

Composing using conducted signals

In this activity the children will devise and use different conducted signals to organise musical material into improvisations and compositions. The activity also encourages careful watching and ensemble skills.

Page 1- Introduction

Using simple conducted gestures is a very effective way of making music with musicians of any ability. Professional musicians use similar strategies when playing together in creative ensembles.

Simple physical gestures can: effectively convey different kinds of music material and ways of playing; allow for and signal complex musical ideas without notation getting in the way; and, enable the organising of different music musical instantly. They allow the children to take the lead and make decisions about the direction of the music, either in the moment or following a predetermined plan.

Learning Objectives

The children will:

- Be able to imagine, create and orchestrate a range of musical ideas, sometimes quite complex ones, for a large ensemble
- Be able to convey individual musical ideas and larger musical structures to others through conducted signals
- Be able to follow and respond through improvisation to a range of conducted signals
- Understand how different kinds of musical material can be organised into an effective musical structure through conducted signals

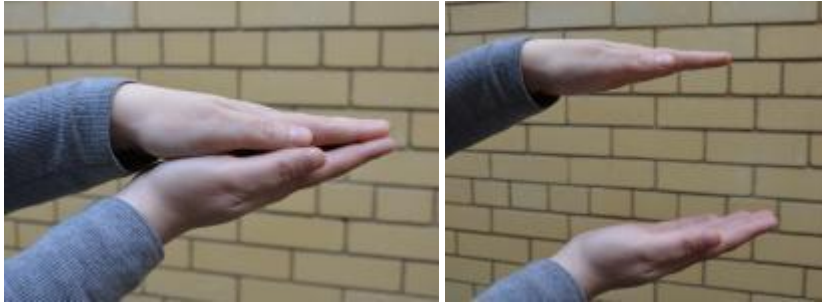
Success Criteria

- A successful composition will:
- Have a clear and effective structure
- Sequence and layer different kinds of musical material to expressive effect
- Have pace through effective use of change, silence and contrast



Page 2 - Warm Up One: Start and Stop

Show the group a clear conducted 'start' signal, and a clear conducted 'stop' signal. The simplest way to do this is have closed hands (palms together) for stop (or silent) and open hands for play.



Ask the group to start and stop precisely when you give the signals. The children can play anything they like or an idea you have jointly chosen, but must you watch very carefully. Ensure everyone can see you clearly. Be strict, especially about the stop signal! Ask children with resonant instruments to stop their sound ringing and demand accuracy.

As you conduct, vary the length of the playing time, and the length of the silences to make the activity challenging, to encourage excellent watching and to demonstrate the creative use of silence.

Now ask one or two of the children to be the conductor. Each time ask them to demonstrate the 'start' and 'stop' signal before the group plays. Encourage strong, clear gestures, and ensure that the whole group is watching the conductor.

Page 3 - Warm Up Two: Louder & Quieter

Carrying on from before, explain that as you move your hands further apart, they should play louder and when they are closer together they should play quieter.

Ask the children to play and match the dynamic as indicated by your hands. Be playful - allow some extended loud playing as well as controlled quiet playing, with lots of mixing up in between. Keep using silences of different lengths. Try to encourage the full spectrum of dynamics from very very quiet to very loud. You may need to practice the very very quiet playing a few times. Ask one or two children to conduct.

Warm-up Three: Chops

Introduce a new signal – the chop. Explain that when you do a single chop with one hand (like a karate chop) everyone will play one short note (on any pitch) altogether.

Practice conducting single chops with varying lengths of silence in between. Be very precise about the ensemble sound and make sure that the group is exactly synchronised on your 'chop'.

Ask one or two children to conduct some chops. Again, make sure their gestures are clear and strong.

Combining Signals

You can now experiment with combining the different signals explored so far to create an improvised piece - chops, continuous sounds with varying dynamics and silence. Invite different children to try this. Comment on their effective use of dynamics, silence and the mixing of the two gestures.

Page 4 - Conducted Textures

Ask the whole class to play very short quiet sounds with gaps in between, like raindrops, all at different times. Ask them what conducted signal could represent this texture e.g. dotting your fingers in the air. Try a few ideas out and decide on the most effective. Practice starting and stopping together using the new gesture. Discuss with the class what other kinds of sounds you could use to create a different musical textures e.g.:

- Short trills with gaps in between
- Rising or falling scalar figures
- Loud sustained notes
- Legato wavy figure moving between two notes
- Accented zigzags moving between a high and a low notes

Collectively decide on a distinctive conducted gesture for each new texture, then practice starting and stopping each one using the new gesture. Let the children conduct too.

Page 5 - Sequencing

Using a range of different signals you now have (don't use too many at once) practice starting and stopping different individuals or small groups instead of the whole group. To



start with have one idea at a time in sequence. You could indicate a group using your arms to show the first and last person, like a slice of cake, then signal to start or stop, etc. Make sure you are very clear with your signals and don't rush from one to the other otherwise you will lose the children or they will get confused. Encourage the class to listen to the different effects as the ensemble changes. You could also arrange the group into different instruments and listen to how the different textures sound on different instruments.

Invite different children to be the conductor. Remember to comment on their improvised compositions. Describe and comment on their effective use of the different textures, the orchestrations they chose, the structure of their pieces and the use of contrast.

Layering

Continue as above but now allow different musical ideas to be layered as well as sequenced. Model first and then invite the children to conduct.

Page 6 - Composing a Conducted Piece

Ask everyone in the class to spend a few minutes (either as individuals, pairs or threes) to think about the different conducted ideas they have created so far. You may need to recap all the different ideas. Now ask them to imagine a new piece of music that uses some of the ideas – sequenced and/or layered. Ask them to plan it on paper or a wipe board. They could use words or graphical images to convey their ideas. Encourage them to think about which instruments they want playing which bit. Choose one of the ideas and rehearse it. Discuss the music:

- Are the children that created it happy with the interpretation?
- Is there anything they would like to change?
- Is it too complicated to conduct?
- Could the different ideas be heard well?
- Does any of it go on too long or do some ideas need to go for longer?
- Is silence used effectively?
- Does it have an effective beginning and ending?

Play it again with the revisions. Ask the children that created it for a title for the piece and record it.

Try another idea/plan and repeat. If there is limited time create a composite piece from different plans i.e. one group provides the beginning, another the middle, another the end.