

Developing Agency through Music and Movement

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Developing Agency through music and movement, is a study based on how using music-and-movement activities helped students develop agency through their interaction and learning (Sutela et al, 2021). Agency is learning through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests, and often self-initiated with appropriate guidance and support from the teacher. The numerous activities that were used in this study included body percussion exercises, quick reaction exercises, follow exercises, drama-like movement expression, dancing, and relaxation exercises. All the exercises were based on techniques from Dalcroze and other methods in music education, and used embodied knowledge, pedagogical approaches that focused on the non-mental factors involved, in learning and signal the importance of the body and feelings.

The researchers recognized that music-and-movement activities tend to evoke strong feelings that need careful care and consideration (Sutela et al, 2021). Through careful and thoughtful planning, the teachers and teaching assistants were able to create lessons that were based on embodied knowledge and helped students develop confidence in decisions and actions toward the group and lessons. The lessons were designed to activate the students both socially and bodily. Activities, such as music listening with free expressions through body movement, and body movement connected to expressive qualities in music, were closely connected to concepts such as metrics, harmony, and tempo. Each student's autonomy was also closely observed through the course of the study. Many students in this study struggled to communicate their learning verbally, so the research team developed a coding system to demonstrate the results in the study. The coding allowed the teachers, teaching assistants, and the researchers to identify the results through the observations. The coding system was labeled as follows: 1)

passivity, 2) activity, 3) intersubjectivity, 4) interaction with objects, 5) responsiveness, 6) initiative (198). These indicators were used to understand their agency and their growth throughout the school year.

The team found that the students tended to gravitate towards students to whom they could associate or interact with (Sutela et al, 2021). These groups were not preconceived but were developed in the beginning of the study. Each group was integrated based on their acting, and decision-making abilities, and each student displayed similar behavior or complimentary behavioral traits to that of their group members.

The results were disseminated into categories. These categories were constructed as follows: 1) individual obstacles to collective action, 2) creation of one's own world in the music-and-movement lessons, and 3) collective resistance to individual decision-making (Sutela et al, 2021). Each category describes how the student's autonomy and embodied learning was positively or negatively affected through the course of the school year in the music-and-movement lessons, and whether they would have benefited from more time.

The students in the first category had several challenges in their behavior, difficulty with or developing relationships, and aggressive behavior (Sutela et al, 2021). These students needed to be supported by the teachers and teaching assistants. Through the lessons, embodied knowledge, and autonomy they managed to grow through initiative, responsivity, and interaction. Each lesson was structured to guide the students in music-and-movement, while acquiring educational agency specific to their needs.

The students in the second category had a very close bond to one another, a bond which was almost inseparable (Sutela et al, 2021). This bond caused timidity, outward inactivity, and passivity. However, in class they demonstrated active and responsive participation. Toward the

end of the study, they became more active, and more responsive to the others in their class reaching out to other students for group work. The study showed that their initiatives and interactivity began to manifest, but with more scaffolding and time they would have yielded better results.

The students in the final category had an inseparable bond, but they acted negatively towards the music-and-movement activities in the beginning (Sutela et al, 2021). Their defiance was a variable in the study, and they were allowed to complete their tasks on their own terms. The three boys in this category were very close that they would not or essentially could not act without the confirmation of the others. Their agency was expressed through collective resistance. Their level of participation was decided on their own terms. One of the students towards the end of the study started to open socially and physically and began moving away from needing the confirmation of his group mates. The activities allowed him to participate on his own terms rather than that of the others. These boys' growth started to surface through initiative, autonomy, and constructive acting.

All of the students in this study were perceiving, acting, and experiencing the music through their bodies during the activities, which highlighted the embodied nature of their subjectivity (Sutela et al, 2021). The way that they made decisions and interacted helped to engage and support their peers. The music-and-movement activities helped with social interactions and boosted confidence. In turn, that helped reinforce embodied knowledge and strengthen educational autonomy. The music-and-movement activities were a culmination of the Dalcroze method and helped structure the lessons of the study. The use of the Dalcroze approach should be more widely considered in helping develop agency, and educational autonomy in music education, through the development of bodily skills, confidence,

communication, self-awareness, and autonomy (Sutela et al, 2021). The development of movement skills may take a while, but it can be widely beneficial to all involved. The musical activities used for music-and-movement should be planned, while maintaining respect towards the personal and growth for all involved.

References

- Sutela, Ojala, J., & Kielinen, M. (2021). Developing agency through music and movement. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43(2), 195–211.
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