

# **“Developing the Child’s Sense of Touch: Tactile Activities Then and Now”**

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National Conference of the American Eurhythmics Society

Helotes, Texas

Saturday, October 8, 2022

## **Preparation for playing musical instruments:**

Eurhythmics provides unique opportunities to also develop the child’s sense of touch. Tactile activities in the classroom can help learners develop coordination, physical response, and sensitivity of touch as preparation for proficiency on a musical instrument.

## **Preparation for ensembles, & life:**

Tactile “intelligence” also helps to achieve Émile Jaques Dalcroze’s goal of social integration. Working together in activities that require awareness, self-control, trust, cooperation, and acceptance can help learners achieve socioemotional competency that will be useful for music ensembles as well as life.

## **I. Some Tactile Activities for the Classroom**

### **A. Skating Rink**

- T. invites everyone to line up to enter the rink for “all skate” & skate to the music (can you use your arms?). T. improvises gliding music.
- T. calls out “partner skate” and st must join hands in a criss-cross while they skate together in same direction. [if music switches to a new “color,” switch partners]
- T. says “solo skate,” everyone freezes in a pose on the ice & one st volunteers to skate solo, showing fancy tricks to the music. When desired, st taps a friend on the shoulder to take over solo skate.

### **B. Solo vs Duet Texture (Leopold Mozart’s “Burleske”)**

- Link elbows with a partner and go for a walk to the music!
- When the music changes to a “solo,” only 1 of you walks. [be sure to keep track of your partner in the room!]
- When the music changes back to a “duet,” both of you walk again.

### **C. Rocking cradles, with scarves (small groups of 3 or 4, in circles, standing)**

- Make a cradle with your group’s scarf
- Rock baby to the music... (can you use your knees to rock?)
- If baby “wakes up crying”, add a ball on top of your scarf and use it to show the music you hear

### **D. Doorbell games (same small groups of 3 or 4, in circles, standing)**

- 1 st holds up hand drum; this is the “door”
- Other st take turns ringing the doorbell (to ring, they hold a ball & touch it to the door)
- Ring the doorbell like you are: early to arrive and not sure if you’re welcome yet; 3 years old and love the sound of the doorbell; a Fedex delivery person in a hurry; you don’t want anyone to know it was you; frustrated because you’ve already rang it 3 times and no one is answering the door

### **E. Marionettes – (partners or groups of 3, lying down)**

- Puppeteer “pulls strings” to move puppet to a standing position, one limb at a time. (stand your puppet up!)
- Puppet stands fixed in place – puppeteer pulls strings to move puppet to music, improvised by T.
- Switch partners. T. improvises with change of tempo.

#### **F. Warmup “follow” game (partners, seated one in front of the other)**

- Choose who will be “composer” (sits behind)
- T. gives 3 choices of rhythms: quarter, eighths, half notes. Rule: Keep same rhythm notes for at least 8 counts (2mm.).
- T. sets tempo softly with hand drum, gives count-off
- Composer “draws” rhythm notes on partner’s back; at same time, performer taps rhythms felt. Note: for half notes, composer must show *duration* while drawing.
- Change now to new type of rhythm note. Remember to follow the rule.
- More advanced: design a repeating rhythm pattern including a quarter rest or half rest.

#### **G. Tactile uninterrupted canon (partners, seated)**

- T. gives 2 choices of rhythms: quarters & eighths.
- Composer draws 4-count rhythm pattern on partner’s back, then waits while partner taps it on hands.
- Continue and vary rhythm patterns drawn! Switch partners.
- More difficult: Repeat as interrupted canon composer does not wait for partner to tap, but continues on. Slower tempo recommended!]

#### **H. Tactile reaction game (partners, seated one in front of the other)**

- Choose who will be composer (sits behind).
- T. gives 2 rhythm note values: quarters & eighths.
- Composer places RH gently on partner’s RH shoulder. When RH is on shoulder, composer draws rhythm notes on partner’s back & partner taps SAME rhythms felt.
- When composer places LH on partner’s LH shoulder, partner taps OPPOSITE rhythms felt!

#### **I. Tactile “telephone” game (long rows, seated one behind other)**

- Place yardsticks across two places in each row (or tape/yarn on floor).
- Last student in row creates an 8-count rhythm pattern (choose from note values: quarters, eighths, quarter rest) & draws it on partner’s back; st continue to draw this pattern up the row – until 1<sup>st</sup> yardstick.
- After 1<sup>st</sup> yardstick, st must stand & MOVE the rhythm felt.
- Across 2<sup>nd</sup> yard stick, last 2 st must stand and together WRITE the rhythm on board (as buddies).

#### **J. Feeling weight of light/heavy objects (small groups in circles)**

- St. look at and pick up 2 objects placed in center of circle (i.e. feather & ball)
- T. improvises music; st move to center like them music, pick up object music shows, & return moving to their place in the circle. (Peers can move in place).
- Start with light vs heavy. Then add a 3<sup>rd</sup> object between (light, medium, heavy), etc.
- Reverse: st. chooses object; group must move how object “feels” (T. can improvise or not)
- Variation: St. chooses object; and a STUDENT improvises the music.

#### **K. Plastique through sensory objects in a bag - (medium-sized groups)**

- Without looking, st choose object from bag and pass it around the group. Everyone must keep eyes closed! Return object to bag.
- Groups quietly discuss object held/felt & plan out a group movement that depicts how object felt.

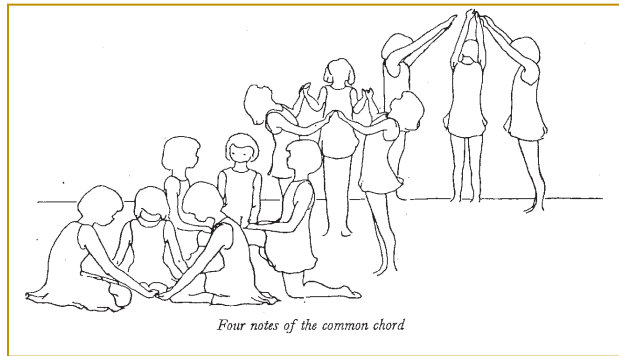
- Add body and/or voice sounds, that depict how object felt.
- Groups perform for class; then T. shows everyone their object from bag.
- Extension: can add non-pitched or even pitched instruments as well.

L. **A Danish Tale (“The Princess Who Wouldn’t Smile”)** from *Ethnic Stories for Children to Dance*, by Margery Dorian.



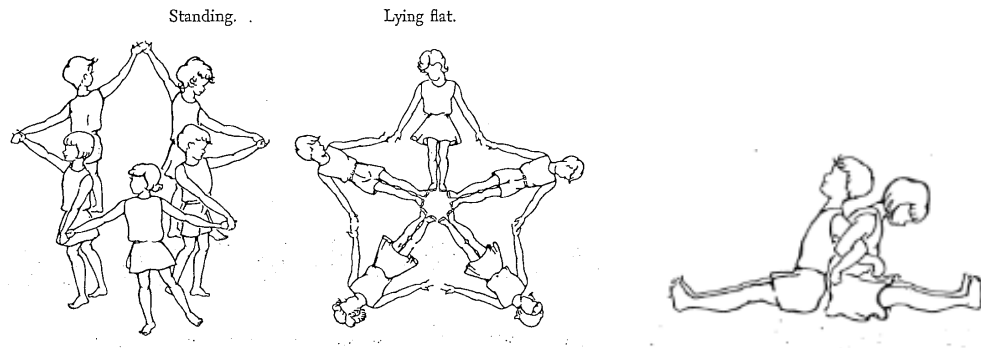
II. **Samples of tactile eurhythmics activities from past history...**

- A. Ethel Driver, *A Pathway to Dalcroze Eurhythmics*, Chapt. 9 “Ear Training and Movement” (1951), 75-76.

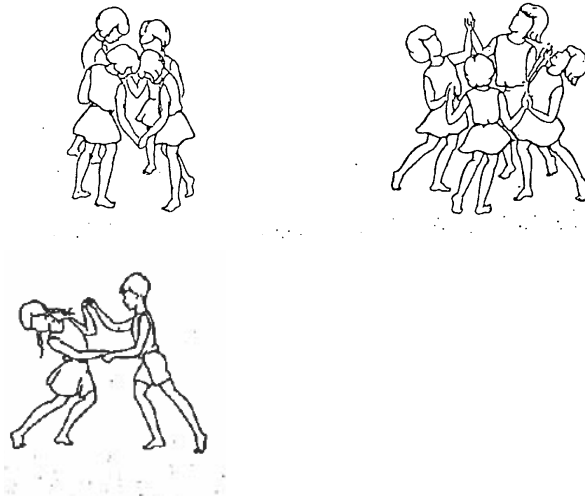


- B. Heather Gell, “Natural Movement, and the Rhythms of Daily Life and Environment,” *Music, Movement and the Young Child* (1949).

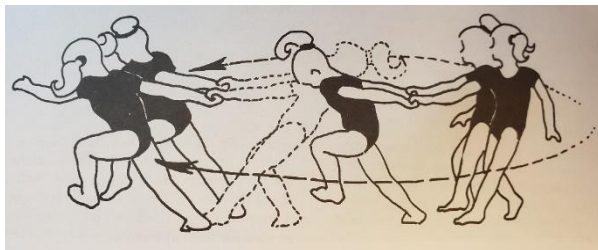
- C. Heather Gell, “Preparing the Instrument,” *Music, Movement and the Young Child* (1949), 15, 27. Starfish, rocking chair.



D. Heather Gell, *Music, Movement and the Young Child* (1949), 40, 86. Opening flower (crescendo/decrescendo), Bending and Leaning (phrasing).



E. Elsa Findlay, *Rhythm and Movement: Applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics* (1971), 22, 68. Duration activities; movement & space patterns.



### III. Implementation

#### A. Giving a rationale

- Touch is one of our five senses. St. can take in a lot of information through touch, can communicate information through touch, and express themselves through touch.
- Playing an instrument requires many types of touch, and control of the body

- Touch = important form of human communication; can show emotions, respect for self and others, acceptance/tolerance, empathy, collaboration, etc.

### **B. Adapting tactile activities for different learner types/needs**

- Some st have sensory challenges; difficulty organizing tactile input. These st may need more help figuring out how something “felt”, how they did on an activity, and/or why. Some may need more time on tactile activities.
- Some st. may have trauma-related challenges related to touch. Watch st. for potential “triggers.”
- We may not know or understand what a learner can or cannot do or why; some may not be diagnosed
- Use asset-based lens (as opposed to deficit-based)
- Some st may need individual choice, a way of doing that is less demanding, uses a different body part, less locomotion
- Some st may need a buddy to collaborate with
- Some st. (or even classes) may need a replacement for direct touch, i.e. an extension such as a pencil, rhythm stick, or scarf between their hand and a friend’s

### **C. Putting tactile activities onstage**

- Past history = st moved in rhythm choirs, often touching to form the scenery, set, & props of the production. [no stage curtains or wings]
- Programming a tactile activity or scene in your program can showcase the SEL skills and class community your students have developed
- If st are accustomed to doing these things regularly in music class & they show understanding of your expectations, they really can be presented onstage
- Give voice to these skills your students have developed, i.e in talk before program starts, or as a note in the typed program. (Don’t assume your audience will notice, understand, or appreciate it). You can promote positive change in bringing these skills back into education.



Questions? Comments?

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