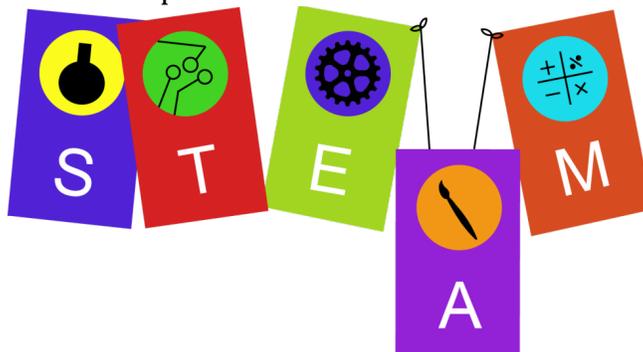


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Schulwerk and STEAM: A Most Natural Integration

By Tiffany Barry, Rocklin, CA

STEAM - an inquiry-based educational framework that integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics - has become a significant acronym to propel schools into 21st century learning. Formerly known as STEM, the incorporation of the “A” for arts as an integral component of this movement has placed the performing and visual arts on equal footing with science-related subject areas. I experienced a measure of uncertainty as to how the arts would realistically fare in this framework when my school district decided to open a public K-8 STEAM school. Fast forward three years and I can safely say that music is valued at this STEAM school in a way that I have never experienced before in a public-school setting. This is because of three important factors: access, freedom of choice, and collaboration. These 3 factors coincide directly with key elements of the Orff Schulwerk approach.

ACCESS TO ARTS

Through the Schulwerk, every single child in the school can access music and movement. All students experience the various parts of music making. Each individual contributes to the whole group through singing, dancing, playing Orff instruments, improvising, and creating. This by far is the most effective means in providing access to arts education for all. Because all participate equally, Orff Schulwerk offers a powerful way to build community in the school. When every single child is engaged in music (and not just those who are able to self-select into ensemble groups), the whole school community connects and thrives as a unit.

As our STEAM school evolved, the school principal became a strong supporter of the Orff Schulwerk approach. She observed that it emphasized music instruction for all students in the school. She saw that other teachers and I collaborated on multiple projects. And when she learned that music was an important part of our collective job to develop the whole child, the importance of teaching in this way became clear. Most importantly, she noticed that students were happier, more engaged, and more connected to each other and the material.

CHOICE GIVES VOICE

In the Schulwerk, students are presented many options to perform: song, games, drama, movement, dance, percussion, mallets, recorder, etc. When students have access to this media, are able try out and practice each, and then are given the choice to perform in the way that best suits their individuality and skill level, they are empowered to highlight their best selves while directing their own learning. The same can be said for the Orff teacher. When we take a quality piece of music, consider our options/strengths/skill levels, and are able to exercise choice in how to implement it, we are given the freedom to customize our teaching to what works best for us. This process allows each of us freedom and voice in our own music classrooms.

This STEAM school advocates Project-Based Learning, which is a student-centered teaching approach that engages and motivates students to ask driving questions and tackle real-world issues. Being trained alongside the classroom teachers in this approach, I quickly discovered the many parallels between PBL, the process of music making, and the Schulwerk itself.^[1] I also discovered my own driving question that helps focus all of my teaching: “How can aesthetically organized sound help us make sense of our human experience?” This has translated into various projects within my K-8 music curriculum. Lesson ideas based on these projects are shared on the Teaching With Orff website.^[2]

COLLABORATION WITH COLLEAGUES

While arts educators may, at times, be excluded from the general curriculum, collaboration can be a significant access point that builds bridges and trust between teachers across disciplines. Collaboration, an important element of the Schulwerk, requires that students involved in the music making be equally invested in the process. This can be achieved among teaching colleagues as well as they delve into cross-curricular integration when each participating discipline receives equal value and attention in the learning process.

One of the challenges collaboration brings to the school is actually having time to collaborate with each other. With the various demands on each teacher to cover their subject area standards, we find ourselves with very little time to meet, discuss ideas, and plan together. Even with a supportive principal, trying to carve out collaboration time in our teaching schedules is still a struggle. Another issue is that of authenticity: is the collaboration genuine or forced? Is it true integration or just arts enhancement?

There is also the additional struggle of simply working with others; sometimes even grown-ups don't get along and cannot agree on a common path. This is where the idea of collaboration can be a valuable learning tool; one that begins with respect for each individual and where they are in their journey as an educator. We do this in the Schulwerk constantly, honoring the strengths and choices of the students as they partake in the arts. This is an important and necessary step to remember for the adults in the room as well. Not everyone is ready or in the right mental space to collaborate, and that is okay. I have not collaborated with every single teacher at my school, and have also said “no” to a collaboration simply because I was spread thin with concert prep, field

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trips, or just didn't feel connected to the material at that very moment. But the idea to collaborate is always present because, as colleagues, we have learned to trust each other. When we ask each other if we want to collaborate, it's similar to a student asking another, "Will you play with me?" Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes it is no. We try not to judge and we try not to have expectations. We respect each other, where we are, and what we can individually bring to the table. This openness makes it easier and much more enjoyable to collaborate on projects.

CONCLUSION

When arts education is valued, this has a direct impact on our American culture and, especially, our sense of empathy and community. As educators of children, we know that it takes skill, practice, and time to develop trust. Understanding our role—and the role of the arts—in the larger context of the world compels us to persevere in bringing the arts back in schools. Hand in hand with an educational model like STEAM, we have great potential in further advocating the "A" for arts.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate for the opportunity to work with a principal, teaching team, and school community who trust and believe in the work that I do with music and the Schulwerk. Because this school provides access to the arts, freedom of choice, and opportunities to collaborate with each other, the school community is able to learn and grow together. If we can begin to foster that in every school, the world will naturally be a better, more integrated and empathetic place.

[1] [Playing with Project Based Learning: Confessions of an Orff Teacher](#); *Reverberations*, March 2017

[2] [Teaching With Orff](#)

Read the author's [STEAM based lessons](#) on the Teaching With Orff website.

Tiffany Barry has relocated to Rocklin, CA after teaching music for fourteen years in San Jose, CA at Cambrian School District, her last assignment at Steindorf K-8 STEAM School. She has taught general music, ukulele, choir, orchestra, and band. Tiffany is also the director of the Orff Levels Course at San Jose State University, as well as a graduate advisor in their Three-Summer Masters in Music Education Program.