

## **DRUMBEAT Senior Facilitator Accreditation Report Kym Weatherley RMT**

**DRUMBEAT Facilitator:** Kym Weatherley B.A. (Hons) MAMT (Music Therapist)

**Co-facilitator:** Richard (Music Educator's Aide)

**Location:** Sydney Metropolitan Public School

**Venue:** School Hall

**Program commenced:** 3/10/09

**Program concluded:** 15/12/09

**Number of participants:** 38 (22 boys, 16 girls)

**Age range:** 11 – 12 years

**Recruitment process:** By age/grade/school class. The School's Grade Six students were recruited, and divided into four groups by their class teachers according to their schoolwork and other extra-curricular commitments and behavioral records (to ensure those with the highest needs were spread across the groups).

### **REPORT ABSTRACT**

**This paper documents the delivery of the DRUMBEAT for thirty-eight Grade Six children at a disadvantaged Sydney metropolitan school. During the initial stages of my music therapy practicum placement within the music education classes at the school, I identified a potential area of need within the senior year and sought an opportunity to run DRUMBEAT, as an ideal adjunct program. After completing the DRUMBEAT training I worked with the music education staff, the school principal and the class teachers to bring the plan to fruition. The program was conducted successfully, and subsequent research affirmed my findings as consistent with the current literature, and indicated areas for further development.**

**NOTE:** Appendices have been removed for publication to maintain confidentiality.



The program took place in a multi-cultural metropolitan school in a low socio-economic pocket of a major city with a high proportion of disadvantaged children. At the time I was on a practicum placement for my Music Therapy Masters degree. The placement involved assisting in the music education classroom, and in particular to help children identified as having any time of special need to participate in the lessons. This afforded me the opportunity to observe the children and consult with teachers on a weekly basis, enabling me to establish an overall picture of the school environment, its education priorities and the children and their needs. After some time I began to identify some priorities within the school that could potentially be partly addressed by a music therapy-type intervention. In particular, behavioural problems, anecdotally reported to be due to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and stress due to trauma and/or change seemed worthy of consideration. Instability at home due to a wide range of causes was cited in nearly every instance of behavioural disturbance, including family violence, parents with mental health diagnoses, parents in custody, recent immigration or living in out-of-home-care.

The Principal of the school was very keen to try and introduce activities to encourage the development of resilience in the children, and had a school-wide, classroom-based project underway to address the issue. I felt it would be worthwhile to explore a music-based intervention that focused on the Grade Six children for a few reasons. Firstly, as the senior students in the school they were the role models for the younger children, so by helping them work through their feelings creatively, and presenting this work to the school, ways to work towards a more healthy school community could be modeled, filtering the knowledge from the top down. Secondly, these children were off to high school the following year and this was their last chance to prepare themselves and learn some skills that could help them through the changes they were about to face. Finally, the senior class was a particularly difficult group from a behavioural point of view, and as the year progressed behaviour was deteriorating. What I learned during the DRUMBEAT training was that drumming could be a motivating activity for children, and particularly those at risk. It seemed an ideal option to try under these circumstances.

The process began with staff consultation to establish viability of the intervention within the school system, which involved a series of meetings. After an agreement was reached I addressed the issue of logistics – where in the school the program would be run, finding a co-facilitator and sourcing funding for the instruments.

I had had regular discussions with the Principal about the school and the drumming was a great fit for his focus on resilience. The first hurdle was the funding, as the drums were an expensive capital requirement, even though I had managed to get an extremely competitive quote from a big music store chain. The school had no funds available, nor did the charity that was financing the music education program, and I did not personally have the \$2500 needed. So I put the word out and managed to get a private sponsor to donate the money, and I bought ten Samba twelve-inch lug-tuneable fiberglass djembe drums. To save costs I sewed the storage bags myself. The school provided the stationary and photocopying facilities for the data collection forms.

The program got off to a difficult start and nearly didn't get off the ground at all due to the extreme skepticism of the head teacher of Grade Six. Despite a short 'in service' session, she felt the drumming was a reward for children who were consistently difficult, and would affirm their unruliness. After some tense negotiations between the music educator, the teacher and myself, we established a timetable so the thirty-eight children from two classes could participate. It was not without significant compromise. The session length was cut from one hour to fifty minutes, and the program duration from ten weeks to eight weeks. This posed a problem, as it meant preparation time for the presentation aspect of the course was shortened, creating risk of presenting work that the children were not happy with leading to negative outcomes. I felt, however, that the benefits of proceeding outweighed the risks and accepted the timeline. This meant, however, that some adaptation of the program was going to be required.

The head teacher divided the children into four groups, the first three groups were all from one class, and were assigned so the children with challenging behaviours were evenly distributed in the three Tuesday groups. The final group, who came on a

Thursday afternoon, was part of a composite Grade Five/Six class and so came as a class group of ten. Most of this Thursday group exhibited challenging behaviours.

The method for delivering the program was as designed in the DRUMBEAT manual, with some small adjustments due to unexpected changes in the school timetable. For the start of Term 4, DRUMBEAT was a timetabled class every Tuesday or Thursday for all thirty-eight Grade Six students. Each class ran for fifty minutes, and for the first five weeks was comprised of the same elements each week, beginning with paperwork/check-in/feedback, warm up, discussion of the learning objective of the week, then applying the structured drumming games to further the discussion; learning and practicing hand drumming patterns, finishing with a final check-in. In the final two weeks learning and practicing patterns was replaced by composition of the presentation piece. In week eight came the performances, and certificates were presented to participants. Finally, feedback and surveys were collated and informal feedback was sought from the staff.

From the outset I felt daunted but confident that the drumming would be compelling enough to help these “difficult” children complete the tasks. I was also battling my own nerve as a beginner in both music therapy and drum circle facilitation. I was very concerned about my ability to keep my thoughts ordered enough ‘in the moment’ to keep things progressing at a pace they were going to need in order to complete the course in a way that achieved the best results for the children.

Weeks one to five revolved around the prescribed DRUMBEAT curriculum. In each session of the first week we established a set of rules and devised the consequences for breaking them, and created a name for each group (see Appendices A, B, C, D). This was a really valuable process that also gave me a chance to do a general assessment of the group members and the state of the relationship between them. From here we moved into a short discussion of the week’s theme. In the first couple of weeks these discussions proved laborious – the children seemed to find this too confronting at the start of the session, and their behaviour reflected this. At the start of week three I put my observation of this to the group and asked for their response. Every group said they’d rather begin by drumming first and talking along the way. In

subsequent sessions discussion was usually initiated by the first “my hands hurt” remark, at which point drums were put aside and some talk could begin.

These discussions were revealing, and at times confronting for me. Bullying, a lack of self worth, a pervasive resignation about their futures, mistrust of adults and their motives were just some of the things that arose during the short periods of thematic discussion. Anxiety and insecurity seemed to be the general state of being. Even the ones referred to by the teachers as “good kids” were constantly questioning and unsure. What made these disclosures more poignant was the potential the children displayed when given the opportunity to talk about their experiences – they were so articulate and had a surprising clarity and self-awareness of expression, musically and verbally. They questioned me constantly about what we were doing and why, and were at all times brutally honest in their assessment of what they were experiencing. While this was very difficult at times, I found it very validating of both my work and the DRUMBEAT program. We were on a journey together; there was not doubt about it.

The drumming skills part of the sessions was much easier to work with, however in every group we had at least two children with poor bilateral coordination and two more with very little sense of rhythm at all. In most instances this was managed by assigning easier parts, and by having the co-facilitator sitting alongside the child doing some subtle coaching and supporting. All four groups progressed satisfactorily with their drumming skills, learning three sets of patterns, albeit at different paces. This was in large part due to interruptions to the program by other teachers and events.

A good example of this was in week five. Mid-way through the session a teacher burst into the hall with her hands in the air saying ‘you can’t be in here we need the hall for Junior Assembly’. It was Thursday, and Thursday was my most challenging group. To provide some indication of the challenges with this group, during this one term alone we’d had a pregnancy scare, a missing child (she had run away from home to join a local gang), two suspensions due to aggressive playground confrontations with teachers, and one child with severe ADHD (the latter child at the beginning of the drumming course could not sit in a chair, he’d stand the whole time but by week

five, the week in question, he was able to sit through the session and was making great progress with the drumming). When this teacher flew in unannounced the children were intensely focused on playing a set of patterns in two parts and doing very well. The interruption threw them into an instant ‘meltdown’ – they literally scattered – half around the room, the others out the door and around the school. I was able to get them back together, talk through what had happened and finish the session, which turned a disaster into an insightful lesson. I also used it as an example to reiterate to staff how vital it was that the drumming time and space was respected.

Weeks six and seven posed a problem as our time for creating and practicing presentations had been cut in half. We were really up against it in terms of time, and I needed a strategy to keep the process concise, maintain the learning outcomes and make success as attainable as possible for the children. We had such a wide variety of musical aptitude in the group, different degrees of cooperation between and within groups and the pressure of the foreshortened time frame. Even in we managed to compose a purely drumming piece, it seemed unlikely that the children would remember the piece with confidence with limited practice time. So I decided to take a song-writing style approach and introduce a narrative framework. As a group we came up with a list of themes we might like to create a story around, then voted on which one we’d use. Then we came up with a list of titles focused around the theme, and again, voted on which one to use. We talked about what makes up a story – a beginning, middle and an end, and we wrote a simple storyline (see Appendix E). Once we had our narrative journey in place, we used the drum patterns we had learned and composed the story in rhythm. By using the simple story structure the children were able to remember what they had to play. It also meant the groups felt they had presented very distinct work, reflecting the individual efforts of each team.

In week eight the children decided who they would like to present their pieces to – in all cases they chose their class, the principal and the music teachers. One after another the groups presented their work. A representative was elected from each group to give an introduction, talk about their DRUMBEAT experience and read the story they were about to tell in drumming. The groups played in turn, and they were all fantastic. What was so magical for the kids was not only their achievement, of learning how to play, writing their stories and performing, but the response they got from their chosen

audience. None of their class teachers, nor the principal or music teachers, had seen any of their work up to that point, and they were collectively amazed. The most resistant teacher actually looked both stunned and overjoyed. She was profuse in her praise of the children and their achievement.

The Thursday group was decimated in numbers for a range of reasons from sickness to suspension, but a group of five kids got up and did their presentation. What happened next completely amazed me. The child with ADHD was chosen to introduce the group and their song-story. When their presentation was complete, this child came to me and asked if they could all join together to perform their drumming that night at the school's annual Twilight Concert. I was completely thrilled for them, that they felt so proud, and so confident in their work (and themselves) that they wanted to share it with the rest of their school and their families in the biggest school concert of the year. However I didn't think it would be possible, as the concert had been arranged many weeks before and the program was packed full. The child then volunteered to lead a delegation to see the Principal and the organising teacher to see if they could perform – and they agreed! The children performed that night, taking the program from a classroom to a community level - it was an amazing conclusion to DRUMBEAT.

Drumming certificates were presented after the end of year assembly the next day, and final feedback forms were completed by all the remaining children, rounding off the data-collection process that had been conducted throughout the term. For a summary of the data collected see Appendix F. Data collection proved challenging with fluctuating attendance levels, but I was able to gather enough to identify a few general trends, most encouragingly an overall improvement in the measurements for self-esteem, and a very positive response to the program (and willingness to recommend it to others) at its conclusion.

Overall I feel the project was a resounding success. There is not much I would do differently. As a Music Therapist I initially felt a little uneasy in the educational environment. The skepticism of the school teaching staff often made me feel a little defensive and tended to make hard work of planning and delivering the program. I was frustrated by interruptions and the double booking of activities for the kids,

meaning attendance (which was already a major problem for the school) was made that bit harder to attain. In future I would plan proper, intensive 'in-service' sessions for all the teaching staff from Grades 3 – 6, and the administration staff. I think that this would have alleviated at least some of the disruption and helped correct the underlying assumption that this was purely recreational music.

I was also challenged by working with an often-difficult group. Keeping my focus and maintaining momentum within sessions was sometimes very difficult. However I very quickly learned that by; being very prepared with a range of drumming activities in mind (the 'extras' at the back of the manual were invaluable!); maintaining a mental flexibility about what the 'right' approach is; and keeping my attention firmly in the present moment I was able to read the group much more quickly, and change course to keep focus. A consistent, open-minded and flexible co-facilitator was also invaluable.

The school hall was not ideal for the group as it was too big – the kids were not well 'contained' by the big echoing space. I set up in one corner of the room and used a whiteboard as a screen to create a sense of enclosure, which was adequate but not great. Noise was a major issue from both a nearby classroom and neighboring residents' perspective, in this case a supportive principal provided a buffer between me and most complaints. I'd definitely try to secure a smaller room than a hall where possible.

Also, I would not compromise on the number of programmed sessions again. Because of the constricted time frame I felt I had to push the children a bit too hard at times, which meant that while educational outcomes were realised in their skills and presentation, the full therapeutic potential of the work might have to some degree been compromised.

Those few concerns aside, the response overall was overwhelming - everyone who saw or experienced it regarded it as a positive experience for the children and the school community. (See Appendix G - Testimonial).

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