

# Trauma-Responsive Instruction in the Music Classroom

Max Deger  
University of Nevada, Reno

California All-State Music Education Conference • 16 February 2023

*tw*: abuse, violence, racism, self-harm, mental illness

## Session Objectives

- Define trauma and how it can manifest in student behavior
- Explore strategies for managing oppositional behavior
- Discuss compassionate/trauma-responsive curriculum and classroom structures

## Defining Trauma

### Symptoms of Trauma

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Possible Manifestations</u>
<i>Hyperarousal</i>	A persistent expectation of danger	Impaired capacity to modulate response
<i>Intrusion</i>	A reenactment of the trauma scene (“day-mares”)	Self-harm
<i>Constriction</i>	Disconnection or dissociation	Appearance of being “out of it;” self-medication

## Trauma in Students

### Managing Oppositional Behavior

- Check your own adrenaline level before engaging
- Maintain a calm and confident demeanor
- Make a brief suggestion/drop a thought
- Use strategic praise
- Use only natural and logical consequences

## Grounding Technique

1. Bring the student into the present moment
  2. Reassure them that this is *not* a punishment
  3. Follow-up with a plan for future incidents
- Grounding tasks (i.e. deep breathing, a walk to the back of the room, a piece of candy to eat, “name one thing you can see/hear/touch”) are useful both to bring dissociated students back into the moment and as a quick Do Now activity to ground your entire class.

## Creating a Trauma-Responsive Classroom

### Compassionate Curriculum Strategies (Wolpow, et. al.)

1. Safety and Connection
  - ◆ Firm classroom procedures and structures
  - ◆ Affirm identities of students
2. Personal Agency, Social Skills, and Academic Skills
  - ◆ Give students the tools for autonomous participation in music-making
3. Emotional Self-Regulation
  - ◆ Intentional and meaningful music-making
  - ◆ Selection of quality repertoire

### Repertoire Suggestions for Developing Band

- Beginning musicians (“Level 0.5-1”)
- ◆ *Last Stage to Red Rock*, Jennifer Jolley
  - ◆ *Three Songs of Bengal*, Aakash Mittal
  - ◆ *Ember Skies*, Kevin Day
- Developing musicians (“Level 1-2”)
- ◆ *The Cave You Fear*, Michael Markowski
  - ◆ *Chasing Sunlight*, Cait Nishimura
  - ◆ *Syzygy*, Viet Cuong
- Advancing musicians (“Level 2.5-3”)
- ◆ *Stillwater*, Kelijah Dunton
  - ◆ *Shenandoah*, Omar Thomas
  - ◆ *Ash*, Jennifer Jolley

→ Most of these composers (plus many more for developing ensembles of all levels!) have works available through Murphy Music Press: <https://murphymusicpress.com>

## References

- Fecser, Mary Ellen. "Classroom Strategies for Traumatized, Oppositional Students." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 24, no. 1 (2015): 20-24.
- Gillespie, Matthew. "The Need for Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction in Native American Communities." *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups* 1, no. 14 (2016): 56-68.
- Mallett, Christopher A. *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Comprehensive Assessment*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2016.
- McEvoy, Carin A. and Karen Salvador. "Aligning Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Informed Pedagogies in Elementary General Music." *National Association for Music Education - General Music Today* 34, no. 1 (2020): 21-28.
- Neville, Morgan, dir. *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* 2018; Universal City, CA: Focus Features, 2018. Netflix streaming video.
- Rickford, John R., et. al. "Neighborhood Effects on the Use of African American Vernacular English." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 38 (2015): 11817-11822.
- Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
- "The Pendulum Swings of Education Reform." TREP Project. <https://trepproject.org>
- "Strategy: Grounding." TREP Project. <https://trepproject.org>
- Wolpow, Ray, Mona M. Johnson, Ron Hertel, and Susan O. Kincaid. *The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2009.

## Please feel free to connect with me!

[mjdeger@gmail.com](mailto:mjdeger@gmail.com)

 @mjdeger

Scan code for more resources:

