

# REVERBERATIONS

## Teachers Teaching Teachers



### DIGITAL TEACHING IN AN ORFF SCHULWERK WORLD

When Orff Schulwerk teachers are asked to offer digital lessons, it is no easy endeavor. What can you add to online lessons that will bring in the components of creativity and collaboration?

Presenters/Authors : English, Tiffany

Year : 2020

Month : April

Resource Types : Reverberations

Subjects Area : Orff Process/Pedagogy Technology

Age Groups : All Ages

Run Length :



### Digital Teaching in an Orff Schulwerk World

By Tiffany English,  
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Digital teaching in an Orff Schulwerk world is something Orff teachers are currently being asked to do all over the country. This is not an easy endeavor. Student input, feedback, and response in real time are huge parts of the Schulwerk process. In my 25 years of teaching, this has been one of the biggest challenges I have faced.

As you wrap your head around this new way of teaching, focus on what you know about Orff Schulwerk. What can you add to your online lessons that will bring in the components of creativity and collaboration? In thinking about solutions, I have identified some questions and articulated some suggestions that may be helpful to you.

Questions I ask myself before planning online lessons - with notes-to-self in italics:

- How can I connect to my students in a meaningful way? *No one wants busy work.*
- How can I engage with students musically? *I initially defaulted to worksheets out of a feeling of panic, but quickly figured out that was not a musical connection.*
- How can I figure out what my students' responses were to the lesson? *In a classroom setting this is easy! Digitally, not so much.*
- What outlets can I provide to my students and their families for music making? *One of the bright spots of online teaching is that grown-ups often have to engage with their children as they work. This has been heartwarming to see.*
- How can I continue the learning that was happening before the quarantine? *This is probably the hardest thing for me to wrap my head around due to the*

*differences in teaching tools required for online teaching.*

Some answers that are working for me:

- Do your best with each lesson and apply the lessons/skills you learn to the next one you develop. I had to write lessons very quickly with only two days' notice that my district was moving to online learning. Worksheets were a part of that out of necessity. However, I knew that this resulted in low student engagement and no music making. I learned from that and applied it to my next set of lessons.
- Simplicity is key. Your students are also overwhelmed with this new paradigm and they have a significant amount of work to do for their classroom teacher. Keeping your lessons simple, music filled, and engaging will go a long way.
- Divide your lessons into components that students can easily digest. For example, with my littles, we do "singing time," "steady beat time," "movement time," and "story time". Each video is 2-3 minutes long.
- Make a grid of where your students are, what you want them to learn, and some ideas of how to get there. Since you are learning a new way to teach, you may not know the best way to deliver the information every single time. Having your learning goals and outcomes clear in your mind will help you figure out the best delivery system.
- Let your students see you. They are worried about you. If you are able, make videos of yourself teaching as this eases student anxiety. There are many ways to do this: smart-phone videos, unlisted YouTube files, the Acapella app, Google Classroom, etc. A recent [Reverberations article](#) by Crystal Pridmore offers some very helpful tips for creating videos.
- Use familiar materials in your lessons. Your students are dealing with a lot of upheaval in their routines and uncertainty in their world. Revisit student favorites and add a twist to keep it exciting.
- Ask your students to send you videos and pictures of their work. While we know that some students don't have access, there are many that do. Keeping this line of communication open not only gives you a good view of their learning, but it also allows you to know your students are OK. These videos teach me so much about my students: their confidence levels, their daily lives (pets, siblings, grown-ups, etc), their musical likes and dislikes, and so much more.
- Establish a way for your students to communicate with you such as email, Class Dojo, Google Classroom, Flipgrid, SeeSaw, etc.
- Stay the course. What you do with children is important. Keep your focus on the central tenets of your teaching philosophy as you work through how to operate in this new paradigm. Each lesson needs to have a collaborative, creative component, as this is what makes it Orff Schulwerk.

Some examples of lessons that invite student input:

- As part of your assignments, ask your students to send you videos of them singing a song from the lesson or another song they love. Giving an open-ended, student choice oriented task rather than asking for a specific outcome can really encourage creativity with your students.
- Create a video of a finger play or simple song and ask your students to teach a family member. They can submit a video to you of the final version.
- Rounds or canons are really fun! Create a video of you teaching the song. Then, ask the students to either sing the canon with your video, a sibling, or their family.

And again, ask the students to submit a video to you. The videos I have received like this are either really funny (the families trying really hard and laughing as they make their way through) or incredibly musical (families singing together in multiple parts).

- After you have taught a song, you can also teach body percussion ostinati that go with the song. At school, these body percussion parts would of course be transferred to instruments. However, at home, that's not so workable. Ask your students to trade parts around with their family. One sings the song while another performs the "BX" part. Switch! Can they create a form for their piece?
- Interviews: Ask your students to interview a family member or other grown-up about the kind of music he or she likes. Why do they like it? Does it bring back special memories? Does it have special significance for the family or culture? Is there a family song that your student could teach you or the rest of your students? This can be done through written form or video form.
- Give your students ideas for word chains and ask them to send you a picture of their final version. Videos work well here too as they can show you how they can read, perform with body percussion, etc.
- Create a video of you teaching an instrument part with body percussion. Ask the students to find something in their house that they can transfer that part to. Can they change the rhythm slightly? What if they swapped a quarter note out for a quarter rest? What if they had to use paired eighth notes in the pattern somewhere? Can they use the same number of beats and notes to create their own pattern?
- Share videos of your favorite pieces of music. This is a great opportunity for students to learn about the musics that have shaped you as a musician. There are many safe share programs out there (SafeShare, SafeYoutube, etc.) that help you avoid commercials, inappropriate comments, etc.

Remember that music is joyful. Focus on bringing joy to your students and the rest will take care of itself.



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Reverberations - April 3, 2020

