

# CENTERS IN THE ELEMENTARY MUSIC ROOM

Presented by Sarah Guilford

guilfosa@qps.org

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*“Teach music and singing at school in such a way that it is not a torture  
but a joy for the pupil, instill a thirst for finer music in him,  
a thirst which will last for a lifetime . . .”*

*Zoltan Kodaly, 1929*

# Questions and Answers

## **- When do I use centers?**

- I send a few students to centers almost every lesson unless I'm preparing a class for a program or a holiday event.

## **- Which part of the lesson should be used for centers?**

- My lesson plans have 3 basic parts – a warm-up, the core of the lesson, and closure
- I use centers during the warm-up phase of my lesson – the first 10 minutes or so of class
- While students are at centers, the rest of the class is working on vocal development skills, a movement activity, a fun song, or a Covey song.
- I may also assign students to a center at the end of class if we are closing with a game or song.
- I use the entire class period when I have planned a lesson around rotating centers.

## **- How do I introduce a center?**

- When introducing a center for the first time, I introduce it to the entire class.
- I use a projector to display new computer and iPad centers before anyone is assigned to the centers.

## **- How do I quickly get centers up and going without having the rest of the class getting restless?**

- I utilize students as tech assistants.
  - Students who have a birthday during a given month are tech assistants for that month.
  - Their names are posted on my Covey data sheet that I post at the beginning of each lesson.
  - A list of previous tech assistants for each class is posted at the back of the room.
- Tech assistants
  - are the first to use centers each month.
  - load the apps or websites
  - help students assigned to centers get started with the activities
  - assist when students have a problem.
  - ask other tech experts to help when they can't solve a problem.
  - evaluate keyboard skills for one criteria (hand position, rhythms, correct notes, etc.) and write a plus, check or an N on a post it note.
  - help students put the materials away at the end of center time.
  - clean screens
  - Make sure the app is on or off per the teacher's instructions at the end of the session.
- I keep a list of centers on the back of my seating chart and check students off as I assign them to a center.
- I also have a color-coded seating chart I keep on iDoceo, an iPad app. The app allows me to have several versions of the same seating chart. I keep one for day to day attendance and participation. Other seating charts are color-coded based on how well a student did on a pre-test or assessment. That lets me quickly see who needs to use a center for additional practice and who needs to be challenged with a more complex activity.

- The pages of the keyboard book are also color-coded based upon the notes used in the songs. This allows me to quickly assign groups of songs based upon a student's ability.

**- Where are materials and centers positioned in the room?**

- Teacher-developed-materials, laptops, and iPads are stored in safe areas easily accessed by students.
- The iPads (with earphones attached) are kept in plastic baskets which make it easier and safer for students to transport them from one location in the room to another.
- Some of the teacher-developed-materials are color-coded by grade level and complexity. For example, all first grade papers are blue. Light blue paper is used for easier material and a deeper shade of blue is used for more complex activities. This allows me to discretely assign centers to students based upon their abilities.
- Pictures are posted reminding students to return materials to their original location.
- Students working at iPads or computers usually sit at the sides of the room with their backs against a wall. This allows me to keep an eye on them and send a tech assistant to them if needed.
- Unless the students are working with a partner, I usually have the students sit with an ample amount of space between them in order to discourage off-task conversations.
- I have 5 keyboards set up against one wall.

**- How do you organize multiple centers for lessons that feature rotating centers?**

- I usually have 4 centers set up when I have a "center day" as a lesson.
- I group the students and make sure that I have a strong leader in each group.
- Each group faces one of the 4 walls in the room. I have found that this helps them stay focused on their task and not get distracted by what another group might be doing.
- Most of the centers are ones they are familiar with, but I may lead an activity that is new to the group.
- I sometimes post directions for the center or information related to the center on the wall where the center is located.
- Center activities may include a game, a pencil/paper task, a boomwhacker center, keyboard activity, composition activity, a reading assignment, or a makeup test.
- Centers rotate counter-clockwise every 5 minutes.
- If I have a group of students who need to make-up a test, I have their group work with me while the rest of the class rotates through the centers.

**- Do all of the students make it to each of the centers ?**

- Not necessarily. You can limit the number centers they rotate to in order to provide differentiated activities that best fit the needs of the groups. You can have the centers increase in difficulty each time a rotation takes place. You can have higher-achieving students start at the harder centers and lower-achieving students start with the easier centers.

**- How do you deal with off-task behavior during center rotations.**

- Students who cause disruptions within their group take some time to think by sitting in the middle of the room until the student and I decide that they are ready to rejoin their group.

**- How many computers and iPads do you have?**

- I have 2 iPads provided by the school and I have one mini-iPad that I own. The mini-iPad works just as well as the regular iPads and are cheaper.
- I have a desktop computer and a laptop computer in my room all of the time. I sometimes bring in my own laptop or borrow a laptop from a colleague.

**- Are your younger students able to use the laptops without a mouse?**

- Most of them are. I do have a wireless mouse available for them to use with each of the laptops.