

Susie and Phil's Brisbane music workshops for teachers – 8.07 Report by Leanne Laboo, Music teacher and editor for ASME, Qld

In August 2007, I attended two workshops in Brisbane by Susie Davies-Splitter and Phil Splitter, "Sing, Jam and Jive" for Primary School and "Teaching music made easy and fun" for Early Childhood. Having only made the change from secondary music teaching to primary this year, I relished the opportunity to gather more information about this vibrant and creative career.

Susie and Phil base their teaching strategies on the Orff Schulwerk approach, i.e. integrating speech, singing, playing, movement, listening and dance. Although these particular workshops were aimed at primary and early childhood teachers, the approach is suitable for all levels of education right through to tertiary. In fact, a cross-culture of the teaching world was represented at the workshops, including a lecturer from USQ, three special education teachers and some general primary classroom teachers.

Using a variety of Susie and Phil's resources, the groups explored:

Orff techniques – such as imitation, echo, ostinato, canon and question and answer

Musical media such as speech, singing, movement, dance and instruments

Orff theory including doh and lah pentatonic scales

Music elements – such as beat, rhythm, pitch, dynamics, tempo, form, timbre etc

We also looked at "ways in" through the blues and jazz. Our learning took place in exactly the same way the student's would – through moving, singing and playing instruments. In a day we covered what could be taught (given the time restraints a primary music teacher faces!) in a year. Every couple of hours we sat down to recap over what we'd done, the experiences and teaching strategies employed.

Susie shared her philosophy of music education with us, being that the primary goal is for each child to experience success and therefore to come away with an improved sense of self, of self-belief and confidence. That, amongst its many educational benefits, music can also be used as a tool to encourage the positive growth of every person.

All songs and repertoire were learned through a mix of speech, solfa-singing, movement, dance and body percussion. We were given a variety of ways in which to approach new repertoire with children, which always makes it fun and exciting as well as a valuable learning experience.

Day One was geared towards the eight to twelve year olds. Much of the repertoire had a strong jazz and blues base, incorporating scatting, improvisation and jazz chords and scales. Included was also some African music, Hip Hop, partner dancing and, of course, music with a distinctly Australian flavour. It was wonderful to see how easily many very difficult concepts could be incorporated into a Primary music program.

The second day was aimed at Early Childhood. I had no idea how much fun puppets, slide whistles and guiros shaped like frogs could be! I was also impressed by the excellent sound quality of many of the instruments that have been designed especially for little people with their small shapes and amazing colours. I still have a very vivid memory of a lecturer at an in-service long ago telling us not to use instruments that look like toys, but rather to use "proper" instruments. Obviously he had never had the pleasure of playing and listening to boom-whackers, sound shapes and (my favourite) the frog guiro! Ribbons and scarves were also used to great effect.

Techniques to use the tuned percussion instruments were also introduced and we all had a wonderful time accompanying many of the songs with xylophones, glockenspiels, chime bars and metallophones. My favourite tip of the day was perhaps “beaters in the pits” – having students place their beaters in their arm pits to bring all sounds to a halt.

Without a doubt this will be remembered as one of the most fun and informative workshops and inservices that I have participated in. My only problem now is how to increase my budget in order to buy some more of those fabulous instruments – a chocolate drive perhaps?

Leanne Laboo

Note:

The entire range of Susie and Phil’s resources can be found on their website www.welcometomusic.net The series includes CD’s, Teacher’s Manuals, Choral arrangements and Musicals as well as Workshops, links to curricula, Artists in Schools programs and Concerts. The free E-news exchange gives information about Professional development workshops, courses and conferences, new resources and articles.