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# *ORFF-SCHULWERK* APPROACH AND FLOW INDICATORS IN MUSIC EDUCATION CONTEXT: A PRELIMINARY STUDY IN PORTUGAL

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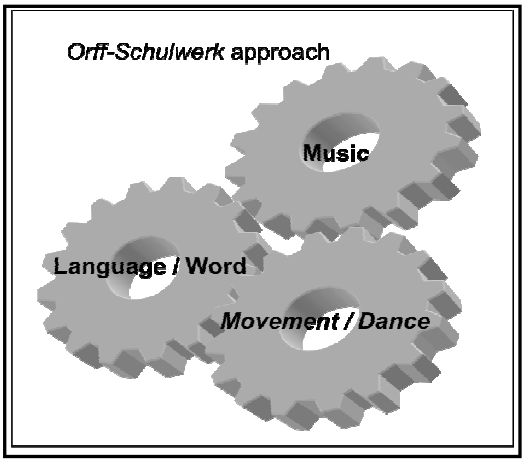
Extensive literature exists on Flow Theory. However there is a lack of published research investigating possible links between *Orff-Schulwerk* approach and Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow or optimal experience. Based on preliminary results from an ongoing research on Music / Music Pedagogy and (is links to) Musical Thought / Musical Cognition, the present paper aims to discuss the existence of optimal experiences / flow states boosted by *Orff-Schulwerk* approach activities / teaching music strategies in the context of Music Education in a Portuguese general public school ($5^{th}$ and $6^{th}$ grades). Attempting to verify, analyze and understand these relationships, an empirical process was developed based on the *Flow Theory - Optimal Experience* (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1988, 1990) and consequently on *FIMA - Flow Indicators in Musical Activity* developed by Custodero (1998, 1999). Conventional flow methodology is adapted in order to define and to operacionalize cognitive strategies exhibited during *Orff-Schulwerk* approach activities in Music Eduction context. Results clearly validated this hipotesys and show how (and which) *Orff-Schulwerk* activities can provide children optimal experience /flow states in Music Education classes.

**Keywords:** *Orff-Schulwerk* approach, Musical Thougt, Musical Cognition, Flow Theory, Music Education.

## INTRODUCTION / LITERATURE REVIEW

The second half of the XX century brings proximity between experience and knowledge. Constructivism ideas present on the philosofical base of Education and consequently on Music Education hold particular significance for the investigation of artistic understanding. In this scenario, promoving creative and emotional experiences based on verbal, musical and body expression, *Orff-Schulwerk* approach offer to any human being deep moments of music enjoyment, learning and knowledge. To sing a song, move, dance, play musical instruments, using games, exploration, improvisation and composition are activities that, based on chinese proverb *Tell me and I will Forget; Show me and I can remember; Involve me and I will understand,* make the *Orff-Schulwerk* one of the most adopted and sucessfull musical teaching/learning approaches in the world.

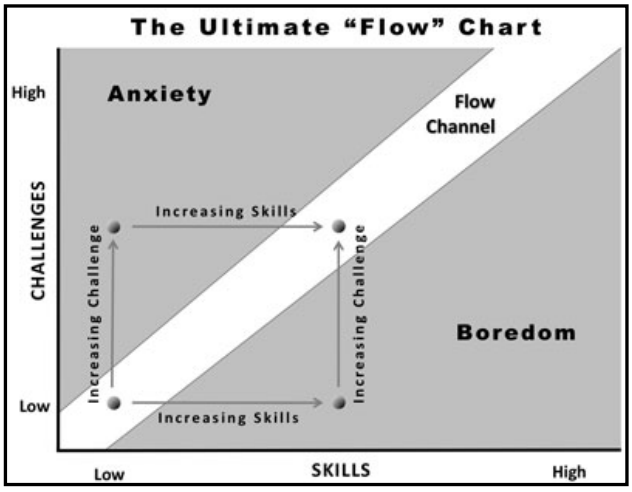



(Figure 1: *Orff-Schulwerk* approach "Scheme").

Carl Orff's idea about Music Education was always to put the practical work in the foreground. Every one of us, (child or adult) have "musical potencial", but we need to experience, act, enjoy, feel, and interact in order to get a cognitive and affective development. In is own words *(…) The Schulwerk aims to bring the child to him – or herself. It aims to awaken fantasy. This builds character, it creates humanity. (…)"*(Orff, 1978)

Joy, hapyness, sucess, gratification, comfort, satisfaction, relish, pleasure, are positive aspects of human experience (life involvement), which Csikszentmihalyi called "flow states". In 1975, Csikszentmihalyi identified four essential components (and eight dimensions) to the occurrence of Flow State(s)/ Optimal Experience(s): Control; Attention; Curisosity and Intrinsic Interest. *"(…) The phenomenology of Flow suggests that the reason why we enjoy a particular activity is not because such pleasure has been previously programmed in our nervous system, but because of something discovered as a result of interaction. (…)"*

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Csikszentmihaly define Flow / Optimal Experience as a "state" between "Boredom" and "Anxiety", produced when there is a equilibrium between "Challenges" and "Skills".




(Figure 2: "Anxiety, Boredom and Flow" – Csikszentmihaly, 1990).

Knowning that flow is the holistic experience that people feel when they act with total involvement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), several studies about Flow / Optimal Experience prove the existence of a relationship between "flow states" and highly creative performances in distinct areas of human life. In Music / Music Education context, Flow Theory was (and still is) a solid reference in multiple and fruitful empirical research on musical cognition, musical learning, musical creativity and musical performance studies.

Based on Csikszentmihalyi's *ESM – Experience Smapling Method*, Custodero (1999) developed and applied the *FIMA - Flow Indicators in Musical Activity* to study Flow / Optimal Experience process in Music Education context. Custodero developed several studies (1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006) involving children between zero and eleven years old, to awnser questions emerged rewarding children's music learning: How do children construct their own musical understandings? Can his constructions (assimiliations / accommodations / transformations) be observed? Since cognition results from interaction with the environment, are there specific conditions that best facilitate musical understandings? The basic assumption was the possibility of observing cognitive processes in children through physical manifestations. Data were collected (in educational context) based on / through: Direct observation; Video / Audio recording of all sessions (*FIMA*) and interviews / surveys (*AFIMA – Adapted Flow Indicators Musical Activity.* Coding scheme of data analisys has been defined in three flow indicators categories (*FIMA*): 1) *Challenge Seeking Indicators*; 2) *Challenge Monitoring Indicators*; 3) *Social Context Indicators*.

(Table 1: "FIMA Coding Scheme Data Analisys" – Custodero, 1999).

| Categories | Flow Indicators | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| Challenge Seeking Indicators<br><br>(To get oneself into flow) | Self-Assignment | Purposeful activity initiated by the child, rather than by the adult. |
| | Self-Correction | Error acknowledgement and adjustment to conform to established "rules" for an activity in the absence of physical or verbal instruction from adult. |
| | Deliberate Gestrure | Quality of movement very focused and controlled, often exaggerated but with no extraneous motion, |
| Challenge Monitoring Indicators<br><br>(To sustain flow experience) | Antecipation | Verbal or physical attempts to guess or show "what comes next" during the presented activity. |
| | Expansion | Making the presented material more challenging by transforming it in some way. |
| | Extension | Continuing to engage with the presented material after the teacher has finished. |
| Social Context Indicators | Awareness of Adults and Peers | Any observable interactions that involve prolonged gaze, head turning, or physical movement toward another person. Attempts to engage another person physically or verbally are especially noteworthy. |

## METHODOLOGY

The preliminary study envolved two classes of children between 9 and 13 years old of a Portuguese general public school (5th and 6th grades) in Music Eduaction context (n=50). The first task was the development and the implementation of "annualy", "quarterly" and "diary" lesson plans based on *Orff-Schulwerk* approcah according the official Music Education program and "Learning Goals" set by the Portuguese Ministry of Education.

Data were collected (*in loco*) during three months of classes through direct observation using video / audio recording and analysided based on Custodero's "FIMA coding scheme data analisys" (Table 1). This analysis is supported on the assumption that observing children's contextualized use of musical knowledge provides an ecologically valid window into their cognitive processes. (Custodero, 2005)

## RESULTS / DISCUSSION

The analysis of videotaped classes provided preliminary results that reveal the existence of strong conections between *Orff-Schulwerk* approach activities and flow states occurency.

The preliminary study results validated the adopted methodology (ongoing research) and revealed several examples of "Flow Indicators" pertaining to each of the three "dimensions" defined in "FIMA" (Custodero, 1998, 1999):

(Table 2, 3 and 4: "Flow Indicators in *Orff-Schulwerk* Activities).

1. Challenge Seeking Indicators

| Flow Indicator | Observed Examples (in *Orff-Schulwerk* activities) |
|---|---|
| *Self-Assignment* | Student creates/prepares voluntarily his "sound gesture" in class pause in the whole group/class ("Sound gesture" improvisation / Movement activity). |
| *Self-Correction* | Student realizes his mistake during the repetition of "sound gesture" and try to do it correctly with the whole group/class. (Sound gesture improvisation / Movement activity). |
| *Deliberate Gestrure* | Student "gets down" (is body) when "sound gesture" of (whole group/class) is done in *piano* dynamic. ("Sound gesture" improvisation / movement activity). |

2. Challenge Monitoring Indicators

| | |
|---|---|
| *Antecipation* | Spontaneously student vocally completes a musical phrase (melody) after eating a given begin. (Singing / Moving activity). |
| *Expansion* | Student creates "sound gesture" of higher "rhythm and speed" complexity. ("Sound gesture" improvisation / Movement activity). |
| *Extension* | Students remind / create voluntarily "sound gesture" and vocalize melody of a song in class pause and still pratice them after class end. ("Sound gesture" improvisation / Movement and singing activity). |

3. Social Context Indicators

| | |
|---|---|
| *Awareness of Adults and Peers* | Students repeat voluntarily with peers "sound gestures" to help him/them on the correction and practice with whole group/class. ("Sound gesture" improvisation / Movement activity). |

The presented results allowed to validate a functional method to define cognitive strategies exhibited during *Orff-Schulwerk* approach activities assessing children musical cognition through systematic and rigorous observation of their behaviors in Music Eduction context. During *Orff-Schulwerk* activities developed in the preliminary study (according to referred lesson plans), classes were always an "experimental field" where children could sing, play, move and create, providing unforgettable moments of joy, satisfaction, relish and success. About this idea Hallan (2010) argues that activities that provides the greatest opportunities for children to experience and express emotions in their music education are those relating to creating music (through improvasation or composition), and actively making music through playing an instrument or singing. Indeed, *Orff-Schulwerk* activities boosts optimal experiences / flow states, teaching children to think deeply, feel, act, communicate and through that *"(…) Awaken fantasy… Builds character … Creates humanity (…)"*.

In addition, in order to give validity to the methodology, the preliminary results also give a strong support for the initially formulated hypothesis (ongoing research) that Musical Thought / Musical Cognition can be powered through creative and emotional processes related to *Orff-Schulwerk* approach activities. This relates directly to Csikszentmihalyi's idea (1997): when we act in the fullness of the flow experience, we are building a bridge to the future of "our universe". More and more, evidence accumulates that *Orff-Schulwerk* approach activities encompass the essential (eight) dimensions defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) to the occurrence of optimal experience / flow:

- *Clear goals and immediate feedback;*
- *Equilibrium between the level of challenge and personal skill;*
- *Merging of action and awareness;*
- *Focussed concentration;*
- *Sense of potential control;*
- *Loss of self-consciousness;*
- *Time distortion;*
- *Autotelic or self-rewarding experience.*

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