

Music *is* EASY

Core Book 1
Module C

Education and Delivery
Supplement

Preface

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Chapter 1 : On Behaviour Management

Behaviour Management

I hate behaviour management. I hate thinking about it, I hate doing it, I hate the awkward world of silence and sullen eyes. It's rubbish and boring, and I will not accept boringness in my lessons.

I make this clear to my Students whenever I have to stop the learning in order to manage behaviour. I then normally growl theatrically ("Grrr don't make me do behaviour management grrrr!") at them to break the tension and get back to learning.

You are there to help them with Music. You are not there to manage behaviour. If they don't want to be there, you don't want them to be there. It's that simple.

If you are able to implement the Games in Music is Easy in your group sessions, you will have a lot of fun. It will get loud and raucous, there will be lots of laughter, with Students calling across the room to each other, shouting words, going to each other's Pianos, helping them play words, singing.

Behaviour Management is boring. If your lessons are fun, you will rarely have to do it, and in my experience every persistent issue with an individual's behaviour has been indicative of a deeper problem. With the tools of analysis described in Module A, it will be easy to pinpoint the issues when you have identified that they are there.

Always remember, there will be some Students or families who Just Don't Get It. As Educational Practitioners we must always strive for humble self-reflection and improvement, but don't let that one Student a year get to you. Sometimes you just have to let it go. They Just Don't Get It.

On Ensemble Training

Delivering music lessons using the Music is Easy method will involve musicians playing together while listening to each other. This means they are an ensemble, and they need to learn how an ensemble works.

This will get Loud and Chaotic.

They need to learn, as Musicians, how to behave with respect towards each other, how to shift the focus of their attention around using sound and visual cues, how to manage instrument volume levels so everybody can hear, how to stop on cue, as well as a hundred other things.

This must happen organically. Where Students make a decision themselves, for reasons they have understood and experienced, this decision and the actions that follow will become habit. Some groups will be louder or quieter, some more or less chaotic, but gradually they will grow to become an ensemble, learning to listen to and respect each other in the process of Musical Growth.

Some Musicians never learn this skill.

Sound Ninjas

This is always the first exercise I go through with new groups of learners. They need to be aware of the Leader's presence and directions, and be able to stop making noise and focus on command.

As an ensemble, there will be times where there is lots going on, lots of different noises, people warming up, practicing things. Students need to be able to recognise a 'All Quiet' visual cue - I use both arms out in a cross in front of me with open hands, then pull them to the sides while closing my fists.

I tell Students I need them to be Sound Ninjas, going from making lots of noise - on whatever instrument or with their voices (I tell them all to say 'rhubarb rhubarb rhubarb', an old Theatre trick) - to being absolutely silent, as a group, at the same time, or we get 'busted' on the mission.

This normally takes 3 tries to get right, and sounds great when it does.

This is the first musical performance by the ensemble - a lot of noise going to nothing on a visual command sounds great if it's tight - 'crispy' - but rubbish if it's loose - 'soggy'.

On several occasions I have needed to manage a group of excited children in front of a piano for 2-3 minutes in front of their families, and this exercise has always elicited spontaneous applause from onlookers, as well as giggles when one child isn't paying attention and is tinkling away with everybody looking at them for a few seconds before they realise!

Note : this does not work if any children don't try to be a Crispy Sound Ninja or choose to deliberately 'miss' the cue. You may have to do some Behaviour Management (argh), but generally accusing a child of being a Soggy Ninja getting us busted on the mission is enough. Ninjas are cool.

+Variations

"High and Low"

Students are challenged to follow Leaders' hands up and down, reflecting that in how they play their instrument, then all stopping on cue. Variations could be in Volume, Pitch, which string is being played, putting just air through an instrument vs engaging embouchure, etc.

This concept is the core of Game 4 of Book 1, The Meow-Coaster.

Harnessing Chaos

There are lots of ways to grow musically, and the real growth your Students will experience is out of your control. You cannot create a fulfilling musical life for a Student with an hour a week. You can give them the tools and the understanding of how to use them, but they will not truly understand the power they are gaining until their experiences as a Musician in the World reveal this to them.

This could be something as simple as playing a song they learned for their Grandma, and seeing the joy their performance gave to someone they loved. It could be going to a performance and seeing a type of band or music for the first time. It could be trying to learn a song from a video on YouTube and finding it was a lot easier than they thought it would be.

At a certain point with most Students, if they are being supported to make the most of their musical opportunities, something will Click. At this point, as an Educator, our role becomes more advisory, with minor nudges or slight suggestions, as you would guide a fast-moving rocket. We will not need to ask 'what have you been working on?' because our Students will bombard us with details of their progress.

It is therefore essential that Music is Easy be viewed as an outward looking Method. It is not designed to be the 'only thing you'll ever need', as so many other Methods seem to be these days. As the Student is able to engage with the fractal and multi-dimensional game of 'Being a Musician with other Musicians doing Music', the Games contained within the book will begin to fade into the background as the concepts become more intuitive and effortless. That being said, some Games will continue to be used regularly, for example the Rhythm Game as a tool to work on challenging Rhythms, some can be used as warm-ups, some can be used for automatic composition.

Within this Chaos, we look for an Oasis of calm. The key outcome of all of the tools presented are Motivation, Agency, and Focus. If a Student is intently focusing on something Musical, trying to do something, trying to remember something, trying to figure something out, trying to play something without looking, without thinking, faster, higher, whatever that may be - we have succeeded. We have created the foundation for a life-long learner who is able to harness the power of learning and Music to improve their own life and mental / emotional wellbeing.

We cannot control the environment to which Students are subjected outside of our lessons, but we can control this environment in which they are able explore and experiment with the tools we provide.

To that end, I have devised the following Rules. In my experience, these are the only Rules relevant to learning Music as an ensemble, barring the obvious ones (Don't eat pencils, don't hit people with Pianos, Don't Levitate, There Will Be Dancing, etc.)

Oh, one more - don't touch another person's instrument without asking.

Chapter 3 : The Rules

The Rules

After Sound Ninjas, this is always the next exercise I do with / story I tell Students.

I Like Rules

When presenting a concept, my preference is to make Students figure it out and understand for themselves the point of the concept. Feel free to skip these and go straight to the Rules. In general Adults don't respond as well to this kind of leading process, despite gaining just as much from it.

"I like Rules," I tell students. "Do you like Rules?"

Often there is a mix of nods and shakes, so I ask for examples Students like or don't like.

"I like Rules for one reason, and one reason only, because you can't have a Game without Rules."

Pause to allow this to sink in, invite objections.

"Does anybody disagree? Can anybody think of a Game with no Rules?"

"It!"

"Ok, well what are the Rules of 'It'?"

"One person is 'It', and they have to chase everybody else."

"Ok, so I'm 'It', but I hate Rules man, I'm a rule-breaker. I'm not going to chase you, you have to come to me!"

Pause.

"Is the Game still fun?"

Pause.

"No...."

"Anybody else? A Game with no Rules?"

"Hide and Seek!"

"What are the Rules of 'Hide and Seek'?"

"One person counts to 10 with their eyes closed, and everybody hides, and then they have to find everybody else."

"Ok, but I hate Rules man, I'm a rule-breaker. I'm not going to close my eyes, I'm going to watch where you hide."

Pause.

"Is the Game still fun?"

Pause.

"No...."

You can get in to some pretty philosophical debates with this line of questioning, which are always worth pursuing, but eventually everyone will agree that it is indeed true that You Can't Have a Game Without Rules.

At which point I inform my Students that I used to be / am a massive Video Gamer - they are always surprised for some reason, the idea of adults being into Gaming is totally alien to them - but that I just can't maintain interest because of how Music is just so much better than any Video Game (I will sometimes then talk about using MineCraft and Fortnite in Music Lessons, but that's for another book!) - and that these are the Rules for how to play music.

These rules were devised over 6 years of implementing the Games described in Core Book 1 in order to pre-address the three Key potential issues with the presentation of Music Learning in the form of Games. It is essential that these Rules are followed at all times, in all lessons. There will be constant opportunities to re-inforce the validity and application of these rules, and constant difficulties if they are not enforced rigorously.

After a few weeks off, Students will sometimes forget these Rules or have them un-trained by experiences outside of your sessions with them. If this happens, you must re-engage them.

When I first present these Rules, I write them on my whiteboard and ask Students to read them out and explain why they think they are important. Throughout the delivery of months of music lessons, we refer to them again and again and again at various points, described in detail in the following pages.

When I have occasionally implemented Games from Music is Easy in groups not acquainted with these Rules, the need for them has been demonstrated in clear terms, by tears, by cruelty, by anger. I have had to immediately stop the session delivery and go over the Rule that had been broken.

Rule 1 : We are all in this Together.

This is the most important rule in the delivery of Music is Easy.

When delivering Music Education in the form of Games, there can be an element of competition, especially where one Student may lose to another, or fail to succeed in a challenge presented. It is absolutely essential that Students are encouraged to Play the Games together as if they are on the same team, not on opposing Teams. As mentioned in Module B, we Play these Games to get better at Music and our Instrument, and regardless of the final 'score', we ALL win together.

I ask my Students what happens in a piece of Music if one person thinks they are better than everyone else, so plays Louder and Faster. It doesn't sound good, the person doesn't sound good, the ensemble doesn't sound good, it falls apart.

I point out that they will be playing Music together, and sometimes they may want another Student to play an accompanying part for them.

I point out that we will all be facing different challenges, and just because they find something easy now, doesn't mean they won't be the one having a hard time some time in the future.

I ask them if we point and laugh when someone gets something wrong? Do we say 'ha ha I'm better than you!'?

They agree we don't.

Enforcing this Rule

Students will not be cruel to each other in your lessons. They will not be resentful when another Student succeeds. They will not feel bad if they take a bit longer to get something than another.

Any time there is any sign of anything like this happening, stop the entire class. Refer to Rule 1. Remind them of it. Get them to say it. Make them apologise / reassure them. Get them to say it again. We are all in this Together.

Reinforcing this Rule

The most effective way I have found of ensuring Students are supportive of each other is to collectively celebrate individual achievements in a way that is fun for everyone. I use three levels of celebration when a Student has achieved something - a 'Whoosh', a 'Hadouken' and a 'Kamehameha' - in ascending order depending on the achievement.

I will repeat these movements until everybody has joined in, pointing out to Students that I am a grown man making repeated 'Whooshing' noises by myself and can they please join me so that I don't feel ridiculous.

Celebration Level 1 : Whoosh

A 'Whoosh' is quick and easy, you just fling your hands at the person who has achieved something and say 'Whoosh'. With practice, groups will casually 'Whoosh' around a circle without really thinking or interrupting a flow of thought - for example in a round of Speed Words.

Celebration Level 1.5 : Flavoured Whoosh

"What's your favourite flavour?" "Of what?" ".....er.... ice cream" "Chocolate"

"Chocolate..... Whoosh!"

I used to use this more, but the 'Of what?' response was a bit of a roadblock. Also, sometimes Students will take some time to decide, completely de-railing the momentum. It's still fun though.

Celebration Level 2 : Hadouken

This is from Street Fighter, and has a bit of a longer build up than a 'Whoosh' with more energy and involvement required from the Hadouken-er. There is a hand movement. Look on YouTube.

Hadouken is saved for a particularly notable task, perhaps a Student overcame something they had struggled with for a time, perhaps a Student displayed kindness and understanding to another, perhaps a Student showed selflessness in their treatment of another, perhaps a Student displayed bravery in a performance they were worried about. Such things are deserving of a Hadouken.

Celebration Level 3 : KameHameHa

This is from Dragonball Z, and has an even longer and energetic build up, with a longer release. It takes a lot of involvement to KameHameHa someone. Same hand movement as Hadouken.

KameHameHa is saved for only exceptional circumstances. Use at your discretion, the rarer it is the more the Students will cherish it. I have had Students trying to get a KameHameHa for months by displaying the qualities described above.

Celebrating Achievements

Using these techniques, Students are constantly listening to and celebrating each other in a way that is fun, self-affirming, and happens quickly so it doesn't detract from lesson flow or momentum, unlike clapping. It feels warm and fuzzy to get a Woosh!, and it's loads of fun to Hadouken people.

When someone performs, however, we always clap. When a Musician finishes performing, you clap.

Rule 2 : We Like to make Mistakes