

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

Nottingham's Drums for Schools and Sound Children have announced a new range aimed at SEND practitioners who don't feel confident using music. The need was urgent, as Craig Trafford tells Alex Stevens

Music has a solid reputation among non-music teachers from a variety of backgrounds, although the extent to which its power is fully realised can be variable. From art teachers putting it on in the background, to nursery teachers (as recent research by Nicola Burke has found) putting it on in the background, to SEND specialist teachers, er, also putting it on in the background – as educational kinesiologist and community musician Craig Trafford discovered some years ago – in fact, the unconsidered use of music in some learning environments means it is at best underexploited and at worst could be actively disrupting children and young people's development.

'I've seen so many stockroom cupboards, even small rooms, packed to the rafters with instruments that never come out,' says Trafford of his experience working with children and SEND practitioners. 'Or if the instruments do come out, somebody plonks a CD on in the corner and everybody shakes around for 10 or 15 minutes – and that's the music session.'

It was as a response to this lack of knowledge, skill, confidence and experience that Trafford and Andy Gwatkin, director of Drums for Schools, first started experimenting with specially adapted instruments and resources. That was around ten years ago, and last Autumn, Drums for Schools collected the work together in a specialised range aimed at non-music-specialist SEND practitioners.

The range is 'suitable for all ages and abilities and designed to get everyone actively engaged, first making and controlling sounds and then making music together'. It consists of specially

selected instruments and kits which come with packs of clearly written teaching support materials 'and access to our experts', says Drums for Schools.

'Our "learning by playing" approach is thoroughly inclusive and accessible to everyone – children, adults and practitioners,' says Gwatkin. 'Our instruments stimulate both the senses and the imagination and generate an immediate response. And they can be played straight from the box – you don't need SEND or music training because everything is so accessible and comes with teaching support and access to our experts. These really are musical instruments for everyone.'



Craig Trafford

to discover more and to develop and progress, and to want to participate. So they're the keys. But yes, I've certainly found a lot of specialist SEND teachers who weren't confident in music-making.

'There's quite a perception among many teachers, I think, that music is for

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NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE

The instruments and materials in the range were designed in response to a clear need, says Trafford: 'There's a really big gap. During my early discussions with teachers they'd say "We haven't got a music specialist". So I began to develop programmes and resources so that they could use them when I wasn't there. I'd always say that just 10 or 15 minutes a day, repeating what we'd learned, was all it required – but that what it does need to be is regular. Even if it's only a short amount, it's the regularity that's important, because that gives the children confidence to explore further,

the specialist, and it should stay in those realms. But for us, that denies access to a broader range of children. We wanted to develop a range that would bring confidence particularly to non-specialists – and specialists, naturally – so that more children would be facilitated. We both felt that the pleasure we get from playing music could be passed on.'

Music is well known as an important tool for working with people with SEND, says Trafford, but without adequate support and provision this reputation can become burdensome for teachers lacking musical confidence. 'If you're in your first year of training as an SEND teacher or a SENCO [Special Educational Needs

Coordinator], then you don't want to be holding onto this baggage of feeling "but I'm not very confident at music".

'Continuous music provision for children is so crucial, not just to our core offering, but, as far as we're concerned, to facilitate all the other abilities that children and young people need to learn and progress. So we make it possible for just about anyone and everyone, really. We have also been looking at inclusion in mainstream education, trying to spread the message about how – just because a certain child isn't able to grip and the teacher keeps having to bend down and pick the shaker up every time they drop it, that kind of thing – those things can build a reluctance over time. And teachers don't necessarily have time to ask themselves how they are going to help each particular child to participate. Overcoming grip issues, for example, was one reason we brought in wearable instruments. So we're trying to cut down those issues.'

DREAM INSTRUMENT

'My personal favourite has got to be the dream drum,' says Craig Trafford. 'These used to be Calor gas bottles, destined for the tip, and we slice them so that they're taken down to just a small-sized capsule. They then have tones and a sounding hole cut into them, and they sound delightful. We were looking for something that would bring calm to children but that children themselves were in control of – aiming for a concept of non-music specialists being able to have control over tone, sound and volume without actually needing too much explicit instruction. That's my favourite one. When you play it, it sounds somewhere between a steel pan and a gamelan, with a gorgeous tone, soft, warm and rich – it's hard to make a bad sound out of it – and they also last for years. What we find is that if we put one in the corner a child will often start playing it gently and they'll be instantly calming themselves, and then other children will gather round, or listening. Or you



can use it as an ambient background sound, as an aural cue, or for sound effects in story sessions. It's so versatile, I absolutely love it.'