coquí" brought memories of the rainforests in Puerto Rico or Central America for many students. "Que llueva" has many ways of singing it, but we used the Central American variant that includes animals from the jungle such as the quetzal. We engaged the students with a variety of puppets to activate their background knowledge in types of animals they would see in the jungle. This allowed for us to model developing background knowledge using culturally sustaining song materials that reflected their families' heritage.

To further the idea of using background knowledge to foster music-based and language-based literacies, we included the Puerto Rican lullaby "El coquí." Parents could see how the lullabies they sang to their children

could serve as ways to develop literacies. Once families could see the things they already did could help their children's education, we could continue to more abstract ideas such as sequencing.

We used "El burrito enfermo" to model how to apply the language-based concept of sequencing. "El burrito enfermo" is a cumulative song in which children must remember the remedies that a doctor gives to a donkey and sequence them in the appropriate order to sing the song. This song was new to some of the families, but because it was connected to their language and culture, we could connect it to other songs that they knew to teach the same concepts.

Each of these songs came from our experiences as teachers of Latinx learners to lovingly affirm and sustain cultural and linguistic practices that could lead to better student outcomes. Parents reported informally during the Noche de Música that they felt affirmed in knowing that sustaining their culture through song would help students develop language and in turn develop academically.

Folktales

Folktales offer another way to enact a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Warner, 1991). The folktale that we chose to use was *Martina Martínez y el Ratoncito Pérez* [*Martina Martinez and the Little Mouse Perez*] (Ada & Campoy, 2006) because it connected to each of the family's language (it was in Spanish) and cultural heritage. The character of Ratoncito Pérez is present in both Spain and Latin America where he is akin to the Tooth Fairy. This folktale recounts how many suitors including Ratoncito Pérez courted Martina Martínez.

Student-created leitmotifs for each character with unpitched percussion instruments traditional to their culture such as maracas, castanets, egg shakers, and claves as well as author-created songs illustrated the folktale. Using a folktale in a playful manner encouraged parents to access the stories they knew and to use them to foster music-based and language-based literacies in their children.

Multimodal Approaches

Last, we wanted to affirm the cultural practice of responding to literature, whether it was in the form of language or music, multimodally. Multimodal communication encompasses the myriad of ways in which people communicate whether that is through gesture, speech, images, writing, sound, movement, or language (Kress, 2010). While some of these multimodal practices did not directly come from the students' cultural practices, they serve as an extension of the students' culture. This extension is our way to lovingly sustain their culture in a way that affirms their assets (Alim & Paris, 2017).

During the same event, the first multimodal response to literature was through the blending of the oral story of *Martina Martínez y el Ratoncito Pérez* with music. Students created leitmotifs for each character and responded to their character's name when we read the story. In addition to the aural stimulus, we incorporated a visual stimulus with pictures of the instruments next to the place in the story they occurred.

Additionally, visualization can draw out multimodal responses. Visualization is the process of creating a mental image of an event. We used Federico García Lorca's poem *La Mariposa* [*The Butterfly*] to elicit responses through visual arts (drawing), dance, and literature. These responses were augmented through the use of Chavela Vargas (a Mexican singer) performing the folk song "*La Llorona*." Both the poem and the song would be familiar to many of the families due to their cultural significance in Spanish-speaking countries.

First, students listened to the poem read in both English and Spanish. From there, they created an improvised movement piece that expressed the movement of the butterfly while the poem was being read. After that, they drew the experience of their butterfly using crayons and paper. After drawing, we played Chavela Vargas' rendition of "La Llorona" and asked the children to recreate their movement pieces responding to the music. From there, we had the students use their experience, drawing, and movement piece to write about the butterfly. Modeling this process for parents allowed them to see how creative play using familiar songs and literature could be used to foster growth in both music-based and language-based literacies.

While each of these examples were important in developing culturally sustaining practices, the most important piece was eliciting the true potential from the families about their funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002) through *community cultural wealth*, especially their familial and linguistic capitals (Yosso, 2005). To sustain these practices, the student's classroom teachers were given instruments and books in which families could take home and continue the work.

Teachers informally reported that students seemed more engaged in their music and language classes. General education teachers noticed that students' engagement increased when using the folk songs and folk stories taught in the Noche de Música. These students also desired to take instruments home to act out these stories and songs with their families. Music education teachers noticed an increase in student engagement as well. While some of the songs and activities became a part of the music curriculum, the more salient benefit was that these students wanted to share their music traditions, songs, and stories. Sharing these allowed the school to participate in sustaining these students' "languages, literacies, cultures, and histories" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1).

We would encourage each teacher to try and connect with families and *their* languages, literacies, cultures, and histories so that we can truly have a culturally sustaining pedagogy for which some have called (Liu, 2020). While this example necessarily connects with our Latinx students, we can see this model being applied to a variety of cultural and linguistic groups throughout the United States. Instead of looking at what music we can put into our students through a banking model of education, let us look at what music we can bring out of our students to cocreate musicing experiences that lovingly sustain all cultures.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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