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School based Partnerships: An Orff Approach Experiencing, Exploring and Engaging in Music Education

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Using the Orff Approach
This article considers the role school-based partnerships can offer pre-service music education students. It is a reflection on what my students and I experienced, explored and engaged in music teaching and learning at a local primary school in Melbourne where the teacher is an Orff practitioner. As Wiggins says, “Excellent teacher education programs provide students with experiences from which they can construct their own understandings of music, education, and music education” (Wiggins, 2007, p.36). Although both students and I kept reflective journals over our five-week visit during the first semester of 2008, this article selectively reports on some of my observation notes regarding music teaching and learning using the Orff approach. Such interaction paves the way for ongoing professional growth for all concerned (pre-service students, music teacher and lecturer). It may be argued that school based partnerships offer students ‘hands on’ opportunities to “develop an initial repertoire of teaching competencies, comprehend the various dimensions of music experience and understand student learning” (Campbell & Brummett, 2007, p.52). Although this article draws on the principal of linking theory to practice where the emphasis is on school and university partnerships (Henry, 2001) it makes pertinent links to the Orff approach to music teaching and learning.

Introduction
“Learning is something people do, most often with the help and support of other people” (Wiggins, 2007, p.36). When considering my role as a music teacher educator, I have to not only prepare my pre-service music education students with knowledge, skills and understandings but I also need to present students with experiences, where they can explore and engage in music education effectively not just within the university but also outside in the wider community. Hence the music education course at Deakin University within the Bachelor Teaching (Primary/Secondary) provides students with experiences that foster a ‘hands on’ pedagogy, four key words effecting this approach to teaching and learning—‘hear’, ‘do’, ‘see’, and ‘create’ resonant with the Orff Schulwerk. The music teacher at the school that the students and I visit lives the Orff approach. This music teacher has attended several national and international Orff courses. As an experienced Orff practitioner in Victoria, she often presents workshops and provides professional development in music education. I contend that by offering students a five-week intensive school-based experience within the thirteen-week university semester, students gain the opportunity to experience professional development through the expertise and experience of a music teacher onsite within a ‘real space’ and with real pupils. This then is one good exemplar to showcase best practice in music education. Research outlines three guiding principals for professional development school partnerships namely: “(1) a community of learning, (2) teaching and learning for understanding, and (3) linking theory to practice” (Henry, 2001, p.24). I contend that students can only improve their own teaching and learning and can be better prepared when entering the teaching profession through school and university based partnerships. It is not the case as Henry (2001) rightfully points out “that theory is exclusively the university’s responsibility and practice is the school’s responsibility” (p.26). When students are provided with opportunities to experience, explore and engage with music teaching as a school-based partnership they are able to discuss the theory and their own practice in groups or as individuals, they also become reflective about the process involved in how pupils learn and how teachers teach.

Partnerships
School based partnerships also called onsite or field based experiences offer “increased relevance for students and greater accountability for colleges through participation of local school(s)” (Elmore, 1979, p.378). Schulman argues that pedagogical content knowledge reflects a teacher’s ability to choose wisely what would be the most effective way to engage students’ understanding particular subject matter, knowing that this decision is situated within the moment of teaching (Hiebert & Carpenter, 1992). Conkling (2007) points out “when the
experienced music teacher presents a compelling vision of music teaching, pre-service teachers not only attend to this exemplar of teaching practice, but they also recognize the influences of teaching practices on younger students’ learning” (p.45). This was an important factor for my students when going ‘onsite’. They were able to experience what the teacher does and when given their opportunity they had to ‘think on their feet’ when they taught. Such encounters allow the pre-service music teacher to “develop a clearer image of the kind of teacher they want to be” (Conkling, 2007, p.44). This vision is possible when school-based partnerships exist.

The primary school we visit has a professional development partnership with Deakin University. This school employs a specialist music teacher, and with permission from the principal and music teacher, my students are able to observe and participate in music lessons. The partnerships between school and university is a positive and beneficial nexus for all concerned when preparing pre-service teachers. The Education and Training Committee (2005) points out that “the right balance between the theoretical and practical components of teacher education is one of the important challenges currently facing those involved in the design, delivery and accreditation of teacher education (p.xxii). By providing an onsite experience, my music methodology students are given the opportunity to link theory to practice. One other outcome of the onsite visit for my students lay in gaining professional development by an Orff practitioner and building a community of learning.

Professional Development
As professional development (PD) inspires professional growth, it can bring new meaning and significance to the work of teachers in their own areas of teaching. In the case of my students and I, the five-week visit with the music specialist takes the form of a short-term teacher led and directed onsite professional development. This interacting contributes to professional growth for all (students, music teacher and myself). Such professional growth centres on the teacher, encouraging reflective practice, valuing teachers’ experiences and knowledge by treating them as active knowledge producers in the learning process (Keast, 2003). While professional development programs vary widely in content and format, they share a common purpose according to Griffin (1983) thereby altering the professional practices, beliefs, and teachers’ understanding of student learning. Having a combination of theory, modelling, practice, feedback and coaching (Stuckey, 1999), particularly peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1982) counts as beneficial and effective PD for both students and teachers. Reflecting on one’s teaching is a necessary part of the profession and adds to one’s professional growth. The use of reflective journals is intended to be an ongoing activity.

Reflective Practice Methodology
Although much has been written about reflective practice and modes of reflection, many teachers simply have no time to reflect in the business of their classroom action (Eraut, 1994). Roth (1989) points out that engaging in reflective practice takes time and effort but the rewards can be great if we question what, why and how things are done and what others are doing, consequently seeking alternatives and keeping an open mind is always a productive strategy in successful practice.

One effective way for my students to experience, explore and engage with music teaching and learning is through onsite visits at a local primary school. Here my students and I observed and experienced ‘music teaching in action’ in what I refer to as ‘real space’. Over a period of five weeks, students and I visit the school once a week for approximately three to four hours. Here students are able to observe ‘best practice’ and reflect on what they experienced during the lessons in terms of the Orff methodology, classroom management, music experiences and or activities and assessment. Students’ observations provided a focus for our debriefing at the school with the music teacher and when we met back at the university. In this paper I focus only on my reflections in terms of my anecdotal notes and journal entries.

“The use of journals can be a powerful tool for reflection” (Loughran, 1996, p.8). Reflection and the concept of ‘reflective practitioner’ have been pioneered by Schön (1987) in which one does not just contemplate in the ‘ivory tower’, instead one makes links to one’s practice and that of others’. In order to further my own practice using the Orff approach as well as be part of a community of Orff practitioners I found it necessary to form a link (with the school and music teacher) and improve my students’ learning. I agree with Loughran “that as a teacher I am also a learner and should be challenged through the teaching and learning experiences in which I am involved” (1996, p.27). Florez (2001)
proposes that reflective practice offers practical options to address professional development.

**Onsite Applications of the Orff Approach**

Within the second year of the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary/Secondary), my music methods students undertaking the unit (subject) Primary Music Curriculum Study are given the opportunity in semester one to experience, explore and engage with a local primary school over a period of five weeks during the thirteen week semester. In this section, I report on a few practical links to the Orff pedagogy during our visit. The Orff approach is largely “process rather than product-orientated” (Shamrock, 1986, p.53). According to Orff, music education should begin with rhythm, which he regards as the simplest musical concept. At the start of most lessons the teacher takes the roll by asking students to sing back their response either by using hand signs or by singing a short melody using solfa (moveable doh). Improvisation is one of the fundamental principals of the Orff methodology. Pupils used between three to seven notes when improvising. This was most impressive for my students.

Speech is yet another distinctive characteristic of the Orff approach and singing experiences follow directly from speech. It was very clear that pupils at this school had a good understanding linking words to that of music rhythms for example saying the word ‘blue’ equated with a crotchet note, ‘jelly’ with quavers and ‘pineapple’ with a triplet. These music rhythms were written on the board as well as on wall charts for pupils to see. This was most effective when they were listening or doing those rhythms in a music activity. The teacher used speech patterns or word chants to teach rhythm this was subsequently transferred to the Orff instruments (melodic and non-melodic). This distinctive feature of the Orff approach allows children to state their musical ideas in a format other than by singing. “Practice in speaking, chanting and clapping word rhythms prepares the child for the experience of combining rhythms with melody” (Landis & Carder, 1972, p. 81). The use of words aided pupil’s rhythmic acquisition skills when playing the recorder. Many of the lessons we observed during the five weeks focused on learning to play the recorder. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed their learning partially due to the choice of music they played. The teacher had a very good range of repertoire and musical styles. It was valuable for my students to see how she taught recorder pieces through imitation (preparing by fingering on her recorder and saying rhythms that her pupils copied before playing the piece). It was only later that she provided the notation. In the Orff approach, singing and playing is not dependent on musical scores.

The Orff pedagogy appeals to teachers who like the challenge of finding different routes to the same goals. Shamrock (1986) suggests, “these teachers have the flexibility of being able to select and develop materials according to the needs of particular classes and situations” (p. 44). Although my students and I saw repeat classes (same content for two of the same year levels), the teacher always varied the way she taught the same content. This was also valuable for the students to experience. It was interesting to note that the teacher rarely spoke. Her pupils always entered the music room by moving to music, copied the teacher doing body percussion or played on melodic instruments or the recorder which later led to improvisation. The teacher taught a song called ‘Tango’ on the melodic instruments (xylophone and marimba) most effectively through imitation and graphic notation. She also used solfa names when teaching the melody which proved an effective way for pupils to learn pitch. My students and I were given the chance to practice and perform the same piece Tango to the pupils. Such an activity gave the students, teacher and myself the opportunity to ‘unpack’ the different ways we would teach and how pupils might learn the piece without the score. Such discussion proved most insightful for all. Pupils also commented on how different our performance of Tango sounded: the choice of instruments was different (timbre) and the arrangement was different.

In week four and five, students were also given the opportunity to explore some of their own ideas and engage pupils using the Orff approach. Here both music teacher and I were able to offer onsite assistance, briefing students on how to improve their lessons and also commenting on what worked or did not. For example when teaching the recorder, one student taught the concept of tempo. The student had the pupils only imitate her, she did not think of including movement nor did she include body percussion. This practical ‘hands-on’ engagement gave my pupils the opportunity to explore ways of teaching and learning having had three weeks of observation. The benefit of an onsite Orff practitioner proved to be an effective way to gain professional development. Making the
professional knowledge base of teaching explicit and valuable for school teachers and higher education tutors is fundamental to pursuing their common goals of increasing understanding of the ways in which children and adults learn most effectively and the personal and social contexts which inform their (and our) thinking and actions; and improving the ways in which they teach (Day 1999).

Conclusion
School-based learning offers my students the opportunity to share their understandings, where they were able to learn from another, the music teacher and myself, then work through what Bruner calls ‘scaffolding’ to fill in the gap between what the student can do and what they can also do with the support of both music teacher and myself. In this way the teacher offers onsite professional development where students can think about “expanded ways of engaging in music and in pedagogy” (Campbell & Brummett, 2007, p.50) particularly linking the Orff methodology to classroom practice. The music teacher often incorporated activities in her teaching that she had learnt through Orff professional development courses and emphasised to the students the importance of networking and attending such enrichment courses. The school based-partnership proved most beneficial for all as the music teacher shared her curriculum, lesson plans, assessment tasks, report writing ideas and management skills. Students also gained insight into how to locate resources and how to budget for such resources.

Conkling (2007) reports that little research has focused on the question of how we learn to teach music, hence it was most useful for my students to experience, explore and engage with the different ways music can be learnt. It may be argued that school based partnerships offers students ‘hands on’ opportunities to “develop an initial repertoire of teaching competencies, comprehend the various dimensions of music experience and understand student learning” (Campbell & Brummett, 2007, p. 52). As a community of learners, this partnership between the school and the university is ongoing as students were encouraged to ask inquiry-based questions and to reflect on their teaching. Through the weekly visits it is hoped that students will construct their own knowledge and question the relationships between theory and practice.

References


