

A Study on the Teaching Reform and Practice of the “Piano Methods” Course in Preschool Education Based on the Three Major Music Teaching Methods

Zhouzhou Deng

School of Education and Psychology, Yangtze University College of Arts and Sciences, Jingzhou, China
Email: 1216929922@qq.com

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Abstract

With the advancement of preschool education reforms in recent years, traditional music education methods have gradually failed to meet the teaching needs of the new era in preschool education programs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to accelerate the innovation of music education methods. The three major music teaching methods—Orff, Dalcroze, and Kodály—have been widely applied globally and play a crucial role in promoting the development of students’ musical creativity and expanding their musical thinking. Based on this, this paper combines the author’s educational practice experience to explore the integrated application of these three methods in the “Piano Methods” course for preschool education majors.

Keywords

Three Major Music Teaching Methods, Piano Methods Course, Preschool Education, Blended Learning, Teaching Reform

1. Introduction

Early childhood education is the foundation stage of the national education system, and its quality directly affects the healthy growth of millions of children and the future human resources of the country. The early childhood education program is responsible for cultivating outstanding kindergarten teachers who are “well-rounded and exceptionally skilled”. The curriculum design and teaching quality are the core guarantees for achieving this goal. As a required course that integrates skills, theory, and artistic cultivation, the “Piano Method” course is not

only crucial for students to master the basic skills of music teaching in kindergarten, but also an important means to cultivate their aesthetic taste and stimulate their creative potential. However, looking at the current teaching of the “Piano Method” course in many higher education institutions for early childhood education, most still follow the traditional model, which centers on the teacher, focuses on skill transmission, and uses single-piece performance as the main assessment. This model, to some extent, neglects the internal experience and personal development of students as learners. The teaching methods lack diversity and interactivity, and the evaluation system focuses on knowledge memorization and technique imitation, making it difficult to effectively cultivate students’ musical creativity, teaching adaptability, and comprehensive artistic literacy. This creates a gap between the training of innovative and application-oriented teachers required by the new era.

In the field of international music education, Orff, Dalcroze, and Kodály are known as the “three major music teaching methods”. After a century of practical testing, they are recognized as scientific and efficient music education systems with the core concepts of “human-centered”, “experience first”, and “creative expression”. These methods show great advantages in stimulating learners’ musical instincts and developing comprehensive musical abilities. To illustrate the integration of these teaching methods, we can present a specific classroom example. For instance, in a “Piano Method” class, the teacher designed a combined activity using both Dalcroze’s rhythm method and Kodály’s solfège system. In this activity, students first engage in rhythmic exercises through Dalcroze’s body movement techniques to develop their sense of rhythm. Then, they apply Kodály’s solfège system through singing and piano exercises to strengthen their understanding and expression of pitch. In the class, students create and perform collectively, integrating body movements and melody variations. This helps them experience the interaction between rhythm and pitch, thereby stimulating their creativity and emotional expression. This integrated teaching activity not only improves students’ musical skills but also deepens their understanding of the essence of music, inspiring their musical innovation and emotional expression.

In recent years, domestic scholars have begun to pay attention to the application of the three major music teaching methods in basic music education, but systematic and integrated research in higher teacher training institutions, especially in skill-based courses such as the “Piano Method” in early childhood education, is still lacking. Most studies are still limited to the scattered application of a single teaching method, lacking integrated innovation of the essence of the three methods, and failing to closely combine the characteristics of early childhood education and the learning traits of contemporary students for localized course reconstruction.

Based on this, this study is rooted in China’s national conditions and the practical needs of cultivating talent in the early childhood education field. It aims to explore the theoretical pathways and practical solutions for organically integrat-

ing the three major music teaching methods into the “Piano Method” course. The research aims to construct a new hybrid teaching model to address the pain points and difficulties in the current teaching of the “Piano Method” course, with the goal of shifting from “teaching techniques” to “cultivating literacy”, comprehensively enhancing students’ core professional competencies, and providing empirical support and theoretical reference for promoting the construction of first-class courses and teaching innovation in early childhood education.

2. The Core Concepts of the Three Major Music Teaching Methods and Their Applicability in the “Piano Methods” Course

2.1. The Orff Music Teaching Method and Its Application Value

The essence of the Orff method lies in the concept of “total art”, which emphasizes the organic integration of music, movement, language, and drama. Its core principles are “experience, imitation, and creation”, advocating for starting from the child’s instincts (such as rhythm and curiosity) and using elemental music (such as fixed melodic patterns and simple rhythms) and percussion instruments to guide learners to experience music through play and create music through participation (Orff, 2005; Li, Xiu, & Yin, 2002).

In the “Piano Methods” course, the application value of the Orff method is particularly prominent. Firstly, its idea of “movement and gamification” can transform dry music theory knowledge (such as pitch and rhythmic patterns) and fingering practice into lively body movements and musical games. For example, improvisation exercises can be done through circle dances, which can effectively reduce the psychological burden of skill training and stimulate students’ interest in learning. Secondly, the spirit of Orff ensemble (primarily percussion instruments but applicable to piano as well) encourages students to engage in group composition and collaboration. This not only cultivates a sense of teamwork but also enhances their sense of musical structure and multi-voiced thinking, laying the foundation for future collective music activities in kindergartens. Finally, Orff’s improvisation concept encourages students to break free from the absolute constraints of sheet music and boldly engage in melody variations and rhythm creation. This is essential for liberating students’ musical imagination and nurturing their creative thinking.

2.2. The Dalcroze Eurhythmics Teaching Method and Its Application Value

The core of the Dalcroze method is eurhythmics, which uses physical movement to express musical elements and combines inner hearing with muscle movement to achieve a unified mind-body musical experience (Dalcroze, 2010). This teaching method views the body as the primary medium for experiencing and expressing music.

For the “Piano Methods” course, the Dalcroze method provides a unique per-

spective on resolving the “separation of technique and art” issue. In piano performance, abstract and internal experiences such as rhythm, phrasing, and harmonic color can be difficult to grasp. Through eurhythmics, students can physically experience the density of rhythms, the direction of melodies, and the tension and resolution of harmonies through actions like walking, swaying, and clapping. For instance, while learning harmonic progressions, students can use body movements like rising or turning to represent different chord connections, which helps them better understand the functional and coloristic roles of harmony. Additionally, when practicing different types of accompaniment patterns, actions such as clapping, stomping, or snapping fingers can be used to reinforce rhythmic characteristics, making the performance more expressive and impactful. This method is particularly useful in developing students’ inner hearing and musical expressiveness, turning their performance from mechanical finger movements into artistic expressions filled with life and rhythm.

2.3. The Kodály Music Teaching Method and Its Application Value

The Kodály method, based on the belief that “music belongs to everyone”, emphasizes that singing is the foundation of music education. The system is built on the solfège system, rhythmic duration reading, Kodály hand signs, and an extensive collection of folk music materials (Kodály, 2012). Its goal is to systematically cultivate learners’ music literacy, inner hearing, and musical cultural awareness (Yang, 2011).

Incorporating the Kodály method into the “Piano Methods” course has multiple benefits. First, its principle of “singing before playing” is ideal for teaching preschool education students how to accompany songs with piano. By singing the melody first, students can become familiar with the melody, understand the lyrics, and grasp the emotional tone, making the final piano accompaniment more natural and emotionally expressive. Second, the use of the solfège system helps students develop a relative pitch concept, which is crucial for improvisational accompaniment and transposition in a kindergarten setting where fixed-pitch instruments may not be available. Furthermore, Kodály’s hand signs as a visual aid can help students understand interval relationships and melodic lines, supporting pitch accuracy training. Finally, the Kodály method’s focus on folk music provides a natural vehicle for integrating political education into the “Piano Methods” course (Zhang, 2022). Through singing and playing excellent children’s songs from different Chinese ethnic groups and regions, students can subtly cultivate a sense of national identity and cultural confidence.

3. Constructing a New Teaching Model for the “Piano Methods” Course Integrating the Three Major Music Teaching Methods

Based on the core principles of the three major music teaching methods and modern educational technology, this course constructs a new teaching model for the

“Piano Methods” course, based on the “concept-goal-content-method-evaluation” five-in-one framework.

3.1. Reform of Course Philosophy and Goals

With the update of educational concepts, the “Piano Technique” course in the preschool education major needs to innovate its concepts and goals. Traditional teaching overly focuses on piano skills training while neglecting the cultivation of comprehensive qualities. Therefore, this course establishes the core concept of “quality cultivation”, guided by music perception, emotional expression, practical innovation and value guidance. Through activities such as music appreciation, performance and creation, it stimulates students’ interest. The course goals balance skills and qualities: on the one hand, it helps students master music theory, harmony and piano playing principles, solidify their skills in performance and singing of children’s songs, and be able to carry out creation and design using the three major music teaching methods; on the other hand, it cultivates students’ music auditory, collaboration and improvisational expression abilities, enhances their aesthetic taste and humanistic qualities, and lays a foundation for future early childhood education work. At the same time, the course cultivates cultural confidence using Chinese folk songs and traditional music as carriers: introducing traditional melodies in pentatonic scale, guiding students to understand cultural heritage through performance creation; introducing local festival music, characteristic tunes and folk instruments, and presenting the charm of traditional music from multiple dimensions. This not only deepens students’ understanding of national culture but also nurtures their cultural identity and pride, promoting the internalization of cultural confidence.

3.2. “Online-Offline-Extracurricular” Blended Teaching Model Design

To meet the educational demands of the information age, this course adopts a “blended” teaching model combining “online, offline, and extracurricular” components. This model has shown significant advantages in higher education music courses, effectively enhancing the teaching effectiveness of skills-based courses through the synergy of “online knowledge transfer + offline in-depth experience” (Wang, 2020). Research has demonstrated that this model can achieve an efficient integration of “theory and practice” in music skills courses (Wang, 2021), providing a solid practical foundation for the “Piano Method” course.

Online teaching focuses on knowledge transfer and initial understanding, relying on learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle and Canvas. Students can access videos and micro-courses related to the three major music teaching methods on the platform, completing interactive tasks such as rhythm training and scale exercises. Additionally, real-time online classes and interactive music games are conducted through platforms such as YouTube, Zoom, and Kahoot, stimulating students’ interest and providing a flexible learning environment. Of-

fling teaching emphasizes knowledge deepening and skill development, with the classroom transforming into a “workshop”. The teacher’s role shifts from “lecturer” to “guide” and “co-participant”, encouraging students to engage in music experiences, creative practices, and group collaboration. Extracurricular teaching extends both online and offline learning, promoting the transfer and real-world application of knowledge. The course encourages students to integrate the piano method skills and teaching concepts they have learned into research projects, social services, and artistic practices, enhancing their overall literacy and social responsibility.

3.3. Reconstruction and Development of Teaching Content and Resources

In terms of reconstructing teaching content and resources, this course breaks the traditional teaching framework based on progressive difficulty of musical pieces, instead constructing a modular content system centered on “musical elements” and “application contexts”. Specifically, the “rhythm and movement” module combines Orff’s vocalization and Dalcroze’s eurhythmics; the “children’s song accompaniment and harmony” module incorporates Kodály’s solfège system and Dalcroze’s harmonic exercises; the “improvisation and composition” module utilizes Orff and Dalcroze’s improvisation concepts. At the same time, various teaching resources have been developed, including digital micro-course resources and physical teaching aids such as piano keyboard puzzles, hand posture correction models, and rhythm charts, as well as a rich activity plan library, such as “rhythm transmission”, “rhythmic canon”, and “situational improvisational performance”. These resources help make abstract musical concepts tangible and visual, thereby enhancing students’ learning effectiveness.

3.4. Establishing a Diversified Teaching Evaluation System

To comprehensively assess students’ learning performance, this study constructs a diversified teaching evaluation system that integrates both formative and summative assessments, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods. Formative assessment covers online task completion, classroom participation, group-created work quality, and extracurricular practice reports, with evaluation participants including teachers, peers, and the students themselves. Summative assessment, in addition to traditional performance evaluations, introduces a contextualized comprehensive assessment, such as simulating a kindergarten teaching scenario where students are required to apply the teaching methods, they have learned to conduct a children’s song performance and interactive teaching demonstration, or engage in group creation and performance of a musical theater segment.

In this contextualized comprehensive assessment, students are required to demonstrate their practical application of music teaching methods. For example, students choose a song appropriate for young children and use Orff, Dalcroze,

and Kodály methods to complete the song performance and interactive teaching. The evaluation criteria include pitch and rhythm accuracy, natural emotional expression, interaction with children, the ability to guide children's learning interest and creative thinking through musical activities, and the ability to adjust teaching flexibly based on children's varied responses.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

This study proposes a systematic reform plan for the "Piano Method" course in higher education early childhood education programs, addressing the current challenges. The core of this plan is the integration of the three major music teaching methods, with hybrid teaching as its framework. This approach is not only a partial adjustment of teaching methods but also a comprehensive reconstruction of the course's philosophy, objectives, content, implementation, and evaluation. The core principle is to return to the true essence of music education—awakening instincts, stimulating creativity, and nourishing the soul.

Looking ahead, the deeper implementation and promotion of this teaching model will still face several challenges, with the high demands on teachers' comprehensive qualities being particularly prominent. This model requires teachers to be proficient not only in the theoretical core and practical techniques of Orff, Dalcroze, and Kodály methods but also in the application of educational technology in hybrid teaching, the design of innovative teaching activities, and the dynamic control abilities required for cross-scenario teaching. Therefore, it is recommended to establish a continuous professional development plan for teachers: through regular workshops and systematic training, focusing on the localization of the three teaching methods, the integration of online and offline teaching tools, classroom interaction design, and the implementation of diversified evaluation methods. Additionally, interdisciplinary teaching seminars should be used as platforms for communication, encouraging teachers to share innovative cases and reflective experiences from their teaching practice, stimulating new teaching ideas. At the same time, a regular peer review and feedback mechanism should be established, where teachers can observe each other's classes, engage in case discussions, and receive targeted guidance to continuously optimize teaching practices. These measures will provide support for teachers' professional growth and lay the foundation for the successful implementation of the teaching model.

Moreover, the continuous development and updating of teaching resources will require long-term investment. Future research will focus on the specific implementation of teaching practices, conducting rigorous empirical studies to quantitatively analyze the impact of this model on the development of students' various abilities. It will further explore its horizontal connection with related courses such as "Early Childhood Music Education" and "Introduction to Art", with the goal of building a more complete set of artistic courses for early childhood education programs and making a solid contribution to the cultivation of outstanding kindergarten teachers for the new era.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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