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Interview with Barbara Kling



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Q: Please tell me about your current work situation.

I'm a classroom teacher at the *Carl-Orff-Schule Dießen*, in Bavaria, where Carl Orff lived the last 30 years of his life. I mostly teach children up to 10 years old, the third and fourth grade of primary school. At the moment I am a 3rd grade classroom teacher. I've taught there for nearly 20 years.

Q: And did you work somewhere else before that?

Yes, I worked in other primary schools for 10 years, then I went to the Orff Institute.

Q: So you trained as a teacher before you trained as a music specialist?

For my first studies at university, it was combined. In Bavaria, if you study to be a teacher, you have to decide for one (specialist) subject, and I preferred Music, and this was at the *Musikhochschule* (University of Music and Performing Arts, Munich).

Q: As a child, were you learning music, and was music an important part of your life?

Yes, especially organ. I played organ at the church of my home. And I had also a choir at church and a children's choir. So I decided to continue my studies with this special focus on music.

Q: In your own education, when you were at school, did you come across Orff-Schulwerk, or was it more conventional?

At school, not really, but when I was at the kindergarten, my mother sent me to *Früherziehung* (Early Childhood Music Education) where I did the one-year course and then continued with piano playing.

Q: So your mother was keen for you to learn music and develop musically. Was she, is she a musician?

Not at all. No one in my family...I think I was a very active child, and she put me in a course to have some silent time. She said this to me, but she likes music and she wanted me to get experience.

One experience was very interesting. She had an LP of Carl Orff's 'The Christmas Story' with Bavarian-speaking shepherds and the music composed by Gunild Keetman. I was five or six years old, and we listened to it at Christmas, and I knew it all, the text and the songs by heart... I was fascinated by the music and the instruments because I played xylophone and glockenspiel at the *Früherziehung*.

Q: So was that more active and involving than the music you had when you went to ordinary school?

Yes. And at my time at primary school, we had percussion instruments, and a teacher used instruments during music lessons, especially at primary school. At Gymnasium, the high school, there was no contact with Orff-Schulwerk or practical music making.

Q: So, when you were at university, you had chosen music as your specialist subject, and you studied that at the music university. Was there an emphasis on Orff-Schulwerk on that course, or did you just find out about it?

Oh, the regular course for only one term had two lessons per week and the teacher did some songs from the Schulwerk, with not very much success. But then additionally a teacher came, he was a teacher trainer in practice working near Munich. He was sent to the *Musikhochschule* to share his practice with us, two hours as a block, and he brought xylophones in his car. He used Bavarian songs and dances, with xylophones and improvisation. He was inspired by Kaspar Gerg, who had studied at the Orff Institute and published the book *Musik – Sprache – Bewegung (Music – Speech – Movement)*. He worked to translate Orff-Schulwerk for music lessons in primary schools in the 1970s.

Q: So that experience made you realise that there was a different way of doing things?

Yes, he gave me some examples. And during the studies, I had to practise at school for some weeks. So I put these songs into my teaching. I had a model of how to practise at primary school.

Q: And it was successful?

Yes. And I thought about the construction or the model and I learned to prepare for myself songs in this style. And I knew that this music belongs to Carl Orff, that it was his idea because I was born near Dießen and I knew about Carl Orff. My father had a colleague who

lived near to him. So I knew about the person, the personality of Carl Orff. If I saw a xylophone or a percussion instrument, I assigned it to Orff.

Q: So you had this experience as a student and then qualified and worked in ordinary primary schools.

In Bavaria the first two years at school you start as a teacher trainee. Theory and practice is combined. I came as a teacher trainee to a primary school at Weilheim, near Dießen, where there was the person who influenced me mostly. Eva-Marie Uhlemann participated in summer courses in Salzburg with Leo Rinderer. She had an orchestra of instruments mostly bought by herself because she was so fascinated by this music. And she knew about the influence of the instruments and the work and the music with children.



Q: Did you get an impression at the time that this was unusual? That the school down the road or the school in the next town would maybe not have any of this at all?

Yes. It was just her passion and her commitment. But I realised that she only did the instrumental part of the Schulwerk and very strictly playing tunes. There was no improvisation. There was no movement. It was a limited point of view.

After I was there for another two years I changed to a different school. I went back to my hometown. At this primary school I had also a lot of instruments. They had some teachers who used Orff ideas, not too much, but they integrated it in the normal music lessons. And they were very, very glad to get someone with more knowledge and know-how. And I think, the school administration sent me to schools where there was already a music life, but to be a specialist and to go where you find good practise.

Q: *That's good. It sounds as though you had a very positive beginning to your teaching career.*

Yes, indeed.

Q: *And at what point did you come in contact with the Orff Institute and going to courses?*

There was a scholarship for Bavarian teachers to go to the Orff Institute. The school administration sent the flyer to all schools and I read it and I thought, oh, it would be nice to go there. You need a very good mark or good feedback from the school administration to get the scholarship. And so I went to Salzburg for two days to find out about the studies.

And then I had the first preparation there and the entrance exam for the one-year master's course in 2006. So it was great to get a master's degree. With 10 years of teaching experience.

Q: *So you did the year and then did you go back into the same school?*

Then the headmaster of the *Carl-Orff-Schule Dießen*, wanted a teacher with a master's degree and he asked me to go. We knew each other from organ playing, from the music at church, because he was an organist too. And he asked me to come to his school.

At the school I was before, the headmaster expected me to come back and become the head teacher. And I thought about it, being the head teacher and doing all the administration. I thought of the possibility to teach at the *Carl-Orff-Schule* directly after the master's studies. And so I decided to go to Dießen.

Before I went to Salzburg, I was also a teacher trainer for music, for music lessons for young teachers. I continue to do this at the *Carl-Orff-Schule Dießen* – it's an extra responsibility.



Q: So clearly you've had a very rich and coherent kind of experience yourself in terms of your education. I have a question here, about where you see your strengths and weaknesses in your own practise.

I feel very secure and have a lot of ideas about improvisation, using the instruments and also singing and leading the choir, because I have had choirs since I was 13 years old, a lot of experience. And also improvisation, because I'm playing the organ at church and you often have to play until the bride appears. So I have ideas and I feel very competent.

I like Bavarian dances and I got some inspiration from Salzburg, from courses, and our meetings. So I try to show it to the students. I have the ideas, but movement is not my natural response so much. And now in Dießen, I have a colleague, Christine Preißinger, who teaches 1st and 2nd grade. She is a movement and dance specialist which is great, so we each have our specialisation. We are classroom teachers so we teach all subjects. But being two of us is very important because for the first time this year Music is only one 45 minutes lesson per week. Before it was always two. I have an optional school choir once a week for 3rd and 4th grades, I have 27 students, and Christine has an optional Orff-Schulwerk class. I try to include more music during the school day, I can sing in the mornings and have music breaks in lessons: children have to move, and clap, call and response and so on. I'm the teacher, I can decide when we make music or special performances. For example, this year we have a celebration of 700 years of the town. I prepare a theatre and music piece with the children, and I will show the video at the Convention in Athens. We will perform at the new Carl Orff Museum. I need lots of rehearsal time and my head teacher said I can rehearse the actors during German and History lessons.



Q: So what happens in the classes who have different class teachers. Do you have a responsibility to encourage them to do their own music?

Yes, they know that Mrs. Kling is always singing and making music (they can come to me for help). For example, we have the 'Music Action Day' from the Bavarian Ministry of Culture. During this day or week groups of institutions like schools or kindergartens meet each other, sing together, perform or make a street concert. Each year a new song is presented. For some years I have been in the group to create the new songs. So I want all the teachers in my school to know the songs and I swap classes to teach them and we perform together in the playground.

Q: It sounds like you are really well supported by your head teacher and colleagues. Is there anything you find challenging or frustrating ...or can you really do whatever you want?

Yes, I can do everything I really want to do. One problem is having only one lesson a week, not enough time. And although we have two music rooms (because we are a primary school and a middle school with about 750 students and 60 teachers), often the rooms are occupied so I have to do my choir in my classroom.

Q: Do you find there is a problem with convincing people that Music education is more than learning and instruments and singing?

In this *Carl-Orff-Schule* music is well established. We have a teachers' band where the head teacher plays the guitar. He is very thankful for all the things I do and the performances because parents and the whole community value them. And my colleagues apologise for their lack of skills in Music and they often ask me for ideas and songs.

Q: You mentioned someone who influenced your practice early on. You've obviously always had a strong connection with the Orff community through the Institute. Has anything else had a strong influence on you?

I think the experience of reflecting on my practice through writing the article for the Forum (and presenting my work at the Convention 2018) was really valuable. It made me consider the social dimension in my teaching, and now when I work with student teachers I always give them that article to read. Not just to do the teaching: awareness of the instruments etc. but also to reflect and develop a theory about it.

I'm also the music advisor for the region and I offer three or four half day courses for teachers throughout the year. Some teachers come to them all!

In the end, I think the most rewarding thing for me is the feedback from the children and parents.

Thank you so much.

References

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