The purpose of the study was to evaluate how much conductors apply movement methods to conducting and the effect movement methods have on music- and musician-related functions of conducting. Conductors (n=84) applied acting, dance, Dalcroze Eurythmics, Alexander Technique, Body Mapping, mime, kinesics, Feldenkrais, and Laban with decreasing frequency. Only certain methods were shown to help conductors balance mechanical and expressive characteristics of music with motivational, physical technique, tone-tension, and psychosocial needs of musicians. The key suggestion is that multiple conducting functions and movement methods should be taught to prepare students for the fuller demands of a career in music education.

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Investigation of the Effects of Movement Methods on Functions of Conducting

Consistently, research of conducting aims to find a way to teach conductors to be more expressive rather than mechanical. The search for ways to teach expressive conducting has led researchers to sort through various movement methods and approaches. Examined so far in this search are Dalcroze Eurythmics (Baker, 1992; Dickson, 1992), Laban movement analysis (Chapman, 2008; Gambetta, 2005; Holt, 1992; Neidlinger, 2003; Plaag, 2006), kinesic nonverbal communication (Chapman, 2008; Krudop, 2003; Mathers, 2009), mime (Chapman, 2008), and theater-acting exercises (Chapman, 2008; Baker, 1992; Running, 2008). However, other possible movement methods have yet to be investigated. These include dance, Feldenkrais (1972), and Alexander Technique and Body Mapping (Conable & Conable, 2000; Fried, 2001).

Research has only begun to examine the extent to which movement methods are applied by conducting teachers or conductors in the field. In a survey of 53 conducting pedagogues, Chapman (2008) found that 34% applied Laban, 38% applied kinesics, and 40% applied mime in teaching conducting. This direction in research needs to expand to include a more representative sample of conducting teachers and practitioners, as well as a more comprehensive collection of movement methods. Research has yet to investigate the comparative effectiveness of different movement methods on conducting. Such comparisons are needed before reliable and valid suggestions can be offered concerning how to teach conducting more effectively.

A key problem in these research trends is the assumption that expressive conducting is the only way to improve conducting skills beyond basic mechanical precision. Recent research not only confirms conducting functions of Mechanical Precision and Expressive, which both reflect characteristics of the music, but reveals four additional functions used by conductors to connect with the musicians who perform the music (Gumm, Battersby, Simon, & Shankles, 2011). Conductors were shown to draw on (a) a Motivational function to heighten musicians’ mental and visual connection with the conductor, (b) a Physical Technique function to guide the motion and strength of musicians’ performance efforts, (c) an Unrestrained Tone function to ease tension and release control of tone and tempo over to musicians, and (d) a Psychosocial function through which conductors choose gestures interactively based on musicians’ ideas and common experiences. The six conducting functions imply unique effects of conducting that should be addressed in determining which movement methods would be most effective. In this sense, the choice of which movement method is most effective would depend on which effect the conductor is interested in—musical precision or expression, or musician attentiveness, coordinated motion and effort, free release of tone, or collaborative interplay.

The purposes of the present study were to (a) evaluate the extent to which conductors apply movement methods toward their conducting and (b) investigate relationships between movement methods and functions of conducting. Assuming causal-comparative relationships between movement methods applied in the past and current conducting priorities, the general goal was to suggest which methods may have an effect on each conducting function.

METHOD

The present study represents a second stage of research drawing upon the same sample of conductors through which six functions of conducting were distinguished (Gumm, Battersby, Simon, & Shankles, 2011). A sample of volunteer participants (N=84) was drawn through university sites in three different U.S. regions, and included faculty and student conductors within each university music program as well as music teachers in surrounding communities. The sample was representative of a wide range of experience levels and areas of conducting, with an average of 10 years of experience.
Participants were asked to indicate each movement method they applied toward their conducting. Choices were Dance, Acting, Mime, Eurythmics, Laban, Body-Mapping, Alexander, Feldenkrais, and Kinesics, with a fill-in-the-blank “Other” item included for participants to specify movement methods not listed. A conducting priorities survey administered to the sample for purposes of the first stage of the research (Gumm, Battersby, Simon, & Shankles, 2011) was used to calculate conductors’ use of conducting functions. In the survey, participants indicated their frequency of use of conducting gestures on five-point scales of “Never” to “Always.” Conductors’ use of conducting functions was calculated by summing the seven survey items found to be most representative of Mechanical Precision, Expressive, Motivational, Physical Technique, Unrestrained Tone, and Psychosocial functions in the previous study.

To evaluate the extent to which conductors apply movement methods toward their conducting, frequencies were calculated for each method listed as well as for the total number of methods applied by conductors. To address the second purpose of the study, investigating the relationships between movement methods and functions of conducting, correlations between movement methods and conducting functions were computed. In addition to identifying simple correlations, multiple regression was used to control for the redundant influence of interrelated independent variables with beta weights serving as an indication of the direction and relative size of relationship. Backward elimination was used to determine the set of variables significantly related to each conducting function rather than identifying significantly related variables separately one at a time with forward regression.

RESULTS

Frequency results indicated that acting and dance were applied by the largest number of participants, while Feldenkrais and Laban were applied by the least (see Table 1). Other methods written in by participants were “Delsarte structural acting system,” “yoga,” “Curwen hand signs,” and “grounding” at a frequency of one each. As to the number of movement methods applied by participants (see Table 2), 21 indicated no movement method compared to 63 who marked one to six movement methods applied towards their conducting.

Univariate correlations and multivariate regression analysis beta weights (see Table 1) point out significant but modest-sized relations between movement methods and conducting functions. Kinesics, Feldenkrais, and
DISCUSSION

The first purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which conductors apply movement methods toward their conducting. According to results, most conductors apply at least some type of movement method in learning to conduct, and many apply several methods. Comparing present results with past research, mime, kinesics, and Laban were shown to be applied on about the same balance as found by Chapman (2008) with conducting pedagogues, and yet the relatively low application of Laban movement analysis in both studies contrasts with the prominent level of attention the Laban method has received in the research (Gambetta, 2005; Holt, 1992; Neidlinger, 2003; Plaag, 2006). Acting and Dalcroze Eurythmics ranked about as prominently as explored in research (Baker, 1992; Chapman, 2008; Dickson, 1992; Running, 2008), whereas dance ranked second most frequent in the present study but was not previously researched as a method for learning to conduct. Overall, differences between present results and previous research point out that movement methods prominently studied in the past for their effectiveness did not show to be used so prominently in the field or to be effective as previously suggested, and that movement methods ignored in previous research are used prominently by conductors to good effect. These differences point out new avenues for future research of the use of movement methods as conducting pedagogy.

The second purpose of the present study was to distinguish functional differences in conductors by their movement method training. Assuming causal-comparative relationships in the results, implications are that: dance helps conductors motivate, free up tension in the tone of, and psychosocially collaborate with musicians; acting influences a physical technique approach to conducting; Eurythmics and Alexander Technique help conductors respond to tension and other restraints of tone; and Feldenkrais helps conductors both mechanically and motivationally in their conducting. The most broadly effective individual methods seem to be dance and Alexander Technique, neither of which have been investigated in research of conducting prior to the present study.

In this study, the effect of movement methods is shown to go beyond the stated aim of previous research, which is to help conductors become more expressive. Functions other than expression may benefit most from the use of movement methods in conducting instruction. Results suggest that what researchers and conductors view as one intent—expression—is instead a combination of functions that tap into musicians’ mental attention, physical output, release of emotional and physical restraint, and social interplay. The six-function theory of conducting seems to offer viable new directions in the study of conducting and the nature of expression in music ensemble rehearsal and performance.

The broader implication of this study is that combinations of acting, dance, kinesics, Feldenkrais, Alexander, and Dalcroze—rather than any single method—would appear to be most beneficial to the development of conducting. Combining a variety of movement methods seems to lead conductors to look beyond the musical score and connect with musicians in the ensemble. This is important for any conductor, but is especially vital for music educators in managing classroom behavior. The implication for conducting instructors is to incorporate movement methods in teaching conducting, especially for music education majors and foremost to incorporate several movement methods in the teaching of conducting. As an alternative, music teacher educators could supplement basic conducting instruction by addressing conducting functions that impact music teachers, such as how to motivate, physically invigorate, ease tension, and share collaboratively through the art of conducting. Results demonstrate how important it is for music teacher education programs to offer movement method courses and/or to include movement training as a significant part of methods courses. Whether in conducting, music education, or separate movement courses, each application of movement methods to conducting should take into account the greater variety of functions that may be impacted by such efforts.

As this study relied on 84 volunteers from three regions of the U.S., future research is suggested to corroborate the findings and implications of
the present study. As additional movement methods and theories are investigated in research of conducting—such as yoga or Delsarte structural acting system as suggested by participants in this study—it is important to determine the specific function being met in order to evaluate their effectiveness against other methods that associate with the same functions.

A final implication is that the present study brings the profession to a point of seeing beyond movement methods as standalone theories or approaches. Each movement method has its unique purpose and benefit, so it stands to reason that no single method should suffice either in teaching children music or in helping conductors function more effectively in the classroom or ensemble. It is clear that an eclectic approach, one that recognizes and applies the unique purpose and benefit of a variety of movement methods, helps conductors to communicate in broader and deeper ways with music ensembles.

REFERENCES


