



Include  
Empower  
Transform

# Building Musical Confidence

Action Research  
Project Report





**Here at Drums for Schools we are passionate about the power of music to unlock potential in both students and teachers.** We know that non-specialist teachers often struggle with lack of confidence and feelings of inadequacy when it comes to teaching music. We're on a mission to change this, and so we initiated the Building Musical Confidence Action Research Project.

## Introduction to the Project

In the Spring of 2024 we put a call out for music hubs to partner with us to identify a small number of schools from across England to participate in an action research project. In order to be eligible, music needed to be taught across the school by non-specialist teachers. Leicestershire Music Hub and Waltham Forest Music Hub answered the call and were able to nominate 8 schools between them to take part across the course of the Summer Term 2024.

### Leicestershire Schools:

- Diseworth C of E Primary School
- New Swannington Primary School
- Ashby C of E Primary School
- Inglehurst Junior School

### Waltham Forest Schools:

- Parkside Primary School
- Henry Maynard Primary School
- Thorpe Hall Primary School
- Mission Grove Primary School

Schools were provided with: one class set of West African Djembe Drums; teacher books, lesson plans, and audio and video support resources; a dedicated contact person from Drums for Schools for support and advice via email, telephone or Zoom. There was no cost to either the participating schools or the music hubs for these resources, and at the end of the project, schools were able to purchase the drums at a reduced rate if they wished to keep them.

Through this project we hoped to find out whether the provided teaching approach and resources would improve teacher and pupil confidence and skill and help them identify as 'more musical' by the end of the project.



*I enjoyed the opportunities to have the students try new things with instruments that aren't readily available for them in everyday life."*

## Methodology

We engaged Music Education Solutions® as our independent researchers to design and deliver the research aspect of the project.

Each teacher involved in the project was asked to complete a short survey at the start of the project, use the specially devised teaching materials and instruments regularly over the course of the Summer Term 2024, and keep reflective notes to assist them in completing another survey at the end of the project. We also asked each school to collect a small amount of (anonymised) pupil feedback.

Each survey asked the same questions around perceived level of confidence, expertise, and enjoyment in the teaching of music, asking teachers to rate themselves on a ten-point scale. The score for each question was compared by the research team to see if there had been an improvement over the course of the project.

Teachers were also offered the opportunity to add their comments and reflections on the project, and were asked to identify a small focus group of pupils to gather feedback from before, during and after the project. Again the researchers were looking for evidence of improvement in pupil skill, attitude, and confidence across the life of the project.

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“ *This project has given my pupils and I the confidence needed to enjoy and build our self-esteem in learning music and being able to appreciate it.* ”



## Findings

There was a marked improvement in overall confidence levels amongst the teachers, with 60% of respondents rating themselves 8 or above on a 10-point scale for confidence, compared to just 31% at the start of the project. Similarly, when asked to rate how musical they felt, 35% rated 8 or above at the end of the project compared to 13% at the start. Teachers' feelings of expertise also rose dramatically from 9% to 30% with a rating of 7 and above.

Teachers were also asked how confident they felt about teaching the music of West Africa specifically. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that all the project materials focused on this musical style, there was an improvement from the beginning to the end of the project. However, the scale of this was dramatic, with 90% rating themselves 9 or 10 at the end of the project, compared to 0% at the start! As one teacher put it: "The African Drums project has significantly enhanced my music teaching by fostering students' confidence and skill in rhythm and timing. It has introduced a rich cultural dimension to my lessons, engaging students with diverse musical traditions."

Pupils too reported improvements in their enjoyment of music lessons throughout the project. One pupil commented during the project 'I didn't used to like music lessons that much but now they're my favourite.' As one teacher noted, "Children who previously didn't enjoy music LOVED these lessons. They were excited for it and they made great progress." Confidence too improved, with pupils at the end of the project making comments such as "I'm more confident than before."

Playing the Djembe showed me that I can learn new instruments if I practice" and "I feel very confident now, especially with the Djembe. I think I could learn other instruments too."

The teachers particularly noted pupils' skill improvement in terms of maintaining a beat, copying and creating rhythms, and ensemble playing skills. One teacher noted "At the beginning of the project, many of the class struggled to maintain a steady beat and play in time with a rhythm. However, as the term has progressed, they have all shown noticeable improvement in their musical abilities." Another similarly commented, "They now exhibit greater confidence in maintaining a steady beat, demonstrating improved timing and coordination. Additionally, they have deepened their understanding of rhythm, recognising different patterns. Their ability to play in an ensemble setting has also improved, showing better synchronisation and musical communication with their peers."



*The children eagerly expressed their confidence and excitement about having 'music' on our weekly timetable... that they feel 'alive' and 'energetic' after participating in the music sessions."*

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## Conclusions

This research was carried out with a relatively small sample of schools in a limited number of geographic areas, so while the results are encouraging more data is needed to draw more secure conclusions. However, the data from this project shows significant improvements across perceived confidence, skill and enjoyment of teaching music with the teacher group, and self-perceived and teacher-observed improvements in confidence, skill and enjoyment amongst the pupils too.



*What I enjoyed most about the music lessons during this project was the children's enjoyment and enthusiasm. Their excitement and eagerness to learn and play the African Drums were truly inspiring and made each lesson a joyful and rewarding experience."*

## Next Steps

Drums for Schools has an ambition to scale this research up to more schools, and more areas, so if your music hub is interested in being involved in the next stage of the research please contact them to express your interest.



# Appendix

## Research Findings

### **How confident do you currently feel about teaching music?**

There has been a marked improvement overall in confidence levels over the course of the project, with 60% of respondents rating themselves at 8-10 on the confidence scale compared to 31% at the start of the project. Additionally, the lowest confidence score at the end of the project was 5, whereas at the start there were a significant number 31% scoring at 3 and 4.

### **How 'musical' do you currently feel?**

There has been a marked improvement in participants' feelings about their musicality over the course of the project. By the end of the project 35% of respondents rated their musicality at 8 or above, compared to 13% at the start of the project.

### **How 'expert' do you currently feel in music?**

The scores for musical expertise were markedly higher overall at the end of the project, with 30% of respondents scoring 7 or above, compared to 9% at the start.

### **How confident do you feel about teaching the listening aspect of the music curriculum?**

No respondents reported a score of less than 5, compared to 6% at the start of the project. However only 15% reported a score of 8 or above at the end of the project, compared to 31% at the start.

### **How confident do you feel about teaching the singing aspect of the music curriculum?**

There was a significant increase in respondents' confidence to teach singing, with 40% reporting a score of 8 or higher at the end of the project, compared to 17% at the start.

### **How confident do you feel about teaching the instrumental performance aspect of the music curriculum?**

At the start of the project only 6% of respondents gave themselves a score of 7 or higher. At the end of the project this had increased to 35%.

### **How confident do you feel about teaching the staff notation aspect of the music curriculum?**

A marked overall improvement in confidence around staff notation at the end of the project with 60% reporting scores of 7 or over compared to 13%.

### **How confident do you feel about teaching the other notations aspect of the music curriculum?**

At the start of the project 13% of respondents reported a confidence level of 7 or above when teaching 'other notations' compared to 40% at the end of the project.

### **How confident do you feel about teaching these different musical styles?**

Whilst data on other styles of music was collected, the relevant question here is West African Djembe Drumming, with 50% of participants rating themselves a 9 or 10 at the end of the project, compared to 0% at the start.

### **How much do you currently enjoy teaching music / How much did you enjoy teaching music during this project?**

There was a marked improvement in the enjoyment of teaching music during the project, with no participant scoring less than a 5, and 40% scoring 7 or above, compared to 25% ranking 5 or below and 22% 7 or above at the start.

### **How 'good' do you think you currently are at teaching music / How 'good' do you think you were at teaching music during this project?**

At the start of the project 7% of participants rated themselves at 8 on the scale and 0% at 9 and 10. At the end, 30% of participants rated themselves 8, 9 or 10 in terms of how good they were at teaching music.

### **Would you choose to use the instruments provided for this project again if you had the chance?**

87.5% said yes.

### **Would you choose to use the teaching materials provided for this project again if you had the chance?**

100% would be happy to use the materials again either in their current form or with minor edits.

### Teacher Feedback: What did you enjoy most about music lessons during this project?

- "That each child was capable of joining in no matter their needs"
- "What I enjoyed most about the music lessons during this project was the children's enjoyment and enthusiasm. Their excitement and eagerness to learn and play the African Drums were truly inspiring and made each lesson a joyful and rewarding experience."
- "How much the children loved it"
- "The singing and learning of history aspect."
- "How engaged the children were!"
- "Pupil engagement and progress."
- "The videos were great to follow."
- "I enjoyed the opportunities to have the students try new things with instruments that aren't readily available for them in everyday life."
- "I've thoroughly enjoyed learning how to play and teach the drums. I am the Music Lead at school without a musical background, but I've found it straightforward to learn both playing and teaching the African Djembe Drums. Initially, it took some time for the class to coordinate and play harmoniously, however, once the children learned to play independently and improvise, they became more confident in playing as a whole class."

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### Teacher Feedback: Summarise in a few sentences what the impact of this project has been on your music teaching

- "It has allowed me to better understand the techniques of drumming and the importance of getting the basic techniques secured."
- "The African Drums project has significantly enhanced my music teaching by fostering students' confidence and skill in rhythm and timing. It has introduced a rich cultural dimension to my lessons, engaging students with diverse musical traditions. This project has also improved the children's ability to collaborate and play in an ensemble setting, making my teaching more dynamic and interactive."
- "Children who previously didn't enjoy music LOVED these lessons. They were excited for it and they made great progress."
- "This project has given my pupils and I the confidence needed to enjoy and build our self-esteem in learning music and being able to appreciate it."
- "Pupils enjoyed the hands on approach. They were all enthusiastic and remembered the rhythms and knowledge well."
- "The children were able to quickly pick up rhythms and create some of their own. It was great to use this for our assembly."
- "It was overall a positive experience, and it gave me more structure which was a huge help."
- "We have decided to keep the instruments for next year and continue teaching the drums in school. The teaching resources and instruments provided were effective and greatly supported the project."

## Teacher Observations:

- “ The children eagerly expressed their confidence and excitement about having 'music' on our weekly timetable. They unanimously agreed that during the lessons, they love experimenting with the assortment of drums of varying sizes and take great pleasure in creating unique rhythms to share with their classmates. Additionally, the group mentioned that they feel 'alive' and 'energetic' after participating in the music sessions.”
- “ I believe the children have significantly developed their motor skills through playing the drums this term. At the beginning of the project, many of the class struggled to maintain a steady beat and play in time with a rhythm. However, as the term has progressed, they have all shown noticeable improvement in their musical abilities. The children's coordination and timing have greatly enhanced, demonstrating their dedication and progress in mastering the drums.”
- “ The children have significantly enhanced their skills in playing African Drums. They now exhibit greater confidence in maintaining a steady beat, demonstrating improved timing and coordination. Additionally, they have deepened their understanding of rhythm, recognising different patterns. Their ability to play in an ensemble setting has also improved, showing better synchronisation and musical communication with their peers.”
- “ My main observations were that all of these children were extremely enthusiastic in each lesson. They really 'perked up' when it came around to music time. Overall, the listening was better as each lesson came around.. Those that needed to , ensured that they were listening carefully to all instructions, in order that the lesson could start promptly. They also started to encourage their peers with this.”

## Pupil Feedback:

Before	During	After
<b>Do you like music lessons?</b>		
"Yes, I love music lessons! They are fun and we get to play different instruments."	"Yes, especially now with the Djembe drums. It's so much fun!"	"Yes, I love music lessons even more now! The Djembe lessons were really fun."
"Sometimes I like them, but it depends on what we are doing."	"I love them! Playing the Djembe is different from any other instrument we've tried."	"I really enjoyed the music lessons with the African drums."
"Not really, because I'm not very good at music."	"I didn't used to like music lessons that much but now they're my favourite."	"I think music lessons are good. The Djembe stuff was fun but it was very long."
It is a bit boring.	I enjoy them.	Way more because it makes me feel happy and I want to dance when playing the drums.
<b>Do you like music lessons?</b>		
"Before music lessons, I feel excited because it's different from regular classes."	"Before the lesson, I'm excited to see what we'll learn next."	
"During the lesson, I try to focus and do my best."	"When we start playing the Djembe, I feel relaxed and happy."	
"During the lesson, I'm having fun, and after it's over, I'm a bit tired but happy."	"At the end, I feel like I just want to keep playing."	
	Music lessons playing the drums make me happy because I like to feel the music and African Drumming is my favourite instrument.	
	Music lessons have been fun	
<b>Do you think you are good at music?</b>		
"I think I'm okay at music."	"I think I'm getting better at music, especially with the Djembe. I'm good at following the rhythms."	"Yes, I think I'm good at music. I think I have a good sense of rhythm which I didn't know before."
"I'm not sure if I'm good at music but I try my best."	"I wasn't sure at first but now I feel more confident because we all play together."	"I think I'm getting better. I'm not amazing but my drumming has been getting a lot better."
"Yes, I think I'm pretty good because I practise a lot and my teacher says I am."	"Yes, I think I'm good at music. I really like leading the class on the Djembe which is I didn't really do before"	"I'm not sure. I still find some parts of music challenging but I try my best."

# Pupil Feedback:

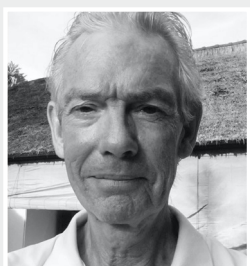
Before	During	After
<b>How confident do you feel about playing instruments?</b>		
"I feel confident when I play instruments that I know but it take me a while to get used to new ones."		"I feel very confident now, especially with the Djembe. I think I could learn other instruments too."
"I'm a little shy about playing in front of my friends"		"I'm more confident than before. Playing the Djembe showed me that I can learn new instruments if I practice."
"I like trying out different instruments and seeing what sounds I can make."		"I feel a bit more confident but I still get nervous playing in front of other people."
<b>What did you enjoy most and least about music lessons?</b>		
"I like when we get to play instruments the most because it's different. I don't really like singing."	"I enjoy playing the Djembe the most. It's so loud and fun. I don't enjoy when we have to stop playing to talk about Africa as much."	"I enjoyed playing the Djembe the most, especially when we played together as a group."
"I like learning new songs. I don't enjoy when we have to write music notes because it's confusing."	"The best part is when we all play together and create cool rhythms. The least fun part is when we have to wait our turn in our circles because I just want to keep playing."	"I loved learning new rhythms and creating music with my friends. I didn't enjoy the times when we had to say how our friends could improve their performance."
"My favourite part is when we all play together in small groups. I don't like it when we just listen to music without doing anything."	"I love learning new beats on the Djembe. The only thing I don't like is that the lessons feel too short."	"The best part was performing for other classes at the end of the lessons."



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