

Creative music-making at home for all ages

Creativity and independent remote learning at home

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What's the idea?

Music in schools before the pandemic made use of a range of digital and online tools for creative music-making. Music can thrive online – streaming, cloud-based tools, digital audio workspaces etc. – but this can add to the sense that young people are screen-bound too often. There are ways to be creative with music-making whilst remote learning, and this compact guide shares some suggestions to use with a range of students.

What does it mean?

To be making music, or musicking (Small, 1988), is part of our human existence; all cultures have music, and music-making with others helps build social cohesion (Kirschner and Tomasello, 2010).

During the pandemic, educators of all subjects have rapidly developed and deployed their technological expertise, and music particularly has made use of various tools. While the technology has been effective in many ways, there remain challenges; the latency on platforms such as Zoom means making music with others on a live call is problematic, and Zoom works in ways to maximise bandwidth, such as reducing the volume of those not speaking.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Anderson WT (2012) The Dalcroze Approach to Music Education: Theory and Applications. *General Music Today* 26(1): 27–33.
- Kirschner S and Tomasello M (2010) Joint music making promotes prosocial behavior in 4-year-old children. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 31(5): 354–364.
- Small C (1998) *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- You can access free resources for body percussion activities at: www.beatgoeson.co.uk/free-resources.
- There are examples of vegetables being made into instruments at: www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/17360501.

Making music is very possible at home or in an outdoor space; homes can be rich with sonic potential due to an array of objects that will create sound based on their material and size. There is an important health and safety aspect to consider when working with found objects, and very young children should not be left to hunt for potential instruments around the home alone.

Teachers might consider some sensible options and provide parents with a list. Instruments can be struck, blown, or bowed and pupils can experiment with the sounds they can create and how sound changes when the approach to playing is changed. For creative music-making, structuring music over time using a variety of different playing approaches is a good way into composing.

The body is the best instrument at any student's disposal. Simple body percussion can give a variety of different sounds that can be used creatively, but they can also be used to encourage pupils to listen and respond.

While there is not much evidence for the benefits of approaches such as Dalcroze (Anderson, 2012), there is some indication that moving to music can enhance a student's ability to maintain a beat.

What does this mean in practice?

- **Body percussion** will give students a range of different sounds, and this works well for a range of ages. Students could be challenged to make patterns more complex, or to manipulate different elements to make a composition; they could experiment with dynamics, and changes to the attack. If appropriate, students can be encouraged to use their voices.

- **Found objects** – be they recycled materials or even vegetables – can make good instruments. Students can gain insight into the physics of sound; the size and shape of objects will help them understand how pitch is related to size, and how acoustic variables alter the timbre of a sound. Students could be encouraged to create their own vegetable orchestra, for example. With clear instruction and a title from the teacher, such as “compose a piece called ‘running horses’”, students can deploy their newly created instrumental resources imaginatively to fit the title.

Listening and responding flexibly to music are valuable activities too; students might be encouraged to move to music, and consider why they move in certain ways. Students could create artistic responses to music, and consider how different colours might represent what they hear.