

Application of Eurhythmics in Junior High School Music Education

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Abstract:

Eurhythmics, also known as the Dalcroze Method, was proposed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze in the early 20th century and has since become one of the most important pedagogical approaches in the field of music education. This method emphasizes the use of physical movement to perceive and express rhythm, melody, and emotional changes in music, enabling students to deepen their understanding and experience of music through full-body engagement. For junior high school students, who are in a stage of rapid physical and psychological development, Eurhythmics not only stimulates their interest in music and enhances the fun and interactivity of the classroom, but also promotes the development of a sense of rhythm, physical coordination, and creativity. This paper selects three teaching methods of Eurhythmics and integrates them with the content of music textbooks to effectively improve students' overall musical literacy, strengthen their sense of teamwork and self-expression, and broaden the scope and methods of music instruction in junior high schools. It provides valuable references for enhancing music classroom teaching.

Keywords:

Eurhythmics, Junior High School Music Education, Rhythm Training

1. Introduction

Eurhythmics—also known as the Dalcroze Method—is centered on the core concept that “the body is an instrument.” It advocates for the embodiment of musical elements through physical movement, enabling students to build a comprehensive perception of rhythm, melody, tempo, and emotional changes through auditory, visual, and tactile stimulation. According to this method, music is not confined to listening with the ears or memorizing in the mind; rather, it should be transformed into motion that can be sensed and expressed through the body, thereby creating a deeper and more complete musical experience. In Eurhythmics instruction, students engage in basic movements such as clapping, stomping, swinging arms, turning, and jumping to directly correspond with rhythmic units, changes in strong and weak beats, and melodic contours in music. For example, when learning a lively 2/4 rhythm, students may stomp their left foot to represent the strong beat and lightly tap their right foot for the weak beat, thus naturally understanding the alternation between strong and weak beats. Through such physical experiences, abstract rhythmic structures become

tangible and perceptible, allowing students to internalize musical concepts without relying on rote theoretical memorization. Furthermore, Eurhythmics emphasizes the importance of “active listening.” Students are expected not only to listen with their ears but also to respond to musical changes with physical movement. This dynamic mode of participation allows students to respond instantly and accurately to tempo changes, syncopated rhythms, and melodic contours, greatly enhancing their sensitivity to musical details and expressive ability. Especially when dealing with complex rhythmic patterns or flexible tempo changes, Eurhythmics provides students with an effective way to perceive and organize rhythm through movement, helping them naturally grasp musical flow and emotional nuances.

2. The Importance of Eurhythmics in Junior High School Music Education

During the junior high school stage, students’ physical coordination, rhythmic perception, and desire for emotional expression are undergoing rapid development. Music education at this stage not only bears the responsibility of imparting musical knowledge and skills, but also plays a crucial role in enhancing students’ overall competence. Eurhythmics aligns well with the physical and psychological characteristics of students at this developmental phase, providing a novel teaching approach and practical pathway for junior high school music classrooms. Firstly, from the perspective of cognitive development, Eurhythmics facilitates the coordinated development of students’ multiple senses. By integrating auditory (listening to music), visual (observing movement), and kinesthetic (bodily motion) experiences, students deepen their understanding of musical structure and emotional content through a continuous cycle of perception, comprehension, and expression. For example, when learning a song, students may practice rhythmic movement and naturally experience the strict rhythm and uplifting emotion of 2/4 or 4/4 marches while walking, thereby internalizing rhythmic sense and emotional expression in both mind and body. Secondly, Eurhythmics greatly enriches the teaching methods and content of junior high school music classes, breaking the traditional unidirectional model where teachers explain and students passively listen. The essence of music learning lies in the sensitive perception and accurate grasp of rhythm, melody, tempo, and dynamic changes. Eurhythmics, by directly involving the body, allows students to intuitively feel these musical elements through movement, thereby overcoming the comprehension barriers often caused by purely theoretical instruction. When appreciating and studying a musical piece, students can experience the progressive intensification of musical emotion and the steady advancement of rhythm through spatial movement and collaborative composition, making it easier to understand the artistic features of the work.

3. The Practice of Eurhythmics in Junior High School Music Teaching

At the junior high school stage, students are experiencing rapid physical and psychological development. They are eager to release their energy through physical activity and are beginning to develop abstract thinking and aesthetic judgment. However, due to individual differences in sense of rhythm and bodily coordination, relying solely on traditional auditory-based instruction often fails to fully engage all students or provide them with deeper musical experiences. Eurhythmics serves as a bridge by integrating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic sensory inputs into music

instruction. When applied to the current junior high school music textbooks published by Huacheng Press, this approach significantly enhances both teaching quality and student engagement. By analyzing the rhythmic structure, emotional expression, and musical imagery of various textbook pieces, teachers can design eurhythmics-based activities tailored to students' developmental characteristics, thereby deepening their understanding of musical elements and stimulating their expressive and creative potential through movement.

3.1. Rhythmic Movement

Rhythmic movement exercises are one of the most fundamental and commonly used forms of eurhythmics. Through walking or body movement in space at different speeds and intensities, students can directly perceive beat unit length, stress patterns, and meter structure. As Xiaomeng Wang and Yamei Wang [1] point out, "It is not only acknowledged that music can have an impact on people's spirit and emotion, but also acknowledged that music can also have an impact on people's physiological state." In class, teachers can design a variety of step patterns based on different time signatures and rhythmic figures. For example, when teaching march-style pieces, students can be guided through firm, deliberate walking patterns to experience the solemnity and drive of a march. Especially when introducing duple meter pieces, students can be led to perceive the "strong-weak" pattern through footwork.

3.1.1. The Kursk Mail Coach

The Kursk Mail Coach, featured in the seventh-grade textbook (Volume 1, Unit 4), is a lively and upbeat 2/4 song depicting a mail coach galloping across the vast Russian plains. The music features a clear rhythm and distinct alternation of strong and weak beats, making it highly suitable for eurhythmics-based teaching to help students perceive musical motion and the beauty of rhythm. In the lesson design, the teacher first organizes a rhythmic movement warm-up. Accompanied by the backing track of The Kursk Mail Coach, and starting from the distinct rhythmic figure in bar 5, students walk through the classroom following a "| X X |" pattern, using strong-weak step accents. On strong beats, they stomp to emphasize the downbeat; on weak beats, they tap lightly to simulate the mail coach's rhythmic motion. This step exercise allows students to naturally feel the defining traits of 2/4 time through physical movement. Next, during the return of section A, the teacher introduces body percussion exercises. Based on the rhythm in bars 5–20 and 21–36, the following movement pattern is designed: (1) Beat 1 (strong): stomp right foot (2) Beat 2 (weak): clap hands softly. Every two bars, students slightly rotate their bodies to simulate the coach's swaying on uneven terrain. The teacher gradually guides students to synchronize these movements with the music, reinforcing their coordination between body and musical rhythm.

3.1.2. March of the Athletes

March of the Athletes, from the eighth-grade textbook (Volume 1, Unit 6: "Songs of Steps"), is a powerful and rhythmically driven piece in 2/4 time with a march style and uplifting spirit. The piece is structured in four sections: A, B, C, and a recapitulation of A. Each section features distinct rhythmic and dynamic characteristics, making it ideal for eurhythmics instruction using spatial movement games and beat perception exercises to help students embody the form and emotional tone of the march. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher can lead students in a

spatial movement game. The classroom is arranged to create an open area for movement. During the A section, students are divided into groups, forming lines to mimic the entrance of athletes into a stadium, marching in step with the music. They are encouraged to maintain synchronized steps and focus on the beat's placement, especially transitioning smoothly after each second beat, experiencing the march's forward momentum. Once the basic movement is familiar, beat perception conversion training is introduced. The tempo is gradually increased (e.g., from 80 BPM to 100 BPM), and students must adjust their marching pace accordingly, experiencing the strength and tension generated by tempo changes. Teachers guide students to notice shifting centers of gravity—leaning forward during acceleration to emphasize momentum, and widening, slowing steps during deceleration to reflect dignity. In section B and its repeat, a simple group choreography activity is designed. Each group of 8 students creates a short march movement sequence that emphasizes beat accents (e.g., stomp on the first eighth note, tap shoulder on the fourth eighth note). For the more lyrical C section, students are encouraged to compose corresponding movement patterns that match the mood. These are then performed for the class with peer evaluation. Through this approach, students reinforce their perception of march rhythm characteristics through collective activity, while also developing their expressive and choreographic creativity.

3.2. Body Percussion Activities

Body percussion training involves using actions such as clapping hands, patting legs, stomping feet, and slapping to directly express rhythmic patterns in music. [2] This method helps students clearly perceive the subdivision of rhythmic units, dynamic changes in beats, and the complexity of rhythm through physical movement. Through body percussion exercises, students can develop an intuitive understanding of rhythm and express different rhythmic patterns accurately during singing or instrumental performance.

3.2.1. “Clarinet Polka”

The piece Clarinet Polka is written in 2/2 time and emphasizes rhythmic bounce and cheerfulness, making it a lively polka dance tune with an upbeat melody. In teaching, students can stomp their feet to express the strong beats and clap hands for the weak beats. For dotted rhythms, actions such as patting the shoulder or thighs can be used to highlight the elongated or compressed rhythmic feel, helping students intuitively grasp the light and jumping nature of the polka rhythm. The teaching steps typically include breaking down rhythmic patterns in musical fragments, assigning corresponding body movements, and gradually moving from slow practice to normal tempo. Students are guided to perform rhythmic strikes while listening, enhancing their auditory discrimination and synchronization skills. This lesson is well suited to using Dalcroze-style movement techniques to help students experience beat emphasis and dance-like qualities. The movement arrangement according to the polka rhythm can be as follows: (1) Strong beat (first beat): stomp the right foot; (2) Weak beat (second beat): clap hands or tap thighs; (3) For dotted rhythms: add hand slaps or single-leg hops to express rhythmic extension.

3.2.2. “Mungari”

When teaching the Indian song-and-dance piece Mungari from Unit 6 “Window to World Music” of the seventh-grade textbook (second semester), teachers can design

Dalcroze-based movement activities that match the work's unique rhythmic and melodic style. This helps students perceive the exotic rhythmic charm and dance characteristics more vividly. The piece is in 4/4 time, with a brisk rhythm and strong beat motion, making it suitable for teaching through a combination of body percussion and melodic contour simulation. Teachers may guide students to stomp on strong beats and clap on weak beats. When encountering ornaments or rhythmic changes, actions such as hand slaps, shoulder swings, or arm rotations can be added to enhance the sense of rhythmic layering and dynamic dance motion. The teaching process can begin by breaking down rhythmic patterns in short music phrases and assigning appropriate body movements, then gradually transitioning from slow tempo exercises to full-speed practice, strengthening students' rhythmic responsiveness and body control. In melodic instruction, teachers may guide students to express melodic contours through bodily movements—such as raising arms for ascending lines, leaning the body sideways, or waving wrists—to showcase the rhythmic beauty and flexibility of Indian dance.

3.3. Creative Movement Composition

Creative movement composition refers to students independently designing and performing short sequences of body movements within a given rhythmic or thematic framework. This teaching method fosters students' improvisational creativity and performance awareness, while enhancing their ability to organize and express musical ideas through movement. It is an effective approach for deepening their understanding of musical emotion and rhythmic variation, and a key strategy in promoting Dalcroze-based instruction. A typical process includes: (1) Introducing a creative theme (e.g., expressing a particular rhythmic mood or telling a story through music); (2) Small group discussion and rehearsal; (3) Group performance and feedback sharing.

3.3.1. "Train"

The orchestral piece *Train* from Unit 4 "Times in Motion" in the seventh-grade textbook (first semester) depicts the process of a train starting, accelerating, running at full speed, and gradually fading into the distance. The piece is in 2/4 time, featuring rich rhythmic changes, progressive tempo, and strong emotional tension, vividly evoking a cinematic scene. It serves as ideal material for creative movement instruction. In the teaching design, the teacher first conducts auditory response exercises to help students sensitively catch rhythmic changes in the music. When playing segments of *Train*, students respond to the slow initial tempo with gentle stomps or small arm swings. As the music accelerates, they increase the frequency of movements, making steps tighter and more powerful to simulate the accelerating motion of a train. Then, the teacher organizes improvised group movement creations. Students are divided into groups, each responsible for a different stage of the train's movement (start-up, acceleration, cruising, departure). Each group creates an 8-bar sequence of movements reflecting the dynamic and emotional progression in the music. For example: (1) Start-up stage: small and slow movements, emphasizing hesitant rhythm; (2) Acceleration: rapid and fluid actions, highlighting compact rhythm. This activity strengthens students' bodily response to rhythmic and emotional progressions.

3.3.2. "Bolero"

Bolero is known for its single repeating melody and gradually intensifying rhythm and orchestration. It is in 3/4 time with unified rhythm, emotionally progressing in layers, full of tension and ceremonial beauty. It serves as a classic example for group creative movement activities. Teaching begins with a spatial movement game: the classroom is arranged in a circular path, and students walk along it slowly. As the recurring melody and gradually enriched orchestration continue, in Theme A, the volume grows, steps enlarge, and movements become more exaggerated, reflecting the music's accumulating energy. At the start, steps are light and small; toward the end of Theme A, step force and arm swing increase, simulating emotional intensification. When the more subdued Theme B appears, students return to the initial movements. Once students are familiar with the musical structure and dynamic progression, the teacher organizes improvisational movement creation. Groups choose a music section (e.g., beginning, middle, climax) and design actions that match its emotional character. For example, transform slow walking into jumping steps, shift arm motions from compact to expanded, and change body weight distribution from stable to leaping—representing the transition from calm to explosion. Throughout the teaching process, the teacher should encourage students to pay close attention to the correspondence between movements and the music's rhythm, tempo, and emotional changes, avoiding mechanical or monotonous actions.

4. Conclusions

Eurhythmics, as a comprehensive music teaching method integrating perception, understanding, and expression, effectively breaks through the traditional auditory-dominant perception model of the classroom. [3] It enables students to actively experience changes in rhythm, melody, and emotion through bodily movements, greatly enriching both the pathways and depth of music learning. In the practical application of eurhythmics-based teaching, the author has deeply felt the vibrancy it brings to the classroom and the enthusiasm it inspires in students. In class, strategies such as spatial movement games and melodic contour simulations effectively enhanced students' understanding of rhythmic structure and emotional color. Although challenges such as students' differing senses of rhythm and the complexity of classroom organization remain, the use of techniques like group practice, verbal cues, and sectional integration have improved teaching efficiency and student performance. The Dalcroze method not only expands the pedagogical pathways of music classrooms, but also contributes to the development of students' physical coordination, creativity, and sense of collaboration. Future teaching should continue to align with the physical and psychological development of junior high students, [4] further exploring the integration points between music works and rhythmic movement. Through experiencing music with the body, expressing emotion, and enjoying the arts, students can more fully realize the holistic educational goals of music instruction.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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