The Family Musical Identity Project:
Gathering Perspectives and Enacting Curricular Change

Kaitlin Beck || K-5 Music Teacher || DC West Elementary School
Nebraska Music Educators Association Conference || Friday, November 20, 2026

Tinikling Teaching Process

Imitate and Explore

- → Simultaneous imitation – body percussion patterns with rondalla music
- → Echo imitation – Tinikling steps (dip, basic, and jump) and arm movements with rondalla music
- → Share information about the Philippines

Improvise

- → Using ideas from the warm-up, create a 3-part pattern with a partner to reflect the meter of the rondalla music
    - → Could include: body percussion, gestures, statues, dance moves ☺
- → Share ideas going around the circle or interested students, group tries to imitate

Imitate and Explore

- → Perform basic Tinikling steps with text support and rondalla music
    - → Dip step – "testing the waters" – dip, dip, up
    - → Basic step – feet beside the poles – left, right, left OR right, left, right
    - → Jump step – feet between the poles – in, in, out
- → Explore linking steps together (dip step first!)
- → Introduce clapping the poles
    - → Pool noodles – tap, tap, up
    - → Bamboo poles or PVC pipes – tap, tap, slide OR tap, tap, clap
- → Watch a video of traditional Tinikling and notice the parts we just practiced

Explore, Improvise, and Compose

- → With the poles stationary or with clappers, practice each step with the music; switch jobs!
- → Watch a video of modern Tinikling and compare with traditional Tinikling
- → In your small group, create a short Tinikling sequence to share
    - → Could include: stationary poles or poles being clapped
    - → Could include: formation changes, getting creative with the poles
    - → Could include: any of the basic Tinikling step, ideas from modern dance
- → Share what you created!

Project Explanation

Two years ago, my district released a new strategic plan last year and one of the points of focus is engaging families and the community more frequently in student learning. There are several events I already have in place that provide opportunities for family and community engagement: 2nd and 4th grade informances, annual drumming residency, preschool and family drumming class, and more. I wanted to develop ways for my students, their families, and our community to begin having conversations about music and identity.

The Family Musical Identity Project was created in 2024 as a part of a grad school assignment. This project came out of the realization that although I am going into my seventh year of teaching at my school, I do not know much about the racial, ethnic, and musical backgrounds of my students, outside of what they have shared in class. I used the Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) Anti-Bias Framework (ABF) standards as a means of structuring the project.

The project rolled out fall 2024 with a short survey that was sent to families with prompts about their general experience with music, how they engage with music at home, and how it might connect to their heritage. Families were invited to submit photographs of their families (which could feature them making music together) and then were displayed in a mural outside of the music room alongside some of the data received.







Project Goals

- → Gain information about the musical heritage and identities of students and their families
- → Identify potential culture bearers and/or community members to connect with student learning in the music room
- → Create new or enhanced curricular experiences centering the musical backgrounds, identities, and heritage of the student population at my school

Survey Set-Up

Focusing on the ABF standards for identity, I chose the following standard as a guide when developing the project and survey:

IDENTITY			
Anchor Standard	**K-2 Outcome**	**3-5 Outcome**	**Music Educator Outcome**
1. Students and music educators will develop positive social identities based on **their participation in and an understanding of multiple musical cultures** in society.	I know and like different types of music and can talk about the music my family and I listen to and perform.	I know and like different types of music and can talk about the music my family, myself, and my friends listen to and perform.	I have a positive view of myself and the music I listen to and perform, including an awareness and comfort with my membership in multiple groups in society.

Source: Howard, 2022, p. 150

The survey starts with demographic questions (student grade level, email address, etc.) and then the following open-ended questions:

- → What genres of music do you listen to at home? Do you have any favorites? Feel free to share artists or specific songs that you enjoy!
- → Are there specific songs or styles of music that are important to your family? What makes them special?
- → Does your child(ren) play an instrument(s) or dance? Take lessons in voice, an instrument, or dance? If so, please explain below; if not, type n/a.
- → Is there someone in your family that sings and/or plays an instrument or dances? If so, please explain below; if not, type n/a.
- → Would a member of your family be interested in sharing what they know about a particular instrument, genre of music, or style of dance?
    - → Respondents can answer: yes, please reach out; no, thank you; or maybe, but I could use some more information
- → Do you know a member of the community that might be interested in sharing what they know about a particular instrument, genre of music, or style of dance? Please list their information!
- → Share a photo (or more than one) of your family for our mural!

The survey was sent out as a Google Form. Print copies or versions of the survey translated into students' home language were also provided. As responses came in, I removed families from the email list who had already completed the survey. Since August 2024, I have sent out the survey about 8 times (once a quarter) and continue to receive more responses each time.

Survey Results

Since last August, over 180 families have responded to the survey. Out of these responses, 24 families indicated that they themselves or a family member would be interested in teaching students about an aspect of music or dance which with they are familiar, while another 8 families shared the name of a community member. Here are two sample responses from families:

Are there specific songs or styles of music that are important to your family? What makes them special?

Family #1 response: "*Silvia* by Miike Snow; Phoenix's younger sister was named after this song. *1901* by Phoenix; Phoenix was named after this band. *Thinking About You* by Beck; Phoenix's younger brother was named after this artist."
Do you know a member of the community that might be interested in sharing what they know about a particular instrument, genre of music, or style of dance?

Family #2 response: "Unfortunately, no. I'd love to have my kids learn more about the tapatios and mariachis from Jalisco in Mexico (where my family originates from). I am trying to incorporate more of this into our family. I've always wanted to learn the dance and music, but haven't had the chance to REALLY look into it. I wouldn't mind helping look into this to support your curriculum if you'd like!!"

Outcomes

When identifying potential collaborators within the community, I first contacted families whose responses connected to curriculum that was already in place at my school. This made the changes feel more manageable to take on mid-year and maintained curricular continuity for students.

One of the first survey responses I received was from the Mayotte family: "Jonah and Jemma recently learned our Filipino Folk Dance called The Tinikling (bamboo poles). We've been listening to this folk song. Our family would be interested in showing The Tinikling (Philippines National Folk Dance)."

Long Term Goals

Outside of this collaboration, I am pursuing two other leads that came from FMIP data, including:

- → 2025-2026 school year: Bringing in live performers to share their musicianship and knowledge with 5th grade students as they learn about the families of the orchestra – already a big hit!
- → 2026-2027 school year: Working with a reading teacher at my school this year to research tapatio and mariachi in Jalisco, Mexico, and identify a local performing ensemble or non-profit organization to tie in with curriculum next year

Implications and Considerations

Making curricular shifts in the music classroom may not be accessible to all for myriad reasons, including but not limited to scheduling, curricular plans and assessments mandated by the district or school, and teacher time and energy, among other barriers. Utilizing feedback from families or the local community to enact curricular change opens up a level of uncertainty and risk with which teachers must contend. Nonetheless, the possibility for greater connection between students and their community through collaboration and learning in music is undeniable.

Katz (2024), a professor of music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who co-teaches a collegiate music course with local musical artists describes the impact on this style of collaborative teaching and learning, stating that "for some students, these artists represent aspects of their identity that I do not. For others, the collaboration exposes them to people, perspectives, and ways of living they have never encountered" (p. 125). Experiences like these not only uplift the various identities of our students, but pushes them to imagine past their current view of the world. Noddings (2005) expands on this sentiment, establishing that "knowledge is important, but it is best acquired in relation…A powerful source of motivation is an invitation from living others. One good reason for studying a particular selection of literature is that people we care about ask us to read it" (p. 114). When someone we are in relationship with recommends we try something new, the incentive to do so is much higher.

Inevitably, when changes are made to curriculum, choices have to be made on what is included and what is not. By intentionally highlighting a certain perspective in our classrooms, there is a simultaneous distancing of another, not necessarily because of bias (it could be that too), but because of the many barriers teachers face to teaching content (Noddings, 2005, p. 112). The process of change must therefore be delicate and wrought with reflection, time, and a lack of urgency, which is antithetical to the narratives of productivity over everything we so often face.

For more information, check out my article in the summer 2026 edition of *The Orff Echo* on this project or listen to my interview on the American Orff Schulwerk Association podcast!

References

references for presentation included in slide deck, references for presentation notes below

Beck, K. (2026). Family musical identity project: Gathering perspectives and enacting curricular change. *The Orff Echo 58*(4), 18-23.

Howard, K. (2022). *Realizing diversity: An equity framework for music education*. GIA Publications.

Katz, M. (2024). Connecting students and artistic communities: Understanding agency, fostering empathy, and expanding representation in the classroom. In C. Renihan, J. Spilker, & T. Wright (Eds.), *Sound pedagogy: Radical care in music*, pp. 125-136.

Noddings, N. (2005). The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Shea, M. (Host). (2026, October 14). Orff echo feature: Kaitlin Beck (No. 21) [Audio podcast episode]. In *American Orff-Schulwerk Association Podcast*. American Orff Schulwerk Association. https://open.spotify.com/episode/2e1mStnp27OGtcMZ3aq4hK?si=2b24b617b6154af0

Teaching Tolerance. (2014). *Introducing the teaching tolerance anti-bias framework*. Southern Poverty Law Center. https://www.learningforjustice.org/site/default/files/general/TT%20anti%bias%20framework%20pamphlet_final.pdf