

Practice Report on Curwen Gesture Teaching

—Taking *Do Re Mi* as an Example

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Abstract—"Curwen Gesture" is an important component of Kodaly music teaching system. Through learning this group of gestures, it can help music beginners understand the sol-fa syllables and intonation concepts of the degrees in the scale; find out the high-low pitch connection between the degrees in the sol-fa syllables system; establish a good concept of pitch; promote the teaching development of music curriculum. Through the practice teaching of Curwen Gesture in the elementary music class *Do Re Mi*, this paper expounds and analyzes the teaching process, gesture applications and teaching effects, hence promoting Curwen Gesture teaching.

Keywords—music teaching method, Curwen Gesture, teaching practice, primary music class

I. INTRODUCTION OF CURWEN GESTURE TEACHING METHOD

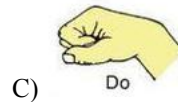
The "Curwen Gesture" was initially created in the 1870s by British musician John Curwen and it was later borrowed by the famous Hungarian music educator Kodaly in his own music education system, evolving into an essential part of his system. The Kodaly teaching method has not only been promoted and used in Hungary, but has also been widely spread around the world, being loved by music teachers all over the world.

The Curwen Gestures are seven hand shapes used in different high and low positions in front of the body, each representing a sol-fa syllable of a note. We should let hearing supplements vision and express the relationship between high-low pitch sounds in the space. The Curwen Gesture teaching method is conducive to the necessary body language communication between teachers and students when dealing with pitch, intonation and note value to explain the knowledge more intuitively. In this way, it can not only effectively improve the class quality, but also significantly enhance students' interest in learning and promote after-class communication. We can visualize the abstract pitch connection and help beginners to establish a stable tone concept, hence laying a solid foundation for music course learning.

The specific gestures are shown as follows: (subject to the right hand)

Do: Hold the empty fist, place it beside the waist. (Central

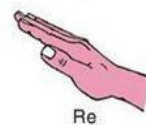
The key project of Sichuan Provincial Department of Education in humanities and social sciences in 2017, "Study on the Development of Primary School Special Inter-curricular Exercises under the Background of Music and Dance in Ganzi Tibetan Area (17SA0127)" and the demonstration professional construction project of Sichuan University for Nationalities (Sichuan University for Nationalities issued, 2017 No. 123 file)



C)

Do

Re: Upper the slanting punch, place it beside the waist.



Re

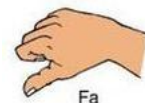
Mi: Straight palm, palm down, and place it above the waist.



Mi

Fa: Down the thumb like the upside down gesture "you are

awesome", place it beside the waist.



Fa

Sol: Flat palm, palm inward, and place it in front of the

chest.



Sol

La: Droop loose fingers, slightly open the tiger's mouth,

and place it above the chest.



La

Si: Extend the index finger, point to the upper left, and

place it in front of the mouth.



In the above scales, the position we put in front of the body is gradually moved up according to order of the scales. For different octaves, the same hand shape is used while the placement position is different.

By observing the gestures and combining the scales and sol-fa syllables, we can find that the corresponding gestures of

the stable scales are relatively simple and easy to grasp (such as tonic, dominant, mediant, etc.); the unstable scales are also unstable in the design of the corresponding gestures, but there are certain solutions (such as leading-tone, upper and lower midrange, etc.).

At the same time, the Curwen Gesture also made an image design for the commonly used varying degrees. For example: $\sharp Fa$ flips the Fa sound thumb down to the thumb up, and evolves into the "you are awesome" gesture with the sol-fa syllable changes to Fi; $\sharp Sol$ sound is to move the palm forward and fingers stretch backwards with the sol-fa syllable changes to Si; $\flat si$ sound faces down the index finger and points to the lower left with Ta as the sol-fa syllable.

Because it is simple, imagic and easy to master, the Curwen Gesture is very popular among children and teachers. It is widely used in practical teaching and enjoys various ways of using it. It can help beginners to recognize degree relationship, adjust the pitch, and also carry out comprehensive training of

music, such as scale, interval and arpeggio sol-fa, harmony training. [1]

II. THE PRACTICE PROCESS OF CURWEN GESTURE TEACHING METHOD IN THE SONG *DO RE MI*

In order to further explain the superior role of the Curwen Gesture teaching method in the teaching process, we take *Do Re Mi* as an example to carry out the classroom teaching practice. Through the practice analysis, the Curwen Gesture teaching process is elaborated.

A. Analysis of teaching content

Do Re Mi is selected from the second lesson of the first unit of the PEP third grade volume one music textbook "Happy *Do Re Mi*", which was written by Oscar Hammerstein and composed by Richard Rogers. It is from an episode in the American classics song and dance film "The Sound of Music", which vividly introduces the various scales in the music. The melody is simple and easy to catch, which is suitable for primary students who are first exposed to the Curwen Gestures accompanied by song singing.



Fig. 1. The Music score of Do Re Mi

Do Re Mi is set to C major, $\frac{2}{4}$ beat in the textbook, and

the melody part is one-segment. For the convenience of analyzing the music score and gesture teaching, the whole song is divided into three parts. The first part is from the first bar to the 16th bar, which can be divided into two sentences. The melodies of the first and fifth bars begin with the ascending progression; the second and fourth bars return to the tonic in a three-degree jump; the melody from the sixth to eighth bars still develops in three degrees; the ninth to sixteenth bars are the rising three-degree sequences of the previous 8 bars. The second part is from 17 to 32 bars, which can also be divided into 2 sentences. The 17th bar melody jumps to tonic from dominant, and then develops by means of ascending

progression; next, rising two-degree sequences are developed twice on the basis of the previous 4 bars. In this section, the Curwen Gestures of the corresponding tones are added to the remakes of the 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21 and 25 bars; in the 28th bar, the last beat is connected by the leading-tone, and it is looped to the tonic. The third part is the ending sentence. From 33 to 36 bars, the melody is the ascending degree, which is intended to introduce scales again. Finally, the whole melody is summarized using the main chord decomposition in C major. It is appropriate to add a Curwen Gesture to each of the tones. Through a close combination between the melody writing method and the creation purpose of music composition, learners can easily grasp the rule of melody development. Let music be full of positive momentum. With the ascending degrees, the speed and strength of the music can be kept in a

unified style and at the same time it can change dynamically according to the requirements of the classroom teaching, giving more space of changes in songs. Besides the above gesture additions, we can also add appropriate gestures on its basis, and the specific additions can be designed in accordance with rhythm and voice training.

B. Academic analysis of the course

The teaching subject of *Do Re Mi* is third-grade elementary school students at present, most of whom are between the ages of eight and ten. Piaget, a famous Swiss child psychologist, divided the psychological development of children into four phases in his book *The Intellectual Development Stage from Children to Adolescents*. The book wrote that "the children between the ages of eight and ten are in the stage of specific computing and children's logic thinking in this stage is developing rapidly." According to the improvement of children's reasoning and inductive ability at this stage, the music curriculum should pay attention to their psychology and teach students according to their aptitude. In the teaching process during this stage, Curwen Gesture teaching should be added. In this way, this group of lively and active students will stimulate the learning potential driven by curiosity, which is conducive to the teaching and expansion of music knowledge, hence laying the foundation for building a knowledge system of music disciplines.

The child's voice at this age is divided into the mid-term children's voice, which is characterized by the gradual disappearance of the young child's voice and the relatively stable development of the vocal system, so it is also the best singing period in the children's voice. At this stage, the music course can give students a more comprehensive teaching, including a singing experience and a preliminary music theory system and aesthetic guidance. We should combine the practical experience and pay attention to the voice protection measures to lay a good foundation for future art education.

At the third grade, students' self-control ability is still not strong, and the concentration of thinking is about 20 minutes. In this stage of classroom teaching, we can enhance learning interest, maintain students' attention, increase memory and consolidate knowledge by designing games. [2] We should adopt various forms of teaching in class design to improve the overall quality of art among students.

C. Course implementation methods and processes

1) Guide of the class

Goal: Sing the song *Do Re Mi* combining the Curwen Gestures. We should

prepare related videos and pictures of Curwen Gestures. The purpose is to

introduce the subject of the course to facilitate the basic explanation of the gesture.

Implementation process

First of all, we should visually convey the related content of Curwen Gestures and sing *Do Re Mi* with the demonstration gestures to help students understand the Curwen Gesture. At the same time, the melody content of the song is introduced

into the vocalization, and at this stage, we can add the Curwen Gestures.

The following vocalizations start from the central C, and then perform two-degree rising and downward sequences within one octave.

1 2 | 3 1 | 1 2 | 3 1 | 3- || (Practice progression melodies)

Wu

 |  |  |  |  || (Add place of the Curwen Gestures)

5 1 | 5 1 | 5 4 | 3 2 | 1—|| (Practice jumping melodies)

Du

 |  |  |  |  || (Add place of the Curwen Gestures)

Vocalization requirements: Keep your posture right and keep your breath steady and smooth. You can start with the melody and sol-fa syllables, and then add the corresponding Curwen Gestures while singing and gradually transit to the vowel pronunciation. In this way, we can gradually become familiar with and master the application of Curwen Gestures in singing. [3]

According to the characteristics of the sound zone of the teaching object, the above vocalization songs need to receive the practice feedback of the teaching object during the practice process, and timely correct the singing and gestures issues that occur when practicing vocalization.

2) New class teaching

The main content of this section of instructional design revolves around learning and applying Curwen Gestures. Through video, audio and teacher demonstrations, students can constantly be familiar with the melody of *Do Re Mi*, and we can learn the Curwen Gestures by adding games. We can gradually guide students to add Curwen Gestures in *Do Re Mi* and let students experience the influence of gestures on pitch and rhythm during singing. Hence, we can further explain, learn and practice Curwen Gestures and put forward clear requirements that we will continue to use Curwen Gestures in the future teaching.

Implementation process

After the practice of vocalization, students are divided into 7 groups according to their seats. Each group represents a solmization of a Curwen Gesture and the different octaves of the same solmization are also responsible for the same group. Each group first learns to master its own gestures of solmization. We divide the *Do Re Mi* melody into sentences, and the corresponding group needs to make their own gestures when playing a certain tone. High octaves require the same gesture to be placed on the body. After students gradually become familiar with the gestures, they can start adding gestures synchronously in the singing melody segments. On this basis, the group will be merged in different forms, namely let the same group start to master two or more gestures, play the same length of sentences and let the corresponding group make gestures. At this stage, a competitive mechanism can be appropriately introduced to allow the changing game rules to attract the attention of the students. In the game session, the

songs are divided into sections and tempos are also divided, practicing the coordination of Curwen Gestures and singing synchronization.

When the teaching object has a certain synchronization of gestures and singing, we begin to solve the difficulties in the song. The purpose is to let students experience the guiding effect of singing through practice. The intonation difficulty of this lesson lies in the downward five-degree jump of the minor second intervals mi to fa, sol to do, la to re, si to mi and other intervals. The addition of gestures can guide the student's intervals and its pitch position. Here we can focus on training of synchronization and accuracy of gestures and singing. When the whole song practice is completed, the gesture can be evolved into a finger dance. During the singing process, adding some gestures properly is conducive to improving the learning interest and consolidating the learning results. Later in the course, students can practice adding gestures singing decomposition chords and experience harmony effects, laying the groundwork for the promotion of future music courses. In the synchronous song singing process of using Curwen Gestures, more game links can be designed according to the actual situation to attract students' attention, enhance classroom

interaction, encourage and praise the teaching objects in the process and boost their confidence, which can help students master knowledge and consolidate skills.

3) Homework expansions

This after-school practice is to synchronously sing the song *Do Re Mi* with the gestures, and at the same time encourage students to choose the songs they are interested in and properly add the Curwen Gestures. In the form of small surveys, we should let students first understand the expression ways of altered sound in the Curwen Gesture. The design of homework is to achieve synchronization of singing and gestures and also consolidate gestures.

III. TEACHING EFFECT ANALYSIS OF *DO RE MI* CURWEN GESTURES

At present, most of the music classes in primary and middle schools in China involve the Curwen Gestures teaching method to varying degrees, and the teaching effect is obtained by comparing with the conventional teaching. We compare the teaching effect after using the gesture teaching method in *Do Re Mi* with the conventional teaching process and the statistical results are as follows.

TABLE I. THE QUESTIONNAIRE FROM MUSIC TEACHERS

Survey respondent Teachers	Full-time music teachers	Music teachers for three years and above	Using the game teaching method	Curwen gestures to understand	Often use Curwen gestures teaching Gesture	Students' acceptance of Gesture teaching method	Gesture teaching method for the improvement of the pitch	classroom interaction situation of Gesture teaching method	students' mastering situation of gesture teaching	Spread tendency of gesture teaching
	70%	40%	60%	80%	60%	60%	100%	60%	60%	100%

The survey participants in the above table are full-time music teachers. The survey scope is model primary schools, urban primary schools and rural primary schools in some relatively developed areas. A total of 15 valid teacher questionnaires were returned and the teaching ages of the teachers are between 1 and 15 years. Through the above data analysis, it can be seen that most teachers tend to adopt game links to increase the teaching effect when designing music

courses and most music teachers have some common sense about the Curwen Gesture, and only a few teachers have no knowledge of it. Most teachers have once used Curwen Gestures in the class teaching and the students' learning initiative and effect are good with better classroom interaction, and students are easy to master the knowledge. Teachers are willing to spread Curwen Gestures teaching in the long-term music teaching process.

TABLE II. THE QUESTIONNAIRE FROM STUDENTS

Survey object Students	Grade 3 and above	The degree of love for music courses	The degree of love for singing courses	Class is the channel of understanding the Curwen Gesture	Recognition of the Curwen Gesture application in the courses	Recognition of the improvement of intonation through gestures	Whether like the Curwen Gesture or not
	80%	100%	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The respondents in the above table were students from the same school, and 80 valid questionnaires were returned. Through the questionnaire, we find that students enjoy music lessons. Students at this stage especially like the singing part of the music lesson. The music class is an important learning channel of Curwen Gestures. We add the Curwen Gestures to the class design and the recognition of the students was consistent. They were full of learning enthusiasm for the Curwen Gesture teaching method.

In summary, it can be concluded that the Curwen Gesture teaching method is helpful for finding the pitch position quickly, improving the pitch problem and effectively implementing the intervals and harmony training, thereby promoting the students' interest and attention. Music teachers must be familiar with the basic movements of the gestures and the coordination with songs when preparing for Curwen pedagogy. The most important thing for teachers is to learn about Kodaly teaching system. We design the class combining the actual situation of the curriculum when carrying out and applying teaching methods to gradually improve and

consolidate students' music knowledge. The class game can be designed according to the teaching system, so that the limited attention of the students is constantly attracted by the fresh and interesting teaching form, hence practicing the Curwen Gestures and other musical knowledge happily in the game environment.

Through the classroom practice of the Curwen pedagogy, a practical situation has also been found. When using Curwen Gestures to help singing songs, it is not appropriate to add gestures to each note, which can avoid "hurry-scurry". [4] If the vocal sounds and gestures do not correspond or the gestures are not standard, it cannot achieve the purpose of the Curwen Gesture or the interest and effect of students' singing and learning will be greatly reduced. When using the Curwen Gestures in the sol-fa of scales, arpeggios or decomposition chords, the singing speed should not be too fast. Because the training at this moment is to use gestures to guide the direction and position of the degrees motion and each tone needs to make a corresponding Curwen Gesture. If the speed is too fast, the meaning of the Curwen Gesture will be lost.

Through the practice teaching process of the Curwen Gesture teaching method in *Do Re Mi*, we can find that if we use the Curwen Gestures reasonably in the practice of vocalization and songs, we can achieve good teaching results. As a teaching method with game color, the Curwen Gestures can stimulate students' interest in learning and they can also train team awareness, communication and cooperation through games. In this way, the concentration time in the class is longer and the learning atmosphere is relaxed and enjoyable. But at the same time we should also pay attention to the adjustment of the Curwen Gesture when singing. We should avoid weakening the artistry and artistic sensibility of the song. Confronted with different classroom content and teaching objects, we must choose a reasonable method for teaching and try to arrange the knowledge points in a unified system to avoid "fan out from a point to an area". We pay attention to the combination of students' psychological development and music practice, and choose more effective teaching methods at different ages. We continuously improve and promote teaching design and closely contact with the dynamic development of music to stimulate students' learning interest and motivation, hence establishing a perfect music discipline system.

At present, Kodaly teaching system has been introduced to China for nearly 30 years, and its influence on China's basic music education has been expanding. In recent years, numerous emerging excellent music teachers have been using the Kodaly teaching system. [5] However, because China is a developing country with a vast territory, the development of music teaching is not balanced with varied level of music teaching in different regions. In developed regions, music education awareness is strong and students can access a wide range of resources, therefore the Curwen Gestures can be better promoted and used; while in less developed areas, students can only contact limited Curwen Gestures knowledge due to weaker music awareness and a lack of teachers, and even in some remote areas, some primary and secondary school students have never learned or understood Curwen Gestures. As a music professional, we must first love our profession and career, avoiding indoctrination. We actively study the combination of teaching skills and professional knowledge, actively apply it to practical teaching, and try to find the happiness in music with students. We pay attention to the growth characteristics of students and use scientific teaching methods to improve students' singing ability and learning interest and promote students' emotional expression, hence achieving music education. We cultivate students' musical culture aesthetic ability and improve comprehensive quality education.

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