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# Applications of Dalcroze Eurythmics in Music Theory Education

by Laura Simna

[1] Emile Jacques-Dalcroze was a multi-faceted performer and pedagogue who designed a method for teaching music and rhythm, and with this method an entire school of thought. In the early twentieth century, Dalcroze created a three-pronged approach to the study of music using eurhythmics (the study of rhythm), solfège and improvisation. This method of teaching explores the relationship between mind and body and the movement of the body through time and space.

[2] According to Dalcroze, music "is composed of sound and movement. Sound [itself] is a form of movement."<sup>1</sup> Dalcroze sought to unify mind and body in the study of rhythm, which for him "consists of movements and breaks in movement."<sup>2</sup> It is because of the connection between sound and movement that he considered certain traits essential in all professional musicians: ear training, rhythm and the ability to externalize inward sensations.

[3] Music education facilities around the world advocate Dalcroze's method, employing it at all age levels, from toddlers through adulthood. While it is commonly thought to be primarily a children's class, his method was originally designed for college students and remains in use across the globe. As a eurhythmics teacher, I have studied the Dalcroze method and implemented exercises based on his ideas to further my students' musical abilities at various levels and worked extensively with several Dalcroze classes for students aged 3–6.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Dalcroze, *Rhythm, Music and Education* (England: The Dalcroze Society Inc, 1921), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Marie-Luare Bachmann, *Dalcroze Today* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 14.

[4] There are three components to the Dalcroze approach to music education. The eurhythmics section deals primarily with the exploration of time and duration; the solfège method deals with more concrete concepts. The improvisation portion nurtures creativity and invention in music. These three methods come together to solidify music skills in all areas of music, including music theory.

[5] A common way to use the Dalcroze method in music-theory education is the employment of solfège. This is one of the first things generally taught in children's Dalcroze classes. In working with a group of 5–6 year-olds who have no previous solfège training, I use the fixed-do system, referring to C as "home." The students begin by standing on one side of the room with their feet on "home." As I play the scale, the students take a step forward for every ascending syllable and a step backward for every descending syllable, eventually returning to "home." This exercise introduces the syllable names, applies them to different pitches, and also lays the foundation for active listening (ascending and descending). Next, I sing groups of three consecutive notes and the students decide whether it was ascending or descending. Reinforcing the same idea through different movements is an effective way to fortify the concept.

[6] Young children do not generally have the musical training to label intervals, but they are able to at least hear and interpret them. To visually represent the concept of an interval, I place cards printed with solfège syllables on the floor. Students can then see that the ascending interval do–fa is smaller than the interval do–la. The students can step alongside the cards for a visual and kinesthetic representation of the relationship between solfège syllables. After the students gain a physical sense of how the intervals relate to step size, I repeat the exercise with the cards removed in order to strengthen the kinesthetic connection.

[7] An important aspect of ear training is differentiating between and reacting to a variety of sounds. In order to achieve this understanding, I use a game discussed in Elsa Findlay's book *Rhythm and Movement: Applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics*. This activity involves passing a ball around a circle while responding to various aural stimuli. I begin with a simple distinction: starting and stopping the music. When the music

stops, the student with the ball must freeze until the music begins again. Students are then asked to pass the ball in the opposite direction at the signal of two high notes. Another signal, a low rumbling from the bass of the piano, indicates that the student passing the ball should skip the next person.

[8] Children can be encouraged to hear phrase patterns and the occurrence of cadences using the Dalcroze method. A common activity asks students to draw the music they hear, letting the marks on the paper follow the music. The teacher can demonstrate this with an example, likely a curved line following the shape of the music. The students may begin by making arcs in the air before making any marks on paper. In this exercise students become aware of the direction of the musical line, as well as the resolution at the end of the phrase.

[9] Practices based on Dalcroze methods may be used effectively at the college level in first year theory courses as a way of recognizing chord quality. For example, three students may be used to represent the notes of a major triad. The distance between the first two students is larger than the distance between the second two students, representing the difference in interval size between major and minor thirds. The middle student, representing the third of the chord, may take a step closer to the first student, the root, demonstrating the difference between major and minor triads. The exercise may also be used to illustrate augmented and diminished chords. Students may be asked to sing the pitches in each example to aurally represent the kinesthetic activity. Chord resolutions may also be represented using a similar physical model.

[10] Dalcroze's method explores the connection of mind and body in music through a variety of kinesthetic/aural activities. This method allows students to explore concepts in music theory from a variety of perspectives. Students of all ages can benefit from experiencing the music physically in connection with their aural experience. These exercises may be a useful addition to music theory courses at any level, and benefit students of all ages.

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