

Excerpts from “Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the Choral Classroom” by Marla Butke and David Frego, published by Hal Leonard Corporation (2021) have been included.

Applying Dalcroze Eurhythmics to the Choral Classroom

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“The goal of Dalcroze Eurhythmics is to internalize all the elements of music through kinesthetic activities, allowing the learner to experience music physically and joyfully, then expressing the music thoughtfully and artfully.” Butke & Frego, 2021

This article addresses the goals and outcomes of blending Dalcroze Eurhythmics into the choral rehearsal framework. Choirs of all types and ages can benefit from meaningful movement activities done in very short segments which are experienced consistently over time. Creating a culture of movement in the choral classroom starts with the choral teacher’s understanding and appreciation of the Dalcroze philosophy.

Jaques-Dalcroze wrote extensively about the choral art. He believed that the ear and body should convey much more than the technical considerations of the music. Aural exercises combined with kinesthetic experiences should build both musical accuracy and musical expressivity: “The practice of bodily movements awakens images in the mind. The stronger the muscular sensations, the clearer and more precise the images, and thereby the more metrical and rhythmic feeling is developed; for feeling is born of sensation” (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921, p. 124). The integrated use of aural and kinesthetic images constitute what Jaques-Dalcroze termed the “inner ear.” (*excerpt*)

Choral teachers have many goals for their students and inherently must be efficient and effective in order to achieve those goals. They are also often working with multi-age classrooms with a variety of student skills, learning styles, and experience levels. Implementing Dalcroze Eurhythmics into the rehearsal will enable choral students to:

- Embody rhythmic integrity
- Improve expressive singing
- Develop sight-reading skills
- Develop conducting skills
- Develop sensitivity to nuance
- Reinforce musical concepts
- Enhance musical interpretation
- Increase muscle memory

Let’s further delineate these important goals. **Rhythmic integrity** includes numerous rhythmic elements found in a piece of choral literature. Steady beat, meter, tempo, note durations, and rhythmic patterns are all effectively taught through physical movement. Rhythm must be physicalized or *felt* before it can be intellectually understood. Therefore, having students walk to various rhythmic elements is an effective way to start the learning process. Clapping rhythms has been a common feature of learning rhythms but using the entire body in a musical way can be a more effective means to create understanding.

Expressive singing connects the body and the soul of the singer. Dynamics, articulations, phrasing, and **nuance** can be realized through eurhythmic activities. As Daley reported in her dissertation research study, *Moved to Learn: Dalcroze Applications to Choral Pedagogy and Practice* (2013), attending to expression using physical activities throughout the rehearsal process is an inversion of the typical choral rehearsal sequence. Dalcroze techniques not only introduce musical expression, these exercises make musical expression an essential component of the rehearsal (*excerpt*). Specifically, students can show dynamics with their bodies by starting with the hand at the chest for *piano* markings and pressing away from their bodies as the music *crescendos*. Another option is to have students walk forward as the music *crescendos* and walk backwards as the music *decrescendos*. In terms of articulation, having students paint *legato* phrases, using a flicking motion to demonstrate *staccato* markings, and punching the air to display *marcato* sections will help students embody those concepts by increasing **muscle memory**. Phrasing can be demonstrated by using elastics in partners with the students forming parallel lines and having the students pull through the phrase to feel the length of the phrase or use the elastics to represent the rise and fall of the shape of the phrase. Students can also independently experience their own **musical interpretation** as they use their body in a variety of ways to create responses and reflections to the musical score.

Sight-reading is an essential element in the choral curriculum. Adapting whatever sight-reading system a choral teacher uses by adding meaningful movement will facilitate learning by incorporating the kinesthetic dimension. Students can start by walking the scale forward and backward as the scale ascends and descends. Add the next level of difficulty by changing the size of the step that the student takes to replicate the half vs. the whole step. Chromatic passages can be particularly challenging for students and having them show the half steps with their feet can help by combining the physicalization of the passage along with the visual notation, to the aural act of singing. Students can physically represent both melodic and rhythmic patterns or measures to build **muscle memory** for those challenging passages.

Conducting plays a major role in eurhythmics classes with the students performing the gestures. Students as young as second grade can learn the basic meter patterns and gain a rudimentary understanding of anacrusis and cruris. Conducting also assists in fostering student independence in meter and tempo, as well as developing coordination, and multi-tasking. Advanced students can focus on **nuance** and **expression** as they use the gesture to create their own **musical interpretation**.

Most **musical concepts** can be taught through physical means. Polyphonic structures can be experienced by having the students walk the beat (or melodic rhythm) through space when it is their section's turn to sing and thereby create a space of independent singers who become aware of the other voice parts as they pass other students while walking through space. Another activity for polyphonic sections is to have the students form a circle in groups of four (SATB – one on a part, or whatever the voicing might be) and tap their individual rhythms into the student's hand on the right so they are feeling another person's rhythmic part as well as hearing all 4 voice parts.

There are also social skills and non-musical benefits that are cultivated in a eurhythmics experience:

- Increase focus
- Enjoy social interactions
- Practice listening skills
- Increase visual and kinesthetic awareness
- Engage in processed-based learning
- Share in the joy of shared musical experiences
- Release tension
- Stimulate brain function
- Energize body

Student focus is paramount in any educational setting. Ensembles necessitate a singular focus as singers work towards the goal of creating an artistic and homogeneous sound. The goal of a focus activity is to guide a student's attention to a specific task. Dalcroze-based focus activities can help students look for and experience patterns that translate to hearing or performing patterns in music. (Butke & Frego, 2016, p. 11). A focus activity clears the mind and prepares the body physically and emotionally to engage in the music. (*excerpt*)

Choral singing has social outcomes. For some students it functions as the most important reason for being in choir. For the choral teacher it is the connective tissue that takes individual singers and turns them into a choir. This group learning experience involves being receptive to the other singers in the ensemble. "You have to be able to adapt your own energy to the energy of the others. You have to adapt your voice to what is happening around you, to what is surrounding you. So, this receptivity, this adaptability, is something you are learning through cooperative work." (Master Teacher C, in Daley, 2013, p. 168). Dalcroze Eurhythmics provides the framework for students to interact, react, and adapt within the ensemble experience. (*excerpt*)

The implementation of eurhythmics into the choral classroom combines the kinesthetic, aural, and visual modes to increase understanding for all students. Movement can bring a new vitality to the rehearsal therefore evoking student attentiveness and interest. But most importantly, it can create more avenues for expressiveness and joyful singing.

Butke, M. & Frego, R.J.D. (2021). *Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the choral classroom*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation.

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Jaques-Dalcroze, E. H. (1921). *Rhythm, music and education* (H. F. Rubinstein, Trans.). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. (Original work published in 1921).

