

Research Report

Bryan E. Nichols, editor

Culturally Responsive Pedagogical/Andragogical Context Knowledge in Choral Music

by Vanessa L. Bond

Responding to the diverse strengths, interests, and needs of musicians is a critical issue in music making and has been forefront in the scholarly dialogue. One significant current in this discourse is culturally responsive education. Framed as culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and other related terms, these asset-focused approaches are not synonymous. As Julia Shaw recently noted in this journal, “scholars who coined these terms have used them in nuanced ways to refer to precise concepts.”¹ There are, however, shared foundations among them, including recognition of the impact our cultural background has on teaching and learning, and commitment to addressing the misalignment between dominant school structures and students’ cultural frames. These approaches also share similarities in that they are multidimensional, representing an attitude toward teaching rather than a set of specific pedagogical strategies.

In 2019,² Joshua Russell and I investigated music teacher educator perceptions of culturally responsive education (CRE), an umbrella term that draws on the connections between models of responsiveness, such as their emphasis on employing students’ funds of knowledge. We discovered that while music teacher educators were familiar with the concept, their engagement with

CRE appeared to be surface level, not an embedding of CRE into their practice. To encourage a deeper understanding and integration of CRE into practice, we proposed the Culturally Responsive Pedagogical/Andragogical Context Knowledge (CRPACK) framework.³ In this article, I will describe the Culturally Responsive Pedagogical/Andragogical Context Knowledge framework and how it might be applied in choral music.

CRPACK: A Conceptual Model

CRE is a mindset that must be integrated into all facets of teaching and learning. Adopting this mindset requires learning how to teach one’s content area—in our case, choral music—through a culturally responsive frame. To theorize the specific knowledge required to teach music through CRE, we extended the pedagogical context knowledge (PCK) framework created by John Barnett and Derek Hodson.⁴ PCK is a way of conceptualizing teacher knowledge. To be an effective choral educator, one needs to develop knowledge in four domains:

- 1) Academic and research knowledge (i.e., knowledge of content and of learning in general terms)

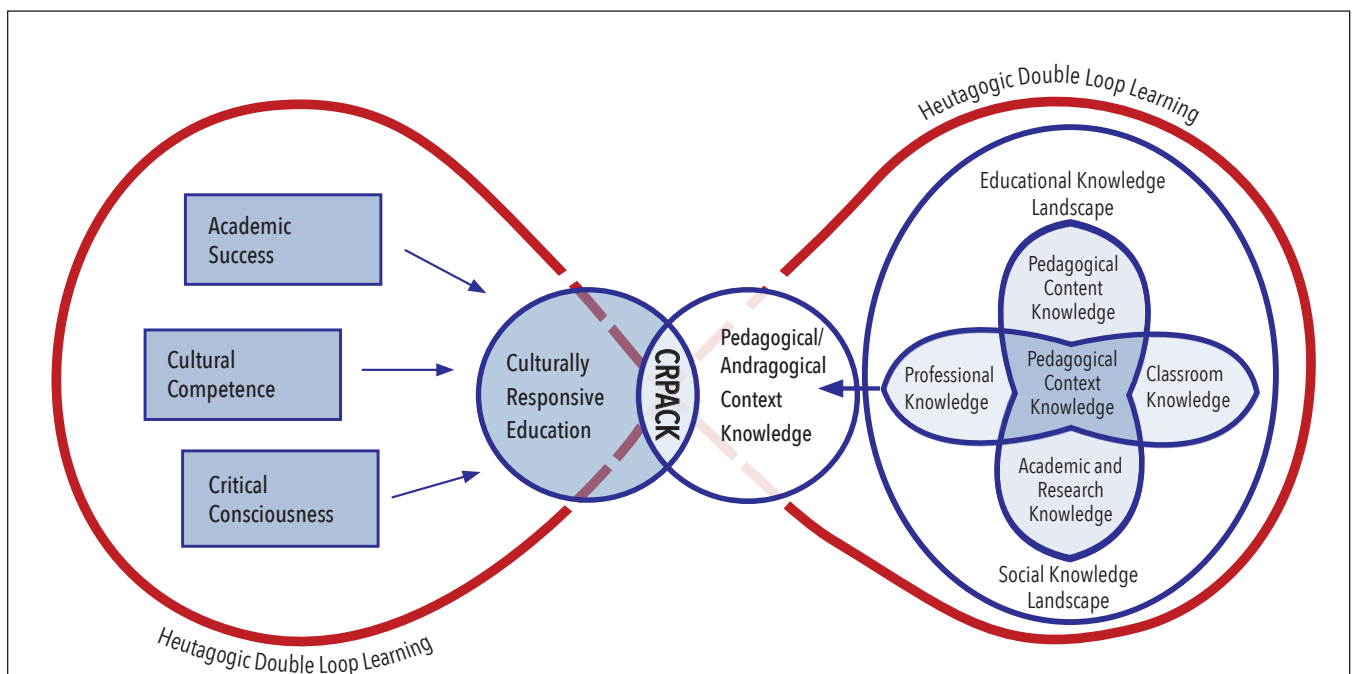
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- 2) Pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., knowledge of teaching a particular subject effectively)
- 3) Professional knowledge (i.e., practical knowledge of teaching built through experience), and
- 4) Classroom—or in our case, rehearsal—knowledge (i.e., knowledge of one’s chorus community and the singers within it)

A conductor will navigate all four knowledge domains within the broader societal and educational landscape. Although Barnett and Hodson were not the only scholars to consider context within a PCK framework, their model seemed the best fit to connect with respon-

sive education.

In our conceptual model of CRPACK, we brought together CRE, PCK, and the consideration of andragogy to include working with adults, a component that may be particularly salient for choral directors working with community, church-based, and professional ensembles. Thus, if PCK for choral conductors is the knowledge of teaching choral music informed by one’s understanding of the profession, the choral communities in which they work, educational research, and the broader societal and educational landscape, CRPACK is the intersection of that knowledge with cultural responsiveness. CRPACK is a type of knowledge to develop within ourselves as choral leaders and in the musicians we mentor, including student leaders (see Figure 1). Building this knowl-



Note. Components on the left represent Ladson-Billing’s (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy as informed by Bond and Russell’s (2019) principal component analysis. Barnett and Hodson’s (2001) model of pedagogical context knowledge is represented on the right. We believe that it is necessary to consider both pedagogical and andragogical context knowledge in light of the work with singers of all ages. CRPACK is the intersection of those theories.

Figure 1. A visual matrix of the culturally responsive pedagogical/andragogical context knowledge model. Vanessa L. Bond and Joshua A. Russell, “Culturally Responsive Pedagogical/Andragogical Context Knowledge: A Conceptual Model for Music Education,” *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 30, no. 3 (2021): 11 -25. Reprinted with permission.

edge is not easy and no one experience will be sufficient. CRPACK is a type of knowledge that develops over time, that continues to develop as we engage with new musicians, and that serves as a lens for our work.

How, then, might you construct this knowledge to serve as the foundation of your choral practice? First, invest time in CRE resources to develop understanding in the general field of education and the specific music education context. The recommended resources section includes full books, articles, and podcast episodes to provide multiple perspectives on CRE. Consider exploring these resources with choral music colleagues so you can process them in community.

Next, unite that understanding with your pedagogical context knowledge of choral music. In integrating CRE and PCK note that your current PCK may need to expand to embrace ways of leading choral music that are less known to you in order to build on the assets of the singers in your care. For example, you might feel most comfortable using notation with music that has a fixed form meant to be performed the same way each time it is experienced. The singers you lead, however, may be most comfortable learning aurally with mu-

sic that is flexible and adapted in the moment. Building your CRPACK will allow you to facilitate choral experiences that lean into the strengths of all singers while also challenging them to develop new areas of strength. Let us work through some examples of applying CRPACK starting from daily interactions with singers, moving outward through performance considerations in your environment (see Figure 2).

Interactions with Singers

Applying CRPACK must begin with knowing the singers and their musical and cultural assets. Considering the size and diversity potential of a choral ensemble, this is no easy task. Because music is a known shared interest between you, the singers, and among the singers, use music as an entry point into learning about the ensemble. Ask members of the choir to share music with you via a YouTube or Spotify playlist and guide their selections with a prompt such as, “Give examples of music heard in your home now or in the past,” or “Share a piece of music that is the essence of beauty to you.” These examples can provide insight about a singer’s musical identity in a format that allows you to learn about them through listening as you go about other tasks in your day.

Shared playlists among the ensemble, rather than just with the conductor, can also assist with building a musical community and can serve as fodder for future rehearsal dialogue. For example, ask singers to suggest a recording of their ideal vocal tone and use those examples to build a communal playlist shared with the choir. In doing so, the singers will learn about each other and a range of vocal tone possibilities.

Because culture is not static and being responsive is a mindset, adopting a CRPACK lens will also lead you in your manner of interacting with singers. Demonstrate a general openness to learning, perhaps by modeling vulnerability to engage in a new musical practice led by a culture bearer in or outside of the ensemble. Exhibit flexibility to respond to emerging or evolving singer identities, whether related to an identity that has specific choral implications, such as voice type, or related to your general knowing of the singer. Above all else, showing unconditional positive regard, care, and belief

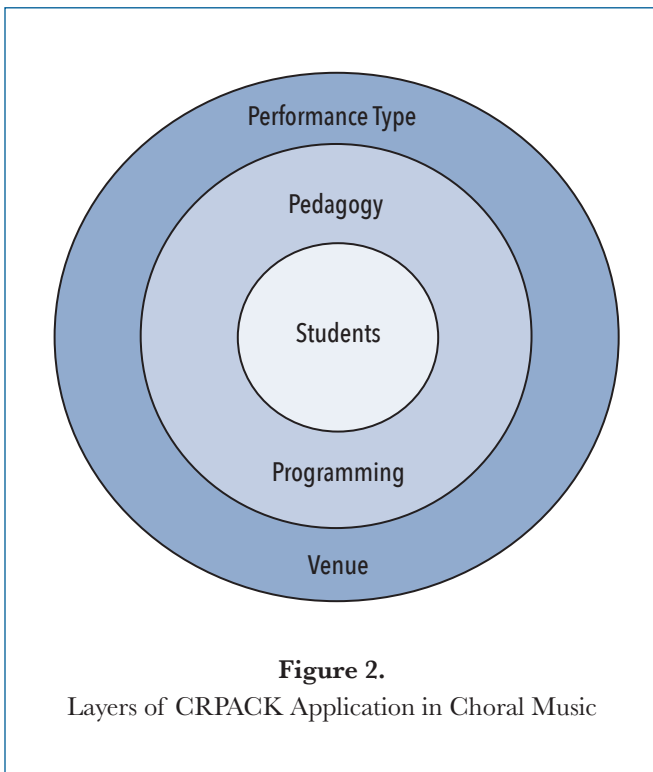


Figure 2.

Layers of CRPACK Application in Choral Music

in their abilities is at the heart of building relationships with singers; relationships are the precursor to singers sharing of themselves in order to build on musical interests and assets. Knowing the singers allows CRPACK to manifest in choral pedagogy and programming.

Pedagogy and Programming

Working from known information toward unknown information is how we learn. In a CRPACK framework this means empowering students to use their cultural referents⁵ and coupling new information with existing funds of knowledge.⁶ In the choral rehearsal, this translates to building from past singing experiences. To do so, it is likely that a conductor will need to expand beyond choral practices that fit a Eurocentric frame, such as a *bel canto* timbral ideal, emphasis on Western notation, and separation of conductor and ensemble. Note the use of *expand*, not *replace*. For example, a conductor can call upon the choir's communal "ideal tone" playlist as examples of vocal colors to try on, first as part of vocalises and eventually as specific choices for selected repertoire. Using a broader palette of tone possibilities allows singers to maintain cultural practices while developing a common vocabulary to approach various choral traditions with integrity.

Because the majority of musical cultures learn through aural transmission, highlighting learning by ear in rehearsal processes can allow singers to maintain their home musical language. Teaching repertoire through rote, vocal chording, lining out, or by immersion with recorded culture bearer modeling is especially important when exploring musics outside of the Western European Art Music tradition. Doing so ensures both the musical work and music learning process are approached with integrity. When choosing to build notational literacy skills, engage singers in that work by helping them to develop what Zaretta Hammond called "learning-how-to-learn studio habits," meaning skills and tools that help them to independently process information. As she noted in a general education context:

Too often, when we deem students behind academically, we increase compliance measures

and actually decelerate learning. We over-scaffold rather than coach students to engage in productive struggle to process the content.⁷

I see parallels to her thoughts for notation reading—when singers struggle reading, we often provide more scaffolding than needed or do the musical thinking for them. Instead, encourage singers to build a set of tools such as solfège and rhythm syllables, processes for tonal center identification, and multiple entry points to notation (e.g., contour reading, reading rhythms but learning tones by ear). Equipping singers with such studio habits will increase their independence in a manner grounded in the science of learning.

The use of power within a choral context can be inviting or alienating to members of the ensemble. If embracing a CRPACK lens, rehearsals would be democratic spaces where singers have agency, are empowered to have voice in the rehearsal process, and where there is an emphasis on the collective, rather than individual, achievement and safety. For example, rather than using a podium as a conductor-singer divide, invite singers to stand side-by-side with you to interpret the choral sound and provide feedback. Alternatively, singers could write single feedback items on sticky notes throughout rehearsal; collect the notes at the end and use the list to generate strategies collaboratively to address those concerns in future rehearsals. Collaborative problem solving to this degree is likely not feasible for every piece on a program due to time constraints, but it can become a normed practice of the choir used for some works over time.

Another pedagogical decision of importance is choosing which types of choral experiences are offered and which musical skills are developed. Certainly, the development of the singing voice will be a priority due to the nature of the ensemble type, but what other possibilities exist? Making such decisions will be based on your localized context and knowledge of singers' cultural referents and prior singing experiences, but might include improvisation and spontaneous harmonization; these are skills of utility for singing in community. For example, CircleSinging in which one singer (either a conductor or ensemble member) leads a group to create spontaneous vocal compositions through im-

provisation, similar to a community-based drum circle, would assist in developing aural skills while providing an outlet for creativity and means of lifelong musicking. Such experiences would encourage singers to step into roles in addition to performer (i.e., arranger, conductor, critic) as a way to engage in practices and discourses that are central to the discipline of music.⁸

Programming is a critical task of the conductor. And yet, it appears that some who prepare preservice music teachers are not discussing programming through a responsive lens.⁹ Selecting repertoire and curating a series of performances in a CRPACK frame means leaning into the abilities, identities, interests, and community resources of the singers. While the field has typically emphasized race and ethnicity in the CRE literature,¹⁰ these are but two facets of identity. Referencing multiple characteristics of singers can be helpful in finding commonality among a large heterogeneous group, and can be helpful in avoiding tokenizing individuals. Ultimately, ask yourself as you program repertoire, will this performance incorporate musics that are known and enjoyed by singers and their communities? Are programmed composers, arrangers, or performers of the music representative of singers' identities? Does the music speak to matters of importance to the singers?

Performing Considerations: Type, Place, and Timing

A conductor's CRPACK can also manifest in or inform performing considerations including performance type, place, and timing. The vast majority of choral performances in the United States are presentational in nature, meaning:

situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing.¹¹

Another viable option for public choral offerings is participatory performance, meaning:

a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only par-

ticipants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role.¹²

For example, community members could participate with an ensemble by learning a descant, partner song, or round during the performance or by learning through immersion with musics that have repetitive structures. Movement can be an excellent tool for minimizing the artist-audience divide, whether that movement is used while singing or as an alternative way to experience a musical culture, such as through a folk dance. Incorporating aspects of participatory performance could be a way to emphasize collective music making and integrate musics intended to be shared or learned with immediacy among a community.¹³


A re-envisioning of performance type invites a re-envisioning of performance space to include those that align with participatory music values such as an outdoor courtyard, cafeteria, or public park as opposed to concert halls or auditoriums.¹⁴ These spaces typically have greater variability and can be shaped to signal the shift in audience etiquette from an expectation of quiet observer to musical participant. Such spaces might also better serve the acoustical considerations needed for a diverse repertoire of musics and the instruments that accompany them.

If constrained to performing in only one location, such as a church or theatre, consider how you might alter typical usage of the space to encourage participation. For example, colleagues and I led a multi-group children's choir concert in a theatre with a flat stage that we used to our advantage by programming songs where movement in circles, lines, and other formations aligned with the cultural practices of the musical traditions we shared. The large, flat surface then provided a space for families to learn dances alongside their children in a community folk dance that served as the concert finale.

In addition to the pedagogical and social benefits, full or partial participatory performances may assist choral leaders logistically by providing them with the time they need to learn about the singers during the beginning of a performance cycle rather than diving

into repertoire preparation. Taking the time required to learn a variety of musics through a variety of transmission processes in a manner that empowers singers to have agency in the music learning process likely necessitates performing less. This might translate into fewer public offerings, different public offerings (such as an open rehearsal or community sing), or a smaller amount of literature that is performed with greater frequency. When making this shift, it will be important to do so over time and to be proactive in communicating your rationale and intent to community stakeholders. Understanding the emphasis on the quality of the singer's experience over the quantity of repertoire or concerts will assist in gaining stakeholder buy-in and will underline your commitment to individuals' socio-emotional and musical development.

Conclusion

There is great potential in the application of the culturally responsive pedagogical/andragogical context knowledge model to choral music. Using a CRPACK lens will manifest differently in different choral music spaces by different choir directors—there is no one-size-fits-all model or precise steps to follow to build and implement this form of knowledge. By developing and employing CRPACK, we can grow our choral music pedagogy to validate and build on the wealth of singer knowledge already present in our choirs and deepen singers' connection to the choral arts. We can take care to reflect on previous practices and consider their fit with singer assets and musical ways of knowing. We can honor the singers we lead over the musical works we explore. Through our interactions with singers, rehearsal strategies, programming, and performance considerations, we can put singers' needs first and ensure they are well-positioned for rich, challenging choral music experiences. 

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Recommended Resources for Developing an Understanding of Culturally Responsive Education

Books

Hammond, Zaretta. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2015).

McKoy, Constance L. and Vicki R. Lind. *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education: From Understanding to Application* (2nd ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2022).

Shaw, Julia T. *Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education: What Teachers Can Learn from Nine Students' Experiences in Three Choirs* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

Articles

Bond, Vanessa L. "Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Choral Classroom," *Choral Journal* 55, no. 2 (2014): 8–15.

Gurgel, Ruth E. "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Disengagement in the Choral Classroom: What Can We Learn from the Students?" *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 11 (2023): 1–22.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *Theory Into Practice* 34, no. 3 (1995): 159–165.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (1995), 465–491.

Paris, Django. "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice." *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (2012), 93–97.

Shaw, Julia T. "The Skin That We Sing: Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education," *Music Educators Journal* 98, no. 4 (2012): 75–81.

Shaw, Julia T. “‘The Music I Was Meant to Sing’: Adolescent Choral Students’ Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 63, no. 2 (2016): 198–223.

Podcast Episodes

Gonzalez, Jennifer, and Zaretta Hammond, “78: Four Misconceptions about Culturally Responsive Teaching.” *Cult of Pedagogy*. September 10, 2017. Podcast, MP3 audio, 43:23. <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/pod/episode-78>.

Caldera, Altheria, and Alexandra Babino, “211: Teaching that is Culturally-Relevant-Responsive and-Sustaining.” *Intercultural Research Development Association Classnotes*. May 18, 2021. Podcast, MP3 audio, 16:02. <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/teaching-that-is-culturally-relevant-responsive-and-sustaining-podcast-episode-211/>.

NOTES

¹ Julia T. Shaw, “Culturally Responsive, Relevant, and Sustaining Pedagogies: An Introduction to Seminal Contributions and Selected Empirical Studies in Choral Singing,” *Choral Journal* 63, no. 3 (2022): 51. See Shaw for an excellent discussion of terms and related research in choral music.

² Vanessa L. Bond and Joshua A. Russell, “Music Teacher Educator Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 221, (2019): 7–28. doi:10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.221.0007

³ Vanessa L. Bond and Joshua A. Russell, “Culturally Responsive Pedagogical/Andragogical Context Knowledge: A Conceptual Model for Music Education,” *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 30, no. 3 (2021): 11–25. doi: 10.1177/1057083721993738

⁴ John Barnett and Derek Hodson, “Pedagogical Context Knowledge: Toward a Fuller Understanding of What Good Science Teachers Know,” *Science Education* 85, no. 4 (2001): 426–453. doi:10.1002/sc.1017

⁵ Gloria J. Ladson-Billings, *The Dream-Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,

2009, 2nd ed).

⁶ Zaretta Hammond, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2015).

⁷ Zaretta Hammond, “Integrating the Science of Learning and Culturally Responsive Practice,” *American Educator* 45, no. 2 (2021): 8.

⁸ Cara Faith Bernard, “A Disciplinary-Based Approach for Advanced Learners in the Performing Arts,” in *Content-Based Curriculum for Advanced Learners* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2023).

⁹ Bond and Russell, “Music Teacher Educator Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching”

¹⁰ Vanessa L. Bond, “Culturally Responsive Education in Music Education: A Literature Review,” *Contributions to Music Education* 42, (2017): 153–180.

¹¹ Thomas Turino, “Participatory and presentational performance,” in *Music as social life: The politics of participation*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³ See Sarah J. Bartolome, *World Music Pedagogy: Choral Music Education* (New York: Routledge, 2019) for additional participatory choral performance considerations and ideas

¹⁴ William J. Coppola, “Matters of Place and Space in School-Based Performances of World Music,” *General Music Today* 34, no. 2 (2021): 13–18.