

## Author's Response

### RESPONSE TO HUCKABY, OSMOND, AND MITCHELL

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#### *Sound Curriculum: Sonic Studies in Educational Theory, Method, & Practice*

Walter S. Gershon / Routledge / 2018

It is a remarkable thing to be heard. To sit back and feel the press of vibrations, listening to voices of scholars whom you know and respect share what resonated with them about your work, the pitch and timbre of their words playing your bones. As is likely clear from their responses, all three of these scholars are friends and, in defying much conventional wisdom about the blind reviews we receive and their associated processes, I can always count on my scholar-friends to bring it, their critique and engagement (that sauce, con sabor) as a form of care and respect. These three responses to *Sound Curriculum: Sonic Studies in Educational Theory, Method, and Practice* are no exception.

I remain deeply grateful to the Bergamo Conference for Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice for organizing the session on *Sound Curriculum* that served as a springboard for these responses, to Warren Crichlow for his organization and participation in this panel, and to my colleagues and friends for their thoughtful, critical responses. Thank you all. My rejoinder to Drs. Huckaby, Osmond, and Mitchell first speaks to points that reverberate across their respective pieces then moves to articulate specific points in response.

This work was an experiment on multiple levels, an experiment that I have not spoken to until now in order to better ascertain the degree to which I might have been, at least to some degree, and according to my own plans and desires, successful. I wanted to put together a polyphonic, polyvocal, synoptic work, one that had an intentional organization but that could be approached from any angle, where understandings were deeper for taking on the whole but present in each section,

and, certainly not least, that was critically affective. In short, I wanted *Sound Curriculum* to follow the kinds of sonic-oriented possibilities presented in the work in form as well as content.

While I may yet not have achieved this end, together these pieces by Drs. Huckaby, Osmond, and Mitchell provide a performative example of key constructs in *Sound Curriculum*: because every-thing vibrates, any-thing can resonate with another in ways that are audible or inaudible, affectively reverberating in deep ways above or below our hearing but not our feelings and person. Whether through Huckaby's imbricated narratives, Osmond's riffing on potential trajectories for sound pedagogies, or Mitchell's important reminders and encapsulation of his colleague's responses, these three responses document the potential for such a critical sonic perspective.

As was true during the Bergamo session, there is a good deal of focus in my colleagues' responses on the eighth chapter of the book, for it is the most unsettling to read and, as I hope I have been clear in the written portion of the chapter, the most unsettling to create. In addition to what each contributor has shared, what also strikes me in reading these responses is a general silence on a couple of points that may be helpful in further situating their thoughts.

The written, textual part of chapter eight is in service to the soundwork. I wrote it in order to do my due diligence as a scholar, working to be transparent about my positionality, my intentions, and my process. It did not, however, seek to explicate the piece. This soundwork is situated as the penultimate chapter of *Sound Curriculum* for a few reasons. The book's general arc moves from theory to method to practice or, more accurately, chapters dither (in the sense of a computer dithering as it works between analog and digital in sound engineering rather than its negative connotation) between the introduction of an idea in one chapter and its use in the next over that arc. Where chapter seven, *Songs to Nowhere*, was a primarily texted version of how sonic educational scholarship might practically function, chapter eight, *Sound Art, Social Justice*, is its inverse: the soundwork does not require the text for an audience to engage.

In keeping with this kind of dialectical scholarly dithering, I have recently produced a soundwork on Black joy at school as part of *Sounding Out!*'s DuBois @ 150 celebration (Gershon, 2018a). Although listed as a podcast, I understand the work to be sound(ed)/sonic scholarship, a choice made to enunciate that this is a sonic

expression of text written to be read and impossible to do textually, due to the ways that sounds function and the sonic information provided beyond what is read. This point about how sounds can do things that text cannot is also implied in the following discussions of chapter eight and should likely be rearticulated here: this soundwork that is chapter eight was intended to record how deeply affecting sounds are and the entangled resonances in which they are inexorably caught, which one carries with adding never-ending layers of complexity and interrelation. It is a chapter in which I try to bring much of the points raised throughout the book to bear in practice, a piece of sound curriculum.

In closing this more general response, I would like to again thank my colleagues and friends, Fran, Chris, and Reagan for engaging my work as they have. I am truly touched. I would also like to rearticulate that this is a work that has sought to address questions about the potential for sound educational understandings and provide concrete examples of their use. To write in ways that are meant to be at least as affective as they are efficacious has changed how I work as well as that to which I am attuned as a scholar. As I mention in passing in *Sound Curriculum*, I am as, if not more, affected in the making and, for me, this is another strength of the sonic, making our bones sing like claves, our tissues vibrate, and unheard resonances that haptically sway our selves.

### **Response to Huckaby**

As is one of her many gifts, Dr. M. Francyne Huckaby graciously gives us recounting of the book in her inimitable way, tacking back and forth between summaries of chapters, personal historical narrative, reaction and reflection, a truly reflexive narrative act. It has been a remarkable thing for me to hear how *Sound Curriculum* has reverberated in unexpected ways that she so vulnerably shares with us here. What does it mean to truly hear another? When do we hear and to what do we listen? Did we hear her? What does Dr. Huckaby's willingness to so transparently share of her own mishearing and opening of her ears teach us? How might we bravely listen with eyes open? What are our responsibilities now that we have all heard her family's narrative of enslavement, education, knowledges, and oppressions?

In response to her strong points about the expression of *Sound Curriculum*, it was released as an e-book and printed. This said, I am still unsure if the e-book contained all the links to sound files in an embedded, integrated fashion. To Dr. Huckaby's

point, the publisher was somehow unaware that there would be sound files associated with the work when it was handed in, and the work to make the sound files readily accessible within the work as links and outside the work as files was entirely my doing. I remain indebted to third party copy editor, Debra Kopka, who worked with me to ensure that a hyperlink in the middle of a page remained there and had the associated file properly hyperlinked and to editor Karen Adler who worked to ensure that the sound files were present and could indeed be both links and QR codes. The work was indeed imagined as fully electronic and, because it was printed, I did need to create a website organized by chapter (rather than simply post a sound file with an associated URL), suggest QR codes as a means to get to the sound files for each chapter, and provide a URL for the website so that those who are still unfamiliar with QR codes could nonetheless access the associated sounds.

As Dr. Huckaby and I have discussed about each of our own projects, the reason for continuing academic books is often monetary, for it is difficult to justify “library costs” for fully electronic works. Conversely, in my own tenure and promotion case, I had a work of soundart exhibited at a local, nationally recognized contemporary art museum for three months, something that would have gone a long way towards tenure for my colleagues in the Arts. However, in spite of versions of this piece being recognized through special invited sessions by both the American Educational Research Association and the American Anthropological Association, not only did this work not have any “weight” for my T&P file, I was specifically told that such work was not scholarly and the only way it might become so was if I was to write peer reviewed articles about that experience. In other words, as you well know, Fran, it’s still a thing, coming and going, and something I’m glad to have an ally like you in fighting (e.g., Huckaby, 2019).

### **Response to Osmond**

I much appreciate how Chris Osmond has latched on to the musicality of sound without neglecting the sonic for the musical in posing his questions about possible directions for what I call sound (or sonic) pedagogies. Given our common loves of music, education, and criticality, it is perhaps not surprising that I have a few concrete responses to the questions he raises. First, yes. Yes to all the questions and their many possible responses to those provocations. Mine are not intended as either singular or correct but, instead, as with this entire piece, one person’s articulation of his ethical obligation to someone who has so generously taken time to engage his work.

A central point that is sometimes lost when we take a slightly different tack to interrupt familiar paths of understanding is that this take too is but another path. In this instance, the chapter on using music to create impotent curricular products is intended to note how using musical tools for sound interpretations is not a means to either strong understandings or, in some cases, strong art. You can write a song about anything and do so poorly with little effort, mistaking the dazzle of moving media or artform for amplifying knowledges. While resonances are always amplified or dampened and students in this instance worked hard at the musical aspects of their work, as Huckaby notes, their product was educationally vapid, what I called superfluous curriculum. Just because it's sonic doesn't make it "better" or "important." And, conversely, just because curriculum is superfluous doesn't mean that participating students didn't gain important information along the way, including that about sound, music, and its educational potential. Listening, hearing, filtering, resonating, and reverberating are sonically oriented ways to consider educational experiences that are disruptive because we have such a deeply ocular acumen. As Osmond notes and implies, this does not remove us of our responsibilities as educators or somehow magically produce some kind of "more" or "extra" education. It does, however, provide us some tools that we can use towards potentially more just and caring educational ways of beingknowingdoing.

Finally, the overwhelm is really our constant. We filter out that which we believe to be irrelevant, turn our attentions and intentions in order to attune ourselves to particular things in particular ways, moment-by-moment (Gershon, 2018b). One possibility sonic perspectives can provide is a means to no longer falsely split that to which we do and do not attend or attune as simply outside our frames. To Dr. Osmond's questions and point, Peter Appelbaum at Arcadia, Reagan Mitchell at Colgate, Boni Wozolek at Loyola Maryland, and I, as well as many others including yourself if I recall correctly, regularly utilize what might be called sound pedagogies. It's also something I'm currently writing to, should it be of interest, first in an encyclopedia entry of that name.

### **Response to Mitchell**

Thank you, Dr. Mitchell, for engaging this work with your students. I too was taken aback by your students' response—not in the way that it is hard to settle on a single sound or the unsettling sounds themselves, the first of which I intended and the second is a necessary part of those sonic choices (therefore also intended)—but in

defaulting to a news anchor's voice as the voice of authority. This surprised me especially in relation to the written portion of that chapter that clearly speaks against such possibilities and because it is, in the most literal sense, a truly minor voice for a fleeting moment in the over 15 minute piece. As Dr. Mitchell writes, and please forgive if I have misremembered our initial conversation about this incident, I am also surprised at my surprise for this is how white supremacies, settler colonialisms, and systemic injustices resonate, another point of the eighth chapter of the book. It is at once the tenor of our times and how it has always already been, resonating, reverberating violences that are exponentially received, wave after wave, each crashing on the vulnerable and our vulnerabilities. Yet, as I also write in *Sound Curriculum*, though in spaces across chapters, just as this is how violence, aggression, and oppression are amplified, luckily, so are love, care, and justice.

Picking up on Dr. Mitchell's move to underscore interconnected, ongoing racial, queer, economic, and other oppressions and how they are reproduced and reified, as he has employed in his own work (e.g., Mitchell, 2018), this too is central in sound educational theorizing. From a sonic perspective, being heard correctly is impossible for we are always literally and figuratively misheard, and separations between resonances, echoes, and reverberations are equally impossible. Singing a song of self is a wonderfully messy endeavor and we can no more splice off an aspect of that song or how we are sung into being by others, than we can truly catch a sound in our hands.

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