



There's Science Behind the Drum Jam! *By Kenya Masala*

Educators are always seeking powerful, effective, time efficient programs that deliver learning and engage youth. Drumming exceeds in all criteria. Young people of all ages love to drum. Their faces literally light up when the myriad percussion instruments and drums are brought out.

Drums flip the switch for disinterested teens – they *always* rock out and jam with each other when invited to join in on a rhythm program or drum circle! If you have ever watch them, you have your own stories; if you've not watched, ask those who have – or better yet, schedule one for your school.

As a responsible educator however, you'd never hire a facilitator or pay for a drumming experience simply because 'kids love drums.' And rightly so.

As an educators or youth development specialist, you are happy when students love *whatever* they engage in, the reality is there are the budget and outcome factors. Why is it worth having drums and rhythm? Do these programs have educational relevance and sustained value beyond the session? Are there specific and legitimate learning outcomes from such programs?

There are studies that give scientific evidence of the program benefits – and there's some science that may not be as well known.

First, the HealthRhythms™ studies by Dr. Barry Bittman and Christine Stevens demonstrate scientifically, the excellent health benefits derived from drumming (increased immune system function and decreased drop-out rates to name two: www.healthrhythms.com). And, there is now the added benefit of Dr. Bittman and Alyssa Janney's further research with the addition of the adolescent protocol to the HealthRhythms™ program. This is significant for those interested in youth based rhythm programming as it gives more science to legitimize the experience.

The study called *The Impact of Group Drumming on Social-emotional Behavior in Low-income Children*, also offers more science from which benefits can be extrapolated. The results of this study suggest that group drumming combined with group counseling may be used effectively to mitigate internalizing problems in a low-income, predominantly Latino, population. This fascinating study can be found by searching for the title at: ecam.oxfordjournals.org. And, there are many more studies from the world of music and drumming.

Then, there are studies that appear to have nothing to do with drumming yet are completely connected. Since 1989, the Search Institute out of Minneapolis has been conducting scientific explorations with a simple question: *what makes a young person healthy and successful?* To date they have surveyed about 3 million young people, in thousands of communities across North America. In 1997 they launched a revolutionary longitudinal study in the St. Louis Park School District of St. Louis Park, Minnesota. They have the research, the data, and the science.

So how is the study connected to drumming? Simple: *Assets*.

The Search Institute discovered sets of what they call *40 Developmental Assets™*. When present, Assets support the healthy development and success of a young person as they grow to adulthood. These Assets take into consideration, **prevention**, protective factors that inhibit high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, dropping out of school and risky sexual behaviors.¹

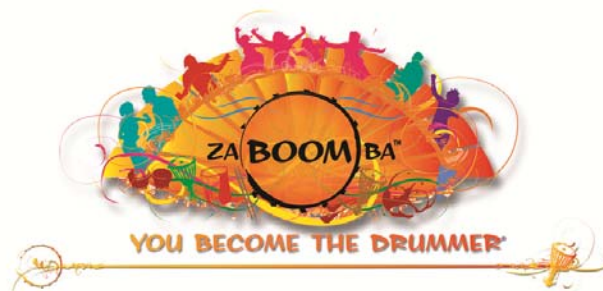
And they take into consideration **resiliency**, factors that increase young people's ability to rebound in the face of adversity, from poverty to drug-abusing parents to dangerous neighborhoods.² *Note that prevention and resilience are key deliverables in excellent youth development programming. If you work with youth or schools, you are doing youth development programming.*

The research shows that programs and communities focused on Asset Building, significantly (beneficially) impact a young person's development. There are numerous programs nationwide using Asset Building as their core curricula. In fact, there are even whole towns that call themselves "Asset Building Communities." Asset Building is real science and an excellent foundation for program development.

In the Search Institute's list of 40 Development Assets™, there are specific Assets that map directly to the affective skill development from a solid rhythm/drumming program. **In other words, *drumming builds Assets*.**

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^{1,2}Where the Asset Framework Comes From: <http://www.search-institute.org/research/assets/background> accessed September 14, 2010



Take for instance Asset #7 (from the list of Assets for Adolescents):
Community Values Youth –Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.

A community rhythm experience is a kinesthetic expression of Asset #7. The context of all voices encouraged, all contributions (regardless of age) welcomed and everyone uniting to create the groove (the strength of the community), becomes the Asset Building application of the rhythm metaphor.

And yes, rhythm connects directly with more Assets! Here's an example:

Asset*	Description	Relationship to Drumming
2	Positive Family Communication –Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.	Drumming provides the direct experience of clear and positive communication; both listening and speaking.
7	Community Values Youth –Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.	Drumming provides the direct experience of all community members being fully valued for their contribution.
14	Adult Role Models –Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.	Drumming provides the direct experience of adults modeling healthy ways to express joy and connections.
17	Creative Activities –Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.	Drumming provides the direct experience of creativity through making music, with immediate positive feedback.
30	Responsibility –Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.	Drumming provides the direct experience of assuming responsibility for individual contribution. <i>"My choices lead to the stability of the community's groove – I have a responsibility to this."</i>
33	Interpersonal Competence –Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.	Drumming provides the direct experience of interpersonal encouragement and support; everyone helps their neighbor create the common rhythm in a non-judgmental way.
34	Cultural Competence –Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.	Drumming provides the direct experience of valuing the contributions of other cultures, and creating unity within diversity.
40	Positive View of Personal Future –Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.	Drumming provides the direct experience of the joy available in community; this is integral to holding the feeling of a bright future.

Now back to our initial scenario. When looking for **powerful, effective, time (and cost) efficient programs that deliver learning and engage youth**, choose rhythm and drumming – it's got real science to back it up. Assets provide educational relevance, sustained value, and provide legitimate learning outcomes.

Not only does it serve young people, *they love it!* © 2010 Kenya Masala contact for more information: kenya@zaboomba.com

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www.ZaBoomBa.com | www.Rhythm-Play.com

*The 40 Assets™ are developed and trademarked by the SEARCH Institute. The Assets listed are from the 40 Asset list for Adolescents. See: <http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets/lists> for the full Assets listing.