

## ZeneZen, Creative Piano Pedagogy

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Received: March 19, 2022

Accepted: May 11, 2022

Online Published: July 6, 2022

doi:10.5539/ies.v15n4p9

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v15n4p9>

### Abstract

This study aims to investigate in detail *The ZeneZen Creative Piano Pedagogy*. This research, which is an example of a case study, is a qualitative study in which descriptive research methods and techniques are used. For the research, both professors were interviewed. The interview was conducted within the framework of an unstructured interview form designed on 4 main lines of approach: methodology, application, difficulties, and its impact on other areas. The data obtained were analyzed by descriptively. As a result, it is seen that the ZeneZen pedagogical approach created for piano education is quite different from traditional piano education as an approach in which many elements are applied as opposed to only teaching and practicing piano works. In this approach, music and also silence are considered holistically, auditory, visual, bodily, and internal sensations are blended, and students learn to explore and communicate their imaginations and inner worlds through the piano.

**Keywords:** ZeneZen, piano pedagogy, creativity, Kodály, Kokas

### 1. Introduction

As in life, development and progress in all areas of education demand a creative impulse that needs to be supported. 'If students are to satisfy their needs in the information age, educational systems will be required to go beyond didactic transmission models to the development of more creative forward-thinking forms of education' (Hosseini, 2011, p. 1807).

Lee deals with a creative education method consisting of 5 steps: the idea, its discovery, its digging, its manifestation, and its development. 'The common premise for applying the five-stage teaching is the encouragement of learner's freedom and willingness, and the teaching mode should be preceded as the principle of teacher's love and guide' (Lee, 2013, p. 47).

Having a sense of freedom during the learning process raises the student's creativity, providing a balanced combination between knowledge and imagination. Contrary to positivism, creative learning is developed in the framework of the constructivist approach, as the individual is the person who learns through their actions. 'As a guiding philosophy for encouraging creative thinking in music, constructionist approaches tend to celebrate student-centered learning and favor the social and collaborative nature of education' (Webster, 2016, p. 28).

'The cultivation of students' creative thinking ability is conducive to the development of students' creativity and imagination in piano courses based on learning piano playing skills well' (Li, 2020, p. 6). This situation will make an impact on the students' piano performances as well as on their own lives. 'The goal of the creative musical tasks is not to prepare future professional composers, but for the creative activity, woken up through music, to be transferred later on into the whole life of the person, regardless of the profession they practice' (Mincheva, 2015, p. 31).

As in music education, the effect of the use of voice in piano education is very important in the different learning stages, creative works, and activities, etc. The role of singing is essential to understand and express any musical element or the music itself. Zoltán Kodály, who attaches great importance to the use of the voice, also emphasizes its relevance in the cognitive and physical context as follows:

[...] 'The elements of music are precious instruments in education. Rhythm develops attention, concentration, determination, and the ability to condition oneself. Melody opens up the world of emotions. Dynamic variation and tone color sharpen our hearing. Singing, finally, is such a many-sided physical activity that its effect in physical education is immeasurable [...] Deeper musical cultivation is

only developed where the voice was the foundation' [...] (Bónis 1974, p. 130; Kodály 2007, p. 117 quoted by Hooker, 2013, p. 132).

According to Kodály, voice is the foundation of music education and is an important part of any kind of activity at every stage of music training. 'Choksy notes that singing is the best foundation for developing musicianship skills because "musical knowledge acquired through singing is internalized in a way that musical knowledge acquired through an instrument—an external appendage—can never be"' (Choksy, 2001, quoted by Bowyer, 2015, p. 70).

In his desire to change Hungarian music education, Kodály did not only introduce singing as an important fact but also compiled other teaching tools to provide efficient and complex musical training. This system, unlike only perceptual and cognitive education, is for every individual starting from a young age - 'aimed at training all children and not just the musically gifted, it uses such techniques as signs, games, clapping, reading musical notes, rhythmic notation, and, most centrally, singing' (Hurwitz, Irving, et al., 1975, p. 45). Gönczy explains the elements of the Kodály system with the following illustration:

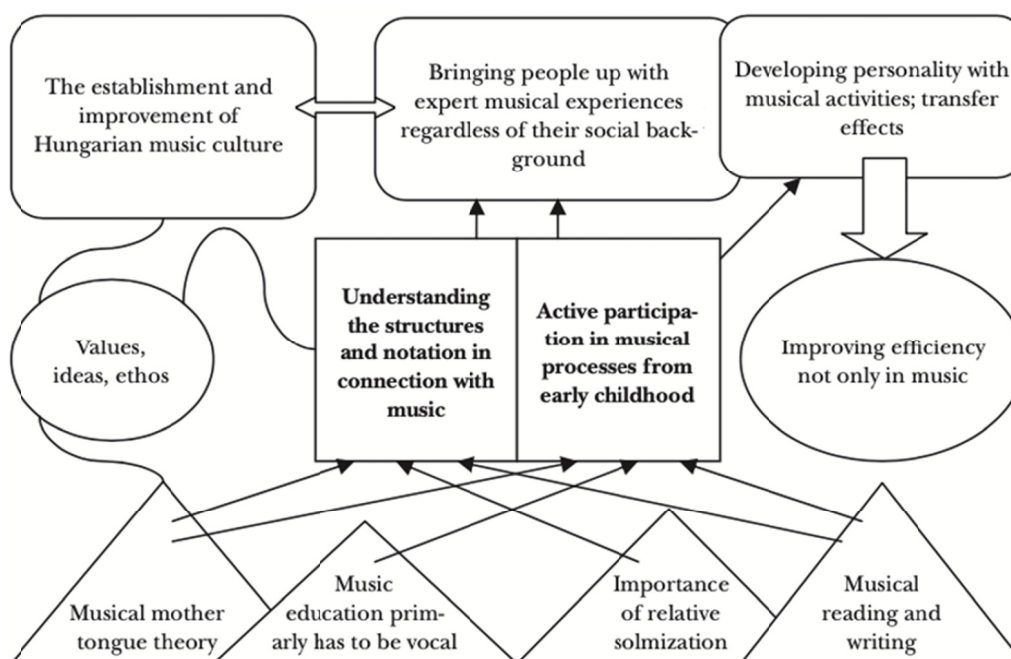


Figure 1. Hierarchical illustration of the main elements of the Kodály concept (Smuta & Buzás, 2017, p. 362, quoted by Gönczy, 2009)

Unlike traditional and didactic teaching methods, Kodály created an ideology that provides development in the physical and cognitive fields by handling music in an experiential context. The Kodály philosophy can be explained as the following:

- 'Advance the level of teacher training and enhance musical literacy in schools,
- Everyone is capable and has the right and freedom to musical literacy,
- Singing is the cornerstone of musical learning,
- Music education must commence with the very young,
- The value of using folk music and music of high artistic purpose,
- Including movement, games, playing instruments, music reading and writing with singing; and sequential method supporting a child's natural learning, growth, and development' (Tabuena, 2021, p. 13).

Based on this, the teaching techniques he developed for Hungarian music education also made an impact all over the world. 'The four effective teaching methods of the Kodály Music Education Methodology; the tonic sol-fa method, the gestures roll-call method, the rhythm duration syllable pronunciation method and the numbered musical notation of rhythm letter method are the best examples' (Han, 2017, p. 200).

The tonic sol-fa method, also known as ‘movable do’ is the technique used to sing solfege in the Kodály teaching method. ‘Solfege singing can be combined with hand signs, body movements and playing musical instruments for children’s musical pedagogy’ (Luen & Luen, 2019, p. 1259). ‘Solfege singing with body movements in the Kodály teaching method practiced by early childhood educators is said to be able to increase preschool children’s memory, kinesthetic abilities and singing skills’ (Luen, Ayob, Augustine, & Wong, 2019, p. 812).

The Kodálian lesson plan also called the Kodály trilogy of Ps, is developed in three phases: preparation, presentation, and practice. Houlahan and Tacka (2015, p. 41) described these phases in detail as follows:

#### Preparation

- 1) Prepare the learning through kinesthetic activities.
- 2) Prepare the learning through aural activities.
- 3) Prepare the learning through visual activities.

#### Presentation

- 1) Present the solfege syllable or rhythm label for the new sound.
- 2) Present the notation for the new sound.

#### Practice

- 1) Incorporate the new element (now identified as a familiar element) into the practices of reading.
- 2) Incorporate the new element (now identified as a familiar element) into the practices of writing.
- 3) Incorporate the new element (now identified as a familiar element) into the practices of improvisation.

After the “new element” has been discovered, the activities in the last section are the part where the processed knowledge transforms into new forms. ‘At this stage, the now-familiar concept is reviewed by finding it in other materials and using it in new ways. It is during this period of experimentation that improvisation and composition challenge students to integrate the new concept into their existing musical framework’ (Boshkoff, 1991, p. 31).

‘According to Klára Kokas, the basic tenets of modern pedagogy are, on the one hand, the artistic and scientific value in a given material and, on the other hand, the material itself providing creative opportunities for the children...It is not enough to impart knowledge in music education; the educator has to be a partner in the child’s discovery of new experiences’ (Király, 2016, p. 28, quoted by Kokas, 1972, p. 6).

Klára Kokas, a disciple of Kodály, developed a pedagogy that can be expressed as an experience-centered extension of the Kodály approach. ‘It is based on the idea that the best method to guide children towards the absolute perception of music is through activity, movement, listening and creative work’ (Çağlak Eker, 2020, p. 761). In addition to the use of voice, which is the cornerstone of the Kodálian approach, she developed a perspective in which all the activities are performed through body movement. ‘Besides singing, movement plays an important part in the activities of the human organism’ (Kokas, 1969, p. 125).

Székely states that the characteristics of Klára Kokas’s pedagogy are the following:

‘Creativity development through music – not music education in a classic way, but rather personal development with music, therapy, empathy, absolute attention, improvisational shape-changing dances, motional-verbal-visual representation, spontaneous self-expression, association to music, folk song and name singing, circle games, the importance of imagination in education, free choice of partner or technique, complex art pedagogy, qualitative and absolute classical instrumental music, transfer effect, trusting and intimate atmosphere’ (Székely, 2021, p. 4).

‘Kokas’s pedagogy makes bodily experience the key in fostering children’s explorative, open mindset: both in the individual sense (creative presence) and for the collective (creative attunement)’ (Vass, 2018, p. 23). Kokas’s pedagogy not only reveals the power of self-expression and the individual’s inner world through music but also develops imagination and creativity expressed by the use of the body. ‘Music education can also germinate children’s feelings and help them experience the beauty of music in social and cultural life to enrich their imagination and creativity, promote children to learn to use the mind to feel and discover beauty, and express and create beauty in their own way’ (Jin, 2019, p. 1062).

‘According to Klára Kokas’s world view and child-centered pedagogy, as a music teacher and music psychologist, she built her method on creativity, human and interpersonal relationships, child-centered approach, personality development, and attention to others. These aspects are characteristic of the reform pedagogical methods - art pedagogical elements like music and dance - additional values of the Kokas method’ (Székely, 2020, p. 2).

In this approach, music listening is an active experience which acquires a deeper meaning where children are

taught how to listen to the music. As Tiszai points out:

‘The unique method of Klára Kokas facilitates a deep musical understanding through the repeated listening of selected short high-quality classical masterpieces. Participants share their emotions by the freely improvised movements of their body, which Kokas defines as dances. A close analysis of these dances reveals that participants’ movements are often synchronized with more than one significant characteristic of the musical piece they are listening to’ (Tiszai, 2016, p. 8).

‘It also beneficially develops socialization, association, communication, coordination skills and abilities, aesthetic sense, empathy, and concentration. In other words: holistic education. The accent is on personality development and self-expression through musical inspiration’ (Székely, 2018, p. 117).

*ZeneZen*, a new approach in teaching piano performance and the subject of this research, is the reflection of all these approaches and integrates them into piano education. Regarding instrumental education not being limited to just the instrument itself, Kodály says the following:

*“To teach a child an instrument without first giving him preparatory training and without developing singing, reading and dictating to the highest level along with the playing is to build upon sand” (Estrella, 2019).*

## 2. Method

This is a qualitative study in which descriptive research methods and techniques were used. A qualitative research ‘is a scientific study based on the discovery, understanding, and interpretation of various events and phenomena in their environments as a result of a detailed examination’ (Tikaç, 2015, p. 360).

This research, which investigated *ZeneZen Creative Piano Approach*, is an example of a case study. “A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case. To accomplish this, the researcher collects many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews to observations, to documents, to audiovisual materials” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Study is an example for the revelatory case from single-case studies. ‘This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation’ (Yin, 2003, p. 42).

In order to collect the necessary data for this research, Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák, the experts who created the approach that is the subject of the research, were interviewed. ‘Expert interviews are a widely-used qualitative interview method often aiming at gaining information about or exploring a specific field of action’ (Döringer, 2021, p. 265). Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák, professors of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, work together and apply this approach they have developed, among other trainings they provide. In addition, they explain and practice this approach in many important music schools in other countries. ‘The theory-generating expert interview holds an analytical and interpretative perspective in order to outline interrelations in the empirical data and to develop theoretical approaches’ (Döringer, 2021, p. 267).

In these interviews, which were held to examine the *ZeneZen Creative Piano Approach* in depth, although the instructors are evaluated as experts, they can also be qualified as elite with their globally recognized identities as members of an important institution. In this context, it can be said that this paper sets an example for expert and elite interviews. ‘Elite individuals are considered to be influential, prominent, and/or well-informed in an organization or community; they are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 105).

Interviews in the research were conducted via e-mail. Due to the busy schedule of the participants, the predetermined unstructured interview form was sent to them by e-mail. A joint mail group was created with the participants and they answered the questions jointly.

The interview was conducted within the framework of an unstructured interview form designed on 4 main lines of approach:

- 1) Questions about the methodology of the approach
- 2) Questions about the application of the approach
- 3) Questions about difficulties
- 4) Questions about the impact of the approach on other fields

The data were analyzed descriptively, and mostly direct quotations are included for ‘to provide an orderly description of rich, descriptive detail’ (Patton, 2015, p. 853 quoted by Lofland, 1971, p. 59) and as the opinions of the experts/creators of the approach are considered very important.

### 3. Findings

In this section, the findings of the interviews conducted within the scope of the research are given in context of methodology, application, difficulties, and its impact on other areas. First of all, the views of the participants were directly conveyed, and then the themes and sub-themes obtained from the speeches were presented in tables.

#### 3.1 Questions About the Methodology of the Approach

- What is the basic philosophy of the ZeneZen approach that you have developed as a piano pedagogy and its connection with Kodály and Kokas pedagogies? (What are the learning steps of the ZeneZen approach?)

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“Our pedagogical approach is called “ZeneZen”, which is also the basis of our philosophy. ZeneZen is a play on words: “Zene” means music in Hungarian, and “Zen” refers to meditation, or more specifically, meditation at its highest level. Since zen is not attached to any religious or philosophical view, for us the meaning of zen is – a life lived with music. The full path to zen is a path to experience, the practice of music, and a way of teaching that goes beyond words.*

*Certain Zen ideas became highly influential for us, and we made them our philosophy. For example, this is one of our thoughts - “The ultimate goal of the ZeneZen path is not to experience music alone, secluded, or to withdraw from everyday life, but to integrate the spiritual experiences perceived through music into everyday life, work, and our relation to nature and each other.”*

*The ZeneZen course has a metaphorical link to the Kodály Institute as well. There is a huge, lone Linden tree in the old monastery building, and this tree’s majestic trunk, branches, and leaves became the starting point for our ZeneZen warm-up exercise. Living through the changes of the four seasons, the tree became the symbol of tradition, renewal, style, and character. It became the symbol of ZeneZen. (Ap.1)*

*Since ZeneZen combines three different Hungarian pedagogical branches, it is worth examining each one of them briefly.*

*The Kodály concept educates the totality of a human being, shaping the whole personality. Music is used to complete our existence, and to help us become better people. The Kodály-pedagogy is a music pedagogy that educates people from their kindergarten years, to develop and maintain their musical skills. Kodály’s student, Dr. Klára Kokas PhD wrote:*

*“The main point of Kodály’s concept is that it places artistic education, especially music, in the center of children’s education. With its systematic structure, active music-making, singing, and musical skill development leave space for the reception of artistic content, as well as for further individual development. The basis for the reception of musical content is the emotional experience, which is followed by the recognition of the aesthetic value of the musical piece. This is where the carefully planned, logically built and exigent skill development leads to.” (Kokas, 1977b, p. 8)*

*Kodály’s principles – namely the regular, singing-based music education that is rooted in folk music using relative solmization that is started in early childhood, and practiced in a group environment - can manifest itself in several possible ways in music pedagogy. One such road is the Kokas-pedagogy. Kokas Klára gave her students the chance to encounter original Hungarian folk songs as well as the highest quality masterpieces. The focus of her teaching was a free movement created by children, imagination, as well as synchrony of musical and literary content. Kokas-pedagogy is not only music pedagogy but is successful in supporting the harmonious development of the personality as well. It also has transfer effects on many non-musical skills and allows students to experience creativity on multiple levels, in the form of a creative action that strengthens the self.*

*“When a Hungarian pianist places his hands on the keys, we can feel the spirit of Franz Liszt.” – said Zoltán Kocsis, one of the most excellent representatives of the Hungarian piano school worldwide. Thanks to Franz Liszt (1811-1886), the Royal Hungarian Music Academy could open its doors in Budapest in 1875. After the Second World War, musical culture became available to a larger part of society largely to the efforts of Zoltán Kodály. As mass education became dominant, it called for a new system that was efficient enough, but not too costly. By establishing a network of state music schools and singing elementary schools with daily music classes, group solfège classes were also introduced. At this point, teaching the basic concepts of music theory became the solfège teachers’ job, not that of the piano teachers.*

*We, who grew up with this education, only began learning a musical instrument after one or two years of music, or solfège lessons (depending on the type of school we attended). By then we were a little familiar with the “theoretical world” of music. We knew the different keys, the notes’ absolute names, and their places on the pentagram, as well as the solfa names and the basic rhythms; and we acquired all of this knowledge via singing.*

*This was a huge advantage in our instrumental education, since the ground was already prepared, and we were able to advance and learn musical pieces much faster. Thanks to our singing practice, we were able to play in a much nicer and expressive way on the piano.*

*We are very grateful for this education, but we also have to admit that this road – barring a few exceptions – often proved to be very dry and dull because of its rigor, and its theoretical, systematic approach. Moreover, separate solfege and instrumental lessons were unknown to our foreign students, since in other parts of the world the instrument teacher also teaches music theory, sight-reading, and musical styles. We had to change, and we had to change our pedagogical tools in order to be able to help our students, who will be the music teachers of the future.*

*These were the experiences that inspired us and led us to aim for something new, more colorful, more child-centered, and more varied while maintaining our heritage and traditions. Our aim was not to separate movement, solfege, and piano, but to let them strengthen each other, and to exploit the possibilities that are inherent within them as they are combined. We also wanted to keep the intimate format of small group classes, as we prefer the creativity, cohesive force, and trust fostered by such classes.”*

- What was your main idea in creating this approach, what inspired you?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“We met during our years at university since we both attended the Liszt Academy at the same time. However, we became closer friends once we got to be colleagues at the 12-year school of the Hungarian Radio Children’s Choir and later at the Teacher Training Institute of Music of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. We started teaching at the Kodály Institute in 2010, where we frequently had the same students: Kata for solfege and Anikó for piano. We realized that pianists and piano teachers barely learn any singing-based solfege before coming to the Institute, while solfege professors and voice or music teachers usually have trouble with the piano.*

*Combining our thoughts and shared experiences, we initiated the idea to build a course in which the two subjects could complete and aid one other, and in this way provide a more complex musical knowledge. In 2011, Kata got her training in Klára Kokas’s creative music pedagogy course, which is based on improvised movement. She began to teach Kokas pedagogy classes at the Institute, the influence of which softly and almost invisibly, yet drastically transformed not only our teaching, but also our relationship to music, and even to each other. Basically, the Kokas activity became the “dough” of our course. Suddenly it all fit together: piano teaching completed with free movement and solfege as preparation. Ever since the very first lesson, we’ve been constantly learning, reflecting, and implementing changes to find better and more effective solutions. We continue to do this with every new experience that comes our way.*

*Discussions with our students got us thinking about how we could share our pedagogical experiences and love of music through a course, in which understanding music, singing, solfege, free movement, and listening to music would naturally help students express their feelings while playing their instruments. ZeneZen is the musical and artistic fulfillment of Kodály’s and Kokas’s philosophy through piano playing and piano pedagogy.*

- Is it possible to design a piano training program based on this approach from the beginner level?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“Absolutely! We cover different topics, and address different grades of difficulties in our courses, depending on the age group, and the participants’ level. Although we only had the chance to work with children a couple of times, we firmly believe that the complexity and playfulness in ZeneZen, together with free movement, singing, and music listening, helps piano and other instrumental studies in a subconscious way, without tension or performance anxiety. The piano becomes the main protagonist in our courses that are directed to children and teachers “through the lens of a child”. The piano becomes their friend, and with its help, we playfully learn about rhythm. We sing, we dance at the piano, and with the piano. Most importantly, we do not teach fixed choreographies or stories, but we give space to children’s original ideas and experiences. The curiosity and imagination of children is an inexhaustible treasure trove and an enormous source of inspiration to us. By the way, touch and technique can be taught even to complete beginners. Just think of how our sense of touch changes on the surface of different materials: on velvet, or a sponge, stone, paper, water, etc. Or the way we touch the piano keys when we are sleepy, angry, cheerful, or sad. Or perhaps like a cat, a snail, or an elephant... As Kodály said, studying music should be a source of joy, and not suffering, right from the beginning.”*

- What do you think about the difference between the ZeneZen approach and the practice of traditional piano education?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“The ZeneZen approach to teaching is different from traditional practices. It*

*is about much more than just teaching and learning piano pieces. It is about the pleasure of listening to music, about our emotions, imagination, about deciphering the sheet music, about nature's order, universal values, love, tales and stories, images and dreams.*

*In our course, we do not share and teach well-established rules and musical instructions that always work, but we set out to look for our inner child and to take in the miracle of music with a pure, innocent soul through the piano pieces. We do not offer ready-made "recipes" to our students. Instead, we try to lead the classes in a way that the students themselves should understand, and get a feel for the inherent beauty, excitement, creativity, harmony, tale, mood, personal point of view, ideas, challenges, difficulties, main points, and phenomena which occur in a musical piece... so that later they can pass it on to their students in their teaching, in their lectures or concerts.*

*Kodály, referencing Robert Schumann's advice to music students, described the following characteristics of a good musician: 1. a well-trained ear; 2. a well-trained mind 3. a well-trained heart, and 4. a well-trained hand. He believed that all four parts must develop together in constant equilibrium. When one lags behind the others or goes ahead of the others, there is a problem.*

*ZeneZen is the class in which all of these four components are in an adequate balance, and in which each of them is taught hand in hand, progressing simultaneously. Each ZeneZen lesson consists of three main parts, independent of the duration of the class.*

- 1) The initial body awareness exercises, the creative singing, and the movement improvisation = well-trained heart - (preparation)
- 2) The following solfege and music theory part of the class brings awareness to a conscious level = well-trained ear and mind - (presentation)
- 3) And finally, the knowledge and experience of these two are combined at the piano = well-trained hands - (practice).

*ZeneZen is principally a group lesson. Students attend a 1,5-hour-long weekly class during the school year. Besides this, they also attend solfege and individual piano lessons.*

*According to our experience, ZeneZen is the most efficient and intense when we can teach in an immersive course format, continuously day after day, and when the daily schedule can be like so:*

*We begin together in the morning with a ZeneZen group workshop (90 minutes or 2x90 minutes) followed by individual piano lessons in the format of an open class (30, 45, 60 minutes), and group solfege lessons for the same students (90 minutes) in the afternoon. While half of the group attends piano lessons, the other half works on their solfege, and they switch at the break.*

*Working like this daily in workshops of 5-10 days can bring about miraculous transformations. New inspirations, surprises, exciting revelations, and strong emotions unfold day after day, and often come to completely alter the students' approach to music, and music teaching. It often filters into their musical interpretation, and piano playing. The knowledge they put together – in music theory, piano theory, and the realm of emotions – brings about a change in their teaching."*

- Is the approach for a particular group? Is it possible to apply for all ages?

*Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: "Yes, as we said, ZeneZen is suitable for every age group, and every level, starting with the absolute beginners, through to university students, general music teachers, and pianists. The framework is the same, but the topics, materials, difficulty, and length of the musical pieces, as well as the length of the music listening component, will be determined by the ages and the levels of the students. The same is true for the games that we use (attention games, drama, rhythm, or solfege-oriented games). We'd like to mention that we only use classical repertoire in our courses, a factor that is especially important for groups of children. It is never too early for children to get acquainted with beautiful, heart-warming pieces of classical music. Picture a child in kindergarten dancing along, or drawing, while listening to a Bach Minuet or a Mozart Sonatina. Or perhaps just listening to Bartók's Mikrokosmos while resting after running around – classical music will be a natural part of their lives. As they grow, they will begin to go to concerts, theatres, exhibitions, and will develop an interest in poetry, literature, and fine arts. They will develop an appreciation for the arts and human creations. They will have a chance to live a life of better quality. We, teachers, have an enormous responsibility that cannot be misused. This way perhaps the world will come to a point when people will be more and more thirsty for traditions and universal values. Classical music can become "trendy". This depends on us, teachers."*

- Is it possible to use this approach for individuals with disabilities in special education?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“Listening to music and partaking in musical activities are in themselves emotionally healing. So we certainly envision that ZeneZen could be adapted for therapeutic purposes, in collaboration with special educators, and/or music therapists. However, in principle ZeneZen is a music pedagogical course.*

*Kokas pedagogy, which is an important component of our teaching, has a therapeutic effect. Many music therapists use it in their work, and scientific research has been conducted and published about it.”*

Table 1. Themes found on the methodology of the approach

Theme	Sub-theme
Philosophy	Zenezen
	<i>“The ultimate goal of the zenezen path is not to experience music alone, secluded, or to withdraw from everyday life, but to integrate the spiritual experiences perceived through music into everyday life, work, and our relation to nature and each other.”</i>
Inspired approaches	Kodaly Concept Kokas Pedagogy
For whom	All age groups
	All levels
	Special education piano students
Basics of approach	Well-trained heart
	Well-trained ear and mind
	Well-trained hands
Type of lesson	Group

### 3.2 Questions About the Application of the Approach

- How does the working process of the approach progress? How is the lesson plan formed?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“We choose a different piano piece for each topic, and approach the given theme through that piece, by unraveling its most significant musical characteristics and problems through various singing and movement exercises. The three main parts of our course are built up as follows:*

#### Section 1:

- *Greeting with body awareness exercises, warm-up, attention games, creative, free games using melodies and rhythms from the actual piece.*
- *Creating silence. Experiencing full attention and inner concentration before starting the music listening.*
- *Receptive and active music listening. Repetitive listening to the musical piece, and its active and creative integration: improvisational free dancing to the music that might lead to the creation of movement composition(s) eventually.*
- *Optional: Presenting the dance piece developed either alone or with peers, as a solo composition, and its narrative explanation, verbal account.*
- *Optional: Visual expression. Visual representation of the musical movement experiences: drawing/painting to, or drawing/painting about the music, drawing the structure or the construction, and the creation of other visual compositions using various artistic techniques; then narrating the image, presenting, interpreting, and discussing it, and, finally giving a title to the work.*

#### Section 2:

- *Decoding the structure, melodic world, style, and harmony of the given piece of music more deeply through singing exercises, memorization, and singing of multiple-part transcriptions.*

#### Section 3:

- *“Discovering” the challenges of the piece from a technical, theoretical, and performer’s point of view at the piano. Exploring the trinity of body, singing, and piano-playing, by playing smaller segments from the piece individually, incorporating what we have just learned and experienced.*

*Of course, not all of these components have to be strictly present in every ZeneZen class (see the “optional” elements for example), but in the long run (which means weeks and months) students get a chance to try out*



being motivated by each activity. Additionally, the three main parts of the lessons or the sub-activities of the units, can appear in a different order, depending on the situation. For instance, a beautiful closing moment of the class can be a group dance while listening to a chosen piano piece.

*Although the piano is at the center of our course, the pathway to the instrument, and the musical piece is often longer, and more winding, than the goal itself. One often wouldn't even think, how rich a small piano piece can be. But this road can become ever shorter and can make the encounter with the piano more intense and profound. The participants in this 1h/1,5h long lesson can learn not only from us, and from each other, but from their own experience. Our students might open up, and get inspiration for studying a piece, for practicing, or for their future teaching."*

- Is there specific training material? Or is it possible to study on any piece played by the student?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *"We use musical material from the same traditional books of Hungarian piano education that we grew up with. Along with these, pieces that were written for music education, contemporary composers' pieces that were written for children, and the 6 volumes of Mikrokosmos by Bartók are always present on our musical palette. Besides these works, we constantly expand our repertoire, as we would like to get our students to meet with and become fond of the most diverse styles at the most varied levels of difficulties, since music listening is the essence of our course. Our love for these musical pieces and the world that we have discovered through them provide an inexhaustible source of inspiration for our teaching."*

- As part of the approach, what kind of practice is being done to improve the power of artistic expression, such as phrasing?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *"The road leading to artistic expression is as long as piano learning itself. It is a process that does not stand alone, since, without musical knowledge, understanding of music theory, solid handling of the instrument, emotional background, sensibility, and freedom of self-expression, artistic expression would not be possible. Without all of this, students are taken by a compulsion to "prove something", which in better cases may be overcome, but otherwise, will always remain an obstacle to creative playing.*

*It is known that everybody who works in the arts or teaches art, has to possess a strong artistic expression to be able to pass on their knowledge, and to be able to understand, sense, and even feel the thoughts and emotions of the student. It is impossible to imagine a piano teacher; or any music teacher who exists in music, and who deals with music, teaching in a dry style, following strict principles, deprived of emotions, in an impersonal manner. Teaching music is an art in itself, and let's not forget either that every pianist had at least one piano teacher in their lives who awakened in them the love for music, and the desire towards piano playing. What does this mean? It means that one of the main triggers of artistic expression is the teacher: their creativity, personality, and inspiring self. In our courses, we try to give as much space for self-expression to our students as possible. We try to encourage their creativity and inspire them to feel their own emotions freely (without being afraid of making mistakes) since music is that channel beyond words, through which we can learn much more about each other and ourselves than one would expect. All of this intensive time spent together really helps to develop a musical and artistic interpretation.*

*But how? This is probably the most difficult question in music pedagogy. The key in ZeneZen is the connection with Kokas Pedagogy. Besides the creative and trustful energy of the group, this is the pedagogical path that can help to liberate the anxious self. The stories that were invoked by free movements during the music listening, will appear once again in the form of moving images while playing the same piece at the piano. The condition for artistic expression is freedom, and self-expression is born out of emotional security and mutual trust – towards fellow students and the teachers. These are all reminiscences from Kokas Pedagogy."*

- What kind of practices does ZeneZen include regarding the individual's way of self-expression and creativity?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *"The previous question already touched on this. The benefits that our course derives from the Kokas Pedagogy are creativity and artistic expression. We would like to add here the importance and one of the main scenes of ZeneZen, which is "The Piano Class". We transfer the experiences of the group dynamics - such as games, body awareness exercises, creative music listening - into the realm of individual classes, where there are only the three of us: the teacher, the student, and the piano. The class often features singing, movement, creative exercises, and the student's ideas. The student barely takes notice of how much they have learned during the games.*

*We agree with one of the ideas in the study plan of Ágnes Lakos's "Friendly Music School", according to which repetition and summary should follow up every couple of piano classes, since this plays an important role in the*

learning process. We need to make the students aware of what they have learned up to that point, how well they did, how many things they can play already, and so on. If they just receive one new assignment after the other, they might end up feeling that they don't know anything, and likely won't even have the will and the confidence to keep on studying.

Therefore, it would be very useful (also for those who do not study according to ZeneZen), if the students who attend regular individual lessons could also participate in group classes occasionally, monthly, or once every other month. Going to a private teacher, or a music school, the fellow students often don't know each other – at most, they meet at concerts or exams. Group lessons would help them feel like they are not alone. They would better enjoy playing in front of an audience, they could experience the joy of playing four-hands, and they could get inspired by each other's strengths and weaknesses. They could have conversations about their favorite music, hobbies, they could listen to music together, play, share some pastries and chocolate... And sometimes we could also invite the parents for a little piano gathering, to the "Piano Club". What a joy it could be for parents and teachers alike to see that the children can't wait for piano classes! Everything goes better if done with love. If the children genuinely enjoy piano lessons, they can improve much more, and feel a greater sense of success. Most importantly, they (and we) can live a happier, and better-quality life."

- What kinds of activities are applied to convey the style difference while the pieces of different styles are being performed?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *"The most spontaneous path that leads to stylistic knowledge is music listening. This can be done in many ways, such as through Kokas Pedagogy, which dedicates a central role to free movement. Free movement is crucial for children, and provides the opportunity and motivation for discovery through active music listening. For a little child, every piece of music that is connected to movement is an experience. And the more s/he listens to pieces of different styles, the more familiar they'll become with the melodic fabric, tone-set, rhythmic world, form, character, phrasing, and compositional technique. This intuitively gained experience will come in handy later as a form of musical knowledge – at their singing-based solfège lessons, and then when playing a given piece on their instruments."*

Since all of the starting activities in the ZeneZen classes are Kokas-based, one of the most powerful changes compared to traditional piano teaching is precisely the music listening combined with movement activities that improve the stylistic sense. We will dance, then analyze, and then sing the piece that we would like to learn. Naturally, this can be enhanced with various games. Different styles evoke different characters in our minds. Why couldn't we imagine ourselves wearing period dresses, at a historic scene, living and feeling the stories that we invented? These things will all contribute to the recognition of stylistic differences, and to the ability to apply this knowledge at the piano when playing the same piece."

- Within the scope of this approach, what kinds of studies are carried out to improve technical and musical skills?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *"This question actually summarizes the previous answers. Musical skills and technical skills are always interdependent. The correct technique often supports the musical interpretation, and vice versa, the musical idea calls for, and informs, the technical solution."*

Naturally, to be able to understand and take in all of this, students first must master the necessary technical knowledge. Just as we learn choreography in dance, or movement in sport, we must also teach our fingers how to move. We have to train them to be stronger, more sensitive, and thereby more confident on the keyboard. At the same time, we have to try to practice more playfully, without stress and pressure to perform. It's no coincidence that we say piano-playing and not piano-working.

Finally, we have to remember that practicing the technique should not be for the sake of practicing itself, but it should always serve the quality of the musical performance. (It is interesting to note that the meaning of the ancient Greek word 'tekhnikos' is 'artistic, skillful').

In our ZeneZen courses, we draw on solfège and on Kokas's ideas in teaching general concepts in music and piano technique (touch, legato, leggiero, octave and chord technique, small technique, etc.). For example, it is much easier to feel a slow legato motion, if, in addition to imagining the tune and the tempo with our inner ear in advance, we also imagine the quality and character of the tune and the notes, or if we feel the weight of our steps in slow motions, the way we put our feet on the ground, or how two steps are connected."

Table 2. Themes found on the application of the approach

Theme	Sub-theme
Learning steps	‘Section 1:
	-Body awareness
	-Full attention and inner concentration
	-Receptive and active music listening, improvisational free dancing
	-lesson plan
	Section 2:
	-Decoding the given piece of music more deeply through singing exercises
	Section 3:
	-Discovering the challenges of the piece from a technical, theoretical, and performer’s point of view at the piano.’
Training materials	Traditional books of Hungarian piano education
	6 volumes of Mikrokosmos by Bartók
	An extensive repertoire
Artistic expression	
-technical	Fundamentals of Kokas pedagogy
-musical	

### 3.3 Questions About Difficulties

- Is there an attitude specific to technical problems in the piano within the scope of the ZeneZen approach?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“As we said before, we first need to clarify what we mean by piano technique. The best way to put it, perhaps, is that it is the practical knowledge and usage of the instrument that allows us to express our ideas and emotions naturally at the piano without physical blocks or inhibitions, so that no obstacle might come in the way of the high-quality interpretation of the piano pieces.*

*Piano playing in a physical sense is hard muscle work, in other words - it is a sport. However, the technique is not only physical training, where the goal is to become ever stronger, faster, and more skilled. The technique always has to serve the musical interpretation and expression. Learning the correct technique is a prerequisite to being able to play piano pieces without inhibitions and blocks.*

*We have plenty of exercises and games for the improvement of piano technique that can be practiced with children, or with beginner piano players. For example, we have a game that is already a very serious technical exercise, when students have to touch the piano keys with different moods and emotional charges. This will allow for an easier transition in the future when they want to play an ever so light pianissimo melody or a subito forte agitato. By then, they will not only have emotional experiences about these different states, but the expression will also be present in their bodies and their touch, thanks to the Kokas activities. And of course, for a trained hand we need to develop and strengthen our fingertips since, eventually, that is where we make contact with the instrument. For example, it is a very good exercise to squat down from impulse, in a swingy way, and come up in the same way. After that, we can execute this movement without any external help, only with pure muscle work. Once we transfer this bigger movement to the piano, we will immediately feel the difference between hitting the notes with impetus from the fingertips, or pushing down the notes without impetus, from the same spot, and then trying to hold the weight of our hand and arm on our fingertips. It is an unusual exercise and not an easy one, but if it's prepared with movement in a playful way, it can work very well. It is not only useful because it strengthens our fingertips, and because it makes our touch more precise and more secure, but in the process, it also helps to develop a very different contact with the instrument. Suddenly we realize that we hear full and soft notes, that the piano has come to life with sound. This example reinforces our principle that technical solutions serve the musical interpretation.”*

- Is there a practice in the ZeneZen approach for situations such as physical problems or injury?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“The ZeneZen approach helps to develop a natural contact with the piano, to play without physical and mental inhibitions. This way it can help to release certain muscle contractions and joint strains, that arise largely from psychological problems. Besides this, improving body awareness, dance, playful movements, and various concentration exercises - for instance, focusing only on one thing while we rest - can help. All of these elements can contribute to avoiding physical problems related to piano-playing.”*

### 3.4 Questions About the Impact of the Approach on Other Fields

- How would you define teacher-student communication and student motivation in the ZeneZen approach?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“The fundamental mode of communication is derived from the Kokas-pedagogy. In an environment of gentleness and trust between teacher and fellow students, ideas are exchanged non-verbally through movement, eye contact, gestures, and play. Each participant, student or teacher, can contribute and inspire ideas with their creative input. Of course, even when communication is verbal, we aim to explain things in a way that leaves room for students to discover the nuances by themselves. We later sit down and discuss our discoveries with each other. Thus, there is a very free and open flow of communication in this approach.”*

- What is the contribution of the approach to music education? What positive gains have you observed?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“At the end of our course, our students are often able to perform even short beginner piano pieces with the utmost artistic expression. And it is especially heart-warming when one of our students, who perhaps never dared to approach the piano, now plays beautifully, in a completely free manner. Besides this, we have discussed earlier how this approach can help develop the personality and expression of the self. We consider our job well done if we are able to help students discover an inner joy for music, and the ability to express themselves with it.”*

- What is the effect of the approach on the concert performance?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“The answer to this already appears in a previous question: As part of the approach, what kind of practice is being done to improve the power of artistic expression, such as phrasing?”*

*It is difficult to put into words exactly what kind of qualities is necessary for someone to become a concert artist. It is interesting to note that many otherwise talented and charismatic teachers never give concerts, and this is also true for the contrary: there are only a few concert artists who also teach. Besides stage presence, interpretation, musical sensitivity, impeccable technique, control of the instrument, humble and perseverant work, there are several other components, or we could say, pre-requisites to becoming a concert artist. If we have to highlight one especially important condition, it is the ability to concentrate. Performing artists are spiritual mediators. It is not enough to perform the piano pieces in the highest quality - all this treasure has to be transmitted to the public. Imagine an actor in the theatre, performing a passionate scene, yelling and crying recklessly, while the audience has no idea what is wrong, because they don't understand a single word that he says... So what then, is the ability to concentrate? Perhaps it is that state when we can be 100% inside of a situation, while we can also have an external view of the whole. As the saying by Hermes Trismegistus goes - “As within, so without...” It is being able to give one's full emotional participation, devotion, and being freely exposed, and yet being able to hold introspective concentration within, living inside the marvelous musical pieces. And meanwhile, one cannot forget that one is playing to the audience on the stage of a concert hall.*

*We haven't spoken yet about overcoming performer anxiety, neither about being petrified of memory lapses, nor have we touched the question of angst about the public's judgment, nor of stopping during the performance, and not being able to go on, nor what happens if our hand cramps up if we hit the wrong note, etc. If we simplify the question, realizing or overcoming these challenges depends on our ability to concentrate, besides our knowledge and preparation.*

*As it often happens, we realize through our courses over and over, what a strong influence Zenezen has on musical interpretation, stage performance, and concert performance. The approach that piano studies, practice, and performance should bring joy rather than fear to children, can already provide help to concert playing. Passive and active music listening, inwards attention, and the full perception of music, are all such emotional experiences that later will show up naturally in the piano playing of children and adult students.*

*Another permanent feature of the Kokas classes is the individual performance, which can have different themes - singing, dance, mimics, any kind of free movement, and PIANO PLAYING. This kind of activity is also a supportive element in preparing for concert activities. Even if each person plays only one note, it then grows to one little phrase, and eventually, the “whole” will take shape. At a later stage, students will actually feel like playing their piano pieces to each other. The joy of “playing concerts” will naturally take shape, just like the mutual experience of music listening and the communication of our emotions and thoughts by piano playing. And although we said before that our goal is not to raise solely concert artists, it is still very important to have concert artists, so that they can be a sort of compass for the correct interpretation of the pieces, and inspire children to study music, to listen to music: basically, to be an example, and to help us exit the monotony of everyday life. Concert artists are essentially pedagogues. They teach us differently, but the essence is the same: awaken the love for music in people, awaken the desire in them to open up their emotions. Not only children, but everybody could experience this kind of awakening at the sessions of Klára Kokas. They could experience music itself.*

*Perhaps this is the right place to add a thought by Heinrich Neuhaus that has been very important to us:*

*“Our purpose is modest, and at the same time vast: it is to play our amazing, our magnificent piano literature in such a way as to make the listener like it, to make him love life still more, make his feelings more intense, his longings more acute and give greater depth to his understanding...” (Neuhaus, 1993, p. 22).*

Table 3. Themes found on the impact of the approach on other fields

Theme	Sub-theme
Communication	High motivation
	Class participation
	Free and open flow of communication
Effects on performance	Utmost artistic expression
	Enhanced self personality and expression
	Musical interpretation
	Stage performance
	Concert performance

- As an educator, what feedback did you get from other educators who studied with you to adopt the ZeneZen approach?

Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák: *“We asked our students to write us a few sentences on their thoughts and experiences throughout the course. Here are some examples of the feedback we received:*

*“Something that is always in my mind about this class and also the Kokas class is the idea of “learning from the child’s perspective”. This is very inspiring to have in mind, and it is also much more fun to learn about teaching this way. It not only makes more sense and helps us get to know the tempos and strategies, but also helps us have a little bit of fun, realize things about ourselves, and go back a little bit to our big imagination world!”*

*“I think we can all remember the point or the time we all started to dim the natural light that was within us as children. I can safely say that classes like ZeneZen and Kokas pedagogy help me find that light and let it shine again. In this class, I hope that light continues to shine brighter and that in the future I can provide education like this to others so that they have the space to shine and to learn music in a joyful, creative, and meaningful way.”*

*“I really love the spontaneous movements and dancing that we do in class. I get a great sense of freedom with it. Just like we discussed in class, children are free and not burdened by the many complications of adult thinking, and we need to revisit that place now and then. We all have an inner child, after all. I also think it’s really important to use the spontaneous and creative way of teaching, which gives an emotional connection to the subject rather than simply telling the children what they have to do/know.”*

*“If there is one thing I have noticed about myself since taking ZeneZen, it is my newfound appreciation for piano music. I think this is due to how my relationship with the piano is changing because of all the new ways I am learning to engage with it from the ZeneZen classes. When Anikó played this piece, I genuinely thought she was making magic with piano. The way she played really captivated me and it was a joy to move to.”*

*“It’s really amazing to see so clearly how the musical terms are much more than just names/definitions/descriptions/words/etc, they indeed are the images, they are what helps us make more than just notes and rhythm while reading, because that can’t be enough, that would leave so many options to be played, so many different moods/characters and stories behind... They are almost the key to emotion and expression behind the music!”*

*“It is very good to understand the structure of the piece, hearing all the voices separately and together as one, hearing the different types of rhythms, knowing that all three parts are important and need the same amount of energy.”“*

#### 4. Result

As a result of the interview with Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák, it was seen that the ZeneZen pedagogical approach created for piano education is quite different from traditional piano education as an approach in which many elements are applied as opposed to only teaching and practicing piano works. In the ZeneZen approach, music and also silence are considered holistically, and auditory, visual, bodily, and internal sensations are blended.

Students learn to explore and communicate their imaginations and inner worlds through the bodily improvisations. According to Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, representative of the approach to learning and experiencing music through movement, in improvisation 'Performance is propelled by developed the students' powers of sensation, imagination, and memory' (Abramson, 1980, p.64). In this context, in the ZeneZen approach, this skill is also reflected on the piano, occurring in utmost artistic expression. Kaikova (2020), in her work investigating the creative potential of future instrumental pianists, emphasizes the importance of creativity and potential creativity, and states that it contributes to the effective preparation process of the future artist and gives them the opportunity to acquire high-level skills and perform successful instrumental and performance activities.

This approach, which is based on the philosophy of Kodály and Kokas, one of the important music teaching approaches, consists of three basic stages - bodily awareness, solfège/theory, and the reflection of these two stages on the piano - and can be applied to all age groups and levels. Emphasizing the importance of bodily awareness in understanding and reflecting on music, Kokas explained this situation as follows: 'they explore – in freely chosen order but in their indivisibility–rhythm, melodic cadences, shifts, in consonance, harmony, responses to each other, their dialogues, their meetings, the entering, the departing, or the harmonious blending of the different parts'(Tiszai, 2016, p.8, quoted by Kokas, 2003, p.1-5). Regarding the importance of solfège in instrument training, in the years when Hungarian music education was reorganized, Kodály recommended instrumental music schools to do solfeggio in all classes and stated: 'Those who have learned to sing first, and only then to play an instrument, will catch the "melos" of any music much more quickly' (Ittész, 2004, p. 137, quoted by Kodály, 1946/1969, p. 20). Also Bela Bartók stated the importance of solfège in his *Mikrokosmos* Preface as 'all instrument study or training should really commence with the student singing' (2014).

Based on my own ZeneZen experience, I can say that this approach is very effective for solfège training, which remains superficial in traditional piano training, and also for using the body correctly, which is very important for performance. The correct use of the body not only allows the works to be interpreted freely but also provides great comfort technically. As a result of the research, it is recommended that piano educators experience the ZeneZen pedagogical approach and transfer it to their lessons.

### Acknowledgments

Special thanks for Csoma Orsolya, Marina Rivero Prieto and Márk Fédrónic for the translation support they provided for the interview.

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## Appendix A

### The Linden Tree



Figure 2. The Linden Tree, the symbol of ZeneZen with Katalin Körtvési and Anikó Novák (Novák, 2015)

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