

Section 6:

AOSA Teacher Education Curriculum Standards

Improvisation: The Heart of Orff Schulwerk

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Improvisation is the primary element of the Schulwerk that distinguishes it from all other music education philosophies or methods practiced in the United States. Improvised music and dance represent the highest levels of understanding of *musikè*: the unity of music, dance, and speech. Through artful pedagogy, both children in our schools and adult students in our courses can learn to improvise with ease.

For course instructors, the challenge is in designing lessons that help adult learners become competent improvisors, even though the experience may be new to many. At the same time, these adults students must learn how to prepare lessons for children that will make the experience of improvising a joyful one. Challenging? Yes. Important? Definitely. But it should be noted that improvisation skills develop quickly if practiced.

From obvious beginning points, experiences in improvisation ideally follow *Musikè*'s joint roots in rhythm, which suggests structuring paths to improvisation first through rhythm. Rhythmic speech games that require the insertion of a single word can be followed by games that have rhythmic questions and improvised answers. Similarly, an ending measure can be supplied for a short melodic phrase or an "answer" to a "question" on recorder, barred instrument, or voice. This can be followed by exercises requiring longer, phrase-length "answers." Movement games with gestures can grow to movement phrases that move through space. Providing a wide variety of approaches to improvisation allows opportunities to practice skills while providing pedagogical models for adult learners to apply to classroom instruction. Through improvisation, students are positioned to demonstrate understanding of rhythmic, melodic, and movement concepts while expressing individual musicianship skills. For instructors, improvisation is a powerful tool for assessment as well as an important precursor to elemental composition. As they improvise, students demonstrate their level of musical or movement skills, as well as their ability to synthesize and create using materials and concepts presented in the lesson. As they observe the improvisations of others, students have the opportunity to reflect, analyze, and further integrate their understanding.

Developing the ability to improvise artfully is a longer process than can be accomplished in two-week summer courses. Course participants should be encouraged to attend local workshops, and to practice melodic and movement improvisation at home or with colleagues. Also important is the necessity to put improvisation in every lesson that is taught in courses. Its importance dictates that it not be an afterthought, not something to do only if there is time. Improvisation is the very essence of the Schulwerk.