

Exploring Vocal Percussion in the Classroom

Melinda Packer

University of Massachusetts Amherst

My Background

- Graduate of UMass Amherst '14, degrees in Music Performance (Viola) and Music Education
- Current graduate student at UMass, Music Performance program
- Have been mouthdrumming for 8 years
- Co-founder of competitive collegiate all female a cappella group, director of two casual a cappella groups
- Vocal Percussion clinician, workshops, conferences

What is Mouth drumming?

- Mouth drumming is the general technique of creating both acoustic and electronic percussion sounds, sound effects, and instrument sounds with the mouth and voice

Beatboxing

- Solo technique
- Show off skills
- More improvised, flow

Vs.

Vocal Percussion

- for a cappella
- support the group
- tempo and groove

What can this do for my students?

- Introduce improvisation
- Improve articulation and diction
- Reinforce a steady beat and tempo
- Practice free buzzing
- Cultivate multitasking skills
- Provide a sense of accomplishment, self-worth, determination, new skill
- Exercise proper breath control/management in a new fun way
- Apply to any grade/ability level
- Free!
- Great for all populations of learners

Fundamentals

- Emphasize clarity, consistency, power, and confidence
- Three basic sound categories: Hi-hat, snare, bass
- Teach the hi-hat first, most accessible sound

T O S S

TSS

T

- t k t k and ttk tkt- double and triple tonguing

Echo practice

- Echo patterns for each sound individually as you teach initially
- Use this technique for patterns and longer grooves
- Have students take turns coming up with four beat patterns, then longer grooves
- ** This is also a great re-focuser for a rowdy class- beatbox a short pattern and have students repeat, continue until class quiets**

Snare

- Multiple snare types with different difficulty levels
- Teach K snare first, Psh, Pf, Kl

Push

Poof

Psh

Pf

**Inward snare= find your duck place

Bass

- This sound is pure mouth muscle power, takes time to strengthen
- Break steps down
 1. tighten corners
 2. curl lips in
 3. apply back pressure, push lips out and in
- Can use 'Boom' 'Bm' (be the bass and drum), 'B'

How to structure patterns and grooves

- Think in 2, 4, or 8 bar 4/4 phrases to start
 - Keep it simple!
 - pick symbols and stick to them

1. B T Pf T / B T Pf T / B T Pf T / B T Pf Ts /

2. bb T Pf B / B - Pf - / bb T Pf B / B - Pf Ts /

3. Ts tt Ts tt / Ts tt Ts tt

4. B T T B / Pf T T B / T T B T / Pf T T T

B	Bass
T	Closed hi-hat
Ts	Open hi-hat
Pf	Pf Snare
K	K Snare
Kl	Inward snare
-	Quarter rest
'	Eighth rest
/	Bar line

Structuring grooves

- This is a great opportunity to talk about musical styles
- For example: What makes a reggae beat and a rock beat different? (Snare placement)
- Challenge the students to come up with different style beats
- Play examples of a cappella vocal percussionists and beatboxers to see differences in approach

Activity- tempo

- Don't drop the beat
 - Students form small groups of odd numbers
 - Have students tap tempo and then internalize it
 - Go around the circle with students individually making sounds, keep the tempo steady
 - If the beat is dropped, start over
 - Start with one sound, then increase difficulty to 2 sounds, then 4 beat grooves
 - Let's try it!

Activity-Dictation

- Dictation: split class up into small groups (best for upper elementary and older)
- Give them guidelines to come up with a four bar groove
- Have each group share with the class, other students take dictation (sounds and rhythm)
- Encourages both sound, rhythm, and tempo accuracy

Activity- Improvisation








- Improvisation: students in a circle
- Everyone does B T K T basic pattern
- Every fourth bar a student will do their own pattern for one measure, repeat until all have a turn
- Go around the circle until everyone goes, good way to introduce silence into beats
- ** Extension- turn this into a session of trading fours between students

Activity-inventing beats

- Use a simple folk song and remix it
- Small groups can each come up with their own beat, the rest of the class sings and they beatbox
- Try to use songs with word painting to encourage their beats
- Example: 'come along my friends' – train sounds

Rhythm teaching

- Replace your Kodaly/ rhythm syllables with sounds

Symbol	Rhythm Name	Notation Name
	ta	Quarter Note
	ti-ti	2 Eighth Notes
	---	Quarter Note Rest
	tika-tika	4 Sixteenth Notes
	too	Half Note
	ti-tika	Eighth Note 2 Sixteenth Notes
	tika-ti	2 Sixteenth Notes Eighth Note
	tum-ti	Dotted Quarter Note Eighth Note
	syn-co-pa	Eighth Note, Quarter Note, Eighth Note
	tim-ka	Dotted Eighth Note Sixteenth Note

Pf, Psh, K
t t
-
Tktk
Tss
pf tk
tk pf
Ts t
t psh t
Ts k

Breathing

- Use 'decreasing air time' breathing exercise to warm up
 - In for 4, out for 8 on 'Ts', then 3, 2, 1
 - Use rhythms on 'Ts' when expelling air to increase challenge
- Talk about proper breathing, keeping your ribcage expanded and core engaged
- Relate to singing posture and breath control, reinforce the concept in a new and fun way

Advanced sounds

- Inward sounds= Click, inward drag, inward snare
- Add pitch to the beats= hum and beatbox
- Lip buzz
 - Multiphonics/ polyphonics
- Throat bass
- Scratches
- Tongue roll

Examples

- [Tom Thum](#)
- [Reggie Watts](#)
- [Kaila Mullady](#)

Conclusion

Thanks for coming!

Feel free to contact me with any questions

Melinda Packer

Melindapacker.com

melindapacker@gmail.com