Texas
Music Education
Research

Reports of Research in Music Education
Presented at the Annual Meetings of the Texas Music Educators Association
San Antonio, Texas

Robert A. Duke, Chair TMEA Research Committee
School of Music, The University of Texas at Austin

Published by the Texas Music Educators Association, Austin, Texas
Elementary Music Specialists’ Perceptions of the Benefits of Incorporating Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the Elementary Music Classroom

Stephanie K. Andrews
Baylor University

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss musician and educator, created the Dalcroze approach to music education. During his tenure on the faculty of a music conservatory, he was troubled by the emphasis on abstract thinking in musical instruction. Dalcroze therefore sought to create an approach to music education that cultivated musical understanding through movement. Dalcroze Eurhythmics is based on the premise that the source of rhythm is found in the human body and that the child can organize rhythmic stimuli into existing movement schemata (Zachopoulou, Derri, Chatzopoulou, & Ellinoudis, 2003).

The Dalcroze approach comprises three aspects or components of teaching that Dalcroze saw as essential to developing musicianship: eurhythmics (movement), solfège (ear training), and improvisation. According to Mead (1996), it is unique in its incorporation of natural movements, such as walking, skipping, and running. The teacher takes these natural movements and expands upon them through rhythmic and improvisational exercises. The children are called upon to use their natural body responses to respond to the teacher’s musical suggestions or to make independent decisions (Zachopoulou et al. 2003).

Dalcroze Eurhythmics emphasizes education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit (Juntunen & Hyvönen 2004). With the current emphasis on high-stakes testing and the trend towards one-sided education focusing solely on development of the intellect, many educators are beginning to see the value of holistic educational approaches such as Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the development of the whole child (Giles & Frego 2004).

Despite arts funding cutbacks across the nation, music continues, by and large, to be an important part of the elementary school curriculum, both in the music room and in the general classroom. In a study conducted by Orman (2002), 30 elementary school music specialists supplied the researcher with videotapes of a typical music class session. Videotapes were analyzed to determine activities used. An average of 3.5% of class time was devoted to movement activities (including moving and singing simultaneously as well as simply moving), compared with 3.8% of class time devoted to singing. Price (1990) conducted a study in which activities used by Orff certified and non-Orff certified teachers were compared. No statistically significant difference existed between Orff-certified and traditional teachers in overall percentages of time in Orff activities, non-Orff student activities, or teacher activities. However,
the Orff-certified teachers tended to spend more time in student-centered Orff activities and less time in non-Orff student activities than did the traditional teachers. Giles and Frego (2004) interviewed classroom teachers to determine the amount and specific types of music integration occurring in the elementary classroom. All of the subjects interviewed incorporated at least 15 minutes of musical activities per week into their classroom activities and indicated an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the use of music in the classroom.

An important aspect of movement is that of musical play. Berger and Cooper (2003) conducted a study in which the musical behaviors of preschool children were observed in both free and structured musical play environs. The children participated in “Musical Play,” a 45-minute weekly class offered at a major university in the southwestern United States, along with a parent or caregiver. The classes were divided into four time segments: opening free play, guided group activities, middle free play, and a closing group activity. At the end of the class, the researchers concluded that free musical play is highly important in a child’s musical development and that children should be allowed to finish musical activities at their own pace with open-ended instruction.

The use of movement in music education can facilitate the development of musical perception and response. In a study conducted by Zachopoulou, Derri, Chatzopoulou, and Ellinoudis (2003), researchers investigated whether a 10-week music and movement program based upon Orff and Dalcroze approaches would affect the rhythmic abilities of preschool children. An experimental group participated in the 10-week music and movement program, while a control group participated in unstructured free play activities. At the conclusion of the program, the experimental group demonstrated gains in every test of rhythmic ability as compared with scores obtained prior to participation in the program, while the control group showed no changes in ability levels.

Movement also facilitates understanding of musical concepts such as phrasing, form, and melodic direction (Urista, 2003). Often, children are able to demonstrate understanding of these and other musical concepts through movement long before they are able to verbally articulate their knowledge. Movement also assists children in developing the schemata necessary for understanding the unfolding ideas within music as it moves through time (Ferguson, 2005). Caldwell (1993) proposes that all musical concepts can be taught through movement. Students must be taught how to learn concepts through directed attention, concentration on the task at hand, remembering prior learning, performing what has been modeled by the teacher, changing or personalizing their performance, and finally, automation, in which the learner synthesizes all previous steps and performs the task independently.

Dalcroze Eurhythmics can stand on its own, or it can be used in conjunction with any other approach to music education, including Orff Schulwerk, Kodàly, and Gordon. Movement through Eurhythmics helps students internalize musical concepts. Singing and ear training lead to music reading and writing skills. Dalcroze’s emphasis on improvisation gives students the musical skills to apply improvisation to all areas including movement, singing, playing instruments, and notation (Johnson, 1993). Beginning with natural movement and instinctive gestures, Dalcroze activities use movement to sharpen student perception and engender a more sensitive response to the musical elements of timing, articulation, tone quality, and phrasing. Jaques-Dalcroze encouraged the integration and simultaneous use of all three components of the Dalcroze approach: solfège, eurhythmics, and improvisation. When these components are taught as a single entity, students experience the Dalcroze approach as it was intended. They study the music aurally, orally, and physically, and are then encouraged to creatively express it as their own (Mead, 1996).
Farber (1991) discussed the role of improvisation in Dalcroze instruction and musical instruction in general. The author presents improvisation as a skill that can be taught and that is accessible to all students. Music is a powerful means of expression and communication. Technical skills should be honed in order to facilitate improvisation. Techniques for stimulating improvisation are offered, including teacher-student melodic phrase exchange (question/answer) and playing duets with another student. Benefits of improvisation include learning to think compositionally, learning to listen and react to other musicians, and enrichment of the study of music theory and history. Improvisers must guard against triviality, tendency towards cliché, and overindulgence in self-expression. However, when quality, artistry, taste, and discipline are the improviser’s primary concerns, improvisation becomes an incomparable tool for developing musicianship.

Juntunen, Hyvönen, and Westerlund (2001, 2004) explore the philosophical basis of the Dalcroze Eurhythmics approach to music education. Dalcroze based his approach to music education on the question of the body in relation to music and movement. Furthermore, the Dalcroze approach was established upon the premise of holistic duality – that human beings are a functional whole and that the mind and body are inseparable aspects of that wholeness, although they are at the same time different aspects of the functional whole. Along with John Dewey, Alexander, and philosopher Merleau-Ponty, he sought to bring a closer connection between body and mind into educational theory. Music is best understood through the body: the movement involved in making music increases bodily knowledge and is directly connected to a heightened awareness, attention, memory, concentration, and responsiveness. Moreover, musical instruction must be based upon experience: students should not be taught concepts and rules before they have an actual experience of these facts. Students should be taught to know themselves and to use all of their faculties (Juntunen & Westerlund 2001; Juntunen & Hyvönen 2004).

The purpose of the present study was to examine elementary music specialists’ perceptions of the benefits of incorporating the Dalcroze approach to learners at the elementary level with regard to the development of the whole child.

Method

Subjects were elementary music specialists from across the United States (N=25). Teachers selected taught in a general music classroom with students in kindergarten through the sixth grade. The researcher sent subjects a survey via email. Surveys featured a series of 20 questions regarding music education approach used (Orff, Kodály, Dalcroze, combination, traditional, or unspecified), types of activities used in the music classroom (e.g. movement, playing instruments, singing, rhythmic chanting), and amount of emphasis placed on intellectual (e.g. identification of note values and musical symbols) or kinesthetic learning (e.g. clapping rhythmic patterns, folk dancing, body percussion). Questions also addressed teacher perspectives on the perceived benefits of movement in music education, application of the principles of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and the relative importance of holistic education. Nineteen of the 20 survey items were closed-ended in nature; the final survey item was open-ended. Subjects were able to select a short answer response to the first nineteen items such as “yes,” “no,” “uncertain,” or “not applicable.” The final item requested a brief summary of the teacher’s views regarding why they did or did not believe that movement education was important in the elementary music classroom.
Following the completion and return of teacher surveys, percentages of all survey responses were calculated. Survey responses were then compared to determine which music education approaches and activities the subjects most commonly used. Further comparison was completed to determine whether instructional emphasis tended to be intellectual, kinesthetic, or a combination of the two in the typical music classroom.

**Results**

Responses to demographic survey items revealed that 76% of the teachers taught in a public school, 12% taught in a private parochial, and 12% taught in a private school with no religious affiliation. One hundred percent of the subjects taught students ranging from pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade, with the highest percentages teaching kindergarten through fifth grade (28%), pre-kindergarten through fifth (20%), and kindergarten through fourth (20%). Most of the teachers had over ten years of teaching experience (68%).

Teacher responses indicated that most of the subjects used a combination of instructional approaches. The most common approaches included Orff Schulwerk (96%), Kodály (72%), Dalcroze (44%), and traditional (40%). The most commonly used activities used included singing (100%), playing instruments (100%), rhythmic chants and speech (100%), movement (100%), improvisation and creativity (96%), and listening (96%). Perceived benefits of movement activities to students included coordination (96%), heightening an awareness of the body-mind connection (88%), and overall fitness (64%). A majority of the respondents also felt that movement activities were helpful in reinforcing cognitive learning (96%). Other perceived benefits included that movement activities provided students with a chance to “let off steam,” to interact socially, and to develop creative or artistic expression.

Fully 100% of the respondents indicated that they used movement activities of some kind in their classrooms. One hundred percent of respondents also reported that their use of movement included fine motor, large-motor, body percussion, folk dance, and creative movement. Twenty-four percent of the respondents had at least minimal training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Most of the subjects reported that they did not have Dalcroze training (76%). Of these respondents, 36% indicated that they were not interested in obtaining training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and an additional 36% indicated that they were uncertain as to whether they would pursue Dalcroze training in the future. Twelve percent of these respondents indicated an interest in pursuing training in Dalcroze in the future. However, the majority of subjects (68%) responded that they did use Dalcroze principles in their teaching, including the use of natural body movements as the basis of movement activities and developing overall musicianship. The majority of subjects also indicated that they used one or more of the fundamental components of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, with eurhythmics (rhythmic movement) and solfège being the most commonly used components (used by 72% of the respondents), followed closely by improvisation (68%). Thirty-six percent indicated that they used all three components of Dalcroze.

A majority of respondents indicated that they considered both intellectual education and kinesthetic education important, with 80% rating intellectual education and 60% rating kinesthetic education as “very important.” Sixty percent of respondents rated intellectual and kinesthetic education as being of equal importance: “very important.” Finally, the respondents indicated that they regarded the development of students’ overall musicianship as more important than the acquisition of purely factual or “academic” knowledge about music, with 72%
rating developing students’ overall musicianship as “very important,” compared with 48% rating the acquisition of “academic” musical skills as “very important.”

The final survey item requested a brief summary of the teacher’s personal beliefs regarding the incorporation of movement in music education and the reasons they believed that movement did or did not play an important role in music education. All respondents indicated that they believed that movement does play an important role in music education. One respondent stated, “Movement plays a major role in helping a child develop mentally and musically. I begin to teach my students about rhythm and the beat through movement.” Another stated, “Movement is essential to music education, especially with children. The natural human response to music is to move.”

The value of movement to assist students in obtaining beat competency was underscored by several of the educators. One stated, “…the ability to feel and move to the steady beat of the music is the starting point for all of music education. If a child can feel and move to the beat it will be easy for him to progress to higher levels of musical training.” Several also expressed the belief that movement is a highly effective means of teaching various musical concepts, including dynamics, tempo, phrase length, and pitch relationships, allowing children to experience these concepts within their own bodies, thus internalizing these concepts. As one teacher stated, “Movement…connects the body to beat, tempo, form, and dynamics.” Movement was also perceived to be important in developing children’s musicianship and to play a key role in helping children to take ownership of their musical experiences. “It (movement) should be an integral part of music instruction and leads to good musicianship and artistic sensitivity,” said one teacher. Another stated, “Movement, especially improvised movement, demonstrates that the music ‘belongs’ to the child in the child’s own way.”

Discussion

Movement was perceived to be fundamental to music education by all educators surveyed, evidenced by the fact that all educators surveyed used movement in some form in their teaching. The belief that music and movement are inextricably linked and the belief that movement is essential to music education seem to go hand in hand for many of the educators surveyed. As one respondent stated, “Music and movement are intertwined and must be taught that way.”

With few exceptions, the benefits of using movement in music education were perceived to outweigh its potential liabilities, such as classroom management issues, or obstacles such as lack of training in movement. These benefits, including the reinforcement of cognitive learning, improvement of coordination, enhancing physical fitness, and heightening awareness of the body-mind connection, were perceived to contribute significantly to the education of the whole child. Furthermore, the perceived importance of educating the whole child, body mind, and spirit, was evidenced in the fact that a majority of the respondents considered both intellectual and kinesthetic education “very important.” A majority of respondents also indicated that they felt it was more important to develop students’ overall musicianship than to memorize musical symbols, note names, and so on by rote. Jaques-Dalcroze also evidenced this belief when he stated, "Musical theory is too often the study of the signs of music, instead of being the experience and analysis of music itself. It ought to be a consequence, not an end in itself."  

---

There was a general acknowledgement among the educators surveyed that movement and kinesthetic learning modes in general are often downplayed or trivialized in our educational system. As one respondent expressed it:

It (movement) is a powerful teaching mode that uses areas of the brain that are neglected in traditional education. In the pursuit to gain respect for music as an academic subject, the tendency...is to intellectualize. By its very nature, music is ethereal, its essence not well adapted to visual media. Music notation is often considered more important than the actual sounds. Education is heavily biased towards that which can be seen, read, and analyzed verbally. Any subject that cannot be notated in words on paper is considered trivial...Movement cannot be put neatly in words on paper, and is dismissed as being childish, beneath the consideration of those who are educated.

Jaques-Dalcroze himself was emphatic about the necessity of incorporating movement in music education not only to develop overall musicianship, but the whole person as well, stating, “The whole body should come under the educational influence of rhythm...” He later elaborates on this idea, saying,

Here rhythm is the link between mind and senses, and this to such a degree that each pupil speedily rejects the current opinion which looks upon the body as inferior to the mind. He quickly comes to regard his body as an instrument of incomparable delicacy, susceptible of the noblest and the most artistic expression.

Although the majority of teachers surveyed in this study indicated that they did not have training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, it is evident that they were nonetheless interested in its principles and valued the incorporation of Dalcroze activities in their teaching. The majority of respondents used at least one component of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in their teaching, while a significant number reported that they incorporated all three. Furthermore, most of the respondents indicated that they felt that one or more Dalcroze principles were articulated through their teaching, including the use of natural body movements as the basis of movement activities and developing students’ overall musicianship. With this apparent interest in the incorporation of Dalcroze principles and activities in the elementary music classroom, one may well wonder why more of these educators did not have training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics. One possible reason for this is the rigorous nature of Dalcroze training. As one teacher explained, “There aren’t a lot of Dalcroze teachers because Dalcroze training requires considerably higher levels of musicianship than Kodály or Orff (training).” Geographical limitations may also have been a factor preventing these educators from seeking training. All Dalcroze training institutions in the United States are located either on the Eastern Seaboard or in the Midwest; however, the majority of respondents in this survey lived in the Southwest.

As a significant majority of respondents to this survey were trained in movement education, particularly in Orff Schulwerk, it is questionable whether the results of this study may be

---

3 Ibid., 111.
generalized to the population of music teachers as a whole. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be repeated with a larger subject pool with percentages of Orff and non-Orff trained teachers representative of the population of music teachers as a whole. It is also recommended that a random sample be drawn from music educators from across the United States rather than from a concentration in the Southwest. As a limited number of respondents in this study were trained in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, it may also be worthwhile to repeat this study surveying only educators who have Dalcroze training. Such an investigation may bring to light additional perspectives on the potential value of movement in music education, particularly with regard to the incorporation of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the elementary music classroom.

The comments of a number of the educators surveyed reflected a desire to see more emphasis on movement in the general elementary music classroom. Similarly, a desire to see a greater emphasis on kinesthetic learning modes in the educational system as a whole was voiced by a number of respondents. It is hoped that this study will provide a stimulus for more research investigating the potential value of kinesthetic educational approaches as well as movement in music education. It is also hoped that this study will provide implications for further research into the potential value of holistic educational approaches and development of the whole child through music education. This potential value was voiced in the beliefs of Jaques-Dalcroze himself:

"When a pupil leaves school, he should be capable not only of living normally but also of feeling life with a certain emotion. He should be in a position to create, to thrill in accord with the emotions of others. Only an artistic education, entering largely into physical exercise, can bring calm to an over-excited nervous system. If this education is essentially of the nature of sport, it will outstrip its object and produce generations devoid of sensibility. It is important that education should devote like attention to intellectual and to physical development, and as rhythmic gymnastics possess this dual qualification, its influence must be a beneficent one."

Dalcroze Eurhythmics, along with the Kodály approach, Orff Schulwerk, and the Montessori approach, may provide an appealing alternative to the one-sided instructional approach commonly seen in today’s testing-driven classrooms.

---

Bibliography


