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Play and Playfulness: Planning for Freedom and Structure in Orff-Schulwerk

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Introduction

The field of international play scholarship is multi-disciplinary and multi-vocal in representing the voices and experiences of human and non-human beings at play. In child development theories, play has been considered essential for young children's healthy development and learning. Play is enshrined in children's rights, and has been validated within educational approaches as play-based learning and play-based curriculum (Wood, 2013). As governments around the world have invested in education, health and social care, a significant trend has been the performatisation of play. Play must be turned towards specific developmental outcomes and must realise certain educational goals and benefits. The performatisation of play is evident in early childhood education, but extends to therapeutic settings, outdoor learning, forest schools, and even playful learning as a means to improve productivity in the workplace. In other words, if human beings insist on play, then it must be seen to produce immediate positive outcomes for the individual, and longer-term social, educational and economic benefits.

The performatisation of play aligns with discourses of planned and purposeful play, where educators are expected to plan activities that may have elements of play or playfulness, but may also disguise work as play. Pedagogical structures support play as development and adaptation to the status quo. In contrast, freely-chosen play is initiated and led by children, reflects their choices and agency, and draws on repertoires of knowledge, interests and experiences within their peer, home and community cultures. The importance of popular culture and converged (digital-traditional) play in children's lives foregrounds the breadth of their cultural repertoires across global and local contexts.

Whether we look at play, or music in particular, there are tensions between structure and freedom, which have implications for teachers' pedagogical approaches and the planning and enactment of curriculum. Focusing specifically on Orff-Schulwerk, there are similar intersections between structure and freedom, which have been expressed through its principles (Hartmann and Haselbach, 2017). The aim of this paper is to explore the intersections between play, playfulness and the Orff-Schulwerk principles, and the pedagogical challenges of structure and freedom. The following organising concepts are used to consider contemporary debates in play scholarship, and the implications for those principles.

- 1) Structured ('educational') play as adaptation to the status quo
- 2) Play and the Orff-Schulwerk principles – children as play makers and music makers
- 3) Children's agency – the collective and the individual
- 4) Converged (digital-traditional) play
- 5) Play repertoires – play for its own sake.

1) Structured (Educational) Play as Adaptation to the Status Quo

Teachers of all subjects, and all age groups, encounter pedagogical dilemmas as they strive to ensure practice is grounded in professional knowledge, beliefs and values, and is

responsive to children's diverse cultures and heritages. In many countries they are pulled in particular directions by policy frameworks that provide different degrees of prescription in curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment, often within an overarching framework of accountability and regulation. Curriculum-based knowledge tends to be organised in linear and hierarchical ways, and assumes pre-determined norms and pathways. Progression is expressed as the achievement of specific goals or outcomes that reflect the knowledge valued by policy makers. Teachers can then assign a number, a rating scale or a level of development that locates children on a predetermined and seemingly logical trajectory, and quantifies progress.

The bio-politicisation of play is also linked to neuroscience, specifically to discourses of building human capital, expanding human potential, accelerating national growth and driving economic competitiveness in global markets. Play is drawn into the wider educational imperatives of individual self-governance, as well as means of governing human conduct, where children are projected towards an imagined future. Within such powerful policy drivers, play for its own sake is being undermined by the focus on educational play as adaptation to the status quo, and the achievement of curriculum goals. Moreover, certain subject areas (such as mathematics, the sciences and technology) are valued more than others, with the creative arts and humanities receiving less time in the curriculum.

In light of these trends, a key concern is how educators maintain openness and flexibility to ensure time, space and opportunities for play, spontaneity, creativity, intuition and agency. Extending these concerns to the creative arts, and to music in particular, we can see similar tensions between structure and freedom. Understanding play in relation to the artistic and pedagogical spirit of the Orff-Schulwerk principles (*ibid.*) offers productive insights into these tensions.

2) Play and the Principles of Orff-Schulwerk – the Individual and the Social Dimension

The Orff-Schulwerk principles value play and playfulness, and being intuitive and spontaneous. Play, like music, is an integral term, which embodies creativity in improvisation and composition. Music, like play, requires a skilful combination of structure, flexibility and freedom to support the emergence of spontaneous, playful musicality and subsequent skilful music-making.

By placing the individual at the centre, Hartmann and Haselbach (2017) understand children as music makers, who must develop and experience their own creativity and understand themselves as creative beings through learning by making music. This explanation places creativity as a social practice, and as a human quality, desire or disposition, with music and musicality being accessible, and indeed necessary to humans from birth. Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) define musicality as

expression of our human desire for cultural learning, or innate skill for moving, remembering and planning in sympathy with others that makes our appreciation and production of an endless variety of dramatic temporal narratives possible... (p. 4).

This definition synthesises the individual and the collective, in which children's peer cultures connect with their wider cultural contexts and knowledge. In the social dimension, people around the child create the conditions for musicality in different contexts, where adult interactions are sensitive to the individual and to the collective, including the development

of relationships and connectedness. Tools, materials and resources are key elements within the structure, with opportunities for these to be used in inter-and intra-active ways, combining musicality, play and playfulness (Lagerlöf, 2016). Placing the individual at the centre necessitates a consideration of motives, desires and interests, with attention to the social dimension of collective and relational pedagogical approaches.

3) Children's Agency – the Individual and the Collective

Although many curriculum frameworks present learning and progression as individual acquisition, Stetsenko provides a counterbalance to this reductionist position, and the urge towards adaptation to the status quo. Stetsenko (2020) theorises the connections within and between the collective and the individual, with reference to theories of human agency. Her work draws attention to the role of context, situativity, historicity, and interactivity, including collaborative, situated, and distributed cognition theories; participatory learning approaches; and theories of embodiment, enactment and cultural mediation (Stetsenko, 2020, p. 7). These are all part of the social dimension of children's everyday experiences, and are relevant to understanding children as play makers and music makers.

Children's agency, ideas and imagination are collective activities, which are always complex, situated and connected. Music and musicality are relational, communicative and embodied from children's earliest experiences with caregivers, and their participatory learning in families and communities. Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) present a variety of research projects that place music within a broad spectrum of human communication, meanings, relationships, and emotions. Key themes in this collection include spontaneity and improvisation that occurs within the earliest free, untutored communicative practices between babies and caregivers, to the development of more structured and skillful music making. The integration of digital technologies has extended the potential for children as play makers and music makers.

4) Convergence Between Digital and Traditional Play

Rogoff's exploration of the cultural nature of human development foregrounds the cultural nature of children's play repertoires, and how these evolve over time, place and space (2003). Digital and traditional forms of play are blending or digital converging in many children's lives to extend our understanding of what counts as culture, and the breadth of play repertoires. Converged digital-traditional play is multi-modal, and contextualizes global and local influences as children draw on narratives and themes from popular culture (Edwards, Mantilla, Grieshaber, Nuttall and Wood, 2020). As children consume diverse content, from sources such as social media and Youtube, converged play is extending children's play repertoires in ways that transcend traditional child development theories, and challenge recent policy discourses that aim to performatise play in education.

Convergence between digital-traditional play sustains the qualities of play and playfulness – imagination, motivation, engagement, multi-modality, multi-literacies, creativity, open-endedness, flexibility, choice, making decisions, creating and solving problems, taking risks, and developing metacognitive capabilities. Similar processes are at work in children's play-making and music-making in their converged digital/traditional play. For example, children weave the latest pop songs, raps and dance routines into their physical games, and their digital play. They are adept at making videos, downloading background music, and sharing their creations online. Although the potential for freedom is almost limitless, Edwards et al (2020, 640) argue that convergence is understood as a life-world experience,

so what matters is how people make meaning and contribute to life in a digital age. Converged play therefore reflects concerns with freedom and structure, and the social dimension of children's everyday experiences.

5) Play Repertoires – Play for its Own Sake

Justifications for play in children's lives – whether in their homes, communities or education settings – draw on evidence for the multiple benefits of play – for social, moral and emotional development, for cognition and metacognition, for physical development across gross-motor, loco-motor and fine motor skills. The rhetoric of play as learning and development is deeply embedded in international discourses and practices, including therapeutic and educational interventions, and in curriculum and pedagogical frameworks for pre-school education. However, the dominance of a developmental discourse has been contested, and inter-disciplinary perspectives on play focus on contexts, cultures, diversities and children's perspectives (Brooker, Blaise and Edwards, 2014; Pramling-Samuelsson and Fler, 2009). Edwards et al (2020) also argue that the contexts and conditions for learning in early childhood education should reflect those of the digital age in which young children are learning and developing.

If we consider play for its own sake, it is harder to define how specific types of play lead to specific outcomes in an orderly and hierarchical way. Play may be seen as exuberant, lively, seemingly chaotic and unpredictable, and tending in many different directions and combinations. But on closer examination there is usually an underlying structure, where the actions, purposes and meanings are set in motion by the players, and support collaborative playfulness through individual and collective agency. Contemporary ways of understanding play for its own sake emphasise play as non-linear, and non-hierarchical, and as complex assemblages or webs of activity, meanings and interests. Play themes can be changed and negotiated over time as children build shared cultural repertoires. Motivations are particular to the players, as well as to time, space, place and materials. Play is a highly integrative activity that requires effort, concentration, shared memory, and knowledge, but generally brings pleasure, satisfaction and affective intensity.

Consistent with Orff-Schulwerk's principles, Stetsenko talks about uniqueness and togetherness. For Stetsenko (2020) transformative agency involves children adapting the world to themselves, and, in the process, changing themselves and the world. As in Orff-Schulwerk, the developmental process is more akin to unfolding and emergence and is the phase in which learning happens. It is in play that we see children's uniqueness and togetherness, particularly in their peer cultures.

From the perspective of play for its own sake, adults cannot plan children's play, but they can plan for children's play to happen in ways that combine appropriate structure and the flexibility needed to sustain free choice, agency, improvisation and a dynamic combination of individual and relational agency. Although children's purposes and meanings are foregrounded, responsive teachers may support planning by offering suggestions and ideas, providing resources and materials, supporting new directions, and acting as co-players if invited. Children create shared spaces and places for play, with joint attention and intersubjective attunement contributing to how play builds in social and symbolic complexity. The improvisational qualities of play also determine its complexity, especially socio-dramatic play because themes evolve within play episodes, in context, and over time. Children are continually co-authoring play, and co-authoring identities. Contemporary ideas

about assemblages and webs of activity conceptualise the multiple directions of development in play.

Play and playfulness are also aligned with creativity and the creative arts. There are connections with the two Orff-Schulwerk principles of music as an integral term, and creativity in improvisation and composition. However, as in play, there is a distinction between freedom and structure. For example a child may randomly explore a stick and a drum to create noise and vibration, and to experience the embodied intra-action between self, emotions and the materials. In more skilful music making, children develop an understanding of rhythm, pitch and harmony, all of which can be used in improvisational ways. Processes of creativity and self-realisation are at work in the improvisational nature of play, and of music-making, including the unity of the individual and the collective.

Whether we look at improvisation in music or in play, it would be a mistake to understand improvisation as wholly spontaneous and without preparation or structure. Players are acting with cultural tools and mediational means as they co-create play themes, play rituals, stories, and rules. Rogoff (2003) argues that young children are continuously building their play repertoires within their peer cultures. Rules are integral to the flow and development of the play themes over time, and might include what, and who, can come into the play, and how they can contribute.

Connecting the earlier theme of the individual and the collective, an aspect of children's play that is often overlooked is the different funds of knowledge and interests they bring into the play. They step in and out of the play to negotiate roles, develop the play theme, add or clarify knowledge and understanding, and add their own contributions about what they do and do not feel comfortable with.

In play we see the synthesis of processes of human development and the products of their learning that are less amenable to being scaled and measured. Process and product are not separate but part of the unity (Holzman, 2017) – the interplay of development and artistic experiences, including creativity, spontaneity and improvisation, flexibility, inventiveness, ingenuity, blending, mixing and re-mixing. What we may also see in play is children's resistance to the status quo, as they build the confidence to do and see things differently.

In relation to debates about structure and freedom, play frees children from some contextual constraints, but at the same time may also impose others that are related to the rules that are negotiated and agreed. This is not a contradiction because in play and music, the rules that are negotiated and agreed create spaces for uniqueness and togetherness. Music, like play, requires a skilful combination of structure and flexibility to support spontaneous, playful musicality and skilful music-making. Play and music also share the same qualities of not always prioritizing individual creativity but creating spaces for uniqueness and togetherness.

If we understand play as complex social/cultural practice, and not just as a developmental pathway, children are agentive co-creators, who are transforming their social worlds with new tools and resources. We can also see these processes embodied in the principles of Orff-Schulwerk, as being applicable to different cultures, using songs, dances, texts and musical repertoires. Children creatively re-mix global influences and local interpretations, using their cultural narratives and experiences.

In conclusion, the complex interplay between structure and freedom is common to children's play-making and music-making. Music and musicality are embedded and embodied within children's multimodal communicative repertoires. The Orff-Schulwerk principles remain relevant in contemporary contexts, and ongoing interpretations of those principles can encompass the shift towards converged play, and children's everyday engagement with digital technologies. A pedagogical commitment to sustaining structure and freedom is essential to renewing the artistic and pedagogical principles of Orff-Schulwerk, and resisting the instrumental discourses in many curriculum frameworks within and beyond early childhood education. It can be argued that the qualities of play and playfulness are needed in the present and in the future to address and to resist the difficult problems humans have already created in our interconnected world, and to work towards creative solutions to those problems. For these reasons, also, as play makers and music makers we need to maintain an appreciation of play for its own sake within children's lives and within our practice.

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