

Report on Sound Education in North America: A Gathering of Voices

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Until fairly recently, the voice of R. Murray Schafer calling upon music educators to explore sound and investigate the acoustic ecology of our world as components of North American music education was barely audible in school policy and curriculum documents. There were sporadic bursts of sound education in schools, post-secondary arts coursework and teacher education programs, usually initiated by energetic individuals. Primarily, however, the norms for music education were constructed around instrumental and/or vocal performance skills. Any programs that were sustained were found, for the most part, in post-secondary institutions with innovative arts programs or departments. Recently, there seems to be a dynamic change in which sound as a component of music education is being heard in a widening context. In this brief report, I will look at some of these offerings in schools and post-secondary institutions in North America.

Since the publication of Schafer's music education books (beginning with *Ear Cleaning* in 1969), the influence of this Canadian composer and music educator has been felt around the world. In North America, his ideas about sound exploration and acoustic ecology have found their way into the academy (as part of the training of musicians, architects and other professionals) and more recently have begun to emerge in school education documents. The influence of people like Schafer, Barry Truax, Hildegard Westerkamp and Gary Ferrington among others, is beginning to be reflected in music experiences of many school children through school curricula and artist/school partnerships in the arts. Not surprisingly, in North America, their influence has been most strongly felt in Canada as all four are Canadian or Canadian educated. So too, is Tadahiko Imada, whose translation of Schafer's book, *A Little Sound Education* (1996), and his use of soundscape and sound education methods in music education (2006), have had an influence on music education in Japan.

Sound education in schools

I have been guided by the challenge R. Murray Schafer sent out many years ago- *teach on the edge of peril* - since I first encountered him at SFU's Contemporary Arts Department. As a music specialist in an elementary school in Vancouver, BC, Canada, Schafer's invitation was like a beacon of support and safety, encouraging me to explore the various possibilities of music and sound with my students. Soon after, I found myself teaching in the Education Department at SFU; although Schafer had left by then, his influence was being amplified and transmitted through the Soundscape Project and people like Barry Truax and Hildegard Westerkamp. During my years as an artist-educator in schools and at the university in the teacher training program, I honed my teaching practice and expanded my understanding of sound exploration and sound ecology as foundations for creative expression, meaning making and communication in dialogues with and through sound and music. Even now, as I teach undergraduate and graduate students, sound exploration is one of the mainstays of my practice in music, integrated arts and curriculum design courses.

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Time has seen the placement of the *edge* shift...the edgi-ness of this kind of practice has had its own rhythm as curricular trends come and go. Generally, mandated curriculum or suggested guidelines concerning state, provincial or state music education policies over this time in both Canada and the US have remained conservative for public K-12 (Kindergarten to grade 12 high school graduation) levels. For the most part, at this time, Canadian curriculum is more often *recommended*, whereas in the US, *mandated* content and methods are becoming increasingly prescriptive.

Currently, sound exploration in various provincial public K-12 music curricula in Canada is often embedded within music themes and arts-based strategies for learning linked across content areas. For example, in science, health, physical education, or social studies, sound activities might be part of units of study in physiology, ecology, sound and light, or creative movement. Several provinces have curricular offerings of note; a few are included here: The Prince Edward Island elementary music program includes sound exploration, composition with unconventional sound sources and invented or graphic notation. “Opportunities for students to express their feelings, moods and ideas through sound creations are essential if students are to develop a basic understanding of music. Creative activities should require that students use and develop critical and divergent thinking skills [and] be a natural outgrowth of their exploring process and not simply dictation or rote exercises.” (p.21); In Saskatchewan, the grade 9 arts curriculum has a music unit called “Creating with Sound”, linked to developing understandings and skills in the critical/responsive, cultural/historical and creative/productive realms around which the whole curriculum is organized; and in British Columbia, grade 11 students can take Fine Arts 11: Exploring Music and Sound, as one of their elective courses. Individual teachers have the autonomy to choose methods and pedagogy for implementing the necessary content, and so the way sound exploration “looks” varies greatly; teacher accounts published in various issues of *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* are examples of the variety of sound education classrooms in Canada and around the world involving diverse students in diverse settings for a multitude of purposes.

Over the last ten years, the development of schools of choice has increased in both Canada and the US. Magnet schools (both privately and publicly funded) for particular religious ideals or a specific content focus have sprung up. Two of the most common organizational formats are integrated curriculum and arts-focused schools. In BC, the two philosophies have been combined in more than fifteen schools (to date these many are noted in the literature, but there are probably more). While there has been little published research on the efficacy of this organizational and philosophical perspective for teaching and learning in terms of student achievement in these specific schools, empirical data and informal reporting lead me to believe that the arts as foundational for curricular and pedagogical implementation, are extremely successful. (I am currently involved in a research study at Beattie School of the Arts in Kamloops, BC, where sound exploration is an integral part of the integrated curriculum – findings from this inquiry to be reported within the year)

A variety of successful arts integrated partnership programs in Canada and the US that include sound exploration in their curriculum have emerged in the last several years. One of these is *Learning Through the Arts* (LTTA) program, begun in Ontario, Canada as a mentoring partnership between the Royal Conservatory of Music and schools and now encompassing teaching resources, workshops and other support for arts education in 350 schools in 12 countries, including the U.S. A unique partnership that has evolved out of the LTTA idea involves direct contact between orchestra musicians and students is the “Adopt-a-Player” program between the

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Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony in Ontario, Canada, and the schools in that city. In this program (free to the schools), a KWS musician comes into a grade 5 or 6 classroom for 5 visits of 45-60 minutes each. During the visits, the musician leads the class in rhythm games, music appreciation, sound exploration, graphic notation, etc. The students also attend a symphony concert.

Another vibrant partnership in Chicago, Illinois, is the *Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education* (CAPE) partnerships between schools, artists, community and business have strengthened and broadened participation in the arts across all components of various art forms. Both programs' offerings can be found on the Web: www.ltta.ca; and www.capeweb.org.

In the U.S, the national music education standards for grades K-8 include general statements that experiences should include: exploring sounds (environmental, instrumental, vocal, non-traditional, etc.), composing with a variety of conventional and unconventional sounds, and notating with both invented and traditional notation. These experiences are contextualized within historical/cultural, listening and composing framework categories (see the National Association for Music Education, MENC, for guidelines and explanations). In state curriculum guides, there are far fewer offerings than in Canada; two which include sound exploration and use of non-traditional sound sources specifically are the District of Columbia's grade 8 curriculum, linking them to the learning of improvisational concepts, and the state of Wisconsin's elementary curriculum guide, which says these aspects of music are to included "by" grade 8.

Sound education in post-secondary institutions

Generally, innovative and flexible programs are available at the post-secondary level. For example: at SFU, Truax's Soundscape Project and electroacoustic work within contemporary arts has endured and expanded over time, garnering recognition worldwide; Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has a long-running Creative Arts and Learning Master's degree, where sound education in the form of soundscape, sound ecology, sound exploration, etc. is part of the inquiry format of the music component of this program; and Ferrington's long time involvement in *ecoacoustics* at the University of Oregon, Eugene. (see the *Journal of Acoustic Ecology*, 2001, 2 (2), December)

In my own work with pre-service teachers in the arts (primarily music and integrated curriculum across content areas including, but not limited to, the arts), I use sound exploration as a way to access, express and communicate significant ideas and feelings. Using soundscapes (based on Schafer's term and musical idea) and sound stories (my own interweaving of narrative or text, images, movement and sound), I design learning experiences that spring from meaningful socio-cultural questions or artistic problems. Utilizing all our senses to elicit links between our feelings and ideas, between what we already know (Dewey's idea of 'funded knowledge') and new *edgy* ideas, I invite my students to express themselves in multiple modalities. For most people with whom I work, visual art is the most comfortable art form, one that they all seem to have had much experience with (and often a lot of training) in school. As well, most people dance in entertainment settings and in most schools, the PE curriculum (which all students have instruction in through most of their school years) includes folk and creative dance. The art form in which the fewest number of students have training and often the one they are least confident to participate in, is music. And of those students who have had music lessons, the vast majority of them have been offered band or choir. For many who consider themselves "untrained"; using a variety of unconventional sound sources, classroom instruments and computer-based

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composition programs, opens the door for all students to source and develop their creative, musical selves. Additionally, in my work with International students at several universities as well as in public schools, using sound exploration becomes a means of communication that leaps across the language barrier and allows relationships between English language learners and their English as a first language peers to develop through the sharing of ideas and feelings represented in music.

The adult teacher candidates with whom I work eagerly engage in sound exploration, just as my younger students did. And as I watch them teach in practica situations, I am encouraged at the various ways that music and sound enhance meaningful learning for their students. The sound-ripple effect seems to be widening through North America, as research into things such as: how our brains work; multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence; holistic teaching and learning; embodied learning; spiritual, ethical and moral education; healthy living programs (including sound ecology); just to name some foci, begin to move into the foreground of “best practice” and life-long learning. A particularly encouraging sign of the philosophical shift to broaden the parameters of music education is the recent addition (2005) of a certification course in Ontario, Canada entirely on Sound Exploration.

In other teacher education programs that I am familiar with in BC, and for educators across Canada, sound education is part of the music coursework. This is evidenced, in part, by the fact that my book on sound exploration, informed by Schafer’s teachings and based on many years of music/sound work with children and teachers, *Soundbursts! Making Meaning with Music*, is the current text in a music education course in the Teacher Education Program at UBC, is also used at Thompson Rivers University and Simon Fraser University, and is being purchased by other teachers across the country. Schafer’s teachings internalized, transformed and extended (the process of developing our ‘best’ professional selves) has spiralled through me, and my teachings will spiral through my students, gathering more voices through generations of educators over time. Looking at current policy and practice, it would seem that this process of diffusing and extending Schafer’s ideas is being effectively established by other educators as well, and the innovations of the man that were once at the *edge* are now being heard closer to the *centre*.

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