

INTEGRATION OF THE DALCROZE'S APPROACH IN COMPETENCY BASED MUSIC CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: Dalcroze education is a dynamic, experiential method that blends music learning with physical movement and multi-sensory engagement. Rejecting passive instruction, it emphasizes active participation, using eurhythmics, solfège, and improvisation to help students embody musical concepts like rhythm and phrasing. Rooted in philosophies from Dewey and Vygotsky, it promotes holistic development through doing, reflecting, and social interaction. Techniques such as quick reaction exercises and improvisation enhance creativity, kinesthetic memory, and adaptive musicianship. Suitable for all ages and contexts, including therapy, Dalcroze nurtures technical skill, emotional expression, and artistic individuality, transforming music education into a joyful, multidimensional, and profoundly human experience.

Keywords: Music, Movement, Competency Based classroom, Eurhythmics, Dalcroze education

1. Introduction

Dalcroze classrooms are dynamic, interactive spaces where music learning is deeply intertwined with physical movement and multi-sensory experiences. Unlike traditional classrooms where students may remain seated and passive, a Dalcroze environment prioritizes large, open spaces that allow for free movement, group activities, and improvisation (Mead, 1994). Floors are typically cleared of obstacles, and teachers frequently use live piano accompaniment to shape the flow and energy of the session, adjusting tempo, dynamics, and style in real time to guide students' responses (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

Lessons in a Dalcroze classroom integrate movement, ear training, and creative exploration. Students may walk, run, skip, or gesture to express rhythms, phrasing, and musical dynamics (Sauer, 2010). Exercises often include quick reaction activities, spatial exploration, and group improvisation, all designed to internalize musical concepts through bodily experience (Giguère, 2011). The environment is playful yet focused, encouraging creativity, social interaction, and embodied understanding of music (Holme, 2009). Through this unique approach, Dalcroze classrooms cultivate not only technical musicianship but also expressive artistry, confidence, and joy in musical learning (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921).

2. Fusing Dalcroze with other Psychologists and Philosophers

The philosophies of John Dewey (Warfa, 2023) and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze share a natural synergy (Sauer, 2010), particularly in their emphasis on experiential learning and the active role of the learner. Dewey (1938) advocated for education as a process grounded in experience, where knowledge emerges from doing, reflecting, and interacting with the environment. This aligns closely with the Dalcroze method, which engages students through physical movement, improvisation, and responsive musical exploration. In Dalcroze classrooms, students are not passive recipients of musical information but active participants who learn by moving, sensing, and expressing (Tabuena, 2021), directly embodying Dewey's call for education rooted in lived experience (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

Both Dewey and Dalcroze emphasized the holistic development of the individual (Channawar, 2023). For Dewey, education was about cultivating democratic, reflective, and socially responsible citizens. Similarly, Dalcroze classrooms encourage cooperation, empathy, and social learning through group activities and ensemble

improvisation, nurturing social awareness alongside musical skills (Giguère, 2011). The open-ended, play-based, and student-centered nature of Dalcroze learning reflects Dewey's belief in education as a process of continuous growth and inquiry. Fusing these philosophies in the classroom enhances both musical and personal development, making learning joyful, embodied, reflective, and deeply connected to the individual's lived world (Chinn, 2011).

Integrating Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory with Dalcroze Eurhythmics enriches music education by emphasizing the social and collaborative nature of learning. Vygotsky (1978) argued that cognitive development occurs through social interaction and language, and that learners achieve more with guidance from teachers or peers within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This aligns seamlessly with the collaborative spirit of Dalcroze classrooms, where group activities, ensemble improvisation, and responsive movement exercises foster peer learning and scaffolded support (Giguère, 2011; Goyena & Fallis, 2019). When students mirror one another's movements, engage in canons, or participate in collective improvisation, they are both modeling and internalizing musical knowledge through social processes, embodying Vygotsky's idea that learning is mediated by interaction and shared experience (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

Moreover, Vygotsky's emphasis on language and symbolic tools resonates with Dalcroze's use of movement as a symbolic system for understanding music (Moreira, 1978). In Dalcroze pedagogy, movement becomes a "language" through which students express and interpret musical ideas, bridging the gap between abstract concepts and lived experience (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921; Anderson, 2012). Teachers can act as knowledgeable guides who scaffold students' learning, gradually transferring responsibility for musical interpretation and creative decision-making to the learners themselves (Chinn, 2011). By blending Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective with Dalcroze's embodied approach, music educators can create classrooms that promote cognitive, social, and artistic development, nurturing musicians who are both technically skilled and socially connected (Giguère, 2011; Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

3. Relevance of Dalcroze Approach to teaching and Learning of Music

The primary goal of Dalcroze education is to cultivate an experiential understanding of music by engaging the body as an essential tool for learning (Tabuena, 2021). Through purposeful movement, students explore and internalize the structural elements of music, such as beat, rhythm, meter, texture, phrase, and form (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921). Equally important, the method emphasizes the aesthetic dimensions of music; including nuance, dynamics, tempo, articulation, and affect which are experienced kinesthetically and emotionally during lessons (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). By integrating these musical components into physical experience, Dalcroze education provides learners with a multidimensional understanding of music that transcends theoretical knowledge alone.

As students gain increased control and awareness of their bodies, their musical precision and accuracy naturally improve, enhancing both technical skill and expressive capacity (Mead, 1994). The development of a strong connection between the ear and the body allows learners to respond fluidly and creatively to musical stimuli, fostering expressive freedom not only in movement but also in instrumental performance (Giguère, 2011). Ultimately, Dalcroze education aims to produce musicians who are deeply sensitive, artistically expressive, and capable of interpreting and communicating music in a holistic and embodied manner.

Dalcroze education is a comprehensive approach that cultivates musicianship through experiential learning. Central to this method is the development of musical expression and deep understanding, where students learn to interpret and convey musical meaning with nuance and sensitivity (Hauck et al., 2024; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921). The curriculum emphasizes active listening and the cultivation of inner hearing, helping students anticipate and mentally "hear" music before performing it (Giguère, 2011). Skills in music literacy, aural and visual memory, sight reading, and dictation are also fostered, ensuring that students can read, write, and analyze music effectively. Additionally, Dalcroze education integrates choreography and movement as tools for understanding musical composition, creating an embodied connection between physical motion and musical structure (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

Another significant focus of Dalcroze education is recognizing the body as an instrument of learning and expression (Seitz, 2005). This method engages the senses including aural (both musical and verbal), visual, tactile,

and proprioceptive/kinesthetic to create a multi-sensory learning environment (Mead, 1994; Seitz, 2005). Kinesthetic memory plays a crucial role, enabling students to internalize musical concepts through repeated physical experience (Demian, 2020; Ebert et al., 2009). Movement exercises enhance motor control, coordination, balance, posture, and flexibility, all of which contribute to more precise and expressive musical performance. Furthermore, Dalcroze education cultivates spatial awareness and explores the qualities of movement such as weight, quality, and intention as they relate to conveying musical meaning with clarity and efficiency (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

Improvisation occupies a central place in Dalcroze pedagogy, serving as a vehicle for imagination, creative expression, and adaptability (Habron, 2017). Through improvisational activities, students learn to spontaneously synthesize and explore musical concepts, transforming theoretical knowledge into practical, creative action (Giguère, 2011). This approach promotes “music theory in action,” where learners actively manipulate and experiment with musical materials in real time (Welles, 2009). Improvisation not only strengthens musicianship but also cultivates personal artistry and confidence, empowering students to express themselves uniquely and respond flexibly to varied musical contexts.

The contexts in which Dalcroze improvisation occurs are diverse and dynamic, embodying the spirit of joy and play that underpins the method. Improvisation can take place musically—on the piano, with the voice, or on other instruments or through solo and ensemble movement activities (Mead, 1994). These experiences foster social interaction, collaboration, and shared creativity, contributing to the development of community and mutual understanding among participants. Through this multifaceted approach, Dalcroze education nurtures musicians who are technically skilled, creatively expressive, and deeply connected to music through both body and mind.

4. Branches of Dalcroze Education

Teacher training in Dalcroze education encompasses five interconnected branches, each contributing essential skills and knowledge to a holistic understanding of music teaching and learning. The core branches; eurhythmics, solfège, and improvisation form the foundation of the Dalcroze method, focusing on the integration of movement, auditory skills, and creativity (Anderson, 2012). Together, these disciplines cultivate musicianship that is deeply embodied, sensitive, and expressive, reflecting Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s belief in the inseparable connection between music and physical experience (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921; Demian, 2020).

Eurhythmics, the first core branch, involves the use of purposeful movement to embody musical concepts such as rhythm, tempo, dynamics, and phrasing (Anderson, 2012; Demian, 2020; Dutton, 2015). By translating sound into physical motion, students internalize musical structures and develop refined rhythmic precision and responsiveness (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). Solfège, the second core branch, focuses on ear training, sight-singing, and the development of pitch awareness, often integrating movement to reinforce melodic and harmonic understanding (Anderson, 2012; Demian, 2020; Dutton, 2015; Habron, 2017; Sauer, 2010; Seitz, 2005; Tabuena, 2021; Welles, 2009.). This kinesthetic approach to solfège strengthens the connection between auditory perception and musical literacy (Mead, 1994).

Improvisation, the third core branch, is central to fostering musical creativity and flexibility. Both teachers and students engage in improvising movement, melodies, rhythms, and instrumental parts, allowing spontaneous exploration of musical ideas and enhancing musical fluency (Giguère, 2011). Improvisation builds confidence and nurtures personal artistic expression, helping learners develop a versatile and intuitive approach to music-making (Alrowais et al., 2025; Anderson, 2012; Demian, 2020; Nikolaou & Agiopetritou, 2024; Sayers, 2025). The applied branches of Dalcroze education; *Plastique Animé* and pedagogy extend the practical and artistic scope of the method. *Plastique Animé* involves creating choreographed movement pieces that visually interpret music, blending musical analysis with expressive physical storytelling (Barbara, 2023; Dutton, 2015; Habron, 2017; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921; Neely & License, 2023; Sauer, 2010). This branch deepens both artistic expression and analytical insight. Pedagogy, the fifth branch, equips future teachers with strategies for designing and delivering effective Dalcroze lessons across varied age groups and contexts (Anderson, 2012; Apaydin, 2016; Demian, 2020; Dutton, 2015, 2018; Habron, 2017; Hauck et al., 2024; Manifold, 2008; Neely & License, 2023). It emphasizes adaptability, observational skills, and the creative application of core Dalcroze principles to meet diverse learner needs (Mead, 1994). Collectively, these five branches ensure that Dalcroze-trained educators are versatile,

perceptive, and prepared to inspire musical growth in a wide range of educational settings (Anderson, 2012; Apaydin, 2016; King, 2020; Manifold, 2008).

5. Dalcroze Strategies and Techniques

Dalcroze education employs a rich array of strategies and techniques designed to help students internalize music through movement and multi-sensory engagement. A foundational strategy is re-association and automation, where musical concepts are repeatedly linked to physical movements until responses become natural and instinctive (Habron, 2017; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921; Neely & License, 2023; Tabuena, 2021). Techniques such as inhibition and incitation, or excitation, train learners to control impulses and respond precisely to musical cues, building disciplined yet flexible reactions (Barbara, 2023; Habron, 2017; Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). Quick reaction exercises further sharpen the ability to respond instantly to verbal, aural, tactile, or visual stimuli, enhancing musical reflexes and attentiveness across all contexts of learning (Mead, 1994).

Canonical forms and following exercises are central to Dalcroze pedagogy (Anderson, 2012; Dutton, 2015, 2018; Manifold, 2008). Canon activities involve students repeating musical or movement patterns at staggered intervals, fostering rhythmic precision, concentration, and memory (Mead, 1994). Similarly, “follow” exercises require learners to mirror or shadow another’s movements or musical ideas, strengthening observational skills and ensemble cohesion. These practices reinforce an understanding of musical phrasing and structure while developing social sensitivity and cooperative skills within the group (Giguère, 2011).

Series, sequence, and systemization are additional tools used to deepen comprehension of musical order and organization. By arranging musical or movement elements into logical patterns or sequences, learners internalize the structure and predictability inherent in music, which enhances both memory and analytical skills (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). Simultaneously, concepts of time, space, and energy are continuously explored through movement exercises, enabling students to perceive music as a multidimensional experience involving dynamic shifts, spatial pathways, and expressive energy (Giguère, 2011; Demian, 2020; Habron, 2017; Seitz, 2005). Spatial orientation and exploration activities further develop awareness of direction, distance, and personal space in relation to musical elements, fostering kinesthetic intelligence and artistic interpretation.

6. Principles of a Dalcroze Education

A central principle of Dalcroze education is the belief that musical understanding begins with physical experience (Anderson, 2012; Demian, 2020; Habron, 2017; Hauck et al., 2024; Sauer, 2010; Seitz, 2005). Rather than perceiving music as purely theoretical or abstract, the Dalcroze approach emphasizes learning through the body, engaging the senses and the emotions to deepen comprehension and connection to musical ideas (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). This philosophy reflects Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s conviction that movement is fundamental to human learning and creativity, and that it can transform how individuals experience and interpret music (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921).

In Dalcroze education, movement is used deliberately to embody musical elements such as rhythm, phrasing, tempo, and dynamics. Activities might include walking, swaying, clapping, or more expressive gestures, each mirroring specific musical concepts and structures. This kinesthetic approach enables students to internalize music on a deeper level, allowing them to feel and physically express nuances of musical form, rather than merely understanding them intellectually or through written notation (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). By linking physical sensation and movement with auditory perception, learners develop a more integrated and intuitive sense of musicality. Active, experiential learning is a cornerstone of the Dalcroze educational approach. Unlike traditional methods that emphasize passive reception of information, Dalcroze pedagogy encourages students to learn music through direct engagement and physical involvement (Hauck et al., 2024; Neely & License, 2023; Sinaga, 2023; Tabuena, 2021). Learners are not merely observers but active participants in their own educational journey, experiencing music as a dynamic and multi-sensory phenomenon (Mead, 1994).

Students in Dalcroze classes engage in a wide variety of activities, including musical games, improvisation, and problem-solving exercises. These experiences are carefully designed to integrate movement, listening, and creativity, allowing learners to explore musical concepts in an embodied and playful way (King, 2020). Such

activities help make abstract ideas like rhythm, phrasing, and dynamics tangible and personally meaningful (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). For example, students might respond physically to changes in tempo or interpret musical phrasing through expressive gestures, turning theoretical knowledge into lived experience. This active and exploratory approach fosters deeper cognitive and emotional connections to musical material (GONG Xinyi, 2024; King, 2020; Nicolich, 2008; Rai, 2021). By engaging the body and emotions alongside intellectual processes, students develop a holistic understanding of music that goes beyond technical skill or rote memorization (Giguère, 2011). This method cultivates not only musical competence but also creativity, confidence, and expressive freedom, empowering learners to connect more profoundly with both music and themselves.

A foundational principle of Dalcroze education is the integration of mind, body, and emotion in the learning process (Gong Xinyi, 2024; King, 2020; Nicolich, 2008; Rai, 2021). Émile Jaques-Dalcroze emphasized that musical understanding is not solely an intellectual activity but one that must engage the whole person cognitively, physically, and emotionally (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921). This philosophy recognizes that deep musical comprehension arises when learners actively involve their bodies through movement and connect emotionally to the music they are exploring. By engaging multiple dimensions of experience, Dalcroze education fosters a richer, more embodied understanding of musical concepts. Accordingly, Dalcroze lessons are designed not only to build technical proficiency but also to nurture musical sensitivity, expressivity, and creativity. Through movement-based exercises, improvisation, and responsive listening, students develop a personal and expressive relationship with music that goes beyond performance accuracy (Mead, 1994). This holistic approach encourages learners to become emotionally connected musicians who are not only skilled but also artistically engaged and communicative. The goal is to cultivate well-rounded musicianship grounded in physical awareness, emotional expression, and intellectual insight.

Improvisation is a core element of Dalcroze education, serving as a powerful tool for developing spontaneity, flexibility, and musical fluency. Unlike traditional music instruction, which often prioritizes replication and precision, the Dalcroze approach embraces improvisation as a way for learners to engage creatively with musical material (Mead, 1994). This emphasis on improvisation encourages students to think musically in the moment, cultivating the ability to respond to changing musical contexts with confidence and artistry. Within a Dalcroze classroom, both teachers and students participate in improvisation across various dimensions of music-making (Dutton, 2015). Teachers frequently improvise music at the piano to guide movement exercises, adapting tempo, dynamics, and phrasing in real-time to shape students' physical responses (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). Likewise, students engage in improvising melodies, rhythmic patterns, instrumental passages, and even expressive movement sequences, using their bodies as instruments to embody and explore musical ideas. This interactive process fosters a lively and engaging learning environment where creativity is nurtured and valued.

Through improvisation, learners deepen their musical understanding while simultaneously building personal expression and artistic identity. Engaging in spontaneous music-making helps students develop essential skills such as listening, adaptability, and creative problem-solving (Giguère, 2011). Beyond technical proficiency, improvisation in the Dalcroze method aims to empower individuals to become expressive, thoughtful musicians who can communicate their musical ideas confidently and authentically. Social and collaborative learning is an essential component of Dalcroze education, as classes frequently incorporate group activities designed to build a sense of community and mutual engagement. Rather than learning in isolation, students participate together in musical games, rhythmic exercises, and ensemble experiences that encourage active listening and shared creative exploration (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). These collaborative activities transform the classroom into a dynamic environment where music becomes a collective experience, fostering interpersonal connections alongside musical growth.

Shared movement exercises and ensemble improvisations play a crucial role in promoting empathy, cooperation, and communication among students. When participants move in synchrony or respond to each other's musical ideas, they develop heightened sensitivity to group dynamics and learn to adapt their actions in response to others (Giguère, 2011). Such experiences help cultivate important social skills, including patience, respect, and the ability to work harmoniously within a team (Apaydin, 2016). Through these collaborative practices, the Dalcroze approach not only enhances musical understanding but also contributes to the broader development of social and emotional intelligence (Sinaga, 2023)

Key principle of Dalcroze education is its emphasis on developmentally appropriate practice, ensuring that activities are thoughtfully adapted to the age, experience, and abilities of each group of learners (Widiatmika, 2015). Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all curriculum, the Dalcroze approach recognizes that musical understanding and physical coordination develop differently across the lifespan (Giguère, 2011). Lessons are carefully crafted to align with learners' cognitive, emotional, and physical capacities, offering challenges that are stimulating yet achievable. This sensitivity to developmental stages helps create a positive learning environment where students can engage fully and build confidence in their musical abilities.

The versatility of Dalcroze education allows it to be effectively implemented with a wide range of populations, including young children, professional musicians, older adults, and individuals in therapeutic contexts. For instance, activities for young children often incorporate playful movement games and simple rhythmic patterns, while advanced musicians may engage in complex improvisation and nuanced rhythmic exercises (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). In therapeutic settings, Dalcroze techniques are adapted to support physical rehabilitation, cognitive development, and emotional well-being (Sinaga, 2023). This adaptability underscores the method's strength in meeting diverse needs and fostering meaningful musical experiences for all learners, regardless of age or ability (Giguère, 2011). An essential goal of Dalcroze education is the cultivation of musical sensitivity, which involves developing a refined perception of the subtle nuances in music. Rather than focusing solely on technical skills, Dalcroze emphasizes helping students recognize and interpret fine details in phrasing, dynamics, articulation, and other expressive elements of music (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921). This heightened awareness enables learners to experience music as a richly textured art form, deepening both their understanding and enjoyment of musical works.

Through movement-based exercises and embodied listening, students are taught to respond musically and physically to shifts in sound, fostering an internalized and vivid "map" of musical expression. By connecting auditory perception with physical sensation, learners become more attuned to the expressive possibilities inherent in musical performance (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). Research highlights that such embodied learning methods engage multiple cognitive and sensory pathways, enhancing memory retention, musical understanding, and interpretive skills (van der Merwe & Habron, 2015; Maes et al., 2014). When students physically engage with musical elements such as rhythm, phrasing, and dynamics, they are not merely passive listeners but active participants in the music-making process, cultivating a holistic musical intelligence that integrates body, mind, and emotion (Perry & McPherson, 2022). This approach not only sharpens their listening skills but also encourages personal expression and artistry, transforming them into musicians who are both technically capable and deeply expressive. Moreover, embodied learning fosters creativity and critical thinking, empowering students to develop unique artistic voices while responding adaptively to the interpretive demands of diverse musical genres (Thompson & Williamon, 2023). Such integrative practices are increasingly recognized in contemporary music education for their role in nurturing musicians who are sensitive, versatile, and capable of conveying profound emotional and artistic insights.

The Dalcroze approach offers a range of significant benefits for music learners, contributing to both technical skill and holistic musical development (Gong Xinyi, 2024; King, 2020; Nicolich, 2008; Rai, 2021). One of its primary advantages is the cultivation of rhythmic precision and heightened musical sensitivity, as students engage directly with tempo, dynamics, and phrasing through embodied experiences (Mead, 1994). The emphasis on movement-based learning also enhances physical coordination and body awareness, allowing learners to internalize musical concepts more fully and perform with greater expressive freedom (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004). These kinesthetic activities transform abstract musical ideas into tangible, memorable experiences, promoting deeper understanding and artistic confidence.

Beyond technical gains, Dalcroze techniques support the development of emotional expression and creativity, encouraging students to improvise and explore their personal responses to music (Demian, 2020). The collaborative nature of many Dalcroze exercises fosters social interaction and teamwork, helping learners build empathy, listening skills, and cooperative spirit (Giguère, 2011). Importantly, the adaptability of Dalcroze methods makes them effective across a wide range of ages and abilities, from young children to professional musicians, as well as in therapeutic settings where music and movement can aid physical rehabilitation, cognitive development, and emotional well-being (Neely & License, 2023). Through these multifaceted benefits, Dalcroze education provides a powerful and inclusive framework for cultivating both musical artistry and personal growth.

7. Conclusions

In sum, Dalcroze education stands out as a profoundly holistic and innovative approach to music learning, transforming classrooms into vibrant spaces where movement, sensation, and creativity merge to foster deep musical understanding. Rooted in the conviction that music is best internalized through the body, this method enables learners to translate abstract musical concepts into tangible, kinesthetic experiences, developing rhythmic precision, expressive artistry, and heightened sensory awareness (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921). Its integration of improvisation cultivates spontaneity and personal artistry, empowering students to engage musically with confidence and imagination. The method's adaptability across ages, contexts, and learning needs underscores its value, not only in traditional educational settings but also in therapeutic and community environments, where music and movement can promote emotional well-being and social connection (Giguère, 2011; Neely & License, 2023).

Moreover, the philosophical intersections between Dalcroze, Dewey's experiential learning, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlight the method's unique capacity to foster cognitive, social, and artistic growth. Dalcroze classrooms exemplify a learner-centered paradigm where music education transcends technical skill, nurturing individuals who are reflective, socially attuned, and creatively expressive (Chinn, 2011; Warfa, 2023). Through purposeful movement, collaborative learning, and embodied exploration, students not only acquire musical literacy but also develop broader skills of empathy, communication, and critical thinking. Ultimately, Dalcroze education offers a transformative framework that bridges the mind, body, and emotions, producing musicians who are not merely performers but sensitive, innovative artists capable of interpreting and communicating music with profound insight and joy (Perry & McPherson, 2022; Thompson & Williamon, 2023).

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