

“Beyond the Obvious”
Using metaphors in drum circle programs
Part I

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Drum circles are a powerful experiential learning tool. The key is relating the drum circle back to the themes and goals of each event or population we serve. We often say, “*It’s not about drumming*” and yet, *what is it really about?* How do you make analogies to rhythm as it relates to life, job, school, health, and community? One of the most effective ways is through **metaphor**.

A. When to Implant Metaphors

1. *Before* - by setting the stage. Sample script – “Before we start, let me tell you that this is not just about drumming. Through drumming we are practicing listening, leadership, diversity, and creativity.” Etc.
2. *During* – by calling attention to a metaphor in the moment. The facilitator catches some one’s playing or a group behavior and catches it in the moment, making the metaphor or asking the group what is it like?
3. *After* – using reflection. After they put down the drums, asking how was the drum circle like work, school, health? Share with your neighbor any similarities or possible lessons that can improve the work culture from our teambuilding drum circle?

Try this sequence;

- a. Any comments about how you feel after drumming?
- b. Person A says Excited
- c. Ask the group – who else felt excited? Raise your hand if you felt that way too?
- d. Is excitement important in sales and marketing?
- e. How can you bring the excitement you feel back into the work place?

B. Metaphors for Different Settings

1. School Programs
(John) As a Teaching Artist, I teach an “Enrichment” program, which means I don’t have to satisfy any specific curriculum guidelines. My goal is to strengthen the school as a

community so I begin with the village metaphor (from Arthur). Most kids' standard definition of "village" is "a small town". We make comparisons to the school being like a village: sharing meals, celebrating achievements, rites of passage, learning together, tending a garden. Kids love to identify the "elders" (teachers) and chief (principal).

I usually bring in the metaphor AFTER an icebreaker/warmup type of activity, but before drumming. Once the metaphor is established, the kids understand the WHY of drumming. You've made a deep, personal connection and set up opportunity for powerful learning.

Sample format;

1. Ask the kids what could be our reason for drumming.
2. Answer: Celebrating the end of school year and the beginning of summer!
3. This is similar to the harvest season" or something similar in the village.
4. Now the kids understand that drumming is not for the sole purpose of "performing" or "entertainment" but rather as a tool for community building and commemorating important events.

2. Corporate Programs

What we do in corporate programs is determined by information from the client. Rarely do they just want to "have a good time". They want comparisons and take-aways that will deepen learning, renew vision, and build connections.

Themes such as Diversity, Leadership, Communication are usually popular. If you are going to teach diversity and leadership, why solely use drums? Leaders don't lead just one type of person. They have to lead many types of people and personalities. This is where using powerful metaphors can really "hook" your audience into the experience. So, in the spirit of diversity, I offer a variety, but limited set of options for metaphors for different timbres in the symphony of teambuilding in the workplace.

1- Wood blocks ("managers" of the rhythm) Their priority is to keep time.

This is also a metaphor for illuminating leadership styles. In the wrong hands, this instrument can mean death to the groove. Someone who is unaware of how loud they are playing, or maybe playing too many notes, is like a leader who is abusing his leadership and is unaware of what true leadership is, INFLUENCE. And if you want followers, you must listen to them.

2-Shakers (soft-spoken leaders, silent majority, new ideas - seeds) Shakers add depth and character. You don't always know they are there, but you REALLY miss them when they're not.

3- Tambourines (bright, colorful, energetic people) They add color and usually enhance what is already there, but can also disrupt. Like leadership, knowing when to lead (play) is just as important as what to do and where to go.

4 – Drums – (powerful, out-spoken leaders) - The main body of all rhythm. The drums provide power and substance, but are also dependent on the other parts to create the foundation for them to be creative. It's like a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship. In the leadership world, we call this the Law of Significance: One is too small a number for greatness.

5 – Bass Drum (pulse keeper) This is the ultimate Servant Leadership role. Not fancy, not a “lead role”, but a vital role in creating trust. Everything is built on the foundation. The pulse keeper is a position of trust, reliability, consistency, commitment. Not for everyone. Trust is the foundation of leadership.

(Christine) You can use similar metaphors in the game **Body Beat** with “Beat Keepers” representing people whose roles are stable foundation and “Wild Cards” representing those whose role is to innovate.

Think creatively about metaphors you use in your work...beyond the obvious. Use buzz words that relate to their life experience and school or workplace. The real payoff is when you make it relevant.

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