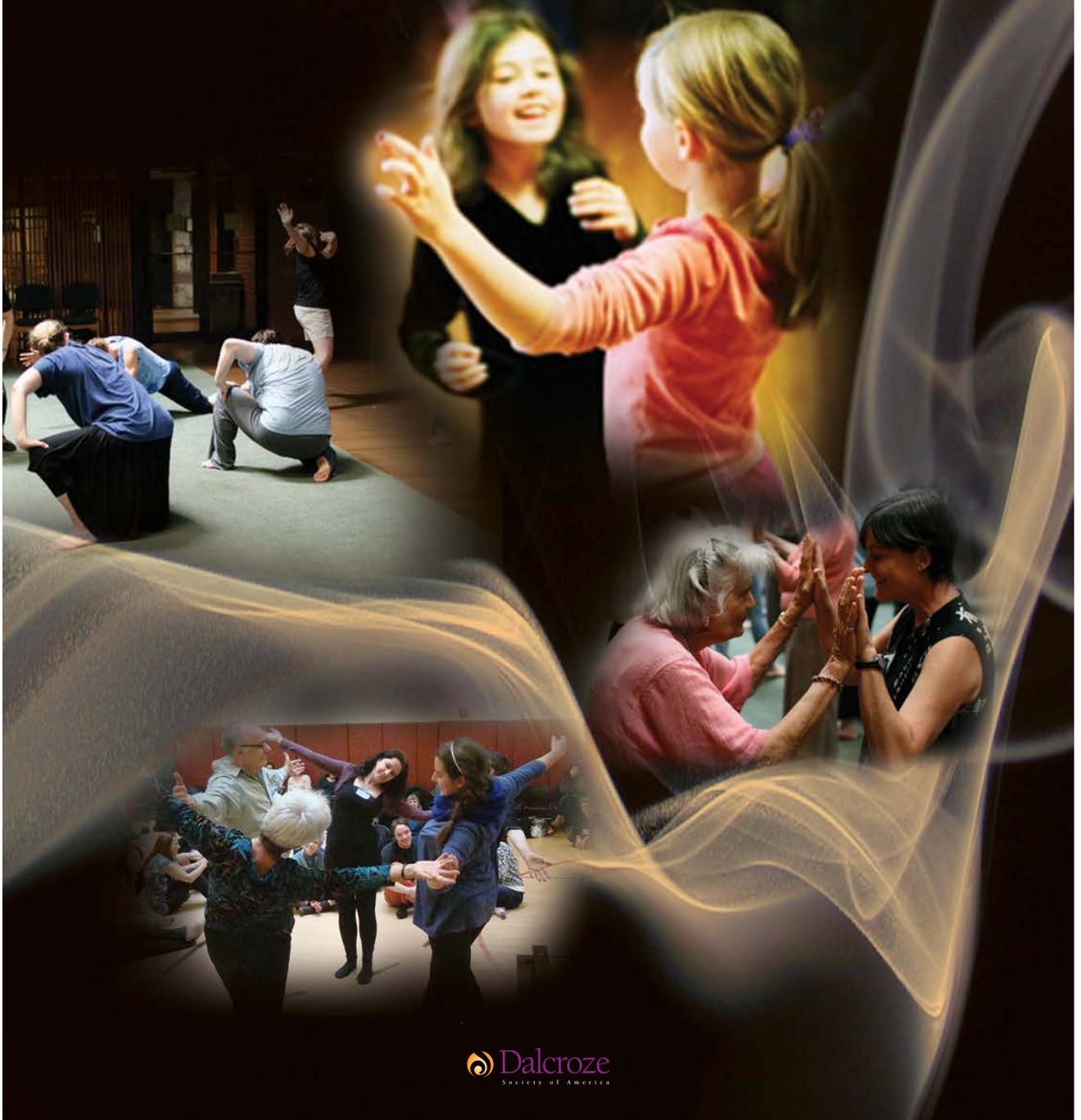


Dalcroze Connections

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INTEGRATION AND IMPROVISATION: A FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER AT LONGY

A FELDENKRAIS PRACTITIONER APPROACHES DALCROZE

I was the rare music educator who already had a certification in *The Feldenkrais Method* when I returned to college in my thirties to study music education. The method offered me a more holistic perspective on the kinds of skills I would need to acquire as I became a music teacher. I did my utmost to apply the ideas of scope, sequence, movement, and experience that I got from my Feldenkrais training into my music teaching.

My experience with the Dalcroze approach had actually begun many years earlier at Oberlin College, when I took a semester-long course on Eurhythmics and *Plastique Animée* from Herbert Henke. Although the class sparked something in me at the time, I did not have the opportunity to pursue further training.

Twenty-four years later, now a full-time music educator looking for inspiration, I attended a one-week session at Longy to acquaint myself with Dalcroze's methods and principles. In that week I saw these two parts of myself, the music educator and the Feldenkrais practitioner, come closer together than they ever had before. Experiencing the Dalcroze training as a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner, I was surprised by the connection I felt between Dalcroze Education and the Feldenkrais Method, despite their apparent differences.

As I spoke with Longy instructor Adriana Ausch, we were both struck by the similarities between the communities of Dalcroze and Feldenkrais practitioners. Both are small, express frustration with how the work is perceived by outsiders, and have difficulty reaching consensus on the specific elements of the practice. I left Longy with a feeling that creating a stronger connection between the two practices of Dalcroze and Feldenkrais would benefit both communities.

Dalcroze was spurred to recreate education itself. He attempted to bring about a complete reform in the way humans thought about and improve themselves. This is precisely what Moshe Feldenkrais was after as well. I am convinced that what we do brings about a potent transformation of individuals, and that the ideas of both Dalcroze and Feldenkrais can revitalize not only our music making but our entire notion of what is possible in education.

COMPARING THE LANGUAGE OF DALCROZE AND FELDENKRAIS

The commonalities between Feldenkrais and Dalcroze are not hard to spot. Both men were visionary and saw more deeply into human potential than their peers. For both, the process through which they attempted to achieve this potential defies simple explanation.

Dalcroze made a number of statements that could easily be mistaken for passages in Feldenkrais's books: "The practice of bodily movements awakens images in the mind. The stronger the muscular sensations, the clearer and more precise the images...The precision and regulated dynamic force of muscular automatisms are a guarantee of the precision of thought-automatisms..." (Jaques-Dalcroze 1921, 124).

As early as 1898, Dalcroze would express the radical notion that students be evaluated on what they could feel rather than on what they know. His statements echo Feldenkrais's mistrust of language in favor of movement. Dalcroze understood that what we think we "know" is often only what we can describe in words, and that the actual knowledge must show up in our ability to act. "The delay between thought and action is the basis for awareness" (Feldenkrais 1972, 45). Dalcroze had already come to this conclusion from his studies with Claparède when he attributed poor rhythm to a lapse between the brain and the muscles (Jaques-Dalcroze 1921). The solution, of course, was to use movement to provide a person with an opportunity to more fully feel, and thus become aware.

A DALCROZE APPROACH WITH A FELDENKRAIS MIND

When I get up from the floor or table after a Feldenkrais lesson, I may feel a remarkable sense of freedom, lightness, or enhanced sense of presence or ability. Practitioners are not encouraged to diagnose or repair specific symptoms of their clients, but strive instead to address their clients' needs by generating this overarching sense of well-being and functionality. Whatever my state before the session, I now have a more integrated sense of self that arises from a profound sense of connection between sensation and action.

To generate the awareness of this connection, a Feldenkrais practitioner may take me through carefully considered sequences of movement, with the aim of carefully considering the elements of a practical function such as reaching, rolling, or twisting. The practitioner is able to engage me in a kind of attention which I do not habitually employ, one which resembles the way I attended to the world as an infant, without the agendas and distractions that accompany the development of language. The human system often responds to this kind of attention with remarkable self-correction, bringing it back to a more neutral and responsive state that is better able to act in accordance with our wishes.

This state involves the practical ability to travel in any direction without prior preparation. Such a state requires balance over my center of gravity in whatever posture I happen to be, and an understanding of the transformation of my internal body

schema as I move from one configuration to another. When I am in this state, I find myself more present, with all the emotional resonance, both good and bad, that this entails.

When I was at Longy during my week of Dalcroze, I had a similar opportunity to increase my organization to move in any direction without preparation. In contrast to many kinds of movement instruction related to music, the Dalcroze teachers encouraged me to improvise movements that reflected the music as I heard it. The more possibilities I had on the floor to move from one place to another, the more freedom I felt when at rest.

It was this emphasis on improvisation coupled with sensation which, when linked to the structure of music, may have generated the profound sense of "joie" to which Dalcroze refers over and over again. While my Dalcroze teachers were not examining the deficits in my functionality the way a Feldenkrais practitioner might, they were modeling a higher functionality, both in the way they moved and in the way they manifested themselves musically through their improvisation at the piano. I had an opportunity to hear and see the instructor's effective organization and was given many opportunities to adapt to it to solve musical problems.

Yet it was not the modeling alone which created the profound shift. Essential to the Dalcroze approach was the opportunity for me to explore without criticism on the floor, to move freely, and to sense while I improvised. As I came to realize that I was no longer being asked to conform, but to rather explore the possibilities and select those that were the most effective, I engaged in that level of attention which resembled the infant, rolling around on the floor, lost in a state of contemplation. This kind of absorption resembled in many ways the integration of a Feldenkrais lesson. Most notably, at the end of each lesson, my mind was quieter while my capacity to think seemed to have increased. There was a kind of magic in the experience which nonetheless defies easy explanation.

I am convinced that this magic sensation is more than a fringe benefit of the lesson. Just as it is the desired end result of Feldenkrais's work, I suggest it can be seen as a significant consequence of Dalcroze Education which sets it above and beyond other modern music education methods. In fact, this is the element which makes the Dalcroze work so elusive and difficult to codify when compared to other methods and systems of music education.

Dalcroze had in mind not only the improvement of musicianship but also the improvement of the whole self through the study of music. If one recognizes that a greater sense of efficacy and a more profound connection to one's surroundings is an educational marvel, then one can begin to see what Dalcroze may have meant.

AUTHOR'S BIO

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