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Ethics or Choosing Complexity in Music Relations

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The indelible yet nearly unbearable relationship we carry with ethics is central to philosophical and educational engagements. This relationship is perhaps the ever-pressing element in our lives, for it marks our engagements with that which we cannot predict, plan, or ordain. There is nothing else but a becoming in ethics, and this transience, this time-timelessness is in consonance with music, as music and ethics share a praxis that relates not to a mere doing, but to what Aristotle called *eudaimonia*, or flourishing.

The hardship and pleasure of a life in ethics, as in music, springs not from a commitment to the veneration of stability, refinement and consistency, as some political and aesthetic discourses often suggest. Rather, the productive tensions of ethical living arise from a restless interaction between constant motion and adaptability; both marks of critical thinking and being. Consequently, attending to ethics is indubitably hard. Harder still is the realization that educating ethically leads us to face and reconsider deeply ingrained tendencies of social living: the tendency to generalize, to codify into norm, and to assert. Therefore, to speak of ethics is to speak not of *gradus,* nor of *Parnassus*. Rather, it means avoiding non-linearity and indeed considering imperfection, inconsistency and failure. All which may leave us asking "How might we take seriously an ideal that human beings must fall so far short of attaining?" (Appiah 2008).

Following Appiah's question requires that we dispute misperceptions about ethics and by consequence, about who and how we are as human beings. Firstly, it requires that we reinterpret *fulfillment,* avoiding cultural-aesthetic notions of wholeness and perfection. Ethics, I suggest, is about attending to imperfection. Secondly, it leads us to the tension between *attribution* and *character.* In other words, it asks us to consider that the ways we act in given situations, e.g., when we choose to be compassionate or dismissive of others, are fundamentally a consequence of factors beyond any *core* dispositions[1]. Being ethical is not a stagnant or unwavering condition, but rather a set of momentary and *placed* efforts that require constant deliberation[2]. And here is where education and ethics meet, joined in the

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effort to unveil the labor of living in the face of, as Milan Kundera asserts, *the unbearable lightness* of our own beings.[3]

As far as teaching is concerned, ill defined notions of *morals* remain at the center of a public schizophrenia toward teachers, who are held to escalating standards of conduct and accountability, while dismissed in their capacity for professional autonomy. In other words, teachers are asked to be moral (uphold fixed ideals and notions) but discouraged from being ethical (having the freedom and responsibility to act according to self-critical and self-directed parameters). Contemporary research has exposed the problematics of a 'moral core,' making it available to the analysis of any skeptic or empiricist. The now historic data collected by two Yale psychologists working with over ten thousand schoolchildren demonstrate that when examining children's opportunities to cheat and lie, "deceit was, to a surprising extent, a function of situations" (Hartshore and May 1928). In a different vein, Richard Rorty argues that paradigmatic shifts away from natural law or the mirror of nature indicate that a 'globalist' vision of the *moral being* is nothing if not ideological thinking[4] (Rorty 1979). Since then, many have scrutinized and developed this issue, including social psychologists and philosophers (Merritt 2000, Ross and Nisbett 1991), reasonably and convincingly disputing the *idealist* notion of central, unified, natural or even recurrent moral cores.

Beyond the indication that socio-economic conditions and dispositions underlie the interpretation of ethics is the apparent paradox of ethics, potentially articulated in the metaphoric notion that, as human beings, not only are we *both* thieves *and* charitable, but indeed we are them in a moment's unfolding. What define these constantly unfolding moments are our relationships and interactions with others. This is therefore a procedural account of ethics, which attempts to highlight how, in education for example, we are called upon to push beyond functional decision-making based on how to avoid one and embrace another. My contention is that, at their best, ethics and education help us to understand our own constant contradictions; moving us to relate mindfully to the *other*, as well as with the alterity of who we are.

This article is further premised upon a simple distinction between *ethics* and *morals,* in which ethics refers to questions of flourishing, and the struggle with our own inconsistencies—and those of others. While morals refer to externally or internally "imposed constraints that govern how we should and should not treat other people" (Appiah

2008, 37). This distinction is important in supporting a greater emphasis on critical frameworks for ethics, but also in making the case that mistakenly equating the codification of behaviors found in *morals* with the embodied becoming found in *ethics,* can quickly lead to misguided educative actions that may emphasize social inequity, skill over understanding, and the development of aesthetically narrow music doing rather than creative production.[5]

I argue that an ethical commitment to an impactful education in and through music requires that we focus on *authorship* and not simply on music 'doing,' while evaluating the implications of *music production* rather than simply *music making*. To be clear, my contention is that the role of ethics in education is not the institution of norms or practices, but rather the formation of *framings* as exemplary capacities of educated individuals. These framings are understood not simply as a capacity to appreciate and value,[6] or to elucidate appropriate or normative ways of practicing. Rather, framings can be extrapolated as a constant pedagogical interaction with inconsistency, failure, dissent and choice. Indubitably a pragmatist construct, *framing* is linked to the notion that "since ideas are provisional responses to particular situations, their survival depends not on their immutability but on their adaptability" (Menand 2001). A music education weak in adaptable qualities, is akin to an ethically deficient music education.

The kind of ethics proposed here then, asks us to see the process of education beyond the edification of, and indefatigable march toward, "the *resolution* of quandaries about what to do" (Appiah 2008, 193, italics added). Rather, such ethics compels us to focus on the role music and music education can play in manifesting ethical flourishings, which would place 'real-life' parameters and qualities and their inclination toward change, toward complexity and even contradiction as enduring, essential and constructive elements of any thoughtful pedagogical act—be it musical or not.

The Pragmatic and the Postmodern

Thus far, the departing element in this article is a practical separation between the *moral* as formational (the attempt toward fulfillment), and the *ethical* as productive (the attempt at flourishing). My aim is neither relativism nor the creation of polarities, but to highlight a consciousness of transitivity—the adaptability Menand mentions above—and the realization that the sign of *agency,* an ever-important concept in ethics, is found in the anxiety of constantly reconstituting ourselves and our actions. These two elements, agency and a

consciousness of transitivity, are also essential for any artistic enterprise and offer great promise if taken seriously as an educational goal. I thus invite the reader to understand the proximity between postmodernism and pragmatism that can be seen in this article, as an attempt to emphasize the value of *ingenuity toward adaptable environments*, rather than continuing to capitalize upon *applicability toward preexisting contexts*. Ethics then is found in the pragmatic endeavor of seeing "ideas as tools which people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves" (Menand 2001, xi). But also placed by the postmodern notion of transitivity, which are particularly significant to values such as empowerment, agency and authorship. Approximations of this ideal, can be found in notions such as David Myers' *music for the lifespan* (Myers 2008) or Tom Regelski's version of *praxis* (Regelski 2004).

As a pragmatic signifier of how ethics can be enacted, the notion of *empowerment* brings together agency and transitivity, focusing on the development of "the capacity to influence the range of available choices and the social settings in which choices are made and pursued" (Bauman 2008). A simple yet challenging example of these abstract notions is found in the work developed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) across the world (Schmidt, under review). These place-centered educational projects see agency connected to social equity, and transitivity connected to pedagogies focused in developing necessary capacities to generate and contribute to musical economies. Empowerment then, is not a metaphysical vagary—the *je ne sais quoi* that some would suggest—but an ethical conjunction between agency and politics, conceptualization and enactment, and between capacity, wherewithal and possibility.

If ethics can generate an empowering education, this act in turn, can invite us toward ventures that rethink assumed behavior and ideas.[7] An example would be to define risk as an indelible part of being ethical, imbuing it with a care-full attention to being responsible and responsive. This extrapolation of risk, i.e., a rethinking of the assumed parameters of risk, can leads us to consider the ways in which risk might be understood as the embodiment of a need to 'speak out,' or to venture fully into the world.

The point here is that challenging what is commonsensical requires that we disturb our own orthodoxies; and that is the demand that ethics as a becoming or flourishing places upon us. In pragmatic terms, this means to *place* the ethical charge of an educational act right within the tension between acting upon what is recognizable, while always already

challenging that which attempts to blinds us. In music education, for instance, the 'recognizable' might be the pervasiveness and preponderance of meanings that musics generate in the lives of youth. The 'blinding' is perhaps that which displaces classroom instruction away from the exploration and expansion of these same meanings.

Such blinding elements are often *exported* into teaching, and overtime, made commonsensical and logical, accepted as appropriate and even deemed effective. This process of regimenting privileged practices as the defining element of what all teachers ought to be and do is legitimized by what I call the *moral of the state.* We see this kind of *moral* in that which is externally articulated as proper and necessary. Most significantly, our relationship with this moral of the state is neither simple nor easily untangled, for while it places contingencies on teaching and represses agency, it also offers teachers reduced personal risk and greater safety (Popkewitz 1998). Consider momentarily the United States' National Standards for Arts Education as a representation of the moral of the state and the manner in which it often caters to teaching that is prescriptive and safe. While one could maintain that these standards are a responsible way to foster minimal parameters of practice in the profession, one could also argue that little data exists providing a national or convincing case of their impact upon the quality of creative or innovative music teaching. What seems easier to address is the strained relationship between the practices codified by these standards—now almost twenty years old—and the learning realities of today's 'creative societies' in a 'flat world' (Florida 2003, Friedman 2005).

The challenge then, seems to reside not upon the re-writing of the standards to render them more current, relevant, or critical, but rather to mind the ethical stance that the teacher, as a state agent and servant, must take. This is a significant challenge because failure to take an ethical stance, which involves a focus on agency, empowerment and risk, is akin to becoming invisible. Failing to place oneself in an ethical relationship with teaching is to disappear, figuratively or even literally, as we know, as many as forty percent of teachers leave the profession within five years. To dismiss the import of ethics is then to take the first steps toward burn-out and disillusion, accepting a moral that pressures teachers to suppress their own creative and professional potential in order to respond to the established norms of external accountabilities. [8] On the other hand, succeeding at an ethical stance, might also prove to be alienating, as many teacher who 'do not follow the rules' are often deemed 'inefficient' or named 'uncooperative'.

While we may accept that external accountability models are pragmatically pertinent in light of contemporary complexity, divergence and speed of change, we should also recognize how external accountability can be deleterious; particularly when it does not provide teachers with the opportunity to *give an account* and thus engage in self-evaluation, agency and professionalism (Horsley 2009, Schmidt 2009). Placing ethics in the midst of teaching then requires connecting educative practices to agency, transitivity and empowerment, leading us to ask: "how can classroom practice focus more on shared opportunities and less on the systematization of teaching?" Or simply put, "am I committed to making my classroom a place where discovery, disruption and innovation are welcomed?"

Flourishing Revisited

Essential to an ethics based upon flourishing, therefore, is the invitation to discovery and disruption, which pedagogically requires that we facilitate the unfolding of agency onto *voice*. Voice is placed here beyond the need for outward exertion and recognition, but more simply framed as *replies* to an *other*. To be sure, agency does prepare us to address external mandates. For Levinas, however, voice, as an internal demand, goes beyond norms and rules, for to respond is the ethical-humane imperative of all human beings (Levinas 1985). Flourishing then springs from the *need* to be responsive—not the mandate—while recognizing failure and risk as necessary for *growth*. Voice, I would offer, makes growth possible, as the agency of a self is placed *face-to-face* with the needs of an *other*. This face-to-face can be named as proximity, vulnerability, or responsibility, often sharing transitory characteristics that are predicated upon engagements where views or perceptions are *voiced* rather than *held*. Consequently, voice implies interaction, requiring risk-taking, the capacity to *extrapolate,* as well as the courage to engage in relationships in which *protocols* are not at the center of authorship. This is important for it places *face-to-face* interactions as a framework for education as "an experience in the strongest sense of the term: a contact with a reality that does not fit into any *a priori* idea, which overflows all of them." (Levinas 1987, 45)

Even if temporarily, altering learning situations where teaching does not fit into *a priories* seems to be both necessary and worthwhile. Such actions may push us beyond (or against) notions of *experience* based upon 'learned content' or a simple 'musical doing,' toward the challenge of experience as a risky business. Notions of *free improvisation* are an apt example here, particularly when accepted approaches to music present doing in absence

of voice or empowerment (for instance in Elliott 1995). Its necessity finds roots in the fact that in educational terms, preparation only takes us so far. Practice and anticipation only take us so far. Doing only takes us so far. And this 'so far' is a short path in terms of ethics, for musical doing in which risk and agency are not experienced and fostered could be said to be unethical in that it does not foster flourishing; and consequently it is not educative.

The challenge then is to acknowledge learning as an ethical endeavor and act upon it. We might start by heeding Foucault's admonition that to *think* differently we must *be* differently. Applying this to teacher preparation for example, we may start by considering that the discourse of 'giving students entry level skills' is another near unethical proposition. Arguably, this would mean that curricular parameters that continue to provide narrow notions of skill-building are not simply professional mal-practices (Bowman 2000), but are also ethically unconscionable. I would go further and conjecture that the inability to act upon teaching beyond these 'entry level skills' is a main contributor to the high attrition levels among teachers cited above.

Granted it is not easy for higher education to ask pre-service teachers to focus upon *face-to-face* experiences, a first step might come from a re-constitution of the current forms of accountability, as we discussed above. A second might be to recognize the dependency between external accountability and teaching practices that are didactic-oriented. Teaching ideals that are principally concerned with efficiencies, management and 'time-on-task' are insufficient—they may be helpful in training individuals but they do not amount to an education. This focus on functional teaching is not only anathema to ethics, but helps to dismiss risky, innovative and unscripted pedagogies, placing them as inconsequential and even unprofessional. I suggest that in order to change such pathways strengthened by both policy and ideology, we, as teachers, must be able to have robust conceptualizations of our own professional ethics and articulate how said constructs are matched within our own practices.

Tough Choices and Even Harder Change

Contrary to Dewey's focus on learning as a consequence of a constructive environment, teachers 'trained' upon the notion of 'entry-level-skills' only see content and procedure, and therefore define teaching as the effective and proper codification of these elements. A case in point is found in a NY City school where *procedural steps* "for getting students to pay

attention to the teacher", have been codified and named "attention capturing devices."[9] When these are the guiding elements for our relationships with students, how is it possible to respond to the *other?* [10]

To be able and willing to move away from what we silently think, is the stuff of ethics, and in pragmatic terms it requires that we be able to voice different possibilities for our own practices. Multiculturalism in music education can be the perfect entry point here, particularly if we look at how it historically highlighted authenticity—a key construct in the formation of autonomy and voice—as the presentation of closed ideals, while circumventing interpretation and relegating deconstruction to oblivion. After over thirty years of official multicultural directives, we still have difficulty constructing multi-cultural musical practices that highlight difference as difference, or at least do not reinforce "predominant values" or tokenism (Bradley 2009, Morton 2001). In practice, multicultural teaching commonly focuses on content delivery rather than on environments and their complex musical productions—patently dismissing that "we never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment" (Dewey 1916). As the social research developed by Putnam shows, the practice of *presenting* individuals to 'other' cultures or neighbors creates, in and of itself, no critical outcomes (Putnam 2000). Thus *authenticity* as that which regiments appropriate and legitimate practices, remains the thought we "silently think," further suppressing innovation and real face-to-face encounters. While critical lenses have expanded widely in music and education literature and practice (Benedict 2009, Bradley 2009, Dimitriades 2000, Giroux 1981, Valenzuela 1999), the ethical question remains pertinent and in many cases unasked: if all I can do is to be informed, and all I can accept is the polite un-deniability of the *other*, how can I learn to be ethical? What risk is there, in the absence of musical interpretation that requires contribution and innovation? What is ethical or educative about the presentation of seemingly uncontroversial or 'authentic' musical renditions? What space is there for authorship in my relationship to a musical *other*?

The pragmatics of these questions arise in difficult but tangible places; for example, in the indispensible evaluation of how critical pedagogies can quickly be emptied by gimmicks that provide little more than rhetoric and re-dressed training. What we see here is a kind of repressive tolerance that speaks of *empowering* students and of *honoring their world,* while easily conserving privilege, structure, and conformity. It is difficult to engender risk, and even more to commit to it time after time. Even harder is to avoid a double-talk that

embroiders onto the teacher a politics of correctness, establishing a veiled power-laden structure, and maintaining unethical spaces in which no *encounters* take place—in which teachers remain reluctant to take risks, in which neither failure nor flourishing are tolerable.

I would argue that at the center of much school music in the United States is a regulatory e*conomics of withholding* fostered by the absence of risk-taking. What I mean here is the manner in which musical development that does not fit into normative musical values and practices finds significantly less space for realization—feminist scholars have pounded on this issue for decades, albeit within different parameters. A common example, then, is the fact that while interest in diverse musical practices has grown, available musical pathways for youth inside higher education remains, at the second decade of the 21st century, overwhelmingly restricted to western classical skills and dispositions. The consequence is that music teachers who themselves are beholden to the musical dispositions reinforced by their college experience, are less capable of creating musical spaces that are different from the semi-professional, performance-based structures made normative by models in tertiary education. While professionalizing spaces easily co-opt alternative desires, at the k-12 level, the absent space for voice and empowerment can easily lead to resentful relations, made manifest through rebellion, lack of participation, conformity; and false-consciousness. It is easy to observe the continuation of a cycle in which students *resolve* their resentfulness by either 'becoming like' their teachers—embracing the only fulfillment available by emulating this *other*, or by resisting the curricula (and consequently its music) as an extension of the resistance toward the individual (the teacher) and the economics of withholding he/she represents. A learning environment in which youth's desire to become copious music producers goes unaddressed or is channeled to specific kinds of fulfillment (e.g., playing properly, becoming literate, appreciating naturalized values) seems far from the ethical ideal of *flourishing*, and is ripe for othering and voicelessness.

The alternative to this economics of withholding is as complicated as ethics, not because it is too complex to be understood, but because embodying it has proven elusive—consider as an example the evanescence of constructive alternatives such as the Contemporary Music Project (CMP). What I propose is a focus on authorship and a Freireian redesigning of authenticity—as that which is produced in a specific moment and place, by consciously engaged individuals[11]. The shift to "when everyone is an author no one is absolutely in authority" (Pechey 2007), is simple yet challenging, since the technical

rationality of labor inside school environs makes us accustomed to authorities. Further, this simple statement confronts us with the following ethical conundrum: if I see authorship as an intrinsically necessary element of Being, if I recognize my own need for volition, innovation and self-assertion, how then can I deny such possibilities to *others*? In music education the question of the repression of authorship remains a widely untouched challenge. One way to enter this issue is to shift focus from moral/aesthetic practices to a socio-economic stance on music production, to which I turn next.

The Economics of Music and School

The repression of authorship is paramount to the denial of music as educational and economic possibility, which in turn amounts to the denial of agency and the consequent restriction of flourishing. Authorship repressed can be seen through many entry points. Environmental is often the first, as external discourses define or replace one's own point of entry to an artistic or educative endeavor. Slogans such as *music is for all* and *all are welcomed to music*, are easily turned into codes that mediate what we ought to create and how we should be within music education. Thus, through adopted slogans, the external environment represses possible face-to-face interaction—the formation of curricular goals, for example—replacing meaningful work done locally and by communal authorship. Being that slogans are a significant part of music education interaction, the innocent yet insidious visions upheld by slogans often veil the social, cultural, economic, and gendered realities of music (Bradley 2009, Koza 2006). This in turn plays a powerful role in distancing authorship from *economic agency* (see Attali 1985), diminishing authorship's *capital* as a viable or legitimate goal to an education in and through music.

Another palpable point of entry to the lack of authorship and socio/economic discourse in school music is ideological in nature and expressed through the phenomenon of the *artist by decree*. For Zygmund Bauman, being an *artist by decree* means that "nonaction also counts as action" (Bauman 2008), and is characterized by an environment in which individuals are not responsible for the outcomes of their work. In educative terms, this implies that students and teachers may not consider what their work is 'good for,' ponder upon the ethical outcomes—to self and others—of their engagement with music education, nor consider the impact of systems that promise to all but consistently deliver to few. As Bauman (2008) argues,

> if freedom of choice is granted in theory but unattainable in practice, the pain of *hopelessness* will surely be topped with the ignominy of *haplessness*—as the daily test of one's ability to cope with life's challenges is the very workshop in which individuals' self-confidence and also their sense of human dignity are cast or melted away (141, italics in the original).

My argument is that a renewed education in and through music requires musical engagements that are not hapless and that take seriously the socio/economic potential of music. This ideal, embedded in many current practices, presents examples of in-the-world ethical flourishing, such as:

- Music studies which are compatible with economically viable models
- Learning structures (communities) that mirror current real-world requirements
- Entrepreneurship and collaborative engagements at the center of new *skills* (Higgins 2007)
- Life-long engagements with music (Myers 2008)
- Music as an in-the-world resource (UN Compendium—Music as a natural resource http://www.unpan.org/Regions/Global/Directories/Resources/tabid/456/ItemID/1836/language/en-US/Default.aspx)

Multiple pathways to musical engagements then imply a multiplicity of *voice,* which consequently lessens the space for narrow ideals of achievement and advance, knowingly out of reach to many.[12]

To highlight empowerment and voice requires that we place the individual at the center of any interaction, musical or educative. For music to become a verb, to act as a conduit toward *voice,* it is necessary that our interactions with music be more than a *doing*. At issue here is the propensity for generic yet narrow propositions such as David Elliott's (1995), where "fundamentally, music as something that people do" (39) to facilitate the erasure of politics, of the body, and of ethics in educations through music. While Elliott acknowledges that music education values "overlap the essential life values" of "personal growth, differentiation, complexity, enjoyment and self-esteem and happiness" he places the individual as a conduit, as an ecological space in which music (in capital letters or not) will act. As he submits, "the means and results of educating students to make and listen for music well are simultaneously personal, social and cultural" (130), concluding effortlessly that "it follows that the most effective way to achieve any *adjunct benefits* of music education is to concentrate on the primary aims of music teaching and learning" (131, italics added). In other

words, the doing of music 'well' can generate a humanistic by-product upon the individual; an adjunct benefit as Elliott argues. What music education as *doing* does not do, however, is to challenge us to rethink *what we silently think*, nor to consider the ethics of our "primary aims".

The functional stance upon which Elliott encapsulates music as a netting of human actions—between the individual, the object and the action—is directed toward building an edifice that places performance front and center; thus replacing any aesthetic focus. While the individual is indeed part of this discourse, her agency, and the quality and purpose for voicing said agency, are left unattended, at the periphery. This model maintains, and has historically reinforced, a focus on music doing where the individual is the medium through which music acts—doing little to move us beyond the sonic and its contexts. In other words, it provides training *in* music, but does little to educate *through* music.

This perfomative training, filled by efficiencies of musical doing, presents action as another representation of extrinsic norms. Moreover, in such an environment, ethics can be easily forgotten, and can only be regained at the moment in which music becomes the medium through which the individual enacts *her* voice. But the enactment of one's voice requires more than *doing*, for *voice* is the process of becoming a subject by generating empowerment and by producing interactions with others; their ideas, differences, challenges. To act, simply, is to attend to an individualistic corruption—to attend to external accountability alone—which might know nothing of what is required to interact ethically with others.

The danger then rests in the quite real possibility that schooling—and school music—continue to be pushed toward the reduction of capacious moments for *voice*. The outcome is the intensification of consumption of certain kinds of *musicking*—via training *in* music—and forgoing a more risky, complex and challenging education *through* music—based upon individual adaptation and creation.

The consumerist stance established by a training *in* music is tantamount *to be put on the move*, that is, to constantly shift from standpoints determined by external systems of consumption—musical tastes, accepted practices, guided State efficiency, or normative aesthetics. A central element here is the postponing of gratification, a key element in *consumption societies,* as Max Weber articulated. This autonomy deficient environ forms seemingly independent *doing* that is nevertheless unable to uncover the fallaciousness of the

fulfillment said training promises (Weber 2003). This environ is apolitical and consequently disregards ethics.

Conversely, to see music from an ethical standpoint is *to be on the move*, that is, to acknowledge the complexity that forms intellectual-artistic-social decision making, while taking-on the practice of teaching (and learning) as a form of *authorship.* To educate *through* music is to foster an agent that acts with music, claiming authorship that goes beyond doing, attending and intending to generate social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital. That is a pedagogical process we are yet to fully conceive and make operational.

Ethical Complexity as Boundary Spanning

Re-imagining music teaching might start with changes at the pre-service teaching level, avoiding the restrictive certainty of 'entry-level skills' and risking a curriculum suggesting that we act as 'boundary spanners' (Sandholtz and Finan 1998). *Cluster work* seems to be essential here, providing spaces in which collaboration is asked of students and faculty (Rogers 2002). This notion, derived from the literature on gifted education, strives to make constant a complexity of engagements that are not quick to reify previous patterns. I use the word 'patterns' carefully here, for I intend a sense of divergence and risk while accepting that learning environs need a level of familiarity.[13] I concede that familiarity and repetition are necessary practicalities of flourishing, particularly when repetition does not mean reproduction, but rather a reply.[14]

To think of teaching in these terms is to understand how productive a 'refrain' can be (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). In a song, the refrain is that element which returns; it is comfort, the familiar. Therefore, the refrain can easily become that which identifies, that which is routine. Alternatively, the refrain can also be seen as the repetition that affords elaboration, change, adaptation, and risk. Teaching as the enactment of planning, can be the traditional refrain; a marker that identifies a trusted set of tasks and activities. But, teaching as a boundary-spanning process places the refrain at a point of convergence for multiple readings, a metaphor for how to interact with the complexity of musical possibilities while maintaining didactic feasibility.

Consider as an example the manner in which a middle school teacher with whom I collaborate and who has set up virtual spaces in which his junior high band interacts with other bands, including a college band. As they play with and for each other, these shared

spaces become the basis for discussion about skills, sound, and musical production. They also set the stage for improvisation and *recordist* practices (Merrill 2010) in which virtual jam sessions become the musical material, the recorded *refrain,* which is the source for further in-class playing, improvising, mixing, splicing, and creating 'loops' from which new songs are composed. This is the *reply* I mentioned above, placed as a simple yet creative practice. Refrain then, goes beyond a functionalist point of reference, becoming the supportive point of rest upon which a reply is facilitated. The refrain becomes the improvisatory lead, the building of communal interactions that generate musical innovation, the identifier that balances expansion and recognition. The refrain *rescues* a safety amidst what is uncertain, it facilitates a certain homelessness that gives teachers *permission* to try something that is not prescribed, previously categorized or identified.

The boundary-spanning teacher then is one who constructs curriculum by asking: What if the boundaries between refrain and verses establish not the clear constancy in a song but rather the innumerable possibilities for interpretation? What if I understood (and taught) the refrain as a locus for homelessness that incites authorship rather then reification? What if my ethical obligation were to be placed in creating gateways to not-yet-known musical possibilities?

Ethics Reinstated

While ethics as flourishing is not utopian, its enactment is indeed a daunting task. The implications are major for schooling in music—at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels—and still structurally focused upon the sustainability of didactic practices. We are nudged by ideology and cajoled by policy. The consequence is that as teachers, we are often inept at being responsive to those in front of us. Our *training* has asked us to conceive of ontologies and archetypes. Our policies ask us to privilege the atomistic in teaching, observing norm and projecting homogeneity. Our own fears, and search for identity, lead us to the pursuit of wholeness and fulfillment, and consequently to the projection of teaching as *conquering steps* onto the lives of our youth.

What then of striving for an agency-based, empowered homelessness of teachership? What of creating space for authorship, while deflating consistency and delivery as the acumen of responsible practice? Could we rather hope education to be more *responsive,* allowing space to consider the argument that we do not fully exist except through exerting the

paradoxes we enact? The ethical call in such questions confronts us with the presence of uncertainty and risk, while pressing the idea that to live our professional lives according to notions of identity is to search for answers we assume already exist, and to construct teaching through identifiable markers upon which I recognize myself and upon which others will recognize (read accept) me.

Identity fails ethics in that it translates regularities or constancy into rules of behavior and thought. These autarchic models gently convert and slowly sediment our capacities to address fears, societal pressures and tendencies, professional dictums, or personal desires.[15] As identity models often avoid multiplicity or conflict, they provide false notions of control, certainty and expertise (McCarthy et al. 2003). This in turn results in uninvestigated assumption about who teachers should be, and how they should enact themselves and their teaching. Here discord or risk become improbable because electing its ethical strife is too great of a burden—violence is the response risk and discord usually receive from their interlocutor. [16] Regardless of being the friction that constructs dialogue and innovation, discord and risk are seen as neither civil nor plausible alternatives when placed in ethically vacuous spaces (Schmidt, in press). So it is that, when teachers behave differently than expected, when they "break set" (Loughran and Northfield 1996), students, colleagues, administrative structures and routines will—often in not so subtle ways—push teachers back to *proper* or *moral* modes of action. The dangers of this kind of identity formation are twofold. Firstly, identity often functions through a *telos,* which determines future action and to which one must return. Identity is thus about fulfillment and not becoming. Second, "identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty" (Connolly 1991). Identity thus begets Otherness. A concern with ethics and flourishing manifests itself most significantly here, for it asks us to create spaces that re-imagine the normative practices embedded in ourselves.

According to Levinas (1998), as conscious subjects in our complex relation to the world, we come about not in and through the formation of our identities, but rather by, and in the process of, responding to one another. As he puts it, the subject is not a noun, something that defines and is to be defined. The subject is a verb, a performative, a body that reacts to others, and in doing so, becomes. This is challenging for as he reminds us "there are no preexisting ethical grammars by which I might respond adequately to the other, and yet I must respond nevertheless" (Levinas 1998). The *encounter* between the other and myself

cannot be preempted, it cannot be taught or prepared, and yet it must take place (I can only be a teacher in the interaction with students). Ethics, Levinas would argue, is the "calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other" (43). This *spontaneity* is one way to understand the *impossibility* of preparing oneself for teaching and learning (Ellsworth 1998), and might lead us to more seriously consider music teaching as encounters that take place as I am *face-to-face* with students[17]—therefore confronting the limitations of praxis that underplays social, personal and ethical responsibilities while privileging *doing* and thus *delivery*. If this indeed applies to us, it must too be the condition of flourishing, and to what is central in music: a capacious engagement with production mediated by an ethical interaction with others.

In very simple terms, we educate individuals in and through music when we create empowered spaces for interaction. Thus, to be a subject who musics is to be a body that replies and is responsive to others. To music is to be constituted in the interaction with the other and by that interaction. And that is at the center of an ethics of flourishing: a complex interaction with the constancy of being contradictory, divergent, and multiple.

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Notes

[1] We should consequently see that these same elements would serve as poor predictors of any actions in the future. This is not, I should caution, a relativist claim, nor a fatalist vision.

[2] The notion of place here is seen as a contextual element. A *placed* reality, action, thought, is then one that addresses the location—physical, epistemological, hermeneutical—of the subject.

[3] Kundera, M. 1993. *The unbearable lightness of being*. NY: Continuum.

[4] A simpler way to present this idea is throught the popular dictum: ‘the opportunity makes the thief.’ This is helpful for revealing the manner in which we, as a collective, understand the conditionality of our beings. Rather then focusing on ‘character’ or ‘virtue’ it asks us to understand that we do things in inconsistent ways; that we adapt, falter, and are constantly struggling against externally codified rules.

[5] Here and later in the article when I speak of *production,* what is meant goes beyond the ‘end results’ of an act or process. Rather, I place it as a larger undertaking that involves personal creativity in conceptual and practical terms, irrespective of clear parameters, or goals sometimes imputed to ‘production/product’.

[6] The latter being connected mainly to performance and aesthetic notions.

[7] Ethics as flourishing then addresses agency and transitivity, which provide space for empowerment, which in turn create the capacity for risk-taking.

[8] Performativity is here defined in terms of efficiency (Ball 2003).

[9] *Attention capturing devices* is the code for procedures, the 'tricks' teachers are asked to use—and upon which they are evaluated—when trying to get the attention of students.

[10] The questions proposed by Foucault seem to be relevant to our concern with ethics as a flourishing, for they do not challenge the *telos* that presents us with a *history* of proper assumptions or knowings. Rather, Foucault is preoccupied with *emergence*; that is, with an uprooting that allows us to see origins (and consequently *original ideas)* as adaptable. "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. Its disparity" (Foucault in *Nietzche, Geneology, History,* 79). Understanding our histories and stories in music and education as birthing out of and into *difference*, would provide the space to distance ourselves from 'tradition' or the maintenance of ideals one finds *fundamental* or *foundational.*

[11] Freire articulates authenticity from a political standpoint, as a practice that sees the connections between *word* and *world* as contextualized and urgent. This urgency is prognosticated by a lessened import on *a priories*—historic or conventional—and greater emphasis on present communal interaction. Authenticity does not disregard nor is it capricious toward tradition or previous knowledge, or even expertise, but it does address the pressing urgency of now in learning situations, making them a priority (Freire 1970, 1997)

[12] While it is known that professional life in *high art* is economically feasible only to a minority, that remains the mainstay of the profession as well as the basis for many conservatory-driven programs in higher education.

[13] I would argue that it is only the intensification of routine that creates detachment and possible alienation.

[14] The notion of a *reply* emerges out of a differentiated, unique, creative or conscious *response*, one that takes a question not as an imperative for an answer, but as a proposition for further thinking and acting.

[15] Virno (2008) re-positions Hobbes by proposing that "the institution of the body politic oblige us to obey, even before knowing what will be required of us" (45). Hobbes, of course, organized this in the idea that the need for obedience is connected to a common self-interest in security. Central here is in what ways we are aware of the power, and the extent to which the State, and how well we internalize the State through identity, plays a role in gently and subliminally coercing us into particular notions of security.

[16] Discord is often neither economically viable, nor taken as common-sensical. For to think and act divergently, to repudiate certain identities or roles is to punish oneself. While we can 'choose' ethical actions that move us away from the 'normal' or 'mainstream', we also understand the 'price to pay' for such actions. And we are often discouraged from them.

About the Author

Patrick Schmidt is an Associate Professor of Music Education at the Westminster College of the Arts of Rider University in Princeton, US. He teaches courses on the philosophy and sociology of music, research, curriculum, secondary methods and Hip Hop. His most recent publications can be found in the following journals: *Arts Education Policy Review; Journal of Curriculum Theorizing; Philosophy of Music Education Review; Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education; ABEM Journal* in Brazil; and the *Finnish Journal of Music Education.* He is currently co-editing a 2012 NSSE book (Teachers College Press) and a special issue of the well-known education journal *Theory into Practice.*