

MUSIC TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

The Orff method

Speech, movement and creative ensemble music

Understanding the approach

Orff Schulwerk, developed by Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman, joins speech, singing, movement and instrumental play. Learners explore sound, imitate models and invent musical ideas together. The teaching process values participation and creative discovery; a polished performance is a possible outcome rather than the sole purpose. Notation can extend music that learners already know through making it.

How the teaching works

Start with accessible musical play. Give a short model, invite exploration, then leave room for an original response. Connect several modes: say a phrase, move its pulse, clap its rhythm and transfer it to instruments. Ensemble roles allow children to contribute at different levels. A repeating accompaniment provides a secure framework for invention.

What teachers can observe

Look for musical evidence: listening before responding, accurate examples, independent decisions and improvement after feedback. Participation alone does not demonstrate every learning goal. Offer a second opportunity after modelling a smaller step, and record the assistance needed.

From method to classroom

A simple topic: Rhythm vs beat

For rhythm vs beat, keep a steady four-beat pulse while saying a phrase with unequal syllable durations. Use the original chant “Play the drum, come and play”: beat 1 has “Play the” as two equal eighth notes; beat 2 has “drum” as a quarter note; beat 3 has “come and” as two eighth notes; beat 4 has “play” as a quarter note. The chant rhythm changes within the steady pulse. This is an original classroom adaptation, not prescribed Orff repertoire.

Teacher decisions and common difficulties

Do not turn the entire session into copying the teacher. After secure imitation, offer a bounded choice such as a new four-beat pattern. Explain that an ostinato is a repeating pattern; it may contain subdivisions and is not automatically the beat. Teach each layer separately before combining them.

Before the lesson

Rehearse the chant at about 80 beats per minute. Draw four boxes and put the words under their assigned beats. Practise a steady thigh tap while speaking. If using barred instruments, prepare an easy accompaniment such as C and G; it is optional.

Age, time and resources

Designed for primary-school beginners, approximately ages 6-10. Duration: 30 minutes. Adjust examples, language and pace to readiness rather than age alone. Voices, hands, board and four beat boxes; optional hand drum, shakers or barred instruments.

Success criteria

Maintain eight steady beats, distinguish the pulse from the chant rhythm, and create one four-beat response.

30-minute lesson plan

0-4 minutes | Explore

Invite quiet taps, claps and spoken sounds. Choose two contrasting sounds. Establish a comfortable pulse with thigh taps and count four beats twice.

4-9 minutes | Imitate

Speak the chant twice while tapping the pulse. Children echo. Clap the syllable rhythm separately, then ask which action stays evenly spaced. Demonstrate both again.

9-15 minutes | Layer

Half the class taps the beat while half speaks and claps the chant. Swap. Add one optional shaker pulse; stop and rebuild if the group speeds up.

15-23 minutes | Create

Pairs invent a four-beat spoken response using one or two sounds per beat. Rehearse it over four boxes. Alternate the class chant with each response, keeping a pulse group throughout.

23-27 minutes | Share

Perform an A-B-A form: class chant, pair response, class chant. Ask peers to identify a steady beat and one rhythm change.

27-30 minutes | Check

Individually tap eight beats, clap the model rhythm and explain the difference. Record each skill separately; repeat a slower model when needed.

Adapt, assess and continue

Access and differentiation

Use seated taps or finger movements. Offer a two-beat response repeated twice for support. Advanced learners can sustain an ostinato under the chant or add a rest to their response. Rotate creative and accompaniment roles.

Assessment record

For each learner record: name; target skill; independent / with prompt / not yet; one observed example; next teaching step. Assess the named musical objective, not confidence, volume, mobility or access to an instrument. Use small-group checks when a whole class cannot be heard individually.

Follow-up and teacher reflection

Ask learners to fit their name or a local food phrase into four beats and teach it to a partner next lesson. Keep the beat boxes as planning aids. Revisit whether the group retained pulse while creating.

Using this guide

The activities and lesson plans are original LmnoP classroom applications informed by the references below. These introductions help teachers explore each approach; sustained study and practical professional learning deepen its use. Keep the approach's central purpose visible as you adapt the lesson.

References and further learning

American Orff-Schulwerk Association: The Orff Schulwerk Approach
<https://aosa.org/about-aosa/the-orff-schulwerk-approach/>

AOSA: About AOSA
<https://aosa.org/about-aosa/>

Reference pages consulted 7 October 2026.