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## *A New Rhythm in Learning*

*By*

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Steven Angel, a former child prodigy who played with legendary Buddy Rich as a 6-year-old and later recorded with Jimi Hendrix, is a leading advocate of drumming's educational and therapeutic benefits.

"Drumming takes away the blockages," says Angel. "It builds community; it connects people to each other."

Angel founded the Drumming for Your Life Institute, a Santa Monica-based nonprofit organization, two years ago. He leads drumming workshops for different groups, including teens in L.A. County probation camps, cancer patients and students in mostly low-achieving public schools.

At Camp David Gonzalez, a L.A. County Probation camp for juveniles, teen inmates bang bongo-style drums under Angel's direction, allowing them to express their anger. "It makes me feel like a kid again," says one teen in a 1999 CNN segment.

Angel says drumming exercises used to teach classroom curriculum are powerful teaching tools.

"Drumming connects students to each other," he says. "It creates a strong bond between the teachers and the students. It helps them deal with stress."

At Westminster Avenue Elementary, a school in a poor section of Venice, Angel's philosophy is being used to raise the reading level of struggling students. His "rhythm" method is also being applied to lessons in math and social studies. In the classroom, a lesson taught to beats helps students better absorb information, he says.

During a recent Language Arts class, fifth-grade teacher Evelyn Soo uses drum exercises to explain what a complex sentence is. She taps her hands on a textbook while saying, "Independent a-lone, de-pendent word connects." She claps her hand four times, and the rest of the class joins in. They pound on their notebooks and repeat the phrase.

This is the third year Soo has used the rhythm method in her classroom, and she credits the unusual method for improvements in her students' reading test scores. In the most recent test, all of Soo's 24 students passed grammar, spelling and vocabulary. The class fluency scores also rose from 106 words per minute to 130 words per minute.

"I really believe the improvement is from the program and the students using the rhythms to go back to," Soo says. "I tell them to relax and use the rhythms to relax themselves."

Angel also leads a Reading in Rhythm program at Westminster Avenue for third graders who read below grade level. Angel, who meets with a few students for four weeks, taps his hands and bobs his head to a fast-paced beat from his ticking metronome. He tells each student to read at the speed of the beat.

Tye'Quon, a third-grader who completed the Reading in Rhythm program in December, says he liked the classes so much that he shared it with his family.

"I like how he taught me to read fast," he says. "I told my mom about the program. She tapped her foot on the floor while I read."