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# **WIRED** TOOLKIT

**Supporting girls, women and minority gender  
young people in music technology classrooms**

**Strategies from educators and learners**



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# introduction

**This booklet offers a range of evidence-based strategies for educators to support gender-inclusive learning environments in music technology. It is drawn from research compiling the experiences of women, girl and minority gender learners and educators, with additional input from male educators working in the field.**

Adding to the findings of existing research highlighting gender inequalities at all levels of the music technology sector, it addresses factors that harm girls' and minority gender young people's engagement with audio learning at the earliest stages. From open misogyny to more subtle issues around teaching, environment and communication, these can all be addressed by educators of any gender.

The research was undertaken by Anni Raw & Associates during 2023 as part of Yorkshire Sound Women Network's WIRED education project, funded by Youth Music. In addition to this booklet, the findings form the basis of a full toolkit of resources for educators, policy-makers and the wider audio sector. Visit the YSWN website for more information and the full toolkit.

“Recognition, validation and appreciation motivate us – whether it’s trying a new technology or process, or using existing learning.”



# Get started

## General classroom strategies: suggestions by teachers and music leaders



**Programme classes, sessions and informal learning spaces** targeted at girls and minority gender learners, while remembering the diversity that exists within gender: for example, of background, ability, expectation, culture and neurodiversity.



**Make learners feel welcome in mixed environments.**

- In-class surveys offer a low-risk way to check understanding and for learners to ask questions without feeling exposed.
- Celebrate everyone in any group without pointing out differences.



**Support better visibility.**

- Invite successful women and minority gender audio professionals as visiting speakers for all audiences.
- Increase how many examples are given showing girls and minority genders.
- Share and contribute to a database of women and minority gender people working in audio.



**Fight misogyny, inequality and discrimination.**

- Immediately challenge disrespectful, silencing or intimidating language, jokes and attitudes, whether mild or extreme.
- Introduce regular conversations about these negative and pervasive cultures – this is important even if the audience is all male.
- Men have a vital role to play here.



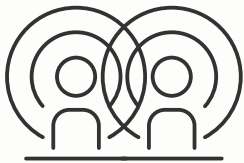
**Think intersectionally.** Race, disability, class, sexuality (and more) can all contribute to learners' exclusion, isolation and the blocks and barriers to learning they experience.



**Think outside the box.** Combine artforms to introduce music technology to new audiences, exciting learners with its possibilities.



# Tips from women and minority gender educators and music leaders



## Strategies in mixed gender sessions



### Across all education settings:

- Make sure that everyone is treated fairly: clearly show that there will be no tolerance of discrimination.
- Use anonymous surveys to gauge levels of comfort with the equipment. Google chat (or another discreet system) allows students to ask questions if they don't want to do so out loud.
- Take time explaining the gear to everyone; pair people up so they can learn from each other without exposure in front of the class.
- Often male students reply to questions straight away and non-male-identifying students stay quiet. Invite: 'I would like to hear from some women (or) from somebody else!' Try to say that in a way that values the engagement of male students but makes them aware that they should not take all the space.
- Ensure that learning materials provide a good mix of genders, but in ways that don't feel forced.
- Encourage student input on music selected to analyse: ensure women and minority gender artists are included.
- Make seating arrangements circular when possible, but include anybody who prefers to sit in another position.
- Let students sit next to their friends, because they're more likely to make music with their friends than with anyone else.
- Build good relationships with the students prior to doing any music technology work; playful approaches are effective.



### In secondary schools:

- In KS3 classes, encourage everybody to try using computers to make music, not just as tech to support performance. Prioritise students who have never done it before or who are cautious about trying.
- At GCSE, encourage students to try Logic (instead of default classical software such as Sibelius) to take their ideas to another level.
- Ask directly and discreetly: 'Do you understand? Can you demonstrate what I've just shown you?' Encourage students not to hide their doubts.
- Offer plenty of one-to-one support.
- Run extra-curricular sessions targeted at girls and minority gender learners.
- Have technology equipment around the classroom and encourage everyone to ask how it works.

“People occasionally talk in unclear tech jargon to show off, which is inaccessible and makes it feel like you can't ask anything.”





## In further and higher education settings:

- Offer positive reinforcement and validation to counter fear of failure. Recognise and name imposter syndrome.
- Hold 'let off steam' sessions where women and minority gender students can share experiences and talk about difficulties or confidence issues with a woman or minority gender tutor.
- Adapt to students' specific learning needs – promote equity, not just everyone getting the same treatment.
- Don't call out students for not knowing something.





### ***Mixed sessions: male educators' additional suggestions***

- Actively re-steer the conversation if male contributors are over-sharing, if they become confrontational or aggressive, or if what they are saying is not based in any evidence.
- Ensure women and minority gender tutors are not only leading girls and minority gender learner-only sessions. They need to be at all sessions, to avoid 'OK, this is the girls' stuff, then we go back to the boys' stuff over here.'
- Encourage and support girls and minority gender students to take the lead in live sound work.
- Accept the battle against gendered instrument choices (e.g. flute vs electric guitar) made in primary school. Sometimes you have to ease people into new ideas and sounds until they can relate.
- Start young: in mainstream education there is a better gender split in the room in KS3 before GCSE options.



## Strategies in targeted sessions for girls and minority gender learners



### General learning and teaching:

- Compile a reference document with free apps and tech resources so learners can continue exploring.
- Lots of sharing starts with: 'It's not very good, but...'. Challenge that by finding something to like about it, such as the process or the sound.
- Be adaptable and find a way into what learners want to do that week. If they don't want to DJ, could they make a presentation about the industry, or plan a play list?
- In inclusive sessions for girls and minority gender learners with disabilities, identify challenges clearly, and generate enthusiasm to be collaboratively creative and find solutions to barriers. We learn together!



### Equipment:

- Question the need for a lot of hardware as this can create barriers around money, transportation and mystification of complicated technology. Consider showing the hardware form, then teaching the software form, but always translating it into the practical – ‘This is what you can do at home.’
- For hands-on activities, assign students to ensure everyone gets a chance to touch the equipment and learn.
- Configure technology to enable easy wins for the underconfident, whilst also inspiring those who like to find their own way of using it.
- Make music tech playful. Use resources such as Ableton’s online Learning Synths to improvise and create something instantaneously in an easily understandable way.
- Ask learners if they want to share, and encourage swapping and joining up. Collaboration builds the social.



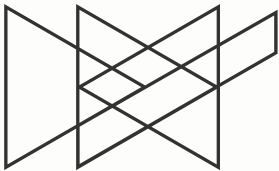
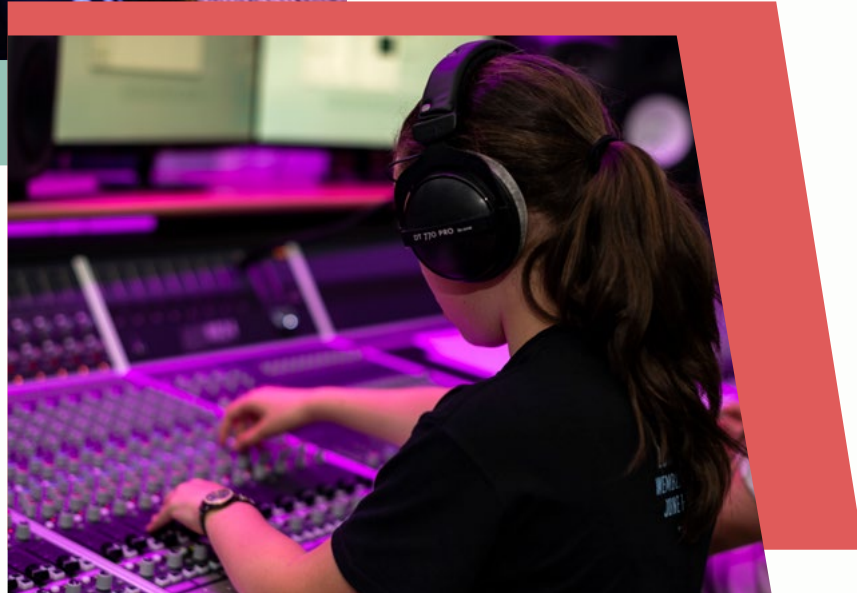
### With younger age groups:

- Positive reinforcement and fun are essential.
- Change activities to vary the dynamic of the session and boost engagement: ‘Having a podcast activity for 10 minutes at the end of each week was good. They loved it and it gave them a voice! They took this really seriously, took ownership of it.’
- Recognise that the social part is important for learners: instead of stopping ‘silliness’, make it part of the creativity.



### Targeted sessions: male educators’ additional suggestions

- Build rapport to make learners feel welcome, accepted and safe, so they can thrive. For example, take note if they do something that reminds you of an artist they might enjoy, whose music you can then share and talk about in the next session.
- Recommend girls and minority gender learners for performances, or for paid opportunities, and support them to become team members, mentors and tutors in the longer term.




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Visit the Resources section of our website for the full WIRED toolkit to download and share.

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