

Máté Vizeli:

**The appearance of educational methodology in
Hungarian institutional folk music education –
with a special regard to teaching the folk viola**

doctoral (PhD) dissertation abstract

University of Pécs, Doctoral School of Educational Sciences,

Educational sociology programme

Supervisor: Dr. habil Ágnes Herpay (DLA), reader



Pécs, 2024

Abstract

Teaching the folk viola [in Hungary] has evolved significantly since 1972, the beginnings of the *táncház*¹ movement. Almost right from the very beginning, there has been great interest in learning to play folk instruments – as well as folk dances –, which quickly became institutional. By 1990, every folk music instrument had become available in institutional folk music education, and, in 1998, the first curriculum of folk music for every musical instrument was prepared.

In this period, mostly adults and adolescents studied the folk viola at primary music schools; today, however, more and more little children begin to study music with this instrument. This is a substantial change with respect to the period when the 1998 primary curriculum was made, still, it can be claimed that the fundamental principles of the curriculum have not changed ever since. The goal of this dissertation is to explore the sources and development of these problems, and to collect possible solutions.

The research is fundamentally based on two types of sources: analyses of relevant literature and documents of educational administration of the period, as well as a series of interviews investigating knowledge transfer with informant village musicians and practising folk music teachers. The results of the research have, essentially, confirmed the initial hypotheses, which suggest that the central element and organising principle of future curricula ought to be instrumental skills, rather than learning material. This concept may be greatly facilitated by the time-tested methodology of classical violin textbooks.

¹ Lit. “dance house”. A casual event where people can join in and learn folk dancing on the fly (as opposed to a choreographed stage performance). The name, apparently, comes from the fact that, in Transylvania, Romania, dancing also took place at private homes. Starting from 1972, a cultural movement was launched to revive folk dancing as a form of preserving and cherishing tradition and heritage.

1. The motivation behind the research

I am in a lucky position, as my research is supported by a lot of my own professional experience, besides the literature and the accumulated knowledge of having taught folk music for the past decades. I started playing the violin at the age of five at the Municipal Music School² in Nagykanizsa, Hungary. I grew up in a family of mostly folk musicians, but I started learning classical music; in the town, there was no institutional folk music education.

In the end, I decided to pursue a career in classical music, and I was admitted to the Bartók Béla Secondary School of Music³, Budapest, to the violin and composition programmes. For a time, I was not involved in folk music, until I was commissioned to compose a piece of folk music inspiration. The piece was made, and it had a great success, so the performers, with me among them, decided to stay together and learn how to play authentic Hungarian folk music: this is how the Góbé Band was established, in which I started to play the folk viola.

I chose this instrument for two reasons. On the one hand, I did not want to play the folk violin alongside my classical violin studies due to the different technical expectations of the two modes of playing, on the other hand, as a composer, I am especially interested in harmonising for the folk viola. In order to deepen my knowledge, I took up playing the folk viola besides classical violin as a student at the Music Academy, so I could have weekly lessons.

As graduation was approaching, I received an invitation from the Tóth Aladár Music School, Budapest, to teach folk string instruments as well as classical violin. Therefore, I did a Master's programme on them, too, and I left the Music Academy as a classical violinist-violin teacher, and a folk string instrument teacher.

Already during my studies, I was looking for the connections between the bodies of knowledge of the two professions. I observed in my folk music training that, contrary to my experiences at the classical programme, I was not receiving instructions on what exact movements to make in order to create the different ways of sounds that can be found in folk viola playing; into what smaller units these movements can be divided, and how and with what methodology these could be taught to someone so that they precisely understand when to move which muscle in what fashion, and for what reason.

² today Farkas Ferenc School of Music and Golden Ratio, Primary School of Art

³ today Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Bartók Béla Training Secondary School of Music and Instrument Building

I was able to explore and develop this background only by tracing the technical features required for the given musical phenomena back to my knowledge as a classical instrumentalist. However, a young child, a beginner at primary music school, cannot yet do so. Thus I hypothesised that the absence of methodological components in folk viola education I experienced cause general problems for my colleagues at the primary music schools, too. This thought initiated my research.

I have experienced enormous differences between my methodology trainings for classical and folk music. This difference illuminates the fact that, ten years ago, there was a fundamental conceptual divergency about the teaching of methodology between the two fields of expertise. Folk music profession relied much more on non-conscious imitation related to traditional, informal knowledge transfer. Its limitations were only revealed later; training at the Music Academy includes an independent course on methodology today.

After having graduated as a folk music teacher and having begun teaching at a primary art school⁴, I started to study the folk viola curriculum for the primary level. I was astonished to find that Southern Transdanubian dance music and that of Szék is an obligatory part of the material for year 1 (Ministry of Education 1999)⁵. Playing the latter would require that an 8–9 years old student hold a viola of 38–42 cms body length (that is, without the neck) under their chin, which is physically impossible. Although this could be, in theory, solved by rebuilt half-sized violins, it would result in further problems with acoustics and didactics (Pap 1994, Rados 1950/51).

The appearance of the music of Szék at the beginning of the curriculum for the primary level can be explained by two reasons. In the period in question, mostly adults and adolescents studied the folk viola at music schools, thus, there was no physical obstacle to overcome (Vizeli 2024). It is also possible to suppose that the music of Szék was included into the curriculum not for methodological, but for historical reasons. As is known, one of the first and most important music and dance material of the *táncház* movement, begun in 1972, was that of Szék (Jávorszky 2022: 34–36).

⁴ A general term for an elective institute in Hungary established to teach some branch(es) of art for beginners, amateurs, and students who want to enter professional art education; primary music schools are a type of them dedicated only to teaching music. The majority of the students are under the age of 18, thus, these schools normally serve as complement for general education (and, therefore, classes are usually in the afternoon and evening); however, it is also, technically, available for adults of virtually any age.

⁵ Note that page numbers in the references are given according to the Hungarian versions, where available, of the publications originally written in another language, or where the publication was originally written in Hungarian, even if it is available in English, too.

This realisation helped me formulate the hypotheses and research questions of the dissertation.

2. Hypotheses

1. The dominance of the three-stringed viola in primary folk music education can be traced back to historical motives.
2. Methodological experiences of the classical and folk music field may mutually enrich each other, with special emphasis on the achievements of classical violin education.
3. In institutional music education, the methods of traditional knowledge transfer cannot be exclusive.
4. The teaching methodology of the folk viola as taught at university may be incomplete with regards to young children, and, as a result, graduated teachers' pedagogical repertoire related to deliberate technical instruction is likely to be unsatisfactory, too.

3. Research questions

1. How and to what extent did social trends involved in the táncház movement and the dominant way of thinking of folk musicians influence the curriculum and teaching methodology of the folk viola for the primary level?
2. Why was cooperation between classical and folk musicians limited for a long time?
3. At which points of the teaching process and to what extent should it be recommended to use the learning methods of village informants?
4. To what extent is it necessary to implement the methodology of the classical violin into the instruction of the folk viola? Exactly which elements are required?

4. Research methodology

4.1. Document analysis

The main method of the research related to this dissertation was document analysis, as a basis of which books, studies, articles, memos, curricula, and music school records were used. This analysis is mostly descriptive and qualitative in nature (Babbie 2001: 413), but the music school records were examined quantitatively, too.

4.2. Interviews

The second research method is a unique mix of surveys (Babbie 2001: 274–277), and interviewing typical for qualitative field work research (Babbie 2001: 316). It may be regarded as survey research from the aspect that roughly the same series of questions were asked of people belonging to the same area of research; however, they were not presented in writing, but in the form of interviews. This decision was made partly because the number of people was not too high, and partly because the answers to the questions, which were 100% open ones, may have been quite diverse, which made it necessary at times to have the possibility to ask contingency questions (Babbie 2001: 283) and probes (Babbie 2001: 300).

The subjects can be sorted into three groups: informant village musicians, teachers working in institutions, and teachers working independently and/or with a methodology of their own development. The interviews were largely analysed qualitatively, but, in the case of certain data, quantitative analysis was also required. These analyses were, at times, paired with theory generation (Babbie 2001: 316), and they were also useful for testing hypotheses and revising conclusions developed prior to and throughout research. Questioning was sometimes subject to minor redesigning during the interviews (Babbie 2001: 336–339), thus, they may be called semi-structured.

The subjects belonging to the same research area may also be thought of as one focus group (Babbie 2001: 339–342), with the difference that the questions were presented to them separately, not at the same time and place. The analyses are not only variable-oriented, but, at times, case-oriented (Babbie 2001: 414), too, since details of the careers and biographies of the interviewed teachers played a part in obtaining certain data. Induction and deduction were both applied to generate theory (Babbie 2001: 39–40).

4.3. Case studies

Although it is not among the objectives of the dissertation to analyse individual careers and biographies, this was still necessary in a succinct fashion in the case of village informants and teachers who use alternative methodologies, since these personal histories significantly contribute to the development of the learning or teaching methodology in question, and interpreting certain data would be impossible without them. When presenting these points, short case studies are also given (Babbie 2001: 329).

5. The structure of the dissertation

The essential portion of the dissertation consists virtually of six chapters. In the first, the evolution of the táncház movement is given in details with respect to Hungary and the international aspect, too, as well as the connection of revival⁶ folk music to other musical genres. In the second chapter, social trends related to the táncház movement are analysed from its beginnings (1972) until the 2010s; it also serves as an introduction to the establishment of folk music institutions which do not offer education, the media presence of folk music, and the connection between classical and folk music. In the third chapter, the educational history of folk music is discussed, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education (fully established today) are introduced, and other forms of instruction, which may be regarded as their precursors, are also mentioned. The following two chapters contain the results of the interviews, the first one presents data obtained from those made with informant village musicians, and the second one those made with my music teacher colleagues.

The last main chapter centres on methodology, it presents the curricula written since the '80s, and it discusses the possibility to implement certain publications and materials used in classical violin education into the folk viola programme. Instrument learning methodologies developed by colleagues who work in certain non-governmental institutions are also mentioned here with the same intention. Several sub-chapters titled "Reflection" can be found in the dissertation, which connect the factual data presented for different topics with the problems of methodology, and they point out what influence a certain trend had on the evolution of the later established institutional folk viola education.

6. The evaluation of the hypotheses

1. *Correct.* As a result of the fact that the táncház movement began primarily with learning the music of Szék, folk musicians mostly used the three-stringed viola in the accompaniment section until the '90s. Based on the classical methodology, using the violin and the classical viola would be substantially more reasonable in the first years of studies (Dénes – Kállay – Lányi – Mező 1966), yet, the curriculum does not reflect this.

⁶ This term was first used in Ireland for the movement whose objective is that people who were not born into the community and are not, originally, a member of a traditional village culture on the verge of extinction learn it and, thus, keep it alive. It was Ferenc Sebő who so named the – mostly – urban musicians and dancers and their groups and ensembles who learned and, thus, preserved the music or dance of village cultures as outsiders.

2. *Correct.* The material found in certain classical violin schools would provide excellent preliminary studies for playing the folk viola, and their system would help in organising the folk music material in a methodically more logical fashion.
3. *Correct.* At the beginning of instrumental studies, in the unanimous opinion of fellow teachers, the methodology of classical violin instruction is required, since, with the exclusive use of the traditional learning methods of the villages – due to certain technical limitations –, it is unfeasible that a child of average ability be able to play the extremely diverse folk music material of the Carpathian basin at a uniformly good standard by the time they grow up.
4. *Partially correct.* At the Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, materials on teaching beginners and young children are not part of the methodology training of folk violists for the time being (Árendás). At the University of Nyíregyháza, however, this has already been incorporated into the curriculum, thus students graduating at this institute are already given information on the matter (Vizeli 2023).

7. Answers to the research questions

1. In the táncház movement, for about the first ten years, the participants' energies were completely taken up in a search for identity, and the process of defining the genre of folk music, and distinguishing it from classical music, urban Gipsy music, and the beat movement, which was tightly connected to the táncház movement (Lévai 1977). The data obtained from the sources and the interviews strongly suggest that the way the representatives of the táncház movement and, later, folk music education thought about these questions did not significantly change even after the process of defining and distinguishing had become positively successful. This attitude in education did not favour connecting folk music and folk music education to other genres of music and their education. Since the revival folk violists and, later, teachers, who mostly learned to play the instrument informally as adults, were untrained in the details of transferring knowledge about the technical requirements of their instruments, this knowledge did not reach college and university students, either. Since the 2000s, the number of primary school children participating in folk music education has been continuously growing. The data as summarised above raises problems mostly with respect to their instruction.
2. The reason behind the distinction from classical music and classical musicians on behalf of folk musicians has been the search for identity as discussed in the previous point 1.

From the point of view of classical musicians, according to the sources, the reason behind the lack of understanding towards folk musicians has been the differences in instrumental technique and musical expression, which are unusual for classical musicians.

3. Compared to the classical methodology, it appears that the years 4–5 of learning the viola may be the appropriate time to introduce and adopt certain learning methods of informant musicians, since, by this time, the student is likely to be confident enough in their instrumental technique so as not to be confused by a different method.
4. Folk viola teachers (since they do not have general knowledge of methodology) have attempted to compensate for their shortcomings about teaching young children by individual inventions and/or studying classical violin methodologies, learning materials, or supplementary materials on their own. It is worth noting that several individual inventions are fairly similar to some of the methods well-established in classical violin education.

From the analysis of instrumental textbooks, and colleagues' feedback, it is possible to conclude that, in all probability, two years of preliminary studies on the violin would be necessary on average for the future students of the folk viola, which may follow the guidelines in the curriculum for the classical violin. Closely studying the relevant requirements demonstrates that students should learn the basic skills necessary to play this type of instrument during this period, irrespective of musical genre. From among them, I wish to underline stopping the string, playing in tune, bow hold, bow stroke, bow division, string crossing, and *détaché*, *legato*, *portato*, and *martalé* bowing.

8. Further possible directions of research

It can be asserted that the main subject of the dissertation, the methodology problems of folk viola education play a significant role in the everyday work of fellow teachers. Every subject reported several requirements in the curriculum currently in effect which are very difficult or downright impossible to meet for young children. The finalised dissertation may serve as an adequate starting point so that a group of professionals can later restructure and reformulate the curriculum for the folk viola on the primary level, based on classical methodology. This will require further research, analysis, and the testing of certain specific materials which will be created later. The final objective would surely be to create a curriculum which is useful for beginners, and, chiefly, for young children; this, besides being sound methodically, should

preserve the traditional values of folk music, too. Not least, the dissertation also points out that it would be necessary to incorporate the classical materials which may be of assistance to future primary music teachers when teaching young children into the methodology training of the folk music department of the Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest.

9. References in the dissertation abstract⁷

Árendás, Péter DLA. Tantárgyi program. *A népi brácsa tanításmódszertani anyaga, témakörei. Szakmódszertan, szakdidaktika és pedagógiai repertoárismeret.* Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem. Népzene Tanszék. (*Course programme. The materials and topics of the educational methodology for the folk viola. Methodology, didactics, and educational repertoire.*)

Babbie, Earl 2001. *A társadalomtudományi kutatás gyakorlata.* Balassi Kiadó. Budapest. (Original title: *The practice of social research.*)

Dénes, László – Lányi, Margit – Kállay, Géza – Mező, Imre 1966. *Hegedűiskola I.* Editio Musica. Budapest. (*Violin school I.*)

Jávorszky, Béla Szilárd 2022. *Táncház 50. Történetek a táncházmozgalom fél évszázadából.* Kossuth Kiadó. Budapest. (*Táncház 50. Stories from half a century of the táncház movement*)

Lévai, Júlia 1977. Zenei köznyelv: népzene, magyaránóta, sláger vagy beat? *Mozgó Világ* 1: 99-105. (*Common musical language: folk music, Hungarian song, popular song, or beat?*)

Ministry of Education, Hungary 1999. *Az alapfokú művészetoktatás követelményei és tantervi programja. Népzene.* ROMI-SULI Könyvkiadó és Továbbképző Műhely. Budapest. (*The Requirements and Curricula of Primary Art Education. Folk music.*)

Pap, János 1994. *A hangszerakusztika alapjai.* Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola. Budapest. (*The basics of instrumental acoustics.*)

Rados, Dezső 1950/51. *A hegedűtanítás módszertana (Ideiglenes jegyzet).* Kézirat. Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola Zenetudományi Osztálya. Budapest. (*The methodology of teaching the violin. [Temporary notes.]*)

⁷ The italics in the titles are of the original format. In the parentheses, the translations of the titles are given, always in italics, irrespective of the original entry.

Vizeli, Máté 2023. An interview with Áron Sárközi, a teacher at the Pikéthy Tibor Secondary School of Music, Vác, and the University of Nyíregyháza, Institute of Music. 2nd Nov 2023. Üröm. The recording is owned by the interviewer.

Vizeli, Máté 2024. An interview with Béla Szerényi, director of the Folk Music School of Óbuda. 2nd Jan 2024. Budapest. The recording is owned by the interviewer.

10. Publications⁸

Vizeli, Máté 2018. Hegedűtanulás többféle zenei stílusban. In: Magyar Margit (szakm. vez.): *Újító törekvések. Megújuló művészetpedagógia. Jó gyakorlatok értéktára 2. kötet.* Magyar Zeneiskolák és Művészeti Iskolák Szövetsége. Budapest. (*Learning the violin in several musical styles.*)

Kéringer, Gábor – Vizeli, Máté 2021. Ha nagy leszek, zenész leszek... A család, mint pályaorientációs tényező a zenésszé válás útján. In: Juhász Erika – Kattein-Pornói Rita (szerk.): *Tanulói társadalom. Oktatáskutatás járvány idején. Absztraktfüzet.* Magyar Nevelés- és Oktatáskutatók Egyesülete. Budapest. (*When I grow up, I'll be a musician... The family as a factor in career choice on the path of becoming a musician.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2022. A magyarpalatkai cigányzenész családok bemutatása. *Parlando*. 1. (*Introducing the musician Gipsy families of Magyarpalatka.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2022. Lehetséges változtatások a népi brácsa tanítási módszertanában. In: Juhász Márta Klára (szerk.): *Változások a pedagógiában – a pedagógia változása IV.* Programfüzet és rezümék. Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Bölcsész- és Társadalomtudományi Kar. Esztergom. (*Possible changes in the educational methodology for the folk viola.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2022. Lehetséges változtatások a népi brácsa tanítási módszertanában. In: Juhász Márta Klára – Karainé Gombocz Orsolya – Mongyi Norbert (szerk.): *Pedagógiai változások – A változás pedagógiája IV.* Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem. Budapest. (*Possible changes in the educational methodology for the folk viola.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2022. „Kilépni Bartók árnyékából”. *Folkmagazin*. 4. (*“Leaving Bartók's shadow.”*)

⁸ Only the titles of the author's publications are translated, not the entire entry.

Vizeli, Máté 2022. A falusi vonósbandák hangszer tanulási módszerei és azoknak az intézményes népi brácsaoktatásba való beépítésének lehetőségei. In: Juhász Erika – Kattein-Pornói Rita (szerk.): Oktatás egy változó világban – Kutatás, innováció, fejlesztés. Absztraktfüzet. Magyar Nevelés- és Oktatáskutatók Egyesülete. Budapest. (*Methods of instrumental learning among village string bands, and the possibilities of implementing them into institutional folk viola education.*)

Kéring, Gábor – Vizeli, Máté 2023. Ha nagy leszek, zenész leszek... A család, mint pályaeorientációs tényező a zenésszé válás útján. *Parlando* 5. (*When I grow up, I'll be a musician... The family as a factor in career choice on the path of becoming a musician.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2023. Erdélyi adatközlő brácsások hangszer tanulási módozatai. *Parlando* 6. (*The ways of instrumental learning of Transylvanian informant violists.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2023. Erdélyi adatközlő brácsások hangszer tanulási módozatai. In: Juhász Erika – Kattein-Pornói Rita (szerk.): *Az oktatás határdimenziói*. Absztraktfüzet. Magyar Nevelés- és Oktatáskutatók Egyesülete. Szombathely. (*The ways of instrumental learning of Transylvanian informant violists.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2023. Lehetséges változtatások a népi brácsa tanítási módszertanában. In: Váradi Judit – Kerekes Rita – Kiss Julianna (szerk.): 3. Zenepedagógiai konferencia. Kutatások a zene és a zenepedagógia világában. Absztraktfüzet. Debreceni Egyetem. Debrecen. (*Possible changes in the educational methodology for the folk viola.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2023. Lázár Zsigmond: Csontváry utazásai. *Folkmagazin*. 3. (*Zsigmond Lázár: Csontváry's journeys.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2024. Az alapfokú népi brácsa tanítás problémakörei egy interjú kutatás tükrében. In: Juhász Erika – Gyányi István (szerk.): *Az oktatás időszerű narratívumai*. Absztraktkötet. Magyar Nevelés- és Oktatáskutatók Egyesülete. Eger. (*The problems of teaching the folk viola at the primary level as reflected in research interviews.*)

Vizeli, Máté 2024. The problems of the curriculum and of teaching the folk viola on the primary level. *Eruditio – Educatio*. 4.