

Article Review

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Article Title: The Dalcroze Approach to Music Education: Theory and Applications

Author: William Todd Anderson

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What is the author's purpose?

Anderson's purpose in this article seems to be describing the three main elements of the Dalcroze approach to music education: eurhythmics, solfege, and improvisation. He also acknowledges how kinesthesia relates to these elements. He discusses the findings of empirical studies, but states that they may not be the best way to evaluate the Dalcroze approach, and instead suggests looking at the philosophical studies that relate to it.

What are the salient issues in this article? (i.e. the main issues that provoked/stimulated your thinking)

The salient issues within this article are the three elements of the Dalcroze approach to music education. Anderson begins with eurhythmics. This was interesting to me because although I was aware of this approach, I didn't know it had a specific name. He explained a few different activities that fit within this category, such as "follows." There are free-follows as well as tempo and dynamics follows. He also suggests quick response activities, cannons (interrupted, semi-interrupted, and continuous), and ball exercises. These eurythmic activities were interesting to me because I've already used them to teach young students music, but I didn't realize it was part of the Dalcroze method.

The next element of the Dalcroze method is solfege. I thought this was interesting because so far we have learned to use numbers rather than solfege since children already understand how numbers work. I was also very surprised to read that this method uses fixed do. I have personally only ever used moveable do, and I feel like I would be rather uncomfortable if I had to teach students fixed do. Alexander acknowledges that fixed do isn't necessarily the best approach in modern U.S. music classrooms. He also explains that the hand signs are useful because it integrates kinesthetic movements which help to internalize the pitch. I like this idea, although I hadn't learned the solfege hand signs until I was in my second year of college. I think I would have done a lot better in my first few semesters of aural skills if I had already known these hand signs.

The third element is improvisation. I personally think that this is the most difficult element because I had little to no experience with improvisation in high school, let alone in my general music classes. I really like the concept that "composition prevents [the] natural stream of musical thought." I had never thought about it this way, but it seems quite logical. It's similar to the act of writing versus speaking: when you write an essay you can edit it and rewrite it as much as you'd like, but once you have spoken something there is no going back to change it.

Improvisation is the same way. It seems to be the most pure form of musical expression because the performer doesn't have the chance to overthink the action.

I thought it was odd that Anderson included multiple empirical studies about the Dalcroze approach to music education just to go on and state that it isn't the best way to evaluate its value. What is the point of discussing these studies if in his opinion, they "may lack validity"? I think this takes away the value that he put so much effort into instilling in the multiple pages preceding this section of the article. I wish he would have left the empirical studies out and had just proceeded directly into the philosophical studies.

How do you believe this article will impact your personal/professional development as a teacher? (i.e. what insights, connections, comparisons, or considerations resulted from reading this article?)

I think I will try to integrate the elements of the Dalcroze approach into my own teaching methods. In relation to eurhythmics, I feel like children often incorporate this sort of learning in their own play. Ball exercises and "follows" are enjoyable and children seem excited to participate in these activities (in my Teach Academy experience in high school) and I hope to incorporate them in my future lesson plans. I also hope to find similar activities that weren't specified in this article but would most likely be considered eurhythmics.

Solfege is definitely something that I have used and will continue to use my entire life. I have found it to be incredibly helpful with sight reading music for ensembles as well as in improvisation. It's also useful while trying to transcribe a piece of music. I didn't learn solfege until high school, and I hope to incorporate it a bit more with my younger (upper-elementary and middle school) students. I think I'll start my youngest students with numbers like we originally learned in this class, as it seems to be a more natural approach for that age group. I don't think I'll be using fixed do, however, because it doesn't seem as practical in everyday use. I'm also not nearly as comfortable teaching this method because I've never had to use it myself. I may change my mind if I ever come along more support for the method of fixed do.

I really hope to incorporate a lot of improvisation into my classes. I had very sparse experience with improvisation until college, and I feel this has really put a damper on my creativity. Being in Gold Company II my freshman year and Dr. Baird's Introduction to Classical Improvisation class my sophomore year has really helped me improve in this area, but I wish it was introduced to me at a much younger age. I think it would have given me a creative outlet that would allow me to express myself in the most pure-form of music. Improvisation has helped me to understand the form and specific elements of music in a way that formal instruction has not.