

Junior Vitamin D

Drumming for Children with Autism in the Trenton New Jersey Public Schools



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Executive Summary

For 8 weeks, 75 children with autism from 3 elementary schools and 1 middle school in the Trenton, NJ, Public Schools participated in a drum circle. Children in grades 3-8 met in self-contained classrooms in each building. There, they learned African, Brazilian, and Latino drumming by playing rhythms indigenous to the cultures that represent the children's heritages. They also learned to improvise and perform original musical compositions for world drums, and perform as soloists and ensemble members in a drum circle.

Undergraduate music education students, all members of Vitamin D, the student drum circle at Westminster Choir College, sat side-by-side with the children providing guided instruction. Special education teachers and paraprofessional aides were also present.

With the program director, the lead teachers implemented a curriculum called *O Passo* (The Step), a Brazilian approach that develops musicianship, creative expression, and self-confidence, and was specifically selected for this population of children with autism.

Participation in the drum circle added to the formation of student identity by empowering children to engage cognitive processes of musical imagination, musical intellect, and musical creativity. Curriculum content aligned to creating, performing, responding, and connecting to music, which are the artistic processes that frame the National Core Arts Standards in music education. Playing in the drum circle provided opportunities for collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication, which are the skills identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (www.p21.org), and are important for every child's success.

For children with autism, participation helped them express and release anger, promoted listening skills, and fine and gross motor skills. It reinforced positive behaviors such as turn-taking, sharing, self-control, and contributing in positive ways to individual success and to the success of a group.

At the conclusion of the program, students were able to improvise original rhythmic responses, play together in an ensemble, and perform with confidence for one another.

The lead teachers/facilitators, classroom teachers, and the undergraduate music education majors who assisted with the instruction reported that their own notions about what children with autism could achieve, and also their own perceptions about teaching changed in positive and significant ways.

The program was made possible through a contract with VSA International Young Soloists: Music For Every Student Program services to the Kennedy Center and provided by the Westminster Center for Community Engagement and Critical Pedagogy.

Introduction

Westminster Center for Community Engagement and Critical Pedagogy provided VSA International Young Soloists: Music For Every Student Program services to the Kennedy Center through the framework of our “Junior Vitamin D Drum Circle Program.” For 8 weeks, 75 children with autism from 3 elementary schools and 1 middle school in the Trenton, NJ, Public Schools participated in a drum circle. Children in grades K-8 met in self-contained classrooms in each building. There, they learned African, Brazilian, and Latino drumming by playing rhythms indigenous to the cultures that represent the children’s heritages. They also learned to improvise and perform original musical compositions for world drums and perform as soloists and ensemble members.

Undergraduate music education students, all members of Vitamin D, the student drum circle at Westminster Choir College, sat side-by-side with the children providing guided instruction. Special education teachers and paraprofessional aides were also present.

With the program director, the lead teachers implemented a curriculum called *O Passo* (The Step), a Brazilian approach that develops musicianship, creative expression, and self-confidence, and was specifically selected for this population of children with autism.

Program Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives provided an experience in a drum circle that utilized culturally relevant rhythms from the African, Brazilian, and Latino traditions. Participation added to the formation of student identity by empowering children to engage cognitive processes of musical imagination, musical intellect, and musical creativity. Curriculum content aligned to creating, performing, responding, and connecting to music, which are the artistic processes that frame the National Core Arts Standards in music education. Playing in the drum circle provided opportunity for collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication, which are the skills identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (www.p21.org) and are important for every child’s success.

For children with autism, participation helped develop listening skills, express and release anger in positive ways, and refine fine and gross motor skills. It reinforced positive behaviors such as turn-taking, sharing, self-control, and contributed in constructive ways to individual success and to the success of a group.

Educational Strategies, Frameworks, and Methodologies

O Passo (The Step) is a music methodology developed by Lucas Ciavatta in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Rich with participatory musical experiences, the method promotes musicianship. The techniques have been especially successful for children with disabilities.

The framework is premised on four principles:

1. The body is a means to make and understand music. Whenever children make music, their bodies move. Often, and especially among children with disabilities, the engagement is involuntary.
2. The ability to represent musical ideas through notation is a means toward musical independence. Teachers adapt strategies for teaching musical notation to children with disabilities.
3. Children learn best when they learn from each other in groups. In *O Passo* classrooms, children develop skills for listening and participating in an ensemble. As they contribute to the musical accomplishments of the group, they acquire a sense of self-worth. This is especially important for children with disabilities including autism.
4. Music resides in a context rich in culture. Culture defines the music that children hear, and the music they study. It includes the music inside of school and also the music children enjoy outside of school. The *O Passo* approach helps children to connect “their” music with “our” music.

Student Learning Outcomes

Arts learning

This project aligns to National Core Art Standards for Music Ensembles (<http://www.nafme.org/wp-content/files/2014/11/2014-Music-Standards-Ensemble-Strand.pdf>).

Able to Do - Children with autism will use drums to generate original musical ideas, and express personal emotions; evaluate and refine their own work. Perform as a soloist, and as part of a group.

Know - Basic drumming techniques and indigenous rhythms consistent with the neighborhoods in which the children live.

Understand - Musicians make creative choices; creative ideas, concepts, and feelings influence musicians’ work and emerge from varied sources.

Academic learning

Able to do – The children will create, compose, and perform original drum pieces that include improvisation and aural notation, thereby nurturing their artistic and cultural literacy.

Know - How music expresses thought, emotion, and story. Experience the crosswalk between language literacy and musical literacy. Use appropriate vocabulary to describe this connection.

Understand - The relationship of music to history, culture, and the arts.

Social and emotional learning

Able to do - Work cooperatively in a community of practice.

Know - How to appropriately express their own ideas and feelings.

Understand - Participate in making music, listen purposefully to music, and perform music to help shape and form their personal identities.

Timeline

The Junior Vitamin D Drum Circle Program took place from October 2016 to March 2017 at three elementary schools (Jefferson, Grant, and P. J. Hill) and one middle school (Rivera) in Trenton, NJ. Each school had multiple self-contained classes of children with autism. The program was a collaboration between music education students at Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, NJ, with children and staff in the Trenton, NJ, Public Schools - both of which are Community Team Members of the Trenton Any Given Child program.

Assessment

This document examined the outcomes of the program, and its impact on the children with autism. Connecting to the program goals and objectives, research questions considered the efficacy of the program on the development of student musicianship, self-confidence through solo and group performance, and creativity evidenced by original compositions and improvisations. Data included impressions from the lead teacher/facilitator, the classroom teachers, and music education students who observed and assisted. Catalytic validity, which accounts for the changes in perception on the part of the participants, justified claims of trustworthiness, which is a key feature of qualitative inquiry.

Organizational Qualifications

Since its inception, the Center for Community Engagement and Critical Pedagogy at Westminster Conservatory of Rider University has embraced a mission of inclusion, cultural relevance, and social justice. Its administration endorses post-modern pedagogies, and fosters collaboration through community outreach. The Center promotes music instruction that improves the lives of all its constituents. It has overseen instruction for 6th grade children at a laboratory school near the college campus. Those classes included children with disabilities who were mainstreamed into regular classrooms. For that program, leadership in the Center wrote a curriculum designed to meet the needs of music children in urban schools. For 3 years, the Center staffed a drum circle at Cambridge School in nearby Pennington, NJ. This private school serves only children with cognitive processing disorders and dyslexia. Westminster Conservatory, the Community Music School at Westminster Choir College, and home of the Center for Community Engagement and Critical Pedagogy still provides staff for the drum circle in addition to classes in recorder and GarageBand, a Mac supported software music program.

Established in 1970, Westminster Conservatory offers a range of classes and performing ensembles to engage children, from the beginner to advanced, regardless of age. It maintains active membership in the National Guild for Community Arts Education and is a member of the Community Arts Team of Trenton's Any Given Child.

Stakeholders

Key Program Personnel

Joel Michalchuk, lead teacher/facilitator/percussionist holds a Bachelor of Music in Music Education degree from Westminster Choir College and a Master of Arts in Teaching from Rider University's School of Education. His studies included dedicated courses in music for children with special needs. He studied *O Passo*, the method for this program, with Lucas Ciavatta. For 18 months, Mr. Michalchuk was the lead teacher/facilitator for the drum circle at Cambridge School in Pennington, NJ, where he taught the *O Passo* approach to children with dyslexia and cognitive processing challenges. Joel served as lead teacher/facilitator for the program in the elementary schools.

Larry Miller holds a Bachelor of Music in Music Education and a Master of Arts in Teaching from Westminster Choir College and the College of Education and Human Services at Rider University respectively. From his beginning with percussion and garage-band guitar, to his collegiate voice study, Larry Miller brings a broad perspective to the music classroom. His teaching is rooted in the joy of active music making, the appreciation for human expression and communication, and a passion for the social development of children through music study. Larry's special interests include multi-cultural music, the *O Passo* music education methodology, the application of digital music in the classroom, and exploring a variety of vocal music styles and traditions. He served as the lead teacher/facilitator for the program in the middle school.

For 17 years, **Frank Abrahams** coordinated arts programs in the Stoneham, MA, Public Schools, where his teaching assignment included music in a self-contained classroom of children with disabilities. He completed *O Passo* training with Ciavatta in Princeton and in Rio de Janeiro. Dr. Abrahams is a recognized published researcher who has written on *O Passo*, assessment, curriculum, choral pedagogy, and music psychology. At Rider since 1992, he served as Chair for Music Education, Associate Dean for the Arts, Director of the Center for Community Engagement and Critical Pedagogy, as well as Professor of Music Education. Abrahams supervised this project and completed the assessment report.

Alice Hammel is a widely-known music educator, author, and clinician whose experience in music is extraordinarily diverse. She teaches for James Madison and Virginia Commonwealth Universities in the areas of music education and music theory respectively, and is also the Autism Spectrum Disorder Music Intervention Specialist for ASSET (*Autism Spectrum Support, Education and Training*), a division of Virginia Youth and Family Services.

Dr. Hammel is a co-author for two texts: *Teaching Music to Children with Special Needs: A Label-free Approach*, and *Teaching Music to Children with Autism*, available through Oxford University Press. She has been affiliated with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts for several years and has presented multiple workshops for arts educators and arts administrators through this association. She has been a Thought Leader for the *Kennedy Center National Forum: Examining the Intersection of Arts Education and Special Education since 2012*, and serves on the planning committee for their annual national conference.

Ellary Draper, Assistant Professor of Music Therapy at University of Alabama, and an expert in music for children with autism, and **James Maher**, Head of the Cambridge School in Pennington, NJ, and a former instructor in music for special education at Westminster Choir College, served as expert consultants and provided resources, as needed and appropriate.

Norberto Diaz, Supervisor, Visual and Performing Arts, Trenton Board of Education, and a member of the Trenton Any Given Child Community Arts Team was the Trenton Public Schools project liaison.

Key Partners/Collaborators

- Trenton Public Schools Music Department
- Trenton Public Schools Office of Special Education and Services Programs
- Westminster Conservatory - The Community Music School at Westminster Choir College of Rider University
- Westminster Center for Community Engagement and Critical Pedagogy
- Students in the music education department at Westminster Choir College, **Grace Amodeo, Rebecca Carroll, Alex Delbar, Lauren Goldman, Julia Henry,** and **Kelly Ruggieri** assisted with the program at the elementary schools.
- **Daniel Wells**, a graduate student in music education at Westminster Choir College, served as administrative assistant.

Discussion

While lesson plans (included in the Appendix) and the engaged expressions evidenced on photographs (included in the Appendix) constituted evidence, the reflective comments from the college students who assisted at the elementary school, the facilitator at the middle school, and two classroom teachers were the most significant data. Their comments provided validity and confirmed our choice of critical pedagogy as an appropriate theoretical framework for the project.

One of the tenets of critical pedagogy is the desire that the experience cause a change in perception, such that the teacher and the children see themselves and their places in the world with a heightened commitment for equality, social justice and the fostering of democratic ideals. The college students had positive comments at the conclusion of the project that aligned to this tenet. For example, Rebecca expressed concerns relative to equal educational opportunities [including music] for all children. She was pleased to see how the drumming project impacted not only the children with autism, but also herself. She shared:

It was inspiring to see these children make music and improve each week in not only their musicianship, but their comfort with the group and their confidence. From this opportunity, I learned how to be more direct in my instruction, and had an opportunity to see the children express the musical creativity that was going on in their heads. It was beneficial to learn how hands-on these children were, and if they were engaged, how good their aural skills were.

Alex agreed, and commented:

No amount of charts or well-written papers on the positive effects that music has on young learners can equate to actually seeing it happen in front of you. It's easy to agree that music is important in a student's academic diet, but the changes exhibited in these children's behavior prove that music is truly essential in education. We were...consistently surprised by how responsive the children were to the drumming and music. Many of these kids had severe autism, and were more responsive in the drum circle than they were in their other activities and subjects.

He also felt that participating in the project changed him as a pre-service music teacher. He said:

This project showed me that the phrase "music is the universal language" extends beyond breaking just the verbal language barrier. Music, especially in the vein of rhythm, is so natural and human that it also broke the social barrier, demonstrating these children's *ability* to create and respond to music, rather than their *inability*. It causes me, and hopefully everyone else, to re-think the term "learning disability." The children certainly learned in a different way and at a different pace than other children, but I saw no "dis" or "in" attached to their ability.

Julia's perspective also changed. She explained:

Overall I was able to view music as... an avenue of expression to those who struggle with a method of communicating their own thoughts and emotions.

I have always had a special place for special education in my heart, and this experience has just solidified the importance even more. If I could gift every educator a present, it would be to work with these children. In this experience, they were the teachers, and I am so happy that I had the pleasure of learning from them.

Lauren was also very positive about the experience:

As soon as this project was announced I already had one foot in the door. I was hooked. In our preparation for working with children on the autism spectrum, we were taught that each case of autism is unique. We were taught that as teachers, putting aside time for this one on one attention is critical for the child's development. It's important that we see where each child is developmentally in the lesson, as each child has a unique set of strengths and challenges. It's amazing to me how quickly the relationship seemed to form between teacher and child simply because we began with recognizing that each child has a unique set of needs. This inspired me as a future educator to see the child as an individual first regardless of diagnosis or lack thereof.

The experience affected the lead teachers, the school music teachers, and the children's classroom teachers. Larry, who facilitated the classes at the middle school learned how necessary it was to be flexible and to "go with the flow." He shared:

During this program, I shifted the goals and objectives of my teaching each week in response to the children's interest and success, a conversation that proved to be meaningful in my own development as a reflective and responsive teacher.

Because autism is such a broad spectrum, I was not able to easily predict the children's abilities, interests, or personalities prior to meeting them. I also was not sure of the classroom environment or the relationship between the children and their teachers. Even more simply, I was unsure about how many children would be in each class.

In response, I arrived the first day with a flexible plan. It was a day of exploration. My primary goal was to build my own understanding of their abilities and interests. From there, I would be able to plan the rest of the program to meet their needs, challenge their abilities, and provide meaningful musical experiences. I noticed immediately that many of these children had great musical mirroring ability. They could understand and recreate complex rhythms without hesitation. I also noticed, though, that they backed away from parts of the activities that relied on individual contribution. They needed the safety of performing in a group. I knew, then, that my goals and objectives needed to include many opportunities for children to assume leadership roles within the drum circle.

As the program continued, I reached a strange wall in the middle of the program for one of the classes. The children in this class seemed to be losing interest. It appeared that they felt comfortable and satisfied with their new percussion techniques, and participation in varying leadership roles. While their comfort in participating showed great growth from the first week, their interest in building larger-scale musical products seemed to be dwindling. However, children in the next class were practically begging to put all the musical pieces together, eager to experience the final product. In response, I decided that the final product needed to change character and be more student-centered. The children were open to sharing their own musical ideas now, and I had the responsibility of using them in the final products. The latter half of the sessions focused on using student-composed rhythms to accompany the cognitive concepts I was introducing to them.

While I did not need to adjust my teaching style very much for the children's various levels of cognitive and social limitation, there were a couple elements of my teaching that became more important in this context. These children, for the most part, were not comfortable verbally expressing their understanding of content or their musical opinions. While I would love to work on their verbal confidence, I knew that my goal needed to be to find methods of nonverbal musical expression for children to contribute their own original ideas. Throughout the program, I returned to small echo pattern exercises in which children passed leadership positions from one to another. These exercises allowed for the transfer of very meaningful information, such as children's own improvised rhythm, the overarching musical culture of the classroom, the children's preference for rhythm as shown by repetition and enthusiasm of performance, and finally, each child's growth in musical confidence throughout the program.

Ms. G., a classroom teacher reported that she incorporated the lessons they learned during the Jr. Vitamin D program each week into her daily class lessons.

I wanted to reinforce the lessons learned so that the Jr. Vitamin D program would have the greatest impact on my children. In all the years I have taught children with autism we have never had an opportunity to learn music in this way.

She even joined in the circle with children and said:

Each week we looked forward to learning about different kinds of instruments, a little musical history, and rhythm. I joined in to each lesson as much as I could while supporting children's engagement. Early on, we explored various relevant cultural instruments [that] encouraged the children as well as the adults to become more interested in engaging in music and instruments.

Her co-worker Mrs. K., also a classroom teacher, confirmed another tenet of critical pedagogy, which addresses the importance of teachers and children working together as partners in the learning process. Her comments also provided evidence that we met the learning goals for the program. She told us:

The drumming program was an exceptional experience. My children and I were both able to benefit together, which rarely happens. I learned quite a bit about drums, and the correct way to use them. I found it fascinating to watch Joel [the facilitator] use the drums as a teaching tool. It was useful in teaching the children to focus, listening skills, patience, and group participation. There are not a lot of things that my children do as a whole group due to their disabilities so it was very nice to see this. The other problem is that there are not many things that hold their attention and boy did this. They not only enjoyed the activities but they looked forward to the next session. While my children have music class weekly they do not always get a chance to play an instrument so this was very special to them. I was able to purchase some drums since the program, and am able to keep the momentum going. It is so nice that they have such a good foundation already established. This has really made a huge contribution to my classroom, and what I can do with my children. This has been quite a valuable piece to my professional development.

Conclusions

Data from all stakeholders confirmed that participation in the program by children with autism contributed to the development of musicianship, self-confidence through solo and group performance, and creativity evidenced by original compositions and improvisations.

Objectives

Nine objectives, divided into three groups, provided the learning goals for the program.

a) **Arts learning**

Able to Do - Children with autism will use drums to generate original musical ideas and express personal emotions; evaluate and refine their own work. Perform as a soloist and as part of a group.

Know - Basic drumming techniques and indigenous rhythms consistent with the neighborhoods in which the children live.

Understand - Musicians make creative choices; creative ideas, concepts, and feelings influence musicians' work and emerge from varied sources.

In music lessons titled "My Drum Can Speak," and "We Can Improvise On Our Drum," children learned fundamental drumming techniques indigenous to Afro-Brazilian traditions. They learned to play various rhythms from western and non-western dance traditions. Children also learned fundamental musical concepts including high and low and loud and soft and how to execute those on the drums. Through "call and response" strategy, children were able to improvise, and express their musical thoughts in solo and ensemble.

b) Academic learning

Able to do – The children will create, compose, and perform original drum pieces that include improvisation and aural notation, thereby nurturing their artistic and cultural literacy.

Know - How music expresses thought, emotion, and story. Experience the crosswalk between language literacy and musical literacy. Use appropriate vocabulary to describe this connection.

Understand - The relationship of music to history, culture, and the arts.

In the lesson “We Can Improvise On Our Drum” children created, composed, shared, and performed original “compositions” on their drum and taught them to the other members of the drum circle. Children learned the names of each instrument and used appropriate vocabulary when discussing musical terms such as piano (soft) and forte (loud). Middle school children learned to read rhythmic notation and play patterns on their drum from notation.

c) Social and emotional learning

Able to do - Work cooperatively in a community of practice.

Know - How to appropriately express their own ideas and feelings.

Understand - Participate in making music, listen purposefully to music, and perform music to help shape and form their personal identity.

In lessons such as “Playing Drums in a Circle” children learned how to contribute as a productive member of a musical community of practice. They developed listening skills and in the lesson “All The Sounds My Drum Can Make,” realized that the drum is the vehicle, but it is the player that brings emotional impact and self-expression to the music-making.

Critical Pedagogy as a theoretical framework

Critical pedagogy is a lens to view teaching and learning. Rooted in critical theory, the ideas and ideals were developed into a pedagogy by Paulo Freire in the late 1960s to teach the illiterate of Brazil how to read. Forty years later, Frank Abrahams adapted the principles of critical pedagogy for music education. When applied to music teaching and music learning, five tenets delineate a critical pedagogy for music education. They are:

- (1) *Music education is a conversation where children and their teachers pose and solve problems together.* Children and their teachers pose and solve problems together in a community of practice. In music classrooms, this means composing and improvising to open possibilities for children to express their own original musical ideas, inside the context of the school and the community. The drum circle provided children with autism with ways to communicate both their musical and emotional thoughts by learning how to make the drum “talk.” They used tubanos and a talking drum to respond to musical cues by the facilitator and to improvise their own original answers. In learning to read Portuguese, Freire advocated dialogue, or conversation. In the United States, communication is identified as one of the 21st century skills essential for success. Children learned to listen to the teacher and to each other, and to respond in ways that the teacher deemed appropriate to the context of the drum circle. This constituted a communication that was meaningful and significant.

- (2) *Music education broadens the children's view of reality.* A goal of music teaching and music learning is to affect a change in the way that both children and their teachers perceive the world. Comments from the college students who assisted in the program, and comments from the classroom teachers confirmed that the drumming program changed them in profound ways. For the pre-service music teachers, it shaped teaching dispositions. For the in-service classroom teachers, it provided meaningful professional development.
- (3) *Music Education is empowering.* Critical pedagogues believe that music is a verb of power. They claim that when children can engage in musical activities and music making that is consistent with what musicians do when they are making music, they know that they know. Children with autism sometimes feel powerless. They experience frustration communicating, and making their feelings known in appropriate and socially acceptable ways. The drumming program provided ways for them to take charge, make musical statements and feel success. This was empowering for each one of them.
- (4) *Music education is transformative.* Music learning takes place when both the teachers and the children can acknowledge a change in perception. For children with autism this is difficult. However, it was not difficult for the classroom teachers or the music education students who assisted with the instruction. Comments from the lead teacher, the classroom teacher and the college students triangulated this tenet.
- (5) *Music education is political.* There are issues of power and control inside the music classroom, inside the school building, and inside the community. Those in power make decisions about what is taught, how often classes meet, how much money is allocated to each school subject, or program and so forth. The children with autism in this program are classified as members of an under-served population. They attend school in an urban district plagued with political challenges. The drumming program provided enrichment that complimented, and filled a gap in the experiences children with autism were able to enjoy.

For all these reasons, critical pedagogy for music education was an appropriate theoretical framework for the drumming program.

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Appendixes

Email from Frank Abrahams to the teachers and principals in the Trenton Public Schools

Good morning:

Early this fall, Westminster Choir College received a contract from the Kennedy Center's VSA Music for Every Student program, to provide an experience in drumming for children with autism in Trenton elementary schools. Working with Norberto Dias, our program includes visiting your school during January and early February to provide at least 5 sessions for your children identified on the autism spectrum. The program includes Afro- Brazilian and Latin rhythms. We have an experienced facilitator, and children from the music education department will work side-by-side with the children at each session. At the end, we hope to present an informance for parents and other interested folks at the school.

Already, Matthew Shaftel, Dean at Westminster and I have met with our alum Christopher Tatro at P. J. Hill school, and he has agreed to help us coordinate the project. Attached to this email is a copy of the proposal Norberto will send to the Board of Education in October.

I write to begin a conversation with you about the project. For now, I would like to meet with you to discuss schedule, logistics and answer any questions you may have. We can do that via email, SKYPE, conference call or in person. I hope that you will support this initiative, and that we can meet in the very near future.

Lesson Plans



My Drum Can Speak

Playing Drums In A Circle

We Can Improvise On Our Drum

Let's All Play Our Drum

Let's Play Other Percussion

All The Sounds My Drum Can Make

Stepping With The Drum

Classroom Music Lesson Plan 1

MY DRUM CAN SPEAK

Lesson Developed by Joel Michalchuk

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, the children will be able to play high and low sounds on their drum with a success rate of 80%.

Understand (cognitive): Children will be able to apply the concepts of high and low when playing the drums.

Encounter (experiential): Playing drums, listening, echoing patterns, responding to musical stimuli.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children will come to realize that the drum has a “voice” and can communicate, in its own language, like they do when speaking.

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways does the drum speak?

MATERIALS

Various djembes, hand drums, toms, tubanos

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Ongoing assessment by the facilitator observing how children are concentrating and responding.

Summative: There is a review at the end of the class. Sometimes children get correct answer and sometimes they do not.

Integrative: After each class the facilitator and the assistants talk through the lesson. There is considerable variation from class to class and school to school.

PROCESS

Partner: (Honor their world by beginning with an experience children bring to the classroom. Include time for children to respond through sharing and discussion.) Introductions – tell me your name. Children meet the college children. Facilitator then plays various sounds on the djembe. Facilitator explains the “attention” sound – palm slide up the head of the drum. He demonstrates the “attention” sound.

Present: (Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.)

High/Low game: Facilitator plays different sounds on the drum. Are they high to low or low to high? Whenever you hear this sound (low to high) that sound says – find your seat, stop talking and pay attention. Is what I play a low sound or a high sound? Then children move in a circle to the drum. Low sound, crouch down. High sound walk tall. Then fast/slow and the pace of the walking changes. They practice clapping patterns with echoes. Children do sounds with their hands on their thighs and knees.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.) Facilitator plays a pattern and children respond with an original pattern.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.)



This lesson was prepared for classes of children with autism, grades K-4 in the Trenton New Jersey Public Schools. It aligns to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Music 1.1; 1.3;1.4, the National Standards for Music Education, and the 21st Century Skills (collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity) from p21.org. Assessments are consistent with Understanding by Design by Wiggins & McTighe, and the Danielson Frameworks. The lesson plan template is from Planning Instruction in Music: Writing Objectives, Assessments, and Lesson Plans to Engage Artistic Processes by Frank Abrahams and Ryan John, published in 2015 by GIA.

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PLAYING DRUMS IN A CIRCLE

Lesson Developed by Joel Michalchuk

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, the children will be able to keep their own part on their drum in a small drum circle.

Understand (cognitive): Children will be able to apply the concepts of high and low timbres when playing in ensemble. They will begin to gain self-knowledge and improvise their own rhythms.

Encounter (experiential): Playing in a drum circle. This lesson is a pre-step to each drum circle playing its own complete composition.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children will come to realize that drums can play in ensemble and that they can play independently and with confidence.

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways does the drum speak independently and as an extension of the drummer's voice?

MATERIALS

Various djembes, hand drums, toms, tubanos

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Ongoing assessment by the facilitator observing how children are concentrating and responding.

Summative: There is a review at the beginning of class of the previous lesson and at the end of the class for the new material. Sometimes children get correct answer and sometimes they do not.

Integrative: After each class the facilitator and the assistants talk through the lesson. There is considerable variation from class to class and school to school.

PROCESS

Partner: (Honor their world by beginning with an experience children bring to the classroom. Include time for children to respond through sharing and discussion.) Facilitator reviews material and activities from the previous class. He plays rhythms on the djembe as children enter. Then a review of high/low game. One of the teachers demonstrates. Then children walk in a circle responding to the drum playing high and low sounds, fast and slow.

Present: (Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.)

Echo clapping: Facilitator demonstrates with the college children. The children try and they do very well. Then children move to rhythmic patterns the facilitator plays. Patterns contain quarter notes, half notes, eighth notes and rests.

For example, ta ta ta rest; ta rest ta rest; ta ta ti-ti ta; ti ti ta ti ti ta. Children get drums. They play patterns with the facilitator. On the drums, children play the rhythms from the previous step. The goal is for children to hear a continuous rhythm and play along with it. Facilitator uses hand gestures to help children if needed and as appropriate. To set up independence, children play an ostinato pattern while the facilitator improvises. Then they switch. Facilitator explains the role of the "caller." All of these activities prepare musical independence.

Next, children get into two groups of circles. Each group has a different rhythm. Group 1: ta ta rest rest; ta rest ta rest; ti ti ta rest rest. Group 2 plays simultaneously, rest rest ta ta; rest ta rest ta; rest rest ti ti ta. This sets up a traditional rhythmic call and response.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.)

Each child contributed to the success of the group by playing their own drum and pattern. They improvised original patterns during a drum break in the group piece. Each child contributed a short improvisation.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.)

Two drum circles performed their patterns at the end of the lesson. Children realize that playing two independent parts in the drum circle is the beginning of a drum piece.



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WE CAN IMPROVISE ON OUR DRUM

Lesson Developed by Joel Michalchuk

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, the children will be able to play new rhythms that include transitions in two parts with a success rate of 80%.

Understand (cognitive): Children will be able to apply drumming techniques from past lessons to differentiate when to play high sounds and when to play low sounds.

Encounter (experiential): Playing unison and in ensemble together. This lesson continues preparation to each drum circle playing its own complete composition.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children will come to realize that ensemble playing requires the ability to follow directions and discover, through free-play, the potentials of the drum.

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways does each player contribute to the creativity of the drum circle?

MATERIALS

Various djembes, hand drums, toms, tubanos

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Ongoing assessment by the facilitator observing how children are concentrating and responding.

Summative: There is a review at the beginning of class of the previous lesson and at the end of the class for the new material. Sometimes children get correct answer and sometimes they do not. But, by this lesson more children are able to find success.

Integrative: After each class the facilitator and the assistants talk through the lesson. There is considerable variation from class to class and school to school.

PROCESS

Partner: (Honor their world by beginning with an experience children bring to the classroom. Include time for children to respond through sharing and discussion.) Facilitator plays rhythms on the djembe as children enter. Then there is a review of ensemble playing and responding to playing a musical answer to a musical question posed by the facilitator on the drum in call and response fashion. Children then trade and share improvisations. This is as a pre-step to playing in parts.

Present: (Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.) Facilitator introduces the following new rhythms, which the children play in two parts.

Part 1: L L H R (Quarter Quarter Quarter Rest)

Part 2: L RR H (Quarter Rest Rest Eighth Eighth)

Transition 4 sixteenths 4 sixteenths
two eights two eights

Part 1: HH R HH R (Eighth Eighth Rest Eighth Eighth)

Part 2: R L R L (Rest Quarter Rest Quarter)

Children practice and then must follow the facilitator as he conducts – hands up loud, hands down soft. They practice and then split into two groups. Facilitator writes the patterns on the white board to assist visual learners.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.)

There is opportunity for free play where children can experiment with the different techniques they have learned – high/low, loud/soft, slow/fast, crescendo/decrescendo.

Children begin to make connections and solve musical problems: If I play on beats 1 and 3, what beats do you play on? Many children were able to solve this problem.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.)

Children have the opportunity at various parts of the lesson to perform in solo. In addition, they perform as a group following the conducting gestures for loud and soft by the facilitator.



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LET'S ALL PLAY OUR DRUM

Lesson Developed by Joel Michalchuk

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, the children will be able to respond to aural and visual cues to indicate when to play with a success rate of 80%.

Understand (cognitive): Children will be able to apply drumming techniques from past lessons to differentiate when to play high sounds, and when to play low sounds.

Encounter (experiential): Playing unison and in ensemble together. This lesson is further preparation to each drum circle playing its own complete composition.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children come to realize that ensemble playing requires the ability to follow directions and discover, through free-play, the potentials of the drum to speak an answer to a musical question posed by the facilitator.

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways does each player contribute to the unison of the group?

MATERIALS

Various djembes, hand drums, toms, tubanos

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Ongoing assessment by the facilitator observing how children are concentrating and responding.

Summative: There is a review at the beginning of class of the previous lesson, and at the end of the class for the new material. Sometimes children get correct answer and sometimes they do not. But, by this lesson more children are able to find success.

Integrative: After each class the facilitator and

the assistants talk through the lesson. There is considerable variation from class to class and school to school.

PROCESS

Partner: (Honor their world by beginning with an experience children bring to the classroom. Include time for children to respond through sharing and discussion.) Facilitator reviews material and activities from the previous class. He plays rhythms on the djembe as children enter. Then a review of ensemble playing and responding to a musical question posed by the facilitator on the drum. Children watch and listen as the facilitator plays call and response with each individual child. Children process each performance and facilitator critiques as appropriate.

Present: (Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.) Facilitator introduces a new rhythm.

Children practice and then must follow the facilitator as he conducts – hands up loud, hands down soft. They practice and then split into two groups. Facilitator writes the patterns on the white board to assist visual learners.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.)

There is opportunity for free play where children can experiment with the different techniques they have learned – high/low, loud/soft, slow/fast, crescendo/decelando. Children begin to make connections and solve musical problems: If I play

on beats 1 and 3, what beats do you play on? Many children were able to solve this problem.

Children have the opportunity at various parts of the lesson to perform in solo.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.)



This lesson was prepared for classes of children with autism, grades K-4 in the Trenton New Jersey Public Schools. It aligns to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Music 1.1; 1.3;1.4, the National Standards for Music Education, and the 21st Century Skills (collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity) from p21.org. Assessments are consistent with Understanding by Design by Wiggins & McTighe, and the Danielson Frameworks. The lesson plan template is from Planning Instruction in Music: Writing Objectives, Assessments, and Lesson Plans to Engage Artistic Processes by Frank Abrahams and Ryan John, published in 2015 by GIA.

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LET'S PLAY OTHER PERCUSSION

Lesson Developed by Joel Michalchuk

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, the children will be able to play rhythms on auxiliary percussion with a success rate of 80%.

Understand (cognitive): Children will be able to apply new techniques for playing auxiliary percussion to enhance the sound palate of percussion instruments.

Encounter (experiential): Playing a variety of individual auxiliary percussion instruments that enhance the timbre and contribute interest to their drumming.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children come to realize that a percussion ensemble has drums at the core but auxiliary instruments to add different timbres.

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways does auxiliary percussion contribute to the sound of our percussion ensemble?

MATERIALS

Various djembes, hand drums, toms, tubanos, and auxiliary percussion including agogo, guiro, casaba, maracas, claves, shekere and cow bell

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Ongoing assessment by the facilitator observing how children are concentrating and responding.

Summative: There is a review at the beginning of class of the previous lesson, and at the end of the class for the new material. Sometimes children get correct answer and sometimes they do not. But, by this lesson more children are able to find success.

Integrative: After each class the facilitator and the assistants talk through the lesson. There is considerable variation from class to class and school to school.

PROCESS

(Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.) Facilitator presents instruments one by one, providing their names, origins, and methods of “playing” (sound production).

These instruments included the Guiro, Agogo, Cowbell, Maraca, Shekere and Claves. Teacher demonstrates each instrument’s unique sound while modeling proper playing technique. After demonstrating, facilitator allows each child a chance to try the instrument and corrects any mistakes in playing technique.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.)

Instruments are distributed so half of the class is playing a Tubano, while the other half has a balanced variety of aux instruments. Stagger auxiliary instruments and drums between children as space allows. This gives children equal opportunities in regular intervals for both drums and auxiliary percussion instruments.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.)

Using simple rhythms (utilizing the part-playing techniques developed in prior classes) have children play their assigned instrument for about 32 measures. Children then switch instruments.

This should continue for the remainder of the class. Depending on the class' proficiency, the teacher judges whether or not to assign a new, more difficult rhythm for children to play.



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ALL THE SOUNDS MY DRUM CAN MAKE

Lesson Developed by Larry Miller

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, children will be able to play low and high sounds on djembes, in a variety of rhythmic patterns, and create their own rhythmic motives through performance, with a success rate of 80%.

Understand (cognitive): Children will have perspective on the capabilities of each individual drum.

Encounter (experiential): Children will perform together in the context of a drum circle.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children come to realize that a percussion ensemble has drums at the core but it is the player that brings the drum's sounds to life

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways can children bring life to the sound of the drum?

MATERIALS

Tubanos

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Are children able to stay focused, wait for their turn to participate, and participate with musical intent? How complex are the rhythms that they are able to accurately echo? Are they able to improvise within a metrical context?

Summative: Were children able to reproduce the musical patterns with accuracy?

Integrative: Depending on the capabilities present, echo patterns will need to be adjusted to be more or less complex. Are children able to hold an individual part while other children are playing contrasting parts? If not, layering of drum patterns will need to be sequenced slower in future lessons.

PROCESS

Partner: (Honor their world by beginning with an experience children bring to the classroom. Include time for children to respond through sharing and discussion.) Sitting in a circle, the facilitator and children get to know each other. Sitting on the front edge of their chair, children step with alternating feet to a predetermined tempo, and continue while the teacher plays | 1 e2 a (3) a 4 ae | on a djembe. Then, children pat with both hands on 1 (when the low sound is played).

Next, the rhythm is changed to | 1 e2 a 3 a 4 ae |, and children pat on both low sounds (beats 1 and 3). Repeat with patting on 2 and 4. As a formative assessment, the teacher tests children's ability to hold own parts by splitting into two groups, one patting on 1 and 3, the other on 2 and 4.

Present: (Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.) Distribute drums. Allow for 30 quick seconds of explore time. Teacher-led echo patterns. Be sure to explain the echo pattern procedure: listen first, repeat once, and listen for the next pattern. Use this opportunity to test children's complexity of rhythmic understanding. Allow a few student volunteers to lead echo patterns.

On laps, children learn Pattern 1 | 1 (2) 3 a (4) |, including claps on the rest. Repeat as group. Introduce technique for low drum sounds (cupped hand position on the center of the drum head). Using the low sound hand position, apply Pattern 1 to the drum. Split drum circle in halves. One group plays Pattern 1 while the other half improvises. Use this opportunity to check for children's individual creativity and ability to perform within a predetermined metrical context. Switch the roles of the groups and repeat this

step. Introduce technique for high djembe sounds. Flat hands, fingertips only. Avoid hitting inside of knuckles on the edge of the drum.

Demonstrate Pattern 2: | 1eae2 3 4 |, all played with high sounds. Repeat this rhythm, focusing on light playing to contrast with the heaviness of Pattern 1. Split drum circle in halves again. Start with one half providing a foundation of Pattern 1. When musical context is stable, cue the second group in with Pattern.

2. Switch roles of the groups and repeat this step.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.)

End the first lesson by returning to echo patterns, making sure to review that procedure (listen first, repeat once, and listen for the next pattern). Focus on using the variety of sounds explored in this lesson. Begin with teacher-led examples, and then choose one volunteer and move clockwise through the circle, allowing everyone the opportunity to lead the class. It is important to note that there are no wrong answers; the class will echo anything they hear.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.) Children perform as soloists by playing patterns in turn on their drums to end the lesson.



This lesson was prepared for classes of children with autism, grades 6-8 in the Trenton New Jersey Public Schools. It aligns to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Music 1.1; 1.3;1.4, the National Standards for Music Education, and the 21st Century Skills (collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity) from p21.org. Assessments are consistent with Understanding by Design by Wiggins & McTighe, and the Danielson Frameworks. The lesson plan template is from Planning Instruction in Music: Writing Objectives, Assessments, and Lesson Plans to Engage Artistic Processes by Frank Abrahams and Ryan John, published in 2015 by GIA.

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STEPPING WITH THE DRUM

Lesson Developed by Larry Miller

LEARNING GOALS

What Learners will:

Be able to do (behavioral): By the end of the lesson, children will be able to perform the 4-pattern O Passo step with a success rate of 80%.

Understand (cognitive): Children will apply the O Passo step while participating in a group musical performance.

Encounter (experiential): Children will perform together in the context of a drum circle.

Construct meaning (constructivist): Children come to realize that musical ideas may be organized in various ways.

FOCUSING QUESTION

In what ways can children organize and layer musical material for a final performance?

MATERIALS

Tubanos and djembes. Rhythm printout.

ASSESSMENT

Formative: Are children able to stay focused, wait for their turn to participate, and participate with musical intent?

How well are children able to both remember and maintain rhythmic motives in a larger musical context?
Summative: Were children able to perform the layered piece with accuracy and ease?

Integrative: This lesson may need to be adjusted if children are not able to maintain this many parts in the same musical texture. The O Passo step will be challenging to some children, and echo patterns used may need to be simplified to reinforce the placement of the beat.

PROCESS

Partner: (Honor their world by beginning with an experience children bring to the classroom. Include time for children to respond through sharing and discussion.)

The Step: Children are standing in a circle, in front of their chairs. Drums are outside of the circle, away from distracting the exercise. Facilitator starts walking 4-pattern O Passo step, asking children to join when they understand the pattern.

Discussion: who can explain in words the pattern we are stepping? Teacher uses this explanation for formative assessment, to help any children that may be struggling (forgetting to alternate feet. Not going forward and backward at the correct time. Keep 4-pattern Walk going, perform facilitator-led echo patterns using only clapping. Then, allow student volunteers to lead clapping echo patterns. Use this opportunity to allow children' confidence with echo patterns to distract them from the Walk, solidifying the Walk as a subconscious act.

Next, introduce O Passo, a Brazilian approach to developing comprehensive musicianship, by having children map rhythms and clap only on specific beats. "Clap only on beat 2." Call out beat numbers, and practice transitioning clapping while the Walk stays constant. Allow for a student volunteer to call out beat numbers. This is a game of musical focus. End this section by doing 1 and 3, 2 and 4, and splitting into two groups (facing each other), performing these two parts together.

Present: (Sequence the lesson steps. Take the learning from THEIR world to the world of the classroom. Present the information and allow time for children to practice and respond. Engage critical thinking, problem posing, and problem solving.) Distribute drums. Using printouts, review Pattern 1 and Pattern 2 from lesson 6.

Practicing layering these two together again. Introduce Pattern 3, connecting it to the Walking activity. This will be played on a high-pitched instrument, such as a bell or tambourine. Layer the three parts together. Introduce Pattern 4, which is the most complex. Break it down as three chunks of “1 e2 a” and one chunk of “1eae2eae”.

Personalize: (Make the learning goal personal to the children. Provide opportunities for children to create and be musicians. Encourage original thinking and innovation.

Divide the drum circle into quadrants for the four parts.

Distribute high-pitched instruments for the group playing Pattern 3. Using the printouts, order them on the board as 1, 2, 3, 4. We are working on musical layers. Before layering everything together, have the members of each group play their corresponding pattern together, as a smaller ensemble. Beginning with Pattern 1, layer in the parts by cueing the next part when appropriate. Have a student volunteer reorder the printouts on the board.

Add unison outro for a solid ending to a layered performance. [1eae2 3eae4 | 1 2 3 (4.

Perform: (Communicate and share the new learning as children perform through concert presentation, demonstration, or exhibition.) Return to student-led echo patterns, continuing to work on confidence and leadership.

Pattern 1



Pattern 2



Pattern 3



Pattern 4



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