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REFLECTIONS ON THE ARTISTIC ASPECTS OF THE DALCROZE APPROACH

Music has been defined as the “manipulation of sound to create a sense of significance, interest, meaning and pleasure, in a word—expressiveness” (Reimer, 1972, p. 4). Music shares with the other arts the definition of being the **organization of material** which is designed to create an **aesthetic and expressive experience**. And, specific to music is that this organization of materials ---sound and rhythm---takes place as a flowing forward on the **axis of time**.

The music lesson shares these qualities: it too develops on the **axis of time** and is dependent on the **organization of materials** to create **aesthetic and expressive experience**. Works of art and lessons both share a common attribute: both are formed through creative efforts of organizing materials into unified meaningful compositions which bear a message and aim to give participants experiences of “significance, interest, meaning and pleasure”.

Moreover, there are a great many parallels between what teachers do and what artists do (Eisner, 1979). Teachers, like artists, have an inimitable style and a personal signature on their work and treat their subject with inspiration and insight. Good teaching may create an aesthetic experience which yields great satisfaction to the participants, owing to the skill and grace of the teacher and his/her ability to deliver the lesson in a way that may actually be likened to a form of artistic expression.

Of course, these qualities of teaching and composing lessons can be applied in general to the teaching of many subjects. But it is significant to apply them to Dalcroze teaching in particular, because of the specific artistic attitudes and behaviors, which are central to Dalcroze eurhythmics. The Dalcroze orientation encourages **aesthetic sensitivity, subjective interpretation, creativity**, and opportunities for **expressiveness**. Its methods excel in merging understanding and enjoyment in the learning process. Its practices contain certain activities (to be elaborated presently) which are in themselves artistic and creative.

Although Dalcroze eurhythmics is not actually considered as an independent art form, but rather as a means toward keener perception and response (Aronoff, 1979), it possesses many artistic qualities, which enable music teaching to reflect the very essence of its artistic subject matter. This article will explore the artistic aspects of the Dalcroze approach while integrating a broader perspective on the art of teaching, as it relates to the Dalcroze philosophy.

Artistic aspects, activities and adventures:

“One of the qualities of good teaching is the ability to impart a sense of the extraordinary and surprising so that learning becomes a continuous adventure” (Phenix, 1964, p. 12).

The delivery of a Dalcroze lesson is characterized by adventure. The teacher does not announce to the class what the content of the lesson will be. Rather, through a sequence of experiences, there is a gradual emergence of the subject, which is being discovered by the participants in a very experiential and personal way. The unfolding of the lesson is like that of a musical composition which flows along in time, and is absorbed gradually as the listener follows its development. Quoting Lisa Parker, a Dalcroze master teacher and director of the Dalcroze Studies at the Longy School of Music, who studied with the famous Hilda Schuster: “Every lesson is a miniature work of art. The lesson begins with a tiny seed. Throughout the lesson, different activities continue to water the seed, until at the end a beautiful flower emerges.”

This analogy between lessons and works of art may be carried further, as we may note a number of parallels:

- As with art, in the lesson, form and content are inseparable—i.e. *how* the material is presented is as important as *what* is presented.
- A well-constructed lesson must have the organic unity likened to a composition. There must be points of connection between each of its parts and a logical and sequential progression.
- Like works of art, lessons have a mood and a rhythm, an organization designed to convey a message, elements of repetition and variation in the development of themes, an interplay of tension and relaxation, points of climax and points of closure.
- As with art, the lesson aims at sharpening our perception of the world in affective as well as cognitive ways, and as with aesthetic creations, the lesson can cause the participant to experience *enjoyment and pleasure* as well as *insight and understanding*.
- Like a musical composition, the music lesson activates in us multiple dimensions of experience: kinesthetic, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social, etc.

Dalcroze lessons indeed exemplify the artistic qualities enumerated above, and in addition to these, contain some uniquely “Dalcrozian” artistic-creative activities which enable the participants to internalize, to interpret and to recreate the music:

- A **follow** invites its participants to maintain a constant pattern while adapting to changes of tempo and dynamics, texture, mood and style, according to the music they hear. By embodying the principles of *repetition and change*, which are the fundamentals of musical

structure, students create a musical composition with their whole bodies. In addition, they also produce a counterpoint, formed by the pattern they are keeping constant, and the teacher's variations on it.

- Stepping a **canon** is a challenging activity in which the students actually create the canon through their interaction with the music that is being played. Their bodies become instruments of counterpoint, as they step one rhythm while listening to another. In this way, a counterpoint is formed between the body that moves, and the mind that records and remembers something else, about to be transferred to the feet.
- **Plastique animée** is the ultimate creative activity in Dalcroze, as the movers embody the musical composition by constructing a spatial representation of their interpretation of the music. It is true that *plastique animée* is not originally intended to be an "art form", but only to serve as an interpretive tool. Nevertheless, this activity has artistic value, not only because of the creative process involved in expressing the music spatially, but also because of the final outcome—a visually pleasing choreography which may be likened to a work of art. The use of space in an aesthetic way, adds a visual dimension to the aural component of the music and the muscular sense from the movement, and the union of these 3 senses results in an artistic design, which reinforces the meaning of the music all the more powerfully because it addresses several senses at once.
- **Improvisation** is a creative activity engaged in by both student and teacher. By improvising, students invent something of their own from the wellsprings of their imagination. In addition, central to the Dalcroze lesson is the teacher's improvisation as a stimulus for movement. Here, the teacher becomes both composer and performer with the aim to inspire the mover. Like a musical composition, a successful improvisation must have energy and forward movement, and the "intent" and purposeful development which will enable the mover to respond to the music. The teacher's improvisation must have the sensitivity to interact with the movers' responses, and take its cues from what the movers do. In this way, a marvelous mutually nourishing composition evolves from the music-movement interaction of teacher and students.

The beauty of these unique Dalcrozian activities is that they are not limited to participants with formal musical knowledge and well-developed technical skills, but rather are accessible to all who respond intuitively, naturally and holistically to music. Thus, even the untrained student can engage in artistic activity when he participates in creating music and

performing it, using his body as the instrument of response which reconstructs the elements and configurations of the music.

Another feature of Dalcroze eurhythmics is in the **social interaction** of the participants. Acts such as taking a partner, working in groups, and cooperating in joyous music-making provide sources of fun and playfulness, which serve as “catalysts” to unlock the creative energies of the participants. These enjoyable behaviors help to further enhance the artistic aspects of the lesson and generate all the more “a sense of significance, interest, meaning and pleasure”.

Creativity and co-creation:

Our active involvement in experiencing a work of music and reconstructing it in a plastic spatial manner is a creative process, which actually carries on the work of the composer. Dewey (1934) gives us insight into this process:

“...to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced. Without an act of recreation, the object is not perceived as a work of art. The artist selected, simplified, clarified, abridged and condensed according to his point of view and interest. In both, [the artist’s experience and the perceiver’s experience] an act of abstraction, that is of extraction of what is significant, takes place...” (Dewey, 1934, p. 54).

It is remarkable how Dewey’s words capture the essence of the Dalcroze practice of “*plastique animée*”, which indeed carries out the “recreation” of the work of art in the participants’ experience. Moreover, Dewey notes that words such as “building,” “construction” and “work,” all of which refer to the artist’s activities, in actuality refer both to the *process* and its *finished product*. (We may also add the words “creation” and “expression”, as they too indicate both the process and the product.) The dual significance of these words implies that in artistic experience, it is the ongoing activity of these verbs that gives the nouns (the final products) their meaning. In other words: the artist leaves us his “work of art”—his “creation”—his “expression”, and we in turn must continue the “work”, by engaging in the “creation” and “expression” of this composition in our experience.

The Dalcroze approach insures that the artist’s “creation” continues to be an ongoing process. Each piece of music becomes an invitation to the learners to participate in recreating the work, continuing the artist’s vision, internalizing his message, and embodying its essence. By moving through the music, creating the spatial plastic representation of the composer’s

ideas, the movers are personally involved in an act of interpretation and reconstruction of the music, which keeps it alive and flourishing.

Not only does this act perpetuate the composer's message, but it also contributes to the formulation of meaning and significance in the participants' inner world.

"This is a function of art—to heighten the participant's awareness of the significance, meaning, and beauty of life. It is done by abstracting and recombining bits of the chaos into unique, aesthetically satisfying patterns" (Huebner, 1999, pp. 23-24).

This type of creative composition makes the teacher and the learners into "co-creators", for "every mode of knowing is participation in the continual creation of the universe—of one's self, of others... It is co-creation" (Ibid., p. 350). The concept of co-creation is related to the notion of "worldmaking" (Goodman, 1978), by which we form new combinations which raise our understanding of the world around us. "Worldmaking" entails forming connections between ideas and thoughts, perceptions and conceptions, and giving them significance in forming our outlooks on life. The encounter with the arts has the capacity to promote such "worldmaking".

"Music obviously works ... upon the auditory realm, but it also participates in producing whatever conglomerate linguistic and nonlinguistic visual version we tend to take at a given moment as our 'picture of the world'. For the forms and feelings of music are by no means all confined to sound; many patterns and emotions, shapes, contrasts, rhymes, and rhythms are common to the auditory and the visual and often to the tactual and the kinesthetic as well. A poem, a painting and a piano sonata may literally and metaphorically exemplify some of the same features; and any of these works may thus have effects transcending its own medium. In these days of experimentation with the combination of media in the performing arts, nothing is clearer than that music affects seeing, that pictures affect hearing that both affect and are affected by the movement of dance. They all interpenetrate in making a world" (Goodman, 1978, p.107).

The Dalcroze approach--- with its embodiment of music through movement, its inventiveness with words, rhymes and rhythms, and its combinations of the dimensions of time and space--- engages us in such "worldmaking", as we enhance our perception of the world of music and of the world at large. Thus, the act of "worldmaking" goes hand in hand with the growth of meaning and heightened awareness, all of which are the legacy of our experience with great works of art. A Dalcroze lesson makes these processes possible by activating our interpretive involvement with works of music, which enables us to form worlds of meaning and gain new insights for our lives.

"Essentially, when we engage with and respond to music, we are extending our ways of making and taking the world through symbolic discourse: drawing on the deep psychological wells of a

universal play impulse in the exploration and communication of insights into the human condition" (Swanwick, 1988, p.88).

Avoiding possible pitfalls

Being aware of the artistic potential of the Dalcroze lesson can help the music educator to avoid some of the possible pitfalls which can cause the lesson to be less artistically satisfying.

1. Often the Dalcroze lesson consists of a variety of activities which are physical and fun. However, in some cases, the lesson seems like a "smorgasbord" of tasting different enjoyable activities which may be disjointed and may not sufficiently combine, cohere and connect. As in a work of art, there needs to be unity and a strong sense of organization, where all the parts of the lesson come together and culminate in a central message or concept.
2. The beauty of the Dalcroze lesson is that it begins with an adventure, in which students are in a state of suspense as to where the lesson will lead. There is a sense of excitement and expectation at waiting to see how all the preparatory stages will develop and culminate. Sometimes however, these expectations remain unsatisfied and the students do not understand the purpose of the preparation they have undergone. This is more likely to happen to more mature learners-- adolescents and adults at the "meta-cognitive"¹ stage of their development (Swanwick, 1988), who need for the intuitive understanding to take on a cognitive dimension. Particularly in the music education of adolescents and adults, there is a need for the lesson to lead somewhere beyond the enjoyable and playful, and for all the preparatory stages to "make sense" and "come together". The physical activities and movement experiences of music must eventually lead to an opportunity for the students to analyze what they have experienced and to reach some sort of cognitive summary, bringing the learning from an instinctive and sub-conscious level to an intellectual and conscious level. The Dalcroze teacher needs to function as a *facilitator*, allowing students to explore and make discoveries for themselves, while assisting in bringing these to a level of analysis, for the sake of a conscious understanding of what has happened.
3. Ideally, the Dalcroze lesson culminates with a piece of music as its climax, and this piece is intended to exemplify the concepts developed in the preparatory stages. Students then feel the connection between the different parts of the lesson and feel a sense of satisfaction at discovering these concepts in a piece of music. However, often the piece is arrived at only in

¹ Swanwick (1988) defines different stages in musical development and defines the "**meta cognitive**" stage, as the stage from age 15 onwards, characterized by the individual's growing self-awareness and his ability to articulate ideas about processes of thought and feeling.

the very last few minutes of the lesson, and there is not enough time to give ample attention to this piece. Sometimes it seems as if the focus was in the journey to the piece, with too little time to enjoy the final destination at which we have arrived. This too can be a source of frustration to students, since the musical masterpiece must be given a chance to be experienced, internalized, interpreted and expressed.

4. The act of beginning with the physical, the experiential and the natural instincts and leading through a series of activities toward a culmination is a model of most Dalcroze lessons. However, this model runs the risk of becoming a "routine", which students may grow to expect and predict, and which may undermine the uniqueness of the lesson and take out the sense of its excitement and adventure. While there are many advantages to an order and a dependable sequence of activities, this runs the danger of becoming a form of "automatism", which is the enemy of creativity and originality. Lessons should never be conceived of as fixed "recipes". Artistic teachers' activities are not dominated by prescriptions or dogmatic routines, but rather by ingenuity, innovativeness and invention, which give their work a freshness and even a measure of unpredictability. The interaction between the teacher and students must always be a dynamic process, where the reactions of students influence and even alter a teacher's plans and strategies. This fruitful adventurous interaction between teacher and class may give birth to the "creation of ends in process" (Eisner, 1979, p. 154), which not only lends an artistic aspect to teaching, but also preserves a sense of novelty and provides an antidote to mechanical routine.

Educational journeys of exploration and discovery

Beyond the artistic aspects in the individual lesson perceived of as a work of art, there is also an interesting parallel between the **progress of a musical composition** and the **overall process engendered and supported by a Dalcroze education**, since both involve giving shape to the flow of life on the axis of time. Composers use their musical sounds to give form to feeling and to give us certain experiences which take place over time. A Dalcroze education also gives us certain experiences which affect our feelings and shape the flow of our lives over time. Let us further explore these parallels:

- **Counterpoint:** A musical composition is comprised of several parameters, often containing a counterpoint of voices, which interact and change over time, as the sounds vary from moment to moment. As in the musical composition, within the human personality, things move in a counterpoint and are always in motion, never static. At different times, different voices are dominant, while others are less prominent. A Dalcroze education recognizes the

individual with his different “voices”-- his different moods and emotions, his different facets and abilities. The Dalcroze approach respects this “counterpoint” within the individual, and allows him to arrive in his own time at the different concepts, while providing a variety of opportunities for self-expression, encouraging the different “voices” to be heard, and the different abilities to manifest themselves.

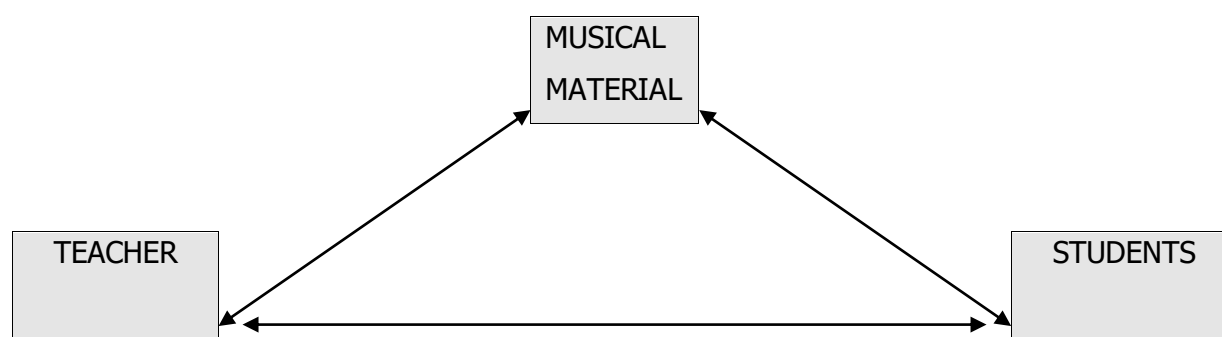
- **Multi-dimensional collaboration:** Works of music offer stimulation which is physical, sensual, emotional, intellectual and spiritual, and these different levels reinforce one another, and result in a *synaesthesia* (Sachs, 1946)—i.e. the activation of several senses at once-- which impacts more strongly on the perception and reception of messages and meanings. The more senses involved, the more we feel the interrelationships between things and the intensity of living more fully in the world. The multiple dimensions working at once reflect life’s variety and simultaneity, connected into a unified whole. As a result, we may sense both complexity and completeness in a communion with the universe. We undergo similar experiences from a Dalcroze education which particularly activates the “muscular sense” in conjunction with the aural sense, thus promoting a connectedness between body, ear, mind and emotions.
- **“Journeys” in the progression over time:** Just as in following a piece of music, where we feel a sort of “journey” made over a progression of time, so with the life of the individual, who is engaged in a dynamic development in which he changes over time. A Dalcroze education promotes this journey of the individual by giving him opportunities to explore and experiment and to make discoveries about music, himself and the world around him. There is a great joy in discovery, and a spiritual exhilaration when we experience a journey which takes us *beyond* where we were originally. As we move to realms beyond ourselves, we gain a sense of transcendence and elation, which are the sensations characteristic of an artistic encounter. In both the art experience and the Dalcroze experience, “we are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves” (Dewey, 1934, p. 195).
- **Teachers and the “educational triangle”:** Finally, the notion of the journey of exploration may also be applied to the Dalcroze teacher. Taking an artistic approach to teaching means that the teacher will undergo an artistic process, which may take him/her on a quest, or adventure, an expedition into the unknown, seeking new understandings and connections. “Artists are people who play hide-and-seek but do not know what they seek until they find it” (a statement by H. W. Janson, quoted in Eisner, 1979, p. 154).

"The word 'artist' also carries with it the notion of a person continuously reaching out into the world and becoming a skilled creator of beauty and meaning...Teaching is also this constant search for perfection, for satisfaction, and in a sense, for beauty" (Huebner, 1999, p. 26).

The result of "artistic" teachers in a state of quest is that as they broaden their own horizons along their explorative expeditions, they strike a chord in their students, who are also in search of broader horizons, deeper insights and understanding. This state of quest has artistic value, as well as humanistic and educational significance.

"It is the special function of art, to strengthen, to extend, to illuminate, to transform, and, ultimately, to make life worth living... The subject of the arts is human consciousness, deliberately extended and explored." (Swanwick, p. 50)

There is tremendous creativity in this process, which activates the "educational triangle" of teacher, learner and subject matter in a mutually nourishing relationship. Inspired by their art—by the wonders of the musical subject matter—the teacher transmits his/her enthusiasm to the students, who become inspired as well. The students respond to this inspiration with their own interpretations, which continue the ongoing activity of the composer's "work" and "creation". Their inventive ideas and input further motivate the teacher, who responds with more artistic creativity. Thus, in the Dalcroze experience, there is a strong sense of interactivity in the "triangle" of teacher, learner and artistic/musical subject matter. All three "members" of this triangle have the capacity to inspire and to be nourished by the others, resulting in a mutual support and creative dynamism, where each is constantly advancing the other along a journey of exploration and discovery.



Moreover, it seems that the Dalcroze approach actually sets this "triangle" into a cyclical motion, resulting in a continuous self-perpetuating artistic process, which brings its participants the ever-increasing rewards of "significance, interest, meaning and pleasure."

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