

Thirty years in school music teacher training among different circumstances

Life and work at the Music Department of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest

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1. Introduction

One of the youngest units of Hungary's oldest university celebrates a significant anniversary: the Music Department of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) Budapest, Faculty of Humanities began its 30th educational year in September 2014. The Department was originally founded at the former Teacher Training College, the first institute that started the process of renewing school music teacher training in Hungary in 1984. The purpose of this short essay is to present the activity of the Music Department, which is an important place of the Hungarian school music teacher training for public education. However, the form of the presentation might be special as it will happen by describing the often changing structure of the Hungarian educational system. Such an interesting overview about the problems of our musical education and society may be useful for the comprehension of the special situation of teacher training in Hungary and for the achievements and difficulties of the famous teaching method. Some people, even experts of the area say that the problems of teaching need to be solved by changing its method or perhaps its whole concept and when other experts gain positions with the power to change, they do it immediately. But in Hungary the problems of classroom music teacher training might have begun at the level of the society that (after a long period of rest) started the process of continuous changes for about forty years. The current status is a result of a process, which could be both good and bad in general and may lead to a desire for a new stability either at a better or a worse position. It cannot be considered to be the result of conscious planning, for it has developed from the transfiguration of the society and it has been created by different educational policies. The Music Department was sometimes the initiator, a victim, or even a winner of these changes but the goal of the education always remained the same: "to educate talented persons who could become creative music teachers".¹

¹ G. Bodnár, *Postgraduate program 'Talent Care in the Spirit of Kodály' and the principles of teacher training at the Music Department of the ELTE University*. In: Grujić, Tamara (ed.) *Competences of Preschool Teachers in Knowledge Society*. Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda, Kikinda 2014, p. 63.

2. Constraint for alterations and constrained alterations

The Hungarian music education has been accepted worldwide for more than a half-century – that’s why it has been officially supported continuously, even in the fifties. According to the concept based on folksongs and relative solmization children have to know folk music as their ‘musical mother tongue’. (The Hungarian folk music differs totally from the world of Slavish and German songs, especially the pentatonic scales without semitones and the descending melodic line of the old-style tunes. Besides, children are able to learn them easily with the help of relative solmization – the syllables are not used in the absolute sense; the names indicated only the functional position of the notes, which is identical and relative in all keys). During the ‘Golden age’ – until approximately the middle of the eighties – music played a very important role in the primary and secondary schools where lessons existed two or three times a week, and nearly every day in some special schools profiled for music education – pupils were taught there by qualified music teachers educated usually at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest.

A great number of foreign experts visited these institutions admiring the children’s perfect knowledge of solmization or solfège and enjoying the productions of the excellent choirs. These conditions stayed constant for more than three decades; while the society began the change its condition step by step.

2.1. Good and bad crises

It may seem to be strange but the cause of the classroom music teaching fell a victim of a positive process in the life of Hungarian people. At the end of the sixties great economic and political changes started in Hungary proving necessarily useful for the living standard of the inhabitants and for the political-economic connections of the non-liberalized country. However, this good crisis caused a bad one in the system of teaching especially in the music education, and for the middle of the eighties the well-organized and good-looking music teaching method suddenly became less and less important “because of the changes in the society”, in its “way of thinking”.² For example foreign languages, mathematics (and later the computer skills) became the most important for the schools and the special subjects like ‘singing and music’ simply lost their prestige.

² G. Bodnár, *Music Teacher Training in Hungary: Problems and possible solutions*. “Training and practice / Képzés és gyakorlat” 2008/1, p. 61.

Besides, the teachers encountered more and more obstacles when they wanted to organize a journey or an appearance for the pupils, (there could be financial and social difficulties as well). A lot of musical primary and secondary schools changed their profile and the directors of the so-called ‘normal’ (which meant non-music) schools degraded singing, reducing the number of music lessons as much as they could – the society revenged itself on the earlier favorite. The new ‘enemies’, pop and rock music also appeared and they gradually gained nearly all the power in the musical life of the Hungarian youth. Unfortunately the very rigid and arrogant reaction of the so-called ‘serious musicians’ alienated the popular music fans and the cultural circle of classical and folk music became a rather isolated phenomenon.

So the problems in teacher training began only virtually on the level of public education and the general change of the society with the arts, music and the system of music teaching was the “secret source of problems”.³ That could be the turning point and also the real reason of the continuous changes started in the eighties.

3. The chain of the changes

Naturally, the experts and instructors reflected these negative processes as the students produced less and less at the entrance exam, so the universities had to reduce their requirements. They could also realize that some musical primary and secondary schools in the bigger towns worked excellently, while schools of the unfrequented regions and districts were full of singing teachers who taught children without any convenient degree. It became clear too, that there were far not enough universities or colleges in Hungary where good experts of music and methodology could instruct good singing teachers. So an alteration had to be made in the field of classroom music teacher training where the most important step was to create a new training concept. The first institute that started the process of renewing was the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest where the Music Department (founded in 1984) qualified music teachers for primary schools.⁴ The aim was to educate teachers who are able to teach music in the field of the education and – based on their preparedness as a choir conductor – lead choirs in schools, provide the tasks of music education in schools as well as able to continue their studies in the doctoral education. A few years later the training started in other towns of Hungary, located in different regions of the country.

³ G. Bodnár, *Musical education in Hungarian schools: Problems and attempts for solution with the renewing of the teacher training concept*. In: *International Conference, Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of SNUE*. Seoul National University of Education, Seoul 2006, p. 114.

⁴ G. Bodnár (ed.), *Music Department: 25 / Zenei Tanszék: 25*. Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest 2009, p. 4.

The training of choir conductors and music teachers for primary schools was combined into a single degree program, the main subject-groups were:

Conducting and choir singing; Music theory, music history, and solfège; Piano and private voice training.

The students got a curriculum especially for their development in choir conducting but it was based on a high level study of theory, singing, and piano.

The curriculum of the training program was the following:

– Group of choir conducting subjects: Choir conducting, Choir literature, Choir singing, Methodology of choir conducting, Observation of choir work, Performance practice and study-tour, Practice of conducting techniques, Study of choir practice, Diploma choir.

– Group of music theory: Classic and baroque harmony, Folk music, Modal music theory / Vocal and baroque counterpoint / Romantic and 20th century music theory, Music analysis, Music literature, Organology, Solfège.

– Group of vocal and individual instrumental training: Piano, Private voice training, Transposition and score playing (with playing figured bass), Study of vocal health.

(Of course there were also methodology subjects and Practice teaching in school.)

In the previous decades the all-time leadership and the instructors aimed at maintaining this structure and at preserving its quality despite the changes of the educational concept.

3.1. Changes caused by the labor market and the reorganization of the University

According to the reflections lots of colleagues who worked in elementary or music schools (mainly as a solfège teacher) without a certificate wanted to gain a diploma. Thus in a few years new full-time and part-time degree programs were started for these applicants and – as a result of the claim of students – specialization in piano and solfège also got into the original program.

Later on, because of the transformation of the structure of education, the Music Department – since the Teacher Training College Faculty was closed – became the part of the Faculty of Humanities and a university level training also became available for our student in five years. It was a great occasion for them to get to know the work of the human degree programs, which were in the closest connection with arts, and for the instructors (who were performing musicians at the same time) to utilize the influences of three different branches of study; the training of music teachers, artists, and human intellectuals.

3.2. Changes induced centrally

After the Millennium, the structure of education became determined by decisions coming from ‘above’. First of all, in a few years after our country became a member of the European Union, the Teacher Training Programs changed into an MA-form in Hungary in accordance with the Bologna Process.

3.2.1. Teacher training in a Master level

This type of education made the mobility of the students easier towards European universities but could cause special difficulties in the training of musicians and music teachers. For example the students could start the Master program – which was a two-year project – only after finishing the undergraduate degree program of three years and a student who wasn’t able to start an MA course could gain only a diploma nominated as ‘musical expert’. It wasn’t enough for teaching in any type of school thus a detailed and continuous market research was necessary to find a job after graduation – possibly in cultural institutes operated by the state, local councils or churches.

The aim of education of the undergraduate degree program was “to educate professionals who are able to function in musical and other cultural institutions in Europe as well possessing an adequate theoretical and practical knowledge to continue their studies at a master level.”⁵

However, the graduated school music teachers could find their job easier: the University educated exclusively school music teachers with two degrees in Budapest and its region, therefore the possibility to find work as a teacher of music and another subject (e. g. language, informatics or history of art) had a good chance.

A special difficulty of the Bologna-type project was grouping of the former four year curriculum into a 3+2 year system. In the Bachelor program students had to carry out the requirements of so-called ability subjects (e.g. Piano or Solfège) far more quickly than before, to get through to the level requested for the final exam.

But, on the other hand, those who could get into the MA program had one plus year to further improve these abilities. In this way, the curriculum of the school music teacher degree program could be the continuation and the expansion of the undergraduate degree program simultaneously.

⁵ G. Bodnár (ed.), *Music Department: 25 / Zenei Tanszék: 25*, p. 7.

Besides, the teaching and organization of the methodical subjects was transferred to the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology. That opened new perspectives for the knowledge of special pedagogical subjects on the one hand and several forms of human education on the other, but it meant a great challenge for making the curricula in general and especially for the methodology of school music teaching.

3.2.2. The ‘undivided’ educational system

The latest change happened in 2013, when the unified (or so called ‘undivided’) education system started in the Hungarian teacher training and now the students have to choose another degree program in addition to music at the beginning of their study, e.g. English or History. In this new system classroom teachers are trained for 4+1 years or 5+1 years (4+1 years for primary school and 5+1 years for secondary school teachers), where the extra year is only for practicing teaching in schools. But, as usually, the classroom music teacher training is an exception because the education time of this section is 4+1 years for both types of teachers. According to this new change the school music teacher degree program was placed into ‘category number 2’, in which students are allowed to choose other programs of this professional area (e.g. Drama and theatre, Drawing, Folk music, Media) or those belonging to the ‘category number 1’ (the so called main subjects such as English and German, Geography, History, Literature, Math, etc.). Thus – though the ELTE has the capacity for it – it’s impossible to learn a few degree programs together with music (e.g. the Latin languages). We can only hope that the problem will be solved officially in a short term.

A great advantage of the two major degree programs is that our students can learn in two professional areas at the same time for five years and that would be useful for them to find a good job. Besides, the Music Department could strengthen its connection with two other faculties of the ELTE; with the Faculty of Informatics and the Faculty of Science. We also hope that the new, mainly practical problems can be solved by the partnership of the Centre of Teacher Training that has been found recently for the coordination of the different programs in the different Faculties.

Though the elapsed time is short, the advantages and problems of the double major training are perceptible; from the point of view of transdisciplinarity on one hand (the students can find a job more easily) and in the field of organizing the education on the other (harmonizing the curricula with other departments and faculties).

3.3. Special advantages of the frequently changing situation

Special situations have also got special advantages. The often changing periods of music teacher training give us the possibility to renew the curricula continuously – for example through building new content and knowledge upon them. In the following let's see two experiments for it made by the Music Department in the previous years.

3.3.1. Renewing the methodology of teaching

By reducing the number of singing lessons in the primary and secondary schools (from the end of the nineties) the possibilities of music teaching in Hungary have also been changed. So the methodology of classroom music teacher training must have accommodated to the circumstances indicating new purposes with new ways of approaching. On the basis of the researched theme “Our ‘musical foreign language’; learning music” the Music Department worked out the main principles of these new ways, and a summary of the most important directives have been published in the form of an essay. The higher education schoolbook, which contained this study, was a common work of the methodology instructors of the formerly existed Teacher Training College Faculty under the title of *Tanuljunk, de hogyan!?* (*Let's learn, but how!?*). The essay tried to summarize the main tasks to be done – which were the following:

Working at home: The ‘phantom’ of the homework: what do I have to learn from music and what kind of tasks have I got to do? (And what kind of help could I get to do that?)

Keywords: short decision of the important words, such as clefs, notes, metre, tempo mark, etc.

Operation plan: a reminding summary of the previous lesson, before doing the homework.

(What was the process of learning at school? What was the recapitulation exercise we made before the new lesson? What kind of practicing exercises we did? What kind of help I've got to do that? What kind of melodic phrase I was able to observe?)

A ‘concert’ at home: ideas for practicing. (Contents and relations of the text; emphasizing of rhymes and repeated text; connecting the other parts to these memorized lines; learning a song by heart; learning a song as in a ‘final rehearsal’ and in a ‘concert’.)

The freedom of learning: how can I learn without homework?⁶

⁶ G. Bodnár [et al.], *Az ének-zene tanulása*. In: Katona András [et al.] (eds.). *Tanuljunk, de hogyan!?* Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest 2005, pp. 272–277.

3.3.2. Cooperation in the development of creativity

A good-working example for the cooperation of the formal and non-formal education is the partnership organized between our Department and the Psalmus Humanus Association for Arts Education, which is an NGO member of the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO.

The Association was founded for the sake of connecting the Hungarian music teaching method with the other types of arts, creating a special, integrated educational form. The most important part of this cooperation is the implementation of a common post-graduate program for music teachers.

The main elements of the multiple-part project:

- Music education for 1–3 year old nursery school children, together with their parents.
- Kindergarten education (3–6 years), development of partial abilities through singing, music and movement.
- Complex music education (6–14 years): introducing the ‘Kokas Method’.⁷
- Teaching singing within a primary school and in a music primary school (6–14 years).
- Teaching singing in English and German: connection between music and language teaching to 6–14 year old children.
- Teaching folk dance in elementary, music primary and secondary schools (6–18 years).
- Drama pedagogy: development of personal and social skills (12–18 years).

For those with disabilities and injuries:

- Music education for motor disabled and for mentally challenged children.
- Music education for children with special education needs with the ULWILA color note.
- Music education for blind and visually impaired children (singing, music and dance).
- The care of musical work capacity (‘Kovács Method’).⁸
- The application of computers in music education.
- Children’s concerts for expectant mothers.
- Romany poetry and literature and free-time training in fine arts for Romany children.

To overcome socio-cultural disadvantages:

- Afternoon and free time artistic activities for children from disadvantaged cultural and social environments.

⁷ More: <<http://www.kokas.hu/index.php/inenglish>> 10. 01. 2015.

⁸ More: <www.kovacsmethod.com> 10. 01. 2015.

4. Conclusions

Permanent changes of the society could cause similar changes in teacher training. But how could our instructors maintain the high level of their work in these frequently changing circumstances?

Local habits sometimes can be the origin of positive results – even in an unconscious way – and the continuous change of the teaching concept may help us find new paths. So, the instructors who experience this process may despair of that but they could also try to survive it by making strong and ‘durable’ curricula. The possibility of the development of cross-curricular projects could also be a kind of utility. For example the institutions concerned in music teacher training for public schools – there are six institutes for this project located in different areas of Hungary – are nearly obliged to harmonize their curricula with the officially renewed educational programs.

The recognition of non-formal music education opportunities within the formal education and the transparency in the two fields is also a good solution. A classroom music teacher – who is a teacher and a choir conductor in one person – should be familiar with the formal and informal education as well. In the previous years we received some help and guideline from the *Bonn Declaration*, which was born in 2011.⁹ (Recently the theme has been discussed as an item of an international symposium organized by the Association of Hungarian choirs – but the conference was visited mainly by foreign participants.)

But how can we coordinate the principles of the Declaration with our tasks in teacher training and how can we keep the high standard of the education among such changing circumstances? Let’s see a special way again: make questions from the statements and ask the students. How can you reach these goals in your future workplace and how can you resolve the cultural and social challenges there? How can you recognize the talented pupils in all social and cultural environments? (The problems of talent spotting and the development of creativity are very important in the field of music education). And we hope they will be able to answer these questions at the final exam.

Or we can ask ourselves as well, how we could teach the future teachers to ‘declare the Declaration’ and how we could ‘care for the talent of the future talent-cares’. I think that is a ‘real question’.

⁹ More: <http://www.emc-imc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Cultural_Policy/Bonn_Declaration.pdf> 10. 01. 2015.

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