

## **THE IDEAL ORFF CLASSROOM**

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Orff Schulwerk requires only four things—a body, a voice, a mind and a group of people. As such, Orff practice can occur anywhere and anytime—sitting around a restaurant table, riding on a train, strolling through the park. In schools, brilliant classes are being taught in school cafeterias, portable trailers, classrooms with desks and even in parking lots. The human need for creative encounter and social communion that the Orff approach addresses runs so deep that it can surface in the most adverse of circumstances.

The very adaptability of Orff Schulwerk teachers may work against them. No one expects a basketball coach to teach the sport without a court, a computer teacher to work without computers or a reading teacher to accomplish her goals seeing children once a week for thirty minutes. Yet music teachers often must make do with inadequate spaces, schedules and materials. Good facilities alone do not a good music program make, but by no means are they incidental. If a school is to seriously commit to music as a vital part of a child's whole education, it must understand the needs of the program. Basketball, computer and reading teachers don't need to educate parents, administrators or school boards as to their needs—music teachers do.

In an ideal world, it is the responsibility of the administration to ask. In the real world, we music teachers must be the strongest advocates for our own programs. Many of us begin our program in difficult conditions, in faith that our work will come to be known and valued. This is fine as far as it goes, but institutions get spoiled by such dedication and are only too happy to continue to underpay the music teacher and expect him or her to go on in this way. For both beginning and ongoing music teachers, a picture of the minimum a good program requires may prove to be a helpful guide for administrators and teachers alike, a goal towards which the committed school aspires.

The following is an outline based on my own 31 years of experience teaching children via the Orff approach. Naturally, there is a great deal of flexibility and interpretation here. Some may be content with their small space, but desire more time. Some may lobby for room to dance over more instruments. The idea is to use this picture to begin a dialogue and choose your battles wisely. Don't feel defeated by the seeming impossibility of doubling the number of classes you have—begin with the vision and then work out the details. In my own experience working in a small independent school very committed to and supportive of the program, I still had to speak out strongly and negotiate virtually every step of the way, from getting a grant to install a wooden dance floor to more class time to more equitable salary to more support during performance times. If we don't ask, these things will never be given to us. If we ask—and discuss and negotiate and support our claims from within and without the program — we just may receive. This outline is intended to offer the isolated music teacher some "official" support—please share it with your administration and fellow teachers. Remember that the following is a suggestion for a *minimum* program, i.e., the amount in which one can honestly say that this is music education and not just babysitting, entertainment or prep period for other teachers. Those who want higher quality programs will naturally insist on more.

## **MINIMUM NEEDS OF A QUALITY ORFF SCHULWERK MUSIC PROGRAM**

### **TIME:**

- 40 minutes class period.
- Each class twice a week.
- Maintain throughout all ages of the school.

### **SPACE:**

- Open space large enough to move comfortably and sit in a circle.
- Room for instruments, either stored or out on the floor ready to play (without intruding on movement space).
- Acoustically sound.
- Sprung wood floor for movement.
- Enough privacy and sound-proofing to play drums without disturbing other classes.

### **CLASS SIZE:**

- 10 is minimum for the kind of group energy required in games and dances. Excellent size for recorder work and Orff instrument ensemble.
- 18 is maximum for activities that require individual improvisation or solo playing. Good for some games, folk dancing and integrated activities.
- 12-15 ideal for full scope of activities in an Orff class.
- Size of group must fit first space requirement above.

### **EQUIPMENT**

- Basic set of Orff instruments—ideally, one for each child in class. 2 for every 3 children okay if supplemented by voice, recorder and untipped percussion.
- One soprano recorder per child.
- A variety of untipped percussion, at least one per child.,
- Sound system for listening examples and folk dance recordings.
- Piano recommended, but not required.

### **SUPPORT**

- Salary at same level as classroom teacher, with full benefits.
- Same level of planning time as classroom teacher.
- Parent, teacher and/or administrative support for performances.
- Reimbursement for ongoing Orff training—workshops, conferences, summer courses.

