



# Musical vulnerability

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Receptivity, susceptibility, and care in the  
Key Stage 3 music classroom

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## Abstract

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Over the past decade, music education policy, pedagogy, and research in England has been shaped by a neoliberal discourse of invulnerability, in which the benefits of music upon academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development have been extolled for their influence upon the education of prosperous and independent individuals. However, research in music studies suggests that such benefits are far from universal. On the contrary, music-making—especially within compulsory classroom education—often reveals individuals' shortcomings and dependencies.

Such diverse experiences in the music classroom highlight an urgent need for music education to be reframed by an understanding of 'musical vulnerability': individuals' inherent and situational openness to being affected by the semantic and somatic properties of music. Drawing on existing vulnerability studies, I evaluate how music can foster both positive receptivity and negative susceptibility, depending on its delineation of self-identity, social identity, and space, and its embodiment through aural receptivity, mimetic participation, and affective transmission.

Using a two-phase phenomenological ethnography, I investigate teachers' and pupils' lived experiences of musical vulnerability in the Key Stage 3 (KS3) music classroom (ages 11–14). In Phase 1, interviews with music teachers reveal the interaction between interpersonal and personal vulnerabilities—including musical, personality, and neurological differences—in instances of musical receptivity and susceptibility. Phase 2 comprises ethnographic observations and a focus group interview with pupils in one KS3 music class. It exposes how values espoused in the music classroom require pupils to negotiate conflicting musical expectations, identities, and abilities while making music together. While this can prompt fruitful compromise and resilience, it can also cause exclusion and resignation. I therefore conclude that music education policy, pedagogy, and research should prioritise a 'critical pedagogy of care', acknowledging music's capacity both to heal and to harm, and equipping teachers and pupils to respond critically and care-fully in situations of musical vulnerability.



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## List of abbreviations

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ABRSM	Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
A-level	Advanced Level
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport (United Kingdom)
DfE	Department for Education (United Kingdom)
DoE	Department of Education (United States)
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EFHS	East Fen High School
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IB	International Baccalaureate
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ISI	Independent Schools Inspectorate
ISM	Incorporated Society of Musicians
KS	Key Stage
LED	Lived Experience Description
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-Spirited, Asexual, or Ally
MPA	Music Performance Anxiety
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
O-level	Ordinary Level
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEN	Special Educational Needs
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
T-level	Technical Level
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Declaration of authorship

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I, Elizabeth H. MacGregor, confirm that this thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University of Sheffield's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. Aspects of the present research project have been published or presented as follows:

### *Chapters 1 & 2*

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Elizabeth H. MacGregor

27 May 2022

## 1. Introduction: Policy, pedagogy, and vulnerability in music education

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### 1.1. Philip's experience

In my first teaching post, at a small independent secondary school in the English countryside, I taught a boy named Philip.<sup>1</sup> Philip was a bright and energetic 11-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, on a Wednesday afternoon, 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 lessons. He loitered in the corridors of the department while his peers were practising. He refused help or encouragement. Almost before he had begun, he had given up.

Philip's experience shocked me. It stood in stark contrast to the familiar rhetoric of the music education policy, pedagogy, and research undergirding my classroom curriculum: namely, the expectation that music-making would have a positive effect on pupils' academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development (Philpott, 2012). Contrary to the stipulations of policies such as England's National Plan for Music Education (2011), National Curriculum for Music (2013), and Model Music Curriculum (2021a), Philip's experience of classroom music-making did not inspire him to develop a love of music, foster his talent as a musician, or enrich his sense of social inclusion. Rather than encounter opportunity, achievement, and friendship, Philip encountered shortcoming, disappointment, and conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent schools in England are private, fee-paying schools. Secondary schools educate pupils aged between 11 and 18 (see Section 1.2). For purposes of confidentiality, 'Philip' is a pseudonym.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: POLICY, PEDAGOGY, AND VULNERABILITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

Philip's experience therefore challenged me. It challenged me to ask how, in his experience and that of others like him, classroom music-making could be at times so beneficial and at other times so detrimental. And it challenged me to ask what that should mean for music education policy, pedagogy, and research.

Questions surrounding the potentially beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making are by no means new. Scholars in fields ranging from historical musicology and popular music studies, to sound studies and music psychology, have identified music's longstanding associations not just with nurturing wellbeing and demarcating inclusive spaces (DeNora, 2013), but with inflicting incidental and even integral pain (Cloonan & Johnson, 2002). Incidental musical pain has been associated with public noise disturbance (Hirsch, 2007; Llano, 2018) and the perpetuation of symbolic and structural violence through certain musical practices (Cheng, 2020; Powell et al., 2017). Integral musical pain has been documented in the burgeoning literature on music's use in war and torture, which has surveyed music's role in, for example, the Holocaust (Brauer, 2016), the Iraq war (Daughtry, 2015), and the Guantanamo Bay detention camp (Cusick, 2006, 2013).

Within the field of music education there has grown a similarly acute awareness of both the benefits and detriments of music-making in classroom contexts. Scholars have called out the 'systematic harm' enacted by music education which fails to develop pupils' musical identities (Wright, 2019, p. 218). Increasingly, inequalities relating to issues of class (A. Bull, 2019), gender and sexuality (Green, 2010), race and ethnicity (Hess, 2021), religion (Harris, 2006), and disability (Churchill & Laes, 2021) are being brought to light in scholarly discourse. Yet this has not translated into music education policy and pedagogy that accounts for experiences like Philip's. On the contrary, the gap between internationally-acclaimed critical scholarship and the implementation of music education policy and pedagogy has only grown wider, resulting in a global decline in the position and status of music education (Aróstegui, 2016).

In light of this friction between scholarly accounts of classroom music-making and the implementation of music education policy and pedagogy, in this thesis I aim to present a conceptualisation of classroom music-making that accounts for both its beneficial and



detrimental effects, in such a way that it could be meaningfully applied to transform policy, pedagogy, and future research. In doing so, I introduce, theorise, and investigate the concept of ‘musical vulnerability’. I first ask how the concept of musical vulnerability can account for the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making in the classroom, and how it can be conceptualised for application to music education policy and pedagogy. I then apply this conceptualisation in an empirical investigation exploring the extent to which musical vulnerability is experienced in the classroom, how it is characterised, and how it interfaces with pedagogical practice. I conclude by suggesting how policy and pedagogy could be developed to foster a symbiotic relationship with musical vulnerability in order to harness the beneficial effects of classroom music-making and mitigate its detrimental effects.

By way of introduction, I begin in Section 1.2 by situating my research within the contemporary political and educational climate in England. In Section 1.3 I address how music education policy in England relates to existing evidence for the beneficial effects of music-making and review extant research into the detrimental effects of music-making. In Section 1.4 I introduce musical vulnerability as a lens upon the complex issues arising from the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making in the classroom, before concluding with Section 1.5, where I summarise my research questions and provide an overview of the subsequent chapters.

### *1.1.1. A note on terminology: ‘Music’ and ‘music-making’*

Throughout this thesis I use the term ‘music-making’ to refer to music as ‘practice’. As is widely accepted in practical, praxial, and pragmatic approaches to music education—and in the so-called ‘new’ musicology (Goehr, 2007; Tomlinson, 1993)—‘music is not simply a collection of products or objects. Fundamentally, music is something that people do’ (Elliott, 1995, p. 39). In this thesis, music-making should therefore be understood to encompass all kinds of active and passive engagement with music, including (but not exclusively) performing, composing, and listening. Unless stated otherwise, references to ‘music’ or expressions such as ‘musical engagement’ or ‘musical participation’ should be considered equivalent to music-making. For the sake of clarity, I avoid the terms ‘musicking’ (Small, 1998), ‘musicing’ (Elliott & Silverman, 2015), and ‘music(k)ing’ (Froehlich, 2018), since each refer to specific conditions that are not

necessarily fulfilled in all situations of music-making (Froehlich & Smith, 2017; Odendaal et al., 2014).

## 1.2. ‘The power of music’: Music education policy in England

Since the advent of Thatcherite Conservatism in England in the 1980s, the steady emergence of neoliberalism has shaped English politics. Neoliberalism is typically understood as the political prioritisation of free market capitalism and individualism (OED, 2018). Its proponents aim to reduce public expenditure, increase economic efficiency, and thereby cultivate prosperous and independent individuals who are not reliant on the social support of the state (Belfiore, 2002). Those who promote neoliberal educational policy expect individuals to be educated into compliance with the dominant socioeconomic system: to become ‘docile worker-citizens directly connected to the (possessive-individualist) global economy’ (J. Cole & McKay, 2015, p. 125). They seek to persuade individuals that ‘the main goals of education are to produce economically engaged and eminently employable citizens’ (Horsley, 2015, p. 68).

Neoliberal educational policy is often characterised by two central tenets: first, the development of a ‘knowledge-based economy’; and second, the implementation of standardised evaluation measures for international educational comparison (Aróstegui, 2016). To contribute to the knowledge-based economy, curricula privilege key competencies that drive economic productivity and efficiency, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. Progress in these subjects is scrutinised in high-stakes global rankings, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which impels a culture of increasing accountability and regulation by performativity (Aróstegui, 2016; Ball, 2003; Burnard & White, 2008).

Since the formation of a coalition government between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in 2010, the development of a knowledge-based economy in England has been dictated by an ambitious programme of education policy reforms pursuing the so-called ‘social justice case for an academic curriculum’ (Gibb, 2015, n.p.). Former Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, first used this neoliberal reappropriation of ‘social justice’ to validate a Thatcherite emphasis upon preparing pupils for the profitable pursuit of market interests

(Horsley, 2015, p. 63; Woodford, 2012). In 2015, Gibb contended that increasing academic rigour across school subjects

will give more pupils the preparation they need to succeed—whether that’s getting a place at a good university, starting an apprenticeship, or finding their first job. [It] will provide the foundations of an education system with social justice at its heart, in which every young person reaches their potential. (n.p.)

Music education policy has not been exempt from ‘the social justice case for an academic curriculum’ (Bate, 2020). The state-sanctioned knowledge enshrined in documents such as the National Plan for Music Education (2011), the National Curriculum for Music (2013), and the Model Music Curriculum (2021) perpetuates hegemonic neoliberal values (Wright, 2012), acting as a manifesto for raising academic standards to solve perceived educative problems (Benedict & Schmidt, 2012). Over the last decade, this has become increasingly evident as policymakers have extolled the development of musical skills as a beneficial route towards prosperity and independence through academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development.

The publication of the National Plan for Music Education, which was released in 2011 in response to an independent review conducted by Darren Henley (2011), emphasised a renewed political interest in academic rigour in music education. Following years of reported variability and discrepancy in the delivery of school music (Ofsted, 2009, 2012), the National Plan proposed a clear two-fold aim for improving accessible and academically-rigorous music education: ‘that more children will have access to the greatest of art forms’, and ‘that they do better as a result in every other subject’ (DfE & DCMS, 2011, p. 4).

Soon afterwards, England’s National Curriculum for Music also underwent significant revision. In all subjects, the newly-revised National Curriculum aimed to provide pupils from all backgrounds with ‘the essential knowledge that they need to become educated citizens’, introduce them to ‘the best that has been thought and said’, and engender within them ‘an appreciation of human creativity and achievement’ (DfE, 2013, p. 6). With regard to music, the

National Curriculum emphasised how, as pupils developed musical skills, so too would they ‘increase their self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement’ (p. 257).

Despite its emphasis upon the rigorous development of traditional musical skills—such as appreciation of the canon and competency in reading staff notation—the National Curriculum for Music did offer some inbuilt flexibility within its guidelines. Unlike its predecessor, the revised version spanned only two pages, offering teachers a degree of professional autonomy in deciding how to implement the curriculum guidance in their specific contexts (Bate, 2020). However, in 2021, the publication of the Model Music Curriculum signalled a reverse in this trend towards curriculum flexibility and teacher autonomy. Designated as non-statutory guidance for the implementation of the National Curriculum, the Model Music Curriculum was intended both to ensure that ‘all pupils can benefit from knowledge rich and diverse lessons’, and to ‘make it easier for teachers to plan lessons and help to reduce workload’ (Gibb, 2019, n.p.). Although it has been praised for reinforcing the government’s commitment to ensuring that pupils receive classroom music lessons until the age of 14 (Music Mark, 2021), it has already faced criticism for being overly prescriptive, lacking a detailed sense of focus and purpose, and containing inconsistencies in expectations across school year groups (ISM, 2021).

Although schools are not legally required to adopt the Model Music Curriculum, it has set a demanding and ambitious benchmark for the implementation of a music education of ‘the highest quality’ (DfE, 2021a, p. 2). It is likely that its tenets will inform the forthcoming refreshed National Plan for Music Education, which was due to be released in 2020 but has been delayed indefinitely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (DfE, 2021b, p. 7). Already, the Model Music Curriculum’s emphasis on the importance of pre-planned, well-sequenced curriculum time has been reiterated by the most recent report into school music from the state schools’ inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted). Published after almost a decade-long hiatus in their triennial school music reports, Ofsted’s Research Review in Music posits three ‘pillars of progression’ for underpinning ‘robust, direct and incremental teaching’. It argues that accomplishment in technical,

constructive, and expressive aspects of music-making is central to ‘a broad and balanced curriculum’ (Ofsted, 2021, n.p.).

### *1.2.1. Advocacy and music education policy in England*

According to the National Plan, National Curriculum, and Model Music Curriculum, music is of instrumental value for developing prosperous and independent individuals who will contribute to the socioeconomic system as ‘the next generation of Adeles, Nigel Kennedys and Alex Turners’ (Gibb, 2019, n.p.). This sentiment—alongside arguments for music’s therapeutic, civilising, emotional, and rational values (Philpott, 2012)—has persisted among advocates seeking to secure a stable future for music education in England. In 2018, the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) published the results of a survey arguing that school music education is an essential contributor to the nation’s society and economy: ‘Britain has less than 1% of the world population, but one in seven albums sold worldwide in 2014 was by a British act. This is a critical part of Britain’s soft power’ (ISM, 2018, p. 3). The following year, a State of the Nation report highlighted the need for more inclusive music education so that the United Kingdom does not lose ‘a major part of the talent pipeline to its world-renowned music industry’ (Daubney et al., 2019, p. 2). The ISM’s 2020 report—concerned primarily with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school music-making—then restated how ‘the creative industries, now worth more than £111 billion to the UK economy, rely heavily on the pipeline of creative talent from schools which has been essential in creating the UK’s world-renowned music industry’ (Underhill, 2020, p. 3).

As I go on to highlight in Section 1.3, advocacy reporting the positive socioeconomic effects of music education is not ungrounded in research evidence. The National Plan, for example, references Susan Hallam’s influential paper, ‘The Power of Music: Its Impact on the Intellectual, Social and Personal Development of Children and Young People’ (2010), which summarises evidence from neuroscience and psychology for music’s positive effects on skills such as literacy and numeracy. However, despite the ubiquity of studies reporting the benefits of musical engagement, such reports must be considered with care. In contrast to the aforementioned policies, the Ofsted Research Review in Music (2021) points out that:

## 1. INTRODUCTION: POLICY, PEDAGOGY, AND VULNERABILITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

music's place in school life is sometimes justified by reference to literature that supports its wider benefits. [...] This focus on the wider benefits, however, is not always helpful if it encourages a view of music as existing in the service of other subjects and competencies. (n.p.)

Alternatively, Ofsted's review stresses that learning music is primarily 'good for becoming more musical', and 'starts from the assumption that a central purpose of good music education is for pupils to make more music, think more musically and consequently become more musical' (Ofsted, 2021, n.p.). This shift in justification for music in the curriculum—from extramusical to musical, extrinsic to intrinsic, instrumental to aesthetic—mirrors similar changes in the historic development of music education philosophy and advocacy (Mark, 2012; Røyseng & Varkøy, 2014). Yet it only superficially veils the review's underlying neoliberal agenda: to 'become more musical' is equated with becoming proficient and confident in traditional forms of performance and composition, and thereby equipped to contribute to the commercial success of England's 'powerhouse' music industries (Ofsted, 2021, n.p.).

In this regard, both instrumental and apparently intrinsic legitimisations of music's place in the curriculum reflect an attitude of hubris amongst policymakers and advocates (Rinholm & Varkøy, 2020). Each argument represents a political undertaking determined by the pre-ordained end-goal of proving music's worth within the existing dominant socioeconomic system (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010; Bowman, 2005; Kanellopoulos & Barahanou, 2021; Mota & Figueiredo, 2012). Unsubstantiated claims cling to the assumption that 'music (all of it) is important because of things it (all of it, invariantly, because of its innermost nature) does that no other practice does' (Bowman, 2014, n.p.). By necessity, any factors at odds with this assumption are overruled, so 'the positive effects of [...] music [...] [are] overestimated and the negative dimensions underestimated' (Rinholm & Varkøy, 2020, p. 40).

The exaggeration of the beneficial effects of music-making is problematic for music education advocacy. Chris Philpott (2012) highlights how so-called 'soft' justifications for music in the curriculum (including arguments for its instrumental, therapeutic, civilising, emotional, and rational values) can romanticise music's 'special' effects (or 'magic' (Camlin et

al., 2020)) and prevent it ‘from being taken seriously as a “hard” subject’ (Philpott, 2012, p. 50). This can lead to instances in which music is offered a nominal place in the curriculum to gain approval from lobbying advocates. As in Brazil’s Law 11.769 (2008) and the United States’ Every Student Succeeds Act (2016), the success of advocates in securing music’s place in the curriculum has been counterbalanced by the relative lack of importance attributed to its role within the neoliberal, knowledge-based economy. In Brazil, music education legislation omits any suggestion of specified content or achievement objectives, and therefore has had only a negligible impact on the curricula actually delivered within schools (Manning & Kamil, 2017). Likewise, in the United States, the place of music within the ‘well-rounded curriculum’ prescribed by the Every Student Succeeds Act remains peripheral. Unlike core subjects, including science, mathematics, and reading, music is not subject to standardised testing and may be incorporated through extra-curricular rather than curricular activities (Kos Jr., 2018).

In the case of music education policy in England, the reiteration of instrumental justifications for music’s place in the curriculum has led to the simplification, generalisation, and decontextualisation of research findings reporting the beneficial effects of music-making. Inaccurate claims and ‘neuromyths’ about music’s benefits continue to abound (Odendaal et al., 2019): the National Plan (2011) underlines ‘a direct link between music and improved reading ability’, ‘a link between mathematics and music’, and ‘a connection between music and increased scores in IQ’ (p. 42); and the National Curriculum (2013) praises music as ‘a universal language that embodies one of the highest forms of creativity’ (p. 257). At least superficially, music therefore appears to have taken on a significant role in the curriculum, lauded for its merits upon academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development. Unlike in Brazil and the United States, its subject content is carefully prescribed through detailed guidance such as the Model Music Curriculum, and academic rigour is encouraged through technical, constructive, and expressive skill development.

Yet these expectations of music’s place in the curriculum—of its formative role in shaping prosperous, independent, and socioeconomically-compliant individuals—fail to account for many individuals’ experiences of music-making. As Philip’s experience in Section 1.1 demonstrates, ‘it might be the case that music “heals” or enables us to become more socially

adept, but we should also entertain the idea that music might actually cause us to be psychologically ill or excluded' (Philpott, 2012, p. 49). Regardless of the ways in which music might contribute to the 'social justice case for an academic curriculum' through increasing pupils' self-confidence, sense of achievement, or musicality (DfE, 2013; Ofsted, 2021), this is not the sum total of its worth. Rather, it is only through the consideration of both the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making that we may begin to see how 'it could be that music is more important than any of us think it to be' (Philpott, 2012, p. 61).

### *1.2.2. A note on terminology: Schooling in England*

In England, the neoliberal political agenda has influenced not only the changing face of educational policy, but also the structure and governance of the national school system. In the following overview I therefore offer a brief introduction to this idiosyncratic system, with the aim of clarifying terminology used in subsequent chapters.

English schools principally fall into two categories: state schools (funded by central government and accountable to Ofsted), and independent schools (private, fee-paying schools regulated by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)) (Brock, 2015). Between 1970 and 2000, state schools operated within a non-selective comprehensive system managed by local authorities, although in some regions grammar schools (with admission based on academic ability), faith schools (with admission based on religious observance), and special schools (catering for some pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)) continued to exist alongside comprehensive schools (Gorard, 2015). Beginning in the early 2000s, an increasing number of state schools converted to state academies. The implementation of the academies policy—which aimed to offer state schools greater autonomy over issues of curriculum, staffing, and admissions—allowed converting schools to remain state-funded but become independent from local authority control. In reality, however, a convoluted system of stand-alone academies and multi-academy trusts has led to increasing fragmentation of the state school system and stark socioeconomic discrepancies between schools (Gorard, 2015; West & Wolfe, 2019). By 2018, 27% of primary schools and 72% of secondary schools were academies (West & Wolfe, 2019, p. 73).



The majority of pupils in England attend state schools: on average, only 7% of pupils attend independent schools (Gorard, 2015). Independent schools—also known as private schools, or, confusingly, public schools—are often more varied in form than state schools, and may include faith schools, performing arts schools, or special schools. Nonetheless, across both state and independent systems pupils typically begin formal schooling at the age of four and leave at the age of 18. Primary schools (or independent preparatory schools) typically educate children until the age of 11, and secondary schools (or independent senior schools) educate children until the age of 16, and may offer sixth-form provision for 17- and 18-year-olds. However, some preparatory schools—and in some regions, state-funded middle schools—educate children until the age of 13 before they move to senior or secondary school.

Although state academies and independent schools exert a certain degree of control over their curriculum provision, most state schools and some independent schools are at least nominally guided by the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013). The National Curriculum determines which subjects are compulsory for pupils to study until the age of 14, and includes art, drama, and music. At the age of 14, pupils then make their own choice of subjects in preparation for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations taken at the age of 16. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc), an award first introduced in 2010, necessitates that pupils opt for certain core subjects at GCSE: English language and literature, mathematics, science, geography or history, and a modern foreign language (DfE, 2019). Following GCSEs, most pupils make further subject choices for examinations to be sat at the age of 18: Advanced Levels (A-levels), the International Baccalaureate (IB), or Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) diplomas.<sup>2</sup> This is summarised in *Table 1.1*, which shows pupils' usual progression through secondary school.

### *1.2.3. A note on terminology: 'Pupils' and 'students'*

In line with existing music education policy in England (DfE, 2013, 2021a; DfE & DCMS, 2011), throughout this thesis I use the term 'pupils' to refer to school-age children, unless

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<sup>2</sup> From September 2022, most BTEC diplomas are due to be replaced by a new 'high-quality technical alternative qualification' to A-levels, to be known as T-levels (DfE, 2022b).

Table 1.1. Secondary school provision in England

<i>Age</i>	<i>Year group</i>	<i>Key Stage (KS)</i>	<i>Examinations</i>
11	7		
12	8	KS3 <sup>3</sup>	
13	9		
14	10		
15	11	KS4	GCSE
16	12		
17	13	KS5 (sixth form)	A-level / IB / BTEC
18			

quoting scholars whose preferred terminology is ‘students’. This ensures a clear differentiation between school-age ‘pupils’ and undergraduate and postgraduate ‘students’ (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. xii). Any possible invocation that ‘pupils’ lack autonomy or maturity compared to ‘students’, ‘learners’, or ‘young people’ is unintentional.

### 1.3. ‘Music can be bad for you’: The beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making

To date, there exists a great wealth of research into the positive outcomes of musical engagement which has been drawn upon by music education policymakers and advocates alike. Papers in disciplines ranging from neurology and psychology to sociology and education have

<sup>3</sup> Traditionally KS3 has been three years long and is followed by two years of study for GCSEs. However, some schools have moved towards a two-year KS3, beginning GCSEs in Year 9. Though there has been concern that this is to the detriment of arts subjects that remain optional at GCSE (Daubney & Mackrill, 2018), Ofsted has indicated that there is no preferred length for KS3 provided that a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’ is provided (Harford, 2020). Since this thesis primarily concerns compulsory music provision, I use KS3 to refer to the two or three years in which classroom music participation is compulsory, with or without Year 9 depending on the school.

presented evidence of music's perceived positive influence on academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development. A recent scoping review published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) helpfully illustrates the extent of such research (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). It maps a global research literature of over 900 publications concerning the outcomes of music and arts engagement on health and wellbeing across the lifespan, ranging from music's benefits for mother-infant bonding in neonatal care (p. 29) to its effect on reducing distress and pain in end-of-life care (p. 49).

While the WHO's (2019) report offers a succinct summary of much of the existing research into the beneficial effects of musical engagement, there have also been concerted efforts to collate evidence of music's benefits specifically upon young people. Perhaps most notable in this regard is Susan Hallam's (2015) book, *The Power of Music*. Following her earlier article referenced by the National Plan (Hallam, 2010), Hallam offers a detailed synthesis of studies into the impact of musical engagement on young people's language and literacy skills, numeracy and reasoning performance, aural and visual memory, and social and emotional development. She concludes that 'there can be many benefits of active engagement in making music' (Hallam, 2015, p. 103), but also highlights a number of limitations in existing studies. She argues that extant research is unclear on what specific music-making activities may be (most) beneficial to young people, and questions the potential influence of duration and intensity of musical engagement. She also underlines 'the issue of the quality of the teaching. When the teaching is poor there may be no benefits and even negative outcomes' (p. 103).<sup>4</sup>

Hallam's apprehension over the potential effects of musical engagement in situations of poor-quality teaching is shared by a number of scholars in music-related research. Some have expressed concern over the consequences of utilising music not in knowledgeable ways (MacDonald et al., 2012); others have criticised the very small and unsubstantiated effect size for the relationship between music and wellbeing (Clift, 2012); and others still have highlighted the lack of attention to individuals' personal musical experiences in systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and randomised control trials (Odendaal et al., 2019; Perkins et al., 2020; Wigram &

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<sup>4</sup> An updated version of Hallam's 2015 publication is due to be released in the coming year (Hallam & Himonides, forthcoming).

Gold, 2012). Such misgivings reflect a long tradition of philosophical reflection upon the potentially negative influence of engagement with music and the arts, including the way in which they may distract from worthier pastimes, cause the imitation of undesirable behaviours, or fail to offer valuable intellectual insight (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Kennaway, 2016).

In the following sections, I review a range of music-related research in order to summarise existing concerns surrounding the potentially detrimental effects of music-making. I begin in Section 1.3.1 by focussing on neurological studies of amusia and musical anhedonia, before discussing maladaptive listening behaviours and Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) from the perspective of music psychology in Section 1.3.2. In Section 1.3.3 I adopt a broader sociological stance to consider the effects of group participation and social expectations in music-making. To conclude, in Section 1.3.4 I address findings from educational studies—in music and other subjects including sport, mathematics, and languages—to consider any detrimental effects associated specifically with classroom music-making.

### *1.3.1. A neurological perspective: Amusia and musical anhedonia*

Recently, studies in neurology have begun to question the previously ‘un-interrogated assumption in the research of music and the brain that all encounters with music are necessarily good’ (Odendaal et al., 2019, p. 12). A large-scale quantitative study (Peretz & Vuvar, 2017) found congenital, pitch-based amusia to occur in approximately 1.5% of the population. Individuals with amusia lack the ability to recognise familiar melodies or identify ‘wrong notes’ in music. Although amusia has been shown to have only a negligible effect upon individuals’ ability to perceive emotions expressed in music (Gosselin et al., 2015), it does appear to have a more significant (though variable) effect upon emotions induced by music, including positive experiences such as pleasure and arousal (McDonald & Stewart, 2008; Omigie et al., 2012). Claire McDonald and Lauren Stewart’s (2008) study with 21 participants with amusia and 21 control participants demonstrated that only 43% of amusics reported liking or loving music, compared with 100% of controls. A similar result was found by Diana Omigie, Daniel Müllensiefen, and Lauren Stewart (2012), in whose study 59% of amusics found music less

likely to be enjoyable or catch their attention, compared to 94% of controls who showed significantly greater liking for music in their everyday lives.

Evidence from studies into amusia suggests that neurological deficits in musical perception can limit musical appreciation and cause music to be experienced as boring, irritable, or even unbearable. Some cases of amusia may be so severe as to render listening to music as excruciatingly painful, like screeching or banging (Sacks, 2011, p. 108). However, an even more striking finding in neurology has suggested that negative experiences of listening to music may affect up to 10% of the population—and not just individuals with amusia. Musical anhedonia is a specific hedonic disorder which has been shown to occur in a significant proportion of otherwise healthy individuals. It is characterised by a distinct lack of pleasure when listening to music, even when musical perception is unhindered by conditions such as amusia or hearing loss (Belfi & Loui, 2020). Individuals with musical anhedonia lack the physiological reactions to pleasurable musical stimuli possessed by other individuals, such as increased dopamine release, heart rate, skin conductance, and reports of chills (Belfi & Loui, 2020; Mas-Herrero et al., 2014). This suggests that disturbance to the neural pathways facilitating music's emotional impact may occur even while other pleasurable experiences such as food and exercise continue to activate the brain's reward system (Mas-Herrero et al., 2014).

The significant incidence of amusia and musical anhedonia within the general population undermines any assumption that the capacity for musical enjoyment or pleasure is intrinsic to humanity. On the contrary, positive and negative responses to music-making appear to vary at the level of individual neurological differences, causing a range of musical behaviours and preferences varying from musical anhedonia to musicophilia (Sacks, 2011).<sup>5</sup> This 'intricate, intimate, and flexible coupling between the auditory and reward systems' (Belfi & Loui, 2020, p. 112) plays a significant role in musical experiences including listening, performing, and group participation. In turn, each of these experiences is also subject to the impact of factors

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<sup>5</sup> Other neurological conditions affecting individuals' musical perception and appreciation include musicogenic epilepsy (epileptic seizures induced by music), musical hallucination, varieties of amusia including dystimbrina, amelodia, and dysharmonia, and auditory processing disorders such as hyperacusis, diplacusis, and tinnitus (Sacks, 2011).

including personality traits, sociomusical relationships, and the physical demands of musicianship.

*1.3.2. A psychological perspective: Listening behaviours and MPA*

Tia DeNora (2013) has theorised how personal music listening can be used for ‘asylum-seeking’: ‘respite from distress and a place and time in which it is possible to flourish’ (p. 1). Listening to music can allow an individual to become removed from or to refurnish and redefine a space. However, she warns that though this can be experienced positively, as greater connectivity with the outside world, it can also lead to extreme solipsism, social withdrawal, or the exertion of symbolic violence. Every ‘musical good’ has an associated ‘musical harm’ (Alperson, 2019, p. 37). Musical asylum-seeking can ultimately render listeners ‘vulnerable’, left ‘perhaps with fewer skills for the negotiation of real life’ (DeNora, 2013, p. 68). Maladaptive listening behaviours can cause symptoms of psychopathology, such as aggression, anti-social behaviour, depression, and anxiety (Miranda et al., 2012), which may lead to an overemphasis on self-definition over the need for strong community formation and social bonding (Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Turino, 2009). This in turn can become especially problematic when consumption of specific musics becomes entwined with discriminative ideologies (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Similar so-called ‘vulnerabilities’ experienced by musical performers have been explored in extensive research into MPA. The technical demands, competitive nature, and emotional investment associated with musical performance can lead to acute psychological and physical stress for some musicians (Gross & Musgrave, 2016; Papageorgi & Kopiez, 2012), resulting in a specific anxiety disorder often accompanied by social anxiety or generalised anxiety disorders (D. T. Kenny, 2010). MPA describes ‘a state of arousal and anxiety occurring before or while a person is performing non-anonymously in front of an audience producing a valuable or evaluated task touching on his / her self-esteem’ (Kesselring, 2006, p. 309). Dianna Kenny and Margaret Osborne (2006) have suggested that MPA can be associated with David Barlow’s (2000) ‘triple vulnerability’ model of anxiety disorders caused by the integration of:

## MUSICAL VULNERABILITY

1. Generalised biological vulnerability: genetic associations with high neuroticism and low extraversion.
2. Generalised psychological vulnerability: anxieties resulting from negative experiences of uncontrollability or unpredictability in early life.
3. Specific psychological vulnerabilities: specific anxieties focussed on particular objects or events. (p. 1252)

Though this model is widely cited in emotion theory (D. T. Kenny, 2010; Suárez et al., 2008), it offers only a limited insight into the association between anxiety and vulnerability. Barlow's (2000) definition of vulnerability is equivalent with that of diathesis—the tendency to suffer from a particular medical condition (p. 1253). This parallel between vulnerability and the undesirability of suffering overlooks the possibility that vulnerability associated with MPA may have both adaptive and maladaptive effects, as in the case of music listening behaviours. Though MPA is most commonly associated with debilitating anxiety which can lead to mistakes, failure, and low self-esteem, adaptive anxiety can enhance performance through stimulating alertness and concentration. For example, the negative perfectionist tendencies often associated with MPA (such as negative responses to imperfection) can also occur in positive forms closely related with intrinsic motivation, effort, and high achievement (Stoeber & Eismann, 2007). Likewise, moderate arousal before a performance, leading to a sense of vulnerability, can aid a performer's sense of focus, which—if reinforced through positive post-performance feedback—can result in positive self-concept and further motivation for success (Papageorgi et al., 2007; Senyshyn & O'Neill, 2001).

Research into musical training and personality traits has shown that musicians' 'openness-to-experience' may render them particularly vulnerable to both these adaptive and maladaptive anxieties. Individuals with formal musical training or sophisticated musical preferences (defined as 'reflective-complex' or 'intense-rebellious' as opposed to 'upbeat-conventional' (see Vella & Mills, 2017)) often score more highly in the personality trait of openness-to-experience, which is associated with creativity, imagination, and sensitivity (Gibson et al., 2009; Vella & Mills, 2017). Those who are particularly open to experience seem

to be more likely to feel vulnerable to music—open to being emotionally moved in either a positive or negative sense. Although the direction of causality between musicianship and personality is unclear, openness-to-experience has been shown to be positively correlated with duration of musical training (Corrigall et al., 2013), frisson-inducing emotional response to music (Colver & El-Alayli, 2016), and the ability to use music to communicate and evoke emotion (Ruth et al., 2020).

*1.3.3. A sociological perspective: Group participation and social expectations*

Reports of vulnerability stemming from musicians' openness-to-experience correspond with experiential evidence collected by Jackie Wiggins (2011). Her study interviewing 40 individuals about being and becoming professional Western classical musicians identifies vulnerability as a major emergent theme. Individuals described vulnerability as an essential—but sometimes detrimental—facet of musicianship. In a positive light, vulnerability in music-making was associated with openness and sensitivity to the possibilities of alternative interpretations and perspectives, and a willingness to move outside a comfort zone. However, vulnerability could also lead to maladaptive performance anxieties, struggles for perfection, and self-doubt. Such negative vulnerabilities sometimes accompanied music's close association with self-concept and cultural identity. Since 'the sonic nature of the art form makes the product public even when the producer is not ready to share it' (p. 358), musicians often struggled with the way in which music could present a vivid—and possibly unwanted—insight into their innermost self-identity. In other cases, further situational vulnerabilities were associated with destructive institutional expectations and pedagogies, such as authoritarian teaching, unrealistic targets, and lack of personal autonomy (p. 361).

Wiggins' (2011) findings relating vulnerability in music-making to self-concept and social identity are reinforced by further empirical research into the beneficial and detrimental effects of group music participation. Gunter Kreutz and Peter Brüngrer's (2012) investigation into negative experiences associated with amateur choral singing remains one of the earliest studies to explicitly report both the positive and negative effects of music-making. In surveying 3,145 active members of amateur choral societies, they found that 24.7% of participants



reported negative experiences, including social issues regarding relationships with the conductor, other singers, or self-perception, and aesthetic issues relating to musical preferences and performance demands. Despite concluding that such experiences did not seem to outweigh the benefits of participation, they rightly acknowledged that their results were likely biased towards singers who maintained regular participation despite negative experiences. It is possible that for some former members of amateur choral societies, similar negative experiences were significant enough to prompt quitting altogether.

Drawing on Kreutz and Brünger's research, Victoria Williamson and Michael Bonshor's (2019) study into brass band participation also reported on both its positive and negative effects on wellbeing. They noted that around 10% of their 346 survey participants reported negative impacts of playing in a brass band. Physical health issues such as toothache and hearing loss were noted, as were social, psychological, and emotional issues such as pressures on family relationships, performance anxiety, and disappointment and frustration during competitive performing.

Although both Kreutz and Brünger (2012) and Williamson and Bonshor (2019) concluded that the positive effects of musical participation far outweighed the negative ones, their studies offer a valuable insight into the potential hazards of musical participation. Their empirical evidence supports observations that group music-making requires the careful balancing of personal aspirations and social expectations, which can easily be upset by individual habits or unreasonable group expectations (Pitts, 2005). Without careful management and understanding of the paradox between individual contributions and group interests, music-making can quickly dissolve into a frustrating and unsatisfying experience (MacGregor, 2020; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991).

### *1.3.4. An educational perspective: School music-making and institutional expectations*

The challenge of balancing individual aspirations and personalities with group interests and expectations is particularly prominent in school music-making (MacGregor, 2020). As Wiggins (2011) describes, issues in the classroom such as prioritising teacher authority over pupils' agency can have lasting and detrimental effects on individuals' attitudes towards music-making.

Nonetheless, this is not unique to music. Negative school experiences stemming from institutional expectations and pedagogies have been thoroughly documented in subjects including sport, Physical Education (PE), science, mathematics, foreign languages, and literacy. Evidence suggests that each of these subjects can have lasting and potentially detrimental effects on individuals' lives, either because of anxiety resulting from task difficulty (e.g., McPherson & O'Neill, 2010), frustration caused by teachers' approaches (e.g., Bekdemir, 2010; Hudson et al., 2010), or a sense of exposure in performance-related activities such as sport and reading aloud (e.g., Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Roe & Vukelich, 1998). Yet in one significant regard, music remains distinctive:

part of music making and music learning involves the vulnerability of baring one's musicianship, one's musical understanding, one's whole musical identity to others, often in the context of seeking validation from those one respects. There is vulnerability in knowing about and comparing oneself to musicians who have come before or to standards set by respected others. There is vulnerability in being a musical decision-maker and making one's musical ideas or interpretations public. (Wiggins, 2011, p. 358)

As Wiggins highlights, unlike other school subjects, music-making has the potential to reveal multiple simultaneous vulnerabilities: those stemming from task difficulty, institutional expectations, and the exposure of self-identity in artistic performance. There is, therefore, a need to account for these vulnerabilities specifically within the context of the music classroom, and for music education policy, pedagogy, and research to be shaped accordingly.

*i. Sport, PE, science, mathematics, foreign languages, and literacy*

Both extra-curricular sport and PE lessons have been shown to have significant negative effects on many individuals, despite wide-ranging evidence of its positive contributions to personal and interpersonal development. Results from the Canadian Youth Experience Survey suggest that sports activities lead to higher levels of stress than similar extra-curricular arts, academic,

or service activities (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Hansen & Larson, 2007; Larson et al., 2006). Stress is often associated with relationships with peers and coaches, and the competitive nature of the sporting environment (Dworkin & Larson, 2006; Streat, 2009). The case is similar in PE lessons, in which negative memories often relate to teacher incompetence leading to an overemphasis on competitive games without sufficient training in motor skills (Morgan & Hansen, 2008). Such experiences in PE can have a lasting negative impact, not just on future PE teachers (Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Morgan & Hansen, 2008), but also on individuals' involvement in physical activity in their own leisure time (Cardinal et al., 2013; Morgan & Bourke, 2008).

Other classroom subjects may also influence individuals' identities and anxieties as learners—both as children and later as adults. Research into secondary science education shows that as pupils progress through school they are more likely to find science boring, poorly explained, and irrelevant (Barmby et al., 2008). This may later translate into negative memories of science as uninteresting, and potentially detrimental attitudes towards its importance in everyday life (Hudson et al., 2010). Studies in 'mathematics anxiety' also suggest that learning mathematics in school can cause pronounced distress. According to Mehmet Bekdemir (2010), 'some victims with negative experiences recall vividly a moment of extreme embarrassment that sometimes wiped out years of success in mathematics and created a deep hatred for the subject' (p. 313). Experiences of teacher hostility, teacher inadequacy, and exam anxiety can perpetuate a vicious cycle of mathematics anxiety, as anxious teachers unconsciously create further anxiety in their pupils (Bekdemir, 2010; Brady & Bowd, 2005).

'Foreign language anxiety' seems to be closely related to mathematics anxiety and is related to the specific pressures of learning a new language in the classroom. Most research into foreign language anxiety has been carried out in university settings, but there is substantial evidence suggesting that anxiety sets in during secondary school, when lessons, assessments, and curriculum expectations become more demanding (Trang et al., 2013). Nonetheless, positive experiences that boost self-confidence, such as time spent overseas, are influential in reducing foreign language anxiety, suggesting that foreign language teaching could benefit from a greater focus upon strategies for improving self-confidence (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004).

The influence of teaching literacy in school has also been reported to have a long-lasting impact on individuals' lives. Proficiency in literacy skills is 'positively associated with important aspects of wellbeing, including health, beliefs about one's impact on the political process and trust in others' (Tett, 2016, p. 442). Therefore, negative experiences of reading and writing in school can lead to negative learning identities which last well into adulthood. Often, individuals' most negative experiences of literacy are related to school reading strategies, such as round-robin reading and ability-based streaming, while the influences of family and friends are considered positive (Boggs & Golden, 2009; Roe & Vukelich, 1998).

### *ii. Music-making*

As in subjects like sport, mathematics, and languages, childhood and school musical experiences can be particularly significant determinants in adults' dispositions towards music-making. According to the basic psychological needs model, how institutional expectations and pedagogies support or inhibit individuals' feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy strongly determines their later development of beliefs about musical ability, preferences, and values (P. Evans et al., 2013). Compulsory participation in music-making—such as that outlined by England's National Plan and National Curriculum—can leave a particularly marked imprint. Though compulsory participation is often intended to offer children from all backgrounds opportunities that they might not otherwise have pursued, it is well known that unavoidable exposure to music not of one's own choice can be frustrating or even painful, with the common positive emotional pull of music negated when listening is not a voluntary activity (Eerola, 2018; Frith, 2004; Johnson & Cloonan, 2009). The mixed-ability groups typical of compulsory participation can also lead to varied perceptions of musical competence and lack of appropriate differentiation (Hallam, 1998), and teacher-pupil or peer relationships can be either highly motivating or distressing. Furthermore, obligatory activities are likely to undermine a sense of personal autonomy unless care and attention is given to pupils' individual agency during participation.

Several existing studies indicate that compulsory music education can have lasting effects on adults' dispositions towards music-making. Nita Temmerman's (1993) study into

trainee teachers' recollections of music in their childhood concludes that 'school music experiences appear to have a lasting influence on people's lives'. Notably, there were 'substantially more respondents who perceive[d] school related, especially primary school music experiences unfavourably than favourably' (p. 64). Respondents' worst experiences were primarily school-related, including performance pressure, repetitive and theory-based lesson content, and unsatisfactory teaching quality; school music-making accounted for only 20% of best experiences. Comparable results were found by Helen Gavin (2001), whose study into the musical memories of expert musicians and self-professed non-musicians found that non-musicians were more likely to have hostile memories of school music as 'irrelevant' or 'a waste of time' (p. 58). Some scholars have highlighted how such memories may be associated with specific 'wounding stories'—such as being identified as 'unmusical' or a 'non-singer' by a music teacher—which can result in long-term shame or embarrassment affecting individuals' sense of musical agency (Hogle, 2021; Palkki, 2022).

Negative school music-making experiences can also have lasting influences on adults' continuing musical participation. Using life history interviews with individuals who had either ceased or lapsed in their playing, Stephanie Pitts has illustrated how adult musical participation is often coloured by past school experiences. Compulsory musical participation at school can leave a sense of 'classical music as a school thing' (Pitts & Robinson, 2016, p. 334), tainted by institutional values and detached from personal musical preferences (R. Herbert & Dibben, 2018). Some perceive the musical skills they learnt at school as disconnected from those which would be useful to them as adults, or leave school with musical and social expectations which cannot be matched by participation in amateur music-making opportunities (Pitts, 2017; Pitts & Robinson, 2016). Others, accustomed to making music under a school teacher or band director, struggle to participate in less formal, out-of-school musical practices (Isbell & Stanley, 2011; Mantie & Tucker, 2008; Woody et al., 2019). Yet others become disaffected with music while still at school through perceived exclusion from extra-curricular activities and entrenched self-criticism (Pitts, 2011), although some overcome such negative experiences to continue participating in informal music-making later in life (Palkki, 2022; Turton & Durrant, 2002).

It is widely acknowledged that lasting negative impacts are most likely to occur when school music-making becomes distanced from the reality of children's out-of-school music-making and later opportunities for continuing musical participation. Roger Mantie and Lynn Tucker (2008) contend that 'the profession's conceptualization of music teaching, at least concerning "school music", militates against lifelong participation and engagement with music' (p. 218). The formality of most classroom-based music teaching—both in American band classrooms, to which Mantie and Tucker refer, and in other classroom settings—is far-removed from children's everyday communal and holistic music learning and the sociocultural learning common in amateur music-making.

School music-making is often determined by 'the hegemony of the professional paradigm', wherein the value of recreational and social music-making is undermined (Mantie & Talbot, 2020, p. 99). Yet participatory, imaginative, and informal music-making is integral to children's play, helping them process thoughts and feelings, develop a sense of social belonging, and learn shared ownership and responsibility (Campbell, 2010; Harwood & Marsh, 2012). As they mature, they require a music education that reflects such cultures and practices: 'which emphasises relationality, embodied and embedded in social and material dimensions; [...] [and] which understands that we are always changing, moving, and growing within music, never arriving' (Young, 2021, p. 402). But where formal curricula fail to draw on pupils' existing musical practices, they can instead be perceived as irrelevant to pupils' personal lives and cultures (Lamont et al., 2003), uninteresting in relation to pupils' personal tastes and preferences (Kruse, 2016), and even provocative of a 'dialectic of vulnerability' (Allsup & Benedict, 2008, p. 165) between pupils' personal experiences and the expectations of school music-making.

### 1.4. Evaluating the place of musical vulnerability

As evident in Sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3, in common parlance the term 'vulnerability' carries with it the weight of violence and victimisation. It most often refers to a negative attribute or situatedness, 'susceptible of receiving wounds or physical injury', or 'open to attack of a non-physical nature' (OED, 2019). It is undesirable: DeNora (2013) refers to it as indicative of

weakness and dependency arising from maladaptive listening behaviours; Kenny and Osborne (2006) relate it to diathesis, neuroticism, and anxiety; and Wiggins (2011) notes its association with struggle and self-doubt. Within the neoliberal socioeconomic system, vulnerability is antithetical to the prosperity and independence said to be required to master a position of power and individual thriving—to maintain ‘the proto-typical arrogantly self-sufficient, independent, invulnerable master subject’ (Gilson, 2014, p. 76). Neoliberalism insists upon ‘self-reliance over dependency, on cutthroat competition over mutual welfare’ (Cheng, 2016, p. 9), and on ‘individualised notions of resilience, wellness and self-improvement’ (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 2). Vulnerability ‘must be managed, covered over in the self, and repositioned as a quality of the other’ (Shildrick, 2002, p. 68). It is to be avoided at all costs.

However, the desirability of invulnerability has, in recent years, come under scrutiny from scholars in the fields of feminist philosophy, ethics, and human rights and distributive justice. In particular, feminist scholars in vulnerability studies have sought to redefine the desirable–undesirable, invulnerable–vulnerable binary which has historically lauded masculine attributes over feminine attributes, positioning women’s bodies as weak and susceptible to harm, and women as solely responsible for providing care to the most vulnerable in society (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Gilson, 2014; Laugier, 2016; Mullin, 2014). Many have called for an appreciation of the universal nature of vulnerability, especially in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, which devastatingly drove home humanity’s collective vulnerability to loss and mourning, the mortality of individual bodies, and the penetrability of national borders (Butler, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Gilson, 2014).

Vulnerability studies scholars have drawn on a number of earlier theorisations, including models of vulnerability by Alasdair MacIntyre and Robert Goodwin (Gilson, 2014), Emmanuel Levinas’ concept of the face-to-face encounter with the Other (Butler, 2004; Shildrick, 2002), and Judith Butler’s earliest theories of ‘linguistic vulnerability’ (Ferrarese, 2016; C. Mills, 2000; Shulman, 2011). The resulting reconceptualisation of vulnerability has led to a plethora of new definitions and categorisations, each attempting to take account of the ambiguity and complexity inherent in the term. Vulnerability has been described as universal, inherent, ontological, constitutive, corporeal, linguistic, affective, situational, pathogenic,

epistemic, and even posthumous. It has been compared to precariousness and precarity—terms used to refer to the specific condition of institutions which fail to mitigate individuals' vulnerability (Gilson, 2014; Turner, 2006). It has therefore been redefined as a condition of both being affected and affecting (Gilson, 2014), and as an openness to others that can be both positive and negative (A. Cole, 2016).

Through close attention to the nature of responsibility, care, and dependency, vulnerability studies have shed new light on the importance of redefining the role of vulnerability within society. It is therefore worth considering how the lens of vulnerability could contribute to our understanding of the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making and transform our attitude towards music education policy, pedagogy, and research. Following those who have already redressed the 'vacuous celebration' of music's 'redemptive and emancipatory forces' in popular music studies (Cloonan & Johnson, 2002, p. 28) and 'the evangelism of the recent sonic renaissance' within sound studies (Goodman, 2010, p. xvi), in the following chapters I seek to redress the incessant advocacy for music's benefits upon academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development. Instead, after evaluating and reflecting upon recent research in vulnerability studies, I offer a conceptualisation of musical vulnerability and highlight the need for empirical research identifying, describing, and managing vulnerabilities in real-life classroom music-making experiences.

## 1.5. Chapter overview

Throughout this thesis, I address three research questions. In response to the lived experiences of pupils such as Philip—introduced in Section 1.1—and the substantial body of research literature detailing both the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making, I ask:

1. What is the place of musical vulnerability in music education and how can it be conceptualised?
2. To what extent is musical vulnerability experienced in the KS3 music classroom and how is it characterised?



3. How can pupils and teachers in the KS3 music classroom mitigate negative musical vulnerability and harness positive musical vulnerability?

*Table 1.2* summarises these research questions in relation to the specific aims of each chapter.

Although musical vulnerability can occur in all music-making situations—both inside and outside the classroom—in this thesis I focus primarily on pupils’ and teachers’ experiences of musical vulnerability during KS3. Since KS3 comprises the final two or three years of compulsory classroom music lessons, many pupils perceive KS3 music-making to be irrelevant to their personal lives and inhibitive of feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Cooke, 2011; K. Evans, 2012; Kruse, 2016; Lamont et al., 2003). There is, therefore, a particular need for thorough investigation into how musical vulnerability might be manifested in the KS3 music classroom and its potential influence on both positive and negative music-making experiences.

*Table 1.2. Chapter overview*

<i>Research question</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Means</i>
What is the place of musical vulnerability in music education and how can it be conceptualised?	1	To justify the place of musical vulnerability in accounting for the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making in the classroom	Review of extant literature on the beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making
	2	To conceptualise musical vulnerability for application to music-making in the classroom	Review of extant literature on vulnerability studies and the institutional mediation of music education
	3	To explain how musical vulnerability can be investigated in the context of music-making in the classroom	Methodological outline of a two-phase phenomenological ethnography

	4	To describe <sup>6</sup> pupils' experiences of musical vulnerability	Phase 1 analysis: composite textural-structural description of teachers' accounts of their pupils' musical vulnerability
To what extent is musical vulnerability experienced in the KS3 music classroom and how is it characterised?	5	To describe the similarities and differences between pupils' and teachers' experiences of musical vulnerability	Phase 1 analysis: composite textural-structural description of teachers' accounts of their own musical vulnerability
		To analyse how teachers' experiences affect their response towards pupils' experiences of musical vulnerability	
	6	To observe and discuss pupils' and teachers' experiences of musical vulnerability at a case-study school	Phase 2A analysis: composite textural-structural description of ethnographic observation Phase 2B analysis: composite textural-structural description of pupil focus group
How can teachers and pupils in the KS3 music classroom mitigate negative musical vulnerability and harness positive musical vulnerability?	7	To analyse how pupils and teachers could foster a symbiotic relationship with musical vulnerability through a radical ethic of care	Conclusion and evaluation of Phases 1 and 2; implications for policymakers, teachers, pupils, and researchers

<sup>6</sup> Here and elsewhere in *Table 1.2* I use the term 'describe' (rather than 'analyse' or 'explain') in the phenomenological sense. As phenomenologist Max van Manen (2014) emphasises, 'generally, the social sciences such as sociology, psychology, and ethnography aim at *explanation*, while phenomenology aims at *description* and *interpretation*' (p. 43, my emphases). Analysis, in a phenomenological sense, involves reductive reflection aiming to describe the essence of lived experience (see Section 3.2).

## 2. Conceptualising musical vulnerability: A review of the literature

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### 2.1. Reconceptualising vulnerability

While the field of vulnerability studies only formally emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the concept of vulnerability has drawn the attention of philosophers for much longer. Alongside the theorisations of Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Goodwin, and Emmanuel Levinas, Judith Butler's exposé of linguistic vulnerability has proven foundational for the development of vulnerability studies. Her concepts of vulnerability, precariousness, and precarity—first described in her book *Excitable Speech* (1997), and later in *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009)—set out her conviction of humanity's constitutive susceptibility to hurt and harm, and the possibility of its exacerbation through sociopolitical circumstances.

Butler's (1997) theorisation of linguistic vulnerability is the starting point for this chapter, in which I conceptualise musical vulnerability for application to music-making in the classroom. Drawing on established theories comparing music and language, in Section 2.1.1 I evaluate the extent to which linguistic vulnerability can be compared to musical vulnerability. In Section 2.1.2 I then consider how issues overlooked by linguistic vulnerability have been redressed by contemporary vulnerability studies, and introduce the concepts of inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities (Mackenzie et al., 2014). Through synthesising insights from both linguistic vulnerability and more recent developments in vulnerability studies, in Section 2.2 I then offer a (re)conceptualisation of musical vulnerability and examine evidence for inherent, situational, and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities. Finally, in Section 2.3 I outline existing pedagogical approaches that have aimed to address symptoms of musical vulnerability in the music classroom—such as exclusion, disengagement, and frustration—before in Section 2.4 positioning musical vulnerability as a necessary recognition of the root causes of such problems. I close Section 2.4 by proposing how the conceptualisation of musical vulnerability could transform classroom music-making through cultivating a renewed ethic of care.

2.1.1. *Linguistic vulnerability*

Though a growing appreciation of music's varying sociocultural contexts has led to a disregard of music as a 'universal language', music still shares much in common with language and is often described as a means of communication (Cross, 2005; Hargreaves et al., 2002; K. M. Higgins, 2012; Sawyer, 2005). The theory that music evolved as a mode of 'credible signalling' suggests that music has evolutionary roots in primate vocalisations used for marking territory and contact calling (Mehr et al., 2021), and is supported by recent anthropological evidence of indigenous forest dwellers who use communal singing to deter predators and signal the strength of their community (Knight & Lewis, 2017).<sup>7</sup> Developmental evidence also indicates that evolutionary biology has shaped infants' dispositions for both acquiring language and music-making: infants can detect melodic shape, rhythmic patterns, and interact using 'communicative musicality' (Cross, 2001; Trevarthen, 2002). Culture and environment then 'particularises the developmental trajectory of those predispositions' (Cross, 2001, p. 98), defining the language learnt and the skills of reading and writing (Gauvain et al., 2000; Son & Morrison, 2010; Weigel et al., 2006), and musical preferences and so-called 'talent' or 'ability' (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Hargreaves et al., 2002; McPherson & Hallam, 2012).<sup>8</sup>

There is, therefore, a strong case to be made for conceptualising musical vulnerability along similar lines to linguistic vulnerability. Linguistic vulnerability describes Butler's (1997) understanding that words 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' (p. 2). On being unexpectedly or injuriously addressed, such as in the context of criticism, slander, or hate

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<sup>7</sup> The credible signalling theory of music's evolution has been challenged by the alternative theory that music originated as a coevolved system for social bonding (Savage et al., 2021). However, both theories acknowledge the close relationship between music and language, drawing on developmental and cross-cultural evidence for the development of communicative musicality and the importance of song in parent-infant signalling and bonding. Neither theory provides conclusive evidence for which of language or music originated first: music may have developed to signal decisions already made using language (Mehr et al., 2021), or to enable joint participation in a way not afforded by language (Savage et al., 2021); or language may have developed out of the adaptive use of music to deceive prey animals or deter predators (Knight & Lewis, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> However, Susan Young (2021, p. 399) astutely observes that not all cultural groups actively foster infants' vocal precociousness, and that therefore evidence for communicative musicality in practices of parent-infant communication cannot necessarily be considered indicative of universal musicality.

speech, we become vulnerable to suffering ‘a loss of context’ or being ‘put out of control’ (p. 4).

Butler (1997) suggests that the way in which 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: they can be suggestive of a new identity through names and associations. Second, words have *somatic* power: even when their semantic meaning may not be explicitly injurious, their mode of address—their context—can cause the embodied self ‘linguistic pain’ (p. 5). This is easily demonstrable in the case of an everyday phrase such as ‘leave me alone’. In the context of a civil conversation between colleagues (‘just leave me alone for a minute while I finish this off, and then I’ll come and join you for coffee’), these words are not injurious. But in an alternative context, in a situation of anger and raised voices (‘for goodness’ sake, just leave me alone!’), they are wounding. The addressee goes from an embodied state of knowing their standing in the conversation, to one in which they are no longer sure of the status of their relationship. Their secure sense of identity is replaced by one of exclusion and uncertainty as to what will happen next.

Butler (1997) gives two reasons for the semantic and somatic effects of language and its potentially injurious consequences. First, and related to their semantic properties, words are ‘citational’ (p. 49). The effect of any one word or phrase is neither a direct result of its immediate semantic significance nor its somatic presence, but of a whole historic and social ‘legacy of interpellations’ (p. 50). Each word has past and future associations which are conjured up in the moment of the speech act. It wounds only when it ‘accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices’ (p. 51). The phrase ‘leave me alone’ wounds when it grates against the social expectations of friendship and companionship, or when it recalls the memory of previous relationships broken by similar disputes. However, citationality also means that not only are individuals vulnerable to constitution by language, but language itself is vulnerable to reappropriation and resignification by individuals (C. Mills, 2000; Shulman, 2011). This implies that vulnerability is a reciprocal quality that could, when initially experienced as negative, be harnessed for positive purposes. Noémi Michel (2016), for example, considers how derogatory racial slants

could be subjected to purposeful ‘misappropriation’ to ‘seek to displace the effects of hegemonic conventions of exploitation’ (p. 252).

Second, Butler (1997) explains how, through language’s somatic properties, its effects may be perceived as physical. Drawing on aspects of phenomenology, she locates speech as a ‘bodily act’ (p. 152). The body acts as a rhetorical instrument of expression, which in turn influences the embodied habitus of the addressee. The body itself is ‘sedimented ritual activity’; ‘a kind of incorporated memory’ of normative social rules and actions (p. 154). The phrase ‘leave me alone’ therefore wounds when it contradicts a bodily habitus which perceives friendships and relationships as requiring togetherness—which wants to problem-solve using dialogue and discussion rather than solitude and isolation. And the racial discourses described by Michel (2016) ‘all converge to constitute the residence of the subject marked by racial difference’ (p. 247), conveying the racialised body as toxic and imprisoning.

However, focussing as it does upon hate speech, repression, and censorship, Butler’s (1997) theorisation 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 (p. 5). Although she explains how citationality exposes language to reappropriation or resignification by individuals, she presents such actions as necessary resistance rather than positive transformation (Magnus, 2006, p. 83). Provocative though this conceptualisation of linguistic vulnerability may be, it fails to account for occasions on which language—like music—can convey comfort, encouragement, and affirmation.

### *2.1.2. Vulnerability studies*

More recently, predominantly negative definitions of vulnerability—such as Butler’s—have been critiqued by feminist scholars in wider vulnerability studies. In response to the historic association between vulnerability and weak, feminine attributes, scholars have sought to redefine common conceptualisations of vulnerability and account for both its positive and negative characteristics. Erinn Gilson (2014), for example, defines being vulnerable as being ‘open to being affected and affecting in ways that one cannot control’ (p. 2). Alyson Cole (2016)

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*’ (p. 261, my emphases).

The potentially positive characteristics of vulnerability have drawn particular attention from scholars questioning the conventional dichotomy between vulnerability and autonomy. Rather than situating vulnerability as opposed to autonomy—and therefore redolent of a lack of self-control or individual agency—vulnerability has been reconstrued as a condition necessary for the development of autonomy. If autonomy is recognised as ‘relational autonomy’, with the development of self-determination requiring the social scaffolding of caring and affirmative relationships, then openness to the influence of others is a necessary part of its establishment (J. Anderson, 2014; Mackenzie, 2014). The care that stems from acknowledging humanity’s mutual vulnerability is essential for providing the security and resources needed for the development of a sense of autonomy (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 29), and it turn makes it possible to emphasise ‘the “ability” in vulnerability’ (Bluhm, 2012, p. 156).

This broader understanding of vulnerability is a helpful corrective to Butler’s bleak conceptualisation of linguistic vulnerability. Indeed, in response to scholarly debate in *Women’s Studies Quarterly* (Miller, 2011), Butler has more recently acknowledged how, ‘if words have the power to wound, they also have the power to convey love’ (Butler, 2011, p. 236). 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?

One further question left unanswered by Butler’s conceptualisation of linguistic vulnerability is that of the definition of language. In Butler’s (1997) 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 (pp. 5–6). Butler is not wrong to attribute such power to speech; she highlights how the nature of constitution by speech means that it can occur even without the awareness of the subject (pp. 30–31). However, this constitutive quality may lead 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 (Clifford Simpican, 2015). This is a concern that has been raised repeatedly in response to conceptualisations 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 (A. Cole, 2016; Ferrarese, 2016).

Nonetheless, others have proposed that it is possible to take account of the multiplicity of possible characterisations of vulnerability—including its constitutive aspects and its circumstantial exacerbation—using a simple, tripartite taxonomy. Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds (2014, 2012) define three distinct categories of vulnerability:

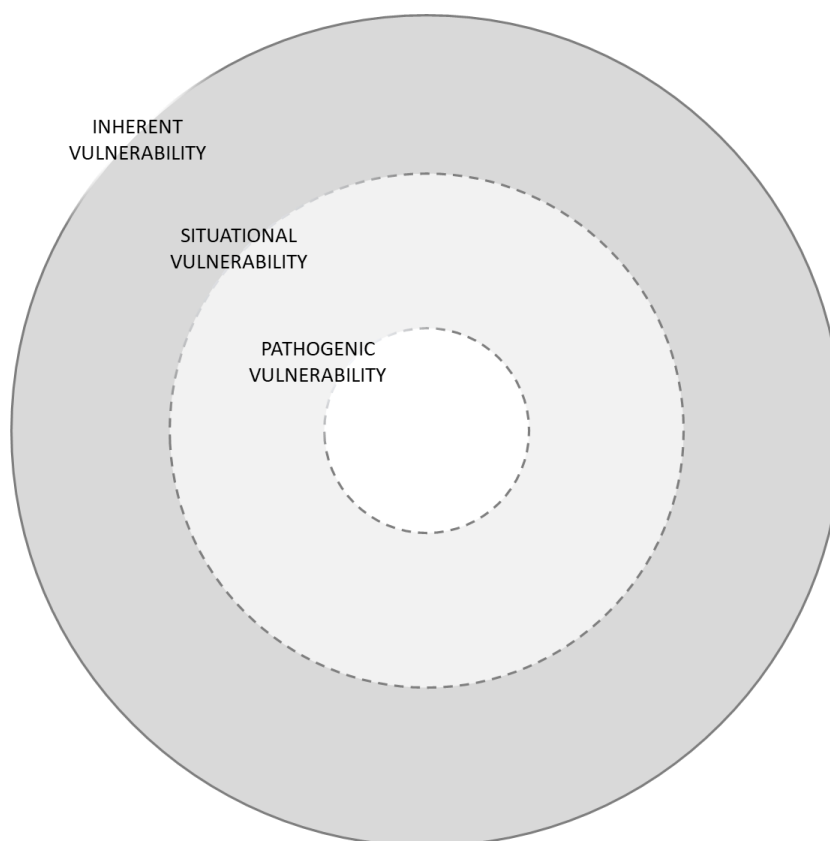
1. Inherent vulnerability: the universal and ontological vulnerability of all humankind, resulting from our corporeal, social, and affective nature.
2. Situational vulnerability: specific vulnerabilities arising from personal, social, political, economic, or environmental context.
3. Pathogenic vulnerability: a subset of situational vulnerabilities that pose particular ethical challenges, such as those arising from abuse, oppression, or injustice.

Both inherent and situational vulnerabilities can be experienced as dispositional (with the potential to be affected) and occurrent (in the present experience of being affected).

This taxonomy, illustrated in *Figure 2.1*, is a helpful tool for understanding situations of both physical and figurative vulnerability. Mackenzie (2014, pp. 54–55) explains how it may apply in a physical sense to a homeless individual. A homeless individual is inherently vulnerable since they require food and shelter to satisfy their basic needs. Until they became homeless, this vulnerability was dispositional—but without a home, this vulnerability is realised as occurrent. While homeless, the individual will encounter specific situational vulnerabilities, such as to ill health or physical assault. But again, until they become ill or are assaulted, these vulnerabilities remain dispositional. Pathogenic vulnerabilities may emerge in



*Figure 2.1. Taxonomy of vulnerability*



cases of assault or abuse, or in the failure of state institutions to provide sufficient housing solutions.

This taxonomy also offers an insightful lens upon linguistic vulnerability, demonstrating how its constitutive nature is influenced by inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities. For the linguistic being, their vulnerability remains dispositional until they are addressed, at which point the address defines their context and their vulnerability—positive or negative—becomes occurrent. In being addressed, a number of situational vulnerabilities arise, which may in turn become pathogenic:

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 situations [situational vulnerability], especially those in which violence is a way

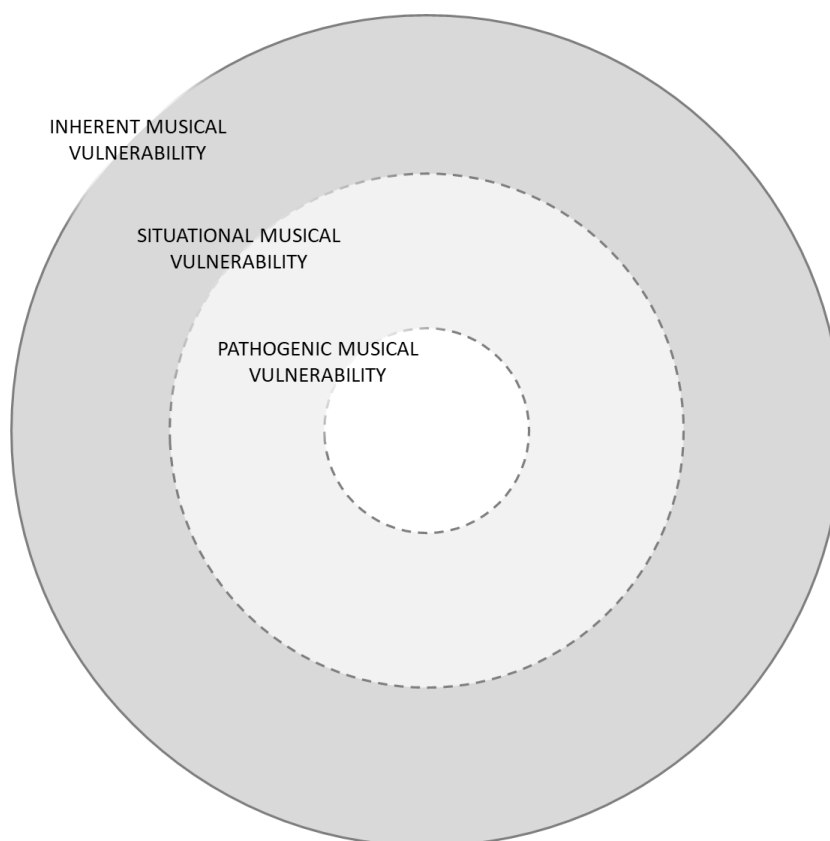
of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited [pathogenic vulnerability]. (Butler, 2004, p. 29)

By situating linguistic vulnerability within the broader framework of vulnerability studies there is greater potential to understand how music, like language, can be at times so beneficial and at other times so detrimental. However, to translate Butler's assumption of 'linguistic being' directly into 'musical being' would be to perpetuate the pitfalls of a discourse of universality. As William Cheng (2020) emphasises, 'frameworks of universal humanity and universal musicality can sometimes harm those whom they purport to help [...] a valorization of music's universality stands to further marginalize individuals for whom music doesn't play a major rehabilitative or edifying role' (pp. 53–54). Nevertheless, a richer understanding of the multiplicity of inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities contributing to classroom music-making has the potential to offer a valuable conceptualisation of music's capability both to stimulate happiness and healing and to incite hatred and harm.

### 2.2. (Re)conceptualising musical vulnerability

Within recent scholarship there are occasional examples of overlap between vulnerability studies and music studies, such as when musical encounters have been compared to Levinas' face-to-face encounter with the Other (e.g., L. Higgins, 2007; Jourdan, 2012, 2015), when musical performance has been described as a citational practice of interpellation (e.g., Elliott & Silverman, 2017; Westerlund et al., 2019), and when music education has been situated alongside recognition of humanity's interdependency and connectedness (e.g., Tiszai, 2020; Yob, 2020). However, to account for the diverse musical encounters that often characterise the lived experience of teachers and pupils in the music classroom, I suggest that the conceptualisation of musical vulnerability should build upon existing vulnerability studies in three ways. First, as illustrated in *Figure 2.2*, it should address how musical vulnerability, like linguistic vulnerability, may relate to the inherent, situational, and pathogenic vulnerabilities outlined by the taxonomy of vulnerability. Second, it should elucidate the role of institutional

Figure 2.2. *Taxonomy of musical vulnerability*



and (inter)personal factors that affect musical experiences specifically within the classroom. And third, it should 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 what follows, in Section 2.2.1 I consider what constitutes music’s semantic and somatic properties, and how these properties give rise to inherent musical vulnerability that may be realised as positive receptivity or negative susceptibility. In Section 2.2.2 I then discuss how music’s institutional mediation—through methods of teaching and their associated values—has the potential to cause situational vulnerabilities in the music classroom. In Section 2.2.3 I address circumstances surrounding pathogenic musical vulnerability, using examples related to issues of safeguarding in teaching. Throughout each section I concentrate primarily on *occurrent* vulnerabilities, given that making music necessarily causes the realisation of previously

dispositional musical vulnerabilities. To conclude, in Section 2.3 I reflect on how existing pupil-centred, informal, transcultural, and critical pedagogies aim to assuage symptoms of situational and pathogenic vulnerability, before, in Section 2.4, outlining the urgent need to adopt a more holistic understanding of the root causes of such vulnerabilities through fostering an ethic of care.

### *2.2.1. 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’ (Holmes, 2017, p. 208)—even the least attentive musical engagement is able to affect how we think and feel (Kassabian, 2001).

#### *i. 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. Philosopher of art Stephen Davies (2010) makes clear that, though music is organised according to quasi-syntactic rules, ‘there is not a semantics in music’ (p. 25). Ian Cross (2005) draws attention to music’s ‘floating intentionality’ (p. 30), highlighting how the ambiguity of musical communication differentiates it from the relatively unambiguous interpretation of linguistic semantics. Likewise, Kathleen Higgins (2012) argues that it is music’s ‘lack of a full-blown semantics’ (p. 100) that enables it to provoke distinct experiences exceeding linguistic capabilities. Martha Nussbaum (2001), though drawing only upon works of Gustav Mahler, pertinently describes how music, unlike linguistic expression, is not a ‘language of habit’ (p. 268) but a language of unique, symbolic, and crystalline expressive capacity. Nonetheless, as Butler’s (1997) theory of linguistic vulnerability suggests, both language and music are characterised by complex and multiple semantic interpretations which can lead to the signification and resignification of meaning (Philpott, 2016). In this regard, music can be said to possess some kind of semantic power, albeit perhaps more readily described as indexical

(Sawyer, 2005), connotative (Cross, 2005), or delineated (Green, 2008) meaning: musical aspects that can only be interpreted in light of their context.

Music's semantic properties can therefore be defined as the meanings denoted outside its musical constituents. They may encompass personal, social, or cultural associations generated through music's citationality. This has been explained by Heidi Westerlund, Alexis Kallio, and Heidi Partti (2019), 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' (p. 61). Based on Butler's concept that identity is performative and that performance shapes individual subjectivities, they recognise that school music can therefore be inclusive or exclusive depending on which musical identities are legitimated in the classroom: whether, for example, pupils are expected to be competent orchestral instrumentalists, blues music enthusiasts, or proficient beatboxers.

Westerlund, Kallio, and Partti (2019) make particular reference to pupils' religious expression, but other cultural identities—such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and ability—also become entangled in 'musical acts of interpellation' (p. 61). This is clear from existing scholarship on musical identity, which describes how musical identity can be defined both by roles taken in music-making (such as composer or performer), and by the role of music in wider cultural formations (such as class, race, or gender) (Hargreaves et al., 2002). The development of musical identity is often considered a positive effect of musical engagement, especially when it enables adolescents to negotiate their rapidly developing sense of self and shared peer experiences (Davis, 2016; O'Neill, 2006; Tarrant et al., 2002), and when it leads to the long-term establishment of a sense of musicianship or musicality (Dalladay, 2017; J. W. Davidson & Burland, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2012; O'Neill, 2002, 2012, 2016). In such instances, an individual's openness or vulnerability to music is realised as a positive sense of receptivity.

Nonetheless, musical preferences, abilities, and activities can also have ill effects on identity formation. Music provokes strong and extreme opinions which are often symbolic of wider cultural unity or division: 'people tend not to give neutral or ambivalent responses about

music they do not like, but react strongly against it' (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 79). Negative musical identities can therefore begin to develop from childhood if music-making is associated with exclusive or divisive contexts (Lamont, 2002), and often remain resistant to change long after their initial establishment (O'Neill, 2002; Woody et al., 2019).<sup>9</sup> Openness or vulnerability to music in these cases is realised as a negative sense of susceptibility. Identities formed within music classrooms can come to define 'hardcore' musicians and 'slackers' (Abril, 2012), 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' (Ivaldi & O'Neill, 2009; Tarrant et al., 2002), and ultimately acceptance and rejection (Elliott & Silverman, 2017).

This partly results from music's capacity to reconfigure physical spaces, such as streets, homes, and classrooms: 'every time music is used to demarcate the territory of self or community, it is incipiently being used to invade, marginalize or obliterate that of other individuals or groups' (Johnson & Cloonan, 2009, p. 4). Since music can 'become detached from place and embedded in new contexts' (N. Cook, 2013, p. 230), it can be manipulated to define in-groups and out-groups associated with specific spaces. This manipulation can be used explicitly as a form of social control, such as to deter loiterers from public spaces (Cheng, 2020; N. Cook, 2013; Hirsch, 2007; Llano, 2018). But even when not intentionally employed for social engineering, music's semantic associations can blur the boundaries between public and private spaces, such as through the use of personal stereos (Born, 2013; M. Bull, 2000; N. Cook, 2013) or the public projection of religious soundscapes (Bohlman, 2013; Eisenberg, 2013). With such an impact on the definition of public and private spaces, as well as strong resonances with self-identity and social identity, music can powerfully interpellate the status of different social groupings ranging from institutional and large-scale, through to imagined communities and the microsocialities of interpersonal musical practices (Born, 2011, 2012).

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<sup>9</sup> The fixity of musical identities can lead to specific situational vulnerabilities related to adult musical learning. Adults learning or relearning musical instruments can find it particularly difficult to overcome past anxieties associated with learning music (Perkins & Williamon, 2014) or to reconstruct existing musical knowledge (Bowles, 2010; Myers, 1992). These vulnerabilities are then often exacerbated by functional declines associated with ageing, such as hearing loss, restricted motor competencies, and reduced stamina (Tsugawa, 2009).

*ii. Music's somatic properties*

Like Butler's (1997) speech acts, music-making also has somatic properties which enhance its semantic power to define identities and spaces: 'sonic practices territorialize by virtue of combining physical vibration with bodily sensation [somatic power] and culturally conditioned meanings [semantic power]' (Eisenberg, 2015, p. 199). While music demarcates space in part through its semantic and citational delineations, its 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, expressed by Julian Henriques (2011) as three 'wavebands' of sounding and by Steve Goodman (2010) as an 'audio virology' (p. 145). First, music's physical vibration—the 'material waveband' (Henriques, 2011, p. 22)—is received through the receptive ear. Second, this physical vibration is embodied as the 'corporeal waveband' (p. 22). And third, the resulting processes of entrainment and the communication of affect create the 'sociocultural waveband' (p. 25), within which the individual body 'becomes vulnerable to viral contagion' from others (Goodman, 2010, p. 145).

The process of hearing music is one of sympathetic vibration: sound waves vibrate the mechanics of the inner ear, causing the neural perception of sound. But because it cannot be closed,

the ear is vulnerable because a person is unable to turn off his or her hearing, to voluntarily interrupt the perception of the world through the ear. Because sounds and noises may thus make their way unimpeded into the person's mind, she finds herself open to violation by way of the ear. (Brauer, 2016, p. 23)

Music's somatic effect can therefore become particularly pronounced when hearing others' music: 'auditory receptivity involves giving up a measure of power, and in the case of music performed by other persons, this involves allowing others to have an effect upon us via the receptive ear' (Cox, 2016, p. 175). In some cases, it might result in feeling that 'to listen to music is to *yield* our inner voice to the composer's *domination*' (Maus, 2004, p. 24, original emphases),

or in sheer frustration that the music ‘is not, at that moment, *our* music’ (Frith, 2004, p. 67, original emphasis).

Jessica Holmes (2017), drawing on Jonathan Sterne’s theory of ‘audile scarification’, points out that such musical experiences leave a lasting physical imprint upon our ears. She highlights how auditory experiences of ‘listening’ and ‘hearing’ vary according to individuals’ aural differences (including d/Deafness) and specific musical situations (see also Rice, 2015; Sterne, 2015).<sup>10</sup> Listening may take different forms and render the ear more or less receptive. The informed, teleological approach of structural listening, for example, can dismiss the power of unexpected musical moments, particularly when invoked by score-reading rather than hearing (Dell’Antonio, 2004b). Heteronomous modes of listening, characterised by multiply-distributed and fluctuating attentional focus, take in multiple visual and aural stimuli at once (Dell’Antonio, 2004a; R. Herbert, 2012). Music might be engaged with as an ecologically-situated sound defined by its environmental surroundings and spatial location (Clarke, 2005), or as a multisensory stimulus with somatic and phenomenological effects extending beyond the ear (Friedner & Helmreich, 2012; Holmes, 2017; M. Mills, 2015).

Anahid Kassabian’s (2001) theory of ubiquitous listening posits that everyday listening adapts to the omnipresence of music in day-to-day life, and while being dissociated from the specific characteristics of music is still able to affect how we think and feel.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that this is a result of how music causes bodily sensations beyond the receptive ear, stimulating mechanisms such as mimesis and entrainment even when conscious aesthetic judgment is not taking place (Juslin, 2013).<sup>12</sup> In some circumstances, such as high volumes, infrasound, or

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<sup>10</sup> In contrast to more recent sound studies, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) suggests that musical ‘listening’ is the preserve of the privileged few who have ‘knowledge of musicology’: ‘if someone listens to music without knowing anything about it [...] without being capable of interpreting it, is it possible that he is actually listening to it, rather than being reduced to hearing it?’ (p. 63).

<sup>11</sup> However, further research implies that dissociated listening stimulates limited emotional responsivity, since the quality or depth of emotional response to music is positively correlated with the listener’s degree of attentiveness (Diaz, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Patrik Juslin’s (2013) BRECVEMA framework of musical emotion proposes eight hypothetical mechanisms by which music induces emotion, namely brain stem reflex, rhythmic entrainment, evaluative conditioning, contagion, visual imagery, episodic memory, musical expectancy, and aesthetic judgment. Tuomas Eerola (2018) has added two further high-level appraisal mechanisms: cognitive appraisal and identity confirmation. From this model, evaluative conditioning, visual imagery, episodic memory, aesthetic judgment, cognitive appraisal, and identity confirmation can be associated with music’s semantic properties; brain stem reflex, rhythmic entrainment, and contagion can be



ultrasound at the very peripheries of human audition, sound can become a visceral experience (Goodman, 2010; Heller, 2015): ‘a sonic *invasion* of our bodies and their personal space’ (Henriques, 2011, p. xvi, original emphasis). But according to the mimetic hypothesis (Cox, 2016), whether or not music is physically felt, it is still comprehended through the covert or overt imitation of its observed or imagined performance. Studies into the theoretical mirror neuron system suggest that it responds in the same way ‘both when an action is observed and when the same or closely analogous action is executed’ (p. 23)—so listening to music *always* prompts a bodily response. This may be experienced internally, as mimetic motor imagery (covert mental representations such as imagined instrumental fingerings or subvocalisation), or externally, as mimetic motor action (overt mimetic behaviours such as tapping or singing along) (p. 12). Therefore, ‘sonorous experience is invariably corporeal, and is distinguished from other semiotic experience by its links to muscle, movement, and action’ (Bowman, 2004, p. 38).

Though the mimetic hypothesis is in part conjectural—and it is unclear how it might apply to deaf, blind, or neurodiverse individuals (Iverson, 2016)—it does provide a feasible explanation for the somatic power of music and its phenomenological qualities. If speech is a bodily act—that is to say, it ‘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’ (Elliott & Silverman, 2017, p. 29). Any musical practice will stem from and speak into an existing bodily habitus of expected normative musical behaviours, therefore imbuing music with the power both to celebrate and to wound.

When overt mimetic action takes place in response to music, this somatic power extends beyond sympathetic vibration and is heightened through the process of entrainment. Entrainment occurs when ‘independent rhythmical systems interact with each other’ (Clayton, 2012, p. 49), and has been shown to be a notable somatic effect of music, especially when it

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associated with music’s somatic properties. However, while this framework helpfully models possible causes of musical emotions, it does not illuminate the lived experience of music’s semantic and somatic power.

results in interpersonal synchrony—‘the temporal aligning of action between two or more interacting individuals’ (Rabinowitch & Knafo-Noam, 2015, p. 1). Research suggests that interpersonal synchrony can result in increased likeability and perceived closeness and similarity in both adults (Hove & Risen, 2009) and children (Rabinowitch & Knafo-Noam, 2015), possibly as a result of the self-other overlap stimulated by the link between perception and action made by the mirror neuron system. Compared to similar processes of entrainment and synchrony in non-musical contexts (such as walking together or mimicking speech), entrainment and synchrony in musical contexts appear to enhance prosocial behavioural tendencies (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010; Rabinowitch et al., 2013). Such prosocial effects can result in higher perceived social bonding across large communities (Weinstein et al., 2016), and even be exploited by groups to emphasise their independent or co-dependent identities through avoiding or fostering inter-group entrainment (Lucas et al., 2011).

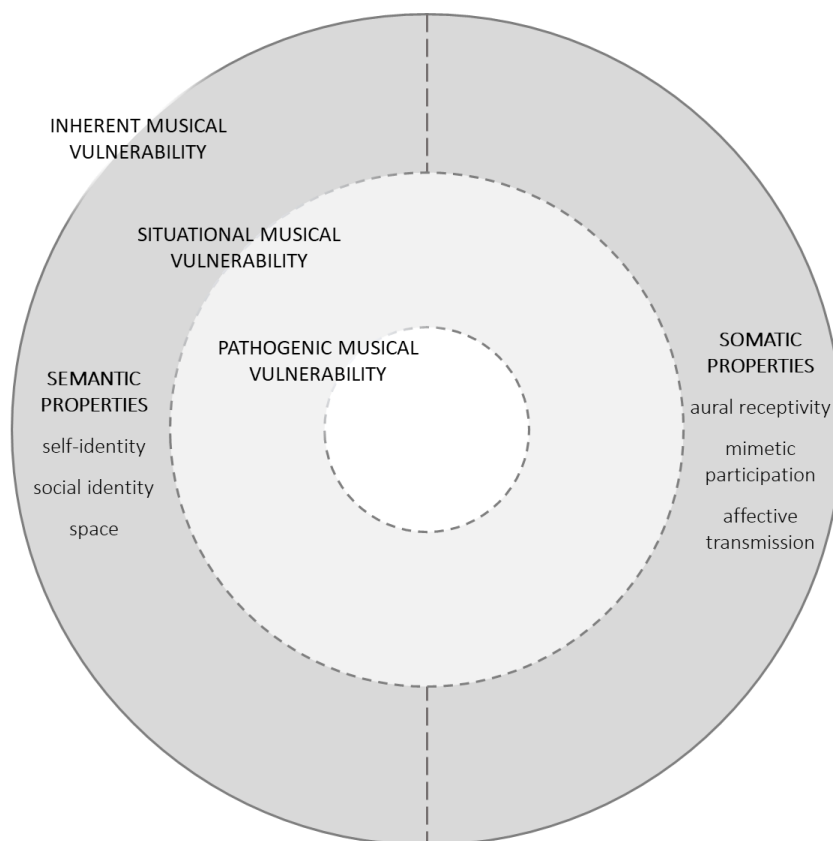
The corporeal process of musical entrainment also creates a phenomenological intensification of the experience of musical affect, creating ‘affective associations’ within social groups (Born, 2011, p. 384). Affect—and musical affect—is a highly contested term, but can be broadly understood as ‘the physiological shift accompanying a judgment’ (Brennan, 2004, p. 5). Affect can be transmitted between bodies, resulting in affective or emotional contagion (Brennan, 2004; Thompson & Biddle, 2013). Although proponents of affect theory hold widely disparate views on its definition (see Leys, 2011), it is generally accepted that the transmission of affect between bodies results in part from entrainment: physical entrainment or mimicry, chemical entrainment involving the release of pheromones or hormones, and nervous entrainment involving the imitation of rhythmic sounds to establish or enhance feelings of shared purpose (Brennan, 2004). This acknowledges that human bodies are not self-contained or invulnerable, but are rather interconnected, open, and susceptible to influences below the threshold of conscious feeling, including the modulating forces of sound and silence (Blackman, 2012; Brennan, 2004; Goodman, 2010; Thompson, 2012). 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’ (Thrift, 2008, p. 239).

*iii. Conclusion*

As summarised in *Figure 2.3*, music’s semantic and somatic properties generate an inherent musical vulnerability. First, music’s somatic properties generate a vulnerability for the human body to be moved—literally, through sympathetic vibration, mimesis, and entrainment. When we hear music, we can only escape its effects by physically leaving the locality. If we leave, we are vulnerable to exclusion from the space and the values delineated by the music, but if we stay, we are vulnerable to becoming interpellated by what we hear. This interpellation causes positive *receptivity* or negative *susceptibility* associated with music’s semantic, citational power, and its relationship with self-identity, social identity, and space.

Usually, resonance between music’s semantic and somatic properties and an individual’s existing musical expectations or identity leads to an enriching experience of vulnerability as positive musical receptivity. However, ‘if we impose our own preferred music on someone else in a way that is beyond their control, even thinking to share our pleasure, we

*Figure 2.3. Inherent musical vulnerability and music’s semantic and somatic properties*



are more likely to take them closer to the experience of pain' (Johnson & Cloonan, 2009, p. 25). This debilitating sense of negative susceptibility is most likely when the listener perceives that they have lost control over their own identity construction (Butler, 1997; Frith, 2004; Hirsch, 2011; Johnson & Cloonan, 2009), such as in the extreme circumstances in Guantanamo Bay, where a detainee may be tortured using unbearably loud, Westernised, and sexualised music in an inescapable racial or cultural affront (Cusick, 2006, 2013). The detainee's experience becomes that of 'his body's inevitable sympathetic vibration [somatic response] to music he despise[s] [semantic response]' (Cusick, 2013, p. 285). Yet in less extreme instances, musical susceptibility is palpable when overheard music triggers the haunting memories of trauma (Bradley, 2020; Daughtry, 2015) or incites complaints about 'tortuous' neighbourhood noise (Cloonan & Johnson, 2002; Frith, 2004). Music's somatic propensity to permeate private spaces and porous bodily boundaries exacerbates its semantic associations with past trauma or cultural discrimination.

### 2.2.2. *Situational musical vulnerability*

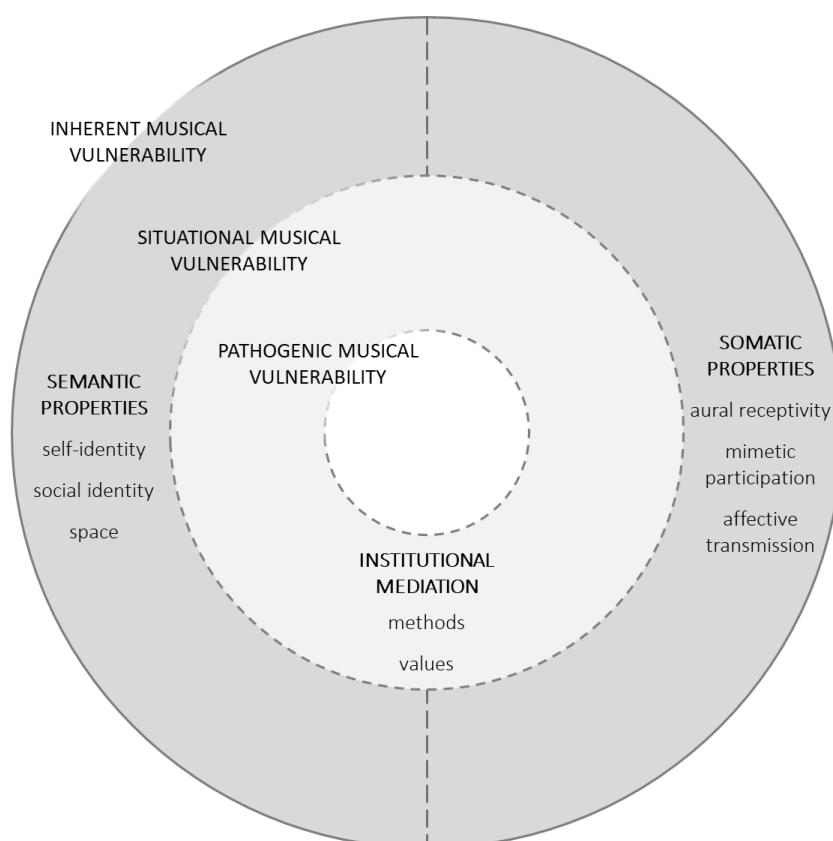
The exposition of music's semantic and somatic properties demonstrates the ways in which musical vulnerability can be understood as an inherent, constitutive aspect of what it means to engage in music-making; the experience of which differs depending on specific situations. Although there is currently little research into the nature of *inherent* musical vulnerability, existing scholarship has identified particular *situational* (and sometimes pathogenic) vulnerabilities related to music's institutional mediation in education.

Ruth Wright (2019) has posited that since music's evolution is closely intertwined with what it means to be human (notwithstanding the pitfalls of a universalist discourse of 'musical being', see Cheng, 2020), the nurture of musicality through music education is therefore a human right. However, prevailing institutions often cause 'systematic harm': 'a failure to develop, regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, class, or musical preference, each child's musical identity, talents and abilities, and [...] to equip them to continue musicking throughout the lifespan' (p. 218). In many instances, such failure to meet individuals' needs stems from the enactment of symbolic violence through a neoliberal

emphasis on the value of mastery and invulnerability. Skill and order is favoured over sound and expression (Kanellopoulos, 2019); masterful, propositional knowledge exerts dictatorial control over experimental, explorative creativity (Singh, 2018); and dominant political ideology and hegemony is normalised and reified (Powell et al., 2017). Though symbolic violence often appears unavoidable or benign, its perpetuation can sometimes result in real violence, in which the relationships of dependency between individuals are replaced with relationships of domination, subordination, and colonisation (Gould, 2008; Singh, 2018; G. D. Smith, 2015).

There is, therefore, a need to consider how specific institutional methods of teaching, values of teaching, and issues surrounding abuse and oppression in teaching have the potential to cause situational and pathogenic musical vulnerability through the performance of systematic harm and symbolic violence. Understanding such situations within a broader framework of vulnerabilities, as illustrated in *Figure 2.4*, could initiate an approach to music education which mitigates against harm and instead encourages the harnessing of vulnerabilities for positive outcomes.

*Figure 2.4. Music's institutional mediation*



### *i. Methods of teaching*

Methods of teaching and learning vary widely across different cultures. In the Western classical tradition, teaching is often shaped by colonial forms of mastery (Singh, 2018), with technical skill and musical literacy developed through master-apprentice relationships (Allsup, 2016). The similar guru-shishya relationship governs teaching and learning in Indian classical music (Grimmer, 2011). In contrast, learning Western popular music tends to focus on self-discovery and peer learning, and in musics including jazz, African, and European folk idioms learning is a shared community experience involving observation and osmosis (Schippers, 2010).

However, when employed without careful discernment, all formal methods of teaching and learning are susceptible to fostering situational vulnerability and causing potential harm or ‘musical suffering’ (Benedict, 2009, p. 221):

the indiscriminate use of method, any method (including those that may dictate rehearsal techniques and practice techniques) deflects our attention from interrogating issues such as what our purpose would be if a reconstruction of society based upon critically reflective learning framed our engagements. (p. 222)

‘Methodolatry’—a term used by Thomas Regelski (2002, 2005, 2014) to refer to adherence to efficient or effective teaching methods without addressing their desirable end-goals—can result in domination or division in the classroom as both pupils and teachers relinquish critical engagement and operate in slavish obedience to a regime of efficiency. Standardisation of technique and outcome is given precedence at the expense of individual musicality (Small, 1977, p. 198).

Methodolatry often occurs in pedagogies that are governed by a master-apprentice relationship, including teaching in orchestral settings, classroom ensemble teaching such as the American band method, and one-to-one tuition. Overreliance on the guidance of a director or teacher can lead to ‘practices that are based on fear, intimidation, competitiveness, and exclusion’ (Kanellopoulos, 2016, p. 27), and leave individuals ill-equipped for pursuing musical

participation away from the conductor's baton (Dionyssiou, 2011; Kreutz & Brünger, 2012; Pitts & Robinson, 2016). Randall Allsup (2016) warns against the potential for such relationships to generate closed, authoritative, and oppressive forms of education, inducting individuals into pre-existing traditions with no room for manoeuvre:

oppression, the love of overwhelming control, is by nature an effort to silence alternative voices. In this way, relationships of control damage not only the soul-life of an apprentice but the Master's, too. Indeed, the Master loses a source of self-knowledge in his desire to control and silence others, and thus his own journey may narrow along with that of his apprentice. (p. 11)

Alongside Cathy Benedict, Allsup (2008) expresses particular criticism of the oppressive master-apprentice relationships that govern the American classroom band method—a pedagogical approach widespread in American high schools, where pupils learn a wind-band instrument in an ensemble directed by their classroom teacher. Allsup and Benedict argue that the band method often resembles 'conditioning' (p. 158) rather than teaching of its pupils, using relentless repetition to achieve rehearsal efficiency. Through accepting the traditional roles of directorship and rigorous modes of teaching, the band method 'divides musical communities and obscures issues of power and control, effectively reproducing oppressed / oppressor relationships' (p. 161). They explicitly describe how every relationship between teacher and pupil 'contains within it a dialectic of vulnerability: part hope and fear, part promise and peril' (p. 165).

Both Allsup and Benedict (2008) and Roger Mantie (2012) highlight that the particular situational vulnerability raised by the band method has in part resulted from its various struggles for social and educational legitimacy. Having evolved out of the participatory community practice of 'banding', as wind bands moved into classrooms they sought legitimisation through invoking high-status musical knowledge and elite Western classical traditions. The oppressed / oppressor relationship was therefore normalised as an essential part of Western-style classical training, leaving the wind band existing as 'a schizophrenic creature

that suffers a continual crisis of identity, struggling to be simultaneously common and special' (Mantie, 2012, p. 70).

This is suggestive of the master-apprentice, oppressor / oppressed relationships that continue to be at work in other Western modes of teaching. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, Anna Bull (2019) has described how these authoritative and oppressive relationships play out both in conductor-ensemble contexts and one-to-one tuition. With reference to an English youth orchestra, she illustrates how the expertise of a conductor and their relationship with an ensemble can contribute to 'the susceptibility and vulnerability of the young musicians to the conductor's charisma' (p. 128). This can lead to respect and reverence, but also to humiliation, fear, and depersonalisation.

Bull's (2019) findings echo Geoffrey Baker's (2014, 2016) seminal research into the Venezuelan El Sistema project. This project claims to offer orchestral training to Venezuelan youth as a means of citizenship education. However, Baker illustrates how the orchestral model—a hierarchical community presided over by an autocratic director—is antithetical to such an education. He comments that the success and productivity of the project is dependent on strict standards of discipline, uniformity, and obedience, reinforcing unequal power relations and militating against creativity, spontaneity, and individual autonomy. Gary Spruce (2013b) describes a similar effect within the whole-class orchestral projects in English primary schools emphasised by the National Plan for Music Education: 'the aim appears to be to make the learner anonymous within a collective homogenous whole' (p. 116). Baker (2016) summarises this sense of situational vulnerability: 'classical music itself is ripe with emancipatory potential, but its institutionalized practices and educational methods have frequently curbed that promise' (p. 327). Bull (2019) therefore advises that

the rehearsal methods that are common in professional music practice are not necessarily appropriate for pedagogical spaces. Instead, the question of how young people's voice can be fully incorporated into classical music pedagogy needs to be further explored and experimented with. (pp. 129–130)



The vulnerability resulting from the master-apprentice teaching relationship can also feature in one-to-one music lessons—perhaps the most common iteration of master-apprentice teaching across varied art music cultures. In such relationships, the development of deep trust between teacher and pupil may allow the teacher to shape not just the pupil’s music, but also their life. The formation of a pupil’s musical voice is ‘an intimate, vulnerable process requiring great trust’ and the ‘taking on [of] the gestures, the phrasing, the encouragement, and the physicality’ of the teacher (A. Bull, 2019, pp. 52–54). As in the pursuit of spiritual guidance, the master invests deeply in the pathway and progress of the apprentice (Heuser, 2019); indeed, in both Hindustani and Karnatic classical music the guru ranks more highly than their pupil’s biological parents, and is treated with the respect due a god (Grimmer, 2011). However, such relationships are not unproblematic. While some teachers take seriously the responsibility to care for their pupils and relieve any fears of failure, embarrassment, and shame (Nourse, 2003), others are known to abuse their position of power through demanding uncompromising obedience, lacking compassion, or acting unethically (Heuser, 2019; Pace, 2013; see Section 2.2.3).

The influence of these relationships is perhaps nowhere more evident than in formal music examinations, in which the examiner steps into the role of the expert, the god, or the oppressor and effectively makes a final judgment on the outcome of the master-apprentice teaching relationship. Roe-Min Kok (2011) has written evocatively about her experience as a child in Malaysia, undertaking music exams with the British Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). In postcolonial Malaysia, ‘Britishness’ remained a marker of power and economic and social success. Pursuing a Western music education was therefore an indicator of superior class, upbringing, and affluence. But faced with the uncompromising ‘Britishness’ of ABRSM exams and their insensitivity to cultural difference, Kok explains

when I engaged in Western classical music activities, however, I underwent what I have come to think of as a consistent destabilization of my identity in the encounter between a cultural system perceived as established and

hegemonic (European via the British) and one struggling to define itself (Malaysian-minority Chinese). (p. 83)

Kok's experience of this Western music pedagogy profoundly illustrates a sense of situational vulnerability—to an institution and its values that undermined her sense of self, her sense of culture, and her sense of heritage.

*ii. Values of teaching*

Kok's (2011) account begins to illuminate the way in which master-apprentice teaching and its associated pedagogy can perpetuate situational vulnerability not just through its methods and relationships, but also through music's semantic properties and the values it disseminates. The values transmitted between teacher and pupil are often culturally specific; for Kok they reinforced the colonised / coloniser paradigm. In other settings, they may relate to certain expectations of class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion, and (dis)ability which leave pupils excluded or alienated (Spruce, 2011).<sup>13</sup>

Classed values—favouring the middle and upper classes—have been implicated across the breadth of formal education in Britain since schooling became accessible to children from all backgrounds in the mid-nineteenth century. When state schooling began in the late nineteenth century, 'the intention of the dominant classes was still to police and control the working classes rather than to educate them' (Reay, 2017, p. 31). The learning valued by schools then and now, typically competitive and individualistic, often fails to recognise day-to-day working-class values, such as community cohesion and collaboration. Through aspiring towards middle-class values as the epitome of educational achievement—'rendering working-class cultures as the "underclass", as abject zones and lives to flee from' (Littler, 2013, p. 55)—schools perpetuate 'injuries of class' (Reay, 2017, p. 155).

This is particularly evident in music education institutions. The music conservatories and exam boards founded in Britain in the nineteenth century sought to become a civilising

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<sup>13</sup> Class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion, and (dis)ability are by no means the only factors related to expectations in music education institutions. Other factors such as age, neurodiversity, caste, and physical appearance may be invoked, but are beyond the scope of this thesis.

force, cultivating the values of the bourgeois middle class to make music a means of wholesome, 'rational recreation' (A. Bull, 2016, p. 127). These organisations, many of which are still in operation today, promoted the middle-class disposition to accumulate cultural capital to gain future benefits, the association of hard work with moral worth and success, and the middle-class signifier of respectable femininity. As Bull (2019) points out, these classed values continue to define individuals' participation in classical music education. Alison Gangel's (2011) memoir of enrolling in the junior department of a music conservatory poignantly describes the alienation of moving from piano lessons in her children's home to a conservatory where other pupils seemed 'posh'. Though these pupils looked and sounded different from her, the overriding emphasis of the conservatory was 'to link people more strongly into the culture and norms of [their] world rather than to connect with others outside the middle-class group' (A. Bull, 2019, p. 173). Such values remain at the forefront of music education institutions across the world, including in El Sistema, in which intensive training courses enforce middle-class cultural investment and hard work in the extreme, with children as young as eight playing for up to 10 hours a day (G. Baker, 2014).

The close association between music institutions and classed values becomes especially problematic when claims are made for music education as a vehicle of social justice (Benedict et al., 2015; Woodford, 2012). Innumerable projects in music education and pedagogy have been justified through an appeal to social justice: from the civilising effects of early British conservatories (A. Bull, 2016), to the social intervention and citizenship education of El Sistema (G. Baker, 2014; A. Bull, 2016) and the 'academic rigour' promoted by England's National Plan and National Curriculum (Bate, 2020; Spruce, 2013a, 2013b). Yet often, such claims are hindered by entrenched and politicised class values, leaving their recipients vulnerable to false hopes of justice or social mobility. Alexandra Kertz-Welzel (2019) goes as far as to describe these claims as harbouring evil, 'where music education promises salvation and transformation, but, in the end, supports the misuse of people, trying to turn them into a certain kind of character, living according to someone else's rules' (p. 178). Terms such as inclusivity and diversity become associated with the neoliberal facilitation of invulnerability, 'global economic competitiveness[,] and not democratic citizenship' (Woodford, 2012, p. 96). The British

government's 'social justice case for an academic curriculum' (Gibb, 2015), for example, validates the National Curriculum for Music through drawing on narrow conceptualisations of talent, greatness, performance training, and musical literacy that epitomise middle-class sensibilities (Bate, 2020).

Closely associated with the classed values underlying music education and social justice are values relating to gender and sexuality. Bull (2016) describes how the rational recreation of the nineteenth century required bourgeois women to exemplify sexual restraint, in contrast to the degeneracy and immorality commonly associated with the working classes. Accessing formal music education through conservatories and institutions such as the ABRSM enabled middle-class women to become professionally trained in classical music, endorsing its implicit code of morality and respectability. Bull (2019) also explores how this continues to take effect in contemporary music education practices, in which learning restraint of the body through disciplined practice and rehearsal can be associated with respectable bodily comportment and self-control.

Elizabeth Gould (1994) relates such practices to the historic gendered associations between femininity, music, and education (in opposition to masculinity, academic discourse, and intellectual professions). She describes how this association has perpetuated beliefs that participation in music-making could 'emasculate and thus homosexualize men and boys' (Gould, 2012, p. 46), and how music education has subsequently emphasised masculine, heterosexual values—such as invulnerability and mastery—in an attempt to 'ontologically disappear' individuals who identify as queer (pp. 46–48).<sup>14</sup> As a result, school music education often reproduces gendered and sexual musical practices including gender stereotypes relating to musical instruments and genres (Green, 2010), assumptions regarding appropriate male and female singing practices (Mantie & Talbot, 2020), the representation of heterosexual (over homosexual) relationships in music history and repertory (Bergonzi, 2009, 2015), and the

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<sup>14</sup> Although the term 'queer' has in the past been associated with derogatory and discriminative speech against individuals identifying as homosexual, I use it here in the broad sense acknowledged by queer theorists. In this regard, 'queer' can be seen as a more widely encompassing term than specific acronyms such as LGBTQ+ (typically understood to refer to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirited, asexual, or ally, and their associated communities and political activism) (Bergonzi et al., 2016).

enactment of ‘protomascularity’ in hierarchical master-apprentice relationships (Allsup, 2016, p. 12). Although there is evidence that the music classroom can be a safe and supportive environment for individuals who identify with a gender or sexual minority (e.g., Nichols, 2013), the reinforcement of masculine and heteronormative stereotypes can militate against pupils’ individual tastes, choices, and abilities.

Mari Yoshihara (2007) provides an interesting synthesis of how the classed, gendered, and sexual values of Western music education institutions can interact with racial and ethnic values to create a potent source of situational vulnerability. She explains how during the twentieth century, Asia welcomed Western music and its institutions as symbolic of progress and modernity: ‘Western music quickly gained symbolic power as a marker of middle-class status’ (p. 34). Singing and playing the piano or violin became ‘the domain of women’ (p. 102), allowing some girls to pursue higher education in music while boys were encouraged to seek more lucrative employment. But despite the continuing popularity of Western classical music amongst Asians, its inherently Western connotations leave Asian musicians ‘racially marked as cultural Others’ (p. 191). It can potentially challenge their ethnic identity and cultural heritage, offering opportunities for formal training but devaluing traditional musical skills and ways of learning (Kok, 2011; Mok, 2011; Yoshihara, 2007). In some instances it can even prompt racial discrimination from Western musicians (Yoshihara, 2007). Recent research into the lives of Black and minority ethnicity music industry professionals in the United Kingdom reported that 73% of participants had experienced direct or indirect racism in the industry, and that 80% had experienced racial microaggressions (Gittens et al., 2021, p. 18).

Racial discrimination may be particularly evident in school classrooms, where the stereotype of the ideal musician is often taken to be White and Western. Ruth Gustafson (2009) compares this ideal of ‘a relatively motionless body, a reverent demeanor, and a minimizing of gesture’ (p. xii) to the typical values of Black, African, and African American music-making, which foreground spontaneous movement and gesture in response to music. Latasha Thomas-Durrell (2022) describes how, for her, this overriding emphasis on White, Western musical ideals at school led to the erasure of her pre-existing musical identity fostered by the cherished customs and practices of her Black family and church community. But even when teachers

pursue culturally-responsive approaches, acknowledgement of minoritised musical cultures in the classroom can be, at best, cursory. Mitsuko Isoda (2021), for example, highlights how in Japanese classrooms, minority Zainichi Korean pupils are encouraged to engage with traditional Korean music-making, but in doing so are segregated from Japanese pupils and demarcated as culturally other or inferior.

Despite growing secularism across Western cultures, there is evidence that religiously-diverse populations can lead to heightened religious sensitivities in schools, and that when music education does not engage critically with religious values and assumptions it can propagate situational vulnerability (Jorgensen, 2019). In Finland, these conflicts have been widely debated as a result of the positive and negative freedom of religion delineated in the Finnish Constitution. Schools' traditional singing of the Lutheran hymn *Suvivirsi* has prompted arguments that no-one should be exposed to religious music against their will, and counterarguments that a completely secular education would be contrary to the interests of educating 'culturally reflective ethical agents' (Väkevä, 2019, p. 118).

In Britain and North America, the very presence of music in schools is known to cause tensions among some Muslim populations (Harris, 2006; Izsak, 2013). Although music is not specifically mentioned in the Qur'an, some Muslims believe it is completely forbidden—haram—according to the additional teachings of the hadith. Others believe that music is acceptable when associated with Islamic praise and celebration, but not permissible if it has overtones of other haram practices, such as drinking alcohol, promiscuity, or other acts of immorality. For example, dancing, making music in the company of the other sex, or making music during the fasting season of Ramadan may be considered inappropriate. Yet other Muslims are more amenable to Western uses of music, or have their own cultural history of music-making in traditional styles (Baily, 2011). This variety of stances on music-making and its religious significance means that it is not unusual for some Muslims to exclude their children from classroom music, or for Muslim children to be less willing (or able) to participate (Harris, 2006; Izsak, 2013). Similar concerns can occur in the Orthodox Jewish tradition, in which female singing and public performance is associated with lewdness, licentious behaviour, and indecent bodily exposure (Badarne & Ehrlich, 2019). It is therefore clear how even a seemingly

secular music education can perpetuate specific religious values, cause religious tensions, and potentially generate situational vulnerability for participants, especially if they are unaccustomed to music-making in their everyday lives (Harris, 2006).

The same can be said in relation to music's perpetuation of standards of ability, able-bodiedness, and ableism. Especially in Western classical traditions, dualistic values such as consonance and dissonance, on-beat and off-beat, and in tune and out of tune 'can be harsh and relentless enforcers of these conformational standards, punishing divergence while favoring uniformity in ways that may profitably be understood to mirror the social oppression of disabled bodies and minds' (Howe & Jensen-Moulton, 2016, p. 526). This has a notable effect in higher education music studies, where a culture of rampant critique and paranoia reinforces the need for 'sounding good' as a means of securing social status and prestige (Cheng, 2016, p. 8). In education—and especially within the neoliberal discourse of invulnerability and mastery (Churchill & Laes, 2021)—music studies often resemble ability studies, emphasising the 'tempting belief that talent, ambition, and hard work can prevail over all adversity' (Cheng, 2020, p. 107).

Despite humanity's innate communicative musicality—which enables severely disabled individuals to participate in music-making with sound and movement (Tiszai, 2020)—ableist expectations in music classrooms serve to reinforce divisions between those who are able and disabled (or differently-abled). Physical, attitudinal, social, and educational barriers (such as bullying, lack of appropriate professional development, and the expense of Special Educational Needs (SEN) staff and resources, cf. Grimsby, 2022) can prevent inclusion of disabled individuals, and misguided interventions and adaptations can cause additional stigmatisation (Darrow, 2015). This can become particularly problematic when it leads to the marginalisation of disabled individuals with additional intersecting subordinate identities, who may be subject to complex interactions of classed, gendered, heterocentric, racial, ethnocentric, and religious oppressions (Churchill & Laes, 2021, pp. 136–137).

### *2.2.3. Pathogenic musical vulnerability*

In addition to the situational vulnerabilities generated by the relationship between music

## 2. CONCEPTUALISING MUSICAL VULNERABILITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

education and class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion, and (dis)ability, where educational practices also perpetuate the neoliberal agenda of invulnerability they can cause pathogenic vulnerabilities. This is partly a result of the slippage between the expectations of the commercial music industries, music education policy, and everyday pedagogical practices. Sally Anne Gross and George Musgrave (2017) identify the competitive pursuit of success and a ruthless feedback economy—in which musicians' personal investment in their music leaves them 'vulnerable to the criticisms of others' (p. 20)—as cultural norms of the music industries. Professional musicians expect to face immense performance pressure, job insecurity, and financial precariousness because of others' demands on their music-making; these are normalised aspects of their working conditions. Similarly, in one-to-one tuition preparing pupils for professional music careers, 'bullying and humiliation are a normalized, accepted part of learning classical music' (A. Bull, 2019, p. 87). Criticism is expected because it forces progress to be made and resilience to be developed. But in such a culture, correction may come to be taken as judgment not just on the sound an individual makes, but on their standard, calibre, and moral worth (A. Bull, 2019). This can prompt harassment and pathogenic vulnerability, since criticism of one's music-making or taste can rapidly become criticism of one's self-identity (A. Bull, 2019; Carter, 2011).

Fortunately, one-to-one teaching can also generate positive vulnerabilities and encourage the reflective use of constructive criticism. However, there are harrowing accounts of instances in which the relationship of trust in these circumstances has been abused. Ian Pace (2013), reflecting on allegations of abuse made against staff members at Chetham's School of Music in northwest England, describes how the values often associated with music render pupils particularly vulnerable to abuse:

many of the values and attitudes informing classical music today remain rooted in the 19th century. Among these is the idea that solo performance entails a highly intimate expression of self, dealing with deeply intimate emotions. Or that it entails a seduction, captivation and bewitchment of one's audience, which can objectify performer and listener alike. Both place the musician in a



vulnerable situation that can be withstood from the vantage point of adult emotional and sexual maturity, but that is extremely testing and potentially dangerous for children. (n.p.)

Given the isolated nature of one-to-one music teaching and the power differential at play, it is perhaps unsurprising that the number of allegations of sexual abuse in music education is significant. Yet, as Pace (2013) indicates, these reports are only a glimpse into the vulnerabilities made manifest in master-apprentice-style teaching. Even when abuse does not explicitly take place, pupils may be subjected to teachers' 'narcissistic self-obsession, narrowness of outlook, ruthless competitiveness, vanity and [...] insatiable need for reassurance' (n.p.). The disposition and character of their teacher can have a significant influence on their lives, leaving them vulnerable to the lasting negative influence of a demeaning, discouraging, and potentially dangerous experience of musical participation.

### 2.3. Alternative pedagogical approaches

Pathogenic issues such as abuse and harassment have not gone unnoticed by music education scholars and practitioners, and there have been many and varied pedagogical developments attempting to foster inclusion and celebrate diversity in the classroom. Yet while such pedagogies go some way in addressing symptoms of vulnerability such as exclusion, disengagement, and frustration, they often fall short of identifying the root causes of inherent, situational, and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities. In the following sections, I therefore evaluate four existing pedagogical approaches that have made a significant impact upon music-making practices in classrooms across England. In Section 2.3.1 I consider the role of consulting the pupil voice, and in Section 2.3.2 I examine the introduction of informal learning into classrooms. I then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of transcultural approaches in Section 2.3.3, and critical pedagogy in Section 2.3.4. Finally, I summarise the need for music education pedagogy that is based on a nuanced understanding of pupils' diverse experiences of musical vulnerability and its situational and pathogenic manifestation in the classroom.

### 2.3.1. *Consulting the pupil voice*

The ‘pupil voice’ movement in England originated in the 1990s, growing out of a combination of international legislation, a drive to raise educational standards, and a trend towards personalised and democratised learning (Finney, 2011; Flutter, 2010). According to the pioneering research of Julia Flutter and Jean Rudduck (2004), consulting the pupil voice as a means of shaping educational practice means drawing upon ‘the principle that pupils can bring something worthwhile to discussions about schooling’ (p. 5). Their research shows that the pupil voice can make a real difference to schools through acknowledging pupils’ personal, out-of-school interests, promoting pupils’ autonomy as learners, and encouraging pupils’ democratic participation in school life (pp. 132–136).

Within music education, consulting the pupil voice has proved a popular approach for teachers and researchers alike investigating pupils’ ‘attitudes, motivations, ways of knowing and perceptions of the learning and teaching of music’ (Finney, 2011, p. 102). For teachers, entering into dialogue with their classes can be instrumental in engaging pupils as active participants in their learning and fostering classroom environments where they feel welcome (Burnard & Björk, 2010). It can offer pupils an agentic role in delineating their own curriculum and taking ownership of their own music-making (Laurence, 2010). For researchers, listening to pupils’ voices can provide a valuable insight into pupils’ and teachers’ different perspectives on learning (e.g., Burnard, 2004; Wright, 2008), uncover large-scale trends in pupils’ musical preferences and cultures (e.g., Lamont et al., 2003), and contribute to cross-cultural educational comparison (e.g., Hardcastle et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, consulting the pupil voice has been criticised for potentially sustaining existing inequalities in the music classroom. The nominal use of pupil voice ‘as a mechanistic tool for investigating attitudes and behaviours’ can fail to have any impact at all on pupils’ learning (Burnard & Björk, 2010, p. 29). Likewise, misplaced assumptions that the pupil voice is a homogenous construct can silence the voices of pupils who are less able or willing to articulate themselves (Spruce, 2015). Rather than acknowledge the multiplicity and diversity of ‘pupils’ voices’ (Flutter, 2010), this can result in reinforcing existing dominant and exclusive

discourses in the classroom that fail to account for pupils' varied out-of-school musical experiences.

### *2.3.2. Introducing informal learning*

The concept of informal learning is closely related to that of pupil voice, and is built upon ideas of democratic, participatory, and dialogic learning (Allsup, 2003). Informal learning occurs when '[the] learning situation is not sequenced beforehand; the activity steers the way of working / playing / composing, and the process proceeds by the interaction of participants in the activity' (Folkestad, 2006, p. 141). In England, informal learning in the music classroom was first conceptualised by Lucy Green (2008), following her seminal research into popular musicians' ways of learning (2002). In contrast to music education policy at the time, the concept challenged traditional schemes of musical progression, instead emphasising pupils' choices and the development of music-making communities (Finney, 2011, p. 134). According to Green (2008), informal learning practices involve five fundamental characteristics that differentiate them from typical formal learning practices. First, learning relates to music that pupils choose, like, and with which they identify. Second, learning takes place by listening to and copying recordings. Third, learning occurs within friendship groups. Fourth, learning is personal and haphazard, with minimal structured guidance. And finally, learning integrates listening, performing, improvising, and composing (p. 10).

Green's research into informal learning practices and their relationship to formal and non-formal approaches resulted in schools across England adopting Musical Futures, a classroom programme introducing informal learning practices within a carefully planned pedagogical structure (D'Amore, 2009). Now an international not-for-profit organisation, Musical Futures boasts a network of over 13,000 practitioners in England and overseas (Musical Futures, 2021). Alongside other similar approaches that utilise pedagogical practices from popular music—such as Little Kids Rock in the United States—it has been praised for democratising classroom music-making, offering pupils greater agency, and empowering them to make independent musical decisions (Powell et al., 2017).

However, research suggests that informal learning practices are not always successful in alleviating issues of vulnerability, inequality, and exclusion in the classroom. Reviews of Musical Futures have indicated that the approach may alienate pupils with specific needs such as autism or anxiety (Hallam et al., 2011, p. 165), and that some pupils lack confidence within the unstructured learning environment, fearing humiliation or embarrassment in front of their peers (Mariguddi, 2019, p. 185). The emphasis on group work may also create tension, both for pupils negotiating with their peers (Hallam et al., 2018, p. 220) and for teachers working tirelessly to facilitate flexibility and inclusivity (Hallam et al., 2017, p. 49).

### *2.3.3. Facilitating transcultural approaches*

Both the pupil voice movement and informal learning approaches are grounded in the understanding that mediating between pupils' in- and out-of-school musical experiences through drawing on their pre-existing musical knowledge has the potential to enhance equity, inclusion, and diversity in the music classroom. By foregrounding pupils' musical preferences and learning styles, teachers may foster dialogic pedagogies which respect pupils' cultures and level the hierarchical master-apprentice relationship. Further pedagogies based on these foundational principles include peer mentoring (e.g., A. Anderson, 2010; Davis, 2011) and using music technology to offer pupils more relevant and autonomous learning experiences (e.g., Tobias, 2013, 2015).

Yet such approaches are becoming increasingly complex and demanding in an age of globalisation and transculturality. In culturally-diverse classrooms, 'the direct link between ethnic background and musical preferences is rapidly weakening' (Schippers, 2010, p. 30). Pupils' musical cultures outside school may be multicultural, intercultural, or transcultural—involving in-depth cultural exchange and fusion of styles facilitated by the global reach of the commercial music industries (Kertz-Welzel, 2016, 2018)—and cannot be assumed to represent 'homogenous groups with common aims' (Creech et al., 2016, p. 80). It has therefore been proposed that a transcultural educational approach may be most appropriate to

allow children to make well-informed choices concerning their musical preferences on the basis of a globally inspired value system, equip them with the tools to explore their culturally diverse musical world, and limit the risk of prejudice and estrangement. (Schippers, 2010, p. 129)

This kind of ‘culturally sensitive’ approach aims to account for both the global commonalities in children’s cultures and for their individual, traditional, and informal ways of learning (Kertz-Welzel, 2018, pp. 90–92). It may also have the potential to create stronger bonds between school music and pathways for continued musical participation in community settings, by collaborating with culture-bearers and musicians from different traditions to facilitate transcultural exchange and fusion (Campbell, 2004; Schippers, 2010; Zeserson, 2011).

But there are challenges to implementing transcultural approaches in the classroom. Teachers often feel ill-equipped to achieve pedagogical authenticity, and either seek the authentic representation of youth cultures without interfacing with current, real-world musical practices, or introduce authentic musical practices without engaging with their own pupils’ musical interests (Allsup et al., 2012; D. G. Herbert, 2010; Lum & Marsh, 2012; Schippers, 2010). This can hinder opportunities for ‘vibrant musical experience[s]’ (Schippers, 2010, p. 52), and lead to music-making that seems exclusive, distant, and abstract in comparison with pupils’ everyday lives.

### *2.3.4. Engaging critical pedagogy*

One final pedagogical approach that has sought to ameliorate the symptoms of musical vulnerability in the classroom is critical pedagogy. Unlike the aforementioned approaches, which seek greater diversity and toleration in the classroom through focussing on pupils’ preferences and experiences, critical pedagogy seeks to uncover problems of exclusion, lack of diversity, and discrimination through explicit and dialogic conversation. Having grown out of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critical pedagogy has been described by Gary Spruce (2012) as enabling pupils to become ‘critically conscious of the power, ideological and relationship matrices that impact on the world’ (p. 189). It entails the recognition that

knowledge is constructed through dialectical negotiation and social, political, and historical mediation. Applied to musical practice, it highlights how musical meanings and values are socially, politically, and historically constructed, and inseparable from issues of exclusivity, ideology, and hierarchical division.

Previous research has suggested that critical pedagogy could be pivotal in engendering teachers' and pupils' awareness of—and action against—inequality and oppression in musical practices. It could draw attention to the monolithic social construct of the Western musical canon, and its associated classed and gendered values (Bate, 2020; Hess, 2017). It could prompt critical and challenging conversations surrounding racial discrimination and the place of music in anti-racist activism (Bradley, 2007; Hess, 2021; G. D. Smith, 2021). And it could begin to disrupt and untangle seemingly irreconcilable moral conflicts such as those presented by hate speech and hate music (Kallio, 2021b).

However, critical pedagogy is not without its shortcomings. Despite its aim to engage with pupils' individual positionalities, it can sometimes reinscribe hierarchical relationships, privileging teachers' life experiences in initiating and directing dialogue (Hess, 2017, p. 179). Its critical and political nature also means it may be unfeasible to implement in settings where high-stakes assessment and accountability measures restrict teachers' freedom in curriculum delivery (p. 180), although this may be avoided through the development of local curricula using ecological or spherical design to interface with accountability measures (Schmidt, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Furthermore, the left-leaning politics associated with critical pedagogy may preclude the viability of traditional (right-leaning) approaches, and therefore 'work against the values of free debate and student agency by delegitimizing conservative or libertarian perspectives in advance' (Perrine, 2017, p. 7).

### 2.4. Mobilising musical vulnerability

Despite extensive theorisation of how critical, transcultural, informal, and pupil-centred pedagogies could address pupils' exclusion, disengagement, and frustration in the music classroom, in England uptake of music activities beyond the age of 14 remains low (K. Evans, 2012). Between 2016 and 2018 there was a 9.8% decrease in the number of pupils opting to take

GCSE music in schools across the United Kingdom, and a 4.0% decrease in the number of pupils opting for A-level music (Daubney & Mackrill, 2018). Neoliberal accountability measures such as the EBacc and PISA have raised new barriers for pursuing music after KS3, since pupils (particularly those from deprived backgrounds) are often encouraged to drop ‘non-essential’ subjects (Daubney et al., 2019, p. 16).

Evidence for the decline of classroom music education in England—alongside the research into the potentially detrimental effects of music-making summarised in Section 1.3 and the examples of inherent, situational, and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities outlined in Section 2.2—challenges the proliferation of advocacy for the unquestionably beneficial effects of classroom music-making. It is a sincere reminder that it cannot be assumed that musical participation ‘is necessarily good for the child’ (P. Evans et al., 2013, p. 614), and that, in some instances, ceasing musical engagement may be more desirable than continuing it. Music ‘may serve ends both desirable and undesirable, both beneficial and detrimental’ (Bowman, 2014, n.p.), and it may ‘appease or annoy, heal or harm, bring communities together or break communities apart’ (Cheng, 2020, p. 5). In this regard, we are vulnerable to music: to its joys, pleasures, and benefits, but also to its pains, hurts, and frustrations.

As illustrated throughout this chapter, musical vulnerabilities—both positive and negative—are often implicated in educational institutions. Not only does music education policy and pedagogy frequently subscribe to the neoliberal agenda of invulnerability, but its long-established methods and values also have considerable propensity for exacerbating situational and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities. Even though many instances of such vulnerabilities are isolated cases, far-removed from most individuals’ day-to-day lives, they should not be overlooked. The clear evidence that negative musical experiences can have lasting and detrimental impacts should provide a strong stimulus to mobilise a nuanced understanding of musical vulnerability to develop an approach to music education that accounts for both positive and negative experiences in the classroom.

Understanding musical vulnerability as humanity’s inherent and situational openness to being affected by the semantic and somatic properties of music gives a greater insight into how music affects human identity through its citational and phenomenological qualities. But

because musical practices in and of themselves ‘are vulnerable to unethical and self-destructive identity formation’ and can promulgate racist, homophobic, or antidemocratic values (Elliott & Silverman, 2017, p. 29), music education practitioners have an ethical responsibility to mitigate against lasting ill effects or potential harm (Bowman, 2001). David Elliott and Marissa Silverman (2017) call this ‘an ethics of musical identity construction’ (p. 41). In their view, facilitating the power of music to construct ethical musical identities—or harnessing musical vulnerabilities—requires the development of a philosophy of music as praxis rather than practice. Whereas viewing music as practice can run the risk of focussing on music-as-doing without regard for its potentially injurious outcomes, viewing music as praxis situates music-making within an ethical framework of phronesis: practical knowledge based on an ethos of care and social responsibility (cf. Elliott et al., 2016; Elliott & Silverman, 2017; Regelski, 2002, 2005; M. Silverman & Elliott, 2016; Spruce & Matthews, 2012). Musical praxis must include ‘critically reflective thinking-and-doing for the *positive* transformation of people’s everyday lives and situations’ (Elliott & Silverman, 2017, p. 41, my emphasis).

### 2.4.1. *Towards an ethic of care*

Adopting such an ethic of care requires an active engagement with musical vulnerability: accepting and debating music’s semantic and somatic power to endorse, uphold, and celebrate, or wound, degrade, and disintegrate identity (Philpott, 2012). An ethic of care is, in fact, dependent on the recognition of vulnerability. Vulnerability ‘reminds us that we need others in order to satisfy our primordial needs, even (and even more) when we display obvious autonomy’ (Laugier, 2016, p. 208). It shows us what it means ‘to grasp the reality of the other as a possibility for [ourselves]’ (Noddings, 2013, p. 35). Care can therefore be painful, because it means becoming vulnerable to being challenged by attending to the needs of others, ‘and thus confronting frailty’ (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 27). This pain is often familiar to classroom teachers, who struggle for recognition within classrooms fraught with the pressures of performativity measures and difficult relationships with pupils (Kelchtermans, 1996). But care can also be life-enhancing, because becoming vulnerable to being harmed by another also 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. (Noddings, 2013, p. 52)

Care, therefore, should not be restricted to close personal relationships, but should be distributed equitably to cater for the vulnerabilities of all (Mullin, 2014). The conservatory and the musicological community should be characterised by an ethic of care (Cheng, 2016). The one-to-one music lesson should be characterised by an ethic of care (Nourse, 2003). And the school music classroom should be characterised by an ethic of care (Jorgensen, 2003), meeting pupils where they are at and equipping them with the autonomy, self-identity, and moral agency required to mitigate their vulnerability to current or future harm (Lotz, 2014). Places of music education must become ‘collective communities of care’ (Michaeli, 2017, p. 54): communities that are wide awake to the discouragement, disparagement, and discrimination that stems from the institutional exacerbation of situational and pathogenic musical vulnerabilities.

However, this does not and should not mean instigating a new ‘hegemonic understanding of emancipation and liberatory practices’ (Niknafs, 2021a, p. 14), in which the recognition of musical vulnerability is used to evade the need for recognition of each individual’s unique, circumstantial needs. On the contrary, an ethic of care necessitates the respectful and loving recognition of each individual’s values and vulnerabilities and their constitutive contribution to the community (Niknafs, 2021a). This requires giving critical and care-full attention to individuals’ complex intersectional identities and the ways in which they relate to values of class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion, and (dis)ability (Churchill & Laes, 2021). This should be equally the case for those who may be the enunciators of hate and discrimination as for those who may be the recipients of such (musical) violence. Though there may be a place for censorship in the classroom, a radical and critical ethic of care engages even individuals whose views may seem reprehensible, and therefore enacts ‘a

democratic and ethical commitment to communication with one another that may well allow for new visions of solidarity to emerge' (Kallio, 2021b, p. 173).

Music education has the potential to facilitate these ethical encounters through a *critical pedagogy of care* that positively transforms individuals' everyday musical experiences. Though music-making often highlights individuals' failures, shortcomings, and dependencies, it can also foster 'an attitude of care, concern, and commitment toward a good outside the self and its interests' (Bowman, 2001, p. 17). Music-making can become a place of (safeguarded) intimacy, where physical proximity with others kindles a deep sense of trust (Allsup, 2020; Lapidaki, 2020): acknowledging vulnerabilities and interdependencies, dwelling with ambiguity and fragility, and committing to care and be cared for (Singh, 2018, p. 167).

When music-making takes place within 'a politics of intimacy' (Lapidaki, 2020, p. 262), music itself can be transformed through resignification. Music is like language. When words are citational their statement can create resignification, unmooring them from their prior context. The separation between speech act and immediate context 'opens up the possibility for a counter-speech, a kind of talking back' (Butler, 1997, p. 15). Language can be reappropriated as resistance (Michel, 2016; C. Mills, 2000), vulnerability reframed as humility (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Gilson, 2014), or dependence transformed into autonomy (J. Anderson, 2014; Mackenzie, 2014). Likewise, musical practices that perpetuate the desirability of invulnerability can be reappropriated as praxes, openly acknowledging musical vulnerability. Subjection to classed, raced, or gendered musical values can be reframed as humble learning experiences engaging critical consciousness.<sup>15</sup> And master-apprentice relationships can be transformed to facilitate relational autonomy. In light of music's semantic indeterminacy, classroom music-making can offer a safe, low-stakes environment in which to foster reflexive dialogue and disrupt expressions 'of the fundamentally irreconcilable views and values that compete for legitimacy

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Ketil Thorgersen and Thomas van Wachenfeldt (2019, 2021) have offered a tentative theorisation of how black metal music—conventionally associated with elite satanism—could be reframed as a pedagogical tool emphasising aesthetic communication, artistic excellence and agency, and critical thinking. They suggest that cross-fertilisation between genres such as black metal and classroom teaching 'could perhaps help music education to reveal and escape the double bind of gendered, white, middle-class, and hegemonic music cultural capital' (Thorgersen & von Wachenfeldt, 2019, p. 216). Others have proposed that hip-hop (G. D. Smith, 2021) and hate music (Kallio, 2021b) could serve a similarly provocative role.

in pluralist societies' (Kallio, 2021b, p. 172), while participatory musical practices may offer an alternative social model of communal recognition and equitable engagement (Hess, 2021; MacGregor, 2020).

Nonetheless, such a process of transformation in the music classroom may seem like a Utopian dream, impossible in the face of the burgeoning neoliberal agenda of invulnerability and increasing pressures on teachers' performativity and accountability. But facing up to systematic harm and symbolic violence in music education requires a Utopian vision—to adopt 'an ethos of experimentation that is oriented toward carving out spaces for resistance and reconstruction' (Wright, 2019, p. 222), and confront and disturb dominant neoliberal discourse through opening up new possible worlds (Vujanović, 2016). After all, 'it is only once we recognise our shared entanglement in conflict—along with its powerful corollary, an awareness of our shared vulnerability and interdependence—that we can begin to develop new caring imaginaries on a global scale' (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 94).

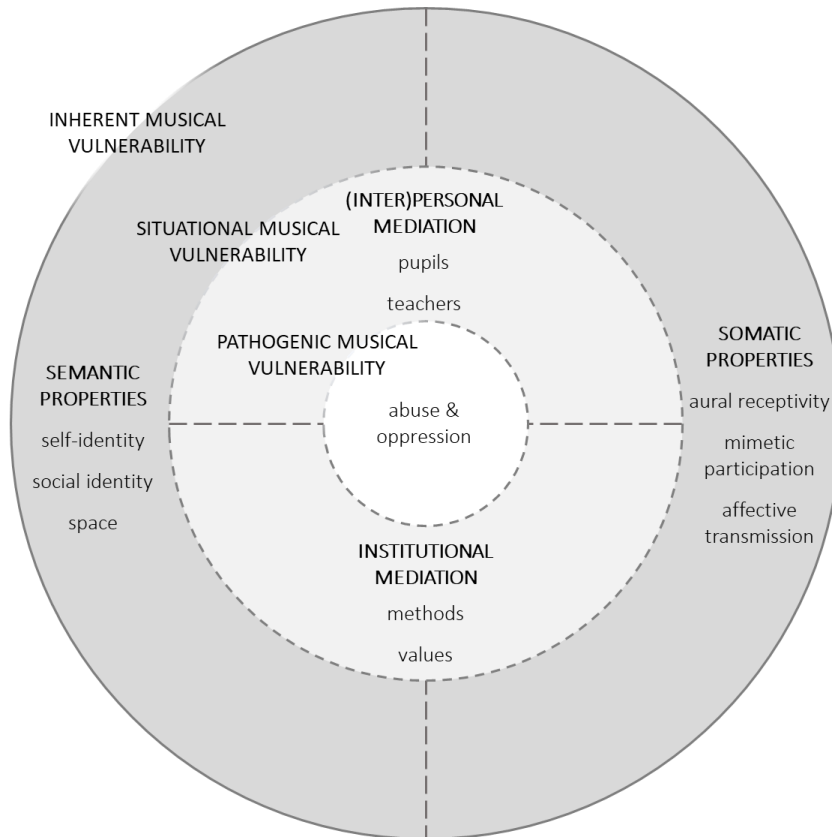
In this thesis, I therefore endeavour to carve out the space of musical vulnerability, opening up new possibilities for conversation, reconstruction, and transformation. I emphasise the need for empirical research investigating the extent to which the concept of musical vulnerability is representative of the lived experiences of pupils and teachers during school music-making. While the present chapter has highlighted the significant body of extant literature addressing the methods and values that affect the *institutional* mediation of music-making in the classroom, in Chapter 3 I set out a methodological approach that aims to address the current lack of research into individuals' everyday lived experiences of music's *interpersonal* and *personal* mediation in the classroom (*Figure 2.5*).

Using the phenomenological ethnography described in Chapter 3, in Chapters 4 and 5 I identify and describe the characteristics of musical vulnerability—both positive and negative—within school music-making contexts. In Chapter 6 I investigate these characteristics in greater detail, evaluating the extent to which they are observable in one KS3 music classroom, and whether they are recognised by the pupils concerned. Finally, in Chapter 7 I summarise my findings and outline potential implications for policymakers, teachers, pupils, and researchers. I explore ways in which music education policy and pedagogy could harness

## 2. CONCEPTUALISING MUSICAL VULNERABILITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

musical vulnerability for positive outcomes, transforming classroom music experiences into those that affirm a genuine ethic of care, establish positive musical identities, and satisfy every individual's right to continued music-making throughout their lives.

*Figure 2.5. Music's institutional and (inter)personal mediation*



### 3. Researching musical vulnerability: A methodology

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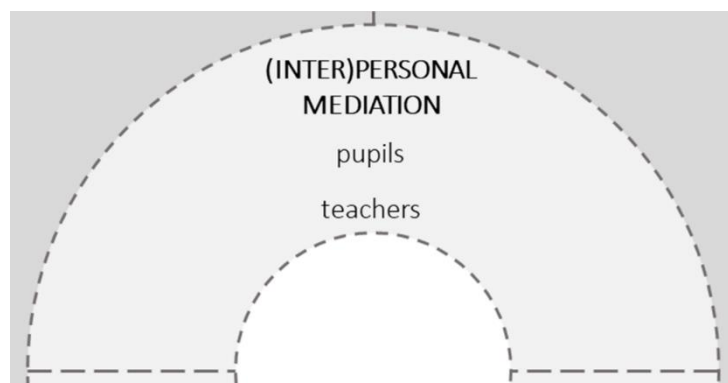
#### 3.1. Introduction

As outlined in Section 1.5, in the following chapters I aim to investigate the extent to which the concept of musical vulnerability—the inherent and situational openness to being affected by the semantic and somatic properties of music—is representative of individuals’ lived experiences in the KS3 music classroom. As shown in *Figure 3.1*, I concentrate on the interpersonal and personal factors mediating pupils’ and teachers’ experiences of situational musical vulnerability, thereby identifying and describing instances of musical vulnerability in response to three research questions:

1. What is the place of musical vulnerability in music education and how can it be conceptualised?
2. To what extent is musical vulnerability experienced in the KS3 music classroom and how is it characterised?
3. How can teachers and pupils in the KS3 music classroom mitigate negative musical vulnerability and harness positive musical vulnerability?

Having considered the place of musical vulnerability and its conceptualisation in Chapters 1 and 2, in this chapter I outline and justify the development of a two-phase phenomenological

*Figure 3.1. The (inter)personal mediation of pupils’ and teachers’ musical vulnerability*



ethnography to establish a typology of musical vulnerability in classroom music education. This typology forms the basis of the conclusions drawn in Chapter 7, which propose how music education policy, pedagogy, and research could be developed to harness teachers' and pupils' musical vulnerabilities for positive effect.

In the following sections, I discuss the validity of a phenomenological, ethnographic approach, outlining the characteristics, benefits, and limitations of ethnography in Section 3.2 and phenomenology in Section 3.3. In Section 3.4 I evaluate existing phenomenological ethnographies of music absorption and music listening to assess the value of a phenomenological ethnography of musical vulnerability. To conclude, in Sections 3.5 and 3.6 I summarise my method and analytical approach for each phase of data collection.

### 3.2. Defining ethnography

Ethnography, despite its increasing prevalence in qualitative research across disciplines, remains a contested term with blurred boundaries (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). However, as *Table 3.1* indicates, there is some consensus over the typical characteristics of ethnographic research (cf. Creswell, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethnographers aim to view the culture under investigation as 'anthropologically strange' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 9), setting aside presuppositions to study it from a fresh perspective. Such an approach has become increasingly popular in educational research, in which school ethnographers seek 'to make the familiar strange' (Gordon et al., 2001, p. 188).

*Table 3.1. Characteristics of ethnography*

<i>Characteristics of ethnography</i>
Studying everyday actions and behaviours in culture-sharing groups
Gathering qualitative data through cultural immersion in the site, participant observation, and informal interviews
Employing descriptive and interpretative analysis of the data to assess their implications for wider human actions and behaviours
Establishing the reflexive positioning of the researcher and their role in the construction of knowledge

Classroom ethnographies may draw on influences varying from social interactionism to post-structuralism (Gordon et al., 2001), but will almost always adhere to the tenets of cultural immersion, participant observation, and informal interviewing. An ethnography of a school, a classroom, or a group of pupils or teachers therefore ‘provides understanding of a larger issue’ (Creswell, 2008, p. 473), as the rich, qualitative data of a small-scale study are situated within the macrostructures of educational processes and institutions.

### *3.2.1. Applications of ethnography*

Ethnographic approaches are common in music education research. They are sometimes applied in the context of practitioner research, in which the music teacher—who has ready access to cultural immersion in the musical lives of their pupils—reflects on classroom observations and discussions or interviews with pupils. This is evident in Joanne Cheetham’s (2013) study of an after-school rock band, in which she participated in her pupils’ informal music-making, and in my own previous work investigating participatory music-making during Year 7 and 8 classroom lessons (MacGregor, 2020).

Former teachers John Finney (2003) and Ruth Wright (2008) have also both undertaken classroom ethnographies as external researchers rather than as practising teachers. In these instances, the researcher adopts an insider-outsider perspective with greater critical distance than that afforded to the practitioner-researcher. Finney’s (2003) study investigated the attitudes, motivations, and ways of knowing of one Year 8 class and their teacher over 20 weeks. Through cultural immersion—lesson observations, musical participation, questionnaires, and group interviews—Finney gained an insight into the successful teacher-pupil relationship that characterised the class’s enjoyment of music lessons. Situating the study within wider questions of the success of music education, Finney concludes that ‘of primary importance is the relationship between teacher and learner, and learner and what is to be learnt’ (n.p.).

Wright’s (2008) ethnography makes a similar contribution to the field, using cultural immersion over several months to reveal perceptions of the KS3 curriculum from one Year 9 class and their teacher. From her observations, questionnaires, and interviews, Wright concludes that, despite the teacher’s ‘culturally relevant, enabling, enjoyable and motivating

curriculum' (p. 397), many pupils did not perceive themselves as 'musical' and found the curriculum to be at odds with their existing cultural habitus. Through positioning her study alongside the Bordieuan concept of habitus (see Burnard et al., 2015), she explores how classrooms with a similar sense of disconnection between pupils' habitus and curriculum expectations could benefit from informal learning, in which pupils take greater responsibility for the construction of musical knowledge.

While Finney and Wright both use ethnographic approaches to highlight possible improvements to classroom music teaching, it is also possible to use ethnography to identify and define existing attitudes and behaviours in the music classroom. This has been the focus of recent research by William Coppola (2018, 2019), whose doctoral dissertation on musical humility addressed the following questions:

1. Is there a distinctive form of humility specific to musical participation evident within the context of a competitive public high school jazz band?
2. What are the sociomusical ramifications (both positive and negative) resulting from such a manifestation of humility and egoism on the musicians, the ensembles in which they participate, and the larger musical outcomes of the group? (Coppola, 2018, p. 18)

Since Coppola's aims in relation to musical humility are—at least superficially—similar to my aims in relation to musical vulnerability, it is worth evaluating his study in detail.

Although Coppola (2018) sets out to research the form and role of musical humility, he contextualises his ethnography as an investigation of the wider prosocial dynamics of music-making in a high school jazz band. He justifies how 'this approach seeks all possible conclusions rather than engaging in a potentially-misguided deductive reasoning process in which I attempt to illustrate the themes of humility and egoism as singularly driving the narrative of events' (p. 21). His ethnographic, instrumental case study observed the sociomusical interactions and relationships within one high school jazz band. Over six months of fieldwork, he carried out non-participant observation of rehearsals, concerts, and competitions; made corresponding



audio recordings, fieldnotes, and analytic memos; interviewed 11 (out of 28) pupils and the band director; and collected material documentation such as concert programmes.

Coppola presents a thick description of his ethnographic account before identifying and analysing themes of egoism and humility. These five emergent themes (summarised in Coppola, 2019, pp. 13–18) comprise purposeful musical engagement and collaboration, other-orientedness, lack of superiority, acknowledgements of shortcomings and learnability,<sup>16</sup> and healthy pride. He then constructs an emergent definition of musical humility, identifying the musical, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal interactions between themes, and has more recently devised an associated psychometric measure (Coppola et al., 2020).

Coppola's study provides a valuable model for the potential investigation of musical vulnerability. In a similar way to how I have drawn on existing scholarship in vulnerability studies, Coppola reviews existing research on humility and its subdomains to theorise the possible existence of a specific, 'musical' humility. With this theory in hand, he uses inductive, ethnographic techniques to test whether musical humility can be observed in his chosen setting, without presuming its necessary presence. Through situating musical humility within the wider gamut of social interaction, he also avoids the possible self-enhancement effect that could arise if members of the jazz band were asked to self-report about their own humility (Coppola et al., 2020, p. 2). Since I also risk presupposing the presence of a phenomenon without existing empirical evidence, I follow Coppola's methodological example and situate musical vulnerability within a wider array of musical effects and experiences, both to avoid my own deductive theorisation and participants' potential self-enhancing or self-deprecating understandings of the term 'vulnerability'.

However, there are significant differences between investigating musical humility and musical vulnerability. Humility is often an observable character trait that manifests itself in distinctive behaviours and shared cultures within the classroom. Vulnerability, on the other hand, normally operates in an affective dimension, and is not necessarily visible as a shared culture or behaviour. Coppola's (2018) research reveals the facility of using ethnography to

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<sup>16</sup> Coppola (2019) defines 'learnability' as the acceptance of 'the understanding that the musician has identifiable shortcomings but possesses the potential to overcome them through effort and practice' (p. 16).

identify musical humility. His classroom observations illustrate clear instances of egoism on display:

pinning his elbows tensely to his sides, Simon plays a short bebop passage in the upper register of his horn and shakes on the final note momentarily before ripping the trumpet from his lips in a forceful, forward motion. His eyes awkwardly dart around the room, but catching no one's eye, he repeats the same procedure a few more times before making his way to the classroom "bandstand" setup. (pp. 93–94)

These observations are later confirmed during interviews with other pupils: 'while expressions of egocentric behaviors were broad and varied, the band member that was most prevalently identified as arrogant was trumpeter Simon, who was named by nearly every member of his section, as well as several members beyond' (pp. 130–131).

Musical vulnerability, on the other hand, often seems to manifest itself more subtly. Kathryn Jourdan (2015) describes observing the vulnerability of Tom, a pupil in her year-long ethnographic case study of one KS3 music class: 'Tom expresses perspectives which set him apart from his classmates and which are symptomatic of his vulnerability to being perceived as "different" in a school setting, where this is problematic' (p. 192). Anna Bull (2019) discusses vulnerability during interviews with participants in her ethnographic research into out-of-school youth music-making. One pupil, Megan, describes her singing lessons:

sometimes I go in and it's not linked to anything you've been doing, but I just burst into tears, so I try and sing and I just cry. It's like a space, an hour in the week where it's just you and yourself and you can't do anything else. [...] You can't hide anything, 'cause when I'm learning to sing it's quite a sensitive time. [...] It's like an hour that is ... sacred in a way, like, I don't know, it's for yourself, and ... it's vulnerable. (p. 52)

These two examples demonstrate how, in opportune circumstances, some manifestations of musical vulnerability might emerge during ethnographic research. However, observations and discussions may reveal a one-dimensional picture of musical vulnerability, picking up on its associations with pedagogical issues (such as the place of Tom's musical preferences in the classroom) and institutional structures (such as the master-apprentice relationship in Megan's singing lessons). The classic ethnographic approach, well-suited for researching shared cultures, values, and behaviours, remains limited in exposing the essence of affective and emotional experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### 3.3. Defining phenomenology

Whereas ethnography is fitting for the study of shared cultures, 'a phenomenological qualitative study is well-suited to studying emotions and affective states' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 28). While there are numerous possible research methods for exploring issues of affect and multisensory perception (e.g., Knudsen & Stage, 2015; Pink, 2015), phenomenological approaches focus on identifying the underlying 'essence' or 'structure' of a given human experience through establishing concrete descriptions of everyday phenomena. This can help avoid the positivist tendency to analyse music as a static work or abstract pattern by accounting for its praxial, social, and corporeal nature (Bowman, 1998, p. 299; cf. J. Davidson, 2004).

Although phenomenological approaches vary from individual, philosophical self-reflections to human science phenomenologies employing qualitative data collection,<sup>17</sup> they are all characterised by at least two common methods summarised in *Table 3.2*: bracketing (or the epoché) and reduction (Moustakas, 1994; Valle et al., 1989; van Manen, 2014). The exact

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<sup>17</sup> Max van Manen (2014) lists no fewer than 37 phenomenological methods, ranging from the earliest transcendental philosophy of Edmund Husserl through to a wide variety human science approaches. For examples of a phenomenological philosophical approach in music studies, see *Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship* by Alfred Schütz (1951), *Ways of the Hand: A Rewritten Account* by David Sudnow (2001), and *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* by Bruce Ellis Benson (2003). Don Ihde's (2007) phenomenologies of listening and voice (including music) are also based on his personal experiences of listening, though he additionally cross-checks his experiences with those of others. Human science phenomenology typically employs methods including participant observation, interviews, and written descriptions or diaries to collect more systematically experiential material (van Manen, 2014, p. 311). Such approaches include phenomenological psychology (Giorgi, 1985), which is also known as empirical phenomenology (Fischer, 1985; Moustakas, 1994) or existential-phenomenological psychology (Valle et al., 1989).

Table 3.2. *Characteristics of phenomenology*

<i>Characteristics of phenomenology</i>
Studying everyday lived experiences
Beginning with the bracketing (or the epoché) of the researcher's own presuppositions and assumptions so as to view the phenomenon with an open perspective
Employing reduction <sup>18</sup> to establish a description of the universal essence of the phenomenon:
Analysing the 'invariant constituents' of the phenomenon—the features which each experience of the phenomenon has in common
Subjecting the invariant constituents to 'horizontalisation' and 'imaginative variation' to reflect on alternative possible experiences of the phenomenon
Combining the invariant constituents into a composite description of the essence of the phenomenon

nature of bracketing and reduction differs depending on the approach adopted. For example, Clark Moustakas' (1994) heuristic phenomenology places greater emphasis on transcendental bracketing, whereas Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) 'has the more modest ambition of attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people' (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 16). Max van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice uses bracketing and reduction to investigate areas such as healthcare and education, to 'address and serve the practices of professional practitioners as well as the quotidian practices of everyday life' (p. 15).

### 3.3.1. *Applications of phenomenology*

Following van Manen's (2014) use of phenomenology to support professional practice in healthcare and education, hereafter I focus upon how *human science phenomenology* (rather than philosophical phenomenology) can be utilised in empirical, affective research. Two classic examples include Frederick Wertz's (1985) study of being criminally victimized, and William Fischer's (1989) study of being anxious. Both these studies demonstrate how phenomenological

<sup>18</sup> Reduction in this sense should not be confused with phenomenological reduction when used as a term for the phenomenological process as a whole. As van Manen (2014) explains, the phenomenological reduction (as in the entire phenomenological process) comprises the 'epoché-reduction' and the 'reduction-proper', more commonly referred to simply as bracketing and reduction.

approaches seek not to establish participants' interpretations of their experiences, but rather to pursue pre-reflective descriptions of concrete, felt experiences. Through analysing the convergences and divergences of individuals' accounts and exploring imaginative variation,<sup>19</sup> both conclude with a 'general psychological structure' of the phenomenon that could be applied to experiences beyond those of their original participants.

Phenomenological research has not been restricted to studies of psychology. As Wertz (1985) points out, 'the breakthrough of a rigorous phenomenological perspective in one human science field can serve as a guide if not a paradigm for analogous advances in other fields' (p. 155). Phenomenology has been used more widely in cognitive science and education research (e.g., S. Gallagher, 2003; S. Gallagher & Francesconi, 2012). In education, Dave Trotman (2005, 2006) has used descriptive phenomenology to investigate how primary-school teachers understand the imaginative lifeworlds of their pupils. Through three phases of participant discussions, classroom observations, and participant diaries, he establishes how fantasy, affective states, and empathy are understood as fundamental attributes of pupils' imaginative worlds. Pedagogical implications are also drawn out in van Manen's study of secrets in childhood, in which he gleans lived-experience descriptions both through adults' reminiscences and children's personal accounts (van Manen & Levering, 1996), and by Stephen Smith (1998), whose observations of children in playgrounds lead to discussions of how to manage risk-taking in educational settings.

In the field of music psychology, Ruth Herbert (2011) has applied phenomenology to the study of everyday music listening, using IPA to assess data from semi-structured interviews and free descriptions. IPA identifies themes in participants' accounts and analyses how these themes cluster together into superordinate concepts. Herbert's analysis reveals common characteristics of everyday music listening—including its affective and emotional dimensions—such as fluctuations in attention, multisensory blending, and visual imagery and reminiscence. She also reports specifically on the everyday listening experiences of young

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<sup>19</sup> Imaginative variation questions how an experience would change or stay the same if it had, for example, been in a different location or at a different time of day.

people aged between 10 and 18, and highlights how phenomenological analysis could be a valuable tool for influencing participation in classroom music teaching (R. Herbert, 2012).

This has been put into practice by Susan O'Neill and Yaroslav Senyshyn (2012), who have used a phenomenological 'mapping' method with 10- to 18-year-olds to evaluate their engagement with school music. Creating Music Engagement Maps prompted pupils' open-ended interview accounts of musical participation in school, and demonstrated the importance that pupils attributed to 'real-world', multicultural, multimodal, and multimedia musical engagement. Similar questions have been addressed by Aaron Yackley (2019), whose phenomenological interviews with eight 'non-participants in school music' elicited their reflections on enjoyable music experiences. He emphasises how phenomenology is valuable for investigating complex experiences in which analysing intertwined aspects separately 'would no longer accurately represent the experience as it was lived by the participants' (p. 48).

One such complex experience is that of musical absorption during performance. In a series of formal and informal interviews with the Danish String Quartet, Simon Høffding (2018) uses phenomenology to ask not 'how' absorption occurs, but rather 'what it is like'. Unlike previous string quartet studies—which have sought to *explain* modes of expressive interpretation (Blum, 1986) and intra-group interaction (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991)—Høffding's phenomenological analysis *describes* five different kinds of consciousness during musical performance: standard absorption; mind wandering and not-being-there; frustrated playing; absorbed not-being-there; and ex-static absorption. He combines these into a topography of musical absorption, which he analyses in light of theories of musical expertise, aesthetic experience, and flow.

Although van Manen (2014) is resolute that phenomenology has no place in generating or proving theory,<sup>20</sup> Høffding's (2018) study illustrates how phenomenological reduction can be used to establish a compelling narrative or typology of a phenomenon such as musical

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<sup>20</sup> 'The project of phenomenology aims to question the assumptions and abstractions of theory, push off theoretical frames, shake off the captive constraints of concepts, and penetrate and deflate the suppositions that are wittingly or unwittingly adopted by theory' (van Manen, 2014, pp. 65–66). 'Phenomenological reflection on lived experience is neither inductive nor deductive—rather it is reductive. Phenomenology does not try to develop conceptual schemes or prove a preconceived idea' (p. 222).

absorption. This bears some resemblance to my own aim to describe how musical vulnerability is experienced in the KS3 music classroom. With similar outcomes to Coppola's (2018) inductive modelling of musical humility, Høffding uses phenomenology as a reductive approach to empirical investigation. Yet unlike Coppola's direct observation of musical humility, Høffding uses phenomenology to gain an insight into a musical experience that occurs primarily in the affective realm.

### *3.3.2. Applications of phenomenology to musical vulnerability*

Høffding's (2018) phenomenology demonstrates the value of applying a similar approach to the investigation of issues such as musical vulnerability. Phenomenological interviews enable the co-constitution of knowledge between the researcher and participant to seek the invariant structures of affective experiences (pp. 26–29). However, for this to be successful, the researcher is dependent on recruiting participants who, first, have experienced the phenomenon in question, and second, are able to verbalise that phenomenon with fluency (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47). This could be problematic in classroom-based research. First, it is unlikely that pupils (or even teachers) would possess a sense of 'musical vulnerability' in the same way in which they might have a sense of 'being anxious' or 'being absorbed'. Nonetheless, this issue could be alleviated through situating musical vulnerability within wider musical effects and experiences, following Coppola (2018), or by using an anecdote or narrative describing musical vulnerability as a starting point for discussion (van Manen, 2014, p. 316). Second, pupils might not benefit from involvement in phenomenological interviews, which are normally long, relatively unstructured, and reliant on clear verbal articulation of emotions. This kind of intensive interviewing is normally more appropriate for use with adults, although there have been phenomenological studies undertaken with children and young people (e.g., Neely, 2011; van Manen, 2014; van Manen & Levering, 1996; Yackley, 2019), often aided by observation (e.g., Kendrick, 2011; Smith, 1998) or tools such as the Phenomenological Mapping Method (O'Neill & Senyshyn, 2012).

Certain adaptations to the phenomenological interview can make it more accessible for children (Polkinghorne, 1989). For example, group interviews can enable participants to

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discuss their own individual experiences with one another, like in existing research which uses focus groups to elicit the pupil voice (e.g., Barbour, 2007; Burnard, 2004; Finney & Harrison, 2010; Lamont et al., 2003).

Alternatively (or additionally), video-stimulated recall can be used to capture the social complexities of a specific event and consult participants on aspects of their experience, including those that surpass linguistic records (Burnard, 2004; Kelly, 2013; Rowe, 2008; Staunæs & Kofoed, 2015). However, some participants may find video-recording intrusive and act differently as a result (Rowe, 2008, 2009), and basing interviews on a recording of just one event could limit responses which might otherwise benefit from references to other events.

Unlike video-stimulated recall, photo-elicitation can be used in interviews to prompt reflection on multiple scenarios as captured in a variety of photographs, and to elicit multiple different interpretations from different observers (Lapenta, 2011). Reflecting upon photographs can give participants opportunities to clarify or obscure values, sensitive issues, or aspects of self-identity that may not otherwise be addressed (Croghan et al., 2008). This can be especially effective in interviewing children, since it offers linguistic flexibility, allows participants to determine the direction of the interview, and encourages the equitable co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and researched (Croghan et al., 2008; Epstein et al., 2006; Leonard & McKnight, 2015; Rasmussen, 2004).

However, although visual-elicitation techniques have been used in existing music education research to discuss children's musical histories and values (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007), Tyler Bickford (2017) highlights how children can be reluctant to engage in discussions of music as 'an abstract object of discourse' (p. 141). He found that children were more willing to engage him in listening to their music than to make analytical or evaluative comments based on visual reference points, which suggests that music-elicitation techniques may be more effective than using videos or photographs. Interviews based on participants' own choice of music have been shown to be particularly effective for eliciting discussions of emotions (Allett, 2010) and sensitive subjects such as domestic violence (Levell, 2019). Yackley (2019) found music-elicitation fruitful when combined with phenomenological interviewing: in some



interviews participants listened to music of their own choice and simultaneously described and discussed their experience of enjoyment.

It is also possible that phenomenological methods could be combined with a life history methodology. Life histories are normally structured around one-to-one interview-conversations, in which the researcher and participant mutually exchange stories to establish trust and co-construct life narratives (Goodson & Sikes, 2017; Plummer, 2001). This approach often elicits long, in-depth conversations (because people enjoy talking about themselves), and can be paired with other tasks such as constructing timelines of key musical or life events (Goodson & Sikes, 2017; Jourdan, 2015). Like phenomenological approaches, life histories can also be collected as written accounts, and although they may be prone to self-enhancement they can still provide valuable insights into past experiences that participants believe to have been influential (Pitts, 2012).

However, there remain significant limitations with any attempt to combine focus groups, visual- or music-elicitation, or life histories with phenomenology. These primarily concern the potential lack of trust or familiarity between researcher and participant. Perhaps with the exception of long-term life histories (Ellis, 2017), these methods all rely on participants engaging in complex discussions with little foreknowledge of who they are talking to and why. From this perspective, combining phenomenology with ethnography could be most productive for discussing and observing musical vulnerability. Ethnographic immersion in the classroom ensures that pupils are familiar with the researcher and willing to talk to them formally and informally (Bickford, 2017; Coppola, 2018; Finney, 2003), with or without further elicitation aids. This means that the success of interviews need not be tied to the efficacy of a designated method, but can instead build upon the natural development of relationships during day-to-day classroom interactions.

### 3.4. Towards a phenomenological ethnography

A phenomenological ethnographic approach is not unprecedented. Human science phenomenology often draws on ethnographically-informed observations and interviews, albeit to describe 'existential means of phenomena that are not limited to a certain group of particular

people or particular places’ (van Manen, 2014, p. 209). Cultural immersion and participant observation provides multiple data sources that challenge presuppositions, lead to ‘a more extensive, clearer and more accessible idea of [the] phenomenon’ (Maso, 2001, p. 143), and enable the researcher to embody participants’ affective and sensory experiences (Pink, 2015; Ravn & Hansen, 2013). In turn, ethnography can benefit from ‘phenomenological leanings’ to unpick how participants ‘make sense’ of their cultural context (Mantie & Talbot, 2020, p. xii).

Høffding’s (2018) topography of musical absorption in elite classical music performance exemplifies how the combination of phenomenology and ethnography can facilitate researcher-participant relationships and generate rich data. By travelling on tour with the Danish String Quartet, Høffding gained

an infinitely better entry point for interview, compared to interviewing relative strangers. [...] Following them on tour provided a background context that the other interviews lacked. This again testifies to the importance of taking seriously the commitment to embodiment and enaction in both method and praxis. (pp. 42–43)

Høffding carried out multiple rounds of informal and formal interviews with the quartet over several concert tours. While his initial interviews directly apprehended the concrete description of musical experiences, he later developed a more conversational approach to allow the emergence of more nuanced descriptions. This demonstrates how ethnographically-informed, conversational interviews—rather than formal, unstructured interviews conventionally used in phenomenology—can be effective in eliciting phenomenological description of complex musical experiences.

Michael Bull (2000) has also used phenomenological ethnography to investigate the musical experience of personal-stereo users. Like Høffding, he generates a typology describing users’ listening strategies and presents detailed individual and general phenomenological descriptions of personal-stereo use. Using an ‘ethnographic approach tied to an empirically orientated phenomenological methodology’ (p. 10), he employs a critical, auditory

epistemology to analyse personal-stereo use in relation to social systems of dominance and resistance. Ethnographic data gathered from in-depth interviews and participants' diaries are then formulated within a phenomenological framework 'to go beyond the individual into structures of use which are then related to the wider social and historical characteristics of society' (p. 18) (cf. Daughtry, 2015). His phenomenological descriptions are therefore rich with verbatim examples from his participants, successfully presenting 'a sociology that is both non-reductive *and* structural, and may be usefully applied in analyses beyond the current context' (Padley, 2001, p. 995, original emphasis). Like Høffding, Bull locates a middle ground between naturalism and constructionism, benefitting from cultural immersion among participants while recognising the role of individual and social differences in the construction of reality (Maso, 2001).

This methodological framework means that phenomenological ethnography is particularly well-placed to respond to the call for a 'relational ethics of care' in research (Ellis, 2017). Especially when dealing with sensitive issues—such as musical vulnerability—research must be carried out with care and compassion, avoiding emotional harm, superficial listening, or a detrimentally unequal power relationship between researcher and participants (Ellis, 2017; Partington, 2013). Compassionate research might even employ 'vulnerability' as a methodological device: acknowledging the risk posed to the researcher as they allow themselves to be challenged by the experience of participants (Benson & O'Neill, 2007), and accepting the mutual vulnerability of researcher and participant by asking, 'what might it mean not to fully comprehend the lives upon which we make epistemic claims?' (Page, 2017, p. 17).<sup>21</sup>

While phenomenological philosophy has been criticised for inattention to vulnerability and the assumption of the (male) phenomenologist's transcendental sovereignty (Ahmed, 2006; Boubilil, 2018), phenomenological ethnography provides a methodological grounding that takes seriously the need for care, trust, and mutual understanding between

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<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that Carolyn Ellis (2017) and Tiffany Page (2017) discuss the application of compassionate and vulnerable research techniques to situations which are far more sensitive and tragic than musical vulnerability: the Holocaust and self-immolation respectively. Without wanting to claim that musical vulnerability should be treated in the same way as these two profound issues, their suggestions regarding research ethics have far-reaching implications, and should be taken seriously when studying any potentially emotive research topic.

Table 3.3. *Characteristics of phenomenological ethnography*

<i>Characteristics of phenomenological ethnography</i>
Studying everyday lived experiences
Gathering data through cultural immersion in the site, participant observation, and informal interviews
Beginning with the bracketing of the researcher's own presuppositions and assumptions so as to view the phenomenon with an open perspective
Establishing the reflexive positioning of the researcher and their role in the construction of knowledge
Employing reduction to establish a description of the universal essence of the phenomenon:
Analysing the 'invariant constituents' of the phenomenon—the features which each experience of the phenomenon has in common
Subjecting the invariant constituents to 'horizontalisation' and 'imaginative variation' to reflect on alternative possible experiences of the phenomenon
Combining the invariant constituents into a composite description of the essence of the phenomenon

researcher and participants. Nonetheless, to be necessarily compassionate and situationally responsive it needs to foster vulnerability: 'being vulnerable within research places unexpected affective and sensorial demands upon researchers in representing the lives of others, and involves being receptive to the limits of knowing' (Page, 2017, p. 18). In remaining receptive to these 'limits of knowing' and critical of the dissymmetry of the researcher-researched relationship (Benson & O'Neill, 2007), phenomenological ethnography offers an insightful methodology for exploring musical vulnerability within the KS3 music classroom. Through combining cultural immersion, participant observations, formal and informal interviews, and detailed reductive analysis (see *Table 3.3*), it has the potential to elicit a new understanding of the essence of musical vulnerability as experienced by both researcher and participants.

### 3.5. Method

As shown in *Table 3.4*, my own phenomenological ethnography took place over two discrete phases combining phenomenological interviews (Phase 1) with ethnographic observations (Phase 2A) and a concluding focus group (Phase 2B). Following the example of van Manen's

Table 3.4. Timeline of completion for Phases 1 and 2

May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Jun 2021	Jul 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Oct 2021	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	Jan 2022	Feb 2022	Mar 2022
Phase 1: Questionnaires and interviews with teachers eliciting their experience of musical vulnerability as pupils and as teachers in the KS3 music classroom							Phase 2A: Classroom observations recording the experience of musical vulnerability for KS3 pupils and their teacher						Phase 2B: Focus group with pupils recording their experience of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom			

study into childhood secrets (van Manen & Levering, 1996), I employed semi-structured, conversational interviews to elicit participants' lived experiences of musical vulnerability, asking them to describe specific instances of times when music positively and negatively affected them in the KS3 music classroom (*Appendix 1.1*). Drawing on Coppola's (2018) research into musical humility, participants were informed that the study was about positive and negative experiences and effects of music, so as to avoid self-enhancement bias or misinterpretation of 'musical vulnerability' as an undesirable weakness.

Bracketing took place during each phase of research, and included writing and analysing my own lived-experience accounts of musical vulnerability to gain awareness of my own presuppositions. This was especially important for establishing my reflexive positioning as researcher (Berger, 2015). I realised that sharing some of my former experiences as a classroom music teacher could support teachers participating in Phase 1 in sharing their own experiences with openness and candour. However, I also recognised that my classroom-based research during Phase 2 would be affected by the negotiation of my teacher and researcher identities. Although I did not expect to take on a teaching role in the classroom, I anticipated that pupils would be likely to perceive me as a teacher-figure who might ask them questions, offer them help, or enforce disciplinary measures.

In the process of bracketing, I grew aware that my own memories of being both a pupil and a teacher were bounded by my identity as a White, middle-class woman who attended a girls' grammar school. I knew that I was likely to be biased towards aspects of participants' accounts that resonated with my own lived experience, including those that had significantly

affected my participation at school such as my training as a musician and my diagnosis of autism. I therefore made a marked effort not to focus on such issues unless participants raised them independently, but remained open to acknowledging the unique insights that could emerge from the interaction between my personal experiences and my participants' intersectional identities (see Section 4.3.3).

In the following sections I summarise the context, participants, and methods associated with each phase of research. The study was ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Music. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and gatekeepers. All individual participants and participating schools were made aware of their right to withdraw from the project at any time and assured that their personal data would be stored securely and pseudonymised to maintain confidentiality. All data collection, storage, and usage met the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation and the University of Sheffield's Data Protection Policy.

#### *3.5.1. Phase 1: Elicitation of lived experiences of musical vulnerability*

##### *i. Context*

Phase 1 took place between May and November 2020, and aimed to elicit the lived experiences of musical vulnerability of KS3 classroom music teachers from schools across East Anglia. This served two primary purposes: first, to attend to teachers' voices (cf. Nicholson, 2020) and establish the extent to which their experiences were consistent with the concept of musical vulnerability; and second, to gain an insight into different school contexts before selecting case-study schools for Phase 2.

##### *ii. Participants*

Twelve teachers were selected to take part in Phase 1, based on their ability to contribute to a concrete experiential description of the phenomenon of musical vulnerability (van Manen, 2014, p. 353). This meant selecting teachers from a range of different backgrounds and school

settings, as illustrated in *Table 3.5*.<sup>22</sup> Teachers were initially recruited through existing personal contacts,<sup>23</sup> posts on Facebook and Twitter, and appeals to groups including choirs and churches. Further recruitment then took place through contacting schools directly via email.

Each teacher was emailed the Teacher Information Booklet for Phase 1 (*Appendix 1.2*) and an invitation to take part in the research project. Teachers who confirmed that they would like to take part were then sent a consent form (*Appendix 1.3*) and questionnaire (*Appendix 1.4*) using Google Forms, and we arranged a suitable time for an interview. All interviews took place using video-conferencing software (either Zoom or Google Meet) in line with legal restrictions introduced following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in England. This proved to be a time-efficient and straightforward way of carrying out interviews, since participants were able to take part while at home and did not have to contend with travel or childcare arrangements.

*Table 3.5. Phase 1 participants, schools they attended, and schools at which they teach*

	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Experience of KS3 music as a pupil</i>	<i>Experience of KS3 music as a teacher</i>
Pilot study	A	Alice	State comprehensive school
	B	Bethany	State comprehensive school
	C	Claire	Independent senior school
	D	Danielle	Independent music school
	E	Esther	State comprehensive school
	F	Fynn	State comprehensive school
	G	Georgina	State comprehensive school
	H	Hannah	State grammar school
	I	Isabelle	State comprehensive school
	J	John	Independent cathedral school
	K	Katie	State comprehensive school
	L	Lucy	State comprehensive school
			Independent senior school
			State academy

<sup>22</sup> This resembles purposive or purposeful sampling in other empirical methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), by which the researcher selects participants based on a prior determination that their perspectives will be appropriately informative. Aside from van Manen (2014), who asserts that phenomenological approaches should not use sampling methods, other phenomenologists have suggested that participants be purposively selected to illustrate the full range of variation within the phenomenal experience. Participants should be recruited until reaching saturation point—when no further variations emerge from new participants' accounts (Fischer, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Jourdan (2015, p. 108) helpfully highlights that recruiting participants based on existing personal contacts can often be more fruitful than 'cold-calling', resulting in greater receptivity, reliability, and enthusiasm.

Each took about an hour to complete, and began with an informal, unrecorded chat to create a conversational atmosphere. The interview itself was then recorded using the in-built recording features of the software, and saved for later transcription and phenomenological analysis. At the end of each interview I asked participants if they knew any other teachers who might be willing to take part, thereby using a snowballing technique to expand my pool of potential participants.

#### *iii. Pilot study*

The initial four teachers recruited for Phase 1 formed a pilot study sample, whose responses and feedback informed the further development of Phase 1. I already knew each of these four teachers through community music involvement and previous teaching posts, so their interviews provided a valuable opportunity for me to refine my interviewing technique and finalise my interview schedule.

My pilot interview schedule is shown in *Appendix 1.1*. In practice, this detailed schedule provided me with prompts in what were otherwise semi-structured interviews. For each participant, I asked four explicit questions:

1. Can you remember a time when you were positively affected by music during a classroom music lesson in KS3?
2. Can you remember a time when you were negatively affected by music during a classroom music lesson in KS3?
3. Can you remember a time when your pupils were positively affected by music during one of your classroom music lessons for KS3?
4. Can you remember a time when your pupils were negatively affected by music during one of your classroom music lessons for KS3?

When participants were able to answer in detail, I rarely used further prompts during the discussion. In other cases, I used the interview schedule to home in on specific issues that had not already been addressed, such as ‘what were the surroundings like?’, ‘who else was there?’,



and ‘how did you feel about your musical identity?’ Sometimes I shared my own experiences to help clarify questions or assure participants of the value of their responses. However, I quickly became aware of how my use of value-based terminology (notably the words ‘positive’ and ‘negative’) was sometimes co-opted by participants in such a way that it seemed to restrict their own use of alternative expressions:

Elizabeth      What do you think the general atmosphere in the classroom [is like]?

Bethany        I think that’s really hard to be honest. I can’t only give one atmosphere because I think there’s lots of lessons where it’s really positive. [...] The majority of the time it’s really positive. There’s one particular class where the atmosphere can be a bit negative, a bit more switched off, but I think there’s always going to be those more difficult classes, isn’t there?

On the other hand, terms such as ‘music’ and ‘effects of music’ were normally interpreted more broadly by participants. Whereas ‘music’ is sometimes understood as a reified object, most teachers understood it as synonymous with typical classroom music-making: appraising, composing, performing, providing technical support, or other related activities (see Section 1.1.1). Likewise, whereas ‘effects of music’ or ‘musical affect’ have a specific, narrow meaning in music psychology, music teachers understood music’s effects as relating to their day-to-day lived experiences in the classroom.

The pilot study therefore developed my own reflexivity as a researcher, raising my awareness of how my preconceived interview questions would influence the co-construction of knowledge with participants. Since all four initial interviews proved relevant to my research aims and participants clearly understood the questions, I kept the interview schedule the same throughout Phase 1 and merged the data from the pilot study with subsequent data collected.

#### 3.5.2. Phase 2: Observation of lived experiences of musical vulnerability

##### *i. Context: COVID-19*

Phase 2 took place between June 2021 and March 2022, and functioned as an instrumental case study investigating the experience of musical vulnerability. As a case study, it comprised ‘an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37), and took on the instrumental role of illustrating the wider issue of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom (Creswell, 2008, p. 276).

Though I had initially hoped to be able to visit one or more schools beginning in September 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic meant that research access arrangements were delayed. Because of the risk of visiting schools during the pandemic, I chose to visit just one school rather than several. Though this eliminated any chance of carrying out a collective case study and reduced my pool of participants, it enabled me to make repeated visits to a single case-study school while confident that I was minimising face-to-face contact and the risk of virus transmission.

After several unsuccessful enquiries with teachers that I interviewed during Phase 1, I received an invitation to visit Danielle’s school. Following a discussion with Danielle, I emailed the Headteacher Information Booklet for Phase 2 (*Appendix 2.1*) and a consent form (*Appendix 2.2*) to the Headteacher of the school. After meeting with Danielle, the Headteacher confirmed that I could visit the school provided I worked within the necessary COVID-19 guidelines. At the time, this meant maintaining a two-metre distance from pupils, wearing a facemask, and following the school’s COVID-19 risk assessment. I was finally granted research access to Danielle’s school for six weeks during the summer term of the 2020–21 academic year, and then for a further 13 weeks during the autumn term of the 2021–22 academic year (Phase 2A). After further liaison with Danielle I carried out my concluding pupil focus group (Phase 2B) on 1 March 2022.

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Phase 2A took on several new and important functions in my research study. As initially intended, it offered the opportunity for ethnographic immersion within the culture of Danielle’s music classroom and first-hand observation of the kinds of musical vulnerabilities recounted by teachers during Phase 1. This

enabled me to develop some degree of familiarity with classroom expectations, Danielle's teaching, and the pupils themselves, therefore providing a better entry point for my subsequent pupil focus group. However, Phase 2A also became essential for planning the logistics of Phase 2B, such as how, where, and when to carry out a focus group when the school timetable and available meeting spaces had been drastically affected by COVID-19 regulations.

One further implication of the pandemic upon Phase 2A was the pedagogy adopted by Danielle in the classroom. School restrictions affected music teachers particularly severely, since at the height of the pandemic pupils were unable to share classroom instruments, use individual practice rooms, or come within two metres of the teacher (Underhill, 2020). In some schools (though not in Danielle's school), music teachers were unable to teach in specialist classrooms and had limited access to resources. Some of the initial observations I undertook therefore seemed far-removed from the noisy, interactive, and participatory lessons described by many of the teachers in Phase 1. Especially during the summer term 2021, lessons were more likely to centre around desk-based listening activities. Furthermore, the pupils I observed had had no 'pre-COVID' experience of KS3 music lessons since pandemic restrictions had been in place since before they left primary school in July 2020.

Though these issues posed a huge limitation to my research project as I had initially planned it, I am immensely grateful to Danielle and her school for permitting me to carry out my research in her classroom throughout the pandemic. My observations and interviews with her pupils, while still primarily addressing situational musical vulnerabilities in the classroom, also captured a unique snapshot of classroom music education during a global health emergency, which I hope will prove to be enlightening and thought-provoking in ways in which I never expected.

### *ii. Context: East Fen High School<sup>24</sup>*

The school at which Danielle teaches, East Fen High School, is a state-funded, non-selective secondary academy in the East of England. It has approximately 2,000 pupils on roll, 50% male and 50% female, aged between 11 and 18. The school's most recent Ofsted report rated the

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<sup>24</sup> The school's name has been pseudonymised to protect its identity.

school as Outstanding, and its Progress 8 score (which measures pupils' improvement in attainment between KS2 and KS4 (DfE, 2022a)) is 'above average'. Between 10 and 15% of pupils are eligible for Special Educational Needs (SEN) support; between 5 and 10% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM); and less than 2% of pupils speak English as an Additional Language (EAL).<sup>25</sup>

Compared to the most recent school census data (2020–21), East Fen High School has a similar percentage of SEN pupils as the national average for state-funded secondary schools, 11.5%. However, located as it is in an affluent county, it is not representative of other national averages for school demographics. Nationwide, 18.9% of state-funded secondary pupils are eligible for FSM, and 17.2% have EAL.<sup>26</sup> With this in mind, East Fen High School cannot be considered to be typical of the national pupil population; rather, it represents one unique school context characterised by a predominantly White, affluent, and high-achieving demographic.

#### *iii. Phase 2A: Participants and classroom observations*

Before my first visit to East Fen High School, I arranged to observe one Year 7 class throughout their classroom music lessons during the summer term of the 2020–21 academic year. As the school operated a two-week timetable, these classes alternated between Friday mornings and Friday afternoons. The class comprised 31 pupils aged between 11 and 12, 15 girls and 16 boys. I initially observed five of Year 7's music lessons as a pilot study. This provided me with an opportunity to familiarise myself with the music department before beginning the bulk of my data collection the following term. Although opportunities to interact with the Year 7 pupils were limited by COVID-19 restrictions, I was able to engage in their classroom discussions and gauge how they responded to my presence in their lessons. I also became familiar with Danielle's classroom demeanour, and she grew comfortable with me observing her teaching.

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<sup>25</sup> All demographic information has been approximated based on data from 2019 in order to protect the identity of the school. Demographic information for all schools in the United Kingdom is publicly available at [www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/](http://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/), and all Ofsted reports are freely accessible at [reports.ofsted.gov.uk/](http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/).

<sup>26</sup> The most recent national data for SEN is available at [explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england](http://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england). The most recent national data for FSM and EAL is available at [explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics](http://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics).

Although I had hoped to continue observing the same Year 7 class as they progressed into Year 8 for the 2021–22 academic year, this was impossible because of school timetabling procedures. For the teaching of arts subjects, between Years 7 and 8 classes were rearranged into mixed-ability sets of approximately 20 pupils. Danielle and I therefore arranged that during 2021–22 I would observe a Year 8 class who had classroom music lessons on Tuesday mornings in Week 1 and Tuesday afternoons in Week 2. This class comprised 20 pupils aged between 12 and 13, 10 girls and 10 boys (*Table 3.6*). Four of the pupils had been in the Year 7 class that I had observed previously.

During my first observations with both Year 7 and 8 classes, I explained my project to the pupils and handed out copies of the Pupil Information Booklet and consent form for Phase 2 (*Appendix 2.3*). After an opportunity to ask questions about the project, all pupils completed the consent form. In Year 7, 26 out of 31 pupils provided their informed consent to participate in the study. In Year 8, 12 out of 20 pupils provided their informed consent to participate in and be audio-recorded during the study, five pupils withheld their consent, and three pupils were absent.

Following both classes' initial lessons, pupils' parents and guardians were sent a Google Form (via East Fen's Parent Mail) containing the Parent Information Letter and consent form

*Table 3.6. Phase 2 participants in Year 7 pilot study, Year 8 observation, and Year 8 focus group*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Pilot study</i>	<i>Observation</i>	<i>Focus group</i>	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Pilot study</i>	<i>Observation</i>	<i>Focus group</i>
A Adam		✓		K Kieran			✓
B Brandon		✓		L Lara			✓
C Charlie		✓		M Matthew	✓		✓
D David		✓		N Naema			✓
E Ethan		✓	✓	O Otilie			✓
F Fleur		✓		P Phoebe			✓
G Greg		✓	✓	Q Queenie	✓		✓
H Harry	✓	✓		R Rachel			✓
I Iniya		✓	✓	S Suzie	✓		✓
J Juliette		✓	✓	T Tim			✓

for Phase 2 (*Appendix 2.4*). Two weeks following the initial distribution of the form a reminder email was sent. Before Phase 2 commenced, parental consent to participate in the project and be audio-recorded was provided for 18 pupils in Year 7 and 11 pupils in Year 8.

The process of gaining informed consent from both pupils and parents or guardians proved challenging. Having already postponed research access to any school by almost a year, on finally (and suddenly) being permitted to visit East Fen I felt underprepared for negotiating informed consent and communicating my research effectively to pupils and parents. Within the time constraints of carrying out Phase 2, I also lacked the time and space to build individual relationships with potential participants or liaise directly with their parents (M. Gallagher et al., 2010, p. 475). By the end of the term, some pupils had given their own consent to participate but had not been given parental consent, and some pupils had declined their own consent but had been given parental consent. In total, in Year 7, 16 pupils gave their own consent and received consent from their parents; 10 pupils gave their own consent but were lacking parental consent; two pupils had parental consent but did not provide their own consent; and three pupils neither gave their own consent nor had parental consent. In Year 8, eight pupils gave their own consent and received consent from their parents; four pupils gave their own consent but were lacking parental consent; three pupils had parental consent but did not provide their own consent (or were absent); and five pupils neither gave their own consent (or were absent) nor had parental consent.

Such issues have received much attention in existing research literature. Importantly, 'ethical research involves informing and respecting everyone concerned' (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 108), including, in this instance, teachers, pupils, and parents or guardians. However, seeking informed consent from pupils and multiple gatekeepers can become problematic. Even while very young children can be considered competent to share their life experiences and therefore to consent to participate in research (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Heath et al., 2007), their competency to provide informed consent may be affected by their self-confidence, the complexity of the research project, and the sufficiency and clarity of the researcher's communication (Coyne, 2010). Individual competency to consent is also bound up with social context, and pupils' decisions to consent or dissent are often related to their relationships with

teachers and peers (M. Gallagher et al., 2010). Some pupils may consent out of a sense of obligation or coercion if they believe that refusal to participate may be considered poor conduct. Yet others may refuse to provide consent as a statement of belligerence or opposition to authority.

Seeking parental consent can cause similar issues. Parents' decisions may intentionally (or unintentionally) force children to participate in research against their will, or block children's willing participation (Coyne, 2010). Sometimes parental dissent—especially in low-risk social research contexts—may provide valuable opportunities for researchers to engage with parents' concerns or provide clearer explanations. However, there is always the possibility that 'parents may be right to refuse, and ignoring them can remove protections and advocates for children' (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 108).

Although it is essential to consider instances where consent or dissent may have been uninformed, accidental, or intentionally oppositional, it is also important to accept expressions of dissent as indicative of pupils' and gatekeepers' genuine engagement with the research process (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). Expressions of dissent that threaten to pose limitations to a research project could well indicate deeper concerns that should not be ignored. Parents, for example, may refuse consent out of concerns for their child missing valuable lesson time, especially if they have recently experienced other school disruption (such as that resulting from COVID-19). Pupils, likewise, have a right to choose not to be involved, whether this stems from a general antagonism towards figures of authority in the classroom or from other anxieties.

With this in mind, during Phase 2 I aimed to respect the competency and decision-making of all participants and gatekeepers involved in my research. Though I ensured that pupils were the first to be considered in the consent process (Coyne, 2010), I did not want to dismiss the perspectives of their teachers and parents. I therefore collected individual data only from pupils who had given their own consent *and* received parental consent. In Phase 2A this did not adversely affect my data collection, since, in line with ethical guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (2018), I was able to record interactions between consenting and non-consenting pupils during my classroom observations: 'to the extent that the research is concerned with the *group* dynamic as a whole (for example, within a classroom),

consenting individuals' interactions with the non-consenting individuals may still be significant to the research' (p. 12, original emphasis). Phase 2B—which concentrated on a smaller group of participants—was carried out only with consenting pupils. But, in accordance with an understanding of informed consent as an ongoing process of negotiation (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 111), before Phase 2B all pupils and parents were given the opportunity to review their initial decision regarding informed consent. By the time Phase 2B commenced, 11 pupils (all in Year 8) and their parents or guardians had provided full consent for participation in interviews.

#### *iv. Phase 2B: Participants and focus group*

My final stage of data collection took place at the beginning of March 2022, and comprised a single focus group with four Year 8 pupils selected purposively from the class I had observed during Phase 2A. Although my original intention was to carry out several pupil interviews, either individually or in focus groups, multiple factors influenced my decision to carry out just one focus group. First, school access was limited in January 2022 because of a further COVID-19 outbreak causing significant pupil and staff absences. Second, Danielle grew increasingly concerned about pupils missing valuable lesson time to take part in interviews, especially while Year 8 were preparing to choose GCSE options in the spring term. Third, East Fen were preparing for a school theatre production in February, which meant the music department staff were particularly busy at the start of term. And finally, during my iterative process of data analysis I was already gaining valuable insights into the rich data I had collected from previous terms, which would not necessarily have been augmented by multiple pupil interviews.

Broadly speaking, a focus group can be defined as any group discussion in which 'the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction' (Barbour, 2007, p. 2). Focus groups can be particularly effective in eliciting the pupil voice, since young people may be more confident to enter into conversation with their peers than with an individual researcher. The format also encourages greater reciprocity between pupils and researcher (Barbour, 2007, p. 97), and enables in-depth engagement with group dynamics (Ryan et al., 2014, p. 338). With this in mind, the four pupils who took part in the concluding focus group



were those I had observed working together on a small-group samba project during Phase 2A: Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette (see *Table 3.6*). Having spent time with me during three previous observations, they were always happy to talk (or argue) among themselves when I was in the room, or engage me in conversation about school, music, or research.

Given the rapport I had established with these pupils, I knew they were comfortable working alongside one another and was confident that a focus group would elicit fruitful and open discussion (Polkinghorne, 1989). This approach also minimised the amount of lesson time pupils missed, therefore allaying Danielle's concerns about further interruption to the term. Following my observation of their boisterous behaviour and fractious relationships during Phase 2A (see Section 6.4.2), I also wanted to ask these four pupils about their experiences during the samba project. By homing in on this one topic (rather than asking pupils to recall other specific occasions, as I asked of teachers in Phase 1), the data I collected directly informed my ongoing analysis of Phases 1 and 2A through a process of participant consultation. Although I did not implement any of the specific elicitation methods discussed in Section 3.3.2, I arranged to carry out the focus group in the same room that the group had used for their samba project. The familiar surroundings made it easier for the pupils to recall their past experiences making music together, even without the samba instruments in the room.

Using a simple adaptation of the phenomenological interview schedule I prepared for Phase 1 (see Section 3.5.1.iii), I followed a semi-structured interview protocol with the pupil focus group (*Appendix 2.5*). I asked four primary questions:

1. Can you describe what you remember about your group samba project?
2. How did the music make you feel?
3. How did your group make you feel?
4. If you had to do a similar project again, what would you keep the same and what would you do differently?

The entire focus group took just over 35 minutes; the pupils were excused from the first half of their classroom music lesson. The focus group was audio-recorded on a dictaphone device and

a laptop, and the recordings were stored securely and backed up according to the University of Sheffield's Data Protection Policy.

## 3.6. Analysis

### 3.6.1. Phase 1

Throughout Phases 1 and 2 I carried out data analysis as a continuous process, to allow for the idiographic analysis of each individual lived experience account. During Phase 1 I audio-recorded all interviews and transcribed them in full. Audio-recordings were played back with tempo adjustment in the computer software Audacity ([www.audacityteam.org/](http://www.audacityteam.org/)), and transcriptions were made as .txt files. I then subjected each individual transcript to an initial reductive analysis to create anecdotes pinpointing the concrete experiences discussed by participants (for an example, see *Appendix 3.1*). Each interview transcript and initial reductive analysis was then checked by the participant in case they wanted any changes to be made.

Following this editing process, I thematically analysed the finalised interview transcripts. Phenomenological thematic analysis differs somewhat from other methods of qualitative coding, focussing on 'recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text' (van Manen, 2014, p. 319), rather than simply searching for recurring codes or themes. All data were imported into NVivo Pro ([www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home](http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home)), where themes and analytic memos could be stored, cross-referenced, and edited.

The thematic analysis of each transcript was an important stage for me to become familiar with the data and identify basic similarities and differences between accounts. However, it was not conducive to the finer-grained analysis required to compile composite phenomenological descriptions. To facilitate this stage, I returned to each transcript one-by-one and worked through a variety of phenomenological analyses to establish more thorough reductions. Within each transcript, I identified the key anecdotes recounted by participants and analysed them separately. Each transcript therefore resulted in up to four analyses, of (1) positive experiences of being taught KS3 music; (2) negative experiences of being taught KS3 music; (3) positive experiences of pupils being taught KS3 music; and (4) negative experiences

of pupils being taught KS3 music. In the chapters that follow, these accounts are identified as Phase 1 (P1) followed by the first letter of the participant’s pseudonym and the corresponding number of the anecdote (e.g., P1.A1, P1.B4) (see *Table 3.7*).

Although phenomenology has no set procedure for analysis (van Manen, 2014), I found it helpful to design a set of basic steps to guide my analyses. *Table 3.8* describes these steps and their relationship with van Manen’s (2014) reflective phenomenological methods (pp. 319–320) and Moustakas’ (1994) examples of phenomenological research analyses (pp. 120–143). An example of a full phenomenological analysis can be found in *Appendix 3.2*.

Once I had completed textural-structural descriptions for certain anecdotes, I began to cluster descriptions together to form small-scale composite descriptions. These descriptions would compare up to four anecdotes, drawing out their invariant themes and reflecting upon their similarities and differences. This process enabled me to engage both with the specific details of each account, but also with overarching ideas of how musical vulnerability occurred in individuals’ lived experiences. By gradually joining together these small-scale descriptions according to my earlier thematic analysis I was able to establish a complete composite description accounting for all participants’ individual anecdotes.

*Table 3.7. Identifiers for interview, observation, and focus group data*

Phase 1						
Teacher		Pre-interview questionnaire	(1) Positive experience of being taught KS3 music	(2) Negative experience of being taught KS3 music	(3) Positive experience of pupils being taught KS3 music	(4) Negative experience of pupils being taught KS3 music
	A	P1.AQ	P1.A1	P1.A2	P1.A3	P1.A4
B	P1.BQ	P1.B1	P1.B2	P1.B3	...	
C	P1.CQ	P1.C1	P1.C2	...		
D	P1.DQ	P1.D1	...			

Phase 2					
Lesson		Term A (Year 7)	Term B (Year 8)	Term C (Year 8)	Focus group
	1	P2.A1	P2.B1	P2.C1	P2.FG
2	P2.A2	P2.B2	...		
3	P2.A3	...			
4	...				

Table 3.8. Phenomenological analysis framework

<i>Lived Experience Description (LED)</i>	What was recounted during the interview? Present the interview verbatim but removing unrelated digressions, repetitions, or interruptions.
<i>Textural description (Moustakas, 1994)</i>	What was the experience of musical vulnerability like? Describe the experience of musical vulnerability using verbatim extracts of the LED to present its nature and focus. Focus on the significant emergent themes relating to musical vulnerability. Maintain the phenomenological content and pull the reader into the anecdote (van Manen, 2014).
<i>Detailed thematisation (van Manen, 2014)</i>	What does each sentence or cluster of sentences reveal about the experience of musical vulnerability?
<i>Selective thematisation (van Manen, 2014)</i>	What phrase(s) seem particularly revealing about the experience of musical vulnerability?
<i>Wholistic thematisation (van Manen, 2014)</i>	How can the phenomenological meaning of the text as a whole be captured in one phrase? ‘Musical vulnerability...’
<i>Structural description (Moustakas, 1994)</i>	How did the experience of musical vulnerability occur? Use imaginative variation and reflection to go beyond the appearance of the experience to capture the essence of musical vulnerability. What are the invariant themes and qualities responsible for the thoughts and feelings associated with musical vulnerability?
<i>Textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994)</i>	Combine the textural and structural descriptions to capture the experience and essence of musical vulnerability.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I present these composite descriptions to explore the extent to which musical vulnerability is experienced in the KS3 music classroom and how it is characterised. In Chapter 4 I describe the experience of current *pupils’* musical vulnerability as recalled in teachers’ positive and negative anecdotes of teaching KS3 music (3 and 4). The structural aspects of the composite descriptions utilise the historic present tense, in keeping with the phenomenological aim ‘to be allusive by orienting the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form’ (van Manen, 2011, n.p.; cf. van Manen & Levering, 1996).

In Chapter 5 I reflect on *teachers’* experiences of musical vulnerability as recalled in their own positive and negative memories of being taught KS3 music (1 and 2). In order to compare their past personal experiences to those they describe observing amongst their current pupils, I present the composite descriptions using the past tense. In both chapters, quotations are taken

from the textural descriptions of teachers' accounts—redacted summaries of their verbatim LEDs. In line with teachers' own expressions, individual pupils are only named when the teacher did so explicitly during their interview. Where pupils are specified their names have been pseudonymised for the purpose of anonymity.

### 3.6.2. Phase 2

#### *i. Phase 2A: Ethnographic observation*

A similar analytical process was carried out during Phase 2. During each observation I handwrote ethnographic fieldnotes. Immediately after each observation I transcribed these fieldnotes into full prose as .txt files and in NVivo Pro, and added annotations and analytic memos. I then carried out a phenomenological thematic analysis, using NVivo Pro to create and cross-reference codes, before returning to each fieldnote one-by-one and evaluating them according to my phenomenological analysis framework (*Table 3.8*). Once I had completed textural-structural descriptions for all the fieldnotes in one term of observations, I clustered them together to form composite descriptions and sent them to Danielle to check their accuracy and make any necessary changes.

Chapter 6 presents these composite descriptions from Phase 2 to characterise the experience of musical vulnerability at East Fen High School. Extracts from textural descriptions of the individual lessons I observed are denoted as Phase 2 (P2), followed by the term of observation (A, B, or C) and the number of the lesson (e.g., P2.A1, P2.B4) (see *Table 3.7*). As in Chapter 4, structural aspects of the composite descriptions are presented using historic present tense to affect a sense of experiential immediacy. Although I carried out an initial thematic analysis of all three terms of observations, only Term B is presented as a full composite description in this thesis due to limitations of space. However, when pertinent to my analysis I occasionally cross-reference observations and emergent themes from Terms A and C.

#### *ii. Phase 2B: Pupil focus group*

As in Phase 1, I began analysis of Phase 2B by importing the focus group recording into Audacity, adjusting its tempo, and transcribing it as a .txt file. In keeping with the

phenomenological approach used in Phases 1 and 2A, I used a process of reduction to clarify pupils' descriptions of their lived experiences, eliminate repetition, and improve ease of reading. While aiming to retain the authentic pupil voice wherever possible, superfluous repeated vocalisations such as 'err', 'um', and 'like' were therefore removed, and clarifications of context or expression were added where necessary in square brackets.

Beyond this initial phenomenological reduction, it was not possible to analyse the focus group transcript using the same analytical framework deployed in Phases 1 and 2A. Since focus groups are intended to encourage group interaction and study collective sense-making (Barbour, 2007), it would be inappropriate to attempt to divide the transcript into individual LEDs for each of the four pupils involved. I therefore used multiple cycles of qualitative coding and categorisation to identify recurring themes within the data, and recorded analytic memos reflecting on relationships with data from Phase 2A (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2009). In keeping with the social constructionist perspective underpinning focus group research (Ryan et al., 2014), my coding identified emergent patterns of group behaviour as well as topics of conversation, and aimed to assess the discursive context of individuals' contributions (Barbour, 2007, pp. 131–141).

The primary themes reported in the conclusion to Chapter 6 have been purposively selected from my analysis of Phase 2B to verify earlier findings from Phases 1 and 2A, and are presented in the past tense as reflections upon the ethnographic observations discussed earlier in the chapter. Although limitations of space mean that it is impossible to offer an analysis of all the data collected during the focus group, the selected themes are broadly representative of the content and tone of the focus group as a whole, and demonstrate a high degree of data saturation when viewed in conjunction with Phases 1 and 2A (Polkinghorne, 1989). Extracts of the focus group discussion are hereafter referenced as Phase 2 (P2), Focus Group (e.g., P2.FG) (see *Table 3.7*).

## 4. Characterising musical vulnerability: Pupils' experiences

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### 4.1. Introduction

As I explored in Chapter 2, music's semantic and somatic properties mean that the practice of music-making is always relational. Since music is immaterial and invasive, anyone in its vicinity has the potential to become implicated in its relational practice (Cox, 2016). In a concert or recital both the performers and the audience are implicated because their values and responses shape the musical outcome. In a music classroom, both the pupils and the teacher are implicated because their objectives and assessments shape the musical outcome. And even in a practice room, during independent, individual 'holicipation' (Killick, 2006), both the physical music-maker and their subconscious internal critic or teacher—usually a reflection of real-life relations with a teacher, examiner, or role model—are implicated because their intrapersonal hopes and expectations shape the musical outcome.

To make music, therefore, is to become relationally vulnerable; even twice vulnerable. Making music means becoming vulnerable first to the effect of music-making on one's self-identity, and then to the effect of music-making on the other(s) concerned—on delineating social identities and spatial boundaries (cf. Section 2.2.1.i). Musical vulnerability begins to emerge at this interface between self and other.

In this chapter, I aim to describe pupils' experiences of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom and illuminate the associations between these experiences and the relational nature of music-making. I draw on accounts of pupils' classroom music-making experiences shared by the 12 secondary music teachers interviewed during Phase 1 of my research project, in response to the questions:

3. Can you remember a time when your pupils were positively affected by music during one of your classroom music lessons for KS3?
4. Can you remember a time when your pupils were negatively affected by music during one of your classroom music lessons for KS3?

The responses shared by all the teachers offer a valuable insight into the relational construction of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom. In the following Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, I describe how musical vulnerability may manifest as a positive musical receptivity when the musical responses of self and other (pupil and pupil, or pupil and teacher) are in accord with one another, but as a negative musical susceptibility when conflicting musical responses arise. In Section 4.3 I then consider how such experiences are in turn affected by compounding factors including musical, personality, and neurological differences.

Several of the teachers I interviewed alluded to the dynamic, fluid relationship characterising the lived experience of positive musical receptivity and negative musical susceptibility. Before concluding the chapter with Section 4.5, in Section 4.4 I describe how, in instances of conflict or resignation, positive receptivity can revert to a sense of susceptibility and discouragement; yet with resilience, negative susceptibility can be transformed to a sense of receptivity and engagement.<sup>27</sup> It is on these occasions that it becomes clear how harnessing musical vulnerability in the music classroom has the potential to change pupils' musical experiences both for better, and for worse.

## 4.2. Interpersonal vulnerability

Of all the teachers I interviewed, few had any difficulty recalling their pupils' notably positive or negative experiences in the classroom. However, some were careful to distinguish whether or not such occasions were directly related to the effects of music-making. Fynn, for example, was emphatic that most difficulties he witnessed in his classroom stemmed from relational issues such as pupils arguing with their peers. He differentiated these incidents from the experience of music-making itself, instead attributing conflict to poor choices of groupings, lack of space, or broken equipment.

Yet each of these issues is, in fact, closely tied up with the process of music-making, and cannot be separated from the experience of musical vulnerability. Within the music classroom,

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<sup>27</sup> Throughout this thesis I use the term 'resilience' to refer to 'positive adaptations, success following adversity, and good outcomes following difficulty' (Hess & Bradley, 2022, p. 199). However, I acknowledge that some scholars dispute the association of resilience with resistance or 'bouncing back', and that there is a growing body of literature reframing resilience in relation to processes of forward movement, transformation, and change (pp. 200–201).



the influence of relationships between teachers and pupils, pupils and their peers, and even pupils and their past, present, or imagined musical role models cannot be overestimated. Since each individual comes to a musical encounter with their own musical abilities, identities, and expectations, the interaction of different individuals' values is at the heart of the experience of musical vulnerability. The meeting of self and other in the context of music-making can therefore contribute towards both life-affirming and potentially debilitating musical encounters.

### *4.2.1. 'They trusted that I got what they thought': Relational concord*

When self and other experience complementary musical values and expectations while music-making, the resulting relational concord can stimulate a sense of positive musical receptivity. This is illustrated by the experience of Danielle's two pupils, Charlotta and Carrie, when their music-making is praised and affirmed by their teacher:

we were doing animal music, so we'd worked through whatever musical examples were relevant, and I'd done a little bit of demonstration, and then I had sent anyone who was well-behaved into neighbouring group rooms to start building their own motifs. So Charlotta had gone to a practice room because she's got some basic piano skills. But then I just became aware of her at my heels, coming back to the classroom every five minutes. (P1.D3)

Charlotta, having been singled out as well-behaved and capable enough to work in a practice room, clearly needs her teacher. She doggedly pursues her round the classroom, leaving Danielle frustrated and impatient:

so I was like, "I will come to your practice room, I will come to your practice room." But she was there, she was there, she was there. I felt like saying, "I've explained it! Why do you need me?!" But she was like, "no, no, no, I've finished,

I've finished!" "You can't have finished, you've got 15 min-!" "I've finished, I've finished!" (P1.D3)

Danielle now realises that Charlotta does not want assistance, but assurance. She wants to share her music-making, and her teacher to be receptive to the effort she has invested. But Danielle is sceptical of what she could have achieved in such a short space of time, until,

I went to her room. She'd written the most beautiful piece, that not only had the right structure that we'd set up, but also went on to have a rondo structure. She'd been working with a girl called Carrie, who wasn't very good at anything, but was a nice girl, and she'd even given Carrie a role. (P1.D3)

In this moment, Danielle's expectations of her pupils' music-making are exceeded. She finds herself captivated, receptive to their ideas and recognising that 'they'd had a really great time, done some excellent work, and even used their initiative a bit' (P1.D3). She is particularly struck by Charlotta's inclusion of Carrie. By giving Carrie a role, Charlotta invites her into the relational experience of musical vulnerability and enables her to share in the reward of their teacher's positive feedback: 'Carrie was very smiley because she couldn't do anything before that lesson and then she could play a four-note ostinato, in time' (P1.D3).

Fynn described a similar experience when he let his Year 9 pupils determine their own unit of work: 'last year I said to Year 9, "what do you want to learn about?" And they all said grime' (P1.F3). Fynn's decision to let his pupils choose what to study is by no means unusual in the KS3 music classroom. As outlined in Sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, popular projects such as Musical Futures emphasise that pupils' agency in classroom music choice is important in fostering self-directed learning and improving engagement (Green, 2008). However, pupil agency is not synonymous with positive musical receptivity. The decontextualisation of pupils' preferred musics in the classroom can lead to a sense of inauthenticity, leaving pupils disappointed and uninterested (Allsup et al., 2012).

Nonetheless, in this instance, Fynn ensures that his approach is as ‘authentic’ as possible:

[grime’s] got bad language and gang culture in it, but I was like, “OK.” There’d happened to be a BBC documentary on where it came from, and I thought, “I can get my teeth into this.” So we bolted it onto protest music because it’s got that kind of message. (P1.F3)

Despite initial reservations about the association between grime and cultures of violence and deprivation, Fynn’s research into the genre’s origins and its resonances with protest music help him realise the emancipatory potential of allowing his pupils to engage with such music. He therefore allows them free rein during their lessons, imposing few restrictions and removing the pressure of having to achieve a polished end-product:

we had some ground rules, but then I was almost giving them free license. I was like, “well, I’m going to come in and check on you and I want to hear what you’ve done, but there’s no expectation that you’ll have finished it.” (P1.F3)

Using this approach, Fynn gives his pupils the freedom to engage in their music-making at their own pace, discovering how it relates to their musical interests rather than being restricted by his own musical priorities. He finds they make significant investments in their creative work, unhindered by constant surveillance and particularly excited by the opportunity to take apart school equipment (which, unsurprisingly, would not normally be permitted):

so I went into one room, and there was this bunch of boys who’d taken a bass drum apart and put their iPad in there so they could record from inside it. They were playing a bass line on the piano, and making their own distortion basically. They were really proud of this—maybe because they got to take apart school equipment. (P1.F3)

These pupils are clearly pleased with their creation. Their original techniques are not comparable to any existing musical standards or expectations, so it seems that it is only their personal musical judgment that counts. But like Charlotta, who persistently seeks assurance from her teacher, Fynn's pupils find his response to their music-making secures their sense of positive receptivity:

I was like, "yes, that's exactly what I want! That's how people discover stuff!"  
When they listened back to the recording they were like, "this is really good, this is fantastic!" From then on there was a trust built: they trusted that I got what they thought, and that I wouldn't make them do anything that they couldn't relate to. (P1.F3)

Fynn's praise of the boys' music accords with their personal pride and investment, reinforcing their sense of achievement and celebrating their music-making. In time, this shared musical receptivity stimulates an affirmative, long-term relationship, which contributes towards the positive realisation of other musical vulnerabilities. Having found common ground in the grime project, the pupils discover a new trust in their teacher, coming to respect his musical input and be receptive to his musical ideas. As a result of this rekindled receptivity, Fynn gets more 'buy-in' from pupils in future projects involving music less familiar to them, such as minimalism (P1.F3).

Interpersonal receptivity between teacher and pupils is not the only relationship affecting musical vulnerability in the music classroom. As described by two teachers, Alice and Danielle, classroom music-making often entails performing to a wider audience of pupils or parents. Alice recalled the experience of her Year 9 pupils performing their end-of-year music-drama showcase to an audience of 80 parents:

the school hall was full. Parents had tears welling up in their eyes. Year 9 were performing scenes and dialogues on the theme of the First World War: a scene in the trenches, a scene of women saying goodbye to their loved ones, a scene

of survivors returning and their families. Some scenes had incidental music that they wrote—three pop songs and two or three raps. They had written the whole thing themselves, and the sense of ownership and achievement was really brilliant. (P1.A3)

During the performance the audience of parents is overwhelmed with emotion, both because of the emotive subject of the First World War, and because of their children's achievements. This response fuels a reciprocal feedback loop: the parents are affected by the music's reflection of their children's achievements, and the pupils experience a 'really brilliant' sense of achievement because of their parents' response. The pupils' *personal* musical receptivity is, therefore, relational: influenced by wider, *interpersonal* musical receptivity.<sup>28</sup>

In this instance, the intensity of the reciprocal feedback loop is heightened because of the pupils' significant personal investment in their music-making. Writing their own songs and raps is an opportunity to 'pull together everything they've done since Year 7' (P1.A3), and for many of them will be their last chance to make music with their peers before progressing to GCSE classes. Their sense of ownership over the music therefore leaves them more vulnerable to the judgment of the audience of parents, since any judgment on their music-making will translate into a judgment on their own achievement and self-identity.

#### 4.2.2. *'She was really cross, and they were cross': Relational conflict*

Pupil ownership and agency in the music classroom does not always result in positive musical receptivity. Though it is often related to increased engagement, intrinsic motivation, and personal investment (e.g., Burnard et al., 2008), Katie highlighted how pupil autonomy can cause disagreement and conflict:

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<sup>28</sup> David Hargreaves, Raymond MacDonald, and Dorothy Miell (2012) have used a reciprocal feedback model to explain how musical responses (such as physiological arousal, cognitive attention, and affective experience) are influenced by the interaction between the music, the listener, and the listening context. My description of a reciprocal feedback loop, though both encompassing wider practices (not just listening) and homing in on musical vulnerability (rather than more general music responses), is based on the same principle of interaction between individuals' personal and interpersonal receptivity.

when the top-set Year 7s were doing a guitar and ukulele project, we'd given them the choice of three songs to sing, including one more challenging one. One particular student was very keen on doing the more challenging one. They were very able, but could also be quite overbearing in the way that they worked and could quite easily rub other students up the wrong way. They really wanted to do well, and they felt that their idea would help everyone else do well, but everybody else felt they'd much rather do something else. (P1.K4)

For this one pupil, their particular individual differences and attitude towards group work does not stand them in good stead with their peers. While they want to be helpful, their heavy-handedness means their suggestions are overridden: 'the others said, "well, we don't know that song, so no, we don't think we'd like to." And the student was extremely upset because no-one was listening to them' (P1.K4). In this instance, increasing pupils' agency through a wide choice of music heightens relational conflict and prompts musical susceptibility. The one pupil whose choice is dented appears to feel an even greater sense of exclusion than had they not been given individual agency in the first place.

Katie highlighted that, fortunately, such minor conflicts in the music classroom can usually be resolved fairly quickly. Yet she expressed concern that such mitigation may be only superficial. 'Although it was resolved reasonably quickly and they all moved on and performed together, I imagine some of the others would not have wanted to work with that student again' (P1.K4). A similar concern was expressed by Lucy, whose pupil Maddy often experiences alienation in the music classroom. Lucy recalled an occasion when Maddy storms out of a music lesson in a moment of extreme vulnerability, feeling excluded and rejected by her peers:

Maddy had been in and out of our samba lessons because she'd get sent to the Reflection Room a lot to reflect on her poor behaviour. When she got back for the final lesson when her group were performing she found that they'd changed her instrument to try to adapt to the fact that she wasn't there. Then she was really cross, and they were cross, and it was all quite tense. (P1.L4)

Maddy's initial susceptibility seems to arise when she finds that her samba group have changed her part without her knowledge or permission. Though their executive decision seems to be necessitated by her absence, it conflicts with her musical expectations and exacerbates her sense of vulnerability to failure and embarrassment. So she refuses to perform:

they all stood up apart from Maddy. They were like, "come on, come on, come on," and she was like, "I'm not doing it, I'm not doing it, I'm not doing it." I said, "you can do it," "I'm not doing it," "you will do it." She ended up walking out. She just stood up and flounced out. Often when she does that she then hovers outside the classroom, but this time she properly stormed off. It really hit a nerve, asking her to do something that she wasn't confident doing because she'd missed so much time. She assumed that she was going to cock it up and everyone would know. (P1.L4)

Out of fear of embarrassment, Maddy ignores her group's admonitions and her teacher's encouragements. She is more comfortable drawing attention to herself by storming out of the class than potentially bringing shame upon herself by ruining the performance.

Though Lucy pointed out that storming out of the classroom is not unusual behaviour for Maddy—and that it did not have long-term consequences for her engagement in music lessons—Maddy's experience of musical vulnerability does seem particularly pronounced. By running away, she refuses to be interpellated into further musical vulnerability through listening to others' performances. It seems likely that the confluence of the samba performance, the tension with her peers, and her own fear of embarrassment precipitates such vulnerability that she feels no choice but to escape. This is something Katie reflected upon when discussing her Year 7 guitar and ukulele project, worrying how relational conflict in one classroom situation may well lead to further instances of exclusion that quickly add up to a discouraging sense of abandonment. Katie wondered how such apparently trivial instances could become 'a very negative experience' (P1.K4), resulting in unbearable encounters, perhaps like Maddy's.

#### 4. CHARACTERISING MUSICAL VULNERABILITY: PUPILS' EXPERIENCES

Katie's observation of the possible long-term consequences of musical susceptibility is borne out by the experience of one of John's pupils, Simon. Simon's sense of susceptibility first emerges during a Year 8 blues performance with four of his peers:

they were trying, but it wasn't going their way. The seams came apart, and the pupils were just out of kilter with one another. Two of them were laughing it off, but Simon was crying at the same time as trying to play the trombone. He was crying because it wasn't going his way, and because the sound he was trying to emit was being affected by his crying. (P1.J4)

Although Simon's group quickly realise that their performance is falling apart, two of them shrug it off and simply give up. In contrast, Simon perseveres through the humiliation, and his sense of vulnerability is compounded. His initial disappointment that their performance is going badly is exacerbated by his peers' response, and his embarrassment grows as he realises his trombone-playing sounds poor. But the more upset he gets, the worse his playing sounds.

The susceptibility Simon experiences at the interface between his own investment in his music-making and his peers' conflicting response seems to be aggravated over time. Because John is using video-recordings to assess his pupils' work, the class have to watch back each performance:

the worst thing of all was that in the next lesson the whole class had to evaluate a video of the performance. I explained, "we're watching this simply because performances can go wrong, sometimes. What's important is that Simon kept going. That takes terrific tenacity, and I'm proud of him." (P1.J4)

Although watching back a previous recording may not have quite the same effect as performing a second time, for Simon it means reliving his intense experience of susceptibility while his peers respond and his teacher tries to justify his poor performance. Despite accepting his teacher's praise with an attitude of, 'OK, I'll take that' (P1.J4), his sense of susceptibility does



not abate. John described how Simon ‘became a kind of shrunken violet. It literally took me half a term to get him back to the stage at which he felt comfortable to perform on the trombone again’ (P1.J4). Simon is reluctant to be involved in any further performances which may prompt the reliving of his disastrous blues performance. He distances himself from the crippling sense of vulnerability associated with playing his trombone. Only time and John’s patient persuasion eventually bring him back round to a renewed enthusiasm and engagement.

In his interaction with Simon’s class, John goes to great lengths to rebuff any further relational conflict that might negatively affect Simon, using his authority as teacher to position Simon’s efforts as admirable. However, in future lessons he avoids making the class watch back video-recorded performances. He recognises the discomfort that this must have entailed for Simon, and realises that his decisions and interventions as teacher cannot always mitigate—and may even exacerbate—relational conflict. This is a sentiment reflected by Danielle, who distinctly remembered her own misguided response to two Year 8 pupils:

they were writing pop songs in Year 8, and this young girl went away into one of these group rooms with her partner. When the end of the lesson was imminent, I went round to scoop up the well-behaveds from the group rooms and they came back in with all the strugglers to share what they’d done. There were some nice things going on, and then we got to her and her friend. They performed a piece from the musical *Moana*. Off by heart, really nicely. But with the same chords, the same words—they just sang the song. (P1.D4)

This anecdote touches on many of the ways in which teachers’ decisions influence pupils’ musical vulnerability in the music classroom. First, Danielle’s pupils are (explicitly or implicitly) divided into ‘the well-behaveds’—the responsible and musically capable—and ‘the strugglers’—those who require constant teacher assistance. Each pupil is therefore aware of an obligation to meet such expectations, and ‘the well-behaveds’ sometimes feel ‘special’ or privileged to be working outside the classroom (P1.D4). Second, all pupils are expected to share their music-making with the rest of the class. As in the music-drama showcase described by

Alice, this leaves them vulnerable to the judgment of others who become participants in the act of music-making—a vulnerability that may well be exacerbated by the self-other comparison between pupils and performances.

The experience of Danielle's two pupils performing a song from *Moana* illustrates the relational vulnerability typical of such performance situations. Danielle is disappointed by their performance. Her response creates two interlocking conflicts, which in turn result in a disabling negative susceptibility. First is the conflict between the girls' expectations and their teacher's response: 'all they'd have done for 40 minutes in their little group room was get more and more excited about the moment they went to do their performance. And then I ridiculed it immediately' (P1.D4). The girls are clearly proud to have been singled out to work in a practice room, and know that their polished performance, sung off by heart, will be impressive. Their teacher's ridicule therefore appears to come as a genuine shock to them. This issue is exacerbated by a second conflict, between aesthetic value and Danielle's chosen pedagogical criteria. Danielle explained:

I didn't deal with it properly. I just went, "that's already been written! What are you doing? I didn't ask for a cover!" I was abrupt and cold, and a bit annoyed that they'd manipulated what I wanted them to do. And one of them burst into tears and sat down, and wouldn't talk to me about what had happened. I kept digging, saying, "but what you did was really impressive, to have played that piece by ear—but just not quite what we were supposed to be working on."  
(P1.D4)

In this moment, Danielle appears to experience her own personal conflict: on the one hand, recognising the girls' performance as 'really nice' and 'really impressive', but on the other, frustrated that they did not do the assignment as she had asked. By voicing this conflict in a cold, abrupt, and sarcastic manner—in front of the whole class—Danielle's response drives home the reality of the girls' susceptibility. She belatedly acknowledges the time and effort they must have invested in their work, but leaves them without any doubt that this investment was

inappropriate. Although she knows that she is handling the situation badly—and running out of time before the end of the lesson—her response leaves the girls vulnerable, their excitement at performing quashed by the conflict between their own expectations and their teacher’s expectations.

A similar experience was described by Alice, but in which the interpersonal vulnerability between herself and her pupils was exacerbated by the additional, unexpected response of a second, non-music teacher.

We’d watched a really inspirational video called *Six Drummers One Apartment*, in which this Swedish group break into a flat and create this incredible music just using what’s around them in each room: the kitchen, the bedroom, the bathroom, the living room. So that’s what we then did. I sent the pupils out to various places and said, “right, you can use what you’ve got around you. Create a piece of music—you’ve got half an hour.” But the backfire came when one group were working really well, but the teacher in the classroom next door then came and yelled at them: “they were just making all this noise, and it was completely uncoordinated—they were just banging on the walls, banging chairs on the floor, it was absolutely outrageous!” (P1.A4)

*Six Drummers One Apartment* immediately captures the attention of Alice’s pupils: “[the performers] break into the flat, and it looks like it’s going to be a heist, but it’s not!” (P1.A4). Like so much avant-garde music, it prises open underlying assumptions about music-making, dismissing the need for conventional instruments and performance spaces. Although Alice sees that some pupils find it ‘quite a challenge to just think so much outside the box’, others find it ‘really stimulating because they naturally would think outside the box anyway’ (P1.A4). But Alice’s appreciation of ‘thinking outside the box’ is not shared by the teacher who overhears one group’s music-making. On the contrary, this teacher experiences their music as ‘noise’—an undesired interruption to her own thinking (Thompson, 2012)—and becomes implicated in their music-making. To begin with, the pupils’ music-making is defined by the relationship

between their musical expectations and Alice's musical expectations. As long as these expectations remain closely aligned their musical vulnerability is realised as positive. But when the second teacher becomes involved, her perceptions also become influential.

When those implicated in a music-making practice hold contradictory values, it is not surprising when musical vulnerability is realised as negative:

she was really angry, I felt bad, and the poor kids were devastated! They said, "but we did what you told us to do Miss! We were only trying to create music and we just got really told off." It was really upsetting. (P1.A4)

In this instance, the teacher overhearing the pupils reacts in anger at her vulnerability to the 'noise'; Alice feels guilty for contributing to the misinterpretation of her pupils' work; and the pupils are upset and disappointed, trapped in the conflict between their own expectations, their music teacher's expectations, and the second teacher's expectations.

### 4.3. Personal vulnerability

Since musical vulnerability is closely related to experiences of relational concord and conflict, it is often compounded by personal vulnerabilities affecting individuals' predispositions towards music-making and relational competencies. This is exemplified in an account from Isabelle, who works at a prestigious independent school. She remembered an occasion when 'we were doing samba in the recital hall, and there was one boy who really struggled with tempo. He was concentrating like mad, and perhaps thought he was doing alright, but he just could not coordinate his pulse' (P1.I4). Although this pupil is clearly having difficulties, the experience of vulnerability actually seems more pronounced for his peers, whose music-making is affected by his struggle:

it was really hard to keep the rest on track, because they could sense that something wasn't right. They didn't get that "wow" factor because they were

frustrated, thinking, “well, this just sounds like a cacophony of sound. Why doesn’t it sound right?” (P1.I4)

In this case, the boy struggling to maintain the right tempo is unaware of his error—he is concentrating so hard on his individual task that his perception of the music-making as a whole is limited. But his lack of coordination gradually wears away at the musical receptivity of his peers. They are aware that something is wrong; that their otherwise coordinated effort sounds like a ‘cacophony’. Their disappointment and frustration illustrate the susceptibility inherent in their group music-making: they can only ever be as good as their weakest participant.

While Isabelle framed this anecdote in a negative light, John recounted a similar story in which he drew attention to the resulting *receptivity* of the struggling individual.

There was one Year 8 boy and a boogie-woogie bass line. He’s not a pianist, so we talked about the idea. “How many notes are there? OK, there are five. Right, you’ve got five of these little digits here. So you don’t even need to look at your hands while you’re doing it. So you just practise that. Do you have a piano at home?” “Yeah, I have a piano at home.” “Alright, OK. Well, just practise these first few notes so you know what it feels like.” (P1.J3)

After speaking with his teacher, John’s pupil is motivated to practise—he understands how the boogie-woogie bass line works and how to learn it. In turn, the more he practises, the more his sense of individual achievement is reinforced: ‘something about the tactile nature of what he was doing seemed immensely satisfying to him. He was just riveted’ (P1.J3).

But like Isabelle’s pupil, when it comes to performing with others, John’s pupil seems out of his depth. He is concentrating so hard on his own part that he is almost oblivious to what is going on around him: ‘in the performance itself, he was so invested that he didn’t play in time with any of the others’ (P1.J3). Though it is unclear how his group respond to such an obstacle, the boy playing the boogie-woogie bass line seems elated. He is not disappointed that his part does not seem to fit. On the contrary, he remains musically receptive and motivated,

fixated on playing his own part as accurately as possible and proud of his achievement. With the praise and affirmation of John, 'because he was playing his part accurately and put in a lot of effort, that was a real turning point for him' (P1.J3).

These two accounts from Isabelle and John illustrate the intimate relationship between interpersonal and individual vulnerabilities in the music classroom. Yet their contrasting perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of such experiences exemplify the varied and sometimes unexpected outcomes resulting from pupils' particular musical and personal differences. As I explore in the following Section 4.3.1, musical vulnerabilities may be directly associated with pupils' particular musical abilities, identities, or expectations. In other cases, such as those I describe in Section 4.3.2, they may relate to pupils' personality differences: extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism, or agreeableness. Furthermore, five of the teachers I interviewed specifically highlighted the impact of neurodivergence on pupils' sense of musical vulnerability; therefore, in Section 4.3.3 I investigate how the behaviours associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may intensify pupils' experiences of both positive musical receptivity and negative musical susceptibility.

##### *4.3.1. 'Some students could really fly with it': Musical differences*

Within the music classroom, individual pupils' musical differences—such as the music they most or least appreciate—have a substantial influence upon their experience of musical vulnerability. Sometimes, as in the following accounts of teachers Fynn, Hannah, and Claire, this can lead to an unexpected receptivity to specific music-making opportunities. However, in other instances, it can lead to a sense of disparity and lack of cohesion across the classroom, as some pupils enjoy their newfound receptivity while others find themselves negatively susceptible to music they dislike or with which they cannot identify.

A number of teachers who described their pupils' positive experiences of music-making in the classroom referred to moments when pupils discovered a certain resonance between their classroom music-making and their existing musical preferences. This is the case in Fynn's description of his Year 9 grime project. Because Fynn makes a concerted effort to engage with his pupils' preferred musics, they find a connection between their teacher's conception of

classroom music-making and their own existing musical understandings. They therefore become increasingly receptive to new musical opportunities in the classroom, experimenting with how they can build upon their teacher's ideas to create their own unique soundworlds.

Hannah described a similar instance in her classroom, albeit in rather different circumstances. For Hannah, classroom music teaching entails a responsibility to introduce her pupils to music with which they are not already familiar. She believes it is their engagement in such music—rather than the agency emphasised in Fynn's grime project—that encourages positive musical receptivity. For this reason, Hannah always teaches her Year 7 classes the first movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. 'Every single time I do it', she said, 'they always applaud' (P1.H3). So it is on this occasion:

Year 7 knew that they had to sit in complete silence, for seven minutes, and follow the thematic development on their graphic score: "duh-duh-duh-duuh, duh-duh-duh-duuh." After about a minute they could see where it was going, the pitch changes, the dynamic changes. But at the end they applauded. (P1.H3)

The experience of listening to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in this manner seems to stimulate pupils' musical vulnerability in two ways. First, since these pupils are unfamiliar with the piece, they do not know what to expect from it. They are vulnerable to being amazed by it—or to being bored by it if it does not resonate with their personal musical preferences. This stands in contrast to the experience of the pupils in Fynn's grime project, whose musical vulnerability may result in being excited by an authentic exploration of music they already know and love—or in being disappointed as the music is deadened by classroom pedagogy. Second, by listening attentively, following the thematic development and the graphic score, Hannah ensures that her pupils remain immersed in the music with no distractions. For experienced musicians, this kind of structural listening can negate the emotional impact of unexpected musical moments (Dell'Antonio, 2004b). But for these pupils, the graphic score provides enough guidance to keep them engaged, but not so much that they become unaffected by the music's climax.

#### 4. CHARACTERISING MUSICAL VULNERABILITY: PUPILS' EXPERIENCES

The pupils' spontaneous applause at the end of the symphony's first movement suggests that their musical vulnerability is realised as positive receptivity. They find the music exciting and surprising, so much so that they are almost lost for words: 'I turned around and said, "why did you applaud?" And they replied, "because it was... wow! That was, it was a-, it was amazing!"' (P1.H3). This positive receptivity has both short- and long-term impacts related to the pupils' musical differences. For most pupils in the class, they immediately experience a sense of awe, feeling the music's 'wow' factor. But one boy aspires to be able to *make* music like that which he has heard:

shortly afterwards, one student who came from a very, very deprived background came up to me and said, "I asked my mum and dad to actually get me the CD of Beethoven's Fifth because you played it Miss, and because it was just so 'wow!'" (P1.H3)

Then he is inspired to take up the violin:

it had opened up a whole other bank of possibilities for him. We were able to get him some violin lessons at school because he wanted to learn an instrument. He didn't stick at it, but he did a couple of years. (P1.H3)

Though two years of violin lessons may seem relatively insignificant, it is a remarkable outcome to emerge from one lesson listening to one movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. This indicates a degree of receptivity that lasts well beyond the initial encounter. Hannah went as far as to speculate the impact it may have, even many years after the boy gave up the violin: 'maybe even now he may look back and go, "this is what I learnt from violin"' (P1.H3).

In Fynn and Hannah's recollections, their pupils experience a positive musical receptivity which stems from their existing musical preferences and aspirations. Yet one further account demonstrates that the realisation of positive musical receptivity is not always dependent on possessing a pre-existing positive musical identity. Claire began, 'I had a Year 8



boy who was very, very bright, but not very musical' (P1.C3). In the first sentence alone, Claire implicitly highlights the situational vulnerability caused by institutional norms in the music classroom. Like Danielle, who is in the habit of separating 'the well-behaveds' from 'the strugglers', Claire separates those she considers 'musical' and 'not very musical'.<sup>29</sup> While developmental evidence suggests that all individuals have an innate capacity for music-making (Scripp et al., 2013), she labels some pupils as 'not very musical', possibly leading to their experience of an implicit sense of failure.

Yet on this occasion, Claire's 'not very musical' pupil 'got on really well with the variations project because he saw it in a scientific way: he could really see the logic behind what we were doing and came up with some really clever formulae' (P1.C3). In contrast with previous classroom music lessons, that have led Claire to question his musical ability, this project really resonates with this pupil. Claire observes how the project seems to engage with his personal interests—science, mathematics, logic, chess—in a way he finds fascinating and rewarding. She watches as he realises the connection between his self as a mathematician—his primary self-identity and source of self-esteem—and his self as a musician—which has previously been othered and overlooked. He appears to begin to understand the complementarity of this perceived self and other, investing in the project and gaining a new appreciation of both the music itself and his own musical ability: 'he saw that if you retrograde, "oh, look, that happens!" And then, "if I invert it I can work out...!"' (P1.C3).

Through discovering different ways of music-making, Claire's pupil experiences a new openness towards music. This vulnerability is not forced upon him by his external circumstances; rather, his self-awareness allows him to take an active and agential role in recognising the effects the music-making process has upon him. This in turn provides him with the long-term motivation for engagement in and enjoyment of classroom music lessons, in the knowledge that with greater personal investment comes greater achievement:

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<sup>29</sup> This does not necessarily indicate that Claire uses these terms on a day-to-day basis to address her pupils in person. A number of the teachers interviewed used the descriptors 'musical' and 'not musical' or 'unmusical' without elaboration, possibly because they are a convenient and widely-accepted shorthand for referring to those who seem more or less adept in music-making. However, it is important to consider how habitual use of shorthand phrases such as 'unmusical' could lead to a subconscious belief that some individuals cannot learn music.

that really changed his attitude towards other music projects. He was always keen to have a go, but in the next project he had much more of a “can do” attitude, as opposed to, “I’ll just sit here and do my best.” He definitely enjoyed himself a lot more. (P1.C3)

Although it can be a rewarding experience for pupils who find personal resonances between their musical identities and their classroom music-making, it is not always the case. Bethany, who teaches at a state academy, recalled a music lesson that upset a pupil because of particularly negative associations with his personal circumstances:

this boy’s girlfriend had just dumped him. So he was feeling a little bit rubbish when he came in. We were doing blues, so we sang through the *St Louis Blues* together and then I discussed the lyrics with them. But at, “‘cause my baby she done left this town”, he burst into tears. It obviously was not a great set of lyrics to hear when he was already really upset. (P1.B4)

This pupil’s experience is not unique to the music classroom. Pupils all come to school bearing burdens and pressures from elsewhere, and lessons can prove a helpful distraction or exacerbate the initial problems. Although this pupil manages to sing through the song, as the class discuss the lyrics he becomes visibly distressed. As the music’s meaning becomes clear he realises its semantic associations with his own situation.

While studying the lyrics of the *St Louis Blues*, this boy’s musical vulnerability is realised as negative susceptibility. He responds as though defeated by the music: ‘his friends offered him a bit of support, but he didn’t particularly want to talk to me about it and he was not very keen to do the task afterwards’ (P1.B4). By disengaging with the music, he seeks to avoid further vulnerability. Although by ‘next lesson he seemed fine’, Bethany realises that any discussion of lyrics has the potential to compound musical vulnerability (cf. Bradley, 2022): ‘it made me aware that you’ve got to be really careful discussing lyrics because lots of songs are really sad and often talk about things which are quite difficult for children to hear’ (P1.B4). Nonetheless,

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she still emphasises that ‘because the lyrics are sort of the meaning, it’s useful to discuss it from an academic point of view’ (P1.B4). Since most pupils in her class are receptive to these discussions, Bethany believes that one pupil’s experience of negative musical susceptibility should not prohibit these wider benefits.

In contrast, Hannah made clear that on some occasions the incongruence between some pupils’ receptivity and others’ susceptibility could cause an unbearable atmosphere of division. Like Fynn, she once explored the informal pedagogical approach promoted by Musical Futures:

I tried Musical Futures in its early days. But there was a real lack of cohesion and I didn’t enjoy how disparate it was. Some students could really fly with it: the rockers all really enjoyed it, the guitarists and singers who suddenly got to really, really shine. It even spawned a Rock School that we did on a Saturday morning. Lots and lots of kids went into that. But some students couldn’t get past bar three or four. When they went into groups they were very much, “I can’t do this. I, I can’t, I’m not musical, I can’t do it,” and would just be carried along by other students. (P1.H4)

For some of Hannah’s pupils—the ‘rockers’ and ‘guitarists and singers’—their musical preferences predispose them towards a positive response to Musical Futures. Their familiarity with the semantic and somatic properties of the music means they feel comfortable and confident in the music classroom. When they find the music to express positive social delineations and affirm their understanding of its meaning, their experience is involving and celebratory (Green, 2008): their vulnerability, in other words, is realised as positive receptivity. This has both short-term consequences—enjoyment and engagement in music lessons—and longer-term influences. For Hannah’s pupils, the development of an extra-curricular Rock School caters specifically for those who are receptive to Musical Futures. It capitalises upon their receptivity by offering extra opportunities and encouraging them to invest in music-making outside the classroom.

However, not all pupils' musical vulnerability is realised as positive receptivity. For those who 'couldn't get past bar three or four', their sense of vulnerability is decidedly negative. Their musical expectations leave them particularly susceptible to demoralisation, and lack of self-confidence leads them to give up quickly: 'I can't do it, I'm not musical, I can't do it'. They flounder without guidance from their teacher, and Hannah is critical of the way in which they end up being 'carried along by other students'. She is aware that—like in Isabelle's samba class—their struggles have a knock-on effect on their peers, who have to make adaptations to accommodate their susceptibilities. Hannah does not suggest that this is always a negative experience (Danielle's example of Charlotta and Carrie highlights how some pupils benefit from having to cater and care for their peers), but she does reiterate the potential negative susceptibility occurring at the relational interface between different pupils in her class.

#### 4.3.2. *'She doesn't want to be part of the madness': Personality differences*

The musical vulnerability associated with pupils' social relationships and individual musical differences, such as their preferred genres and perceived musical abilities, is frequently exacerbated by individual personality differences (Vella & Mills, 2017). Though the impact of pupils' personality traits<sup>30</sup> is not unique to the music classroom, several music teachers highlighted related issues that seemed unique to their lessons. As described earlier in Chapter 4, Katie's particularly conscientious, top-set Year 7 pupil struggles with the group work necessitated by the guitar and ukulele project. Lucy's pupil Maddy, who is already marginalised from her peers by her behavioural difficulties, experiences even greater vulnerability when expected to perform in front of her class. And Hannah finds that Musical Futures 'didn't seem to cater for the shy students who would've quite happily worked on their own. So I did see a lot of students who were disillusioned by it' (P1.H4).

For pupils who are shy or anxious about group work, their vulnerability is often manifested as negative susceptibility to alienation or exclusion from their peers. This is a

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<sup>30</sup> Psychological trait theory typically recognises five primary dimensions used to describe personality. This five-factor model (or the 'Big Five') comprises extraversion, conscientiousness, openness-to-experience, neuroticism, and agreeableness, and has commonly been used in research into music cognition and personality (e.g., Colver & El-Alayli, 2016; Corrigan et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2009; Ruth et al., 2020; Vella & Mills, 2017).

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particularly pertinent issue in music classrooms where group music-making is often the norm, and pupils have little or no opportunity to opt out. Hannah described having to follow up such group-work lessons with projects that are of greater immediate benefit to more introverted pupils, creating more cohesion within the class rather than overemphasising the potential conflicts stemming from individual and musical differences. Another teacher, Georgina, echoed these concerns, recalling the profound sense of vulnerability that occurs when teaching a class with one pupil who seems to be the ‘odd one out’ (P1.G4). One of Georgina’s pupils, who is particularly shy and reserved, experiences an otherness stemming from her relative lack of proficiency in Western classical music compared to others in her class:

I’ve had a group this year where 11 of them are just fantastic musicians, and bonkers and boisterous. But there’s one little dot, who’s actually not a bad musician, but she’s so quiet she doesn’t want to be part of the madness. (P1.G4)

This girl’s sense of vulnerability could not be clearer: ‘to begin with there were some lessons where she really wasn’t happy’ (P1.G4). She is not confident putting up her hand, and when her teacher asks her to take on a leadership role she responds ‘in absolute horror’ (P1.G4). Like some of Hannah’s pupils, she seems susceptible to an acute sense of inadequacy and inhibition. She lacks confidence because of her different musical preferences and quiet demeanour.

However, though this girl’s vulnerability is initially realised as tearful, negative susceptibility, she gains confidence over the course of the year. To begin with:

I made her captain of one of the ensemble compositions so that she could have a specific role. It was a risk, [...] but I put the quieter ones with her and they worked together and came up with something really lovely in which she had a proper part. (P1.G4)

Through taking on a specific role within the class, this pupil’s previously negative susceptibility begins to be realised as positive receptivity. She collaborates with her peers to produce

something 'really lovely', which garners their teacher's praise. Her role then develops as lessons move online during the first COVID-19 national lockdown:

during lockdown music lessons we ended up finding that she's really good at technology, and that she likes electronic music. That side of lessons really levelled the playing field for her. She's half Chinese, and she introduced the class to a great piece of Chinese pop that we'd not have listened to if it hadn't been for her. (P1.G4)

Through the opportunity to share her own musical skills and interests, this girl's sense of being the 'odd one out' is gradually transformed into a sense of inclusion and receptivity. Previously, her apparent lack of ability in Western classical performance rendered her vulnerable to feeling left behind by her peers. Now, her unique skill set in music technology and electronic music wins the respect of her class. She enters into a reciprocal relationship of receptivity with them, introducing them to her preferred music and engaging with their interests during other lessons. Her individual differences are embraced, no longer contributing to a stark sense of otherness but instead emphasising her value and self-worth.

Georgina's second account further described how careful pedagogical choices aligned with pupils' preferences can transform the experiences of particularly introverted pupils:

I did a lesson with Year 7 where we'd had a go at singing *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. They'd enjoyed all of that, so I gave them a lesson where they all had iPads with the Acapella app on it. And they had to see what they could do in 30 seconds of multitracking themselves. (P1.G3)

For Georgina, this lesson is a remarkably positive experience. Usually, she finds her pupils reluctant to sing in class—especially the 'lads who [are] a bit unsure about their singing' and 'kids who are maybe more instrument focussed' (P1.G3). This accords with anecdotal evidence that singing can beget a stark sense of vulnerability: putting oneself on show, complete with

any shortcomings and inadequacies (e.g., A. Bull, 2019, pp. 52–54). Singing alone can feel exposing and quickly lead to embarrassment, while singing with others requires group cooperation and the management of different musical expectations and potential disputations.

However, during their lesson on *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, Georgina’s pupils keep rushing back into the classroom to show her what they have done: ‘Miss, Miss, Miss, listen to this!’ (P1.G3). Working individually with basic multitracking technology allows them to sing without any onlookers or the cooperation of any other singers, yet also enables them to record multiple harmony parts. For one pupil in particular, this has a profound impact on her sense of vulnerability:

this one girl, who’s so shy and down on herself—but a lovely musician—she’d done this fantastic, four-part multitracking of herself doing the harmonies to *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, adding the thirds and a little descant over the top. It was just me and her in the room as I listened to it, and I just went, “wow! This is, this is absolutely fantastic! I would like to be able to use that as an example to the others when we come back next time. I’ve never heard you sing this beautifully.” And she went red and stammered, “oh, no, no, no, it was, it’s, it’s nothing.” But she didn’t stop me—she allowed it to be used as an example to the others, when usually she’s like, “it’s no good, I need to do it again, I need to delete it.” (P1.G3)

This shy girl seems to experience maladaptive perfectionist tendencies: despite being a good musician, she does not usually respond positively to praise, and reacts to perceived failures by deleting her work and denying her achievement (Stoeber & Eismann, 2007). This experience may sometimes be exacerbated in the music classroom, since music-making never has an objectively ‘perfect’ outcome. Perfectionism therefore leaves this pupil vulnerable, especially to her own self-criticism when she feels she has not met her desired standard of music-making.

However, during this lesson, the girl’s vulnerability is realised as a positive receptivity. She voluntarily shares her music-making with her teacher, rather than deleting it, and—despite

some embarrassment—she accepts her teacher's effusive praise. She seems genuinely pleased with her achievement, perhaps because she has been able to work on her own (without having to negotiate her peers' musical expectations), yet still create a piece that sounds complete, fulfils the task in question, and cannot easily be improved upon within the 30-second, four-part limit.

As in Danielle's experience listening to Charlotta and Carrie, and Fynn's experience with his Year 9 boys experimenting with grime, the fact that this girl's personal positivity is in accord with Georgina's praise serves to enhance her experience of receptivity. Not only does she open herself to sharing her music with her teacher, but she is also newly willing to play her music to her peers. In this regard, her experience of positive musical receptivity reaches beyond her music-making alone and begins to shape her self-confidence and self-concept.

#### 4.3.3. *'He's very particular': Neurological differences*

For some pupils, the musical and personality differences that influence their musical vulnerabilities are compounded by neurodivergence. Five of the teachers I interviewed—Alice, Bethany, Esther, Fynn, and Lucy—each independently drew on the experiences of pupils with ASD<sup>31</sup> in describing musical vulnerabilities in their classrooms. Their focus on ASD may, in part, be a result of their greater awareness of the specific (and often idiosyncratic) needs of pupils with ASD, or a result of the particularly memorable or unusual behaviours of such pupils. But it also highlights how a condition such as ASD may exacerbate the kind of individual differences that heighten relational and musical vulnerabilities.

Fynn recalled a notable episode involving a boy named Jack:

Jack is autistic and he's very particular. Get him in the right group and he'll play flute, he'll play drums, he'll even sing. But once his group were away, so I

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<sup>31</sup> Recent discourse in disability studies has raised concerns relating to the use of person-first language (e.g., 'pupil with autism') or identity-first language (e.g., 'autistic pupil') when referring to individuals with disabilities (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). Research has shown that individuals with ASD differ in how they prefer to describe their condition: some may use terms such as 'autistic', 'on the autism spectrum', or 'autism spectrum condition' rather than the diagnostic term, ASD (L. Kenny et al., 2016). However, speaking as an individual with a diagnosis of ASD, I believe there are advantages and disadvantages to using all such terms. In this thesis, I therefore use a variety of descriptors to refer to ASD, and use person-first and identity-first language interchangeably depending on context.



had to combine groups. And when I came into their practice room, I asked, “where’s Jack?” “He ran away.” We couldn’t find him. He’d hidden in one of the instrument cupboards and wouldn’t come out. Absolutely not. So the lesson basically went down the pan. (P1.F4)

ASD is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder defined by two core domains: difficulties in social communication or interaction, and restricted, repetitive behaviours and interests (Geretsegger et al., 2014). For pupils like Jack, this means that group work can be especially stressful. When his group unexpectedly changes, Jack is poorly equipped to adapt to the new social expectations. He finds it difficult to adjust or explain his musical ideas:

we’d been doing *I Will Survive*, and his new group started with the drumbeat, whereas his normal group started with the piano flourish and had the first verse quite rubato. So he was trying to demonstrate how the drums should go, just using cymbal flourishes at the beginning, but he didn’t have the language or emotional ability to explain it in a calm way. The drummers were like, “no, this is the way we’re doing it.” And Jack couldn’t cope. (P1.F4)

Although research into music listening indicates that some neurodivergent individuals show a similar level of emotional awareness in music to neurotypical individuals (Allen et al., 2009; Quintin et al., 2011), this evidence is not generalisable to experiences of group music-making. While recognising music-induced emotion is not dependent on social interaction, many other music-making situations are highly dependent on interpersonal communication. As Jack struggles with his new group’s reluctance to listen to his ideas, his sense of vulnerability is exacerbated: he seems to experience an intense sense of relational susceptibility, closely associated to the music-making with which he is trying to engage. Although running away and hiding—a classic panic response of ‘fight or flight’—may seem extreme, it is not uncharacteristic of autistic individuals who may lack ‘subtlety and variety in emotional expression’ (Attwood, 2007, p. 131). In fact, Jack achieves a similar outcome to other pupils

who give up or refuse to engage with classroom music-making: he escapes the situation altogether.<sup>32</sup> By leaving the vicinity, he avoids being interpellated by the enveloping invasiveness of the music, thereby eliminating the threat of further exacerbation of his vulnerability.

This instance of negative musical susceptibility does not have a lasting impact on Jack during his classroom music lessons: 'when his normal group came back he was able to get back on' (P1.F4). However, the significance of Jack's musical vulnerability becomes more apparent when, soon afterwards, he stops attending classroom music lessons:

later I had to give him a warning for wandering around during group work. And he reacted very badly to that, so went off to the pastoral base and then basically wouldn't come back to his music lessons for the rest of the half term. He was still engaging with music in school, but there was something about being in that classroom with that particular group dynamic. (P1.F4)

Jack's situation here seems complicated: is his sudden aversion to classroom music lessons a result of having been told off, or being uncomfortable in the dark and low-ceilinged classroom, or being unhappy working with his form group? In any case, Jack's sense of situational vulnerability in the music classroom leads to a longer-term avoidance of some kinds of music-making, with some people, and in some spaces.

Though it is sad to consider how one minor conflict in the music classroom could lead to long-term disengagement, Jack does continue coming to his flute lessons and participating in the school orchestra. His experience of musical vulnerability in the classroom, therefore, seems to be place-specific, perhaps associated with music-making circumstances experienced only during timetabled lessons (cf. N. Cook, 2013). Through other modes of music-making, Jack continues to foster a secure, positive musical identity. This poses the important question of the role of pedagogical modality—such as group work, individual practice, whole-class

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Jack's response may be comparable to the reactions of Bethany's pupil who finds the *St Louis Blues* particularly upsetting (Section 4.3.1), and Lucy's pupil Maddy who storms out of the music classroom to avoid performing in front of her peers (Section 4.2.2).

ensembles, or theory—in the experience of vulnerability and its long-term effect. Some classroom music practices, such as teacher-directed singing sessions with neurodiverse and neurotypical pupils, have been shown to have positive impacts upon pupils' prosocial emotions towards one another (A. Cook et al., 2019). Yet in Jack's experience, these positive outcomes are clearly dependent on avoiding the social conflict and misunderstanding common to so many classroom music-making experiences.

This point was reiterated by Esther, a music teacher who works at a special school for pupils with autism. Since most of her pupils have limited musical experience outside the classroom, in most classes 'you can actually physically watch them, see them make progress. It's just incredible because all the stuff they're learning is new to them' (P1.E3). But although many of her pupils enjoy music-making, for one boy, Declan, the music classroom is a space associated with significant anxiety and vulnerability. The distinctive characteristics of the classroom—with extra equipment such as instruments and computers, varied seating arrangements, and facilities for rehearsals such as practice rooms and instrument cupboards—provoke profoundly negative memories. 'At Declan's primary school, when he was a naughty boy they used to lock him in the music room. So when he started here, his anxieties wouldn't let him come through the door' (P1.E4). To the avid musician, this may seem shocking. Yet it is not impossible to understand why an over-stretched primary teacher, at the end of their tether with a disruptive, autistic boy, may have sent Declan away to an empty room where he could be left without disrupting any other pupils or breaking anything of value.

But the long-term consequences of these actions are, for Declan, debilitating. Combined with the anxieties that many autistic individuals face during times of transition (such as moving schools), Declan's long-standing association between the music room and the threat of punishment maintains a stronghold as he starts at Esther's school. 'Only when he gradually, literally one-to-one, saw that he wasn't going to be locked in could he stay a bit longer' (P1.E4). Nevertheless, he still finds some aspects of music-making overwhelming:

he wouldn't touch a keyboard—he wouldn't go anywhere near one. Now even when some weeks he does better than others, when he's worried about things

he will do anything not to be there. He will start an argument to get himself to a place where he can storm out. (P1.E4)

Here, the tactile nature of making music seems problematic for Declan. This could be because playing an instrument forges a tangible connection between the act of music-making and his self, therefore compounding his anxieties if he takes an active role in the music he associates with punishment. His worries are also heightened by external factors, which are perhaps reminiscent of the circumstances underlying his behaviour at primary school.

Esther's hard work to enable Declan to come into her classroom demonstrates that in some circumstances it is possible to transform or replace the musical associations of past negative experiences. Through the assurance of repeated non-threatening experiences in the music classroom, she helps him overcome some memories of past trauma. However, in some instances the citational nature of music-making may cause more anxiety than is manageable, both for Declan and for Esther:

we don't want to pressurise him to stay [in music], because that just makes it worse for the week after. So what we'd rather do to take his anxieties down a bit is to cut music out of his timetable rather than put him in a painful and negative situation. (P1.E4)

Esther takes the time to seriously consider which is more important: Declan's experience of music, or Declan's experience of wellbeing. Though she has the luxury of working in an independent special school where timetables can be readily adapted to individuals' needs, her consideration is essential to the management of musical vulnerability. Even when the music classroom may provide a safe and powerful space for addressing past traumas, it could also potentially compound pupils' distress (Bradley, 2022).

Though the examples of Jack and Declan paint a sadly negative picture of the experience of pupils with ASD in the music classroom, Alice, Bethany, and Lucy all recounted instances in which their autistic pupils' struggles with musical vulnerability resulted in transformative

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receptivity during classroom music-making. Like Declan, Lucy's Year 7 pupil Stephen often finds school anxiety-provoking. He struggles to attend many lessons because of the social anxiety and sensory overload associated with the classroom environment. Initially, this is the case in his music lessons. While his peers take part in three weeks of class singing, Stephen 'hadn't been in any of his class's first lessons because he'd been refusing to come into the classroom' (P1.L3).

Following the singing project, the class move onto a six-week gamelan project. Stephen, with the encouragement of a teaching assistant, joins them in the classroom. Initially his vulnerability remains pronounced: 'we started off learning the balungan, and he really struggled with that because it's quite a lot of coordination' (P1.L3). To alleviate his difficulties, Lucy offers him a more accessible role:

the first additional instrument we added in was the kehtuk. I said, "OK Stephen, you've been trying really, really hard. Why don't you have a go at this?" He really took to it. He had a good sense of timing and he managed it really quickly. He was just excited to come in every lesson and get his kehtuk. (P1.L3)

Lucy's provision of a suitably differentiated part that is within Stephen's capabilities is essential in transforming his susceptibility into receptivity. She chooses a part she knows is less reliant on motor coordination, and Stephen quickly succeeds with it. He no longer struggles or faces the risk of failure. In fact, he is so secure in his role that he is open to new suggestions from Lucy, who is 'able to help him learn different techniques' to create varied timbres (P1.L3).

Two further aspects of Stephen's musical experience appear to contribute to his growing receptivity:

he responded well to praise. He was obviously paying attention to the fact that his part fitted in really nicely with the others, and he got a lot of sensory gratification from the way the beater bounces in a very satisfying way. (P1.L3)

#### 4. CHARACTERISING MUSICAL VULNERABILITY: PUPILS' EXPERIENCES

It is possible that the somatic feedback and embodied experience of playing the kehtuk influences Stephen's sense of security: his attachment to his instrument offers him a safe individual space from which to participate in the rewarding experience of group music-making. His initial sense of susceptibility to the frustration of failure and the social demands of interacting with his peers is, thereby, alleviated through a microcosm of music-making in which he is confident and content.

Bethany recalled a similar encounter in which a challenge faced by one of her pupils with ASD was transformed into a fulfilling sense of achievement:

somebody who I saw just today is really excited about learning the ukulele and learning new pieces. In Year 7, we do a project where the whole class plays ukulele. We teach them as a group how to play simple chords, and then some slightly more tricky chords, and then some tab of pieces for varying levels of ability. She started off using a classroom instrument, but now she's actually got her own instrument, so she does a bit of practice at home. Today she said she wanted some more pieces to learn, so I gave her some stuff she can do at home. She's not necessarily the most fluent tab reader, and she's really good in class but needs some support, so I gave her some online tutorial videos. (P1.B3)

In this project, all the pupils in Bethany's class encounter the musical vulnerability associated with the somatic and semantic experience of playing the ukulele within a whole-class instrumental teaching pedagogy. Some pupils are not receptive to this music-making experience (cf. Hallam, 2019): Bethany said 'it can be quite tricky if they find it quite difficult', so 'there are a minority of students who do switch off' (P1.B3).

Her pupil with ASD, however, finds learning the ukulele to resonate with her self-identity, so much so that she buys her own instrument to play at home. Bethany supports this investment by providing her with new pieces well-suited to her needs. Like the kehtuk part Lucy gives Stephen, Bethany's careful differentiation of instrumental parts allows her pupil to build on her existing musical competencies, despite occasional challenges in the classroom:

## MUSICAL VULNERABILITY

she's sometimes had the odd lesson where she's found practice really frustrating, and because she has autism that's more difficult for her to manage. But when she perseveres she really appreciates that she's done it. She's really pleased when she learns something new and it gives her a sense of skill, like she really is now playing music. (P1.B3)

Although her ASD sometimes leaves her vulnerable to discouragement, rather than being demotivated by frustration this pupil is resilient, persevering in the face of challenges and making her success all the more special.

Alice described a very similar instance during her Year 9 pupils' music-drama showcase:

there was one girl in particular who was quite significantly on the autistic spectrum, who could have slightly peculiar reactions to things and had a very low sense of self-esteem. But she created from scratch a pop song, with lyrics, and devised all the chords and everything, and then performed it, live. (P1.A3)

Like Bethany's pupil, this girl often finds it difficult to cope with disappointments in the music classroom. Yet for the showcase she manages to compose and perform her own song, in front of her teacher, her peers, and a full audience of parents. The pressure is immense: her personal investment in and ownership over her song means her performance is a glimpse into her very self. But it is a success.

That was an incredible achievement, an amazing confidence booster to cope with the pressure of live performance. It was really special. It gave her a really concrete sense of achievement, that, "this is what I've done, and I performed it live, in front of an audience." There was a lovely atmosphere: her peers were really excited for her, and the parents were really moved. (P1.A3)

This pupil's achievement seems all the more special because of the social and emotional hindrances she has overcome in the process of music-making. Her previous negative susceptibility associated with relational vulnerability is transformed into positive receptivity to the shared reward of making music with others.

Though Alice and Bethany recognise how the challenges and differences associated with ASD can be harnessed for positive musical receptivity, Esther goes further in describing the different kinds of musical vulnerabilities experienced by her autistic pupils. Research has shown that individuals with ASD often excel in music-related activities more so than in other interactions, in part because of the way in which music-making stimulates an innate sense of communicative musicality, regardless of other communicative abilities (Tiszai, 2020). Some autistic people with additional learning disabilities are particularly gifted savants, while many others possess heightened pitch discrimination and sensitivity (Sacks, 2011). Some autistic pupils, therefore, may be more likely to be receptive to classroom music-making. This is the case for several of Esther's most gifted pupils:

I have one student at the moment who's relatively new to the school. But he'll walk in the room and he'll go up to the piano and he'll play the blues off the top of his head. He wasn't listening to me in the slightest, but then I was like, "you can't play the blues in C can you?" and he just went straight into another key. Then I went to the other end of the room and just played something really simple on the keyboard, and he played it back to me without even looking at me. It's inspiring, it's just incredible what you see from those glimmers. (P1.E3)

In Esther's observation, this pupil is defined by his music. His music is a place of refuge and solipsistic reflection; but it is also a place of receptivity. While his teachers are 'still trying to work him out and understand his needs', 'even when he's in a rage the place he'll want to come to is the music room, because he wants to be in that space and his way of relaxing is to play the blues' (P1.E3).



In contrast to Declan's experience, for this pupil the strong citational qualities of music elicit a sense of comfort and achievement, rather than anxiety and punishment. With some pupils, Esther is able to harness these positive citational properties to encourage musical receptivity. This sometimes means focussing on the theme music for *Thomas the Tank Engine* or *SpongeBob SquarePants*. But on other occasions it means discussing difficult and emotional subjects such as racism and discrimination:

you have to personalise whatever you're doing to what they like, so the students can link it to lots of other things in their lives. When this student's class were doing blues and talking about Black people and White people, when we went on to jazz they were like, "well, that's Black people and White people getting together isn't it?" And you're like, "yes, it is." And they're like, "oh, well that's really good," and you're like, "yes, it is." (P1.E3)

Through creative music-making and critical conversation (Hess, 2021), Esther enables her pupils with ASD to engage with weighty social issues. Their receptivity provides opportunities for her to address their implicit assumptions and biases in a sensitive and appropriate way: 'the guy who plays the blues is a Black lad, and I have to remind them, "it's not because he's Black that he can play the blues—it's because he's a really, really clever musician"' (P1.E3). By doing so, she also finds resonance with this one particular pupil's life, engaging his passion for music as a way for him to come to terms with his racial history: 'I could see it in him, him trying to unpick that history side of it and find his place within it' (P1.E3).

Such experiences of neurodiverse pupils are instructive for characterising what it is like to experience musical vulnerability in the classroom. Their seemingly idiosyncratic responses—Jack's difficulties communicating his musical ideas to a new group, or Declan's inability to set foot in the music classroom—closely relate to neurotypical responses to similar situations. In this regard, Jack's struggles are not all that different from those of Hannah's pupils who are 'disillusioned' by the group work in Musical Futures, and Declan's anxieties are not all that different to the distress of Danielle's pupil performing a song from *Moana*.

The varied—and sometimes dramatic—accounts of teachers of pupils with ASD begin to give some insight into how positive musical receptivity and negative musical susceptibility are inextricably related. Jack, previously keen to play his flute or drums during lessons, is left unable to face coming into the music classroom. Yet in contrast, the music classroom is a valuable place of refuge for Esther's blues-playing pupil. In trying to cater for such pupils, these teachers sometimes encourage them to make music outside the classroom, or offer them differentiated parts to accommodate their particular skills, or allow them 'a right of refusal to participate' (Hess, 2022, p. 29). Their anecdotes illustrate both the entanglement of musical receptivity and susceptibility, and the fundamental place of the teacher—as encourager, supporter, or facilitator—in transformative experiences of musical vulnerability.

#### 4.4. Transforming musical vulnerability

Teachers often described the lengths to which they went to foster positive musical experiences in their classrooms, addressing both relational and individual susceptibilities. In some instances, such as John's class appraisal of Simon's trombone playing and Danielle's ridicule of her pupils performing a song from *Moana*, these attempts do not have the desired effect. Yet in others, teachers' awareness of pupils' musical preferences (such as Fynn's facilitation of a grime project) and their provision of carefully differentiated parts (such as for Bethany and Lucy's autistic pupils) clearly go some way towards harnessing pupils' positive musical receptivity.

##### 4.4.1. *Virtuous cycle? From negative susceptibility to positive receptivity*

Bethany and Lucy's accounts demonstrate how some seemingly discouraging situations in the music classroom have the potential for fostering positive musical receptivity. For Bethany's Year 7 pupil, her commitment to learning the ukulele means that while she is receptive to new opportunities, she is also susceptible to discouragement in the face of challenges. Yet any negative susceptibility is repeatedly transformed back into positive receptivity: through Bethany's provision of suitable music and the pupil's resilience, 'when she perseveres she really appreciates that she's done it'. Lucy's recollection of Stephen learning the kehtuk further demonstrates how the careful provision of a part well-suited to his skills transforms Stephen's

experience of the music classroom from one of such anxiety that he cannot cross the threshold, to one in which he makes visible progress and enjoys himself. The same is the case in Georgina's anecdote of her shy and unhappy pupil in a class of 11 'fantastic musicians'. When Georgina takes the time to find out her pupil's particular skills, she ensures that they are able to make significant contributions to each lesson. By attributing equal value to this one pupil as to the others in the class, Georgina successfully transforms any previous sense of conflict between her pupils' different musical abilities, thereby encouraging a new sense of positive and reciprocal musical receptivity.

The potential for susceptibility to be transformed into receptivity through careful, individual differentiation is further emphasised by Isabelle. She described how 'one year we did the song *Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot* on the steel pans. There's quite a cool bass line that you can put in, and at first try the bass player just sighed' (P1.I3). For this pupil, at first glance the music appears simply too challenging. They seem susceptible, perhaps to confusion or failure. Yet Isabelle has chosen this piece purposefully to challenge her pupils:

because the class had learnt steel pans for three years, by the time they got to the end of Year 9 many of them could appreciate that they'd become quite accomplished steel pan players—they thought, "yeah, I can play a steel pan."  
(P1.I3)

In time, this sense of accomplishment is shared by the bass player: 'once they got it they loved having the responsibility of keeping the groove, and you could tell by the end that they were proud of themselves for completing their part really, really well during the performance' (P1.I3). Though initially discouraged by the perceived risk of the piece's difficulty, their sense of susceptibility is quickly replaced by pride. They realise that the musical and relational reward of contributing such an important role in the group performance is greater than the risk of failure, and their experience is transformed into one of positive musical receptivity.

Katie explicitly attributed similar classroom encounters with risk and reward to work 'that is achievable, but not too easy' (P1.K3). This reflects Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's (2002)

concept of 'flow': a state of absorption occurring during experiences in which the degree of challenge is suitably matched to the ability of the participant, such that the experience is neither so easy as to be boring, nor so hard as to be discouraging. Though some of Katie's pupils often feel susceptible to failure in their music learning, she provides them with carefully differentiated, competitive activities to encourage receptivity:

last year I did a samba project with a bottom set who didn't find learning easy. But they had got quite enthused about music, and were happy to work hard and listen and get engaged. So at the start of every lesson they'd come in and sit in a horseshoe, and we'd do very competitive vocabulary quizzes that they enjoyed. (P1.K3)

Katie's pupils clearly invest time and effort in learning their music vocabulary, motivated by the competitive nature of the regular quizzes. This attitude then carries over into their practical music-making. When they start playing, 'what we were doing was such that they were managing to make musical sense, and there was a feeling of enjoyment in the room. There was no clock-watching or poor behaviour' (P1.K3). The pupils enjoy the reward of making 'musical sense'—of their music sounding 'right'. They manage to achieve it without too much difficulty, yet it is enough of a challenge that they cannot afford to get distracted.

This is particularly evident for the boys whom Katie entrusts with the more difficult caixa part:

some boys had the challenge of playing the caixa part where the rhythms are more complicated and the motor skills needed are more complex than playing the surdo. But they were particularly focussed because they recognised that they'd got something quite tricky to do, and they knew that they were capable of doing it but they had to really knuckle down to it. (P1.K3)

For these boys, the susceptibility inherent in their music-making quickly becomes greater than for their peers. Their parts require greater dexterity, and should they go wrong their mistakes will be more obvious. It could, therefore, be tempting to give up or become frustrated if the part proves too difficult. Yet in this instance, the sense of accomplishment associated with successfully performing a more virtuosic part is not beyond their grasp. Despite their susceptibility to failure should they go wrong, these boys remain positively receptive because they recognise their capability to reach their end-goal.

Handled sensitively, the experience of negative susceptibility can therefore prompt renewed resilience and a transformative sense of positive musical receptivity. This may result from the degree of risk and challenge required to achieve ‘flow’, the differentiation necessary for offering each pupil a meaningful musical role, or even the simple reality that musical achievement seems all the more special against a backdrop of repeated frustration and failure. Some such experiences also offer valuable opportunities for learning in and of themselves. For example, Alice’s pupils composing on the theme of *Six Drummers One Apartment* find that conflicting musical expectations may be dealt with through compromise,<sup>33</sup> resulting in a new and potentially improved musical outcome. After having been told off by the non-music teacher in the classroom next door, Alice’s pupils

then slightly rejigged what they were doing so it didn’t involve quite so much substantial hitting of the wall, essentially adapting their piece to accommodate the class next door and thinking about how they could do things in a different way. In the end it was great, they had some really fun rhythms. (P1.A4)

These same pupils also begin to engage in critical discussion, evaluating contradictory musical values and becoming ‘quite protective towards music; they didn’t like the idea that their music

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<sup>33</sup> Keith Murnighan and Donald Conlon (1991) highlight the paradox between confrontation and compromise as one of the most prevalent factors influencing the success of group music-making. In their study of professional string quartets, the most successful quartets avoided continuous confrontation by covert strategies of compromise, such as playing alternative musical interpretations in different performances, taking time-out from difficult arguments or controversies, or deferring to the leader of the quartet.

lesson was being criticised. It was the sense that, “we’re making music! You don’t understand! Some people just don’t get it, do they?” (P1.A4) Though they resent being told off, their experience heightens their awareness of what constitutes music and musicianship—just as *Six Drummers One Apartment* also aims to do. This sentiment could lead towards a fruitful discussion of what differentiates ‘music’ and ‘noise’ (Attali, 1985), different individuals’ musical tastes and preferences (Kertz-Welzel, 2021), or even the historical precedent for the original avant-garde movement (Ross, 2008). In this instance, therefore, there is potential for harnessing the negative susceptibility arising between conflicting musical expectations, and in turn developing a critical, positive receptivity.

#### 4.4.2. *Vicious cycle? From positive receptivity to negative susceptibility*

Despite the possibility for negative musical susceptibility to be transformed into positive musical receptivity, for some individuals and in some circumstances susceptibility can be completely debilitating. After breaking up with his girlfriend, Bethany’s pupil is unable to bring himself to listen to the *St Louis Blues*. Fynn’s pupil Jack runs away from his group playing *I Will Survive*, seeking refuge in an instrument cupboard. Lucy is unable to stop her pupil Maddy storming out of her samba class. And Danielle regrets her devastating ridicule of a pupil singing a song from *Moana*: ‘at the end of the lesson I couldn’t bring her back round. She was so desperately sad’ (P1.D4).

On occasions such as these, the tension between pupils’ positive musical receptivity and negative musical susceptibility seems beyond their teachers’ control. This is exemplified in the case of Claire’s Year 8 pupils Bertie and Thomas. During a project in which ‘they were using GarageBand to set music to a film clip, even though they’re not happy playing the keyboard they really got into this software’ (P1.C4). Claire sees how they ‘really took off’, even though ordinarily they do not seem ‘hugely musical’ (P1.C4). The project seems to resonate with their personal musical interests and abilities, provide an outlet for their creativity, and allow them to embrace new ideas and opportunities offered by the software. But then,

their work got lost five times! It was supposed to be saved on the Shared Area, and when it first got lost they were like, “oh, OK, we’ll start again.” And that was fine. It had happened to a couple of other people once or twice. But then by the fourth time they were like, “nah, Miss, we’re not doing this again.” They’re the last boys I’d expect to turn around and say that, but they wouldn’t do it. (P1.C4)

Having invested so much time and effort in their work, Bertie and Thomas’s disappointment when it is lost seems to lead to a profound sense of negative musical susceptibility. Though they initially respond with resilience, starting their work again and making the most of fresh opportunities, by the fourth time, their resilience is exhausted and they are resigned to defeat. The cumulative effort of rewriting their work multiple times seems to make their susceptibility to loss all the greater—so much so that their resignation appears completely out of character.

Bertie and Thomas are clearly aware of how much they have lost, and consider further attempts to recover their achievement hopeless:

so I said, “well, look. Do what you can, and I’ll listen to as much as you’ve done this lesson so I can see some of your ideas.” But they were like, “yeah, but Miss, it was really good, and we had this bit... and this melody...” (P1.C4)

In their pride over what they had achieved, they find their musical vulnerability—previously realised as positive receptivity—disabling, leaving them defeated and resistant to new suggestions. Bertie and Thomas give up, preferring not to risk any further vulnerability. Their sense of defeat cannot be contained. Claire is implicated in their disappointment, left feeling ‘pathetic’ and ‘out of control’ (P1.C4). She rightly worries about the long-term effects of similar experiences: ‘it’s those situations which make pupils ask, “why do we want to do another project like this if this is what happened last time?”’ (P1.C4).

## 4.5. Conclusion

Claire's concern over the long-term impact of pupils' negative susceptibility in her music classes reiterates the ubiquitous impact of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom. It is musical vulnerability—characterised as susceptibility—that is at the heart of Claire's pupils' despair, 'why do we want to do another project like this if this is what happened last time?' But it is also musical vulnerability—characterised as receptivity—that is at the heart of Hannah's pupil's exclamation, 'I asked my mum and dad to actually get me the CD of Beethoven's Fifth because you played it Miss, and because it was just so "wow"!'.

In these two examples—and throughout the other accounts described by the teachers I interviewed—pupils' experiences of musical vulnerability are intimately connected with interpersonal relationships (Bowman, 2009). As I summarise in *Figure 4.1*, relational concord often kindles positive receptivity: openness and sensitivity to others' musical ideas, and willingness to explore new ways of thinking (Wiggins, 2011). Relational conflict, on the other hand, often fuels negative susceptibility: disempowerment, belittlement, and exclusion from others' music-making, and tension between different ways of thinking (Frith, 2004). Deleterious or recurring experiences of susceptibility may cause resignation if individuals feel they have no choice other than to try to escape further musical interpellation; but in favourable circumstances, susceptibility can encourage resilience and stimulate a renewal of receptivity. In turn—as I depict in *Figure 4.2*—these relationships are influenced by individuals' different musical experiences and competencies, personalities and preferences, and social and neurological dispositions.

As demonstrated both by Alice's pupils composing on the theme of *Six Drummers One Apartment* and by Claire's pupils Bertie and Thomas, the interaction of (inter)personal vulnerabilities in the KS3 music classroom can have varied outcomes. With the right support and opportunities, even seemingly irreconcilable musical conflicts can result in resilience and receptivity (Kallio, 2021b). But recurring or extreme circumstances of negative susceptibility may prompt resignation: unwillingness to continue engaging in fear of further hurt, disappointment, or frustration (Cheng, 2016). For some pupils this may even be expressed physically, as refusing to set foot in or storming out of the music classroom.



Figure 4.1. *The interpersonal mediation of pupils' musical vulnerability*

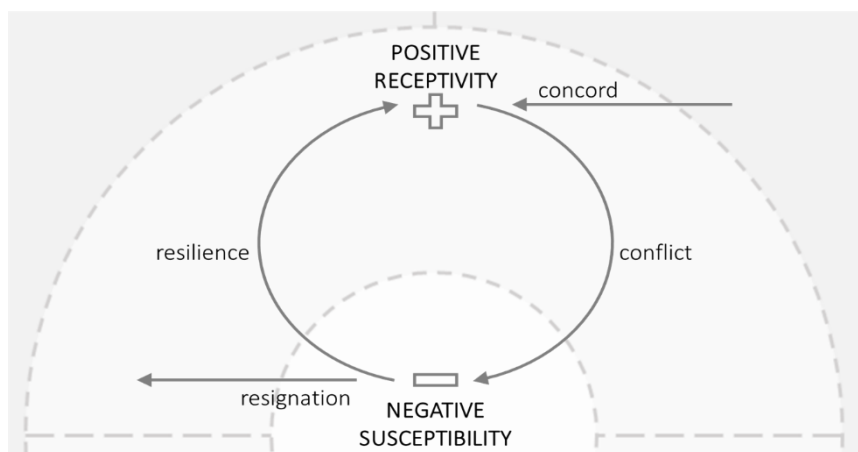
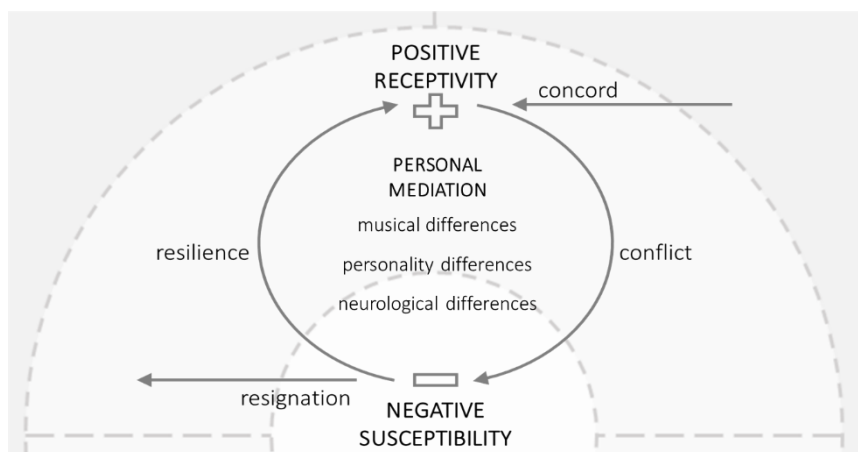


Figure 4.2. *The personal mediation of pupils' musical vulnerability*



Although such striking responses seem to be neither ‘normal’ nor even common in most KS3 music classrooms, the frequency with which teachers referred to such instances poses the question of how music-making results in vulnerabilities that are characterised in this way. How—and importantly, why—does musical vulnerability seem so distinctive in the wider school context? In the following sections, I briefly summarise how these teachers’ accounts highlight music’s distinctive semantic properties, somatic properties, and institutional mediation. In Sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 I discuss music’s semantic delineation of identity and space and its somatic impact upon the body, before examining its association with particular institutional methods and values in Section 4.5.3.

#### 4.5.1. *Musical vulnerability and music's semantic properties*

The theorisation of music's citationality (Westerlund et al., 2019) is borne out by a number of the experiences described by the teachers I interviewed. It is evident, for example, in the experience of Claire's 'very, very bright' boy. His musical self-identity is transformed by the resonance between his class's variations project and his existing interests in mathematics and logic, and his attitude in the music classroom shifts from one of passive engagement to one of active enthusiasm. In contrast, Lucy's pupil Maddy finds her sense of alienation reinforced in the music classroom, as her peers discount her musical contributions and position her outside the musical and social in-group (Tarrant et al., 2002).

Furthermore, the experience of Fynn's pupil Jack, who runs away from the music classroom following a disagreement with his group, demonstrates how in-group and out-group identities interlock with musical spaces. For Jack, certain music in a certain space comes to demarcate inaccessibility and marginalisation—a place where his ways of music-making are not welcome (Johnson & Cloonan, 2009). This semantic power of music may be fleeting—or it may retain an enduring hold over individuals' musical experiences, as in Declan's fear of the music classroom and its associations with isolation and punishment.

#### 4.5.2. *Musical vulnerability and music's somatic properties*

Music's somatic properties reinforce its delineation of identity and space through aural receptivity, mimetic participation, and affective transmission. Two teachers I spoke with emphasised the particular effects of music listening on their pupils' vulnerability; but while Hannah's pupils find Beethoven's Fifth Symphony 'amazing', one boy in Bethany's class finds the powerful combination of music and lyrics in the *St Louis Blues* emotionally overwhelming.

Several other teachers described their pupils' experiences of mimetic participation and rhythmic entrainment, and their responses to the corporeality of developing an intimate connection with playing a musical instrument (Bowman, 2004). This is evident in the 'groove' that Isabelle's pupil experiences when playing the steel pans in *Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot*, and in the 'immensely satisfying' tactile experience of John's pupil mastering a boogie-woogie bass line at the piano. Perhaps most telling, however, is Lucy's depiction of Stephen learning to play the

kehtuk: ‘he got a lot of sensory gratification from the way the beater bounces’. By experimenting with the kehtuk, Stephen becomes receptive to new sounds and sensations.

Stephen also appears to find joy in playing with a musical group, where ‘his part fitted in really nicely with the others’. His experience seems to extend beyond that of individual mimetic participation to be positively influenced by the affective transmission stemming from physical, chemical, and nervous entrainment (Brennan, 2004). Nonetheless, the powerful affective properties of entrainment do not always result in such positive receptivity: Isabelle’s class grow quickly frustrated with the one pupil who cannot keep in time in their samba band; and John’s pupil Simon is upset when his group performance—while being video-recorded—collapses and leaves him struggling through his trombone part alone.

#### *4.5.3. Musical vulnerability and music’s institutional mediation*

Simon’s negative susceptibility, in the face of John’s insistence on video-recording and peer-assessing his performance, is a particularly poignant reminder of the influential role of institutional and pedagogical decision-making upon musical vulnerability. John’s dogmatic expectation for his pupils to conform to his own musical values—like Danielle’s ridicule of her pupils performing a song from *Moana* and Hannah’s disappointment with Musical Futures—begins to reveal the significance of teachers’ own experiences and socialisation in the characterisation of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom (Isbell, 2020).

To establish the nature of this relationship between teachers’ and pupils’ encounters with musical vulnerability, in the following chapter I consider the similarities and differences between teachers’ own KS3 music experiences and those of their pupils. In accordance with extant literature considering music teacher identities (e.g., Ballantyne et al., 2012; Dolloff, 1999; Griffin, 2011), I reflect upon how such similarities and differences affect teachers’ awareness of and response towards musical vulnerability when they are teaching. With reference to my observations at East Fen High School, in Chapter 6 I then describe how emergent musical vulnerabilities are experienced both by pupils and their teacher in the KS3 music classroom. I ask how teachers’ own musical experiences may influence their pedagogical practices and how they perpetuate, mitigate, or avert continuing cycles of musical receptivity and susceptibility.

## 5. Characterising musical vulnerability: Teachers' experiences

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### 5.1. Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 3, each teacher I interviewed during Phase 1 of my research project answered four primary questions, the first two of which addressed their own past experiences of KS3 music lessons:

1. Can you remember a time when you were positively affected by music during a classroom music lesson in KS3?
2. Can you remember a time when you were negatively affected by music during a classroom music lesson in KS3?

These questions served three important purposes: first, to put teachers at ease with an opportunity to share some of their life history and reminisce about their own past musical experiences (Goodson & Sikes, 2017); second, to expose any similarities and differences between teachers' own KS3 music experiences and those of their pupils; and third, to elicit how teachers' past experiences may influence their own awareness of and response towards musical vulnerability in their present teaching.

Of all the teachers I interviewed, very few had an immediate response to either of these questions. For some, recollections were vague: 'we are talking a very long time ago now, like 30 years ago!' (P1.E1). For others, KS3 music lessons seemed so unremarkable that they barely merited reflection: 'KS3 music did not inspire whatsoever. I got all my music inspiration from church choir and from choral music opportunities' (P1.H1). But this in itself is instructive. As I explore in this chapter, beginning with a brief overview in Section 5.2, all the teachers I interviewed experienced musical opportunities that were noticeably different to those afforded to many of their own KS3 pupils. Through these early encounters, they firmly established their own distinctive musical abilities, identities, and expectations.

Nonetheless, all 12 teachers were clear that these encounters did not negate their experience of musical vulnerability. In Section 5.3, I evaluate in greater detail how teachers'

well-established sense of musical identity had an enduring influence on the positive receptivity (and, less often, the negative susceptibility) they encountered in the music classroom. In Section 5.4 I then consider occasions outside the music classroom when, on account of their secure musical abilities, identities, and expectations, these teachers found themselves unexpectedly—but acutely—vulnerable to alienation and exclusion.

## 5.2. Teachers' past musical experience

In accordance with previous research (e.g., D. Baker, 2006; Robinson, 2011), for all the teachers I interviewed, KS3 classroom music lessons formed only a very small (and often insignificant) part of their music education as children. In contrast to the majority of KS3 pupils they currently teach—for whom classroom music lessons are the sum total of their formal music education—all 12 teachers had extensive musical experience before beginning secondary school, including taking graded instrumental examinations with the ABRSM. Two later went on to pursue ABRSM diplomas, and all took some combination of GCSE, A-level, or equivalent qualifications in music before leaving school.

Several teachers described the notable musical experience they gained outside school through their local county music services before and during KS3: '[County] Music Service was fantastic—I went to Friday night area orchestra and also did holiday courses, residential, and foreign tours with [County] Jubilee Choir and [County] Youth Orchestra' (P1.GQ). Bethany explicitly described how her school supplemented their own music provision with that from the local music service:

the school had links with [County] Music Service and encouraged its students to participate in their ensembles. Transport was provided from school for these ensembles and students' instrumental teachers were also part of this Music Service and directed some of the groups. The school's own extra-curricular offer was very small but the fact that all instrumental lessons and ensembles from the Music Service were free meant that students could take part. (P1.BQ)

For these teachers, being involved with county music services, taking private music lessons, or having supportive parents helped develop their sense of musicianship before even starting secondary school. Not only did such experiences improve their musical abilities, but they also established their musical identities and fostered particular musical expectations.

### 5.2.1. *'Singled out as musical': Musical ability*

Extra-curricular opportunities outside school—including instrumental lessons, ensemble rehearsals, and concert tours—enabled each of these teachers to develop high levels of musical ability before starting KS3. This was particularly significant for John and Danielle, both of whom had sufficient musical experience and ability to attend selective schools with specialist music provision. John explained how, as a chorister at a prestigious cathedral school,

by the time I got to age 11, I was technically a talented musician, but I had very little experience of actually making my own musical decisions. I was taught how to interpret decisions that had been made for me in the sheet music and by my conductor. (P1.J1)

Although John spoke somewhat disparagingly of his own musical ability, describing himself as 'a kind of pianola [...] [that] just regurgitated things' (P1.J1), he highlighted that he was undeniably a talented, confident, and technically-able pupil. Danielle similarly described how, even among the most gifted pupils at her music school, 'I was one of the youngest members of the chamber choir and had super relative pitch and was a very good little alto' (P1.D1).

For those at other schools, the music classroom was typically a place where they were comfortable and their musical ability was valued. Fynn described his KS3 classroom simply as 'my comfort zone, especially as I'd been singing in the church choir basically since I could talk!' (P1.F1). Others were 'singled out as musical' (P1.H1) and offered opportunities such as 'a day's Gifted and Talented workshop doing blues-style compositions' (P1.I1). John, Lucy, and Esther all remembered being allowed to use classroom music lessons as time for extra performance or composition practice. Having been a chorister at preparatory school, John became a music

scholar at senior school, and during classroom lessons, ‘essentially I was just allowed to practise’ (P1.J1). Lucy took her GCSE in music early, so ‘throughout most of Year 9 I wasn’t really in the class very much at all, [but] I felt privileged to be doing something else’ (P1.L1). Esther similarly recalled how her music teacher

let me go out of classroom music lessons to practise my clarinet. I did lots of extra-curricular stuff: peripatetic lessons were good, getting involved in the shows, going on the trips, a lot of concerts, spending lunchtimes doing music. Classroom lessons made me feel quite clever and special, because I could do it all quite happily. I’d been having music lessons outside of school since I was seven. Even when other people thought music was hugely boring it made me more determined to enjoy what I could from those lessons. I had my own little set of friends who enjoyed the same things as me, and I was quite happy to improve my skills with them and ignore what else was going on. (P1.E1)

Esther, like several others, described her existing musical ability and the privileges it afforded her in the music classroom, touching on how her awareness of being ‘clever and special’ helped reinforce her sense of musical identity. Her confidence in and commitment to her music-making helped her persevere in making the most of classroom music lessons, ‘even when other people thought music was hugely boring’.

### 5.2.2. *‘Cliques, probably—geeky, definitely’: Musical identity*

Esther took great delight in her ‘own little set of friends’ who shared her musical passion and sought to make the most of classroom music lessons. She described their sense of friendship and solidarity as ‘cliques, probably—geeky, definitely’ (P1.E1). Yet some teachers I interviewed described how classroom circumstances and friendships occasionally challenged their sense of musical identity. Katie was daunted by having to write a pop song during class: ‘I was not used to playing chords and rhythm on the piano. I was quite nervous about it. I wanted to get it right because the others thought I would be good at it.’ (P1.K1).

Nonetheless, experiences like Katie's were in the minority. Most, like Esther, explained how their previous musical experiences equipped them with self-confidence, giving them the conviction and motivation they needed to pursue their musical goals, even when classroom circumstances were less than ideal. Esther's description of her friends' determination to enjoy their music-making shares commonalities with the musical confidence and pride of Danielle and John at their specialist music schools. Alice, Georgina, and Isabelle also each described being confident enough to lead their friends in group composing activities, shaping the music according to their skills and tastes. Georgina remembered one composition assignment that offered a valuable outlet for her own musical preferences: 'one lesson my group were doing a pentatonic composition. I was keen to get away from just trying to make it sound oriental—I wanted to write something that appeared in Western music' (P1.G1). Contrary to the expectations of her teacher, Georgina sought to draw on her existing musical ability and identity to pursue her own fastidious musical expectations, and create something which held aesthetic value according to her own (Western) musical ideals.

### *5.2.3. 'I was expecting to learn about Bach and stuff': Musical expectations*

Georgina's desire to compose according to Western musical conventions is particularly telling when it comes to these teachers' childhood experiences of musical vulnerability. Since they all began KS3 as competent, experienced musicians with relatively secure (and largely positive) musical identities, most struggled to identify explicitly 'negative' experiences during KS3 music lessons. However, for some, their exacting expectations of the music classroom led to notable susceptibilities. Some found lessons to fall far short of their musical expectations: 'I was always confident in classroom music because it was so easy' (P1.B2). Others were disappointed by their music teachers: 'she didn't sell herself as much of a musician' (P1.C2). Yet others believed that they knew better than their teachers, and were frustrated or confused by the content of their lessons: 'I was expecting to learn about Bach and stuff. When we learnt about the Beatles I thought, "what, wha-? Why are we doing this?"' (P1.I2).

These teachers' existing musical abilities, identities, and expectations give some insight into their varied experiences of musical vulnerability during KS3. As I describe in Section 5.3,



many of these teachers often found themselves markedly receptive or markedly susceptible to music-making in the classroom, depending on how it fulfilled—or failed to fulfil—their preconceptions of classroom music. In the cases I consider in Section 5.3.1, this is related to the classroom space itself. In others, that I outline in Sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3, this is associated with relationships with teachers or peers. As I summarise in Section 5.3.4, in all such instances teachers' vulnerability appears to be closely tied up with the musical opportunities offered to them in the classroom.

Interestingly, however, some of these teachers also recalled experiences of musical vulnerability extending beyond the music classroom itself. In Section 5.4.1 I explain how some considered themselves almost as onlookers in the classroom, passive observers of others' musical vulnerability but exempt from it themselves because of their past experience and self-confidence. Yet in the accounts of Esther and John in Section 5.4.2, their own musical vulnerability powerfully impacted their sense of social inclusion and exclusion in the wider school context. To conclude this chapter, therefore, in Section 5.5 I explore the ramifications this may have upon teachers' awareness of and response towards situational musical vulnerability manifested in their own current KS3 music classrooms.

### 5.3. Teachers' past musical vulnerability: Inside the music classroom

Many teachers I spoke with had vivid, almost photographic memories of their childhood music classrooms, their music teachers and peers, and the various opportunities they encountered during music lessons. During our interview, Georgina, for example, mapped out her middle school in detail—the arrangement of corridors, the rooms in the music department, and the spaces they used for composing and performing. She explained how:

we were allowed to take the class xylophones to a corner of the school—a good little walk away from the music department—and were trusted to put together a composition. We were given stringent guidelines, so even though I never really liked composition there was enough structure to feel like you could achieve something that you were pleased with at the end. (P1.G1)

Georgina recalled exactly what happened when she and her peers had been tasked with composing a piece of pentatonic music:

we went and worked outside the cafeteria near the Head's office with a keyboard, but then the Head came out. We thought she was going to tell us off. But she said, "girls, you're doing some great work here, well done." That positive reinforcement was nice, since we were making noise that could have been seen as quite negative. (P1.G1)

Georgina's account was typical of many of those I recorded. She not only remembered the space, but the details of the lesson's assignment, the sound of the music, her own musical aims and intentions, and her trepidation and relief in response to the Headteacher.

### 5.3.1. *'A little incubator': Classroom space*

Though teachers like Georgina enthusiastically recalled everything from the positioning of the piano in the music classroom to whether or not the blinds were usually up or down, two teachers I interviewed remembered their classrooms with some sadness. Hannah described how her classroom seemed good for little more than music appreciation, since it was 'set up like a lecture theatre, so we were sat at desks in tiers' (P1.H2). Similarly, Fynn's upper-school music department 'was in a brand-new block that had been built the year before, but all the orchestral instruments were stuffed in a cupboard and decaying rather' (P1.F2).

Nonetheless, most teachers remembered their school music classrooms with fondness. These classrooms were exciting, unusual spaces, associated with novel musical opportunities. But they were also safe, comfortable spaces, familiar because of their associations with extra-curricular and out-of-school music-making. Claire's account epitomises such a sense of both novelty and familiarity: 'I loved coming into the music building and walking down the steps into the music classroom. It was always light, that room, and there was a little stage, which was exciting' (P1.C1). In this light and airy classroom, Claire found herself excited for new

opportunities and experiences. The room was interesting and different to others in the school, with its stage and grand piano and record player.

Yet for Claire, the classroom space itself paled into insignificance in comparison to the musical opportunities it afforded. She recalled the moment when, in this classroom, she first discovered Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*:

I remember sitting in there the first time I heard any bit of Fauré's *Requiem*. That was a big moment, being given a whole score to be responsible for. My score was my absolute pride and joy. I loved marking it up. I was blown away by the *In Paradisum* and the *Offertorium*, and all the language we learnt was just wonderful, learning about the viola obbligato and the motifs and the canon.  
(P1.C1)

Claire's score seemed almost like a physical embodiment of the music itself. As she marked it up, interpreted it, and sang from it, her knowledge of and experience with the music grew and delineated associations gathered. It soon opened up a whole new world of possibilities:

that's when I really started loving choral music. I'd always been in choirs and in the orchestra because that was the thing I was told to do. But then I wanted to sing in a choir like that and sing music like that. Sacred music is still my absolute passion, and I think Mr Fauré's probably where it started. (P1.C1)

While Claire's previous involvement playing the violin in the school orchestra was undergirded by a sense of obligation—extrinsically motivated by others' expectations—her desire to sing sacred choral music in a serious choir was hers alone. Fauré's *Requiem* introduced her to the kind of music she wished to sing—and the kind of musician she wished to be—and initiated a passionate, lasting, intrinsic motivation for music-making (Renwick & Reeve, 2012).

The interplay of novelty and familiarity forms a noticeable undercurrent in Claire's account. She recognised the music classroom and the ownership of a score as exciting, new

experiences—chances for exploration and discovery. Nonetheless, she also implied that, for her, these experiences were already accessible and within her grasp. Since her musical ability and identity was already well-established from singing in a choir, new opportunities for music-making and learning in the classroom were not out of her depth. She already spent time making music outside school, so the music classroom seemed comfortable rather than intimidating. She was already able to read staff notation, so the ownership of a score was an opportunity for exploration rather than alienation. And she was already enculturated in choral music traditions, so the soundworld of the *Requiem* seemed sublime rather than boring.

This indicates the relative importance of both novelty and familiarity in determining individuals' experiences of musical vulnerability. For Claire, musical vulnerability was realised as positive receptivity when the classroom experience was both familiar enough not to seem culturally alienating, and novel enough not to seem tiresome. The same was the case for John, who, alongside the other choristers in his year, was 'largely kept apart from most classroom music-making' since 'classroom music lessons were felt to be beneath me' (P1.J1). Instead, the choristers engaged with more novel and challenging theory and practical musicianship lessons, which John described as 'really eye-opening'. Previously accustomed to having musical decisions made for him, 'practical musicianship was a fantastic way of being able to unleash some of that creativity, to think on the spot, to improvise for the first time' (P1.J1).

But though John clearly revelled in the chance to engage in creative, unrestrained music-making during practical musicianship, entering such unknown territory was also a potent source of vulnerability because of the potential for 'getting it wrong':

one lesson I was playing the flute for an exercise where we were given a question phrase and we had to answer. I had to try to work out why I had answered with a particular phrase, and then we got on to talking about cadences. Although I felt a sense of intuition as to what the phrase should sound like, there was a slight frisson of danger that I could get it wrong, or that there could be multiple ways of interpreting the question. (P1.J1)

John implicitly acknowledged how, as an already accomplished and confident musician, there was a premium upon being able to ‘get it right’, all the time (A. Bull, 2019). But this was much harder in an unfamiliar practice, and especially in one which lacked clear distinctions between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. This is what John found particularly dangerous and thrilling. Sitting with the uncertainty of whether one had performed ‘right’ in itself could cause susceptibility: fear of the unknown or of potential failure. But it could also stimulate greater receptivity: straddling the divide between right and wrong could lead to fresh openness to new perspectives, fragilities, and freedoms (Kanellopoulos, 2019).

John—in contrast to some of the other choristers in his class—described finding this encounter predominantly one of receptivity for two reasons. First, he was confident in his own existing musical ability and intuition. He described how having music-colour synaesthesia gave him a certain feel for how the music should ‘look’, even if he could not imagine what it would sound like. This, he said, helped him to understand the ‘certain logic to things’, while others in his class struggled with the difficulties of improvisation (P1.J1).

Second, John described being comfortable in an amenable and supportive classroom environment. Like Claire, he found the music classroom to afford opportunities for exploring new music in a safe and familiar space: ‘that kind of freedom and rule-breaking was something quite new and dangerous. But there were only five of us in the class, so it was very intimate and supportive, like a little incubator, a chance to try things out’ (P1.J1). In his caring and encouraging classroom, what might have been encountered as a susceptibility to danger and failure was instead manifest as a receptivity to the excitement, freedom, and opportunity presented by his first taste of creative improvisation.

### 5.3.2. *‘A real charismatic’: Teacher relationships*

For John, the ‘little incubator’ that was his practical musicianship classroom was profoundly shaped by the influence of his Director of Music and the other choristers in his year. Whereas most other classes in the school were for up to 25 pupils, the intimacy of his small music classes was comforting when ‘that kind of subject-to-interpretation-style approach was something quite new and dangerous for us’ (P1.J1).

The influential role of the teacher in such classroom settings is widely acknowledged across existing research into music teacher identity formation. Classroom teachers often act as important role models for those who later decide to train as music teachers (Isbell, 2020, p. 67), although possibly more often as model performers and directors than as talented classroom pedagogues (D. Baker, 2006, p. 43). Evidence suggests that music teachers across cultures often count the emulation of their past music teachers as a major motivation for pursuing a teaching career, alongside their love of music and the availability of training courses (Ballantyne et al., 2012).

This may well have been the case for Danielle, who described how she and her class were 'in awe' of their KS3 music teacher. Although he was 'quite snappy', 'he was an interesting little guy and he'd done all his training in Hungary and Romania' (P1.D1). But despite finding her teacher inspiring, Danielle's attitude towards his lessons was somewhat nonchalant. She explained how on one occasion she was not taking their lesson seriously: 'I was being really, really silly'. When about to begin class choir, her teacher rebuked her:

halfway through the lesson we all went to the back of the room to the staging for a class choir. I particularly enjoyed the element of performance and the sense of success, when I could hear what I was creating was working. But that moment he told me off for being silly. He shouted, "one of the best singers in the lower school and she can't behave herself when I really need her!" (P1.D1)

It might be expected that this kind of relational conflict would result in Danielle's susceptibility to embarrassment and shame in front of her peers. But on the contrary, Danielle said, 'I was so proud of myself. I felt like he had recognised how good I was at pitching the hard parts, and nominated me to step up when surrounded by quiet, timid people' (P1.D1). Through her teacher's back-handed compliment, Danielle quite suddenly realised that her musical ability, of which she was so proud, mattered to her teacher: that he 'needed' her and had high expectations of her. Her pride, previously so self-interested, was transformed into musical receptivity and other-orientedness. She even changed her behaviour, to 'emulate a girl in my

class called Siobhan, who was a cathedral chorister and one of the strongest choir singers. I took everything all the more seriously after that because obviously my teacher needed me’ (P1.D1). This demonstrates the influence of teacher-pupil relationships upon musical vulnerability, exemplifying how even a one-off comment may initiate long-term change in behaviour, attitude, and expectations.<sup>34</sup>

However, while Danielle described this as a positive change, Fynn highlighted how even the most positive teacher-pupil interactions could have potentially negative outcomes. During lower school, Fynn’s class had a good relationship with their music teacher, who ‘never wore a tie and had a mullet perm. He was a massive Beatles fan, and he had a poster of Darth Vader from *The Empire Strikes Back*. We were like, “that’s so cool!”’ (P1.F1). Although this is not to say that all good music teachers need to be Beatles fans or have a mullet perm, Fynn’s teacher was influential because his pupils were able to relate to his interests. Their discussions about the Beatles and Star Wars blurred the boundaries between formal ‘teaching’ and informal dialogue about pupils’ musical preferences, and inspired a sense of ‘awe’ and receptivity.

Fynn also described how he found his teacher’s choice of classroom music particularly attractive. Certain songs—which formed the mainstay of the curriculum—were memorable, familiar, and relevant. He recalled, ‘we sang through *The Jolly Herring*—lots of folk songs, lots of ’60s pop songs, and a lot of Beatles. I was drawn to the honky-tonk piano in *Lady Madonna*, and *Eleanor Rigby*—the story songs’ (P1.F1). Fynn found these songs entertaining, and, having begun to learn the piano at the age of nine, especially enjoyed hearing his teacher play the accompaniment. But moreover, his peers also enjoyed the music. It was funny and light-hearted, and fostered an environment in which they were all comfortable to participate:

there was a folk song called *Fling it Here, Fling it There*, about a muck spreader that had gone amok in a village. Just at the mention of poo we were like, “yeah, this is great, this is amazing!” Watching our teacher play the piano and having

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<sup>34</sup> This reinforces existing research that has found that adults remember the influential comments and attitudes of their music teachers many years after leaving school (Temmerman, 1993; Turton & Durrant, 2002). Unfortunately, these memories often include discouraging or aggressive remarks made by teachers, which may become ‘permanent beliefs that severely limit people’s musical engagement for a lifetime’ (Woody et al., 2019, p. 316).

the whole class sing and everyone being involved, it was massively influential.

(P1.F1)

Participatory music-making was particularly important for Fynn (cf. Turino, 2008). Making music together in the classroom was clearly not something his teacher expected to be serious or highly accomplished, and Fynn and his peers were therefore receptive to the music-making because it was fun and inclusive. Through facilitating a space where the class could laugh together, Fynn's teacher therefore fostered a joyful, communal sense of musical receptivity.

However, having developed such distinctive musical values and expectations through the influence of his lower-school teacher, Fynn struggled to come to terms with the very different approach adopted by his upper-school teacher:

in Year 9 I had a music teacher who was a bit disgruntled. In lessons we had these cheap Casio keyboards that we had to play, learning tunes like *When the Saints Go Marching In*. It was like, "here's the tune, this is how it goes, now you play it with the person next to you." (P1.F2)

In contrast to his experience at lower school, Fynn found lessons boring, repetitive, and uninspiring, and this became a source of vulnerability: 'there wasn't any sense of making music. We would just be going for an hour without any stopping or checking, without any reason' (P1.F2). For Fynn, this 'music' was, by definition, not music: 'I was Grade 3 or 4 by then, so it was, "OK, there's a keyboard, and I know how to play it." It wasn't challenging for me personally, and we also weren't making music as a class' (P1.F2). Unable to relate to his 'disgruntled' teacher, Fynn felt under-stretched and insufficiently challenged. The so-called 'music' sounded 'rubbish', was culturally irrelevant, and did not engage the class as a collective whole. What Fynn and his lower-school music teacher perceived to constitute music—a relevant, relational, and rewarding process of music-making like singing about muck spreading—was side-lined in favour of something he considered inherently unmusical.



Remarkably similar accounts were recalled by Claire and Georgina, both of whom remembered the frustration of music teachers who did not live up to their own musical expectations. While neither found these teachers so discouraging as to cause them to question their own musical ability—as has been shown to be the case in some research with trainee teachers (Griffin, 2011; Temmerman, 1993)—both considered their influence to have had long-term ramifications on their classroom experiences.

Claire outlined how after finishing KS3, she experienced a shift away from engagement and enjoyment in the music classroom towards apathy and boredom. Initially, her musical receptivity had been inspired by her teacher: ‘our Director of Music was a real charismatic: a great composer who always had something musical going on around him. He was a very good ’cellist, and his choirs were wonderful. Everybody absolutely loved him’ (P1.C2). Like Danielle and Fynn, Claire’s receptivity was not restricted to her individual experience: everybody found her teacher’s exuberant musicality inspiring and respected his expertise. But, ‘unfortunately, he was married to the other main music teacher, and they got divorced. He left at the end of Year 10, so we got a new Head of Music in’ (P1.C2). The departure of the Director of Music left Claire ill-disposed towards her new teacher: ‘I really didn’t like her! She wasn’t as charismatic, and didn’t sell herself as much of a musician’ (P1.C2).

Claire resented her new teacher’s apparent lack of enthusiasm, and eventually decided to change schools for sixth form. But in contrast to the slow accumulation of Claire’s frustration, Georgina’s experience moving from middle school to senior school sparked an immediate sense of negative musical vulnerability. In her case, relational conflict with her music teacher was exacerbated by working with one particular boy during Year 9:

in the first year of senior school I had to work with this bully kid. And he wouldn’t do anything. He was a bit smelly, he didn’t take his coat off, and then he just slumped over the other end of the keyboard. He clearly thought, “oh great, she’s a geek.” And even though I produced something to perform that was essentially good enough for us both, because this kid didn’t take part I got into trouble with our teacher. (P1.G2)

For Georgina, the music classroom was a particularly vulnerable space because of the unquestioned obligation to work closely alongside peers with diverse backgrounds and interests. She highlighted how this was an issue exclusive to music lessons. In other subjects her classes were usually streamed according to ability, and most work was undertaken individually rather than with others. In music, however, the expectation to work with one partner—in this case selected by the teacher—instilled within Georgina a profound sense of vulnerability. Her clear commitment to and enthusiasm for music, having learnt clarinet and viola at middle school, came under fire from her partner. In his apathy, this disengaged ‘bully kid’ effectively disparaged her music-making and, by extension, her self-identity.

This occasion stood out for Georgina because of the response of her music teacher. Since her middle-school experience had nurtured her love of music and acquainted her with brilliant and committed music teachers, her teacher’s response in this lesson came as a complete shock to her. Rather than affirming her hard work and musical creativity—or even praising her for carrying the burden of her unresponsive partner—he criticised her work. ‘He just dismissed the work that I had done’ (P1.G2). In spite of her effort, her teacher implicitly affirmed her partner’s indifference and therefore belittled her musical achievement and work ethic.

This unexpected and seemingly unfounded conflict with her music teacher prompted several contrasting responses from Georgina. On the one hand she remained resilient, and, ‘in the end, because we had to work together for a whole half term, I managed to sort of crack some work out of my partner’ (P1.G2). Yet on the other hand, she was so vexed by her music teacher that she felt unable to respect him: ‘I thought that was so unfair, I was like, “well, I don’t respect you anymore”’ (P1.G2). She did not allow her resignation to go without notice. On the contrary, during lessons she subtly opposed her teacher, proffering fewer answers and not putting up her hand: ‘it did quite seriously affect my participation, because I loved music and it was really important to me, but that wasn’t being recognised’ (P1.G2).

### 5.3.3. *‘Taking the lead’: Peer relationships*

Georgina’s poignant reminiscence of being forced to work with a ‘bully kid’ during the first year of senior school offers a unique insight into the influence of peer relationships in the KS3

music classroom. Fortunately, for most of the teachers I interviewed, difficult peer-to-peer relationships in the classroom were uncommon. In fact, like Esther and her ‘cliquey’ group of musical friends, several explained how it was in the music classroom that they became increasingly aware of and receptive to their friendships and shared musical interests. Lucy described how she gradually learnt to share her musical achievements with her friends, even though she sometimes felt under pressure from them to pretend she was not academically high achieving. She recalled a particularly memorable lesson, when

we were doing composition in groups, which felt like quite a novelty. The TV was wheeled out on its stand and we had to play along with a video clip. We’d chosen groups with our friends, and my group had been especially allowed to use the piano, which was exciting. I wrote a melody with some chords to go with it, and I taught my friend the melody and she played it an octave higher than I was playing it while the others played percussion. (P1.L1)

Compared to usual classroom music lessons, for Lucy this group composition assignment was unusual and exciting. Yet it stood out not just because of the opportunity for her to *use* her musical skills, but to *share* her musical skills. She specifically remembered how

it made me feel very competent. Sometimes my friends fell out with me because I was academically high achieving, but this was one of the first times that I was able to show them something that I was good at without them being really sniffy at me. It was something we could then share in a little bit more. (P1.L1)

Though the term ‘competent’ has connotations of proficiency, capability, and knowledge, Lucy’s memory primarily concerns not her own skills at the piano, but her chance to include her friends by teaching them some of her musical ideas. This ‘competency’ was relational. Being able to share her love of music without feeling rejected rekindled Lucy’s musical receptivity. She became increasingly aware of what her friends hoped to learn and achieve, and was able to

take on a leadership role which was not overbearing, but rather promoted group cooperation and cohesion: 'I felt like I was leading the group and they were happy to join in and produce something really good that other people would admire' (P1.L1).

Alice recalled a very similar occasion, distinguished by its almost unprecedented novelty:

in Years 7 and 8 we didn't do very much practical music-making, just written work. But one lesson our teacher said, "you can bring in your musical instruments and work in groups." It was such a novelty, it felt like a wild thing to be actually playing instruments. (P1.A1)

Compared to Alice's customary, 'spurious' music lessons (P1.A1), the opportunity to play musical instruments and work in peer groups felt 'wild', and offered new openings for creative music-making. Unlike Lucy, Alice's peers already had musical experience and she did not need to hide her musical accomplishment. Nonetheless, like Lucy, Alice found that her sense of musical receptivity grew as she directed her peers:

I loved the hands-on, but it was also nice to create something in a group. I brought in my violin and worked with my best friend who also played violin, and another friend who played recorder. We made up a pentatonic piece, and I ended up taking the lead. Though I'm not naturally a forward person, I felt confident and comfortable to direct everybody and shape it all. (P1.A1)

For Alice, her musical skill and enthusiasm enabled her to take on a leadership role from which she had previously shied away. Not only did this lead to a creative and positive compositional outcome, but it helped ensure that her peers were productively involved in music-making. She realised that she was confident and comfortable in leading the group, and found it 'exhilarating to be actually productively creative' (P1.A1).

Katie echoed this sentiment, describing a notable opportunity she had to work with like-minded peers in the music classroom. In Years 7 and 8 she was one of the only pupils in her class to have any particular interest in music: ‘my class enjoyed music, but there weren’t lots of desperately keen musicians’ (P1.K1). She was accustomed to getting on with the work on her own, ‘and that was fine’ (P1.K1). The opportunities for creating new music or learning new skills were limited. But,

in Year 9 we had a more mixed music class, and there was a greater variety of people who were interested in music. We did a pop music project, and I was really pleased because the students who played instruments all joined together and so it was very enjoyable. (P1.K1)

Year 9 was distinctive for Katie because it was the first time she was able to work with musically-engaged peers in the classroom. But this also prompted a sense of vulnerability. On the one hand she was newly receptive to the opportunities presented by working with other instrumentalists—she found it pleasing and enjoyable. Yet on the other hand, she experienced a certain degree of anxiety and susceptibility as the expectation to compose in a pop style challenged her skills as a classically-trained pianist. Though she was open to the different style of music-making, she was acutely aware of the risk of letting down her group.

Nonetheless, on reflection Katie considered this experience to have been a positive one: ‘in the end it boosted my confidence as a musician, and everyone was quite impressed with our performance’ (P1.K1). Like Alice—who admitted that the ‘general cacophony of glockenspiel sounds and percussion instruments’ associated with classroom group work made it ‘really hard to focus on what we were doing’ (P1.A1)—Katie acknowledged that in spite of the challenges of working alongside other pupils, she appreciated the opportunity for fostering new skills and receptivity.

### *5.3.4. ‘Let off the leash’: Musical opportunities*

One other teacher who elucidated the joys and challenges of working with like-minded,

musically-experienced peers was Isabelle. However, in contrast to Alice and Katie she recalled that this only ever occurred outside the music classroom. In addition to regular classroom music lessons during KS3,

there was one particular occasion where we had a day's Gifted and Talented music workshop doing blues-style compositions. It was the first time that we'd been let off the leash, just to go and compose with other very like-minded people. (P1.I1)

Isabelle's positive experience of being 'let off the leash' resonates with the accounts of Georgina and Lucy, both of whom described how privileged they felt when allowed to leave the music classroom to work on their compositions.

For Isabelle, this kind of freedom was not a reality in classroom music lessons. But during the Gifted and Talented workshop all the pupils were experienced and enthusiastic instrumentalists, and were given greater autonomy to make their own musical decisions and use their time and resources as they wished: 'there was a little more trust put on us to use all the instruments and come up with whatever we wanted' (P1.I1). The experience was particularly rewarding, because 'everyone who'd been picked out was able to play an instrument, so the level of outcome that we could get to was much higher than in class, where people might have been interested but couldn't play an instrument' (P1.I1).

Isabelle highlighted that, having experienced such positive receptivity working with other Gifted and Talented musicians, she felt all the more disappointed when working with her mixed-ability classmates: 'it was an exciting opportunity to do music for a day with people I didn't usually see in the music classroom, but it did mean that going back to classroom music felt a little bit disappointing' (P1.I1). Likewise, while she found the freedom of the Gifted and Talented workshop an exciting opportunity to develop her existing musical skill, this same skill also left her more susceptible to frustration in the music classroom:

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there were perhaps times during KS3 music lessons when I thought, “oh. I already know this.” I could read music, I understood the theory, I played the piano. I also remember times when I thought, “hmm, why are we learning about this?” I was a bit of a classical musician—I didn’t have a good pop knowledge, and I was expecting to learn about Bach and stuff. When we learnt about the Beatles I thought, “what, wha-? Why are we doing this?” (P1.I2)

This issue of unfulfilling musical experiences in regular classroom music lessons was described further by Bethany. She highlighted how the lack of challenge in the music classroom meant that she did not often experience any sense of vulnerability—positive or negative. Classwork was so straightforward there was little likelihood of experiencing either significant achievement (and concurrent receptivity) or significant failure (and concurrent susceptibility). But she did associate some degree of vulnerability with performances outside the classroom:

there were loads of times outside the classroom where I didn’t feel confident. Like playing a piece on violin for a concert that I hadn’t really prepared properly. I didn’t enjoy fluffing a whole load of notes in the concert and I was upset at the time, but it just made me feel like, “I’m a bit of an idiot because I should have learnt that properly.” (P1.B2)

Though Bethany was reproachful of her own shortcomings in performance, she described how occasional disappointing performances led her to greater resilience: ‘then I was happy to keep practising’ (P1.B2). Her frustration with her own failings translated into a renewed motivation to practise, thereby transforming susceptibility to failure into receptivity to improvement.

Bethany’s recollection of resilience in out-of-school music-making stood in juxtaposition to the occasional positive classroom experience she remembered. She found that classroom music lessons ‘weren’t particularly interesting’ and left much to be desired:

there was one lesson when we were doing some group work, an instrumental blues piece. We were in a practice room in a group of five, and I had a keyboard which I was awkwardly leaning against something because there wasn't enough room for it. (P1.B1)

Though these circumstances were not particularly conducive to music-making, on this occasion Bethany did remember having fun. Despite the restrictions of space, 'the chance to accompany using chords on the keyboard was quite different for me because I had only done violin, and I enjoyed getting my own part right and achieving something new' (P1.B1).

But though Bethany experienced some sense of achievement, the emergent feeling of receptivity she described seems almost overshadowed by her emphasis on the shortcomings of the practice room. Compared to her experience outside the classroom, where each mistake reminded her of the importance of practising and encouraged her to remain resilient, the occasional novel opportunity for learning a new skill in the classroom faded into the background. For Bethany, classroom music lessons during KS3 were simply too easy and too boring to be a place of any significant receptivity or susceptibility.

#### 5.4. Teachers' past musical vulnerability: Outside the music classroom

Of all the teachers I interviewed, Bethany was perhaps the most reluctant to describe her KS3 classroom experience. On asking her whether she could remember any specific instances when she was positively affected during a classroom music lesson, she responded:

- Bethany [pause] No.
- Elizabeth [laughs] Did music never have a positive effect on you?
- Bethany Great start!
- Elizabeth [laughs].
- Bethany Um. I'm sure this is fairly common for a lot of people, but I grew up in an area with a really excellent music service [...].  
I then found the music service was so good [...] but the



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[classroom] lessons themselves were not very good. They weren't particularly interesting.

Elizabeth OK.

Bethany Probably because they were not pitched at the right level [...].

Likewise, when I asked Bethany if she could recall any negative experiences:

Bethany Again I'd say no really, because I didn't dislike going to music by any means, I enjoyed music. It wasn't my favourite subject that I took. It was my favourite thing to do but not my favourite school subject. But I don't really remember thinking anything negatively about it. I'd go and I'd do it and it was nice, but it wasn't exciting, as exciting as doing French or maths for example.

Elizabeth Was there... can you remember any instances where perhaps you felt excluded by what was happening in the classroom, or frustrated by it, or perhaps your friends felt that way?

Bethany Not really.

Elizabeth That's good! [laughs] Um...

Bethany Yeah!

Elizabeth ... were there any times that you... you weren't confident in what you were doing [...]?

Bethany You mean specifically in classroom music?

Elizabeth Yeah.

Bethany Yeah, I was always confident in it. I don't think I can remember a time when there was something where I thought, "oh, I don't really know how I can do this."

Although I found these responses somewhat frustrating, I soon came to realise that they represented something of a norm for the teachers I interviewed. In particular, Bethany, Hannah, and Isabelle struggled to remember any particularly positive or negative experiences in the music classroom, let alone any that might be described as instances of vulnerability. The boredom bordering on frustration described by Bethany and Isabelle seemed to be the predominant memory of these teachers' KS3 music-making, and prompts the question of what they might expect for their own pupils' KS3 experiences. Though several teachers described a deep desire 'to use [their] musical knowledge, skills and experience' in classroom teaching (P1.FQ), or a recognition 'that teaching was something I could and should do' (P1.HQ), their own disinterest in KS3 classroom music-making may well have instilled values and expectations at odds with the experiences of their own present KS3 pupils.

### 5.4.1. *'That guilty shame': Others' musical vulnerability*

Despite their own security in the KS3 music classroom, several teachers did highlight striking—sometimes almost pathogenic—occurrences of musical vulnerability in the classroom. Danielle gave one such dramatic account:

slap! "No!" Our teacher threw Ollie's manuscript book on the table, ridiculing and shouting at him. We had been writing down the intervals of a piano tune, and Ollie had got it wrong. Our teacher didn't take any prisoners, and it was really embarrassing. The theory was crazily complicated for 11- and 12-year-olds, and I often had the feeling of guessing in certain exercises. There was always that worry of getting it wrong. There wasn't much room for failure.  
(P1.D2)

A remarkably similar occasion was recalled by Lucy:

our teacher was scary. He was frightening and people were frightened of him. He had a big bunch of keys for all the practice rooms that he wore on his jeans,

and we'd hear him coming down the corridor, jangling. I remember him absolutely losing it at a boy in my class: really, really yelling at him, slamming his hands down on the desk in front of the boy. I was so shocked, with that guilty shame you get when someone else is being told off. But that was the only time I ever felt uncomfortable in that room. (P1.L2)

Of all the notable similarities between these two accounts, perhaps the most significant is that both teachers were telling stories not of themselves, but of other pupils in their classes. This is not to say that Danielle and Lucy did not experience vulnerability in any sense; on the contrary, both described the atmosphere of susceptibility in the classroom as all-pervasive. Danielle painted a vivid picture of the stunned hush falling over the classroom when Ollie's book was thrown down onto the table. And in the single moment when Lucy's teacher slammed his hands on another pupil's desk, the feeling of 'guilty shame' emanated round the whole room.

Both Danielle and Lucy explained how these dramatic events had a long-term impact on the musical vulnerability of all those in their classes. For Danielle, the music classroom was characterised by an enduring fear of failure, and the unsettling 'feeling of guessing in certain exercises'. For Lucy, even the sound of her teacher's approach was intimidating. Yet both described these effects as if from the side-lines. Danielle maintained that her teacher, who was quick to recognise how good she was at singing, was 'lovely'. And Lucy, who took her music GCSE during Year 9, was rarely present in KS3 lessons in any case.

The sense of being an onlooker or disinterested outsider in the music classroom was common across several other teachers' accounts. John, for example, recalled how he and his best friend thrived in practical musicianship classes because they took a 'kind of analytical' approach to music, whereas the others in his class found it 'slightly harder' coping with the lack of sheet music (P1.J1). Hannah described enjoying her school's extra-curricular music, but admitted that when it came to classroom music lessons,

the majority of the class saw them as a time to snooze. Every other lesson would be music appreciation, like being played *Vltava*, and drawing a river. Then other lessons would be singing lessons, and an awful lot of the time that was the music teacher playing piano to the girls. (P1.H2)

These accounts suggest that for pupils with some existing musical ability, a secure musical identity, and established musical expectations, their past experience often served to negate the effect of classroom situations which may have caused others much greater musical susceptibility. Sometimes, a degree of mutual understanding (or even favouritism) between them and their teacher ensured that they were rarely implicated in relational conflict or deemed to be a musical failure. Even when they did find themselves in such situations—such as when Danielle was rebuked by her teacher, or when Georgina had to work with a ‘bully kid’—they were more likely to be able to draw on their assured musical identities to foster resilience.

### 5.4.2. *‘Strangely ostracised’: Social integration outside the music classroom*

Though most teachers’ well-established musical identities equipped them to mitigate negative vulnerabilities *inside* the classroom, this was not always the case *outside* the classroom. Both Georgina and Lucy said that though they had peers who were willing to work alongside them in the music classroom, outside the music classroom they were more likely to be socially excluded. For Georgina, music lessons were ‘one of the few lessons where people actually wanted to work with me!’, but otherwise her peers thought ‘oh great, she’s a geek’ (P1.G2). For Lucy, KS3 was ‘a time when I was struggling with friends’, because her academic and musical achievements were ‘a point of tension’ for her peers who perceived themselves as less able (P1.L1).

Georgina and Lucy’s experiences resonate with existing research into musical identity, which underlines how musical abilities and interests play an important role in social group identification, even in non-musical contexts. For many adolescents, music expresses ‘a particular identity which serves to differentiate their peer groups from others’ (Tarrant et al., 2002, p. 139). Esther reflected that this must have been the case when she was a KS3 pupil:

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some people are really good at sports, some people are good at music, some people are good at other things, and music was my thing. You get your own little set of friends who enjoy the same things as you, and [...] we were just of a mindset that music's something we enjoyed and were quite happy to spend lunchtimes doing that, spend breaktimes doing that, hanging out round that area. The choice was that or maybe go outside and play football. (P1.E1)

But Esther pointed out that she did not always understand this while growing up:

I found a lot of my Year 7, 8, and 9 time quite stressful because we were in a form class, and there were the traditional two or three very naughty individuals who did quite a lot of disrupting. And me, being quite keen to get on, found that difficult. That wasn't specifically in music, but it was probably worse in music because I enjoyed it and I didn't want them to disrupt said lesson. It probably hurt my feelings at the time, and I thought, "why doesn't everybody enjoy this?" You don't understand when you're 11 that everyone has different things. (P1.E2)

In describing feeling 'hurt' and offended by the attitudes of those who had interests in 'different things' to her, Esther alluded to a sense of discomfort surrounding her 'geeky' musical identity and 'cliquey' friendship group. Though with hindsight she recognised this to be no bad thing, she hinted that maybe lessons would have been less stressful if music had not been so important to her: if she had, perhaps, been more willing to 'go outside and play football' with others in her class. Nonetheless, she admitted that segregating her musical friendship group from their wider peer group was a conscious choice, and like Lucy she enjoyed spending 'quite a lot of our time at break and lunch sitting in the music department corridor and just hanging out, having a nice time' (P1.L1).

John, on the other hand, described the uncomfortable experience of being unintentionally excluded from wider friendship groups on account of his musical identity:

music can be one of those touchy subjects where if you're not a good musician you really feel it. I was the opposite. I felt strangely ostracised. Part of me actually wanted to socially integrate with the rest of my year group, but because I was a chorister I wasn't allowed to. (P1.J2)

John poignantly described his own exclusion stemming from being singled out as 'a talented musician'. He explained how this was exacerbated by the institutional segregation of 'choristers' and 'non-choristers'—both in music lessons and in wider school life. Although small, selective practical musicianship classes offered academic benefits for the choristers, John described a sense of marginalisation and otherness in wider social circles:

throughout school life there was a sense that we were different, and that we were being treated differently. Like, "well I would stay and chat, but I've got to go to Evensong now," or, "I'd love to hang out with you guys on Saturday, but we've got a massive concert." We were just very much on our own. (P1.J2)

Though John knew he was lucky to have such privileged opportunities as a chorister, he regretted missing the chance to grow in social awareness and integrate with his other peers.

Musical ability, identity, and expectations related to John's musical vulnerability in multiple ways. He acknowledged that feeling like 'you're not a good musician' can cause susceptibility to distress, failure, and exclusion—especially when musical participation is delimited by institutional benchmarks such as streaming KS3 classes or auditioning for extra-curricular activities (Pitts, 2011). But he also highlighted how similar processes appear to operate in the opposite direction. Being identified as 'a talented musician' means risking susceptibility to social exclusion because of niche or unpopular musical interests, enviable musical ability, or time-consuming musical commitments.

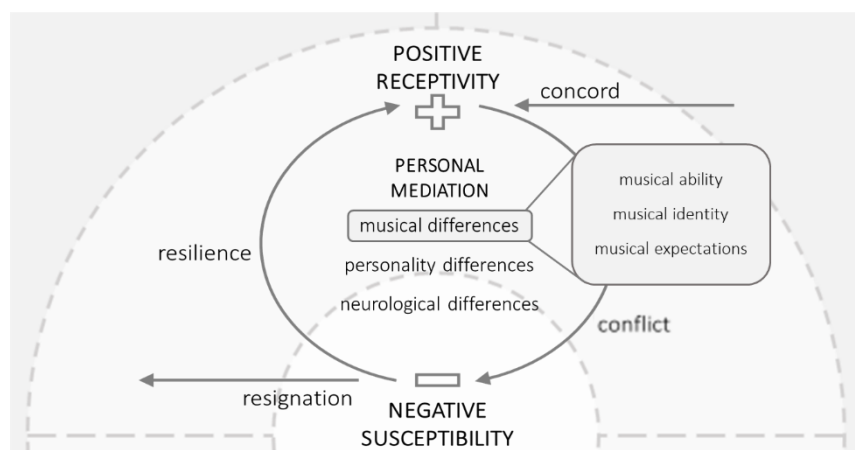
This poses important questions in relation to scholarly discourse surrounding social inclusion in music education. In most research, it is the high-status musical knowledge associated with the Western classical tradition—in which all the teachers I interviewed were

well-versed—that has been labelled as ‘a form of social capital through which is gained access to, and membership of, dominant social groupings’ (Spruce & Matthews, 2012, p. 120). Yet in John’s case, two parallel dominant musical ideologies were at play: the traditional ideology of Western classical music, as enshrined in the Anglican choral tradition; and the alternative ideology of contemporary youth culture, as delineated by the ‘non-choristers’ everyday lives (cf. Wright & Davies, 2010). In John’s preparatory school, these two ideologies were irreconcilably separated. John, the chorister, could not access the dominant forms of social and cultural capital of his peers; the non-chorister could not access the ivory tower of the chorister’s privilege. So what counted as social capital, and who constituted the dominant social grouping? And how, therefore, might social inclusion and exclusion influence situational musical vulnerability, both inside and outside the music classroom?

### 5.5. Conclusion

The evocative accounts of both Esther and John are demonstrative of teachers’ past experiences of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom. Despite the compelling evidence that teachers’ pre-existing musical abilities, identities, and expectations afforded them very different KS3 experiences to many of their current pupils, teachers’ and pupils’ vulnerabilities appear fundamentally similar in character. As shown in *Figure 5.1*, teachers’ vulnerabilities were personal and interpersonal, affected both by their own musical and personality differences,

*Figure 5.1. The personal mediation of teachers’ musical vulnerability*



and by relational concord and conflict with others in the classroom. These vulnerabilities sometimes prompted resilience and receptivity, and on other occasions caused resignation or even resentment.

The teachers I interviewed, like their pupils, found music's semantic properties to hold sway over their sense of self-identity and social identity: Esther, for example, defined herself and her peer group according to their common enjoyment of music and preference not to have to 'go outside and play football'. They also recognised the power of music to define space: Fynn's music classroom was his 'comfort zone', and Claire 'loved' the feeling of coming into the music department. Teachers also experienced musical vulnerabilities stemming from music's somatic properties. Alice found that the 'general cacophony' of the classroom assaulted her ears, making it difficult to concentrate and achieve her desired musical outcomes. John felt empowered by the 'sense of intuition' associated with knowing how a musical phrase should sound, and Fynn was inspired by singing together with his whole class, sharing in the transmission of positive affect through musical entrainment.

Nonetheless, though teachers' experiences of musical vulnerability did not differ in *character* compared to their pupils' experiences, they did differ in *extent*. As I explain in Section 5.5.1, teachers' vulnerabilities were more likely to be characterised as positive receptivity than as negative susceptibility, because of their formerly established musical identities. Though they were often acutely aware of negative susceptibility among their peers, in Section 5.5.2 I summarise how they typically attributed less significance to such vulnerability in classroom music-making, because of the value they instead ascribed to extra-curricular opportunities.

#### *5.5.1. Differences between teachers' and pupils' musical vulnerability*

The outstanding musical abilities, secure musical identities, and exacting musical expectations of the music teachers I interviewed set their KS3 music experiences aside from those of their peers and their current pupils. Usually, their encounters with musical vulnerability were more likely to be manifested as positive receptivity. Having grown up surrounded by musical opportunities provided by county music services, local churches, and parents, teachers like Fynn found the music classroom 'just a very welcoming place to be'. In such a safe space, they



knew their existing musical ability would be appreciated, and found this encouraging and reassuring even when—like Danielle—they got into trouble or faced criticism.

Danielle’s reaction to the backhanded compliment of her teacher during class choir reveals how, for many teachers, their securely-established musical identities stood them in good stead for coping with difficult classroom circumstances. Even when they did encounter a sense of negative susceptibility, they were more likely than others to respond with resilience. Georgina’s irritation with her teacher and the ‘bully kid’ he expected her to work with led not to disheartenment, but to an active refutation of her teacher’s values and a conscious refusal to engage with classroom music until her ability was recognised. Likewise, while Alice found classroom music-making frustrating since ‘I couldn’t perhaps do it in the way that I really wanted to because of the distractions’ (P1.A1), she did not give up. Rather, she persevered in her efforts and remembered the occasion because of its associated novelty, creativity, and exhilaration.

Despite moments of negative musical susceptibility in the KS3 music classroom, neither Danielle, Georgina, nor Alice remembered finding such experiences debilitating. Unlike some of their pupils—such as Danielle’s girl who could not stop crying after being told off for performing a piece from *Moana* (Section 4.2.2), or Georgina’s girl ‘who’s so shy and down on herself’ (Section 4.3.2)—these teachers were more likely to find lessons simply disappointing. As Bethany highlighted, KS3 music lessons ‘were not very good’, nor ‘particularly interesting’. For many teachers, musical vulnerability was rarely a pressing issue inside their own KS3 music classrooms, and, even when it was, it was a problem of boredom, frustration, and disappointment, rather than resignation, debilitation, and disengagement.

### *5.5.2. Teachers’ awareness of and response towards musical vulnerability*

Despite not having personally experienced debilitating negative susceptibility in the KS3 music classroom, all the teachers I interviewed still showed an acute awareness of issues posed by musical vulnerability. Both Danielle and Lucy remembered empathising with the vulnerabilities of others in their classes, such as Ollie struggling with the consequences of ‘getting it wrong’. Esther and John also highlighted how, though they rarely experienced

musical vulnerability inside the music classroom, other ostracising experiences left them well aware of its consequences. Their experiences outside the music classroom made them recognise how 'everyone has different things', and that musical ability and identity (or lack thereof) can be 'one of those touchy subjects' that exacerbates social differences.

The rich accounts teachers gave of their own pupils' vulnerabilities, described in Chapter 4, provide further evidence of their astute awareness of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom. The events they recalled—ranging from pupils storming out of lessons to pupils' personal hopes of success and fears of failure—indicate that their own teaching is profoundly affected by pupils' various musical receptivities and susceptibilities.

However, teachers' responses to these musical vulnerabilities in their classrooms also appear to be significantly influenced by their own past experiences. Several teachers' anecdotes reiterated their long-standing beliefs that classroom music lessons form only one aspect of pupils' music education. For example, Bethany—whose own childhood was shaped by her local county music service—recalled the receptivity of one of her pupils playing the ukulele informally at home, far-removed from the initial frustrations of classroom instrumental lessons (Section 4.3.3). Similarly, Fynn emphasised how his autistic pupil, Jack, continued engaging with music through flute lessons and orchestra rehearsals, despite his refusal to participate in classroom music lessons (Section 4.3.3). Likewise, although John regretted that his Year 8 pupil Simon felt unable to perform on his trombone during classroom lessons, he maintained the assumption that Simon would be able to continue his instrumental learning in peripatetic lessons and with extra-curricular support (Section 4.2.2).

Teachers' perceptions that KS3 classroom lessons are not the sole repository of music education are important when it comes to responding to circumstances of musical vulnerability. It is this understanding that prompts Esther to allow her pupil Declan to leave classroom music lessons when they become overly upsetting (Section 4.3.3), and that initiates Hannah's Saturday morning Rock School catering for her pupils who thrived on Musical Futures (Section 4.3.1). However, this same understanding may also lead to deleterious presumptions in the music classroom. Though in the broadest sense it is true that music education can occur across times and places (Bowman, 2012), and in formal, informal, and

non-formal contexts (Folkestad, 2006), for a large proportion of pupils such opportunities are not easily accessible. For most, the chance to develop musical abilities, identities, and expectations like their music teachers is rare—but this can escape teachers' notice. As Randall Allsup (2013) expresses, 'our mostly homogeneous middle-class teaching force cannot see the fullest range of student interests and desires that are present around us' (p. 1). Within the high pressure, time-constrained environment of many KS3 music classrooms, teachers are often hard-pressed to come to know their pupils individually. Instead, they may presume that all their pupils share fundamentally similar musical outlooks to themselves, and will therefore benefit from the same conceptions of good music teaching and learning (Bernard, 2009).

When teachers expect pupils to share similar musical experiences to themselves, they run the risk of initiating a socialisation cycle that favours certain musical identities—and vulnerabilities—over others (Isbell, 2020, p. 71). Whether 'they are teaching as they were taught' (Dolloff, 1999, p. 204), or 'as they *wish* they had been taught' (Robinson, 2011, p. 196, original emphasis), this self-perpetuating cycle may blind teachers to the more diverse musical experiences and ways of music-making among their pupils. At best—such as in Katie's Year 7 guitar and ukulele project (Section 4.2.2)—this may restrict pupils' receptivity through offering them limited musical choices and expressions. At worst—such as for Danielle's pupils performing a song from *Moana* (Section 4.2.2)—it may exacerbate pupils' susceptibility, and even enact systemic violence 'as a consequence of the internalization of prejudices, stigmas, and stereotypes' (Matthews, 2015, p. 246).

Therefore, it is essential not to discount classroom experiences such as those of Fynn's pupil Jack (Section 4.3.3) or John's pupil Simon (Section 4.2.2), because—unlike the pupils to which Fynn and John refer—other Jacks and other Simons may not be able to fall back upon pre-existing musical identities or extra-curricular activities when they encounter negative susceptibility in the classroom. Until pupils can be guaranteed equal access to music-making both inside and outside the classroom, it remains of utmost importance that teachers' recognition of musical vulnerability leads to appropriate personal and pedagogical responses. Rather than reinforcing existing cycles of socialisation in the classroom, teachers' mindfulness

of musical vulnerability should equip them to address pupils' individual musical expectations with care and attention.

In order to consider how awareness of musical vulnerability could equip teachers to meet the needs of all their pupils, in the following chapter I present an in-depth, instrumental case study of one particular KS3 music teacher, Danielle, and her classroom. Using data collected during Phase 2, I describe the classroom music-making of one Year 8 class, explore their lived experiences of musical vulnerability, and reflect upon how Danielle's past experiences affect her response to her pupils' receptivities and susceptibilities. Finally, in Chapter 7 I evaluate how existing music education policy, pedagogy, and research could be developed to foster a mutually advantageous, symbiotic relationship with musical vulnerability, through escaping the systemic violence enacted by teachers' socialisation and harnessing the benefits of positive musical receptivity.

## 6. Experiencing musical vulnerability: East Fen High School

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### 6.1. Introduction

Phase 2 of my research project commenced in June 2021, having received an invitation from my Phase 1 participant, Danielle, to undertake observations in her KS3 classroom at East Fen High School. Danielle's own past experience as a KS3 music pupil was notable, having been one of two participants to have attended an independent specialist music school. Since qualifying as a teacher, Danielle has worked as a music teacher in a large independent school, and as Head of Music at East Fen High School. East Fen, an affluent state academy with an Outstanding Ofsted rating (see Section 3.5.5.ii), has a well-resourced music department and a purpose-built performance space. Alongside classroom music lessons, the school offers pupils access to peripatetic instrumental and vocal lessons, extra-curricular ensembles and choirs, and an audition-only enrichment programme.

In my observational fieldnotes, recorded during and after each of my visits to East Fen, I documented my first impressions of the school on my arrival on a Friday afternoon in the summer term. In line with pupils' practice at the school, hereafter I refer to Danielle by her (pseudonymised) surname, Miss Dean.

On arriving at the school and signing in at the reception desk I was invited to wait in a seating area in the vestibule. A small coffee table boasted a selection of leaflets advertising forthcoming concerts in the school's performance space. Pupils passed me dressed smartly in dark blazers and ties despite the hot weather. When Miss Dean arrived to meet me we walked towards the music department, and I became aware of just how much COVID-19 regulations had shaped school life: arrows on the floor indicated the one-way system, and each room had a sign on the door indicating the maximum number of occupants. Miss Dean showed me round two blocks of music classrooms facing onto reception. The two classrooms in the first block were spacious and equipped with xylophones and djembes. One was set up with rows of desks (to maintain

social distancing) and the other with computer desks along the walls. Further up the corridor were practice rooms and trolleys for storing instruments, and the doors, notice boards, and chairs were all coloured blue. The neighbouring block had several practice rooms for peripatetic lessons and one large, octagonal classroom with computer desks and keyboards around the walls. (P2.A1)

After my pilot study observing five Year 7 music lessons, I spent the autumn term 2021 observing a Year 8 class (see Section 3.5.2.iii). This class spent six weeks working on the unit ‘Music of the Americas’, and it is my observations of this unit that form the mainstay of this chapter. Extracts from my fieldnotes are identified according to *Table 3.7* (Section 3.6.1), and the accompanying textural-structural descriptions aim to capture the lived experience and invariable characteristics of musical vulnerability in Miss Dean’s Year 8 music classroom.

Although my observations widely accorded with East Fen’s reputation for high-quality musical provision, my phenomenological reduction also identified recurring themes related to musical vulnerability. In the following Sections 6.2 and 6.3 I describe the occasional underlying atmosphere of confusion in Miss Dean’s classroom and the overstretched capacity of the music department. In both sections I also highlight the gradual emergence of conflicting values in the music classroom—including expectations surrounding sound and silence (Section 6.2.2.i), participation and preparation (Section 6.2.2.ii), inclusivity and exclusivity (Section 6.3.2.i), and right and wrong (Section 6.3.2.ii)—and their relationships with Miss Dean’s own past experience of musical vulnerability.

I then explore how group music-making in the classroom—in this instance, groups of four to five pupils playing samba instruments—affects pupils’ and teachers’ conflicting musical expectations, identities, and abilities. Drawing on the experiences of Year 8 pupils Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette, in Section 6.4.1 I consider how group music-making can encourage fruitful compromise and reconcile musical differences, before describing its potential to cause resignation or prompt resilience in Section 6.4.2. In Section 6.5 I summarise these pupils’ experiences of musical receptivity and susceptibility using focus group data collected during

Phase 2B, and reflect upon their expectations, experiences, and evaluations of group music-making.

## 6.2. The music classroom is confusing

Miss Dean has a poster in her office with the title, ‘Five reasons to study the arts’ (see *Appendix 4.1*). The final point describes how ‘arts “reach the students other subjects can’t reach”’, asserting that ‘those who struggle with traditional subjects’ may ‘blossom’ in the arts, and that ‘those who are high achieving’ may find the arts to be a ‘release’. These alluring claims emphasise the seemingly unique character of school music departments, as places where ‘the inexpressible may be expressed’ and ‘the unfulfilled brought to fulfilment’. They evoke the reflections of the music teachers discussed in Chapter 5, who recalled their childhood music departments as places where they were comfortable, where they enjoyed spending their free time, and where there were exciting opportunities on offer (see Section 5.2.1). Their music classrooms seemed special and different from other classrooms, filled with instruments, scores, and records (see Section 5.3.1).

This is certainly true of the music department at East Fen High School. It is well-resourced with instruments and computers, and pupils have access to practice rooms during lessons and lunchtimes. However, although this poses exciting opportunities for many pupils—and perhaps, indeed, for ‘those who struggle with traditional subjects’—the differences between the music classroom and other school classrooms sometimes contributes to an undercurrent of confusion during classroom music-making.

### *6.2.1. The classroom is different from other classrooms*

Beneath the outward appearance of order and discipline as Year 8 line up and enter the classroom for their weekly music lessons there is a discernible sense of disorientation. In the class’s first music lesson since Miss Dean introduced them to Music of the Americas the previous week, the pupils arrive early because it is raining heavily:

the classroom had been rearranged for the new term: the desks removed, new posters on the walls, and class sets of samba instruments and ukuleles on the shelves. There was confusion as Year 8 arrived and tried to arrange themselves according to Miss Dean's seating plan. (P2.B1)

Even when Miss Dean meets them outside the classroom when the weather is dry, as Year 8 arrive they seem to lack a sense of purpose. Despite having 'been taught an acceptable manner for their arrival and settling into appropriate places' (Campbell, 2010, p. 52), many of the pupils enter excitedly, gravitating towards instruments they can tap or shake (p. 53). Unlike in other classrooms, there are no desks at which to sit, nowhere to put their bags, and no books to retrieve. Pupils often appear confused about where to sit, distracted and preoccupied rather than prepared for and receptive towards what they are about to encounter.<sup>35</sup>

#### *6.2.2. The learning is different from other learning*

As Year 8's first lesson on Music of the Americas progresses, the relationship between pupils' musical vulnerability and the distinctive classroom space becomes increasingly clear. Not only is the music classroom markedly different to other classrooms, but so are the associated learning expectations. On this occasion, Miss Dean begins and ends the lesson as in any other classroom subject, asking the pupils to recall the definitions of 'rhythm' and 'syncopation' that they learnt the previous week. The class are quiet and attentive, and understand the implicit expectation to put their hands up to suggest answers. They seem keen to please their teacher at the beginning of the new academic year.

However, Miss Dean then moves on to practical music-making, introducing two samba rhythms for the class to learn. Fewer pupils are willing to demonstrate the rhythms, seemingly underconfident: while answering questions about musical vocabulary requires similar recall skills to other classroom subjects, rhythmic imitation requires well-attuned listening skills and confidence in performing. Nonetheless, Tim, a cheerful and outspoken boy in the class, courageously tries to clap the first rhythm: 'each time Miss Dean patiently identified his mistake

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<sup>35</sup> A diagram and photographs of Year 8's classroom and the neighbouring office are provided in *Appendix 4.2*.



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and he enthusiastically tried again until he got it right' (P2.B1). Yet even as the class watch Miss Dean guide Tim towards the right answer, other pupils still shy away from participating:

Miss Dean then introduced a more complex syncopated rhythm and picked Charlie to demonstrate it. He was anxious, and exclaimed, "why me?" Miss Dean said he didn't have to go if he didn't want to, but he said, "I'll try, but I'm not very good." Charlie and several other pupils tried unsuccessfully to demonstrate the rhythm, so Miss Dean went through the rhythm with the whole class. (P2.B1)

Charlie explicitly describes the source of his worry: his perception that he is not 'very good', and that he can do no better than 'try'. But Miss Dean remains patient, even as the class struggle to follow her lead.

Acknowledging her pupils' growing sense of vulnerability to failure, Miss Dean seeks to mitigate further issues by differentiating the following activities according to pupils' confidence:

Miss Dean then handed out the samba instruments. She encouraged pupils who didn't want to play the syncopation to play the agogo bells, and the other pupils to play the tamborim. Four remaining pupils fetched a surdo each, and Miss Dean taught them a simple crotchet rhythm. (P2.B1)

Yet some pupils seem unable to overcome their difficulties. "Those playing the surdo struggled to play in tempo until Miss Dean suggested they simply play the pulse, but Fleur continued to struggle to join in' (P2.B1). Miss Dean therefore overlooks their mistakes and introduces a different activity:

despite the inconsistencies in the surdo part, Miss Dean directed the whole class to play together. Most pupils fell into synchrony, but one or two repeatedly fell

behind. Miss Dean seemed satisfied and introduced some new rhythms with lyrics to help learn them. The class were unable to synchronise their cross-rhythms, but Miss Dean emphasised, “music is not easy, but it’s also not difficult. I don’t believe in dumbing down.” (P2.B1)

Although Miss Dean is content to excuse the pupils’ mistakes and move on to something more engaging, when the class play together they cannot achieve a satisfactory sense of synchrony. As in the samba lesson taught by Isabelle (Section 4.3), this seems to heighten the whole class’s sense of susceptibility, since even the most confident pupils are unsettled by the limitations imposed by those struggling. Only at the end of the lesson, when Miss Dean returns to the familiar territory of a quick vocabulary quiz, do the class regain receptivity.

Nevertheless, despite regular vocabulary tests to start and end lessons, such activities play a relatively minor role in Miss Dean’s classroom. She ensures that, in line with the National Curriculum, her pupils have time and space to engage in practical music-making every lesson. But although the pupils are often keen to make music, this can exacerbate the emergence of musical susceptibility. This is notable in Year 8’s second lesson on Music of the Americas. As they attempt to play samba together the division between those who feel more and less confident again becomes increasingly obvious:

Miss Dean allocated instruments (surdo, tamborim, agogo, and ganza) around the class, and they played the call-and-response together. After several attempts the class began to lock together in synchrony, but several pupils struggled to stay in time. Miss Dean then taught the individual instrumental parts for the break. The class played together successfully, though those playing the surdo were rushing and some pupils playing the agogo or tamborim were unsure of their parts. The class then swapped instruments before learning the syncopated rhythms of the groove, and did so again before working on the improvised mid-section. (P2.B2)

While regularly swapping instruments effectively reduces pupils' susceptibility to boredom, in the rush to introduce all the instruments some pupils appear unable to keep up. These pupils then seem more susceptible to confusion or failure—despite the novelty of trying out new instruments—and at the same time cause other pupils' dissatisfaction with the overall musical outcome. On the other hand, those who master their instruments quickly are more likely to be receptive to later opportunities to improvise and perform.

### *i. Conflicting values in the music classroom: Sound and silence*

Although some of the Year 8 pupils seem receptive to the noisy, practical learning often required in the music classroom, many others appear more comfortable with the quiet, abstract learning typical of other classroom subjects. For these pupils—and, on occasion, their teacher—collaborative experimentation allowing for individuals' different rates of progress and musical expectations involves leaving behind the relative safety of silent, solitary learning.

The difference between expectations of sound and silence during practical music-making and theoretical music learning is noticeable, especially during Year 8's first and second samba lessons. In their first lesson, they begin quietly and confidently—as they might do in any other classroom subject, in line with wider school behavioural expectations—and are understandably hesitant to join in with clapping and playing. In contrast, in their second lesson they are faced with opposite expectations. To begin,

Miss Dean handed them worksheets of notated rhythms to practise using body percussion. The room quickly filled with noise, although not all the pupils understood the notation. She then tested their understanding, clapping a phrase and asking them to clap it back. She encouraged them to identify their mistakes before trying again, and after attempting all the rhythms, Ethan and Iniya tried making up their own two-bar rhythmic phrases. (P2.B2)

On this occasion, Year 8 are given permission to be as noisy as they like while Miss Dean prepares the lesson. They seem to find this stimulating, and even those who cannot read staff

notation are receptive to help and encouragement. But after a raucous and exciting starter, Miss Dean moves on to revise some samba vocabulary: ‘using her PowerPoint, she introduced a whole samba piece to the class, beginning with the opening call-and-response. No-one could identify the textural device from the score, so she led them in singing call-and-response phrases from an African melody’ (Y8.1B).

On returning to a quiet, hands-up, recall test, the class quickly revert to well-behaved silence. But Miss Dean does not want their silence. She wants their sound. Yet they are taken by surprise by her sudden diversion into singing. Some seem shocked or embarrassed, caught up in insecurities about singing in front of others (cf. A. Bull, 2019; Hogle, 2021; Palkki, 2022):

Miss Dean sang each phrase and asked the class to sing it back, which they did with little enthusiasm. Many pupils were slumped in their chairs or seemed embarrassed, calling out that they had a sore throat or that they couldn’t sing high enough. (P2.B2)

But Miss Dean chooses not to address their concerns. Having been a confident and passionate singer since she was a child (Section 5.3.2), she recognises singing as an indispensable aspect of classroom music lessons and has little time to attend to her pupils’ anxieties. Yet even when the class do participate more fully in singing, only one pupil, Rachel, is able to identify the textural device that sparked the diversion in the first place.

For Miss Dean’s Year 8 class, these occasionally contradictory expectations surrounding sound and silence in the music classroom contribute towards a growing sense of confusion. Even within just one lesson, multiple conflicting expectations can come to the fore:

Miss Dean asked the class what they could remember about samba. Tim hesitantly described how it originated in Rio de Janeiro and Charlie explained the structure of a samba piece, before Miss Dean added some new facts. To the class’s dismay, she then began an interactive samba quiz, explaining that she needed to test what they had learnt. But the quiz quickly degenerated into a

shouting match. Different pupils shouted out different answers and suggestions of how to top the leaderboard. Just a handful of pupils sat quietly. Nonetheless, after scoring 100% Miss Dean exclaimed, “you have done exceptionally well.” (P2.B6)

Here, in the class’s final lesson of the term, Miss Dean begins by ensuring that Tim and Charlie critically self-correct their answers, and explicitly requests that the pupils do not shout out during the quiz. However, throughout the quiz there is so much shouting out that it is almost impossible to interpret the class’s suggestions. Rather than asking the pupils to quieten down, self-correct their reasoning, or think critically about the possible answers, Miss Dean simply clicks the correct multiple-choice answers regardless of what the pupils suggest. They therefore achieve full marks, but with little regard for the quiet behaviour or secure factual recall expected by their teacher.

After growing steadily noisier and more distracted during the quiz, Miss Dean then unexpectedly reprimands the class:

she then moved on to describe how samba influenced Latin fusion music, and showed pupils the castanets, bongos, and guiro. But the class were increasingly restless. Eventually Miss Dean stopped and sternly explained that if they kept chatting they would have to stay in the classroom and listen to the most boring music she could find—perhaps some 1970s minimalism. (P2.B6)

Having been rebuked for their noisy behaviour when learning about fusion music—but not when participating in the samba quiz—Year 8 are subdued. The boundaries between sound and silence appear to have been blurred: sometimes sound is endorsed when silence was expected, and sometimes silence is endorsed when sound was expected.

In this instance, Miss Dean’s expectations surrounding sound and silence are accompanied by further remarks revealing a complex picture of musical values in the classroom. Miss Dean warns the class that if they misbehave they will have to listen to some

‘boring music’, rather than work in practice rooms. Although this achieves the desired effect—the class quieten down, receptive to the prospect of independent group work—it has significant implications. Miss Dean seems to imply, first, that playing music is better than listening to music; second, that listening to some music (i.e., Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, which she is using to introduce fusion music) is better than listening to some other music (i.e., 1970s minimalism); but also, third, that playing music is an optional aspect of the curriculum. Given her own rigorous training in ‘crazily complicated’ music theory during KS3 (Section 5.4.1), she is more than willing to enforce ‘boring’ listening assignments when Year 8 misbehave, despite her conviction that performing is a necessary part of the National Curriculum.

Miss Dean’s expression of such musical values and expectations—in addition to those surrounding sound and silence—further contributes to the classroom undercurrent of confusion. It causes an effect resembling ‘code clash’, a notion used in Legitimation Code Theory to describe the conflict that can occur when pupils’ ways of being mismatch those demanded within an educational institution (Lamont & Maton, 2010). Legitimation Code Theory explains how the differences between music-making inside and outside school mean that the ‘underlying bases of achievement [in classroom music-making] may not match those of the majority of learners and/or teachers’ (p. 68). But the conflicting expectations I observed *within* Year 8’s classroom may point towards additional, microscale code clash between different underlying bases of achievement inside the boundaries of the music classroom itself.

*ii. Conflicting values in the music classroom: Participation and preparation*

Further conflict or code clash in Year 8’s classroom emerges surrounding expectations of participation and preparation. In Year 8’s first samba lesson Miss Dean encourages all the pupils to participate, but when Charlie is hesitant to join in she does not coerce him. Yet the following week, when the class are reluctant to sing together Miss Dean insists they all still participate.

Related issues arise concerning pupils’ preparation for classroom music lessons. Since they are not set music homework, Year 8 often arrive at their lessons uncertain as to what will be expected of them. In the final lesson of Music of the Americas,

when Miss Dean arrived after break duty she was rushing to prepare for her lesson. The week had been particularly hectic and COVID-19 cases were high. The weather was windy, and Year 8 were hyperactive and unsettled. They repeatedly asked Miss Dean, “what are we doing today?” (P2.B6)

But Miss Dean expects that the pupils will arrive ready to engage with their lesson. Like her own KS3 music teacher, she is disappointed when they rush into the classroom ‘being silly’, seemingly not knowing how they should behave (cf. Section 5.3.2): ‘the class came inside noisily, and some pupils were confused by having to rearrange the chairs. Miss Dean was frustrated by their confusion and reminded them of the need to be better prepared’ (P2.B2).

This problem is exacerbated when Miss Dean herself feels underprepared. In Year 8’s fourth lesson, she is feeling the pressure of COVID-19 disruptions:

Miss Dean seemed overwrought. She’d never felt busier—despite a year of disruption to lessons and rehearsals the music department had to go straight back to running as normal. She went to let Year 8 in, before remembering that they would need to rearrange the chairs for their seating plan. The pupils rearranged the chairs and stacked the spares, before Miss Dean made them restack them more neatly. She then took the register (initially starting with the wrong class) before lecturing the class on how not to break the clipboards. The pupils each collected clipboards and paper, but two or three grew agitated because they couldn’t find any paper. Miss Dean was frustrated that they hadn’t simply waited patiently for her to fetch some. “Never, ever panic,” she said, “it’s fine. This lesson is just a tiny moment in a long journey of lessons. It doesn’t matter if you don’t have a piece of paper, it will get sorted out.” (P2.B4)

Before even beginning any music-making, the classroom is awash with mixed messages about preparation. Although the confusion does not last long, the cumulative effect of similar occasions has the potential to sustain a culture in which the music classroom is perceived as a

space where expectations are unpredictable and disorderly; where what is acceptable one moment may be unacceptable the next. While varying the aims and activities of each lesson may stimulate engagement and receptivity, it also marks the music classroom out as different from other classrooms: governed by different codes, driven by different values, and requiring different skills. For pupils with prior musical experience—such as the teachers in Section 5.2.1 who learnt music outside school—these unique differences may distinguish the music classroom as exciting or welcoming. But for pupils who are more accustomed to the expectations of other classroom subjects, the music classroom can be a space in which they feel uncomfortable, alienated, and vulnerable.

### 6.3. The music department is overstretched

Like many other classroom music teachers, Miss Dean has numerous additional commitments outside her KS3 lessons. Alongside staff meetings and wider school duties, she directs several extra-curricular ensembles, oversees the visits of peripatetic teachers, coordinates the department's enrichment programme, and organises concerts and workshops. She teaches multiple classes across KS3 (including four Year 8 classes), in addition to GCSE and A-level pupils.

#### *6.3.1. The music teacher is overstretched and underprepared*

Miss Dean manages an immense workload balancing administrative responsibilities, extra-curricular provision, and classroom teaching. With so many commitments, she often arrives at her Year 8 lessons with little time to finish preparing resources or think through possible lesson scenarios. Are this class confident in reading staff notation? Who will struggle with the starter worksheet? Are certain pupils more likely to be well-suited to playing certain instruments? Without time to reflect on such questions, Miss Dean may feel poorly equipped to mitigate situational vulnerabilities that arise during lessons, and more likely to fall back upon the supposition that her pupils' musical values and expectations will be the same as her own (Bernard, 2009).



Even when Year 8 is eager to begin their lesson, in her busyness Miss Dean is often tired and understandably hesitant to teach:

when I arrived Miss Dean was working in her office and hadn't eaten lunch. She wanted to find a piece she'd heard in the Top 40 to play to Year 8, but couldn't find it. She couldn't remember what she did with the class last lesson, and apologised to me that she hadn't had time to prepare herself. As Year 8 arrived outside Miss Dean reluctantly went to let them in. They were full of enthusiasm and quickly sat themselves in their seating plan. (P2.B3)

In this instance, a noticeable sense of vulnerability begins to emerge through the relational conflict at the interface between Miss Dean's reluctance and the class's enthusiasm:

by the time Miss Dean began a lengthy recap of rhythm and beat, Year 8 seemed disengaged: only Brandon put his hand up to answer any questions. Their boredom was palpable as Miss Dean worked through a web resource, reading out facts about samba, playing videos of instruments, and demonstrating some classroom percussion. (P2.B3)

The pupils' unwillingness to answer Miss Dean's questions seems out of character compared to previous weeks. Nonetheless, Miss Dean continues the lesson as planned, despite their disinterest. The pupils give little attention to the videos, increasingly restless and disappointed not to be playing the instruments themselves.

As more pupils grow impatient and ask Miss Dean when they will be able to work in practice rooms, 'she was apologetic: "I don't pretend to be a samba specialist. I'm a British music teacher exploring it with you"' (P2.B3). Her statement is telling. It underlines the discomfort often encountered by music teachers trying to engage with 'authentic traditions' other than their own (Schippers, 2010, p. 41). It suggests, perhaps, Miss Dean's own sense of vulnerability stemming from her high-status training in Western classical music (cf. Section

5.4.2), her inexperience in samba music, and her lack of time for lesson preparation. She relies upon the web resource, possibly feeling that she lacks sufficient skill in samba to improvise a lesson better suited to the class's specific needs and expectations.

### *6.3.2. Curricular music competes with extra-curricular music*

Miss Dean's difficulty finding preparation time for Year 8's lessons is a clear reminder of the careful balancing act required to enable the provision of extra-curricular activities. Rather than spending lunchtimes eating lunch, Miss Dean is more likely to have to run rehearsals or set up for concerts. Although she recognises that maintaining high standards of extra-curricular provision often takes time away from preparation for classroom teaching, she does believe extra-curricular opportunities to be of utmost importance. Often (and especially at the beginning of each term), she starts her Year 8 lessons by reminding pupils of East Fen's extra-curricular provision:

Miss Dean began the lesson by reminding the class of the various extra-curricular opportunities available to those who had instrumental lessons outside school, and mentioned the upcoming European music tour that anybody could attend if they joined the show choir or percussion ensemble.

(P2.B1)

Although this is one important way for Miss Dean to ensure that KS3 pupils are aware of extra-curricular opportunities, the reiteration of the value and prestige of extra-curricular involvement creates tension in the classroom. It shapes the recognition of different pupils' musical identities (Pitts, 2011) and contributes towards an implicit sense that 'exclusive' extra-curricular music takes priority over 'inclusive' classroom music. As is evident in the accounts of pupils Jack and Simon discussed in Section 5.5.2, Miss Dean's attitude towards extra-curricular music-making infers that Year 8's classroom music lessons are comparatively insignificant.

When discussing extra-curricular provision with Year 8, Miss Dean often speaks directly to pupils she knows already receive instrumental or vocal lessons, such as Iniya and Otilie (P2.B1). Throughout the term, this reinforces the impression that involvement in extra-curricular music-making is more important than participation in classroom music-making, and ‘that not all children will benefit from the same set of musical opportunities’ (Lamont, 2002, p. 45). Miss Dean knows the names of the pupils who take part in extra-curricular music: she is more likely to engage them in classroom activities while overlooking others who have made exceptional musical progress elsewhere, and risks implying that pupils fortunate enough to enjoy extra-curricular involvement are more worthy of her attention than their peers.

*i. Conflicting values in the music classroom: Inclusivity and exclusivity*

The implicit competition between curricular and extra-curricular music provision at East Fen High School has significant ramifications for the values and expectations upheld in the music classroom. In addition to the emergent conflicts between sound and silence and regarding participation and preparation, issues surrounding inclusivity and exclusivity are prominent—though often unspoken—in Miss Dean’s Year 8 classroom. Although Miss Dean frequently reminds the pupils that ‘[they] all do music!’ (P2.B6), her clear distinction between pupils who are and are not involved in extra-curricular activities is significant in reinforcing opinions like Charlie’s, ‘I’m not very good’ (P2.B1). Pupils who perceive extra-curricular activities as inaccessible are therefore more likely to self-identify as ‘non-musicians’ (Lamont, 2002, p. 47), even if they find classroom music lessons fun and affirmative.

Nonetheless, Miss Dean does go to great lengths to generate an environment of inclusivity in her classroom. In Year 8’s first lesson of Music of the Americas she ensures that pupils have opportunities to play the samba instruments best suited to their competence and experience, while in the following lesson she challenges all the pupils to try all the instruments. When setting small-group assignments she asks that pupils work together fairly, without expecting anyone to do all the work or relegating anyone to a ‘passenger’ role (P2.B3).

However, Miss Dean's assurances of inclusivity are not always realised. During Year 8's penultimate lesson of the unit, Miss Dean is conscious of the need to give groups plenty of time to work on their samba compositions, so lowers her expectations of the length of their pieces:

Miss Dean began by recapping the expected structure of their samba pieces. Harry defined call-and-response, which Miss Dean explained should be followed by a break and a groove. She emphasised the importance of "quality not quantity" and said it wasn't necessary to have an improvisation section. (P2.B5)

But Miss Dean's stress upon 'quality not quantity' expresses an underlying expectation for high achievement. She admits that she considers pieces notated in traditional staff notation to be more 'sophisticated':

Miss Dean also recapped different notation options for writing down their pieces—staff notation, box notation, or word rhythms—describing them as, "sophisticated, or... well, not unsophisticated... but, just, works for your group." She caveated that there would be "no brownie points" for using staff notation, but that by the end of Year 8 they would all be expected to use it. (P2.B5)

Although Miss Dean hastens to add that pupils will not gain greater recognition for using staff notation, her reminder that they should all be able to use it by the end of Year 8 reiterates how highly she values it as a skill. In her own childhood her ability to read staff notation was influential in her status as 'one of the best singers' in her school, an expert at 'pitching the hard parts' (Section 5.3.2). But in her teaching, Miss Dean experiences vulnerability to her own conflicting expectations that all pupils should have equal opportunities to achieve highly, and that traditional staff notation and its associated musics are, indeed, more sophisticated or comprehensive than other alternatives (Boorman, 2001).

Year 8's final lesson on Music of the Americas further illustrates this conflict between inclusivity and exclusivity. Without sufficient preparation time, Miss Dean's lesson feels disjointed, and involves revising staff notation, learning and testing new samba vocabulary, introducing instruments used in fusion music, analysing the cultural influences in *West Side Story*, and a 15-minute fusion-style composition assignment (P2.B6). Within a few minutes,

Miss Dean was disappointed that only Iniya and Adam could identify the pitches and rhythms of staff notation: "why is it always the same hands in this class?!" Iniya called out, "because I do music!" Miss Dean responded, "you all do music!" Iniya replied, "I learn an instrument." Miss Dean then asked, "put your hand up if you cannot read the notes on the stave." Six pupils put their hands up. Ethan pointed out, "I didn't like my [music] teacher at primary school, Miss." Miss Dean replied, "education is not about who you like or not."

(P2.B6)

Unlike in the previous lesson, Miss Dean does not try to hide her disappointment that not all the pupils are confident in reading staff notation. But she does try to reassure them that reading staff notation does not have to be the reserve of those like Iniya, who are privileged enough to have extra-curricular instrumental lessons. She emphasises how learning to read music simply requires 'repeated exposure—"using it enough that the code gets embedded"' (P2.B6). But her accompanying description of how she learnt to read music in her sister's piano lessons at the age of three implies that confidence using staff notation requires having learnt it from infancy. By extension, there is little hope for those who are not already skilled in using it.

### *ii. Conflicting values in the music classroom: Right and wrong*

Closely related to the ongoing tensions between inclusivity and exclusivity in Year 8's music classroom are Miss Dean's evaluations of 'right' and 'wrong'. In her own experience as a KS3 pupil, this was a source of significant vulnerability for Miss Dean. Even though she was confident of her advanced musical ability, her school music classroom was characterised by an

enduring fear of failure and the disconcerting ‘worry of getting it wrong’ (Section 5.4.1). She knew that for others in her class, like Ollie, being publicly singled out as ‘wrong’ was a terrifying threat to one’s innermost self-identity (Wiggins, 2011). Miss Dean, therefore, does not draw undue attention to her own pupils’ difficulties. Her first samba lesson with Year 8 demonstrates how she sometimes identifies their mistakes and explains what they need to do differently, sometimes reassures them that it is fine to make mistakes, and sometimes overlooks their mistakes entirely when they lack confidence or need encouragement.

However, these divergent responses occasionally cause conflict surrounding the issue of right and wrong. During the third lesson on Music of the Americas, Miss Dean introduces a dictation exercise as a starter:

Miss Dean explained that the class would be practising dictation, which they would do in music right up to university. Pupils copied out grids to dictate samba rhythms using box notation. Miss Dean said that it didn’t matter if they got it right or wrong: she was more interested in “training ears than testing ears.” After playing the first extract, nine pupils put their hands up, volunteering to transcribe the rhythm on the whiteboard. Miss Dean was impressed. After the second extract, almost the whole class volunteered. Miss Dean picked Ethan, who made one mistake that the class quickly corrected. Miss Dean then made the class do one further box notation exercise, and although some groaned about its difficulty, Juliette completed it correctly on the whiteboard. Miss Dean was so pleased that she introduced some new dictation using staff notation. There were more groans, to which she responded, “please never be negative in a music lesson.” She assured the class that adding up the different rhythms was as easy as pre-school maths. Yet after both the first and second extracts, three or four pupils volunteered answers but couldn’t identify the correct syncopated rhythms. Gradually the class grew more confused, until eventually Iniya and I were able to notate the correct rhythms. Several pupils clapped with relief. (P2.B4)

Despite beginning by emphasising the academic rigour of the dictation exercise, Miss Dean de-emphasises the importance of getting the ‘right’ answers. Although she implies that the ability to dictate is an admirable and essential skill for studying music in Years 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and at university, she assures Year 8 that she is more interested in ‘training ears than testing ears’. Yet she then adds that they should ‘never be negative in a music lesson’, even though their pessimism is most pronounced when they are grappling with working out the ‘right’ answers. Finally, having explained how the final exercise will be as easy as ‘pre-school maths’, no-one in the class is able to notate the last answer correctly.

By the end of this exercise the sense of confusion in the classroom is palpable. As the dictation grows harder many of the pupils lose confidence and seem unsure of Miss Dean’s expectations. The tension is running so high that the sense of relief when Iniya finally manages to notate the last answer explodes in a round of applause. Although the applause outwardly suggests a sense of achievement, there is little indication that the pupils have learnt anything from the taxing experience. Unlike in the initial box notation exercises, when the class were quick to point out the mistake made by Ethan, no-one recognises why the final answer is correct, or how it is different to their previous failed attempts. On the contrary, their celebration seems more likely to stem from their growing eagerness to disperse to practice rooms.

### 6.4. Observing pupils’ classroom music-making

Although Miss Dean often begins Year 8’s lessons with vocabulary quizzes, music theory, or whole-class samba, their final assignment in Music of the Americas is to compose a small-group samba piece. Halfway through the term, Miss Dean allocates pupils to groups to rehearse pieces to perform to the class in their penultimate lesson. I observed the progress of one group: Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette. In the following sections I describe how a sense of musical vulnerability emerges as they work together. In Section 6.4.1 I explore how their negotiation of conflicting musical expectations, identities, and abilities enables them to cater for each other’s musical needs, reconcile their disagreements, and foster positive musical receptivity. Then in Section 6.4.2 I highlight how, over time, their relational reconciliation and musical receptivity gives way to profound resignation. In Section 6.4.3, I summarise how, after their

initial resilience in negotiating conflict, the repeated strain of disagreement and compromise finally takes its toll.

#### *6.4.1. Compromise and reconciliation*

After explaining the final assignment to the class during the third lesson of the unit, Miss Dean allocates each group to a practice room. Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette are working next door to the classroom in Miss Dean's office (see *Appendix 4.2*):

Iniya had the surdo, Ethan the tamborim, Greg the agogo, and Juliette the ganza. Iniya took a confident lead in establishing a call-and-response. The group discussed ideas including taking turns to call, but when this seemed too complicated Ethan took the lead instead. His calls were rhythmic and well-executed, and Iniya and Juliette attentively imitated him. (P2.B3)

Although the group make a confident start, as they exchange ideas and practise together they quickly realise that they do not share the same musical expectations, identities, and abilities.

##### *i. Conflicting musical expectations*

Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette each assert distinctive personal aspirations for their samba piece. While Iniya and Juliette expect to begin by planning their piece according to the structure dictated by Miss Dean, Greg would rather explore the instruments before making firm plans. It is Greg who suggests taking turns to play the call, and who later expresses how, 'all we need to do is experiment and we'll find something we like' (P2.B6).

Although these different musical intentions spark some initial conflict, Ethan intervenes by directing the introductory call-and-response. Iniya and Juliette are receptive to his confident leadership and musical suggestions. Greg, however, 'was less engaged. He often didn't notice when to come in, and Iniya complained that his agogo playing was making her headache worse' (P2.B3). Greg's attention wanders and he gazes out of the window, seemingly oblivious to what the others are doing.



*ii. Conflicting musical identities*

Greg's tendency to get distracted during music-making seems to indicate a significant difference between his musical identity and the identities of the others in his group. As mentioned in Section 6.3.2, Iniya has more musical experience than her peers and is accustomed to being favoured by Miss Dean and earning prestige through her extra-curricular participation. Juliette—though less experienced in music-making—is well-behaved, listens carefully to her teacher, and regards following instructions and meeting expectations as important. Ethan's passion is team sport, and although he does not consider himself good at music, he has an excellent sense of rhythm and values effective leadership.

Greg, however, often appears disengaged in making music with his group. Initially this seems, perhaps, inevitable: the practice room (like the classroom) is different to other school classrooms, and full of distractions including easy chairs, large windows overlooking the car park, and an upright piano. Yet as the group progress with their samba piece, Greg remains uninterested. He is side-tracked by creating new sound effects:

he quickly became completely absorbed by his discovery that striking the tamborim horizontally would make an interesting sound on the rim and skin of the drum, and continuously played over the others. Iniya said it made her head hurt, but he didn't stop. Ethan grated his beater against the rim of the surdo in retaliation, but he didn't stop. (P2.B3)

For Greg, the opportunity for self-discovery, play, and experimentation appears to take precedence over collaborative group work (Pitts, 2005, p. 33). Although he enjoys exploring the musical instruments, his identity lies not in the making of *music*, but in the *fun* to be had in doing so. As the term progresses, he becomes equally immersed in making 'weird sounds' with the ganza (P2.B3), spinning on Miss Dean's desk chair (P2.B4), using his clipboard as a drum (P2.B4), discussing cheese-graters (P2.B4), and reciting the two times table (P2.B5). Despite seeming willing to make music, other distractions persistently vie for his attention.

*iii. Conflicting musical abilities*

When Greg does engage in playing with his group, he initially appears to struggle to join in. He is uncomfortable holding the agogo bells and using the beater, despite Miss Dean's demonstration earlier in the lesson. When he joins in with the call-and-response he repeatedly misses his entries, is out of time, or plays too loudly. But it is unclear whether his apparent lack of competence is genuine—whether he lacks sufficient rhythmic or motor coordination—or whether he is simply more interested in what else is in the room, what instrument he would rather be playing, or what his group think of him.

To begin with, Greg's group take his struggle seriously, swapping instruments 'so eventually Ethan had the surdo, Greg the tamborim, Iniya the ganza, and Juliette the agogo' (P2.B3). Despite being frustrated by Greg's poor playing, the group agree that it would be in everyone's interests to swap instruments. Yet even with an instrument that he is more confident in playing, Greg remains disengaged. Either he is genuinely struggling to join in, or—as Iniya later expresses—he is 'just doing this to annoy [us]!' (P2.B6). Ethan, Iniya, and Juliette do not know what is wrong. Sometimes they laugh with Greg before trying to make better progress; other times they take on the role of 'teacher' (cf. A. Anderson, 2010; Green, 2008; Lodemel, 2010): 'they rebuked him—sometimes laughing, sometimes imploring him to engage—but he continued to struggle to join in' (P2.B3).

*iv. 'Great rhythm': Reconciliation in conflict*

Despite the best efforts of Ethan, Iniya, and Juliette, the musical vulnerability arising during their group work remains problematic. It emerges between their expectations for music-making and Greg's expectations for music-making; their musical identities and Greg's musical identity; and their music-making abilities and Greg's (apparent) lack of music-making ability. By the time Greg 'discovers' the sound effects he can make using his tamborim at the end of the group's first rehearsal, the atmosphere in the practice room is balanced precariously between hilarity and despair. On the one hand, Greg's pride in his new discovery and determination not to stop are almost funny. On the other hand, there is a risk that their piece will fall short of Miss Dean's expectations, and, like the two girls Miss Dean recalled performing a song from

*Moana* (Section 4.2.2), that they will face ‘ridicule’ when performing in front of their class. Furthermore, their susceptibility to the growing tension between Miss Dean’s expectations, their own expectations, and Greg’s expectations is magnified by the gradual crescendo of noise in the room. The painful sound of Greg’s insensitive playing and the group shouting in response is somatically distressing and effectively inescapable (Cox, 2016).

Yet from a place of escalating negative musical susceptibility, the tension within the group begins to unwind with Ethan’s intervention: ‘eventually, while Iniya was notating their call-and-response, Ethan stopped playing against Greg’s tamborim and instead joined in with a syncopated rhythm on the surdo’ (P2.B3). By beginning to play *with* rather than *against* Greg, Ethan affirms Greg’s self-discovery while simultaneously demonstrating the positive contribution it could make to the wider group (cf. Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002). To avoid further confrontation they therefore reach a compromise (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991). Although Iniya and Juliette are hesitant to endorse Greg’s behaviour, they follow Ethan’s lead and recognise that to make progress they cannot continue ignoring Greg or simply imploring him to follow their instructions (MacGregor, 2020).<sup>36</sup> They reluctantly agree to incorporate his discovery into their work:

the group admitted that it sounded good and tried hesitantly to link it to the call-and-response. Meanwhile, Greg got distracted by a school bus arriving outside. This sparked a lengthy conversation about buses, until Juliette suggested they continue playing. They tried to run through their piece, Juliette and Iniya joining in with Ethan and Greg in the break. Despite the weakness of the link section, they seemed pleased with their achievement. (P2.B3)

Although the group’s work on joining the introduction and break seems half-hearted, it diffuses the tension in the room. They temporarily resolve their conflict, reconcile their different expectations, identities, and abilities, and relax sufficiently to chat together without

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<sup>36</sup> In a previous study into paradox theory and participatory performance (MacGregor, 2020, forthcoming) I have written about other similar pupil-initiated models of leadership that have emerged as a means of overcoming conflict between the fulfilment of individual ability and the desire for interpersonal affinity.

being overly concerned about staying on task. Though this may suggest that they are not engaged with their music-making, it does imply that they are comfortable enough in the music-making context to enjoy spending time together. Greg certainly benefits from the more relaxed atmosphere: when Miss Dean comes to listen to the group at the end of the lesson ‘he begged her to listen to their break, which she said had “a great rhythm”’ (P2.B3).

#### *6.4.2. Resilience and resignation*

Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette’s satisfaction and reconciliation is short-lived. During their final three lessons working together, the conflict between their different musical expectations, identities, and abilities once more intensifies. Despite making some hasty compromises to ensure that they are able to perform in front of their class at the end of the unit, they finish the term in despondency and resignation. Like Claire’s pupils Bertie and Thomas in Section 4.4.2, any remaining semblance of musical receptivity is overwhelmed and resilience exhausted.

##### *i. Conflicting musical expectations*

During their second group work lesson, the conflict between Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette’s expectations of their music-making quickly re-emerges. Before going into practice rooms, ‘Ethan asked Miss Dean, “when are we going in our groups? Groups are more relaxing!” But Juliette and Iniya exclaimed, “no they’re not, ours was really stressful!” Ethan replied, “only because you made it so”’ (P2.B4). For Ethan—as for Greg—group music-making is an opportunity for fun and relaxation. But for Juliette and Iniya, group music-making feels like a stressful exercise in compromising their own expectations for the sake of the group. Nonetheless, when Miss Dean suggests pairing groups together for the rest of the lesson, Juliette and Iniya loudly protest and insist on working with their original group of four.

The group’s enthusiasm to continue working together, despite their disagreements, implies that since they already know what to expect from each other (good or bad), they are receptive to the opportunity to explore their instruments in a familiar environment without the interference of any other pupils:

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by the time they had reached Miss Dean's office, Ethan, Greg, Juliette, and Iniya were overexcited, hammering their instruments stridently. Juliette's agogo was severely dented from past abuse. Ethan was complaining that his surdo rattled too much. Greg was striking the rim of the tamborim unbearably loudly.

(P2.B4)

The group's initial receptivity quickly unfolds into a sense of somatic susceptibility. While each pupil is intent on exploring the capabilities of their own instrument, the growing noise and lack of interpersonal communication initiates conflict. Enthusiasm is transformed into pain and reluctance; an awkward reminder of their disputes during the previous lesson.

### *ii. Conflicting musical identities*

The group's conflicting musical expectations and identities become increasingly apparent during their third rehearsal, when they are obliged to adapt their piece to compensate for Ethan's absence: he is off school with COVID-19.

The group decided that Iniya should play Ethan's surdo part. I offered to play Iniya's ganza part, and Greg asked, "how good are you?" I asked him whether that would make a difference to whether he'd want me to play, at which he exclaimed, "of course!" I asked him whether he thought I'd be good, and he said, "yes, because you're wearing earrings with musical notes on them."

(P2.B5)

Greg, Iniya, and Juliette's initial efforts to rework their piece demonstrate a newfound, collective desire to meet Miss Dean's expectations and perform well at the end of the lesson. They unanimously pick Iniya to play Ethan's surdo part, agreeing that she has most musical experience and will be most confident in the leadership role. Likewise, when I offer to play

Iniya's ganza part, Greg makes it clear that I will only be allowed to join in if I can prove myself to be 'good' enough.<sup>37</sup>

Yet as they begin playing—having decided they would rather work as a three than with me—they find themselves unable to live up to their expectations. Greg seems to lack a secure sense of musical identity, remains susceptible to distraction, and appears reluctant to build his musical confidence:

only Juliette joined in the call-and-response. Greg always came in a phrase late. The atmosphere was tense. Iniya and Juliette argued with Greg about how many times to repeat his [tamborim] "solo", but Greg played it as many times as he wanted, regardless. They moved onto the groove, Iniya playing the pulse and Juliette playing repeated quavers on the agogo. But Greg was not listening. So Iniya put Greg on the spot and asked him to recite the structure of their piece. He couldn't. The girls were losing hope. Iniya sighed, "Greg, we've been through this, you're just not paying attention. It's only me and Juliette trying."  
(P2.B5)

In time, Greg's susceptibility causes wider musical susceptibility. Without Ethan to mediate between them, the girls grow tired of Greg's apparent nonchalance. Their initial attempts to facilitate his participation—taking on the instructive 'teacher' role—gradually peter out.

### *iii. Conflicting musical abilities*

Although Iniya and Juliette have previously gone to great lengths to help Greg participate—switching instruments, incorporating his ideas, and repeating Miss Dean's instructions—by the time they are preparing for their final group performance they show growing concern over his

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<sup>37</sup> Greg's association between my (innocuous) choice of earrings—depicting quavers and a treble clef—and my assumed musical experience suggests that the implicit classroom dichotomy between those who 'do music' (and can read staff notation) and do not 'do music' (and cannot read staff notation) shapes individual pupils' musical values. Like Miss Dean, Greg seems to associate staff notation with sophistication and ability (see Section 6.3.2.i). I decided not to wear the same earrings to East Fen again.

musical ability. Unexpectedly, however, this is not because of what he *cannot* do, but rather because of what he *can* do:

as Iniya and Juliette continued working at the groove, Juliette seemed dissatisfied with her ostinato. I demonstrated some syncopated rhythms she could play and encouraged Greg to join in on the offbeats. Greg did, but only while calling out the two times table (forwards, backwards, and in random orders) every time he struck a beat. Iniya reached over to grab his beater, exclaiming, “Greg, you’re just doing this to annoy me!” Greg was adamant that he wasn’t, retorting, “stop screaming and raising your voice!” Juliette responded, “that’s the only way to get your attention!” (P2.B5)

Iniya’s distraught exclamation brings Greg close to tears. He insists that he is not annoying her on purpose. But both Iniya and Juliette have noticed that he can, in fact, follow musical instructions, play in time, and maintain a steady pulse. They conclude that he is not actually struggling to join in, but simply choosing to do so when it suits him, rather than according to their expectations. Iniya gives up trying to help Greg. Her furious outburst rapidly subsides into despairing resignation: ‘Juliette commented that they hadn’t yet worked on the improvisation, but Iniya replied dejectedly, “I don’t want to do the improv. I can’t get him to do anything. If I ever have to work with Greg again...”’ (P2.B5).

*iv. ‘Our duet sounds rubbish’: Resignation in conflict*

Although Iniya’s sense of resignation climaxes when she realises that she ‘can’t get [Greg] to do anything’ (P2.B5), an unwelcome atmosphere of defeat has been emerging among the group since their earlier disagreement over whether group work is relaxing or stress-inducing (P2.B4). After the chaotic start to their second rehearsal, the group seem resigned to failure almost before beginning. Practising their call-and-response, ‘their playing was out of time and inconsistent. Greg was unsure of his part. They tried working on Ethan and Greg’s duet instead, but Ethan simply beat crotchets, increasing in tempo and volume’ (P2.B4). They do not discuss their

music-making with each other or attempt to solve their problems. They stop enforcing or encouraging Greg's participation, and soon give up altogether. Ethan sounds dejected:

“our duet sounds rubbish. Miss, does our duet sound rubbish?” I conceded that it did not sound as good as previously and they decided to replace it with instrumental solos. Repeatedly, the group tried to play together, sometimes starting with the call-and-response and sometimes with the break. Often the call-and-response had the wrong number of beats or repetitions, and Juliette commented, “I don't feel like we're making any progress.” The group stopped trying. Iniya started playing her ganza like a guiro, which led to a long conversation about cheese-graters. Eventually I pointed out that they only had five minutes left, but just then Miss Dean came in. She explained that next week they would perform their samba piece to the class, and they exclaimed, “oh no!”

(P2.B4)

When Miss Dean reminds the group that they will be performing next lesson, they are shocked and worried. Their susceptibility to failure in the practice room threatens to become susceptibility to embarrassment in the classroom.

But then, ‘Miss Dean said, “show me what you've got already.” They played through their call-and-response confidently, accurately, and in time. Miss Dean was very impressed’ (P2.B4). Suddenly, it seems that the group's sense of susceptibility provides a new impetus for their music-making. In a unified attempt to demonstrate that they have achieved something—despite their earlier disappointment—they concentrate and communicate. This dramatic turnaround seems unprecedented. After such stark susceptibility, the extrinsic motivation of the upcoming performance appears to rekindle their resilience. Through external regulation—the desire for reward and the concomitant fear of failure (Renwick & Reeve, 2012)—they begin to resist the conflict between their opposing musical expectations, identities, and abilities.

Nevertheless, this resilience is short lived. As the group (in Ethan's absence) approach their final performance in the subsequent lesson, their vulnerability returns: ‘Iniya put up her



hand. “Do we have to play in front of everyone else?” Miss Dean replied, “yes. It’s character-building and an expectation of the music curriculum” (P2.B5). As they await their turn, their fear of embarrassment grows. Despite Miss Dean’s own past fear of embarrassment (cf. Section 5.4.1), she expects them to persevere.

After the first three groups had performed, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette got up reluctantly, Greg clutching their unfinished notes to put on the music stand. Their performance closely resembled what they had practised, in time but with weak transition sections. But at the end of the groove, there was an awkward pause. Iniya prodded Juliette to keep going, so Juliette spontaneously improvised a short section that Iniya accompanied. When they at last stopped, the class commented on the unusual use of rim shots, and Miss Dean said they were sensible to pause between sections to make sure no-one got lost. (P2.B5)

When their turn arrives, Greg makes a show of putting their unfinished notes on the music stand, bluffing confidence and imitating the previous group who had impressed Miss Dean by using staff notation. Greg, Iniya, and Juliette’s performance itself is unremarkable—until they reach the end. Without warning, Iniya and Juliette play on without Greg, improvising on the *surdo* and *agogo* and further bluffing confidence in a bid to impress Miss Dean.

Although the group’s performance does indicate some degree of resilience after their previous resignation, their final reflections on the lesson tell a different story. While pupils in other groups congratulate each other and are visibly pleased with Miss Dean’s feedback, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette are simply relieved to have finished their group work. At the end of the lesson, Miss Dean explained that they would not be working in the same groups again. Iniya sighed with relief, “thank God!” (P2.B5). They are not pleased with their performance, proud of their teamwork, or receptive to the feedback. They are simply desperate never to have to work together again.

### 6.4.3. *Reprise*

Despite Miss Dean's assurance that Year 8 would not have to work in the same groups for the final lesson of Music of the Americas, in the confusion and busyness of the final week of term she sets them a further group assignment. As described in Section 6.2.2.i, after a chaotic quiz and a warning concerning 1970s minimalism, Miss Dean sends the groups back to practice rooms for 15 minutes to compose a short, high-energy fusion piece.

Reunited with Ethan after his COVID-19 isolation, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette return to their practice room with mixed feelings. The few minutes they spend working together illustrate the multiple musical conflicts that have characterised their term's work and their resultant experience of musical vulnerability.

Ethan immediately rushed next door and started playing the piano. Miss Dean followed him and told him he was doing exactly what she had asked them not to do, and to fetch another instrument instead. He chose a pair of bongos; Greg a castanet and a surdo; Iniya a xylophone; and Juliette a conga. (P2.B6)

Ethan's initial enthusiasm is dampened by the partition of inclusive and exclusive music-making. Having just told fellow pupils Adam and Tim that they can use the piano, Miss Dean tells Ethan that he cannot because he does not know how. Instead, she offers his group a selection of classroom percussion instruments. Though she has already demonstrated these instruments and contextualised them in their global cultures, there remains a risk that the group perceive that, compared to the piano, 'tuned percussion does not feature as a "real" instrument likely to be encountered in "real" music' (Wright, 2008, p. 397).

Nonetheless, the group quickly become so distracted by their allocated instruments that they are—again—reluctant to cooperate with each other. But unexpectedly, given his apparent confusion in previous weeks, Greg stays focussed and engaged:

Greg enthusiastically tried to lead the group, counting in using the castanet and directing from the surdo. But they were preoccupied with their own

instruments and unwilling to listen. They said Greg's suggestions sounded bad. Iniya and Juliette played over him, hitting his surdo with their beaters. They laughed, "we're giving you a taste of your own medicine. That's what you did to us last week and the week before and the week before." Whenever the opportunity arose, they interrupted Greg, wildly snatching for his beater or arguing loudly. (P2.B6)

Regardless of Greg's newfound attention, the social tension arising from his disengagement in previous lessons lingers. His suggestions are not only dismissed, but resented. Iniya and Juliette's vindictive remarks belittle his musical ability and attack his sense of self-identity (cf. Palkki, 2022; Wiggins, 2011). But they also expose their own sense of musical vulnerability, their experience of music-making having been irreparably affected by their past conflicts with Greg.

Ethan spots these vulnerabilities, and suggests that the group set aside their disagreements and focus on achieving something musical:

Ethan gradually grew frustrated, shouting, "this is old now! Why can't we just listen to Iniya? She's the musician!" But Iniya would not take the lead. Instead, Ethan directed Greg, Iniya, and Juliette to come in one at a time, leaving four beats between each entry. For a short while they managed to play in time together, before Juliette exclaimed, "how do we end this?!" They stopped playing as Greg thumped his surdo, Iniya crying out that he was too loud. In turn, Ethan complained that it was Iniya and Juliette, not Greg, who were messing things up. (P2.B6)

Mirroring Miss Dean's implicit belief that pupils with extra-curricular musical experience are more capable than those without, Ethan wants Iniya to lead their group. But when she refuses to engage, he steps in to resolve the group's continuing conflict. Nonetheless, his solution is only temporary. When the group stumble upon further vulnerability—somatic susceptibility

to Greg’s raucous playing, and social susceptibility to disagreement on how to end their piece—the conflict erupts again.

Juliette and Greg’s subsequent comments are revealing: ‘Juliette kept trying to tell everyone to stop shouting, and Greg suggested, “all we need to do is experiment and we’ll find something we like”’ (P2.B6). As discussed in Section 6.4.1.i, while Iniya and Juliette advocate a careful, structured approach to their music-making, Greg would rather explore and experiment with ideas. Although either approach could be fruitful (see Finney et al., 2021; Paynter & Aston, 1970), Greg’s preferences continue to go unheeded. Rather than make further compromises to include him, Iniya and Juliette clearly perceive him as causing relational conflict, and, in turn, musical vulnerability. Despite Ethan’s affirmation of Greg’s effort, the group do not recognise his receptivity or enthusiasm, and instead rebuke and exclude him.

Although the group do finally agree to try working on their fusion piece again, their conflict is never resolved because they run out of time: ‘eventually they started again, following Ethan to begin and Greg to end. But before they finished Miss Dean announced the end of the lesson, and, relieved, they abruptly stopped playing and hurriedly returned their instruments’ (P2.B6). As in previous weeks, the group’s resolution to keep working until the end of the lesson is not so much one of resilience, but one of resignation. Their cooperation and engagement is superficial, and their relief in stopping making music together is tangible.

### 6.5. Discussing pupils’ classroom music-making: A focus group

Just over four months after Year 8 completed their samba project, I held a focus group interview with Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette. We met in the same practice room in which they had worked previously, and, despite not having worked together for some time, their interactions bore the same hallmarks as in their first term of Year 8. Their discussion was noisy and enthusiastic, and was often side-tracked by distractions such as adjusting the height of the piano stool, spinning on the teacher’s chair, and opening and closing the lid of the piano. Even without instruments to play, the space remained novel and exciting, different from other classrooms.

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Our discussion was interspersed with teasing and jesting. Within a couple of minutes, Ethan was rebuking Iniya for being ‘very controlling’, and in retaliation Iniya was mocking Ethan’s height:

Ethan [Iniya] was very controlling. She was very controlling, and I did not find it very nice how she told us what to do. [...] I feel like she could have done it in a nicer way.

Elizabeth OK. And how did you deal with that? So it was quite stressful, but there was a kind of control?

Iniya Yeah, how did you deal with that?

Ethan I keep... I didn’t... You can’t change her.

Juliette [laughs] I feel like this is just a “bully Iniya” session.

Iniya This is just a Bully Iniya Club! No. You [Ethan], in retaliation...

Ethan [imitates Iniya in a high-pitched voice] You, you, you...

Iniya [laughs] [to Ethan] What are you doing?

Ethan I’m putting up my chair [piano stool]. It goes up.

Iniya I’m so tall and he’s so short!

Ethan Don’t make fun of me!

Some distractions were directly related to previous classroom music lessons. Twice the group disputed Ethan’s choice of footwear, in reference to a lesson in November (P2.C4) when Miss Dean noticed that he was not wearing black socks and that the soles were falling off his shoes:

Juliette Are you wearing white socks Ethan?

Iniya You’re not allowed white socks!

Juliette [laughs].

Greg They’ve got black on them!

Ethan Yeah, they’ve got black!

[...]

- Iniya            Ethan, your shoes are falling apart again.
- Elizabeth       I think it's the same shoes [as last term].
- Ethan            I know. I bought new shoes, and then they're breaking again.
- Juliette         I think you need to get some different shoes Ethan.
- Greg             Wait, they're not the old ones?
- Ethan            No, they're new.

Nevertheless, amid these tangential conversations, the group's interactions yielded significant insights into their experiences of musical vulnerability while making music together. Two primary themes emerged during our discussion, both of which reinforced my observations in Section 6.4 concerning pupils' conflicting musical expectations, identities, and abilities. These two themes, which I address in Sections 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 respectively, consider what constitutes 'a real musician' and what constitutes 'the perfect group'.

#### 6.5.1. 'A real musician': Realistic and idealistic constructions of music-making

From the very start of our focus group, a dichotomy arose between pupils' *realistic* and *idealistic* constructions of their lived experience. Often this seemed to stem from the researcher-researched power differential (Greig et al., 2013, pp. 116–117). Juliette, for example, initially answered most of my questions with a confident, 'right' answer, adopting a self-presentational strategy that would be validated in the classroom as having 'social utility' (Matteucci, 2014). But frequently, she then changed her mind in response to others in the group:

- Elizabeth       Can you describe what the project was like [...]?
- Juliette         It was very fun, 'cause we had a lot of independence. 'Cause we were like...
- Iniya            Yeah, but it was also stressful, 'cause we were working with Greg.
- Juliette         So stressful. [...] It was awful.

In this brief dialogue, Juliette moved from describing the project as ‘very fun’, to ‘stressful’ and ‘awful’. Later she spoke about their composition in similar terms: ‘it was really good. It was kind of in time, and it sort of worked together in a nice, flowy way. [...] It wasn’t just some random noises put together. Which it kind of was, a little bit...’. After trying to use musical vocabulary that Miss Dean would encourage (such as ‘in time’), Juliette acknowledged that their music-making more closely resembled ‘just some random noises put together’.

Collectively, the group demonstrated that they remembered their samba project accurately. They knew which instruments they played, what roles they took, and how parts of their composition (namely the call-and-response and Ethan and Greg’s ‘duet’) were structured. But an underlying sense of resignation was evident when their realistic reminiscences came up against a fanciful narrative that Ethan constructed around being ‘a real musician’. *Table 6.1* shows a dialogue between Juliette and Ethan as they simultaneously tried to describe their piece. While Juliette attempted to articulate an accurate and detailed account, Ethan dismissed her perspective, stood up, and demanded silence as he performed his own take on their composition, like ‘a real musician’. Although Ethan’s performance was clearly a carefully-prepared piece of showmanship, it offered a telling commentary on the group’s experience. Juliette described their project in simple terms: who played first, on what instrument, and with what rhythm. In contrast, Ethan improvised an elaborate account of complex rhythms and melodies, contrapuntal entries, and highly developed textures. His performance was impressive, representing what he believed might have been performed by ‘a real musician’. But by extension, the group’s actual performance—characterised by simple rhythms and textures—seemed to have fallen short of his expectations of ‘real music’ made by ‘real musicians’.

Ethan repeatedly alluded to this concept of ‘a real musician’ when describing how the group’s music-making made him feel. As illustrated in *Table 6.2*, he disagreed with Greg, Iniya, and Juliette’s descriptions of their performance as ‘stressful’ and ‘terrible’. His fictitious conclusion that ‘by the end we all worked very well’—and, later, that they performed ‘so much better’ than other groups—overlooked that he was, in fact, absent for their final performance (see Section 6.4.2.iv). It also contradicted his own despair that ‘our duet sounds rubbish’ (P2.B4) and his frustration with the group’s arguing (P2.B6).

Although Ethan was clearly aware that he was exaggerating his account,<sup>38</sup> his imaginary narrative exposed a deep-seated sense of musical vulnerability. Like Juliette's initial descriptions of their music-making as 'very fun' and 'really good', in offering a socially desirable, 'right' answer he implicitly recognised that the group's music-making was somehow 'wrong'. Their conflicting musical expectations, identities, and abilities caused arguments, disappointment,

Table 6.1. Realistic and idealistic narratives of the structure of the group's samba piece

<i>Realistic narrative</i>		<i>Idealistic narrative</i>	
Elizabeth	So, can you remember any of the specific sections? [...]		
Juliette	We had the...	Ethan	No, Juliette, hang on. I'm going to become...
Juliette	We had the call-and-repeat [ <i>sic</i> ].	Ethan	... a real musician.
		Iniya	Wait, let Ethan be a musician. Shh.
		Ethan	OK. So we had the starting point of Greg's rhythm, of beat, and he goes, [sings] bum-bum-ba-da-ba-da, bum, bum-bum...
Juliette	No, we had Ethan starting...	Ethan	And then...
Juliette	... and he went bum-bum-bum...	Ethan	Shh!
Juliette	... on the big drum.	Ethan	Shh! Then I join in with my little, [sings] do, do-be-do-be-do, do, bo, bo-bo-bo-bo. And then it mixed very well.
Iniya	Oh yeah!		

<sup>38</sup> Ethan later drew upon his expression of 'toastiness' (see Table 6.2) to construct an entertaining metaphor comparing the group's music-making to 'making a warm s'more when you're camping'. Throughout the focus group he used the metaphors of chocolate, marshmallow, and crackers at random to describe the sound of the music, the group's interaction, and the roles of each of his peers.



and stress; ‘a real musician’ should have experienced a sense of warmth, achievement, and success.

Table 6.2. *Realistic and idealistic narratives of the feelings evoked by the group’s samba piece*

<i>Realistic narrative</i>		<i>Idealistic narrative</i>	
Elizabeth	How did that music make you feel? Can you remember how you felt at the time?	Ethan	Warm inside.
Iniya	Stressed.		
Elizabeth	Warm inside?! Stressed?!		
Juliette	It was very like...	Ethan	Stressed?!
Juliette	I’m sort of disagreeing with what I just said. But it wasn’t very flowy. It was sort of like, [sings] bum-bum-bum, like marching almost.		
Elizabeth	OK.	Ethan	Toasty.
Iniya	I feel like it would have been quite nice. I liked it quite a lot, but I think I found it quite stressful because—no offence to you two [Ethan and Greg]—but you are quite hard to deal with sometimes.	Ethan	[gasps] Says you! [...]
		Ethan	Me and Greg were pretty good. Those two were pretty good [...] Iniya and Juliette worked together, and then [...] by the end we all worked very well, and the music...
Greg	And we did terribly at the end.	Ethan	... made me really toasty inside.

6.5.2. *'The perfect group': Realistic and idealistic constructions of music-making*

Ethan's implicit belief that he, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette did not act like 'real musicians' related closely to their shared perception that they did not work well together as a group. This shaped much of their focus group discussion, from initial jibes about Iniya being 'very controlling' to concluding comments about what the project taught them about teamwork. In answer to my question about what they enjoyed while music-making, they responded:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Iniya    | I enjoyed actually being able to make...   |
| Ethan    | Working with Greg.   |
| Greg     | Yes! Let's have it!  |
|          | [...]  |
| Iniya    | I liked being able to make my own music, but I didn't like doing it in a group. Because I don't particularly like working in groups. |
| Juliette | Yeah, I like being more independent and being by myself, 'cause I just don't like people that much [laughs].                         |
| Iniya    | Yeah, I like being independent working by myself, because I don't like working in groups. So, yeah, I don't like people.             |
| Greg     | I don't like people too.   |
| Ethan    | I like working in a group, but I don't think it worked very well.  |

The four pupils justified their apparent dislike of group work in several ways. Like many of the pupils quoted in Lucy Green's (2008) *Music, Informal Learning and the School* (pp. 121–122), Juliette suggested that 'it would have been better if we could pick our groups [...] 'cause we'd be able to pick people that we knew we could work well with together'. Iniya added that this would be particularly important 'with the more creative things [...] because we're more open about our ideas when you know the people, and we know we won't be judged'. Ethan and Greg agreed that 'you're more comfortable' working with friends, and that friendship groups would

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be less likely to experience the difficulties that arose when—as Juliette explained—‘four very stubborn and opinionated people’ were required to work together.

Nonetheless, the group also acknowledged the potential shortcomings of working in friendship groups during classroom music lessons. This was a particular concern for the two girls:

Juliette        I feel like if you were able to pick your groups, some people would take advantage of that and just choose their friends, even though they might not work well with them and might just mess around.

[...]

Iniya            There’s sometimes when we do get put in groups, [...] but then there are only a certain few people who ever actually get to go with their friends, because we [the mature girls]’ll get put with the immature boys ’cause the teachers think we’ll be responsible. Then it’s not fair on us because we didn’t get to go with our friends, but other people did.

Although Iniya was quick to reassure Ethan and Greg that they were not ‘the immature boys’, she admitted,

I was happy [the project] was over [...] because I was not happy with this group. [...] ’Cause the first three lessons we spent fighting, and then when we finally actually got together, we had quite a little amount of time to actually get through it. (P2.FG)

In light of these issues, the group began to discuss what would constitute ‘the perfect group’ for a similar project. Ethan said he would still want to work with Greg, and also have

at least one smart person in the group. [...] So let's say we were in groups of four. [...] Two of them, or like one other person is your friend, and then you have one person who's really, really good at music. Or like, better than everyone else. [...] And I think [the music] would come out very well because we would all have fun. And then we would also have that one person who's good at music, so our music would be very nice. (P2.FG)

The group debated at length which of their peers might qualify to be in such a group. Brandon was favoured because he was friends with Ethan and Greg, and Iniya liked him because 'he's actually nice to people'. Ethan wanted Una in his group because she was 'smart at music', but she was not in their class. Fleur was both 'smart' and 'nice', but Rachel was ruled out because 'she doesn't talk', and Ethan could not remember who Otilie was.

Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette drew significant conclusions as they arrived at clearer parameters for 'the perfect group':

- Ethan            Normally in school you have the smart friend group, and Iniya's probably in that smart friend group. [...] So, Iniya's really smart...
- Iniya            Thank you.
- Ethan            ... and then, me and Greg are not that smart.
- Juliette        What about me?!
- Greg            We're in top set maths mate! Come on.
- Ethan            Greg, we're in bottom set English.  
[...]
- Ethan            So we're not the smartest in... at least in music, we're not the greatest. I've never done music in my life, and Iniya has, because obviously Iniya's got this badge thing [a music award]. So Iniya needs a friend. So, me and Greg are here. So we're like the not very smart ones in music, so we get helped. So normally, if you

have someone good in your group your grades also get bumped up, because they encourage you. So we have Iniya. Iniya's friend is probably quite good at music as well. So we get, like, Fleur, or Juliette, 'cause she's not bad at music. And then, so we have me and Greg—not very smart two people in music—and then we have two smart people in music.

Juliette      And then there's two sets of friends.

Ethan        Yeah! And then they're friends, me and Greg are friends...

Elizabeth    So actually, this is the perfect group!

Although all four pupils went on to describe other ideal groupings (ranging from Greg's plan to include six people, to Iniya's suggestion of multitracking recordings of herself 'doing loads of instruments' (cf. Section 4.3.2)) they did concede that their own group was a good one. Though it was me that suggested it might be 'perfect', they agreed that it was a fruitful compromise between musical identity and ability, with social cohesion encouraged through existing friendships and musical achievement facilitated through Iniya's past experience.

Ethan depicted this process of social cohesion in typically colourful language, prompting hysterical laughter during the focus group:

Ethan        So, basically. At the start we were like little mole-rats to each other. [...] We were like little naked mole-rats to each other, all ratty and like, "oh no, you do this, you do that," "no, no, oh!"<sup>39</sup> And then, eventually over time we became... maybe a dog, and we were like...

Juliette     Like we were a pack of dogs!

Iniya        A pack!

Ethan        ... and we were kind, we were really kind.

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, in contrast to Ethan's presumption, naked mole-rats are in fact noted for being the only mammals known to exhibit *eusocial* behaviour. Like some ants and bees, individuals take on specific roles pertaining to the welfare and harmonious functioning of the community, thereby preventing unnecessary conflict (Allaby, 2020).

Iniya Oh my God.

Ethan And then by the end we were like elephants, and we were like...  
brave and strong. And it's like, [sings] bum, bum, ba-da, bum.  
Bum, bum, ba-da, bum.

Ethan's mole-rat-dog-elephant metaphor portrayed an idealistic image of a virtuous cycle from relational conflict to relational concord (see *Figure 6.1*; cf. Section 4.4.1). Although my observation of the group's behaviour while music-making would not necessarily lead me to the conclusion that they became 'kind', 'brave', or 'strong', they did complete the project, perform in front of their peers, and exhibit some resilience in the face of conflicting musical expectations, identities, and abilities. Juliette and Iniya reflected that:

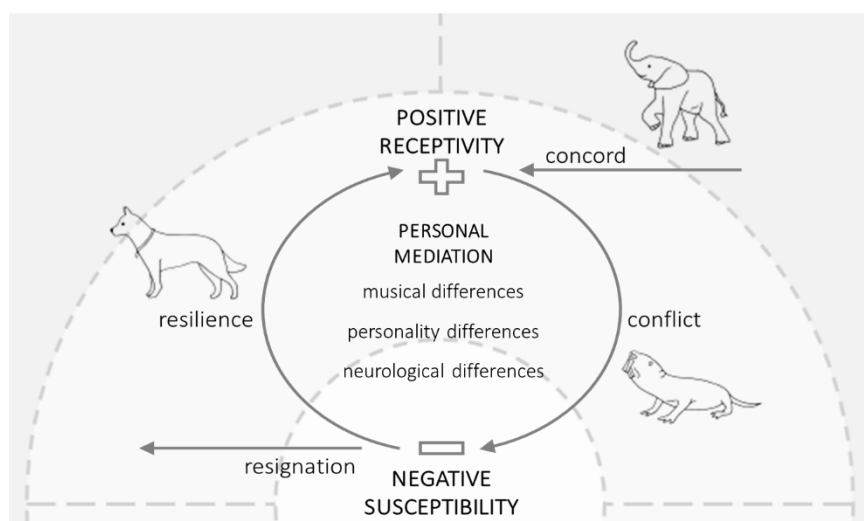
Juliette If we were in a different group, then we'd have to start the  
process of naked mole-rats and dogs again.

Iniya Hmm, yeah. I think I would keep [...] who was on the  
instruments the same, 'cause as annoying as Ethan was, he did  
really well with keeping the beat and everything. 'Cause he kept  
it the same, when, no offence, if it was Greg it would change  
every lesson. I just know.

Juliette Ethan's time of the pulse was the same every single time.

They acknowledged that, though they would rather have chosen their own groups to begin with, over the course of the project they fostered greater relational concord within their allocated group than they might have done if they had had to change groups. The gains in resilience they made by working through their interpersonal conflicts outweighed the costs of their otherwise fractious relationships.

Figure 6.1. Relational conflict to relational concord: the mole-rat-dog-elephant metaphor



### 6.5.3. 'The core of the group': Expectations and experiences of music-making

Although Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette did agree upon the benefits of making music together, their discussion highlighted some vestiges of their experiences of musical receptivity and susceptibility. Initially, their reflections demonstrated a gradual shift from the presumption that *Iniya* had been best placed to lead the group (as a 'smart' and 'talented' 'musician' (Asmus, 1986; Lamont, 2002)), to receptivity towards *Ethan's* role in leading the group. Juliette explained, 'I feel like Ethan was the core of the [group]. [...] 'Cause he was the pulse, and so, if he wasn't there it would be all over the place and everyone would be doing different rhythms at different times'. This supported my observations in Section 6.4.1 of Ethan's important role in encouraging the group to make fruitful compromises and seek reconciliation following conflict. Beginning in their initial group work lesson, Ethan led the group from the surdo and was the first to intervene to help Greg play with, rather than against, the group. Iniya took on leadership only in Ethan's absence, and—other than snide remarks about her 'controlling' attitude—during the focus group no-one commented on her role.

However, this shift in attitude had reversed by the end of our interview. Ethan, despite agreeing that his pulse keeping the group in time 'was pretty good', was adamant that he lacked musical ability. He explained that he did not want a high grade in music, 'cause I don't want to be rude, but I don't really like music. And I'm probably just going to drop it in Year 9.

Because it's just not for me' (cf. K. Evans, 2012). He counted himself among the 'not very smart people in music', saying that even in his ideal group involving a drum kit and guitar he would maybe just 'do the glockenspiel thing' (cf. Wright, 2008). His entrenched belief that 'a real musician' must be capable of playing a 'real' instrument, improvising elaborate melodies, and expressing true 'warmth' and feeling, seemed to leave him resigned to the category of 'not smart' or 'non-musician'. Iniya, on the other hand, maintained her status among the 'smart people in music', because—at least according to Ethan—'obviously [she]'s got this badge thing'.

The subtle conflict between these pupils' idealistic expectations of group music-making and their real lived experiences of group music-making reiterated the sense of confusion imbuing their weekly classroom music lessons. The competing values of curricular and extra-curricular music—and their associated influence on inclusion and exclusion (Lamont, 2002)—remained hugely influential in shaping pupils' beliefs about music, even in the absence of their teacher. Both at the beginning and end of our focus group discussion, Ethan, Greg, and Juliette concurred that Iniya exemplified 'someone who's smart at music', despite agreeing that Ethan was 'the core of the group'. Even having witnessed and recognised Ethan's musical capability, they held fast to their belief that he must be less able than pupils like Iniya, because his musicianship was not validated by himself, his teacher, or the wider school. In his own eyes, Ethan was 'not that smart' at music. Miss Dean did not know his name, but she did know that he could not read staff notation or play the piano (see Section 6.3.2). And while Iniya was presented with a school music award and expected to achieve 'well above' the expected standard in Year 8 music, Ethan believed he would be graded only as 'working towards' the expected standard.<sup>40</sup>

Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette's lack of receptivity towards the different values espoused by their lived experience of music-making must, therefore, in part be attributed to the wider sociocultural values that saturate their Western, middle-class communities. As described in Chapter 2, historic classed, gendered, and racialised social hierarchies (e.g., Allsup, 2016; A.

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<sup>40</sup> At East Fen High School, KS3 pupils are assessed according to an end-of-year expected standard for each subject. Regular progress checks are used to allocate pupils to five attainment bands: working towards the expected standard; working towards the expected standard plus; meeting the expected standard; above the expected standard; and well above the expected standard (EFHS, 2019).



## MUSICAL VULNERABILITY

Bull, 2019), meritocratic structures (e.g., Littler, 2013), and the relentless pursuit of mastery (e.g., Singh, 2018) still shape present-day educational and economic systems. The neoliberal fixation on progress, efficiency, and performativity has only served to exacerbate such divisive issues.

For pupils in the KS3 music classroom, such societal values mould their beliefs and expectations surrounding music-making. If their individual musical expectations, identities, and abilities are not supported by the communities and cultures in which they live their day-to-day lives, then they are susceptible to disappointment, failure, and resignation in the music classroom. In the same way in which musical vulnerability occurs at the interface between teachers' and pupils' conflicting musical expectations (see Section 4.2.2), so too does it occur at the volatile boundary between societal musical expectations and individual musical experiences.

## 7. Harnessing musical vulnerability: Conclusions and implications

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### 7.1. Revisiting Philip's experience

At the time of writing, it has been five years since I first taught Philip. His experience of KS3 classroom music lessons, introduced in Section 1.1, has stayed with me throughout that time. Every school in which I have taught and every teacher with whom I have spoken has reminded me that his experience was not an isolated one. His experience resonates with the conflict between Danielle and her pupils performing a song from *Moana*, in which teacher's and pupils' expectations stand at odds with one another (Section 4.2.2). It resonates with the nervous apprehension of John's pupil Simon, whose crippling fear of shame and embarrassment prevents him from playing his trombone in front of his peers (Section 4.2.2). And it resonates with the despairing and disheartened resignation of Claire's pupils Bertie and Thomas, when they have nothing to show for the time and effort they committed to their music-making (Section 4.4.2).

But I have also seen how experiences like Philip's are intimately bound up with the exciting opportunities, remarkable achievements, and uplifting friendships that can—and often, do—characterise classroom music-making. Had Philip's circumstances differed in even the smallest way, his sense of shortcoming might have been transformed into a sense of success akin to Bethany's Year 7 pupil learning the ukulele (Section 4.3.3). His defiance and disappointment could have been reshaped through enriching extra-curricular opportunities such as those on offer to Fynn's pupil Jack (Section 4.3.3). And the relational conflict between himself, his teachers, and his peers might have initiated the careful compromise and resilience cultivated by Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette during their small-group music-making (Section 6.4).

### 7.2. Reframing music education policy, pedagogy, and research

The lived experiences of all the teachers and pupils I interviewed and observed throughout this research project are testament to the urgent need for music education policy, pedagogy, and

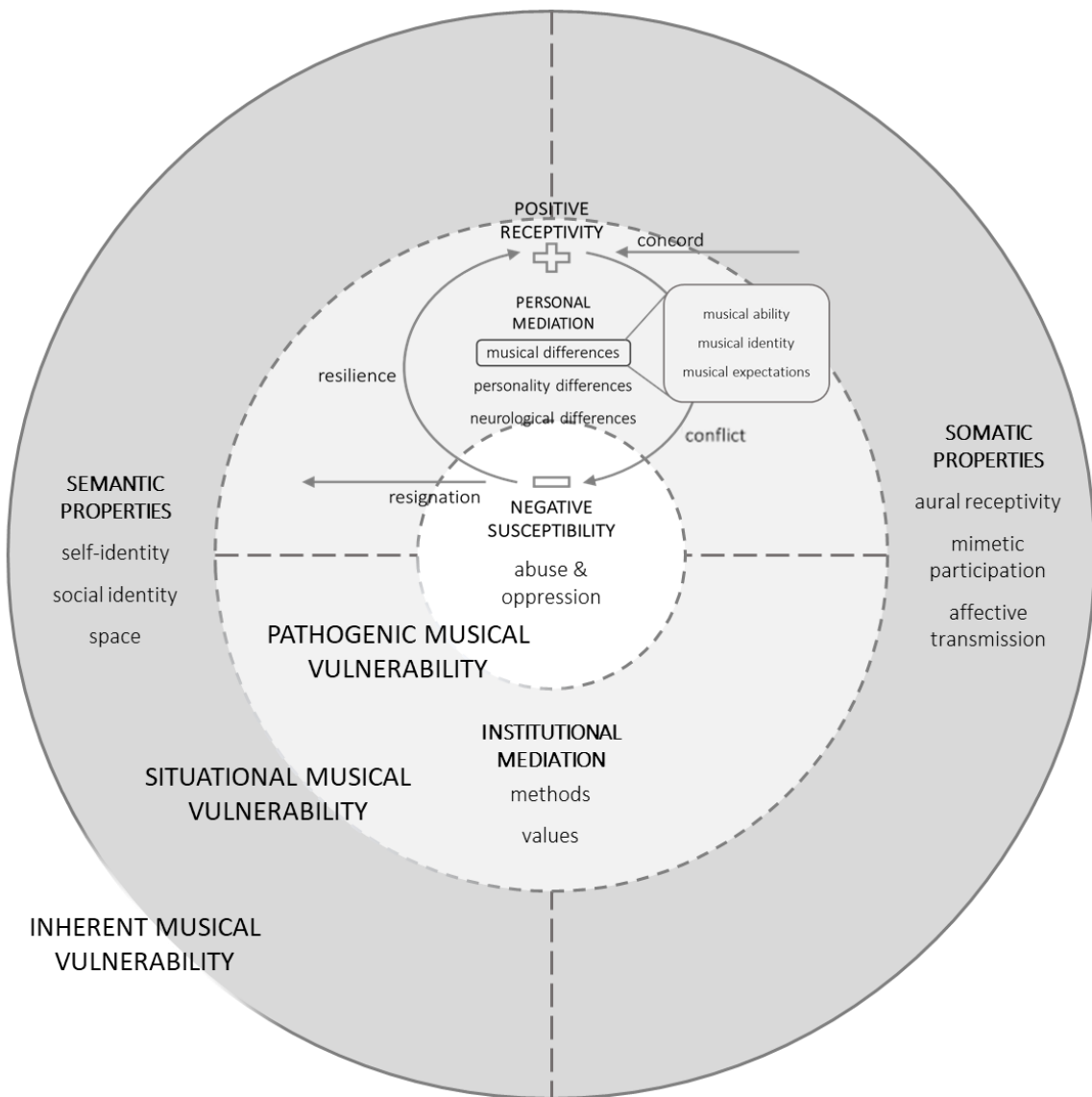
research to be reframed by an understanding of musical vulnerability. In Chapter 2, I drew on recent research in the field of vulnerability studies to define musical vulnerability as the inherent and situational openness to being affected by the semantic and somatic properties of music. Using Judith Butler's (1997) conceptualisation of injurious language, alongside more recent theorisations of the interconnection between susceptibility to harm and receptivity to intersubjectivity (A. Cole, 2016), I proposed that musical vulnerability could provide a valuable framework for fostering a realistic and holistic awareness of music's beneficial and detrimental effects. I thereby addressed the first of my research questions: *what is the place of musical vulnerability in music education and how can it be conceptualised?* With evidence from psychological and sociological studies (e.g., Cox, 2016; DeNora, 2013), I demonstrated how music's semantic properties—its delineation of self-identity, social identity, and space—and somatic properties—its embodiment through aural receptivity, mimetic participation, and affective transmission—could potentially contribute towards both positive and negative music-making experiences.

Employing the two-phase phenomenological ethnography outlined in Chapter 3, my research with secondary music teachers (Phase 1) and Year 8 pupils at East Fen High School (Phase 2) enabled me to construct a typology of the characteristics of musical vulnerability experienced in the KS3 music classroom. To answer my second research question—*to what extent is musical vulnerability experienced in the KS3 music classroom and how is it characterised?*—I built upon existing research into institutional methods, values, and oppressions (e.g., Allsup, 2016; A. Bull, 2019) to identify (inter)personal factors affecting musical vulnerability. These factors and their interactions with music's institutional mediation, semantic properties, and somatic properties are summarised in the typology in *Figure 7.1*.

As *Figure 7.1* illustrates, the composite textural-structural descriptions I analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 showed that teachers' recollections of both their pupils' and their own experiences aligned with my conceptualisation of musical vulnerability in Chapters 1 and 2. Pupils' experiences of vulnerability occurred both as positive receptivity associated with relational concord, such as for Fynn's Year 9 pupils learning about grime (Section 4.2.1), and as negative susceptibility associated with relational conflict, such as for Alice's pupils

composing in the style of *Six Drummers One Apartment* (Section 4.2.2). Occasions of receptivity and susceptibility were both characterised by close relationships with music’s semantic and somatic properties. Receptivity could quickly disintegrate into susceptibility if individuals came into conflict over musical, personality, or neurological differences, and could potentially result in distress or resignation, as for Fynn’s pupil Jack (Section 4.3.3) and Claire’s pupils Bertie and Thomas (Section 4.4.2). Yet susceptibility could also be transformed into receptivity when pupils were open to learning new musical skills, developing new social identities, and fostering resilient attitudes (cf. Section 4.4.1).

Figure 7.1. Conceptualising and characterising musical vulnerability



Although the teachers I interviewed in Phase 1 recalled similar past experiences to those of their current pupils, their own examples of musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom were somewhat different in scope. As indicated in *Figure 7.1*, their pre-established musical identities, abilities, and expectations influenced their receptivity and susceptibility to classroom music-making. Notable receptivity typically occurred only when novel opportunities were on offer, such as for Isabelle in her Gifted and Talented workshop (Section 5.3.4); more often, in Bethany's words, classroom music lessons 'weren't particularly interesting' (Section 5.3.4). Likewise, notable susceptibility of the kind described by Esther and John (Section 5.4.2) was usually attributed to a feeling of exclusion when outside the comfortable and welcoming space of the music classroom; inside the classroom it was more likely to be other pupils who experienced greatest susceptibility to failure, embarrassment, and resignation (Section 5.4.1).

In line with existing research into music teachers' identities and practices, my observations at East Fen High School described in Chapter 6 suggested that some teachers may be limited in their awareness of their pupils' individual musical identities, abilities, and expectations (Allsup, 2013). Teachers' own past encounters with musical vulnerability may lead to presumptions surrounding the competencies that should (or should not) be foregrounded in the classroom. For example, Miss Dean implicitly emphasised the importance of reading staff notation based on her own experience in infancy (Section 6.3.2.i). This could lead to the systemic perpetuation of exclusionary musical values and stereotypes (cf. Isbell, 2020; Matthews, 2015), which may be exacerbated by the extra-curricular demands and time limitations that prevent music teachers from coming to know their pupils in a meaningful way (cf. Section 6.3).

However, my focus group discussion with Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette (Section 6.5) reiterated how mitigating susceptibility to conflicting values and expectations in the music classroom may not be simply a matter of teacher education or time management. These pupils' Utopian ideals of 'real' musicianship and 'perfect' group work were fundamentally grounded in sociocultural notions of mastery and invulnerability that extend far beyond the four walls of their KS3 music classroom. Even following their realisation of Ethan's musical capability, they maintained that he lacked sufficient skill in instrumental performance and reading staff

notation to be considered an asset in ‘real’ or ‘perfect’ music-making. Their ingrained beliefs about musical abilities, identities, and expectations did not just mirror those of Miss Dean, but were shaped by lifetimes of musical experiences mediated by institutional values and methods, interpersonal concord and conflict, and personal differences and preferences.

Unlike present neoliberal discourse on ‘the power of music’ for academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development (Hallam, 2015), the concept of musical vulnerability accounts for the potentially beneficial and detrimental effects of music-making, and furthers existing understandings of the relationship between positive and negative experiences in the KS3 music classroom context. However, as illustrated by Ethan, Greg, Iniya, and Juliette, it also offers a valuable insight into the entanglement between political, sociocultural, and educational perspectives upon music-making. This has significant implications for music education policy, pedagogy, and research that I discuss in Section 7.4 in response to my third research question: *how can pupils and teachers in the KS3 music classroom mitigate negative musical vulnerability and harness positive musical vulnerability?* But it also elucidates some of the limitations of my present research, as I outline in the following Section 7.3.

### 7.3. Limitations in a changing sociocultural landscape

Since I began this research project, the sociocultural landscape in the United Kingdom has changed almost beyond recognition. Worldwide, there have been seismic shifts in politics, economics, and environmentalism. News headlines have been dominated by supremacist nationalism, right-wing extremism, human rights abuses, war crimes, supply chain disruption, anthropogenic climate change, and global health crises. Arts, culture, and education organisations and initiatives have changed beyond recognition—and some have disappeared altogether (Biesta, 2020; Walzer, 2021). The precarity, fragility, and interdependency of human life has been driven home by ubiquitous societal trauma, and, as in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, the concept of vulnerability has taken on new significance.

The emergence of these societal traumas—and their concomitant personal impacts—has posed two primary limitations to my present research. First, and perhaps with little need

for elaboration, have been a number of practical limitations. As detailed in Section 3.5, all my empirical research had to be adapted in line with national guidance relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did this pose logistical problems, but it meant that all in-person research I was able to carry out required extra precautions and was fraught with anxiety. Time constraints and travel restrictions significantly reduced my sample size, meaning I was unable to undertake comparative observations across diverse geographical regions, schools with more varied demographics, or different year groups or classes. Any opportunities for longitudinal, participatory, or action research were inhibited (cf. Laurence, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and I was not able to spend as much time coming to know teachers and pupils as I had hoped (cf. Høffding, 2018). Associated research activities were also severely affected: all conferences and seminars were cancelled, postponed, or moved to virtual platforms; all university teaching switched to online delivery; and all libraries were closed. Opportunities for academic networking and collaboration were therefore few and far between, although I am grateful to have had the chance to engage with other researchers from around the world at online events.

However, although the practical limitations posed by the COVID-19 restrictions reduced the breadth and generalisability of the conclusions of my research, working with a select group of teachers and pupils did have some advantages. Investing time in eliciting detailed interviews, establishing a close relationship with one school, and gaining an in-depth insight into four pupils' music-making experiences facilitated much greater phenomenological rigour and comprehensive analysis than might otherwise have been possible. I am hopeful that the rich characterisations of musical vulnerability that I have presented will serve as a robust foundation for future research into the beneficial and detrimental effects of classroom music-making.

The second limitation to my present research concerns the dramatic explosion in scholarship relating to current societal crises, including on themes of vulnerability, trauma, and care. When I began this project, vulnerability was an under-researched subject, especially in the field of music education. Yet since then, significant publications in the field have tackled subjects including division and hatred (Kallio, 2021a), the politics of diversity (Kallio et al., 2021), and trauma-informed pedagogy (Bradley & Hess, 2022b). Wider literature on radical

care has also burgeoned (e.g., Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Hobart & Kneese, 2020), and issues including vulnerability, necropolitics, music-induced harm, and trauma-informed care have begun to attract increasing attention in music education and psychology (e.g., Kanellopoulos, 2021; Niknafs, 2021b; M. J. Silverman et al., 2020; Walzer, 2021).

While it has been beyond the scope of this thesis to address each of these themes in detail, it is my hope that the sudden influx of research into the potential benefits and detriments of music education will bear testament to the timely conceptualisation and characterisation of musical vulnerability. In light of ongoing sociocultural changes and societal crises, the present moment should offer a powerful impetus for recognising the ubiquity of trauma and the pervasiveness of vulnerability (Bradley & Hess, 2022a). Pupils and teachers in the KS3 music classroom—like communities across the world—have suffered irreparable anxiety, isolation, and grief over the past several years. But through raising greater awareness of musical vulnerability, the music classroom could become a space ‘to grieve and process, while simultaneously honing a eudaimonic pedagogy that dignifies the humanity of pursuing the arts and lifelong learning’ (Walzer, 2021, p. 2).

To close this thesis, I therefore suggest how policymakers, teachers, pupils, and researchers in music education could foster a *critical pedagogy of care* to address everyday experiences of positive musical receptivity and negative musical susceptibility. I illustrate how such an approach could both enrich music education provision through accounting for individuals’ musical differences, and open up a safe space to engage with music’s institutional, interpersonal, and personal mediation through symbolic, non-threatening experiences (cf. Cross, 2005; DeNora, 2013; Hess, 2022). In Section 7.4.1 I outline how music education policy conveying a philosophy of ‘less is more’ could provide a secure foundation for critical reflection and care-full learning in the classroom. In Section 7.4.2 I provide examples of practical approaches that could engage both teachers and pupils in enacting a critical pedagogy of care. Finally, in Section 7.4.3 I emphasise the importance of future phenomenological, ethnographic, and action research into musical vulnerability. I propose that the co-construction of knowledge between researchers, teachers, and pupils could establish a more comprehensive



account of the potential for curricular and co-curricular music education to contribute to individuals' rights to continued music-making throughout the lifespan (Wright, 2019).

#### 7.4. Implications in a changing sociocultural landscape

Theorisations of both critical pedagogy and pedagogies of care have attracted significant critique over recent years. As I described in Section 2.3.4, critical pedagogy has come under scrutiny for its potential to reinforce dominant social hierarchies, foreground privileged voices, and undermine free debate through invalidating right-leaning values and perspectives (e.g., Hess, 2017; Perrine, 2017). Likewise, in Section 2.4.1 I highlighted how pedagogies of care risk constructing a monolithic and hegemonic notion of care, which inappropriately discriminates between those who do and do not deserve care and those who can or cannot take on the role of caregiver (e.g., Kallio, 2021b; Niknafs, 2021a). Adopting a *naïve* pedagogy of care has the potential to reconstruct the inadequate, neoliberal notion of vulnerability that feminist scholars in vulnerability studies have rightly discredited (Gilson, 2014; Laugier, 2016), and to position teachers in unsustainable and stressful roles as educators and counsellors (Kelchtermans, 1996; M. Silverman, 2012; T. D. Smith, 2022).

I propose, therefore, that addressing musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom requires the development of a *critical* pedagogy of care that surpasses the limitations of both critical pedagogy and pedagogies of care. Drawing on the critical consciousness espoused by Freirean pedagogy (Spruce, 2012), and Nel Noddings' (2013) notion of dialogic care, a critical pedagogy of care should employ meaningful dialogue to enable both teachers and pupils to reflect *critically*, 'listen intently[,] and engage with the other person beyond a trivial conversation' (Walzer, 2021, p. 6). Without reinscribing hegemonic hierarchies, teachers and pupils should be able to mutually recognise and reflect upon each other's personal and interpersonal vulnerabilities, seeking out *caring* 'learning principles and practices that consider the difficult aspects of life that may affect routines of teaching and learning so that they do not inflict more harm or create further marginalization' (Bradley & Hess, 2022a, p. 9).

However, a critical pedagogy of care should, at all costs, avoid co-opting care as a strategy of invulnerability or 'self-optimization' (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 4). Framing care

from a critical perspective means embracing it as radical, disruptive, and agonistic. Radical care prioritises solidarity and coalition over charity and obligation, envisioning care as collective, diverse, and able to extend across intersectional boundaries (Hobart & Kneese, 2020; Michaeli, 2017). Disruptive care carries with fragility, unease, and failure. Acting like ‘a pedagogy of discomfort’ (Singh, 2018, p. 152), it teaches the importance of dwelling with uncomfortable conflict and painful susceptibility in order to ‘participate in new emergences’ and ‘new possibilities for nonmasterful relations’ (pp. 174–175). Infused with agonistic recognition,

such pedagogy is doubly disruptive. It unsettles inwardly, with its call to confront our own implication in ongoing norms and structures that oppress; it also unsettles outwardly, with its provocative challenge to dominant cultural values of self-sufficiency, self-advancement and mastery. (Schick, 2016, p. 26)

Within the context of music education, a critical pedagogy of care therefore has the potential to avoid passive advocacy, pity-full sympathy, and practical stasis. Grounded in *feasible* methods and *praxial* philosophy, a critical pedagogy of care should equip policymakers, teachers, pupils, and researchers alike to harness musical vulnerability for ethical outcomes: to care sincerely for experiences of susceptibility and resignation; to provoke responsive resilience and receptivity in the face of challenges and trauma; and to sit patiently with conflict and failure, acknowledging its potential to prompt new perspectives and facilitate new opportunities.

### 7.4.1. *Implications for policymakers*

Utilising an understanding of musical vulnerability for beneficial effect in the KS3 music classroom necessitates a straightforward and feasible policy framework. As I observed at East Fen High School, elaborate curriculum guidelines (e.g., DfE, 2021a) and standardised cross-curricular assessment drawing on measurements such as the PISA and Progress 8 (e.g., EFHS, 2019) threaten to complicate and overstretch the capacity of (even well-equipped) music departments. Short units of work and infrequent lessons prevent teachers and pupils coming

to know each other well enough to work effectively together, as highlighted by Iniya's comment during our focus group: 'the first three lessons we spent fighting, and then when we finally actually got together, we had quite a little amount of time to actually get through [the work]' (Section 6.5.2). Similarly, assessing pupils' music-making in the same way as for other school subjects risks promulgating unhealthy attitudes towards musical ability and identity. As Greg and Ethan suggested in their discussion about being 'smart' at music—'we're in top set maths mate! Come on. [...] Greg, we're in bottom set English' (Section 6.5.2)—assessing music like mathematics or English may imply that musicianship is equivalent to, and inseparable from, academic proficiency.

This calls for music education policymakers to make *more* time to meet *fewer* expectations, that are assessed using non-hegemonic, subject-specific criteria (e.g., Fautley, 2015).<sup>41</sup> In this way, pupils would have more time to learn to navigate the confusing norms and behaviours expected in the music classroom (see Section 6.2), less likelihood of encountering contradictory or conflicting musical expectations from week to week (see Section 6.3), and a greater understanding of the differences between the roles of music-making skills and academic skills in their everyday lives.

In some respects, this 'less is more' philosophy is already encapsulated in England's current National Curriculum for Music (2013), in which flexible guidelines offer schools the option of implementing 'their own local curricula designed to interact with the National Curriculum, maintaining accountability whilst also fostering critical, innovative, and autonomous pedagogical approaches' (Bate, 2020, p. 12). However, the growing demand for prescriptive curriculum models (DfE, 2021a), rigorous and up-to-date policies for local music provision (DfE, 2021b), and models of good practice and evidence-based approaches for the post-pandemic 'recovery curriculum' (DfE, 2021c), suggests an ongoing retreat away from the flexibility encouraged by the National Curriculum.

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<sup>41</sup> For further discussion of the possibilities of using ipsative assessment for evaluating classroom music-making, see MacGregor (forthcoming).

#### 7.4.2. *Implications for teachers and pupils*

If curricular flexibility were to be re-established in forthcoming music education policy, teachers and pupils would have greater space to respond to both the opportunities and challenges posed by musical vulnerability in the KS3 music classroom, adopting a critical and care-full lens. Decelerating the pace of work and setting consistent and realistic targets could allow more time to establish relational concord—between pupils and with their teacher—and therefore enhance musical receptivity. Even when relational conflict takes place, a praxial approach offering time and space to establish empathetic understanding and foster resilience is more likely to encourage musical receptivity. Situations such as the ridicule of Danielle’s pupils performing a song from *Moana*, or Maddy storming out of Lucy’s samba lesson (Section 4.2.2), could be mitigated without the concern that pupils might fall behind or fail to meet learning expectations.

However, adopting a more comfortable classroom pace and setting appropriate targets requires proactive differentiation, which can only take place when time and space has been given over for pupils and their teacher to get to know each other. Typically, differentiation is associated with meeting the requirements of SEN pupils (such as Lucy’s pupil Stephen, who has a dedicated teaching assistant; see Section 4.3.3) or those identified as Gifted and Talented (such as Isabelle when she was a pupil; see Section 5.3.4). Yet this can be ineffective, since music teachers are often under-educated on how SEN may affect classroom music-making (e.g., Grimsby, 2022) and lack the resources to provide for more musically-experienced pupils within mixed-ability classes (Hallam, 1998; cf. Section 5.2.1). Appropriate differentiation, therefore, needs to cater for all individuals in the classroom. As I illustrated in Sections 4.3 and 5.2, *all* pupils and teachers have musical, personality, and neurological differences that affect their music-making. Their existing musical abilities, identities, and expectations differ depending on their prior musical experiences and imagined musical futures.

In the case of Danielle’s pupils performing an extract from *Moana* (Section 4.2.2), active differentiation might have meant making time for critical appraisal of the girls’ music-making. Danielle might have focussed on providing feedback on the ‘really nice’ and ‘really impressive’ aesthetic aspects of their performance, or asked genuine questions about why they had not

followed her instructions, what they hoped to achieve instead, and whether they would appreciate more time to work on the project. If it transpired that they had misunderstood the assignment, the problem could easily have been resolved. But likewise, if it transpired that they were especially passionate about creating covers of Disney music, Danielle could have facilitated new avenues for them to pursue their self-identified musical interests in curricular or extra-curricular opportunities.

In the case of Lucy's pupil Maddy (Section 4.2.2), active differentiation might have involved setting explicitly praxial, sociomusical expectations, rather than aesthetic ones. In the same way in which Georgina prescribed a specific group role to engage the quietest pupil in one of her classes (Section 4.3.2), Maddy's group could have been tasked with re-integrating Maddy without alienating her. They could have been assessed on whether they were able to compose a new instrumental part for her, in keeping with the work she had already done with them. Alternatively, or in addition, Maddy could have been challenged to interact with her group with maturity and self-control—perhaps encouraging them in their performance even if she personally felt unable to join in. She could even have designed her own alternative, individual activity in case she became overwhelmed by working with her peers, thereby having a 'right of refusal' should group work become too traumatic (Hess, 2022, p. 29). In such instances, even if Maddy or her group had not achieved an explicitly 'musical' learning objective, managing their relational dynamics could have begun to espouse musical receptivity, alleviate musical susceptibility, and cultivate 'the positive transformation of [their] lives and situations' (Elliott & Silverman, 2017, p. 41).

As these examples demonstrate, implementing a critical pedagogy of care in the music classroom need not be overly burdensome or contribute towards teachers' fatigue, burnout, or stress (T. D. Smith, 2022). Rather, drawing on basic principles such as those summarised in *Table 7.1*, teachers and pupils could develop collective and intimate communities of care (Lapidaki, 2020; Michaeli, 2017) grounded in well-established practices of consulting the pupil voice, facilitating democratic engagement, and promoting dialogic discussion (Spruce, 2015; Woodford, 2005). To implement such principles effectively may require shifts towards smaller music classes or co-teaching arrangements, so that teachers and pupils have more time to get to

*Table 7.1. Adopting a critical pedagogy of care in the music classroom*

Comfortable pace	✓ Do we have enough time to get to know each other?
	✓ Do we have enough time for music-making?
	✓ Do we have enough time for critical evaluation?
Active differentiation	✓ How can we get to know each other?
	✓ What are my musical & learning preferences?
	✓ What are others' musical & learning preferences?
Realistic expectations	✓ What is the aim of our music-making?
	✓ How can we cater for each other's musical & learning preferences?
	✓ How will we be assessed?
Empathy & resilience	✓ How can I contribute using my musical & learning preferences?
	✓ How can we encourage relational concord?
	✓ How can we overcome relational conflict?

know each other, greater scope for differentiation, and increased flexibility to cater for specific needs. However, it should also be feasible to apply the same principles even in classrooms where time, space, and resources may otherwise be lacking.

#### *7.4.3. Implications for researchers*

There are many important benefits to adopting a comfortable pace, active differentiation, realistic expectations, and empathy and resilience in the KS3 music classroom. However, in light of the embedded sociocultural ideologies that affect both teachers' and pupils' attitudes towards classroom music-making (see Section 6.5.3), it is also worth asking whether more radical curriculum changes may be necessary to instigate wider-reaching transformation. If negative musical susceptibility typically emerges at the interface between conflicting musical expectations in the classroom—including those relating to sound and silence, participation and preparation, inclusivity and exclusivity, and right and wrong—then it needs to be considered how individuals' different musical expectations can be accommodated. This does not mean downplaying the teacher's role in determining learning objectives or introducing pupils to new musics. Rather, it means asking pupils to reflect critically on what they hope to gain from their music education, and trusting and honouring their choices (Hess, 2022).

Currently, 'constructing music as a school subject introduces questions about the role and function of music learning in the future lives of students' (Mantie, 2022, p. 217). Music

education advocates place music on a par with mathematics and English, celebrating its purported role in ‘the social justice case for an academic curriculum’ (Gibb, 2015), and, by extension, implying that it will occupy an equivalent place in pupils’ future lives. Yet musical literacy will never serve the same purpose as mathematical literacy, and difficulty playing an instrument will not have the same ramifications as difficulty reading a book. This is not to say that music should not be a school subject; on the contrary, ‘without some form of music learning in schools, future opportunities for well-being are inequitable’ (Mantie, 2022, p. 222). But there should be no need to pretend that music is not different to other subjects, or that it does not encompass a whole gamut of contrasting, confusing, and sometimes contradictory values and expectations.

I therefore suggest that future music education research should investigate the possibility of reshaping music as a ‘structured’, *co-curricular* subject (Mantie, 2022, p. 221).<sup>42</sup> In the same way in which I have questioned the abundance of politicised advocacy for music’s beneficial effects upon academic achievement, health and wellbeing, and social development, I believe that there is a strong case to be made for repurposing classroom music education. Given the multifarious individual and musical differences at play in the music classroom, and the diverse hopes and expectations that individuals hold for their future music-making, it is only right that those invested in music education consider how best to care for individuals’ rich and varied, realistic and idealistic, and present and future musical identities.

I postulate that a structured co-curricular music programme would—as is presently the case in the United Kingdom—remain compulsory for all pupils until the age of 14. Like curriculum subjects, music would have a fixed position in the school timetable. But unlike curriculum subjects, not all pupils would have to engage in it in the same way. In *Appendix 5* I offer a model of what this might look like in practice, based on a school with similar resources to East Fen (two to three classroom music teachers, two or more peripatetic teachers, classroom

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<sup>42</sup> Here I use the term ‘co-curricular’—as opposed to ‘extra-curricular’—to emphasise the nature of being ‘together with’, ‘in common with’, or ‘equal with’ the normal curriculum (co-, OED, 2022), as opposed to ‘outside’ (and by implication, not essential to) the normal curriculum (extra-, OED, 2021). This is in line with current practice at some independent schools in the United Kingdom, where participation in co-curricular sport or activity programmes is compulsory.

teachers in other performing arts, and two or more sixth-form music pupils). At the beginning of each term, pupils would be offered a selection of music-making activities in accordance with the capabilities of the department. These could range from small-group instrumental lessons or rehearsals, to using Digital Audio Workstations, to researching historical subjects relating to GCSE music. Not all would require facilitation by a classroom music teacher: some could be co-ordinated by peripatetic teachers, performing arts teachers, other teachers with personal musical experience, or sixth-form music pupils. Following an initial taster session, KS3 pupils would be able to choose their preferred activity based on their past musical experiences and their imagined musical futures. If some activities proved especially popular (or unpopular) they could be adapted accordingly, perhaps splitting into multiple groups, adopting pupils' suggestions, or being replaced by other activities that would better suit pupils' preferences.

In theory, a co-curricular model like this would present more possibilities for decelerating the pace of learning, differentiating musical expectations according to individuals' needs and preferences, and assessing pupils' music-making using relevant, subject-specific criteria. Pupils who might want to take GCSE music would have the chance to learn relevant content, whereas those who would rather learn to sing in a choir or compete in a Battle of the Bands would not be tied to the same academic expectations or assessments. Hypothetically, a classroom music teacher with a specific interest in music psychology could run a programme on music and mindfulness for Year 9 pupils approaching exams, while the Design and Technology teacher who dabbles in music production for a local amateur rock band could work with pupils interested in using Cubase ([www.steinberg.net/cubase/](http://www.steinberg.net/cubase/)).

This kind of model would, without doubt, incur significant financial and time-related costs, and have ramifications for assessment, reporting, and Ofsted or ISI inspections. Timetabling that guarantees co-curricular music-making every week could be detrimental to other subjects, and music departments may have to redistribute or invest in new resources. Assessment procedures would need to be overhauled, and planning would be required to ensure that co-curricular provision would meet accountability measures enforced by the school inspectorates. This would most likely be feasible in well-resourced academies like East Fen—or



in independent schools with longer school days and existing programmes of co-curricular activities—but would, therefore, run the risk of aggravating existing hierarchies of privilege.

Nevertheless, implementing structured co-curricular music provision might not be beyond the realm of possibility. Past and present efforts to ringfence funding and offer detailed music education policies (e.g., DfE, 2021a; DfE & DCMS, 2011; Music Mark, 2022) suggest that time and money can, and will in the future, be put aside for classroom music-making. When it is, policymakers, teachers, pupils, and researchers need to have considered how best to use it.

Making the most of resources available for developing music education provision calls for further rigorous research into teachers' and pupils' experiences of classroom music-making. As I demonstrate in this thesis, phenomenological, ethnographic methods have the potential to uncover the depth of individuals' lived experiences while avoiding over-generalised, positivistic analyses supporting naïve advocacy for music's benefits. Increasingly, music education scholars are turning to phenomenological approaches to investigate complex musical experiences such as happiness (Mantie & Talbot, 2020), engagement (Jääskeläinen, forthcoming), and egotism (Coppola, in review). Such studies reinforce the value of detailed, reductionist analysis, and underline the need for more research into the fundamental nature of making music as affective, embodied, and vulnerable beings.

Researchers' growing interest in phenomenological, ethnographic methods could, in future, underpin larger-scale, schools-based action research exploring the advantages and disadvantages of curricular and co-curricular music-making. As in major projects such as Musical Futures, the evaluation of possible curricular or structured co-curricular programmes would require input from teachers and pupils from the earliest pilot studies to the final review stages (e.g., Hallam et al., 2017, 2018). Through facilitating in-depth co-construction of knowledge between researchers, teachers, and pupils (Cain & Burnard, 2012), future action research could offer a rich insight into how classroom music-making could be developed to account for individuals' lived experiences of musical vulnerability, as mediated by institutional, interpersonal, and personal factors. In all its chaotic confusion and distinctive difference, the KS3 music classroom could, therefore, become a space where musical being—in all its diversity—is cultivated and celebrated.

## Appendix 1: Phase 1

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### 1.1. Phase 1 interview schedule

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<i>Interview questions</i>	<i>Relationship to musical vulnerability</i>
1. Can you remember a time when you were positively affected by music during a classroom music lesson in KS3? (Try to remember a single instance or event.)	<i>Inherent susceptibility to be affected by music in positive ways (e.g., when music made you happy or you felt included in a musical group).</i>
2. Describe the instance or event. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the surroundings like?</li> <li>Who else (if anyone) was there?</li> <li>What was the music like?</li> <li>How were you engaging with the music?</li> </ol>	<i>Situational vulnerability—vulnerability is often associated with specific circumstances.</i>
3. How did this experience make you feel? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did your body feel? How did it affect your hearing? How did you behave as a result?</li> <li>How did you feel about your musical identity? How did it make you feel about your (sense of) self? How did it make you feel towards others?</li> </ol>	<i>Music's somatic properties and phenomenological effects. Music's semantic properties and citational effects.</i>
4. Can you remember a time when you were negatively affected by music during a classroom music lesson in KS3? (Try to remember a single instance or event.)	<i>Inherent susceptibility to be affected by music in negative ways (e.g., when music made you sad or you felt isolated from a musical group).</i>
5. Describe the instance or event. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the surroundings like?</li> <li>Who else (if anyone) was there?</li> <li>What was the music like?</li> <li>How were you engaging with the music?</li> </ol>	<i>Situational vulnerability—vulnerability is often associated with specific circumstances.</i>
6. How did this experience make you feel? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did your body feel? How did it affect your hearing? How did you behave as a result?</li> <li>How did you feel about your musical identity? How did it make you feel about your (sense of) self? How did it make you feel towards others?</li> </ol>	<i>Music's somatic properties and phenomenological effects. Music's semantic properties and citational effects.</i>

## 1.2. Phase 1 teacher information booklet



 Department of Music  
Researcher: Mrs Elizabeth H. MacGregor  
Supervisor: Professor Stephanie E. Pitts

# Investigating the positive and negative effects of music in the Key Stage 3 music classroom

Information for teachers (Phase 1)

You are being invited to participate in a research study into the positive and negative effects of music in the Key Stage 3 music classroom. Before you decide whether or not you would like to participate, please read the following information about why the research is being done and what it involves. Please feel free to ask any questions if you would like any additional information or clarification. Thank you for reading!

### What is this research for?

This research project is being carried out as part of my PhD in Music Education, and will take place between May 2020 and July 2021. Using interviews and classroom observations I will be researching how music affects pupils and teachers during Key Stage 3 music lessons, such as how it affects sense of identity, confidence, inclusion, and learning.

### Why have I been chosen, and do I have to take part?

The first phase of my research project involves interviews with 16 teachers from different schools across East Anglia. I have contacted you because I am interested in hearing about your experience at your particular school.

It is completely up to you whether or not you would like to take part in this research project. If you decide that you would like to take part, please contact me using the contact details on page 5 and I will send you an online consent form to complete. If you decide to take part but you change your mind later, you will be able to withdraw from the research any time until July 2021. Please contact me if you decide you would like to withdraw.

2

### What will happen if I do take part?

If you decide to take part in this research, you will first be asked to fill in a brief questionnaire about your experience as a pupil and a teacher in the music classroom (including the secondary school you attended; the music provision of your secondary school; your decision to become a music teacher; and your current school and its music provision).

You will then be asked to participate in an individual interview about your experiences of Key Stage 3 classroom music lessons. This interview will last between one and two hours, and will involve open questions allowing you to talk freely about your experiences. I will ask you to describe your own experiences as a pupil at secondary school (including specific instances that you remember about when you were positively and negatively affected by music), and your current experiences as a secondary school teacher (including specific instances when you or your pupils have been positively and negatively affected by music).

Your interview will take place at a time and location convenient to you, such as at your school or home, or at a central location such as a café. If your interview takes place during COVID-19 social distancing, then it will be carried out using video-conferencing software such as Skype or Zoom. With your consent, your interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and then analysed. I will then send the interview transcription and my initial analysis to you so that you are able to add or remove anything you feel should be included or excluded.



3

### What are the possible benefits or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for participants in this research project, I hope that the findings of the completed research will be of long-term benefit to the music education profession, as teachers become better equipped to harness music's positive effects in the classroom and mitigate against its negative effects.

There are also no immediate risks for participants in this research project, though I do appreciate that the interview and checking of the interview transcript could be time-consuming. If you are concerned that involvement in this research project would be too great a commitment, please feel free to choose not to participate or to withdraw if necessary.

### How will my information be used?

All the data collected as a part of this research project will be kept strictly confidential and stored securely. All personal data will be pseudonymised (individuals' names will be changed).

With your consent, the data from this research project will contribute to my completed PhD, and may also be used in future publications or academic presentations, and shared with other researchers. All these publications will be accessible online, and you are also welcome to request access to your personal data and its analysis at any stage during the research process. For further information about confidentiality, data protection, and ethical approval, please see the details on page 6.



4

### What if I have a question or a complaint?

Please feel free to get in touch with me at any time during the research project if you have any questions, require any further information, or wish to make a complaint. I can be reached by email – [ehmagregor1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ehmagregor1@sheffield.ac.uk) – or by telephone – 07843 819087.

Should I be unavailable for any reason, please get in touch with my supervisor, Professor Stephanie Pitts – [s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk).

If you have a complaint which you feel I have not handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Head of the Department of Music, Dr Simon Keegan-Phipps, who can escalate the complaint as necessary – [s.keegan-hipps@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.keegan-hipps@sheffield.ac.uk). Please consult the University Privacy Notice (details on page 6) if you have a complaint specifically related to the use of any personal data.

### What do I do next?

Thank you for reading this information! Please keep hold of this information booklet for your personal reference, and if you have any further questions about the research project, please do contact me.



Please now let me know whether or not you would be interested in taking part in the research project. If you would like to participate, I will send you an online consent form to complete. This consent form should be returned to me **within two weeks** of having received the information booklet.



Thank you again for your time, and for your contribution to this research project. It is much appreciated!

### Keeping your information safe and secure

#### Confidentiality:

1. All data collected as part of this research project, including audio-recordings, will be stored securely on the University of Sheffield networked filestore, which meets the standards required by the University of Sheffield's research and ethics policies and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data will only be accessible to the researcher and the research supervisor.
2. All personal data will be pseudonymised, and identifiable personal data will be destroyed upon completion of the project in 2023. After the destruction of identifiable personal data, the anonymised data will be made available to other researchers through the University of Sheffield's online data repository, ORDA.
3. The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study, and will therefore be responsible for looking after personal information and using it properly.
4. Upon completion, the findings of this research project will be available to access via [etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/](https://www.whiterose.ac.uk/), and any associated publications will be accessible at [eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/).

#### General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):

1. The legal basis being applied in order to process personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). When interviews or conversations involve discussion and recording of information relating to sensitive issues (such as ethnicity and religion), the use of this sensitive personal data will be deemed 'necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes' (Article 9(2)(j)).

2. Further information can be found in the University of Sheffield's Privacy Notice:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/governance/data-protection/privacy/general>

#### Ethical approval and funding:

1. This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Music.
2. This project is being funded by a University of Sheffield Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University Post Graduate Research Committee Scholarship.

### 1.3. Phase 1 teacher consent form

1. Informed consent:

- I give my permission to be involved in this research project, as described in the accompanying Information Booklet. I confirm that I have been informed of the research process and am aware that I retain the right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the project until July 2021.
- I give my permission to be audio-recorded during interview, and I understand that any personal data collected will be stored and shared in accordance with current data protection legislation, as described in the accompanying information booklet.

2. Name:

*By entering your name below, you are effectively providing your signature to authorise this consent form.*

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3. Date:

---

## 1.4. Phase 1 teacher questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Contact email:
3. Contact telephone:

### *Your current school*

4. What is your current job?
5. What is your current school?
6. What kind of school is your current school?  
 State comprehensive       State grammar       Special  
 Private preparatory       Private senior       Academy  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Briefly describe the music provision for KS3 at your current school*

7. How much time does each class spend in classroom music lessons each week?
8. What is the provision for instrumental or vocal lessons outside the classroom?
9. What is the provision for extra-curricular music activities?
10. Any additional comments:

### *Your childhood school*

11. What school(s) did you attend between the ages of 11 and 14?
12. What kind of school was your school?  
 State comprehensive       State grammar       Special  
 Private preparatory       Private senior       Academy  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Briefly describe the music provision for KS3 at your childhood school(s)*

13. How much time did each class spend in classroom music lessons each week?
14. What was the provision for instrumental or vocal lessons outside the classroom?
15. What is the provision for extra-curricular music activities?
16. Any additional comments:

### *Becoming a music teacher*

17. What music qualifications did you pursue after the age of 14?  
 GCSE       BTEC       O-level       A-level  
 ABRSM exams (or equivalent)       ABRSM diplomas (or equivalent)  
Undergraduate music degree at:       university       music college  
Postgraduate music degree at:       university       music college  
Teaching qualification at:       university       college  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_
18. Briefly describe your decision to become a music teacher.

## Appendix 2: Phase 2

### 2.1. Phase 2 headteacher information booklet



  
 Department of Music  
 Researcher: Mrs Elizabeth H. MacGregor  
 Supervisor: Professor Stephanie E. Pitts

# Investigating the positive and negative effects of music in the Key Stage 3 music classroom

Information for headteachers



Your school is being invited to participate in a research study into the positive and negative effects of music in the Key Stage 3 music classroom. Before you decide whether or not your school would like to participate, please read the following information about why the research is being done and what it involves. Please feel free to ask any questions if you would like any additional information or clarification. Thank you for reading!

**What is this research for?**  
 This research project is being carried out as part of my PhD in Music Education, and will take place between May 2020 and July 2021. Using interviews and classroom observations I will be researching how music affects pupils and teachers during Key Stage 3 music lessons, such as how it affects sense of identity, confidence, inclusion, and learning.

**Why has my school been chosen?**  
 Following an interview with one of your school's music teachers during the first phase of my research project, I have contacted you because I am interested in observing and interviewing pupils at your school about their particular experience of Key Stage 3 classroom music lessons.

2



**Does my school have to take part?**

It is completely up to you whether or not you wish your school to take part in this research project. If you decide that your school would like to take part, please contact me using the contact details on page 5 and I will send you an online consent form to complete. If you decide that your school would like to take part but you change your mind later, please contact me and you will be able to withdraw from the research any time until March 2021.

**What will happen if my school does take part?**

If you decide that your school would like to take part in this research, I will undertake regular classroom observations and informal interviews with one Key Stage 3 class in their weekly classroom music lessons during the 2020/21 academic year. These observations and interviews will take place either in person or online, in order to comply with your school's COVID-19 regulations and a risk assessment approved by the University of Sheffield.

During classroom observations I will watch each lesson, take fieldnotes, and participate with class activities when appropriate. Following my initial observations, I will interview pupils in the participating class about their experience of classroom music lessons. In consultation with the music teacher, these interviews will take place during classroom music lessons, either as whole-class activities, small-group discussions, or individual interviews. They will involve open questions about specific instances when pupils were positively or negatively affected by music during a lesson, including what the music was like and how it made them feel.

With the consent of pupils and their parents / guardians, interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and then analysed. I will then present my initial analysis to pupils so that they can add or remove anything they feel should be included in or excluded from their accounts.

**What are the possible benefits or risks of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for schools in this research project, I hope that the findings of the completed research will be of long-term benefit to the music education profession, as teachers become better equipped to harness music's positive effects in the classroom and mitigate against its negative effects.

There are also no immediate risks for schools in this research project, though I do appreciate that spending time facilitating researcher observations and interviews – especially with COVID-19 restrictions in place – could seem disruptive to normal school routines. Though I will endeavour to minimise any possible disruption caused by my research, if you are concerned that involvement in this research project would be too disruptive, please feel free not to participate or to withdraw if necessary.

If pupils and / or their parents / guardians do not give consent for their involvement in the research project, their participation in classroom music lessons will not be adversely affected. Although I will be present in lessons taking observational notes, I will record data only from pupils who have been given permission to be involved in the research study.

**How will my school's information be used?**

All the data collected as a part of this research project will be kept strictly confidential and stored securely. All personal data will be pseudonymised (individuals' names will be changed). With your consent, the data from this research project will contribute to my completed PhD, and may also be used in future publications or academic presentations, and shared with other researchers. All these publications will be available online should you wish to access them. For further information about confidentiality, data protection, and safeguarding, please see the details on page 6.

**What if I have a question or complaint?**

Please feel free to get in touch with me at any time during the research project if you have any questions, require any further information, or wish to make a complaint. I can be reached by email – [ehmacgregor1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ehmacgregor1@sheffield.ac.uk) – or by telephone – 07843 819087.

Should I be unavailable for any reason, please get in touch with my supervisor, Professor Stephanie Pitts – [s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk). If you have a complaint which you feel I have not handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Head of the Department of Music, Dr Simon Keegan-Phipps, who can escalate the complaint as necessary – [s.keegan-hipps@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.keegan-hipps@sheffield.ac.uk). Please consult the University Privacy Notice (details on page 6) if you have a complaint specifically related to the use of any personal data.

**What do I do next?**

Thank you for reading this information! Please keep hold of this information booklet for your personal reference, and if you have any further questions about the research project, please do contact me.



Please now let me know whether or not your school would be interested in taking part in the research project. If you are happy to give your informed consent for your school to participate, I will send you an online consent form to be completed **within two weeks** of having received this information booklet.



Thank you again for your time, and for your contribution to this research project. It is much appreciated!

**Keeping your school's information safe and secure**

**Confidentiality:**

- All data collected as part of this research project, including audio-recordings, will be stored securely on the University of Sheffield networked filestore, which meets the standards required by the University of Sheffield's research and ethics policies and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data will only be accessible to the researcher and the research supervisor.
- All personal data will be pseudonymised, and identifiable personal data will be destroyed upon completion of the project in 2023. After the destruction of identifiable personal data, the anonymised data will be made available to other researchers through the University of Sheffield's online data repository, ORDA.
- The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study, and will therefore be responsible for looking after personal information and using it properly.
- Upon completion, the findings of this research project will be available to access via [etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/](https://www.whiterose.ac.uk/), and any associated publications will be accessible at [eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/).

**General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):**

- The legal basis being applied in order to process personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). When interviews or conversations involve discussion and recording of information relating to sensitive issues (such as ethnicity and religion), the use of this sensitive personal data will be deemed 'necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes' (Article 9(2)(j)).
- Further information can be found in the University of Sheffield's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

**Ethical approval, funding, and safeguarding:**

- This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Music.
- This project is being funded by a University of Sheffield Faculty of Arts and Humanities University Post Graduate Research Committee Scholarship.
- The researcher has prior experience working as a music teacher at two schools, and has an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate for the Child Workforce (issued 23 March 2020).

## 2.2. Phase 2 headteacher consent form

1. Informed consent:

- I give my permission for my school to be involved in this research project, as described in the accompanying Information Booklet. I confirm that I have been informed of the research process and am aware that I retain the right to withdraw my school from the research at any stage of the project until March 2021.
- I understand that any personal data collected will be stored and shared in accordance with current data protection legislation, as described in the accompanying Information Booklet.

2. School:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Name:

*By entering your name below, you are effectively providing your signature to authorise this consent form.*

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Date:

\_\_\_\_\_



Department of Music

Researcher: Mrs Elizabeth H. MacGregor

Supervisor: Professor Stephanie E. Pitts

## Investigating the positive and negative effects of music in the

### Key Stage 3 music classroom

#### Information for pupils

Have you ever wondered why music can change the way you feel about yourself? Have you ever considered what makes the worst classroom music lesson, or what makes the best classroom music lesson?

You and your class are being invited to be part of a research project which is aiming to answer some of those questions. It is investigating how music affects you during your music lessons, including how it makes you feel, how it affects your confidence, and how it helps your learning. It's up to you and your parents / guardians whether you would like to be involved. Before you decide whether you would like to participate, please read the following information about the research project and what it involves. Please feel free to ask me any questions if anything is unclear. Thank you for reading!

#### Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you want to take part in this research project. Please use the form on page 4 to indicate whether or not you would like to participate. If you would like to take part but you change your mind later, you will be able to withdraw from the research any time until 31 December 2021. If you would not like to take part, or would like to withdraw, please tell me or your music teacher. Your class music lessons will continue as normal even if you decide not to take part in the research project.

#### What will happen if I do take part?



I will be visiting your school for two terms to watch your classroom music lessons, and I will keep a record about the things that happen

during your music lessons. I will then be holding some small-group interviews with your class, which I will audio-record. In the interview I



will ask you about times when music has particularly affected you during a classroom music lesson, like when music has made you feel happy or sad, or more confident or involved in your music lessons.



Your music teacher will decide when the interviews will take place, and after your interview you'll be able to look back at what you said and see whether there is anything you would like to add in or take out.

#### What will I get out of taking part?



By being part of this research, you will be helping your school and other similar schools improve their music lessons. You and your teacher will have the opportunity to think about what could be changed about your music lessons during Key Stage 3.

**What will happen to the things I tell you during my interview?**

All the information that I collect as part of my research will be kept safe and secure. Your name will be changed, and no-one except me and my supervisor will be able to see your information. My research findings will contribute to my completed PhD and some other publications and presentations, which will all be accessible online.



**Confidentiality:**

1. All data collected as part of this research project will be stored securely on the University of Sheffield networked filestore, which meets the standards required by the University's research and ethics policies and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
  2. All personal data will be pseudonymized, and identifiable personal data will be destroyed upon completion of the project in 2023. Upon completion of the project the anonymized data will be made available to other researchers through the University's online data repository, ORDA.
  3. The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study, and will therefore be responsible for looking after personal information and using it properly.
  4. Upon completion, the findings of this research project will be available to access via [etheses.whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:etheses.whiterose.ac.uk) and [eprints.whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints.whiterose.ac.uk).
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):**
1. The legal basis being applied in order to process personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). When interviews or conversations involve discussion and recording of information relating to sensitive issues (such as ethnicity and religion), the use of this sensitive personal data will be deemed 'necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes' (Article 9(2)(j)).
  2. Further information can be found at [sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general](http://sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general).
- Ethical approval, funding, and safeguarding:**
1. This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Music.
  2. This project is being funded by a University of Sheffield Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University Post Graduate Research Committee Scholarship.
  3. The researcher has prior experience working as a music teacher at two schools, and has an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate for the Child Workforce (issued 23 March 2020).

**What if I have a question or complaint?**

If you have any questions, would like more information, or have a complaint to make you can either talk to me in person or email me – [ehmacgregor1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ehmacgregor1@sheffield.ac.uk).



**What do I do next?**

Thank you for reading this information! If you don't have any further questions, please now complete the form below to indicate whether or not you would like to be involved in the research project. Then return the form to me.



**Consent form** | Please return this form to the researcher during your lesson.

**I do / do not [DELETE AS APPROPRIATE] give my permission to be involved in the above research project and to be audio-recorded during interview. I confirm that I have been informed of the research process, the data storage procedure, and my right to withdraw from participation.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_



## 2.4. Phase 2 parent information letter



[date]

Dear parent / guardian,

Your son / daughter is being invited to participate in a research project investigating the positive and negative effects of music in the Key Stage 3 music classroom. This research project is being carried out between January and July 2021, as part of my PhD in Music Education. Using observations and interviews I will be researching how music affects pupils during classroom music lessons, such as how it affects sense of identity, confidence, inclusion, and learning.

During the research project, I will observe your son / daughter's classroom music lessons for two terms. During the second term, pupils will have the opportunity to be interviewed in small groups about their experience of classroom music lessons. These interviews will involve open questions about specific instances when pupils were positively or negatively affected by music during a lesson, including what the music was like, what the surroundings were like, and how it made them feel. Interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed, and pupils will be able to add or remove anything they feel should be included in or excluded from the initial analysis of their accounts. Observations and interviews will not disrupt normal school routines, and will take place within [the school's] COVID guidelines. Should any pupils not wish to take part, their participation in classroom music lessons will not be adversely affected. It is my hope that the findings of this research will be of long-term benefit for music education provision, as teachers become better equipped to harness music's positive effects in the classroom.

This research project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, and by the Senior Management of [the school]. All the data collected will be kept strictly confidential, pseudonymised, and stored securely, according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Further details about confidentiality, GDPR, safeguarding, and the complaints procedure can be found in the Data Protection Notice overleaf.

Your son / daughter has received information about this research project during their classroom music lessons. If they and you are happy for them to take part, you can give your consent by signing the form overleaf. Please complete and return this form by [date]. Should you wish, you will be able to withdraw your son / daughter from the research project until July 2021. If at any time you would like to get in touch with me, please use the contact details above. Should I not be available, my supervisor, Professor Stephanie Pitts, can be reached at [s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.e.pitts@sheffield.ac.uk).

Thank you in advance for your cooperation; I am most grateful for your support of this research project.

Yours faithfully,

—  
Mrs Elizabeth H. MacGregor  
Doctoral Researcher



**Data Protection Notice**

**Confidentiality:**

1. All data collected as part of this research project, including audio-recordings, will be stored securely on the University of Sheffield networked filestore, which meets the standards required by the University of Sheffield's research and ethics policies and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Data will only be accessible to the researcher and the research supervisor.
2. All personal data will be pseudonymised, and identifiable personal data will be destroyed upon completion of the project in 2023. After the destruction of identifiable personal data, the anonymised data will be made available to other researchers through the University of Sheffield's online data repository, ORDA.
3. The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study, and will therefore be responsible for looking after personal information and using it properly.
4. Upon completion, the findings of this research project will contribute to a PhD thesis and associated publications and presentations. These publications will be available to access online via [etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/](https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/) and [eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/).

**General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):**

1. The legal basis being applied in order to process personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). When interviews or conversations involve discussion and recording of information relating to sensitive issues (such as ethnicity and religion), the use of this sensitive personal data will be deemed 'necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes' (Article 9(2)(j)).
2. Further information can be found in the University of Sheffield's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

**Ethical approval, safeguarding, and complaints procedure:**

1. This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Music.
2. The researcher has prior experience working as a music teacher at two schools, and has an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate for the Child Workforce (issued 23 March 2020).
3. Any complaints concerning the researcher's handling of this research project should be addressed to the Head of the Department of Music, Dr Simon Keegan-Phipps: [s.keegan-hipps@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.keegan-hipps@sheffield.ac.uk).
4. Please consult the University Privacy Notice for complaints specifically concerning the use of personal data: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

**Funding:**

1. This project is being funded by a University of Sheffield Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University Post Graduate Research Committee Scholarship.

Please complete and return this consent form by [date].

I **do / do not** [DELETE AS APPROPRIATE] give permission for my son / daughter to be involved in the research project entitled 'Investigating the Positive and Negative Effects of Music in the Key Stage 3 Music Classroom'. I confirm that I have been informed of the research process and am aware that I retain the right to withdraw my son / daughter from the research at any stage of the project until December 2020.

I **do / do not** [DELETE AS APPROPRIATE] give permission for my son / daughter to be audio-recorded during their interview, and I understand that their personal data will be stored safely and securely.

Son / daughter name: \_\_\_\_\_ Form: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / guardian name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

**FOR RESEARCHER'S USE ONLY:**

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

## 2.5. Phase 2B focus group interview schedule

<i>Interview questions</i>	<i>Relationship to musical vulnerability</i>
1. Can you describe what you remember about your group samba project? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What was it like?</li> <li>b. What was the music like?</li> </ol>	<i>Situational vulnerability— vulnerability is often associated with specific circumstances</i>
2. How did the music make you feel? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What was it like to listen to?</li> <li>b. How did you behave as a result?</li> </ol>	<i>Music's somatic properties and phenomenological effects</i>
3. How did your group make you feel? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What did you expect from making music together?</li> <li>b. How did it make you feel about yourself?</li> <li>c. How did it make you feel towards each other?</li> </ol>	<i>Music's semantic properties and citational effects</i>
4. If you had to do a similar project again, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. what would you keep the same?</li> <li>b. what would you do differently?</li> </ol>	<i>Receptivity, susceptibility, and resilience</i>



## Appendix 3: Analysis

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### 3.1. Phase 1 initial analysis example (P1.D1–4)

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#### *Positive experiences of being taught KS3 music*

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“I remember very much enjoying singing in lessons [...] that element of *performance*, and again, probably that sense of *success*, where I could hear *what I was creating was working*.” “I liked anything contextual and historical [...]that seemed *fascinating*.”

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The classroom where we had academic music was right at the top of the school building up some stairs. We would wait outside, often being a bit noisy, until our teacher arrived. He always arrived in a hurry from teaching elsewhere and he would scuttle up the stairs. We were always in awe of him; he was a really interesting man. He had studied in Hungary and Romania, and had a bit of an Eastern European accent even though he was English. Even though there were only about 18 of us in the class, when we went into his classroom we sat at big, square tables, really spread out from each other. We didn't use the tables, unless we were doing an exercise in our little blue manuscript books. Otherwise we would be singing or clapping while our teacher led us in really complex Kodály aural exercises.

Every lesson, about halfway through, we would stop our aural exercises and go to the staging at the back of the room for our class choir. We would learn songs in two-part harmony. This is what I really enjoyed. I had always had super relative pitch and was a very good little alto, and I was one of the youngest members of the chamber choir. I knew I held an important role in the class choir, because I was surrounded by lots of quiet, timid children who were not singers. They didn't have good projection or instant recognition of pitching, and I knew that they relied on me to hold the choir together. But one day I was being really, really silly in class and our teacher told me off. He shouted, “one of the best singers in the lower school and she can't behave herself when I really need her!” That was a backhanded compliment really. I remember thinking how proud I was, because he recognised that I was good at pitching the hard parts and that he needed me in this class choir. That definitely changed how I acted: it made me mirror a girl called Siobhan, who was a cathedral chorister. She was one of the perfect girls, the main deal in the front row, and I aspired to be like her. I wanted to emulate her so that our teacher would feel like he needed me and could trust me to step up to the challenge.

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#### *Negative experiences of being taught KS3 music*

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“I do really strongly remember the feeling of *guessing* in certain exercises.” “Our teacher didn't take any prisoners, so it was really *embarrassing*.” “I remember that [...] worry of *getting it wrong*.”

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I remember one lesson when we were all sitting around the big tables notating intervals in our blue manuscript books. Our teacher was at the piano playing a melody, and we had to notate the intervals as he went along: major third, minor third, and so on. But when our teacher saw Ollie's manuscript book, and that he'd got some intervals wrong, he snapped, threw the book on the table—slap!—and shouted, “no!”

So I was often worried about what would happen if I got it wrong, and I was embarrassed by the fact that sometimes I had to guess things, like some cadences when I didn't know the right answer. Previously I had understood some of those more tricky aspects—like when I was preparing for my Grade 5 theory with my violin teacher back home—but in that classroom the level of attainment was so high that there was no opportunity to take time to understand things in more natural surroundings. Although at the time I didn't worry about it too much once I'd left the classroom, even now I'm still a perfectionist when it comes to music—I hate getting anything wrong.

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There were definitely other pupils in the class who struggled with the difficult lessons too, like a boy who was a jazz musician and had been to the Saturday school but did not have rigorous training in traditional music theory. He lacked confidence in those lessons—the theory was crazily complicated, like Grade 5 theory on steroids—and I remember he didn't know what on earth was going on and found it very upsetting.

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*Positive experiences of pupils being taught KS3 music*

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“It's just that lovely moment where they smile and they say, ‘yes!’” “They show you that they've *mastered* it.” “What was really nice about that moment is [...] she'd even sort of given Carrie a *role*.”

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In most lessons, my class will come in, I'll do my ‘chalk and talk’ and a bit of demonstration, and then I'll send the most well-behaved pupils out into practice rooms with worksheets. Then I float around the classroom helping the pupils, and when I remember I go out to the practice rooms and check on the other pupils. In one particular lesson, we were doing ‘Animal Music’, and pupils were working at a piece I'd written for them, *Little Mouse*. I expect some pupils just to learn how to play *Little Mouse* with one or two hands at the keyboard. Some then compose another two or four bars to add onto the end. I give manuscript paper to some others and let them go to practice rooms to compose their own animal music. I had sent two girls called Charlotta and Carrie out to a practice room: Charlotta had basic keyboard skills and could help Carrie, who wasn't as good. They had left the classroom, and I was busy with the pupils left in the classroom. But after a while, I noticed that Charlotta had come back in and was following me around the room, trying to get my attention. I thought she was stuck and was a bit frustrated because the instructions were clearly on the whiteboard and on the worksheet. But she insisted that they had already finished, even though they still had 15 minutes left.

When I did follow her to her practice room, she and Carrie played me the most beautiful piece. Not only did it follow the basic structure that we'd set up (one bar, second bar, one bar repeats, second bar slightly changed, first bar repeated, second bar something completely new, nice little ending), but they'd also used their time working independently in the practice room to develop a kind of rondo or theme and variations form. Charlotta had clearly composed the piece, but despite being somewhat precocious, she'd also taken the time to give Carrie a role playing a four-note ostinato, even though before she'd entered that room Carrie could barely play anything. That had a very positive effect on Carrie, who was all smiley, because I praised them as a pair and gave them both a really good grade for their roles in the piece.

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*Negative experiences of pupils being taught KS3 music*

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“I [...] *ridiculed* it immediately.”

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Once during a project when Year 8 were writing pop songs, I had sent two girls into a practice room to write their song. One was quite cocky, but she already had some keyboard skills. It must have made them feel special, being sent to a practice room on their own, and they were probably getting excited about what they would perform when they came back to the classroom. At the end of the lesson, we went round the class listening to everyone's work. There were some really nice things going on. But when we got to this girl and her friend, what they performed was a cover of a song from *Moana*. They played it very well, and by ear, and it sounded lovely. But it was not what I had asked for. So in my pride, I ridiculed them for not following my instructions. I was annoyed because they were bright girls and should have been able to do what I had asked. I said, “what are you doing? I didn't ask for a cover!” I was really digging, saying, “but what you did was really impressive, you know, to have played that piece by ear.” And the girl burst into tears. She was desperately sad. She went and sat down, and refused to talk to me about what happened. She waved her hands in front of her face and wouldn't look at me. I felt really bad because it was the end of the lesson and I hadn't dealt with it properly, and I couldn't bring her back round to stop crying.

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### 3.2. Phase 1 complete analysis example (P1.D1)

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*Lived Experience Description (LED)*

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I went to a music school, but I did have normal music lessons, which I always found really bizarre, because they felt so normal. So Mr Hill's classroom—in Year 7 and 8 we always went to Mr Hill—and he was at the very top of the building up some stairs. And he was classed as [the school's] academic team, of which there was him, Mrs Clarey, Mr Brown, Mr McIntosh, and Mr Bailey. And they were mainly senior teachers, and Mr Hill dealt with lower school. So you would wait at the top of the stairs, and you might be a little noisy or whatever, and then he was a very quick man. Now in hindsight I realise to maintain a full-time position he must have done something else, but I don't know what else he did, but he used to scuttle up the stairs and arrive. And when he arrived you were kind of in awe of him really, because he was a really interesting little guy. He'd done all his training in Hungary and Romania. His wife was my piano teacher, she was Romanian. And he'd picked up the accent a little bit, so you could tell he was English, but he also had this Eastern European twang, which of course to an 11-year-old made him all the more interesting.

We did a lot of Kodály aural work in the lower school, so Year 7 and 8, although Mr Hill never labelled what he was doing. And that's kind of instant gratification to children really because if your ears are trained you've heard that you've got it right. So I'd say my fondest memory and what I can physically remember success in were all those aural training activities. Mr Hill was always very lovely and very keen to make sure that you knew if your intonation was great. I loved doing that. We'd sit round great big square tables, five children round one big table, all this desk space which sometimes we did little manuscript activities, but mainly we just sat there singing. And not always singing, lots of clapping, lots of body percussion, anything aurally. He used to play all sorts of lovely little tunes on the piano, just based around standard warm-up tunes based around intervals, but really impressive ones that I've tried to recreate now and can't quite remember how he involved so many interesting intervals in the harmony. So that was his main exercise in that respect.

And then straight away halfway through the lesson we all went to the back of the room, where he had staging. So nothing glamorous at all, it was a class choir. Again, very Kodály, very Hungarian. So as soon as we'd done out aural and our theory, after about half an hour—I'd say they were 50-minute lessons—we went to the back of the room. I remember very much enjoying singing in lessons. So not the aural activities, the actual learning of songs. I remember the two-part harmony. Nothing tremendously sophisticated and I don't think really true of [the school], just equivalent to what I might do now with *Sing Up!* or *Friday Afternoons*. But I remember particularly enjoying that element of performance and, again, probably that sense of success, where I could hear what I was creating was working.

And just this one particular day, I was being really, really silly. But I was one of the youngest members of the chamber choir, because I've always had super relative pitch and I was a very good little alto. And it was that moment where he told me off for being silly, but in telling me off, he shouted, "one of the best singers in the lower school and she can't behave herself when I really need her!" And I remember thinking, "I'm so proud of myself, because he's just recognised that I'm really good at pitching this hard part, and he needs me." That made me mirror a girl called Siobhan, who was a cathedral chorister. Everybody knew that the choristers were some of the strongest choir singers, so she was the perfect girl in the front row, and Mr Hill would wave his hand, and I knew he meant me and Siobhan. So I would probably emulate her behaviour to an extent. And I definitely took it all the more seriously after that, because obviously he needed me.

Basically there were lots of non-singers at [the school], and I remember I used to stand next to my best friend Rebecca, who was not a singer, and just didn't have that kind of projection or that instant recognition of pitching, and probably wasn't the strongest sight-singer, and was a pianist and probably

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learnt everything very much at the piano and in harmony. So I do remember like I was holding an important role, particularly surrounded by quiet, timid people that clearly weren't going to sing. I remember that feeling of, "you've been nominated to step up." And so I always modelled myself then on this girl called Siobhan the chorister, because I knew she was the main deal.

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*Textural description*  
(Moustakas, 1994)

*What was the experience of musical vulnerability like? Describe the experience of musical vulnerability using verbatim extracts of the LED to present its nature and focus. Focus on the significant emergent themes relating to musical vulnerability. Maintain the phenomenological content and pull the reader into the anecdote (van Manen, 2014).*

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I was being really, really silly. We were waiting at the top of the stairs for our teacher to scuttle up and arrive. We were all in awe of him, because he was an interesting little guy and he'd done all his training in Hungary and Romania. We started the lesson sitting round great big square tables, doing aural work. Then halfway through the lesson we all went to the back of the room to the staging for a class choir. I particularly enjoyed the element of performance and the sense of success, when I could hear what I was creating was working. I was one of the youngest members of the chamber choir and had super relative pitch and was a very good little alto.

But that moment he told me off for being silly. He shouted, "one of the best singers in the lower school and she can't behave herself when I really need her!" I was so proud of myself. I felt like he had recognised how good I was at pitching the hard parts, and nominated me to step up when surrounded by quiet, timid people. That made me emulate a girl in my class called Siobhan, who was a cathedral chorister and one of the strongest choir singers. I took everything all the more seriously after that because obviously my teacher needed me.

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*Detailed thematisation (van Manen, 2014)*

*What does each sentence or cluster of sentences reveal about the experience of musical vulnerability?*

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I was being really, really silly.

Danielle's attitude before beginning her music lesson influences her musical vulnerability.

We were waiting at the top of the stairs for our teacher to scuttle up and arrive.

We were all in awe of him, because he was an interesting little guy and he'd done all his training in Hungary and Romania.

Danielle has great respect for her music teacher and is in awe of his musical skill.

We started the lesson sitting round great big square tables, doing aural work.

Then halfway through the lesson we all went to the back of the room to the staging for a class choir.

I particularly enjoyed the element of performance and the sense of success, when I could hear what I was creating was working.

Danielle is particularly receptive to the somatic effects of singing, when she can hear and feel her success.

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## MUSICAL VULNERABILITY

<p>I was one of the youngest members of the chamber choir and had super relative pitch and was a very good little alto.</p>	<p>Her singing is also a source of pride and self-identity.</p>
<p>But that moment he told me off for being silly.</p>	<p>Danielle's vulnerability is realised as occurrent in this sudden moment of relational conflict.</p>
<p>He shouted, "one of the best singers in the lower school and she can't behave herself when I really need her!"</p>	<p>Her teacher's rebuke reinforces her own pride and sense of self-identity by recognising, affirming, and attributing relational value to her musical skill (as a backhanded compliment).</p>
<p>I was so proud of myself.</p>	
<p>I felt like he had recognised how good I was at pitching the hard parts, and nominated me to step up when surrounded by quiet, timid people.</p>	<p>Danielle's sense of pride is heightened by being singled out from her peers.</p>
<p>That made me emulate a girl in my class called Siobhan, who was a cathedral chorister and one of the strongest choir singers.</p>	<p>Her newfound receptivity has a long-term impact causing behavioural change.</p>
<p>I took everything all the more seriously after that because obviously my teacher needed me.</p>	<p>Her previous attitude of nonchalance is replaced by one of receptivity when she realises she (as defined by her skill) is 'needed' by her teacher who she greatly respects.</p>
<p><i>Selective thematisation (van Manen, 2014)</i></p>	<p><i>What phrase(s) seem particularly revealing about the experience of musical vulnerability?</i></p>
<p>I took everything all the more seriously after that because obviously my teacher needed me.</p>	
<p><i>Wholistic thematisation (van Manen, 2014)</i></p>	<p><i>How can the phenomenological meaning of the text as a whole be captured in one phrase? "Musical vulnerability..."</i></p>
<p>Musical vulnerability occurring in the face of relational conflict can initiate a transformation from nonchalance and self-interest to receptivity and commitment.</p>	
<p><i>Structural description (Moustakas, 1994)</i></p>	<p><i>How did the experience of musical vulnerability occur? Use imaginative variation and reflection to go beyond the appearance of the experience to capture the essence of musical vulnerability. What are the invariant themes and qualities responsible for the thoughts and feelings associated with musical vulnerability?</i></p>
<p>Danielle is already deeply invested in her music lessons: she enjoys the sense of success associated with performing; and her teacher is interesting and inspiring. Her musical vulnerability is therefore defined in three ways: (a) personally, by her sense of success; (b) musically, by her enjoyment of performance; and (c) relationally, by her relationship with her teacher.</p>	

In this particular experience, her vulnerability is made manifest through the musical affirmation of her teacher. For this experience to affect her so deeply, the affirmation feels personal (her teacher rebukes her for her bad behaviour) and comes from someone whose opinion she takes seriously (her teacher who is an experienced musician). In response to this experience, Danielle changes her behaviour in order to (a) prove herself, (b) through her music, (c) to her teacher.

This realisation of musical vulnerability occurs in the face of relational conflict, when Danielle's teacher (who she deeply respects) tells her off for her poor behaviour. But—perhaps surprisingly—Danielle describes her response as one of positive receptivity rather than negative susceptibility. Rather than feeling embarrassed or ashamed she feels pleased and proud. But this pride is not the same as the self-interested pride she initially describes. This pride stems from a realisation that her musical skill is valued and needed by her teacher, and that with skill comes responsibility and relational expectation. This is notable in understanding the relationship between relational conflict and musical vulnerability. Conflict that is belittling or demeaning is likely to result in susceptibility. But conflict that aims to be transformative—through implicit affirmation or an expectation of future concord—can enhance musical receptivity, potentially even changing musical self-interest into musical other-orientedness.

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*Textural-structural  
description (Moustakas,  
1994)*

*Combine the textural and structural descriptions to capture the experience and essence of musical vulnerability.*

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I was being really, really silly. We were waiting at the top of the stairs for our teacher to scuttle up and arrive. We were all in awe of him, because he was an interesting little guy and he'd done all his training in Hungary and Romania. We started the lesson sitting round great big square tables, doing aural work. Then halfway through the lesson we all want to the back of the room to the staging for a class choir. I particularly enjoyed the element of performance and the sense of success, when I could hear what I was creating was working. I was one of the youngest members of the chamber choir and had super relative pitch and was a very good little alto.

Danielle, as a pupil at a specialist music school, is deeply invested in her music lessons: she finds her teacher interesting and inspiring; and she enjoys the physical and audible sense of success associated with performing. But her investment is somewhat nonchalant and self-interested. She does not always take her lessons seriously—'I was being really, really silly'. And her musical skill is, for her, primarily something that sets her apart from others at her school, as 'a very good little alto' with 'super relative pitch'. In her self-interest she is receptive to success, but does not necessarily consider how her musical behaviour or attitude affects others.

But as Danielle recalls, this attitude suddenly changes halfway through this particular lesson. While about to begin class choir, her teacher rebukes her: 'that moment he told me off for being silly. He shouted, "one of the best singers in the lower school and she can't behave herself when I really need her!"' It might be expected that this kind of relational conflict would result in Danielle's musical susceptibility: to embarrassment and shame over having been rebuked by her teacher in front of her peers. But on the contrary, Danielle describes, 'I was so proud of myself. I felt like he had recognised how good I was at pitching the hard parts, and nominated me to step up when surrounded by quiet, timid people'. Danielle quite suddenly realises that her musical skill, of which she is so proud, matters to her teacher; that he 'needs' her and has high expectations of her. She realises that with skill comes responsibility. Her pride, previously so self-interested, is transformed into musical receptivity and other-orientedness. She even changes her behaviour in acknowledgement of the relational importance her teacher associates with her skill: 'that made me emulate a girl in my class called Siobhan, who was a cathedral chorister and one of

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the strongest choir singers. I took everything all the more seriously after that because obviously my teacher needed me’.

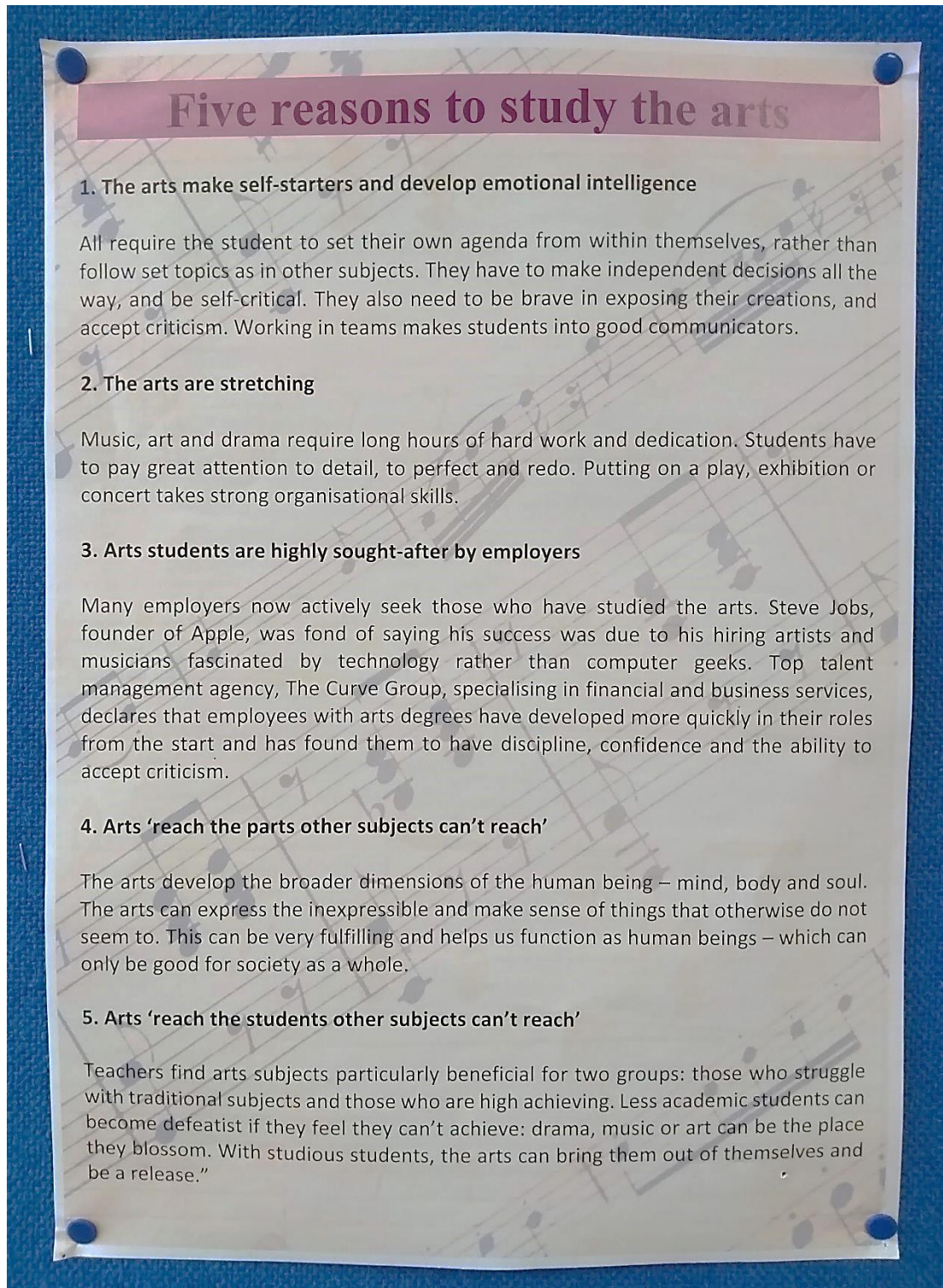
This incident is significant for understanding the relationship between relational conflict and musical vulnerability. Conflict that is belittling or demeaning is likely to result in susceptibility. But conflict that aims to be transformative—through implicit affirmation or an expectation of conflict resolution—can enhance musical receptivity. As is the case for Danielle, conflict can be an important catalyst for the transformation of musical nonchalance and self-interest into musical receptivity and other-orientedness.

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## Appendix 4: East Fen High School

### 4.1. Five reasons to study the arts

Figure A.1. Poster in Miss Dean's office: *Five reasons to study the arts*





## 4.2. East Fen High School music department

Figure A.2. Diagram of Miss Dean's office and music classroom

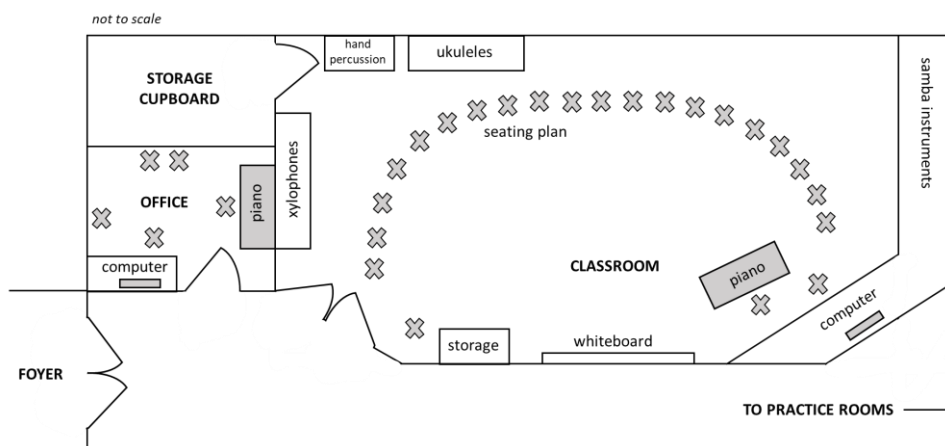


Figure A.3. Miss Dean's office



Figure A.4. Miss Dean's music classroom



## Appendix 5: Modelling structured co-curricular music provision

<i>Facilitated by...</i>	<i>For pupils who would like to...</i>	<i>Year 7</i>	<i>Year 8</i>	<i>Year 9</i>
<i>... classroom music teacher and/or peripatetic teacher</i>	<i>... play with other pupils in an orchestra / big band</i>	Year 7 orchestra / big band	Year 8 orchestra / big band	Year 9 orchestra / big band
<i>... classroom music teacher and/or peripatetic teacher</i>	<i>... sing with other pupils in a choir</i>	Year 7 choir	Year 8 choir	Year 9 choir
<i>... sixth-form music pupil(s)</i>	<i>... learn new instrumental skills from around Europe</i>	Learn to play the violin	Learn to play the guitar	Learn to play the clarinet
<i>... community culture bearer (Schippers, 2010)</i>	<i>... learn new instrumental skills from around the world</i>	Learn to play the steel pans	Learn to play samba	Learn to play gamelan
<i>... peripatetic teacher</i>	<i>... learn new popular music skills</i>	<i>The Voice: Where to start as a singer-songwriter</i>	Battle of the Bands	Mixing and multitracking using Cubase
<i>... classroom drama or dance teacher</i>	<i>... participate in a school musical or dance show</i>	<i>Oliver! the musical</i>		
		Beat drop: Electronic Dance Music		
<i>... classroom music teacher</i>	<i>... learn about music history and prepare for GCSE music</i>	Genius: Famous musicians throughout history	Where are all the Black female composers? (Holder, 2020)	Introduction to GCSE music
<i>... cover supervisor</i>	<i>... spend time in individual practice</i>	Individual instrumental, vocal, or theory practice	Individual instrumental, vocal, or theory practice	Individual instrumental, vocal, or theory practice

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