

# Inclusive Music Practice

with Primary Aged Young People

Ann Jones & Daz Adderley



# Introduction

## Watch Video

Ann Jones and Daz Adderley, two of MAC Makes Music's most experienced Community Musicians, share their top tips for best practice in inclusive music-making with primary aged young people. If you are just starting out in music education, or you would like to learn how to work more inclusively in your music sessions, this resource is a fantastic place to start. There are 9 sections, each with a corresponding video, so be sure to check those out on our website.

Ann and Daz have worked in various mainstream and non-mainstream settings across the West Midlands with a particular specialism in supporting young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Here they explain the importance of fully embracing children's creativity in order to facilitate participant-led music-making to help them develop their personal and social skills as well as their sense of wellbeing.

There are lots of ideas for warm ups, attention grabbers and engaging musical activities, and they also discuss the smaller things you can put in place to ensure your sessions are fun, inclusive and beneficial to everyone.

The 9 sections are:

1. Introduction
2. The Young People
3. The Staff
4. Equipment and Space
5. Props and Stimuli
6. Warm Ups
7. Attention Grabbers
8. Participant-Led Music-Making
9. Reflection and Planning

# The Young People

## Watch Video

The ideas shared in this resource have been particularly successful with young people in primary Pupil Referral Units or children in mainstream primary schools who may have experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The children have a range of needs so it is important to take a participant-centred approach right from the beginning in order to build up a good relationship of trust.

Start by finding ways to encourage children to express themselves and share their ideas. By listening to them and valuing their ideas, you can help nurture their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. You might want to try to develop their ideas and interests in to songs or compositions. This could be a great opportunity for young people to articulate their feelings and build up confidence and resilience.

Always remember that music is essential for everybody to participate in, and should not be regarded as a treat for those who demonstrate 'good behaviour'. Music can be a really important tool for unlocking a child's self-expression. It could be just the thing that helps them to engage more positively in their lives.

One key thing to remember is that children's music doesn't sound like adult's music. It can be noisy, and very creative. Children have got their own musical voices and it's important for us to find and explore this. As a Music Leader, you have to be willing to learn or re-learn approaches to making music by listening to the children and responding to their needs and interests.

A useful tip for being able to understand more about the young people and how you can best help them is by finding out the various acronyms used in the setting and what they mean, for example PRU, SEMH, THRIVE etc. Talk to members of staff to help you feel more confident that your sessions can have a positive effect on the young people. By treating everyone as a musician on a musical journey you can establish a sense of inclusion, excitement and fun!

# The Staff

## Watch Video

It's very important when you go in to a new setting to get to know and work with the staff. That's everybody from teachers, teaching support staff, right through to receptionists and cleaners. Getting to know everybody is really useful both inside and outside of sessions. Receptionists are brilliant at helping you gather parents for performances or sharings. Lunch time staff and caretakers can help you set up a space, which is especially useful if your room is changed at the last minute.

The staff in the session are so important for helping you note differences in engagement because they will already know the young people well. If staff in your sessions are involved in the activities, perhaps with an instrument or piece of percussion, they are modelling what you would like the young people to do. It also means they can carry on with activities with the young people in between your sessions to really help build confidence over time.

Make sure you talk to staff outside of sessions so that they feel confident that they know what role you would like them to take. You can create a more joyful and relaxed atmosphere by asking teaching staff if they can help with things like observing engagement or modelling activities and having some reflection time with them at the end. Asking what they thought were the highlights can be uplifting and can help make sure the young people get the most out of your sessions.

# Equipment & Space

## Watch Video

### Space

- When you're starting a session, get there early and try to create a neutral space by rearranging chairs or making room to sit in a circle on the floor. You want to be able to see everybody's face.
- Moving around the furniture can be inspiring to children because it can signify a different atmosphere, ready for music-making.
- When the room is opened out and you see somebody who looks like they're not participating, observe this but don't draw attention to it as children will make their first sound in their own time.
- Some children may find it challenging to sit down in a circle, but it can be very positive to embrace and encourage dancing and movement. You may find that a young person can focus better when they have the freedom to dance.
- Consider taking a session outside and incorporating the space and the sounds outdoors.

# Equipment & Space

## Equipment

- Get to know what instruments are available to you in the setting. If the resources are very limited, you can always use body percussion, voices or home-made instruments.
- If you are able to bring your own instruments to a session, a good tip would be to invest in something special or unusual that the children will remember but may never have had the opportunity to play before.
- It's great to be able to provide lots of variety, but this doesn't have to cost lots of money. Kazoos, harmonicas, whistles and ukuleles are inexpensive but often create lots of excitement and are ideal for small hands.
- Think about all the different ways you can make sounds with an instrument, not just the conventional ways. This is great for building soundscapes, and also means you don't have to be an expert in every instrument in the room! Don't be afraid of children judging your skills. Be imaginative, and invite them to be imaginative too!
- If you can't play an instrument, this could be an opportunity for a child to teach you what they know about an instrument. This can give them a huge sense of empowerment. "Mistakes are humanising for everybody and they keep us all on that level together".
- If you're worried about using too many instruments and losing control, a great tip, if it gets a bit too noisy, is to ask everyone to use their invisible binoculars because they will have to put their instruments down and use both their hands to see where you're going next on your musical adventure.
- You can also try using a screen. Put on some lower lighting and project images of different environments like space or the Northern Lights to give the room a different feel. You could even use sensory fabrics to enhance the space and the creativity in the session.

# Props & Stimuli

## Watch Video

- Most settings have a computer and a whiteboard, so make the most of YouTube! You can find music from all around the world with different instruments and different languages, and you can also find videos to add a sound track to. Try using a video of a rollercoaster or a volcano or a waterfall, or ask the children to suggest their ideas.
- Other props can be used to stimulate imagination, like sensory fabrics, lights, or any other usual object you can find. This is where your unusual musical instruments can come in and stimulate some ideas for music-making. Vibratones, ocean drums and gongs are great to explore too.
- Puppets and teddy bears can be useful to demonstrate and encourage listening. They might also be useful for helping a young person feel calm and connected to what is happening in the rest of session.

# Warm Ups

## Watch Video

- Warm ups are great for getting the participants' musical minds switched on and their body ready for being creative.
- Mix up your warm ups to avoid the young people switching off. Think: does the group need to be energised or would a more calming warm up be beneficial? Relate the warm up to a later activity if you can.
- Call and response is a great warm up because you can invite participants to take over the leadership and make their own sounds.
- If somebody doesn't want to join in at first, they might just be warming up! Allow them to take in the surroundings and the situation, and once they feel safe and included, they may well join in.
- Talking too much at the beginning of a session can cause young people to switch off immediately. Have a warm up prepared in your head and launch straight in to it to help engage and energise the young people in the session.
- "Bungalow" and "My Name is Joe" are particular favourites.
- Let the warm ups evolve, especially in the children suggest their ideas. Finding ways to adapt warm ups can be fun and empowering for everyone.



# Attention Grabbers

## Watch Video

- Attention Grabbers are great to use alongside your warm ups if people are drifting off. It can be an instrument, a signal, a rhyme or even a 'magic stick'.
- Attention Grabbers are a more friendly and musical equivalent to you shouting "Everybody stop!!" as loud as you can.
- Change your Attention Grabbers up so that the young people have something different to listen out for.
- Try using a warm up as an Attention Grabber. Often if children know the song they will start to join in and reengage in your session.
- Verbal call-and response Attention Grabbers can work if the young people know the response. E.g. Music Leader: "Macaroni Cheese" Young People: "Everybody freeze!"
- A "Magic Stick" is useful for creating a sense of excitement. The rhyme goes "Magic Stick, Magic Stick, Magic Stick who will you pick?" The person it lands on can feel empowered to come to the front and share their ideas without the pressure to nominate themselves.

# Participant-Led Music-Making

## Watch Video

- The most successful music sessions are centred on the young people's interests. It is really important that you keep this one of your main focal points.
- Invite young people to write their ideas for a subject for a new song on a piece of paper, fold it up really small and drop it in the Magic Hat. Children often get very excited picking them out and seeing whose idea is going to be next.
- Ask the children what they're learning about in school and you might generate ideas from what they're particularly interested in.
- Try using the Magic Stick as a conducting stick. Every young person has an instrument and the conductor controls the soundscape with their stick. It can give the young person a sense of empowerment, it can be a very physical activity which can help some young people stay engaged, and you can create different soundscapes every time you change the conductor.
- The Blues Train is a similar idea, where the Music Leaders play a 12 bar blues and everybody imagines the journey of the train. All participants can take part in the jam. What happens when the train goes up hill? Downhill? Through a tunnel? Experiment with dynamics and timbre.
- Take a small recording device to your sessions. Young people love to hear their music played back to them. If a young person doesn't want to join in with the music-making, perhaps they'd like to be in charge of the recording instead?

# Reflection & Planning

## Watch Video

- Taking a child-centred approach means you will often be taking in lots of the participants' ideas. That's why it is really important to reflect and plan in order to incorporate as many of them as you can in to your sessions.
- Always reflect on what worked well, what could be improved and what progress the young people are making. Staff in the session with you can help with this.
- Ongoing communication with staff can help you pick up on more subtle developments as they will know the young people really well and can help you identify reactions or changes in behaviour that you may have missed.
- Have a long term plan and a weekly plan. This will give you a starting point for every session and help you feel prepared and confident that you are supporting the young people on their journey to the best of your ability. However, you must always be adaptable to children's ideas and willing to abandon your plan if another idea comes forward.
- If you're having a very busy and creative session, don't forget to make notes along the way about what has happened so that you can factor this in to your planning.
- Gather young people's feedback as much as you can to help facilitate their progression. If ever you have a difficult session, remind yourself of those lovely moments to help get yourself back on track. Reflection is just as important for your own wellbeing, and your professional development too.

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