

Delivering the Benefits

The Drums for Schools approach to whole class instrumental teaching

Introduction

The National Music Plan gives schools the primary responsibility for delivering a high quality music education to their pupils and insists that *every pupil should have the opportunity to learn an instrument and make music with others*. Impossibly demanding? A pipe dream? I don't think so.

Drums for Schools already has tried and tested programmes which are delivering classroom based instrumental teaching which is:

- **Inclusive of ALL pupils**
- **Enjoyable and yet academically rigorous**
- **Coherent, linking both to the music and the general syllabus**
- **Progressive, taking pupils from KS1 smoothly through to KS3 and beyond**
- **Demonstrably cost-effective**

Here's what's already in place

For many years now we've been using world music styles - African Drumming, Gamelan, Samba, Steel Pans, Taiko and Class-percussion to deliver Wider Opportunities (now called First Access) instrumental and ensemble lessons. We've developed these further into programmes that are suitable for pupils in all key stages and which can run over a full year, or longer.

These world music styles are popular with the children and with school staff and that's vitally important as it makes the teaching and the learning so much easier. I make no apology for the fact that the lessons are enjoyable - yes, they're fun for pupils and teachers and, as I'll show below, they're also extremely effective and generate an enormous amount of real musical learning.

The styles are also naturally accessible and inclusive

Children don't feel excluded for reasons of cultural background or ability and because the instruments we use are technically quite easy for beginners to get to grips with, relatively little time has to be spent on technique and so most of the lesson time can be spent actually playing.

Although the teaching is accessible and we can ensure that no one gets left behind, we are still able to challenge the more able pupils with more demanding part playing.

For example in African Drumming the rhythms are made up from three parts with a simple bass part on the large drums maintaining a steady pulse, a slightly more complex part on the medium drums and a challenging part with more sophisticated rhythms on the smaller drums - all linking in with the standard lesson plan objectives that every lesson should contain outcomes that all pupils can achieve, further outcomes that most will be able to achieve and higher outcomes that some (a few) will be able to attain. Similar types of differentiation are found in nearly all world music styles.

The teaching is rigorous and coherent

But despite being popular, accessible and inclusive these styles are also **rigorous** and **educationally potent**. In the course of a term's lessons we cover both theoretically and practically:

- **All the Elements of Music** - Including rhythm, tempo and pulse, pitch, dynamics, duration, texture and structure.
- **Musical Notation** - grid notation, graphic notation, cipher notation and stave notation are all used in the teaching of the world musical styles and in response to OFSTED we will soon be publishing a guide on how you can simply convert any of the above notation systems into classical western stave notation.
- **Improvisation** - Soloing within the ensemble and building upon a thematic musical style.
- **Composition** - Once pupils understand the way a musical style is put together they are encouraged to make up their own musical representations in the style.
- **Performance** - All our projects conclude at the end of the first term's work with a short performance and larger concerts can be organised in the school or community.

And all the theoretical learning, although rigorous, is relatively painless for the pupils and it's all the more effective because it's being continually reinforced by the practical playing.

In terms of **coherence**, it's evident from the preceding summary of content that these world music programmes dovetail very neatly with the traditional music syllabus. And they can also fit the ethos of each school and link across subjects. Many schools are twinned with other schools around the world and I have found this a useful hook on which to hang a world music programme as the school will often be doing other curriculum work tied in with this - in History, Geography, Languages and even Maths - that can be further supported by its music programme.

The teaching is progressive

World music programmes also have legs and can deliver **progression** – they’re by no means one term wonders. We have developed a set of teaching guides and a repertoire of ensemble pieces that allow continuous progression over three or more terms. It's also possible to build in lateral progression by adding a new style - starting with African Drumming and then adding a module on Steel Pans for example. This helps to reinforce the learning and give a broader musical perspective. We've also now developed a Level 2 program for African Drumming, designed for more advanced groups, which extends both repertoire, range of instruments and technique. An example of this is the introduction of the Balafon or African Xylophone to allow pupils to play simple cyclic melodies. We'll be adding Level 2 programs for Gamelan, Samba, World Percussion and the other styles with the aim of having a complete 6 to 12 term program for each style.

The programmes are astonishingly cost-effective

Cost effectiveness and **value for money** are concepts which were built into our program from the outset. We developed sets of instruments and teaching materials that are affordable and cost-effective, costing as little as £1 per pupil per year. The table below gives an idea of the economics and the quite startling value for money for a school with 10 classes of 30 pupils.

Style	Cost per pupil per year			
	Instruments	Specialist Training	CPD	Total cost per pupil per year
World Percussion	£0.9	£3	£3	£6.9
African Drumming	£0.8	£3	£3	£6.8
Indonesian Gamelan	£1.2	£3	£3	£7.2
Brazilian Samba	£1.0	£3	£3	£7.0
Caribbean Steel Pans	£1.4	£3	£3	£7.4

Assumptions: Thirty lessons per year delivered to ten classes of thirty pupils each. Three lessons led by professional musicians (introduction, evaluation, master classes and performance preparation) and the remainder led by in-house teachers. Support for in-house teachers includes teaching guides, lesson plans, mentoring, three CPD training days per year and online video, audio and written teaching materials. Cost of instruments written off over five years (one year for World Percussion), though in practice the instruments properly looked after will give service for ten years or more.

Conclusion

If you've not seriously looked at World Musical styles before I hope the above overview will encourage you to do so. I've personally seen the benefits of the approach at first hand in so many schools that I rather take it for granted but I do realise that for some it may seem a radical approach.

There's another major advantage of this approach that I've not yet mentioned but that is very important and which does in fact make it truly radical:

**All these world musical styles can be taught successfully by
enthusiastic generalist teachers.**

This means that the school and teachers are taking the lead themselves in developing their own musical culture. The result is that we get away from the all too common situation where music and music making is a weekly import that comes and goes with the visiting music professional.

It also means that the music department can quickly develop new teaching skills in-house and extend its relevance and reach to EVERY pupil.

In my experience there's really nothing that comes close to these world music styles, if taught properly, for delivering a rigorous, progressive and cost-effective music education that has real musical depth and results in real musical learning for ALL pupils. If we could roll this out to every school, we could transform the overall quality of music education in just a few years and make music making and musicianship a right for every pupil, not just for the fortunate minority. The collateral benefits for our schools and for society would be enormous.

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