

# **Percussion Empowerment Project** Final Report

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# The Percussion Empowerment Project provided free, virtual percussion classes to middle school girls on a weekly basis.

## Problems PEP Addressed

### 1. A gender bias in music education.

A large gender gap exists in music education. This is especially true in band. According to MTD research, 80% of band directors at large public middle and high schools were men. Girls looking for inspiration in adults will rarely find a woman band director.

### 2. A gender bias in western music.

In Beth Abelson Macleod's *Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?*, Macleod discusses this bias and notes that before the 1900s, women were not allowed to play any instrument outside of the home, except piano. Beginning in the 1900s, the flute became the first acceptable instrument for a woman to play. This is only because while playing it, the appearance of your face didn't change drastically, compared to something like a trombone.

### 3. Mental health in middle schoolers.

Middle School can be challenging for a lot of people and many mental health problems can develop in this time, most notably anxiety and depression. According to data from the National Comorbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement, an estimated 32% of kids aged 13-18 have an anxiety disorder; however, in this same survey, 38% of girls have an anxiety disorder, compared to 26% of boys. PEP provided a safe environment, an opportunity to express themselves, meet new people with similar interests, and unlearn gender biases at an early age.

## Fitting Into HDI's Mission

HDI promotes inclusion and independence. Often, girls can feel excluded from certain activities simply because they are seen as "masculine," even if they show an interest in these activities.

By providing a safe space for young girls to learn a skill and participate in an activity that is male-dominated, they can gain confidence to show interest in any activity with a lack of fear from being seen as "too masculine" or "too feminine." This also encourages them to join their school's band and increase diversity in school percussion sections.

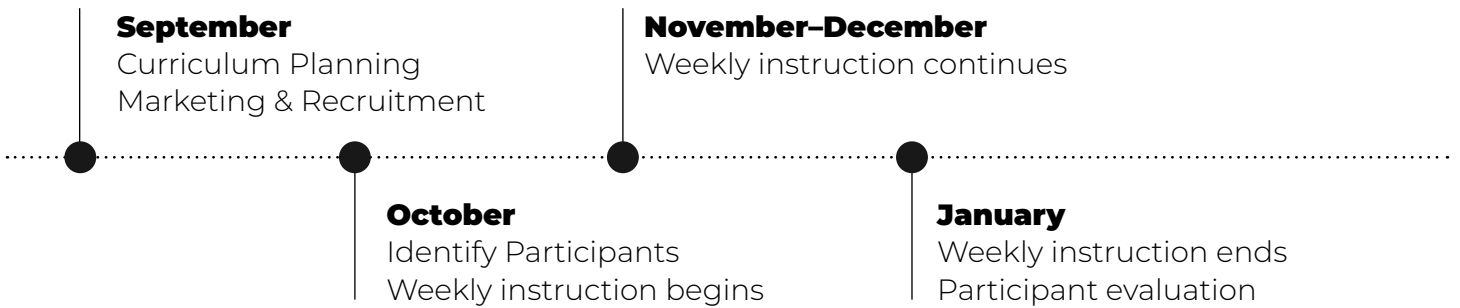
A skill gained from music is the ability to perform. Providing young girls with an opportunity to perform for their peers will allow them to gain the confidence to use their voice in other situations, like the classroom, in their relationships and families, and other clubs and activities.

Being on a team of any kind provides an opportunity for leadership. Often, girls are told they are "bossy" for being a good leader. This space provided an opportunity to learn and build leadership skills. This also prepared them for high school and college bands, into their adult lives and possibly an arts-related career path.

Performance also allows them to gain self-advocacy. As a musician, I thought "if I can play this solo by myself, I can do anything," and simply being able to showcase something I was passionate about gave me the confidence to speak up in class and other areas of life.

Delivering the course virtually made it more accessible to all students. The teacher responded to students reporting mental health disorders by providing more time for assignments, stating clear expectations, and doing frequent check-ins.

## Project Timeline



## Goals

### 1. Develop an inclusive percussion-focused curriculum.

#### General Curriculum

##### **Growth Mindset**

The Music Educator ensured that the students were in a growth mindset. Instead of focusing on perfection, a focus of growing and learning was promoted.

##### **Introduce Music through Body Percussion**

This taught the students that one of the best parts of music is creativity and innovation. This also showed that anything can be playing surface. Sounds created included the snap, clap, pat, and stomp.

##### **Women in Music**

A video of a woman or women in percussion was shown each week. This provided the students with role models that they can look up to and be aware of women in music and in percussion. Some examples include:

**Sheila E.** arguably the most famous woman drummer. She has been a performer for Beyonce, Madonna, Prince, and more.

**Dorothea Taylor** a drummer that focuses on the fact that drummers can come in all shapes, sizes, ages, genders, and personalities.

##### **Introduce a New Playing Surface & Sticking**

Everyone received a 5 gallon bucket, a common playing surface. This taught the students sticking, telling the player which hand to use to play which note. This is major part of drumming and is looked for in auditions.

##### **Practice Plan & Accountability**

During the holiday break, we discussed a practice plan with the students. This gave them a sense of accountability and responsibility, much like other school assignments.

According to the students, the most liked topic of the curriculum was playing to grooves. This was done a lot with the 5-gallon bucket playing surface while learning sticking.

## 2. Increasing Self-Advocacy & Empowerment



100% of students said that they felt empowered by the class. When asked what the word “empowered” means, students responded with “strong, to feel better about myself, confident, and to feel educated about a topic.”



Additionally, 75% of student said they are “very likely” to join an ensemble at their school.

## 3. Increasing Musical Knowledge



75% of the students said that they learned a lot or a great deal of new information about music.

## Improvements

Throughout the project, improvements and changes were noted, including:

- In the future, have students sign a pledge or contract of accountability. There was a lot of trouble getting students to submit performance videos, which was the intent of the final presentation. The music educator, Shauna, suggested that the person in her role in the future sign it with them so they can see an adult doing the same thing. Although there are no real punishments for the students if they break this contract, it provides a feeling of accountability.
- Meet more than one time a week. This is really important for learning, especially in music. Musicians should practice once a day, and it is difficult getting students to commit to something like that; however, if we meet more than one time a week, learning would significantly increase.
- Provide better playing surfaces. This is really challenging in a virtual setting. If we were able to use a school’s band room where instruments were provided, it would be a lot easier. Because we couldn’t buy everyone a drumset or snare, we had to work with unconventional materials. While working with these materials is affective, they are not as affective as real instruments.

Moving forward for HDI, more programming and projects related to the arts would be greatly beneficial to the HDI portfolio. Using music and the arts to promote inclusion and independence can be really effective and has already proven effective with several other organizations. Research in the arts is underfunded and provided more research opportunities that benefits everyone and anyone would be valuable.

## References

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