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Abstract

A question I explore in this paper is how music and environmental education coexist and support each other. Mitigating the impact of human activities on the environment is among the many pressing issues in our society. As such, environmental education has become an interdisciplinary concern among many educators beyond their disciplinary boundaries. The nexus of music education and environmental education may involve singing nature songs or engaging in the soundscape of a place of dwelling.

It has been argued that music can be a medium to enhance students' eco-literacy. Although the mission of music education is not the same as that of environmental education, we have to ensure that the two are not against each other. This is not to suggest that music education and environmental education need to take a "subservient" relationship in which one sacrifices for the other. Instead, it asks to reconsider the underpinnings of the current practice of music education. The experience of music corroborates with the experience of nature. Nature is not merely a background environment but an active participant in music making. Then, would teaching indigenous forms of music make itself an environmental education?

In this paper, I explore an epistemology of music education by drawing on ecological pedagogies. The latter emphasizes relational knowing over objective analyses of the world. I argue that the basic principles of teaching and learning should be congruent with the characteristics of ecosystems such as interdependence, sustainability, ecological cycles, energy flows, partnerships, flexibility, diversity, and co-evolution. Can any of these points be practiced and promoted in music education? In this paper I introduce a case study in which these characteristics were identified in the processes of music making. The practitioners of the case community experienced not only harmony with the environment, but also diverse expressions of nature, integration with the earth energy, and co-evolution with nature through making instruments. For these practitioners, music making and learning was a process of developing an interdependent relationship with nature. The paper offers ideas as to how ecomusicality may be cultivated.

Bio

Koji Matsunobu is a musician, educator, and cultural ethnographer, with two PhDs in music education and secondary and continuing education granted from Tokyo Gakugei University, Japan and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. Prior to joining the Hong Kong Institute of Education, he held academic positions at the University of Queensland and the University of Kumamoto. Former Fulbright Graduate Scholar, he explored possibilities of incorporating non-Western ideas into Western contexts of education. He has taught music and arts education and world music courses in Japan, the United States, and Australia, and has written widely on topics ranging from spirituality, creativity, mindfulness to qualitative research, arts integration, world music pedagogy, and Japanese music. He loves playing and making the shakuhachi.