



World Music Drumming Transforming Lives . . . Building Community

A Common Sense: An Antidote for School Bullying

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Once again school bullying has surfaced as a hot-button issue in desperate need of solution. Following are some thoughts about how the **World Music Drumming** curriculum can help students develop a *common sense* — awareness of their shared humanity and community.

When students treat a peer as an outcast, they are showing their insularity — their suspicion of someone who is seen as “other,” “different,” “outsider,” “weird,” or “strange.” In Desmond Tutu’s new book, **Made for Goodness**, he quotes the primatologist Frans de Waal who explains that

We belong to the category of animals known among zoologists as ‘obligatorily gregarious,’ meaning that we have no option but to stick together. This is why fear of ostracism lurks in the corners of every human mind: being expelled is the worst thing that can befall us. It was so in biblical times, and it remains so today. Evolution has instilled a need to belong and to feel accepted. We are social to our core. (p. 14)

Forcing a peer outside the circle may be a worse punishment than a physical beating. Unfortunately, we know all too well what the dire consequences have been for many outcast students.

In today’s school curriculum, pressures to perform on standardized tests (No Child Left Behind) or emerging teacher rating systems (e.g. merit pay) have prompted many teachers to underemphasize social development or what used to be called *citizenship*. Knowledge of reading and math alone will not equip students to live in either their present or future communities.

The World Music Drumming curriculum teaches much more than just musical knowledge and skills. It is designed to help students get along with each other and work as a team. Here are some of the benefits of World Music Drumming that serve as an antidote for bullying:

- The first key word in the curriculum is *Respect* — for others in the group, for the culture being studied, for the instruments used.
- *Cultural differences* are celebrated as a rich palate of life choices. “Other” is seen as good.
- Learning *complementary rhythms* requires students to listen carefully to each other, take turns, and build on each other’s patterns.
- *Cooperation and teamwork* in a drum ensemble means each student helps the next student to succeed. When cooperation breaks down, the ensemble falls apart. Composing a small-group composition demands excellent teamwork.
- *Inclusion of all students* is accomplished by finding easy skeleton parts for some and challenging parts for others. As Bill Staines’ song says, “All God’s critters got a place in the choir.”

Developing *a common sense* of community only happens when a school makes it a priority. You can do your part by seeing to it that stakeholders (parents, administrators, school board members, other teachers) know about your music curriculum's contributions to that goal.

Let me end with another quote from Desmond Tutu's book:

Ubuntu is the Xhosa word used to describe the "tend and befriend" survival behavior. Ubuntu recognizes that human beings need each other for survival and well-being. A person is a person only through other persons, we say. We must care for one another in order to thrive. (Made for Goodness, p. 15).