

September Helpful Hint
Carolyn Janke
Pine Creek Elementary
cjanke@bennps.org

Break It Down

In our day and age of teaching when we see our students for limited amounts of time with so much material to fit in, it can oftentimes feel overwhelming. Not to mention when we miss a class due to field trips, school-wide events, and other random reasons! (And why is it that certain students always seem to be absent on music days?!)

A lot of times I find myself rushing to teach a song, instrument piece, or folk dance so that we can get to the end result quickly. I need to be reminded constantly that it is OK to slow down and teach with the Orff process. I believe that the Orff process is not only good for students, it is magical for teachers. The AOSA website defines the teaching process as:

“The prototype of the active music and movement model known as Orff Schulwerk is the spontaneous play of young children in which imitation, experimentation, and personal expression occur naturally and unconsciously. In the Orff Schulwerk process, aspects of play are developed consciously to involve learners with the elements of music and movement.”

We know by involving students in their music making that we are providing them with well-rounded authentic musical experiences. But sometimes getting there in our daily plans can be daunting with everything that lands on our plates as specialists in our buildings!

By thinking about the process while lesson planning can be helpful. I am the first to open up a book of canons, pick one that relates to the topic I am teaching and start my next 5th grade lesson with teaching it by rote immediately. What if I taught it through body percussion first? How about solfege? Play it on recorder and have groups create movement before I even imply it's a melody they will be singing? As I type this it seems so simple. But we all know that when we get rushed we tend to go to where we are comfortable, and at least for me that can easily turn into “shoving the music down their throats.”

So I challenge you to try something new in YOUR process. Pick a grade level and focus on HOW you break down your activities and lessons and reflect on the way it made you feel and how the students reacted. I am willing to be that the lessons ran smoother and the end-result was even more beautiful than the last time you tried that particular piece!