

# ***DRUM CIRCLE FACILITATION***

DR. BRAD MEYER

*"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, and gaiety and life to everything. It is the essence of order, and leads to all that is good, just, and beautiful, of which it is the invisible, but never less, dazzling, passionate, and eternal form."*

~Plato

There have been numerous studies done by Remo's HealthRHYTHMS division, the Yamaha Institute, the Mind-Body Wellness Center, and UpBeat Drum Circles on the health benefits of community drumming. Barry Bittman is a neurologist who has been in charge on many of the scientific studies that have been used to show how community drumming is beneficial in regards to: ***boosted immunity, stress reduction, exercising, self-expression, camaraderie and support, nurturing, spirituality, and music-making***

## **SET-UP:** *The Circle*

- Too many people -> several concentric circles
- Space between chairs -> freely while playing
- Create several paths -> for entering and exiting
- Good line of site to see the drum facilitator
- Wide variety of instruments -> divide the circle in half for side-to-side improvisations

## **INSTRUMENTS:**

**Types of Instruments** - bass drums, hand drums, mallet drums, pitch instruments, shakers, wood sounds, bells, tambourines, ambient instruments (rain stick, thunder tube, etc.)

**Mono-timbre** - having only one type of instrument to play

Advantage - participants are forced to come up with different ways of playing on instrument.

Disadvantage - musically, it can be hard to discern different rhythms and participants can become easily confused by their neighbors' rhythms.

**Multi-timbre** - having multiple instruments ranging from high to low and consisting of different materials (wood, metal, "skin," shakers, whistles, etc.)

Advantage - people with similar instruments can be paired up into smaller groups, and people who are less musically skilled can play softer instruments (shakers, ocean drums, rain stick, wind chimes, etc.).

Disadvantage - getting a lot of different instruments for a drum circle can be expensive and can also be a hassle to move if your transportation has limited space.

## **PERSONNEL:**

*Facilitator* - You are the facilitator most of the time. You are in charge of guiding the group towards short- and long-term goals, gauging group attentiveness, communicating upcoming events, devising “games” between groups and individuals, and pairing up less musically skilled persons with musically skilled persons.

*Greeters* - Welcome people as they enter, and remind people to take off their jewelry if they will be playing hand drums.

*Drum Distributors* - These are individuals that make sure each individual has an instrument; they also scan the drum circle looking for people who might not be enjoying the instrument they are currently playing. If this is the case, ask if they'd like to try another instrument, or see if they can switch with another person.

*Rhythm Allies* - People who you can count on to keep the group rhythmically together

## **DRUM CIRCLE PRINCIPLES:** from *The Art and Heart of Drum Circles*

- *There is no audience*
- *There is no rehearsal*
- *There is no right or wrong*
- *There is no teacher*
- *It is inclusive*
- *Spontaneity thrives*
- *It's about much more than drumming*

## **INTRODUCTION:** (Optional)

- *Stretching:* hands, wrist, and arms.
- *Relaxation:* keep shoulders low and relaxed
- *Jewelry:* remove any hand or wrist jewelry
- *Technique:* if there are hand drums, show how and where to hit properly strike the instruments; if they are using sticks, show them how to hold the sticks properly and where they should strike the instrument
- *Volume:* remind everyone that playing too hard can damage the instruments as well as their hearing by demonstrating a good volume

## **TWO TYPES OF DRUM CIRCLES:** *Short-term and Long-term*

**Short-term (5-15 minutes)** - one “event”

### Drum Circle Instructional Methods:

- *Call and Response* - The simplest way to demonstrate rhythmic patterns, different sonic options from instruments, and dynamics.
- *Metaphoric Teaching* - Utilizing different metaphors to represent aspects of performing on an instrument. Example:
- *Say It-Play It* - Vocalizing patterns, pitches, and tones through different syllables and phrases.
- *Written Music* - Giving everyone music to read from and then arranging the musical ensemble either prior to the performance or during the performance

|           | 1 | & | 2 | & | 3 | & | 4 | & |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bell      | • |   | • |   | • | • |   | • |
| High Drum |   | • | • |   | • |   | • | • |
| Low Drum  | • |   | • |   | • | • | • |   |

**Long-term (15+ minutes)** - Multiple “events”

- It's great to start with a “short-term” drum circle. Then, when finished, do some musical team building exercises:

*Facilitator Exchange* - Have someone in the group be the facilitator, and make them then hand off their duties to someone else after a minute or two.

*Circular Rhythms* - Create a small one or two beat rhythm and “pass” it in one direction around the circle. After it makes one revolution, speed up the rhythm. Keep speeding up the rhythm until it disintegrates. Then, do a smaller rhythm that is only a half a beat or one beat long. Speed it up like the first rhythm. Finally, do one single note and pass that around the circle. If the circle has several rows behind it, first discuss how the rhythm will be passed from one circle to the next so there is no confusion.

*Hand Squeezer* - This is a great silent game that can bring a welcome break to the loud, bombastic nature of most drum circles. Have everyone hold the hand of the people next to him or her, creating one giant circle (if there are multiple rows to the circle, make sure that the connection from one circle to the next makes one large continuous chain instead of several smaller chains) and tell them to close their eyes for this exercise (the facilitator should keep their

eyes open to assess the progress of this exercise. Squeeze the hand of the person on your right, that person will then squeeze the hand of the person on their right, etc. After one or two tries, then try sending the hand squeeze to the right and then another squeeze to the left at the same time.

*Kinesthetic Simon Says* - Touch different parts on the body in rhythm creating a kind of impromptu dance. Start with touch two different locations on the body, in a regular tempo, and then slowly add other locations to the initial two.

*Stomp* - This exercise is based on the percussive “step competitions” that utilize the body as the instrument of choice. Make sure to use all sorts of sounds including: slapping, clapping, vocal sounds, clicking, stomping, and even motions that do not make sound.

## **GROOVE WRECKERS:**

*Show-Offs* - Give them their moment to shine, applaud them, and offer them a new important role, like a bass drum. They CAN be your key rhythm allies or your worst nightmare.

*Oblivious/“Heads-Down” Drummers* - Instead of signaling them out, ask everyone in the drum circle to practice “heads-up” drumming and look across the circle to find a “rhythm partner.”

*Loud Participants* - Offer softer mallets instead of sticks to quiet their sound, or a softer instrument such as a hand drum, shaker, or thunder tube.

*Constantly Speeding Up* - Set a “speed limit,” by creating a signal or literally a sign to indicate when the group has gotten too fast and needs to slow down. This will help participants who cannot play rhythms as quickly as others. Or, give less musically skilled participants easier parts that they can succeed at performing.

*Out-of-Control Children* - Remind parents to keep an eye on their children. Having the parents playing next to their children can subdue most unruly children.

## **SMILE!**

**Dr. Brad-Meyer**  
IrmoBrad12@hotmail.com  
www.Brad-Meyer.com