

The Drums for Schools Advantage

All the benefits of a Classical Music Education. . .

We make a very bold claim about the effectiveness of our approach to class music education, that

“it delivers all the benefits of a classical music education but in a fraction of the time, at a fraction of the cost and for ALL pupils.”

and you’d be justified in wanting to know how we can support such an extravagant promise.

As a first step let’s define what we mean by “*all the benefits of a classical music education*” and without getting into an argument about their relative importance, let’s list the main ones out under three headings: Life Skills, Musicianship, Academic Learning:

Life Skills - Empathy, Listening, Initiative, Creativity, Self-discipline, Teamwork

Musicianship - Instrumental skills, Improvisation skills, Performance skills, Aural memory

Academic Learning - In depth knowledge, Notation skills, Compositional skills

If the above is a reasonably complete list, then how does our world music-based approach measure up? Can it really deliver the same benefits? The following table scores classical instrumental and ensemble based learning and the world music-based approach for the scope they give in developing each of these skills.

		Classical	World Music
LIFE SKILLS	Empathy	5	5
	Listening	5	5
	Initiative	5	5
	Creativity	3	5
	Self-discipline	5	4
	Teamwork	5	5
MUSICIANSHIP	Instrumental skills	5	4
	Improvisation skills	1	5
	Performance skills	5	5
	Aural memory	5	5
ACADEMIC LEARNING	In depth knowledge of the style/tradition	5	3
	Notation skills	5	4
	Compositional skills	5	4



You may be surprised just how high world music-based learning scores, but the fact is that most of the major world music styles are ancient and sophisticated traditions with extensive repertoires and considerable scope for developing all the same skills that are needed for and developed by classical ensemble playing. It is mainly unfamiliarity that has tended to make many classical musicians assume that world music traditions are in some way musically inferior — in a reverse of the norm, unfamiliarity has bred contempt.

Now let's look at the second part of our claim, that the approach delivers these all-important benefits

- a) to ALL pupils**
- b) in a fraction of the time**
- c) at a fraction of the cost**

a) The approach works for ALL pupils, regardless of ability and socio-economic background, because the instruments and the music are accessible. The basic playing techniques of most instruments can be picked up in less than an hour and although it may take hundreds or thousands of hours of dedicated practice to become a virtuoso djembe or gamelan player, many simple ensemble pieces can be played by complete beginners. So the instrument is not a barrier to progress. Similarly, the music is generally easily approachable (even if it's foreign sounding to the classically trained western ear), and whole classes of children can be playing simple pieces successfully together right from the first lesson.

b) The inherent accessibility of the instruments and music is the key to fast progress - because the children can quickly make a good sound together, they are immediately engaged and encouraged to focus. Nothing succeeds like success and under the guidance of a good teacher it's possible for a class of complete beginners to be performing together in front of the whole school after just a few hours. In a more normal situation, where the teacher is also new to the tradition and where there hasn't been any expert input, it may take as many as 8 or 10 lessons for the class to get to performance level. But compare that with any classical musical instrument where 8 or 10 lessons might not even cover the basic playing techniques.

c) Fast progress of course reduces costs significantly - but so does the fact that experts are not needed. These world music traditions really can be taught by any enthusiastic generalist teacher, enabling schools to make use of in-house manpower to extend their music department capability with just the occasional injection of expertise. As a third cost-minimising factor, there's the cost, durability and ease of maintenance of world musical instruments and the fact that one set of instruments can be used by the whole school - there's no need for one instrument per pupil.

The following table shows the approximate cost per pupil per year of teaching world music traditions with and without additional CPD and pupil workshops given by visiting experts. Please note that the figures are in £ not £'000 and are based on a school with 300 pupils. The cost-effectiveness of the approach is clear with total annual costs for all 300 pupils of between £250, if all the teaching is carried out in-house and £2,150, if visiting experts and CPD training is added to the mix.

Style	Cost per pupil per year	
	Without extra CPD or visiting experts ¹	With extra CPD and visiting experts ^{1, 2}
World Percussion	£0.9	£6.9
African Drumming	£0.8	£6.8
Indonesian Gamelan	£1.2	£7.2
Brazilian Samba	£1.0	£7.0
Caribbean Steel Pans	£1.4	£7.4

Assumptions:

1. School of 300 pupils in 10 classes of 30 pupils each
Cost of musical instruments written off over 1 year (percussion) or 5 years (other instruments)
2. Three lessons per class per year from a visiting expert
Three twilight sessions of professional development training per year for 10 class teachers

Finally, consider the above in the light of the benefits accruing to pupils, school and community and the speed with which the benefits will arise. There really is nothing that comes close to the educational cost-effectiveness of the *Drums for Schools* approach.

NOTE: the *Drums for Schools* “learning by playing” approach has been developed, tested and refined over twenty years of actual class teaching, initially in primary schools in the Bristol region of the UK and later extended to Foundation Stage and Secondary levels in schools all over the UK and internationally. It is currently being applied successfully in literally hundreds of state-funded and independent schools in the UK, the Gulf, South East Asia and the USA.