

THE KODÁLY METHOD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Sharon LIERSE¹

Abstract: *Music methodologies provide educators with a defined curriculum which transpires students to a level of musical proficiency. They are often designed for young children and can be adapted to different cultures. The Kodály Method was developed in Hungary during the 1940s and is based on the premise that children should acquire music skills from an early age. It was first used in Hungarian schools and subsequently has been used in training institutions around the world. Since the implementation of the Kodály Method there have been many social, economic and political developments which have impacted arts and education. A group of music educators visited the Zoltán Kodály Pedagogical Institute of Music in Kecskemét and the Kodály School to observe the method in a twenty-first century context. The Kodály School was a testament of an enduring and successful music method. Current research has attributed the success to the quality of teaching, commitment of the school and community and the quantity tuition. For the Kodály Method to continue and flourish quality training, support and commitment is required from the school and the community.*

Keywords: *Kodály Method, music, education, self-determination theory.*

1. Introduction

Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967), a Hungarian composer and music educationalist studied music at the Franz Liszt Academy as well as taking a degree in languages and a Doctor of Philosophy in linguistics. He promoted Hungarian music through collecting and publishing Hungarian folk melodies with his contemporary Béla Bartók (1911-1945).

Kodály was focused on the education of the masses and his philosophy was based on the premise that music belonged to the people. He believed that everyone has musical aptitude and education should begin as early as possible, preferably first

at home then at school. The Kodály Method is a child centred approach where they learn their mother tongue through song which according to Kodály was the foundation of all music education. The music should be of the highest quality in order to nurture an aesthetic appreciation for fine music. It uses a structured sequential curriculum exemplified through folk music and quality Western art music. He used the solfa and movable doh system which was first developed by John Curwen (1816-1880) in England. The Kodály Method was first introduced to the Hungarian school curriculum in 1943 and became general school practice two years later. In 1964, the International Society of

¹ University of Melbourne.

Music Education conference in Budapest helped to further promote the *the method on an* international platform. As a result, the Kodály Method it was applied to other countries through using folk tunes and melodies the children of the region were familiar with. As Boughen (1990) discussed “If the Kodály system is to be used as Kodály designed it, the teacher would have to use musical material from the background of the children or culture with whom they are working” (p.20). The appeal of the Kodály Method was the well planned out structure of the materials and the success of students.

2. The Kodály Method in the Twenty-First Century

In January 2010, a group of music educators from Australia and Singapore visited music institutes in Europe to observe methodologies in their original settings. This included a week at the Zoltán Kodály Pedagogical Institute of Music in Kecskemét, Hungary where an intensive course in the Kodály Method was completed. Classes at the Institute included musicianship, methodology, lectures and observation of class music lessons at the Kodály School.

The Kodály School is a local school for children from the ages of approximately five to seventeen with a specialization on music education. The school has an active Kodály program and nine choirs which have made commercial recordings, toured and have won many international choral competitions. In primary/elementary school students have a forty five minute music lesson in class each day. From years six to eight, music is an elective where students focus on a particular genre. Instrumental music lessons are also offered at the school once the student has reached

a level of musical aptitude, usually from the age of around nine. The students receive two instrumental lessons a week of thirty minutes duration in addition to the classroom music program. The Kodály School has an active and highly successful curricular and co-curricular music program based on the Kodály Method.

Since the introduction of the Kodály Method, there have been many social, political and economic changes in Hungary and around the world which have impacted education and the arts. From what was observed, the Kodály Method was still used at the Kodály School largely in its original format. The music teachers observed were Hungarians, had grown up with the Kodály Method in which some had learnt from Kodály himself. These first and second generation teachers were passing on the tradition and culture of the Kodály Method.

The concerns prior to the visit was that the Kodály Method would be deemed old fashioned and would not appeal to the students. Artistic tastes and educational trends have rapidly changed which has impacted the place of music in the school curriculum.

Advocating music in schools has been an ongoing issue due to curriculum demands and funding pressures. Consequently music in many schools is catered to appeal to the current tastes of the students. It was refreshing to experience a music curriculum in which the focus was in teaching high level skills and folk and Western art music. The Kodály School displayed how exposing children to the highest quality of education and culture results in a high level of musical ability.

The Kodály School was a testament of an enduring and successful music method. In the future, this may change if the influence of popular culture and

information technology alters the students' attitude towards the Kodály Method. Moreover, if education boards decide to cutback music in the curriculum, the quality of these programs may be adversely affected.

3. Success of the Program

The success of music in the Kodály School was due to the quality and commitment of the Kodály Method. Each class music lesson was structured and focussed on learning a new skill. Activities changed regularly from singing, learning hand signs, rhythmic exercises, note reading, individual, small group, class exercises and revision to reinforce the musical elements.

The quantity of tuition was also a large factor in the success of the program. Students at the Kodály School who complete the compulsory class program and learn a musical instrument receive over one thousand hours of music tuition by the time they are in year nine. This does not include practise at home or co-curricular choir rehearsals. It is of little surprise that the students were highly skilled and competent musicians.

Another important factor was the supportive environment by the school, teachers and the other students. The school made music part of the curriculum supported the co-curricular music program. The school hall was equipped with a grand piano and accommodated the students for choral rehearsals. The music classrooms each had a piano and a sound system. Lierse (2005) attributed the success of music programs in schools to many factors which included the support of personnel, policy and facilities.

4. The Kodály Method and Musical Talent

Current research in music and education is investigating why some students achieve an elite level in a particular field and what elements are required for this to occur. The evidence has shown that it is the number of hours of deliberate quality practice completed and the determination of the student to achieve. (Colvin, 2008; Coyle, 2009) Natural ability or talent was found to be a very small factor. Gladwell (2008) in *Outliers: The Story of Success* discusses how experts in a diversity of fields including Bill Gates, the Beatles, hockey players and classical musicians require ten thousand hours of deliberate practice to reach an expert level. Parncutt, R. and McPherson G. (2002) have researched musical ability and talent and McPherson (2006) has investigated the child as musician. Zimmerman and Schunk (1994) and Deci and Ryan (2002) have investigated self-determination research in relation to motivation to acquiring a skill. What has been consistent in the research is the number of dedicated hours required in the appropriate positive environment.

At the Kodály School, the students who had already received one thousand hours of tuition by year nine were well on their way to reaching a high level of ability. Musical ability or talent was in the prime environment to be nurtured.

5. Conclusion

The Kodály Method has endured for over half a century amongst political, cultural and social cultural changes. This can be attributed to the commitment of the Kodály Method in schools and the community, the proven success of the method and current *evidence which displays how many hours*

of deliberate practice results in expertise in a particular skill. For the Kodály Method to continue and flourish quality training, support and commitment is required from the school and the community.

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