



Special Issue

The Orff approach to special music education and music therapy:
Practice, theory and research

Orff-Schulwerk in Special Education: A Case Study

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Abstract

In the school year 2012-2013 a cross-curricular programme was designed by a class teacher and a music teacher in a school for children with special needs in Athens, Greece. The programme was based on the Carl Orff approach. The purpose of this article is to show the advantages and the effectiveness of the elemental music and movement approach when applied in a group of students with special educational needs in a public school for special education.

The motivation of the cooperating teachers in selecting this specific group stemmed from the particular challenges that they were facing. The first challenge was the lack of homogeneity among the students. There were children with mental deficiencies, pervasive developmental disorders (autism) and rare syndromes. The second challenge was that the programme focused on only one specific topic that sought to acquaint children with their body and how to relate to it through space and time. The final challenge was the use of music and movement as the main means of achieving the goals of this programme. The goals were both musical and non-musical. The outcomes of the programme were thought to be positive by both teachers. The students worked in a group and their cooperation increased progressively during the programme. They showed progress not only cognitively but also psychokinetically and socially. At the end of the school year, their progress was marked by their participation in the school festival, in a performance of music and movement, which was the result of their efforts all year.

Keywords: Orff approach; music; movement; autism; mental deficiency; body

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Introduction

Over the last few years, in Greece, special music education has been a place of exploration and experimentation (Kartasidou 2004). Many recorded applications show that musical education for people with special needs proves to be effective and

successful on many levels. As a result, music teachers' specific interest in this area is continually increasing.

Many research studies concerning the field of music education for people with special needs are founded on case studies (Vamvoukas 1988). Based

on this fact, the purpose of this article is to present a case study concerning a music programme. This programme was designed by a music teacher and a special education teacher and was applied in a music class of a public school of special education in Greece. This music programme was based on the theoretical principles and practices that Orff-Schulwerk (elemental music and movement education by Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman) suggests, and it was adjusted to the specific uniqueness of the students.

The last decade the value of cross-curricular teaching is fully recognised in Greece. Therefore it has been intergraded in the curriculum of elementary education. Still, this cross-curricular approach is usually designed and applied by the classroom teacher alone, in typical elementary schools. In schools for children with special needs, the cooperation between educators with different specialisations is essential. Even though cooperation always exists between educators, the implementation of such cross-curricular programmes with the cooperation and coexistence of two teachers in the same class is rare, due to curriculum issues and other everyday problems that school facilities are facing (understaffing, problems with material and technical infrastructure, etc.).

As Kouloubaritsi and Mouratian state (2004) collaboration among teachers is successful when there is a good relationship between them and when both teachers wish for this collaboration. The collaboration makes sense when teachers plan their goals and assessment criteria together. In the following report, a successful collaboration is highlighted between the two specialists and the good practice that took place in a public special needs school in Greece, is presented.

Definitions

Orff-Schulwerk

At the first Convention of the Orff-Institute in 1962 that took place in the Mozarteum Academy, Carl Orff stated:

“The Schulwerk has not found yet the place where it belongs, the place where it will be more effective and where its combination with other topics can be detected, developed and beneficial. This place is school. The Orff-Schulwerk is work for school” (Orff 1978/1976: 245).

The Schulwerk, as Goodkin writes, may be called the Orff approach or the Orff process and it is applied in different environments. The Orff teacher is responsible for finding the appropriate procedure in his teaching inspired by his creativity and

musicality. This does not mean that there is a lack of fundamental principles (Goodkin 2002). The pedagogical base of the Orff approach is founded on theories of Pestalozzi, Rousseau, Dewey, and Montessori. It is a child-centred approach and supports experiential participation (Antonakakis 1980). Orff-Schulwerk does not only support musical education but also proposes a wide cultivation and growth of a child’s personality.

Special education

Polychronopoulou-Zaharogeorga (1995) describes special education as:

“[...] the specially designed teaching which is supported or can be supported by special programmes of additional services and can be provided in appropriate arranged and equipped spaces in order to meet the special needs of a child. With Special Education a child can be provided with the knowledge and the dexterities that are required in order to be – according to his/her capabilities- an independent and productive member of the society” (Polychronopoulou-Zaharogeorga 1995: 30).

Literature review

The close relation between Orff-Schulwerk and music in special education is apparent. Here, we present the basic points where the two practices meet:

- they address the whole personality of a child;
- they use music, movement and speech as a unity;
- they offer the possibility of participation to everybody, by giving the chance to every member to *benefit from whatever is necessary for him/her*;
- they activate the basic elements of human nature;
- they focus on the primary elements and parameters of music;
- they facilitate the socialisation and integration of a child;
- they respect the uniqueness of a child;
- they support self-action through active participation.

Indeed, as it is indicated in the Cross Curriculum Framework that is elaborated from the Ministry of Education in Greece, the principles that special education follows are the basic blocks on which the philosophy of Orff-Schulwerk pedagogy is standing upon. These are the principals of the music programme that is presented here. More specifically, Orff-Schulwerk adopts the principle of self-action, meaning that the student is encouraged

to act on his/her own intention. In modern times, the educational goal is to have a school where the pupil, according to Pestalozzi, is aspired to be a three-dimensional being with head, heart and hand (“homo sapiens, homo sentiens and homo faber”, see Vertsetis 2003: 169). Other educational principles are: the principle of wholeness, where knowledge is based on every aspect of children’s capabilities (cognitive, psychokinetic, social-emotional fields), the principal of induction, where teaching follows the course from simple to complex and from precise to abstract, the principle of cohesion where the course of teaching is organised in a structured form and the principle of sensory perception according to which knowledge begins from our senses. Other principles are communication and proximity to real life and the principle of cross-curricular approach to knowledge, in a way that a child can acquire an overall and united extension of knowledge (Vertsetis 2003).

The idea that the Orff approach could offer experience and knowledge to all irrespective of their abilities was first suggested to Carl Orff by Wilhelm Keller, a teacher of music and composition, in 1949. Keller then began to experiment and in 1962 he began to teach at the Orff Institute (Salmon 2011). Another important person who highlighted the direct connection between Orff-Schulwerk and music in special education was Gertrud Orff (1980) in her book *“The Orff Music Therapy”* (German original 1974). In Greece, Polyxeni Matey (1970) referred to the use of Orff-Schulwerk with children with special needs and she actually composed a little song dedicated to deaf children. Antonakakis (2006) has also made important references to the contribution of Orff-Schulwerk in special education. He has reported that mental deficiencies, speech disorders, cerebral palsy, autism and sensory disorders of blindness and deafness, are cases where Orff music-therapy can be applied successfully.

Orff-Schulwerk in a group of children with special needs: Case study

During the school year 2012-2013 a specific music education programme was implemented with pupils of the preparatory class in an elementary special school in Athens, with the collaboration of the music teacher and class teacher. The subject chosen by both teachers was titled “Acquaintance with our body and its connection with space and time”. This topic was considered to be suitable for the age (seven to ten years old) and abilities of the children, and the fact that it was a topic that applied to everyone despite the variety of the class population.

There were five pupils: student (A) with Down syndrome, student (B) with Angelman syndrome and behavioural problems, student (C) with autism, student (D) with developmental and cognitive deficiencies (delays) due to insufficient environmental stimulants, and student (E) who was also an autistic child with violent outbursts. The first two students had come to elementary school for the first time, but they had attended kindergarten for two years. The other two children were attending school for the first time that year, and the last student was a bit older.

The students of this class, even though they had many different needs, had some features that led us to design this specific programme. First of all they had poor self-experiencing skills: poor kinaesthetic skills, poor perception of stimulants through the five senses, deficiencies in fine motor skills, and poor control of body movement. Also they had a poor knowledge of self-hygiene and self-helping principals, in everyday life. Furthermore, they presented with issues in orientation and guidance through space and time. These considerations led us to the conclusion that the first step in meeting their needs, would be for the children to start finding out and controlling their bodies and connecting themselves with space and time.

In order to find out the best possible way to start working with these concepts we had to take the special characteristics of the specific group of children into consideration. Some of the students did not have sufficient comprehension of speech and most of them could not speak adequately. In addition, they had poor social skills, they sometimes presented with aggression and they could not participate harmoniously in any kind of group activity. They also needed to develop skills that enhanced their ability to learn, such as imitation, optical and acoustical perception, and attention. We thought that the music class could help with all of these issues and make the learning process much more entertaining and effective, and motivated us to design this programme.

The goals of the programme concerned the cognitive, psychokinetic and social-emotional levels of the students. These would be approached through music and movement activities that were based on principles and techniques of Orff-Schulwerk and followed the Curriculum of Music Education (Pedagogical Institute 2003a).

The cognitive goals, that were set from the beginning, in order for the students to benefit in this area, were:

- to recognise and to point to basic parts of the body and of the face: in pictures, on their body, in the mirror and on another student;
- to compose puzzles of a face and of a body;

- to name (for those students that have speech) basic parts of the body and face.

Music and movement activities were designed in a way so that the students could:

- listen and respond in different ways to sounds, music and silence;
- develop their vocal abilities by singing simple songs;
- produce simple sound patterns with the voice, the body and musical instruments;
- perform rhythmic and melodic motives at the same time with the others;
- move their body following the music that they played or heard.

In reference to the musical material that was used, the play-songs that were chosen referred to parts of the body, inviting the children to imitate movements or to point to specific parts of their body or the body of another classmate. Music listening also contributed to the activation and realisation of the parts of their body. Songs that were chosen provoked responses to the rhythm according to the speed, volume and structure.

On the psychokinetic level, Haselbach (1976) professor of dance, improvisation and creative movement at the Orff-Institute of Salzburg in Austria, named the skills that students need to develop as follows:

- development of physical awareness (parts of the body, muscular functions, warming up and flexibility, steadiness – instability);
- basic ways of moving (walking, running, bouncing, jumping and turning);
- realisation of movement through time (breathing, slow – fast, rhythm and movement)
- realisation of movement through space (lines – curves, directions, levels in space: high, medium, low, levels of the body: horizontal-vertical).

Through musical and movement activities, students started to realise body shapes, the unity of the body, the place of every part of the body and finally formed an image of their own body (Photographs 1 and 2). Body shape connects the body to direct experience, evolves through space and time and from a psychoanalytical point of view, it simultaneously addresses the subconscious, preconscious and conscious (Stavrou 2003).



Photograph 1: Drawing the body



Photograph 2: Here is my body!

Finally, on the social-emotional level, the challenges that the teachers faced were for the students to participate in class while preserving their uniqueness and also to develop a sense of being members of a group and what that entails (the function of the group).

For this purpose, we gave emphasis to cooperation, acceptance of everyone's uniqueness, to the need to share teachers' time with each other, to be patient until their turn comes and to have boundaries in their behaviour. More specifically, the goals were:

- to sit in a circle without getting up and disturb the other children, for five minutes or longer;
- to walk freely in the room, all at the same time without bothering one-another;
- to share materials (musical instruments, colours, etc.);
- to interact with other children (to give instruments to one-another, to form pairs, etc.);
- to wait for their turn, while the teacher was busy with another student (Photograph 3).



Photograph 3: Colouring one's body all together

During the lessons, combinations of pedagogical methods and techniques were used because of the lack of homogeneity between students. The teachers' priority was to find motives and exhortations in order for the children to be interested in participating in the class and to focus their attention for as long as possible. The programme took place in an environment where the children felt secure, in playful and amusing ways, where they could feel trust, joy and were able to express themselves freely. Within this educational environment, some behavioural techniques were used which were helpful and effective for children with pervasive developmental disorders (PDD).

Adamek and Furman (2012) state that music educators promote positive behaviour when they create a sense of predictability and routine in the classroom using a visual schedule and have a predictable room set up, use familiar materials. For example use of pictures that represent types of activities that will help the student to understand what is coming next. Small drawings can be used to represent the "opening song/warm up", "movement", "singing", "instrument playing", and "closing". This can help the student to understand the class schedule better.

Every class followed the principles of structured teaching (TEACCH method) for the planning of the classroom and activities so that children with autism could get organised better and know exactly what was asked of them and what they should do. Through musical activities, they were also trained in individual dexterities (performing simple and complex instructions, imitation, eye contact) according to the needs of every child (Pedagogical Institute 2003). For better communication with them, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECCS) was used whenever needed. At the time of the programme steady limits were set, with constant reminders by the teachers. Objects and other elements that could be upsetting were removed, in order to prevent disturbing behaviour such as obsessive, stereotypical or explosive

behaviour. Reinforcement and rewards were constant and immediate, so the children received feedback and could comprehend which were desirable reactions and behaviours. In general, every class was adjusted according to the goals of the teachers, the needs of the students and the mood that the children were in (especially those with autism) on every specific day.

Presentation of a model class

Goals:

- to play a musical instrument accompanying a song;
- to give the ball to one another in a circle on a point in the music and to clap their hands on a second point as the music changed;
- to walk to the sound of a drum and to music, and to sit down at the pause (one at a time and then all together);
- to point to the parts of their body that were mentioned in the song, one at a time (every child hears a different part of the body);
- to interact and to communicate with the music teacher;
- to cooperate and to wait for their turn quietly.

Lesson- plan:

Welcome

Students sit in a circle together with both teachers and hold hands. They sing the welcoming song¹ (one at the time and then all together) (Photograph 4).

*"Children hi to you, hi
Friend hi to you, hi
Come into our company
Again with joy"*



Photograph 4: Welcome song

¹ This song is composed by Theodoridis (2006).

Song of personal contact with the music teacher and presentation of every student separately

The music teacher plays a song on her guitar addressing every student with the question “*You are [name]*” and waits for his/her response “*It is me*” (for those who can speak) together with the use of a sign. Every time the teacher completes the greeting with a handshake, singing “*We are friends you and me*”. The children without speech participate and reply to the teacher with signs. The rest of the students wait for their turn while they watch the student that interacting with the music teacher.

Song accompanied by musical instruments

Again, every student, one at a time, plays the instrument that the music teacher has given (every child then passes it to the next one), while the music teacher sings “*Come to play and dance and sing [name] together*”.

Respond to the sound of the drum by walking and to the pause by not moving

Students, one at the time, walk outside the circle following the sound of a drum that the music teacher is playing, while singing “*I walk, I walk ... and... I stop*”. When the sound stops the student runs quickly to his /her chair. Everyone participates by taking turns. The same activity is repeated, but this time they walk accompanied by music. When the music stops, again the student runs back to his/her chair. When they finish one by one, the activities are repeated and they participate all together at the same time.

Song for acquaintance with parts of the body

The music teacher addresses every child singing “*One-two the head, one-two the head, one-two the head, show the head*”. Every child is asked to show a different part of the body, such as their hand or leg.

Differentiation of movement at point A and B of the music

Accompanied by tarantella music, the children pass a ball to one another around the circle during the slow part (A) of the music. At the fast part (B) the child that has the ball makes it “dance” over his/her head and the other children clap their hands. The same is repeated with bells. Every time a different child holds the ball or the bells and makes them “dance” over his/her head to the tarantella rhythm. Special attention is given to the communication between students and the participation of everyone.

Goodbye song

Again everyone holds hands and sings a variation of the welcome song “*Children.... we are going to see each other next time*”. The same song is sung again for each child separately, using his/her name.

Important note

The role of the teacher of the class is especially important. She helps the children throughout the activities above, and when needed she intervenes applying her educational goals referring to behaviour and to handling outbursts of children by following specific techniques.

Outcomes and reflections

The children in this programme succeeded in forming a group, cooperating for quite some time peacefully. They increased the time that they could wait for their turn, shared the teacher’s attention and decreased their behavioural problems. Furthermore, they learned the different parts of their body and applied their knowledge in songs and in music and movement games. Music and movement were the means that helped the students to explore and realise the shape and the basic parts of their body, while at the same time having fun with the songs and the games. Starting with very simple goals, the teaching advanced to more complex requirements. The group developed coherence despite the different needs of the members. The structure of class gave them security and stability and contributed positively especially to the cases of students with autism.

The specific programme concluded at the end of the school year with the presentation of a music and movement play-song which showed the achievement of the goals that were set by the teachers. The song urged to move both on an individual level and to cooperate as a group. It gave the opportunity to the children to sing and to clap their hands, following the form of the song. The song “*Our game now begins*” belongs to the collection “*Donia Xelidonia*” from Polyxeni Matey, the Greek music teacher who introduced Orff’s ideas to Greece.

This teaching experience reinforced our belief that the Orff approach offers the opportunity to every student with special needs to find different ways of expression, communication and participation through music and movement. This possibility is due to the existence of inborn basic abilities in every human, which are revealed when proper stimulus is given. The Orff approach can contribute by using elemental music and movement activities.

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