

TOOLS TO KEEP STUDENTS INTRIGUED AND MOTIVATED WHILE PRACTICING FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

by Matthew Black

KEEP THEM CURIOUS

A great step towards intriguing your percussionists is introducing them to some of the extended techniques and instrumentation that exist within the percussion family. There are many different cultures that have taken percussion to an extreme level. Steel Pan, Gamelan, Brazilian, Afro-Cuban, and Traditional Indian Classical are all great jumping off points. In western percussion we have very flashy marching percussion sections, fast keyboard passages in percussion ensemble, amazing drumset players, and unique percussion experiences like Stomp, Blast!, and Blue Man Group. I have compiled a free list of videos and resources you can share with your percussionists over on my Patreon at patreon.com/matthewblackmedia.

YOUTUBE RESOURCES

I find that my students spend just as much time learning new concepts from YouTube as they do from their teachers at school. I am always looking for new resources to meet the students where they are used to learning. Marcus Hawkins from Atlanta has a fantastic YouTube channel where he posts free content like middle school drum warm ups. Mark Wessels has done a fantastic job with the “Fresh Approach” to snare drum, keyboard, and drumset. He covers instrument setup, posture, technique etc. Another fantastic resource is “The Complete Percussionist,” which was put together by the United States Army Field Band. The percussionists go through each instrument, demonstrate correct technique, and talk about the characteristics of each instrument. Just be sure to screen videos before sharing them with your students.

MAKE INSTRUMENTS AT HOME

Another great project is instrument creation. This is another quick YouTube or Pinterest search that can yield some amazing results. Students can use video editing apps on smartphones to show off their new instruments. Anything that draws the student to experiment and explore sounds creation is invaluable for percussionists. Send them to the kitchen (wooden spoons and skillets), garage (think clay pots and screw drivers), and nature (sticks and rocks, etc).

TIME TO CREATE

Create a set of parameters that your students can smoothly follow to create music of their own. For example, record 3 different sounds at home using spatulas on the floor, forks on pots, and a salt and pepper shaker. Make your own 4 measure pattern at 92 beats per minute. Compile your sounds using free apps from the App Store like LoopStation!

MAKE FUNDAMENTALS COOL

My favorite tool to keep percussionists engaged is the use of play-along tracks. If you are a Spotify user, I recommend compiling a playlist of tracks that are school-appropriate in a variety of tempos. After you have compiled your playlist, head over to sortyourmusic.playlistmachinery.com and sort your playlist by BPM. The students can now practice their fundamental exercises with music mapped by tempo. After completing this process, duplicate your playlist on YouTube so that your students do not need to purchase a Spotify subscription of their own. Spotify offers free trials which will give you the time needed to build playlists of your own. If you would like to see examples of playlists I have created and many more percussion articles head on over to matthewblackmedia.com/blog.

AUTHOR BIO

Matthew Black is associate director of bands, director of percussion, and sound designer at Carmel High School in Carmel Indiana. He served as the percussion director and sound designer for Marian Catholic High School from 2014-2019. Matthew has spent time with Phantom Regiment Drum and Bugle Corps, Blue Stars Drum and Bugle Corps, Veritas Indoor Percussion Ensemble, and Cavaliers Indoor Percussion Ensemble. Matthew holds a music education degree from Eastern Illinois University, where he also focused on electronic music composition and audio engineering. Matthew designs full percussion and soundscape packages for marching bands across the country. You can find a list of his notable clients at matthewblackmedia.com. Matthew is a Yamaha Performing Artist and endorses Evans drumheads, Vic Firth/Balter sticks and mallets and Zildjian cymbals. He currently lives in Fishers Indiana with his wife Amy and their English Lab Lydian.