

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

Case Study – The Big Drum Adventure in Scottish Borders



**“Group drumming
practice,
performance,
recording and
learning ”**



About this case study

This case study was developed as part of Creative Scotland’s evaluation of the Youth Music Initiative in 2014/15. The Youth Music Initiative is a national programme which is in its 12th year of operation. These case studies demonstrate the approaches used by organisations funded by the Youth Music Initiative, and highlight the impacts of this work.

This case study is about “The Big Drum Adventure” in Scottish Borders. It is a nine week drumming programme in the Scottish Borders aimed at pupils from Primary 4 to Primary 6 but regularly engages younger and older pupils. It has been running since 2008 and works with approximately 300 pupils across six primary schools each year.

The Big Drum Adventure is one of 13 Youth Music Initiative programmes run by Scottish Borders Council in 2014/15, to encourage music making and participation. The programme costs £18,000 and provides for approximately 300 pupils per year. This covers six schools across Borders each year.

This case study was informed by discussions with 13 pupils who took part, the tutor, the project lead within Scottish Borders Council, one class teacher and one head teacher.

The approach

Initially, The Big Drum Adventure was set up as a gateway music education programme; introducing children to group music activity using world percussion and songs. Within the Scottish Borders the programme works towards ensuring equal access to music making for all young people. The general outcomes for the project are to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to:

- take part in whole class quality music making activities;
- to develop their vocal and instrumental skills, explore sounds and musical concepts, foster musical confidence and use their imagination and skills to create musical ideas and compositions;
- experience a co-operative learning process to develop teamwork, personal and social skills;
- be creative and experience inspiration and enjoyment through music; and
- perform to an audience and share experiences with peers and family.

Drumming was selected as the main focus for this project as it is an accessible instrument, making it appealing to pupils.

“It was chosen because it is accessible to all and children can achieve a result quite quickly. Within 6 -10 weeks they can be proficient and play something that sounds good.”

The Big Drum Adventure links well to the Curriculum for Excellence. It links through the four key capacities - of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. It also ties into the expressive arts outcomes within the Curriculum, and provides a vehicle for learning other subjects on the curriculum. The project involves cross-curricular learning – including incorporating mathematics (particularly times tables), languages and physical education into the lessons wherever possible, often during warm-ups. The nature of the programme has allowed pupils to explore the science of sound in new ways by learning about frequency, pitch and language and to explore poetry through the use of onomatopoeic words and rhythmic language. The tutor also uses theatre techniques to engage the children.



“Framing the work in the language of Curriculum for Excellence helps to reinforce everyone’s learning and joins up the Big Drum Adventure with class learning experiences.”

“We are taking their enthusiasm for music as a springboard to learning other subjects.”

Links to Curriculum for Excellence

In 2014/15, one primary class studied ‘Tropical Climates’ as their class topic. The tutor liaised with the class teacher before beginning the Big Drum Adventure and was able to incorporate many elements of this topic into drumming classes. For example, the sessions involved introducing instruments from the region, and educating children on the culture of the area.

Similarly, another class studied the Scottish Wars of Independence. The tutor searched out battle songs that tied into this theme and prepared the pupils to play at a local community festival, the Reivers festival, which commemorates and

celebrates local history.

Activities

The Big Drum Adventure is a ten week drumming programme. It allows pupils to learn about and play drums from a range of countries. The programme is delivered by one music tutor at two schools per term. The music tutor works independently for his own music education company, and was appointed to deliver the work for Scottish Borders Council.

Each programme is bespoke and designed around the school, the specific year group and their needs. The YMI tutor designs, manages and delivers the project single-handedly. The lessons are generally highly structured. However pupils get to choose the order of the class activities and have choice in warm-up games. The lesson is also deliberately structured to allow each child equal time to experience every type of instrument.

“There is good structure to the lessons and it’s not just about the drumming.”

“We can’t choose which drum we get but we don’t care because they’re all fun and we get to do them all by rotation.”

As part of the programme children make their own drumsticks by recycling old bamboo blinds. At the end of the programme the pupils perform and record their piece and upload it to SoundCloud (an online audio platform) so that they can listen to and share their music with others. Class teachers are actively encouraged to participate along with their class and most teachers get involved in the sessions.

The Museum of Magical ‘Minstruments’

Feedback from pupils indicated this was one of their favourite aspects of the Big Drum Adventure. Each week the YMI tutor introduces new percussion instruments to the class through the ‘Museum’. During the Museum session pupils learn about the instrument, listen to the tutor playing and sometimes have the opportunity to play themselves. This session also provides a window into another culture or topic and allows the drum lesson to tie naturally into classroom topics.

“I wish we could learn to play the instruments that [YMI Tutor] brings in the museum.”



Support and training

The tutor is a self-employed musician with over 15 years experience. He has sought out training in relevant areas, such as drumming and singing courses run by the National Youth Choir of Scotland and various continuing professional development sessions.

“I am always interested in new things that can link to the work.”

The tutor also delivers training to teachers through continuing professional development sessions and to other Youth Music Initiative tutors working in the Scottish Borders. The project has fostered positive relationships with the class teachers. Teachers have no responsibilities other than taking part, and they are encouraged to join in, and have enjoyed their experiences. This was considered to be an important aspect of the programme as pupils can learn with their teachers – and see them making mistakes!

“It’s so important that the children and teachers experience it together.”

“They see me making mistakes and it helps them to know that it is ok to make mistakes.”

Working with others

The Big Drum Adventure is delivered by the tutor, working in partnership with Scottish Borders Council. This partnership is seen as successful because:

- the tutor has free reign over the planning and delivery of the Big Drum Adventure;
- all the equipment is provided, for free, by the tutor and no equipment is stored on school premises; and
- no extra resource is required by the council beyond the funding, which makes this project easy to implement across a range of schools with varying degrees of music provision and facilities.



“We wouldn’t be able to give the provision we do without [the tutor].”

Impact on children

Evidence about the difference the Big Drum Adventure is making is gathered through:

- encouraging people to shout out how the music makes them feel during the sessions – answers include “awesome”, “groovy” and “amazing”;
- evaluation forms - completed by the class teacher with input from the pupils;
- postcards asking for individual feedback from pupils, issued by Scottish Borders Council; and

- focus groups with pupils to gather their views.

Overall, feedback from evaluation forms has been generally positive and both teachers and pupils report they would like more of the Big Drum Adventure sessions.

In our discussions with 13 Primary 5, 6 and 7 pupils, children were very positive about their experiences of the Big Drum Adventure – particularly the warm-up games and the ‘Museum of Musical Minstruments’. All said that they felt happier since taking part in these sessions. Particular changes were noted in more socio-economically disadvantaged areas, where pupils may not have previously experienced many musical opportunities.

“I’ve been overjoyed by drumming.”

“We’re always excited for Mondays.”

Most pupils said that they had improved their music skills, were more interested in music and also feel more confident as a result of the Big Drum Adventure. The tutor and class teacher agreed that pupils appeared more confident.

“It’s actually interesting; you get to learn about instruments from all around the world.”

All involved agreed that the project also helped with wider learning. The tutor and class teacher saw an increase in pupils’ focus and concentration, across all areas of learning.

“The whole educational culture has been changed by Curriculum for Excellence and with Big Drum Adventure the kids learn without realising it, which is the best way.”

“They learn so much without knowing it – many of them are transferable skills and some of it is quite reflective. It increases their overall attainment and achievement.”

“[The tutor] teaches us quite a bit of listening and he also helps with our school work.”

“He makes school work fun – he makes everything seem fun.”

Pupils also felt more connected and worked better together as a team. The tutor felt that in more rural areas particularly, drumming helped to tackle isolation.

“We’ve become more of a team, because when you play drums together you have to listen to each other. We’re working together more and we’re getting on with each other more.”

“Group drumming at this age group has a huge effect on kids and their life development...kids will immediately engage with music and that is because music is intrinsically emotional, so there is a lot of emotional learning in Big Drum Adventure.”

Impact on deliverers and the music sector

The YMI tutor has greatly enjoyed the project. In particular, the tutor values the links between school work, drumming and the wider community. Pupils are encouraged to invite friends and relatives to the finale performance of the Big Drum Adventure which takes place in school at the end of the course. They are also encouraged to use their new drumming skills in local events, such as the Reivers Festival in Hawick.

Scottish Borders Council has reported an increase in the number of pupils wishing to study music in secondary school. It was felt that the Big Drum Adventure, and other Youth Music Initiative projects, create opportunities for young people to experience different musical genres, and therefore broaden horizons.

“YMI is opening up music to a wider audience.”

The tutor would like to see more community drumming projects as a stepping stone after YMI.

Successes

Key successes of this programme include:

- involving all targeted pupils in the programme;
- engaging young people that would not otherwise have access to this genre of music;
- engaging teachers within and beyond YMI sessions;
- connecting young people with their community in an engaging and relevant manner; and
- extensive cross-curricular work.

The tutor was considered to be an especially useful asset for making the programme successful.

“He’s a genius running the sessions.”

“[The tutor] never needs to raise his voice during the class, even with all the drumming going on.”

The Big Drum Adventure is one of 13 Youth Music Initiative projects in Scottish Borders. There is one core programme focusing on meeting the Primary 6 target, and 12 additional projects. The Big Drum Adventure is the most expensive additional Youth Music Initiative project purchased by Scottish Borders Council. However, it is considered to be good value as the quality of the project is extremely high.

“We have to think carefully about the quality and quantity of provision and the Big Drum adventure provides high quality music, so it’s definitely worth the cost.”

Lessons learned

Running the Big Drum Adventure within the school day has been a helpful way of providing the sessions with structure and discipline, within a safe and inclusive environment. The flexibility of the approach has also been critical to its success.

“Take a creative approach and remember that every day is a school day – there is always something new to learn.”

“You have to be open to the power of creativity and to letting a project go wherever it needs to go to be successful.”

The most challenging aspect of work within the Big Drum Adventure has been around building community opportunities for drumming, so that pupils can continue their interest beyond school. In order to address this, Scottish Borders Council have begun building up a bank of instruments that can be used by schools and community groups. The tutor is also developing an online drumming application that pupils can use once they have completed the Big Drum Adventure. This would allow them to create and share their own compositions and build upon their learning from the programme.

“[We aim to] extend the remit of music beyond the school walls and make it sustainable on a wider level.”

Pupils also expressed an interest in continuing drumming activity, with access to more drums and more advanced tuition.

What’s next

The project will continue to develop, through:

- developing a new online drumming application;
- using MaKeyMaKey technology – allowing a user to connect to any object that can conduct electricity to a computer and effectively ‘play it’; and
- continuing to develop a bank of instruments within Scottish Borders.

The tutor also feels that drumming would be a constructive approach to working with pupils

needs.

with social,
emotional and
behavioural

