

The Methodology of Teaching Musical Instruments in Groups

The two predominant methods in which one can teach musical instruments include the practical approach and the holistic approach. The practical approach focuses on the playing technique, sound production, and music theory, while the holistic approach includes dancing, movement, playing the instrument, singing, and other activities that enrich the children and build their relationship to the instrument. Because of its communal nature, the holistic approach is more suitable for a group setting. Unlike in private lessons, in a group, children have the opportunity to develop unique learning and social abilities. Through the holistic approach, children learn to work more collaboratively in a group. Additionally, the approach increases children's motivation and helps them internalize and implement the content and values taught in their music lessons.

Success when teaching musical instruments in groups is not measured by one student's performance of a musical piece, but rather by the results exhibited from group collaboration. In group lessons, children learn to respect one another, how to effectively work in a group, and develop skills such as listening, patience and tolerance, and most importantly, they learn how to work together to achieve a common goal. In MUS-E Israel, it is even more important to use the holistic approach as we work with all of the children in the classroom; we do not preselect certain students. Therefore, the work is more complicated because of the wide range of talent. An ideal class contains six children. This specific class-size creates an environment where students can form a cohesive group while simultaneously, allowing the teacher to give students individualized attention and recognize each student's growth.

When children begin the program, they often have limited to no musical background. Feeling shy, apprehensive and out of their comfort-zone, some doubt their ability to flourish artistically. In order to keep the children engaged, it is important to keep them curious. Curiosity, along with the diverse, nurturing, and positive learning environment, encourages and motivates the children to collaborate and work hard.

Creating a classroom space that is conducive to learning is also important. The classroom should be decorated in an inviting manner with pictures and furniture that make the space comfortable, but not too distracting. Additionally, children should enter the classroom in an orderly and peaceful manner. For example, sometimes we play quiet background music when the children enter the classroom, take their place, and wait for the lesson to begin.

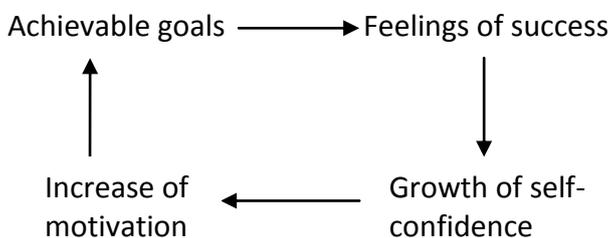
The lesson should be planned ahead of time and built from different activities related both directly and indirectly to musical subjects. Every activity should take a few minutes, as not to wear out the children, and should flow logically. The activities should focus on a variety of subjects to compliment the wide-range of interests among the group. This allows every child to connect to at least one activity and feel successful. Through these activities, we encourage motivation and reinforce collaboration between the children and the teacher. It's recommended that the lesson plan maintain a framework with permanent activities at the beginning and end of each lesson. This framework allows the children to easily follow the lesson.

Sample Lesson (40 minutes)

1. Children respectfully enter the classroom
2. Opening lesson song
3. Concentration activity/Warm-up body exercise
4. Rhythm exercises/Rhythm games
5. Playing technique exercises
6. Playing a music piece
7. Memory game
8. Ending lesson song
9. Children respectfully leave the classroom

The Teacher's Role and Behavior

The teacher should cultivate self-confidence by setting achievable goals. When we give children achievable goals, they feel a sense of gratification from their accomplishment and gain self-confidence. This increases their motivation to challenge themselves to achieve increasingly difficult goals in the future.



The behavioral rules and guidelines should be very clear. These rules are important for a child because children require structure. The teacher should create interesting lessons and be engaging and enthusiastic. Additionally, the teacher should pass some responsibility onto the children to encourage the morale of the group.

General Guidelines

- Create a dialogue between the teacher and the students. The teacher should ask the children many questions and allow them to ask and discover things by themselves as well. This develops their curiosity and increases their level of interest in the lesson.
- Encourage the children through positive reinforcement. This may include complimenting children on something they did, how they behaved, or their relationship to the group. Positive reinforcement can be given to the group as a whole or to an individual child. To reduce the number of disruptions in class, it is best to provide positive reinforcement for good behavior and ignore bad behavior in class.
- Encourage collaboration and not competition between the children. Competition creates anxiety and discourages children, hindering their ability to learn effectively.
- Incorporate humor into the lesson and create a light and friendly environment for the children to learn.
- Plan performances and concerts throughout the year, providing the children with a goal to work towards and an opportunity to reinforce their self-confidence.

Yuval Adereth
Arts Program Director
The Jaffa Institute
Mus-E Israel