

## A COMPLEX FOLK MUSIC EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR THE PREPARATORY YEARS OF MUSIC SCHOOLS: THE LESSONS OF A PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIMENT

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**SUMMARY.** The basis of our research was the István Ferenc Bíró's study entitled *Egyszer volt, hol nem volt, még a tantervi programon is túl...* (2015) (*Once upon a time... over the curricular programme*), in which the author, on the basis of his preliminary experiments, considers Hungarian folk tales as a suitable framework for folk flute lessons. In a didactically oriented analysis, the author claims that the phases of folk tales correspond to those of folk flute lessons. The writer drew on his more than a decade experience in pedagogy; however, no pedagogical experiment has been carried out to justify his claims. Our research aims to make up for this deficiency. The experiment was carried out in a double-group pedagogical test. The students participating in the experiment are roughly of the same age and with similar capabilities, who took part in skill assessment both at the beginning and the end of the experiment. They got acquainted with the same number of child songs, in a vocal and instrumental form, and in the same number of lessons. The difference lay in the order of the set of tones and the forms of the reproduction of songs. The experimental group carried out their work in the order and way determined by the author, while the control group followed an order set by a commonly used textbook. The experiment proved that the folk tale framework does not only mean a motivational difference for the students, but due to the common linguistic and literary roots of folk songs and folk tales, the number of unknown words in folk songs also decreased. For those participating in the experimental group, an organic relationship evolved between the vocal and instrumental versions of folk songs, while the two versions were separated in the control group, as shown by the text-like interpretation of rhythm or its absence.

**Keywords:** folk music education, complexity, pedagogical experiment

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## 1. Introduction

The efficiency of school education significantly depends on the professional and pedagogical expertise of the educator. Thanks to the development of certain disciplines, more and more information is available on children leaving the kindergarten and entering primary school. Environment shift may result in a block on the self-expression skills of children, for the sense of safety provided by a familiar surroundings is impaired.<sup>3</sup> This can lead to cases when the child can perform poorly in a strange environment or in an unfamiliar situation.<sup>4</sup>

Children's way of thinking starts to be similar to that of adults around the age of 6-7. Naturally, individual differences must be taken into consideration, for maturity differences measurable in months can often be detected between children entering school.<sup>5</sup> It follows from this that teachers in music schools have great responsibility in the preparatory years since they have to create an environment in which the pupil feels at home. According to Bíró, one of the most suitable ways to provide this continuity is the framework of fairy tales, both in a physical and mental sense, which is familiar for the child from the kindergarten.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the characteristics of music education, there is a chance to create individually-tailored education programmes. The question is only if the educator is in possession of the necessary methodological expertise.

It was Lujza Tari's study in 1992 who called attention to musical instruments appearing in folk tales.<sup>7</sup> Although her investigation did not take place within the field of music pedagogy, her claim, according to which musical instruments in tales are transcendental tools having magical power, is significant for education studies.<sup>8</sup> In the formation of performance practice, the educator has the chance to use the instrument's "magical power" to establish games and playful situations, which significantly contributes to motivation.<sup>9</sup>

An important source on the aesthetic qualities and refined mode of expression of folk tales is, among others, the work of Vilmos Voigt.<sup>10</sup> Apart

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<sup>3</sup> Cole&Cole, 2001

<sup>4</sup> Bíró, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Vajda, 2001; Vekerdy, 2012

<sup>6</sup> Bíró, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Tari Lujza (1992): *Zenei adatok a magyar népmesékben*. In: Felföldi László – Lázár Katalin (szerk.): *Zenetudományi dolgozatok 1990-1991*. MTA ZTI, Budapest, p. 187-199.

<sup>8</sup> Tari, 1992

<sup>9</sup> Bíró, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Voigt, 1998

from the values mentioned above, the common roots of folk tales and folk songs make it possible to use folk tales in folk music classes. Thus, not only a suitably cherishing and constructive environment might be provided for children, but the most natural context can be established for folk songs whose links to its original source had been disrupted.<sup>11</sup>

Folk songs tell us about times long gone by.<sup>12</sup> This is what can motivate folk song teachers to use them, since listening to the tale, the child indirectly gets acquainted with folklore contents with the help of the textual context.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Presentation of the Research

In the double-group pedagogical experiment, students entering school, of about the same age, with similar capabilities were divided into groups. The groups worked parallel during the entire time of the experiment. The control group studied in a traditional school environment, while in the case of the experimental group, the folk tale framework, both in a physical and mental sense, appeared as an independent variable.

The progress of the control group was determined by a textbook in public circulation, while the experimental group followed the scheme recommended by Bíró in his above-mentioned study. The point of the latter is that it does not think in melodies but in set of tones. Besides this, it conceives of folk culture in the fullest possible interpretation of some of its contents already in the years of preparation, to be utilised in individual sessions.<sup>14</sup>

A shift in the set of tones only takes place when the student has become competent in the previously studied material. The teacher can make sure of the progress if the student can play a melody that they know vocally on their instrument within that set of tones.

H<sub>1</sub>: A student in the experimental group is involved in the process of the tale, through singing and games, etc.

H<sub>2</sub>: The experimental group gets acquainted with fewer set of tones during the experiment but becomes a competent user of those sets of tones.

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<sup>11</sup> Bíró, 2015

<sup>12</sup> Bettelheim, 1976

<sup>13</sup> Bíró, 2015

<sup>14</sup> V.ö. Bíró, 2011; Bíró 2015

H<sub>3</sub>: The experimental group reaches a higher level in the mastery of folklore content, which is carried out indirectly, through the folk tale framework.

H<sub>4</sub>: The experimental group masters models provided by the teacher more precisely, since being involved in the folk tale presupposes a constant level of attention on the part of the student.

H<sub>5</sub>: Acting out and experiencing the stories have a positive effect on performance attitudes.

### **2.1. The Experiences of the First Meeting**

During the first encounter, both students were asked by the educator to sing their favourite songs. The member of the experimental group was engaged in the tale and thus in singing. The student showed no sign of surprise. At a certain point in the folk tale (“And Palkó sang his favourite song”) the pupil began singing the song at the request of the storyteller (the teacher) without hesitation. The member of the control group was reluctant to perform.

### **2.2. The Number of Lessons, Melodies**

Both groups participated in the same number of lessons during the experiment. There is no difference in the number of melodies they learned (15). The only quantity difference is in the number of notes and set of tones they got acquainted with. The variances are shown in the chart below.

<b>Experimental Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Number of lessons: 24	Number of lessons: 24
Number of songs learned: 15	Number of songs learned: 15*
Set of tones learned: bichord, trichord	Set of tones learned: bichord, biton, triton, trichord, pentachord, hexachord
Notes learned: a', g', f'	Notes learned: a', g', f', e', d', c'

It is apparent that the experimental group mastered melodies from two sets of tones, as opposed to the control group that became familiar with six sets of tones. The formulations used are not accidental. Our qualitative test pointed out that the experimental group really “mastered” or internalised the sets of tones they studied, which means that they could play any bichord or trichord set of tone melody on their instrument that they had known vocally before but had not covered in classes. The control group, in spite of the fact that they “became familiar” with more sets of tones, was not able to reproduce these vocal melodies on their instruments.

Both groups learned to sing the melody. However, an organic relationship between the vocal and the instrumental versions was realised only within the experimental group, which was traceable mostly in the rhythm patterns. The member of the experimental group strived to perform the melody on the flute in a text-like manner, as opposed to the control group member where the vocal and instrumental versions did not correlate. Although they were able to sing the melodies faultlessly after a few hours, but they could not repeat the melody on their instruments.

The pace of progress in the case of the experimental group seemed slower as regards the number of the sets of tones, but they exceeded the control group qualitatively.

### ***2.3. The Forms of Song Learning***

As far as the forms and proportions of learning songs are concerned, there was no significant difference between the two groups. This made it possible for both groups to get to know processes of traditional reception and transmission besides the forms prescribed by the institutional framework.

### ***2.4. The Transmission of Folklore Knowledge***

As regards the experimental group, the transmission of folklore knowledge took place in an indirect way. The meaning of words turned out from the context provided by folk tales. More extensive explanation was given by the educator only when the pupils expressly asked them about the meaning.

During the experiment, the experimental group met four folk tales:

- Furulyás Palkó (Palkó and the Flute);
- A csillagszemű juhász (The Star-Eyed Shepherd);
- Jávorfából furulyácska (Flute From Maple Wood);
- Az aranyszörű bárány (The Lamb with Golden Fleece);

The members of the control group met folklore knowledge directly. The meaning of all unknown words in the songs were explained by the teacher, so the only difference was the absence of folk tale context.

The domains of unknown words were determined on the basis of the four folk tales. In the test, the member of the control group reached 95% (19 out of 20 points) while the control group member acquired 60% (12 out of 20 points). The test is included in the appendix of the study.

### ***2.5. The Teacher as a Model***

In the teaching of folk music instruments, following a model is a central question. The term “teacher model” is deliberately evaded since in higher grades, the role of educator as a model slowly draws into the background and archive footage begins to serve as a model to be followed. However, in the case of the preparatory years and the first years of the basic level, the educator serves as a primary source from the aspect of learning. In what follows, thus, our experiences will be presented from the perspective of the teacher as a model.

The member of the experimental group joined the singing of the educator without request in a folk tale environment. The same could be observed in the case of the posture of the head, body, hand and instrument. The member of the control group continuously had to be asked to take and keep the required positions and automatisms appeared much slower. They joined the singing only when asked by the educator, even if they knew the song.

### ***2.6. The Environment and Used Materials***

During the classes of the experimental group, a fairy tale corner was created with the help of a blanket, pillows and the materials prepared together with the student. From the third session, the student, after entering the classroom, took their place in the fairy tale corner in accordance with the previous lessons. The folk tales were not only illustrated but were made to come alive with the help of figures cut out from paper made together. With this, the student’s performance attitude was also developed, thanks to the “magical power” of the instrument. The relationship of the performer and the audience could be modelled with the help of the tools, and besides, student motivation also increased due to the tool-aided situational games. Public performance did not cause any anxiety for the members of the experimental group, while the control group member was reluctant to play an instrument before an audience.

E.g. 1



In the case of the control group, we positioned ourselves in a traditional manner, familiar from folk flute lessons, that is, on two chairs, facing each other.

### Summarizing

The basis of our research was the complex folk music education concept published by István Ferenc Bíró in 2015. The research was carried out in the form of a double-group pedagogical experiment.

All our preliminary hypothesis can be regarded to be justified.

The student in both the experimental group and the control group learned the same number of melodies during the lessons. In accordance with our hypothesis, the experimental group got to know fewer notes during a set amount of classes and lagged behind the control group as regards the number of sets of tones it studied but quality check showed that although quantitatively the experimental group performed poorer than the control group, they were able to use the acquired knowledge at a high level in the case of any kind of melody, within the range of the sets of tones they studied about.

The folk tale context made it possible for the children the creation of an environment familiar from kindergarten education, in which the student opened up for the educator already at the first session. The characters and situations appearing in folk tales enhanced the early development of the performing attitude which is a significant result in stage socialisation.

The folk tale framework created the basis for the transmission of folklore knowledge at a high level, indirectly. The test result produced by the experimental group considerably surpassed that of the control group.

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## APPENDIX

1. Match the words with their definitions.

a) orozkodik (ambush)	inner wall of a well
b) eregél (trot)	sneeze
c) kút köble (steining of a well)	go slowly
d) tömlőc (gaol)	year
e) prüsszent (sternulate)	go stealthily
f) husáng (cudgel)	clothes, outfit
g) gúnya (garment)	thick branch
h) esztendő (year)	prison

2. Choose the words that answer the questions.

Which is used as filter? .....			
Which is used as a weapon? .....			
Which is used for harvesting? .....			
	sieve	hatchet	scythe

3. Choose the correct answer. Underline it.

- Who is sluggish?
- a) who is lazy
  - b) who is jealous
  - c) who is happy
- What does a person do who subsides?
- a) cries
  - b) relaxes
  - c) guards sheep

4. What was the job of these people? Match.

a) herald	the manager of a farm
b) seneschal	the person who guards animals in the open air
c) master	a herdsman guarding sheep

ISTVÁN FERENC BÍRÓ, BARBARA RIMÁN

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|-------------|--|
| d) shepherd | the person who carried news on horseback |
| e) herdsman | keeper of the castle                     |

5. Which was the element of an outfit? Circle.

- |                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| a) sheepskin cloak | d) hay         |
| b) gaol            | e) spear grass |
| c) sieve           | f) year        |