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Conceptualizing Musical Vulnerability

Abstract

Despite a growing body of advocacy for the beneficial effects of music education upon individuals' development and wellbeing, lived experiences in the music classroom are testament to a diversity of both positive and negative musical encounters. For some pupils, classroom music-making is characterized by opportunities, achievements, and friendships. But for others it is redolent of shortcomings, disappointments, and conflicts. This reveals an urgent need for researchers and practitioners to acknowledge pupils' "musical vulnerability": their inherent and situational openness to being affected by the semantic and somatic properties of music.

In this essay, I offer a detailed conceptualization of musical vulnerability and its place in music education. I outline Judith Butler's seminal theory of linguistic vulnerability, and evaluate how her conviction that language can cause hurt and harm may help redress the simplistic coupling of music and wellbeing lauded by music education advocacy. Drawing upon feminist vulnerability studies, I then reflect upon the distinctive experiences of inherent, situational, and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities in the classroom, and their relation to institutional, interpersonal, and individual responses to music's particular semantic and somatic properties. I conclude by proposing how the conceptualization of musical vulnerability could transform music education through cultivating a renewed ethic of care.

Keywords

musical vulnerability, linguistic vulnerability, classroom music, inclusivity, care

In my first teaching post, at a small independent secondary school in the rural English countryside, I taught a boy named Philip.[1] Philip was a bright and energetic eleven-year-old who loved music. He sang in the school choir and enjoyed playing the keyboard in class, and he was excited when given the opportunity to learn the clarinet with some of his peers. Each week, Philip and two others went to their clarinet lesson. But it was not long before Philip fell behind. Try as he might, he could barely make a sound from his clarinet. His clarinet teacher was at a loss. Philip was sent to a practice room, on his own, in the hope that he might be able to progress beyond a squawk without disrupting his peers. Eventually, Philip was offered a trumpet to try instead. But the sense of *déjà vu* was uncanny. His trumpet teacher was at a loss. Philip was sent to a practice room, on his own, in the hope that he might be able to progress beyond a squawk without disrupting his peers. In time, he stopped bringing his trumpet to his lessons. He loitered in the corridors of the department while his peers were practicing. He refused help or encouragement. Almost before he had begun, he had given up.

* * *

Philip's experience shocked me. Behind his boisterous and sometimes defiant demeanor was a stark sense of vulnerability; of having been undone, let down, by his musical encounter. But it also challenged me. How, in Philip's lived experience, could music be at times so beneficial and at other times so detrimental? And what should that mean for classroom music education?

The question of music's potentially beneficial and detrimental effects is by no means new. While a sizeable portion of literature in music education, psychology, and sociology has dealt with music's perceived positive effects on development and wellbeing, there also exists a

long tradition of philosophical reflection upon its potentially negative moral, aesthetic, and epistemological influences: the way in which it may distract from worthier pastimes, cause undesirable behaviors or pathologies, or fail to offer valuable intellectual insight.[2] Empirical research testifies to such varied negative experiences associated with music-making practices such as amateur choral singing, brass band playing, and employment in the music industries.[3] Such experiences may be attributed to conflicts between personal aspirations and social expectations, or to fundamental differences in individuals' neural reward networks associated with music.[4]

In the classroom specifically, music's detrimental effects have been highlighted in a handful of accounts of the impact of music education upon individuals' lifelong musical participation. These have often shown classroom music-making to be perceived unfavorably, as "irrelevant" or "a waste of time" and associated with performance pressure, repetitive and theory-based lesson content, and unsatisfactory teaching quality.[5] Adult musical participation may be colored by such school experiences, whether through the compartmentalization of "classical music as a school thing," or a perceived disconnect between the musical skills associated with school and those required in amateur music-making.[6]

Despite such evidence, the issues of music's beneficial and detrimental effects in the classroom have not been translated into contemporary understandings of music education. In the current educational climate of increased accountability measures, standardized quantitative assessment procedures, and a growing emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, the global decline of music education has instead prompted a surfeit of politicized advocacy.[7] Rather than engaging with nuanced accounts of varied musical experiences in the classroom, advocacy has sought to secure music's place within the

curriculum, adopting an attitude of hubris in which "the positive effects of . . . music have been overestimated and the negative dimensions underestimated."[8] Its arguments are always determined by the pre-ordained end-goal of proving music's worth within dominant discourses of educational value, and by necessity any factors at odds with this goal are overruled.[9]

Music education advocacy has, for the time being, been relatively successful in securing music's place in national curricula across the world. Yet there is a price to be paid for music's passing mention in America's Every Student Succeeds Act, the compulsory music education enshrined in Brazil's Law 11.769, and the monochromatic picture of classroom music teaching painted in England's National Plan for Music Education.[10] Reiterating music's beneficial effects upon individuals' development and wellbeing while overlooking its potentially detrimental effects risks fabricating a simplistic, two-dimensional concept of music education.

For music education to account for the multifarious experiences common to so many classrooms, researchers and practitioners need to recognize that, though "it might be the case that music 'heals' or enables us to become more socially adept . . . we should also entertain the idea that music might actually cause us to be psychologically ill or excluded."[11] Like Philip, we are each "vulnerable" to music: to its joys, pleasures, and benefits, but also to its pains, hurts, and frustrations. In what follows, I evaluate how such "musical vulnerability" compares with Judith Butler's seminal theory of linguistic vulnerability. While researchers and practitioners in music education have tended to neglect issues of vulnerability, Butler's conviction that language can cause hurt and harm offers an alternative perspective that may help redress the simplistic coupling of music and wellbeing lauded by music education advocacy. Drawing on feminist vulnerability studies, I reflect upon the distinctive experiences of inherent, situational, and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities in the classroom, and their relation to institutional,

interpersonal, and individual responses to music's particular semantic and somatic properties. I conclude by proposing how the conceptualization of musical vulnerability could transform music education through cultivating a renewed ethic of care.

Linguistic Vulnerability

Music is widely recognized to be closely comparable to language. Though a growing appreciation of music's varying socio-cultural contexts has effectively discredited theories of music as a "universal language," music still shares much in common with language and is often described as a means of communication.[12] Evolutionary biology shapes infants' dispositions for both acquiring language and making music: infants can detect melodic shape, rhythmic patterns, and interact using "communicative musicality."[13] Culture and environment then "particularises the developmental trajectory of those predispositions," defining the language learnt, the skills of reading and writing, musical preference, and so-called musical "ability."[14]

There is, therefore, a strong case to be made for conceptualizing musical vulnerability along similar lines to linguistic vulnerability. Linguistic vulnerability was first described in Butler's 1997 book *Excitable Speech*, in which Butler sets out her conviction of humanity's susceptibility to being wounded by language. Words can have power over us–the authority to define our name, our identity, and our status. Butler refers to this vulnerability as constitutive, since as "linguistic beings" we "require language in order to be," and are "constituted within its terms."[15] On being unexpectedly or injuriously addressed, such as in the context of criticism, slander, or hate speech, we become vulnerable to suffering "a loss of context" or being "put out of control."[16]

Butler suggests that the way that words are able to wound with similar force to physical injury is a result of the two-fold power of words as meaning and as sound. First, words have semantic power: their citationality means they can be suggestive of new identities associated with a whole historic and social "legacy of interpellations."[17] Second, words have somatic power: even when their semantic meaning may not be explicitly injurious, their mode of address–their context–can cause "linguistic pain" as they resonate with the body's "incorporated memory" of normative social rules, actions, and desires.[18]

However, focusing as it does upon hate speech, repression, and censorship, Butler's theorization of linguistic vulnerability is distinctly negative. She perceives vulnerability as equivalent to subordination and the risk of injury, and language as excitable, a threat to the body, or, if not actively causing harm, merely "sustaining" the body through its constitutive nature.[19] Although she explains how citationality exposes language to reappropriation or resignification by individuals, she presents such actions as necessary resistance rather than positive transformation.[20] Provocative though this conceptualization of linguistic vulnerability may be, it fails to account for occasions on which language–like music–can convey comfort, encouragement, and affirmation.

More recently, predominantly negative definitions of vulnerability have come under scrutiny from feminist scholars in wider vulnerability studies. In response to the historic association between vulnerability and weak, feminine attributes, scholars have sought to redefine the desirable-undesirable, invulnerable-vulnerable binary, and to take account of vulnerability's ambiguity and complexity–including its positive and negative characteristics.[21] Erinn Gilson, for example, defines being vulnerable as being "open to being affected and affecting in ways that one cannot control."[22] Alyson Cole explains how this openness can be both positive and

negative, "a shared, constitutive and connective feature of our existence that encompasses not merely *susceptibility to harm* but also *receptivity to positive forms of intersubjectivity*."[23]

The broader definitions of vulnerability adopted by vulnerability studies are a helpful corrective to Butler's bleak conceptualization of linguistic vulnerability. Indeed, Butler has more recently acknowledged how, "if words have the power to wound, they also have the power to convey love."[24] She describes how the same semantic and somatic properties of speech that can inflict pain can also express affirmation and comfort. Nonetheless, she does not discuss the wider implications of this facet of linguistic vulnerability. How closely related is a word's power to convey love to its power to wound, and what does it take for the same word both to convey love and to wound? And what might this mean for the conceptualization of musical vulnerability?

One further question left unanswered by Butler's conceptualization of linguistic vulnerability is that of the definition of language. In Butler's terms, language is primarily related to speech. The linguistic being is the speaking being and the spoken-to being: one who is subject to interpellation by the speech of another. Butler is not wrong to attribute such power to speech. Indeed, she highlights how the nature of constitution by speech means that it can occur even without the awareness of the subject.[25] However, the constitutive quality of Butler's linguistic vulnerability leads to an understanding of subjectivity that leaves no room for the differently-abled: for those who experience linguistic vulnerability through sign rather than speech, for those who are more or less susceptible to linguistic vulnerability, or for those who are more or less aware of their own or others' linguistic vulnerability.[26] This is a concern that has been raised repeatedly in response to conceptualizations of constitutive vulnerability, with critics highlighting how an overemphasis upon the universal nature of vulnerability may obscure the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable.[27]

Nonetheless, others have proposed that it is possible to take account of the multiplicity of possible characterizations of vulnerability–including its constitutive aspects and its circumstantial exacerbation–using a simple, tripartite taxonomy. Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds define three distinct categories of vulnerability. First, they refer to "inherent vulnerability" as the universal vulnerability of all humankind, resulting from our corporeal, social, and affective nature. Second, they locate "situational vulnerability" as the specific vulnerability arising from personal, social, political, economic, or environmental contexts. Third, they define "pathogenic vulnerability" as a subset of situational vulnerability that poses ethical challenges, such as those arising from abuse, oppression, or injustice.[28]

Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds' taxonomy of vulnerability offers a helpful lens upon linguistic vulnerability, demonstrating how its constitutive nature is in fact influenced by inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities. As Butler describes,

> in a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt [inherent vulnerability]. This vulnerability, however, becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions [situational vulnerability], especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited [pathogenic vulnerability].[29]

By situating linguistic vulnerability within the broader framework of vulnerability studies there is, therefore, greater potential to understand how music, like language, can be at times so beneficial and at other times so detrimental. To translate Butler's assumption of "linguistic

being" directly into "musical being" would be to perpetuate the attitude of hubris that assumes music is fundamental to being, and to "marginalize individuals for whom music doesn't play a major rehabilitative or edifying role."[30] Yet a richer understanding of the multiplicity of inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities contributing to musical encounters like Philip's has the potential to offer a valuable conceptualization of music's capability both to stimulate happiness and healing and to incite hatred and harm.

Musical Vulnerability

To account for classroom experiences as diverse as Philip's, the conceptualization of musical vulnerability needs to build upon Butler's linguistic vulnerability in three ways. First, it needs to address the inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities outlined by the taxonomy of vulnerability. Second, it needs to elucidate the role of institutional, interpersonal, and individual factors that affect music experiences specifically within the classroom. And third, it needs to consider how experiences of musical vulnerability may be both positive and negative, and how issues of receptivity and susceptibility are related.

Based on an extrapolation of Butler's understanding of linguistic vulnerability within the broader field of vulnerability studies, I therefore define musical vulnerability as *the inherent and situational openness to being affected by the semantic and somatic properties of music*. In the remainder of this essay, I consider what constitutes music's semantic and somatic properties, and how these properties give rise to inherent musical vulnerability. I then discuss how differing institutional, interpersonal, and individual responses to music have the potential to cause situational vulnerabilities in the music classroom, and how these may manifest as both positive

musical receptivity and negative musical susceptibility. Finally, I address the circumstances surrounding pathogenic musical vulnerability. I reflect on how existing transcultural, technological, and informal pedagogies often aim to assuage symptoms of pathogenic vulnerability–exclusion, disengagement, and frustration–and the urgent need to adopt a more holistic understanding of the root causes of such problems through fostering an ethic of care.

Inherent Musical Vulnerability

As embodied beings, we experience some degree of inherent vulnerability to music. Music, like language, has semantic and somatic properties that mean that, though our musical encounters "are at the mercy of our sonic environments, our recreational activities, our physical well-being, and our age," even the least attentive musical engagement is able to affect how we think and feel.[31]

Music's Semantic Properties

Music's semantic properties have long been a subject of debate, with many scholars arguing that musical semantics are not comparable to those associated with linguistics. Ian Cross draws attention to music's "floating intentionality," highlighting how the ambiguity of musical communication differentiates it from the relatively unambiguous interpretation of linguistic semantics.[32] Likewise, Kathleen Higgins argues that it is music's "lack of a full-blown semantics" that enables it to provoke distinct experiences exceeding linguistic capabilities.[33] Nonetheless, these scholars still acknowledge that music does have some semantic properties,

more readily described as indexical, connotative, or delineated–musical aspects that have meaning, but that can be interpreted only in light of their context.[34]

Music's semantic properties can therefore be defined as the meanings denoted outside its musical constituents, encompassing personal, social, or cultural citations. Music's citationality has been explained by Heidi Westerlund, Alexis Kallio, and Heidi Partti, who compare the performativity of speech acts with the performativity of music-making. They discuss how music-making–specifically performance in schools–is, like speech, "a citational practice through which available identities are regularly (re)constituted."[35] Based on Butler's concept that identity is performative and that performance shapes individual subjectivities, they recognize that school music practices can therefore be inclusive or exclusive depending on the range of musical values–including those related to class, gender, and race–legitimated in the classroom.

Music's Somatic Properties

Like Butler's speech acts, music-making also has somatic properties that enhance its semantic power to define subjectivities. Music's sonic and phenomenological nature–sound waves propagated, received, and experienced in space–means that it is impossible to escape its interpellation without physically leaving its vicinity. This somatic power can be described in three stages.

First, music's physical vibration is received through the receptive ear. Because the ear cannot be closed, this is a particularly vulnerable mechanism. Our ears leave us open to others' influence, both to receptivity and engagement and to susceptibility and violation.[36]

Second, this openness is exacerbated by the embodiment of music's physical vibration. Even when music is not loud enough to cause tangible, whole-body vibration, the mimetic hypothesis indicates that it is comprehended through the covert or overt imitation of its performance. Evidence suggests that listening to music always prompts a bodily response akin to performing music, experienced internally as mimetic motor imagery (such as imagined instrumental fingerings or subvocalization), or externally as mimetic motor action (such as tapping or singing along).[37] Though the mimetic hypothesis is in part conjectural–and it is unclear how it might apply to deaf, blind, or neurodiverse individuals–it does provide a feasible explanation for the phenomenological qualities of music.[38] If speech is a bodily act–that "does" things as well as "saying" things–then music-making too "does" things. Musical practices, including mimetic motor imagery and action, "serve as tools, technologies, or 'affordances' by means of which individuals create their social-cultural gendered communities, and form and inform their identities."[39] Any musical practice will stem from and speak into the body's incorporated memory of expected normative musical behaviors, therefore imbuing music with the power both to convey love and to wound.

Finally, music's somatic power is heightened when overt mimetic actions give rise to entrainment, which occurs when "independent rhythmical systems interact with each other."[40] Entrainment sometimes results in interpersonal synchrony, which can increase perceived closeness and similarity between individuals, or causes the phenomenological intensification of the experience of musical affect, creating "affective associations" or emotional contagion within social groups.[41] The transmission of affect reveals that human bodies are not self-contained or invulnerable, but rather are interconnected and susceptible to influences below the threshold of conscious feeling.[42] In the context of music-making, therefore, the open ear, the propensity for

mimesis and entrainment, and the transmission of affect all contribute to extreme "corporeal vulnerability."[43]

Situational Musical Vulnerability

Understanding the inherent musical vulnerability of humankind is one way of explaining a wide range of positive and negative musical experiences, varying from the intense pleasure associated with musical *frisson* to the psychological disintegration associated with music's use in torture. However, the way in which musical vulnerability is experienced in such different circumstances varies significantly according to music's mediation across social planes.[44] Although in the case of linguistic vulnerability "the circumstances alone do not make the words wound," the citational interweaving of past, present, and future circumstances within any one word or musical experience is of primary importance in differentiating between their power to convey love or to wound.[45]

In the intimacy of individual music listening, for example, music is primarily mediated by the microsocialities of the individual's imagined relationship with the music. In group performance, on the other hand, the very same music may be mediated both by the microsocialities of interactions between individuals involved and by the macrosocial expectations determined by their collective identity. In the music classroom, multiple complex social mediations of music are brought to the fore. Each individual in the classroom brings with them their own unique socio-musical expectations based on their real or imagined musical communities outside the classroom. These different expectations then interact within the

microsocialities of musical practice and are also governed by the overarching mediation of institutions including the school, the exam board, and the "canon."

It is at the interface of these different musical mediations and expectations–institutional, interpersonal, and individual–that situational musical vulnerability occurs in the classroom. In Philip's experience, for example, he brings with him to the classroom a love of singing. His individual musical preferences shape his interactions with his peers and his teachers as he learns first the clarinet, and then the trumpet. In turn, his experience playing the clarinet and trumpet is shaped by macrosocialities affected by classroom pedagogy (the scheme of work determines that Philip must learn an orchestral instrument), the musical values of the department (learning an orchestral instrument is good for all pupils and therefore they will all do so for two years), and wider school governance (the school governors have agreed to fund this project and therefore all pupils will take part). For Philip, these expectations seem inconsistent. Though he enjoys music and might even self-identify as "musical," his struggle to keep up with learning an instrument renders him a failure in the eyes of his teachers, his peers, and his school's wider expectations. His musical vulnerability is therefore realized as a negative musical susceptibility. Nonetheless, had his experience perhaps been one of a newfound love for clarinet music, his musical vulnerability may well have been realized–in accordance with his individual expectations, interpersonal experience, and the prevailing institutional ethos–as positive musical receptivity.

Institutional Mediation

Within the institutional power structures governing the music classroom–ranging from national government to independent exam boards–music is subservient to dominant discourses of

educational value. This is often evident in the master-apprentice-like teaching relationships governing classroom experiences like Philip's. Master-apprentice relationships have a long history in traditions including Western art music and Indian classical music, and have been adopted into classroom practice across the world, such as in America's band method, Venezuela's *El Sistema*, and England's National Plan for Music Education.[46] However, while effective in disseminating cherished historical repertories in a carefully controlled fashion, master-apprentice relationships can, in some circumstances, reinforce unequal power relations and forestall individual agency. Randall Allsup warns against its potential to generate closed, authoritative, and oppressive forms of music education, and "silence alternative voices."[47]

Master-apprentice relationships, alongside other pedagogies and methods perpetuated by music education institutions, also influence the sociocultural values delineated in the music classroom. They often enact hierarchical gender relationships, their associations with the domineering male conductor or god-like male *guru* leading to what Allsup calls the performance of "protomasculinity."[48] Their relationships may also be perceived as racialized, the master embodying the white, male musician and his ideal of "a relatively motionless body, a reverent demeanor, and a minimizing of gesture," shunning the spontaneous gesturing typical of African and African American music-making, and marking those of minority ethnicities as "cultural Others."[49]

The power relations inherent in master-apprentice teaching relationships also reflect historic classed values, stemming in part from nineteenth-century music conservatories and exam boards founded to cultivate the values of the bourgeois middle class and make music a means of wholesome, "rational recreation."[50] The typically competitive and individualistic middle-class values implicated in teaching relationships at the heart of these institutions often fail to recognize

day-to-day working-class values, such as community cohesion and collaboration. Through portraying middle-class values as the epitome of educational achievement–and "rendering working-class cultures as the 'underclass,' as abject zones and lives to flee from"–such relationships frequently perpetuate "injuries of class."[51]

Interpersonal Mediation

Though master-apprentice-like teaching relationships are a product of music's mediation through educational institutions, they also illustrate the influence of power differentials and gendered, racial, and classed values at an interpersonal level. Every connection between the figures of master and apprentice "contains within it a dialectic of vulnerability: part hope and fear, part promise and peril."[52] While the exercise of trust and care may lead to respect and investment, the abuse of such intimate relationships can also result in humiliation, fear, and depersonalization. In some cases, slippage between institutional and interpersonal expectations creates a damaging culture of criticism, where "bullying and humiliation are a normalized, accepted part of learning classical music," unquestioned because they force progress to be made and resilience to be developed.[53]

Music's mediation through master-apprentice teaching reflects other interpersonal relationships in the classroom. All group music-making requires the careful balancing of personal aspirations and social ambitions, which can easily be upset by individual habits or unreasonable group expectations.[54] Group music-making is by its very nature paradoxical, a tenuous balancing act of self and other. While its success can be highly rewarding and lead to a sense of personal achievement and social affiliation, without careful management and

understanding of the paradox between individual contributions and collective interests it can quickly dissolve into a frustrating and unsatisfying experience.[55]

Individual Mediation

The paradox arising through music's interpersonal mediation can be particularly problematic in the classroom, when individuals from different musical backgrounds and with different music preferences are expected to work together with limited personal autonomy. Pupils' individual subjectivities, backgrounds, and preferences influence music's mediation through institutional and interpersonal relations, and in turn, the nature of bodily being-in-the-world means that their individual perceptions of musical experience are always situated within the tensions between institutional and interpersonal relations. Even "holication"–the act of making music on one's own–is a relational act, entangled with social histories, traditions, and institutions, and imagined communities and critics.[56]

Musical acts of interpellation and their institutional and interpersonal mediation therefore exert significant power over individuals' experiences of musical vulnerability. Often they encourage positive receptivity: broadening personal horizons, equipping individuals to negotiate their sense of self-identity, or leading to the long-term establishment of a sense of musicianship or musicality.[57] Yet they can cause enduring ill effects if music's semantic associations or somatic properties relate to exclusive, alienating, or divisive contexts.[58] If music's institutional or interpersonal mediation demarcates values that are at odds with an individual's personal background or preferences–such as the gendered, racial, and classed values often associated with

master-apprentice teaching relationships–it is more likely to be perceived as marginalizing or invasive.

The potentially positive receptivity or negative susceptibility arising at the interface of music's individual, interpersonal, and institutional mediation is discussed at length by professional musicians in a study by Jackie Wiggins.[59] Individuals described vulnerability as an essential–but sometimes detrimental–facet of musicianship. In a positive light, when their individual expectations and preferences were in accord with institutional and interpersonal expectations, vulnerability could lead to positive receptivity to alternative musical interpretations, sensitivity to other musicians' ideas and ways of thinking, and a willingness to move outside a comfort zone. However, vulnerability could also lead to a negative sense of susceptibility: performance anxieties, struggles for perfection, and self-doubt. Musicians associated this with the individual and interpersonal consequences of music's delineation of identity: since "the sonic nature of the art form makes the product public even when the producer is not ready to share it," music could present a vivid–and possibly unwanted–insight into their innermost self-identity.[60] Such susceptibility could then be exacerbated by destructive pedagogical expectations at odds with their personal needs, such as authoritarian teaching and lack of individual autonomy.

Pathogenic Musical Vulnerability

In the same way that Philip's experience opened my eyes to the vulnerability involved in both beneficial and detrimental musical encounters, Wiggins' study emphasizes that vulnerability cannot be understood as solely positive (and thereby exclusively benefitting individuals'

development and wellbeing) or as solely negative (and thereby exclusively wounding like Butler's conceptualization of linguistic vulnerability). But though it is important to recognize both the positive and negative aspects of musical vulnerability, pursuing a balanced conceptualization of vulnerability should not negate its ethical impetus. Musical vulnerability is at the root of the lived experience of music-making and contributes to the receptivity and creativity at the heart of the musical encounter. But it can be abused.

Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds' definition of pathogenic vulnerability as posing specific ethical challenges resulting from oppression illustrates the fragile relationship between situational vulnerability and music's institutional, interpersonal, and individual mediation. When institutions fail to provide the care necessitated by inherent musical vulnerability, their own political and social precarity can increase pathogenic vulnerability.[61] In some of the most devastating cases, this may be manifested as relational abuse.[62] In Philip's experience, I saw his situational musical vulnerability in his struggles to learn an instrument exacerbated through the inadequate response of the school music department–myself included. Rather than taking account of his vulnerability and offering him a suitable alternative or intervention, such as one-to-one support, extra lessons, or the option of practicing an instrument upon which he already had some competence, we simply left him to his own devices in a practice room.

Toward an Ethic of Care

Philip's pathogenic musical vulnerability–negative musical susceptibility, institutionally exacerbated–poses ethical challenges around inclusion and exclusion, educational differentiation, and individual autonomy. These issues, not uncommon in the music classroom, have by no

means escaped the attention of researchers and practitioners. Transcultural, technological, and informal pedagogies have all attempted to address issues of equality, diversity, and inclusivity, and sought to foster institutional and interpersonal relations within which individuals' musical backgrounds and preferences are genuinely valued and respected.[63] Yet many have had only limited success, superficially mitigating against the symptoms of pathogenic musical vulnerability without attending to the fundamental nature of individuals' openness to being affected by music.[64]

Pathogenic musical vulnerability and its symptoms of exclusion, disengagement, and frustration cannot be understood aside from the inherent and situational musical vulnerability common to all musical experiences. Musical vulnerability is what makes music at once so beneficial and so detrimental. The selfsame musical properties responsible for negative musical susceptibility are also responsible for positive musical receptivity, and are shaped within the same nexus of music's institutional, interpersonal, and individual mediation. Musical vulnerability, therefore, needs to be embraced–because while this nexus of musical mediation is complex and unique to each individual, it is not fixed. Institutional decisions to prioritize affirmative musical encounters over quantitatively measurable outcomes have the potential to foster inclusivity over exclusivity. Practitioners' awareness of relational dynamics in the classroom has the potential to facilitate rewarding group music-making experiences rather than disappointment and disagreement. And even when disappointment and disagreement seem inevitable, encouraging resilience and determination has the potential to transform negative musical susceptibility into positive musical receptivity.

Embracing musical vulnerability, however, is not easy. Recognizing vulnerability in the music classroom means questioning the assumption that music is always beneficial for

individuals' development and wellbeing. It means refuting such presumptions in the advocacy that has, for so long, been central in justifying and sustaining music's place in the curriculum. And it means, above all, fostering an ethic of care: "grasp[ing] the reality of the other as a possibility for myself."[65] This can be challenging, since care is a holistic way of being rather than a self-contained pedagogical solution. Care can be painful, because it means becoming vulnerable to being harmed by another, but it can also be life-enhancing, because it means becoming vulnerable to being helped by another:

> it is clear that my vulnerability is potentially increased when I care, for I can be hurt through the other as well as through myself. But my strength and hope are also increased, for if I am weakened, this other, which is part of me, may remain strong and insistent.[66]

In the face of individuals' diverse musical experiences, music classrooms must become "collective communities of care": communities that are wide awake to the disparagement, frustration, and discrimination that so frequently stems from pathogenic musical vulnerability.[67] But such communities will not simply mask their susceptibilities with superficial or tokenistic attempts at inclusivity. On the contrary, they will be prepared to accept and learn from even the most discouraging and devastating experiences of musical vulnerability–because music education is not two-dimensional, beneficial only when tantamount to happiness and healing. It is in fact all the more important because it has the capacity to encompass the breadth of lived experience; to address matters ranging from happiness and healing to hatred and harm.

It is immensely valuable to foster positive musical receptivity in the music classroom. But the same must be said of recognizing negative musical susceptibility. Experiencing and rehearsing the right responses to the shortcomings, disappointments, and conflicts made evident through musical encounters is essential to a holistic ethic of care. Care requires practicing a responsible and responsive "politics of intimacy": embracing our interdependencies, assuming a proximity that brings us into contact with individuals and experiences that may shock us, and allowing them to change us.[68] It requires recognizing and sharing our susceptibilities and seeking the means to resignify them, not merely as necessary resistance, but as fruitful transformation towards positive experiences of receptivity. And it requires adopting an unwavering trust of the other; caring for them, and allowing ourselves to be cared for by them.[69] For it is at the moment of being undone by music that we may be most profoundly transformed.

Notes

[1] Independent schools in England are private, fee-paying schools. Secondary schools educate pupils aged between eleven and eighteen. For purposes of confidentiality, "Philip" is a pseudonym.
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