

# Exploring the role of body movement in music education and choral practise through autoethnography

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**Abstract:** Body movement is deeply rooted in musical expression in all cultures and has an important place in music education and choral practise. This article explores how movement – whether conscious or instinctive – shapes the training and performance of choirs, focussing on the dynamic relationship between conductors and singers. Using auto-ethnographic narratives, the article traces the developmental paths of two individuals involved in music education, focusing on how movement has influenced their development as educators and performers.

Based on a comprehensive theoretical framework that includes the methods of Zoltán Kodály, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Carl Orff (Orff-Schulwerk), the article emphasises the deep connection between music and movement. It explores how this synergy promotes cognitive, physical and emotional growth by introducing movement-based practises such as body percussion, rhythmic gymnastics, expressive dance and conducting gestures. These exercises have been shown to improve musical understanding, concentration and emotional expression.

By comparing personal narratives, the article highlights both similarities and differences in the way movement is integrated into choral training. The findings emphasise the inextricable link between music and movement and demonstrate its transformative power in fostering deeper musical engagement and building a sense of community among teachers and learners. Ultimately, the article argues for the continued inclusion of natural movement in artistic and pedagogical practise, emphasising its role as an essential component of music education and the choral arts.

**Keywords:** movement, pedagogical approach, autoethnographic, comparison, choir environment.

## Introduction

Across cultures, movement, including body percussion, is deeply intertwined with musical expression. Whether deliberate or spontaneous, movement accompanies musical activities, forming an integral part of how singers and conductors communicate in choral settings. Observing choirs in performance reveals diverse approaches: some remain stationary, others incorporate meticulously rehearsed choreography, while many exhibit natural, organic movements that breathe life into the collective performance.

In music education, teaching and learning have long aligned with interactive rhythms resembling a dance (McIntyre & Cole, 2001). Educators who reflect on their intuitive sense of rhythm can gain profound insights into the pedagogical frameworks that have shaped their practice (Hwang, 2019; McIntyre & Cole, 2001).

This article examines the developmental journeys of two individuals in music education, highlighting how movement has influenced their personal and professional growth. Adopting an autoethnographic perspective delves into pivotal educational experiences that shaped a choral conductor's use of physical activity in their work. By analysing these narratives, the study identifies commonalities and offers recommendations to enhance pedagogical approaches in choral training.

## Theoretical Framework

Music naturally encourages young children to move and serves as a medium for expressing physical and mental states. The rhythmic structure of music motivates movement and promotes cognitive, emotional, physical and social development (van der Sandt & Jiříčková, 2023). This synergy improves concentration, auditory skills, imagination and musical memory. According to Mabingo (2019), movement enhances engagement by transforming music into a shared, immersive experience, while music simultaneously defines and energizes dance, fostering rhythm-driven, collaborative interactions.

Historically, Zoltán Kodály emphasised conscious singing by incorporating melodic analysis and hand signs to aid pitch accuracy. Emile Jacques-Dalcroze emphasised the unity of rhythm, body and mind and used movement to internalise musical nuances such as tempo and dynamics (Jaques-Dalcroze, 2000). His approach combined rhythmic gymnastics (eurythmy), solfège and improvisation. Similarly, the Orff Schulwerk integrates music and movement as inseparable, using body percussion, folk dance and spontaneous exercises to teach rhythm and instrumental techniques (Keetman, 1977; Kugler, 2013).

Hartmann summarised these systems by placing Kodály's emphasis on singing, Dalcroze's emphasis on physical expressi-

on and Orff's emphasis on creativity and improvisation, highlighting their shared value (Hartmann, 2021). Pedagogues such as Jenčková and Tichá advocate natural movement expression to deepen musical understanding and encourage relaxed singing, emphasising its importance for children's development (Jenčková, 2005; Tichá, 2005; 2024).

Nowadays, musical movement activities are widely integrated into curricula, even though the natural expression of movement is declining in some cultures. Efforts to preserve these traditions emphasise their importance in promoting holistic musical and personal development.

## Literature Review: Movement in Music Education

Rhythm is a fundamental music aspect deeply rooted in daily life and motor skills. Activities such as walking, jumping and running depend on rhythmic patterns that, when mastered, promote complex interactions, social skills and enjoyment of life (Sedlák, 1989). Movement reflects and promotes the perception of rhythm and forms a basis for child development. In some cultures, e.g. in parts of Africa, traditional practices such as carrying children in rhythmic patterns influence rhythm perception and show how cultural contexts shape the understanding of rhythm (Ayres, 1973). In con-

trast, research by Pretorius and Naude (2002) suggests that such practices can impair visual integration skills, indicating different developmental outcomes.

The dynamic interaction between rhythm and movement stimulates cognitive, emotional and social development. Research shows rhythmic activities improve auditory discrimination, problem-solving, and emotional regulation (Bautista & Ho, 2021; Chronopoulou & Riga, 2012). With music, movement improves physical coordination, social interaction and creative expression and thus promotes holistic development (Jiříčková, 2023). Rhythmic movement sharpens attention, memory and phonological awareness while strengthening communicative skills such as listening, sequencing and vocabulary development. Familiar songs and movement-based games support language learning and self-expression (Kaiser, n.d.). These activities also promote motor skills, creativity, body awareness and self-confidence (Dodge & Colker, cited in Kaiser, n.d.).

Synchronised movements play a crucial role in promoting social bonding and prosocial behaviours. Kragness and Cirelli (2021) link these behaviours to neurohormonal and cognitive factors, suggesting that synchrony has evolved as a survival advantage for group cohesion (Zaraska, 2020).

Rhythmic auditory stimulation (RAS) offers therapeutic and cognitive benefits beyond education. It helps to res-

tore motor function in conditions such as Parkinson's disease (Thaut, 2008). In addition, engagement with music promotes spatial awareness, which is essential for navigating and organising objects, as early musical education improves spatial and spatio-temporal skills (Rauscher, 1999; Maresch & Sorby, 2021).

For children aged 6–10 years, movement-orientated methods effectively promote musicality, creativity and engagement (Szirányi, 2021). Sedlák (1985) and Jenčková (2005) emphasise holistic approaches that integrate motor skills, social interaction and emotional expression to foster a deep connection to music. Movement is an effective pedagogical tool integrated into music, especially during choral performances and rehearsals. Choral singing is about more than just producing sounds; with movement, it is important to promote learning and development. Integrating conducting knowledge and skills into music lessons benefits performance precision, musical clarity, and conceptual understanding (Kelly, 1999). Activities that combine movement and music promote rhythm, motor skills, confidence and language development (Palupi et al., 2019; Mizener, 2008; Badriyah et al., 2020; Kelly, 1999).

Movement is fundamental to child development and promotes physical, cognitive and social-emotional growth. Early childhood movements enable children to explore and understand their

environment (Siregar et al., 2021). Basic movement skills such as walking, running and jumping form the foundation for an active lifestyle and are crucial for refining essential skills (Cools et al., 2009). Cognitive development is closely linked to movement, as demonstrated by Piaget's theory, which emphasises its role in early intelligence and knowledge acquisition (Leppo et al., 2000; Cools et al., 2009; Akbar, 2020; Siregar et al., 2021). In addition, physical activity supports social-emotional development by fostering self-confidence, emotional expression and social skills.

Movement is increasingly recognised as essential to shaping and communicating the musical vision in the evolving art of choral conducting. Effective choral conductors translate their musical ideas into precise physical gestures that enhance performance accuracy and musical clarity (Chen et al., 2013; Kelly, 1999). Further research could explore the potential benefits of personalised virtual conductors tailored to individual singers or ensembles (Takatsu et al., 2016).

Children's natural tendency to move while engaging with music emphasises the deep connection between rhythm and movement in their development. This interplay fosters musical growth and contributes significantly to cognitive, physical and emotional development, making movement an indispensable element of music education. Van der Sandt and Jiříčková (2023) emphasise the domi-

nant presence of movement in children's experiences and urge educators to consciously incorporate it into their pedagogical practice to create more dynamic and effective learning environments.

## Methodology: Autoethnographic Approach – a Comparative Analysis of Researcher Narratives

Autoethnography is a research method that combines the researcher's personal experiences with sociocultural analysis to provide a unique lens for understanding cultural phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). This study utilises an autoethnographic approach to compare the narratives of two researchers and use their reflective accounts to explore the meaning of movement in music and choral education. By systematically analysing personal experiences, the study links individual insights to broader cultural contexts (Adams & Manning, 2015). This methodology is based on the belief that research is inherently political, socially just and socially conscious (Ellis et al., 2011). It emphasises self-awareness and reflexivity and is consistent with transpersonal psychology's focus on self-discovery and transformation through lived experience (Raab, 2015). By bridging the personal and academic spheres, autoethnography enables researchers to critically examine

their practises while engaging with broader societal implications (Deibert et al., 2021). The comparative analysis of the two researchers' narratives highlights their unique perspectives on movement in music education. Through themes of personal growth, pedagogical innovation, and the integration of movement into classroom practice, the study uncovers connections between private experiences and public educational practices (Raab, 2015; Deibert et al., 2021).

This study employs a thematic analysis of the researchers' narratives, organised around the following areas, to examine the role of movement in choral- and music education:

- **Personal background in movement and rhythm:** Exploration of formative experiences with movement, including education and participation in movement-based activities;
- **Movement in pedagogical practices:** Analysis of how conductors use movement to enhance rhythmic precision, phrasing, and dynamics in choral rehearsals;
- **Rhythmic intuition and conducting style:** Investigation of the influence of improvisational movement on individual conducting styles;
- **Collaboration through movement:** Evaluation of movement's role in fostering group cohesion, rhythmic energy, and vocal expression;
- **Impact on student outcomes:** Assessment of how movement influences

student engagement, confidence, and rehearsal dynamics.

Brief biographical profiles of the two researchers provide context for their perspectives and give insight into the personal and professional experiences that characterise their narratives. This thematic framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis and enables the researchers to gain deeper cultural insights through their reflective enquiry.

Using autoethnography, this study contributes to the discourse on embodied pedagogical practises and offers practical and theoretical insights into the integration of movement in music education.

## **Narratives**

This section presents the narratives of the two authors of this article (Researcher 1 and Researcher 2), whose pedagogical approaches emphasise the integration of movement and rhythm in the music and choral classroom. Each researcher offers a unique perspective on how these elements shape their teaching and influence student development.

Together, these narratives explore the transformative role of movement in music education, demonstrating how rhythmic and physical engagement can enhance musical understanding, promote emotional expression, and foster a collaborative spirit within the ensemble.

The section concludes with a comparative analysis and discussion of these two narratives, highlighting their shared values and distinct approaches to integrating movement and rhythm in their teaching practices.

### **Researcher 1**

#### **Brief Biography**

Researcher 1 has over two decades of experience in education, specializing in music education, pedagogy, and choral conducting. During her academic training in the Czech Republic, she focused on Music Education, Teaching for Lower Secondary Levels, and Foreign Language Teaching. As part of her studies, she spent a year on a scholarship abroad, where she actively participated in a university choir and began conducting a senior choir, a role she continued for several years, regularly traveling to work with its members.

She also pursued extensive musical training, completing five years of solo singing and earning a diploma in piano performance. During this period, she participated in choral activities and completed foundational training in choral conducting. After completing her studies and spending a year abroad, she founded a children's choir, which she has directed for over 20 years. The choir has since grown to include three age-based sections with approximately 100 singers.

She has achieved habilitation in Music Theory and Pedagogy and has directed other choirs for both children and seniors. In addition to her choral work, she has taught at various educational levels and is currently a university lecturer specializing in the didactics of music education for primary and secondary school educators. She also conducts workshops designed to engage children, seniors, and practicing teachers, as well as pedagogical training sessions for students and educators.

Researcher 1 is deeply committed to the children's choir she established, which has become one of the most prominent in its region. Under her leadership, the choir regularly participates in competitive and non-competitive events, significantly contributing to the local cultural scene. Its activities include weekly rehearsals, weekend retreats, summer music camps, and performances in both domestic and international venues.

The choir, under her direction, has recorded multiple CDs and staged several children's operas and musicals, further cementing its reputation and cultural impact.

### **Personal background in movement and rhythm**

My connection with rhythm and movement began in early childhood. In kindergarten, I loved swaying to the rhythm of music, joyfully jumping and dancing—sometimes alone, with other

children, or alongside my mother. These activities often included clapping, stomping to accompany songs, and playing Orff instruments. At home, I sang in my mother's choir and followed her guidance in complementing folk songs with rhythmic movements. My mother often sang expressively, performing various children's songs accompanied by improvised movements, creating a playful and creative musical atmosphere.

From a young age, I thoroughly enjoyed attending the dance department of the elementary art school. Those classes often included rhythmic gymnastics elements, making them even more engaging. As I grew older, my involvement in dance shifted toward modern gymnastics and the fundamentals of expressive dance. In my free time, I loved inventing dance sequences inspired by the music I heard.

In seventh grade, I started attending a country dance club with a classmate and later transitioned to modern dance courses, which featured dance elements set to pop and rock music. Like many of my peers, I took a six-month introductory course in ballroom dancing during high school but chose not to pursue it further. However, I continued dancing on my own at home and after school. Alongside dance, I explored music by learning piano and guitar and led a theatre group.

At 17, I returned to expressive dance and enrolled in the elementary art school to study it more formally. This renewed

my connection to movement and music, allowing me to discover how movement could express emotions and moods. I found it especially rewarding to align my movements with the tone length and qualities of the music, a process that felt natural to me.

One of the most significant influences on my journey in expressive dance was my teacher, whose approach blended various methods over the decade I danced under her guidance, with some breaks in between. While my dance education was deeply intertwined with music and movement, my experiences in school choirs—spanning early elementary school through college—did not incorporate movement as a teaching component. Despite this, my experiences with rhythm and movement have remained a fundamental part of my personal and artistic growth.

### **Movement in pedagogical practices**

I incorporate various music and movement elements in my choir classes to enhance engagement and learning. These include body games, conducting gestures, phonogestics, mime, elementary movement improvisation and simple dance elements. The variety and complexity of these activities vary depending on the age of the children; younger learners experience a wider range of physical activities. For example, when I introduce a new song to seven- or eight-year-olds, I often have them start by acting out

the movement of the melody with their hands. Other times, they might go to the song's beat and explore its character—whether light, bouncy, or dance-like.

The children clap rhythms or rhythmic excerpts from the song with their bodies. Depending on age and circumstances, these can be basic forms of body percussion or more advanced activities. In the beginning, the children master one type of body play and gradually add other variations, such as clapping in different positions (e.g. in front of the body, behind the body, above the head or under the leg) and with outstretched palms or arms.

I adapt the activities according to the needs of the group. For example, the children can play individually, in pairs facing each other, in small groups, in a circle or freely scattered around the room. Movement serves as a means of self-expression in preparatory rhythmic or vocal exercises or the natural accompaniment of a song with gestures. Sometimes, we incorporate dance steps, such as the mazurka, the polka or the waltz, which younger children enthusiastically take up. I incorporate dance steps as part of the choir choreography for older singers. We work together to find the most effective hand movements or gestures that suit the choir's positioning and the singers' creative input.

Many children already have experience with sports and some with dance, but their involvement in movement-based

activities increases significantly over time. At the age of 15, many choir members participate in introductory ballroom dance classes, as I did when I was their age. Older singers also enjoy physical activities, including body games or other movement elements, if they fit the song's character.

Kinaesthetic learning is important in my lessons, especially with younger students. Over time, as singers develop a solid foundation in music theory and note reading, I encourage them to sing from sheet music. Even then, movement remains an essential component: singers often hold the sheet music with one hand while tapping the metre or tracing the melody in the air with the other. As a choirmaster, I sometimes use hand signals in front of the choir to visualise melodic progressions, creating a visual and physical connection to the music.

This dynamic integration of movement into choir rehearsals promotes a holistic learning environment that supports both musical development and physical expression. It encourages singers of all ages to engage intensively with music and combine theoretical knowledge with physical experience.

### **Rhythmic intuition and conducting style**

When rehearsing and conducting my children's choir, I prioritise precision in my gestures to provide clear direction and strictly adhere to instructions.

However, I do not always rely solely on traditional conducting gestures. I use my hands in certain moments to "paint" the piece's mood, aiming to convey changes in melody or agogics expressively. The children respond attentively to my gestures, adapting their singing immediately. Interestingly, even when my gestures are imprecise, or I unintentionally misrepresent a section, the children follow my lead and sing accordingly. While unnoticed by the audience due to our collaborative approach, these moments highlight the strong connection between my conducting style and their intuitive response.

Each choir rehearsal follows a structured format, beginning with warm-up exercises and then singing and practising several songs at varying difficulty levels. The focus of my conducting gestures naturally shifts depending on the specific demands of each piece. To maintain the children's attention and motivation, I frequently incorporate diverse movement-based activities tailored to the characteristics of the song being rehearsed. For instance, I may employ different forms of movement accompaniment or emphasise particular physical gestures to enhance engagement.

I also encourage the singers to actively participate in shaping these movement activities. They are welcome to suggest alternative variations or adapt the movements I introduce if the adjustment does not conflict with an exact require-

ment—for example, precise rhythmic tapping. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership among the singers and enriches the rehearsal process by integrating their creativity into our practice.

By balancing precise instruction with expressive and adaptive gestures, I strive to cultivate technical accuracy and artistic interpretation in my choir, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

### **Collaboration through movement**

I have observed that movement activities, particularly those involving pairs or small groups, are highly enjoyable for children, especially those in the younger school-age range. These activities have the added benefit of encouraging children to repeat tasks multiple times without realising they are engaging in a learning process. I find that regular repetition of such activities helps to strengthen their sense of rhythm. Less experienced pupils often learn effectively through imitation, supported by their more experienced peers. Within our choir rehearsals, whether in our rehearsal room or during regular practice sessions, I notice increasing confidence in movement and rhythmic activities, accompanied by the joy of successfully completing manageable tasks.

I integrate a variety of motivational activities during choir training and choir outings. These not only develop the

rhythmic skills of the singers but also serve as a form of entertainment that enhances their overall well-being. When working with older children, I observe that preparatory rhythmic and movement exercises significantly improve their proficiency and self-confidence. This, in turn, allows them to move naturally in other contexts without overthinking their actions. Their relaxed demeanour fosters free, natural singing and creates a subconscious space for deeper emotional engagement.

On some occasions, I have used deliberately expressive gestures to enhance the emotional intensity of a particular song. However, I noticed that the children tended to perceive the activity more as a theatrical performance in these instances. This experience has led me to consider the balance between expressive movement and maintaining a natural, intuitive connection to the music.

### **Impact on student outcomes**

The way I apply movement elements in my choir is deeply influenced by my childhood experiences with movement, my formal studies, and the educational methodologies I prioritise. Over the past 20 years, my approach has evolved significantly, mainly as I have gained a deeper understanding of Orff-Schulwerk principles and incorporated elements of Dalcroze training. I have observed that singers who spend a substantial amount of time in the choir embrace this move-

ment-based approach as natural. It often lifts their spirits, fosters enthusiasm, and visibly enhances their motor skills. As the singers gain more experience, I am able to introduce more complex rhythmic ostinatos and polyphonic structures into our repertoire.

When I notice a choir member struggling with a rhythmic challenge, I adapt the activity to a simplified version that allows them to remain engaged and included. Additionally, I sometimes rearrange the group spatially, interspersing less confident members with stronger singers who can provide subtle support. This approach ensures that all members feel secure and confident within the ensemble.

Mistakes during rehearsals are handled light-heartedly, reinforcing a supportive and collaborative atmosphere. If choreography is momentarily disrupted during a performance, choir members instinctively offer subtle cues to help each other recover. Movement is seamlessly integrated into our choral sessions, contributing not only to the singers' enjoyment of music but also to the overall structure of the lessons and the development of their vocal and physical coordination.

## **Researcher 2**

### **Brief Biography**

Researcher 2 completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in music

and pursued advanced training in choral conducting at an institute in the Netherlands. Throughout his career, he has worked as a composer, conductor, arranger, and adjudicator, with experience at both national and international levels.

He has conducted a wide range of ensembles, including children's choirs, youth choirs, university choirs, and adult choirs. He also founded a chamber choir dedicated to the recording, development, and preservation of regional choral music. Additionally, he directed a mixed student choir that received various awards and contributed to the international reputation of a boys' choir as a leading ensemble in its category.

Since 2015, he has been based in Italy, where he serves as a professor of Musicology and Music Education. He conducts multiple ensembles, including a university choir, a male choir, and a provincial youth choir. He also directs an organization focused on providing musical education for children through singing.

Over the course of his career, Researcher 2 has participated in numerous choral and educational projects, contributing to the fields of music education and choral conducting as a lecturer, adjudicator, and conductor.

### **Personal background in movement and rhythm**

Reflecting on my early experiences with movement education, I realise how profoundly they shaped my confidence, cre-

activity, and discipline. Movement and rhythm were integral to my daily life, with childhood memories filled with rhythmic clapping, foot stomping, and spontaneous dancing during moments of joy or communal celebration.

A transformative moment was my introduction to drumming in a community where contributing to a collective rhythm fostered empowerment and belonging. I discovered that my individual rhythm contribution, however small, was essential to a larger whole. These experiences nurtured a somatic awareness, making movement and rhythm a path for self-expression, resilience, and confidence.

Rhythmic practices also fuelled my creativity, mainly through improvisation. Experimenting with syncopation and tempo felt like a playful dialogue with movement and sound, teaching me that rhythm can be structured yet flexible. This freedom encouraged risk-taking and expanded my creative boundaries.

Discipline was another key outcome. Achieving a steady rhythm required focus, patience, and consistency, which instilled perseverance in my personal and professional life. This rhythm of engagement now informs my teaching, where I highlight rhythm as a pathway to self-expression and growth.

Movement education also deepened my appreciation for kinaesthetic learning, where physical engagement enhances understanding. This insight

has shaped my teaching philosophy, prioritising active, physical engagement to create meaningful and transformative learning experiences.

### **Movement in pedagogical practices**

Movement is an essential tool in my teaching, encouraging interaction and deepening students' understanding of music. I firmly believe in the power of rhythm and music to bring people together and create meaningful connections. Throughout my career, I have seen how these elements, rooted in ancient tribal traditions, unite communities in a way that words often cannot. While modern society has moved away from such practices, I have found that incorporating rhythmic and movement-based activities in the classroom can reignite that deep sense of belonging.

For me, educational spaces are dynamic environments where movement and music come together to create profound opportunities for learning, cultural exchange and collaboration. Through my work in music and choral education, I have seen how incorporating movement into musical activities fosters deeper engagement, enhances learning and connects the diverse backgrounds of participants.

Movement, whether through rhythmic activities or choral performances, becomes a powerful tool to connect people and allow them to communicate and collaborate beyond words. I have seen

these practises transform classrooms and rehearsal spaces into vibrant communities where unity and common purpose thrive. This belief in the transformative power of movement and music fuels my passion and inspires me every day in my work. I recognise the physical nature of rhythm and use movement to make abstract musical concepts more tangible. Activities such as clapping, body percussion and call-and-response exercises help students to internalise rhythm in a kinaesthetic way. This approach makes learning intuitive and strengthens the link between rhythm, memory and development. Psychologists have found that rhythm promotes memory from an early age. This can be seen in children's natural reactions to rhythmic sounds and rhymes, which emphasises the role of rhythm in language and memory formation.

Movement also makes music lessons more accessible to students struggling with traditional notation or theoretical concepts. Students develop an instinctive understanding without feeling overwhelmed by analysis by embodying rhythm through actions such as clapping or swaying. This reflects historical practices where rhythmic patterns fostered cultural and emotional foundations.

Incorporating movement into pedagogy promotes inclusion by appealing to different learning styles and ensuring students can engage and excel. Ultimately, integrating movement and rhythm in

the classroom fosters community strengthens memory and confidence, and introduces students to the universal language of music.

### **Rhythmic intuition and conducting style**

Rhythm is the cornerstone of my conducting philosophy and characterises my gestures and the entire musical experience of my ensembles. My early immersion in rhythm has profoundly influenced my approach. I emphasise that conducting is not limited to the movements of the hands but involves the whole body. Every subtle to expansive gesture conveys dynamics, phrasing and emotional intent. At its core, rhythmic intuition is essential to creating a common pulse, synchronising understanding and effectively communicating musical ideas.

I firmly believe that choristers must also master basic conducting patterns. In rehearsals, they are encouraged to conduct as they sing, harmonising their physical gestures with the beat and momentum of the music. This dual engagement deepens their rhythmic understanding and cultivates a grounded sense of flow, resulting in dynamic, coherent and rhythmically secure performances.

Synchronising rhythmic understanding within the ensemble encourages collaboration and responsiveness. By modelling rhythmic energy and encouraging physical interaction with the beat,

I create an environment where music is intuitively felt as a living force. This foundation allows the singers to connect with the music and each other deeply, fostering individual creativity and collective expression.

For me, rhythmic momentum is the backbone of music. It provides a subconscious framework that allows singers to feel safe while exploring the emotional and artistic dimensions of the repertoire. Together, we cultivate an ensemble that performs and embodies rhythm as an integral, living element of the musical journey.

### **Collaboration through movement**

Movement is a powerful tool for fostering cooperation and unity in choirs, promoting trust through shared rhythmic and physical activities. Exercises such as clapping, stepping, and synchronised gestures create a collective sense of rhythm, breaking down barriers and encouraging singers to shift focus from individual voices to the ensemble. By engaging choir members in movement, I help them embody rhythm and dynamics, transforming their understanding into a deeply felt experience that enhances musical performance and interpersonal connections.

My appreciation for collaboration and creativity in choirs was shaped by my experiences in South Africa, where music, movement, and rhythm were deeply interconnected. Conducting and tea-

ching in this context often encouraged choristers to contribute choreography ideas, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and creativity. These collaborative efforts enriched performances and strengthened the group's connection to the music. Now working in Europe, I continue to prioritise movement in rehearsals, guiding singers more directly but still encouraging their input to ensure inclusivity and dynamism. Movement serves as both an artistic and unifying force within the ensemble.

Incorporating movement transforms rehearsals into collaborative experiences. Simple rhythmic exercises evolve into complex patterns that require singers to synchronise and connect, reinforcing a shared rhythm. Gestures, swaying, or striding in unison allow the choir to cultivate a cohesive sound and emotional resonance. Movement becomes a common language that deepens ensemble connections and fosters collaboration and trust.

One of the most rewarding outcomes is seeing choristers taking ownership of the they make. Inviting them to contribute to choreography or experiment with gestures turns rehearsals into spaces of exploration and expression. This approach strengthens their connection to the music and fosters community, resulting in performances imbued with collective joy and meaning.

Whether in South Africa or Europe, I remain committed to the transformati-

ve power of movement and collaboration. This philosophy celebrates the shared heartbeat of music, the beauty of creative unity, and the deep connections that emerge when individuals come together to create something greater than themselves.

### **Impact on student outcomes**

Integrating movement and rhythm into the classroom significantly improves student outcomes and fosters personal growth, creativity and a deeper connection to music. Rhythmic body percussion and movement exercises allow students to physically experience rhythm through clapping, tapping, stomping and stepping. We start with simple patterns and increase the complexity so that the students internalise the rhythm through repetition and transform it from an abstract concept into a tangible experience. Call and response exercises strengthen this connection by combining sound and gesture to improve listening, movement skills and rhythmic understanding.

I use spatial dynamics and movement-based phrasing to explore musical expression, such as rising to represent crescendos or imitating legato lines with arms outstretched. These activities encourage emotional engagement and personal interpretation, making movement a bridge to expressiveness. Role-playing and storytelling through gesture immerse students in the narrative aspects of music, deepening their

interpretive skills and understanding of the emotional qualities of music.

Improvised movement and dance foster creativity and confidence by allowing students to respond freely to rhythms and melodies, encouraging self-expression and independence. Learning form through movement mapping, i.e. assigning movements to sections of a piece, anchors students' understanding of the musical structure and builds their confidence in navigating compositions.

Props and instruments, such as scarves and percussion instruments, extend the movement to visualise phrasing, dynamics and rhythm. Mirror exercises promote awareness of the ensemble and teamwork and improve sensitivity to timing and group cohesion. Mindful movements at the beginning or end of the lesson improve concentration and the willingness to learn.

This active, movement-based approach transforms passive observation into participation, promoting body awareness, coordination and an enduring love of music. It promotes resilience, adaptability and creativity and enriches students' musical and personal development.

## **Comparative Analysis of Teaching Styles: Similarities and Differences**

### **Personal background in movement and rhythm**

Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 provide personal insights into the profound impact of rhythm and movement on their lives, but their perspectives differ in focus and methodology.

Researcher 1's experience is firmly rooted in structured activities, beginning in childhood with clapping, dancing and playing Orff instruments. Formal dance training, including rhythmic gymnastics and expressive and modern dance, shaped her artistic development. Music was central to this journey as she participated in her mother's choir, learned piano and guitar and led a theatre group. A key influence was a teacher whose varied methods, spanning over a decade, created a strong connection between music and movement. Although her school choir experience did not include a movement component, Researcher 1 highlights how rhythm and movement became integral to her artistic identity.

In contrast, Researcher 2 sees rhythm and movement as inextricably linked to daily life and community interaction. Early experiences such as rhythmic clapping, spontaneous dancing and drumming fostered a sense of belong-

ing and self-expression. Improvisation provided a creative outlet to explore rhythm's structured yet flexible nature. For Researcher 2, rhythm was also a means to develop discipline, resilience and personal growth – qualities that inform his teaching philosophy today. His approach emphasises kinaesthetic learning, where physical engagement promotes understanding inspired by his transformative experiences.

While Researcher 1 emphasises formal education and artistic progression, Researcher 2 focuses on rhythm's collaborative, improvisational and adaptive aspects. However, both believe in the transformative power of rhythm and movement, not only as tools for education or art but as profound mediums for self-expression, growth and connection.

In her teaching practice, Researcher 1 uses movement to embody music. She integrates body percussion and improvisational dance to foster rhythmic intuition and emotional connection. This approach enhances students' creativity, memory, coordination and confidence. Both researchers integrate principles from Orff Schulwerk and the Dalcroze pedagogy and use structured movement exercises to support rhythmic understanding and promote ensemble cohesion. Their students develop vocal technique, physical coordination, and cooperative skills by synchronising body and voice. Both Researchers' methods demonstrate

the potential of rhythm and movement to promote musical education and personal development.

### **Movement in pedagogical practices**

Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 emphasise the transformative role of integrating movement into music lessons, albeit with different emphases and approaches. Both researchers agree on the importance of movement in deepening musical understanding and engagement. Researcher 1 views movement as a universal tool that helps to internalise rhythm and improve memory, while Researcher 2 emphasises its practical application in choral contexts to enrich rehearsal dynamics and performance.

A shared focus on accessibility and integration emphasises their methods. Researcher 1 addresses the value of movement for different learning styles, while Researcher 2 adapts activities to different age groups and physical abilities to ensure inclusion in the choral environment. Both researchers also advocate kinaesthetic learning, which is central to musical development. Researcher 1 emphasises the ability to make abstract musical concepts more tangible, and Researcher 2 illustrates this through detailed examples such as clapping, body play and dance steps that enhance students' musical understanding. In addition, both emphasise the

motivational benefits of movement, with Researcher 1 highlighting the ability to generate enthusiasm through rhythmic exercises and Researcher 2 developing engaging physical activities for younger and older singers alike.

Despite these shared principles, their approaches differ in scope and focus. Researcher 1 takes a broader perspective, placing movement within a cultural and psychological framework and exploring its universal relevance in different educational contexts. In contrast, Researcher 2 takes a more specific focus and applies movement directly to choral rehearsals using age-appropriate strategies and practical techniques. Researcher 2 also addresses different group configurations, such as working in pairs, circles or freely distributed groups, tailored explicitly to choir members' needs. Researcher 1 presents a distinctive perspective by emphasising the unifying power of movement in her work. Whether in music education or choral work, her methods emphasise how movement cultivates a common purpose and connection between participants, making it a fundamental aspect of her practise.

Regarding developmental considerations, Researcher 2 addresses age-specific strategies by introducing more complicated dance steps for younger children and adapting activities for older singers with prior physical experience. Researcher 1, on the other hand, emphasises the timeless and universal benefits of

movement that apply to all ages and learning levels. Furthermore, the contexts in which they use movement differ: Researcher 1 views it as a universal cultural and pedagogical tool, while Researcher 2 relates it directly to vocal performance and provides concrete examples of how movement complements the dynamics of rehearsal work.

Both narratives emphasise the profound impact of movement in music education, with shared priorities of kinaesthetic learning, accessibility and student engagement. While Researcher 1 takes a theoretical, overarching approach, researcher 2 offers a detailed, practise-orientated perspective tailored to age and experience. Together, these complementary viewpoints illuminate the multifaceted value of movement in promoting musical growth, inclusivity and cohesion.

### **Rhythmic intuition and conducting style**

Both researchers underscore the centrality of rhythm as a foundational aspect of conducting and ensemble work. They argue that conducting extends beyond traditional hand gestures, involving the entire body as a medium to express musical intent and convey artistic expression. A shared emphasis is placed on rehearsals' collaborative and interactive nature, which fosters engagement and creativity among singers. Additionally, both research-

ers highlight the importance of tailoring gestures and rehearsal activities to meet the specific needs of the ensemble, whether these adaptations serve expressive or motivational purposes.

Despite these similarities, the researchers diverge in their approaches. Researcher 2 prioritises rhythmic intuition as a holistic framework, advocating for both conductors and choristers to master conducting patterns to deepen their rhythmic understanding. In contrast, Researcher 1 emphasises the precision of gestures, particularly in working with younger singers, and incorporates movement exercises tailored to their developmental stages to maintain focus and engagement. While Researcher 2 views rhythm as an unconscious and unifying force in music, Researcher 1 adopts a more practical perspective, adapting gestures and movements to align with the specific requirements of individual songs. Moreover, Researcher 1 explicitly incorporates improvisation and flexibility into rehearsal activities, encouraging singers to propose variations, whereas Researcher 2 focuses on achieving synchronisation and shared rhythmic momentum within the ensemble.

### **Collaboration through movement**

Both researchers underscore the significance of movement in music education, emphasising its role in fostering rhythm

and engagement within choral settings. Researcher 2 highlights movement as a tool for promoting unity and emotional connection within choirs, while Researcher 1 focuses on its importance in developing rhythmic skills and sustaining engagement, particularly among younger singers. Both adopt collaborative and inclusive approaches, valuing the active participation of ensemble members. Researcher 2 encourages choir members to contribute ideas for choreography, while Researcher 1 emphasises peer learning through imitation and group interaction. Furthermore, both researchers recognise the emotional dimension of movement, noting its ability to enhance trust and confidence. Researcher 2 observes that movement helps singers embody rhythm and dynamics, while Researcher 1 highlights its role in fostering a natural singing style and building confidence.

Despite these shared perspectives, the researchers differ in their focus and methodologies. Researcher 2 primarily explores the experiences of adult or mixed-age choirs in diverse cultural contexts, including South Africa and Europe, with an emphasis on artistic and cultural collaboration. In contrast, Researcher 1 concentrates on younger, school-age children and the developmental benefits of movement in music education. The types of activities they advocate also diverge: Researcher 2 emphasises ensemble exercises such as clapping, tapping and

synchronised gestures to promote unity. In contrast, Researcher 1 emphasises smaller, often repetitive tasks performed in pairs or groups that develop essential skills and encourage elementary musical creativity.

Researcher 2 approaches movement through a philosophical lens, viewing it as a means of artistic expression, emotional depth and collective harmony in performance. In contrast, Researcher 1 takes a more pragmatic stance, viewing movement as a developmental tool to balance expressive gestures and natural singing. This perspective also addresses practical challenges, such as the fact that younger singers often misinterpret expressive movement as too theatrical, leading to an adaptation of teaching strategies. Researcher 2, on the other hand, focuses less on such challenges and more on movement's transformative and unifying potential.

In summary, both researchers advocate for incorporating movement into choral practice, though their emphases differ. Researcher 2 prioritises collective artistry and emotional connection, while Researcher 1 highlights developmental benefits and practical strategies tailored to younger learners.

### **Impact on student outcomes**

Both researchers recognise the significant role of movement in enhancing students' musical development, empha-

sising its ability to foster creativity, engagement, and a deeper connection to music. Movement is incorporated to improve rhythmic understanding and physical coordination, linking bodily actions to core musical concepts such as rhythm, dynamics, and phrasing. Both also emphasise the importance of creating a supportive and collaborative environment through movement, promoting teamwork, ensemble awareness, and mutual support among participants. Additionally, each researcher highlights the necessity of adapting movement exercises to suit the specific needs of learners, ensuring inclusivity and sustained motivation for all students.

Despite these shared perspectives, their approaches reveal notable differences. Researcher 2 strongly emphasises using movement to facilitate emotional expression and personal interpretation of music, employing role-playing storytelling and improvisation techniques. This approach enables students to express themselves freely and creatively. Moreover, Researcher 2 integrates a diverse range of props, including scarves, ribbons, small percussion instruments, and kinaesthetic exercises, which are less prominent in Researcher 1's methodology.

Researcher 1 takes a more methodical approach, emphasising the gradual development of skills over time to help singers build confidence and feel more comfortable with their movement. This

approach ensures that the naturalness of the movement complements and enhances the musical expression. As students progress, more complex rhythmic challenges and spatial arrangements are carefully introduced to encourage steady growth. Researcher 1 also tailors the movement exercises to involve all choir members, focusing on the spatial and relational dynamics within the group. A relaxed, light-hearted attitude towards mistakes or disruptions during rehearsals is encouraged, creating a cooperative and supportive atmosphere.

In contrast, Researcher 2 relies on imaginative methods, such as visualising musical forms and improvising to melodies, to encourage creativity and exploration. While Researcher 1 emphasises group engagement and cohesion, Researcher 2 focuses more on achieving specific learning outcomes centred on movement.

## Summary

The comparative analysis shows that both researchers emphasise the transformative role of movement in music education, recognising its ability to enhance rhythmic understanding, creativity and engagement while promoting collaboration and integration. Researcher 2 emphasises movement as a universal and artistic tool, using props, improvisation and storytelling to facilitate emotional expression and personal

interpretation, with a broader focus on cultural and psychological frameworks. Researcher 1 adopts a structured and pragmatic approach, carefully designing movement exercises to align with specific developmental stages. This method places a strong emphasis on cultivating children's musical and creative abilities while promoting engagement and practical skill-building, particularly in younger learners. While Researcher 2 emphasises movement's artistic and unifying power, Researcher 1 underscores the developmental advantages of movement, offering practical strategies to help singers achieve a natural, unselfconscious expression in harmony with music. This process is supported by a light-hearted and adaptable rehearsal environment, fostering both growth and creativity. Despite these differences, both approaches emphasise the profound impact of movement on musical growth and ensemble cohesion.

## Conclusion

This autoethnographic study sheds light on the intricate relationship between movement and music education by comparing the narratives of two researchers. Through reflective analysis, the study explores how movement shapes choral practice, influences pedagogical approaches, and enhances educators' and performers' personal and professional development. By integrating move-

ment into the music classroom, the study emphasises the transformative potential to enhance musical understanding, promote collaboration, and build community among learners and performers.

Regarding the autoethnographic approach, this methodology offers unique advantages as it allows researchers to combine personal experiences with broader cultural and pedagogical insights. It enables deep introspection and a holistic understanding of the dynamic interplay between conductors and singers – teacher and pupils, revealing how movement influences teaching and learning. However, this approach has certain limitations, including the potential for subjectivity, difficulties in generalising the findings beyond the specific context of the researchers, and the inherent constraints of qualitative research, which limit the diversity of perspectives by excluding contributions from a larger sample of researchers. These insights pave the way for investigating how cultural, institutional and personal factors influence the inclusion of movement in music lessons. Future research could explore the cross-cultural applications of movement in music education, including the benefits of adapting musical movement strategies from diverse cultural traditions. its impact on learners with different abilities, and the long-term cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of embodied musical practises. In addition, investigating the adaptation of peda-

gological concepts such as Kodály, Jaques-Dalcroze and Orff-Schulwerk to modern educational contexts offers a promising direction for further study.

From a practical perspective, this study provides several recommendations for music education. Teachers and conductors are encouraged to regularly integrate movement-based activities such as body percussion, rhythmic games and expressive dance into their lessons to improve rhythmic precision, musical expression and group cohesion. Movement should not only be seen as a tool, but as a fundamental part of music teaching that

promotes the holistic development of learners by addressing their cognitive, physical and emotional abilities.

This study reinforces the notion that movement is an essential and universal component of musical expression that transcends cultural boundaries and enriches both individual and collective experiences. By advocating for the preservation and promotion of natural movement as a pedagogical and artistic tool, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on music education and emphasises the transformative potential of embodied musical practise.

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