



Building Interdisciplinary Bridges Across Cultures

## Jody L. Kerchner

### Abstract

In this presentation I discuss an auto-ethnographic narrative of my planning for, establishing, and conducting an all-male prison choir at the Grafton Reintegration Center (GRC) in Ohio (USA). The Oberlin Music at Grafton (OMAG) Choir began in late October 2015, at a state penitentiary in its minimum-security section, designed to prepare some of the residents (e.g., incarcerated people) to be reintegrated into society. The mission of the OMAG choir is to provide an opportunity for residents to engage in community-building, cooperative group learning, discipline, enhanced self-esteem building, and self-expression, while also sharing their own varied musical and cultural influences, learning new skills, and creating/singing original songs in addition to the residents' learning diverse choral literature. While participation in choir is to be recreational, it also provides strong educational and potentially therapeutic benefits to the residents. This program also represents a partnership between Oberlin College/Conservatory of Music and the Grafton Correctional Institution. In this presentation, I will discuss the political powers that support and undermine the potential of the OMAG choir: 1) the choir as an "extra" responsibility for program and case workers and prison officers; 2) choir as a privilege and fun for people perceived as not deserving either, 3) the establishment of a choral program to gain personal reward within the hierarchy of prison administration, 4) the rigidity of rules and schedules, 5) the communication void, and 6) the volunteer "training" for the purposes of raising awareness of prison life and resident behaviors, while also instilling fear.

### Bio

Jody L. Kerchner is Professor & Director of Music Education at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music where she is the secondary school music and choral music education specialist. She is also founder and conductor of the Oberlin College Women's Chorale and the Oberlin Music at Grafton (OMAG) all-male prison choir. She received degrees in music education and vocal performance from West Chester University and a Ph.D. in Music Education from Northwestern University. Her research interests include children's responses during music listening, choral music education, empathetic leadership, assessment, social justice and musical access, and reflective thinking. She is authored many publications, including her latest book, *Music Across the Senses: Listening, Learning, & Making Music* (OUP, 2013).

Kerchner's work has also been published in various research and pedagogy journals and presented at conferences in North and South America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. She is former chair of ISME's Music in the Schools and Teacher Education commission.