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The Trauma of Separation: Understanding How Music Education Interrupted My Relationship with the More-Than-Human World

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Abstract

I grew up immersed in the sounds of nature. However, throughout childhood, the ambient soundscape that once thrilled me was usurped by human-made sounds. I conducted an autoethnographic inquiry to seek the ways that my early and middle childhood music education diverted my attention from local soundscapes to a near-exclusive focus on anthropocentric sound. During early childhood, I shed my nature-centric musical identity to conform to a musical community that prioritized human-made sounds over the natural soundscape. In middle childhood, listening became an anxiety-ridden activity as hyper attention to human-made sounds became necessary to navigate childhood complexities and to function in my musical environments. Isolation and dissociation from the natural sounds that I valued as a young child resulted in my trauma of separation from the earth. Conclusions are contextualized so that music educators might draw connections between music and nature to avoid practices that perpetuate the trauma of separation with their students.

Keywords

Trauma, ecocentric music education, place-based music education, autoethnography

I believe that I became a musician, and later a music educator, because I grew up in the most exquisite natural space in the woods on my grandfather's farm in rural Ohio. On summer mornings I would awaken to the gradual crescendo of bird song through the open windows of my parents' un-air-conditioned home. Never a morning person—not even as a child—I would lie in bed long after I woke listening to the birds, one chirping loudly in the lower branches of the hickory tree just a few feet from my window, and others echoing through the woods at various softer dynamics, high in the canopy of old-growth oak and ash trees. I could often tell the direction of the wind simply by listening, because the smaller leaves of the ash trees made a lighter, more percussive sound than the larger oak and hickory leaves as the wind blew through them.

As a result of enculturation and schooling, I mostly stopped listening to the ambient soundscape and obediently focused upon primarily human-made sounds in the form of spoken language, the music of Disney, '70s AM radio hits, the hymns sung at my church, and the songs in the Silver Burdett[1] series used in my general music classes. I was also directed to attend to human signals such as the jarring sound of the school bell that indicated it was time to move through the loud and chaotic hallway to class. As a result of my education, I learned that human-made sounds were more important than the natural soundscape. Furthermore, this redirection of my focus away from more-than-human sounds (such as birdsong or rain) caused me to view myself as being separate from the natural world.

Context for Inquiry

Ecophilosophers Joanna Macy and Molly Brown (2014) assert that such a sense of separation is the root cause of ecosystem collapse and the climate crisis because most individuals no longer understand themselves to be an interdependent part of the ecosystem, and subsequently, they engage in the domination of nature and the more-than-human world. Given the ecological crises that humans have caused, I argue that it has become critical to reconsider how we as educators enculturate children so that our practices foster and do not sever our students' identities as a part of the ecosystem. It follows, then, that we need to reconsider the ways that music education has inadvertently worked to sever our identity as earth, so that we adapt our curricula and prevent this trauma of separation for future generations.

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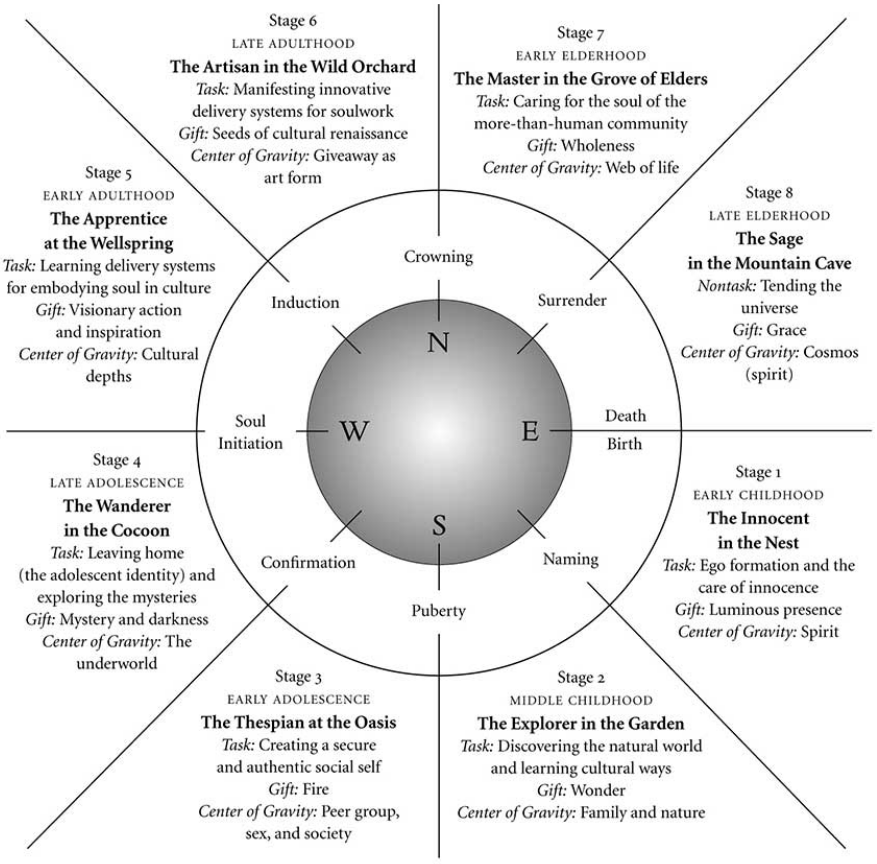
In this autoethnographic inquiry (Denzin 2017), I consider my own developmental trajectory to determine the ways that my music education experiences diverted my attention away from local soundscapes and reinforced in me a sense of separation from the earth. Autoethnographic inquiry allows me to contribute to the discussion of the MayDay Group's Action Ideal: Ecological Consciousness. Specifically, this inquiry into my music education history serves as a form of "critical reflection on the ecological impact of former … musical and cultural practices" (MayDay Group 2021) at the level of my individual perceptions, identity, and relationships with the land (Bates 2013, 2018; Shevock 2015, 2018), the web of life (Carson 1956), and the cosmos (Tucker and Swimme 2013). Autoethnography is concerned with the particular—in this case, the place and the circumstances of my childhood. This form of inquiry aligns with an Indigenous perspective where the "nature of the universe demands that each and every entity in it seek and sustain personal relationships" (Deloria Jr. and Wildcat 2001). In other words, examining the relationships my caregivers encouraged me to maintain or not to maintain illuminates instances of the trauma of separation—or instances where I lost relations with the web of life and cosmos. Although my ancestry is mostly European, through this work I honor the erased heritage of Indigenous Europeans who traditionally and currently maintain personal relations with the earth and cosmos. I engage in this work for the purpose of identifying instances where I, and those who comprise the field of music education, might heal relations, not to appropriate or claim an Indigenous perspective personally or professionally.

Nature of the Human Soul Framework

To interpret reflections and artifacts from my childhood, I apply Plotkin's (2008) *Nature and the Human Soul* framework, which offers a more inclusive and critical perspective than most developmental frameworks. For example, Plotkin views healthy human maturation as essentially intertwined and in concert with nature, which makes it uniquely relevant to this study. Additionally, Plotkin suggests that human maturation seen apart from our relationship with the wilds is harmful and, like Macy and Brown (2014), asserts that the resulting trauma of separation fuels the flawed patterns of thought that bring about the ecocide, in which we are all now implicated by our participation in modern society. By applying his

conceptualizations of healthy maturation, which he suggests can foster ever-deepening bonds and relational understandings with/as the earth, I contrast such ideas with my own history to discern which experiences during my musical growth supported healthy maturation and which led to my sense of separation from the earth. In this article, I focus upon the first two of Plotkin's eight stages (See Figure 1) that correspond with early and middle childhood, as that period of maturation is highly structured by caregivers and teachers and is, therefore, the most relevant for music educators to scrutinize, given that the patterns established during this time can have a strong influence that carries through adolescence and adulthood.

Figure 1. The Eight Soulcentric/Ecocentric Stages of Human Development (Plotkin 2008, 61)



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Self-as-Earth

It is important to clarify what I mean by a human identity in which the self identifies *as earth*. Such a conception of self stands in sharp contrast with Western conceptions of the self, considered as an individual entity that lives in relation to other humans and the more-than-human world. There are many Indigenous cultures that organize identity as an extension of the earth; the self is seen as a part of the whole or as occupying a niche in the overall ecosystem or web of life (Deloria Jr. and Wildcat 2001). Such *eco*centric conceptions also go beyond some Eastern conceptions of the self that are collectivist but still largely anthropocentric.[2]

In music education, Shevock (2015, 2018) points toward music making that would guide learners towards a less anthropocentric self when he advocates for a place-based type of music making that is "rooted in soil" or in the local landscape unique to a particular community. Similarly, Bates (2013) argues that our society needs to come back "down-to-earth" by "caring for the ground we live on, re-discovering a sense of place, and reclaiming and cultivating sustainable and sustaining values, dispositions, and behaviors" (77). Bates (2018) further argues for a music education shaped around the needs of the community, especially in rural localities where individuals may have more awareness of the land.

Although Shevock and Bates argue for the establishment of a less anthropocentric music education that builds relations with the community and bioregion, and Shevock (2018) briefly mentions that ecocentric perspectives are missing in music education (71), ecocentrism is not established as the framework nor used consistently throughout the text. Bates (2013) resists egocentric music education activities when he points out how competition is problematic. His focus on care for the land, a focus upon beauty including the beauty of nature, and a more robust and relational notion of community, point us away from egocentrism, yet many of the ideas are largely anthropocentric. Similarly, the MayDay Group Action Ideals continue to define music making as a strictly human pursuit.

Adopting a more holistic view might build upon the community and land-based relations that Shevock and Bates suggest, but in ways that challenge the value hierarchies (Plumwood 2002) reproduced, particularly by those who "own" land. Many people treat Mother Earth "like dirt," as she is possessed, bought and sold, and literally bound, subjugated, and treated as a slave to humans rather than

being afforded subjecthood.[3] Perhaps repairing relations with one's community, land, and soil through music making could set the stage for a departure from such thinking, but it remains to be seen if that level of change would address the global crises we face—as I will explain further.

Shevock (2018) writes that the ecological crises we face are related to a "spiritual problem" (91), yet he stops short of arguing for a more global consciousness. Spiritual ecologists (Vaughan-Lee 2017, Plotkin 2014, Fischer 2013) suggest that we need to re-establish relations with the *anima mundi* or the soul of the world. Cultivating a sense of anima mundi may allow us to envision ourselves as one in a sea of equal beings, from the microbes in soil to the whales in the ocean—as connected with the entire web of life, which includes rocks, water, and the elements that many humans have deemed non-living or without soul. Such a spiritual awareness may allow us to experience a sense of self-as-earth beyond our connection with the local bioregion. In cultivating such an awareness, we might move one more step away from an anthropocentric worldview, which is primarily concerned with the local and thus perhaps more focused upon self and community interests.

Additionally, Tucker and Swimme (2013), argue for a cosmological perspective that situates the self within the unfolding of the universe—where it is somewhat difficult to maintain an anthropocentric position given the rather small space that humans inhabit within the grand scheme of time and space. By acknowledging anima mundi or the soul of the earth and cosmological understandings, it might be easier to align with Indigenous worldviews that are not anthropocentric. Prest and Goble (2021) explain that Indigenous persons conceptualize society from an ecocentric perspective, inclusive of all matter, which is thought to be "sentient and interconnected" (84). Similarly, Indigenous persons have traditionally had place-based understandings that are not "separated from sacred knowledge of ultimate spiritual realities" (Deloria Jr. and Wildcat 2001, 23) meaning that they do not bifurcate the epistemological and ontological (Prest and Goble 2021). Adopting spiritual ecological and Indigenous perspectives such as these might counter the Western dualisms inherent in an egocentric perspective—the very dualisms that make it possible for us to engage in the destruction of the planet because we artificially disconnect and separate ourselves from relations that, if established, might make it more difficult to act from egoic self-interest.[4]

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To connect with place, land, and soil is to build critical relations, but relations with the anima mundi and the cosmos are helpful to move beyond an anthropocentric worldview. Although Indigenous cosmologies are traditionally place-bound (Deloria Jr. and Wildcat 2001), we cannot ignore that most humans now live in a technologically-driven world that provides us the information necessary to hold a global perspective (from global satellites to the World Wide Web). The global distribution of goods and our resultant patterns of consumption not only impact our local communities but often do great harm to the humans and the ecosystems in communities inhabited by those without the power and privilege to prevent such destruction. To address such global-level issues, or to understand local issues as having global implications, requires us to identify as earth. Therefore, I assert that such an identity must also be informed by a connection with the web of life beyond one's locale and by a sense of justice for all persons within the global community, not just one's own. Additionally, to view oneself as the earth is to also acknowledge that the earth is only one planet in the vastness of space.

As much as one might want to move beyond an anthropocentric perspective, there are many structures that make this transition difficult. For example, to write about an identity construction where one understands "self-as-earth" is challenging because it is a mostly foreign concept in Western culture, and the English language makes such an identity difficult to articulate. I invite you to allow for such awkwardness of language as I offer what, for most of us, is an expansion of what we have considered possible. I start with this poem:

> A soft inhale sends oxygen coursing through mammalian veins
> deer exhales and shares carbon dioxide with tree to create starch that helps tree to grow
> tree drops leaves that decompose into compost
> absorbed by cucumber vine and made into salad
> ingested by human causing hydration just as hot summer air inspires perspiration
> that evaporates and later turns to dew which falls and hydrates lettuce
> which nourishes rabbit which defecates near tree
> which is fertilized as rain dissolves it into tree's roots
> and tree grows taller and thicker and shades yard from hot summer sun.

In this poem, I attempt to convey the human identity as a part of an interdependent web of life. I have removed articles so as to move away from a strictly anthropocentric account. I realize this aim is impossible, given that human language

itself is anthropocentric, yet my attempt decenters the human as the only one considered to hold a perspective. Had I told the same story from an anthropocentric viewpoint, I could have simply stated that I picked a cucumber to make a salad for lunch—a myopic view of the web of life, indeed!

Egocentric versus Soulcentric Maturation

To achieve an identity of self-as-earth, Plotkin (2008) suggests that we must also nurture maturation beyond that of an egocentric self towards one that is ecocentric/soulcentric (terms he uses interchangeably). Plotkin distinguishes between egocentric and soulcentric maturation, with the latter being one where the self identifies as the earth. The term *soul*, according to Plotkin (2008, 30), refers to "a thing's ultimate place in the world," a departure from a Judeo-Christian conception that locates the soul as an individual spiritual entity. Plotkin emphasizes the word "thing" to "embrace the fact that every *thing* has a particular place in the world and therefore has a soul—all creatures, objects, events, and relationships." Plotkin defines *place* as the "role, function, station, or status a thing has in relation to other things" (30), which is similar to how ecologists use the word *niche* to refer to the "position or function of an organism within a community of plants and animals" (32). Specifically, Plotkin states,

> A niche consists of a set of relationships with other creatures and with the land and sky and the waters. It's a particular node in a living web. But in the case of the human soul, a niche is highly differentiated both psychologically and ecologically. The human soul is a psycho-ecological niche, a niche whose essential features include the capacity for conscious self-awareness as well as social and ecological attributes. (32)

As such, Plotkin's conception of soul moves beyond an anthropocentric one and decenters humans, relocating us in our niche within the web of being, along with all more-than-human creatures and objects.

Occupying one's niche is not to be confused with "knowing one's place" in the social world, which in Western culture tends to mean knowing where one fits within the dominant culture's oppressive system of value hierarchies (Plumwood 2002). Rather, it is about a life-long process of being and becoming in both the physical and social worlds. Plotkin (2003) asserts that re-establishing one's relationship with and as earth is essential to understanding one's niche in both the

physical and social worlds. Through reflective practices, to which he refers as "soulcraft," these relations can be nurtured through solitary retreats away from the direct influence of other humans or society, where one can relinquish the expectations of others to make way for a deepening of one's identity with/as earth (Plotkin 2003, 2008).

Plotkin (2008) also makes an important distinction between soulcentric and egocentric child rearing. When parents, caregivers, and teachers themselves identify with earth, or understand the unique niche they serve in the web of life, they understand the critical need to help children to find their unique niche and provide experiences that foster a child's relations (attunement) with the natural world. They view such attunement as essential because the web of life is seen as a more profound and knowledgeable teacher than humans can manage alone, given that we understand only a small part of the web of life from our limited perspective.

In contrast, egocentric maturation, which is prevalent in our society, results in a severing of the child from nature, as they are directed into exclusively social concerns that are external to the self. Children reared by egocentric caregivers, therefore, learn to focus upon what is expected of them rather than coming to understand what unique gift they alone can offer the whole of life or their "ultimate place" within the web of being (46). Plotkin asserts that children not afforded opportunities to understand themselves as earth often get stuck in a type of pathoadolescence or do not mature past what is typical of a healthy early-adolescent ego (46). Pathoadolescence often persists well into adulthood in egocentric cultures where the norm is to "prioritize the lifelong comfort, security, and social acceptance" (46). The egocentric self is dysfunctional (for those past early adolescence) because it views itself as an "isolated, competitive entity, a free and autonomous agent … that represents only itself" (46). As such, egocentric persons view themselves as "in but not of" nature and view themselves as a "visitor or proprietor of the planet with no deep-rooted membership in or responsibilities to the Earth community" (46).

An example of pathoadolescence may be an egocentric White person who remains unaware of the lived experiences of Black, Brown, or Indigenous persons because they fail to be concerned with, nor learn about, the experiences of others and, therefore, fail to consider that others may have different experiences, needs, and values than their own. Similarly, an egocentric person is not aware of their

impact upon the more-than-human world, including their involvement in pollution, habitat destruction, climate change, and other forms of ecocide, because they may deny, resist, or ignore opportunities to broaden their perspective or take responsibility for their actions.

Conversely, a child who is nurtured to mature into a soul-initiated adult has the opportunity to develop a sense of their place in the web of life and is on the path of understanding their identity as located within both the human and more-than-human world. Such children develop into adults who

> are clear and passionate about their life purpose, who know deep down in their bones the treasures that they possess for their people, who truly know *who* their people are, who most every day can be found joyously engaged in their soulwork, who derive deep satisfaction from their efforts in making our world a more vital and beautiful place, and who experience deeply and abundantly their interdependent membership in the natural world. (Plotkin 2008, 45–46)

To survive the environmental crises we face, music educators must move past egocentric pedagogical practices and concerns to afford opportunities for ecocentric or soulcentric maturation so that the children in our care mature into adults capable of healing, restoring, and stewarding a culture that survives and thrives within the limitations of the web-of-life (Smith 2021).

In the next section, I offer autoethnographic reflections of my childhood to explore the ways my music education (broadly defined) influenced my identity formation. I share my story not because it is extraordinary in any way, but in hopes that viewing my experiences through an ecocentric or soulcentric perspective may allow others to consider their own history and the current soundscape of my childhood to make clearer the contrasts between anthropocentric and ecological influences upon identity.

The Innocent in the Nest: Early Childhood–Stage 1

I came into the world in the heat of August, when the humidity is high in the Midwest. Late August is a loud time in the woods where I lived, with a full complement of birds in the canopy by day and a full chorus of insects, frogs, owls, and raccoons emoting their song through the night. All of these sounds were quite present to me, as the windows of my home were always open in hopes that an occasional summer

breeze might offer some relief from the heat. Photos of my earliest days show that I was often placed in the grass with many nearby trees overhead to provide shade.

Once I was able to walk, I toddled around and explored the sources of the sounds around me. I remember noticing how quiet flowers were, how startling the crows and blue jays were when they punctuated the otherwise ambient backdrop of the bird chorus, and how the shrieking sounds of a wounded baby rabbit that had been robbed from its nest by our family dog caused me to want to cry, too.

Human-made or influenced sounds also were present, of course, but they were intermittent: the sound of a tractor far off in a field, the crow of a rooster, the call of a cow or sheep in a nearby field. Also intermittent were the sounds of FM99, an instrumental orchestral pops station that my mother sometimes listened to while doing the laundry or ironing. Less frequently, she listened to an AM radio station that played popular music. But most of the day, the house was quiet except for the sounds made by my baby sister, our dog, or the natural soundscape I described previously.

My parents were socially isolated, so the only other humans I had routine contact with were my grandparents and those at the Church of the Brethren,[5] where I heard religious children's songs sung by the older children and song leaders while I was cared for in the nursery. A few years later, my mother and younger sister often sang these religious songs, as well as common children's songs, as my mother pushed my sister and me on the swings of the swing set in our yard.

In the winter, we listened to LP story records on my father's stereo. *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day, Bambi,* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* were among our favorites. Each of these stories was set in the woods or the forest, which generally reinforced my understandings. Of course, on days when it snowed, we were excited to go outside to play. I remember how quiet it was … all I could hear and see was my breath! I also attuned to the crunching of my boots in the snow, the sounds of the metal snow shovel as my mother cleared the sidewalk. Sometimes we trudged through the snow to my grandparent's house next door. As we warmed by the fire, I enjoyed the sound of the crackling fireplace, of my grandparents talking, and the pounding of the hammer as they unshelled hickory nuts that my grandfather had foraged from the woods earlier that fall. Also, during a visit to my grandparents one spring, I remember my grandma looking up from her quilting to

point out the call of a mourning dove. She said, "Do you hear what it is saying to you? Good morning to you, to you, to you, Good morning to you, to you, to you."

On summer evenings, we walked down to my grandparents' house to visit. They often sat on the porch swing looking at the birds or wildlife and sometimes listened to the Cincinnati Reds baseball game on the transistor radio. But the game was secondary. What I learned was most important was visiting and pointing out the beauty of the sunset, the bird's nest in the bushes, or the lightning bugs that cast a thick and sparkling glow of light in the nearby pasture just after dusk.

My maternal grandparents spent hours teaching me about the nature around me, and this information was reinforced by my mother as she had time. In these ways, my caregivers helped me to develop an understanding of the natural world of which I was a part. However, my grandparents also influenced my musical development. Grandpa would proudly share the story about singing on the radio with his men's quartet from church, and I have fond memories of being encapsulated by the loving sounds of my grandparents as they sang hymns at church while I stood between them on the church pew. At their home, I often experimented on the console piano in their living room, which inspired my mother to sign me up to take piano lessons with the minister's wife. During my late early childhood, I internalized the idea that if I developed my musical skills that I would be considered a "good girl" who could share her music at church. Back then I still believed that I could become a "good girl," so I started to focus my listening attention upon human song in the form of hymns and songs we sang in Sunday school. Although it was subtle, this shift dramatically changed my relationship with sound to an orientation much more exclusive to music. I quickly learned that music was human made and that birdsong did not count. While it was still all around me, except for rare moments, I stopped paying attention to nature. This was a huge moment of soul loss (Hillman 1982, Rogers 1993) and marked the beginning of my trauma of separation.

Early Childhood: The Influence of Egocentric Caregivers

According to Plotkin (2008), there is a tension between the two developmental tasks of early childhood. On one hand, the maintenance of innocence or one's basic goodness is related to human nature, while on the other hand, the cultivation of a healthy ego is related to one's ability to navigate human culture. It is the role of

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caregivers to provide social experiences that assist in the formation of a healthy ego and to maintain a child's sense of innocence.[6] In many ways, my caregivers did provide me with a safe nest and plenty of experiences in nature which might have helped to nurture the beginnings of an eco- or soul-centric awareness. My grandmother even helped me to consider that nature, or at least that mourning dove, might even be aware of me! However, as I got older, a much greater emphasis was placed upon enculturation, particularly enculturation at church, where the emphasis was upon external expectations of those in the religious community. Such expectations can be seen as those of egocentric caregivers, in that they were focused upon maintaining security through social acceptance. Fearful messages to stay clear of "the ways of the world" and the story of Adam and Eve being cast out of the garden of Eden confused me. I did not feel that nature was against me, but who was I to argue with my caregivers and the church? If the adults around me were afraid, then perhaps I should be, too. Conditioning children to be afraid of nature, the world, and of others in one's own community can be seen as an egocentric fear of social rejection.

Middle Childhood: Explorer in the Garden–Stage 2

Signals … human-made signals … demanding and loud. There were consequences for not listening. If I did not hear the school bus on the road ½ mile to the north, I might miss the school bus. If I did not hear the whistle on the playground, I might look up to see a frustrated teacher scolding me to line up to go inside. If I did not listen to the rowdy high school boys barreling down the hallway, I might get shoved into the wall as they passed by. At school, listening was not an in-the-moment experience, but something I had to do in order to navigate the immediate future. As such, listening became an anxiety-ridden activity that previously had been more natural and organic. Inside of the school, I could not hear any of the sounds of nature like I had at home, and the smells of the school were of disinfectant, art supplies, and of many people in one space. Even on the playground, I felt far from nature, because it was mostly covered in gravel or pavement and had only small patches of worn grass.

According to Plotkin (2008), middle childhood is the time for a child to be an "explorer in the garden." The central tasks of this stage are "learning the givens of

the world and our place in it, or said differently, discovering the enchantment of the natural world and learning cultural ways" (112). Although in early elementary school I often came home from school and rushed outdoors to play, it seemed as each year passed that I had more homework to do before I was allowed outdoors. By age 8, my responsibilities included piano practice, and by age 10, additional trumpet practice, all of which shifted more and more of my time indoors.

In elementary school, music was now something in a book, like the hymnals at church. I loved music and my music teacher, but she was the only one who got to play the piano or guitar during class. We sometimes were allowed to play hand percussion instruments or xylophones, but most of the time we engaged in singing songs from the Silver Burdett book or we listened to recordings. The content of the songs was in the background. Rarely did we talk about what we were singing or why. I remember one song, "Sandy Land"—a song about farming, I guess, but a type of farming that happened out west somewhere; it was not like the farming that occurred in Ohio. It was not until I looked up the song recently that I learned that "Great Big Taters in Sandyland" is a traditional fiddle tune. I am still confused as to why I learned a piano and vocal version. Had it been unpacked further, I could have at least understood the song in the context of place, even if that place was different than my own.

Although I loved the symphonic sounds of the recording, listening to Peter and the Wolf was also confusing to me. While I had learned to be respectful and careful around wild animals, never had my grandfather mentioned that wild animals were evil, as the wolf and nature were cast in this story. I had not been cautioned to stay in my yard to stay safe from the wilds, as Peter had been told. Also confusing was the ending of the story, where Peter was the hero because he saved the life of the wolf—yet he was responsible for imprisoning him in the zoo! Why would we capture the wolf and take him from his home?

While some of the songs in the John W. Thompson and John W. Schaum piano method books I studied contained children's songs with which I was familiar, some of the pieces seemed old to me. Some of the illustrations of the cakewalk and of minstrel shows seemed wrong. If it was wrong to be a racist, as I had been taught, why did my piano book have pictures that cast black people in negative ways? I wondered why it was so important to know these old songs, and why my piano teacher (the minister's wife) said nothing about these images.

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And there were old-sounding songs at church too … no one ever explained why these were important. But, as I look back, they were clearly about enculturation. In listening to and singing these songs, I learned cultural expectations for my behavior: an indoctrination of my belief system. Few of these songs mentioned nature, except for metaphoric references, so in this enculturation process, I learned that nature was not important for my spiritual development. For example, "In the Garden," my paternal grandmother's favorite hymn, describes one's relationship with God as a walk in a garden and uses nature as the context (Miles 1913). The lyrics, "He speaks and the sound of His voice, is so sweet the birds hush their singing"—while intended to convey the sweetness of spiritual experience—also places the divine/creator as separate, as opposed to being an integral part of a divine whole that was inclusive of nature and of me. Also, many lines of various hymns taught me not to trust my own nature, which proved problematic for me in adolescence as I discovered that I was naturally attracted to women.

Middle Childhood: Egocentric Enculturation at School and Church

Missing from my middle childhood were all but the occasional experiences of wonder in nature. My caregivers prioritized music practice for its perceived value in terms of my ability to contribute music at church as an adult—a means to gain social acceptability. They prioritized homework because they believed that achieving in school would result in my financial security and comfort. Spending time in nature did not have any perceived value except in terms of recreation, which was only to occur when homework and music practice were completed.

Plotkin (2008) suggests that had I been encouraged to prioritize my relationship with/as nature it would have helped me to maintain a sense of my own human nature, or my wildness, uniqueness, and purpose within the wider web of life (121). Even though I had access to the woods, I was sent to a summer church camp on 400 acres of rolling southern Ohio forest, and even though my school was located in a rural farm community, my caregivers lacked eco-centric and anthropocentric values that would have caused them to also prioritize time spent in nature for the purpose of deepening of my identity as earth. Although I had opportunities to learn my place in society—at that time mainly school and church—I cannot recall any experiences that caused me to consider my identity as the earth or to consider the unique purpose I might eventually embody in service to both my community and

the web-of-life. As a result, my adolescent identity was that of an isolated self who had to compete and strive to gain social standing. I loved making music, but this love was misdirected into earning medals to put on my concert band uniform and competing with others in auditions and contests. Without ecocentric caregivers to guide me to search for the unique niche I might inhabit, I missed the opportunity to begin the lifelong process of determining how my love of music might manifest into a unique contribution—a process I began much later, in midlife, when I felt compelled to go outdoors in order to find myself.

New Ways Forward

When nature is vilified in music or is ignored to make room for exclusively human concerns, when music is studied in a non-contextualized way that does not connect with place nor connect with human history as it relates to wider human or ecosystem contexts, children learn that such concerns are irrelevant; as a result, they often stop noticing their connectedness with the wider social world, the web of life, and the cosmos. This most certainly results in a trauma of separation. It is traumatic because the result is isolation and dissociation. Egocentric enculturation can be abusive and neglectful because it directly influences how the mind learns to process information—in this case, it conditions the mind towards fear of others and nature, to view the self as isolated rather than interdependent, and to see nature and humans through the lens of self-interest, which prohibits the possibility of healthy relationship. Furthermore, anthropocentric-only experiences can cause children to disconnect from their own thoughts, feelings, memories, and understanding of their surroundings, which too often results in the creation of an isolated self as one's identity. Focusing exclusively upon the external matters of culture also sends a message to children that it is more important to focus upon the future (such as disappointing or gaining the approval of others) rather than attuning to being mindful of the present moment (Slattery 2013).

Alleviating the Trauma of Separation in Educators and Adult Caregivers

In order to alleviate and remedy the trauma of separation in children as perpetuated by music education, a critical first step is for educators and adult caregivers to acknowledge that our culture has reinforced a bifurcated identity with the earth.

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Most adults likely reproduce practices and structures with similar results for children unless such practices are identified and changed. Furthermore, adults who have a bifurcated identity—or experience a separate self that is disconnected with the earth and cosmos—may need to begin and/or further their own healing of this trauma in order to make such changes. Plotkin (2008) stresses that children need soulcentric adults to help them learn how to maintain present focus and connection with/as the web of life; therefore, the healing of the trauma of separation among educators may be the most important way to alleviate the trauma of separation of older children and to prevent the traumatization of younger children.

If soulcentric adults are ones that are "clear and passionate about [their life's] purpose" and "know deep down in their bones the treasures that they possess for their people" (Plotkin 2008, 45), then perhaps it is important for pre-service and in-service teacher professional development to include "soulcraft" or nature excursions to help educators deepen awareness of their soul's purpose through reestablishing their identity as earth (Plotkin 2003). Through this process, as educators discern a greater awareness of purpose over the course of their careers, they might find that there is stronger or weaker resonance between their purpose and their chosen profession. For those teachers who are called away from the profession, it is important for schools and communities to acknowledge that it is in the best interest of everyone to allow individuals the freedom to adapt accordingly. For those whose purpose and career are well-aligned but who might need to deepen or adapt their musicianship and/or teaching practices, individualized professional development opportunities may be important, much like differentiated instruction is recommended for students. In either case, a much greater emphasis upon adult maturation and growth is important to support educators as they attempt to heal the trauma of separation and/or their ability to live more deeply into a soulcentric way of life.

If soulcentric adults are ones who "can be found joyously engaged in their soulwork, who derive deep satisfaction from their efforts in making our world a more vital and beautiful place, and who experience deeply and abundantly their interdependent membership in the natural world" (Plotkin 2008, 46), then soulcentrism can be seen as a desirable goal for all music teachers. Therefore, it is important that pre-service and in-service teachers be afforded the opportunity to work in schools that prioritize values such as the maintainence of a healthy work-life balance for

both teachers and students, working conditions that are sustainable and in harmony with the earth, and in both indoor and outdoor classrooms that acknowledge the interdependent relations one has, both socially and with the biosphere.

Such a shifting of the values and priorities in schools is not likely to happen, however, until a sufficient number of adults recognize the need for such a change in worldview. Given that few adults have likely had soulcentric caregivers, many adults may need to parent themselves—or intentionally seek to expand towards a soulcentric identity that is not bifurcated from the earth—through such a self-maturation process, and to seek out appropriate opportunities to support their growth. Through self-as-earth-exploration, educators may develop the ability to maintain present focus more consistently, become more centered in their purpose, and be better able to embody their interdependent niche within the social and natural worlds. Growing into a more soulcentric and integrated self may in turn help educators to provide, more consistently, a soulcentric nurturing of children over time, and to do the important work of deconstructing and replacing the egocentric values that pervade education.

Preventing the Trauma of Separation in Children

As mentioned above, most adults—including myself—have lacked consistently soulcentric adult mentorship. In this autoethnographic inquiry, I attempted to identify the ways that egocentric caregiving interrupted my ability to maintain an identiy as earth and to readily manifest a soulcentric adult self. I consider the act of engaging in this inquiry as a form of self-parenting. Specifically, I aimed to identify where harm had been done to me so that I could heal myself, and more importantly, so that I could identify the ways that I might be most inclined to harm my students. Preventing the trauma of separation in children may require that we break the cycle of harm within ourselves.

As I reflect upon the results of this inquiry, I am eager to consider ways to re-envision music education practices that are sustainable and that foster both the cultural and natural maturation of children. Although it is likely that each music educator's childhood may reveal different harms and resulting traumas, I concluded from my childhood story and teaching experiences that it may be important to focus upon two areas. First, it seems important to carefully consider the music we select for (or with) children and consider the messages and assumptions that

are implicit in the music. Does the song cause the child to disconnect from nature or to view nature as evil or inherently dangerous? When songs about human culture are selected, are the songs placed within the history of our relations with both the wider human world, with our local place in the world, as well as with the more-than-human world? With these considerations in mind, some songs might be deemed harmful and removed from consideration, and others might need careful contextualization as to not cause inadvertent, or in some cases, intentional harm (such as in the case with songs that imply White supremacy, the colonization of Indigenous lands, or the extraction of natural resources).

Second, it seems important to consider music education more broadly as sound education.[7] In doing so, we are decentering human-made music and including the music created by more-than-human means. By including the biophony, or the sounds made by other living creatures, and by including the geophony, or the sounds made by weather and earth (Pijanowski et al. 2011, Krause 2012), we can help learners to maintain their sense of sonic wonder in relation to the natural world. Rachel Carson (1956) defines wonder in nature as a "clear-eyed vision" and a "true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring" (44). How might a sound education help to foster a "clear-eared vision" that maintains a child's ability to hear the beauty in nature, even as they are also learning to hear the beauty of human made sounds?

Elsewhere, I have written about ways that we might support a child's wonder in nature, including music education as soundscape ecology, as sensory education or for the cultivation of the senses, for psychospiritual wellbeing, to promote soulcentric maturation, and for expanding the social commons towards an earth democracy (Smith 2021). These and likely many other additions and adaptations of current practices could help us to expand music education from an almost exclusive focus upon enculturation to one that includes the fostering of wonder in relation to the wilds—or to support the formation of an identity as and not separate from earth. In doing so, music education might shift from egocentric child development approaches to more soulcentric practices that help each child to stay connected both to their inner nature, gifts, and understandings, as well as their sense of being a part of earth. As such, we might prevent the trauma of separation for future generations.

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Notes

[1] General music textbook series, very popular in the 1960s through 1980s (Landeck et al. 1964).

[2] C. Victor Fung (2021) considers Confucianism to be anthropocentric and asserts that Eco-Daoist and Anthropo-Confucian ideas might be considered together in order to bridge current culturally bound purposes for music education with ones that are not exclusively human-centric.

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[3] Ecuador affords subjecthood to the earth through their constitution https://willamette.edu/law/resources/journals/welj/pdf/2016/2016-f-welj-pietari.pdf; and New Zealand's third longest river, Whanganui, has been afforded subjecthood. https://www.treehugger.com/river-new-zealand-granted-legal-rights-person-4850212

[4] For example, if I had a personal relationship with a child laborer who mined the lithium used in the batteries of my electronic devices, it might be more difficult for me to deny that I am implicated in the child's exposure to "cobalt-laden dust that can cause fatal lung ailments while working tunnels that are liable to collapse" https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/03/child-labour-toxic-leaks-the-price-we-could-pay-for-a-greener-future

[5] An anabaptist and protestant Christian church with a dogma similar to that of the Mennonite Church.

[6] "Preserving innocence is a matter of assisting children, adolescents, yourself, and other adults in being fully present with their experience as it is, not pushing any parts away. This is especially important in moments that are unexpected, intense, or overwhelming, moments when people would prefer not to be present, including occurrences of physical or emotional pain. Children in particular need help learning how to manage disappointment and discomfort, including how to find some meaning and value in it. By caring for each other's innocence, people in a soul-centric community congenerate a psychosocial field that amplifies every parent's ability to protect his or her children's innocence." (Plotkin 2008 (85)

[7] In Smith (2021), in arguing for a soundscape-ecology perspective of music learning, I embrace and expand upon Recharte's (2019) conception of "sound education" which de-centers music from music education and allows for the cultivation of "a broad understanding of relationality within ecologies of human and non-human entities" (1).