

# PLAYING THE CURRICULUM



## The Handbook

v1

Max Reinhardt

# Oxford Contemporary Music

This handbook has been produced by Max Reinhardt and OCM.

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## Acknowledgements

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Max Reinhardt has used what was workshoped at that Hot House and created this handbook for the schools participating in the pilot project of Playing the Curriculum.

This handbook is a work in progress and there will be more than one version of this as we progress through the pilot.

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## What Is Playing the Curriculum?

Playing the Curriculum is a pilot project led by Max Reinhardt and inspired by the Norwegian model of teaching music in schools.

**“From an educational perspective, one of the key ingredients that is often missing in music education but seems endemic to the Norwegian approach is the concept of creativity and finding your voice... an emphasis on the creative spark being as important – more so, even – than the acquisition of chops and technical knowledge.”**

(extract from “*Sound Check Norway: Music from Norway: Just How Important Is It, Really?*” by John Kelman, Music Norway [musicnorway.no/2013/10/28/music-from-norway-just-how-important-is-it-really](http://musicnorway.no/2013/10/28/music-from-norway-just-how-important-is-it-really))

Our pilot is an experiment to model a system that can be used by any teacher (whether they are trained musicians or not) to nurture musicality and creativity.

This will take the form of weekly sessions in which the whole class makes sound and music together, often improvising, using exercises for children that we have developed, tried and tested as a launchpad to create music played by trained and untrained children, to empower musical elements in all the pupils.

### **Our hopes, aims and aspirations for PLAYING THE CURRICULUM include:**

- Supplying teachers with the mentoring, skills and support to lead inclusive and inspiring music making sessions
- Empowering the musicality of all children and teachers
- Inspiring playfulness, inspiration, exploratory momentum and spontaneity in approaches to music
- Reaching towards musical horizons beyond conventional song forms, harmonies, instruments and notation
- Expanding performance notions beyond audience and performer to more communal forms

We hope that by doing this the legacy of the project will have an impact for many years.

**“This is all about tuning the ears of children and teachers to music beyond the confines of harmony and hit tunes and popular classics, and it’s not about acquiring an orthodox conception of instrumental skills. It’s about an inclusive music possibly similar to the deep listening concept of Pauline Oliveros, which includes free music, found sounds, musicians, non musicians, improvisational unrehearsed music, tribal music etc. It’s about people discovering:rediscovering their musicality, tapping into the music that’s inside them and that’s all around us”**

Max Reinhardt

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## Handy Hints

*'Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting.'*

**Ivan Illich**, 'Deschooling Society'

It probably helps a lot to see these strategies as pieces of music or sound works in their own right rather than exercises.

No blame, no mistakes, only opportunities....

So children and teachers *play* their instruments and/or sing in these exercises and strategies, rather than *learn to play* and/or *learn to sing*.

Listening and silence are fundamental in all music, but particularly for musical adventures like these.

A circle is such a useful tool.

Keep it simple.

Eska's acronym for the elements of musicality - **PRIFT**:

**PITCH**

**RHYTHM**

**INTENSITY**

**FREQUENCY**

**TEMPO**

A simple underlying rhythmic or melodic loop is a good foundation to many of our group pieces; it helps to make the piece more inclusive whilst maintaining the focus of the participants. There are a number of simple ways of generating such a loop using laptops, smart phones or iPads including Garage Band ..using its loop library... Drum Genius, and iRealB, etc. These provide elements of a steady groove, which forms a basis for the participants to play around, which you may well find useful and also easy to use.

It's good to have an adaptable exercise with the option to add or remove elements to alter the complexity to best match the group's capabilities.

It's often a good idea to start sessions with a playful idea/icebreaker that isn't apparently directly musically related.

Do you 'start easy' or 'throw them in at the deep-end'? Our Hot House session participants had varying levels of success with both approaches. The most important thing is to start...

Known songs and melodies are certainly not a forbidden area, but you should always get the class to take unfamiliar and imaginative sonic paths through those songs and melodies (check *Conductor #2* or *Song Recycling #1* and *#2* below).

It's often a good idea to end sessions with a calmer piece.

Random (as opposed to choosing players for their skill and experience) distribution of instruments will make these instrumental pieces accessible to everyone and spread the word that everyone has permission and encouragement to play, that it's fine to make the instrument sound like they can make it sound as opposed to a more orthodox sound.

At our Hot House sessions (at which these exercises were developed) there was a long and lively discussion around whether it's necessary for a child to understand what concepts they've just learned in any of these pieces. Perhaps generating a love of playing music, of finding joy in sound and confidence in music making in 5-7 year olds, is the essential force here rather than an analytic assessment of their learning process.

*"Carry a candle in the dark, be a candle in the dark, know that you're a flame in the dark."*

**Ivan Illich**



# Icebreakers – Moving towards Musicality

## Giving Gifts

- Proceed from a standing circle.
- Split the class into pairs and include teacher and any assistants in the pairs.
- Teacher starts and (pretends to) gives his/her partner an imaginary present, say a balloon. The child thanks them politely etc. and gives them a present, which freely relates to the first present somehow...maybe a dog made from a balloon.
- Teacher asks all the pairs to give each other presents, which to and fro in this way.
- Perhaps the teacher's next move after thanking the child and saying what a beautiful balloon dog, is to burst it with an imaginary knitting needle, which is the next gift to be given.
- Game goes on for 3 mins maybe.



## Receiving Gifts

- Everybody change partners...now it's all about receiving.
- Child A thanks Child B profusely for a gift they pretend to have received and says with actions what it is and how beautiful it is.
- Child B then takes a turn at imaginary receiving.



## Receiving / guessing / playing / instrument conversation

- Suggest that now they are receiving imaginary instruments.
- Child A mimes and sings the instrument they have received to Child B, who tries to guess what it is.
- Child B then takes a turn at it.
- Now give Child A and Child B an instrument each. Child A sounds their thanks and delight with their instrument. Child B then takes a turn at it.
- They then start to reply to each other and a musical conversation develops.
- Reform the circle.



- Each pair can 'perform' their conversation to the rest of the group, who can guess what they're 'talking' about.



### **Kim's Game (sonic version)**

- **Blindfold** the group.
- Then make 10 sounds with pre-prepared objects on a tray, which are covered before the blindfolds go on. Some could be objects you're going to use later in the session. They should include some found objects (e.g. a stone, a sheet of paper, an elastic band) and some more orthodox musical implements (e.g. xylophone, mobile phone, music box etc.).
- Make your sequence of 10 sounds twice then cover the objects and take off the blindfolds.
- Ask the children to identify the objects...one answer each please. Hold up the object when it's identified.
- See how many objects aren't identified and then take the cover off and show those objects too.

Please note: if you're thinking that means too many blindfolds and too much blindfolding...although that in itself is good multisensory fun...you can keep all the objects in a box and play them in the box so they can't be seen.



### **Breathing-Thinking-Doing**

Good for a clear room...class room size or bigger.

- Start in a circle and explain that this is a game in which everyone first of all finds their own space in the room .
- They take a long breath in (through their nose) and think about how they're going to move when they breathe out (through their mouth).
- They can move in anyway they please, fast or slow, but they must make sure that they don't move too close to anyone...no bumping...and also that when they pass someone they look them in the eye and smile, always moving to fill a space - never have dead/empty space.
- Then in their own time, they breathe out slowly and move as they had planned till their breath runs out.

- Then they are still again while they breathe in and plan how they are going to move next breath. They breathe out while moving as they have just planned....and so on.

**Stage #2** of the game is too add a sound or tone or melodic or rhythmic phrase on your exhale.

- Plan what kind of sound you're going to make while you're inhaling, then move and make your sound on the exhale.
- Make sure you listen to the sounds everybody is making and see what you can add...listen and contribute...don't drown others out.
- Again keep it going for several breaths in and out.

Good for connecting the group...we have to learn to look at and acknowledge each other.



### **Hat Name Game**

- **A** hat is passed around the circle and each participant whispers their name into the hat.
- The hat is passed around a second time and this time the participants say their name into the hat a little louder.
- Try a third pass around the circle...louder still.
- Now put the hat in the centre of the circle and point to a child (A) who comes in- to the middle of the circle, shouts their name as loudly as possible into the hat, then puts the hat on the head of child of their choice (child B) in the circle who then walks into the middle of the circle and shouts their name into the hat while child A replaces them in the circle.
- This process repeats until everyone has had a go.

**Variations:** You could sometimes use this game to sing into the hat and also to sing other children's names into the hat.

## Well Digging Ritual

This warm up is based on an African well digging ritual.

- Divide the class into 4 groups.
- They get into 4 circular huddles in different corners of the room.
- They whisper their wishes and hopes, and then quietly repeat them speaking them.
- After some time when they're ready and none of the other groups are doing it, they pull away from the huddle shouting their wishes and hopes all the way back to their seats.



## Sound Moves

- In a circle, ask the children one by one to sound their name (this might be tuneful or not...it might be more than one note) and accompany the sound with a movement they think fits the sound.
- Then they repeat with the whole circle before the next child in the circle does the same...and so on till everyone has had a go.
- You can then point to children at random and get them to repeat their sound/ movement and the circle to repeat it after them.

**Another variation** would be to supply a rhythm and then get the children to keep repeating their sound and movement joining in one at a time until all the names are being sounded and moved in sync.



# From the Individual to the Group (and back)

## Pass the Ad-lib

Passing control of an ad-lib from one child to another, and then having the whole group repeat this together could be very empowering and affirming for the child.

An ad-lib in this case could be a word, a phrase...they could be spoken or sung and they could have movements attached to them. So for example:

- Child A sings *Today is Tuesday* and passes it round the circle to the child on the left, each child in turn singing the phrase.
- When it comes back to Child A, everybody sings the phrase together.

## How do you end the exercise?

Think about how you want the children to feel after it; do you want them lively and energized or calm and reflective?

You could use an abrupt ending to maintain the energy or you could slowly reduce the pulse and sound level to slowly relax the participants.



## Humming in Pairs

- **Work in pairs.**
- Stand back-to-back.
- Close eyes.
- Both take a deep breath.
- One hums a long note as long as their breath lasts.
- Partner takes over once the other's breath has ended.
- Fairly loud so you can hear/feel partner.
- While not humming, focus on the timbre/sound of your partner.

**Development:** Move back-to-back pairs into circle and get the whole circle to pursue the technique together.

Very useful piece for developing close listening and ensemble awareness.

## Pass the Sound 1

- Try starting this piece by getting the group to set up a rhythm or a drone.
- While they all maintain that sound, one child passes a sound (e.g. hand clap or stamp on the floor etc.) to the child on their right who passes it on.
- Anyone can change the sound or change the direction of the passage of the sound as it goes round, but the group never stops making the rhythm or the drone sound together.

You can try to keep this simple but it might well grow somewhat complex quite quickly.

It's possible that it will shudder to a halt whenever the sound being passed around and the underlying rhythm cross. But on the other hand interruptions like that can be greeted and celebrated by the group and then the drone / rhythm and the piece can continue.



## Variations/Observations:

In a dynamic piece where a repeated phrase/sound/action can be changed, it's good to explore how you determine who can change it.

You might start with the idea that anyone can change it at any time and then move on to the idea that only a person who's holding an object that's being passed around the circle can change it.

Perhaps everyone in the circle has a different object and the group leader calls out the name of an object and the person holding that object becomes the person who can change direction/sound etc.

Generally, we considered that flexibility makes a piece less intimidating for children. For example, you might give them the option of making a sound OR an action, or to repeat a sound or action OR improvise a new one.



## Brown Girl In The Ring Remixed

This is inspired by the children's Ring Games from Jamaica and the West Indies.

- Players form a ring by holding hands.
- Then one girl or boy goes into the middle of the ring and starts skipping or walking around to the song that they all are singing.
- The girl or boy is then asked, "Show me your motion". At this point the child in the centre does his or her favourite dance and the others copy them.
- But in our version the group in the circle interpret the movements of one child in the centre of the group – improvising sounds that reflect the movements. The person in the centre of the group is effectively acting as the conductor.

It's a good way to introduce emotions and empathy into their music, with the children reacting to the actions and perceived feelings of the child in the centre.

**You can develop** the piece so that two participants are acting as the conductor – with half of the circle allocated to each of them.

You might find this a particularly useful exercise in listening if you encourage each half of the circle to focus on and complement the sound the other half are making.

This piece is certainly a little more advanced.



## Sound Ball

Another circle game.

- It starts with silence.
- Then you make it clear that when it's their turn the children can roll *any sound they like* to a child they choose.
- Then you choose the child you're going to roll to by looking at them across the circle and getting their attention.
- Make your sound and keep on making it as you mould it into a ball and roll it across the floor to that child.
- When it reaches them stop making the sound and then they make the sound.
- Silence.

- Now it's their turn.
- They identify the child across the circle that they are going to roll their sound to and repeat the process.
- Once everyone has got the hang of it, get two people rolling sounds simultaneously, then 3 or 4.

**Another variant** is throwing the sound if you want to add an element of chaos.



## **Mirroring Sounds and Movement**

This is an exercise for a bigger room.

- Split the class into pairs and make sure they have lots of space.
- Then they mirror each other's sounds and movements. Child A leads first ...and after a while Child B.
- No one should be too loud, so they can always hear the rest of the room as well.
- Change pairs now and get them to have an argument...not a fight...only using singing and movement.
- Then get each pair in turn to have their 'argument' with the rest of the room watching.
- See who can guess what the argument was about.



## **Me and My Kite**

- In a circle, one person (adult) has an imaginary object – in this instance a kite.
- As they act out using this object they make a noise which mirrors the object they're using and how they're using it.
- The group follows their lead and joins in with the sounds being made and the accompanying actions.
- The adult can then move on to other objects and actions (e.g. basket ball, frying pan) before passing the imaginary object round the circle so that each or many of the children can make the imaginary object become something with sounds being made and the accompanying actions that the rest of the group can copy.



## GROUP PIECES

### **Eska's Non-Stop Wotevva Machine**

- Seat the children in a circle on the floor.
- Choose a task for your machine with the class (e.g. digging, teaching, sewing, washing and ironing, a light house, a radio station, a YouTube video etc.).
- First time out, the teacher moves into centre of the circle and creates a repeated gesture and sound as part of the Whatever Machine.
- One at a time, someone else comes in and adds to the machine, on whichever end of the chain that is forming.
- A rhythmic, vocal tableaux is created by the group built on each person's repeated sound and movement.
- When everyone has joined in, the machine might evolve - movements change / respond to others.
- A 'lever' can be pulled or a 'button' pressed to cut the sound or cut the movement or stop the machine altogether or make it move around the room.



### **Take It at a Walking Pace (Tone Game)**

Probably one for the hall or a large room.

- In a circle, everybody hums one tone.
- Moving from the circle, children make their own way around the space still humming that tone.
- Then add this: if they pass to the right side of someone, the tone they are humming goes up, if they pass to the left, it goes down.
- They may well still be learning to distinguish left from right, which might just stop this piece in its tracks, in which case you can replace walking to the left or right of someone with a high five/low five routine. When they pass another child they exchange high or low fives, high fives mean a higher tone and low fives mean a lower.
- As the game goes on they can try a pattern of both high and low fives with the same person... so they might sing high tone, low tone, high tone, etc. before they move on. You'll probably find that all kinds of interesting accidental harmonies are created across the space.





## This is my Left and that's Right

From time to time left and right is mentioned in these pieces...here's a call and response tune/rhyme to remember which is which, though you may well have much better mnemonic tricks up your right or left sleeve.

Left Right Left Right / Do you want to tell your left from your right

(Hey we want to tell our left from our right)

Left Right Left Right / Sing this to your self every night

(We're gonna sing this to ourselves every night)

Left Right Left Right / No matter where you go in the dark or the light

(No matter where we go in the dark or the light)

Left Right Left Right / This is your left and that's right

(This is my left and that's right)

Left Right Left Right / *All together:* This is my left and that's right/ This is my left and that's right/ This is my left and that's right / Gonna sing this to my self every night

We may well have covered this in one form in the initial sessions...make what you can over the weeks ahead from time to time. See if you can come up with many versions with your class.



## Vocalising the Sounds

A beautifully simple idea involving silence and stillness in the first place. This could take place in the classroom if there's space, in the middle of the room.

- Children could be sitting still on the floor or lying still on the floor, preferably in a circle.
- Get them to listen to what can be heard in the room e.g. scratching, breathing, fidgeting sounds, footsteps or chairs being dragged on the floor above, planes flying over head, passing people or traffic.
- Ask them one by one to vocalise one of the sounds they can hear while the rest of us listen.
- You can get them to guess which sound is being vocalised...what does that sound like? Ask each one to remember their sound.
- When you've been round the whole class, ask each in turn to make the sound again.

- Then see if you can conduct the sounds by pointing at the sound makers...maybe you can put them into group of 2 or more so that you get lots of overlap, dissonance and harmony.
- You can also pass the conductor role to children who can take it in turns.



## Farmyard Soundscape

A variation on *Vocalising the Sounds*.

Build a farmyard soundscape asking each child to add a sound to it using their voice and repeating it from time to time so that a sonic picture of a farmyard is created and sustained by the group.

The group might discover:

- How fast can you repeat your sound before it dominates too much?
- How fast/slow can the whole group make their repetitive sounds before it stops sounding like a farmyard?

Try creating soundscapes for other locations e.g. supermarket, seaside, airport, station, zoo etc., or types of sound e.g. Water Sounds, Air Sounds etc.



## Animal Swap

Probably for a hall or big room.

- Get the class to walk silently around the room as they please i.e. not in a circle.
- Then while they are walking round, ask them to walk like and produce noises as if they are their favorite animals.
- After a little while, when they see/hear another child's animal impression they like, they move close by their side and swap with them - the two children exchange their sounds and movements.



## Animal Tag

This can evolve from *Animal Swap*.

- The children are walking round the room moving and sounding like their favourite animals.
- The teacher surreptitiously tags one of them who is then 'it'.
- When they manage to tag another child, that child then becomes 'it' and also becomes the animal of the tagger.

- The original tagger becomes the animal of the child they have tagged.

Adding an instrument: If the teacher sets the tempo for the speed of movement by tapping a hand drum or tambourine, the tag exchanges can happen fast or slow and the changing tempo is very much a key element in the fun.



## Instrument Swap

This is a close relative to *Animal Swap* and could even evolve from it.

- Get the class to walk slowly and silently around the room as they please i.e. not in a circle.
- One by one give each child an instrument or found/sound object and a number.
- They can make a sound with that instrument/object every time they have taken that number of steps.
- Once the piece is proceeding very nicely they can swap instruments as in *Animal Swap*: when they see/hear another child's instrument they like, they move close by their side and swap with them – so the two children exchange their instruments.
- The teacher can set the tempo for the speed of movement by tapping a hand drum or tambourine slow or fast or pause/freeze when the drum stops.



## The Conductor #1

This is one of the key tools in your box, and this piece is really a simple introduction to it.

Demonstrate to your circle of children the two basic dynamics that you're going to conduct them through....low pitch/high pitch and loud volume/soft volume.

Pitch: Low is signalled by slowly crouching low as you can go with fingers pointing down and as you move towards the floor you lower the tone you're singing, then to signal High you slowly raise your arms above your head and move your body to upright and then to tip toes while slowly singing higher and higher...basically the higher your stance and your arms and hands the higher your pitch and vice versa, the faster you point/move in either direction, the faster the pitch changes.

Volume: this is controlled by a horizontal rather than vertical movement of your arms. If you stretch out your arms with your palms together that's silence and if you open your arms, the wider they get the louder you sing.

Once you've practiced this with the class, you can start to get the children to take turns at conducting, you can even pass the conductorship around the circle, per-

haps by throwing it or rolling it to the next conductor (as in *Sound Ball*) in a moment of silence.



### **Blindfolded Conductor**

All participants have an instrument.

- A 'conductor' is chosen and blindfolded and positioned in the centre of the room.
- The participants walk around slowly with their instruments.
- If they are pointed at by the blindfolded conductor then they commence playing...until the whole room is playing.

You could add in another control factor for the conductor – that when they want a particular instrument to stop they go and touch the arm of the player (if they can follow the sound and find them).



### **Song Recycling #1**

Try using the conductor technique with the group singing a song so that you play with the pitch and the volume as they sing. The song will never have sounded like it before and it won't even sound the same next time you try it!!



### **Song Recycling #2**

- Divide the class into four or five small groups.
- Name a song for each group to sing.
- Start them singing moderately quietly one by one.
- When they are all singing, conduct the groups to change relative volumes and pitches and tempo too.
- Then ask each group to try the whole piece in miniature.
- In each group, they should decide on which song each is going to sing, then proceed to singing....you could end up with each person in the class simultaneously singing a different song.

## Singing the Signs

Try this in a large space like the hall. Most rooms in public buildings have some kind of notices with a rule or two on them. So those are the words of the 'song' in this piece. Let's say the sign reads '*Please don't slam this door shut. To avoid disturbing other classes, please close the door gently.*'

- Get the class to stand along one wall if the space.
- The singing starts when they start walking across the room to touch the other wall, which is when they stop.
- They can walk at any speed they choose, which means that they will stop singing at different times depending on when they reach the other wall and touch it.
- Get them to repeat together the words of the sign after you and then to say them all together without your prompting.
- It's good if the words are written on sheets of paper stuck on each wall so that they can be seen whichever direction you are crossing the room in.
- They can sing the words at any tempo they please, fast or slow; they can sing it as many times as they please crossing wall to wall; they could just keep repeat singing one word from wall to wall; they can split the words up in any way they want to, repeat phrases, sing them in any order and in any rhythm they please; but they do have to sing them out loud until they touch the opposite wall.
- They also must make sure that they're not singing so loud that they can't hear anybody else...don't drown out the rest of the room!
- Agree the signal from you and then the singing starts...start on any note...but tune in to each other.
- Make the crossing a couple of times...give comments and guidance to taste...and then split the group in two and have one group cross left to right and the other right to left and do the same again...a couple of times.
- Finally try a four way cross using the diagonal corners of the room.



## Clapping the Line

- Gather the class into a horseshoe shape.
- Ask eight children to leave the horseshoe and some sit on the floor and some stand but all in a line in front of the horse shoe.

- Slowly everybody 'claps the line', 'reading' it left to right, one clap for a seated child, two for a standing child.
- Each time the horseshoe completes clapping the line, the children change their stances so that the next line sounds different.
- Once you've got it going, try to maintain a steady rhythm.
- Change the line up so that everyone has a turn of clapping and being part of the line.
- See if you can even change the line up and still maintain the rhythm.
- They can then play this piece with each child in the horseshoe playing an instrument and playing the beats that they were clapping on their instruments.



### Clapping Over the Rhythm

- Set up a steady clapping rhythm with the class in a circle...in 4/4 , but keep it steady and slowish.
- Then say that children can clap one of the claps louder than the other claps...any one of the four.
- Then they can try adding or subtracting one clap from the four. They can do this in their own time and they shouldn't do it on every 4 unless they want to.
- Then let them play with both the volume and the rhythm as they will...always staying in tempo.
- They can add sounds they make with their voices and even sing notes if they like.



### Singing over Drones

- Form a circle.
- Start up a drone...single note or chord...using a Tambora app (they're free to download ) or holding one key on an electric keyboard /iPad/computer/ mobile phone with an organ sound or on an accordion or harmonium.
- Get the children to hum / sing single notes....of their own choosing and the phrases...as a group.
- When that has been happily established for a while, get each child in turn to sing one word, with the instruction to sing a different note to the one that the child before you sang.



### Singing over a looped Riff

- Form a circle.
- Set up a looped riff...maybe bass and beats if you use Garage Band (or similar device) or just a repetitive riff from an adult with a pitched instrument.
- Ask the children one by one to sing a repetitive phrase over it (aah or la) and they should keep repeating the phrase until the whole circle is singing.
- Then one at a time ...while the circle is singing...they change their phrase.



### Just Listen to Yourself

- **S**itting in a circle, ask for silence and for every child to try and listen to a sound that's coming from within them.
- They can put their hands over their ears and listen in...breathing, heart beat, pulses and pulsing, maybe hums and drones..who knows.
- They should choose one of the sounds and vocalise it very quietly ...and then increasingly loudly...conduct the volume with the technique in *The Conductor*.

Continue with....



### Singing your Face

Pause...Then ask them to make the biggest smile they can make and then make a sound to go with it.

Then make the saddest face they can .... and then make a sound to go with it.

Then make the angriest face they can and then make a sound to go with it.

Then get them to stand and make the happy face/sound and add a body movement, followed by the sad and angry.

Add excited...as if its their birthday tomorrow.

Then proceed to conduct them through the changes using only your face.....

Then start the next section (call and response) of the piece by singing: 'What do you want to do?' in a neutral tone...and they respond with the same melody you sing to them: 'We want to make music'.

Then you make the happy face/movement and sing the question again with the happy sound and so on...right through the emotions...several times and keep changing the sequence.

We suggest, and you may well agree, that building up slowly to emotions within the classroom is wise. Often kids are taught certain things about emotion at home, e.g. that it is not okay to feel angry or upset. This exercise could therefore be very

liberating for these pupils but they might well need to get used to it before they can really let go.



### Playing the Room (Instrumental)

Get the class to choose a percussion instrument each, then to lie on the floor, with plenty of space around each child and their instrument next to them.

Instructions from you:

- Making as little noise as you can, close your eyes...
- Listen carefully to what you can hear behind you.....
- Now listen carefully to what you can hear to your left ....yes that's your left...
- Now listen carefully to what you can hear to you right.
- Find a sound or part of a sound that interests you.
- Decide how you could make the sound you are focusing on using your instrument.
- After countdown, open eyes and make sound.

This can also be done as a vocalising the sound exercise of course.



### Short Sounds, Long Sounds

- Go round the circle asking them each in turn to make the shortest sound they can make.
- Now point quite quickly at each of them at random and get them to make another 'shortest' sound, it can be the same or a different one.
- This time, maybe now sitting on the floor in a circle, when you say 'let's go' or equivalent, without any other coordination the participants only make their shortest possible sounds when no one else is making a sound. They can still try different short sounds each time to see which one is the shortest or the one they're happiest with.

This encourages everyone to discover, focus on and appreciate silence.

The second movement of this piece (the counterpoint) is:

- Ask the class to each make the longest continual sound they can using the same ensemble technique i.e. only make your sound when no one else was making a sound.
- Try other sounds with this technique...the silliest noise, the quietest long sound, the shortest loud sound etc. Generally people believe this piece helps with 'connectivity' encouraging the participants to listen and sonically socialise.



- Give out instruments or let the children each choose an instrument and then perform the piece again playing instruments instead of vocalising.



### Only Connect

This could follow on from *Short Sounds, Long Sounds*.

The only instruction is Connect! So once again you only make your sound when no one else is making a sound.

You can make any sound you like, but it must connect with the last person's sounds.

### Forbidden Sound

This starts as a call and response clapping game, a little like Simon Says...

- So form a standing circle and you're leading.
- You clap a rhythm and everyone the must repeat it ...but if you clap the football chant clap (1-2-3-4 1234 Palace!), then no-one must clap. If they do they're out and must sit down.
- You can play the same call and response/Simon Says type game with sounds (i.e. one sound that you shouldn't make), or words (one word that no-one should repeat) or movement .
- If this game is played regularly, the role of caller can be passed around the class.
- To sustain/maintain the engagement of the group, it's probably important to maintain an underlying rhythm to the exercise. It could be a rhythm created by walking on the spot.



### Meet the Producer/ X on the Mix

At least the first time you try this, the role of 'Producer' should probably be taken by the teacher.

- Divide the class in half; in the first place one half sits on the floor watching and the other half are positioned in an arc facing the seated children with the Producer in the centre of the arc, back to the seated children.
- Each of the standing children picks a sound to make and the Producer listens to each of their sounds one by one.
- These are then conducted by the Producer, using gestures to turn each sound on or off, making them quieter or louder i.e. they mix the sound.
- As the sound they are making becomes more rhythmic, movement could be

added to each sound.

- The producer can also invite soloists (stars) from the seated half of the class to freestyle over the sounds being maintained by the ensemble in the arc.



### 8 Beats is Where Its At (with instruments)

- Seated in a circle.
- Demonstrate playing for 8 beats.
- Get everyone in the room playing their instruments together for 8 beats and then stop (rest) for 8 beats and then play for 8 and so on.
- Stop.
- Now one child plays their instrument for 8 beats.
- The child next to them joins in for the second 8 beats, then the first participant drops out.
- The third participant joins the second for the next 8 beats and then the second drops out.
- The fourth participant joins and so on round the circle.
- The game might require someone to maintain the beat throughout.



### 2 x 4

- Start this piece with two groups of four children.
- In the first group, each person makes a different sound, one on each beat of 'the 4' so they establish a tempo, which they maintain.
- Then the other group of four sing a song over the top.
- At some point the two groups exchange functions.

**Development:** add two more groups of four, 1 group adding to (maybe crossing) the rhythm (still sounding one beat each), the other group singing a different song, which somehow works with the first song if they just try it. Other groups of four can be added playing instruments.



## One Note Samba

- Part class exercise....one part of the class is performing, the other listening. Then they can swap roles. You might find the whole class can do this together after a while.
- One person starts playing one note rhythmically.
- Others join when they want, with any one note...could be a rhythm or a drone.
- Everyone can stop when they want.



## One Note Conversation

- Just using one note.
- Split group in two
- Team One starts with theme e.g. angry or happy.
- Team Two responds, like in a conversation.
- Listening to your opponent but also listening within your own team.



## 20 Separate Sounds

Part class exercise....one part of class is performing, the other listening. Then they can swap roles. You might find the whole class can do this together after a while.

- Each person has to play a sound and get to 20 sounds without anyone playing at the same time.
- If you play at the same time as someone else you have to start again.

**Variation:** do it with your eyes closed.

**Observation:** very good for ensemble playing and listening.



## Looping the Loops

Part class exercise....one part of class is performing, the other listening. Then they can swap roles. You might find the whole class can do this together after a while.

- One person starts with just a simple repeated two or three note phrase, looping round and round.
- Each join in as they wish, just playing one or two notes each too, also looping in time with the existing players.

- You can subtly change your part but keep looping.
- End by each dropping out.

Observation: people could sing over the top of the loops. It's easy to drop in and out of the exercise.



### **Revolving Loop Piece #1**

- Split into two groups who face each other like a pair of lips, with instruments on one lip, the other lip is silent.
- The children on the instrumental lip start to play the instruments, the children on the other lip are silent.
- When the player on the left end of the lip chooses, they stop playing and move to the right end of the silent lip.
- All move round one, so players move instruments and one non-player becomes a player.

Variation: non-players can also be singers, making something up individually or as a group.

Observation: very accessible formula and game. Also equalises players and non-players so everyone gets a turn on instruments they don't usually play. The piece changes and shifts each time the players move.



### **CANTEEN SYMPHONY**

This is one of many series of pieces that you could build (which could form a whole session or more) that use a particular space for improvised group composition. These 'movements' are based in a canteen, lunch hall or kitchen area, by way of example. But similar improvisations could take place playing with water in a pool area or with containers and water outside on a sunny day, or with the apparatus in the gym, or with art materials ...just think sonically and you'll get Water Symphony, Gym Symphony, Colour Symphony or even Christmas Symphony etc.

This kind of idea could be introduced maybe 3 or 4 weeks into your sessions to give a variety of form and a different dynamic.



### **Listening to the space (what can you hear in the Canteen band):**

- Encourage the children in pairs to explore the space very quietly, listening to and locating the sounds that are already there.
- They come back to the circle and report their findings after a few minutes exploration.

### The noisy fridge:

- Identify from this discussion an object that is emitting sound and the circle moves to the object to focus on and then respond to it vocally.
- Freestyle a repetitive loop in pairs in turn.
- Then the conductor (adult) can bring this together into a piece in which all the pairs contribute because they are being signalled in and out etc.



### Open the fridge door (it could be a cupboard):

- On each shelf you can see a row of contrasting projects, one for each child in the class. So let's say Child A is the sound/note for a bottle of milk and Child B for the orange juice etc.
- Run through the products and get the children to make a special sound or note (s) for each product.
- Practice each shelf.
- Now they can be conducted by a conductor who just holds up the product or products when they want certain sounds or (more complex) can point to a shelf and the children read the visual score from left to right making their sounds in the right place.



### Singing the Space:

- Sing/make sound in different parts of the space.
- Which part of the room has the most reverberant space (look for the tiles and lack of soft furnishing and carpets)?
- Which is the quietest part of the room?



### Chair Piece:

Use the chairs as instruments....freestyle a while then maybe conduct.



### Kitchen Band:

- Have an array of kitchenware (saucepans, spatulas etc.) that children can choose.
- Supply an underlying very simple regular rhythm.
- Get them to join in one at a time at first. If they can take over the rhythm you can conduct...allow lots of freestyle moments.



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