THE CULTURAL PRACTICES AND LEARNING TRANSMISSION OF THREE PHILIPPINE COMMUNITY RONDALLAS

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Abstract

In the Philippines, community rondalla pedagogy has not previously been examined through a digital ethnographic approach. This study investigates the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge of three community rondalla groups: the Sariaya Community Rondalla, Kabataang Silay Rondalla Ensemble, and Dipolog Community Rondalla. Data were collected through online interviews, online focus group discussions, and digital analysis of photographs and documents. The findings reveal that: (1) content knowledge is expressed through instrument selection and tuning, as well as the use of notational aids; (2) pedagogical knowledge is primarily manifested in strategies for group management and rehearsal motivation; and (3) pedagogical content knowledge aligns closely with established rondalla pedagogical practices articulated by Espejo, Calubayan, De Leon, Pasamba, Narzo, and Dadap. The study further highlights the importance of local government funding in sustaining community rondalla groups and supporting the continued promotion of Filipino Musical culture.

Introduction

"Rondalla is our heritage, it's our patrimony. We got that from Spain but we sort of modified it into our very own performing ensemble so it expresses our feelings, it expresses our emotions so you can't take anything away from that."

- Ramon P. Santos, National Artist for Music

(Strings of Unity 2018)

The rondalla became a symbol of Filipino heritage as Filipinos incorporated their own sentiments into its performance practice (Santos 2018). However, rondalla music could not have been fully developed with genuine feelings and emotions without a pedagogy at hand. For this reason, teaching within a performing ensemble requires not only knowledge of instrumental technique, but also an understanding of how musical knowledge is transmitted through effective pedagogical content knowledge that can benefit learners from diverse backgrounds. For instance, rondalla playing could not be delivered sentimentally without the knowledge of dynamics at the onset of instruction as evident from the Celso Espejo Method (Guadalupe 2016).

The rondalla reached a significant milestone in its development as a form of cultural heritage in the Philippines by being recognised as the "original product of the Filipino mind" (Pasamba 1966, 13), and through its sustained preservation through the transmission of skills and competencies within academic contexts. In addition, local competitions and international festivals have provided platforms for Filipino musicians to flourish while performing their own Musical traditions. Taken together, the early adaptation of the rondalla, its institutionalisation in the academe, the emergence of competitions and festivals, and the conduct of training and seminars have contributed to the establishment of standards in rondalla

pedagogical content knowledge, despite the scarcity of written documentation. Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to document the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge of rondalla trainers working with community-based ensembles.

The researcher was inspired to study community-based rondalla pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) since there was no exact study applying PCK as a tool for analysis in rondalla pedagogy. Previous documentation on rondalla methodology had solely focused on school-based settings (i.e. De Leon 2016 & Pasamba 1966), and on bandurria pedagogy as a solo instrument (i.e. Dadap 2007 & Culig, 1995). Previous studies of rondalla transmission in communities were general ethnographies such Fabro's (2014) Rondalla Ilokana and Oracion et.al (2012) Dauin's Rondalla Tradition. Specifically, this study had answered the following:

1. What is the Content Knowledge employed in the teaching of three selected community rondallas in the Philippines?

2. What is the Pedagogical Knowledge employed in the teaching of three selected community rondallas in the Philippines?

3. How is the Pedagogical Content Knowledge applied among the members of the three selected community rondallas in the Philippines?

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In relation to Dr. Ramon Santos' idea of rondalla as our heritage and patrimony, the selection of rondalla groups is based on the different localities or municipalities in our country that served as the sample for this study. Hereof, the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge employed by the three community rondalla groups were investigated based on the theory of Shulman. The diagram below shows that the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge through music education are factors in understanding rondalla methodology. In the figure below, the pedagogical content knowledge occupied a region wherein the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge were interconnected with one another (Schulman 1987, as cited in Forrester 2015):
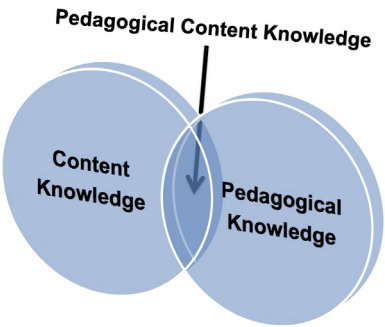
Figure 1. Visual representation of the PCK Framework (Shulman, 1987)

The theory on Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Schulman (1987, as cited in Forrester 2015) had been relevant in this study whereby the relationship of the elements of Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Knowledge, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge with rondalla teaching was examined. The curricular and student's knowledge was not included in this study since the learning was taking place in the community, and not in the school setting.

In relation to Santos' (2018) idea of rondalla as our heritage and patrimony, the selection of rondalla groups were based on the different localities or municipalities in the country that served as the sample for this study. Hereof, the pedagogical content knowledge employed by the selected rondalla groups was investigated based on the theory of Shulman (1987, as cited in Forrester 2015) on Pedagogical Content Knowledge. Furthermore, the diagram showed that the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge through music education were essential factors in understanding rondalla pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).
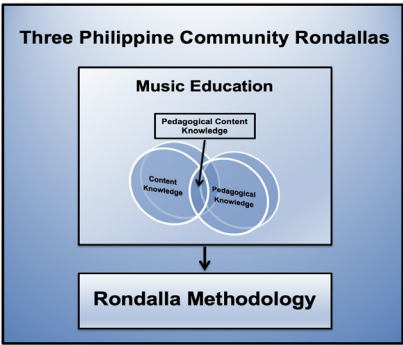

Figure 2. Conceptual framework, adapted from Shulman's (1987) framework.

III. RELATED LITERATURE ON RONDALLA METHODOLOGY

The diagram below shows the comparison among rondalla methodologies. In this part, it was evident that the Espejo method had no commonality with the Pasamba method (Narzo 2020). On the contrary, there was a similarity between the De Leon method (Peters 2016) and Espejo method (Guadalupe 2012) in terms of their utilization of a chart and use of finger and scale exercises. Espejo utilized chart notation symbols while De Leon used the finger and fretboard chart. Similarly, the Calubayan method (Rockell 2012) also implemented rehearsal management in teaching in the same way as the Espejo method. Interestingly, the Pasamba Method exhibited a methodology of utilizing so-fa syllables in rondalla teaching. In addition, the researcher was a former member of Philippine Normal University (PNU) Rondalla under Pacita M. Narzo. With this, he observed other rondalla methods as practiced by the group such as 1) learning note reading was given importance at the onset of instruction; 2) versatility in playing rondalla instruments among members was practiced; and, the 3) alternating upward and downward picking on legato playing.
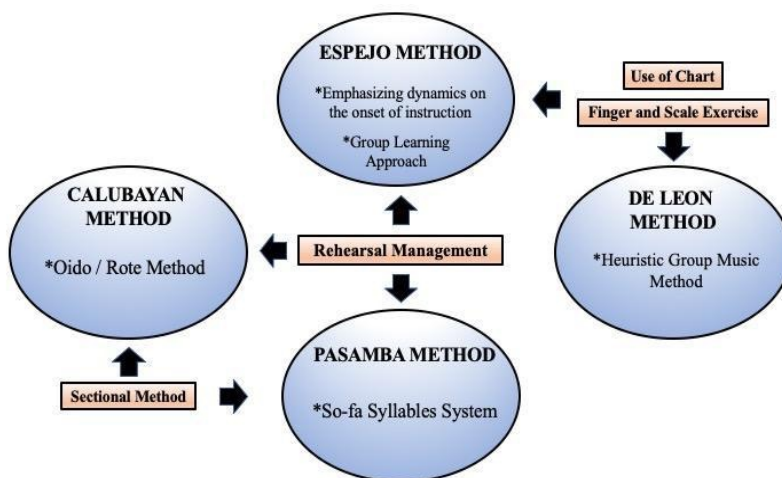

Figure 3. Comparison of Rondalla Methods

III. RELATED LITERATURE ON PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

Pertinent studies and literature reflected on the three elements of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. In this regard, these three elements would serve as a partial basis for the analysis of methodology employed by the three community rondalla conductors in their rondalla teaching. Since this was ethnographic research, the framework for analysis was iterative in which the data found had informed the framework with its discovered new methodologies and terminologies during the process of data gathering. Hence, the researcher had included the discovered methodologies in the study. The diagram below illustrated the overall review of related literature pertinent to the theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK).
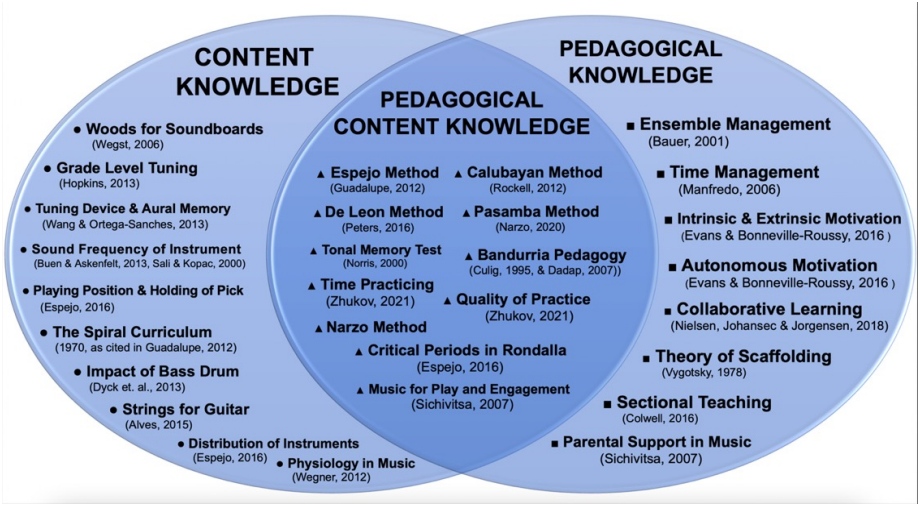
Figure 4. Map of Related Literature Pertinent to Theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilised qualitative analysis through digital ethnographic research to investigate the pedagogical content knowledge employed by the three selected community rondalla groups in the Philippines. The analyses were supported by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study, together with data gathered through digital observation.

A purposive sampling technique was employed (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007) in selecting community rondalla groups to participate in the study. The targeted total number of participants interviewed across the three rondalla groups was fifteen (15), comprising both rondalla members and conductors/trainers.

The selection criteria included: (1) one community rondalla located in Sariaya, Quezon Province (Luzon), one in Silay City, Negros Occidental (Visayas), and one in Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte (Mindanao); (2) years of existence; (3) community influence; (4) awards and achievements in competitions and festivals; and (5) the curriculum vitae of the conductor/trainer.

The data-gathering instruments of the study included online interviews with conductors, recorded video rehearsals when available, online video conferences with members, and digital archival research through photo and document analysis of the rondalla groups and conductors.

Prior to observation and analysis, the researcher conducted structured–informal interviews with the conductors, while focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured informal interviews were administered to the members. The set of questionnaires was provided to the conductors prior to the scheduled online interviews.

Data collection was conducted through recorded video conferencing via the Zoom application, as face-to-face interaction was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the researcher had limited direct contact with the groups and relied on videos, photographs, and documents collected from the participants' social media profiles.

During the initial phase of analysis, the researcher transcribed the recorded data and validated them through member checking. The validated data were returned via email and Facebook Messenger. Subsequently, data from online interviews and focus group discussions were interpreted through thematic content analysis and triangulation. For instances in which new terms emerged from the data, indigenous typology analysis was utilised.

As online observation was not feasible, based on the conductors' agreement, the researcher analysed photographs and recorded videos of performances and rehearsals. These materials were collected via Google Drive and reviewed using QuickTime Player and Apple Preview.

Additionally, digital documents such as charts, Musical pieces, teaching handouts, and certificates were analysed and triangulated with data from online interviews and focus group discussions.

For data analysis, thematic content analysis and triangulation were employed to ensure reliability (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007). Interview and observational data were organised into categories, which were then abstracted into broader ideas and Themes. These Themes were subsequently discussed in relation to relevant literature, as outlined in the study's framework.

Furthermore, informed consent was secured from all selected participants. For minors (below 18 years of age), parental consent was obtained through a written agreement form. All photographs and personal information of participants were kept confidential to prevent bias and potential conflicts related to their participation in the study.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The three chosen participants in this study are the Sariaya Community Rondalla with Herbert D. Perez as the founder, and Reinnard Christian Merano as the current trainer, the Kabataang Silay Rondalla Ensemble with Jegger C. Anjao as the trainer, and lastly is the Dipolog Community Rondalla with Jay Sarita as the trainer.

A. Content Knowledge

The three community rondalla groups utilised their content knowledge through instrument selection, instrument tuning, and the use of notation aids. The data revealed that instruments were selected based on quality rather than cost.

In addition, the classical guitar was the preferred type of guitar for the ensemble. Moreover, the SCR and KSE rondalla groups opted to include a drum set in their ensembles. Lastly, the KSE rondalla preserved their older instruments in pursuit of better sound quality.

In terms of instrument tuning, the three community rondalla groups employed different approaches. The SCR used electronic tuners, the KSE relied on aural memory for tuning, and the DCR used both electronic tuners and aural memory.

With regard to notation aids, the SCR used a pre-reading visual tool known as chart notation. In contrast, the KSE rondalla used its own system of notation written in sol-fa syllables, while the DCR utilised traditional staff notation.

The Sarita Artisan Instrument is the preferred rondalla instrument brand among the three community rondalla groups. In the photograph below, the studio-type banduria is shown on the left, while the concert-type banduria is shown on the right.

Figure 5. "Studio and concert type banduria" photos by Sarita Artisan Instrument, 2019.

The chart notation is a kind of notation written in the Manila paper in which each part of individual instruments was indicated with sofa syllables in the fixed 'do' system together with the traditional rhythm and dynamics symbols. Instead of spelling the notes of the chords, only the chord names were given. The picture below is the chart notation utilized by the SCR.

Figure 6. "SCR's chart notation" photos by Katrina Guce, 2018.

An improvised visual tool utilized by the KSE rondalla. In the visual tool, the notation was presented in sofa-syllables instead of note symbols. The sofa syllables were separated by a bar line to indicate the time signature of the piece. Then, the value of the notes and rests were represented by a number below each sofa syllable. Finally, the type of beat was shown through a zigzag line (i.e. down point is the downbeat and up point is the upbeat). Below is the picture of this visual tool.
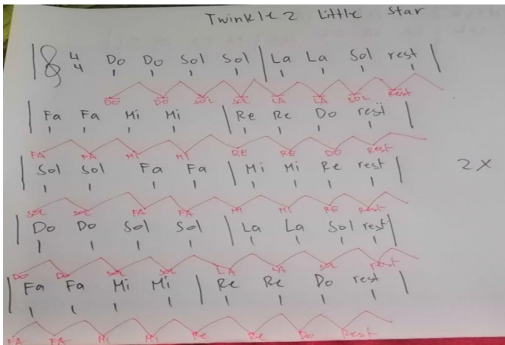
Figure 7. "KSE's improvised visual tool" photo by Nelson Quirit, 2021.

For the analysis of content knowledge, the three community rondalla groups demonstrated a preference for quality instruments over more affordable options. According to Ulrike Wegst (2006), soundboards made of high-quality wood are among the most effective sound radiators due to their low impedance (1445). Low impedance facilitates more efficient sound transmission through the air. In addition, the instrument preservation practices of the KSE rondalla trainer support Wegst's (2006) observation that older instruments can produce enhanced sound quality.

With regard to the type of guitar used in the ensemble, the shared view among the three community rondalla trainers that the classical guitar is more appropriate than the folk guitar aligns with the study of Julio Alves. Alves argued that many guitarists prefer traditional nylon strings because of the fullness and warmth of their sound quality.

In terms of instrument tuning, the practices of the SCR rondalla in using electronic tuners support the findings of Wang and Ortega-Sánchez (2012), who reported that tuning each string within approximately five seconds can result in up to 90% accuracy in achieving the required frequency. Conversely, the practices of the KSE rondalla in utilising aural memory for tuning correspond with the views of Haye Hinrichsen, who suggested that aural tuning may be superior to electronic tuning, as not all electronic devices are capable of accommodating the varying tuning frequencies of different instruments (2301).

Lastly, with regard to notation aids, the use of chart notation by the SCR aligns with the chart notation method of Celso Espejo. In contrast, the use of the sol-fa syllable system for music reading by the KSE corresponds with the pre-reading visual tools advocated by Angelita Pasamba. Finally, the use of staff notation by the DCR is similar to the approach of Pacita Narzo, who emphasised traditional staff notation in both rehearsals and performances.

B. Pedagogical Knowledge

The three community rondalla groups utilised pedagogical knowledge through group management and practice motivation.

In terms of group management, the three community rondalla groups managed their rehearsal time through self-practice and by learning the context of the piece prior to scheduled rehearsals. In addition, the SCR and DCR set long-term objectives for their groups, while the KSE set medium-term objectives. Lastly, the SCR and KSE placed a premium on discipline from the first day of rehearsal.

With regard to motivation for practice, the SCR and DCR employed autonomous motivation by valuing unity and friendship within the group and by treating each member as part of a family. In contrast, the KSE and SCR employed extrinsic motivation by imposing sanctions on members who consistently failed to attend scheduled rehearsals.

For the analysis of pedagogical knowledge in terms of group management, the time-management practices of the three community rondalla groups support the principles of effective time management discussed by Manfredo (2006), as well as the importance of home practice emphasised by Celso Espejo.

Furthermore, the long-term skills training observed in the three community rondalla groups aligns with Bauer's (2001) view that a well-managed ensemble results from long-term learning outcomes. Bauer (2001) also suggested that mid-term planning can be significant in achieving effective ensemble management.

The emphasis on discipline in two of the community rondalla groups corresponds with the views of Angelita Pasamba and Ricardo Calubayan. Pasamba (2020) reiterated that discipline within the group is an essential factor in ensemble success, while Calubayan (2014) asserted that learning cannot take place without the inculcation of discipline.

Lastly, with regard to motivation for practice, the autonomous motivation employed by the SCR and DCR aligns with the findings of Evans and Bonneville-Roussy (2016), who noted that autonomous motivation is supported by the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, particularly relatedness. Meanwhile, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation utilised by the KSE and SCR also support the framework of Evans and Bonneville-Roussy (2016), in which intrinsic motivation is characterised by engagement for personal enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation involves engagement to fulfil a specific purpose.

C. Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Pedagogical content knowledge was utilised by the three community rondalla groups through the learning of initial rondalla skills, rehearsal breakouts, the application of dynamics, and the achievement of difficult passages within a piece. In terms of learning initial rondalla skills, the three community rondalla groups prioritised downward picking over legato playing. With regard to rehearsal breakouts, the KSE and DCR employed a sectional learning approach, while the SCR employed a masterclass approach.

In applying dynamics to a piece, the SCR introduced dynamics at the onset of learning, while the DCR applied dynamics during the polishing stage. The KSE's approach depended on the level of difficulty of the piece.

Lastly, in achieving difficult passages, the three community rondalla groups initially adjusted the tempo to a slower pace. The SCR and KSE focused on discovering proper finger–fret positioning, while the SCR isolated difficult passages at the early stages of learning.

The masterclass approach was utilised by the SCR in learning a rondalla piece. In the photograph below, the trainer is teaching the banduria section while members of the octavina, guitar, and bass sections listen to their respective parts.

Figure 7. SCR's master class approach. photos by Katrina Guce, 2018.

For the analysis of pedagogical content knowledge, in terms of learning initial playing skills, the emphasis on downward picking among the three community rondalla groups aligns with the recommendation of Michael Dadap (2007) that, in banduria playing, downward and upward picking should be introduced before learning the tremolo technique. However, other related studies, such as those by Celso Espejo, emphasise the tremolo technique over legato playing at the onset of skill acquisition.

In terms of rehearsal breakouts, the masterclass approach employed by the SCR was similar to the group learning approach of Celso Espejo (Guadalupe 2012), in which priority is given to developing aural familiarity with various rondalla timbres and dynamics. This approach can greatly contribute to ensemble balance, sensitivity,

and collaborative awareness. Conversely, the rehearsal breakout approaches of the KSE and DCR align with the sectional learning approach of Ricardo Calubayan (Rockell 2012), whereby the ensemble is divided into sections to allow focused attention on each part through direct instruction.

With regard to the application of dynamics within a piece, the practices of the SCR correspond to the Espejo method, as dynamics are introduced at the onset of learning the piece. In contrast, the practices of the DCR reflect the method of Pasamba (Narzo 2020), in which dynamics are applied during the polishing stage of rehearsal.

Lastly, in achieving difficult passages, the practice of adjusting the tempo to a slower pace, as employed by the three community rondalla groups, supports the findings of Zhukov (2009, 6–7) on effective practice strategies. In addition, the finger–fret position discovery techniques used by the SCR and KSE correspond to Charts 2 and 3 of the Heuristic Group Method approach of Rodolfo De Leon (Peters 2016). Finally, similarities can be observed between the SCR and Celso Espejo with regard to the use of isolation and mastery techniques in addressing difficult passages.

V. SUMMARY

The study had three research questions, which were discussed in the first part. To answer these questions, first, the content knowledge (CK) of the three community rondalla groups was examined. This was evident in their consideration of instrument quality in terms of selection, the use of the classical guitar, and the inclusion of drums in the ensemble. In addition, CK was employed in their teaching through the use of electronic tuners and aural memory in tuning instruments. Lastly, their utilisation of pre-reading visual tools, such as chart notation and sol-fa syllables, also formed part of their content knowledge.

Secondly, the pedagogical knowledge (PK) of the three community rondalla groups was demonstrated through the setting of long-term and medium-term objectives, the implementation of discipline and time management as part of group management, and the use of autonomous, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation for practice.

Lastly, the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of the three community rondalla groups was applied through the emphasis on downward picking as an initial skill, the use of masterclass and sectional rehearsal approaches, the isolation technique, the discovery of proper finger–fret positioning, and tempo adjustment in mastering difficult passages.

This research is beneficial to rondalla trainers and conductors who are currently involved in rondalla teaching. The content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) employed by the three community rondalla groups can serve as a blueprint, especially for beginning rondalla trainers, in establishing a competent rondalla group. Through this, rondalla groups may gain cultural and financial support from local government units, which could, in turn, inspire other local governments to establish their own community rondalla groups.

VI. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This online ethnographic study substantiated the pedagogical content knowledge employed by conductors from the three selected community rondalla groups. The selection of participants was guided by the idea proposed by Ramon P. Santos (2018) that the rondalla constitutes Filipino heritage and patrimony; therefore, this study delimited its participants to community rondalla groups with established traditions. Specifically, one group was selected from each island cluster: one (1) community rondalla from Luzon, one (1) from the Visayas, and one (1) from Mindanao. Each group consisted of at least ten (10) regular, non-professional members. In addition, the conductors' track records and their groups' achievements in competitions and festivals were considered.

This study was grounded in Shulman's (1987, as cited in Forrester, 2015) theory of pedagogical content knowledge. However, only two domains of the theory—content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge—were included in the methodology and analysis. Curriculum knowledge and knowledge of learners were not incorporated into this study.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of this study were addressed to the four constituents, namely: the local government administrators, rondalla trainers and players, and future rondalla researchers.

A. Local Government Administrator

The first recommendation stated that there was a need for local government administrators to support and fund their community rondalla groups. Funds provided by the LGU could be allocated to the purchase of quality instruments and to furthering the professional development of conductors through paid seminars and workshops on rondalla teaching and management.

Apart from funding, LGU support could also be manifested by inviting community rondalla groups to perform at various municipal or city events. This would not only showcase the talents and skills of local rondalla groups, but also promote the cultural richness of the community.

Funding and sustained support from the LGU would lead to the development of a sustainable and productive community rondalla group.

B. Rondalla Trainers

The second recommendation was addressed to rondalla trainers and conductors who were currently engaged in rondalla teaching. The content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) employed by the three community rondalla groups should serve as a blueprint, particularly for beginning rondalla trainers, in establishing a competent rondalla group.

For an experienced rondalla trainer, the three types of knowledge (CK, PK, and PCK) demonstrated by the three community rondalla groups should serve as a paradigm for either reconstructing or retaining rondalla culture and practices. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that rondalla trainers and conductors participate in various rondalla workshops and seminars offered by reputable institutions in order to gain substantial knowledge and skills that could lead to more effective rondalla teaching.

C. Rondalla Players

The third recommendation pertained to the understanding of a rondalla player with regard to the purpose of their practices within the group. The study was able to address questions a player might ask, such as "Why am I doing this?" or "What is the purpose of doing this?"

The study mostly explained the aims and bases of the trainer in establishing particular approaches or styles in rondalla teaching. Henceforth, rondalla players should understand the intent of every task they are doing within the group. Likewise, trainers should find time to explain to their members the purpose or intention of each practice undertaken in the group. Proper understanding and awareness can build trust and develop a healthy relationship between the trainer and the members.

D. Future Rondalla Researchers

Finally, this study was intended for future rondalla researchers. This study revealed only the highlights of the three community rondalla groups, particularly their content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. Separate studies focusing on each community rondalla group, concentrating on their history, evolution, and methodological development, or employing empirical investigations of group practices, are recommended for future researchers.

For instance, Quezon province was known for their goal of establishing community rondalla groups in every municipality in its province. With this, the methodology and practices of each community rondalla group in the province would be recommended for future study.

On the other hand, the community rondalla group in Silay City was known as one of the long-established-community rondalla groups in the Philippines. A study on evolution and methodological development would be recommended for future researchers.

Lastly, the trainer from Dipolog City was known not only as a conductor of a rondalla group, but also as a well-known and trusted luthier in the Philippines. An empirical study on the improvement and effectiveness of his particular prototype of rondalla instrument would be recommended for future study.

Apart from the aforementioned recommended studies, an academic correlation analysis on the relationship between funding / support and productivity / sustainability of a community rondalla group were also suggested for future studies.

VII. CONCLUSION

As a researcher and community rondalla trainer, I would support the idea of Santos (2018) that rondalla was our heritage and our patrimony. As reflected in the history and profile of the three community rondalla groups, it was evident that the groups were not just mere performance groups because they greatly represent the cultural richness of their local communities as well as they were the pride for the whole country whenever they performed in international rondalla performances. Nonetheless, there would always be effective methodologies employed in every successful rondalla performance.

In fact, the rondalla could be related to a food served with a secret ingredient. This secret ingredient would be the methodologies employed. The cook or chef would be the trainer, who controls the preparation and cooking process of the food. Without the secret ingredient, the food could taste bland or ordinary. Similarly, a rondalla group could not be competent without an effective methodology.

The general purpose of this study was not only to unveil the secret ingredient of the three community rondalla groups, but also to inspire other groups, trainers, and players in terms of: (1) their proven track record in both national and international rondalla exposure; (2) the diversity and richness of their rondalla practices and pedagogical learning skills; and (3) their role as cultural bearers of their respective communities.

The methodologies of the three community rondalla groups needed to be developed and supported in order for them to flourish as significant components of Philippine Musical heritage and tradition. This study was a leap towards generating renewed or increased interest in, and support for, the methodologies of the three community rondalla groups in particular, and for the rondalla as a hallmark of Philippine culture more broadly.

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