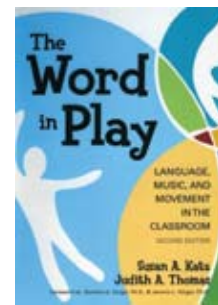


The Word in Play

By Susan A. Katz and Judith Thomas

Brookes Publishing, 2003



Perhaps one of the most profound strengths of the Schulwerk is that it draws from so many diverse elements to awaken the forces of creativity. Yet, while domains such as movement, dance, language, and art clearly shape the Orff process, the process can also exert a reciprocal influence. Such interplay can readily be seen in the realm of language. The power of the word invites connections and collaborations that stretch beyond the walls of the music room, classroom, and school. Just such a collaborative effort can be seen in *The Word in Play*, written by poet and language arts specialist Susan Katz and Judith Thomas, an Orff Schulwerk teacher who has long been a cornerstone of the AOSA community.

The opening chapters begin with a process for drawing out creative and imagistic writing. If one considers a parallel to elemental music in language, it would most likely be poetry. Appropriately, Susan Katz approaches the teaching of poetry as an Orff Schulwerk teacher teaches music—by drawing from elements of the child’s nature to create elemental language. By using color, the senses, emotions, fantasies, and dreams, she shows how the child’s imagination can be gently stirred to produce vivid images and ideas. These are further connected with elements of alliteration, onomatopoeia, personification, adjective, metaphor, and simile and distilled into poetry.

It is at this point that the student-created works are ripe for musical expansion and exploration. As the poetry is largely non-metered, non-rhyming free verse, the music and movement that springs from it, is

likewise, naturally free. Judith Thomas provides marvelous examples of how to facilitate this exploration. By starting first with creative movement, and moving to body percussion, she establishes a foundation of creation that lies within the body, while also taking special note to create an accepting environment that is safe for creative risk-taking. As she moves into the realm of rhythm and melody, Thomas uses well-crafted layered ostinati to punctuate the poetry, and provide a contrast for emerging melodies. The process for developing melody relies on letting lines arise from a recitative treatment, thereby maintaining the rhythm and inflection of the original words and phrases. The techniques for orchestrating and developing form further give structure and balance to the free poetic seed.

This book is about interdisciplinary arts education in which language, music, and movement are combined in ways that not only meet goals within each area, but also move beyond them as well.¹ The second section reaches beyond the traditional boundaries of music and poetry to draw inspiration, structure, and understanding from art, science, nature, and current events. The example in the final chapter of the section outlines a school-wide project in which not only musical and linguistic processes are layered together, but aspects from across the entire curriculum as well. By cross-pollinating subjects, the entire school environment is energized and enriched; students and teachers are free to find the ways in which the word moves them individually and collectively.

Finally, the closing section outlines something that anyone who has been

to an Orff-based class, workshop, or training will be well familiar with: “Teachers As Participants,” or as the authors call it, “TAPS.” While many in the world of the Schulwerk are accustomed to the idea of learning a concept or process by participating in the same way students would, it is a relatively radical idea in the world at large. In their outlines of several workshops and classes for adults they have presented, the authors show that having teachers participate in the process of creating their own poetry, music, and movement not only familiarizes them with the teaching processes, but also inspires and energizes them to make the processes their own.

Each author speaks masterfully to colleagues in their own subjects of language arts and music, yet the lesson design is clear and solid enough to invite teachers to step out of their respective domains and reach across the curriculum. While *The Word in Play* contains many sample lessons and scripted lessons, it is far from being a “cookbook.” The examples of classroom conversation combined with the running annotations of the thought processes behind them give marvelous starting points and guiding structure for the unfolding of playful student creations. For both classroom and music teachers, *The Word in Play* is a stirring invitation to connect with the imaginative realm of children as they explore the language, music, movement, and world around them. ■

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¹ Roxanne Dixon. “Orff Schulwerk as Interdisciplinary Education: A Goldilocks Approach,” *The Orff Echo* 40.2 (2008), 15.