

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

Dalcroze Eurhythmics in music therapy and special music education

Article

Inclusive music education: The potential of the Dalcroze approach for students with special educational needs

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we discuss the potential of Dalcroze-inspired music education for students with special educational needs (SEN), based on preliminary findings of an on-going PhD study (ethnographic practitioner research) and the experiences of the first author when teaching music in a special education school for ten years. In that practice, the holistic approach based on Jaques-Dalcroze's educational ideas was found to offer valuable and meaningful learning experiences and a tool for a deeper understanding of music, oneself and others. The research design consisted of a music and movement intervention for a group of Finnish grade 8 and 9 SEN students over a period of one school year. This paper draws on the first author's reflections on the intervention (field notes and research diary) as well as on the teacher interview data.

The preliminary results of the study indicate that the Dalcroze approach fosters equal opportunities for SEN students to experience music and to develop and demonstrate their skills, musical knowledge and agency. In the music–movement activities, the joy of collaboration with student peers and the teacher on the one hand, and enjoyment of each student's bodily experiences on the other, are intertwined in the processes of embodied musical interaction. This interaction, primarily aimed at learning in and through music, evokes emotions as well as offers students opportunities to confront their emotions and make sense of learning situations and life in general.

KEYWORDS

special music education, Dalcroze approach, special educational needs, music and movement, embodiment, embodied cognition

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INTRODUCTION

Is music for all? Does musical interaction in education promote learning and wellbeing for all participants? We, as music educators, would like to answer these questions with a definite and straightforward 'yes', but the reality may be more complicated. In today's music classroom, music educators face a variety of challenges in teaching and interacting with students, especially when the students' abilities and skills range from very proficient to those limited by severe disabilities, varying from specific learning disabilities to intellectual disability disorder and from emotional disturbance to the autistic spectrum. The consensus is, at least on an ideological and political level, that all children should be given sufficient support in their natural learning environments and local schools (Gabel & Danforth 2008; Todd 2007; Osler & Starkey 2005). However, as inclusive principles become reality, the diversity of students and their backgrounds challenges the teacher. How do we make music lessons meaningful for every student in the group? How can musical interaction promote learning and internalisation of music for those who lack the skills essential for reading music or playing an instrument? How can music education support the development and growth of the student with special educational needs (SEN) in general? According to Adamek and Darrow (2010: 12), teachers must create the best educational environment to help all children succeed to the best of their abilities. To meet this ambitious goal and to meet the complex expectations of the curricula, parents and policy makers, teachers must have proper training and the tools for teaching diverse learners.

In this ethnographic practitioner research (Cooper & Ellis 2011; Saleh & Khine 2011)¹, we

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explore these questions by taking advantage of the challenges faced by the first author when teaching music in a special education school for ten years. In the search for new approaches to music teaching practice, we hold that the bodily approach based on Jaques-Dalcroze's educational ideas is a key to a deeper understanding and learning of music. In Dalcroze teaching, one's perceptions, emotions, bodily movements and thinking are integrated and thus result in a holistic, embodied experience. It allows the students to learn and make music through the moving body, thus enabling them to participate in musical interaction without having to play an instrument. These issues have inspired the first author to pursue a PhD project that aims to understand how music and movement teaching practice can promote embodied musical experience, musical understanding and the development of agency among students with SEN. It also contributes to the need to hear and recognise the voices of students with disabilities in music education research.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM

Committed to the Salamanca Statement (Unesco 1994, viii), national educational policies have been adjusted to recognise "the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs". In Finland, the support for learning among comprehensive school pupils has been divided into general, intensified and special support since 2011 (Takala & Ahl 2014; Takala et al. 2009). Special support is provided if intensified support is not sufficient. The percentage of Finnish comprehensive school pupils having received intensified support has increased yearly since the legislation amendment and recently plateaued at a little over 7% (approx. 40,000 students; OSF 2015). In the United States, for comparison, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has listed 13 disability categories under which pupils can be eligible for special educational services (Björn et al. 2016). These categories include learning disabilities,

multiple disabilities, hearing, visual and speech impairment, emotional disturbance, developmental delay and autism (Adamek & Darrow 2010: 4). The percentage of children and young people receiving special education services in the United States is about 13% (approx. 6.4 million public school students; NCES 2015; Björn et al. 2016). Similar trends have taken place in other countries, particularly in developed ones. Consequently, there are more students with special educational needs in the music classroom and music teachers are faced with a diversity of pedagogical challenges.

The purpose of special music education is to offer every student goal-oriented music education adjusted to their special needs through an individual educational plan. This plan is constructed collaboratively with each individual student and defines the learning objectives and the means for reaching them. In structuring, planning and running the music classroom, the needs of all students and all forms of music making – playing, singing, moving, listening and composing – are taken into consideration. As students with special needs may have histories of low achievement, low self-esteem and low metacognitive skills, it is particularly important that the classroom offers a safe environment for learning. Creating a safe environment and respecting rules and other participants is crucial, but requires practice. The teacher's encouraging attitude, a positive atmosphere, well-structured lessons and the arrangement of the physical environment all contribute to the success of interaction in the classroom (Adamek & Darrow 2010; Kaikkonen 2005). In a safe environment, students can be encouraged to excel themselves, try new forms of expression and make mistakes. When the atmosphere in the classroom is safe and encouraging, there is space and freedom to express one's emotions.

Respect is also crucial for the development of identity, especially among students with disabilities. If students feel accepted and respected among peers and teachers, they are more prepared to learn new things regardless of their disability. MacDonald and Miell (2002) interviewed people with SEN from different age groups, who reported how aware they were of the impact of prior assumptions and other people's expectations of them, and how they felt they were judged on the basis of their assumed (lack of) competence or appearance. Music was regarded as a powerful tool for extending how they were perceived by others, and for establishing a multifaceted identity of not only an individual with a disability, but also of a

musician (see also Haywood 2006; MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell 2009). Music appears to be an excellent tool for practising turn-taking, sharing, admiring and showing respect for the achievements of one another, and in this way for the construction and maintenance of a safe, positive learning environment for SEN students in particular.

In her teaching practice, the first author has discovered first-hand how disabilities affect a music-learning situation in a variety of ways. For instance, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often have difficulties in following instructions or in concentrating on ongoing tasks for a long time. It may be necessary to simplify musical notation and instructions for students with learning disabilities. The teacher may have to pay careful attention to the environment and its potentially interrupting stimuli when working with students with physical impairments. In facing these challenges, the teacher's attitude and patience play a crucial role. By knowing the students and their backgrounds and by recognising their strengths and abilities in musical interaction, the teacher may better succeed in bringing the best out of each participant in the classroom.

Special music education practice is comparable to cooperative learning activity (Johnson & Johnson 1999), where a small group works together to achieve a common goal by maximising their own learning and that of others. As a music teacher cannot assist and guide everybody at the same time, students can lead one another, according to their strengths, and help their peers. For example, a student who learns guitar chords quickly may help others to learn them. Peers can be a reliable and effective resource in managing different abilities in the classroom (Boud et al. 2001; Topping 2005). Sometimes peers understand one another better and perceive the world more similarly than their teacher and, hence, the students may find the best way of approaching a challenging task between themselves. Peer learning can give students a chance to break out of the roles that are covertly defined for them (Allsup 2003). Students can enhance each other's learning by assisting, encouraging and supporting their endeavours to succeed. This supports not only the development of musical abilities but also the enhancement of interpersonal skills (Kamps et al. 1999; Utley, Mortweet & Greenwood 1997), self-esteem (Madsen, Smith & Freeman 1988) and agency (DeNora 2000; Karlsen 2011). As Darrow (2003: 48) states: "All children should have the opportunity to experience the joy of helping another individual".

THE DALCROZE APPROACH

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950) was the first to explore the possibilities of body movement in music teaching and learning in order to make musical experiences and understandings more rooted in perceptions and bodily experiences. He wanted to develop a music education practice in which the body, mind and emotions are integrated and the person is involved as a whole, aiming to enhance and refine the development of learners' faculties in many ways (Jaques-Dalcroze 1921/1980; see also Juntunen 2016). The Dalcroze approach to music education reflects the understanding of embodied ways of learning (Juntunen 2004; Juntunen & Hyvönen 2004) according to which learning takes place within the entire human being and in interaction with others. Understanding learning from the embodied perspective avoids the distinction between perceiving, thinking and acting, and asserts that, in learning, sensation, perception and action all work in close collaboration in and through the body and affect each other (Rouhiainen 2007).

Dalcroze teaching practice enables teacher and student to act as musical agents through the body; to participate in collaborative music making through movement without requiring a certain level of musical, cognitive, or motor skill. Focusing on developing students' embodied knowing directs us to regard each student as a whole, as a complete, unique human being. The interpersonal nature of Dalcroze teaching can create a supportive environment for processing emotions, developing a sense of agency and learning music through intersubjective, bodily encounters (Juntunen 2015).

The Dalcroze approach is mainly applied in music education practices, but also in theatre, dance, cinema, somatic, and special education, therapy, and gerontology (Mathieu 2010). The body of research concerning the Dalcroze approach and the role of body movement in musical learning is currently increasing markedly as the embodied perspective is becoming ever more acknowledged in different fields, for example in cognitive science (see Schiavio 2015, Schiavio et al. 2016). Many of the studies within music education focus on the effectiveness of the approach. However, it is important to keep in mind that the effectiveness is dependent on many variables, such as teacher quality (Anderson 2012), especially since the Dalcroze approach is more of a philosophical approach to education than a systematic method with predetermined ends (Juntunen & Westerlund 2011). Those earlier studies that pay attention to the possibilities of using movement in music

teaching and learning, not only within the Dalcroze approach but in general, suggest that the use of movement develops such abilities as a sense of tempo, beat and rhythmic ability (Wang 2008), melodic and pitch discrimination (Crumpler 1982), rhythmic competency, perception and motor skill in developmentally handicapped pre-schoolers (Burnett 1983), intonation and pitch accuracy (Gruhn 2002), expressivity in singing (Davidson 2009; Ebie 2004), motor performance (Brown et al. 1981; Zachopoulou et al. 2003) and creativity and creative thinking (Gibson 1988). In addition, the use of movement seems to foster positive attitudes towards other music studies (Abril 2011). In addition, many music (education) students report that Dalcroze or Dalcroze-inspired teaching has improved their musical performance (Mayo 2005), fostered musical understanding (Van der Merwe 2015), or had a beneficial influence on composition (Habron et al. 2012) or conducting skills (Bowtell 2012).

Falschlunger (2015) describes a teaching practice closely related to Dalcroze and the ways it supports the personal development and communication of participants with multiple mental disabilities or dementia in inclusive settings. Frego's (1995) ethnographic study among HIV or AIDS clients revealed increases in expression, energy level, and self-esteem as well as benefits in non-verbal communication. Through participation in Dalcroze activities, the clients also became more active and responsible for taking care of themselves. In Habron-James's (2013) study of four children with SEN, Dalcroze teaching had a positive impact on children's well-being through the development of communication skills and sense of contentment in music and movement exercises. Habron (2014) makes conceptual connections between the practice and theory of both improvisational music therapy and the Dalcroze approach, and discusses how we are able to expand our understanding of the approach through the lens of music therapy by highlighting their similarities and differences. The studies of Kressig and others within gerontology show that "a long-term exercise intervention such as the Dalcroze pedagogy can prevent age-related increase in stride-to-stride variability under a dual task" (Kressig et al. 2005: 729) and that the Dalcroze exercises activate not only motor, but also cognitive abilities (Kressig 2015). Despite all these studies, there is, to our knowledge, no research exploring the experiences of children with SEN during Dalcroze-inspired sessions, using ethnographic practitioner research. Therefore, the research

question motivating this study is: What is the potential of Dalcroze-inspired music education for students with special educational needs?

METHOD

This study uses ethnographic practitioner research (Cooper & Ellis 2011; Saleh & Khine 2011), which utilises both ethnographic methods and critical reflection of the researcher to capture multi-dimensional educational experience. The data were produced with the students during an intervention in which a group of Finnish grade 8 and 9 SEN students (N=13, aged 15–16) received added *music and movement* lessons (one lesson a week), taught by the researcher over a period of one school year from September 2015 to March 2016. The lessons were based on Jaques-Dalcroze's ideas of teaching music through movement and bodily interaction (see Juntunen 2016). In the lessons, music was explored through movement and other musical activities such as singing, listening and improvising. Lessons included musical exercises such as follow and quick reaction exercises, improvisation, body percussion exercises, and dances as well as relaxation exercises, which had an important role in teaching.

Altogether, the research data comprise videos and transcripts of music lessons, reflections by the teacher-researcher, interviews with students and other teachers, student drawings and pictures, and sociometric data. This paper draws on the first author's reflections on the intervention (field notes and research diary) as well as on the teacher interview data. The field notes present an active recording and reconstruction of the events of the classroom intervention and their temporal sequence, while in the research diary, the teacher-researcher reflects before, in and on the intervention action, in order to understand her experiences in relation to the process (Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Schön 1983). The field notes and the research diary were expanded and elaborated by stimulating recollection with the recorded video data after each session (Gass & Mackey 2000; Lyle 2003). Grade 8 and 9 students were interviewed as groups. The teacher at grade 9 was interviewed individually, and the teacher and assistant of grade 8 as a pair, for their insights with regard to changes in needs, attitudes, or other related issues of each student, each grade group, their own position and the learning community in general.

After initial familiarisation, the data reported here were analysed through recursive comparative analysis (Cooper & McIntyre 1993). The interview

transcripts were coded for emerging themes. The analysis was continued dialogically by comparing and adjusting the themes and categories of the interview data with the data from field notes and the research diary. Furthermore, the developing analysis was compared with the video transcripts for the main points of difference and similarity. Based on this, we here present and discuss some of the preliminary findings of the project.

Close attention to ethical issues was paid throughout the study. The ethical considerations were handled according to standard university research practice. The project started by requesting research permission from the school principal; then, participants and parents received an invitation as well as information and consent forms. The overall idea of the study was explained together with granting the interviewees' anonymity and the ability to withdraw from the study at any moment without further consequences. Furthermore, in considering ethical responsibilities for SEN students, we reflected especially on relational ethics (Ellis 2007). Relational ethics values dignity, mutual respect and connection between researcher and researched, and it requires researchers to act from their hearts and to recognise their interpersonal bonds to others (Bergum 1998; Ellis 2007; Slattery & Rapp 2003). All the parents and participants gave their informed consent to take part in the study.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When examining the possibilities of Dalcroze-inspired music education with special needs students, our preliminary results suggest that the Dalcroze activities foster equalling opportunities for SEN students to participate in music making, to experience music, to develop and display musical knowledge, to interact, and to demonstrate their skills. The exercises develop, among other things, musical knowing that is based on bodily experience (or even consists of it), as opposed to knowledge being declarative, propositional and expressible in verbal terms. Students learn in a holistic way through movement, experience and interaction, and simultaneously the holistic learning experiences strengthen a sense of self, self-confidence and agency in a broad way.

SEN students often consider themselves different or inferior, and they face challenges and setbacks in learning and communicating in their everyday lives. Their (uncontrolled) bursts of emotions can be regarded as signs of their efforts to make sense of themselves and the world. Our

data suggest that frustration, joy, sadness and anger are daily present in their bodily expressions, such as hiding, turning their backs, hugging, dodging and laughing, which are tokens of the stories and emotions behind those movements and gestures. Dalcroze-based activities and the use of expressive art forms offer guided alternatives for SEN students to express their emotions and feelings in a safe environment.

The data show how strongly the joy of collaboration with peers and the teacher on the one hand, and enjoyment of each student's bodily experiences on the other, are intertwined in the processes of embodied musical interaction. Bodily expression of music enables the student to interact with others as the nature of musical activities is interpersonal with activities mostly taking place in pairs or in a group. The students can identify themselves and one another as musicians despite the level of their musical skills. By utilising their own body as an instrument for music making, the instrument's familiarity makes the participation in musical activities easy and accessible. Many of the students were surprised how easily they learned the musical tasks such as stepping rhythm patterns. This experience of success, of 'being able to', can remarkably change how one perceives oneself and how one is perceived by others. For example, one student had been excluded from genuine peer membership in the class because of her impulsive and aggressive behaviour towards classmates in previous lessons in other subjects. In music and movement lessons she was able to present herself in another light since she was skilful in moving, singing and playing instruments. Her aggression and compulsive behaviour disappeared and she was accepted by her peers. As one of the interviewed teachers put it:

She likes to be in a group and be recognised in a group in a positive way... Yes, that is so good... that she has had that experience, to be seen in a positive light, you kind of give her a chance, even if she has wrecked her own possibilities to be in a group in many different conflicts... nevertheless she has a new chance (Teacher A).

The Dalcroze-inspired music lessons gave her a new space to express her creativity through bodily movements and a chance to acquire a new, different role as a skilful student. Improvisational and bodily participation and expression supported this student's agency and sense of self.

In Dalcroze lessons, students have something concrete to do as they are bodily involved in music making processes. The body movement activities

helped to strengthen participation, especially among the students who had problems sitting in one place and concentrating on listening. In music and movement activities, the students were allowed to move and interact with music and others with their whole bodies, while their musical experience and understanding were reinforced through movement. For example, it was easier for the students to find the pulse in music with the help of bouncing a ball, whether alone or in pairs. The students also learned musical elements and concepts from and with one another by improvising and by expressing them in concrete ways, for example by showing the minor or major chords in their bodily movements. In this way, music theory was not represented in distant figures or symbols in music books, but experienced and lived in the body.

Music does not only move us physically but it also evokes sensations, images and emotions (Juslin & Sloboda 2001). Musical action in moving, singing and playing enables the expression of emotions and, once initiated, such experiences are often strong in the SEN context. Indeed, one important strength of music education, as well as arts education in general, is that it constructs creative and personal opportunities to experience, process and express emotions (Saarikallio 2007). In one exercise during the intervention, students were asked to express a variety of emotions (such as joy, anger and fear) in a group. As a result, the students recreated a variety of real-life situations where they had been abandoned or bullied. As improvised music was added to accompany their movements, the expressions became much more profound and the experience decidedly stronger.

In general, at the intersection of childhood and youth, students often do not touch and lack being touched, as their relationships with parents or friends may be complicated or even absent. Bodily musical exercises are a safe and fun way of being close to another human being, without being embarrassed or bullied. In addition, the exercises fully relate to life skills, such as accepting oneself and others, being together and collaborating in a group. For instance, body percussion exercises in pairs, holding hands in a circle, a variety of dances and relaxation exercises back-to-back enabled the students to feel more connected with their own bodies and also with those next to each other. These feelings were supported by the common sense of rhythm in their bodies. Hence, music and movement activities can be found empowering in terms of their interactive and communal nature.

Students with SEN are often identified with

behavioural problems. However, the 'bad behaviour' may not be what it at first seems, but may rather relate to attempts to overcome emotional tensions of a particular situation. One example of the intervention demonstrates this when a student had a fit of rage as he did not want to participate in an African dance. However, he was unable to verbalise this and consequently his frustration gradually increased during the dance. He tried to express his feelings by touching a form teacher's hand next to him several times, but as the teacher did not understand his intentions, he became withdrawn and finally had an intense outburst of emotion, falling on the ground, kicking and hitting the floor. As Maclaren (2009: 33-34) notes, emotions can be regarded as "lived, embodied, and expressive attempts to make rational sense of our situation". If we experience contradictions in life situations with others, "emotion can lead to a kind of loss of self, wherein we seem to be taken over by an emotion and driven to act in ways that we would not normally endorse" resulting in primitive, compulsive behaviours and even regression. Thus, students' inappropriate behaviour may result from of a lack of (existential) resources for situating themselves within a learning situation. Meanwhile, research suggests that movement, particularly in music, is one of the components mediating or evoking emotions, including those hidden under rational behaviour and thinking (Juslin & Västfjäll 2008; Juslin et al. 2010; Phillips-Silver & Keller 2012). Accordingly, refusing to participate in an ongoing task, moving off in mid-task, reacting negatively or behaving in other unwanted ways in bodily musical interaction may be interpreted as a result of a student's emotional tension that they are attempting to resolve (Maclaren 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary results of this study underline the meaning of bodily musical experiences as positive, powerful and rewarding tools for being in contact with oneself and with others, for expressing emotions and for identity work. Dalcroze-inspired musical activities enable students with SEN to express their emotions in a safe environment, where they are allowed to express themselves and where their expressions are safely reflected by themselves, their peers and the teacher. A safe learning environment enables the emergence of creativity in their bodily expression in music learning situations. The bodily approach to music can give such students meaningful opportunities to express their musical knowledge in non-verbal

ways, without or before conceptualising the musical phenomena, thus empowering and fostering their identity as a musician. In performing music through body movement, the resulting sense of achievement and recognition by others support students' self-confidence and provide the means to improve their communication and interaction skills.

Based on this study, we conclude that the holistic nature of the Dalcroze approach with its embodied, interactive and communicative musical activities may give opportunities for music educators to promote learning and wellbeing of students with SEN. Through participating in Dalcroze-inspired activities in a group, the SEN students engage in joint musical action and experience a sense of synchronisation, moving and singing together at the same time. This connects with the notion of entrainment, referring to "spatiotemporal coordination between two or more individuals, often in response to a rhythmic signal" (Phillips-Silver & Keller 2012: 1). In this study, the students felt a sense of coherence through these shared experiences and most of the participants had more of a sense of 'we' than of 'I' when experiencing musical phenomena cooperatively with others. Based on these findings, we suggest that Dalcroze teaching can offer a learning environment where diverse learners can feel their contribution as valuable and respected. A feeling of belonging may help students with SEN to overcome the threshold of making the first move in interactional situations, in this way supporting their social relationships and holistic development in general.

Throughout the intervention, the calm atmosphere in the music and movement lessons, relaxation exercises and opportunities for self-expression helped students to calm down and concentrate on the ongoing (and after-lesson) tasks. Hence, the utilisation of bodily activities and opportunity to relax during the school day could also help students with SEN in other teaching and learning situations to concentrate on school work better and thus contribute to their learning in general. Our study challenges music educators to recognise the value of Dalcroze-based musical activities and the therapeutic aspect of the Dalcroze approach in special music education contexts.

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