

music
making
SENse



'Band Together'

**A toolkit for enabling
music ensembles for young people
with special educational needs**

Introduction

At Music Making SENse we believe all young people should have access to a dynamic and wide ranging musical education, with a balance of activities and opportunities. Yet this isn't the experience of many young people with special educational needs (SEN), whose education has been compromised by a lack of ensemble music making and opportunities to progress.

With the help of Youth Music we have been working with the Lambeth Music Network and local SEN schools to ignite and transform creative aspirations for young people in this area of south London by:

- empowering teaching staff to deliver high quality, ensemble music making sessions
- developing and modelling pedagogical practice for group music making young people with SEN
- enabling partnerships by working with participants, schools, music and community organisations, and families so that young people with SEN may enjoy the same music progression opportunities as other children in their borough

And now, through this toolkit, we want to share with you our strategies for success so that more young people with SEN across the country may enjoy a rich, varied and long-lasting musical education equal to that of their peers.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit aims to aid the planning and delivery of ensemble music making by anyone interested in leading music groups that include young people with SEN, particularly in SEN settings, e.g. classroom teachers, teaching assistants, music teachers, peripatetic musicians, community music leaders and more.

The activities are designed to be inclusive so that anyone regardless of their musical experience can participate. As a result of our work we have had the privilege to witness a huge array of personal, social and educational developments by participants. Our work focusses on the importance of a musical education and each individual's right to musical experiences, with an awareness of the interventional and transformative effect music making can have.

We developed the toolkit whilst leading a number of ensembles in SEN schools. The participants ranged in age from KS1-4 (ages 5-16 years) and their needs included Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

What is an ensemble?

Being part of an ensemble is the opportunity to experience, create and perform music with others, and to learn with and from our peers. It is the chance to share a group identity and delight in the individual achievements of others. It is a platform for unity and a shared vision, as well as a space for individual expression on your own terms.

So why are these attributes of group music making particularly relevant to young people with SEN? Much has been written about the universality and significance of music making in communities. Research into the efficacy of group music making by people with SEN is still in its infancy but there is evidence to suggest great benefits and progression as a result of social learning (Perkins and Keogh, 2017¹). Within SEN schools it is not unusual for some students to predominantly work 1-to-1 with their support worker throughout the day. Therefore, by creating a sense of community via group music making experiences, the potential for social, personal and musical development is increased.

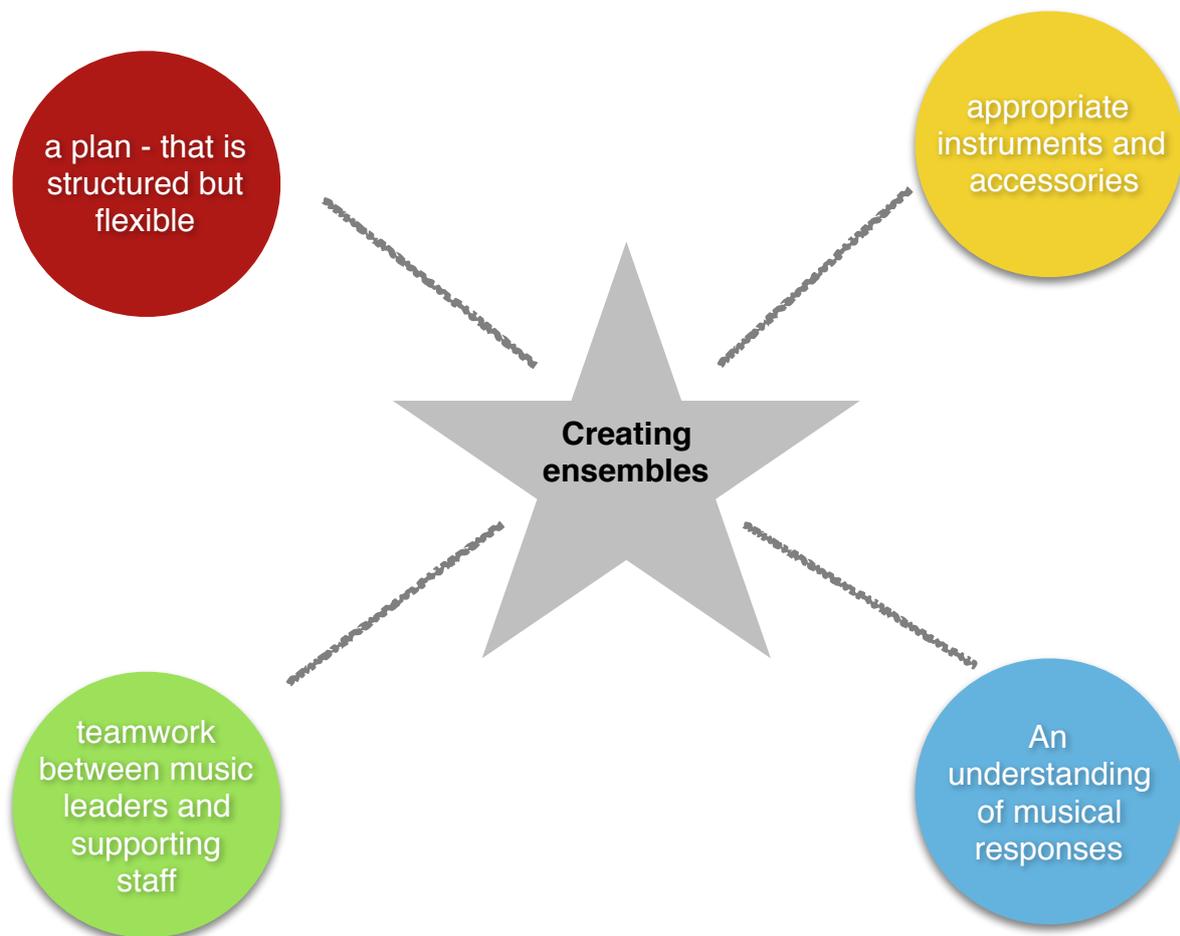
Ensemble music shares many commonalities with individual music making, but with many additions: i) it provides participants with the opportunity to learn from peers as well as professionals ii) it enables peer interactions that can enable new skills better than adult intervention iii) the music of the group can consolidate rhythmic, listening and performance skills iv) ensembles value non-verbal communication and enhance our awareness of others (e.g. learning when to stop and start just from listening or cues) v) sharing creativity across a group can impact individual development as peers build upon or emulate the ideas of others. Therefore not only can ensembles stimulate essential music skills (e.g. listening, playing, instrumental or vocal technique) but the very nature of ensemble music making can encourage additional musical skills as well as social, personal and other educational benefits.

¹Learning through ensembles: developing research and shared practice in ensemble music making for SEN young people, and promoting equality across British music education'

How to create an ensemble?

Through our project, we worked with groups of 6-12 students (NB larger ensembles were made possible by having two music leaders and additional support staff). The students were accompanied by support staff who had incredible insight into and knowledge of the participants, the ratio of which was recommended by the schools based on the individual needs of the students. We worked with ensembles grouped by key stages; each group comprised a variety of needs included ASD, SLD and PMLD.

There are several ingredients recommended for creating a successful ensemble:



Ensemble plan - structured for progression, flexible to spontaneous creativity

Through our project we have developed an ensemble template for planning sessions. We tend to use the same plan for a whole term (10-13 weeks) with small variations as needed to stimulate development, progression and engagement. We do this as many participants need a lot of exposure to new activities before they feel comfortable and confident to respond. The use of variation keeps activities engaging and the freedom to solo, create and improvise provides ownership and freedom, increasing the participants enjoyment. See Appendix 1 for links to songs and lyrics.

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE
<p><i>Hello song</i></p> <p>Example: You take the high road</p>	<p>The hello song is a structural point giving a clear signal that not only has music begun but also a group activity, whereby students will be playing together and solo.</p> <p>If you can it is good to include an instrument you as the leader can play in the hello song. If the ensemble is quite focussed it is nice to share this instrument with the participants to experiment with. For example, playing a guitar as you sing the song then passing the instrument to each student after you have sung a personalised hello verse to each participant. If you have a livelier band who need a quicker flow of activities to prevent disengagement then its advisable to include perhaps one participant per line (and not a whole verse), and to not spend time on solos. However the participants might like to help choose how you sing hello to them (i.e. fast / slow, loud / quiet) and who has a turn next. Both strategies allow the participants to individually engage in the activity and to listen for their turn. They are encouraged to be creative when it is their go, and the turn taking required encourages a sense of sharing and group work, setting the foundations for ensemble playing.</p>
<p><i>Warm Up (may include movement, pulse work, vocal warm up)</i></p> <p>Example: Zimbole</p>	<p>In this activity the participants are encouraged to play together, usually using big muscle movements to help feel the beat/pulse (a constant, steady rhythm like a heartbeat) which is an important first step before playing a rhythm on an instrument. After the initial play through the warm up you may like to draw attention to individual playing in the group (by inserting the names of participants into the song), and/or to encourage the participants to direct the music by making choices as to the tempo (speed) or dynamics (volume).</p> <p>The activity helps retain focus as it gives a break from the intensity of waiting and listening from the hello song, allows participants to interact and engage in an energising activity together. It's good to start with an action that makes a sound e.g. patting knees or clapping hands to give an auditory cue to the students. Some students will find it easier to clap the beat; others will find it easier to stamp it or move in other ways. For older students it may be more appropriate to work with an instrument straightaway, beginning with simple pulse rhythms to start with. Rain sticks, wind chimes and shakers are also great instruments to use for warm ups if not using movement.</p> <p>For some groups you may wish to encourage vocalisations and singing. Having a microphone can help encourage and motivate many participants to use their voice and certain songs can be good for encouraging a vocal response. Again, using a microphone is a simple way to encourage sharing and listening skills across the band. Certain songs, particularly those that build up to a climatic point or silence can be brilliant for prompting a response.</p>

<p><i>Rhythm</i></p> <p>Examples: Siya Hamba, A Keelie Makolay</p>	<p>Rhythm is one of the easiest elements of music to engage with and a logical next step after pulse work and movement.</p> <p>Rhythm is the use of long and short sounds; sound and silence. At Music Making SENSE we use songs to underpin the playing of different rhythms - in general African and world songs work very well. A good song is one where students can play long and short sounds (e.g. ta / crotchet or slow pulse then tete / quaver or quicker / double time pulse) or a variety of rhythms to it. A good starting rhythm is one that involves silence (e.g. drum drum drum ssh). A song with a vocal hook e.g. Siya from Siya Hamba or the Aaaaaa from A Keelie Makolay is great for encouraging vocal responses. A song that allows you to encourage improvisations and soloing is great for stimulating spontaneous and participant-led creativity, as well as ideas for compositions later. For example in A Keelie Makolay after the first one or two play throughs you can change the words to: <i>[Participant name] can you play, [Participant name] can you play, [Participant name] can you play, can you play the drum?</i> Then allow space for a solo.</p> <p>Repetition in all activities is key. To retain focus its great to maintain flow but also allow for variation. After playing your rhythm song one or two times changing the pulse or the rhythm, speed, or the volume of the playing provides instant variations that everyone can follow. Using obvious contrasts helps: e.g. slow then fast, quiet then loud. Creating rhythms for the group using notation cards can be very effective too and can be used to compose new sections for rhythmic pieces.</p>
<p><i>Consolidation</i></p> <p>Example: We Will Rock You</p>	<p>The consolidation is a time for encouraging individual and group talent, and to draw upon musical responses and skills you have witnessed from the participants over the course of the session e.g. encouraging a particular rhythm they've used, skill on an instrument, or vocal responses to drum rolls. Combining pitch and rhythm allows students to encounter other repertoire and develop further instrumental skills. We frequently use ukuleles for this task as they are very tactile and easy to use. Pitch is how high or low a sound is. We use a range of pitches when we sing. Through the strings of the ukulele you can play a range of pitches and harmony, and also continue rhythmic development through strumming patterns. With one group we created a performance piece based on the Canoe Song. We rewrote the song to include simpler more engaging lyrics ("everyone sing along la la la la"). Then whilst the ensemble strummed the ukulele to the song individuals took turns to vocalise or sing the words over the top with the microphone.</p> <p>Playing a mix of instruments as a group can also be very effective for motivating creativity. For some groups we have had students playing the refrain for We Will Rock You on the keyboard with other students accompanying with the beat on the drum kit and hand percussion. We developed these skills into a composition by inviting all students to play the drumbeat on their instrument as an intro, then four plays of the chorus line. After this each participant improvised a solo which in some cases was later consolidated into a composed solo the participant would repeat, with developments appropriate to their skill level (e.g. two handed playing of the keyboard). The We Will Rock You chorus line is then repeated two more times before another participant solos and so on round the group. Four more play throughs of the refrain and the composition ended.</p>
<p><i>Goodbye song</i></p> <p>Example: You take the high road</p>	<p>Typically this will revisit the hello song, with the words changed to goodbye, to help bookend the session and develop a routine. By repeating the same song, we tend to see further vocal development from participants due to increased exposure to the song. By bookending the session in this way we also send the participants on their way settled and ready to learn (important when in SEN schools).</p>

Appropriate instruments and accessories

There are many instruments that may be appropriate for SEN ensembles. The list below includes items we have used, but this list is by no means exclusive. Music technology and other acoustic instruments can be incredibly useful for engaging participants and enabling their innate creativity.

Rhythmic work:

Drums including:

- samba
- djembe
- cajon
- snare drum (some participants particularly enjoy the feel of the snare wires)

Hand percussion:

- wind chimes,
- shakers
- rain sticks
- cabasa
- tambourines of different sizes and weights

Vocal work: a microphone and amplifier can be a revelation to SEN participants particularly if they have hearing problems. The microphone can also encourage the quietest of participants to take a vocal solo, encourage sharing, and amplify quiet vocalisations e.g. humming that might be overwhelmed by instrumental play.

Pitched instruments:

- ukuleles (fantastically tactile create a manageable sound and staff with little musical experience can easily learn 2-4 chords to use)
- guitars (better if you have a guitar player in the group but can be open-tuned for participants)
- keyboard (depending on the group works best either with just one instrument where turns are taken to solo and improvise, or can be taught across whole groups if managed e.g. using coloured stickers to show which notes to play together)

No instruments are off limit and we have used drum kit, violin, iPad apps and bass guitar to supplement our music making where appropriate for the group.

NB please be aware that some participants may be affected by sensory sensitivities and therefore may find particular instruments or equipment difficult to touch or hear.

Teamwork

The importance of teamwork is highlighted in many projects but has particular resonance when working with vulnerable people, who may have ongoing medical and mental health needs.

A huge part of our job as project leaders is to ensure the staff at the schools we work with invest themselves in our work. To do this we have to be able to:

- demonstrate the benefits to students;
- create a receptive and safe environment where everyone is free to express themselves and feel confident in their skills and contribution;
- build trust and respect;
- share the ownership of the project.

We would recommend achieving excellent partnerships by:

- highlighting the developments of participants and pointing out musical responses. Ask the staff to guide you as to the abilities, typical behaviours and achievements of the participant so advancements are not just perceived by you but acknowledged by the team. Record developments to share with other staff members and families;
- Giving space to others so that they can share their expertise and opinion;
- Encouraging your team's supporting, leadership and musical skills. Respect their advice if a particular behaviour arises from a participant that they may want to discourage (and is not a musical response). Remember, what happens in your session can have wider ramifications for the rest of the day and it is your team that may have to manage this.
- Ensuring your session is well planned with transitions between activities well managed. Have the confidence to go off script if a participant is initiating a rhythm or song or using their creativity to stimulate the whole group but have a structured plan and set pieces to fall back on.

- Whilst you may be leading, you are an ensemble and every person's contribution is necessary and valid.

These recommendations can have a huge impact on the success and sustainability of your project and the progression and safety of participants.

Here are two examples from our project where expertise from the support staff and team work has been vital:

1) *During music H smiled and waved her arms excitedly. On the surface, these actions appeared to be a musical response but thanks to the knowledge of staff we knew that in fact H was experiencing a seizure, and the episode needed to be timed and monitored for her safety.*

2) *J had shown lots of engagement throughout the session soloing on the guitar, moving to the pulse during the warm up. However in the transition between using the microphone and the drums his behaviour would become quite negative, resulting in him lashing out at others. Thanks to the support staff we discovered he was sensitive to the continuous use of the microphone, but enjoyed loud drumming. Therefore we arranged a brief timeout during the microphone activity each session so his sensitivity could be managed, and he would return an engaged member of the ensemble in time for drumming.*

What is a musical response?

There are infinite possibilities for the ways any individual might respond to music. With the expertise of support staff from your SEN setting you can interpret the communications of the participants to discern if the participants' reaction is positive or negative. However, the musicality of a response can sometimes be more challenging to decipher.

Here is a list of possible responses, expressing the musicality of the participants. The list isn't exclusive; many more possibilities may arise in your sessions.

Physical responses

- *Dancing, movement*: feeling the pulse / beat, or adding / releasing tension from limbs to show an awareness of the music. A sudden need to jump in response to the music.
- *Facial expressions*: Surprised, relaxed, other expressions in response to sound or mimicking of others expressions e.g. copying the face of the leader when singing a particular sound.
- *Eye contact*: connecting with others who are playing, looking at and following the direction of sound, seeking recognition from peers and staff.

Vocal responses

- *Vocalising*: may include singing the melodic shape of the music or humming. Vocalisations may be continuous or sporadic and response to the whole music or particular events (e.g. in response to glissandos or drum rolls). May include vocalisations recalled from previous music but stimulated in the moment.
- *Verbalising*: words from the current music or recalled from other pieces, editing of words.
- *Changes in breathing*: heavier breathing at structural points or sudden silences.

Instrumental responses

- *Playing instruments in different positions*: holding instruments closer to the eyes to look more carefully. Adopting unusual postures to make playing the instrument easier to play or for a better acoustic (e.g. getting inside the drum to play).
- *Exploring instruments*: banging on different parts to hear changes in the sound, holding a microphone to an instrument as they play, using accessories not associated with the instrument to play it e.g. play a guitar with a beater (an inventive response but not recommended for the health of the instrument..!).

Other musical responses in response to aural cues

- *Emotional response*: a scream, smile, tears. Sometimes help is needed to decipher the impact however, for example, a scream after a drumroll can demonstrate an understanding of musical form as well as excitement.
- *Initiating and conducting activities*: playing existing or original music spontaneously can show a need to engage and connect, as well as confidence, knowledge, ownership or skill.
- *Alertness or calmness*: may stimulate the participants into activity, either making music or listening intensely.

Rhythm:

Siya Hamba

Siyahamba, kukanyen' kwenko
Siyahamba, kukanyen' kwenko
Siyahamba, kukanyen' kwenko
Siyahamba, kukanyen' kwenko

Siyahamba, siyahamba,
Siyahamba, kukanyen' kwenko
Siyahamba, siyahamba,
Siyahamba, kukanyen' kwenko

Translation: We are marching in the light of peace

A Keelie Makolay

Sing twice:

A Keelie Makolay, mo paco meeno sway
Yeah, yeah, mo paco meeno sway.

Sing twice:

Mo paco meeno sway,
Mo paco meeno sway,
Mo paco meeno sway,
O mo paco meeno sway.

To encourage soloing replace “mo paco meneo sway” with:

[Name] can you play,
[Name] can you play,
[Name] can you play,
Can you play the drum?

Consolidation: [We Will Rock You](#)

We used just the drumbeat and the chorus: We will, we will rock you
x4

Goodbye song: [You take the high road](#)

C

You take the high road

C

I'll take the low road

C

G

C

G

C

Let's get together and we'll sing goodbye

F

C

G

C

Goodbye, Goodbye, can we all sing goodbye

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LAMBETH MUSIC NETWORK