

## Abstract

Music education is something that is ever-changing in the national curriculum. From my years at school, music education wasn't something that inspired me to pick up an instrument due to improper teaching methods and a unorganised lesson plans. Since my years at school, I have been contemplating the future of music education in our lives and the best way to go about teaching it. Growing up as an electric guitarist, I discovered an interest in classical guitar during my time at university. I found it fairly easy to learn, which led me to question why this was the case. I have always had a passion for teaching and imparting knowledge onto others, so this paper is catered around the two things that I aspire to be successful at in life: teaching and classical guitar. Through my lecturers and colleagues, I have been inspired to teach in the field of music education to improve the quality of learning for students. This research aims to bring me closer to my goal of becoming a music teacher and improving the world of music education, starting by finding out the most effective way of learning classical guitar.

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## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

There is a great number of academic literature outlining the educational benefits of playing an instrument; however few actually mention the best method to go about learning one. The teaching applications for music in general can be extremely varied, due to it being an incredibly broad subject with many relevant components to it. One valuable teaching method applied by guitar performance masters holder and educator Christopher Davis is to play a piece slowly but accurately, repeating the process and increasing the tempo at ease. He states: *"It's exciting to play the guitar, but slow down. I tell my students this all the time, play it perfectly slow rather than make mistakes all the time"* (Davis 2009). The teaching application of slowing down a piece and perfecting it through repetition is part of the Suzuki method and Gordon's theory. Suzuki believed that *"Technique, musicianship and style are developed through the study and repetition of pieces"* (Suzukimusic.org.au, 2016). To paraphrase Gordon *"we recognize the aspects of repetition and any other relevant factors that give the music meaning to us"* (Gordon 1989, 10-14). This is an important feature for learning classical guitar as repetition ensures that a piece is performed to the best of the composers intention.

The Dalcroze method seems less relevant when teaching an instrument, particularly in classical guitar where the music and body are so restricted. Such is believed by arts lecturer and orchestra manager Kathy Butera, generalizing the unpopularity of the method in modern teaching -

*"unfortunately, Dalcroze programs are not widespread, and where they exist, they are frequently for children only"* (Butera, 2012). Galvao however, stresses the importance of being kinesthetically involved in playing an instrument through Dalcroze eurhythmics, stating that *"playing a musical instrument involves the accurate execution of fine motor movements which are highly dependent upon kinesthetic information reaching the central nervous system"* (Galvao and Kemp, 1999, p. 136).

Thomsen explains that once students have approached their instrument, it is similar to transferring *"from the global – the whole body – to just part of the body"* (Thomsen, 2007, p. 15). Thomsen

blues playing background, and the habits they picked up from that were incorporated into their classical playing. On the other hand, those who do not embellish have no experience in any other style of playing aside from classical. Embellishing on pieces or improvising over changes is a vital skill for a guitarist to have, so having that blues or jazz background will improve these skills, as well as one's general musicianship. Again, Gordon's theory is the most effective learning method for improving on this essential skill as well as the Dalcroze approach. Regardless of the learning method though, improvisation provides the staple for strong musicianship and should be highly regarded by all classical guitarists, which is leading me to think that the Suzuki method is particularly ineffective for guitarists.

My results also rather predictably show that it is more beneficial to learn with a teacher rather than to be entirely self-taught. Self-teaching is inevitable, but learning with the right teacher to start off with is imperative as they can cater their teaching to fit around your goals as a musician. The people of my survey who claimed to be self taught later went on to discuss their regret for not receiving tuition in the earlier stages of practice. One member of the classical guitar forum shared his personal experience by going on to say "I believe I would be a much better player if I'd had instruction. When you are self taught you keep reinventing the wheel. You "discover" things after trial and error that could have been taught in a lesson" (Bear, 2016). This particular viewpoint is stressed highly by Suzuki teachers, as the British Suzuki institute quotes; *"The Suzuki Teacher is not merely able to play an instrument, they have been trained to TEACH. Teachers learn and are expected to perform the Suzuki repertoire as well as a number of other pieces. They are also taught in such areas as child development and psychology and dealing with learning difficulties"* (Britishsuzuki.org.uk, 2016).

A big part of classical guitar playing is learning pieces of music by notational direction. What this paper was aiming to find out in the results section was whether it is best to listen to the piece of music you are trying to play before attempting it. The majority of the public responded by saying that they always listen to a recording first, however a large number also claimed that they just play

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The interviews that I held with the professionals and the survey responses formed the definitive conclusion for this paper. Each learning approach has different elements to them that can prove beneficial when learning classical guitar, however the one that provides the most useful would be Gordon's theory of audiation. His approach along with the Suzuki method both have the most valuable applications for learning guitar, however the stress that Gordon's theory puts on improvisation was the ultimate decider. Any guitarist should strive to improvise with other musicians well, and Gordon's theory promotes this idea more than the others. From drafting my results, the Dalcroze approach was somewhat ignored in this paper, but its function should not be undermined. A lot of primary schools use the Dalcroze approach in music classes, which gets kids interested in music from an early age. This is the triggering point for them to potentially take up classical guitar. Dalcroze's method of moving to music is not directly effective for classical guitar learning though, which is why his approach was dismissed.

The most useful point that I took from the Suzuki method is creating a positive and nurturing learning environment. If you are starting to learn at a young age then parental involvement can really help the learning process. The idea that we learn language the same way we learn language is the most beneficial though. This is the method that Gordon's theory is structured around, as well as parts of the Suzuki method. Learning tunes by ear before starting to read is highly effective for learning guitar, so other genres such as blues and jazz would benefit any classical guitar player. Becoming classically trained by the Suzuki method may appeal to aspiring classical musicians, however this way we are not learning about general musicianship. Gordon's theory of audiation teaches musicianship and musical understanding, which is what every classical guitar player should strive for. This conclusion was rather surprising as I was expecting the Suzuki method to be the most beneficial and popularly used amongst classical guitarists, however few people had even heard of it.

Which might sound a little surprising at first, but was actually something the researchers expected to find, as continued motor learning after a period of sleep is a phenomenon that has been observed in other studies.

### **Different rates of learning**

Though both groups improved during the practice session, they did not improve at the same rate. The students who heard the recording started out with an average accuracy score of 52.18 and over the course of the practice session improved to an average score of 99.96 (a **92%** improvement). The group which was not given a recording to listen to started out at about the same level of accuracy – 48.71 – but only improved to an average score of 84.16 (a gain of only **73%**).

### **Different levels of performance**

Not only did the groups differ in terms of the rapidity of their learning, but the two groups achieved different levels of performance too. The group which heard the recording continued to improve overnight (again, despite not practicing any further), and ended with an average final accuracy score of **108.75** at the next morning's test (an improvement of **9%** over the previous evening's performance). The no-listening group improved a wee bit too, but only by **4%**, finishing with a final accuracy score of **87.24**.

What do you think?

At first glance, the results of the study seem pretty clear, but it's hard to say from the results what's best in the long term. In the short term, yes, it seems that having an auditory model can accelerate our progress in the early going and help us get to a higher level of performance quicker. But does this lock us into a particular way of playing a piece too soon? And make it more difficult to develop our own interpretation of a piece? Or is this more of a concern for advanced players than it is for beginners?

What have you found in your own learning or teaching? Do you find it useful to listen to recordings before looking at the score? Or find it more valuable in the long run to start from the score with no auditory model?

## Appendix Material 5

### Interview with Frances Turnbull

#### **1. Could you tell me a little bit about the Dalcroze method and its applications?**

Dalcroze is known as an approach because it is not a systematic methodology - every teacher teaches slightly differently. It involves 3 integrated strands: movement training (rhythmics), ear training (solfege) and improvisation. Its initial application was in honing the performance of adult instrumentalists in conservatoires, and child training was developed later. As the piano was Dalcroze's instrument of choice, there is a greater emphasis on the ability to improvise using it, but I have known improvisers on guitar, flute, cello, violin, vocal and piano accordion teaching.

#### **2. While the Dalcroze method is great for getting children actively involved with music, how can it benefit instrument learning, especially with an instrument as kinaesthetically restricting as the guitar?**

The emphasis on relating a physical imitation of written scores or aural performance gives a musician a deeper experience of the notation, dynamics and timing needed to play a piece clearly, accurately, and above all, expressively. For children, Dalcroze is an introduction to rhythms and other musical concepts through music games. For advanced musicians trained in Dalcroze, pieces become easier to perform because they are associated with natural movement and understanding of intervals (follows Kolb's theory of experiential learning). For guitarists, I have found countless times that referring to rhythms using movement, getting (teenage and adult) students to walk/jog/skip around a room before playing it on their guitar helps to describe a rhythm more effectively than any possible mathematical explanation. (Children who have had the opportunity to experience a year or two of rhythmic training adjust easily to more advanced rhythms.). Solfege training helps hugely with improvisation, giving a fantastic understanding to different scales (including modes, so very valuable in improv!) and how they can be used. Improv training usually involves writing for particular movements, which develops the expressiveness of the musician.

#### **3. Do you think that the Dalcroze method could be used effectively past the early stages of education? One of the most captivating and informative lectures I've had involved our tutor using eurythmics to teach time signatures and rhythmic subdivisions. It left me thinking why this method isn't as popularly used in further and higher education music institutes.**

I think Dalcroze is actually used most effectively, and most impressively, in more advanced musical concepts. Uneven and irregular time divisions was particularly eye-opening for me, so much more accessible through Dalcroze than any other explanation I've come across! My personal feel is that Dalcroze is not more popular because many teachers who train musicians don't know exactly what Dalcroze is for and can do, combined with an unsaid expectation of exclusive commitment to Dalcroze above other approaches (e.g. Kodály, Orff,