



Malaysian city Putrajaya at dusk

# GLOBAL TEACHER TRAINING

Andy Gleadhill reports from Malaysia

I am on my way back from SK Medini school, which is just outside Johor Bahru in the south of Malaysia, just over the border from Singapore. At the end of last year I was lucky enough to be invited to work in the Malaysian Trust School network with generalist teachers who were interested in teaching music. Trust schools are Malaysian state schools that have business sponsors, who help finance special

projects and teacher training. The trip was part of a longer term project being managed by LeapEd services to help raise standards in schools in Malaysia.

In Malaysian schools music, as a subject, is taught in primary schools only by generalist teachers who have an interest in music. In secondary schools music is an extra-curricular activity and largely depends on having a teacher

in the school, who is interested in running an ensemble of some kind. And in Malaysia, as elsewhere in the world, teachers find it hard to get cover to attend training during the school day and so, to make the best of my time, I ran music workshops with the pupils during the school day which was fantastic and teacher training sessions after school.

## WHERE ARE THE INSTRUMENTS?

On arriving at JK Medini school I was warmly greeted and introduced to the headteacher before being taken to the room I was to be using. This was a relatively new school, built with some of the funding from the school's sponsors and I was pleased to see the plaque on the door that proudly declared: 'Music Room'. However on entering the room, my heart sank as I looked around to find not one musical instrument or indeed any sign of music at all, save for two brand-new music stands (but no music to put on them).

It turned out that up until now music lessons in the school had exclusively consisted of the singing of traditional songs, taught from memory by the teacher and without musical accompaniment. But things were about to change as I had come fully armed



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with a set of African djembes from my tour sponsor Drums for Schools and a very different approach to whole-class music lessons. The excitement was tangible as we set about arranging the chairs into a circle ready for my day's workshops.

It was a new experience for the young people, and they absolutely lapped up the opportunity to take part in a collaborative and creative music-making lesson. During the course of the day, every pupil in the school had taken part in an African drumming class, from the youngest reception pupil to the oldest 12-year-olds, and it was a tremendous pleasure.

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But my biggest challenge came after the end of the school day, as class teachers arrived from all the surrounding schools, some many miles away, ready to attend my training.

While the teachers arrived I took the opportunity to have some curry and rice that the school had provided and on returning to the music room I met with my teachers, all women in traditional 'Baju Kurung' dress and all looking rather solemn.

I always like to begin my training sessions with a group music making activity, which acts as an ice breaker and warm up, so I turned nervously to my local assistant and said 'The first thing I am going to do with them is a rap, do you think that's appropriate?' 'Go ahead,'

she said, 'they'll love it!'

And love it they did, giggling like school children as they tried my 'Getting to know you' rap which involves playing a body percussion back beat while rapping your name, where you come from, what you're 'into' and 'gettin' down!'

## 'GETTING TO KNOW YOU' RAP

Key:

O = Rest

K = Slap Knee

C = Clap Hands

Fast

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
K	O	O	O	C	O	O	K
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
O	K	K	O	C	O	O	O

With everyone sitting in a row or a circle, repeat the beat of knee slaps and claps round and round. For this to work the pulse of the odd numbers needs to be quite fast at about 250 beats or cells per minute. The first person raps 'my name is' at the end of the first phrase on beats 14,15 and 16 then says their first name over the next beats 1 to 4. At the end of the second time around they rap 'I come from' on beats 14, 15 and 16 and say their home town on beats 1 to 4. Next time round they rap 'I'm into', again on beats 14,15 and 16 and then rap their favorite hobby on beats 1 to 4 (no one is allowed to say 'music', as we're all into music). Finally they rap 'an' gettin' down' on beats 14, 15 and 16 and 1. The next person in the row then takes over and repeats the rap with their details until everyone has performed the rap. Now we know a lot more about each other and everyone is relaxed and ready.

## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

During the sessions the Malaysian teachers




Every pupil had the chance to take part in an African drumming workshop

proved themselves to be both willing and able to incorporate more music-making into their lessons. We explored how to use world musical styles to engage all pupils in creative music-making and they learn about music through making music. We were able to show how, even with limited resources, world music can help to teach pupils about all the elements of music, discover a range of different methods of notation and facilitate young people's creativity through improvisation and composition.

We are now working with the Trust Schools' business sponsors and LeapEd to find ways to improve music resources in the schools so that many more young Malaysians can take part.

After the sessions I was touched to be asked to plant a tree to commemorate my visit to the school, something which, I was told, I will have to tend and water on my next visit.

As I retired to my room that evening with the sounds of the *Adhan* (call to prayer) ringing out from the nearby Minaret, I wondered how a musician brought up in rural Norfolk could end up teaching African drumming to pupils in South East Asia. What a wonderful musical world. 

“ UNTIL NOW MUSIC LESSONS IN THE SCHOOL HAD EXCLUSIVELY CONSISTED OF THE SINGING OF TRADITIONAL SONGS, TAUGHT FROM MEMORY ”

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