

PROFESSIONAL PIANO TEACHING

Volume 1: Elementary Levels

A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook

Second Edition

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Chapter 1

THE ART OF PROFESSIONAL PIANO TEACHING

What does it mean to be a professional piano teacher? Is piano teaching even considered a profession? Some people think of piano teaching as a cottage industry. Many piano teachers teach in their homes—some charge small fees to supplement other family income, while others earn a living entirely from teaching. The educational background of teachers varies from those with little formal musical training to those with advanced degrees. This tradition has created a wide range in the quality of piano teaching. Anyone can teach piano since no minimal educational standards, no legal licensing and no mandatory certification processes exist. Consequently, some teaching is highly crafted, some marginally effective, with most falling in between. The lack of national- or state-mandated educational teaching standards often contributes to a public perception that piano teachers provide a service, but are not professionals.

Fortunately, with the growth of university music departments and piano pedagogy programs during the latter half of the twentieth century, talented young pianists majored in music and entered the teaching field with an extensive musical, pianistic and pedagogical education. This has not only provided guidance for teaching advanced or gifted students, but has helped prepare teachers to work with a wide range of ages, levels and abilities, particularly at elementary and intermediate levels. Furthermore, professional organizations, journals, workshops and conferences have increased awareness about this specialized body of knowledge. In the United States, Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) has a teacher certification program that encourages study, even for those without access to university programs. These trends have made piano teacher education more accessible and have increased respect for the profession.

Teaching a broad spectrum of students can be satisfying if the teacher has learned how to teach effectively. University pedagogy coursework addresses those needs, but is often limited and can only open the door for future teachers. It is each teacher's responsibility to refine the art of teaching through continuing education and thoughtful experience.

CHARACTERISTICS COMMON TO ALL PROFESSIONALS

Professional piano teachers possess characteristics that are common to all professionals. They also have specialized skills that are unique to piano teaching. They recognize the purposes and values of music study and have developed a personal teaching philosophy.

Piano teachers should strive to achieve the following characteristics common to all professionals:

- ♦ an advanced education gained through a lengthy period of rigorous training
- ♦ training that involves the study of the theory and practice of a specialized body of knowledge
- ♦ a commitment to continuing education to upgrade skills
- ♦ a professional code of conduct

Chapter 2

PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

Learning to play the piano involves understanding concepts and acquiring skills in a logical progression. Concepts are the principles students must understand and skills are what they physically execute at the keyboard. For example, students should understand that half notes last twice as long as quarter notes (the concept), and they should also have the physical ability to hold half notes for the proper duration (the skill). The teacher functions as a facilitator, using principles of learning to guide students toward the correct observations, answers and physical motions.

FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

Teachers must ascertain what students know before new information is introduced. Understanding musical sound and knowing how to produce it on the keyboard and discriminating between the right and left hands, high and low pitches, finger numbers, and black and white keys are all examples of some basic information that students may know before the first piano lesson. The information on a page of music that experienced musicians regard as routine—lines, spaces, clef signs, rhythm symbols, notes and finger numbers—is a confusing array of black marks to beginning students. Students might also be misinformed about basic musical concepts. For example, they may think that sharps and flats are only black keys, or that middle C is always played with the thumb.

A first lesson or interview should include activities that help the teacher find out what the student knows. Asking the student to “play three high pitches on the piano” will show whether the student understands high and low on the piano. If it is obvious there is confusion, the teacher can play a series of high pitches and ask the young student if they sound like a bird or a tiger. Once the student has identified that the sounds are “birdlike,” the teacher can ask the student whether a bird spends most of its time high in the air or low on the ground. The student is then asked to determine whether the pitches were played on the right or left side of the keyboard. The student knows the sounds related to birds and tigers, knows that birds generally fly in the air and that tigers generally move on the ground, and knows that the bird sound was made on the right side of the keyboard. From known information, the student learns what was previously unknown—that high sounds are to the right on the keyboard.

Known information can also assist students in learning about the musical elements that help pieces become more than just notes and rhythm. For example, playing loud and soft can be related to marching and tiptoeing; staccato and legato can be compared to popcorn popping versus rolling on the floor.

A student’s knowledge of various subjects can facilitate learning pieces that have imaginative titles. Students can be led to play a piece in a more expressive way by using articulation, dynamics and a tempo appropriate to the piece’s title. For example, a title that includes the word “soldier,” “marching” or “parade” might suggest an accented articulation, a louder dynamic (reflecting the action of marching) and a moderate tempo. Knowing that drums and trumpets are frequently used in parades can signal the use of crisp rhythmic figures and articulation.

Chapter 3

BEGINNING METHODS

Choosing appropriate materials is one of the most important considerations when starting a new student. Some experienced teachers, and some who have extensive pedagogical training, devise methods based on their own background and education; they write exercises and pieces or supplement with books of pieces that follow the progression of concepts and skills compatible with their teaching philosophy. Most teachers, however, rely on a body of materials that has been designed to instruct beginning students. These materials are commonly called *beginning methods* or *elementary methods*.

The function of a method book is to provide a logical progression for learning concepts and skills, and music for the practice of these elements. Choosing the appropriate method will help students move through the beginning stages with relative ease, while laying a strong foundation for future study. The student's learning style, experience with music, understanding of the keyboard, aural and physical development, reading capabilities, and rhythmic maturity are all factors to be considered when choosing a beginning method. Teachers should consider individual needs to select a method that meets the requirements of each student. The variety of beginning methods available today provides teachers with many choices.

In recent years, methods have been written for specific ages and types of students. There are methods for pre-school, average age (seven to nine years old), gifted, older and adult beginners. There are methods that emphasize the early development of strong reading skills and others that delay reading until later. Methods that delay reading place emphasis on such skills as aural development or technique and often start with singing or listening to recordings of the pieces. Methods that delay reading instruction are beyond the scope of this chapter and will not be discussed.

NOTE-READING APPROACHES

Methods that emphasize reading skills generally fall into three categories—middle C, multi-key and intervallic. Some methods are purely one of these types, while others are more eclectic, combining principles from the three approaches. Many modern note-reading methods begin with pre-staff (off-staff) reading before introducing reading on lines and spaces. (See chapter 4, page 67 for a description of pre-staff reading.)

Middle C Reading Approach

In the middle C reading approach, middle C is the first pitch taught, with the thumb of both hands sharing that key. Students find middle C easy to recognize since it is a ledger-line note between the two staves and looks different from the other notes that are written on long staff lines. Subsequent notes are learned one at a time and are visually memorized by their placement on the staff so that students feel secure about what notes to play. Mnemonic devices, such as “Every Good Boy Does Fine” for the treble clef lines, often are utilized to help students learn the placement of notes.

With middle C methods, note-reading is dependent upon individual note recognition, rather than on patterns and groupings of notes. Eye/hand coordination can be difficult since the adding

Chapter 4

TEACHING BEGINNERS AND ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Learning to teach is most effective if teachers start with beginners. Some new teachers, as a result of university or other advanced training, are equipped to coach musical aspects of more advanced repertoire, but may find it difficult to acquire students at this level. Beginning, elementary, and early-intermediate students are easier to obtain. Because years have passed since new teachers were themselves at those ages and levels, it is often hard for them to remember the learning process they experienced. What is now easy for them is not easy for beginners. The methods and materials they grew up with may not suit today's students. Furthermore, most teachers are likely to have been exceptional students during their early training.

CONCEPTS AND SKILLS COVERED IN EARLY INSTRUCTION

To effectively teach beginning and elementary students, teachers need to define what elementary students will study and accomplish. Elementary students can be any age from preschool through senior adults. Regardless of age, they all need to learn the same basic concepts and skills. Naturally, some students will achieve these skills more quickly than others. Students learn to apply concepts and skills by doing the following:

- ♦ hearing
- ♦ reading
- ♦ playing the piano
- ♦ writing
- ♦ analyzing

Aural Development

It is critical that beginners start with an aural image of sound and music. Learning to play simple pieces by ear assures that the student will make music and become acquainted with the keyboard before having to read staff notation. When students play without reading, they often play more rhythmically and musically. These pieces can be played using a variety of touches, dynamics and tempos. Teachers can work on posture, body use, hand and finger position; and since students are not reading the music, they can also observe these things more readily.

When students are ready to learn a piece by reading notes, they should have an aural impression of its elements before beginning to learn it. For example, before learning "Mexican Hat Dance" (see example 4.1), students should already know how melodic 3rds and 2nds sound and how quarter and half notes sound when grouped in measures containing four beats.

Chapter 5

TEACHING RHYTHM AND READING

The foundation of piano study for elementary students involves growth and development in three areas: 1) reading, counting and playing basic rhythms; 2) reading pitch notation on the grand staff; and 3) combining rhythms and pitches fluently on the keyboard. Before students learn to read and name these elements, they must experience them aurally and physically in many ways such as singing, chanting, playing back, clapping back and learning pieces by rote. This elementary foundation will prepare students for early-intermediate repertoire.

TEACHING RHYTHM

Rhythm is a natural part of the human experience. The heart beats in a steady pulse and humans walk with a regular gait. Rhythms are naturally tapped, clapped or drummed, many times unconsciously, as a part of daily living. Young children respond physically first to the rhythm of the music and later to the pitches. Although rhythm is experienced naturally, students must be taught to read and play rhythms. Refer to chapter 4, page 64, for a listing of elementary rhythm concepts.

Learning Rhythm with Body Movement

Teaching rhythm begins with the understanding that rhythm is felt within the body. Sound suggests movement, and as rhythm is a major contributor to that sense, rhythmic learning should begin by experiencing it through body movement. No amount of counting aloud, metronome practice, or rhythm worksheets will assure accuracy of rhythm when playing an instrument. Although all of these activities are helpful, basic rhythmic experience must take place *before* students can be expected to play rhythms accurately.

Eurhythmics, a term used by Swiss music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950) to describe movement activities in response to listening to musical sound, facilitates learning. A thorough familiarity with common rhythm patterns can be achieved through movement activities, including the following:

- ♦ walking to the beat of music to experience the pulse (quarter notes) and a steady tempo
- ♦ jogging to faster rhythmic values to feel eighth-note subdivisions
- ♦ skipping to music to feel the dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note
- ♦ walking to the beat of music and showing the strong beats with upper-body motions
- ♦ swinging the arms to the beat or conducting the beat while singing a song
- ♦ walking to the beat and singing the words of familiar songs
- ♦ singing and stepping the rhythm of familiar songs or pieces that are being learned
- ♦ clapping the pulse or the rhythm to recorded music
- ♦ clapping rhythm patterns that the teacher claps first or patterns seen in notation
- ♦ tapping the rhythm of a piece with both hands simultaneously

Chapter 6

TEACHING TECHNIQUE AND MUSICAL SOUND DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the growth and development of strong rhythm and reading skills, students must develop the physical skills for playing the piano. A solid technique allows a student to produce the needed sound and have the facility to play the music at each level of study. When good technical habits are taught from the first lesson and reinforced diligently during subsequent lessons, students learn to play comfortably and effortlessly. A facile technique and a beautiful sound are produced by using the body at the keyboard in its most natural way and using the arms, hands and fingers as a coordinated unit. Elementary students learn many technical skills. (Refer to chapter 4, pages 76–77 for a listing of elementary technical skills.)

Technique can be defined simply as “being able to do what one wants to do at the keyboard when one wants to do it.” This implies that technique is not only being able to make the necessary physical moves but is also the ability to play each sound musically. Musical sound results when there is a mental image of both the physical motion and the desired sound. When the mental image is clear and the motion is made efficiently, one can produce the sound without having to spend hours mastering a particular technical difficulty. For example, unclear playing (characterized by hitting the cracks between the keys instead of depressing the key in the center) often happens when the hand is tense or if there is confusion about which key is correct. When there is a mental picture of the correct key and a kinesthetic image of what it feels like to play the pitch *before* depressing the key, the hand and fingers will usually respond and play cleanly. From the beginning of piano study, young students can be taught to imagine the desired sound and the correct motions for efficient playing.

THE NATURAL WAY TO PLAY—GOOD POSTURE

Technical goals are achieved more easily if the piano is played in a natural way. The first critical element in piano technique is the sitting position. If the posture is not correct, it is difficult to achieve other correct positions (hand, arm, and finger) and movements. Good posture is based on the natural balance and alignment of the body. Pianists should balance their weight on the two bony protuberances at the bottom of the pelvis, feel the spine all the way to the base of the skull, with the neck and head balanced on the spine. The head reaches upwards, rather than being tipped down or reaching forward. The back should be comfortably straight but not hyperextended (swayback), which creates tension in the small of the back.

Students should sit at a height that allows the forearms to be horizontal when the hands are placed on the keys. When young students cannot achieve a level forearm due to a low sitting position, they raise their arm each time a finger plays a key. They learn to play with a wrist that is too low and, as a result, excess energy is needed to play with the fingers. Sometimes students raise the wrist for every note that is played, dropping the wrist back down after each note. Such habits cause excessive tension and use unnecessary energy. Benches in the studio and at home should be at exactly the right height for each student. Casters, adjustable benches and seat cushions will help achieve this. Teachers will probably not need to place their hands under the wrist or forearms of students to raise the arms and wrists if the correct height is achieved from the beginning and adjusted as the student grows.

Chapter 7

ELEMENTARY PERFORMANCE AND STUDY REPERTOIRE

Students reinforce musical concepts, master skills, learn to play musically and have enjoyable experiences through playing pieces. Because music is central to learning, teachers can combine repertoire and other materials in a way that provides a complete learning experience. There is a wealth of available teaching material to add variety to assignments, recitals, competitions, festivals and auditions. With such diversity, it is not necessary to always assign a music book page by page or use the same material for all students. In addition, teachers are responsible for determining difficulties in pieces, teaching those pieces in ways that minimize the difficulties, devising lesson plans, and crafting assignments to promote optimal learning.

KNOWING THE TEACHING LITERATURE

In many studios, students learn and practice new concepts and skills using pieces in their method books. However, most students also need additional music for reinforcement and motivation. Teachers should be acquainted with the standard literature and other supplementary materials, and be able to choose the very best pieces from what is available.

Standard Literature

Standard literature can be found in collections of pieces by one composer and in anthologies of several different composers from one style period or from several time periods. At the elementary level, there is only a minimal amount of standard literature from past centuries. Therefore, collections of pieces by one composer often include more than one level of difficulty. Pieces in anthologies are more likely to be graded to include music by different composers at the same level of difficulty.

Baroque Period

There are only a few pieces by composers from the Baroque period that can be taught to elementary students. Even the easier pieces from the *Notebook (Clavier-Büchlein) for Anna Magdalena Bach* and the *Notebook for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* may be too difficult for some students. The easiest pieces from these notebooks include the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Applicatio in C Major</i> (BWV 994) <i>Notebook for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Chorale "Joy and Peace"</i> (BWV 512) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>March in D Major</i> (BWV Anh. 122) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>March in E-flat Major</i> (BWV Anh. 127) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Menuet in G Minor</i> (BWV Anh. 115) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Menuet in G Major</i> (BWV Anh. 114) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Musette in D Major</i> (BWV Anh. 126) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Polonaise in F Major</i> (BWV Anh. 117a) <i>Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach</i>

Chapter 8

DEVELOPING MUSICALITY IN ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Some students have an innate musical sense and naturally play musically, while others achieve only correct notes and rhythm on their own. Still others enjoy displaying their technical skills without demonstrating an interest in playing musically. For the more innate students, the teacher's job is to make them aware of their musical instincts so they can use them effectively. For those who do not play musically, it is the teacher's job to teach and develop musicality.

Even elementary students can communicate musically. A vital first step is to help students learn to produce a musical, expressive sound and to solve technical difficulties that might interfere with musical communication. It is that which lies beyond correct notes and rhythm that makes music come alive. Some pieces may not be perfected or polished to a performance level, but from the very first lesson, teachers can make sure that all pieces are played musically in some way. One piece might be reassigned for a faster tempo, another for a louder dynamic, a third made more exciting with greater variety in articulation, and still another piece may be made more musical by adding the pedal.

In addition to learning and playing repertoire pieces, there are many other experiences that contribute to musical playing. Students can become musical in their playing as follows:

- ♦ by discovering that music communicates a mood or emotion and creates a character or personality in sound
- ♦ by learning how to listen to their own playing
- ♦ by understanding the construction of the music (music literacy or theory)
- ♦ by creating their own music
- ♦ by playing in ensembles

THE ROLE OF MOOD, EMOTION AND CHARACTER

In addition to developing the technical skills necessary for producing a good sound at the piano, students must associate mood, emotion and/or character with each piece as a critical element in achieving a musical performance. A good performance tells a story or paints a picture. Teachers can coach a musical performance, giving suggestions about interpretation, musical style and expression, but students must understand mood, emotion, and character for performances to become more than programmed perfection.

In the early stages of learning, understanding the composer's musical intent begins with imagery. In "Giant Vines Growing" (see example 8.1), the first three lines move from the low register of the piano to the high register. The last line also moves from a very low C to a very high C. This movement on the keyboard represents the growing of the vine from a seed in the ground to a very tall plant. The dynamics which begin with *mp* and reach *ff* by the end of the third line characterize the large size of the plant.

When pieces are approached through the imagination, musical playing is encouraged as a result of that image.

Chapter 9

GROUP TEACHING

Private piano instruction is the most common mode of piano teaching. However, private lessons are the exception to most other learning activities such as school, sports, band, drama and choir. Group lessons can also be effective in piano instruction, either as an enhancement to the private lesson or as the sole mode of teaching. A group of students can be as small as two or as large as the teacher can handle. Students can be grouped homogeneously by age and/or level, or with different ages and levels in the same class. The format of the class will vary greatly, depending upon the grouping and goals for the class. Group instruction is only effective if *all* students are actively involved *all* of the time.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GROUP AND PRIVATE INSTRUCTION

Both group and private settings for teaching have advantages and disadvantages to consider.

Advantages of Group Lessons

Group teaching gives students distinct advantages that are not possible in the private lesson. In regard to IMPROVED SKILLS:

- ♦ Group lessons develop poise and other performance skills when the student plays for others.
- ♦ Group lessons develop critical listening skills through listening to others.
- ♦ Group lessons broaden students' musical understanding by hearing and studying a greater variety of music. (This is especially true when individual students are assigned different compositions by the same composer or by different composers in the same style.)
- ♦ Group lessons develop rhythmic security and counting ability by providing an opportunity for several students to play the same pieces together or through other ensemble work.
- ♦ Group lessons provide an environment that encourages the development of functional skills.
- ♦ Group lessons develop communication skills and the ability to work in a group.

In regard to INCREASED MOTIVATION and ENTHUSIASM:

- ♦ Group lessons provide inspiration through peer performances.
- ♦ Group lessons motivate students through healthy competition.
- ♦ Group lessons provide a social outlet surrounding a common interest not normally available to private piano students.
- ♦ Group lessons promote enthusiasm and enjoyment as a result of sharing in ensemble work, rhythm drills and music games.

Chapter 10

TEACHING PRESCHOOLERS

Recent decades have seen an increased interest in early childhood music education. The work of 20th-century developmental psychologists supports the idea that music is a viable part of early childhood education.

- ♦ **Maria Montessori** (1870–1952) observed that children learn easily in an environment that stimulates their curiosity and imagination, and leads them to inquiry, manipulation and experience.
- ♦ **Jean Piaget** (1896–1980) believed that all children go through stages of intellectual development and must complete each developmental stage before they can move on to the next stage. Readiness for learning in each new stage of development is achieved in the previous stage.
- ♦ **Lev Vygotsky** (1896–1934) observed that play is an essential component of early learning and that the interaction of children with adults, especially parents, is essential to learning.
- ♦ **Jerome Bruner** (b. 1915) theorizes that anything can be taught to students of any age through a spiral curriculum, where general principles are presented in simple ways at first, and then with ever-increasing complexity over time. An idea must be experienced through sensing and doing; later, it can be internalized and experienced through language or symbols.
- ♦ **Howard Gardner** (b. 1943) believes that we learn in different ways (multiple intelligences). He has identified eight intelligences, of which music is one, stating that musical intelligence—sensitivity to pitch, melody and tone—emerges earlier than some other types of intelligence.

All of these ideas suggest that natural musical instincts are enhanced when music is experienced early, in age-appropriate ways. Interacting with music from an early age can enhance the child's overall development. The proliferation of preschool music programs indicates that both the musical community and parents are taking the discoveries of these psychologists and educators seriously.

ADVANTAGES OF PRESCHOOL MUSIC EXPERIENCES

The study of music and movement during the preschool years provides students with positive experiences and enhances growth in the following areas:

- ♦ patience, perseverance and commitment
- ♦ attention span and concentration
- ♦ self-awareness and respect
- ♦ self-confidence, pride and satisfaction

Chapter 11

TEACHING ADULTS

Some teachers enjoy the challenges of teaching adults, while others prefer working with children. There are a number of positive aspects to teaching adults that can be very rewarding. Adult students tend to be sincerely interested in lessons and are usually intrinsically motivated. In addition to work and family responsibilities, studying piano is a commitment of time, money, energy, and effort not taken lightly. Adults who study piano are likely to acquire a deeper appreciation for music and music making, which can sometimes develop into ongoing support for musical events and the arts in general.

Teachers who teach adults find it rewarding for several other reasons:

- ♦ Teachers can interact and talk to students in an adult manner.
- ♦ Since adults can read directions and teach themselves some musical concepts, lesson time can focus on technical development, expressive playing, and reinforcement.
- ♦ Teaching can occur during hours of the day when most young students are unable to attend lessons.
- ♦ Teaching can be less stressful and more pleasurable because students progress at their own pace.
- ♦ Adult students tend to be enthusiastic and happy about their study.
- ♦ Many adult students understand that lessons are valuable for review, inspiration, and reinforcement, even when they have not practiced.

In lessons with adult students, the teacher's role is being a study partner, resource person, facilitator, and guide. Often lessons with adults are informal and more relaxed than lessons with children. The teacher should work together with adult students to set goals based on individual desires and needs. Because adults independently choose to study the piano, they may come to lessons with preconceived ideas about what they want to learn. Consequently, the focus in most adult lessons should be on enjoyment and playing music, not on a rigid curriculum. Most adults have no desire to become a concert pianist, but many times they want to play a specific piece, such as Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" or Pachelbel's "Canon in D." They may have a particular style of music they want to play or a certain goal they want to reach.

Although some adults study for several years, adults generally tend to study for a shorter time frame due to work schedules and lifestyle demands. This requires the teacher to be more flexible with adults than with children in terms of regular practice and lesson attendance. Since frustration with slow progress is one reason adults quit lessons, the teacher must encourage adults to be patient long enough to achieve their goals. When teachers provide repertoire and other activities that promote a feeling of success and enjoyment during the lessons, adults will study for a longer period of time. An encouraging atmosphere is also necessary, since piano playing requires deceptively challenging and potentially frustrating coordination and physical control.

Chapter 12

TEACHING POPULAR, SACRED, AND OTHER FAMILIAR MUSIC

Since students relate to music they know best, piano students benefit from experiences that incorporate familiar music into the curriculum. Young children sing folk songs or other children's songs in preschool music classes. Children and teens enjoy and listen to popular music. Adults listen to recordings of songs that were popular when they were younger. Familiar music is ubiquitous in offices and retail establishments and as background music for commercials, movies, and television programs.

Some students assume piano lessons will involve music they have experienced and heard. When familiar styles of music are omitted from piano study, students are often disappointed. Playing popular music can be especially important for some teenagers, who without the opportunity to learn and perform this music may stop taking piano lessons. Many students want to learn current songs they hear on the radio, as well as pieces in a variety of styles from previous decades. Furthermore, some want to play arrangements of sacred music, holiday music, folk songs, children's songs, and classical themes, or to learn to use lead sheets to create their own arrangements. Familiar music offers the following learning advantages:

- ♦ Parents and students are interested in music that sounds familiar.
- ♦ Students are motivated and learn pieces quickly if they are familiar with the style of the music.
- ♦ Because familiar music is often performed not exactly as written, students can enjoy the freedom of experimentation and develop skills in improvisation.
- ♦ Playing familiar songs by ear and improvising on them helps students become comfortable playing without the score, which builds confidence for playing from memory.
- ♦ Familiar music often has complex rhythms. Mastering such rhythms aids learning similar rhythms in standard literature.
- ♦ Students learn about harmony by playing familiar music from chord symbols.

Familiar music has the same compositional elements as standard repertoire—pitches, rhythm, harmony, form, motives, phrases, articulation, dynamics, and pedaling. Consequently, many skills developed from studying standard repertoire can be honed equally well by learning familiar music. Students can learn to read notes, rhythms, and fingerings accurately. They can also learn how to keep a steady tempo, improve technical skills, and play expressively. Moreover, significant personal benefits—diligence, discipline, dedication—can be achieved by studying any type of music. Studying familiar styles as part of structured piano lessons provides meaningful opportunities to learn about music in diverse ways. Teachers can incorporate familiar styles into the curriculum, as well as seek, promote, and support evaluative programs, competitions, and

Chapter 13

THE BUSINESS OF PIANO TEACHING

Students who complete a university music degree meet the criteria to be music professionals. However, that college experience may have done little to prepare graduates for the realities of earning a living as a piano teacher. Those new graduates who wish to teach must treat piano teaching as a business by making intelligent decisions about whom, where, what, when and how they will teach. Learning how to conduct the business aspects of piano teaching in a professional manner helps teachers earn a living, eliminates potential problems with students and parents, and results in respect for the teacher from the community.

WHOM TO TEACH

Teachers must decide what types of students they wish to teach. Most independent piano teachers teach beginners and intermediate-level students who are school age. Whether teaching private lessons only or private combined with group instruction, the lessons are usually taught after school, in the early evening, or on weekends. Lessons for adults of all levels are taught during the day or in the late evening. Some adult beginners are taught in groups, often in a digital piano laboratory. If the teacher has special training or interest in preschool-age children, private or group lessons can also often be taught during the day. Some established teachers specialize in serious intermediate to advanced students, but it takes some time to develop such a studio.

WHERE TO TEACH

The format of the lessons determines what type of teaching space is needed. Private lessons can be taught in the students' homes, the teacher's home, or a small studio space. Only one piano and a minimal amount of equipment and materials are required. If any kind of group instruction is included, more space, equipment and materials are needed. Group teaching occurs most often in a church, school, preparatory department of a university, commercial space, community arts center or music school.

Teaching in a Home Studio

A majority of teachers teach in their own homes and have convenience, flexibility and control over the teaching environment. There are many advantages to teaching in one's home:

- ♦ Teachers can allocate space in their home or create a separate, larger studio attached to the dwelling.
- ♦ Since there is no additional rent and additional utilities charges are minimal, a teacher's home may be the most economical place to teach.
- ♦ The mortgage, maintenance and utilities for the space used exclusively for teaching provide a tax deduction. This is not possible if teaching occurs in students' homes or a non-commercial space (church or school).

Chapter 14

EVALUATION OF TEACHING

Since teaching is a skill, one must have a way to evaluate it and to determine whether it is producing results. When one learns to play the piano, experienced instructors guide the learning process, and thoughts and habits are developed through consistent and correct repetition during practice. Similarly, beginning teachers need the same kind of guidance, complete with consistent and correct repetition. Often, this systematic process is not available for piano teachers. They must instead rely on other means for evaluating and improving their teaching. This chapter suggests processes for such an evaluation. It is used most effectively once the teacher begins to observe or teach piano lessons.

To evaluate and improve one's teaching, one must pass through four stages:

1. Acknowledging a lack of knowledge and skills required for particular aspects of effective teaching.
2. Becoming aware of the knowledge and skills required for effective teaching.
3. Determining the steps needed to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be more effective, and implementing those steps.
4. Being secure in teaching, with extensive knowledge and abilities that can be drawn upon readily for each circumstance.

Teachers must find ways to work through stages 2 and 3 to evolve to the level of teaching described in stage 4.

The most common and convenient method of self-evaluation for teachers is to compare their own students' performances with those of other teachers. Competitions, festivals, auditions, recitals, master classes, and evaluations sponsored by music teachers' organizations provide opportunities for comparison and, occasionally, opinions from independent evaluators. Although this information is useful, it is limited because students who participate in these venues are usually the better students who are judged on the performance of only a few pieces, using a narrow range of criteria. Other aspects of student learning, such as sight-reading, aural development, and musical understanding, are rarely evaluated. As a result, teachers receive only minimal information about teaching effectiveness. Observing other teachers, role-playing, peer teaching, observing one's own teaching (through audio and visual recordings), and evaluation by master teachers are more useful measuring devices.

TRAITS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Prior to any observation experiences, teachers should compare the traits of effective teaching to ineffective teaching. The following chart (see example 14.1) offers a comparison of some teacher and student behaviors that are the result of effective or ineffective instruction.