

Drumming Basics, World Rhythms & Classroom Management

OMEA Conference 2026 Mary Knysh | www.rhythmicconnections.com



Accessing Creativity *"I encouraged the activation of the students by the playing of their own music, that is, through improvisation and composing it themselves. I therefore did not want to train them on highly developed art instruments, but rather on instruments that were preferably rhythmic, comparatively easy to learn, primitive and unsophisticated. My idea was to take my students so far that they could improvise their own music (however unassuming) and their own accompaniments to movement... It was therefore important to acquire a well-developed technique of improvisation, and the exercises for developing this technique should above all lead the students to a spontaneous, personal, musical expression."* ~ Carl Orff

Learning Objectives: Explore drumming fundamentals, world rhythms, and brain-based strategies to create engaging, inclusive music experiences.

- Develop rhythmic and improvisational skills using drums, body percussion, and voice.
- Introduce and explore African, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern rhythms.
- Learn inclusive classroom management strategies to foster a supportive musical environment.

Getting Started: Warm-Ups

- **Rumble / Firecracker Game:** Activate brain neurons; energize and focus the group.
- **HOME Rhythm Process:** Create a collaborative rhythmic identity for your classroom or group.
- **Drum Technique Basics:** Practice BASS, TONE, and SLAP strokes.
- **3 Brain-based Ways to Cross the Mid-line:** Integration of Right & Left Brain

Drumming Across the Midline

Crossing the midline—moving a limb across the body's centerline—enhances coordination, cognitive function, and neural integration. Drumming naturally supports this skill, improving hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, and overall brain function for people of all ages.

	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
forward/backward	X	X	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Bass	B	Tone	T	T	B	B	T	T
side to side	X	•	•	X	•	•	X	•	•
	B	T	T	B	T	T	B	T	T
up/down	X	•	•	X	•	•	X	•	•
	B	Slap	B	Slap	B	S	B	S	B

Say It, Play It, LEARN It! Drum Family Ensemble:

DJEMBE
Djem - be, djem-be drum. Djem - be, djem-be drum.

ASHIKO
(clap) A - shi - ko. (clap) A - shi - ko.

**TUBADORA/
TUBANO**
Tu - ba - dor - a. Tu - ba - no

**FLOOR
TOMS**
Low tom, high tom, high tom.

BONGOS
Bon - go. Bon - go.

Exploring World Rhythms ~ Africa

- **Body Drum Song:** Use Shiko 4-part rhythmic layering.
- **Play What You Sing:** Translate vocal rhythms to instruments.
- **Drum Syllables** (Baba Olatunji): GOON – Bass, GO-DO – Tone, PAH – Slap!
- **Amadinda-style Pentatonic Play:** C-D-E-G-A-C
- **African Polyrhythms:** Dance of 2's, 3's, and 4's

SHIKO 4 Part Drum Pattern

goon goon go goon goon go goon goon go goon goon go

go do goon goon go do gn gn go do goon goon go do gn gn

goon pa pa goon pa pa goon pa pa go go goon pa pa goon pa pa goon pa pa go do

go go do do go pa pa pa pa pa go do go do go pa pa pa pa pa

Caribbean

Movement-Based Exploration: Integrate kinesthetic learning with Calypso and Clave rhythms.

Calypso

It's Ca lyp so It's Ca lyp so It's Ca lyp so It's Ca lyp so

Clave

This one is CLA - VE! This one is CLA - VE!

TALA Practice: Track pulse through movement; explore improvisation and solos.

It's Ca-lyp-so It's Ca-lyp-so FREEPLAY! It's Ca-lyp-so It's Ca-lyp-so FREEPLAY!

Middle East / Arabic

- Baladi Rhythm:** Doumbek rhythmic language (D = Dum, T = Tek)

Part 1

Doum doum te ka tek doum Doum doum te ka tek doum

Part 2

Te ka TEK te ka Te ka TEK te ka

- Big Beats & Fills:** Practice layering and improvisational fills between beats.
- Two-Note Exploration:** Create an ostinato (D and A) while improvising with voice and instruments.
- Arabic Scale Improvisation:** Introduce melodic improvisation on recorders.

Classroom Management Strategies: Sequential Four-Step Process **Focus → Connect → Redirect → Reflect**

FOCUS

Rumble / Firecracker Game: Stress release, focus, attention.

Intentional Listening & Imitation: Promote ensemble awareness.

Cross-the-Midline Drumming: Calm the body, engage brain hemispheres, enhance coordination.

CONNECT

Tapping into Heartbeat: Foster group entrainment and connection to pulse.

Basic Drum Circle Techniques: Encourage self-organizing systems.

Initiate/Respond: Practice musical conversations with clearly defined roles.

REDIRECT

Call & Response: Practice self-expression, listening, and mirror neuron activation.

Seed Rhythm: Develop respect for all ideas within the group and build upon the inspiration of these ideas.

Roving Quartets: Teach classroom roles of support, solo, participation, and leadership.

Student-Led Drum Circle: Empower leadership and responsibility.

Facilitator Toolbox

- **Stop Cut / Call to Groove / Continue to Play / Rumble:** Sculpt dynamics and group energy.
- **Volume Sculpting & Group Management:** Guide attention and energy

Creating a Musical Home

Purpose: Build a classroom rhythmic identity that is safe, secure, and collaborative.

- Exploration Phase 1: Personal
- Exploration Phase 2: Observe and imitate others
- Exploration Phase 3: Entire group collaboration
- Check-In: Reflect on the group's choices.

Outcome: A shared Musical Home Rhythm that represents every member of the group; can be used to:

Come to attention, Share feelings, Celebrate communal identity, Provide a safe space for creative exploration

REFLECT

GLP Brain-Based Reflection Process:

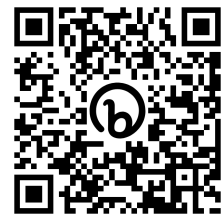
G: Share something you are grateful for

L: Share one thing you have learned today

P: How can you put today's learning into practice?



Website/Resources



MK ~ You Tube



QR Code for Slide Presentation for this session.

