

# **Cracking the Code with Kodály**

## **Applications of Kodály in Choral Rehearsals**

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### **What Kodály is:**

- A philosophy of music education
- Singing-based
- Process-oriented
- Developmentally grounded
- Sequenced
- Multi-sensory
- Emphasizes sound before sight (moves from the known to the unknown)

### **What Kodály isn't:**

- A method
- Something that relies solely on solfege and hand signs
- A way of teaching that requires students to be still and silent at all times
- Static

### **Teaching Material:**

- Folk songs
- Classical repertoire
- High-quality concert music

"The pure soul of the child must be considered sacred; what we implant there must stand every test, and if we plant anything bad, we poison his soul for life." (Kodály, selected writings, p.141)

### **The Traditional Prepare, Present, Practice Model:**

-Prepare: *Concepts are introduced through songs, games, and activities. Students gain familiarity and comfort with the concepts despite not knowing the actual names or labels for the concepts.*

-Present: *Concepts are named/made conscious ("This is a half note and it is worth two beats"). This happens in one short, concise lesson.*

-Practice: *Named concepts are practiced in as many ways as possible.*

In a choral rehearsal, this looks slightly different than it would in an elementary general music class. While a concept may be in the preparation stage for one or two months in a traditional Kodály sequence, in a choral rehearsal, you may include just a few activities right before a concept is presented. Similarly, some skilled secondary Kodály teachers suggest that you jump right in with the concept presentation. Find what works for your students and go with it!

### **Sequencing:**

There isn't a set Kodály sequence. I find the following works well for my middle school students. While it is similar to the sequence I used when teaching general music, it also centers on what appears most in the repertoire we sing as well as events like LGPE and All-State.

Rhythmic:

1. | □ ♯ ♮
2. □□□
3. ♩ -
4. ◦ -
5. | ♯
6. □□□
7. □□ □
8. ♯ | ♯

Melodic:

1. sol-mi\*
2. la
3. do
4. re
5. high do

6. fa and ti

**In my teaching, I use these sequences purely for reading and writing traditional notation. I have my students sing major scales from the first day of school and teach repertoire that isn't limited to quarter notes and sol-mi patterns.**

If I don't think my students are quite ready to read the notation for something, I often do the following:

- Have my students read my hand signs
- Have my students sing using a tone ladder
- Teach the section by rote. This is TOTALLY OKAY in the Kodály world if your students still need to get certain sounds and intervals in their ears. Rote teaching, especially when done in conjunction with solfege, gives the students the musical vocabulary they need in order to read!

\*Many people prefer to use do-re-mi as a jumping-off point for "older beginners". I think students tend to sing sol-mi with a prettier and more tuneful tone, so I stick with the traditional sequence. My middle school students and I move to the entire pentatonic scale very quickly (within the first week of school).

### **Typical Kodály Classes:**

- Include many songs and activities! Keep your students on their toes!
- Include games. Middle-schoolers are not too old, and your class is not too big. It can be done.
- Are structured so that there is a major task, several minor tasks, a game (or change of pace), and musical transitions\*.
- Don't include much speaking.
- Are often conducted without the aid of a piano.

\*Transitions are a big thing in Kodály land! Think of ways to musically connect one activity or song to the next. It becomes the ultimate puzzle for teachers!

## **Reconciling Kodály and the “real world”:**

-We subdivide everything. My students learn from the beginning that one beat = two pulses. For us, this takes a lot of the guess-work out of sight-reading.

-We count-sing. While this is not usually done in Kodály-inspired classrooms, I find it helps us stay together. Also, in the land of Robert Shaw, I think this is a life-long skill!

-I teach sight-reading through our repertoire until January (except for during our after-school all-state rehearsals). In January, we add LGPE-style etudes to the beginning of every rehearsal. It feels like a big risk to wait until January, but it works for us!

-I have my students do melodic and rhythmic dictations 3-4 times each week. This is our way of approaching sight-reading etudes in as multi-sensory of a way as possible.

-I don't insist that my students read all of their concert repertoire. I strive to have them read one element from their scores. This could be as tiny as a phrase from the rhythm or melody. Decoding the form is also a reading skill! If my students are not able to read any elements of the score, I've probably picked something that is too hard.

-We do plenty of “light” music (we even have a traditional “pops” concert every spring). We still work through the music in a Kodály-inspired way.

## **Practical Ideas for Teaching Through the Lens of Kodály:**

### **Rhythmic Practice Ideas:**

- Telephone with rhythms (pass tapped rhythms)
- Beach ball with rhythms
- I Have Who Has

- Rhythm chains (You pass the front row a clapped rhythm and they pass it to the second row. While the second row is passing the rhythm to the third row, you pass the first row a new rhythm.)
- Rhythmic dictations
- Word-Rhythm puzzles (Half the students have cards with words or phrases, and the other half of the students have cards with the rhythmic notation for the words. Set them loose to find their match!)
- Rhythm dice (composition!)
- Perform scales and other warm-ups using a certain rhythmic element

### **Melodic Practice Ideas:**

- I Have, Who Has
- Around the World - Give students "do" and have them compete to read and sing the next note the fastest (and most accurately)
- Repetition with changed articulation
- Pentatonic improvisation chains (each student adds a note to the pattern - ex. s, sm, sml, sml'd', sml'd'l)
- Sol-la-mi/forbidden pattern
- Melodic dictations
- Pentatonic songs in canon
- Mystery melodies (identify the song written on the board)
- Have students audiate certain notes or measures for an added challenge

### **A Few Folk Songs and Teaching Pieces that Middle Schoolers Enjoy:**

- Buffalo Gals
- Cairo
- Cape Cod Girls
- Chicka-Hanka
- Chicken and a Chicken
- Chicken on a Fence Post
- Cindy
- Cumberland Gap
- Down in That Valley
- Down the River
- Great Big House
- Ickle Ockle Blue Bottle (with game only!)
- If You Dance
- I'se the B'y
- The Juniper Tree
- Little Birch Tree
- Liza Jane
- Mairi's Wedding
- Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be

- Oh, How Lovely
- Old Abram Brown
- Old Joe Clark
- Old Molly Hare
- Paw Paw Patch
- Sail Away
- Scotland's Burning
- Shady Grove
- Skin and Bones
- Skye Boat Song
- Sourwood Mountain
- Sumer Is I-Cumen In
- Telephone Song
- Tideo
- Turn the Glasses Over
- La Vibora de la Mar
- Who Stole My Chickens
- Wondrous Love
- Ye Toop Doram

