

SHORT THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)

RELIGIOUSNESS AND CHILD'S CONCEPT IN THE PEDAGOGICAL WORKS OF KLÁRA KOKAS

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Objectives of the doctoral dissertation

The aim of our research is to place the complex art pedagogical method and educational theory convictions of music teacher and music psychologist Klára Kokas (1929-2010) in the context of alternative educational concepts that develop children's skills and personality by incorporating elements of art pedagogy. Accordingly, we examined the elements of Kokas spirituality and child representation, i.e., Kokas's religiosity and child image, which we established by outlining her biography and method, as well as by comparative analysis of the practice of various alternative and reform pedagogical trends.

The summary and presentation of the Kokas method has already been performed by several researchers (see Deszpot, 2009; 2012, 2014a; Vass & Desk, 2017; Holger, 2011; Süttő, 2019), the method is used by pedagogues and special education teachers, and Kokas courses are currently being organized by the *Kokas Klára Agape Music-Joy of Life Foundation*. Although there are encouraging results, the method has not been systematically incorporated into public education practice and teacher training (Deszpot, 2021). In addition, the philosophical foundations of Kokas pedagogy are unexplored, so they are not properly emphasized in the canon defined by the well-known concepts of educational theory and art pedagogical concepts.

As a first step in the exploration and analysis of the pedagogical concept at the center of the research, the Kokas oeuvre and its characteristics will be summarized in new aspects, and then in the framework of our research we have carried out a systematic comparative analysis of the Kokas lessons and the art pedagogical education of the 20th century alternative and reform pedagogical trends, which has significant importance.

The dissertation can be divided into two main units of thought, which - due to the nature of the research - on the one hand assume a text and content analysis method, and on the other hand differ and mutually support each other. In the first three chapters, based on the analysis of the domestic and international literature, we explored the connections in order to establish the research, and placed the Kokas method in international art pedagogical discourses.

To this end, it was essential to form a comprehensive and detailed picture of the Kokas oeuvre, its embeddedness and definition in education policy, the Kokas method and its elements, and the practice of art pedagogy of other alternative school experiments, which we based on the most important professional literature. On the one hand, these chapters of the dissertation serve as the basis for our comparative analysis, i.e., by highlighting the specific features and elements of the Kokas method in the correlation of educational concepts based on other arts (Németh, 2002b; Németh & Pukánszky, 1999; Sávai, 2007b; Skrapits Trencsényi,

2000; Pukánszky & Németh, 1996). On the other hand, the first structural unit thus completed is the basis for the realization of our actual research, which aims to identify the most important characteristics of the views and ideas concerning the transcendence and anthropology of Kokas.

For our comparative analysis, we selected six innovative art educators and school founders whose ideas can be related to Kokas's educational principles (Alfred Lichtwark, Carl Orff, Zoltán Kodály, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner). We corresponded these to some elements of their pedagogical systems, highlighting the similarities and differences with the Kokas pedagogy. As a result of our comparative analysis, not only the ideas of the listed reform pedagogical concepts regarding art education were outlined, but also the educational specifics and peculiarities of Kokas's complex art pedagogical method became clear. We provided an answer to where to place the Kokas method in addition to the art education concepts of different alternative and reform pedagogies. Furthermore, we showed how her pedagogy was new compared to the concepts of art education practices presented. Finally, we explored the concepts and keywords among which the peculiarities of the Kokas method can be formulated.

Structure of the dissertation, research methods

The aim of the second part of the dissertation is to reconstruct Kokas's educational beliefs based on her texts and to reconstruct her educational theory convictions. Chapters 4-6 undertake to explore the fundamentals of the educational theory of Kokas pedagogy, the interpretation of which it is essential to map Kokas's religiosity, human and child image based on explicit and latent content. In order to achieve our research goal, we highlighted a suitable text corpus from the Kokas oeuvre according to the content criteria, on the basis of which we were able to get adequate answers to our research questions. Our goal is to get an exhaustive and detailed picture of how Kokas imagined personality development, God, and the child. The following books, interviews, and articles make up the corpus of text: *Music Raises My Hands* (1992), *Joy Through the Magic of Music* (1999), and *I Combed the Clouds* (2012), an essay entitled *The Galaxy of the Plank*, a self-confession *About Myself. Instead of an autobiography* (Kokas et al., 2007), an interview entitled “*I am convinced that if Kodály could have seen that I was tumbling on Bach with the children, he would have said: Hm ...*” (2009). In addition to these, other Kokas writings are mentioned (see Kokas, 1972; 1977; 1978/2001; 1980; 1982; 1984; Fogas, 2004-2005; Kokas et al., 2007).

We examine the corpus according to three issues, the three dimensions of Kokas's spirituality: her image of God (*Peculiarities of Klára Kokas' image of God* - Chapter 4), and two important components of her anthropology: her image of educators (*Characteristics of Klára Kokas' image of preceptor* - Chapter 5), and her child image (*Peculiarities of Klára Kokas's image of children* – Chapter 6). All three sections are introduced by an explanation of concepts and a short historical summary of the possible variants of the image of God, the image of educators and the image of children. Our research questions can be formulated as follows: What are the concepts by which Kokas's image of God, educators and children can be drawn based on her writings selected from her oeuvre? How can these concepts be placed in the system of different theories of religion and educational philosophy?

The methods of our research were selected according to our goals and in the knowledge of the texts, knowing that it is necessary to analyze the text corpus by its quality. It has become clear that in our case the qualitative, analytical-interpretive method of text and content analysis is the most appropriate, which is suitable for in-depth examination of the correlations, and also undertakes to explore the details that remain hidden from the examiners of quantitative methods (Pusztai, 2002). Using a computer-assisted semantic data analysis method called Atlas.ti7, a text analysis software (QCA), it became easier to make our diverse research questions transparent. Content and text analysis is a method of non-interventional data collection; therefore the validity of the findings is of high value (Fedor et al., 2016).

Characteristics of our research (Krippendorff, 1980/1995. Based on Janis, 1965): *pragmatic*, i.e., it takes into account the rate of occurrence of notions, and *semantic*, i.e., classifies according to meaning content. Regarding the direction of the research logic, we perform an *inductive analysis*, i.e., we provide the selected texts codes and indicators, then examine with the intention of exploring internal connections and drawing conclusions. Our goal (see our open research questions) is to explore Kokas's personality traits and views based on her symbolic-communicative statements, the meaning of linguistic forms, internal contingencies, and context of her thoughts (Fedor et al., 2016). By selecting the analysis directions, we performed a multi-coding method based on a combined (deductive and inductive) coding logic. In order to visualize the conceptual relations, we generated notional networks and figures, then analyzed them (see Antal, 1976; Krippendorff, 1980/1995). After that we interpreted explicit and latent contents, made conclusions, found thinkers of similar spirituality and finally summarized the answers to our research questions. We assigned thinkers to Kokas's worldview, religiousness and anthropological beliefs; we looked for the common points of their

theological and philosophical views of education; and we made statements, thus outlining Kokas's specific religiosity and image of children.

There are several limitations of computer-aided qualitative-interpretive research, since automatized text analysis cannot interpret the symbolic-metaphorical content of texts or their secondary, suggestive messages, and in our chapter on education policy we highlighted that Kokas could not freely express her views and opinions at her time, especially her religious beliefs, and her conviction on the transcendent. On the other hand, it is also an issue to be resolved that in her texts she does not refer to God in an explicit, but rather in a hidden way, using various names, and her thoughts are literary formulations of a rich visual world.

New scientific results of the dissertation

The particular educational theory and philosophical convictions of Kokas become evident after getting to know her oeuvre, and they differ in a way from the ideas of the representatives of various reform and art pedagogy. We realized that the uniqueness that characterizes Klára Kokas's complex method of art pedagogy and educational philosophy, and which can be defined as an added value to the methodology of music education, experiential pedagogy and personality development, can be attributed to the spirituality of Kokas.

In our research, we have also covered the results of the latest educational and comparative international research on the subject of the relevant literature (see Bresler, 2007; Cozzutti & Romero-Naranjo, 2014; Tan et al., 2010; Mantie, 2013; Stipkovits, 2012). They did their research and examined a similar issue and discussed different alternative and art pedagogical methods. So, the Kokas pedagogy can be placed in the context of the well-known methods and alternative school concepts that emphasize personality development and art education. As a result of this, the method and name of Klára Kokas appear in the professional discourse in terms of educational philosophy and professional educational discourse.

The worldview and educational philosophy identified during the analysis, characterizes the Kokas pedagogy, according to which she formulated her educational principles, chose the tools and resources used, i.e., Kokas's method itself for the harmonious development of children's personalities. In Kokas's writings and publications, however, we cannot read a typical creed, nor a specifically outlined transcendence belief, as well as a specially outlined treatise on anthropological subjects, which is why Kokas's peculiar image of God was compiled on the basis of the religious and existential philosophical layer of her texts. As a result of this the aspects of Kokas's image of God are drawn. Similarly, while organizing her views and thoughts

about the educator and the child in an analytical-interpretive way, we developed a conceptual network based on the recurring thoughts of Kokas, the references, concepts and words scattered throughout the texts. According to our analysis, the components of educational philosophy and the worldview belief that characterizes Kokas's view of God and human have been identified, which are strongly reflected in her views on children's personality development, i.e., the Kokas method.

The summary of Kokas's oeuvre laid the foundation for the systematization and placement of Kokas spirituality and anthropological views on the palette of international art pedagogical practices. The relevance of our research is due to the lack of similar comparative-educational-theoretical analyses, since there aren't systematic and in-depth analyses of Kokas' educational system, spirituality and conception of children on which her method is based. However, in order to get to know it and to spread it widely, it is essential to have a thorough knowledge of the views that form the background of pedagogy, the perception of God and the views of humanity. At the same time, it also helps the integration of her ideas and art pedagogical innovations into the public consciousness, creating an opportunity for her educational norms and relationship-ethical guidelines to gain the esteem of the profession and a worthy place among the trends in educational theory.

The Kokas method has been researched from several perspectives and approaches by pedagogical professionals, artists and psychologists (e.g., in the sense of creativity development, literary-aesthetics, sociology – see Deszpot & Vass, 2015), but its theological-religious-spiritual dimensions have not been studied, which is the core of the whole Kokas pedagogy. In addition to such an analysis of the Kokas texts, the comparative-pedagogical study carried out among the principles and methodological elements of the art pedagogical reform experiments since the beginning of the 20th century, of which no similar research is known in the international literature, is of great importance. In addition to Kokas, we parallelize the ideas, concrete elements, procedures, principles, and tools of six alternative school practices that assigned an important role to the arts in personality development. According to these, we established the practical role of each component within the seven pedagogical concepts.

In the central part of our research, we formulated theses along new dimensions, in relation to religiosity and child image, which also writes a new chapter in the history of pedagogy. The Kokas oeuvre has been summarized in many ways and with different goals, but the perspectives of her spirituality and philosophy of education have not yet been researched. Our analytical-interpretive research revealed Kokas's beliefs in her theory of education, her very exceptional and scriptural Christian spirituality, and we found the existentialist thinkers closest to the

spirituality and transcendence thoughts represented by Kokas. The most important of them were Augustinus, Martin Buber, Simone Weil and János Pilinszky. In addition, our research has concretized the stylistic features and concepts by which the Kokas value system can be defined. The references scattered throughout Kokas's publications and the indexes of her relationship with God are encoded in the following groups: Kokas's addresses to God, the God names she uses; her references to divine realities (blessing, grace, holy, angel, heaven, transcendent); her views on the soul, occurrences of the word "soul"; thinking about spiritual activities (prayer, faith, devotion); Kokas's Scripture quotations and their intertextual appearances; and text passages that reflect religiosity not explicitly but through references (Chapter 4).

With a similar research attitude and analytical technique, we coded the text corpus highlighted from the oeuvre, which codes represented Kokas' views on adult and childhood. Our aim was to outline Kokas's value system and to summarize her views on the personality of educational and childlike personality, along which she developed her pedagogical method focusing on personality development (Chapters 5-6). In the course of the research, it became clear to us that we could not talk about Kokas's image of a child as completely detached from her views on adult identity. In many cases, they are mentioned in parallel or opposite to each other. Based on these, our main anthropological codes were outlined: the codes (themes and subcodes) of Kokas's formulations concerning parental, teacher, pedagogue, artist, or in a word, educational role and habit: On adult and child identity; On the profession of parents, teachers and educators – Kokas's image of teacher; About the human soul, *the spirit of parenting and teaching*; *On human attention and attention focus*; *Human expressions* (Chapter 5).

The third important dimension and condition for understanding, placing and evaluating the Kokas oeuvre is her views on childhood, childlike imagination, their specific forms of expression, and the values of children's existence. In addition to Kokas's metaphysical and anthropological beliefs, this is the third dimension. The ethical-pedagogical norms and the intellectual-cultural value system of school founders determine the basis of the art pedagogical method, the practical elements, techniques and manifestations chosen to achieve the goals, in other words the whole concept.

In Chapter 6 we analyze Kokas's perceptions of children, and the subcodes which denote the value categories are the following: *Child's freedom and their determination*; *Educational values – fundamental characteristics of the child's spirit*; *The importance of the child's network of relationships*; *The possibilities and limitation of education*; and *Basic categories of education – its essence, purpose, ethical character*. The concluding summary (Chapter 6.3) is also important because it allows (music) pedagogical colleges, participants in Kokas courses,

and outsiders to learn an essential component of the Kokas method, which will be a key component of later musical sessions, namely how Kokas saw children and how her followers should look at them. The method is not only the use of methods and tools, but much more than that, where in our case the emphasis is on the philosophy of education of Kokas, since the greatest achievement of Kokas pedagogy is emotional education (see Garamszegi. In Tóth, 2010).

In the text and content analysis and coding work phase, we paid special attention to the directions and thematic parts that emerge from the Kokas texts, which we have formed into a system and conceptual network that is also adequate and close to Kokas's world of thought. This is how we arrived at the triple division of Kokas's spirituality: the establishment of the aspects of the image of God, the image of educators, and the image of children. These categories of values represent the concretization of Kokas's system of ideas and spirituality, the nuance of the image that the profession has previously developed of Kokas, which can definitely be interpreted as an added research value to the history of pedagogy. We have expanded and clarified this picture not only with educational aspects, but also with various philosophical-theological aspects and parallels, which was without precedent.

In addition, Klára Kokas's oeuvre has been summarized from an approach that has been completely omitted from previous Kokas researches: the synthesis of the components of her religiosity and spirituality and their characteristics has not been realized before. Without them, it is not possible to form a complete and authentic picture of Kokas's peculiar concept of art pedagogy, for this spirituality and creed are the essence of all her teachings and her whole legacy. Due to the lack of relevant spirituality research, Kokas is unilaterally present in the public consciousness “only” as a music teacher and has not been among the well-known philosophers of existence and religious thinkers. Our research prepares the way for the inclusion of Kokas in the canon of Hungarian and international educational sciences, spiritual literature and the history of ideas. Her rich and varied oeuvre, the specific innovations of her method, the sacred depths of her thoughts and her versatile personality give space and reason for this change since she contributed not only to music or art pedagogy, but to general pedagogy (see child image), educational sciences (see human image), and even to Christian theology (see image of God). Our research is the first to point out these aspects using scientific methods, thorough analytical and synthesis-making research, and literature references.

Summary:

1. Our analytical-interpretive work revealed Kokas's spiritual orientation and the characteristics of her thoughtfulness, but at the same time we found those philosophers, pedagogical and psychological thinkers who agreed with Kokas about religion and human existence, and whose oeuvre is based on a similar image of God and child, so that our open research questions have been answered. We identified the points where Kokas's oeuvre joins international music pedagogical trends and practices and the educational theory of alternative school experiments. At the same time, the components that added new values to the methodological elements already in practice (to the method of the seven teachers we chose) were also drawn. To this end, we have briefly summarized the essence and the terms of meaning frequently used by Kokas, which brought us closer to the specifics of her ideas.

2. We found that the Kokas method can be interpreted as an alternative pedagogy and can be classified among the broader trends in reform and art pedagogies based on its approach, tools, complexity, goal system and interdisciplinarity (Báthori & Falus, 1997; Torgyik, 2004). These common components are not only a point of connection, but at the same time they can show the peculiarity, uniqueness and innovations of the Kokas method, which has been proven to be directly or indirectly related to Kokas' spirituality and Christian faith. Thus, we also got answers to our research questions: the Kokas program differs from the practice of various school experiments and art pedagogical trends in terms of the functionality of the methodological elements, but the real difference of the method is the emphasis on the spirituality of the leader, the relationships and the personal, intimate relationship with God, people and the environment. The teachings about transcendence, anthropology, and her ethics are therefore all based on Biblical foundations, pure gospel teaching, and idealistic child image, which together appear as a unified educational principle in Kokas pedagogy, while becoming a specific Christian and alternative method of art pedagogy.

3. Kokas's image of God and her sacred-transcendent world was outlined with the help of a mind map and the historical timeline of the development of the three main concepts (image of God, educators and children), to which we added Kokas's convictions referring to God, the transcendent and real world, the Divine and human soul – her religiosity and anthropology. Based on the characteristics of the religiosity found in Kokas's pedagogical works, we finally related her to the spirituality and transcendental teachings of Augustinus, Martin Buber, Simone Weil and János Pilinszky. It is important to note that, despite the mental kinship, her religiosity differs from them, because Kokas does not speak in her publications about religious-sacred

topics, but mostly writes about education, arts and childhood. Her references to God, to Scripture, and to the divine mission of humankind therefore increase the creed and authenticity of her thoughts. In the political conditions outlined previously, it was not advisable to talk about spiritual convictions and faith, yet in her writings those appear predominantly, her teachings and manifestations are constantly interwoven with spiritual content. In addition, due to her relationship with God, the scriptural purity of her words, and the spiritual depth and sincerity felt from her thoughts, the Kokas texts evoke in the reader great representatives of the mystical-existential theological literature (see Kokas, 2002).

4. The intimacy of Augustine's relationship with God also characterizes Kokas's religiousness, which is best reflected in her names addressed to God, but both oeuvres are intimate confessions in which it becomes apparent that the author, Kokas, like Augustine, lives near God at every moment, simultaneously in a human and divine relationship (Augustine, 397k./s.a. ; Kokas, 2002; Kokas et al., 2007).

5. In terms of the most intimate, direct I-You relationship between God and the creature, and in the terms of the philosophy of dialogue, Buber's name arises primarily in connection with Kokas's oeuvre, for, as we have shown, the key component of the Kokas method and worldview is the personal, trusting relationship with God and others (Buber, 1953/1990; 1923/1994; 1953/2017; Kokas, 1992; 2007). In addition to the relationship-centered ideology, the way of self-expression by dialogue-philosophy characterizes both of them, i.e., Buber and Kokas respond to questions they themselves posted (see Kokas et al., 2007). The names of Weil and Pilinszky arise in our analysis because of their Christian spirituality instead of churches and denominations – although they are all Roman Catholics (Weil never baptized), this is more of a coincidence. This ancient and puritan Christian faith is specific to Kokas also, which is a further meeting point of the worldview and transcendental beliefs of Kokas, Pilinszky and Weil (Weil, 1947/2009; Reisinger, 2009; Turai, 2012; Pilinszky, 1993; Gáncs, 2010; Hernádi, 2011).

Based on all of this and Wulff's model of God's image, Kokas's religiosity and perception of God were determined in the space of *Second Naiveté and Post-Critical Belief* (Polulfeyt & Bouwens, 2009 based on Wulff). We have found that Kokas's spirituality differs from that of the representatives of personalist philosophy in that she also reflects her intimate relationship with God to her loving, empathetic relationship with children.

6. Our research also covered the analysis and summary of the anthropological views of Kokas, as a result of which we outlined the aspects of Kokas's educational and child image. Child and adult identity often appear side by side in the texts, most often as counter-poles: like reform pedagogical representatives, Kokas also displays an idealized interpretation of

childhood, which is much richer and more value-saturated than adult existence, because in childhood, in Kokas's view, a person as a child has a vivid and more colorful imagination and is a more original, purer-spirited, more empathetic creature than as an adult. The analyzed texts call for becoming a child in the spirit of the Scripture, in an inner way (see Mark 10: 13-16).

7. After all this, we have found that Kokas's anthropological views (especially her image of adults and children) evoke the image of Jesus and the human ideal of the New Testament. Her anthropology is strongly Biblical, and that she is related to the ideas of representatives of modern, humanistic psychological trends, child study and reform pedagogy, and in particular to the convictions and idealistic image of children by Key and Montessori, which is based on the educational and child image formulated by Rousseau (Rousseau, 1997; Key, 1909/1976; Montessori, 1940/1995; Stein, 2015; Kokas et al., 2007; Deszpot, 2014a).

Her existentialism and religiosity strongly permeate her image of a human based on love and acceptance, and even her writings and films, as well as her choice of music and space, in other words her whole method. Our textual, interpretive analysis has shown that Kokas's educational philosophy differs from the way of thinking of the seven alternative pedagogues in that Kokas views human existence from a Divine perspective. As a result of this the Kokas ideology combines the transcendence of existentialism and personality philosophy with elements of mysticism and reform pedagogical tendencies (Kokas, 2002). The result is a specific personality development method, centered on the evangelical spirit, child-centeredness, the application of elements of complex art pedagogy, creativity and therapeutic effect.

The Kokas oeuvre is very diverse, and this makes it difficult to classify among science, but it can be determined to be somewhere in the sphere of arts, psychology, special developing education, spirituality, literature, and religious philosophy – it encompasses all these perspectives on the world's elements in a unique way. According to her testimony, however, she is primarily a passionate teacher (Kokas et al., 2007), who practices existential, person-centered and transcendental pedagogy with all available methods.

Keywords: Klára Kokas, complex art pedagogy, comparative analysis, religiosity, philosophy of education

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List of publications related to the dissertation

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1. **Székely, C. I.:** Irányvonalak Kokas Klára lelkeségének megismeréséhez.
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