

"WE ARE REALLY QUIET AND WHISPER."

Experiences from a working group "Sound break after class" with students in the 2nd grade

Annette Heck

As an elementary school teacher, I integrate sounds and sound exercises within class activities – both as class teacher and specialty instructor, e.g. religious instruction. Experience shows that even just short sequences strengthen the individual child and provide support in everyday class situations. Singing bowl sessions are particularly helpful in calming first-time students, aiding them in focusing on the new class experience and, especially, connecting with themselves. Thus, the idea to offer a working group (WG) for relaxation with sound at the start of the school year 2018/2019 was developed. The objective of the WG was to provide the children various opportunities for relaxation, self-perception, and "connecting with themselves" and to "concentrate on the here and now".

Planning of the WG Sound Break after classes

I presented my idea of a WG for relaxation with sound to school administrator during class planning at the beginning of the school year. Based on former experience, respective free time was allotted, and I was given weekly class time of 45 minutes for the WG. In accordance with the class schedule, this elective activity would be designed for students in the 1st and 2nd grades. The WG was entitled "Sound break after class" and was to be offered after regular classes, i.e., before children returned home or started their open full-day session. The WG thereby highlights the transition, the break between the focused school morning and the subsequent afternoon session and offers students a chance to relax, recharge, and gain strength.

Eight children (3 boys, 5 girls) from the 2nd grade registered for the WG and attended it throughout the entire school year. Together with the open full-day session students, we coordinated use of the room and mats. To carry out the WG, I used the following materials:

- KliK®-box with heart, universal and pelvic singing bowls as well as cymbals (see photo on left)
- various mallets
- mats
- tunnel



DO NOT DISTURB



WG Sound Break after regular class

Image by Annette Heck: door sign to ensure peace and quiet

The room itself could be set up and broken down without much rearranging. We placed the singing bowls in the center and the mats in a star pattern radiating from the bowls. Each student thus had a place.

The first session showed that hanging a "do not disturb" sign on both classroom doors is helpful to ensure not being interrupted (see image).

The principles of Peter Hess®- Sound therapy and education were applied in the planning of the WG class:

- mindfulness
- appreciation
- holism
- less-is-more principle
- solution and resource orientation
- togetherness in dialogue

We provided exercises for each child that could be practiced individually or with a partner. Gradually, students could thus gather varying experiences, become aware of their body, their feelings, their breathing and associated changes in more differentiated ways by learning how to better connect with their inner selves. The following exercises were designed to be carried out repeatedly within the framework of the WG:

- **Massage** of a partner using hands or a spiky massage ball / head or foot massage using oils with a partner – with verbal instructions.
- **Yoga body positions** with short verses for encouragement and strength
- **Breathing exercises** – Concentration on the act of breathing – feeling inspiration/exhalation – perceiving breath as an anchor ("I am completely with(in) me")

- **Various body awareness exercises:**
 - attentive eating of a grape
 - sensing – perceiving – observing breath
 - body journey – sensing into the body, perceiving my body
 - percussion exercises – percussion of body
 - kinesiology-based exercises
- **Sound exercise: sound sun** – singing bowl is placed in the center, all children are lying around the bowl in a star pattern. Their feet are directly in front of the singing bowl. The singing bowl is tapped.
- **Sound-supported fantasy journey** journey into nature (island, ocean, meadow, forest) or to a personal place of comfort.
- **"Mini sound massage" for a partner:** A child may choose a bowl and decide where it should be placed on his body or if it should be placed next to the body. Tapping of the selected bowl. Upon the sound of the cymbal, the child receiving the sound massage can slowly return into his/her own rhythm. A thank you is expressed to the child providing the sound. After approx. 5-10 minutes, roles are reversed.
- **Sound bath for one child.** Here, the tunnel is applied. One child lies down in the tunnel, well cushioned with pillows. The other participating children sit around the tunnel; each child has a singing bowl and a mallet. Heart, universal, and pelvic bowls are used as well as cymbals to mark the completion. Thereafter, other children can lie down in the tunnel.

Course of WG hour

WG hours were uniformly conducted with a fixed progression and a flexible main segment:

Set-up of room with all children pitching in: getting mats, moving tables, etc. This collective start strengthened the sense of responsibility of the students in the group, prepared them for the WG although it took only a few minutes.

Arrival/harmony with the singing bowls: The children adapted this exercise very quickly. Everyone was very mindful that each child was included. The students communicated with their eyes: now I am tapping the bowl, now, it's your turn. Without instructions, the children let the sound of the singing bowl fade almost completely before the next bowl was tapped. At the start of the session, only the sounds of the singing bowls were thus heard and could produce their effect.

Main segment: At the beginning of the WG, I provided several brief settings from the list indicated above with short periods for reflection. In my planning and conceptualization of the WG hour, it was important to me to be able to respond to the situation and to design the exercises accordingly. In the beginning, repetitive exercises were important, and, over time, fantasy journeys, massages or other sound supported exercises took up most of the hour. Requests by the children were realized whenever possible. Repetitions were extremely important and were requested over and over in order to become more familiar with the various settings and engage in them to the fullest.

As the group became more familiar with each another and the settings, their concentration and engagement with the respective format grew. As a result, the time commitment for each setting or exercise increased as well. By the end of the school year, only one setting could be carried out in a session (e.g. sound bath for one child, approx. 5 minutes thereafter, another child) followed by opportunity for reflection (how did you experience the exercise, what did you feel?)

Reflection on the respectively provided setting. It surprised me how increasingly important this phase became to the group. In the beginning, the students would provide only short feedback. Over the course of the school year, a growing need to share individual experiences became evident. Their body perceptions became increasingly more differentiated. The children benefitted from their shared experiences and encouraged each other to express themselves or they would ask targeted questions for further clarification. Their speech also became more refined.

Our sessions were concluded with collective **fading of the sounds of the singing bowls** and a collective **clean-up**.

Insights of WG hours

The mindful interaction of the children within the group and with themselves as individuals afforded them a broad spectrum of experiences and developments. I would like to provide the following insights to these:

During the first session, one boy placed a mat underneath a table that bordered our circle. He needed this protected space. He paid attention and was present but observed us from his "cave". He joined us in exercises with a partner. Starting with Easter, he was part of our circle with his mat. He reached this decision on his own. This open space had

been very important. The other kids perceived this and asked him if he wanted to join their group. The offer "you belong to us" was an important signal for this child. His hesitation and retention were respected.

The setting "sound bath in a tunnel" allowed him to experience deep relaxation.

Another boy was pre-occupied with many thoughts in his head and expressed his state as such. During the exercise, he was unable to sit still or lie down and seemed to be in perpetual motion. The other children signaled that this behavior made them feel bothered and distracted. Increasingly, he could define his rambling thoughts. He could not let go of his prior experiences (fight during break, dissatisfaction with school, family events). Through the other participants, particularly the students in his class, he received offers of support. During one of the WG sessions, it started to snow heavily and, accordingly, we entered a "winter fantasy". He watched the snowflakes with eyes slightly opened. For the first time, he became completely self-aware and could formulate his thoughts: *"The snowflakes calm me down."*



The "sound bath" in a tunnel provides wonderful relaxation.

med to be in perpetual motion. The other children signaled that this behavior made them feel bothered and distracted. Increasingly, he could define his rambling thoughts. He could not let go of his prior experiences (fight during break, dissatisfaction with school, family events). Through the other participants, particularly the students in his class, he received offers of support. During one of the WG sessions, it started to snow heavily and, accordingly, we entered a "winter fantasy". He watched the snowflakes with eyes slightly opened. For the first time, he became completely self-aware and could formulate his thoughts: *"The snowflakes calm me down."*

One girl fell asleep more than once during the fantasy journey. It was obvious to the group that this rest was what she needed right now: „*This is good for her.*“ So they whispered quietly as not to disturb her rest and relaxation under any circumstances.

One girl seemed to know in advance when an instruction of a sound based exercise from me would end. Early on, she would immediately ask, "What's next?" after I was finished. After a few weeks, she no longer asked this question and completely engaged in the exercise.

Two children in the group could build on respective experiences; their families already practiced meditation and massage. Both students are from other countries (Sri Lanka and Afghanistan) and enriched our group, were inspiration and set an example for other participants. They underscored that a certain degree of practice and perseverance is required.

When a massage or sound therapy was carried out for a partner, the providing child was attentive and concentrated on the task and their partner. The child whispered, asked if the amount of pressure applied during a massage was correct, or which singing bowl the partner preferred. In these sessions, there was a natural transition from "*I am completely with(in) me*" to "*I care for you, I am with you.*"

The sharing of experiences after completion of the various settings was surprisingly intense. For most of the students, the exercises were a completely new experience. It was very important for the group to take home brief instructions with them. I was happy to accommodate this request and brought a folder for each child in which they could collect respective instructions. I received many reports of the students relying on their relaxation techniques at home or carrying out individual settings with a parent or sibling.

The children increasingly demonstrated a high level of attentiveness and empathy during reciprocal sound massages.



The WG thus showed sustained effects. Upon completion of the WG, I asked the children what had changed for them through participation in these sessions. I received answers such as:

"We are really quiet and whisper."

"It is good for me."

"I am calm, and I enjoy that."

"I feel my body very differently."

"I don't notice this otherwise because I pay more attention to other things happening around me."

Summary of experiences from the WG relaxation and sound

- Sound connects the group, strengthens the group and enables the participants to grow closer.
- Sound is relaxing and calming. These breaks after regular class were incredibly valuable to the students. During the week, I often received comments such as: "*I am looking forward to the next sound WG.*"
- Sound promotes access to our inner core, to our feelings and needs. Sound enables and facilitates expression of feelings and needs. This small group surprised me again and again with their expressions and differentiated perceptions. Opportunity, space, and time are required to allow these perceptions. We developed a very trusting framework.
- The principle "less is more" was experienced because we often repeated settings. The process was already known and became more familiar with repetition. A request for repetition of a certain exercise was made repeatedly by the students. Sometimes, they learned that they experienced different perceptions or feelings in comparison to the previous time. What I feel and perceive is thus not the same or reproducible, but depends on the current situation. I experience one thing and another child can experience something completely different even if the outer framework is the same. This insight, through the help of the reflection phase, promotes tolerance and respect among the children.



*"I am calm,
and I enjoy that."*

- The body perception has been improved. The experience "my body tells me a lot if I pay attention" was very important for self-knowledge and self-perception. In this context, it was interesting that the feedback to the first body journey has been very critical: *"I didn't like that at all."*, *"It was very weird to concentrate on my arm or leg."* After a few weeks and more experiences, I offered the same body journey again, and the reaction was completely different:

"I was able to feel my foot precisely. I don't notice it at all otherwise." The first body journey has been offered too early. The children needed further experience in perception and body awareness. This development became very clear here.

- Sound focused and supported imaginary journeys. **"I am completely with(in) me."** My fantasy and imagination are allowed to be in the foreground. Inner images may be created and accessed. It was very exciting for the children to experience what images were generated, to recognize that these images even existed, and that every child had different images.
- Especially with imaginary journeys, handling restlessness of another child could be addressed. *"It bothers me when you keep fidgeting,"* is how a restless student was asked to modify his behavior. But it was obvious that his was not easy for him because he really struggled *"How can he manage to do this?"* In time, the students rephrased the question in this way: *"What do you need to find peace?"*. In these conversations, mindful interaction and tolerance with one another became evident. Further progress showed that the child was able to work on this. His restlessness was perceived, but not judged. This gave him an important chance to find his way, in the form of a spot he selected on his own, with pillows for support to feel comfortable. Gradually, he was more successful, and this was also perceived by the group and shared with him. This feedback gave him the strength to continue with his efforts.

External interruptions were also identified and resolved (see door sign) or the window was closed because a group was using the schoolyard and made noise. These processes and reflections not only strengthen self-perception, but also self-efficacy. These students have learned that they can do something on their own to feel good.

- Sound strengthens concentration and self-perception. The students were repeatedly surprised that they suddenly perceived their bodies completely differently, e.g. their heart, *"it's getting really warm"*, *"I could feel it very distinctly,"* or also other areas of the body, *"I felt a tingling in my leg."*
- Sound enables empathy and thereby promotes social competence. Respecting others was something that have become naturally in the interaction of this group. The students acted in a manner that made them feel good and their partner feel good so that everyone felt comfortable.
- Sound promotes responsibility and self-efficacy. Keeping instructions for the WG exercises in a folder for access and self-directed application at home gives the students a sustainable tool. They can guide tension and relaxation on their own based on their needs.
- Sound fosters eye contact and nonverbal communication. For example, during sound harmony at the beginning of a session, child A taps a bowl and then looks at the child who is to play next. Then this child taps a bowl, etc.
- Sound facilitates peace and quiet. The participants could experience the exercises in a calm rhythm. The need to share the experience was great. This peace and quiet allowed processing and expression of feelings and perception. At the same time, the students learned that their perceptions were very different and individual, *"My perception is different from the perception of the other participants."* – This insight promoted respect and tolerance among each other.
- A sustained effect on concentration, perception, and sensing of one's own body developed very slowly. To promote and support this development, repetition of the exercises is necessary. Here, the approach: short and at regular intervals is better than only once in depth and then at long intervals.

- The exercises show the importance of a break in which the focus is on oneself in the regular course of the day. Listening, feeling, perceiving – when I am concentrating on myself, digression (the more practiced I am), becomes less and less possible or can be deferred. We learn to concentrate on what is important and to leave the immaterial alone.
- For me as leader of this group, this concept meant that I not only planned and carried out the relaxation break, but that the relaxing elements and their positive effects also worked on me. Although I am responsible for its organization and execution, this WG also affected me positively and I could carry out my further responsibilities relaxed and recharged.



Foto: Tina Buch

Conclusion

For me, this WG once again demonstrated how important breaks, quiet time, and targeted exercises in perception are for children especially in the elementary school age. Students are completely occupied with their class schedule as well as other activities ranging from after school sport to music instruction, get-togethers with friends, family life, using of digital media, etc. Sometimes there is hardly any time for children to experience their own rhythm and to concentrate only on themselves. The WG shifted this focus a bit for the participating students and they experienced these settings as helpful and applicable to their everyday life. Both my students and I wish to continue the WG in the upcoming school year. To me, this request shows how valuable this short time-out from the everyday is to the students. The WG offered the opportunity to draw on their own resources, both in terms of time and content.

A WG in this form is the cherry on top of the sundae that is the usual school day. If it is possible to incorporate it in the class schedule, that would be ideal. However, if this is not possible, I can only encourage that small settings (sound harmony, short fantasy journeys, breathing exercises, etc.) are included as a ritual in the normal school day, either at the start of class or after a break, or change in lecturers (compare article Taking sound to school in FZ 12/2017, p. 56-59). Such brief but regular time units have positive effects on every child, especially their learning and on the class as a whole. Only when each individual child can concentrate on himself/herself, is the head clear again to absorb new material, and in this way, students learn to focus on what is important. Even in a tight teaching schedule, these few minutes spent on a sound exercise and, thereby, a focus on the self, make way for more efficient learning. In the end, time is not lost but gained!

Literature (on german)

Den Klang in die Schule tragen. Klangvoll durch den Alltag in der Grundschule von Annette Heck, In: Fachzeitschrift Klang-Massage-Therapie 12/2017, S. 56-59

Klangschalen – Mit allen Sinnen spielen und lernen von Peter Hess und Petra Emily Zurek, Kösel Verlag 2008

Klingen, spüren, schwingen (Buch sowie CD) von Beate van Dülmen, Ökotoxia Verlag 2013

Im Land des Klangzaubers von Martina Jaekel, Verlag Peter Hess 2008

Klänge gehen auf die Reise von Irmgard Philipow, Verlag Peter Hess 2011

Kleine Yoga-Rituale für jeden Tag: Mit einfachen Übungen den Schulalltag rhythmisieren von Ilona Holterdorf und Petra Proßowski, Verlag An der Ruhr 2010

Klangyoga für Kinder. Ein Praxisbuch für Kindergarten, Schule, Familie und den Kinderyoga-Unterricht von Tina Buch, Verlag Peter Hess 2017

Wege zu Achtsamkeit und Mitgefühl in der Schule – Eine Schatzkiste voller Übungen und Spielideen von Nils Altner, Kallmeyer Verlag 2019



Annette Heck

is an elementary school teacher, KliK®-specialist, Peter Hess®- sound specialist in school (KliK®), Peter Hess®-sound massage practitioner and offers training for teaching staff as well as sound meditations and fantasy journeys for adults and children. She applies singing bowls in scholastic and non-scholastic settings. The network for sharing application of singing bowls in school as well as extracurricular settings is being expanded. All interested parties are encouraged to get in contact with her via the mail, address see below.

Contact

E-Mail: annetteheck@web.de