

How Music Teachers Recognise and Respond to Negative Emotions in Adolescent One-to-One Music Learning

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Abstract: The present qualitative research focuses on music teachers' perceptions of and responses to negative emotions expressed by adolescent students in private instrumental and vocal lessons. The data are based on a pilot interview and four semi-structured interviews with Chinese music teachers conducted following the pilot. The study was conducted through thematic analysis, and three dimensions of the pedagogical experience were identified and linked to one another: recognizing feelings reflected in changes made to verbal, behavioral, physical, and musical expression; locating the source of distress emotional in music study or in other issues related to school, family, and personal life; and making a pedagogical response through adjustments to lesson dynamics, such as differentiation in task challenge, modifications in lesson tempo, changes in the grading tone, and formulation of reassurance and confidence-inspiring strategies. Participants further elaborated imposing strict professional boundaries, particularly if the emotional issues were perceived as going beyond those existing within the music lesson context. The results suggest that during private music lessons, emotional attention can take the form of situated pedagogical experience rather than psychotherapy. They also stress a professional training deficit of emotional recognition, validation, and referral boundaries that need to be addressed.

Keywords: Adolescent Music Learning; Negative Emotions; One-to-one Music Teaching; Teacher Response; Emotional Recognition; Pedagogical Adjustment.

1. Introduction

When you become an adolescent, music learning has more aspects than technique and expression development. Lessons may be associated with anxiety, frustration, shame, self-consciousness, tiredness, low mood, and fear of mistakes. They may be directly caused by practicing, performance, assessment, or feedback, but can also be related to school tasks, family and friends' pressure, and individual reasons. Previous research indicates a variety of performance anxiety and self-confidence experiences in adolescent musicians [1], and music teachers claim to apply different approaches in supporting learners facing anxiety in performance contexts [2].

Particular attention can be paid to such experiences in one-to-one instrumental and vocal tuition. The teacher meets the same learner repeatedly and can notice subtle changes in speech, posture, face expression, focus, readiness to play, and tone quality. At the same time, the individualized evaluative modality practiced in individual tuition can provide an additional layer to sensitivity to mistakes and feedback responses. Research on one-to-one instrumental teaching has highlighted the importance of interpersonal behavior and the teacher-learner relationship [3], while the study of instrumental feedback has found out that the feedback forms as a relational and pedagogical practice rather than plain error correction [4].

Therefore, this article considers negative emotions in the most inclusive way possible. It includes music learning emotions, such as performance anxiety, frustration, shame, fear of making mistakes, as well as those that can be aroused outside the lesson but then transferred to it. A broader view fills a gap in studies on performance anxiety, concerts, auditions, and assessment, as well as on the everyday

emotional tides teachers can experience in normal lessons, which tend to be overlooked. The research question is: (1) How do music teachers recognize negative emotions in adolescent learners in lessons? (2) What strategies do they use to respond? (3) How do they conceptualize potential triggers of learners' negative emotions, and how does that knowledge shape their teaching responses?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Negative Emotions in Adolescent Music Learning

A music performance provides learners with experiences of repetition, assessment, comparison, and error made visible. For adolescent learners, such experiences can generate anxiety, frustration, discouragement, and self-criticism. Papageorgi's study of adolescent instrumental learners shows that young musicians are not one emotional community; the patterns of anxiety, confidence, and motivation among learners vary considerably [1]. This difference is significant pedagogically because a reassuring response to one learner may not be reassuring to another.

Performance anxiety itself is a factor in the experience, but not the only factor. Teachers may encounter learners who come to class tired after school, distressed about family or peer relationships, or preoccupied by academic demands. Research about academic stress indicates that the broader educational factors can be related to high emotional stress [5], and parental pressure may also contribute to learners' stress [6]. Such external pressures can diminish focus, motivation, and engagement in music lessons, even if the immediate musical experience is not a cause of distress.

2.2. Recognising and Interpreting Emotional Signs

In the emotion aspects during the lesson, not everything is explicitly expressed. One of the students may be unusually quiet, not look at other people's eyes, apologise multiple times, not be willing to do a difficult paragraph, be physically tense, or say that everything is OK without any logical reason for their disengaged performance. So, teachers do not record single behaviours but interpret changes.

According to the data on teacher beliefs and emotional expression, their interpretation of student's behaviour comes from their understanding of support, authority, and psychological needs [7]. In the sphere of individual music teaching services, interpretation holds that much more significant value as one behaviour can be understood in different ways. Silence, for example, may mean unpreparedness, anxiety, tiredness, resistance, or pain.

Emotional nuances can be heard in music performance itself. A tension might be observed in tonal quality, controls of breathing, phrasing, and physicality. Emotions while Learning an Instrument Scale as one of the learner-focused measures demonstrates that learning an instrument may cause a broad spectrum of different emotions [8], but it does not state how teachers in real-time choose to evaluate those emotions. The teacher-focused interpretation process is the current study's subject.

2.3. Teacher Responses, Feedback, and Professional Boundaries

Music teachers' management of emotionally difficult situations may embrace both musical and interpersonal strategies. Attentive preparation, setting reasonable expectations, communication, breathing, and gradual exposure are all identified by research on music performance anxiety [2]. A systematic review also shows that teachers employ different anxiety management strategies, although implementations are uncoded and not always training experts' recommendations [9]. Feedback is another essential element. Whenever it comes to emotionally difficult processes, correction's language, timing, and delivery might be equally as important as the technical component itself [4].

This generates a practical tension between care and professionalism. A challenge that is manageable at the moment does not require its complete removal but rather the opportunity to organize it differently and come back to it later. Teacher development in social-emotional learning in music education has been suggested [10], yet music teachers are not qualified experts in counselling. Bounded attentiveness is a necessary requirement of emotional responsiveness. It remains to be discussed how much they may or should do to support students without making clinical assumptions and bearing organizational, family, safeguarding, and specialist responsibilities.

2.4. Research Gap

In broad strokes, the existing literature describes performance anxiety, student interactions, and feedback. It offers less detail on how teachers cope with on-the-spot choices when the state of a student is suddenly murky. Many articles start with a pointed problem, such as performance anxiety, but an ordinary lesson may confront a teacher with various uncertainties: the student is less verbal, the tone is uncomfortable, the focus seems to be waning, or there is an

abrupt lack of drive. The teacher cannot decipher if inquiry, adaption, persistence, or referral is needed, as the stimulus is not known. This research focus turns attention away from a single emotion type to the real-time process of discernment, interpretation, embodiment, and boundary negotiation. It also considers feelings from outside music study, as instruction may require adaptation even if the issue in question is not solvable during a lesson.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Participants

A qualitative design implementing semi-structured interviews was chosen because the research questions revolve around teachers' experiences, interpretations, and the process of making professional decisions. The project started with one pilot interview. It was found that the term "negative emotions" was rather broad when used without examples, and that there was a need for more specific prompts. Hence, the interview guide was revised to focus on observable signs, potential sources, practical professional teaching adjustments, and boundaries. The pilot work was used to refine the instrument and was excluded from the four-participant results reported below.

Four Chinese music teachers, with two piano-related teachers, one violin teacher, and one guitar teacher, were involved in the main study; their teaching experiences ranged from four years to more than thirty years. The participants were aged 29 to 58 and had all taught adolescents in a one-to-one setting. The purposive sample allowed the study to examine views across the range of instruments and levels of professional experience.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Each of the six interviews was carried out in a semi-structured manner and had a duration of about 20 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, with all the participants being native speakers of the language and better able to express their teaching practices in the language they were strongest at. With the participants' permission beforehand, their interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, anonymised, and translated for subsequent analysis and discussion.

The analysis used thematic analysis and followed a flexible six-step process by Braun and Clarke [11], which concentrates on analysing qualitative data to find, interpret, and provide information on patterns. Each transcript was read multiple times through to reach a level of familiarisation, reflecting on indicators of emotions, perceived causes, teacher responses, and professional boundaries. Then, related codes were grouped into broader themes and checked against the research questions. The ethical procedures were the following: informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymisation, and precautions to not release any identifiable and compromising information about adolescent students, following the guidelines for educational research ethics [12].

4. Findings

4.1. Recognition Through Changes from the Student's Usual Pattern

Teachers have discovered not to depend on a one-sided sign of distress in terms of students' negative emotion. Teachers

would search instead for a hint from the daily actions of the students in each of the four dimensions: verbal, behavioral, physical, and musical habits. Verbal signs included things like irritability, curt, repeated replies, self-denial, and comments aimed at desecrating verbal confidence. For example, one teacher referred to students telling her that they had "no talent" when things didn't go well, while another noticed that some students would maintain that they were alright even when their behavior conveyed the contrary.

Behavioral indications were disassociating oneself from people, silent responses, minimal eye contact, moving aimlessly, avoiding a challenging task, and being generally actively involved less than usual. Physical and musical characteristics were more perceptible to the teachers of the voice and string instruments. It was mentioned that as the possible signs of something being emotional rather than technical, such as tight breathing, body strain, and changes in tone quality, students would show up.

Finally, it seems the teachers noticed that the most reliable indication of distress was not a specific behavior itself but rather a deviation from the usual expectations of the teacher from that "distinct" student.

4.2. Distinguishing Music-Related and External Sources

The distress, as they mentioned, came from both music-related and outside issues. Music-related components were repertoire difficulty, repeated failures, lack of readiness, worry about not turning mistakes into errors, performance anxiety, and family reaction to errors. External pressures were school workload, family expectation, fatigue, peer relationships, and personal problems. Despite the participants' awareness of music-learning issues' risks, they doubted that all distress was due to it. Participants believed that external pressures sometimes prevailed over the task.

Distress would develop depending on how much the teacher inquired about the student. Narrow but open questions followed by concern appeared to be the most typical verbal response. However, the participants were cautious about asking follow-up questions. This difference between asking whether distress was present and looking for the cause of it deserves attention. Although participants saw emotional awareness as relevant, they did not think they had the right to inquire about a family or personal issue.

4.3. Pedagogical Adjustment and Professional Boundaries

The prevailing reaction was to adapt the content instead of halting instruction. Educators lowered the level of challenge, divided a complex section into steps, temporarily changed the repertoire, reduced the velocity, or created a fast track for achievement. The purpose of the given actions was rebuilding confidence and facilitating the student with their control. Humor, personal testimonies, reassurances, or neuro-motor changes were the means for the revised mood.

Often comments on the student's work were softened when the one in question was physically or emotionally fragile. Recognizing partial progress on the path to correction, the educators cut down on the harshness of negative statements, and refrained from any words or sentences that could incite a feeling of shame in the one being reprimanded. These did not imply that any dropping of the musical work per se occurred. The strategists were trying to protect the eventual aim of education, although they were redirecting its course.

Participants also indicated precise allowances for what they were to do or not do. They were fine with dealing with any feelings behind the learning connected to the lesson itself and offer some level of care for problems in which external factors interfere with learning. They opposed the need to diagnose or treat severe problems in someone's life. One participant characterized the role as being an "emotional companion" rather than an "emotional diagnostician." Thus, when circumstances seemed to be beyond the control of the music teacher, the participants preferred to single out the parents, schools, safeguarding processes, or suitable specialists, then trying to latch hold of the issue themselves.

5. Discussion

The results indicate that emotional attunement in one-to-one music teaching is an instance of situated pedagogical judgement. Recognition relied on knowledge of the individual learner rather than a pre-determined behavioural repertoire. It elaborates on prior research into interpersonal behaviour in private instrumental lessons [3] by demonstrating that teachers also interpret alterations in speech, corporeality and musical sonority as part of ongoing emotional appraisal. Their interpretations were based on experience and interpersonal relations, which substantiates the claim that emotional observation ought to be more directly foregrounded in teacher education [10].

A second result is that teachers differentiated, albeit hesitantly, between idiosyncratic aspects of learning-induced emotionality and internally sourced feelings that were carried into the lesson space from an external context. This is important because the alternate understandings generated from different participants produced differential responses. Technical frustration often led to restructuration of tasks; performance anxiety led to reassurance and confidence building; external pressure more often than not produced decreased demands and a more relaxed environment in the lessons. The teachers' carefulness at delving into personal origins is also significant. It suggests that effective emotional care is not contingent on teachers' penetrating the internalised narratives behind a student's mood. Instead, they can react to what is pedagogically observable while also safeguarding the student's privacy.

The third finding relates to the amalgamation of musical practice with emotional care. Participants seldom characterised emotional support as a discrete practice. Instead, it was integrated in pacing, selection of repertoire, scale of setting the task, feedback, humour and communication. This result is in keeping with both research that indicates feedback in the one-to-one instrumental lesson is developed through relational practice [4] and with studies that show music teachers already use pragmatic strategies for dealing with anxiety [2]. However, these were also frequently found to be formed through experience rather than pre-service education. As such, more systematic professional development could aid in helping less experienced teachers differentiate between appropriate pedagogical modification, unsuitable over-involvement and situations requiring referral.

The study has limitations. The sample was small and culturally homogenous and thus the results cannot be statistically generalised to all one-to-one music teachers. The data represent teachers' interpretations rather than adolescents' own reports of their feelings, and two interviews were carried out face-to-face while two were conducted in an online environment, which may have had differential influence on

rapport. Future research could expand culturally diverse samples, incorporate self-reported measures of students coupled with teacher interviews and follow teacher-student dyads over time. It could also test whether the identified strategies in this article are associated with longer-term differences in confidence, engagement and motivation.

6. Conclusion

This research depicts that adolescent negative emotion responses from music teachers happen as follows: observation, interpretation, and pedagogical adaptation. Teachers detect distress by noticing verbal behavior, participation, physical tension, and musical sound changes; they deem both music-related and outside causes; and they modify task difficulty, pacing, feedback, and lesson climate to re-engage students. Simultaneously, they are conscious of and avoid overstepping the boundaries of their role by refraining from treating ordinary pedagogical support as counselling or diagnosis. The main implication is that emotionally responsive music teaching doesn't ask teachers to become mental-health practitioners; it asks them to observe change, interpret with caution, proportionately adapt teaching, safeguard professional boundaries, and recognize when additional support is needed. In instrumental and vocal teacher education, the ability to do this could be enhanced by direct attention during instruction to emotional observation, responsive feedback, and referral processes.

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