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The Politics of Care in the Education of Children Gifted for Music: A Systems View

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Abstract

In educational practice, children gifted for music often become showcases for enhancing institutional prestige, rather than being seen as thriving agents of their own lives. In this chapter, we approach the education of children gifted for music as a special case in terms of social justice and children's rights, by calling for teachers and educational institutions to adopt a transformative politics of care in order to better recognize the moral space for these children to develop, as well as to expand the normative professional frames of entire music education institutions and society at large. By adopting an approach of ethics of care with systems reflexivity, the education of children gifted for music can become a healthy test for the whole educational system's understanding of democracy, social justice, and fairness, and for the very purpose of music education in contemporary societies.

Keywords

ableism, care ethics, children's rights, elitism, gifted for music, politics of care, systems reflexivity, talent education

Introduction

The decades-long and ongoing popularity of positivistic research on gifted children's[1] musical education is today confronted by a growing awareness of the discriminating power of "ableism" in the discipline of music education. Ableist music education that assumes normality and completeness, particularly in terms of students' motoric abilities and sensitivity together with elitism and meritocracy, forms a power structure in which the elite presents itself as a select group of people attributed with certain intrinsic qualities and special skills, or experience that is judged as merit (Ilmola et al., 2021). As such, meritocracy is claimed to be the defining feature of the entire education system of modern democratic societies, in its belief that social class and other social categories have been declared to be irrelevant to an individual's life prospects, which should now only depend on talent and effort. Yet, a vast body of research shows that in a democracy "the professed equality of rights of all citizens contrasts sharply with the very real inequality of living conditions" (Piketty, 2014, p. 361). Hence, a meritocratic education system "grants excessive value to people who stand out in a given field—more often than not socioeconomically—at the expense of those who occupy lower positions in that field" (Gagné, 2021, p. 67). Thus, in gifted education stakeholders face a pressing need to support children from lower socioeconomic strata instead of those already better situated, as precocious children from more challenged backgrounds might not ever get a chance to fully achieve their potential, or even have their gifts recognized.

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[1] Following Françoys Gagné's (2021) Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT; see Figure 34.1 in Hendricks & McPherson, this volume) we assume that children can be considered *gifted for music* when they display unusually precocious "intellectual, creative and/or physical maturity well before the majority of their peers" (Gagné, 2021, p. 77).

However, whereas ableist music education puts talent on a pedestal the critical anti-ableist stance is reluctant to admit any fundamental differences between individual students (Slote, 2013).

In this chapter we distance ourselves from any conception of equality that assumes sameness or talent-related unfairness by recognizing the existence of *giftedness* in the domain of music—albeit when viewed through the critical lenses of care, justice, and democracy (see also Slote, 2013). In our attempt to overcome the polarizing tendencies and Stigma of the Giftedness Paradigm (SGP; Cross & Coleman, 2005), we will highlight how children gifted for music—*because of* their giftedness and potential for being "able" and "selected" to perform at expert levels—can also be vulnerable and at risk in "ableist" and elitist meritocratic music education systems. Once their potential is identified (e.g., Haroutounian, 2002), these children tend to be treated as future professionals; they are prone to being utilized as showcases and national priorities in order to enhance socio-educational ecosystems' prestige (Borland, 1989) and therefore lack the preconditions for becoming thriving agents of their own lives "here and now."

Despite a large number of biographical accounts and studies of the cognitive-motoric skill development of children gifted for music (e.g., McPherson, 2016)—which have been used to support the existence of acceleration programs to maximize their potential in private and public music schools, conservatoires, and music universities[2]—there are also vivid

[2] Formal acceleration programs for precocious underage children—in which "access is controlled through a quota of limited available places" (Gagné, 2021, p. 97) —are common in Western music institutions. These programs are aimed at accelerated progression in music for children who pursue a regular curriculum in a condensed manner, with the main options being (a) entering official youth programs specifically aimed at talent development and

descriptions of the lifelong trauma and abuse that children gifted for music have faced within (but also outside) special programs for talent development in music education systems (e.g., MacNamara et al., 2016). With a history that includes the brutal physical abuse through castration of young boys by the Roman Catholic Church in the service of artistic achievement (Siegel, 2020), as well as more commonplace parental oppression and exploitation (Gordon, 1988; Kijas, 2016) and the authoritarian behaviors of teachers (López-Íñiguez, 2019), music cannot be said to be a field that self-evidently nurtures the welfare of the musically precocious child and follows the legal codes of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However, questions concerning a child's welfare and self-determination, needs and interests, and their exposure to public scrutiny are complex. For instance, in matters such as child labor, children's rights to protection and provision should be prioritized over their right to participation (Wyness et al., 2004). Yet, in light of the literature to date, it is obvious that a simple norm or generalized rule disconnected from reality cannot direct how parental or educational power is exerted in the education of children gifted for music—or any music education for that matter.

We argue that the education of children gifted for music can be seen as a special case in terms of social justice and children's rights, requiring professional care and reflexivity from these children's music teachers and educational institutions. More specifically, we argue for a transformative *politics of care,* not only focused on the typical master-apprentice setting that surrounds children gifted for music, but also expanding the normative professional frames of the entire music education system in Western countries. Based on the premise of

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professionalism in/outside higher music education, or (b) pursuing two or more academic years at the same time (or skipping a grade) at any institution not particularly oriented towards talent development.

relational ontology, the politics of care stresses responsibility for human relationships by accepting that in care ethics "no aspect of human life is unshaped by the political" (Greenswag, 2019, p. 914). Care ethics thus recognizes the complexity of relational ethical life by approaching situations from multiple perspectives. This includes a collective concern for others as well as care and solidarity at the institutional and societal levels (Urban, 2020), and recognizing an individual's rights not only to personal autonomy *for* decision-making regarding their bodies and minds, and their roles in societies, but also freedom *from* the public struggle for recognition and shared vulnerabilities (Dean, 2009).

In constructing the lens for a politics of care in music education for the gifted, we first lay the theoretical grounds for expanding the currently technically-oriented talent education and view of music professionalism to encompass a moral-political endeavour characterized by epistemic respect, empathy, needs interpretation, and deliberation, as well as the public ethic of care. We then discuss how a care ethics approach can support a just education for children gifted for music and balance the common elitist approaches to their educational programs. By drawing from Gagné's work on giftedness and talent development (i.e., Gagné, 2021; in music, e.g., Gagné & McPherson, 2016), we illustrate how care ethics can provide a more holistic frame for educating children gifted for music and for defending the acceleration programs of talent development in a fair manner. Furthermore, we call for *systems reflexivity* that integrates the ethics of care into a critical analysis of the social systems of music education, arguing that through such reflexivity it is possible to transform the entire education system so that it can recognize its unwanted outcomes—such as ableism, abuse, and elitism—and establish an agenda of care in music education. As a whole, we aim to reposition music in contemporary societies by engaging in the reconciliation of the over century-old tension between cognitive/rational educational efficacy views and moral theories

in arts education, and recognizing professional work in music—even at its highest level of expert development—as a moral and political endeavor.

Theorizing Care Ethics in Morally-Oriented Music Education

A Moral Turn

In their recent work, Westerlund and Gaunt (2021) underline that in contemporary societies, professional practice in music needs to be conceptualized as positioned at the nexus of artistic, creative, technical, ethical, democratic, and socially responsible dimensions, and that this work revolves around the capacity to engage in *morally principled association*. In such a professional practice, attaining specialized expert knowledge in music is not seen as the final goal but, rather, a mediating means in the service of human good that needs to be guided by moral wisdom (*phronesis*). As Carr (2014) writes,

> any theoretical or technical knowledge which professional agents may indeed require for the effective prosecution of the various moral ends or goals of professional service are at least normatively secondary to or subservient of such ends. (p. 21)

Such a professional practice requires reflexivity that recognizes how professional work cannot be practised "simply by applying value-free, technically defined authoritatively prescribed competences" (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2015, p. 73). Rather, "[t]ricky ethical and political dilemmas should properly be seen as falling within rather than outside the remit of professional ethics" (p. 73) and, as we argue, the music education of children gifted for music can be seen as one of these ethical dilemmas—often manifested in educational contexts that can be characterized as "ableist" and elitist. Leaning on Sennett (2008), we see a parallel between the care one invests in practices of craftsmanship and the care that is involved in making human relationships: ". . . the craft of making physical things provides insight into the techniques of experience that can shape our dealings with others. Both the difficulties and

the possibilities of making things well apply to making human relationships" (p. 289). However, children gifted for music, when selected for advanced programs, may enter an "ableist" regime of technically defined and authoritatively prescribed musical competence goals instead of being cared for as genuine partners in human relationships and authors of their own lives.

Hence, one might relate the aspects of care, responsibility, and morality in music with the traditional image of the independent, autonomous, rational, and highly skilled expert musician who invests their knowledge and skills in leading their students into their own craftsmanship, while knowing from experience what it takes to be and become skilled at a high level. As Sennett (2008) notes, one can sense a deep care and responsibility for the musical tradition and craftsmanship one represents. However, this image easily overlooks the pluralist educational reality of human dependence and the morality for which it calls and, instead, instrumentalizes the student in pedagogical settings to serve a professional realm of specific craftsmanship, represented by the teacher as the highest representative of the hierarchy (e.g., Gaunt et al., 2021; Pozo et al., 2022). Good work in music teaching in all its aspects therefore also requires *relational expertise* (Edwards, 2010) in which one is always in dialogue with not just one's disciplinary issues and own performative excellence, but also with people and various complex issues of social life.

Epistemic Respect: Turning Points in Learning and Professional Pathways

As an approach to moral philosophy, care ethics recognizes the complexity of relationality. By acknowledging multiple experienced realities, care ethics "implies and justifies the epistemic virtue of open mindedness, and . . . a kind of epistemic humility" (Slote, 2013, p. 80). Slote (2013) argues that failing to be open to other perspectives and to take into account the wellbeing of others *from the perspective of others* is a failure of epistemic empathy. Relational expertise can therefore be said to require *epistemic* respect:

> Some people claim to be concerned about the welfare of others but also tend to impose their own ideas of what is good for them on the others they purportedly want to help. This is disrespectful, and so in defending an ideal of empathic concern for others, the sentimentalist care ethicist is criticizing not only certain kinds of indifference or malice toward others, but also the sort of disrespect(fulness) that consists in not taking the other's point of view into account (and in a caring way). (p. 51)

Hence, in insisting on always knowing what a child's best interest is, and not being able to shift one's perspective towards accepting and offering multiple paths of being a student gifted for music, implies a failure of epistemic empathy and a lack of relational expertise. In this challenging scenario, an opportunity arises when considering the turning points in these children's professional learning pathways, as every person has "undoubtedly experienced . . . key moments that transformed [thei]r trajectory, for better or worse" (Gagné, 2021, p. 107). Supporting the ability and opportunity of children gifted for music to reflect critically on their own journeys can enable them to create meanings and understandings of the (typically neglected and at times unsettling) critical incidents that differently catalysed their pathways. However, engaging in such a process requires empathetic behaviors in both the public and domestic spaces surrounding these children, and in reality the socio-educational systems might fail to adapt and realign to meet their basic psychological needs (Davidson & Faulkner, 2013).

Empathy, Needs Interpretation, and Deliberation

Traditionally, care ethics has been considered to be a matter of private life that lies outside the scope of the questions concerning wider political landscapes (Morgan, 2020; Urban & Ward, 2020). This tendency has been fortified by policies concerning children that tend to emphasize the role of family and parents in care. However, according to Wyness et al.

(2004), the emphasis on private life in terms of care "is at odds with children's membership of more variegated kin and community networks and their involvement in more public adult-oriented environments" (p. 90). This also pertains to children gifted for music, who are often given (semi-)professional roles in institutions and talent development programs. Here, we adhere to theorization that approaches caring as a social practice and also places care, vulnerability, and interdependency in the public domain (e.g., Urban & Ward, 2020; Greenswag, 2019).[3] In this view, the ethical and the political are intrinsically intertwined with one another, and care and justice, emotion and rationality, are brought together beyond the domain of domestic care. However, in this kind of *ethics of care* empathy can still be central, as Morgan (2020) explains:

> The emphasis on empathy in care ethics . . . does not eschew rationality and purpose; it critiques any allegedly pure notion of reason that does not conjoin with emotion, while simultaneously rejecting any argument that would diminish the necessity of rational grounding and application . . . What moves us to act comprises an admixture of emotional-affective transformation and rational understanding. (p. 111)

Such an ethics of care highlights the importance of paying attention to the diversity of needs and the required "politics of needs interpretation" (Fraser, 1987) and deliberation (Urban & Ward, 2020). Although care ethics typically acknowledges social and political inclusion and equal individual possibilities to resist processes of marginalization and exclusion (e.g., Smith, 2006), a politics of care may address a similar mechanism in the abuse of children gifted for music when the child is given no choice and the expert teacher and

[3] See Tronto's (1993) argument for a political ethic of care and Fisher and Tronto's (1990) broad definition of caring as a social practice.

educational institution use their power to limit alternatives and impose on the child their view of what the child's future will be like. A politically formulated ethics of care stresses that a social order, such as an official educational program with specific traditions and hierarchies, must acknowledge care in order to be just to all (Urban & Ward, 2020). Yet, matters of needs are complex when looked at from the relational perspective of dependencies: The child should have the freedom to resist a social order while also being recognized as having a need to belong. In the education of children gifted for music, this translates into an imperative to offer high quality, tailor-made, inclusive, and caring tuition that truly meets the educational needs and intrinsic interests of these students, while (a) letting them decide when and in which ways they can safely share their developed competencies and expertise with the world (e.g., when to attend competitions, when to be remunerated for public concerts or recordings, when to appear in a live TV show or radio broadcast); and (b) supporting their development as rounded, caring citizens in all areas of life rather than merely the cognitive domain. "Caring for" students in this way requires an awareness of the entire spectrum of sociocultural influences affecting these people's lives (parents, teachers, peers), as well as institutional efforts.

Towards a "Public Ethic of Care" in Music Education Institutions

According to Urban (2020), an institutional approach in care ethics addresses values such as reconciliation, reciprocity, diversity, and responsibility, and envisions and institutes social justice as a matter of "caring solidarity" and collective responsibility for care in order to do justice to the idea that people are differently situated (Urban & Ward, 2020). Urban (2020) points out how American philosopher Nel Noddings's seminal views on the ethics of care situated institutions as responsible only for "care-about:, i.e., addressing concerns about something and recognizing existing needs and rights; in this view, institutions cannot "care-for," at least directly. Institutions can only facilitate translating their caring-about into caring-

for by providing and supporting the conditions under which actual persons can engage in genuine caring-for (Noddings, 2015). Instead of separating care-about and care-for, however, Urban (2020) argues that:

> caring and the dependence on care must be incorporated into what is said to count as the 'normal' subject of politics [and] that we need to rethink the role and responsibility of larger social and political structures, such as the state and its institutions, in securing care as a public value. (p. 284)

Such a rethinking of collective institutional responsibilities can be called a public ethic of care in music education. A public ethic of care challenges the still common patriarchal and elitist ethos of the education of children gifted for music, while seriously considering alternative, mutually negotiated educational paths for serving the wellbeing of these children. A public ethic of care does not refer to an administrative state only, but to a common space in which it is possible to openly debate values and choices from multiple perspectives, and in this way also addressing the controversial issues of the education of children gifted for music and its deep groundedness in "ableism" in music scholarship "in which human sciences are compelled to surrender to a medicalised and biological gaze" (Odendaal et al., 2020). Indeed, Fraser (1997) claims that only through struggle and debate can a society engage in needs interpretation, and that only by making the needs public can one influence inequalities. Importantly, a public ethic of care does not assume consensus, but rather takes the concerns and care as an ongoing, case-by-case struggle.

Although institutional contexts for the education of children gifted for music differ globally, it may therefore not be an overstatement to claim that all music education contexts would benefit from consciously creating a "public sphere" for the politics of care, because expert education in music is known to still take place within a "conservatory culture" (Gaunt

& Westerlund, 2013; Pozo et al., 2022) with limited communicative openness, critical discussion, and collaboration.

The Politics of Care in Educational Programs for Children Gifted for Music

In contemporary societies, gifted children's education can however be like "the elephant in the room." On the one hand, differentiated music education seems necessary for providing effective education early enough for these children, and in this way for sustaining a high level of professional life. Gifted children's education can also be seen as part and parcel of democratic, student-centred efforts, since it is based on knowledge according to which children with potential are "bored, unmotivated, and unchallenged" in normal classes (Cross, 2013, p. 116). On the other hand, differentiated education is uncomfortably elitist, sometimes even feeding the narcissist features of contemporary celebrity culture. It creates an undemocratic polarization towards the top of the hierarchy and in this way strengthens the "ableism" against which contemporary institutions and societies should fight.

Similarly, as with gifted education in general (see Cross, 2013; Gagné, 2021), differentiated music education programs are often based on an unfair and unreflected meritocracy. The programs seem not to represent the ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity of societies, and they even poorly serve those of the highest ability. For instance, the official programs for talent development in Western countries can be rather expensive for many students—either in terms of high enrolment fees or the necessity of sustaining the living standards of developed countries—and not all such programs are supported by scholarships or bursaries. Hence, in music, the access to education by the gifted falls within the concept of "chance." What grounds are there, then, to consider the education for children gifted for music from the perspective of care ethics?

First, care ethics would pay attention to the potential epistemic disrespect and imposed futures (cf. Slote, 2013) that are common in gifted children's programs in general. In

these programs, as Cross (2013) argues, adults are "more familiar with the consequences of high ability–higher educational attainment and ultimate occupational status" (p. 117). Teachers and parents that value this continuum turn "the horizontal plane into a vertical one [in which] the ability continuum becomes a status hierarchy" (p. 117). Over time, this straightforward occupational continuum may be adopted by the children, but such unrequested pressure and external requirements might lead to the development of the unethical-unempathetic mindsets and self-damaging behaviors typically prevalent among talented students—particularly as they grow up and their "novelty" wears off (Seiner et al., 2009). Care ethics—with its imperative for openness, epistemic respect, and ethico-prosocial attitudes—provides a critical, morally-oriented framework for a more holistic understanding of these children's socio-developmental process and the importance of the child to be given voice and agency in this process.

These aspects of care ethics also resonate with the research on differentiated instruction. For instance, Gagné's (2021) Differentiated Model emphasizes the "developmental" nature of talent and distinguishes between natural abilities or aptitudes and systematically developed abilities or skills at the high level of expertise, such as musical expertise. For Gagné, giftedness refers to the possession of outstanding natural abilities or aptitudes, whereas talent refers to the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities or competencies, comprising knowledge and skills. Educational programs that follow this model should aim to create a structured, systematic, deliberate, and ongoing and progressive process to develop gifts into talents (i.e., abilities into competences) in order to achieve excellence in musical performance (e.g., McPherson, 2016; McPherson & Williamon, 2016).

Importantly, however, Gagné's model emphasizes that intrapersonal and environmental factors function as mutually constituting catalysts impacting positively or

negatively on the talent development process, and in particular that the intrapersonal factors (the child's motivation) filter the environmental catalysts. Hence, the role of the educational environment is also significant in the education of the gifted for music. Gagné (2008) claims that "natural abilities are NOT innate," but rather developed over the whole course of a person's life (p. 3, emphasis in the original). Based on the relational and life-long nature of this development, Gagné proposes that the programs for children who are gifted should have customized and accelerated pacing for progress, and that the children should have *personal* excellence goals (Gagné, 2015, p. 287; cf. Gagné, 2011, p. 12). Thus, from the perspective of the education for children gifted for music, it seems important that the education should be individually tailor-made, that care should be invested in monitoring the child's motivation, and that this monitoring should be made in dialogue *with* the child by providing the possibility for the child to express alternative goals (in line with López-Íñiguez et al., 2022). As such, acceleration and setting personal goals could in principle be easily included in one-to-one instrumental studies, compared to group-based school education in other subjects.

A second issue that supports the perspective of care ethics in programs for children gifted for music is related to the public ethic of care, and how the educational institution sees itself in terms of supporting democratic and equity processes (in line with Gagné, 2011; McPherson, 1997). While perhaps trying to best serve the child's vertical developmental continuum towards professional life, institutions "are caught in the societal struggle for dominance of the status hierarchy" (Cross, 2013, p. 117). They unconsciously create unwanted public politics and unfair societal presence. With a more conscious care ethics approach, the educational institution can remind itself, its educational environment, teachers, and administrators, as well as the children and their parents, of the positive freedom (i.e., Greene, 1988) of every child to choose their own future. With care ethics, music education institutions and programs for children gifted for music can nurture a practice of negotiation

where the children can also understand the existence of alternatives and be taken as partners in deliberation. This, in essence, would mean a real reconciliation of the tension between cognitive/rational educational efficacy views and moral theories in arts education.

Moreover, by refusing to accept and fighting against "ableist," elitist, and meritocratic discourses—according to which the gifted children deserve the highest-level music education whereas the nongifted can be taught with less quality or not at all—the institution can resist producing structural inequality. Indeed, Cross (2013) argues that gifted education in general plays to varying degrees into "the maintenance of the hierarchical structure that undeniably exists in our society" (p. 117). In order to be truly fair, the differentiating programs should recognize how a seemingly democratic program can at the same time produce inequality and strengthen the unwanted elitist public image of the institution. It can therefore be argued that educational programs for children gifted for music require a conscious politics of care at multiple interactive levels of the educational system. Drawing from Urban (2020), such a politics of care at an institutional and administrative level can

1. reflect "not only expert judgment but a collaborative work that takes into account different viewpoints and lived experiences";
2. "use their discretionary authority not to accumulate more power but to reach out to the public and invite them to join a dialogue";
3. situate their administrative knowledge "in experience and dialogical reflection"; and
4. be "critically reflexive, willing to question and challenge their own values, assumptions and professional judgments" (p. 290).

In such a politics of care, care-*about*, care-*for,* and care-*with* are integrated, and professional work in music—at all levels of expertise—is recognized as a moral and political endeavor.

Towards Caring Music Education Systems

The critical mode of care ethics is "a method of discovery to uncover what underlying forces have contributed to the production and perpetuation of gross injustices" (Greenswag, 2019, p. 917), in this way aiming at transformation. We suggest that in order to increase the concreteness of the critical mode of care ethics, a politics of care should also call for a shift towards a more consciously socio-ecological and politically- and morally-oriented systems view, and what has been called *systems reflexivity* (Westerlund et al., 2021). As all educational phenomena can be seen as social systems (Väkevä et al., 2017), they can potentially transform their practices by constantly intervening and critically testing their prevailing epistemic frames against the purpose and function of the system.

When reflexivity as a "dialectic interplay between thought and action" (Gale & Molla, 2016, p. 249) and translation of critical thinking into action permeates the whole social system, we can talk about systems reflexivity. In other words, systems reflexivity allows us to see, interrogate, and reimagine the taken-for-granted structures that sustain the unwanted features and consequences of the system (Moore et al., 2018; Westerlund et al., 2021). Systems reflexivity provides the politics of care with a bigger operational stage upon which to reflect on the fundamental grounds and values of the system as a whole. Indeed, through systems reflexivity it is possible to identify in what way a system acts as a social system, how it may produce unwanted consequences—for instance by privileging some and marginalizing others—and how the system could, through some conscious choices and different kinds of action, provide more just and fair understandings to the whole society. Hence, a systems view of care ethics emphasizes that epistemic issues are the foundation of any social system, and that some of our deep-rooted mental models can be the very source for unwanted, unfair consequences, even in a discipline such as music education.

The lack of care can be the consequence of our own mental models and conceptions, such as the inability to see beyond the "vertical-occupational path of learning music"

(Väkevä et al., 2017) typically predetermined for children gifted for music. A politics of care with systems reflexivity, therefore, points towards one's self *within* the system equally so as someone else *outside* it. In this sense, the politics of care is not possible unless one better understands oneself and the systemic function of the system itself. When the moral and emotional politics of care are paired with politically aware systems reflexivity, it is possible for an institution to be able to initiate the continuous struggle that any institutional change requires.

In sum, a politics of care is not simply an individual attitude in which a teacher cares for a child who is gifted, but rather can be understood as an institutional, multi-level capacity to rethink and re-organize practices and transform the institution's self-understanding of the purpose of the very social system. A politics of care that involves systems reflexivity does not reduce the consequences to individual students' wellbeing, but rather expands professional responsibility and care towards ongoing critical deliberation on the entire system while also making it possible to see how the system positions itself within wider society through its policies and legal regulations—such as those on children's rights. In this sense, when transformed through ethics of care, education for children gifted for music "can become a catalyst for greater equality; a vehicle for social improvement" (Cross, 2013, p. 121).

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter we have explored the education for children gifted for music from the perspective of care ethics with a systems view, and claim that through care ethics it is possible to transform not just the education for children gifted for music but the entire music education system. We have suggested that by engaging with the politics of care with systems reflexivity, and by accepting ongoing struggle as a characteristic of such reflexive, morally-oriented professional work, it is possible for a music education system to distance itself from "ableist," elitist, and meritocratic practices that support the status quo of musical expertise at

the expense of democratization of the society. By engaging in politics of care it is then possible to overcome the view in which professional work in music is seen as a power-neutral niche operating outside of society's understanding of what is fair and right. Indeed, in an approach characterized by ethics of care, the education for children gifted for music can become a healthy test for the whole educational system's understanding of democracy, social justice, and fairness, and of the very purpose of music education in contemporary societies.

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