

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Stories students tell about their lived experiences of spirituality in the Dalcroze class

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## Abstract

This article is a narrative inquiry of the lived spiritual experiences of students participating in Dalcroze Eurhythmics training. Previous studies have located Jaques-Dalcroze's own writings and thought within the context of spirituality and have explored the spiritual experiences of Dalcroze teachers, but students' perspectives remain to be investigated. We interviewed seven students, broadly defined as anyone currently attending regular Dalcroze training or who have recently attended Dalcroze courses and still consider themselves Dalcroze students. Various strategies for narrative data analysis were synthesised into our own coding scheme. Themes emerged from the data analysis: situation, continuity, personal interaction, social interaction and significant moments. The themes helped us construct a fictive conversation between the participants, using direct quotations from the interviews. Implications for practice focus on what inhibits and promotes experiences of spirituality in the Dalcroze class. This research will be relevant to music educators, as it gives clear, evidence-based guidelines on how opportunities for spirituality can be created in the Dalcroze classroom. It also offers an original synthesis of existing coding schemes for other researchers undertaking narrative inquiries.

**Keywords:** Dalcroze Eurhythmics; spirituality; lived experiences; Dalcroze students; narrative inquiry

## Introduction

This article presents a narrative inquiry of the lived spiritual experiences of seven students participating in Dalcroze Eurhythmics training. In recent years, spirituality as an aspect of human experience has received more attention within the academic literature, with scholars distinguishing helpfully between spirituality and religion to allow for a widened concept of spiritual experience and a plurality of perspectives (Ashley, 2002; Carr, 1995; Williamson, 2010). As important is the notion that spirituality is atopolitical; it is not a thing, fixed in time and space, that one can point to (Cobussen, 2008). Therefore, it can be more fruitful to describe how the word spirituality is used than to seek to define it (Van der Merwe & Habron, 2015).

In a conceptual model of spirituality in music education (Van der Merwe & Habron, 2015), spirituality is described as holistic sacred experience. Spirituality in this model involves relationships with self, others, the environment and a transcendent other; space, time and the body. As such, spirituality is multidimensional and viewed from multiple perspectives. In a closely related conceptual study, spirituality is explored in selected writings of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (Habron & Van der Merwe, 2017). Here, spirituality is described as holism, balance and aesthetic experience, which are afforded through moving in time and space, and with energy. Van der Merwe & Habron (2020) found that five Dalcroze teachers' lived experiences of spirituality, while teaching Dalcroze Eurhythmics, corresponded to these two conceptual studies. The Dalcroze teachers also refer to

relationships, space, time and the body when talking about spiritual experiences. They describe spiritual experiences as transformational. In the analysis of these lived experiences, the following themes emerged: breathing is essential; giving and receiving energy; creating connections through sound and movement; awareness of self, other, environment and music; growth and learning; meaning and holism; wellbeing; and precious moments of transcending time and space (Van der Merwe & Habron, 2020).

Music education offers opportunities for spiritual experience (Bogdan, 2010; Boyce-Tillman, 2000, 2007; Yob, 2011) and whole-person approaches to education embrace this possibility, as they seek to develop the flourishing of persons in all their aspects. One such is Dalcroze Eurhythmics (Dutton, 2015), which early on in its development was conceived as a general education, not merely a musical one (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930). The Dalcroze approach is practised worldwide, across the lifespan and in a variety of educational, performing arts and therapeutic contexts. It centres on the exploration of music–movement relationships in a socially active way, with participants and practitioner making music and moving together as a means of communicating, creating and learning dialogically (Greenhead, Habron, & Mathieu, 2016). Movement, vocalisation and ear training, and improvisation (in music or movement) are its basic pedagogical contents.

Previous studies have located Jaques-Dalcroze's own writings and thought within the context of spirituality (Habron & Van der Merwe, 2017; Huxley & Burt, 2014) and have explored the spiritual experiences of Dalcroze teachers (Van der Merwe & Habron, 2020), but the perspectives of students remain to be investigated. Therefore, the purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore the stories seven Dalcroze students tell about their lived spiritual experiences in the Dalcroze class. Its research question is: how do students narrate their lived spiritual experiences of the Dalcroze class? This research will be relevant to Dalcroze practitioners and music educators more broadly, as it might increase awareness of the holistic nature of student experience and bring to speech aspects of it that have hitherto been explored less fully. It will also be of interest to scholars in Dalcroze studies and related fields, who seek to understand Dalcroze as a pedagogical practice and a philosophy of music education.

## Procedures

Spirituality is in essence relational (Hay & Nye, 2006) and therefore we decided to use a narrative inquiry, which Clandinin (2013) often refers to as a relational methodology, as our research approach.

## Participants

We interviewed seven Dalcroze students currently attending regular Dalcroze training or who have recently attended Dalcroze courses and still consider themselves Dalcroze students. The duration of engagement with Dalcroze training varied, with some students having qualified and now working towards higher qualifications. The participants, three male and four female, are from three continents. True to the nature of narrative inquiry, we include our own narratives as Dalcroze students and 'intentionally put our lives alongside an other's life' (Clandinin, 2013, p. 19). The participants chose their own pseudonyms, which do not necessarily correspond to their genders and gave written informed consent. The Royal Northern College of Music, UK, gave ethical clearance for this study.

We would like to briefly introduce each participant. What follows are not exclusively their direct words, but syntheses of the essence of their story and identity that emerged as a result of data analysis.

- Lucy: There's something about Dalcroze that really pleases me. I can arrange my ideas and creative output through movement, expressing myself as a work of art. I'm someone who needs to be creative on a daily basis and as a child I experienced the arts. I was very lucky. But doing Dalcroze brought it all together; it was like coming home. The thing I keep returning to is how to turn my head off in the class. It's also a battle to improvise at the piano, as that can be quite humiliating. When we're given the skills to go for it, then I lose my fear and have confidence. I feel free. In this social learning environment, I can connect to others and feel a shared presence when we trust each other and let go. It's like a sanctuary.
- Molly: I am an academic, a teacher and a sacred musician. I'd read about Dalcroze, but it was years before I experienced it. It was like an immediate conversion. I love being inside the music with my body, and not analysing it in my brain. I've seen lots of artful teaching in Dalcroze, and I've certainly had aesthetic experiences, but not when preparing for exams. Connection happens all the time in the Dalcroze class and the best teachers attend to the spirituality of individuals. I tend not to have spiritual experiences in class, especially the improvisation class. But, outside, that's where the Dalcroze feeds my work and my creativity. As teachers, we're here to foster beauty and Dalcroze has helped me see that.
- Ella: My first Dalcroze certificate training course was in 1995. I like how Dalcroze makes me feel and that is the main reason why I am studying Dalcroze. I believe Dalcroze draws people together like nothing else can. I am an analytical person and Dalcroze helps me to get me out of my head. I like the feeling that it gives joy, the fact that I can incorporate that into my life as being a mother, a musician and a teacher. When I get the feeling that nobody is judging me, I experience complete freedom, joy and sometimes transcendence in the Dalcroze class.
- Iris: I have been exposed to Dalcroze training for the past decade. At first I didn't find Dalcroze extremely helpful, maybe it is because I've been very disembodied my whole life. It was only later, when I started using it in my teaching, that I noticed how eye contact or connection through Dalcroze activities could make a huge difference in the way students play together in ensembles. I found that mirror activities in pairs can open up communication between people afterwards. When I am in groups I analyze people's reactions. I like how Dalcroze displays diverse points of views, personalities and leadership styles and I find the gestures people make with their hands very meaningful. I've experienced moments where I felt very connected to others.
- Lucas: For the past nine years I have been involved in Dalcroze training, ranging from weekend courses to three week courses and an intensive six-month course. Dalcroze makes me do everyday things, like climbing stairs, stirring coffee or sweeping the floor differently, rhythmically, musically. Through Dalcroze I have built better relationships with my colleagues and students. It is not the activities that I remember but rather the people and how they made me feel. When I see how Dalcroze moves other people, I experience it as aesthetic and sacred. I also like to choose music that incites movement. I understand people better through Dalcroze. In the classes where I forget about myself and help others or do things together I have sacred experiences.
- Helene: I have been involved in Dalcroze training since 2009. I have experienced very strict hierarchy at some Dalcroze courses, which reminds me of the military. But when I move - especially with my students and colleagues - then I experience equality and community. I love it when a teacher empowers the class, building it

up step by step. Then I can do it. Otherwise, it's horrible. Dalcroze supports the way I think about music education and has touched all aspects of my life, as a mother, researcher, music educator, performer and conductor. I accept my body more now. I like the connectedness of Dalcroze: moving and improvising together, sharing a joint goal. This leads to amazing moments of sensitivity. Dalcroze takes me out of everyday life, out of time, to a different reality where things are in harmony.

Leslie: I am a researcher, composer, performer and lecturer. Dalcroze has helped to clarify my professional identity since it brings all my roles together. I have a positive outlook on life and I am a trusting person. Above all I like to help others. Dalcroze has been a revelation to me and I would like to help people by developing Dalcroze studies and by making this approach known as widely as possible. Through exposure to Dalcroze Eurhythmics, over the last ten years as a community of practice, I have experienced a complete transformation in terms of body awareness. I have had many vivid, joyful and liberating experiences in the Dalcroze class.

## Data collection

The narrative interview questions were semi-structured (Online Supplementary Material, file 1) and were theoretically informed (Riessman, 2008) by two conceptual frameworks of spirituality in music education and in relation to Jaques-Dalcroze's writings and spirituality, which we developed in previous studies (blinded, 2015; blinded, 2017). The in-depth interviews took place from March to May 2017. The duration of the interviews varied between 83 and 120 min.

## Data analysis

To prepare for data analysis, we synthesised various authors' narrative strategies for data analysis into our own coding scheme (Online Supplementary Material, file 2). We used this, not the interview questions, to structure the data analysis. The scheme combines the three-dimensional narrative inquiry spaces (situation, continuity and interaction) of Clandinin (2006) and the five elements of plot (characters, setting, problem, action and resolution) developed by Yussen and Ozcan (1997). We added body as an element of plot because we are concerned in our research to understand the lived experiences of Dalcroze, which has been defined as a 'bodily way of being in the sound' (Juntunen, 2004, p. 68). Other aspects that we included in our coding scheme were 'Evaluation – so what' from the six-part Labovian model (Patterson, 2008) as well as some of Saldaña's (2013) subcoding schemes for narrative coding such as story type and storyline. This new coding scheme gave us *a priori codes* to structure the narrative data analysis. The synthesis was arrived at by eliminating duplicated codes. This is, to our knowledge, the only such synthesis of coding strategies and is offered as an *a priori* coding scheme for other researchers undertaking collaborative narrative inquiries.

This coding structure is visible in the writing structure of our findings, where we put our participants in an imaginary conversation with each other, using direct quotations. In other words, these participants never spoke to each other. Through rigorous data analysis, we sorted the data under the headings: situation, continuity, personal interaction, social interaction, problems, resolutions and significant moments. We created the imagined conversation as a metanarrative. We followed Juntunen's (2002) method of narrative writing, where she created such a fictive conversation between Dalcroze master teachers.

## Findings

### Situation

#### *Taking Dalcroze out of the classroom*

- Ella: 'We walked along the river and through the buildings. We spent an hour outside, just looking at the flow of the river and seeing, hearing the music in everything and the rhythm in everything. What I loved about the [Dalcroze] subjects<sup>1</sup> is that they make me see in a different way, make me hear in a different way, they make me feel in a different way and experience in a different way.'
- Leslie: I also have a treasured memory 'which included walking in the countryside and using that as a beginning point for the choreography and then being invited to find sounds which could accompany, but also provoke or incite, movement.'
- Lucy: I remember once when 'there was just incredible weather, and I thought, why not go and teach outside . . . the thing that really hit me was the joy of moving and expressing yourself through music amongst nature . . . you could hear the birds . . . and being able to have that integration of music and that earthy connection with nature . . . It really felt like it was bringing another dimension to the class.'
- Lucas: We also went outside the classroom once, not in nature but on the staircase. 'We were a group of ten and we started singing Solfège while stepping it on the stairs. It was an incredible improvisation experience for me. I still walk differently on the stairs.'
- Molly: If I can talk about an improvisation class in Dalcroze, in those situations 'I absolutely wouldn't have a religious experience . . . but when I'm practicing at home I think I do . . . Once I'm in the moment, got the technique down, and I'm trying to work with an idea, I think I could probably say there's some prayer in there . . . and at some point that might translate itself into . . . playing in a church.'
- Iris: 'I think there's a lot more about space than just the physical space that is important. I really like the way in which she does that . . . made-up dance that she does . . . very often at the beginning of her of her session because everyone, I don't know how to explain it, but the whole room changes.'
- Helene: Yes. 'I think Dalcroze makes us particularly aware of the spaces we are in . . . the available open space. And I think that also contributed to how people experience the moving, taking your shoes off on sacred ground in a chapel and looking up, in that workshop people were looking up a lot. It was meaningful and we were also kneeling together. I remember . . . we had an elastic between the whole group and it ended on everyone kneeling in that church space . . . I think the space plays a role in how you move.'

### Continuity

#### *Making sense of Dalcroze within the life journey*

- Lucas: 'I think as a child I was very versatile. So I did sport, music, dance, everything I could possibly do that was available to me. I think with Dalcroze it brought everything together.'
- Lucy: 'I was relieved, but also really excited to . . . find the Dalcroze thing . . . this whole world that was very much how to unite these two things, music and movement . . . I see Dalcroze as the pivot point in my life journey . . . it was very

- much a culmination of all these things . . . converging at the same time . . . I have now reached a place where the bit that feels most me is in the Dalcroze class.’
- Molly: ‘I can now do all of what I loved doing before, but help students find their own journey in music, and then do that with some . . . fuller understanding of what music can be and what it is . . . I wish, when I was 20, I had been able to experience Dalcroze . . . I would have loved it.’
- Leslie: I was about 30 when I had my first experience. ‘It was very special because it [the creative process] combined my very early training with this more recent experience of music making . . . things like playfulness, improvisation, exploratory learning, I’m just so glad that I’m able to reconnect with those things as an adult.’
- Ella: I was in a special session where ‘all the qualities was in this piece of music to explore, like a child, it was lovely, you know.’
- Leslie: Yes, I also experienced a lesson that ‘made me feel like a boy again in a very positive way. There was a really playful element which connected me to my very early experiences in life.’
- Helene: Yes, it is lovely to play and relive positive childhood experiences but Dalcroze can also remind us of difficult earlier experiences. ‘To get access to the music centre . . . there was an aural test when I was in grade one . . . we had aural classes with these electronic sounds . . . but it wasn’t musical notes so I didn’t do well and I didn’t get into the music centre and I was heartbroken.’
- Iris: I can understand that. ‘I don’t see how it could be good for me to go through the exam system. It would just take the joy out of it, in all honesty, because then I would just go back to the point in my first year, feeling like I am doing everything wrong and struggling.’

## Personal interaction

### *Dalcroze and identity*

- Leslie: Dalcroze ‘really inspired me to go to places as a teacher, as a researcher . . . it helped to clarify my professional identity.’
- Ella: Yes, it also touches all areas of my life. ‘It gives joy to an experience that I never experienced as enjoyable, which is playing classical music or learning classical music or training in classical music and I like the fact that I can incorporate that joy into my life as being a mother and being a musician and being a teacher.’
- Helene: Me too. ‘I would say in all parts of my life Dalcroze is a big part. I play with the children at home using music, they think life is a musical. And so it’s part of my role as a mother, as a researcher, as a music educator, as a bassoonist, as a conductor. I think it’s part of who I am.’
- Lucy: Absolutely. ‘I remember coming out [of a class] thinking it’s a really beautiful sunny day and I feel like I’ve just created a little piece of art for these children. That’s it’s like an expression of who they are, who I am and the interplay between those two things. And it was almost like that lesson was like a little wall hanging . . . parts of a tapestry for each of us.’
- Molly: ‘I’m always at this as a pedagogue . . . I go to learn about myself and I’m learning about Dalcroze. I’m interested in the pedagogy as well, so it’s always . . . why are we doing this, what’s the purpose of this, why is this happening?’
- Leslie: ‘Once I’d experienced it, I had this question in my mind: Why haven’t more people experienced it? Why didn’t I experience it when I was a child? I started to



think about how I could help. I think if you are involved in education or health, then you are in a very real sense taking care of other people and there's no greater responsibility and if you have any sense of the sacred in your life, and I do have that, then that's a sacred relationship and your spiritual state of mind or your spiritual sense of being communicates to your students or to your clients.'

Lucas: Yes, it was meaningful for me when 'I got the feeling that this teacher cares or supports me. It also stood out for me when I saw how I could help the students to learn how to improvise through Dalcroze.'

Iris: I found I could help my students become aware of each other. 'There was a huge change in my marimba bands. Everyone said they sounded so different from previous years and they were playing together and they were playing music that was harder than what they played previously, but it was really just because they were playing together and that was something that I got from using some of the strategies that we learned in the Dalcroze workshops. To me, that was kind of an interesting realisation that something so small could be so powerful and can change ensemble playing so much.'

Helene: 'I find it useful in the orchestra. Often when we get stuck, we take our balls or elastics and show the music.'

## Social interaction

### *Connecting in the Dalcroze class*

Lucy: 'I love people and the social element [of Dalcroze] definitely counts for a lot for me . . . to [turn off my head] within a group where we were all able to trust each other and let go, it was awesome, and the joy that came from it.'

Ella: 'It just draws you together in a way like nothing else. Your body as well as everything else, it's connecting together and physical contact as well as the emotional connection.'

Helene: 'It's a connection deeper than language.'

Leslie: 'I can remember the amount of physical contact we had with each other because this piece of music was full of appoggiaturas and dissonances . . . so there is a lot of tension there which we expressed by holding hands and leaning away from each other or leaning our shoulders against each other. My Dalcroze journey has also included me learning how to be intimately close with other people through the medium of movement in a way which I never imagined I would ever do. I think that's very special because the other person's allowing you and you are privileged to be able to connect to them in that way. They are giving something of themselves to you and you're benefitting from that. Now that's really a privilege and you're also giving them permission to make contact with you.'

Ella: Yes, it is a privilege. 'The space that we created for each other was just really mutually respectful and supportive and we had fun working on an activity like that together. It's just such an intense experience.'

Iris: I agree. It is also intense 'when you are mirroring the way that someone else is catching a ball. You definitely feel a much deeper connection to that person.'

Lucy: 'And that's a kind of interaction you just don't have in normal life.'

Lucas: I think 'you build a different type of relationship with those you do Dalcroze with than other colleagues you just greet in the staff room.'

Iris: Yes! 'I was trying to speak to Katlego and to get to know him and it just didn't work but after that [the mirroring activity] he has been much more forthcoming.'

- Lucas: When 'you build friendships you wouldn't have built otherwise I experience it as sacred. So that is why I say the whole Dalcroze process is spiritual because in our spiritual lives, I feel, we work on relationships. So if Dalcroze is a way to build relationships then that must be spiritual.'
- Helene: I think so. 'I was put together with a colleague who I'm not getting along with that well. There's a lot of tension and between us. We often differ about things. And through this improvisation we played out our aggression, playfulness, energy and we resolved the conflict. After that we know that if we can't see eye-to-eye we just meet each other in the Dalcroze class and we'll be fine again, and we have an extremely good relationship now . . . so that's also special for me that dialogue we had.'
- Molly: 'What's kind of lovely about that work though is there's an opportunity to learn from each other' . . . 'So those are some lovely moments of connection, that sense of we're all striving for sort of a common understanding of this piece and we each have our own challenges, but everybody has something they're going to contribute in some way . . . I think that's why connections can happen, when there's that lovely generosity . . . that's a kind of spiritual place . . . When we have a generous spirit, more possibility exists.'
- Helene: 'And I really just enjoy how two people can focus on the same goal and be sensitive to each other to such an extent that they completely move together . . . I would almost say it takes me out of real life, all the worries and stress . . . I really enjoy that if people move their attention, musical attention or otherwise, towards a shared goal that's quite powerful.'

## Problems

- Iris: 'The dictation never works out well. You can walk it and you can do it but then as soon as you have to move to writing down, like dictating, I'm not sure how that transition happens . . . there's still this disconnect that happens and I'm not sure how to bridge that.'
- Leslie: 'If you're preparing for an exam or doing a practice dictation, a rhythmic dictation, then I can remember those lessons being quite stressful you know because you're really at a pitch where you're sort of really at the edge of nervous energy and you have to really concentrate and it's not necessarily negative, it's not necessarily stressful, but it can be challenging.'
- Iris: 'I don't necessarily want to go through the exam system, that's been a big deterrent.' I don't like being watched. 'She introduced the conductor's clap and I remember feeling very self-conscious because it was so simple. It's just clapping on one, four and then whatever and being quiet on one beat but it was surprisingly hard to do and I think also that was the first time I was ever in a Dalcroze class. It felt like, it was almost a performance, like everyone was watching and if you weren't going to get this very stupid simple exercise right everyone was going to see, especially when you had to go around the circle and do things alone.'
- Helene: Once 'there was a colleague that I respect very much, he saw my struggle so I felt humiliated so I think you know with Dalcroze often you show what you hear and if you are not able to hear then everyone sees it, so that's difficult for me . . . it's like a block, once I feel embarrassed or humiliated, then I'm not able to think anymore.'



- Ella: I do not like being put on the spot either. 'I would tend to freeze at the piano when people are with me or are watching me.'
- Lucas: I find it difficult 'when I have to accompany on the piano according to people's movement or when I have to play for movement. I find it difficult to get what is in my head out on the piano.'
- Lucy: I know that feeling. 'I've been sat at the piano and utterly frozen for ideas, because there's a huge rift between knowing what I'd love to be able to play and absolutely understanding what I'm being asked to do, but just not having the facility . . . it's the most humiliating feeling to not be able to do that, and in front of other people, that's the big negative. I guess you could say the social environment of learning Dalcroze . . . So although there are amazing things that come from it, to have to do it in front of other people is . . . when you stand up and turn around . . .'
- Leslie: 'I've had a relationship with the piano for many many years but for most of the time as a source of improvisation, of composing and making all sorts of weird and wonderful sounds as a contemporary composer, but to use it to very specific pedagogical ends like playing a polyrhythm, or having to choose a metre in a certain key, those were all challenges for me.'
- Ella: 'I must also say that more recently I have found Dalcroze more frustrating. I'm now at a point where it makes me more aware of what I can't do where that wasn't like that 20 years ago.' I tend to be too analytical. I remember 'we were filling in the gaps. So you tapped a tambour in the missing rest in the empty space and the feeling of, particularly when I do something in a pair, I find it more difficult because it's based on responding as supposed to analyzing and my default setting would be to try to work it out and working out what the rhythm is and then work out where the gap is and then clap, at which point I've missed it!'
- Molly: 'There are always challenges. So one of mine is the large arm beats, just bothers me for some reason, and so that's challenging, frustrating, but it's not that I don't enjoy it. I enjoy the challenge and am always intrigued at the ways in which I can get past those challenges. So a favourite lesson would be when there's a challenge that I've surpassed in some way.'
- Helene: 'And usually I would be nervous when someone is sitting and watching but I wasn't because [the teacher] was just giving us everything we needed to be able to do it.'

## Resolutions

- Lucas: 'If I cannot do something I would not necessarily consider it wrong. I would try to find another way or find a way that is enjoyable or find a way that is comfortable.'
- Ella: I find these comfortable moments are 'Moments where I would connect with someone that I was working with in a group in a pair or moments when I would connect so that my head is turned off and I feel like in the zone. They would be moments that would be very much a treasure for me. Moments when I managed to get into my body and not in my head and then moments where I really connect with somebody else doing that as well. That's also a huge, you know, a communication with somebody else and the bonding.'
- Leslie: Once in a *plastique animée*<sup>2</sup> 'I was actually making a lot of contact to show these dynamics and I just remember feeling special and beautiful that we made these

- shapes together and there was quite a lot of tension there but it was also a Baroque poise at certain moments when it came to a cadence and that seemed quite natural as well and I think that's a special way to connect with people.'
- Lucas: 'It is in those classes where you forget about yourself and you watch the others and help others and do something together where you have sacred experiences.'
- Ella: Yes, once in the class where 'the focus wasn't on me playing the piano the focus was on the movers and because the focus was on the movers it meant while I wasn't looking at my hands I was looking at the movers and it meant that the music that I created for them to move to just felt really organic for me because I knew how I wanted it to feel because I have felt it, therefore my fingers just did it without me thinking at all about in what key I was in or what chords I was using or anything like that. I felt really connected to the people that were going to move and I wanted them to feel what I was feeling so they would move in that way and it did feel like a very aesthetic experience to then see how they moved in relation to how I played.'
- Iris: 'When you're focused inwardly you have more chance for that [a spiritual experience] maybe because those times with the diamond<sup>3</sup> you're not focused on getting something right or at least I wasn't, I was focused on the way in which I was moving, especially when you are the leader where you can become almost selfish in your movements it's different when you're copying someone else.'

## Significant moments

### *Transformation and transcendence in the Dalcroze class*

- Leslie: I recall a vocal workshop presented by a Dalcroze teacher. It 'was transformative. If you just asked people to simply improvise it wouldn't have happened like it happened, but to have this object [an orange] as an object of focus it really transformed people and what they were able to do . . . I can remember my voice sounding like I have never heard it sound before. The resonance that I managed to achieve was extraordinary. I was almost surprised at my own physical capability.'
- Helene: 'I remember one special Feldenkrais lesson, it wasn't the Dalcroze lesson but it was at a Dalcroze Easter course, where I became aware that my body could do anything.<sup>4</sup> I was so amazed . . . She showed us [the body] can move in any way and that if it can't then it's because you won't let it, so just letting go was very, very meaningful . . . I remember climbing the stairs after that, I couldn't believe how easy it was, it was completely different. So, it did free me up to do more, to participate more freely in everything, self-acceptance . . . and what's quite special is that I now teach my daughter that her body is perfect just the way she is and it also empowers her.'
- Leslie: I've also felt empowered in Dalcroze classes. 'I remember moving in ways I'd never moved before, improvising a dance, and I'd never had any kind of dance training, but I felt safe and free to use my body in that way and I have since learned about my body in ways in which I never would have imagined. My own somatic awareness now is in a different universe compared to what it was before I did Dalcroze and I think that . . . is part of a much bigger story about my own awareness of myself.'
- Iris: Yes, 'it's a different kind of awareness if people have moved together and they then play together versus if they're just singing or playing together.'

- Lucas: This different kind of awareness can be beautiful. 'I remember how we would sometimes leave the class and the teacher would be overwhelmed with tears because we were so joyful. If I was in a bad mood before, I would never walk out in a bad mood. It was always a case of feeling spirit-filled because of the people you interacted with. It is a connection. You feel safe. For me, that is beautiful because these days it is not a feeling one often has in everyday life.'
- Leslie: 'I think the element of trust is a big one for me, that it requires trust and the way that I was trained, it meant that I knew what was appropriate in terms of touch and I felt safe to explore these things with somebody else and I can remember after my very first summer school writing about the element of trust and movement being really foremost in my memories of that experience.'
- Ella: I think such special moments require a safe space. 'Honestly I just have such trusting feeling with her [the teacher]. She was leading me on a journey through a forest. I didn't know where she was leading me but I felt safe.'
- Lucy: 'One of my favourite lessons is one that's happened just recently, where we were asked . . . to take a risk that the way we would engage with the movement was to be risky and to seek out the freedom that comes with that, to not be fearful. And I guess she'd built the lesson up so that it was very much one step at a time, she'd placed us in an environment where it was safe to take a risk, but also it felt possible, we actually had the skills to go for it . . . To do that and find the liberation that comes from turning off my head, but also to do it within a group where we were all able to trust each other and let go, it was awesome. And the joy that came from it.'
- Ella: 'I was really, really tuned in and she asked us then to do a free response to a Dalcroze piece that she played, a piano piece that he composed, and it was just really, really fun. I just felt liberated that there was nobody telling me what to do, nobody judging what I did . . . I just felt very free and I felt I could move and jump through the air and it kind of felt like an out of body kind of experience really, that I was just having fun and just responding to the music.'
- Leslie: I've also had a similar transcendent experience with a fellow student. 'We were moving through this enormous space, in a leading and following exercise. Phrasing. I had my eyes closed. As I moved through the space, it gave me the sense of flying.'
- Helene: 'Yes, I remember . . . we were running in this chapel . . . and you had to come from the corner and jump and go again and I . . . felt like I could fly. Another flying experience was we had scarves on our chests and you ran without it falling down and that also feels like flying, like a sensation of weightlessness.'
- Leslie: I think using these objects is meaningful. 'I just remember being completely concentrated on this ball and feeling completely, well in a sort of flow experience . . . I just loved doing it. It felt lovely.'
- Molly: I can relate to that. I remember 'moving to *Spiegel im Spiegel*<sup>5</sup> with a partner and trying to locate the phrase . . . We had chopsticks or bars between our hands . . . I didn't know the structure then and I think the person I was with had never heard the piece before so we were really playing with that structure. And somewhere in that journey was this rather lovely sense of not caring about the structure. Actually, I'd figured it out, but I didn't care about it. So I would call that transcendence, it's almost like we're beyond the rationale of the music . . . we're just in the realm of enjoying the space and sound . . . we're trying to understand the music and we're moving through it and the body's telling us things.'

## Discussion

The following discussion section relates the findings, which emerged as a result of rigorous data analysis, to relevant scholarly literature. The participants were very honest about their experiences in the Dalcroze class. They shared stories of inhibited spirituality and, through reflecting on the problems, they also presented the solutions. From the data analysis, it became clear that there are interrelated intrinsic and extrinsic factors that inhibit and promote spirituality in the Dalcroze class.

### *What inhibits spirituality in the Dalcroze class?*

Ella explained that if the Dalcroze teacher puts students on the spot, they become aware of what they cannot do. Iris said that judgement can lead to self-consciousness. Leslie felt deficient when an overly enthusiastic comment was made about another students' brilliant feet. According to Nivbrant Wedin (2018), teaching that emphasises examination and assessment might hinder free exploration and 'often torpedoed [students'] self-confidence' (p. 225). When Dalcroze activities are presented as a performance, it hinders self-confidence and makes students feel self-conscious (Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2014, p. 256). Some students, like Leslie, Ella, Iris, Lucy and Helen, feel stressed, self-conscious or intimidated when they have to perform in front of others.

When students are put on the spot, it might create a competitive atmosphere in the class which is detrimental for spiritual experience (Debenham & Debenham, 2008, p. 50). Sometimes students, such as Ella, Lucy and Lucas are too self-critical, perfectionistic or focusing too much on self and this also inhibits spiritual experiences (Brown, 2013, p. 37; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930, p. 167). When students in this study overanalysed, thought too much (Bolles & Chatfield, 2009, p. 15) or focused too much on the task or technique, they did not have spiritual experiences (Nagel, 2009, p. 17).

Molly enjoys it when she can exceed a challenge, but sometimes the challenge exceeds the students' ability (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 71) and causes frustration. Students, for example Ella, also feel responsible for not letting a partner down in pair work. Frustration caused by these circumstances prevents students having spiritual experiences. Other frustrating external distractions, such as noise or technical problems, also interrupt relaxed concentration and spiritual experiences.

### *How are opportunities for spirituality created in the Dalcroze classroom?*

All the participants comment on the significance of connecting and communicating with others through movement (Bogdan, 2003, p. 83). Mirroring and other exercises that include synchronising (moving in time with others) rely on, and promote, social interaction (McGuire, 2003, p. 15; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930, p. 5). For example, Helene and Molly note how pair work and group work provide opportunities for students to help each other and experience moments of generosity (Grise-Owens, 2011, p. 153; Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921, p. 135). When students and teachers create beautiful movements and aesthetic experiences, such as making music and improvising together, this also fosters spiritual experience (Boyce-Tillman, 2000, p. 91).

Certain actions and attitudes on the part of students can facilitate spiritual experience, such as letting go and responding pre-reflectively (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930, p. 15; Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 72). For Helene and Ella, focusing on the music and not on the self led to flow-like experiences and connection (Palmer, 2010, p. 164; Carr, 2010, p. 134). This can also be understood as becoming the music (Greenhead, 2016, no page). Focusing on an object (Leslie) or on other people moving (Ella) could also be transformative (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921/1967, p. 133; Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 69). Leslie, Ella and Molly associate significant moments in the Dalcroze class with the experience of travelling through space (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1912/1917, p. 26). Opportunities for spiritual experience were also afforded by playfulness (Boyce-Tillman, 2000, p. 91; Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 75), joy (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1912/1917, p. 32), silence (Yob, 2011, p. 46), and taking Dalcroze out of the classroom into students' everyday lives and into sacred spaces (Yob, 2011, p. 46; Boyce-Tillman, 2000, p. 97).

Participants identified spiritual experiences when freedom is given for self-expression (Boyce-Tillman, 2000, p. 91). Lucy notes that having space and choice to decide how to act and what to do can feel risky, but also liberating, if supported by a pedagogy focused on developing skills and creating a safe environment (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1912/1917, p. 16). Outside the exam situation and when not put on the spot, Iris, Ella, and Lucy experienced the freedom that comes from not feeling judged (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1914/1967, p. 90; Nivbrant Wedin, 2015, p. 225; Eisen, 2001, p. 10). Pedagogical sensitivity among Dalcroze teachers can also be experienced by students as a safe space (Freeman, 2002, no page) and empowering (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1930, p. 13).

## Conclusion

Yob (2011) said ‘If we knew what spirituality was, we would teach for It’. This is important since spirituality has been shown to be a determinant of wellbeing (Wills, 2009). We would like to argue that, even though we might not know what spirituality is, we now know what promotes or inhibits spiritual experiences in the Dalcroze class and therefore music educators can create opportunities for it.

**Supplementary materials.** For supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051720000091>

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## Notes

- 1 This refers to a list of musical subjects (pulse and tempo, beat and measure, meter, and so on) which form the basis of rhythmic exercises in Dalcroze classes and which students are encouraged to perceive in the arts, the natural world and human experience.
- 2 *Plastique animée* “generally refers to the realization of a piece of musical repertoire in movement . . . These choreographies can be seen as living analyses of music in real time. Other forms of *plastique* include creating different relationships with the music such as contrast or dialogue” (Greenhead & Habron, 2015).
- 3 This refers to a group of students moving in a diamond formation, in a leading and following exercise.
- 4 “Professional Dalcroze training includes additional classes in movement or dance” (Greenhead & Habron, 2015).
- 5 *Spiegel im Spiegel* (Mirror(s) in the mirror) is a composition by Arvo Pärt written in 1978.

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