Helpful Hint: Use Desks like Drums

By Luke Thallas (lthallas@lps.org)

Sound exploration is a very fun way to engage students - in my Level I course, we were given paper plates to make as many different sounds as possible, and our entire group had a blast with it. I've done this with everyday objects and instruments for years - it's always been a fun way to get into World Music Drumming pieces, explore new instruments, or simply break up a lesson with some creativity.

When a pandemic happens and your ability to use instruments is suddenly taken away (or rendered unwieldy by the amount of time it takes to sanitize or carry to a classroom), you might find yourself scratching your head on what to do… not to worry, there are plenty of things in the classroom to use! I found myself on a cart, travelling to 35 different classrooms throughout the day, and noticed that students' tables and desks are chock-full of different sounds, and were readily available for use. Students were excited at the possibility of using their typically academic-focused school desk as a musical instrument!

I currently carry a djembe on my cart. When I want to do an echoing activity, I'll hold the djembe between my knees, and begin with simple body percussion rhythms. When I play the drum, students are to echo the rhythm on their tables/desks instead, copying my technique. Different sounds include open palm, closed fist, single finger, knuckles, sides of the drum, scratching with fingertips, and gliding the palm across the drumhead. Mixed with body percussion, you can make some very interesting patterns and beats, not to mention playing games you'd typically play with drums!

Make sure to utilize this in a variety of ways: echoing sounds, simultaneous imitation, canonic imitation, students leading, small group work followed by presentation, rhythm games, etc. Assign ostinati to different rows, employ your favorite World Music Drumming pieces, or use as accompaniment for a song. This can be a fun part of your daily lessons, and a great workaround if you don't have drums to use!