SO! Podcast #71: Everyday Sounds of Resilience and Being: Black Joy at School

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Abstract

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Keywords

Music (Subfield), Amplifying Du Bois Forum, Pedagogy, Podcast, Sound Studies, Soundscapes

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Inspired by the recent *Black Perspectives* "W.E.B. Du Bois @ 150" Online Forum, *SO!*'s "W.E.B. Du Bois at 150" amplifies the commemoration of the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Du Bois's birth in 2018 by examining his all-too-often and all-too-long unacknowledged role in developing, furthering, challenging, and shaping what we now know as "sound studies."

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This soundwork resides somewhere between a podcast and academic scholarship. Using W.E.B. DuBois' (1926) arguments about the centrality of aesthetics and the Arts to liberatory practices and justice in Criteria for Negro Art, this piece argues for the significance of Black joy at school as a powerful pathway for interrupting layers of oppression in schooling. It is a work that seeks to convey these understandings as much affectively as epistemologically, where getting a feel for the argument matters at least as much as grasping the points raised throughout.

Sounds for this work are drawn from a four-year longitudinal sonic ethnographic project that was first rendered as a piece of soundart, exhibited at the Akron Art Museum from March through July 2012. The purpose of this project was to examine how writing songs about science might help students of color and girls (of color) more deeply experience and otherwise engage academic content. Students and teachers serves as co-researchers, documenting students' songwriting processes, gathering audio and video recordings of their work, interviewing one another and the like. Given the collaborative nature of this project, with proper layers of student assent and parental consent, participating first, fifth, seventh, and eighth graders and their teachers used their actual names to receive credit for their work. As the study was winding to a close, I also engaged in an extension activity with first graders to better get a sense of how they conceptualized the school. To these ends, I first took pairs of first graders then had them work with one-on-one with their fifth grade buddies to video and audio record their three favorite places in the school.

Bookending the piece are two slices of the same half hour recording of fifth graders in Mrs. Grindall's 5th grade classroom, Taris, Gayle, Tia, and Ki-Auna as they negotiate one of their songs

about planetary motion and phases of the moon. The piece continues with Colton's recording of the spaces and places he likes most at school including the art room, followed by part of Lanaria's recording of the cafetorium (period!), then Delante's recording of his first grade teacher Mr. Bennett's room where he spent most of his days (lockers is amazing!). The sounds at the end of the piece start with Najah's talk at the library as she looks out the window and the school's "wall of fame" located there, with Gayle helping along. The middle sounds are exactly what one might think, bunches of first graders and their fifth grade buddies passing each other along the hall, ending with the friends doing a take of their song, messing up, and keeping rolling for the joy of it.

Along with layering and assembling the above recordings, all other sounds, their composition and arrangement are played, edited, and recorded by the author (Instrumentation: shaker, chekere, guataca, vibratone, udu, and bass). A short reference list for scholarship supporting the arguments made can be found below.

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Walter S. Gershon (Ph.D.) is an Associate Professor in the School of Teaching, Learning & Curriculum Studies, LGBTQ Affiliate Faculty, and served as Provost Associate Faculty for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (2014-2017) at Kent State University. His scholarly interests focus on questions of justice about the ways in which young people make sense, the sociocultural processes that inform their everyday sense-making, and the qualitative methods used to study those processes, especially in relation to sound and the sensory. Though his work most often attends to how continually marginalized youth negotiate schools and schooling, Walter is also interested in how people of all ages negotiate educational contexts and knowledges outside of institutions. Recent publications include serving as co-editor (with Peter Appelbaum, Arcadia University) for a special issue of *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, the first to focus on sound studies in education, and as editor of a forthcoming book titled, *Sensuous Curriculum: Politics and the Senses in Education*. He is the recipient of the 2018 Outstanding Book Award from Division B (Curriculum Studies) of the American Educational Research Association for his work, *Sound Curriculum: Sonic Studies in Educational Theory, Method, and Practice*(2017, Routledge).

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