

Interactive Drumming Meets Teaching Artistry

By Bob Bloom

This expression is well known: “Those who can, do. Those who cannot, teach.” There’s a new variation: “Those who can, do. Those who can do two things are Teaching Artists.”

In education settings, a Teaching Artist (TA) presents activities in an arts integration format (the first thing) as a medium for teaching curricula and life skills (the second thing). An example:

As a science lesson about the vibratory and sonic characteristics of a range of materials used as the body and fill for musical shakers, a TA/interactive drumming leader presents an arts integration, multiple-day, school residency program in which students form homeroom teams to design, build, and decorate the shakers. They learn about physical properties including size, shape, mass, weight, volume, density, and hardness through research into, and the experimentation of using, different materials for the instruments. By collaborating in the design teams, they learn interpersonal and social skills.

To teach the values of goal setting, the TA/interactive drumming leader prepares the students to be featured in a school assembly performance program¹ in which they:

- read aloud from journals that they’ve written during the instrument-making process;
- use the shakers as sound effects for theater skits;
- play their shakers as the accompaniment to songs that they sing interactively with the entire audience.

Utilizing language-based methods that enhance literacy, each homeroom team creates rhythm patterns to play on shakers and hand drums. Students learn the values of cooperation, adaptability, hard work, and perseverance to create an exciting performance of their particular team rhythms in the assembly program.

The democratic method is taught as a means for the students to elect two of the team members in each homeroom to serve as its “Drum Captains.” The Drum Captains interact with the TA and the homeroom teacher as co-leaders for the instrument-making project and the assembly performance.

Arts integration opens the door for TAs to partner with educators for lesson “units” (subject areas) within a school or school district. In the example above, the potential partners include teachers of science, visual arts, reading and literacy, mathematics, music, and drama.

Interactive drumming presentations can

ers of assembly programs, classroom sessions, multiple-day residencies, student-featured performances, out-of-school-time activities, and professional development workshops for educators.

The Association of Teaching Artists (www.teachingartists.com) is a national organization that provides information about how to get started as a TA. *The Music Teaching Artist’s Bible* from Oxford University Press is a comprehensive guidebook for advice on the practice of Teaching Artistry. The author, Eric Booth, is one of the nation’s leading TAs and trainers of TAs. He’s an instructor at The Kennedy Center and is the founding

Artistic Director of the Mentoring Program at Juilliard.

Quoting from the cover notes: “When the artist moves into the classroom or community to educate and inspire students and audience members, this is Teaching Artistry. It is a proven means for practicing musicians to create a successful career in music, providing not only necessary income but also deep and lasting satisfaction through engaging people in learning experiences about the arts.”



engage schoolchildren of all ages and abilities in learning by doing, and it can foster the “Four C’s” of a paradigm of education, “21st Century Learning”: Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Critical Thinking. (www.p21.org)

The results of the work of educators and TAs are known as “outcomes.” The outcomes are evaluated, assessed, and reported according to “Common Core State Learning Standards” (www.corestandards.org). I’ve coined the term “OBID” (Outcomes-Based Interactive Drumming) to describe arts integration, percussion presentations such as the school residency described above.

There are 94,000 public schools in the United States. They are potential venues for TAs to be contracted for bookings as the present-

Arts agencies are marketing and financial resource engines that can provide income to TAs. All of the United States and Puerto Rico, The Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Marianas have arts agencies. To locate an arts agency website and its application process to be listed on its roster, visit the website of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies: www.nassa-arts.org.

An arts agency’s website will enumerate the features and benefits of being listed on its TA roster. They may include:

- notifications of work opportunities;
- eligibility for financial support from grants and fellowships;
- artistic development and career guidance;
- market visibility to contractors such as school

principals and parent/teacher organizations through showcases, on-line listings, and catalogs;

- nationally recognized credentials.

For the purposes of this article, the focus is on interactive drumming as a format for Teaching Artistry in schools. TAs also work in settings including performance venues, health-care and disabilities facilities, eldercare centers, social service organizations, and recreation sites.

ENDNOTE

1. See Mark Shelton's article, "Creating A School Assembly Program" in the July, 2012 issue of *Percussive Notes*.

Bob Bloom received certification as a Master Teaching Artist in 1997 from the Connecticut Office of the Arts. He is a member of the Teaching Artist roster of that state arts agency and the rosters of the New England Foundation for the Arts, the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, the Board of Cooperative Education Services, the Connecticut Association for the Gifted, Arts for Learning Connecticut; Young Audiences; VSA, and the Greater Hartford Arts Council. For over a decade, he was a performance member of Dr. Babatunde Olatunji's drumming and dance troupe Drums of Passion and a faculty assistant to Dr. Olatunji for his *Language of the Drums* courses. Bob served from 2007 to 2010 as chair of the PAS Interactive Drumming Committee. His participatory session at PASIC 2011, "Be A Pied Drummer/Get Gigs Performing in Schools," taught leadership skills and ideas for interactive drumming presentations for "21st Century Learning." For more information visit www.drumming-about-you.com. PN