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Acoustic Ecology in the Field of Elemental Dance and Music Pedagogy

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Introduction

I was introduced to Acoustic Ecology and the educational ideas of Raymond Murray Schafer (1933-2021) through the Greek Association of Acoustic Ecology in 2010. Almost immediately, I noticed many similarities with Orff-Schulwerk in terms of principles, values and means. Carl Orff and Murray Schafer were two composers (three with Gunhild Keetman) with educational pursuits that developed their pedagogical approaches based on creative and humanitarian orientations.

Feeling the openness and inclusiveness, the interdisciplinary and humanistic atmosphere of the Acoustic Ecology community, I began to use some new ideas in my classes and projects. I was inspired by Schafer's *World Soundscape Project*, an international research project that initiated the modern study of acoustic ecology to find solutions for an ecologically balanced soundscape, where the relationship between the human community and its sonic environment is in harmony (<https://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html>). Gradually I developed some educational practices with considerable help from Murray Schafer's books (Schafer, 1977; 1986) and material from the website of the Greek Association of Acoustic Ecology <http://www.akouse.gr/>, especially Ioanna Etmektoglou's texts.

At the same time I was reminded of the timeless relationship between soundscape and the arts of music and dance, remembering some of my favourite works such as "*Le Quattro Stagioni*" by Antonio Vivaldi and Igor Stravinsky's "*The Rite of Spring*" with original choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky (1913) and the later one by Pina Bausch (1975). I was also inspired by musical works in different styles with references to soundscapes such as the "*Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*" (1961) by Krzysztof Penderecki and many pieces of electroacoustic music and contemporary choreographies.

This paper aims to present an indicative scaffolding combining both ideas of Acoustic Ecology and Orff-Schulwerk for anyone wishing to carry out courses or projects that pursue aesthetic education through a creative process. My vision is a combination of outdoor and indoor education influenced by the outdoor education movement and theories behind it (Parker & Meldrum, 1973, Bentsen & Jensen, 2012). My ideas have been gradually shaped out of my reflection on many projects I have led and evaluated during the last seven years. My objective was to run courses oriented towards aesthetic and artistic education capable of contributing to personal and social development through artistic activities and outdoor experience. This has come about through a personal understanding of the environment (Nicol, 2002) that supports sustainability. Sustainability is an objective of environmental education (Smyth, 1999), which is an objective of outdoor education (Higgins & Loynes, 1997), and I argue that this can also happen through the arts.

Orff-Schulwerk and Acoustic Ecology: Similarities and Relationships

I have not systematically compared and contrasted the two theories in order to arrive at conclusions. Speaking of similarities and relationships, I will refer to those that have inspired my work focusing on the following main points:

- The elemental as a core concept of Orff-Schulwerk and acoustic ecology. (Sound is an elemental physical phenomenon).
- Learning through experience and constructing personal meaningful knowledge.
- Exploration and improvisation as educational means.
- Expression and creativity as values and the main educational goal of the teaching process.
- Tradition as a process of handing over and receiving cultural capital with geographical, social and historical characteristics.
- Community and its systemic understanding as a nexus of social, historical, cultural and environmental relations.
- Understanding and respecting diversity as well as its pedagogical use with the aim of social cohesion, resilience and sustainability.
- The body as a carrier of embodied knowledge and as a way to discover, understand and create relationships with people and the environment.
- Participation in the educational process can be done in various ways and the right to participate must be guaranteed.

Working in the field, I also noticed connections and similarities of concepts and media such as the following:

- Music is understood as the organisation of sound in a way that is meaningful to the person or group who organised it with the goal of making music (Small, 1977, Nettle, 2005).
- Improvisation is the art of responding in the moment to what the situation demands, drawing from all previous knowledge and experience (Goodkin, 2010).
- Composition means putting things together (e.g. sounds) and is a natural process (Harding, 2012).
- Soundscape can inspire new music and dance creations.
- Music composition (and improvisation) provides essential pathways to musical understanding (Paynter, 2000).
- Reading and writing music are not prerequisite skills for playing or composing music.
- Graphic notation as representation of music with visual symbols outside the realm of any traditional music notation.
- Listening and active listening as a central and important activity.

Elaborating on the main concept of listening, both approaches treat it as an important process of gaining experience, understanding and communication. However, aural perception is not universal. It is filtered by personal physiological characteristics and by social/cultural characteristics. Listening alone in silence (e.g. to a soundscape or music) is a condition that may foster concentration and lead to a detailed and in depth understanding of an auditory scene, in terms of its meanings and its aesthetic characteristics. Listening together as a group is also a valuable experience and a first experience of sharing without

the need for any contact. Listening to soundscapes can work as a solitary activity or a communal experience. Listening takes place with the whole body and not just with the ears. Both acoustic ecology and Orff-Schulwerk can be a part of an outdoor education that is not just “outdoor pursuits” or “outdoor activities” but an education that deals with the self, the other, and nature. It is based on constructivist theory and it takes place in both natural and cultural settings; for example, forests, parks, local communities, factories and farms (Bentsen & Jensen, 2012). Simon Beams (2015: 28) summarises the key assumptions of acoustic ecology as follows:

- It is about education (not only ‘learning’- education involves an educator).
- It involves the near and far, urban and rural (and everything in between).
- It considers the past/present /future.
- It can be used across the curriculum.
- It encompasses interactions between land, humans and broader ecosystem.
- It requires a certain amount of ‘dwelling’ and ‘responding’.

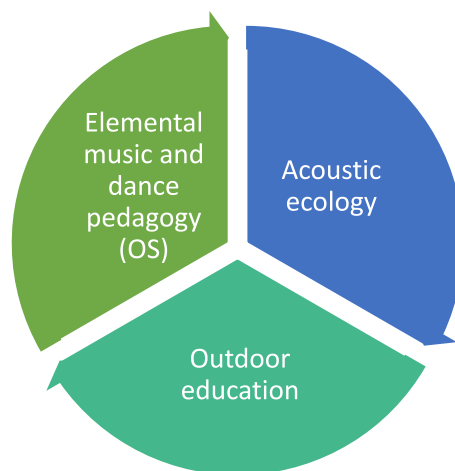


Figure 1: Model for educational projects

Main Assumptions

Humanity is inseparable from nature and so there seems to be a degree of self-interest in protecting nature. The initial idea for my illustrative plan is based on the assumption that music/dance education can foster a creative approach to the environment and take children beyond the refinement of their aural and movement skills. It could contribute to the development of their self-concept and to a deeper understanding of their own self-concept and identity as active and creative citizens.

My intention is a teaching process that goes beyond aesthetic education to an authentic artistic process. Aesthetic education could be achieved by taking children on nature walks, encouraging them to observe in various ways and fostering sensory experiences. The educational ideas of Acoustic Ecology can effectively contribute to this. However, artistic education includes creation or recreation and Orff-Schulwerk can contribute to this by working on the aesthetic experience gained through activities based on acoustic ecology. Aesthetic experience can be considered as a part of artistic experience but frequently we limit ourselves to it and do not proceed to a genuine artistic experience. The arts provide

the characteristic way we record and reflect upon this experience, the unique way we deconstruct and reconstruct the elements, play with them and compose them creating something that expresses ourselves (Taylor and Andrews, 1993).

My ideas are indicative and open to any modification or development. However, the right to participate should be guaranteed and each person should be free to choose the way of participation. The teacher works as facilitator and acts as a member of the group with a distinct role. The personal perception of each teacher and random events are decisive for the teaching process, although a plan is necessary to ensure participation and maximum benefits.

Scaffolding a Process

My suggestion refers to a four-part session, which can take place during one lesson/meeting or spread over time. The structure allows for the combination of indoor and outdoor education or the choice of one of these possibilities, according to conditions, context and aspirations. Here is a brief description of each part.

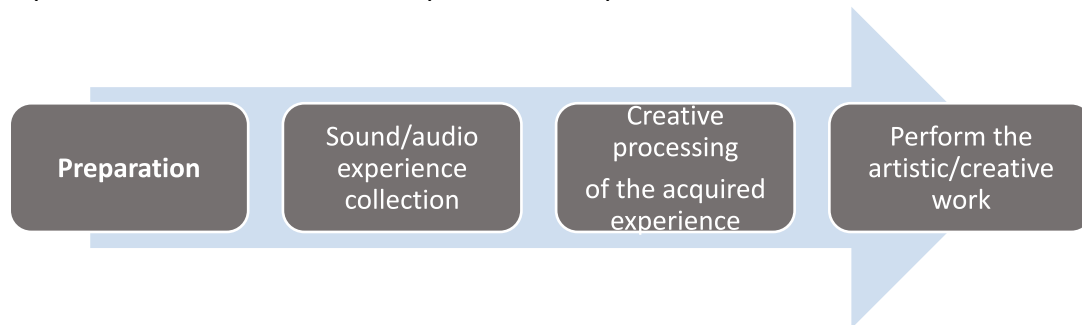


Figure 2: Four-part session process

Preparation is very important and has three main goals:

- First contact with the “other” and team spirit.
- Understanding and becoming familiar with a common way of observing and getting in touch with sound and movement. For this, we organize activities to understand the physical properties of sound and their relationship to parameters of movement as described in Laban Movement Analysis (L.M.A.) (Walh, 2018). In this way, we seek a common understanding and vocabulary of sound and movement ready for use in improvisation and composition that simultaneously allows for personal interpretation (see table 1). The idea of body shaping coming from L.M.A. may help participants to connect physically with the source of the sound.

Physical properties of the sound	Parameters of movement (L.M.A.)
Intensity /dynamic	Weight / dynamic
Duration	Duration
Pitch	Space /levels
Timbre	Flow

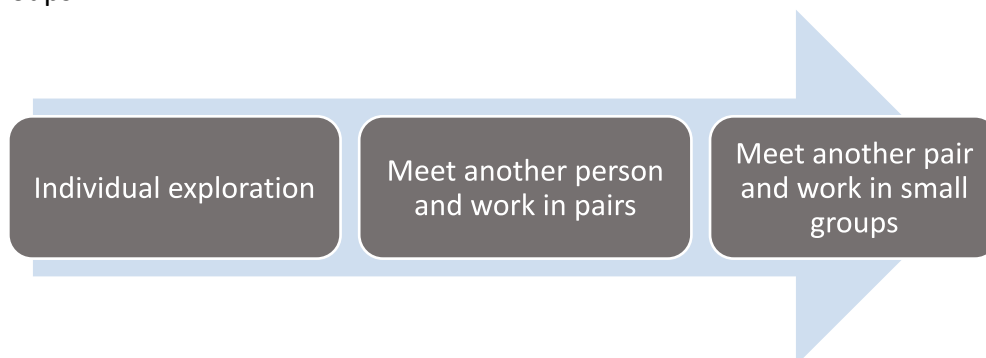
Table 1: Suggested relationship of sound and movement

- Physical preparation for participation in aesthetic experiences. Activities of relaxation, concentration, sensory integration and “ear cleaning” can help participants become receptive to physical stimuli and thus gain rich aesthetic experiences.

After preparation comes the sound/audio experience collection. For this we can organize activities such as:

- Sound walks
- Sound recording during the course or outside teaching hours
- Recall of sound/audio memories
- Generating sound events.

In the next part, participants are ready to work artistically on their acquired aesthetic experiences. The teacher /facilitator using ideas of elemental music and dance pedagogy guides them in their exploration and later their improvisation and composition individually or in groups. Collaborative processes are common practice in Orff-Schulwerk . However, it is good to move gradually to group work passing from individual work to pairs and later on to larger groups.

*Figure 3: From the individual to the group*

Presentation of group creations at the end of the lesson is also a common practice in Orff-Schulwerk. This is a very important part and participating both as a performer and as an audience can be counted as an authentic artistic experience. It works as:

- A way of reflecting on the experience
- A way of artistic (and personal) development
- A way to deeper understanding
- A way to feel connected and accountable
- A way of sharing ideas and building knowledge
- A way to feel the sense of belonging that is an inherent need of every human being
- A way to motivate artistic action.

A Brief Report of Three Projects

My initial experimentations in the classroom were followed by larger projects inspired by acoustic ecology. Here is a brief presentation of three of them in chronological order.

In 2016, together with the graduate student Evangelia Douka, we carried out a project on the subject of “urban soundscape in pedagogy and music and dance education” at a public primary school in the Athens region. Our aims were a) the exploration of the soundscape of the neighborhood, b) the awareness of natural sounds of everyday life, and c) the development of expressiveness and creativity. The project took place in eight one-hour meetings from March to April and involved 19 fourth and fifth grade students. The preparation part took place in the classroom. During the second part, we organised sound walks in the neighbourhood as well as activities to recall sound memories and recordings during the course and also outside the lesson. In the third part children worked in small groups and with the teacher's facilitation brought their creation together in a final orchestrated song in which lyrics were also part of their message. The project was evaluated by reflection on the artistic result, the tree of evaluation (nonverbal evaluation) and discussion with the children. According to the outcome of this project we found that outdoor activities are very important for children since children focus more on artificial sounds than natural ones. They need motivation to concentrate and interpret natural sounds, and when they succeed they enjoy it, as they showed in the lyrics of their song. The comparison between artificial sounds and natural sounds helped them to think about the sustainability of the environment. The project was presented in the fourth conference of acoustic ecology: *Sound, Noise, Environment* (2016) and published as a full paper in Greek language, in conference proceedings (2018).



Image 1: The tree of evaluation

In June 2019 the Laboratory of Electroacoustic Music Research & Applications [EPHMEE] and the Music Education and Music Psychology Group of the Music Department of Ionian University lent their ears to the Sound Environment and proposed a series of educational, research, and artistic activities dedicated to the Soundscape we live in. These activities were a summer academy, symposium, seminars, meetings and concerts

<https://users.ionio.gr/~amlists/HXOZ19/index.html>. I was invited, together with Dr. Clere Hall, as a speaker/teacher in the summer academy..

<https://users.ionio.gr/~amlists/HXOZ19/academy.html>. We worked together to organise a one-week project entitled *Sound-Movement-Body-Environment: Discovering relationships*

for enhanced understanding, expression and creativity. Preparation and reflection took place inside the National Gallery, Corfu Branch. Audios/audio experiences were collected with sound walks, recordings, body sounds, and recalling sound memories. We continued inside the gallery and in the garden, with the creative process using Orff-Schulwerk ideas and digital processing. The artistic outcome was a group performance in the 'Garden of the People', a park in the city of Corfu. We evaluated the project through the artistic outcome, by analysing data from participants' multimodal diaries, and interviewing some of them at the end of the academy as well as six months later. Participants noted that physical understanding of the soundscape leads to personal awareness and personal growth. Soundscape connects people deeply without verbal communication being necessary. Electroacoustic processing of natural sounds can lead to their deeper understanding and appreciation, and to rich artistic products.



*Images 2 and 3 (left):
Digital processing of the
sounds*

*Images 4 and 5 (below):
Performance in the
Garden of the People*



Image 6 (right): A multimodal diary

In 2020, during the first lockdown because of the pandemic of Covid-19, I had to teach online 40 students of the Department of Early Childhood Education (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens). In this context, I gave them the



task to identify the four most significant sounds in their lockdown condition and justify their choices. They had to perform these using their voice, their body, instruments or digital means and create a composition following a clear form. They could work individually or in groups. They had to share with the group the graphic notation of the composition, an audio track looped four times, a video with movement interpretation, and a text explaining their process. 19 projects were created and I used them as data for inductive analysis together with group reflection on them. I report the most indicative words of the students as a results of the analysis.

“The best sound can become torture and the worst noise company”.

“Sounds multiplied and became material”.

“Sound memories exist as actual sounds”.

“I started talking to my mother on the phone about the sounds”.

“Natural sounds (and memories) are healing sounds but we have such a hard time concentrating on them”.

“I am thinking of ways to bring natural sounds in the city, at my home, something like ‘sound gardens’”.

“I felt so creative, a real composer”.

Coda

Acoustic ecology and Orff-Schulwerk pedagogy can work together towards an artistic and humanistic education. Modern outdoor education is a possibility and we should think about examining the need to restore the relationship between humans and the ecological environment in order to ensure resilience and sustainability. The Arts may be the path for this restoration.

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