

# A Complementary Combination: Responsive Classroom and Orff Schulwerk

## ABSTRACT

*Two approaches with complementary elements, Responsive Classroom and Orff Schulwerk, contribute to students' learning through play, process, and exploration. This article compares the two approaches, identifying strategies that link the two and enhance both in the music classroom.*

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*Singing lightens our loads, singing cheers our day, and singing together makes us part of a community.*

**Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete**

**By Matthew Stensrud**

Every day in the music classroom, the importance of singing is undeniable. Someone with experience in the Schulwerk might think the quote above stems from any number of Orff resources. Surprisingly, it is from *The First Six Weeks of School*, an elementary education resource that supports the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach (Denton & Kriete, 2000).

The author's first experience with the RC approach—singing songs, playing games, and discovering classroom materials—made it clear that Orff and RC partner well. As educational stakeholders, Orff music teachers strive to provide cross-curricula experiences that enhance the general classroom and school community while preserving the foundations of the Schulwerk. The ideals of Responsive Classroom in combination with Orff Schulwerk can create a collaborative culture for colleagues and enable student success both in the classroom and the community.

## What is Responsive Classroom?

Responsive Classroom is an “approach to elementary education that leads to greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate” (Northeast Foundation for Children [NEFC], n.d.). Note that RC, like Orff Schulwerk, uses the word “approach” over the more rigid “method.”

Inspired by elementary classroom teachers, the RC approach recognizes that knowing our children developmentally and culturally is an essential part of teaching. RC creates an equal balance of social and academic curricula and employs this balance with students through an explorative- and process-driven approach.

The guiding principles of Responsive Classroom include:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need to learn and practice specific social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- We must know our children individually, culturally, and developmentally.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children.
- Teachers and administrators must model the social and academic skills that they wish to teach their students. (Kriete, 2002, p. 4)

These principles connect with the Schulwerk in many ways. While students delight in singing and playing “Head and Shoulders Baby” (Amidon, 1991, p. 10) because of the catchy rhythms and enticing actions, the enjoyment emerges from the social connection when students play with a friend. RC expands upon these principles with a set of teaching practices: morning meeting, guided discovery, and academic choice.

Morning meeting is a 20-minute active gathering led by the classroom teacher at the start of the day. The meeting might include songs, games, or a class note. It prepares the classroom as a welcoming, community-centered environment. Here, each child is greeted, recognized, and given time to share his or her individuality.

Guided discovery is a focused, purposeful, and playful technique teachers use to introduce students to classroom materials, areas, and activities (Denton & Kriete, 2000, p. 15). Kindergarteners taking part in guided discovery are encouraged to explore how crayons feel, use them as blocks, and find different ways to color before the teacher guides them toward the correct classroom use. This discovery allows students to think creatively through open-ended questions, such as “how can these crayons help us learn?” Guided discovery also employs student modeling, where students have the opportunity to learn from one another and better understand holding and using crayons in a child-centered way. In the music classroom, guided discovery appears when we create a similar activity for students using xylophone bars.

Academic choice occurs when teachers create parameters for students to take risks, make mistakes, and create their own final products. A fourth-grade long-division project incorporating academic choice allows students to demonstrate what they have learned in an individual way. One student may make a board game, another may write a song, while another may create a comic strip (Denton, 2005, p. 6).

Found within academic choice is the natural cycle of learning: The students initiate goal planning, achieve the goal through active working, and reflect on the experience and product with oneself and others. When asking students to create a dance in AB form, music teachers are giving students the opportunity to make academic choices.

Implementing each of these RC teaching practices within Orff Schulwerk happens quite naturally. Through play, process, and exploration, music teachers can integrate RC principles and remain true to the Orff process.

## Play

As Shamrock states, “The impetus for Orff Schulwerk lies in children’s natural group-play behavior” (n.d., para. 2). At the heart of the Schulwerk is the opportunity to play. Bringing the feeling of the playground into the classroom affirms a child’s natural style of learning.

In the modern-day classroom, this sense of play is almost non-existent, and “traditional schooling often comes as a rude shock to children” (Goodkin, 2002, p. 11). Both Orff and Responsive Classroom agree it is critical that we find ways to incorporate play into our classrooms (Roser, 2009, p. ii).

RC encourages play through rhythmic greetings, finger plays, and movement games. In a general classroom, an RC-based "Hidey, Hidey, Hidey, Ho" call-and-response greeting, where students create their own way to "boogie" (Kriete, 2002, p. 166),

and a group activity exploring different voices based on Maurice Sendak's spooky October stanza from *Chicken Soup with Rice* (Kriete, 2002, p. 73) may give the impression that an Orff teacher infiltrated the general education classroom.

Figure 1: Four Variations on the Name Game.

Class  $\frac{2}{4}$  Say your name, when you do, we'll say your name back to you.

Student  $\frac{2}{4}$

Clap  $\frac{2}{4}$

Pat  $\frac{2}{4}$

5 Example #1 Example #2

Class Jon - a - than Jon - a - than

Student Jon - a - than Co - hen

Clap

Pat

9 Example #3 Example #4

Class Co - hen Al - ba - ny

Student Jon - a - than New York

Clap

Pat

ADAPTED FROM KRIETE, R. (2002). *THE MORNING MEETING BOOK*, P. 170. ARRANGED BY MATTHEW STENSRUD.

Morning meeting greetings merge the social and the academic curricula. They enable students to hear and use each other's names and practice social skills necessary for success both outside and inside the classroom. In one greeting activity, the name game,

students respond with their first name and the class echoes back, as seen in Name Game #1 (Kriete, 2002, p. 170). As the year progresses, students can try Name Game #2 and say their last name while the class responds with their first name, or advance

Figure 2: Speech Piece Adapted From the Poem, "As I Was Going to St. Ives."

## As I Was Going to St. Ives - Speech Piece

Traditional Poem

Doug Goodkin, arranged by Matthew Stensrud

The musical score is arranged in four systems, each with a voice line and a percussion line. The time signature is 2/4. The lyrics are: "As I was go-ing to St. Ives I met a man with se-ven wives. E 'vry wife had se-ven sacks. E - 'vry sack had se-ven cats. E - 'vry cat had se-ven kits. Kits, cats, sacks, wives, how ma-ny go - ing to St. Ives? ONE!"

**System 1:** Voice line starts at measure 1 with the lyrics "As I was go-ing to St. Ives I met a man with se-ven wives." The percussion line includes Snap, Clap, Pat, and Stamp.

**System 2:** Voice line starts at measure 6 with the lyrics "E 'vry wife had se-ven sacks. E - 'vry sack had". The percussion line continues.

**System 3:** Voice line starts at measure 12 with the lyrics "se-ven cats. E - 'vry cat had se-ven kits." The percussion line continues.

**System 4:** Voice line starts at measure 19 with the lyrics "Kits, cats, sacks, wives, how ma-ny go - ing to St. Ives? ONE!" The percussion line concludes with a final chord.

to Name Game #3 and say their first name while the class responds with their last name (see Figure 1).

For cross-curricula development, teachers could also explore another content area, such as geography. In Name Game #4 (see Figure 1 on page 36), students could explore various city names; give “New York” and “Albany” a try. This activity, comfortably at home in both RC and Orff Schulwerk, explores how aspects of play are developed consciously to involve learners (American Orff-Schulwerk Association [AOSA], n.d.).

### Process

The Orff process of imitating, exploring, and creating is derived from its elemental style. Orff and Keetman’s *Music for Children* reveals musical models that demonstrate the process, from a simple beat to complex mixed meter or from sol-mi to I-IV-V progressions (Keetman & Orff, 1976). Each step in this practice lets us step back “more and more, as students gain in confidence and ability, from a leadership role to that of a facilitator” (Shamrock, 1997, p. 21). The detailed dissection of a melody from *Music for Children: Volume I*, beginning with mi-re-do and ending with “Ding Dong Diggidiggi-dong,” is an example of the process at its finest (Murray, Keetman & Orff, 1976, p. 24, no. 30).

A baby banging on pots and pans, a toddler wobbling through his first steps, a child scavenging for treasure in the sandbox—all are exploring and following their developmental impulses.

RC explores a similar procedure: A simple greeting, “hello,” to students’ classmates on the first day evolves into a complex game in multiple languages a few weeks later. This scaffolding approach recog-

nizes that the pacing and progression of a lesson is as meaningful as the material. First introduced to the author by Doug Goodkin, the poem “As I Was Going to St. Ives” (Goodkin, 2008, p. 60) highlights the strength in scaffolding (see Figure 2 on page 37):

- Students take seven steps together in a circle, using a common rhythmic pattern of ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩.
- Students say the numbers one through seven to the same pattern (try different languages for variety).
- Students alternate stepping and saying the pattern.
- Students say and step together.
- The teacher leads other ways to count to seven on the body (pat, clap, snap, shoulder, chest, a combination of multiple actions, etc).
- Students explore different ways to count to seven on their bodies individually.
- The teacher speaks one stanza at a time, and each student responds with his or her way of counting to seven on the body.
- Half of the class speaks the poem, and the other half responds with counting to seven using body percussion. Then they switch roles and repeat.

This process-based approach helps students achieve success through constant but creative repetition. In the development of the lesson, students could create a body percussion pattern in groups, transfer their pattern to unpitched percussion or xylophones, or dramatize what happens on the way to St. Ives. The

ideas for variations are infinite.

The second RC guiding principle states that how children learn is as important as what they learn. The Orff process exemplifies this approach

Figure 3: Traditional Speech Piece "Don't Say 'Ain't.'"

# Don't Say Ain't

Traditional rhyme

arr. Matthew Stensrud

The musical score is arranged in three systems. Each system consists of a voice line and a percussion line. The percussion line includes instructions for Snap, Clap, Chest, Pat, and Stamp. The first system starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 4. The second system starts at measure 4 and ends at measure 7. The third system starts at measure 7 and ends at measure 10. The lyrics are: "Don't say ain't! Your moth-er will faint. Your fath-er will fall in a buck-et of paint. Your sis-ter will cry. Your bro-ther won't try. Your grand - moth - er won't bake an ap - ple pie!"

SOURCE: MATTHEW STENSRUD

when moving from teacher-centered imitation to student-focused creation. Successfully guiding students through purposeful experiences is "much more important than developing impressive end products" (Shamrock, n.d., Pedagogy section, para. 6).

## Explore

A baby banging on pots and pans, a toddler wobbling through his first steps, a child scavenging for treasure in the sandbox—all are exploring and following their developmental impulses. Orff Schulwerk encounters allow for preliminary play, "guided experiences in spontaneous exploration of the materials under focus" (AOSA, n.d.). For example, before playing a xylophone,

a child feels, examines, and builds with the bars. Before singing a diatonic melody, a child explores wailing like a siren, "chooing" like a train, and spooking like a ghost.

The RC practice of guided discovery gives children this same opportunity of exploration. If students are discovering blocks for the first time, they are encouraged to "make something high, something flat, something that has open spaces" (Kriete, 2002, p. 17). Through the Orff Schulwerk process, we encourage students to make twisty, open, and tall shapes when exploring movement.

First-grade students explore their bodies by creating sheep, airplanes, sharks, and trees from Eric Carle's *Little Cloud* (1996). When choosing their

favorite cloud character from the story, students also explore a cadre of unpitched percussion instruments and find sounds that fit the characters. Exploring these instruments further, students may realize instruments can become art, and turn the tambourine into a head, the guiro into a body, and the rhythm sticks into four sheep legs.

As the Schulwerk moves from exploration to creation, so does RC move from guided discovery to academic choice. The speech piece "Don't Say 'Ain't'" (see Figure 3) is always popular with the author's fourth-grade students. It gives them the opportunity to create their own ostinati using the structure of the rhythmic building bricks:

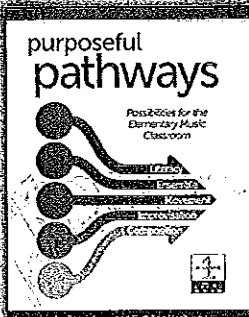
- Students imitate the rhythmic building bricks through various body percussion patterns.
- The teacher leads the creation of ostinati by putting two bricks together.
- The teacher leads an exploration of these ostinati through various body percussion combinations.
- Students learn the poem by rote.
- Students add steady beat (pat) while speaking the poem.

- Students add previous learned ostinati while speaking the poem.
- Each student chooses a favorite ostinato, and class performs all individual choices simultaneously with the poem.
- Each student makes one small change to the favorite ostinato, creates a new ostinato, and performs it with the poem.
- In small groups, students create new body percussion ostinati using two teacher-specified building bricks.
- Students then create new body percussion ostinati using any two of the building bricks.
- Students transfer ostinati to unpitched percussion, using one or more instruments and perform with poem.


In this example, students have an opportunity to imitate teacher-created ostinati, watch the teacher explore putting bricks together to create ostinati, and take small musical risks before being asked to make academic choices in small groups. The two ostinati examples shown in "Don't Say 'Ain't'" illustrates how Keetman's five building

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bricks create complementary and engaging ostinati for student performance.

Children learn best when given opportunities to take risks, explore options, and choose their own paths; RC's academic choice and Orff's composition process promotes these student-directed creations within a clear framework.

### Creating a Cohesive School Community

Instilling social and academic skills in the classroom is more successful when a school community shares values and principles. Using Responsive Classroom in the Orff music classroom is one way to create continuity within a school. Teachers' basic comprehension of RC helps bridge the gap between the music classroom and the general classroom. It also promotes consistency within the school culture.

Throughout the day, RC teachers provide children with brain breaks known as energizers. These are "quick, whole-group activities that can be done anywhere and anytime [during] the school day" (Roser, 2009, p. i). Energizers give students a mental break and a chance to play. Good energizers include "My Sweet Old Aunt" (Roser, p. 48), "Set the Table" (Roser, p. 66), "This Old Man" (Denton & Kriete, 2000, p. 209), and "Hickety-Pickety Bumble Bee" (Kriete, 2002, p. 166).

There are countless ways that music can be incorporated into the general classroom. Classroom teachers might already be singing songs and playing games. The music teacher's professional responsibility is communicating with colleagues and searching out these educational connections.

Preparing students for success in the 21st Century engages the strength of Responsive Classroom and Orff Schulwerk in the school community. The social skills bolstered by dances, greeting games, songs, and group activities found in both the general and music classroom are essential for effective collaboration and communication. Orff's use of improvisation and RC's incorporation of guided discovery promote creative problem-solving skills necessary for student growth. Helping mold productive and successful citizens is an essential aspect of teaching, and is embedded naturally in both RC and the Schulwerk.

### Conclusion

Responsive Classroom philosophically shares many of the same tenets as Orff Schulwerk: It focuses on play, relies on process, and encourages exploration. This creates a perfect opportunity for conversations with classroom teachers to celebrate the common practices. As a result of this collaboration, eager and excited students share in the gifts of these enlightened approaches. ■

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