

Drum Circles as Part of Every Classroom

Nothing is older in the culture of any society than drum circles. They were used for communication, for entertainment and as a centerpiece of all activities for the community.

Today drum circles are being revitalized and being used with students with special needs, with people who are ill, with senior citizens, and in classrooms where music is not the major subject.

Drums circles can cross any barrier. They all speak a language others can understand. They do not have to be costly as drums can be made out of “found materials” or objects found in a room. They can be played at any time and for any purpose and they are all inclusive. Drum circles are not for spectators. Drum circles are for performers. Drum circles build community.

Because of so many positive factors linked to drum circles, this innovative practice is now being brought into regular classrooms at every level. Each teacher has a different type of circle, made up of different materials, but they all seem to bring many positive factors to the classroom environment.

Classroom Climate and Management

Many classroom teachers are using drumming to get students’ attention and ready to focus. These teachers also like to use drumming as a motivational tool. When students have been working for a long period of time on a tough task, bringing out the drums and following patterns is a good way to relax and reenergize. When a teacher says we are going to next go to drumming, the class will begin to perk up and eagerly await the activity. It is extremely rare to find a student that does not like drumming as it is inherit skill that everyone can perform at some level.

Just before an important test, it also helps to bring out the drums and let the students get rid of their tensions. Teachers are finding that three minutes of drumming just prior to an exam, can help to focus the brain and keep the student on track.

Reading Skills and Patterning

In the early grades, drumming is used to help with the auditory segmentation of words. When students say cat, c – a – t , they say the letter and beat it out on a drum. This helps to internalize the number of sounds in a word. This helps students to build their auditory skills along with their perceptual skills. Phonological awareness to the beat of a drum is highly regarded in the world of phonics.

This same segmentation technique is also used with number of syllables. or long and short vowel sounds. When students hear a short vowel sound, they make a certain beat on the drum. When the students hears a long vowel sound, they make another sound. When teaching children to read fluently with phrasing, drumming is a very useful tool.

Students can also learn the alphabet through beats on the drum. The drum beat with certain letters “sticks to the brain” and can then be retrieved when the student is reading or writing. We have all heard

people saying, “I can’t get that song out of my head,” that is what happens when drum circle sounds are applied to any particular skill.

Reading is all about seeing and hearing patterns. When students are in a drum circles, they need to be able to duplicate patterns through careful listening and trial and error. They must also be able to create a new pattern of their own. These two drumming skills involve critical thinking and are important to a student’s developmental level.

Today we talk a great deal about engagement of students. There is no better way to engage students then through the use of a drum linked to a particular skill.

Content Area Classes

Students love to read their poetry, stories, or reader’s theater presentations to the beat of a drum. Working in teams to put the words and beats together through various drumming techniques, can help not only the students with special needs, but all students.

Drumming helps students to become creative, to become critical thinkers, and to integrate their learning senses. Students begin to take risks that they never took before when you give them a drum.

If students are trying to memorize a phrase, a definition, an equation or something difficult, they can pattern the message to a drum beat and the information will be there when they need it. This technique is more effective than just rereading the information a second time.

As a final project, students can also take their research and use a drum circle to help them share the information. For example, if students were talking about a plant going through different life stages, they might not only use power points, but along with the power point have a particular style of drum beats portraying a particular action. Drum beats and how they are performed are a form of speaking and communication, the same way words and pictures give us insight into a situation.

In math and science, students are looking to discover information on number of beats, tone, fluency, vibrations, modulation, strength and length of vibrations, and patterns that can be transferred to technological devices. These STEM type projects and music are becoming more common place and even showing up in many science fairs. Music motivates students and helps them get into areas that before have never been of any interest to them.

As a teacher of teachers, I tell my students at the beginning of each new year. “ Don’t be afraid to try something new this year. By taking risks and tracking the results, you uncover what it takes to be a good teacher. However, if you are only going to do one new activity this year, make it drum circles in some form. You will thank me for this suggestion as I have never seen a situation where drum circles have not helped with relieving stress, helping classroom management, building integration skills, and bringing fun and enjoyment to the rigors of the Common Core classroom of today.”