

How to keep the school in the new schooling

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How to keep the old school in the new schooling.

*This is **the way** of Dalcroze: **Do, think later, put it to use.** It's almost counterintuitive to write a paper about it, but I must say that it comes from years of "doing". And that's why the presentation of the paper comes in the form of a workshop. If you are reading this but didn't experience the workshop. Watch it, and not only that: Live it before you carry on reading. So click on this link, if you want to see it in video form, or this one if you want to hear it as a podcast. Just promise me something: You will not listen to it in your car, and if you do. **DO NOT** follow the instructions! So now get a good pair of headphones or a good speaker and away we go!*

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What is *the way* to teach Dalcroze?

The 5 elements of a Dalcroze lesson - The 3 pillars of Dalcroze

Dalcroze doesn't have *one* way to be taught, as a matter of fact, teaching Dalcroze is about diversity of media and even diversity of practice. This is inherent in the polyvalence of the method and is part of its richness (*The Dalcroze identity*, 2020). We not only experience a certain musical element in various ways, thus ensuring that any given student has an opportunity to experience it through their best interface (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, etc.). Also, Every Dalcroze teacher has a different approach to different elements. However, the method itself has certain requirements to fulfill if we are to call our lesson a *Dalcroze* lesson. All of which are detailed in the previously cited document: "The Dalcroze identity, professional training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics: Theory and practice". Even though the content of this work deals specifically with the professional training of Dalcroze rhythmicians [sic] and is not intended for the development of other kinds of training or courses [...] it could serve as a reference or provide inspiration for them.(p.5).

In the course of our training as *rhythmicians*, we encounter a defined path which we must travel to deliver a Dalcroze lesson, but happily, that path gets completely brushed away before our eyes when it's time to deliver your first *solo* lesson. You have to tap into your training, your musicianship and your available resources. Everything you know gets tossed in with your personality, other training, objectives, etc. Your lesson becomes your own, even if someone had given you the planning for it, it would still be deeply personal once you taught it. And then you must adapt to external conditions. As a teacher I've encountered places where the piano was in such a deplorable state, I preferred singing. The floor we worked on was dirt or too hot, so our shoes were kept on, the noise outside was deafening so the energy level of our lesson was considerably higher than normal, etc. But I have always planned and delivered lessons according to the Dalcroze method because it's really fun for me and the students and because I know that it yields the best results. Even when I was asked for piano lessons online (c.2015) I always kept in mind: *Do - Think - Put to use*.

Dalcroze takes every notion to be learned from movement, from rhythm but not only musical rhythm, rather, *rhythm* is the musical element that is present in every aspect of life. And we use that to learn about music: *Pour la musique et par la musique*.

The key components of a Dalcroze lesson are: “Music, movement (and the relationship between them), the group, space and the use of diverse materials” (Del Bianco, S. *Personal Communication*). This has to be led by an eurhythmics teacher, because she or he has trained certain musical capabilities as well as the pedagogical techniques and sensibility needed to use all of these elements and transform them in a meaningful experience for the student.

And then the pillars of Dalcroze eurhythmics which are: Rhythmics, solfege and improvisation. Through these subjects the method creates moments and experiences which we will analyse and use in our music training. But it's not only destined for musicians. Dancers, thespians, therapists and so many other professionals can benefit from the Dalcroze approach. And every one of these specialties has a different way of understanding eurhythmics, every individual will find a different definition according to their experience with the method. If you say you can explain Dalcroze eurhythmics, then you don't truly understand Dalcroze eurhythmics. You cannot explain Dalcroze Eurhythmics, you must live it.

Dalcroze is not modern

This was written by Frank Martin in 1932. Even though Dalcroze Eurhythmics could've been perceived as ahead of its time back then. And most Dalcroze writings still ring true today, but walking barefoot and asking people to *feel* the music wasn't a very serious way of conducting a lesson. But *M. Martin* explained:

I must define what I understand by this word “modern” which we use so loosely and largely and for our aesthetists it implies an advanced time, the avant-guerre. This word which means so much I take it in a very broad sense, as a characteristic trait of the most obvious path of our world today. (Martin, F. 1932)¹

Something modern was something that would yield results immediately. The Dalcroze method is something that takes time, you can't learn it by reading a book, or attending a single course. And probably the reader is thinking that the same applies for our day and age. I've had

¹ Faut-il que je définisse un tout petit peu ce que j'entends par ce mot «moderne» qu'on met à toutes sauces et qui, pour nos esthéticiens, indique déjà une époque révolue, l'avant-guerre. Ce mot, qui dit tant de petites choses, je le prends, dans un sens très vaste, comme caractérisant l'orientation la plus apparente de notre monde actuel.

students, some of whom are music professionals, ask me for “the method” like if they could just “download it”. I’ve also had teachers who are forced by their place of work to enroll in my course or workshop, tell me that they won’t participate, because it was imposed by their school, and he had already taken 2 Dalcroze lessons a year ago. I fortunately got him to stick around and ended up doing the full workshop and acknowledging what everybody who’s taken at least 2 Dalcroze courses knows: There are no two Dalcroze lessons alike.

Modern has nothing to do with technology and everything to do with how we gather knowledge. Modern means understanding your time, the needs of it and anticipating what will be coming next, which is also a very Dalcrozian skill: Anticipation.

We can’t modernize Dalcroze just by adding a computer to it, we must find a way to take Dalcroze into the next age of learning and mankind, which is upon us after this massive halt we were forced to take globally. We need to adapt in aspects many Dalcroze teachers have opted against in the past. But today after facing the inevitability of online lessons were forced to. Some embraced it, some jumped in the river and some held on to branch in the stream, until they found the means to adapt.

Old school could be mistaken for *exclusive*

In the year 2006 The Institut Jaques-Dalcroze was given the ranking of *Haute Ecole de Musique*. As such it became part of the Geneva Conservatory of Music and a lot changed, one of the first things was that tuition was sliced in half, that meant my scholarship would cover 100% of my studies, the chorus would be IJD and CMG joint allowing me to sing in it, because before I had to find my choir practice outside of the institute, our title would be issued henceforth by the Conservatory and most importantly it gave our title international recognition. Which has been really useful for me having lived and taught in 3 different countries since.

I love to be part of something different, and even though we like to say that our ranks are increasing there’s still very few of us in the world. I live currently in Viet Nam, a country of over 90M inhabitants and I’m the only Dalcroze trained teacher in the country. I think that says a lot. Our condition of oddity was even more evident when we attended our first assemblies at the Geneva Conservatory, instead of having them at the Institut at *la Terrasiere*². Students at the conservatory were a little more... well conservative. You could see where the Dalcrozians were because we were dressed in what could have very well been our pijamas, and it seemed we

² The Institut Jacques-Dalcroze in Geneva has its address at 44 Rue de la Terrasiere, and is often referred to as “Terrasiere”.

were about to get rid of our footwear at the slightest provocation. Some conservatory students joked about us being a sect. We moved in packs, sang and moved when we did, we smiled all the time (maybe a bit amused as to how we were perceived), and proud, very proud of our ability to listen to music in ways no one else in the room could. We felt different and loved it, we were no more than 20, but we truly filled up the room.

The perception of the Dalcroze Institut at the time among students was that it was something very different. Not many knew about it. There was an unfortunate picture of a cellist in one of the front windows of the institut which was reversed and that was a cause of mockery, but other than that what they thought they knew about the institut was that we were being trained to be musicians/dancers. Anyone who got close to the institute and audited a single class would immediately see the difference and relevance of the studies there, but that didn't happen a lot until the HEM status. Dalcroze seemed to many like a strange method, which was able to yield amazing results, but just "not for me". I have seen this perception of Dalcroze being mirrored in various places of the world. In a conversation with a colleague from Chile he confessed that he had never taken a Dalcroze course before, because it seemed daunting. The solfege, the complications in the exercises, calling out individual students to expose themselves seemed too difficult. It felt like a very closed circle (Puebla, personal communication) people in it belonged, but it was difficult to get in. This is the impression I had from conservatories when I was trying to study music, they felt elitist, of impossible standards and just hard to get into (I was actually rejected from the Geneva conservatory because of my age (I was 28 and wanted to study composition, but they said I was too old and too formed).

We know Dalcroze is a collection of experiences attainable to anyone, truly anyone. No matter the stage in their musical (or non-musical) journey they're at. The experience of Dalcroze will grant them access to something bigger than solfege, bigger than musical theory and even bigger than music. The Dalcroze experience will enable you to look into the universe within you and live, enjoy and learn as you haven't before. Dalcroze should not be hermetic. It shouldn't be unattainable knowledge. We should be able and willing to share it easier than it came to us. Once I was promoting a course and stated that the participants *could live the Dalcroze experience first-hand* and a colleague was mad at me for having suggested this. *Yes, people won't have to travel to Geneva like you did, right?* I wasn't suggesting that my course would be as good as a class in Geneva, where I had lessons with some of the best specialists in the world. But I would surely try to give my students the best possible experience. And I still do, some have carried on into making a certificate or even going to obtain a degree themselves, they've written and researched about Dalcroze having far less experience than I in the method,

but their contributions have been and will continue to be precious to their own private practice and those around them. Because we are, as my last grade rhythmic teacher said, a generation which will spawn the next, and everything we do and say will get interpreted by others and so passed on.

There are certain conditions to be met to have a Dalcroze course, workshop, lesson or professional training, but we must remain open to the idea of new human relationships, new connections and ever changing conditions.

Multi-dimensional teaching

A Dalcroze lesson will have aspects relating to teaching that are common to every active teaching methodology: The student is at the center of the process, we're building knowledge on previously lived experiences and we take into account the human factor as well. Each of our students will learn differently and will process information differently according to their personality, temperament and these might, and most likely will change over time.

When teaching in person lessons the teacher creates different dimensions to her/his teaching, the space becomes relevant to the relationship between student and knowledge, the materials they use become valuable to achieve the goal of living a concept, the group both influences and encourages each other's participation and the music vibrates and inspires movement. The 5 elements of a Dalcroze lesson (Del Bianco, through personal communication) are there and when in the hands of a capable *Rhythmician* they appear effortlessly. If we remove the "exclusive" factor as mentioned before, this is what most students and teachers refer to as *old school*, because this is how they lived it and how they've read about it, and very significant experiences have come from this approach. Old school involves human touch, feeling the other person, reacting to others, adapting, listening to the profound *bass* of the music and the voice of the teacher carrying over that music with a HIP or a HOP!

Studies have been written about the effect Dalcroze has on performers (Wentink C. and Van der Merwe, 2020), senior citizens (Kressig, W, 2007) and the results seen in the Dalcroze students themselves at any level are astonishing. The relationship with the methodology is more than clear, so it would be a mistake to take a step back from such an approach. Many consider education on-line a step back, some have gone as far as saying that *online rhythmic lessons are not a good idea and only theory complementary material* would be something they'd pursue. However the issue went far from being optional, it became a necessity. The whole world went into reactive mode and changed a lot of their *In Real Life* activities to online. Education has

been a core activity in this global emergency. And we tried a whole variety of methods. Since then, many things have changed: The understanding of privacy, the ability to go online, the technological capabilities of individuals and countries and the myriad of platforms, *apps* and websites, etc. Which went from being a complement to the classroom to *being* the classroom. For years we had been talking about “flipping” the classroom and how it was something *avant-garde*. Today is not something only a few teachers do. Every teacher in the world had to transition from in person to on-line teaching. Dalcroze was no exception, but we had to find a way to maintain the fundamentals of the method.

At first the reaction was: **Lessons online**: Do everything that you have been doing in person, but on-line. Seemed simple, but that was the exact thing we were trying to avoid when talking about online lessons: Sitting in front of a screen, listening and watching: Passive learning (rather passive listening, learning is debatable). We soon realized this was unsustainable and very ineffective. We had to change. But it wasn't just a question of changing the didactic approach. We had to look into our core, the foundation of your own methodology and rebuild. Go back to the crossroads and take the other way.

So it's not just a change of interphase, but a paradigm shift. The dimensions any teacher could tap into just by conducting a simple lesson would have to be done in a modular shape. Every dimension of our teaching has to be present and more importantly, has to be significant to the student. The 3 moments of the lesson, the 5 elements, and humanity must also be present in an online rhythmic lesson. Each person must find their own path to do so. I cannot presume to have a standardized answer, there shouldn't be anything standard in education and there sure isn't anything standard in Dalcroze. However, I can say it is a complex system we must develop for ourselves if we intend to create significant experiences for our students. This system must be able to grow, change, adapt and reach. We must become experts in this system, we should be able to teach it and even though it's complex, it should not be complicated.

Intuitive responses

Dalcroze relies on intuition, reflex, automatisisation and systematisation. This is created through a series of exercises which use music as the conveyor of a certain musical (or extramusical) element to be taught. Movement is the recipient of this message, the movement then takes the message to the nervous system (we could say simultaneously) generating muscular memory and later awareness of the musical (or extra musical) element previously received.

The most important part of this process is the first stage, nothing can happen if we don't have this intuitive response. During an online lesson the first stage should begin from the moment the student logs on. The same way students enter a classroom and they can sense music will be the motor of the lesson. They must be able to feel that when entering a virtual classroom. The teacher could be playing music or have a recording. I use certain pieces of music and time them so that when the piece comes to an end it's time to begin, this works as a clock and also a powerful reminder that music is our main subject. Sound should be clear, as clear as you can send it and they should be able to hear it as clear as their devices allow. Whenever someone will come into my class they know that the volume has to be either turned up or use headphones, because I need them to feel the music. But to achieve this online, your period of preparation should be longer than what you normally do.

The online lesson

Preparation

When a student comes into an in person lesson, Dalcroze lesson, you would ask them to bring comfortable clothing, be prepared to take your shoes (and possibly socks) off and bring something to write with. You'd also ask them to take notes only at the end of the lesson, because by doing so during the exercises they would miss out on the actual experience. This same preparation online has been adapted to a series of videos³ leading up to the actual lesson or course. Because the mindset of someone getting ready to move in a dance studio or a rhythmic classroom is quite different when they don't need to step out of their home. For a Dalcroze online lesson It's no longer about only asking, we have to show them and give clear examples of what we expect in terms of feeling comfortable in front of a *Dalcroze screen*.

During the lesson

When they log into a session, whichever platform the teacher uses, they must feel ready to move, the screen is just a medium, we shouldn't be within 1 meter from it and they should feel comfortable enough using this platform. Lighting and sound are crucial, because they shouldn't struggle to see you or hear you beyond the normal connectivity latency and similar

³ This series of videos would include a guide for the specific platform the teacher will be using, troubleshooting, setting up a better sound, how to send a better sound, what kind of space you'll need at home to work, where to place your computer, tablet or (hopefully not) phone, even kind of clothes to wear.

problems. The teacher's computer or camera should be set up in an angle allowing the teacher to get closer without covering more than 50% of the screen. And the microphone should allow the teacher to move away from the computer to give movement examples. (Regarding hardware setups see annex 1) and the students should be able to see the whole body of the teacher, using a wide angle lens for example. This setup will allow you to perform a lesson without many interruptions. Students should learn how to navigate the platform. Depending on the age and condition of the students the teacher might need to spend more time making sure this proficiency is in place.

One of the things everybody began doing was sharing their screen. The problem with this is that it might lose the human touch, because even though the miniature video stays in the screen, the attention goes to the shared content. And sometimes is not that interesting. It's just a list of the things we are or will be doing, or a picture. Even if it's a very good presentation, I have found that sharing screen is only useful at certain points during a lesson. It's like percussion in an orchestral score, the less frequent it is, the more effective it becomes.

When the session ends some teachers "end the meeting" but in order to keep the student engagement until the moment they leave, my advice is to have them leave the meeting, some might stay behind to ask questions or if they are small children they might like to stay to look at your room, show you their teddy bear or something different. This part of the lesson is important because it will allow you to establish the new kind of relationship you must have with them.

After the lesson

The habit of singing, listening to music and moving with music is something that I've been working with my students, whether it's in person lessons or on-line. There is so much material online we can share with our students, however I've found that creating the material for them has more value than most of the content they can find. Even if we share with them very simple videos they will find them more attractive than the same content by someone else. As their teacher you have a special relationship with them and they will appreciate this. I have multiple channels where my students can find content, there is one channel for video I use exclusively for my students in the school I work in, there is another one in Spanish for my teacher training program and general videos. But not everybody enjoys or is able to watch video, so we should diversify. I use video, podcasts, online messaging apps and certain educational platforms that allow interaction with the students, they can write, record audio, video, comment on each other's work, etc. What you should always keep in mind is that you are

creating this material for your community, you can leave it open for the rest of the world, but your “audience” is your community.

All this material, along with documents, homework and reading material will help you build your multidimensional learning. It will not be the same as in person learning, because *it is not the same*. But it can be profoundly meaningful.

Dalcroze without borders

One summer before the pandemic hit I visited the University of Colombia in Bogotá, I was an invited faculty member of their Suzuki annual conference. Walking into the building one of the participants stopped me and told me he had been “in contact” with me for the last two years, watching videos, asking questions, etc. (online Dalcroze courses were not yet available) he told me he had heard of the course through one of my broadcasts and enrolled in the whole conference which was a 12 bus ride from his hometown.

I have stories from people who live in such remote places they can only pay tuition by *wire transfer* (an actual telegraph) They then work asynchronously, others who could not afford leaving their hometown, because it's too expensive to leave because they have to work every single day, and they still manage to attend seminars and courses. But they can only do so when they are online and when there is flexibility in *live* attendance.

There are many regions around the world that would benefit from Dalcroze, and the ideal is to have a Dalcroze teacher wherever there should be the need for one. But in some cases, people can only access it or even get to know it remotely. The only other contact they've had with the method is by reading and this is a bigger disadvantage for the method, because there is absolutely no practical experience.

Conclusion

Online teaching and learning has become a necessity in our recent past, but it has also shown us, for those willing to see, the true potential of distance learning even for Dalcroze. A method is effective as long as it has adepts willing to learn about it, and we need to look further that our own geographical limitations, we need to use the tools at hand without falling in the trap of being *modern*. We must become proficient in the hardware we use, much like we use musical

instruments, if we use any device to communicate, we need to be able to manage it effectively. There is no need to become an engineer in order to do this, but we must invest time in learning the best possible way for our students to listen, observe and interact.

I use 3 devices which I've acquired over the years. One smartphone, One tablet (2017) and one computer (2014). And the one that I use as the main camera and interphase is the computer which is 6 years old. We don't need the latest technology although it surely does help, but we need to know how this tech works and how to make the most of it. For a full detail of my hardware please refer to annex 1.

I've talked about the *traps of being modern* I consider the need to update hardware one of these. Your software should be updated as soon as available, this will help developers fix any problems faster, but hardware should be something you change after thoughtful consideration. Any operative system is a powerful tool, whether is Windows, Apple or Linux, but you need to understand the fundamentals of it. When I switched from PC to Apple I had an induction course with an engineer, which seemed hilarious to me, but he told me about what makes these operative systems different from each other and it was eye opening. I have used knowledge from that 60 minute chat in the last 20 years countless times. It's truly worth taking a deep dive into the system you use for yourself, not the latest trend, but how does it work fundamentally. This is another trap of being *modern* get caught up in the trends: New phone, bigger, foldable, larger memory, better camera, better processors, better speakers, (seldom does anyone talk about better microphones). You need to feel comfortable with the hardware you use and the same goes for the different platforms, they are everchanging, so spend time learning about connecting with your students in a diverse way, because platforms and systems evolve quickly and you'll only be able to catch up if you're travelling light.

Annex 1

Hardware

I try to keep my system as simple as possible to cover my necessities, which are:

- Communicating with my students in live lessons
- I should be able to send a clear sound and video signal
- Record different media within my studio
- Access to high speed internet

Main features:

0. MacBook pro (mid 2014)

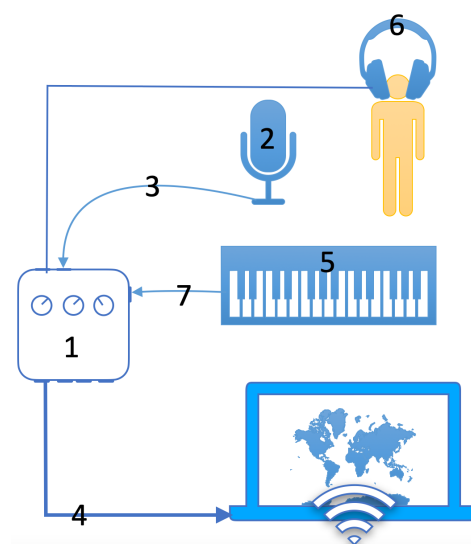
00. Wifi router or ethernet connection

Sound:

1. Icon Upod Nano sound interphase
2. Condenser Microphone
3. XLR cable mic to interphase
4. USB cable interphase to computer
5. Electric piano (Yamaha clavinova)
6. Headphones to monitor the piano
7. RCA connector Piano to interphase

Image:

8. HD quicktime camera (within the computer)
9. 1 light diffuser lamp



Accessories:

10. Lavalier back-up microphone (I also use this one, when I want to be far away from the screen or move around for more than 3 minutes)
11. AirPods, 2nd generation (bluetooth headphones)
12. Wide angle camera lens
13. iPad 5th generation (used mostly as a virtual whiteboard)

Bibliography