

THE FOUR R'S OF ORFF SCHULWERK

By Jane Frazee

Once upon a time, before many of you were born, music education in elementary schools was not very musical, nor was it particularly enlightening. While it claimed to offer experiences in six activities (singing, playing instruments, moving, listening, creating, and literacy), the focus was typically on singing and listening. These activities were promoted in undergraduate courses and they encouraged large group, rather than individual, efforts.

The winds of change blew in from abroad in the early 1960's. The ideas of Dalcroze, Kodaly, Orff, and Suzuki were embraced by teachers who knew that their students could become capable musicians if authentically engaged. Such a model of music possibilities was exhibited in Orff Schulwerk demonstrations beginning in 1958.

But why would teachers be interested in a pedagogical approach that offered no planned curriculum, a set of books of pieces with little explanation as to their use, the assumption that music teachers and their students could invent their own music, and - most radical of all - the notion that personality development takes precedence over mastering musical skills and understanding? Given these dramatic limitations, what was the appeal of Orff Schulwerk?

Perhaps most important to teachers was the role change from classroom authority to participant. We began to see students as individuals, rather than a choir or a group of potential music consumers. Further, we loved fresh opportunities to play, to move, to create, and to stretch our own musicianship. And finally, we welcomed new communities of support that emerged to exchange ideas and to learn from other classroom-tested teachers.

And so, unlikely as it first seemed, Orff Schulwerk has flourished in the United States

for almost 50 years. Generations of teachers have been engaged in the four R's of Orff Schulwerk, transforming classrooms into music laboratories where open-ended experimentation prevails.

The "Four R's of Orff Schulwerk" is my attempt to codify what I think are salient parts of the approach for those of you who want to apply these ideas to your own practice. The first, **Respond**, encourages students to participate in artistic music and movement efforts. The second, **React**, challenges them to demonstrate with care and honesty what they are hearing and feeling. The third, **Reflect**, urges concentration on the content of the music or movement contribution that is offered for analysis, and - finally - **Respect**, insists that the contributions of each student or group be carefully considered and appreciated.

Orff Schulwerk practice encourages the application of these pedagogical elements in an environment of sound and feeling that is based on the principle of improvisation. The music emerges from - and thus belongs to - the students. So here is a final R: rejoice! As they provide the raw material for their own learning your students are expressing themselves in - and realizing themselves through - music.

Jane Frazee is the author of several collections of material for children's voices and instruments; [Discovering Keetman](#), a collection of teaching suggestions for Keetman's instrumental pieces; the first textbook for applied Orff Schulwerk in North American classrooms, [Discovering Orff](#); and the newly released [Orff Schulwerk Today](#) which links Orff skills to musical expression and understanding.