

## TEACHING PIANO PEDAGOGY

# Learning to Teach Teaching to Learn

BY FRANCES LARIMER

*Editor's Note: This column is directed to those readers who teach pedagogy. There are two ways to look at "pedagogy." Each time anyone teaches anything, "pedagogy" is involved. In that sense, we all are "pedagogy" teachers. In a more restricted sense, however, the word refers to the art of teaching others how to teach. Although articles on this page speak to those in the latter category, we hope that all readers will find them informative and thought-provoking.*

There are two main components in organized pedagogy study:

Information: readings, discussions, lectures, research, and observation of master teachers

Practice: on-going supervised intern teaching

Supervised intern teaching is the most important, and it should run concurrently with the informational component.

Pianists should be aware that teaching is also a performance skill. It requires the same scrupulous study and evaluation as performance on an instrument.

To perform as a teacher, the pianist must consider

- ◆ overall musicianship
- ◆ communication skills with students of differing ages and levels
- ◆ body language/energy level
- ◆ sensitivity to student personality, behavior, and learning style
- ◆ organization and sequencing of learning steps (lesson planning and diagnostic skills)
- ◆ pacing (lesson variety and timing of activities)
- ◆ self-evaluation (what was successful; what needs improvement)

Novice teachers cannot deal with these aspects all at once any more than they can deal simultaneously with learning all aspects a piano work.

The intern teacher should consider a number of points. (These would apply to both individual and group lesson settings.)

### The Organizational Aspects of the Lesson

What *new* material do you wish to cover?

How will you sequence a step-by-step process?

How will you set up a model for successful practice?

What material do you plan to *review*?

What are ways to vary the review?

What new practice steps will be added if continuation on the material is appropriate?

How can you *involve the student* in the learning process?

What *thought-provoking questions* will you ask?

In a group lesson, how might students *interact* with each other?

What main points will you *summarize* at the end?

What *practice steps* will be emphasized and demonstrated?

*Evaluate* your performance

Were directions clear?

Were students actively involved?

Did students experience each activity at the lesson?

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The intern teacher's lesson plan would be outlined in order of the presentation, and each lesson activity should be timed to assist in keeping on schedule.

### A Down-Side to This Procedure

Intern teachers can become so engrossed in the lesson plan and what comes next that they are unaware of student responses and behaviors. The student may bungle or misunderstand some activity, and, in an effort to get through the lesson plan, the intern teacher cheerfully announces "good" and plows on! The prepared lesson plan may also be unsuitable for the moment and may need to be modified on the spot. A quick switch in the order and length of time spent on an activity would be more appropriate. These are learning steps that beginning intern teachers will experience, and they cannot totally be avoided.

After learning how to plan and organize the lesson, however, the intern teacher must move on to focus attention on student responses and the student input in the learning process.

This leads to a more integrated process

- ◆ sensitivity to student musical and verbal responses
- ◆ learning to be flexible with the lesson plan—expanding or shortening it
- ◆ involving students more in the learning process—posing thought-provoking questions and generating discussion

Becoming a successful teacher then begins to meld together.

### Self-Evaluation

The video camera is a great tool. The intern teacher should preview and evaluate the taped lesson in advance of a conference with the supervisor. There is a tendency for both supervisor and intern teacher to enumerate what was not so successful and to discuss ways to make repairs. It is equally important to note what was successful and why in order to repeat the success in other situations.

### Before a More Student-Centered Approach

My own experience has shown that student-centered awareness comes more easily if some organizational expertise comes first. A comparison could be made with repertoire study.

Organizing and sequencing a lesson is comparable to the early stages of learning a new score. Awareness and sensitivity to student learning and performance is comparable to incorporating musicality and expressiveness within a piece.

As these processes are regularly experienced with constructive feedback from a supervisor, the intern teacher becomes more adept at blending organizational skills with student-centered learning into a seamless whole experience. Most intern teachers discover that the process of teaching improves their own practice and performance. They begin to apply to themselves what they teach to others.

Thus—Learning to Teach becomes Teaching to Learn! ■■■