

## Book review

# Rhythmik und Autismus: Der integrative Ansatz Amélie Hoellerings in Theorie und Praxis [Rhythmics and Autism: The Integrative Approach of Amélie Hoellering in Theory and Practice] (Lucia Kessler-Kakoulidis)



Reviewed by Ludger Kowal-Summek

**Title:** Rhythmik und Autismus: Der integrative Ansatz Amélie Hoellerings in Theorie und Praxis [Rhythmics and Autism: The integrative approach of Amélie Hoellering in Theory and Practice] | **Author:** Lucia Kessler-Kakoulidis | **Year:** 2016 | **Publisher:** Psychosozial-Verlag | **Pages:** 319 | **ISBN:** 978-3-8379-2571-5

**Ludger Kowal-Summek** (b.1956) has university degrees in education (Dortmund) and music education (Wuppertal/Köln), a PhD and is a music therapist. Since 1984, he has worked with children who have special needs (with autism) at the Clara-Schumann Music School in Düsseldorf. He also teaches at the Robert-Schumann College of Music (since 1996) and lectures at the University of Cologne at the Institute of Music (since 2004). Kowal-Summek has published several books on different themes in education, music education and music therapy, most recently *Musiktherapie und Autismus: Zur Anwendung ausgewählter Methoden der Leiborientierten Musiktherapie* (Springer, 2016). He presents regularly on educational and music educational topics at home and abroad.

**Email:** [LKowalSummek@web.de](mailto:LKowalSummek@web.de)

The subject of this book is the approach to Rhythmics of Amélie Hoellering, a former student of the great Rhythmics teacher Elfriede Feudel, who herself studied and collaborated with Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) was a famous music teacher, composer and conductor at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the creator of what would become known in anglophone cultures as Dalcroze Eurhythmics. His ideas about rhythm developed in relation to what was happening at the same time in music, education, psychology and politics. Both Feudel and Hoellering are important in understanding the development of music therapy, and a therapeutically sensitive music pedagogy, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An overview of the book's contents is a useful place to start. The first two chapters deal with the biography of Jaques-Dalcroze and the basic elements of rhythm. The third is about the significance of rhythm in music pedagogy and music therapy. The subject matter of chapter four is the life and work of Amélie Hoellering. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the application of Hoellering's special approach in an intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) devised by the author.

Jaques-Dalcroze's ideas about rhythm involved more than only the movement of a body; he saw a connection between what happened inside the body (emotion) and the movement of the body. He was not only interested in the intellectual

understanding of music, but also the subjective, emotional and physiological effects on those who moved whilst listening to music. Ultimately, he focused on the connections between music, body movement and emotional experience. According to Jaques-Dalcroze, in order to understand and learn music one has to involve body movement; the interaction between music and movement is essential. In his view, rhythm is also the beginning of all life, working on conscious and subconscious levels, and because of this Jaques-Dalcroze claimed a central place for it in every kind of education, especially in an education based on Rhythmics [Rhythmisch-musikalische Erziehung] and music education [Musikpädagogik] (pp. 119-120).

From the beginning, Jaques-Dalcroze's thoughts were influenced by broader pedagogical, special pedagogical and psychiatric thinking about music. In 1909, after working for eighteen years in Switzerland, he moved to Germany and in 1911 founded the educational establishment Bildungsanstalt Jaques-Dalcroze in 'Gartenstadt Hellerau', near Dresden. It promised to be part of a new educational reform, but ended three years later in 1914, due to the First World War.

Examining the Dalcroze method reveals several basic elements apart from music and rhythm. For example: movement and body awareness; voice, speech and vision; play; the use of materials and instruments; and – last but not least – improvisation. In this substantial book, Kessler-Kakoulidis, a Rhythmics teacher focusing on therapy for young children and adults with autism, gives a sophisticated account of the elements of voice, speech and vision. These three elements are very important in human communication, for conveying information and expressing emotions and are therefore very important in structuring pedagogical and therapeutic situations. It is with precisely these elements that many people with autism experience difficulties.

Kessler-Kakoulidis discusses these three elements in detail. First, she shows the importance of the human voice as the most intimate, expressive and sensitive instrument of our body, and the primary means of expression in our life. Yet, she also demonstrates the connection between the voice and music as a part of nonverbal communication in general. The relationship of voice to emotion and the possibility of modulating the voice in connection with facial expression are a means of communication between one person and another and play a very important role in Kessler-Kakoulidis's own pedagogical and therapeutic work with people with autism.

Another important point is speech, which, like music, articulates itself through modulation, intonation, speed, rhythm and melody (Sacks 2013). Speech and music are verbal and nonverbal means of communication and both have the same phylogenetic roots. For most human beings, speech is the most important way to communicate and it seems that there is nothing that cannot be expressed with words. Speech is also very important for developing self-confidence. Due to their shared roots, music is very effective in supporting the development of speech, especially for children and adults with autism. It is to the reader's benefit and the author's credit that she explains these connections in a sophisticated way (pp. 80-81).

The third important element is vision and eye contact. Through eye contact one can: feel emotions like sympathy, antipathy, interest, fear and shame; express these emotions nonverbally; and send and receive social signals. Eye contact is very important in human communication. But for children and adults with autism it can be very difficult to make eye contact. Rhythm and music can change this for a while and the author shows the reader how (p. 87, pp. 90-91).

The third chapter discusses the meaning of rhythm in (music-) pedagogy, special (music-) education and (music-) therapy. It is very important to note that the Dalcroze method originated as a response not only to the needs of those in mainstream education, but also those with special educational, or additional support, needs (pp. 119-120). Kessler-Kakoulidis describes the beginnings of music therapy, looking at different approaches and definitions, before discussing definitions of rhythm, its place in the intersection between music pedagogy and music therapy, and the meaning of rhythm in the origins of special education.

The fourth chapter introduces the author's former teacher Amélie Hoellering (1920-1995), who taught at the Richard-Strauß-Konservatorium in Munich from 1973-1979, where Kessler-Kakoulidis met her. During the years prior to this, Hoellering developed a special approach that Kessler-Kakoulidis describes as an integrative one. Consequently, Hoellering not only taught using the Dalcroze method, but also underlined it with her knowledge of depth psychology, arriving at a more profound approach to teaching. This led her to take account of the development of each individual she worked with, whether child, adult or student, irrespective of working with a single person or a group. Hoellering's idea of humankind was a holistic one. In the end, she enlarged the Dalcroze approach as well as Feudel's approach to teaching

and learning. Over more than 40 pages Kessler-Kakoulidis describes in impressive detail Hoellering's integrative approach.

What becomes clear is that Hoellering saw in her rhythmic approach a complement to psychotherapeutic treatment. However, before Hoellering's Rhythmics students were able to work in inclusive or therapeutic settings, they had to take a relevant training in order to develop appropriate professional attitudes to those with whom they worked. For example, it is very important for working with people with autism to create a 'safe place', a place where there is no force, where they can be by themselves and regulate communication in their own way (pp. 197-199). In the end, one has to create a 'feel-good atmosphere', which is as important in therapy as it is in every pedagogical situation. Such notions bring the work near to humanistic psychology (pp. 196-201).

The fifth chapter describes the transfer of Hoellering's approach into practice. Kessler-Kakoulidis has worked for nearly 30 years with children and adults with autism. First she describes her understanding of autism, including the relationships between autism and music, autism and movement, autism and play, and autism and social learning. She not only shows how to employ Hoellering's approach in therapy with an autistic child (pp. 250-261), but also how to use it to integrate autistic children into a group of mixed children (pp. 261-273). The first example is therapeutically focused, the second pedagogical. It becomes apparent that Kessler-Kakoulidis is a person, teacher and therapist, who is able to work respectfully with individuals as well as with groups, transforming Hoellering's theoretical approach in many different ways.

This highly interesting and beautifully written book will be very important for those wanting to learn about the Dalcroze method and its development over the years. It will also be essential reading for those wishing to understand Amélie Hoellering's special pedagogical and therapeutic approach and to see examples of her work with children and adults with different forms of autism. Finally, this book is also a missing link in the history of the Dalcroze method. As part of the research process, Kessler-Kakoulidis met Hoellering's daughter Franziska Hoellering, who provided new information not only about her mother's theoretical thoughts, but also her political opinions and their influence on her approach.

The author herself was a student of Amélie Hoellering in Munich, graduating with a specialism

in Rhythmic Therapy. As such, the book is the fruit of her personal interest not only in demonstrating the development of Dalcroze Eurhythmics as a therapeutic practice, but also the merits of Amélie Hoellering's special approach to work with children with special needs, especially those with autism. It would be very worthwhile to translate this well-structured and thoroughly researched book (with a very good index and numerous black-and-white photos) into English, so that it is accessible to those who teach and research into this method, and those who use Dalcroze Eurhythmics, or music and movement more broadly, in special pedagogical and therapeutic contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Sacks, O. (2013) *Der einarmige Pianist: Über Musik und das Gehirn* [Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain]. Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag

---

### Suggested citation:

- Kowal-Summek, L. (2016). Book review: "Rhythmik und Autismus: Der integrative Ansatz Amélie Hoellering's in Theorie und Praxis [Rhythmics and Autism: The integrative approach of Amélie Hoellering in Theory and Practice] (Lucia Kessler-Kakoulidis). *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy, Special Issue 8(2)*, 213-215.