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10 STRATEGIES FOR THE BEST WHOLE SCHOOL SINGING

1. Play a motivational track as the pupils come into assembly.

Encourage the children to clap or sing along. A positive, well-controlled start is vital and will impact on the rest of the whole school singing session. Play what the children enjoy. You might not like all of it, but if it lifts their spirits try to harness that energy.

2. Use four beat 'clap back' games for the children to imitate.

Make up spoken phrases to clap and help retain the rhythm e.g. 'I love daffodils'. Rhythm is a vital element of music and something that all pupils can engage with from the outset of a session. You can extend this by encouraging pupils to be the leader – perhaps a reward for excellent contribution in previous sessions.

3. The 'one hand' strategy works well with pupils and adults in a large forum.

Remember, if pupils are chattering after a song, they are probably uplifted and wanting to share, comment and just connect with their neighbour. Music is a communal business and they are not necessarily being 'naughty'. By establishing clear signals that avoid 'shouting over', and raising noise levels further in the process, you can maintain a positive vibe. Raise one hand high in the air and watch patiently as, one by one, the pupils stop and join you. It works, but be mindful that you cannot keep the same strategy for too long.

4. Keep the pace of the session appropriate.

If you linger excessively on one thing in whole school singing practice, you can start to lose the attention of the pupils. Dependent on age, pupils need varying degrees of variety and input. Ensure you are pitching your expectations appropriately. Note when they start to wriggle – awareness is crucial as an emotionally intelligent music teacher. Don't panic if this happens, it has happened to us all, but make sure you learn from it and build from there – have a calming strategy up your sleeve such as 'sh' four beat rhythm echoes. You 'sh' a pattern, they will 'sh' back. It cuts through very successfully.

5. Keep your songs varied and alternate between a lively and more calming song.

Choose 'old favourites' as well as introducing new songbook material from different sources. This will help to avoid a flat mood and boredom over time. All humans need 'change' to stimulate new directions and inspire creative thinking.

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6. To inspire, you must engage.

Whether you are a musician who plays piano, guitar or a teacher who is enthusiastic about sharing music and uses backing tracks, all can have a part to play. However, be careful not to get stuck behind the piano for the whole session. **Walk about. Stay physically engaging.** Use the guitar when possible as you can maintain eye-contact and nip any misbehaviour in the bud by delegating roles or tasks before it gets out of hand. Avoid negatives whenever possible. You probably know who is likely to be a problem. Ask a support teacher or teaching assistant to sit strategically close to a potentially disruptive child so that a situation can be diffused easily. Don't allow the momentum to be broken, if possible.

7. Introduce skill-based short activities in between some of the songs.

Singing up the scale or in intervals can be great fun. Aim for middle C to top C as a natural range for most children of primary age, then extend the range once you feel the children are solidly coping with that. **'Up the Stairs I Go Again'** is one song for this purpose. Starting on middle C we go up the scale to G. ***'Up the stairs I go again..... and down the stairs I go again.'***

8. Above all, be prepared.

In all your whole school singing sessions, make sure you are able to move seamlessly from one activity to another. Have the words ready on screen. I always ask a child to have the responsibility of moving the lyrics pages on, if it is a PowerPoint Presentation. Again, a reward system, including roles such as this, is worth its 'weight in gold'. Planning is vital, having resources readily to hand, but take advantage of a spontaneous moment that provides a teaching point opportunity. Also, remember that, if you don't feel something is working, it is sensible to adjust your plan. Learn from it for next time. Being analytical, even for a few moments as children troop out of the hall, can really help your effectiveness as a teacher, going forward.

9. Involve the children - Make it accessible to all.

Child involvement is always a powerful tool in singing sessions. Using percussion is always an excellent way to be inclusive. If you have talent, use it. Involve instrumentalists such as recorder players and flautists with the songs you select. Let them take the music or CDs away to practice the songs. Choose children to give out stickers to those who are singing well. (Ensure that they cannot choose people from their own year group.) It is important that every child feels they could earn that role, regardless of musical ability.

10. Enjoy it and smile!

Research has shown that smiling, even when you're feeling low, can naturally boost mood – this is infectious. It's possible to walk into a singing session having had a terrible few days, but experience has always taught us that the children can lift us, if we let them. Our first responsibility is always to come in with a smile. Avoid negativity. There is always a positive way to steer things if you are creative. If possible, ensure you have enough support and chat to the adult helpers who are joining you for the singing practice. Get them 'on board' if you can and explain the strategies you are going to use. Think about giving special jobs of noting hardworking singers for reward at the end of the session. It's important that they feel involved and appreciated for their support.