

# Body Percussion Education: Education All Children Can Enjoy

Toshiyuki Yamada



## Children of Various Personalities in One Classroom

In recent years, the educational world has placed greater focus upon education for special needs students. A reasonable explanation for this could be that situations where children of many different needs are learning together in a single classroom have been increasing.

Within the same classroom, you can find children who are fast or slow runners, those who are quick or slow at arithmetic, or those who are skilled or poor at singing and playing instruments. There will be many different kinds of children. With regards to developmental disabilities, there are those who are easily distracted and may try to rush out of the classroom (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, commonly known as ADHD), those who have difficulty engaging in conversation and may suddenly become angry (Asperger's syndrome), those who can communicate normally but are unable to read a textbook (learning disorders, or LD), those who are unable to speak (hearing disabilities), those who are unsettled by changes in plans or schedule (autism), etc. There can be a wide variety of characteristics and conditions from one child to the next.

Taking this into consideration going forward, there is most likely a need to think of ways to build a society where children of many different personalities can coexist. Based on this line of thought, I have been putting into action teaching materials that allow not only children with disabilities, but also those without, to enthusiastically enjoy and have fun with communication, which I call 'Body Percussion Education.'

In 'Body Percussion,' various parts of the body are struck like percussion instruments to create sound, and the different sounds are arranged to create a rhythm ensemble. Around 25 years ago when I was an elementary school teacher, with a boy who would now be diagnosed with a developmental disorder (I will refer to him as Boy A) as the impetus, I began to use Body Percussion as a part of my classroom management activities. Since that time I have continued to use Body Percussion Education, but today I would like to share one of my experiences where, in order to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its creation, I engaged in Body Percussion Education with students of a special needs school.



## Let's Have a Concert with the Special Needs Students and the NHK Symphony Orchestra!

The first concertmaster of the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Fuminori "Maro" Shinozaki, has expressed a deep understanding of my thoughts regarding Body Percussion Education. Thanks to him, elementary and junior high school students have appeared together with the Orchestra to hold 'The NHK Symphony Orchestra and Body Percussion Concerts' numerous times.

In 2006, it had been around 20 years since I had started Body Percussion Education. So, as a way to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its birth, a plan was formed to have a concert with the top members of the NHK Orchestra. However, this concert would include not only local elementary and junior high school students, but also around 20 students from the high school division of the special needs school at which I worked at the time.

At the special needs school, one teacher is needed for every two to three students. Furthermore, for students in wheelchairs, or those that might suddenly run out of the classroom, a one-on-one approach is needed. For that reason, it was necessary for me to request the assistance of over 10 different teachers with a grasp of each student's various disabilities.

Regardless of that hurdle, I discussed my idea of having the children of the school perform with the NHK Orchestra to Mr. Shinozaki. He replied, "In Europe, there are often concerts where children with handicaps participate. However in Japan, the event organizers or the managers of the venue are worried by the thought of what would happen if some kind of trouble were to occur, so currently such events don't materialize. So yes, I too would definitely love to give it a try." Additionally, it was decided what the goal would be: "The NHK Symphony Orchestra and special needs school students perform Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* together."



## **What Is Important Is the Child's Own Will**

"Just try it!" I resolved to take the first step, and without delay I set out to discuss the idea with the principal of the special needs school, the students of the high school division, and other related parties. Among the students, there were about 20 boys and girls with disabilities including autism (pervasive developmental disorder), low-level developmental disorders, emotional disorders, ADHD, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy. After many talks with the teachers, the resulting opinion was: "At the concert let's not do a performance where the students are just being allowed to perform, but instead one where the students are having fun and engaging of their own free will. Also, let's try to have the students perform on stage by themselves." It was an extremely positive idea.

I understood that it was reckless. Properly speaking, if the teachers were placed on stage among the students in a way such that they did not stand out, if some kind of problem were to occur they could respond immediately. But doing so wouldn't be music the students were enjoying on their own.

The students choose to participate in the concert of their own volition, stand on stage, and while listening to the NHK Orchestra's performance match their hand-clapping to the music on their own. For the students, I wanted this to be an experience through which they could foster the strength to stand in front of people and express themselves to others by their own will.

Practice proceeded much better than I had expected. Most all of the students were clapping their hands happily while listening to the music from the CD. Even on stage, with the teachers only attending to the students in wheelchairs, the students went on stage themselves and practiced the performance.

Of course, one would expect that standing on stage in front of a full audience in the city assembly hall would be different than normal, and as a result expect the students to be nervous to the utmost. Unfortunately, this thought did not occur to me until the day of the concert.



## **Because The Special Needs Students Are the Lead Role**

At last, the day of the concert had come. The first part of the program was to be a performance involving the NHK Orchestra as well as a harpsichord. The second part would be a performance by local elementary and junior high students in addition to students from a school for the hearing impaired. And part three would be the performance of the special needs students.

However, about 30 minutes before the start of the first part of the program, one of the teachers came to me and said, “A few of the boys are in a bit of an excited state. Also, the autistic students are starting to yell out. If this continues, we may not be able to wait until part three.”

As it turns out, the harpsichord is an extremely delicate instrument, and at that point it had just finished being tuned. If we made a change to the program, the harpsichord would have to be reset and retuned. I didn’t know what to do. I immediately went to Mr. Shinozaki and discussed the issue. Upon hearing my concerns he said, “The lead performer in this concert is not the NHK Symphony Orchestra, it is the students. Let’s aim for the best performance and have the special needs students perform first. After that, while the harpsichord is being prepared I’ll give a talk about music to the audience.” Quickly, the three parts of the program were reorganized, and preparations were completed 10 minutes before the start. As the students took their positions on the stage, they were wrapped in a warm atmosphere from the audience.



## **The Proud Figures of the Students Following the Performance**

Well, it was finally the start of the program. Hurriedly, an announcement was made with regards to the program change, and at long last the concert began. Because of the full audience, a few of the boys were in a bit of an excited state. With my eyes turned toward the students, I stepped onto the conductor’s podium with as big of a smile as I could. Now, even I myself had frozen. But when I turned to Mr. Shinozaki, with an earnest look on his face he gave me a big nod. As long as the students did as they had in practice everything would be fine. “All right! Let’s begin!” I called out to myself. I signaled to Concertmaster Shinozaki and swung down the conductor’s baton.

At that instant, the intro melody of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* flowed into my ears. The students intently watched me, preparing their hands to begin clapping. While making big swings of the baton, I would signal the timing to begin clapping. “Please come in on time! One, two, three, go!” I shouted out within my heart. The students’ clapping began simultaneously. Without any time to feel relief, the melody continued to flow.

Would the student with autism get excited and start running around? Could the timid girl with Down syndrome keep her head up and perform? Would the boys who sometimes yell out be okay? Would the boy who often found things bothersome sit down during the performance? The practices that we had at the school ran through my head.

As the performance pushed forward my concerns were slowly wiped away, and by the second half they had completely disappeared. Before I knew it, it was over and, following a brief moment of silence, billowing applause from the audience rang throughout the hall.

As soon as the performance ended, the students stood proudly on the stage with refreshed looks on their faces. All the while, the audience continued to applaud.



## **Body Percussion Education Which All Students Can Enjoy Together**

For me, Body Percussion Education is something that started when, in regards to Boy A, I thought to myself, “I want to do something about this boy!” But, over 25 years of putting this education method into practice, I have personally experienced that it is something that all students, those both with or without disabilities, can enjoy together. As a tool to allow friends to experience a feeling of togetherness and allow students to enjoy communication, I absolutely wish to tell the next generation of teachers about Body Percussion.

### Profile of the author



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In November of 1986, as a fourth grade teacher in elementary school, he began educational activities involving actions such as clapping hands, slapping the knees, patting the stomach, and using the voice.

Together these actions created a rhythmic form of bodily expression called “Body Percussion.” From that time forward, as a licensed

teacher he put Body Percussion Education into practice at elementary schools, special needs schools (for mental disabilities), schools for the hearing impaired, daycare facilities, and various other educational institutions.

In 2009, he received the NHK Disabled Welfare Awards’ Most Outstanding Award. In 2011 he received the Yomiuri Educational Awards’ Most Outstanding Award for the Special Needs Education Division.

The 2005 Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology’s (MEXT) authorized third grade elementary school music textbook *The Gift of Music* (Instructor’s Version) contains the Body Percussion song *Fireworks*, and in 2012 the special needs education MEXT edit of the junior high school music textbook *Music ☆☆☆☆* will contain the Body Percussion song *Bouquet of Clapping*.