

# The Applied Research of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Junior High School Music Class

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## Abstract:

The Dalcroze eurhythmics, which incorporates physical movement, has had a profound impact on music teaching systems in many countries. It emphasizes the close connection between music and the body, enhancing students' perception of and interest in music. While existing research on Dalcroze's theoretical system is relatively comprehensive, more exploration is needed regarding its practical application in secondary school classrooms. This paper examines the core principles of Dalcroze eurhythmics, analyzes current issues in music teaching in China, and demonstrates the integration of spatial and temporal elements in classroom instruction through specific teaching examples. The author argues that the Dalcroze method is particularly well-suited for junior high school music education in China, offering new insights into diversified teaching methods.

**Keywords:** Dalcroze eurhythmics, junior high school music education, music perception.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past 40 years, the Dalcroze eurhythmics has introduced a range of pedagogical models, including physical movement, improvisation, and game, into music education across various countries. The Dalcroze eurhythmics enhances students' interest in music learning and improves their perceptual abilities [1]. Some researchers link this method to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas, which argue that the body is inseparable from the mind and cognition [2], a concept aligned with Dalcroze eurhythmics. Other researchers explore how imagery and sensory perception play roles in guided learning connected to Dalcroze eurhythmics [3].

In the early 20th century, Dalcroze method of teaching body movement was introduced to China and has since been applied in primary, secondary, and higher education music classrooms [4]. However, most research on the Dalcroze method in China remains theoretical [5, 6], with relatively few studies focusing on the combination of theory and practice [7]. This raises the question: Can the Dalcroze method be applied to junior high school music classes in a way that incorporates songs from the curriculum, stimulates students' interest, and enhances classroom engagement?

This paper first introduces Dalcroze's teaching philosophy and eurhythmics. It then discusses the

current challenges faced by music classrooms in China, before analyzing how the Dalcroze method can be adapted for junior high school teaching through specific case studies. Finally, the paper offers conclusions and reflections on the application of this approach.

## 2. Overview of the Dalcroze Eurhythmics

### 2.1 Theoretical Background

The Dalcroze eurhythmics, along with the Kodály and Orff methods, is one of the most widely used music education systems. The Kodály method emphasizes the teaching of folk songs to young children, while the Orff method is known for incorporating a variety of musical instruments and fostering improvisation [8]. This paper focuses on the Dalcroze method because junior high schools in China often lack sufficient musical teaching aids. Additionally, the Dalcroze method emphasizes developing students' musical perception, making it particularly suitable for these educational environments.

The Dalcroze Method, founded by Swiss educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, consists of three main components: „rhythmic movement“, „sight-singing and ear training“, and „improvisation“. The core of the Dalcroze eurhythmics is rhythmic training, which aims to develop students' sense of timing and beat. In this approach, students learn to use their bodies as instruments to experience and express music through physical movements such as clapping or stamping. These movements are combined to improvise musical pieces, which helps students coordinate their mental focus with physical actions, transforming abstract melodies into tangible experiences.

### 2.2 Key Concepts

#### 2.2.1 The Use of Body Movement in Classroom Teaching

The Dalcroze method emphasizes using body movement to enhance musical ability and stimulate creativity and imagination. Movements incorporate elements such as „space“, „time“, and „force“. For instance, spatial elements can represent pitch or dynamics through movement amplitude; force can represent sound intensity, and time can be used to express note duration. By combining these elements, students gain a deeper understanding of melodic content. The physical rhythm method encourages students to use their bodies as a medium to experience music, making learning more engaging and effective [3].

#### 2.2.2 Rhythmic and Emotional Elements in Physical

### Rhythm

Each piece of music has unique rhythms and beat structures. Students must begin with fundamental rhythmic training. For example, when practicing quarter notes, students can walk slowly to the beat, while consecutive eighth notes might be represented by jogging or quick steps. This helps students internalize rhythm changes. The tempo of a piece also plays a crucial role in conveying emotion. Teachers can play melodies with increasing tempo and dynamics, allowing students to express the changes by transitioning from slow walking to sprinting, which mirrors the increasing musical intensity [4].

#### 2.2.3 Game-Based Physical Rhythm and Improvisation

Junior high school students are naturally curious, and capitalizing on this curiosity can enhance learning outcomes [9]. Incorporating new and exciting content into the classroom helps capture students' attention. Traditional lecture-based teaching alone is often insufficient to maintain engagement at this age. Instead, games and group activities can be employed. For example, students can use hand-clapping, circle formation, or other movements to match the melody, either in groups or individually. This approach makes learning more enjoyable and fosters creativity and teamwork as students design their movements in collaboration with peers. Such activities also stimulate improvisation, further developing their musical imagination.

## 3. Practical Use of Dalcroze's Eurhythmics in Junior High School Music Class

### 3.1 General Situation of Music Classes

#### 3.1.1 Challenges

One significant issue is that music education in China is not considered an exam subject, leading students to prioritize subjects like language, mathematics, and English. As a result, music classes are often viewed as a form of „leisure and entertainment“ [10]. This perception causes students to be inattentive and undisciplined during music lessons, making it difficult to maintain classroom order and complete lesson plans. Consequently, music lessons tend to become more formalized and lack engagement.

A possible solution is for schools to create assessment criteria for music classes, integrating music into students' overall evaluation. For instance, schools could hold group talent shows at the end of the term. Additionally, some teachers rely on overly simplistic teaching methods, such

as only having students listen to music, sing along, or watch videos. This passive approach leads to boredom, a lack of concentration, and decreased interest, negatively impacting the effectiveness of music lessons. Furthermore, the content of junior secondary music textbooks is often limited or one-dimensional, affecting students' ability to appreciate and engage with different music genres. To address this, teaching materials should incorporate a wider variety of genres, including classical music, foreign songs, and musicals.

### **3.1.2 Exploring Solutions Through Eurhythmics**

In China, both teachers and parents often underestimate the importance of music education, placing a greater focus on academic subjects. To counter this, teachers must adopt diverse teaching strategies to motivate students to engage with music, allowing them to experience the joy of music learning. The incorporation of body movement is particularly effective, as physical engagement allows students to perceive and experience music both physically and mentally [1]. The playful approach of Dalcroze eurhythmics can stimulate students' curiosity and passion for learning, which is crucial for their development [12].

To enhance classroom engagement, teachers can use group activities and games. For example, a class can be divided into groups of 5-10 students for relay games. The teacher might play a simple melody, and students can take turns touching their palms and pushing each other's arms in sync with the music, helping them feel the fluidity of the melody and changes in rhythm. This approach enables students to participate actively in the lesson, making the classroom atmosphere more dynamic and engaging. In this interactive environment, students are more likely to enjoy and absorb the material, improving the overall quality of music education.

## **3.2 Teaching Case Design**

### **3.2.1 Pre-teaching Preparation**

The objective of this lesson is to apply Dalcroze eurhythmics to help students understand the characteristics of triple meter music and learn to appreciate and sing songs from different cultural genres. The lesson aims to stimulate students' interest, teamwork, and creativity. The required teaching aids include multimedia, a blackboard, a piano, a ball, and silk scarves.

The selected song is „Edelweiss“, from the 8th-grade textbook published by the People's Music Education Publishing House of China. Composed by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein in 1959, this song was featured in the 1965 American musical „The Sound of Music“ and became widely popular [13]. It features a Broadway musical style with influences from Austrian and American folk music. „Edelweiss“ expresses a love for nature and nostalgia for home. This song is ideal for junior high school students, as they are generally open to learning English songs and engaging with new musical styles. The piece's cultural and historical significance, along with its diverse musical elements, can help students develop a broader aesthetic appreciation for classical music and musical theatre.

### **3.2.2 Teaching Steps**

- The teacher begins by showing a clip from „The Sound of Music“, followed by playing the entire piece of „Edelweiss“. Students listen to the song and share their feelings, with the teacher facilitating a discussion about the song's themes.
- The teacher explains the background of the song, introducing the concept of triple meter.
- To create space for movement, the teacher and students move the tables and chairs aside.
- In pairs, students use two balls to pass back and forth in time with the music, feeling the strong-weak-weak beat pattern characteristic of triple meter [14].
- The teacher demonstrates simple body movements, such as clapping, slapping thighs, and slapping shoulders. Students follow along with these movements, which are synchronized with the song's melody.
- The teacher then plays the song again, this time dividing the class into five groups, each receiving a colored scarf. As the song plays, students wave their scarves up and down in response to the melody—raising them when the melody rises and lowering them when it falls—helping them experience the flow of the music and changes in pitch.
- The teacher plays bars 1-20, and students form a circle. They express the rhythm by clapping, stomping, squatting, or jumping in place, matching the rhythm of the notes. For example, on „6,“ students clap twice; on „1,“ they cross their arms and clap their shoulders once; and on „5,“ they stomp their feet three times (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1 Clap hands and shoulders while playing “Edelweiss”**

- Next, the teacher plays the melody, and students hum forward on „6,“ one step forward on „1,“ and three steps forward on „5“ (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2 Step movements while playing “Edelweiss”**

- In the final step, students sing the song while performing in-situ and spatial movements. For instance, on „6,“ they take two steps forward and clap twice; on „1,“ they jump and slap their thighs; and on „5,“ they step forward three times, clapping their shoulders (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3 Combining movements while playing “Edelweiss”**

The goal of this design is to incorporate the spatial and temporal elements of the Dalcroze method. By using physical movement and small games, students can feel the flow of the melody and develop their physical coordination. This interactive approach allows students to enjoy the learning process and temporarily forget their concerns [15]. Teachers do not need to overly control students' movements, as long as the tempo and timing are correct. This freedom encourages students to create their own movements, fostering imagination and creativity.

#### 4. Reflections on the Application of Dalcroze Eurhythmics

The goal of quality education in China is to promote students' holistic development, ensuring they acquire basic knowledge of music theory, while also learning to appreciate and emotionally connect with music. In junior high school, students are naturally curious and have al-

ready begun to form their own opinions on many subjects. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to remain attentive to student feedback in the classroom, continuously adapting and refining their teaching methods.

According to Dalcroze's teaching philosophy, the teacher acts as a „guide,“ facilitating the learning process without imposing strict boundaries on students' creativity and actions. This flexibility encourages students to explore, play, and create on their own, which in turn enhances their creativity and expressiveness. Games and physical movements are incorporated into lessons not as ends in themselves, but as tools to help students experience music more deeply.

Music classroom activities need not be exhaustive; teachers should focus on key learning objectives, prioritizing essential content while avoiding the temptation to cover too much material. The primary goal is to ensure every student actively participates and develops their musical skills.

The successful application of the Dalcroze Method requires teachers to adopt progressive teaching concepts and possess a deep understanding of music. Patience and the ability to guide students through the process of adapting to this method are also essential. Additionally, teachers must be skilled in managing a dynamic and often highly energetic classroom. They should be capable of organizing activities, managing classroom behavior, and addressing unforeseen challenges to ensure a smooth and effective learning experience.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the teaching philosophy of Dalcroze eurhythmics, discussed current issues in China's music classrooms, and proposed solutions to these challenges through the integration of Dalcroze's teaching methods. Dalcroze's approach departs from traditional teaching models by prioritizing students' experiences and emotional responses to music. This shift plays an essential role in modernizing secondary school music education in China.

The classroom case study presented in this paper illustrates the advantages of the Dalcroze Method in fostering students' musical abilities and stimulating their interest in music learning. It offers fresh insights into the teaching of music in junior high schools, showing how this method can cultivate creativity and encourage students to express themselves freely.

In the context of China's quality education reforms, the hope is that music education will become less marginalized. By clearly defining the purpose of music classes, students can develop their imagination and creativity through music, while gaining the confidence to express their emotions. It is the author's sincere wish that this paper provides valuable insights and guidance for the ongoing development of music education in China's junior high schools and contributes meaningfully to the advancement of music education in the country.

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