

Putting It All Together

Holly Smith, PhD

When I first began my Dalcroze training I fell in love with the approach instantly. If you're reading this article, you probably did too. However, I really struggled with how to apply what I experienced in Dalcroze training in my own music classroom. I would experience a type of activity (eurhythmics, solfege, improvisation, plastique animée, etc.) and think how great it was, but I didn't understand how to connect it to my objectives or pre-existing lesson plans. It actually wasn't until the end of my second year of Dalcroze training that I began to feel comfortable designing lessons and instructional units for my classroom Dalcroze activities. This article may seem like common Dalcroze sense for many, however, I know for myself, a summary like this would have been very helpful earlier in my Dalcroze training. I share this brief summary in hopes that it can inspire ideas to bring it all together in your teaching.

I typically start class with creative movement, before my students get through the door. I meet all my students in the hallway, and they begin moving like whatever I ask them to (sneaking fox, hopping bunny, creeping turtle, marching ants, stomping elephants, etc.) I often use a hand drum or other unpitched percussion to get them in the door and take advantage of our human tendency towards rhythmic entrainment as the students move together to the rhythmic pattern or pulse of what I'm playing. I then transition over to piano with minimal vocal cues, intentional about what I play to instill cognitive priming (introducing musical melodies, articulations, rhythms, etc. of music to be learned later in class). Finally, social interaction is always encouraged throughout the movement aspect of my lessons. There is such an opportunity for students to have countless musical experiences before you even begin lesson activities introducing these concepts. *Being intentional about your improvisation requires thought and planning, however, it is also important to remain flexible in your teaching to allow the lesson to be student-guided based on their experiences.*

While moving, students can be introduced to specific rhythmic and solfege patterns to respond to, based on musical cues. This allows students to experience inhibition vs excitation (starting/stopping, responding to musical cues, playing predictive patterns to respond to then changing them), thus developing the working of the nervous system on controlling the movement. These patterns can lead to the introduction of a song. As they experience the movement of rhythm and/or solfege pattern, try to encourage audiation and implement activities that require students to internally hear rhythm/solfege. Some of my favorite types of activities include movement canons (interrupted, semi-interrupted, continuous), moving melodies on the floor through the 'solfege ladder' (while also singing), moving rhythms in augmentation and diminution, and moving and maintaining a rhythmic pattern, regardless of what the teacher improvises,

After experiencing the rhythm/melody through movement and singing, it can then be discovered in visual notation. Once students have the visual notation, transferring the rhythm and solfege to instrumentation can happen quickly since students have developed a deeper

understanding of the rhythm and melodies. A culminating performance aspect of many of my lessons involves an opportunity for students to both sing their songs and play them on instruments while other students use creative movement to express the music they hear/have learned (plastique animee with live music). Inversely, plastique animee are a great way for students to be introduced to a piece of music, learning the rhythm, articulation, melody, etc., and then transferring to instruments and/or singing and visual notation.

The order in which you do Dalcroze activities can vary from lesson to lesson and class to class. However, the deeper understanding and musicality all the activities together can create is a priceless opportunity for your students. Incorporating various Dalcroze activities while using the same concepts, allows for repetition while keeping students engaged. Ultimately, this typically results in students having a deeper understanding of the music objectives presented while also creating fun social and music-making experiences for students to enjoy and remember.