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Intersections of EcoJustice Education, Radical Ecopsychology, and Music Education

A Framework Toward Justice, Wellbeing, and Resilience

Abstract

Das Bewusstsein der fundamentalen Interdependenz sozialer und ökologischer Beziehungen wird in vielen Bildungssystemen nur bedingt reflektiert. Wie können Musikpädagog:innen vor dem Hintergrund ökosozialer Krisen Ansätze entwickeln, diese Interdependenz in den Mittelpunkt stellen? Mit Blick auf dieses Ziel ist eine kritische Reflexion musikpädagogischer Praxen wesentlich. Theorien der Ecojustice (Bowers, 2001; Martusewicz et al., 2015) bieten einen Rahmen, um eine mechanistische Weltsicht und daraus resultierende Ungerechtigkeit zu reflektieren. Ecojustice Education stützt sich dabei auf eine breite theoretische Basis. Sie wirft ein Licht auf die Rolle von Bildung bei der Überwindung destruktiver mechanistischer Prinzipien und ermöglicht eine bewusste Hinwendung zu Vielfalt, partizipativer Demokratie und nachhaltigen Gemeinschaften. Einen weiteren Ansatz, der die vorherrschende Dichotomisierung von Psyche/Natur, Gesellschaft/Natur und Psyche/Gesellschaft überwindet, bietet die Radical Ecopsychology (Fisher, 2013). So schlägt Fisher einen naturbezogenen, erfahrungsorientierten Zugang zur Aussöhnung der o. g. konstruierten Gegensätze vor. Dieser Ansatz kann Musikpädagog:innen dabei unterstützen, spezifische kollaborative, expressive und aussöhnende Praktiken zu erschließen. Das Ziel ist es dabei, musikalische Praktiken u. a. für die Verarbeitung von durch ökologischen Stress verursachten Traumata (Eco-Anxiety) zu nutzen, die bewusste Wahrnehmung zu schärfen und eine ökozentrische Weltsicht zu fördern.

Music Education in Times of Eco-Social Crisis

Many people are learning to accept that the world is structured around unsustainable ideas. At some level, it is known that many practices of daily life cannot continue indefinitely because they overshoot “carrying capacity,” so are unsustainable (Olawumi & Chan, 2018, p. 232). Unsustainable systems and practices are, by definition, doomed to collapse, so it is inevitable that they must either be transformed into sustainable ones or be allowed to disintegrate so that new sustainable structures can take their place. It is likely that most people want to live in a sustainable world, live a sustainable life, and are willing to work toward that end (GlobeScan, 2020) even though there is confusion as to how to do so – and there are a daunting number of political and social obstacles that must be overcome.

I respect that it is challenging to work toward sustainability every day in a world that is undergoing such transitions, as it can be disorienting. There are many losses to grieve (Macy & Brown, 2014; Weller, 2015) – sometimes of traditions and practices that we hold dear. Also, there are an escalating number of uncertainties that provoke feelings of anxiety or depression. These difficult feelings have been labeled eco-distress (Marks & Hickman, 2023) and they are a reasonable and healthy emotional response to intensifying changes.

To maintain our resiliency and mental wellbeing under such conditions, it is important to take more time to care for ourselves and our communities, more time to self-regulate and to co-regulate, and more time to self-resource and to co-resource (Fisher, 2013). This extra time is needed so that we may adapt thoughtfully and carefully so that we do not contribute to the chaos within or beyond ourselves (Davenport, 2017). Extra care is needed as we extend compassion to ourselves and to others because some days our best self may need to take a necessary break into a temporary state of denial about the eco-social crisis, whereas other days it may need to express raw feelings of eco-distress.

The good news is that, as music educators, we have cultivated deep sensitivities from which to engage with the ecological and social worlds. We know how to maintain music-based practices that can sustain community and cultivate emotional resilience through compassion (Hendricks, 2018) and care (Hendricks, 2023a). Although we are invested in the creation of beauty, our relationship with music also has value beyond beauty. For many of us, it has been a lifeline, a coping strategy, a way to emote excruciatingly powerful emotions – from heavy grief to explosions of joy. Many of us create and teach music because we personally know of its power to heal and to nurture community.

Although we certainly need the power of beauty when there is so much ugliness in the world, it is the healing element of music that we may find necessary in ways more profound than ever in the days and years ahead. It is for this reason I have explained elsewhere that the roles of teachers and musicians likely need to shift as society attempts to transform towards more sustainable lifeways or even embrace the collapse of all that is unsustainable to make room for new possibilities (Smith, 2021a; Smith 2023). Change, whether through

intentional transformation or in response to collapse, will create the need for musical practices that can support and sustain individuals and the community.

To further consider the ways that music education practices might need to adapt, I turn to the theory of ecojustice educators (Bowers, 2001; Martusewicz et al., 2015), and the work of radical ecopsychologists (Roszak, 2001; Fisher, 2013). Together these theories can inform the work of guiding music education practices away from those that reify within learners an ego-centric worldview and instead inform those that might nurture an eco-centric one. For example, many music education approaches have focused the learner on personal achievement and individual advancement within a competitive hierarchical system. An eco-centric approach to achievement would nurture a collective standpoint where learners work with co-learners to ensure musical success for everyone. By applying the theoretical perspectives I offer below, I hope that music educators might be better positioned to engage in self-reflection to identify harmful and unsustainable ideas and practices, envision and create ones that are more sustainable, and consider a music education that nurtures deeper emotional and experiential understandings that promote wellness and healing.

EcoJustice Education and Radical Ecopsychology Critique of the Western Worldview

At the heart of the social critique forwarded by ecojustice educators and radical ecopsychologists, is the argument that dominant strands of thinking within the Western worldview has, over the past several hundred years, normalized dualistic thinking through false binaries and value hierarchies in order for those in power to enact colonial, extractive, and exploitive aims. These have together formed logics of domination that harm both people and planet (Fisher, 2013; Griffin, 1995; Martusewicz et al., 2015; Plumwood, 2001). Such strands of thinking are argued to be the root cause of eco-social crisis. This thinking has also normalized individualism or the belief in an autonomous, self-interested, and isolated self to the point that hyper-individualism in the form of human exceptionalism has emerged (Weintrobe, 2021).

The Western worldview, because it has birthed industrialism, has taught individuals that they are to be consumers more than citizens or even humans capable of sustaining themselves through subsistence or cooperative means (Bowers, 2001). It has also forwarded the practice of the enclosure of land and extraction of natural resources, as well as the justification of the exploitation of those deemed to be less-than-human (Martusewicz et al., 2015). As a result, the domination of this worldview has made it acceptable for a privileged few to have more resources than the many, and it has forwarded the false promise that if one works hard or smart enough that one can ascend above others in

the race to the top in competitive fashion (Smith, in press). This notion is inherently false, as achieving the standard of living enjoyed by those in the Global North would require resources equivalent to multiple planets (Global Footprint Network, 2024). This inequitable use of resources reveals the deep social injustices and unsustainable ideas at the heart of the industrial worldview, which has forwarded neoliberal capitalism across the globe (Fisher, 2013; Weintrobe, 2021). Further, Martusewicz et al. (2015) argue how educational systems – because they were devised in conjunction with industrialization – have reinforced androcentric, heteronormative, classist, racist, and ableist oppressions that also contribute to a form of globalism that now threatens life on earth.

The social critique offered by ecojustice educators can help educators identify the ways that education reifies colonial, extractive, and exploitive assumptions and practices; however, it does not offer a means to help educators or students to emotionally metabolize the harm done in and through music education in the name of industrialization. Additionally, it does not offer a means to cope with the psychological challenges of eco-social crisis. Radical ecopsychology (Fisher, 2013), however, focuses more squarely upon the psychological harm that has come from the severing of self/society/nature. As such, it provides useful ways to consider how music education might be leveraged to support individual and community resilience. For example, many now realize that our society is largely unsustainable. However, because individuals fail to see their power to make change with others from a systems theory perspective (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2022), many experience eco-distress.

Coming to terms with why our society is unsustainable causes one to face individual and collective trauma (Smith, 2022) as well as grief (Davenport, 2017; Weller, 2015); therefore, ecopsychological theorizing is important to support such challenging, disorienting, and intense work. Similarly, awakening to the knowledge that most people are implicated in the oppression of other people and the destruction of ecosystems can be emotionally challenging and thus may require psychological support. Music educators can respond to help individuals and communities face such challenges by helping music learners better understand how to turn to music as a healthy outlet for difficult emotions or a deeper sense of belonging and social support.

Further, the pervasive reinforcement of logics of domination and ego-centric individualism can make it challenging to recognize and oppose logics of domination that separate people through marginalization. As a result, when one believes that they are an isolated or separate self, it seems logical to continue to be self-focused and self-serving, and to prioritize individual concerns over those of the community for survival (Fisher, 2013). Therefore, from a psychological standpoint, the industrial worldview

can be argued to have largely prevented the development of a relational or eco-centric self that understands that everyone belongs in real and tangible ways in relation to millions of biological processes and within thousands of strands of social relations (Fisher, 2013; Martusewicz, 2019). As such, a radical ecopsychological approach may be warranted to support to transition from an ego-centric to eco-centric worldview.

Many unfortunately, feel as if they are alone (Murthy, 2020), but that has never been the case – all live within an interdependent web of social and ecological relations. However, education systems have taught otherwise through an emphasis upon individual achievement and competitive (and therefore fear-based) motivations for learning. An underlying emphasis upon education as a means to establish one's economic position within the social hierarchy necessarily focuses learners on those who have and have not. All such underlying assumptions force the learner to make social comparisons, thus reinforcing a sense of aloneness. These assumptions also set up ecological overshoot because there is an assumption that there can be never-ending growth in terms of personal achievement (which stands contrary to the maintenance of wellbeing) and wealth (which stands contrary to the finite resources the current economy is defined). Educators have a great opportunity to react to these harms by shifting attitudes and practices towards those that emphasize belonging, collaboration, and interconnection within one's community.

Feelings of isolation and disconnection are at the heart of many relational mental illnesses (Fisher, 2013). Given the adolescent and young adult mental health crisis that started prior to the pandemic (Twenge et al., 2019), many are searching for the means to strengthen the mental wellbeing of themselves and their relations. Engaging with music can be seen as powerful means to connect with community, family, and friends. Unfortunately, however, some forms of engagement are structured to segregate and isolate people based upon their ability or cultural traditions (Smith, 2023).

To move beyond the destructive and harmful aspects of the industrial worldview, many ecopsychologists (Fisher, 2013; Roszak, 2001) and ecophilosophers (Macy & Brown, 2014) draw upon the ideas of deep ecologists¹ (Devall & Sessions, 1985) to suggest that people can cultivate an ecological self that has a wider sense of identity, and that understands that one's self-interest includes that of the more-than-human world. Such a more relational self is capable of identifying simultaneously with earth and community. The ecological self understands that they belong to both – or even that they belong *as* both. Such a turning to music education practices that nurture an ecological self could help to restore a sense of belonging in community and with earth (Smith, 2021a, 2022, 2023). Doing so might also help to heal the scars many have incurred from having lived in such an isolated way – segregated

from one another and the more-than-human world. Fortunately, there is a choice to maintain the isolated self, or to cultivate an ecological self; and likewise, to engage in music and learning approaches that reinforce one or the other. I focus the remainder of this article upon ways that music educators might support the development of a relational or eco-centric worldview.

Embracing Sustainable, Resilient, and Ecological Mindsets

In their book, *The Future we Choose: Surviving the Climate Crisis*, Figueres and Rivett-Carnac (2020) project two futures. If our society continues to live unsustainably, they predict societal collapse; however, if our society were to adopt sustainable and restorative practices, they believe that there is time to ensure a future for human civilization. To realize the second possibility, our society must collectively embrace a radical shift in worldview. They write:

To survive and thrive, we must understand ourselves to be inextricably connected to all of nature. We need to cultivate a deep and abiding sense of stewardship. This transformation begins with the individual. Who we are and how we show up in the world defines how we work with others, how we interact with our surroundings, and ultimately the future we co-create. (Chapter 4, paragraph 10)

To make this shift, they suggest individuals adopt three mindsets: stubborn optimism, endless abundance, and radical regeneration. To embody stubborn optimism is to reject denial, pessimism, and attitudes of blame or helplessness that interfere with one's ability to create a better future. To adopt a mindset of endless abundance, one must reject a zero-sum mentality based upon competition and scarcity and instead strengthen one's capacity to provide mutual assistance in times of crisis and work collaboratively to create abundance. To embrace the notion of radical regeneration, one must reject the colonial discourse of extraction and exploitation. Instead, one might embrace a regenerative attitude that acknowledges that all persons are dependent upon, and interconnected with, one another and the planetary life-support system. In consideration of our vulnerable future, it is logical that music educators might adopt such mindsets so that music education can be adapted and positioned within the larger project of moving our society towards sustainable and resilient lifeways.

In addition to adopting new mindsets, another way that educators might help learners to cultivate an ecological self is to disrupt the thinking and corresponding behaviors that are responsible for destroying both people and planet. In their book, *Ecojustice Education*, Martusewicz et al. (2015) put forth a pedagogy of responsibility that aligns with this aim. As mentioned above, these ecojustice theorists suggest that educators can help

learners recognize the roles of “language, dualism, and hierarchized thinking” (p. 57) that lie at the foundation of the industrial worldview, especially the value hierarchies that position one side of a dualism as superior to the other – for example, “man/woman; culture/nature; reason/emotion; mind/body; etc.” (p. 57).

Such value hierarchies create an invented superiority that goes unquestioned. For example, in the arts, the labeling of some art as ‘high art’ and other genres as popular, folk, or Indigenous art has traditionally positioned some art forms as superior to others. As a result, we may fail to recognize that each genre has a unique system for determining quality and value within the ecosystem from which it emerged. What if instead of comparing genres each were valued for holding a unique and precious niche within the cultural ecosystem (Smith, 2023)? What if an appreciation of the qualities of each was assessed in terms of one’s own determination of rightness of fit, instead of through the false hierarchies determined by those with the most power?

The problem with false hierarchies is that they form logics of domination (Warren, 1993) that uphold power-over and controlling mindsets that justify class, gender, and race inequities, as well as ecological devastation. For an example, common usages within many Western languages as well as traditional societal structures continue to reify the premise that the physical and emotional are related to nature and the mental is related to culture. This premise is paired with “the assumption that whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to what is cultural and thus human” (p. 63). Together, these two premises create false conclusions that work against the arts because such thinking casts the arts and arts learning towards the bottom of the societal hierarchy.

In part because the work of musicians squarely falls within the realm of the physical and emotional, which are equated with the natural, it is common for those focused upon economic gain to devalue musician’s contributions with the same attitude that they exploit the earth. In systems of education, the arts are not seen as ‘core subjects’ when they are compared to language arts or STEM subjects. In business, art is valued when it can be commodified. Similarly, governments value the arts primarily for their political power. As such, society holds an extractive and exploitive attitude towards the work of musicians and music educators, if it values it at all. Perhaps that is why at times many musicians may even struggle to value their own work when it does not pay off economically, or when it does not help them to raise their status within the hierarchy.

What power might musicians reclaim if they unplugged from such thinking and from the systems that have devalued their work? Perhaps this is one way that music educators might embody the second of Figueres and Rivett-Carnac’s (2020) three mindsets – endless abundance. What if music educators were to resist or

circumvent competitive structures and transform or opt out of systems that create scarcity of time, resources, or money, and instead created endless abundance through sustainable practices that build a robust commons or shared communal wealth (Martusewicz et al., 2015)? It may be hard to imagine that possibility because the logics of domination are so prevalent within society; however, such thinking is built upon false premises: Nature is not inferior to human culture. Human bodies – our human natures – are not inferior to human minds. One’s emotions are not inferior to one’s thoughts – both are necessary to know one’s soul purpose (Plotkin, 2008; Smith, 2021a; Smith, 2022). I believe that the way towards sustainable systems of abundance lies in one’s ability to question false assumptions and free one’s mind, heart, and embodied experience from such thinking so that one can create a better future. The world needs artists to reveal such false assumptions now more than ever, and what better means do educators have to touch the minds, hearts, experiences of others than with the arts?

With that intention in mind, it is important to consider a few ways to identify and replace thought forms, assumptions, and actions that stem from these logics of domination. Martusewicz et al. (2015) explain how common ideas such as “individualism, mechanism, progress, rationalism, commodification, consumerism, anthropocentrism, androcentrism, and ethnocentrism” are harmful to people and planet (pp. 66–67). These ideas inform music education in ways to which the profession is just now awakening.

Because I have already written about the dangers of individualism, I now consider how other ‘isms’ create problems within the profession. Mechanism shows up in music pedagogies in a hyper-focus upon product and technique over process and creativity. The notion of progress often shows up in socially-comparative conversations when one focuses upon how one is making individual progress in the race to the top of the social hierarchy. The catch with the notion of progress is that there is a sense of ‘never enough’ – the idea of scarcity is hidden within. Also, the idea of perpetual growth goes unquestioned, even in cases where that is a physical impossibility for one’s body. Perhaps instead of engaging in social comparison the focus could be upon the music that learners love and the value of creating music in community.

As mentioned above, rationalism positions academic disciplines as superior to the arts disciplines, which are considered emotional or natural and therefore deemed inferior. Commodification of music and consumeristic attitudes further devalues a music education that does not lead to a career that promises economic stability. This attitude often leads to a devaluing of music education for non-career purposes such as personal fulfillment and social connection. Anthropocentric orientations to music preclude one’s sense of inclusion within the soundscape of the more-than-human world, which can result in a sense

of isolation and exclusion (Smith 2021). Androcentric orientations inaccurately focus learners on the accomplishments of male musicians while erasing those of women as well as those who do not identify within the gender binary. Ethnocentric orientations to music preclude culturally sustaining approaches (Good-Perkins, 2021) for those whose music is not that of the dominant culture and therefore dominant within the curriculum.

It is perhaps natural for music educators to focus upon nurturing their student's musical abilities and for musicians to continue to want to expand their capabilities, but perhaps in the absence of an invented social hierarchy it would be possible for one to focus upon musical growth for a much different purpose – one's soul purpose (Plotkin, 2008; Smith, 2021a; Smith 2023). With a soul-centric focus, I wonder if it would be easier to find 'enough' each day and allow ourselves, like the earth, to enjoy cycles of growth that include a spring, summer, autumn, and winter so that one can grow in a more sustainable way? Industrialism has caused individuals to work as if one's body were a machine without a need for rest. Perhaps as music educators we can resist this notion and allow our bodies and the bodies of learners to re-align with the cycles of the day, month, and year – the very cycles from which our species evolved.

Ecological, Eco-Centric, and Soul-Centric Worldview

To understand ways that music learning might promote an eco-centric worldview, it is helpful to consider some additional conceptions. Plotkin (2008) explains that the ecological self understands their psycho-ecological niche or their "specific way of belonging to the biosphere as unique as that of any birch, bear, or beaver pond" (p. 31), and that what makes one human is not one's "autonomy, but [one's] interdependent and communal relationship with everything else in nature" (pp. 31–32). That is to say, the ecological self knows that it belongs to the earth, it identifies as earth, and is both nourished by and responsible to the earth *at the same time* it knows that it belongs, identifies with, is nourished by, and is responsible to the human community. Such a sense of belonging is reflective of a healthy attachment to nature, which Barrows (1995) asserts is as important as healthy attachment to one's immediate family for the foundation of mental wellbeing. Further, given that few people experience such a sense of belonging within one's community (Murthy, 2020) – in part because of the isolation that is caused by competition and social hierarchizing (Martuesewicz et al., 2015) – fostering such understandings could greatly contribute to stabilize the interconnections between self, society, and nature.

From this deep sense of belonging in the eco-social worlds, Plotkin (2008) suggests that the ecological self can be supported to mature beyond the ego-centric

self and towards a soul-centric self. By soul-centric, Plotkin means that the self is focused on deepening its understanding of its sense of purpose as based on an evolving inner wisdom. Noting that society reinforces the ego-centric self, Plotkin suggests that most people need activities that help them better understand the unique gift they bring to fulfill their niche within the biological and social ecosystems. Education systems have taught learners to focus upon their status within various social hierarchies as a matter of survival and achievement, so few learners have had the opportunity to deeply reflect upon their purpose and the gifts that they might be uniquely suited to share with their community. Moving away from educational and musical practices based upon social comparison, and towards ones that cultivate deep reflection and honor ones' experiential knowing, may help learners to break free from egoic motivations and instead embrace and realize their soul's purpose through music engagement. For music educators to support this purpose for music learning, it seems necessary to refrain from educator-directed only forms of instruction and replace them with negotiated and student-directed musical inquiries and exploration.

A soul-centric focus aligns well with Fisher's (2013) assertion that transitioning to an eco-centric worldview requires a naturalistic and experiential approach. This approach supports individuals to attune to the nature that is their own body and use that experience as a means to imagine and attune with the more-than-human world or world consciousness. Such an inward gesture may seem counterintuitive if one is assuming an ego-centric perspective that might reinforce anthropocentrism. However, Fisher (2013) argues that the purpose of focusing upon one's experiential knowing is to more deeply realize one's relationship with the more-than-human world. The result can be expanded awareness of interrelationships and ecological processes such as the exchange of food, air, water, and energy. These are viewed as commodified exchanges from an ego-centric perspective but from an eco-centric perspective they can evoke a sense of kinship and holistic awareness of the relative health of one's immediate community or bioregion. For music educators, refraining from activities that isolate or separate individuals from others or their sense of embodied awareness is needful. Also, a shift towards activities that make evident the interrelationships between sounds, musicians within and ensemble, and one's body and how it produces sound could be helpful to nurture the eco-centric self.

The tendency to view self, society, and nature as separate is the result of the dualisms reified by the industrial worldview. Fisher (2013) seeks psychological means to make the inter-relationships between the three more apparent. He argues that the perceived divisions are false, and the ecological self is one that grows ever more deeply into a realization that the three are actually one. He argues that those navigating with and through

the industrial worldview need an ecopsychology to help heal such false divisions so they can live more sustainably and peacefully. In music education, activities that repair ruptured understandings of self/society/nature are those that prioritize holistic understandings. Perhaps a guiding question for self-reflection about one's practice could be: Does this activity isolate the learner from their embodied experience, a sense of belonging and inclusion within the classroom community or society, or from their identity as nature or the earth? If the answer is yes in any of these areas, there is an opportunity for repair and healing.

Facilitating an Eco-Centric Worldview Through Music Learning

In considering the gravity of the eco-social crisis and wishing to find ways that I can make change within my daily work as a music educator, I have been motivated to consider how music education can collaborate within the larger project of societal transition. In the remainder of this article, I share my vision of how radical ecopsychology and ecojustice education might inform the transition to a more eco-centric worldview and support learners intellectually and emotionally to make such a transition. In *Spiraling to Life: Listening and Sounding Toward a Life-Sustaining Society* (Smith, 2021b), I share how I turned to music to fortify my personal growth towards an ecological self. At the time I wrote that chapter, I had just begun to realize how grave the predicament of eco-social crisis is, and I realized that I needed to do something about the knot in my stomach – which only later I would learn was eco-distress (Marks & Hickman, 2023). I had read the first edition of Macy and Johnstone's (2022) book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in with Unexpected Resilience and Creative Power*, as well as Macy and Brown's (2014) *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects*. In these books, the authors posit that psychic numbing (van Boeckel, 2009) – a means of deadening ourselves – is a coping strategy that many use to deny or distract oneself from eco-social crisis. Because the authors encourage arts engagement as an antidote, I was inspired to turn to music as a self-resource for emotional resilience.

The process that Macy and Brown (2014) and Macy and Johnstone (2022) suggest is a spiral that starts with *gratitude*, proceeds to an experiencing of one's *pain for the world*, seeing with new eyes, and then *going forth* with reclaimed energy, insight, and power to make change. I adapted several of the exercises outlined in *The Work That Reconnects* (Macy & Brown, 2014) to music and experienced the spiral process, only to re-discover that music could help me to attune with nature and facilitate grief for species lost and places degraded. Attuning to the natural soundscape also helped me to clarify my resolve to act in ways that are more sustainable and life-giving.

In *Music Education for Surviving and Thriving* (Smith 2021a), I considered four ways that music educators might support the developing ecological self. I proposed that music educators expand upon the customary purposes for music learning to include the fostering of a child's (or an adult's) sense of wonder in nature, the cultivation of the senses, psychospiritual wellbeing, and soul-centric maturation. Fostering a sense of wonder in nature is an important way for children to maintain their identity *as* earth and for adults to re-connect to such an understanding. Because the human inclination to make music was perhaps once inspired by non-verbal dialogue with nature, engaging in activities that help one dwell in the wonder of nature may be an especially powerful tool to heal one's sense of belonging with the natural world. Conversely, attunement activities in nature may help one to sharpen one's senses so that one may become more attuned to music. Louv (2008) argues that spending time mostly indoors and in a technologically-focused way may cause one's senses to atrophy. Assuming that is the case, nature immersion activities where educators co-teach *along with* nature may be the most inspiring way to help learners to sharpen their senses and enhance their abilities to make music.

After I had written that music education might foster soul-centric maturation, I started to critique the music education that I had received as a child. Much of it had reinforced the separate ego-self so I decided to eliminate such practices from my teaching. In *The Trauma of Separation: Understanding How Music Education Interrupted My Relationship with The More-Than-Human World* (Smith, 2022), I examined my childhood music education experiences to show how some repertoire had been harmful. I concluded that it is important for educators to identify repertoire that encourages children to "disconnect from nature or to view nature as evil or inherently dangerous" (p. 190). I suggested that such literature be "removed from consideration" or very carefully "contextualized as to not cause inadvertent, or in some cases, intentional harm as in the case of songs that imply White supremacy, the colonization of Indigenous lands, or the extraction of natural resources" (p. 190). I also suggested that music education be expanded to sound education so that children can more easily "stay connected to their inner nature, gifts, and understandings, as well as their sense of being a part of earth" (p. 190).

In *Caring with the Earth, Community, and Co-Learners for the Health of Biological, Social, and Musical Ecosystems* (Smith, 2023), I considered aspects of music education that need to be adapted to better nurture the ecological self as it participates within the learning community. I expanded upon Hendricks's (2023b, in press) suggestion that, in addition to caring *for* and *about* our students, we also might care *with* them to eliminate power-over relations and notions of superiority or inferiority between teacher and student. I critiqued teacher-as-hero

and salvation narratives, suggesting that these come from the value hierarchies and logics of domination embedded in the Western industrial worldview.

I proposed that the focus of education might shift to help learners identify their unique niche within the biological and social ecosystems. We can do this by establishing “just, peaceful, and life-giving relations between individuals, among groups, and within a complex web of social and physical relationships” (p. 145). As I explained,

[L]earning to occupy one's niche in the musical ecosystem requires discernment of how much space one needs to thrive as well as the importance of sharing space and resources. Musically, it means learning when to listen and when to play—when to solo or to accompany. (p. 145)

I also discussed how de-centering cultural norms and embracing a pluralistic education can help us see ourselves within a “web of relations – rather than occupying a rung in a singular hierarchy” (p. 146). Doing so might free us “from deficit thinking and [help us to] see the value of own unique contributions as well as those of all others” (p. 146) – a matter of social justice and sustainability.

As I continue to self-parent my ecological self and learn to care *with* my students as they discover their ecological selves, I feel as if there is still so much to learn. However, I am starting to see an emerging vision of an ecological self – one who knows that they belong because they understand the myriad ways that they fulfill a niche in both the biological and social ecosystems. I envision an eco-self that is aware that what they do makes a difference – for good and ill. I envision an eco-self that understands, because they are aware of their interconnectedness, that collective adaptations are necessary. I envision an eco-self that knows they cannot do it alone and are not *on* their own. I envision an eco-self that is aware that their song is unique and an essential part of the whole, and yet aware it is just one beautiful motif in the whole expression of the world (Fisher, 2013). They know that their expression is enough, that their niche has a rightness of fit. They can fulfill the obligations of their niche every day and not grow weary, because they give what brings them joy to give and they take only what they need to thrive.

What then, must fall away to usher in the age of the ecological self? Practices that isolate must be replaced with practices that re-connect and promote belonging. Practices that reinforce self-interest within a system of invented hierarchies must be replaced with those that situate learners within a web of social and biological relations. Practices that overshoot the capacity of the learner or harm those involved must be replaced with those that honor the limits of nature, including human nature. Practices that privilege the mind over the body, and at the expense of the body, must be replaced with a

holistic approach that views the learner as a part of the collective eco-consciousness – a living channel through which the Earth expresses itself.

Conclusion: An EcoJustice and Ecopsychology Informed Music Education

In this article, I explained how the industrial worldview and notions of the separate self disconnect us from our identity as earth and with one another. I summarized the radical ecopsychological and ecojustice education critiques of practices, language, and structures that separate and harm both people and planet, and I offered ideas for expanding, creating, and strengthening sustainable and life-giving ones. With a vision of the eco-centric self in mind, I trust that as music educators we might discern which practices and structures to keep, and which to transform as we compassionately forgive ourselves and others for past abuses that were passed to us through the industrial worldview. To the extent that we nurture our ecological selves towards deeper maturity and help one another deeply know that we belong within the biological and social worlds, I imagine that music educators may contribute to the opening of the possibility for creating a sustainable and life-sustaining future. If perhaps it is too late to avert great loss, at the very least we can offer our contributions to support coping, alleviate suffering, and to provide a means to fortify community stability. As musicians and educators, perhaps this can be accomplished by envisioning music learning as a form of relational sounding within an eco-scape of belonging.

In conclusion, I offer three potential aims of an ecojustice and ecopsychology-informed music education:

1. To address individual, community, and intergenerational trauma and griefwork as a means of stabilizing our communities and helping them be resilient while managing the rapid changes needed for human survival or the collapse of unsustainable systems.
2. To resist the tendency to engage in psychic numbing of one's emotions and embodied sensations, and instead use them to sharpen perception and deepen experiential awareness. Through such forms of music engagement, one might learn how to tap more deeply into world consciousness through the part of the earth with which one is most familiar – one's body. In so doing, learners might reconnect to their identity *as* earth, which may help them to mature past an ego-centric worldview towards an eco-centric worldview.
3. To interrogate ideas and practices that cause harm (such as separation from the earth and community, notions of growth and progress, and competition to name a few), and then use music to convey alternative practices that heal and sustain the social

and ecological community. Such an effort can bring all members of the community into decision-making. It can also enable the community to express new narratives of social and ecological justice as well as visions of a healthy and sustainable future.

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Notes

- I mention deep ecology here to acknowledge the initial conceptualization of an ecological self. Ecofeminists including Sallah (1992, 1993), while in agreement with the need for a more expansive view of self that includes the more-than-human world, argue that the conceptions of Devall, Sessions, and Naess are too individualistic. As such, they do not account for the dualistic thinking, false binaries, and value hierarchies that construct the logics of domination resulting in social oppression and environmental overshoot. In short, such an individualist worldview fails to extend one's sense of self to include that of other humans as well. By including the work of Griffin (1995), Plumwood (2002), Bowers (2001), Martusewicz et al., (2015), and Fisher (2013), I intend to express a more intersectional conceptualization of the ecological self.