proboscis

SOUND SCAVENGING

**Project Report
A collaboration between
Proboscis, Loren Chasse and the
Jenny Hammond Primary School**

March 2006

Introduction

Proboscis is collaborating with staff at the Jenny Hammond Primary School in Waltham Forest, north east London to develop ways of incorporating the Social Tapestries practices for knowledge mapping and sharing into teaching and learning methods within the school's teaching curriculum.

Jenny Hammond is a diverse, high achieving school which believes in enriching the curriculum in imaginative and creative ways. In 2004, it had 192 pupils of which 44% were girls and 56% boys. 15% of these students' first language is other than (or believed to be other than) English.

In June and December 2005, sound artist and educator Loren Chasse from San Francisco, whilst working in collaboration with Proboscis, undertook a sound and mapping workshop with Year 5 of the Jenny Hammond School to investigate how sound could be used to map the pupils local environment as part of the Social Tapestries research project. During this series of workshops, pupils explored how they listen, different types of sounds they hear, favourite sounds and how to map and link the sounds geographically.

The workshop took place over four sessions, three taking place in July and the final mapping workshop in December 2005. After these workshop Proboscis and Loren Chasse edited the recordings into a series of audio podcasts and mapped the students' sounds and pictures using the free Google Earth application.

Sound Scavenger Kits were developed which included an eNotebook, a sound recorder, a music box, earplugs, a blindfold, stones, a cardboard tube, a bulldog clip, a pen and post-it notes.

About Topographies & Tales

We initially invited sound artist, Loren Chasse, to do a residency at Proboscis to explore the relationship between sound and architecture in an urban environment. Part of Loren's work is about excavating sound in the city and finding the unique sonic spaces which are created in urban environments. He is also interested in how people use the city, respond to its sounds and create sounds within this urban context.

Loren is also a primary school teacher and was interested in working with children during his residency. His approach is inspiring, refreshing and exciting. The work with The Jenny Hammond Primary School included a sonic mapping exercise called 'Listen your way to School' where the pupils thought about the various sounds they hear on their way to school and mapped them onto a geographic area. His project looked at the ways of listending and our listening culture and built on the exploration of navigation and pushed it a stage further. How do people form relationships with their environment? What is meaningful to them? What sounds are important? Why do we listen?

Jenny Hammond was a great school to work with as it is very open, responsive and small enough to allow things to happen quickly. Although this was a relatively unusual project, the school made a space for it and both the children and staff were fantastic. This project allowed ideas from two strands of Proboscis' work to be brought together – Topographies & Tales and Social Tapestries.

Alice Angus
March 2006

Links
Proboscis – http://proboscis.org.uk
Topographies & Tales – http://proboscis.org.uk/topographies/
Social Tapestries – http://socialtapestries.net

Quotes from the Students

As a means to evaluate the project the students were asked to record interviews with each other.

What do you think about the Sound Workshop?

> *I think it's good because you get to meet a really famous person and we go out with recorders and take our workshop bags home*

> *It's a great idea because it teaches kids – normally kids talk in the class and mess about but now it teaches them how to use their ears and listen to what is happening around them*

> *I think it's very fun and you get to learn lots of information about sounds*

What did you learn?

> *I learned you can make different sounds with a rock and a microphone and you can make different sounds with different surfaces*

> *I learnt about listening. Loren was fun.*

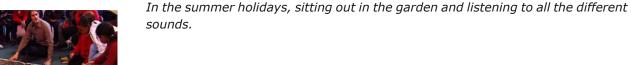> *That sound is not just sound. It could be vibrations and stuff like that.*

How will you use what you've learned after the workshop ends?

> *I will use my ears more than my eyes and listen more*

> *I know how to use a recorder – I'll remember everything he taught us*

> *I would listen to all the sounds around me and I wouldn't listen to people talking to me when I'm trying to work*

> *I will use it at home – I can teach my little sisters and other people who will get a lot of information*

> *In the summer holidays, sitting out in the garden and listening to all the different sounds.*

Why is it important to listen and use your imagination?

> *To use your imagination is good because you get to be free and think about all the things that have happened and all the people in your life*

Good to listen to know what to do – if you use your imagination, there's no wrong or right answer

You could imagine something when you're a child and when you're older, you could build it, draw it or whatever

It's very important because then you can share what you're thinking and what you can see. If you're imagining something you can see faces in the clouds

If you don't listen you won't know what to do and if you use your imagination, whatever you do will be more exciting.

Some sounds have some meaning but can be boring so you just close your eyes and think about it (imagine it)

Listen Your Way To School

List some sounds you hear in your home before you leave for school:

Flushing the toilet
The bread popping up from the toaster
I hear the crust of the bread breaking
Kissing
Wind
Cars
TV
Radio
Car starting
Light switched off
Mum showering
Baby brother playing with toys
Microwave warming the milk
Mum telling me to get my coat on

Evaluation Notes

As part of the evaluation the Year 5 teacher was asked to complete an evaluation form, whilst the artist devising and leading the workshops was interviewed to reflect not only upon the project itself, but also its future potential.

Stephanie Lucas (Year 5 teacher)

The small group allowed all children an equal opportunity to express themselves. The equipment was user friendly and children enjoyed the experience of recording sounds.

The workshop encourages the children to be aware of their environment and community. They are taught the values of team work and being responsible for taking equipment home to complete homework.

The workshop is a fantastic opportunity for children to allow themselves time to closely explore their environment and community. It would lend itself well to P.H.S.E. It could be used as a basis for poetry in Literacy and could easily be turned into an art or music project.
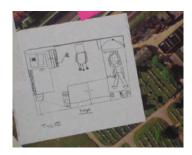
Loren Chasse (Artist)

I was surprised at how meaningful the mapping activity was to students – how interested in and engaged with it they were.

Great Storytelling with students – using worksheets and prompts made it more relevant to them and their neighbourhoods.

Mapping is great for pupils. Preparatory work with the teacher prior to the workshop – in this case mapping the classroom and bedroom at home – was necessary for it to be a success.

The sound workshop is not necessary to do the mapping workshop but it adds to it. It's a way to reference what was already done with the sound and therefore a continuation of previous work. Both workshops could be offered independantly but it's valuable to make the connections.
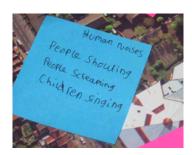
The sound workshop is not specifically about sound. It is more about developing the fundamental practice on how to listen and pass on info.

By presenting new things like mapping and listening, it gives quiet or less confident pupils a chance to express themselves.

Mapping teaches pupils about how to link things by making connections between subjects and areas. This is very important and needs to be taught

Positive Aspects of the Project
- Valuable tool to allow marginalised pupils a voice
- Aids pupils to think critically about space – a skill you can begin early as children and develop through to adulthood
- Personalises a project for a student while conforming to the curriculum
- Develops sensitivity to listening through interview techniques
- Develops democratic models within a group of pupils
- Enables pupils to kick-start change and improve society.
- Maps history of a particular area and improves intergenerational interaction

What next?
Certain components of the workshop could be adapted for all ages from nursery to adults. For instance, in a kindergarden (nursery) setting colour coding could be used to paint the map by each section – with the students choosing the colours based on their impressions of the local environment. Adding transparent overlays to layer the different knowledge and information gathered by diffrent classes would lead to the creation of an entirely new map created by the students – a whole new visualisation of their environment and community.

The workshops could be improved by having more time to look at maps to build more layers and extract more information – there could've been more storytelling and sharing. Sound workshops could also be run with parents and children simultaneously. It would be an opportunity for parents and pupils to work together and allow both parents and children to extract strategies for listening indirectly to themselves and each other.
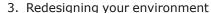
By linking the mapping with the gathering and sharing of knowledge and information, this approach can be used to teach all the curriculum needs within a meaningful and personal context. It is a means for the pupils to learn without actually realising they are doing so, and that skills and knowledge learnt in one subject can be transferred to others.

Ideas for Future Workshops
1. Writing up a story
   Interview someone in your community or family about a story from their life. Using sound as a tool for gathering information, have the students transcribe the story into their own words.

2. Investigate environmental sounds
   Record the sounds of birds you can hear and compare them with other recordings of birds sampled from the internet. Identify the birds you have recorded from their sounds – what can you learn about your environment from the wildlife that are present.

3. Redesigning your environment
   How to redesign environment and make it better – what sounds don't you like? Make recordings of sound you do and don't like (road traffic, aircraft, railways, wildlife, nature, sirens, music) Look at ways of how to improve the environment – from planning sound barriers to block certain noises, to creating sound installations that bring new experiences to other places?