

Theses of PhD dissertation

Zsuzsanna Hunyadi

**PEDAGOGICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PIANO METHOD BOOKS
WITH SPECIAL REGARDS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC SKILLS**

Eszterházy Károly University Doctoral School of Education

Supervisors: Dr. habil. Mihály Duffek,

Prof. Dr. Béla Pukánszky

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1. On the choice of the topic

The first two or three years in studying the use of musical instruments is crucial in the formation of one's future attitude toward music. The particular course in which a child is taught and the goals set by the teacher during this period can shape his/her relationship to music for a lifetime. In the earliest stages of music skill acquisition the so called "piano method books" (*zongoraiskola*) are used as an aid for students. With piano lessons becoming widely accessible by the many, the epicentre of music education shifted from the musically gifted students and are now open to students with average music abilities, too. With that in mind, the quality of the pedagogical approach and teaching tools chosen – including methodological books – have a significant impact on the lives of students, piano teachers, and parents. Thus, an examination and comparison of the developmental strategies found in various piano method books is a key issue. The results of this exploratory research based on a comparative analysis of six different Hungarian piano method books may bear potentially significant implications for a wider, international perspective. Moreover, the selected analytical criteria used in above said research may offer a basis for further research on piano method books and the pedagogical styles they represent.

2. Literary review of the topic

Our research on the role and historical background of the piano school method books is based heavily on the findings of Szabolcsi and Tóth (1965). Szávai (1976), and Veszprémi (1976). The literary review of the related field also relies on the works of Pukánszky (1978) and Duffek (2015). Regarding the definition of skill development we consider the markers founded by Ida Horváth Zakárné (2003) to be the most influential and authoritative. In addition to the previously mentioned work we also regard the relevant articles of the Pedagogical Lexicon –edited by Sándor Nagy (1977), to be of utmost importance and relevance regarding our research. The historical background of the piano school method books is based on the article of László Vikárius (2015). The characteristics of modern piano school method books were outlined with the use of Erna Czövek's notions (1963), moreover, the viewpoints to be considered during our research were formulated using the 2011th edition of Piano School Method Books. In the chapter regarding the development of productive skills the following sources were cited in reference to the importance of motivating productivity: Bali (2013), Kratus (1991),

Philipp (1984), Gát (1964), the National Jazz Camp's Workshop on music education (1986), Márkus (2001). In the same chapter when defining the levels of improvisation the definitions of Taylor (1960; quoted by Gyarmathy 2011) were adopted, whereas in the case of improvisations with musical instruments the article written by Kratus (1991) was used as a basis. We analysed the tasks of improvising and composing by relying on the publications of Tusa (1989), Gonda (1996), Cornick (1999), and Bali (2013). The aims of a creativity-based music education were summarised by citing the article of Kratus (1990). A successful adaptation of a creativity-based music education can be seen in the Québec Education Program (2017). An outstanding example of an improvisation-based study of piano usage is the life and work of György Cziffra (1983). A development of the notion of an existing relationship between creating music and its assessment has taken place on the basis of the publications of Cabedo-Mas & Díaz-Gómez (2013), Major (2008) and Hargreaves & Marshall & North (2003).

3. On the research

The aim of the current research is to study piano school method books: their applied methods, the tasks used in order to develop specific skills, while also examining the underlying differences between each piano school method book. Therefore, it can be considered a document analysis. The research inquires into the methods applied by piano school method books and their likely relationship with the current methodological, educational approach. In this sense, it is an exploratory endeavour as well.

The scope of the research

The study strives to establish a possible system of criteria for the analysis of piano school method books, while at the same time it aims to present the fundamental methodological variations regarding skills development. The further scope of the current study is to identify the possible good methods and equipment used by piano teachers in the first years of piano education to increase the success of their students and what are the likely obstacles in achieving said success. In addition, we sought to point out whether certain methodological practices and processes were implemented within their educational framework. As a result of our study we have established a list of criteria regarding skills' development which can be further adapted and used in any future publication of the field. It is

our firm intention that the research findings be applied in the daily practice of piano education; to enhance the choice of future sheets of music and also their usage while also offering the teacher new methods to apply to fit the individual needs of their students.

The parameters of the research

Based on our previous examination we have established eleven separate areas of skills that both characterise and overlap the study of both piano music and the initial phase of the regarding study of music. During preliminary studies for the present project, eleven categories of characteristic skill/talent development were defined covering the intrinsic elements of elementary piano pedagogy and the corresponding process of early music education.

The present research is based on the following analytical perspectives:

1. The order of musical pitches and presentation of rudiments
2. Orientation on the keyboard
3. Rhythmic competence
4. Technical skills
5. Musical literacy
6. Performance capacity
7. Creative talent/proficiency
8. Musical sensibility and understanding of musical forms
9. Ability to cooperate and participate in group activities
10. Ability to work independently
11. Transpositional facility

We have matched the eleven criteria used during the analysis to the piano schedule of music preschools' 1st and 2nd grade, as well as the 1st and 2nd grade of the primary level.

Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses in question are related to the eleven criteria used during the analysis. It was our assumption that the skill-development's analysis will reflect on any likely difference present between piano school method books regarding each criteria.

The role of developing creativity and its importance

The current research regards the process of developing creativity as a crucial problem of music education and as a result, puts great emphasis on the issue. Among the goals of the current study, the author sought to inquire into the importance and possibilities of creativity for the usage of a primary-level music education. For this purpose, the theoretical section of this study discusses the findings of the literature related to music creation, it dissects the possibility of integrating music creation into the process of music education while it also touches upon the topic of the relationship existing between music creation and that of music-comprehension. As for the practical section of the educational process it both presents and analyses the publications related to the issue.

4. Findings of the comparative analysis

Piano Method Books Examined in the Present Study

1. Apagyí, Mária. *Zongorálom – Kreatív zongoratanulás* [Piano Dream – Creative Piano Study] Vols. I-II. Responsible ed. Attila Garamvölgyi. (Pécs: Duplex Rota, 2008)
2. Aszalós, Tünde. *A zongorázó gyermek: kezdők zongoraiskolája* [Child Playing the Piano: Music Book for Beginners], Vols. I-II. (Budapest: Aszalós, Tünde, 1992)
3. Czövek, Erna. *Zongoraiskola I.* [Piano Method, Volume I]. Participating ed. László Dobszay. (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1966)
4. Hunyadi, Zsuzsanna. *A zeneértés alapjai – Zongoraiskola* [The Basics of Understanding Music – Piano Method] Vols. I-II. (Budapest: Aposztróf Kiadó, 2010-11)

5. Papp, Lajos. *Zongora ABC* [The ABC's of the Piano], Vols. I-II. (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1995)
6. *Zongoraiskola I. kezdőknek* [Piano Method for Beginners, Volume I]. Ed. Fantóné Kassai, Mária; Lajosné Hernádi; Aladárné Komjáthy; Kató Vásárhelyiné Inselt; Miklósné Máthé (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1966). Referred to in this study as the “Komjáthy piano method”

This comparative analysis reveals significant differences between the selected piano method books in all eleven of the analytical perspectives.

For further studying the present pedagogical diversity, it would be worthwhile to juxtapose these findings with the viewpoints of piano teachers, examining the nature and origins of the problems in today's music schools and the relevance of the specific methodological approaches in light of the teachers' practical experience.

5. The empiric research

The most effective research method regarding the earlier mentioned issues is examining the viewpoints of piano teachers related to certain questions. Experience proves that surveys are able to reach the highest number of informants, so we have assembled a questionnaire for music teachers in order to obtain the most information about the teaching practice of piano teachers in music schools. Through said survey we touched upon topics that are significant and problematic in the present teaching of piano music.

The assembling of the questionnaire

The questions of the survey are based on the methodological differences uncovered by the preliminary analysis. Every analytical perspective is represented in the topics of the questions. Thirty questions address methodological issues. Informants gave their answers using a Likert-scale with seven grades to state how important they found the method in

question (1-7 not important - very important). Besides the thirty questions regarding the methods used by piano teachers, one question is related to the time spent in education, and another question about which piano method books were utilized by the teacher. We considered further demographical questions unnecessary to ask, due to the fact that music education is generally based on a unified curriculum in the country's music schools. This entails that the decade-long standing practice of music teaching is almost independent of any other circumstances, including that of the locale.

6. The results of the survey

The survey was made in printed format, as well as made into an online form using a survey maker site. It was uploaded on the Internet on the 21st of March in 2017. and the sampling process closed on the 20th of April in 2017. The questionnaire was originally made for the piano teachers of Hungarian music schools. The principals of 64 music schools have received the request in the form of an e-mail to send the forms to their piano teachers (the link to the survey and the file too). The president of the Hungarian Music Schools' Association also made the survey available on an Internet platform and requested the colleagues to fill out the survey. 108 informants filled out the surveys that were sent, of these 10 were in printed forms and came from the 13th and the 5th district's music schools of Budapest. The rest of the forms arrived online. The 108 surveys filled out is enough to represent the viewpoints of piano teachers working on an elementary level, considering the characteristics and homogeneity of the population in question. The processing of the statistical results was done by SPSS program.

Survey results

The research findings of the survey in question uncovered noteworthy results: it displays significant differences among the applied methodological theories and materials and equipment used by music teachers and the reputation of the above described objects.

7. Conclusion and suggestions

New scientific outcomes

Due to the research and its findings, now we have a clear picture of the viewpoints of Hungarian piano teachers regarding both piano method books and their applied methodology. As a result of the research it has also been uncovered that there are major and relevant differences between techniques of talent development. As a further result of the research, there is also a system of educational standards, which could be applied – and can be applied in future research - during comparative analysis of the teaching methods involving piano method books.

The implications of the research, its future implementations

As a result of our research we can declare that the uncovered methodological differences, the thorough examination of piano method books can aid piano teachers in their future choice of sheets of music as well as other materials and resources used in the process of music teaching. Bearing that in mind, teachers can now find materials that suit their students' individual needs more easily than before, which leads to a more flexible teaching approach. The role of improvising in the teaching of music both in the domestic and the international journals is now processed and can be accessed more easily. The same can be said about the national and international trends regarding the field of research. Bearing all that in mind, the piano teachers now have a greater access to a wider spectrum of information and methods to be used than before, which leaves more room for them to tailor the material to their students' needs.

Conclusion

The research at hand set out to inquire into the methods of skill development in Hungarian piano method books, while also touching upon the issue of those being in the focus – piano teachers – and their viewpoints. The thesis also analysed and presented both the domestic and international research related to the issue of children's improvisation skills. In addition, this research material was assessed and interpreted in order to make it adoptable to the local music education. The research also made it possible to establish a list of standards that can be used as a foundation for any further study and research related to piano method books. The research has likely contributed to gaining a better understanding of piano teachers' views and way of thinking. The research has confirmed either partially or completely our preliminary hypothesis and gave us a chance to categorise both the hypothetical and the practical aspect's

reflections. The research has succeeded in partially uncovering the relationships and factors that influence the role of modern music and music creation in music education. Parallel to the above mentioned, those standards that could be used as stepping stones in the daily pedagogical practice were developed.

Further stages of the research

On a theoretical level the research at hand can have a fruitful role in bridging the gap between the theory and practice of music education by music creation.

The practical aspect of the present research can easily relate to the usage of creative tasks in modern music, while also making collections of light pieces of music that unite the sounds of modern music with that of improvisation skills.

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