

Top Tips for Teachers delivering Whole Class Ensemble (WCET)

Before the work starts:

- Communicate with the school **before** starting to deliver the work - either by telephone or ideally by visiting the school.
- This will enable you to -
 - Find out where the lesson will take place. Check that this is a suitable location - has sufficient space, is free from other noise and distractions as far as possible, that furniture can be moved if necessary.
 - Find out where the instruments will be stored and if it is possible to have them moved to where you will teach ahead of you arriving - depending on the instrument you may like them to be taken out of cases and laid on tables ready to be tuned for example. Appoint reliable children as 'monitors.'
 - Find out about additional resources you may need - access to audio or visual equipment for example, or additional percussion. Even the simple things like knowing where a plug socket is located are better worked out before the children enter the room.
 - Find out who else will be with you in the classroom and whether they have any other role except for supporting your teaching (e.g. they may be attached to a specific child so if that child is out of class for any reason, they will be too). Plan with extra adults in mind - use them to support your teaching and encourage them to join in with playing the instrument. It is good practice for schools to support your teaching with another adult in the room. They know their children's specific needs better than you will. They will also act as a positive role model when learning an instrument - children will see that they have to work on new techniques too and may find it difficult at first!
 - Find out about any additional needs children may have and how these are usually managed - visual, hearing, behavioural, mobility, issues at home which may impact on learning. Adapt lessons as appropriate.
 - Find out about the school's behaviour management policy (merit points, stickers etc.) and the norms of managing any challenging behaviour within the classroom (RAG systems, time out etc.)

During the year:

- Expect the unexpected! Arrive as early as your timetable will allow so that you have time to pick up on any changes (school photographer in the hall where you usually work, so you can't get to the instruments and end up working in a small classroom without any instruments - to name but one recent example in my own experience!) Be adaptable! Ideally establish a contact within school who can advise you by text or email ahead of the lesson if there is anything unusual happening in school that day.

- Use a lot of **variety** in your delivery - don't feel that the whole lesson must be conducted on the instrument you are teaching. It may be appropriate to take time out to do some rhythm work on percussion for example, or to use other instruments to add texture and different timbres to a specific piece. Using games and songs to 'warm up' is another way of adding variety and can concentrate some learning on general musicality rather than the specific skills associated with your instrument - rhythm, pulse, pitch, dynamics etc. Avoid spending too long on one piece - aim to cover some aspects of several different pieces to maintain engagement and cater for the different interests in the class. Include some listening, and different genres of music.
- **Visual/Auditory/Kinesthetic (VAK)** - These named sub-modalities of our senses - the means through which we experience our world - originated out of the theories surrounding Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) which first emerged in the 1970's and were widely used in both the therapeutic and business worlds before becoming mainstream in education. In short all children (and of course adults) make sense of their surroundings and the communication of others in different ways. We all have preferences around the way in which we receive communication. In terms of education that has led to it being widely acknowledged good practice to include activities and information in all three sub-modalities within our teaching in order to catch all the different learning styles and preferences within the classroom. Typically most of us will lean towards our own preferred style - so if we are auditory there may be more auditory content than visual for example. Therefore making a conscious decision to include VAK in our planning ensures we reach all our learnersⁱ
- **Charanga** - is a useful resource offering visual and auditory resources for many of the instruments we teach, covering many different genres of music, plus project based content that can be readily adapted. You will need a licence to use this - please contact the ArtForms office and they can advise how you can be set up as a registered user.
- **Have something to aim for** - maybe a concert or a performance in an assembly. Children may be encouraged in their achievement by revisiting pieces completed earlier in the year which will have seemed challenging at the time but may now appear 'easy' compared to the current repertoire. Let children 'show off' their achievements, both individually and in smaller groups as well as in class pieces. Praise often.
- **Use the ArtForms colour awards** - these also give children a sense of achievement as they can monitor their progress through the 15 different criteria for success. I get children to physically tick these off from a laminated sheet on the classroom wall. The Red Award is the first one of a series in rainbow colours. A WCET class would typically complete the Red Award within the first year. The Orange Award is the second in the series - an UKS2 class may move onto this within the first year if progress is swift. The higher awards then tend to be used in small group continuation lessons. There is an award specific to each instrument or family of instruments as

appropriate. These are all available to download from the ArtForms website. Using the ArtForms colour award system helps to ensure that all our teachers are covering the same broad learning objectives, albeit in different ways and with a variety of repertoire. We would therefore expect all teachers delivering WCET over a full year to be using these. In the case that you are only teaching a class for a term you may still use the criteria in your planning, even though it would be unlikely that the class would reach the level required so you may not use the checklist directly with the children.

If things are not going well:

- If things are not working well - in the first instance talk through the issues with someone in school, as soon as possible, even if this means contacting them at a different point of the week. Most schools will work with you to sort out any problems as they are invested in making lessons work too. Work out who is the most appropriate person. This may be the class teacher, the music coordinator, the Head teacher or the other adult in the classroom and talk to them first.
- Don't struggle on your own! If you are having difficulties which you are finding you cannot resolve within the school then contact either myself or your line manager and talk them through, so that between us we can find a resolution that works for everyone. The chances are that if you are not happy with the way things are going, your schools won't be either, so the faster things are resolved, the better for everyone. This is a challenging area of teaching and what works for one school may not work for another, so flexibility is needed. Don't feel that you are personally failing if you have problems - it is just as likely to be a systemic or school based problem.

And most importantly:

Have fun! If you are enjoying yourself, then the chances are that your learners will be too. Maintain a high level of enthusiasm even when you're having a 'bad day'. Moods are infectious, so if you're not feeling it, fake it! Energised and enthusiastic learners always leave me feeling better.

For more information or support in the classroom contact:

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ⁱ If you would like to read more on this, to me, fascinating subject I highly recommend Thorsons Principles of NLP by Joseph O'Connor and Ian McDermott, published by Harper Collins in 1996, as an accessible introduction to a complex area.