

The Helen Carswell Chair in Community Engaged Research in the Arts

Final Reports - 2019

Components of a Digital Technology Music Class

Approaches to music technology and training to support the pedagogical practices
in the Regent Park School of Music's community music program

Joel Ong and Walter S. Gershon

What is this research about?

We aim to provide a multi-dimensional approach to Music Technology and training, focused on the integration of analog and digital tools, and offer multiple strategies for an 'anti-metrics' approach to musical and digital literacy. At the same time. It has been our experience that younger children's abilities in learning in general and music in specific are often underestimated and conversely, that older children's/young adult's knowledges of technologies are often overestimated. In order to provide a more democratized approach to learning, the members of this research group have created a Resource Guide that grows from listening as a rudimentary creative practice to its implications in the use and "creative abuse" of emerging technologies today. Above all, we focus on children as the inspiration and protagonists of our survey, and also provide a review of the digital environment today that will help us understand the challenges they face on- and off-line in our current era of hybrid synchronous and asynchronous learning. While targeted at the Regent Park School of Music's classes that explicitly involve technology (Music Technology, Keys and Beats, and Keyboards), it is compiled with the intention of being broadly applicable to all classes in music instruction there. Although structured as an informative series of documents, this guide is envisioned as a seed for further conversation and creative work rather than a didactic or closed loop.

What you need to know

There is a general need for more technological aids and better designed digital tools for matching the vibrancy of the instructors and instructional curriculum. As researchers into pedagogy, we are less interested in measuring success or "literacy" as is traditionally understood in pedagogy, and instead seek to understand the cultural capital of music software, hardware and other hybrid and virtual tools that people use now. Far too often, digital literacy metrics assess students against a generalized and marginalizing set of criteria e.g. how well they complete a task online, or how well a particular piece of music is 'mastered' according to a set of predetermined guidelines. Moving against the grain of the Western musical tradition and its evaluation strategies, digital instrumentation with its breadth of multi-sensory and interactive tools allows for a pedagogy that measures its success through the extent of individual and/or collective expression, inclusivity and accessibility within diverse communities.

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What did the researchers do?

The project has 3 documents:

1. The resource guide begins with an introduction to the project, the research team and the research methodology, followed by an expansion of the literature surrounding each of our key thematic: [listening](#), [emerging technologies and techniques](#), [digital environment](#), and [children](#). An [appendix of technological resources](#), that may be useful to the setup of a classroom studio, is provided at the end of this document.
2. In the second document entitled [Educational Workshops](#) a list of workshops meticulously designed by the research team and external guest is provided for easy access to pedagogical exercises that may help to augment the classroom.
3. A third document - [Literature Review](#) - compiles all the bibliographies, abstracts and pertinent information for further reference.

Resource Guide

A research team of 8 graduate students and practitioners representing multiple disciplines and pedagogies was assembled. Initially the team focused on 4 main thematic blocks that would provide inroads between them in order to allow an interdisciplinary and generative framing for digital music pedagogies based on what was identified collectively as important and crucial to our current conditions. Thus, the notion of “situated knowledges” became for us both a pedagogical tool to be discussed in the classroom, also as a meta-organization of our research experiences, interests, inspirations and personal experiences in and out of the classroom. Valuing experience as evidence, the resulting document is a testament to the way teaching today may succeed through a consolidation and experimentation of emerging media and technological offerings; and a sustained approach towards individual mentorship and the engagement of students in an assiduous process of self-discovery through creative and unconventional practices.

Educational Workshops

In light of these and other such possibilities, RPSM educators might imagine for the content provided in this section, we have elected to present these educational possibilities not as a unified curriculum but instead as a series of workshops that can be used in any order and according to a teacher’s particular educational purposes and needs. Along similar lines, we understand that portions of each workshop, from a specific exercise to an idea a workshop is designed to address, can also be “pulled out” of the workshop for a specific aspect of a regularly scheduled RPSM session. For example, an educator might find that a particular breathing exercise designed to have students focus their attention on rhythm and time is a helpful “warm-up” activity at the beginning of every session.

What did the researchers find?

Through this multi-disciplinary approach, we are affirming that attention to the sonic is at once a significant, burgeoning area of study and that the theoretical consideration of what sound can do, as well as the challenges the sonic can present, are central to a music education framework. It is our argument that a continuing gap in what might be called sonic education is a) as much a result of ongoing educational tendencies grounded in the turn of the 20th century as it is b) a continuation of ocular and associated textual tendencies that, incidentally and intentionally, buttress contemporary forms of (settler) coloniality and oppression (e.g., Bell & Kahane, 2004; Simpson, 2014).

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How can you use this research?

The resource guide includes guidelines for current innovations in the digital environment, as well as technological considerations for online learning. Workshops have been divided into larger sections, those that attend to music and sound exploration in general and those that are more technology-focused. They have also been organized from those that require general musical knowledge and experiences and those for which some previous experience and understanding of technologies would be more helpful, whether that is taking the time to learn before teaching the lessons or knowledge accumulated over time.

About the researchers

Joel Ong is a media artist whose works explore emergent ways of interfacing with the environment through hybrid discourses of art and science. His works often begin in improvised ensembles where members come in the form of live instrumentalists, robotic assemblages, scientific apparatus, and digital data. Professor Ong is the PI for an AIF-funded pan-faculty Makerspace. Ong is also working on several community-based projects in digital literacy and community music and mixed-reality technologies through grants funded by internal and external sources. He is currently Assistant Professor in Computational Arts at York University in Toronto, and Director of Sensorium: The Centre for Digital Arts and Technology.

Walter S. Gershon is Associate Professor of Critical Foundations of Education and Program Coordinator of Urban Education in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education at Rowan University. His scholarship focuses on questions of justice about how people make sense, the sociocultural contexts that inform their sense-making, and the qualitative methods used to study those processes. Although his scholarship most often attends to how marginalized and vulnerable youth negotiate schools and schooling, Walter is also interested in how people of all ages negotiate educational ecologies outside institutions. In addition to peer reviewed articles, book chapters, and other scholarly publications, Dr. Gershon is editor and/or author of five books, including two national book award-winning monographs.

Research Team

Adam Faux is a Composer, Performer, Ph.D. student and TA at York University, researching synaesthetic and process composition. He is also a student at the University of Toronto beginning Sanskrit language study. For roughly 20 years, Adam has made music for film, dance, recorded projects and live performance, and most recently worked in varied disciplines that include the Filipino Rondalla, and Swahili language and culture. Present interests and affiliations include: member, Nd Studio Lab with Professor Mark David Hosale; associate, York Centre for Asian Research; associate, York Sensorium, Centre for Digital Arts and Technology
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Chris Taeyoung Kim (she/her/hers) is a music educator, collaborative pianist, and vocalist living and working in Toronto. She obtained her MA in music education and BMus from the University of Toronto, during which she was involved in research examining university-extended community music (CM) education programs in Toronto and their educational and social implications. Chris recently completed her B.Ed. from York University, and is an OCT-certified music and English teacher in the intermediate/senior division. Chris is a faculty at the Regent Park School of Music teaching piano and songwriting. She also teaches piano and voice at Musica Music School in Leaside. Outside of teaching, Chris sings as a section leader (alto) at the Metropolitan United Church in Toronto.

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Dan Tapper is an artist who explores the sonic and visual properties of the unheard and invisible. From revealing electromagnetic sounds produced by the earth's ionosphere, to exploring hidden micro worlds and creating imaginary nebulas made from code. His explorations use scientific methods alongside thought experiments resulting in rich sonic and visual worlds. Dan also regularly uses his skills as a creative coder and interactivity designer to help artists and musicians facilitate projects, these range from building a 20-ton stone boat embedded with interactive soundscapes and pressure sensors to digital video feedback software and audio reactive light environments. www.dantappersounddesign.com

Emily Collins is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary researcher, arts administrator and Ph.D. student in Cinema and Media Studies. She has worked across arts organizations in local and international settings, including the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Festival Scope (Paris), VUCAVU (Toronto), PUBLIC Journal (Toronto), and the Toronto International Film Festival. She holds graduate degrees in arts and culture from Maastricht University (Netherlands) and cinema and media studies from York University (Toronto). Situated at the intersection of film and media, sound studies, cultural studies and gender studies, Emily's Ph.D. research considers practices of deep listening, sonic epistemologies and embodied soundscapes. Namely, her project examines how sonic intervention and experimentation within audio-visual works can function as tools of resistance, instruments for disruption and modes of trans-sensory knowledge formation.

Jacky Sawatzky is a conceptual artist with an interest in scientific inquiry, currently a Ph.D. candidate in theatre and performance studies at York University, Toronto. Her interdisciplinary research investigates the meeting point of animal behaviour science and performance studies. Her current research project, "How Are We to Listen to You, Llama?" explores the perceptual world of llamas by approaching the act of listening as a methodology that interweaves the full range of sensoriums. She writes a blog "The Drama of the Llamas" about her observations on the behaviour of the nine llamas living in Toronto's High Park Zoo. An earlier research project, "A Memorial for Our Commodified Giraffe," was published in the special edition of Canadian Notes & Queries "Writing in the Age of Unraveling," January 2020.

Marko Djurdjić. Prior to starting his Ph.D. in cinema and media studies at York University, Marko received a BA from McGill University, a B.Ed. from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and an MA from York University. His work focuses on media, education, and space, particularly through the lens of philosopher Henri Lefebvre. His other interests include middle-brow entertainment, coming up with hypothetical band names, and basketball.

Michaela Pnacekova is an XR creator, producer, a Ph.D. student and ELIA scholar at York University. Her focus lies in the ways new media impact the real through interaction with algorithmic processes and artificial intelligence. Her first VR piece "Symphony of Noise" was shown at festivals such as VRHAM!, Reeperbahn Music Festival and IDFA 2019. She co-produced "Chomsky vs. Chomsky: First Encounter with NFB" and Eyesteel Film, which premiered at New Frontier Sundance Film Festival 2020. She created an interactive predictive policing app Pre-Crime Calculator and produced three feature length documentaries (Border Cut, Scars, Waterproof), which have been shown at DOK Leipzig, IDFA, Prague One World Film Festival, Warsaw Film Festival, GoEast Film Festival, and more. She also worked on the Oscar® nominated documentary Last Men in Aleppo as the German production coordinator which premiered at Sundance Film Festival 2017. She received EWA Development Award 2017, special mention at the Bosch Stiftung East European Co-Production Prize 2014 and Golden Frog for best feminist play in 2009.

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Natasha Walsh is a Ph.D. candidate and Educational Developers Caucus-accredited graduate teaching and research assistant at York University, where she conducts the undergraduate concert choir, performs as a soprano soloist, and has taught undergraduate music theory, choir, and Western Music history compulsory courses. Ms. Walsh holds a research position under Dr. Lisette Canton and is a research collaborator on the Healey Willan Communication Database research grant with the Library & Archives Canada and Stephanie Martin of York University. Ms. Walsh holds awards from the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, and the Hymn Society in the U.S. and Canada. Ms. Walsh presented with the Canadian Society of Church History (virtual), the American Musicological Society (Columbia University), the College Music Society (Vancouver), and the Canadian University Music Society (University of Toronto). She earned her M.Mus. in vocal performance from Université d'Ottawa and a B.S. in vocal performance from Roberts Wesleyan College.

Peter Appelbaum is professor of education at Arcadia University in Philadelphia, USA, where he directs the *Strangely Familiar Music Group*. He works with invented notation and sound structure composition, environmental sound art, and expanded conceptual definitions of sound; he plays horn and cello, and uses ethnomusicology as a tool for community development and academic collaborations. Appelbaum's scholarship is in psychoanalysis and public pedagogy, mathematics education, arts-based research and alter global social movements. His *Children's Books for Grown-up Teachers: Reading and Writing Curriculum Theory* (Routledge 2008) received the AERA Outstanding Book Award. Recent projects include: the Youth Mathematician Laureate Project (<http://yomap.org>), in which youth are provided the resources to serve as inspirational laureates, using mathematics as the art that builds communities characterized by joy, a can-do attitude, and the courage to act on their convictions; and *Vomit! Slaughter! Block Chain Corporate Social Impact Investment Markets! Gleefully Murdering Public School!*, a multi-media cantata interweaving experimental sound art, classic texts of educational foundations, circus arts, and projected media.

Citations

- Bell, C and Kahane, D. 2004. "Intercultural dispute resolution in Aboriginal contexts" Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Simpson, A. 2014. "Mohawk Interrupts: Life across the borders of settler states". Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Keywords

Digital literacy, online learning, music technology, workshops

About the Helen Carswell Chair in Community Engaged Research in the Arts

The Helen Carswell Chair represents a partnership between York University and Regent Park School of Music (RPSM). All faculty and graduate students of the university are encouraged to collaborate with RPSM on special projects that are aimed at improving community music programming and curriculum for children in the Jane and Finch neighborhood and beyond.