

Learning Through Exploration and Play

by Peggy McCreary, © 2007

An article with enticing illustrations in the Summer 1998 Orff Echo, “Learning From Orff Instruments,” by Giovanni Piazza, had a profound affect on my teaching. I tried some of the ideas in my classroom and began taking pictures. Each year I think that the students have invented everything possible, yet they amaze me again and again. In addition, the kinds of learning inspired by the article far surpass anything I can “teach” them.

According to Mr. Piazza, *It is as if to say: [Children,] creativity is like playing a game, but Music with a capital "M" is hard work. The following examples demonstrate the possibility of venturing into the traditional area in a game form using "manipulation" of Orff instruments, legitimate vehicles of formalized musical experience. These procedures not only offer tactile familiarity with the notes, but also lead to recognition, in a very concrete, empirical way, of some of the basic structures of our music system.*¹

Children love to explore, discover, imitate and recreate while blossoming within their own inventiveness. Because of this, play should be the primary means for the preparation of musical concepts. When students have been allowed this type of playful thinking and provided manipulative materials, musical vocabulary will be developed with understanding, and musical performance will be enriched, again with understanding. Often adults move children directly to a prescribed end result, but Orff Schulwerk teachers should, instead, first present tactile, visual and aural representations of music in a playful manner.

I found this same philosophy on the web site of The National Network for Child Care, while searching the word “play.” I loved the title of the transcript of a video, *Better Kid Care: Play Is the Business of Kids*. As I read, I realized that the advice given to caregivers resonated with the Piazza-type explorations taking place in my classroom. I have therefore included quotations from their web site to accompany some of the following photos.

As seen in these photographs, the *children* will teach *us* how to play and learn - by designing sculptures and patterns with the bars from instruments, by placing bars on the boxes in unconventional ways, by learning with instruments set up in different floor patterns, and by experimenting with known and unknown materials. Then, photos of children’s discoveries, which lead to analyzation and discussion, are followed by examples of the “playgrounds” and “toys” that can guide students to understanding musical concepts. Let’s go play!