

Rationale for Beginning Percussion Course

The purpose of this course is to introduce the basic concepts and skills that are practiced throughout a percussion student's musical career in public school. This course is designed for children between the ages of 9-11, or first-year middle school students. This can be an extremely stressful year because of all the changes being made to the students' schedule, so it is important to create a safe environment in the classroom.¹ Depending on the facilities, the students will stand in a half circle with the instructor in the middle. This has been proven to be a great way to engage all of the students in order to get key concepts across especially when it comes to modeling.

One of the most important roles a middle school elective-based teacher has is being able to motivate the students to continue on from middle school to high school. The turnover rate from graduating middle school music students to entering freshmen music students is always a key factor in building a music program in a district.² This is partly why I decided to create a less conventional course than the average percussion class. This course involves a vast array of opportunities for students to experience many instruments that are much less talked about in the average beginner percussion classroom.³ Students taking this course will learn the basics of drumset and the conga drum just as they will learn the basics of snare drum and keyboard, which is very often the overwhelming majority of the course in most other settings. I believe that having this diversity will not only round out the students as musicians and open doors to new opportunities, but it will also keep them interested.

Occupying the mind of a 10-year-old percussion student for the duration of 50 minutes every single day for 18 weeks with a main focus of 2 instruments seems nearly impossible to me, yet it is exactly the case in many of the programs in the U.S. While it can be said that all other students must do this with just one instrument, I am willing to admit that most other instruments involve a much more complex make-up than the average percussion instrument. The truth is that what makes percussion so unique is the vast array of instruments that are learned. I honestly find a problem in depriving beginners of this rare opportunity. Rather than confining to just 2 instruments out of the year, introducing the capabilities of a percussionist to the students serves as a great motivational tool to spark the students' interest in high school music.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to decipher the level of understanding each individual student has due to the origins of their learning. There is often more than

¹ Darrell Bueckert, "The Musical Percussionist" Vol. 4 Issue 2, (Canadian Winds, Spring 2006) p86-89.

² Kennan Wylie, Director, *The Beginner's Guide to the World of Percussion*, 2006.

³ Gary Cook, *Teaching Percussion* (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, Cengage Learning, 2006)

one feeder elementary school to each middle school, making it difficult to know where the level of the class as a whole may be. One way to help smooth out this issue is to highly recommend students to have 1 year of formal training on the piano when being given the opportunity to take the course. This is actually a very common prerequisite for most middle schools due to the overwhelming number of students that want to play percussion.