

**Peace through Lyricism**

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Peacebuilding Through Music Education

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## **Introduction and Background**

The role of a music educator in a school is much more than just creating, performing, and responding. Music educators must make discoveries about the community they work within and through their pedagogy heal those that don't feel valued within that society. Through this understanding, they can tailor their goals not only to teach musicianship successfully but also to address broader societal issues. Facilitators of music have the opportunity to instill values of empathy, respect, and collaboration through musical activities and peace-building projects. These experiences will not only enrich a population within the district but also equip them with life skills to promote understanding and unity. Anne Marie Gray showcases how music serves as a resource for rebuilding traumatized societies as highlighted in chapter five of "Music and Conflict Transformation". Her research underscores the intricate complexities that arise when merging music reconciliation. Through Gray's insights and the contributions of case studies from my colleagues regarding rewriting lyrics for peacebuilding, it is rather evident that music possesses transformative acts to reconcile conflict and facilitate healing. "Music and Empathy" by Felicity Laurence lays out the complexities of empathy and music. Through her research, the reader has a greater understanding of how music evokes different emotions in both listeners and participants. "I suggest that music, along with all its other functions and effects, indeed offers a specific potential to enable, catalyze and strengthen empathic response, ability and relationship, and that it is this potential capacity which lies at the core of music's function within peacebuilding." (Laurence, 2007, pg. 14)

Within a songwriting workshop in my district, Laurence's insights into music and empathy can profoundly guide the approach and outcomes. Her argument that music has a unique ability to evoke diverse emotions and enhance empathetic responses among listeners and

participants would suggest that songwriting when implemented can evolve our community. Moreover, her assertion that music can catalyze underlines that the workshops impact building a supportive and inclusive classroom community. “Reconciliation can be understood about this continuum as a set of deep processes designed to transform relationships of hatred and mistrust into relationships of trust and trustworthiness. It also can reflect a shift in attention from blaming the other to taking responsibility for the attitudes and actions of one’s self and one’s own community.” (Cohen, 2007, pg. 30) My district has a clear divide of not only economic status but also political and social status within the community. This data allows us as educators to be pragmatic and diverse with my teaching but it also allows me to reflect on how to honor all of my students equitably. The workshops being done in my district’s performing arts space will not only facilitate reconciliation but more importantly provide a platform for participants to express a personal narrative and tell their stories. Through the process of creating lyrics and sharing stories, participants can explore themes of accountability and empathy. This will create a shift that embraces understanding diversities and establishing trust within our community.

Within our districts, we have the powerful task of merging differences and catalyzing change within our society through the work presented in the text below. The research is clear that music contains a powerful pivotal goal of fostering reconciliation, empathy, and social cohesion within our diverse community. Through our songwriting workshops and the improvised rap battles, we aim not only to teach musicianship but also to empower individuals to address societal changes with creativity and passion.

## **Project Description**

My event's title is Peace Through Songwriting. Through the event's objective, we are exploring the role of music in addressing social issues and fostering reconciliation within our community. Gray's writing in "Music as a Tool of Reconciliation in South Africa" exemplifies that music can bridge past experiences and reconcile past traumas through the comprehension of interpreting the realities in which we live.

"This chapter thus argues that music can function as a bridge between the past and reconciliation. It allows for the understanding of a society in terms of its own interpretations of reality, in a way that historical facts alone do not allow. This is mainly due to the fact that affect and meaning through music are derived from the social, historical and cultural contexts in which the music is situated." (Gray, 2007, pg. 64)

Gray's writing has been an inspiration for our event. The event is open to students, faculty, and the overall community for those seeking social justice and creative expression. The event will have six different stationed groups with a music teacher from the district assigned to each group. The groups will be split evenly and have an array of ages and diverse cultures. Once the groups have collaborated, they will perform their new lyrics for We Shall Overcome for the entire community. As an extension to the work already put in place through We Shall Overcome, the community will also be asked to partake in an improvised rap activity. This is the timeline:

Time	Music Activity	Description	Goal
6:00-6:10pm	Welcome Ice breaker- “Name that Tune”	Music facilitators will greet everyone entering our district's performance space. The facilitators will begin the event with an outline and address the overall goals of the event. We will engage in a five-minute short segment of “name that tune”. The facilitators will play short snippets of popular songs and have participants guess the song title and artist. The five selected songs will be from an array of cultures and time periods.	The goal of the welcome and ice breaker is to ensure we foster an environment where participants feel accepted and included. By playing “name that tune” for the five minutes it allows for the facilitators to grasp the climate they are working with and it also allows the participants to see the diversity throughout the room.
6:10-7:00pm  7-7:30pm (Performance)	We Shall Overcome MWB Activity	Participants will enter the district's performing arts space and be assigned to a group. Once they are assigned the music facilitator will teach the melodic line of We Shall Overcome via rote. Once they have a strong sense of the melody the group will begin an acrostic poem workshop of rewriting the lyrics based on a buzz word the entire group decides on. Members of the string, band and vocal ensembles will be dispersed throughout the groups to assist with creating the lyrics. They will also be given an opportunity to trial their performance with the accompaniment before the presentation. Once the time commences, each group will present their new acrostic lyrics as members of the band and strings program accompany.	The goal of this activity would be to promote creativity and artistry within our school body. It would also promote peace building through music education as the entire community would need to collaborate. Through the new lyrics it will spread awareness, unity and empathy between participants.
7:30-8:30 pm	My Life MWB Activity	Participants that would like to improvise on a pre-recorded supplied track will sign up for a three-minute time slot. Once the performances of the acrostic lyric poems are completed, the music staff will call up members to participate in an improvised rap session. This allows for members of the community to showcase their perspectives in a nonviolent way. The participants can either come up with lyrics they meditated upon prior or completely improvise over the track. Each participant will utilize the same track to provide equity and the ability for those to reflect on each performance. The end of this activity will signal the end of the Peace Through Songwriting evening.	The goal of this activity is to create a comfortable platform for members of the community to collaborate and showcase improvisational skills. This will call awareness to issues that are important within the community. It will also promote acceptance within the school body and foster a non-judgmental space for healing and comfort.

### **Acrostic Lyrics MWB Activity:**

This activity has been a variation that was narrated by Dr. Collins within her Peace Building class. Dr. Collins has supplied the following:

**Acrostic** - writing down the theme word vertically and writing "We shall\_\_\_\_\_".

Provide a social/historical perspective of "We Shall Overcome". Practice singing the original lyrics. It is helpful to have a melodic instrument on hand to accompany the songwriting process and the group learns the melody through

- Humming or inner vocalization
- Slow repetition

### **Verses**

With the original song comfortably learned, split the group into smaller teams (pairs or individuals) and assign each with at least one letter of your thematically chosen acrostic word. Provide 10 minutes for the participants to write out the fill-in the blank portion with words that match the letters of the acrostic word and match *rhythmically with the melody*, to create their individual verse. Here's my example:

**PEACE: (5 verses)**

**P:** *We shall \_\_\_\_\_.* "*We shall Pray for peace*"

**E:** *We shall \_\_\_\_\_.* "*We shall Educate*"

**A:** *We shall \_\_\_\_\_.* "*We shall All join hands*"

**C:** *We shall \_\_\_\_\_. "We shall Care for all"*

**E:** *We shall \_\_\_\_\_. "We shall End the hate"*

Coming back together, each team (or individual) shares their verse, then put the verses together in a song performance, along with the chorus between each new verse, "*Deep in my heart, we do believe, that we shall overcome some day*".

Through this activity students from the strings and band program will provide the accompaniment for the new lyrics that are devised from the community. Engaging in an acrostic songwriting activity like "We Shall Overcome" in a small community offers multifaceted benefits. Through this collaborative process, participants will connect deeply with the historical realm of the piece. Singing the original lyrics reinforces a shared commitment to resilience and social justice. By breaking into smaller teams to craft verses that align with each letter of a chosen theme word, individuals contribute by channeling creativity and adding personalization to a collective narrative of hope and empowerment. Please see the attached link for inspiration and to gather the melodic line. The finalized song not only celebrates solidarity but also showcases diverse voices, fostering a sense of belonging and collective strength through communal expression.

[We Shall Overcome](#)

### **My Life MWB Activity:**

This activity was curated based on the video linked below that Dr. Collins had supplied. Within the video we see individuals from all different countries collaborating and voicing their opinions on world events. Within this improvised activity, members of the community will sign up for a three minute time slot to perform their improvised rap. Once we start the segment, music educators will call up individuals or groups to the stage and the pre-recorded track of beats will begin to play. Members of the community will perform on the stage as other community members watch from the audience. For this segment everyone is encouraged to participate. Improvised rap can serve as a powerful cultural and social tool

within a community, fostering creativity, self-expression, and unity. It provides a platform for individuals to share their stories, address local issues, and celebrate collective identity through spontaneous lyricism and rhythm.

[My Life: Rap Workshops with SOS Children's Villages Italy](#)

### **Helpful Hints**

Before proceeding with any of the above within your district, please read the following as helpful insights. Before facilitating it is imperative to have your music education staff to deeply listen and analyze the repertoire before facilitating. It is actually in the best interest of the overall society and to help keep a fast pace to not use standard notation. Rote learning and improvisation will be the driving force behind making the event successful. Within the acrostic lyric workshop, encourage your community members to focus on issues that are specific to their own community, families or themselves. The purpose of the lyric writing element is to create ownership and relevance to the district's culture. It is essential that their original lyrics are themed around issues that are important. Within Music Without Borders, they follow five key principles. The first being to establish a safe space for participants. Secondly, the activities should be experiences of inclusion, everyone should feel important within the performing space. Thirdly it should create an opportunity for creativity to flourish without judgment. Fourth, equality of all members ensures every member's voice is heard and contributed within the workshops. Fifth, is that each workshop establishes high quality music making. Reflecting on everyone's journey throughout the evening will ensure that the goals are met within the event.

### **Conclusion**

Peace Through Songwriting embodies more than just an evening of musical activities. It rather represents a profound time for our school community to dig deeper by engaging with social issues and embellish expression. Music is utilized as the driving force for the dialogue and creativity which can foster empathy, understanding and heal participants of diverse ages and backgrounds. Through collaborative songwriting groups, students and community members will not only learn historical roots but also contribute their voice to the future of our school community. The improvised rap sessions amplify individuals'



perspectives by providing a platform for self-expression and communal dialogue. All of the above with the assistance of Musicians Without Borders promote a culture of inclusivity and acceptance. Ultimately, Peace Through Songwriting catalyzes a sense of belonging, unity and social responsibility within our district. These activities will be long standing with participants by celebrating our individual identities through the transformative power of music. "I think the stories show how we musicians can try to use our musical talents for more than just entertainment, as a tool for building and creating peace." (Palieri, 2007, pg. 200) Through the inspiration of Palieri it is explicit that songwriting will not only tell someone's story but further transform others perspectives and create peace within our communities.

### References

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