

SOUTH SOUND KIDS DRUM & DANCE  
by Becky Liebmann

We are a small group of enthusiasts, starting our fifth year of drumming and dancing with primary school children in Olympia, Washington. We find teachers in public schools who want to start a rhythm and dance ensemble, and then we help make it happen for them by providing instruments, workshops, artists in the classroom. We support this program in four to six schools each year. So far, we have been drawing on Brazilian traditions but now we are starting to add in some Afro-Latin. Funded by grants for three of those years, and sponsored by one donor for a fourth year, our budget hovers around \$5000, depending on number of schools, how many instruments we buy, and the availability of funds.

Are we successful? It seems too early to say, but here are some lessons learned along the way:

- 1) We have not tried to prove the educational value of this work. We start with the premise that some teachers already believe in the worth of this, would like to make it happen, and merely need the support of the community to bring it about.
- 2) We do this work within a "season", so that teachers don't get burned out. Some of our teachers do this work during regular class time, some during noon and after school.
- 3) We take advantage of a perfect built-in venue: a community "species parade" that takes place around Earth Day. Thus, our season begins in January, and culminates in April, where the kids are seen by 20,000 people and make a substantial contribution to the musicality of the parade.
- 4) In the week before the parade, we have an all-school jam, which is also a dress rehearsal for the schools. We take over the local roller-skating rink (thus we have a built in draw for kids and their families), skate to terrific Brazilian music, and then each school performs. After the performances, we have an all-school jam; an enormously capable Brazilian musician leads all the schools in one bateria, everyone in the same groove. This year, with only his drum and his whistle, his eyes and his smiles, he got over 100 drummers to start, do a new break, solo as sectionals, and stop on a dime. And while this is happening, the dancers are following a great dancer we have brought in for the evening. In this moment, these kids, who learn this stuff in the isolation of their respective schools, suddenly see that they have learned the rudiments of a groove that can be performed, improvisationally, with other schools.
- 5) We have observed that leadership is hard. It takes a special teacher to be confident enough to do it. To develop emerging leaders it takes lots of nurturing, patience and support from our organization. It's easy to learn these rhythms but hard to make them so thoroughly "your own" that you can easily lead a group of kids.
- 6) Kids love costumes, even the most bare-bones kind of thing.

7) They love being a musical part of a big event.

8) We want to make this better each year.

Pat Campbell:

Leadership *is* hard in these after-school community music programs. For those who are teaching music all day, to contribute to late afternoon, evening, and weekend music-making experiences is a challenging proposition. Yet playing samba with kids who are also motivated, and joining hands with traditional artists and culture-bearers, may be rewards unto themselves. When several adults agree to share the duties—teachers, parents, musical others—samba-playing (or kodo-playing, or choral-singing, or contra-dancing) can take on a vital energy that benefits all who participate.