

Why Should Music Educators Teach for Eco-literacy?

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In this response I answer the question: Why should music educators teach for eco-literacy. The word *ecology* refers to the “web of life,”¹ wherein music educators find themselves entangled. To answer the question, I provide short responses to foundational questions all music educators wrestle with. What is music? What is education? What can music educators do?

1. Music is not an island. I drew on many thinkers to come to this conclusion, and their ideas are foundational to eco-literate music pedagogy.² Paralleling social insights of those authors, musics are not independent from ecosystems that prepare, form, and communicate their existence—both metaphorical ecosystems such as classroom or concert halls, or actual bioregional ecosystems which necessarily include more-than-human life. Just as the human gut-biome, not merely the brain, is responsible for a considerable portion of human intelligence, those things we have been taught to treat as not-music are a considerable share of music. Even in the Western tradition, the ancient Greeks recognized this, as the Muses—from which we get our word *music*—were not merely sonic beings representing melody, rhythm, etc., but embodied poetry, history, love, astronomy, etc.³ In short, many experiences of life. The first large-scale Western Art Music was Homer’s *Illiad*, an epic tragedy that was sung with accompaniment (though accomplished prior to Western notation), and the Renaissance *camerata* drew on this to facilitate the development of opera. I define music simply as *the intentional experiencing of sound*. Many beings intend and experience music, but the 19th Century search for music as something that separates humans from non-human animals has proven futile.

2. Like musics, educations do not exist as independent from ecosystems that prepare, form, and communicate them. Educational disciplines are not discrete by nature, mathematics discrete from biology, etc. Disciplines are curricular conveniences for the system we have developed in the West. Education has happened throughout human history and continues to happen well within non-Western societies without these conveniences. In the West, perhaps we can aim at interdisciplinarity, helping our students to recognize both the artificiality of isolated disciplines and the fullness of non-Western ways of educating. Disciplines, to the extent that they are, exist within ecosystems, again, both human-social and more-than-human.

3. Following points 1 and 2, Music Education is composed of two deeply entangled ideas, *music* and *education*. To be full it must be, at essence, deeply ecological. Music educators can recognize themselves and their profession as entangled with the web of life, and not discrete. Music educators, musicians, and students are people, human-animals living within a bioregional ecosystem—dependent on the wellbeing of the more-than-human world. I assert that teaching for a critical eco-literacy as a pedagogy of place, a literacy entangled with anti-racism, feminism, anti-colonialism, and other critical pedagogies, allows music educators to matter in a world facing the greatest ecological crises we have faced in *homo sapiens* 200,000 year history.

¹ Rachel Carson. *Silent spring: The classic that launched the environmental movement.* (Mariner Books, Boston, 2002), 189.

² Daniel J. Shevock. *Eco-literate music pedagogy.* (London & New York, Routledge, 2017).

³ Link: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muses>