

# Trees, Ears and the Space Between

This poster tells the story of a project involving children in caring for, planting, listening to and “becoming” trees in their school grounds. The project was led by Ryan Woods - a composer and anthropologist, and Dr Raichael Lock - sustainability education practitioner from the charity **Manchester Environmental Education Network**. It formed part of a wider MEEN project called **Treemarkable**.

3



The children recorded the sounds that they found interesting using microphones. We put microphones into trees to hear what the inside of a tree sounded like and used this to play the trees like instruments. They also recorded the letters which they wrote from the



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Ryan took these recordings and turned them into a sound installation where you can hear the soundscapes of the school, the children’s own soundscapes as created by their mouths. To hear each child’s tree performance and letter scan the QR code to the left.



4

They were introduced to listening techniques to identify different elements of the surrounding soundscape. They were encouraged to think creatively about the sounds around them using their imagination to draw, mimic and meditate on these sounds. Eventually they did a “sonic meditation” to become their tree, so they could write letters from their tree to communicate with human beings.



We have started presenting the installation and our findings of the project at the charities AGM, symposiums, and conferences. We encourage our audiences to imagine what they might want to tell the humans if they were trees. An independent review interviewing the children found they had a deep emotional connection to the trees and ecological understanding of them and were driven to pass on their passion for trees.

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We began by teaching tree science including practical gardening and identification skills. We introduced the notion of the Wood-wide Web (Simard). The children learned to prune damaged trees and planted 170 new saplings. They each chose a tree to name and spent time caring for and befriending their trees including giving them lots of hugs.

## Interdisciplinary Methodologies

We took inspiration from our respective fields using methodologies of deep listening, soundscape composition, acoustic ecology, pan-ethnography, and various pedagogies (experiential, response-able and sensory). We integrated these to teach children skills which they could use to learn about our environment and foster a sense of reciprocity between themselves the rest of the living world.



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At the end of the school year, on the very last day of the project we learned that some of the trees had to be cut down for an emergency exit. The children held a memorial for the trees where they collected seeds so they could be planted in more seeds across Manchester.

- Kimmerer, Robin Wall, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, (Milkweed, 2013).
- Oliveros, Pauline, *Quantum Listening*, (Ignota, 2022).
- Westerkamp, Hildegard, 'Linking soundscape composition and acoustic ecology', *Organised Sound* (2002, Vol 7) p.51-6.

## SCAN HERE

For a full case Study of the Project & to find out more.

