



WORKSHOPS FOR INSTITUTIONS

RHYTHM AND PERCUSSION WITH SIGNS: AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Rodrigo Alberto Matta

INTRODUCTION

Rhythm and Percussion with Signs workshops are an **Experiential Learning** activity for institutions through which group interaction can be analyzed and improved. This is an innovative technique that uses rhythm to explore different dimensions of group dynamics. Rhythm is a basic element of human nature that has deep roots in our evolutive history¹. In these workshops, regardless of musical experience or skills, a group of persons get together to learn how to improvise music with percussion instruments in a fun, harmonious and effective way. The process involves individual creativity and contribution that are directed and coordinated towards collective goals. This allows a delicate balance between creative spontaneity and goal-directed execution in a group environment.

What is Percussion with Signs? It is a new way to create music in a group, based in conducted improvisation. Using around 150 hands and body signs, a conductor can coordinate the members' individual ideas-flow into a collective creation oriented towards a common goal. The technique is both a method and a game in which the personal and interpersonal skills necessary for collective cooperation are regarded and trained in a fun and effective way¹.

What are its applications? Beyond its use in musical groups as a live-composition technique, Rhythm and Percussion with Signs has rapidly transcended stages environment and has become a powerful tool in several contexts due to its learning' simplicity and its results' deepness and immediacy.

Some of the skills regarded and trained in these workshops are: Internal and external listening, effective communication, proactive attitude, identification and comprehension of roles within a group, coordination, creativity, value of diversity, drawing upon errors, leadership capacities, cooperation, team work, concentration, individual and collective confidence, assertiveness, adaptation to others' ideas, responsibility, individual and collective effectiveness, inclusiveness, inclusion, awareness of global objectives, spontaneity and fun.

Who invented the method and who is implementing it in Colombia? The language was invented by **Santiago Vázquez**, an Argentinian conductor, compositor and percussionist. It has been adopted by a great number of groups in several countries. In Colombia, **La Percumotora** is a pioneer group using the method. **Rodrigo Matta** –La Percumotora's director– is currently the only Colombian trained in this method. He received direct instruction and training in Argentina since 2008 and is currently the workshop facilitator.

¹ Patel, Aniruddh D. The Evolutionary Biology of Musical Rhythm: Was Darwin Wrong? PLoS Biol 12 (3). 2014.

² Vázquez, Santiago. Manual de Ritmo y Percusión con Señas. Ed Atlántida. 2013.



Why is the workshop important for an institution? The technique is an innovative, different, highly-specialized and unique Experiential Learning tool for identification and improvement of team work processes. The experience of playing together, listening and collectively creating allows, in a very short time, that participants' skills and ideas can be explored, experimented, identified, analyzed and strengthened. This is something that might be difficult to do in daily situations and environments.

Having a well focused outside-of-the-daily-work experience allows already an improved assimilation of group concepts and processes. In these workshops hierarchies are removed. When it comes to making music together, we all have a role to "play" in order to achieve a common goal, regardless of our position at work.

INTENDED FOR

Groups and work teams in different institutions, schools, universities, organizations and companies. Participants can be persons in any position, department or area, with or without previous knowledge of each other.

METHOD

Methodological considerations: In Experiential Learning applied to institutions, especially when oriented towards group dynamics of mutual understanding, it is very important to focus experience on something that is common to all participants, something that everybody can relate to¹. In this workshop, collective rhythm is used as the main focus. Rhythm is manifested since childhood and it transcends cultural and language barriers². Who hasn't surrender to a drum's seduction and ended up timidly hitting it at the first opportunity? It has been additionally demonstrated that the strongest changes in behavior take place when learning involves basic processes, body, emotion and feelings³.

Following Kolb's learning models, the workshop develops itself over several phases that constitute a solid learning. First there is the concrete experience of playing together spontaneously. Then, this activity starts getting organized and coordinated until it reaches a complex dynamic of directed improvisation. The whole processes requires a constant and reflective observation of what is being experienced, so there is room for abstract conceptualization of analogies between what happens in the group during the workshop and what happens in the group in the institutional environment.

Our capacity to be different is at the end, something that we all have in common. This workshop combines the experience of how to potentiate and express your internal talent and the opportunity to do it together. It allows the participants to live the notion that we can be different, that we can still be ourselves and at the same time reach a common goal together.

³ Faria, Anthony J. Business Simulation Games after Thirty Years: Current Usage Levels in the United States in Gentry (ed.) Guide to Business Gaming and Experiential Learning. The University of Michigan: Nichols/GP Pub., 1990. pp. 36–47.

⁴ Scholes, Percy. "Metre", in The Oxford Companion to Music. Ed. by John Owen Ward. London and New York: Oxford University Press. 1977.

⁵ Kolb, David. Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall. 1984.



Implementation of Rhythm and Percussion with Signs

The method requires that each participant invents an idea or rhythmic phrase with an instrument. A phrase that is musical, understandable, repeated and clear. Each instrument belongs to a section and each section has a specific function within the collective creation. Each section has a leader that takes care of accomplishing the section's function and adaptations to other sections. The participants can change roles by changing section or even conduct the group, so each person gets to experience the different feelings and can identify in which one of them they can potentiate their abilities. To have a specific role implies a big responsibility. Each participant achieves its part by contributing, listening to the others and allowing them to express.

The conductor's role is to coordinate and to potentiate the participants' skills; to correct but also use errors for the common benefit. In general, the groups' ideas are conducted through a sign language executed with hands and body. However in a particular level, each participant is his or her own director, since each one of them must interpret these signals to solve musical situations within a clear rule scheme and without losing track of the main objective: to achieve a collective musical composition.

OBJECTIVE

To significantly facilitate development of group processes by exploring, analyzing, identifying and potentiating participants' skills and ideas. The comprehension and adaptation of these skills is done in an empirical and ludic way in order to generate an experiential learning that is focused on a common goal. This is achieved through the use of an innovative technique: Rhythm and Percussion with Signs.

ACHIEVEMENTS

This workshop intends to develop several institutional processes by allowing participant to experience the following achievements:

- To play percussion instruments together and perform sound creations with musical sense. This is an excellent source of enjoyment and learning
- To express and materialize spontaneous ideas in a collective way and for a common goal
- To identify and potentiate team work skills while playing music and then extrapolate this experience to the work environment
- To experience, analyze and identify different roles within a work team
- To improve awareness of how important individual contribution is for a collective process, when is efficient, useful and concrete
- To discover multiple and new paths to develop a specific role
- To resolve situations in an efficient and rapid way
- To assimilate better the concepts and skills developed in institutional group-cohesion processes
- To recognize new personal skills
- To promote better relations, communication and trust with each other
- To reinforce awareness about responsibility and the individual contribution impact on each other functions and on the group.
- To experience roles never performed before
- To experience the use of errors as an alternative source for problem solving.



FACILITATOR

Rodrigo Alberto Matta Diaz: Musician, percussionist and specialist in Rhythm and Percussion with Signs. He studied at *Centro de Estudios del Ritmo y Percusión con Señas (CERPS)* and also carried out Jazz studies in *Escuela de Música Contemporánea*, both in Buenos Aires – Argentina. Additionally, he holds a degree in Business Administration from *Universidad Javeriana -Cali* and a specialization degree in Cultural Management and Cultural Policies from *Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales (IDAES), Universidad de San Martín – Argentina*.

Rodrigo has fifteen years of experience as a musician and as a teacher for different educative institutions and companies: *Schule fürs Leben –Frankfurt, Germany*; *Universidad Javeriana -Cali (Centre for Cultural Expression)*; *Hotel Spiwak*; *BBVA Bank*; *Escuela para la Vida –Cali, Colombia*; Schools: *Liceo Francés Paul Valery, Colegio Alas, Instituto Popular de Cultura IPC, Conservatorio de Bellas Artes de Cali*, among others.

Additionally, he has experience in administration, management and research for several institutions such as *Universidad Javeriana Cali, Proartes, and Arepas del Pilar*. His work in these organizations covers areas such as marketing, exports, cultural management, entrepreneurship, design, production, events, market research, competitiveness and public policies.

DURATION

Each session takes around 4 hours: 3 hours of Percussion with Signs practice and one hour for feedback and discussion.

One single session can be done, but is recommended to participate in at least 3 sessions with the same group, so there is a more global perspective on achievements and there is more opportunities for feedback.

The number of sessions can be arranged with the institution in accordance with its objectives and the kind of process that is going to be handled with this tool.



SOME PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

- Fundación Escuela Para La Vida. Cali – Colombia. February 2016
- Shule Fürs LebenLeben. Frankfurt– Alemania. January 2016
- Universidad Javeriana. Carrera de Arquitectura. Cali – Colombia. November 2015
- Oficina Norte Banco BVVA. Cali –Colombia. October. 2015
- Hotel Spiwar. Cali –Colombia. November 2014
- Universidad Javeriana. Campus Nova. Emprendimiento Empresarial. Cali – Colombia August. 2013

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