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Chapter 1

TEACHING STUDENTS BEYOND THE ELEMENTARY LEVELS

When students reach the intermediate level, having mastered the basic foundation for playing the piano, there is an exciting opportunity for teachers to guide them into greater musical growth. Growth is facilitated when teachers know the progression of intermediate-level concepts and know how to select appropriate repertoire and structure other learning tasks. Because students will remain at the intermediate levels for a long time period and learn fewer new concepts than they did at the elementary levels, they sometimes lose interest in lessons. Furthermore, because most students pass through the teenage years during the intermediate or early advanced levels they may even stop studying piano. To overcome these struggles, skillful and creative teaching strategies can be applied. Of the students who continue lessons and progress into the early advanced level of repertoire, some consider piano study an extracurricular activity and others want to prepare for college music degree programs. Both groups require individualized curriculum and flexible teaching.

DEFINING THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

A foundation of strong skills in reading, musicianship, and technique during elementary study ensures a smooth transition to the intermediate level. To be considered at the intermediate level, a student will have accomplished the following:

- ♦ completing a basic elementary series
- ♦ reading, counting, understanding, and performing simple rhythms, including all eighth-note patterns
- ♦ fluent reading of elementary repertoire that uses notes spanning the complete grand staff and ledger lines
- ♦ playing with good tone, some articulation, dynamic contrast, and some ability to shape phrases
- ♦ beginning to learn easier pieces by master composers

The Scope of Intermediate Curriculum

To adequately prepare students for advanced repertoire, teachers should know what constitutes the intermediate curriculum. To organize, analyze, and understand this broad topic, the curriculum can be divided into three further levels: early intermediate, intermediate, and late intermediate.

PROJECTS FOR NEW TEACHERS



- 1) Choose a method and select the level that introduces early intermediate-level concepts and skills. (See p. 2.) List the required concepts and skills for the first 10 pieces in the book. Select the first book of a repertoire series at the early intermediate level that seems as though it could be correlated to the early intermediate method book. Choose the easier pieces from the repertoire book and determine a teaching order for the pieces from both books. (See example 1.1.)
- 2) Select an anthology of intermediate-level repertoire not arranged according to level of difficulty. Based on the criteria of early intermediate-, intermediate-, and late intermediate-level concepts and skills listed on pages 2–5, list the pieces according to their level of difficulty.
- 3) Select a piece that students may ask to play but would be too difficult for them. Study the piece to determine where it could be too challenging and simplify those sections. Develop a practice plan for each part of the piece, setting reasonable goals for completion. (See pp. 15–16.)

PROJECTS FOR EXPERIENCED TEACHERS



- 1) Identify two of your teenage students who are difficult to teach. Determine what makes each student a challenge: self-image, independence, intellectual stimulation, peer influence, etc. From the lists of teaching strategies on pages 9–12, select four strategies for each student and apply them to your teaching over six weeks. After the six weeks, assess the effectiveness of those teaching modifications.
- 2) For one of your students who requires assistance in becoming a more independent learner, select an “on-your-own” piece for him or her to learn in six weeks without any help. Refer to the guidelines for selection and assignment of the piece on page 16. At the end of the time period, evaluate the effectiveness of the project.
- 3) For one of your students who you think may choose to major in piano in college, complete the following tasks:
 - a. Instruct the student and the student’s parents to select two colleges the student may want to attend. Instruct them to go online and acquire the audition requirements for each college, including deadlines.
 - b. From that information and the sample audition requirements provided on pages 19–21, develop an audition program for each school. Arrange that program in the order the student will learn the pieces.
 - c. With the student, develop deadlines for learning and memorizing the repertoire. Additionally, schedule performance opportunities for each piece.

Chapter 2

HOW STUDENTS LEARN

Since antiquity, many individuals—pedagogues, scholars, scientists, philosophers, and educational psychologists—have developed theories about how humans learn. In the 19th and 20th centuries, studies about modes of learning, temperaments (personality categories), and learning styles added to this body of information. Although experts do not always agree, the impact of their findings on teaching increases the likelihood of realizing students' potential and success, as well as providing a joyful learning experience. The research in these areas helps piano teachers determine how best to teach each individual student.

THE THREE MAIN APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING LEARNING PROCESSES

Most educational psychologists and learning theorists fall into one of three schools of thought—behaviorist, cognitivist, or humanist philosophies. One can gain information about these branches of psychology by learning about the pioneers of each group.

Behaviorists

Behaviorists primarily study the observable and quantifiable aspects of people's actions, particularly reactions to given situations. They believe that behaviors are acquired through *classical conditioning*, a process of behavior modification in which one adapts due to positive or negative reinforcement. Pleasure or displeasure is therefore associated with the behavior. Positive reinforcement results in pleasure; negative reinforcement results in displeasure. Behaviors are retained or changed to sustain pleasure; behaviors are discontinued or changed to avoid displeasure. Notable scientists in the formulation of classical conditioning theory are physiologist **Ivan Pavlov** (1849–1936) and psychologist-physiologist **Edwin B. Twitmyer** (1873–1943). Pavlov famously experimented with conditioning dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell, and Twitmyer experimented with conditioning human patients to involuntarily jerk their knees at the sound of a bell (patellar tendon reflex).

The behavioristic movement began with **John B. Watson** (1878–1958), an American psychologist who rejected the idea of studying consciousness, an unseen mental process. Watson believed that only overt behavior is measurable and that one can predict or even control behavior. His research was based on the assumption that nothing is instinctual; rather, everything built into a child is through interaction.¹

Other behaviorists, including **B. F. Skinner** (1904–1990), promoted a theory of stimulus and response. They proposed that an individual becomes conditioned to respond as a result of positive reinforcement, a process known as *operant conditioning*. Advocates of this theory believed that to modify the behavior of an individual, the desired behavior should be positively reinforced and negative behaviors should be ignored. Recurring positive behavior is believed to be the result of such conditioning.

¹ John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1928).

Chapter 3

TEACHING TRANSFER STUDENTS

Not all students continue instruction with their first teacher. Some students stop taking lessons; others look for another teacher. There are a variety of reasons why students seek new teachers. In some cases, the desire to transfer is due to negative circumstances with previous lessons, which often makes the transition challenging for the student and the new teacher. The transition also can be difficult because teachers come from diverse backgrounds and use different teaching styles.

Teachers can make this transition easier by keeping detailed student records and providing them to any student who wishes to find a new teacher. These records plus additional information from the current teacher, the parents, and the student lay the groundwork for a smooth transition. Additionally, a well-structured interview helps determine the abilities of the student. When all parties have agreed lessons will begin with the new teacher, a transition plan can be developed based on the teacher's assessment of the student's needs and abilities. The desires of the parents and student can also be considered. This short-term plan includes a curriculum to emphasize flexible teaching that addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the student. During the transition period, assessment continues and after a month to six weeks of lessons a reevaluation is conducted to facilitate long-term curriculum planning.

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES AND PROBLEMS OF STUDENT TRANSFERS

Transferring to a new teacher often happens after the elementary levels are completed. Transfers are common around the time a student becomes a teenager. This is a critical stage in the student's development since patterns for learning and practice, as well as a long-term relationship with the original teacher, have been well established. However, even when there is a good teacher-student relationship, the student might become disinterested with lessons and the parents might think a new teacher will reignite interest. Since this is not the only reason for transferring, one should be familiar with the following situations:

- ♦ The teacher is unable to meet the musical needs of the student.
- ♦ The teacher or student has moved.
- ♦ The teacher has stopped teaching or reduced his or her teaching load.
- ♦ The student has progressed beyond the teacher's capabilities.
- ♦ The tuition has been raised.
- ♦ The student and/or parents are unhappy with the current lessons.

Parents and students might not understand that changing teachers can be a disconcerting process and that sometimes transfers retard musical growth. This is true even when previous instruction and new instruction are excellent. Proactive teaching can help prevent transfers.

Chapter 4

TEACHING RHYTHM AND READING

The basic concepts of rhythm and reading are introduced during the elementary levels. During the intermediate and early advanced levels, those concepts and additional rhythm and pitch concepts are introduced in more complicated contexts. Although the ear hears pitch, the body feels rhythm. Movement activities are an important means for building rhythm into the body. A metronome can assist in keeping pulse, stabilizing tempo, enhancing precision, and preventing rushing or playing too fast. Special learning strategies can be applied for complex rhythmic elements that contribute to the emotional aspects of music and for building strong rhythmic habits. Reading pitch is facilitated by the continued development of aural skills and of a kinesthetic awareness of the keyboard. Facile reading of the treble staff and the bass staff, as well as horizontal and vertical musical structures, is the result of applying the habits good readers demonstrate. This includes utilizing special reading procedures and routines.

TEACHING RHYTHM

Students at the intermediate level will experience new challenges beyond the elementary level with the following:

- ♦ pulse, meter, and tempo stability
- ♦ shorter subdivisions of the beat
- ♦ irregular rhythms and cross rhythms
- ♦ notes grouped into lengthy rhythm patterns
- ♦ long notes, ties, rests, and syncopations
- ♦ strong and weak beats
- ♦ anacruses
- ♦ using the metronome

Pulse, Meter, and Tempo Stability

The basis for strong rhythm is a powerful sense of pulse. As students progress into the intermediate and early advanced levels, they encounter pieces that have more notes per beat and measure, more complex rhythm patterns, and more technical challenges. Feeling the pulse and meter and maintaining a consistent tempo become more difficult. For pieces¹ that have

¹ Generally, practice suggestions given throughout this text can be assigned for an entire piece or for only a section of a piece. For clarity, activity descriptions include only “piece” and not “piece or section of a piece.”

Chapter 5

TEACHING TECHNIQUE

A student can learn to read notes and rhythm, but he or she must also have physical facility and coordination to play music. The way the body moves at the piano affects the fluency of the student's performance as well as the quality of the student's sound. The study and the execution of these movements are known as technique. Technique is difficult to learn by only reading or hearing about it. Consequently, teachers and readers should experience each described technique and provided example in this chapter.

As with other physical skills, piano technique is experienced by developing physical habits. Through practice, the body memorizes the complex physical coordination necessary for technical and musical feats. It remembers these movements that can be recalled at will. Students at the elementary level learn and apply basic technical skills. As students advance and study more complex literature, teachers must consider the following tasks, responsibilities, and obligations:

- ♦ learning to recognize and alleviate excess tension
- ♦ applying principles of movement to piano playing
- ♦ understanding the role and use of fingers, wrists, arms, and the whole body

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE AND ALLEVIATE EXCESS TENSION

As students advance through the intermediate and early advanced levels, they encounter complex repertoire that requires a strong sense of keyboard topography and refined reading skills. This music is also technically challenging and requires advanced physical skills. Weak reading skills, poor keyboard acquaintance, and undeveloped physical skills can produce excess tension that impedes successful learning and playing. If students' skills are strong, however, the inner ear will have time to hear what the sound should be like and the brain will have time to tell the body what to do. If students' keyboard acquaintance and physical skills are strong, this ear-mind-body coordination will lead to freedom from excess tension and the sensation of effortless playing. Such playing promotes beautiful sounds.

In addition to promoting strong reading and keyboard acquaintance skills, teachers can prevent excess tension in their students' playing by learning what causes such tension and by learning to recognize the visual, aural, and kinesthetic symptoms of it. They can then help students learn how to feel correct physical sensations while playing, to develop freedom from excess tension, to gain ease and efficiency, and to prevent pain and injury.

Chapter 6

INTERMEDIATE AND EARLY ADVANCED PERFORMANCE AND STUDY REPERTOIRE

Students take piano lessons to learn to play pieces, the activity that makes music study interesting and exciting. Primarily through pieces, students learn musicianship and technical skills. Therefore, each piece must be compelling and hold students' interest long enough for them to learn what it can teach. During the years spent at the intermediate and early advanced levels of study, a student will learn pieces to varying degrees of refinement. The following tasks will assist teachers in researching, evaluating, selecting, and teaching this large body of repertoire:

- ♦ surveying the teaching literature
- ♦ selecting appropriate editions
- ♦ determining the difficulty of pieces
- ♦ organizing pieces in proper teaching order
- ♦ identifying pieces that develop specific technical or musical skills
- ♦ identifying the pedagogical benefits of each piece
- ♦ developing general repertoire lists
- ♦ developing individualized repertoire-based curricula
- ♦ preparing piece summaries
- ♦ presenting pieces for practice

RESEARCHING POTENTIAL REPERTOIRE

A thorough knowledge of standard literature appropriate for students and knowing the order in which it should be taught provides a basic foundation for selecting student repertoire. A balanced program of study includes pieces from all style periods and other supplementary materials, including contemporary pedagogical literature.

For teachers to make specific repertoire selections, which can be based on the general suggestions provided in this chapter, consulting a repertoire resource book is helpful. Examples include the following:

Maurice Hinson and Wesley Roberts. *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Jane Magrath. *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music, 1995.

Teachers should acquire the latest editions of resource books to complete the most accurate research.

Chapter 7

STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION

Distinguishing musical characteristics determine the style of a piece. These include compositional devices used during specific historical time periods, compositional devices related to particular genres (such as sonatas, variations, or fugues), and compositional devices associated with specific composers. The unique characteristics of each piece also help determine style. Such characteristics include rhythmic, pitch, and sound elements. Stylistic playing is a product of interpreting pieces that share these common characteristics, as well as similar dynamics, phrasing, articulation, tempo, and pedaling. Furthermore, comparing pieces within each time period, as well as from different time periods, helps musicians understand and determine style. The characteristics of keyboard repertoire from the following periods are explored in this chapter:

- ♦ The Baroque Period (ca. 1600–1750)
- ♦ The Classical Period (ca. 1750–1820)
- ♦ The Romantic Period (ca. 1820–1910)
- ♦ The Impressionistic Period (ca. 1880–1930)
- ♦ The Contemporary Period (ca. 1900–Present)

BAROQUE STYLE

Prior to the Baroque period, keyboard music consisted primarily of organ music used in the context of the church. The virginal, a precursor to the harpsichord, was popular in England during the late Renaissance. Nonetheless, the keyboard only began to develop as a solo instrument during the Baroque period. As it did, it was often used to imitate the styles of the other musical genres. J. S. Bach, in particular, drew from many styles of Baroque music. His keyboard pieces either imitate a specific style or combine styles.

Since Baroque composers did not notate interpretive markings—such as dynamics, phrasing, articulation, tempo, and pedaling—interpreting Baroque music can be more challenging than interpreting music from other style periods. During the Baroque period, common performance practices were understood among musicians and interpretive markings were unnecessary. Therefore, modern editions of Baroque music might not include expressive markings or interpretive suggestions of editors. As a result, some pianists play Baroque music as if the absence of expressive markings precludes expressive interpretation, while others blindly follow markings of edited editions which may or may not reflect Baroque performance practices. Therefore, knowledge of Baroque style and conventions, as well as a study of the score for internal evidence, helps performers make intelligent and appropriate interpretive decisions.

Chapter 8

EXPRESSIVE AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION AND PERFORMANCE

Every individual has an innate ability to react to music emotionally. This reaction enables expressive musical performance. As students acquire musical experiences, they begin to “feel the music”—connect emotionally to the ideas of the composer. Sharing music, so audiences can also feel it and connect to it, becomes the goal of performance. Considering this, pianists can think of the human body and mind as their true instrument and of the piano as a medium for conveying musical thought and feeling. Projecting what is happening musically to express character and emotion becomes the primary responsibility of pianists as they progress into advanced repertoire.

Playing correct rhythms, playing correct pitches, and observing marks of expression are only the first steps toward communicative playing. Although precise performance often becomes the primary goal in piano teaching, performances must convey emotion to be interesting and satisfying for performers and listeners alike. Therefore, an effective piano teacher must assume the role as a guide and demonstrator of expressive performance. In this role, teachers can explain how perfection can be sacrificed temporarily to achieve an expressive result.

Although students differ in their abilities, most students need guidance to learn how to make interpretive decisions and play expressively. Some students communicate their musical ideas instinctively without much instruction, but those ideas are sometimes expressed in inappropriate ways. Dynamics may be exaggerated, or the playing may sound overly sentimental or out of control. These students require instruction to learn how to more appropriately express their musical ideas.

Other students have strong musical instincts but seem unable to express them while they play. For example, these students may be aware that a dramatic crescendo is required in a section, but they have difficulty playing it. Personality, emotional disposition, or physical limitations sometimes cause this. Some students are shy about making an attention-grabbing sound, while others lack the coordination to make it materialize. Still others think they are playing the crescendo, but to the audience there is no perceptible dynamic change. These students inwardly feel the crescendo and assume it can be heard, but they are not truly listening to what they are playing. Considering these possibilities, teachers should not assume students who do not play expressively are unmusical. They may need instruction that helps them learn how to express what they are feeling and inwardly hearing. On the other hand, some students focus only on the act of reading or on the task of mastering technical difficulties. Since they often can only focus on one task at a time, expressive playing is neglected. Students may fit into one of these categories, or they exhibit these qualities at different times. Consequently, teachers should be aware of these traits and adapt lessons accordingly.

Regardless of the musical limitations of the individual student, strategies for teaching expressive playing can be used from the very beginning of instruction. When technical

Chapter 9

MOTIVATION AND PRACTICE

The question “How can I motivate my students to practice?” is frequently pondered by teachers, and it implies some students lack the motivation to practice or learn. Finding external reasons for this perception is easy: students have too many activities; parents are not involved enough; students are lazy or do not practice carefully. Placing blame on students or parents is counterproductive since there is little teachers can do to change those behaviors. Teachers, however, can control their own behaviors. Therefore, a more effective question would be “How can I teach so my students will be motivated to practice?” This question, subtly different from the earlier one, can affect behavioral changes in students, result in increased motivation, and encourage more practice and greater learning.

MOTIVATION

“Children start out enthusiastic and skillful learners. Helping them stay that way is a matter of what teachers give them to learn.”¹ Supportive, encouraging, and flexible teaching behaviors, as well as well-designed curriculum and carefully chosen repertoire, provide the conditions under which enthusiastic learning is made possible. Teachers can implement such conditions based on the following motivational, learning, and teaching principles:

- ♦ Intrinsic motivation is superior to extrinsic motivation.
- ♦ Praise and rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation.²
- ♦ Music that appeals to students increases motivation.
- ♦ Appropriately leveled repertoire and learning tasks advance intrinsic motivation.
- ♦ Individualized curriculum increases motivation.
- ♦ Realistic expectations promote motivation.
- ♦ Giving students choices promotes interest in learning.
- ♦ Relevant learning tasks promote curiosity and increase success.
- ♦ Varied and creative lessons make learning more interesting.
- ♦ Thoroughly preparing new pieces and other material during the lesson ensures productive practice.
- ♦ Recognizable progress and frequent, specific appraisal provide encouragement.
- ♦ Active learning that allows students to provide solutions, question ideas, and evaluate their own progress motivates them to continue learning.
- ♦ Frequent teacher self-evaluation improves teaching and promotes intrinsic motivation.

¹ Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993), 225.

² *Ibid.*, 148.

Chapter 10

MEMORY AND PERFORMANCE

Recitals, annual evaluations, competitions, and other performances are an important part of piano study. These events allow students to share the joy of playing and the pride of accomplishment. Most teachers offer performance opportunities. Some mandate participation. Others allow students to choose the events in which they participate.

Traditionally, solo piano music is performed from memory, which places additional time commitment and stress on performers. Except for students who are natural performers, playing a piano piece from memory in front of an audience can be an overwhelming experience. As a result, performance anxiety is common for pianists.

All learning involves memory. Each day, hundreds of bits of information are learned and memorized while previously learned material is accessed and reused. Likewise, memory is used to access previously learned pitch and rhythm patterns when learning new pieces. Key signatures and time signatures are remembered as each new piece is played. Memory allows the body to play articulations, nuances, phrases, and use efficient fingerings.

There are benefits to performing from memory and performing with the score. The following benefits result from performing from memory:

- ♦ development of memory skills and the ability to play from memory
- ♦ capacity to play technically challenging sections and music that is difficult to read
- ♦ opportunities for more performances where memory is required
- ♦ ability to play at any time without needing printed music
- ♦ ability to play with greater understanding of expressive musical elements
- ♦ performing without page turners or losing one's place on the score

Performing with the score after preliminary memorization work allows for the following:

- ♦ reduced learning time
- ♦ added security and reduction of anxiety
- ♦ more spontaneous performance as the result of security provided by the score

Whether or not students enter events where memory is required, they should always have a few memorized pieces ready to perform for family and friends. For all of these reasons, every student should be allowed to experience the following as part of their musical education:

- ♦ efficient initial memorization
- ♦ procedures that promote reliable memorized performance
- ♦ control of performance anxiety
- ♦ successful performance