

Reviewed by David Thaxton

Making Music Cooperatively: Using Cooperative Learning in Your Active Music-Making Classroom

By Carol Huffman

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“AAAGH!” came the vocal explosion from the far corner of the room. My students had learned their instrumental parts and explored various elements of movement. It was time for them to design their movement and music vignettes in small groups. As I floated among them, observing progress and addressing difficulties, the room froze at the collective cry from the corner group. Clearly, they needed my attention immediately.

“Isaiah was absent last week and doesn’t know the drum part, and Andrew keeps messing it up,” complained Eden.

“Thomas is just doing his own thing and won’t help,” chimed in Tori and R.J., their scarves angrily wadded up under their folded arms.

“Can I switch groups?” asked Thomas, his head peeking out of his own purple scarf. Joining him, Andrew protested, “I’m tired of Eden bossing me around. Can I just quit?”

Clearly, my students were showing me what they needed to learn, and it had little to do with musical skills. They needed cooperative learning skills.

Veteran Orff Schulwerk educator, consultant, professor, and AOSA past-president Carol Huffman has written a marvelous gem of a resource in *Making Music Cooperatively: Using Cooperative Learning in Your Active Music-Making Classroom*. Huffman wisely understands that cooperative and collaborative learning are cornerstones

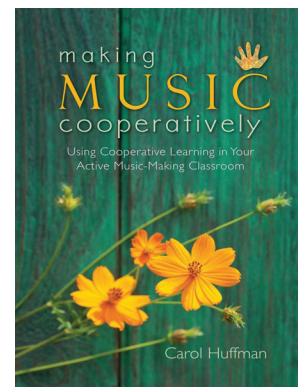
of the Orff approach. She also recognizes that these skills are often overlooked in the music classroom. *Making Music Cooperatively* gives music teachers structures to facilitate group work, and illustrates the tools needed for children to appropriately interact with each other in collaborative groups.

In our current age, with electronic interaction replacing personal contact and recess and unstructured playtime cut in the name of “academic rigor,” students increasingly lack interpersonal skills that will enable their success in the modern workforce and society at-large. Though Orff Schulwerk-based music classrooms are ideal environments for students to learn these skills, many teachers lack the ability to use the same thoughtful teaching process to teach cooperative learning skills as they do musical skills.

Making Music Cooperatively gives a clear guide for such a teaching process. It covers preliminary groundwork, general cooperative learning techniques, concepts, activities, and example lessons that illustrate the process in an active music-making classroom.

Huffman takes generous time to cover preliminary considerations in the first six chapters. Her advice on how to practice conflict resolution, kindness, and communication skills springs from her depth of real-world classroom experience. She also offers realistic classroom and time management techniques, and outlines ways to organize the physical classroom space.

Of particular note are the author’s thoughts on group dynamics when dividing students into groups. She gives examples of various types of groups, including the advantages and challenges of each. Even the most carefully designed group can encounter difficulties, so Huffman lays out strategies for teaching listening skills, conflict resolution, and problem solving. In addition, she provides ideas for evaluating and assessing behavior and group work.



Making Music Cooperatively outlines numerous team-building exercises that can be used in any classroom. Huffman offers a list of cooperative learning structures, such as “Think-Pair-Share,” “Circle of Knowledge,” and “Numbered Heads Together.” These may be commonly found in regular classroom cooperative settings, but may be less familiar to music educators. In her final chapter of example lessons, the author describes these structures and illustrates what they might look like in a music classroom setting. Each cooperative learning structure is outlined through a sample lesson that fits into an Orff Schulwerk or other active music-making classroom.

Fast-forward to my own situation with the unhappy group. It’s the night of the concert, and the students have drawn on their emerging group skills to create their performance over the past several class meetings. Thomas approaches me and says he has an idea for contrasting smooth and rough movements during the middle section of the piece.

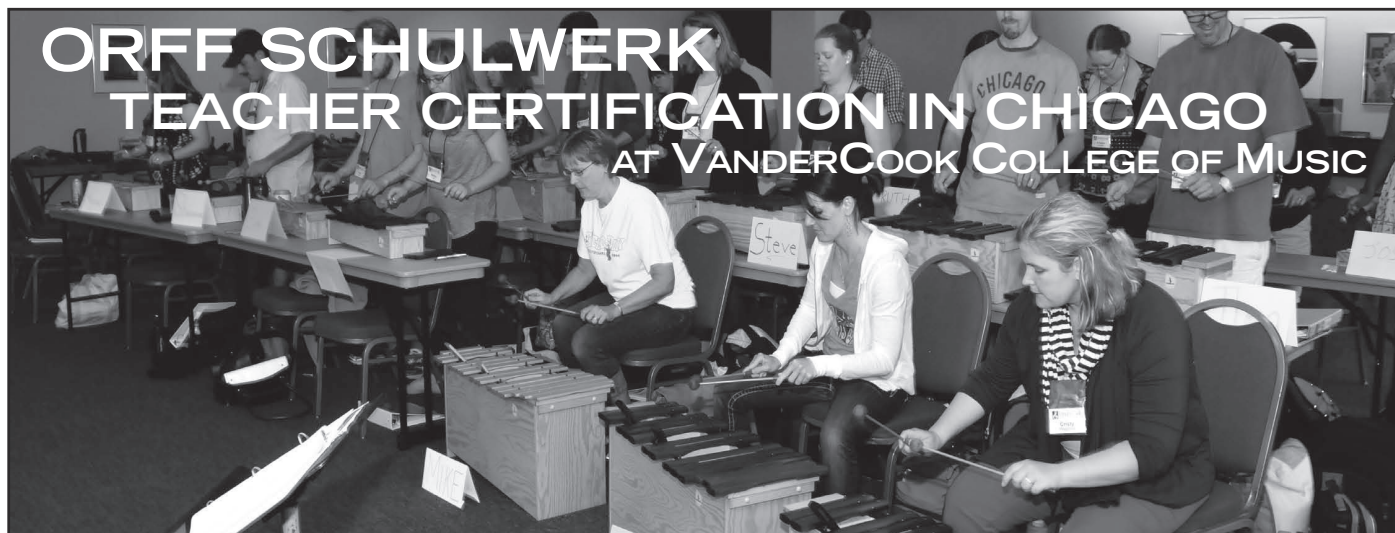
“Fantastic idea,” I say, “but it’s probably too late since the concert is in five minutes.”

“No worries,” he says, “I was working with our group at recess and we’ve got it!”

As it becomes time for the group to perform, Eden silently mouths to me, “Isaiah’s not here.” Stepping into her newly practiced leadership role, she points to me and then to Isaiah’s empty drum. I nod, step up to the drum, and follow her confident lead.

Taking time to specifically teach cooperative-learning strategies produces wonderful results. *Making Music Cooperatively* provides magnificent structures to achieve those goals. In the author’s own words, “We are teachers first, music teachers second. We have a social duty to nurture kindness, thoughtfulness, and understanding in our students so that, through the arts, we might more readily achieve peace.” ■

DAVID THAXTON teaches K-6 music at Diedrichsen Elementary in Sparks, NV. He has served as president of the Sierra Nevada Chapter of AOSA and on the editorial board of *The Orff Echo*. David is currently the technology column coordinator for *Reverberations*, AOSA’s quarterly online publication.



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