ARVIDA STEEN

EXPLORING ORFF

A Teacher's Guide

SCHOTT
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This book is dedicated to
Philip Steen,
Cynthia, Carla and Marjorie

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Finally, I acknowledge my greatest debt to Jane Frazee. She is a master Orff teacher, and ardent, effective champion of artistic teaching, my mentor and friend who continues to challenge and amaze me by demonstrating how much more I can learn about the art of teaching and the art of making music.

Preface

This book has two ancestors. Lowell Mason, who established vocal music in the curriculum of the Boston Public Schools in 1838, believed that children ought to be taught to sing as they were taught to read. In other words, Mason viewed music literacy as the foundation of school music teaching and the key to broader understanding of the art.

A little more than one hundred years later Carl Orff developed a different approach to pedagogy, one in which the student was presented with musical problems and expected to improvise independent solutions. Music insight and independence were the result of this experimentation with all elements of music.

It is the special contribution of this book to forge a fresh approach to music teaching and learning from these two very different sources. This well-crafted synthesis offers the busy teacher help in organization and evaluation, as well as an abundance of ideas for classroom improvisation and musical experimentation.

Finally, every page of this book is full of the conviction of a caring, able, experienced teacher. Arvida Steen's exemplary work demonstrates that young children can master musical material in a typical school situation – and that exploration is the means to mastery. Many children's lives have already been affected by her teaching; this book ensures that many more will benefit from what she has learned.

Jane Frazee
Director, Institute for Contemporary Music Education
University of St Thomas

Introduction

There is no question that Orff-Schulwerk has become established in the practices of many American general music teachers. Summer workshops can be found in nearly every corner of the United States and Canada. The American Orff-Schulwerk Association and Music for Children–Canada continue to develop chapters, hold national conferences and attract increasing numbers of members. Listings for music positions in elementary, middle-school and college-level institutions will often request Orff certification. Since its introduction to North America in the late 1950s Orff-Schulwerk has taken root and flourished in music classrooms everywhere.

Surely the reason for this success lies in the fact that Orff-Schulwerk is a teaching approach which promises that we and our students will interact as partners in making music. Playing instruments, singing and moving are treated as ensemble experiences, requiring mutual awareness in order to create successful musical expression. Students are not passively involved in their education. Rather, the room is full of their purposeful activity. We teachers are the guides who introduce the focus of the lesson, and then encourage the students to develop it until they take over, making music on their own. The responsibility for music belongs to all of us, teachers and students.

This cooperative approach to music making has been facilitated by Carl Orff's view that music can grow, organically, from small motives to phrases and sections, from simple to evolving complexities. Since these initial ideas are small ones, they can be provided by the children as well as by the teacher. Hence, the development of the lesson can involve every member of the class; all ideas may be examined through individual and group effort that may lead to improvisation and perhaps ultimately, to composition. The fact that the student is an integral part of this process is, of course, powerful and exciting.

Consequently, if improvisation based on the musical ideas of students is to be an integral part of music making, the structure of the lesson will need to be flexible, allowing for student responses, suggestions and pace of learning. This emphasis on improvisation also means that instruction is not given for its own sake, which students take or leave. Rather, instruction through improvisation invites the interaction of students with the music, each other and the instructor. Music taught with this in mind promises to be flexible and adaptive to student's abilities and motivations.

For Orff-Schulwerk teachers, a principal aim of this interaction is the development of the musically self-sufficient student. To achieve such independence students must be able to remember music, as well as read and write their own musical ideas and those of others. Reading, writing and remembering become important to students when their ideas are encouraged and when they realize they have many musical possibilities from which to choose. For instance, my students want to remember, read and write when they realize that they can then compare and select from an ever wider body of musical materials. They are also motivated to master these skills when they realize they will be able to preserve what they and their class create. It is this linkage of skill with motivation that is one of the great strengths of Orff-Schulwerk. When students are involved in the

processes of creation they will want to acquire the tools needed to make them, ultimately, musically independent.

The same interplay between motivation and skill acquisition is involved in performance. Children quite naturally speak, sing, move and play instruments. Yet their contributions are obviously limited by their skill level. There is no better way to create the desire to raise that level than to include their contributions in the musical output of the class. The level of skill our students use when performing, as well as when reading and writing, is an acknowledgement of their independence and understanding of music. As their awareness of their musical control and expressiveness is enhanced they will perform with increasing independence from our instruction.

Musical growth for students in an Orff-Schulwerk program is assured because participation with others is central to instruction. We share with our students the responsibility for modeling musical behaviors. They share with us the responsibility for expanding the themes of each lesson. The enhanced responsibilities of student to student as well as student to teacher leads virtually without exception to increased student motivation and to student growth.

In an Orff-Schulwerk classroom our growth as music teachers is also assured. To guide and open up instruction to embrace our students' ideas require quick analysis. We must be able to make musical decisions based on knowledge of rhythm, melody, form, timbre, range and technique. In order to encourage our children to contribute their ideas we must be able to recognize, remember and perform them as we hear them. The tools of orchestration enable us to adapt and adjust settings during the lesson to match the comfort level of individuals and classes. These skills are important when we plan each lesson and when we respond to unanticipated problems presented by each class. If we are open to learning about music with our students we model the behaviors we value in our students. A classroom where everyone is learning is an exciting place to be. With so many reasons to recommend the approach, we are sometimes unprepared for its difficulties.

When we begin to use Orff-Schulwerk in our teaching we are often confronted with unexpected problems. Instruction that in theory appeared to be so much fun and free of encumbrances may be, in practice, full of pitfalls; a structure to hold a series of lessons together isn't always clear. Nor did Carl Orff provide much in the way of a solution. Instead, he was determined to avoid the old practices of his day that stressed learning through lectures rather than learning through participation. Hence, when we look to *Music for Children* for method and structure – as distinct from materials – we find little that is relevant for American elementary school children. Since most of us are under the stress of teaching many large classes in quick succession, the lack of method and structure can lead to confusion.

A second problem is that the Orff approach abounds in choices. Published lessons and settings encourage the use of movement, speech, song and instruments. In the flurry of introducing many activities we run the risk of losing the focus on learning and knowing music. Instead, we end up concentrating on the activities rather than the musical concepts present in each performance. The proliferation of materials published and presented at workshops and courses encourages activity-centered teaching and requires us to be skillful in selecting materials and planning lessons for specific learning tasks.

But if an abundance of activities can pose problems so can too great an emphasis on

structure. When we sense an absence of structure we strive to provide it, sometimes to the detriment of our underlying Orff philosophy. Lessons beautifully taught that remain at the imitation stage of development are not lessons that acknowledge a philosophy of group interaction and improvisation.

Orff's challenge to us is not to see how closely we can imitate his classroom practices. Instead, he challenges those of us attracted to his philosophy to adapt his pedagogical examples and his musical ideas to the new situations in which we find ourselves. He did not guide the development of curriculum or materials. He left it up to each generation of teachers to reinterpret his ideas for themselves. There is no promise of a safe method here. There is rather the basic idea that is open to each of us to interpret for ourselves. The goal of this book is to help each of us develop a curriculum and lessons that address our children's needs with our best thinking and planning.

The possibilities and problems sketched above lead inevitably to three questions facing every music teacher.

- How can I form a curriculum that addresses my students' needs?
- How can I choose the best materials for my lessons from the abundance of materials available?
- How can I plan lessons that have a clear focus, and are also open to frequent student contributions?

Exploring Orff addresses these critical questions in the chapters that follow. A curriculum outline is presented, but it will be viewed as a flexible tool which will help us respond to the changing characteristics of our classrooms and schools. Suggestions for several arrangements of goals within a grade level, and from grade to grade, are given. The outline may also be used as a reference to connect it and the materials that follow with a curriculum you are already using. The link between curriculum goals and student progress – lesson planning – is addressed in a chapter which discusses the elements of a good plan. In Part II a flexible curriculum is outlined. Lesson suggestions for each objective are given, illustrating various ways to encourage individual and group participation. Following the lessons references are made to materials from other Orff-Schulwerk publications which may be used to address the same goal.

The pioneering work of designing a curriculum for teachers of the Orff approach was *Discovering Orff* by Jane Frazee with Kent Kreuter (New York: Schott, 1987). This invaluable book introduces the reader to Orff media, pedagogy and orchestration theory. A curriculum for grades one through five demonstrates the application of Orff's ideas to teaching elementary music in American schools. The book is a basic resource for the teacher who wishes to understand the Orff philosophy and classroom application.

I was attracted to this approach by the curiosity and passion for learning demonstrated by Orff teachers. That is the spirit in which *Exploring Orff* is written. Orff-Schulwerk is applied in a wide variety of teaching styles and environments, demonstrating that many interpretations are possible. This book seeks to support your using this approach by adding my thoughts concerning curriculum and lesson planning. A variety of materials and resources are offered to give flexibility to your program as you guide your children to explore, learn and apply their understanding of music.

This book cannot help but reflect my own experiences with my children and our

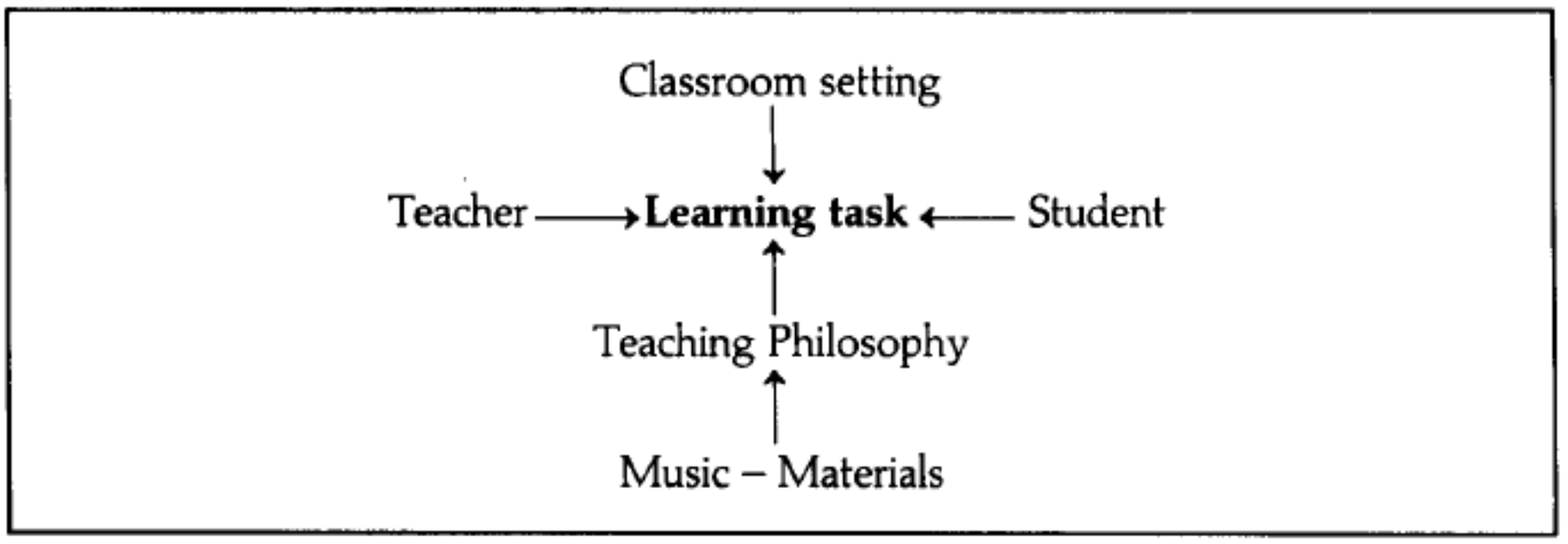
shared journey toward musical independence. This book will achieve an even greater goal if it can help you and your students achieve your objectives while exploring music through Carl Orff's challenging approach to learning together.

Part One:

1 · Planning your Curriculum

If you teach, you have a curriculum, for as you teach you convey expectations for yourself and your students. As their experiences in lessons accumulate you inform students, and the community they come from, of what they know about music and how important you and they consider 'knowing' to be. Your curriculum then evolves in time from your expectations as expressed through your lessons, your students' responses to your instruction, and their own expressions of the presumptions they bring from home, their classmates and their community. A curriculum formed in this way may work, but in time it may become unwieldy and difficult to define, fun but excessively teacher-centered. It may also be difficult for you to evaluate your students' growth, and you may be ineffective in predicting the success of your teaching. You may have success and not know why, or be frustrated with the outcome of your teaching and not know how to improve it.

On the other hand, curriculum planning can be a dynamic thought process which determines and organizes our instructional goals. Our goal planning can be very pragmatic, supplying us with the steps that lead us from one day to the next. However, using the curriculum in only that way limits its usefulness to us. Because knowing music involves the interaction of many factors – not just a sequence of learning tasks – a curriculum that is most useful will reflect a thought process that considers all of them. Learning results when the teacher, student and music interact in the classroom. Each factor contributes to the quality of that outcome. The teacher and the student each bring skills and knowledge to the learning task. The task itself makes demands on both the teacher and the student. And without an accommodating environment and carefully chosen materials, learning can only be accomplished with difficulty. When we understand the total act of learning we see that the curriculum can be a tool to acknowledge and make the best use of all factors. If we view it as organizing only the learning task we risk experiencing unexpected results. But when our planning reflects all factors we can predict that learning will take place, for the teacher's skill, the task, the students' ability to perform the task, the materials and environment have all been



considered. When we have all the elements which influence our planning in mind we see that the best curriculum is one that reflects a specific situation.

Because each teaching situation is unique, you cannot expect other curriculum guides to fit your students' needs. Instead, these guides, including the one in this book, serve as models from which you may extract what fits your situation best. These guides also help you to envision goals beyond what may seem possible at first. Of course, you may enjoy finding that your students seem to learn at a rate that other guides outline. Yet the best curriculum is the one *you* plan and review for *your* students in *your* school.

The Students

The first and most influential factor in your curriculum planning is the focus of your instruction, your students. They come to class with some knowledge of and attitudes about music, and skills to perform it, which combine to affect their readiness to learn more. Your choice of goals for them should be influenced by what you know about them. The students' knowledge, attitudes and skills come from their homes, the community, the school and their classrooms. There are several ways you can gather information about your students that will help you choose goals appropriately. One way is to converse with classroom teachers who can inform you not only about individuals, but can also tell you about how their students work with one another, and how they structure their classrooms so that learning takes place. From these discussions you will discover the kinds of instruction that are familiar to the students, and what other teachers consider your students' social behaviors and motivations to be. You can also learn about your students' interests, motivations and background through informal chats with them at recess, in the halls or during lunch. Interacting with them in a personal way has the added benefit of creating an atmosphere of cooperation and friendly respect that enhances your instruction.

Answering the questions below will give you additional information that will help you select and then sequence goals. It will be especially helpful to consider this information when selecting materials and choosing the means of performance to accomplish learning tasks.

1 Do the students enjoy school? Do they enjoy music class?
2 How has the music program been structured in the past? Is there a record of what the students have been taught? The answer will help you understand their motivation and expectations for learning.
3 Where outside school do they hear music? Do some students participate in music activities after school hours?
4 Do some students take piano or instrumental lessons?
5 Do parents take an interest in their children's performance in music and in other school programs?
6 What ethnic and cultural characteristics do your students represent? (If their culture is kept alive in part through music, there may be ways to relate the music in your program to the music in your students' heritage. You may be able to select melodies and rhythms that will bring their music into the classroom where common music elements can be compared and performed. Group instruction is built on common musical experiences, and your students' music may be different from yours. You may

decide to learn more about their musical culture so that you can teach them with more understanding.)

It takes time and effort to know your students, especially when you see hundreds each week. Find easy ways to collect and organize information to help you with this process. You may wish to keep anecdotal notes in the margins of lesson plans or in a small notebook that you carry from class to class. In this informal way you will begin to gather useful information that helps you reflect on your instruction and analyze your students' responses. In time this understanding, along with the student performance on your evaluation instruments, will help you teach the individual rather than merely the lesson and give focus to your curriculum planning.

1 **Learning Environment:** School Setting

Next, let us consider your students' learning environment. There are two primary factors in that environment which influence your instruction: the importance and function of music within the school program and the physical setting. Your position was formed for you by school policies and priorities, which in turn reflect the policies and priorities for education in the community. Knowing about the philosophy of your school and how it is expressed through classroom instruction and supervision, playground activities, schedules, relationships of other subject disciplines to the school program, and other features unique to your situation, will help you know what influences your students and what they are learning.

Another way to learn about the school environment is through conversations with other teachers. Your students come to you from another classroom and a collection of other experiences. When these teachers tell you what teaching strategies they use and what they perceive to be the abilities of individuals and groups they also describe your students' primary learning environment. These discussions may help you identify some possible useful teaching practices which you may match with your own to increase teaching efficiency. Children learn with more confidence when behavioral expectations are similar as they move from classroom to classroom. The information from other teachers may cause you to change the sequence of certain goals because you realize the students will not be as ready to fulfill your objective as you thought. For instance, it may not be effective to introduce music reading until general reading has been introduced in the classroom. Introducing new meters with half or eighth notes as the beat may be taught more effectively when the students understand relative values. Your goals for music instruction are more likely to be met when they reflect your awareness of the social and learning environments of your students which are influenced by your school and the community.

How often you see the students and for how long you see them each time affects their retention of music concepts, and the frequency of practice activities influences their ability to acquire new skills. The number of classes you teach each day, and even the order in which they are scheduled, affects the time you spend to prepare your room with equipment and materials that support each lesson. Your stamina and how you use your voice become factors in schools where you may teach large classes or many groups in succession without rest. The length of each class and the frequency of instruction also affect the level to which you can direct children to explore music on their own, and the freedom and time you can give to students to improvise and create.

Our students move on to other music programs during and after their years in elementary school. They may become part of an instrumental program in the fourth or fifth grade. In middle school they may continue their music studies in choruses, bands and general music classes. Coordinating approaches to teaching reading and writing skills with others in the music faculty will affect the goals you select and the manner in which you will teach them.

There are reading tools which have been identified with specific methodologies which verbalize rhythms and pitches, providing an intermediate step between perceiving sound through performance and conceptualizing sound as a written symbol. For many children this is a necessary step in helping them generalize and categorize their understanding of musical sound. These tools also help students internalize and retain the specific musical patterns they hear. If you and other music teachers in your school community use rhythm or melody syllables you will want to acknowledge this in the way you write your curriculum objectives. Because these are tools of aural analysis which precede written symbols, and later are tied to written analysis, you will need to acknowledge their importance to your program by stating when they are to be introduced and how you intend to use them. A definitive method of using rhythm or pitch syllables has never been specified for Orff teachers. It has, however, been common practice for American Orff teachers to use solfege with moveable *do*, rather than the European system of fixed *do* or numbers for scale pitches. Teachers have used various rhythm syllable systems such as the Kodály rhythm duration syllables, the French time names, the Gordon rhythm duration syllables, or numerous duration systems which teachers have invented themselves.

When you plan your curriculum and the lessons which follow, remember that these systems are tools that help children build associations about pitch and duration. We should also remember that when a system takes longer to assimilate than a more direct approach to music symbols it is an indication that the system is not efficient or has outlived its usefulness for our students. Whatever system is chosen, it should be used consistently from grade to grade, and should enable the child to make an easy transition from elementary music to general music, choral or instrumental programs.

2 **Learning Environment:** Room Setting

The room you teach in is a second environmental factor which influences your program. Orff-Schulwerk teaching revolves around four activities; speaking, singing, moving and playing. Moving and dance require enough classroom space to allow students to walk, skip, gallop and run with some freedom. Many teachers remove the chairs and have students sit on the floor in order to make the space more flexible for movement, instrument playing, and small group projects. The floor then needs to be smooth, warm and easy to clean so that it is an inviting, safe surface on which to dance or sit. Your children's playing and singing will also be affected by the acoustics of the space. It is difficult to teach group improvisation at the instruments in a large, highly resonant gym or multi-purpose room. The ideal room is large enough to encourage movement while containing the light quality of children's voices and delicate instrumental colors.

The Orff approach uses barred and untuned percussion instruments. You need both performance and storage space for these instruments. I find that when untuned

instruments are stored on peg boards or in open baskets or bins their visibility prompts the desire to use them. Several teachers store theirs on a table where each instrument shape is outlined. Then it is easy to return each instrument to its assigned place. Otherwise, the old adage 'out of sight, out of mind' reminds us to plan more deliberately by taking time to bring out instruments for each lesson. It is also harder to tell children where to find instruments that are hidden from view. The height of chairs and tables used for instrument practice should allow your students to play with shoulders relaxed and hands at about keyboard height. Of course, the beauty of sound affects the musical results, so being able to purchase instruments of high quality becomes a factor in encouraging student participation. We can see that the physical setting, your classroom, and the school's expectations and customs of instruction combine to affect strongly your teaching and influence your selection of curriculum goals.

The Teacher

Many would say that *you* are the most important factor in determining your curriculum, for your musical and teaching abilities determine how you instruct. As you teach, your students are affected by your background, just as your instruction is influenced by their backgrounds. Your plans and designs for learning are expressions of your vision for your students and reflect your style of interaction with the music and the class. When your teaching acknowledges your strengths and your goals your motivation and that of your students will be high. Fortunately, within the philosophy of Orff there are innumerable teaching models possible because there are many ways to model musical behaviors. Some teachers may be experts in American folk music and may have strong vocal training. Others may be skilled jazz musicians who are familiar with traditions of improvised music. Still others may have extensive training in dance, and feel comfortable teaching both folk and creative dance to their students. Each of us has definable performing abilities and unique sources of musical literature from which we draw our own musical understandings. While we all share a basic music background and goals common to other teachers of Orff-Schulwerk, each of us will have a different practical curriculum for we each have a specific style of interacting with music and students and a different body of musical strengths from which to teach. Your students will benefit most if your curriculum draws upon your unique performance skills and knowledge.

Curriculum with an Orff Influence

Finally, we consider the influence of Orff's philosophy on our teaching. While music as artistic expression is greater than the sum of its parts, children understand it more clearly when a single element (rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, or expressive characteristics) is isolated from the whole. A curriculum will often present the elements of rhythm and melody as separate topics, ordered from the simplest (e.g. rhythm to internalized beat) to the more complex (e.g. rhythm as a pattern in a new meter). An Orff teacher will draw these topics from musical examples, explore them, and then place the elements back into the context of the whole, the music. Students begin learning by *imitating* the teacher who demonstrates through music examples and then guides the students to explore the music's content. This exploration can take many forms. Students may *reapply* what they