



Orff-Schulwerk *International*

Volume 1, Issue 1

Orff-Schulwerk
International

ISSN 2791-4763 (Online)

Planning with Mind Maps

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Published online: March 2022

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Presentation from the IOSFS Convention 2021

Planning with Mind Maps

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Introduction

Planning lessons is necessary for all age groups. Every group consists of individuals with different modes of learning, readiness levels, speeds of learning, levels and types of support needed. Children have a range of confidence, independence and self-awareness as a learner as well as different interests and various levels of creativity (cf. Stavrou 2015). As Tomlinson (1995) points out, children in a class may have different interests. Some learn best by working alone and others are successful working in groups.

As learning profiles of children often change rapidly as they develop, there is no single learning template to cater for children who differ in readiness, interest, and learning profiles. A one-size-fits-all model of instruction makes little sense. Rather, differentiated instruction seems a better solution for meeting diversity (Tomlinson 1995).

I have been interested in different types of planning for a long time as most types of planning do not allow for flexibility. Many of the typical forms for lesson planning are linear and often not flexible. This prompted me to think about other possibilities. If we recognize that each group consists of individuals with unique profiles then our planning should allow for flexibility to cater for the reactions, competences, learning paths or types of support needed in the group. A typical template for linear planning might include the following columns: phase and time, content and activities, methods, social forms, competencies and learning objectives. These refer to the questions: when, what, how, why, what for?

As a teacher I should not necessarily expect everything to go exactly according to plan. I cannot tell in advance exactly how long a group will need for a phase of exploration or for creative work or who may need extra time and support. I need to observe the reactions of all the participants carefully, be prepared to make variations, adaptations and to change the timing and planned route of my lesson if necessary, so that everyone can participate, play and learn at their own level. This is especially relevant in classes or groups with a diverse range of abilities. If the planning is linear this gives little possibility of accommodating different abilities, reacting to problems or taking up a new idea during the lesson. If an activity doesn't work, the student teacher may be at a loss as to how to continue.

Because of these demands, I developed a way of planning content using a type of mind map that I have found very useful. This way of planning allows for a creative approach by the teacher before and during the lesson, and it allows for flexibility during the lesson according to the needs of the participants. It can also be useful for observation, documenting lessons and for planning future lessons.

Planning Content

When planning it is of course necessary to think of the goals or objectives of the lesson and individual activities as well as about the content and methods of individual activities, of individual lessons or a series of lessons. My inspiration to look at different ways of planning came from songs as well as play materials which I had found, used and developed in many areas, with diverse activities using music, movement and language, and for groups of different ages and abilities.

For many years I taught in a number of different institutions each week in Graz, Austria where I live. These included classes in a regular kindergarten, in a kindergarten and school for children who were deaf or hard-of-hearing with some inclusive classes, a residential home for boys with emotional and behavioural problems and a day centre for adults with disabilities. Because of the number of classes in a week I found a good, stimulating, useful and interesting solution was to take similar material (a topic, song, dance, poem, game or other activity) and to use it with the different groups, adapting it as necessary. In this way I discovered many different possibilities of developing and adapting the same material to suit the abilities of a particular group.

I found a mind map a useful tool. The focal areas are placed in a circle with the centre indicating the starting point, content or inspiration for the lesson(s). This might be a musical activity such as a song, a piece of music or a musical concept, but it could also be a topic related to other school subjects or an impulse from other art forms such as a picture, sculpture, story or poem.

Focal points

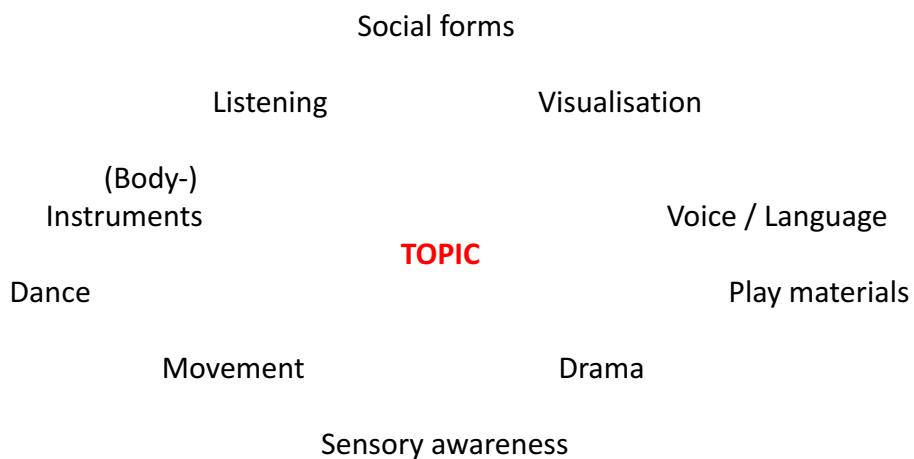


Fig. 1 Mind map with focal points

In order to use the mind map, the focal areas need to be described in a more detail:

Sensory Awareness: sight, touch, vibration, taste, smell, kinesthetics, balance

Movement: playful warm-up; movement experiment; body percussion, basic body activities, movement sequences, formations and paths; parameters; accompaniment

Dance: preparatory exercises; traditional dance forms; popular dance forms; narrative dance; improvisation/composition

Voice and Language: breathing, posture, and physical exercises; sounds, syllables, words, and phrases; chants, rhymes, poems, and story books, drama

Play Materials: natural objects, toys, scarves, balls, spinning tops, household objects, instruments

Instruments: body instruments; voice; found sounds; elemental instruments; home-made instruments; classical instruments (also played in an elemental way)

Forms of Playing: e.g. Pre-melodic and pre-rhythmic forms of playing – leading to rhythmic, melodic and harmonic playing

Social Forms: relationship play; playing individually; working next to or with a partner; working in a small group or with the whole class; leading/following; communicating/cooperating

Listening: sounds and noises; sounds of nature; live and recorded sounds; sounds of voices and instruments; songs related to the topic; pieces of music related to the topic; poems or stories; different styles of music

Drama: music, movement and language, reciting, acting out, props, costumes, elemental music drama.

The mind map offers space for flexibility. Depending on the goals for the lesson, the teacher can decide to work from the outer circle approaching the topic, song or concept through many different types of activities. Or they can decide to work from the centre outwards so that the topic can be experienced in many different ways and can lead to experience in different areas.

Calantropio's two specific models for lesson development - the Convergent model and the Divergent model – could be reflected in working from the outside of the mind map inwards or from the centre towards different areas. Convergent Lesson Development begins with playful but well-guided exploration by students. It moves from many exploratory ideas to specific ideas required for the learning and practicing of an example (piece, song etc.) that is pre-chosen by the teacher. The Divergent model is the opposite to the convergent model, starting with an isolated, simple musical element (a rhythm, a scale etc.) which is developed an expanded towards an open-ended conclusion that is not pre-determined by the teacher or student (Calantropio 2015, p. 6 – 7). Calantropio recognizes that there are pros and cons to each model and suggests an Elemental model which uses both Convergent and Divergent Lesson focus.

When considering differentiation of content, it is important to recognize that there are many different forms of participation that can be part of a lesson. Considering these when planning can help to widen the methods we are using and allow for diverse contributions within one theme.

Forms of Participation include: perceiving, moving, experimenting, playing, imitating, inventing, recognizing, transforming, remembering, varying, choosing, practicing, presenting, performing, communicating, discussing, reflecting (Salmon 2007; 2016). When

planning it is useful to also consider these and to include some different forms of participation in each lesson.

Steps in Planning

Brainstorming using the mind map is useful. It can widen our horizon especially when trying to find or invent many activities for each focal area and to incorporate different forms of participation. The following steps can be a useful guide:

- Select the centre for the mind map (a topic, concept, song, poem...)
- Collect many ideas irrespective of the age group, finding associations and connections and writing a number of different activities in each focal area. It is useful to do the brainstorming more than once, allowing time for researching and for new ideas to emerge.
- Taking this collection of activities, start a new mind map for a particular group you will be teaching - going from general to specific.
- The new mind map would show activities that are relevant to the curriculum and abilities of the particular group and also the planned route.
- Different forms of participation can be indicated next to the activity or underneath
- Activities may need to be differentiated to cater for different levels of ability in a group. These details e.g. accompaniments of various levels of difficulty can be written on a separate sheet of paper
- The goals or objectives for the lesson or for different activities can also be noted separately.

Example

One of the teaching practice groups at the Orff Institute is a group that consists of adults with different support needs, as well as carers for the participants from the sheltered workshops (normally community service providers) together with bachelor or postgraduate students. They attend a music and movement session lasting one hour once a week. The participants show very diverse abilities in music making and moving. They have different levels in sensory, motor and musical skills and in the possibilities for social interaction and relationship. Non-verbal teaching strategies, the assessment of possibilities to relate, and the development of individual forms of communication through music and movement are particularly important when teaching this group.

The central idea of this group is to create experiential spaces and activities for personal expression and for the development of individual skills in music and movement. Increasing social learning processes, interaction, participation, and support of diverse forms of communication are additional aims (Salmon & Kallos 2010). A further goal for the bachelor and postgraduate students lies in furthering their didactic knowledge of and competencies in inclusive settings.

One topic that revealed a multitude of ideas and activities was 'Water'¹ which was the topic for several sessions. Having brainstormed and collected many ideas, the mind map for the first session covered a number of activities and a planned route, although it was clear that the route might be changed during the session.

¹ During the presentation video examples were shown

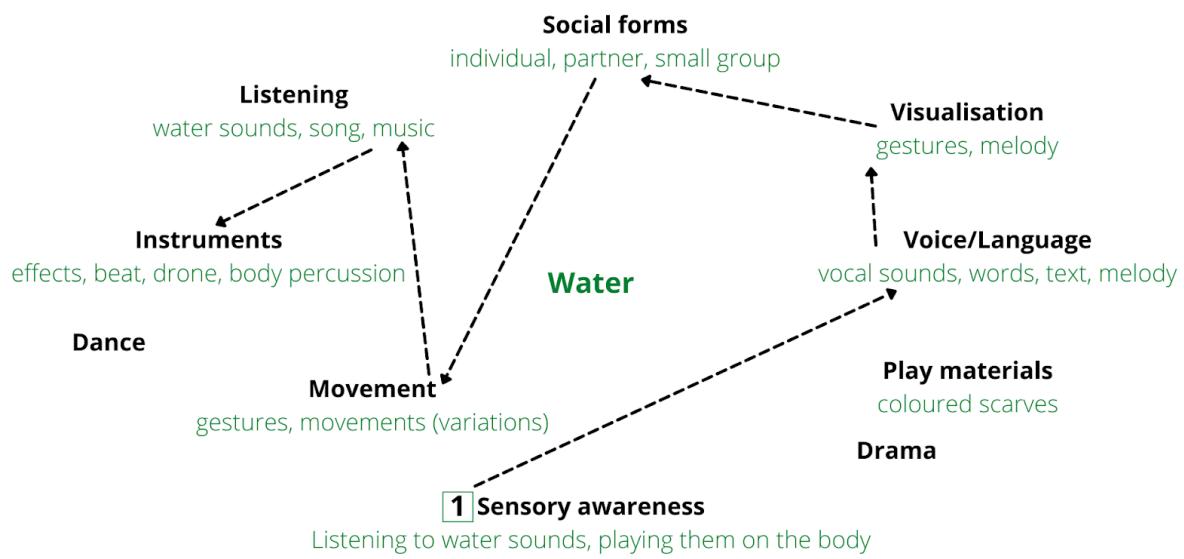


Fig. 2 Planned route for the first session on the topic of water

As expected, the route had to be changed during the session with the teacher spending longer on one activity and developing it further when the participants were very engaged. At another point the teacher took up an idea from one of the participants that occurred spontaneously and integrated it into the lesson.

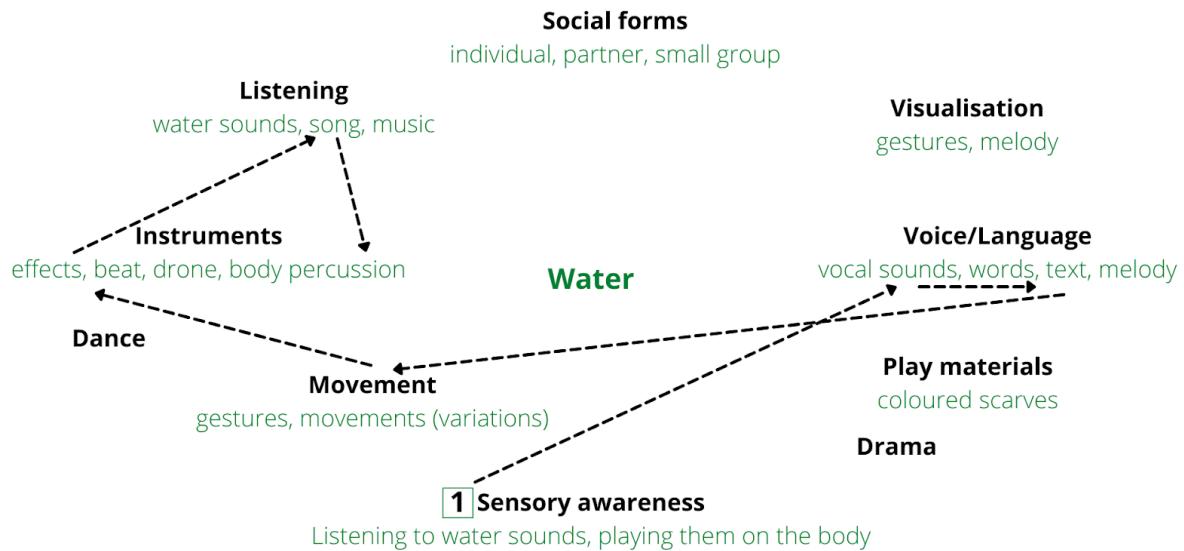


Fig. 3 Actual route of the first session on the topic of water

The order of the activities, the reactions of the participants, forms of participation, support needed and the teaching methods are usually observed by one of the student teachers sitting outside the group. This is then discussed with the others and the mentor after the session. These observations are used as the basis for the next session or series of sessions. It can be important to ask ourselves whether the routes we plan and take in teaching are usually the same. Do we think about taking different routes in our lessons? Do we always start with the same focal point, or do we vary our starting points? Do we offer enough different forms of participation?

Differentiation

All groups are groups of mixed ability. Georg Feuser (1997, 2001) points out that fundamental, child-centered inclusive education involves teaching children and adolescents who are at different developmental levels and have different degrees of competencies in perception, cognition, and behaviour. It recognizes the individuality of each person (in the sense of his or her unique past experiences) and thus the heterogeneity of every human group (Feuser, 1997, 2001). Inclusive teaching means that all participants in a group work, play and learn together in cooperation with one another within one theme, activity or task according to their own individual capabilities (physical, emotional, mental, social) at their own developmental level oriented on their zone of proximal development. To realize this, it is necessary for participants to cooperate within one theme, task or activity as well as for the teacher to provide individual inner differentiation (cf. Feuser 1997).

Children have different levels of readiness and interests and have different learning profiles which mean that we need to offer flexible social grouping as well as different learning paths. Differentiation can be applied not only to the content but also to the learning environment such as the space, the room, different types of instruments and props, but also to the processes such as types of methods and forms of participation as well as the products such as accompanying a song, improvising or composing soundscapes. Goodkin reminds us that in using the Orff-Schulwerk approach, we work in a wide scope of media, trying to understand each child's learning style. We need to simplify or extend parts of a piece, compose and choreograph on many levels, allow children to create at their own level of skill and understanding. We recognize the dignity of each contribution, create opportunities for talent, and create challenges for discovery (Goodkin, 2012).

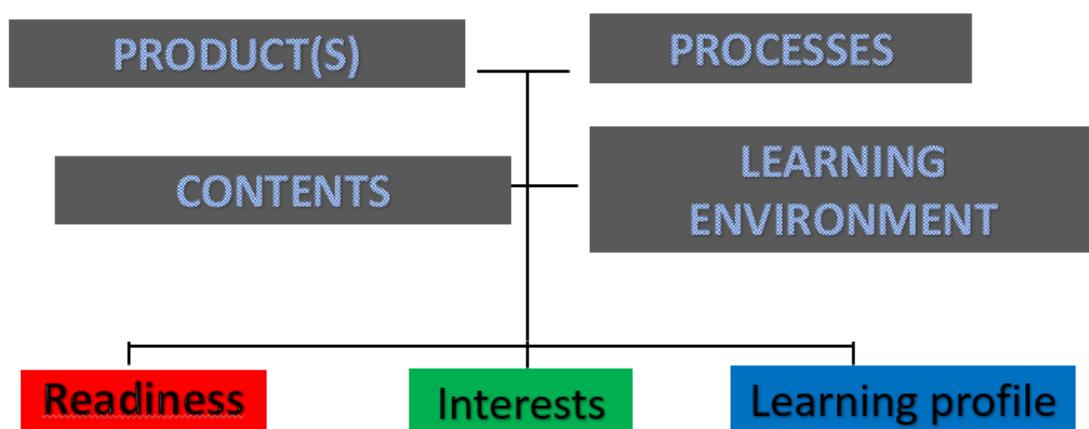


Fig. 4 Differentiation (Tomlinson 1995; 1999; 2010; Stavrou 2015; 2021)

The mind map form of planning in its present form, concentrates on planning the content of one or a series of sessions. It can be used to focus on the different types of activities and the routes we might plan and also on some differentiation of content. This differentiation might be within one type of activity e.g., accompaniments at different levels of difficulty which would be written on a separate page. It could also be using different activities within one topic where some children might be singing and accompanying, others dancing, others concentrating on listening and visualisation. In this case there might be a number of different products that are worked on in groups.

Advantages of Planning with Mind Maps

Using a mind map can help to collect ideas on the topic e.g. song, piece, musical concept, story, without an age group in mind. This first allows us to use our imagination and encourages us to have many more ideas in different areas. It encourages looking at different areas and activities and forms of participation; on the one hand thinking about the 'joint topic' and on the other, considering forms of differentiation. It can be used to plan routes for a lesson that can and should be flexible, and to consider different forms of participation. Especially for student teachers, it can be useful for observing, and then for discussing and reflecting on the lesson as well as for documenting and planning the next lesson(s). Although one mind map cannot include all the aspects of differentiation – the learning environment, the processes and products – it can be a useful tool in planning music and movement lessons.

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