

**“This is Music Therapy in the Real World”:  
Negotiating Standardization, Curricularizing Joy**

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**Abstract**

Music is a discipline with its own literacies, specialized texts, and space for envisioning joy through the arts. This article shares findings from Cecilia Gregory’s ninth grade music appreciation class in an urban Catholic high school as part of a humanizing, critical ethnography investigating culturally sustaining literacy practices. The findings focus on how Miss Gregory uses music literacy to critically center and sustain students’ multiracial and multilingual identities. They also focus on how Miss Gregory’s musical literacy instruction is challenged by standardization within teacher evaluation and her agentive moves to remain centered on student joy through student agency in art literacy exploration.

*Keywords:* Literacy; culturally sustaining pedagogies; music literacy; qualitative; teacher evaluation