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## THE PIANO ADVENTURES® TEACHER

Marianne Uszler, Editor  
Randall and Nancy Faber,  
Editorial Directors  
Cover: Terpstra Design, San  
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Design: Susan Pinkerton  
Production Coordinator:  
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Publisher

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The FJH Music Company Inc.  
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The FJH Music Company Inc.  
(custserv@fjhmusic.com)  
(800) 262-8744

Websites:  
www.PianoAdventures.com  
www.PianoTeaching.com  
www.FJHMusic.com

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## From the Editor

BY MARIENNE USZLER

It's exciting to think that we're producing our fifth issue! And it's equally gratifying to get comments from readers that the newsletter is filling some needs. I had the opportunity to speak to quite a number of teachers at the last MTNA convention in Kansas City, and I've also been keeping up to date on the website "conversations." So, in a very real way, we're learning from each other!

There seems to be particular interest in discussing how to make lesson plans. While some of this relates to organizing time efficiently, the greater concern is with sequencing what is taught and finding ways to vary what is taught. For that reason, many of you like the "How To" articles. These answer some common questions: "Is there another way to say that?" or "What else can I do when I teach this piece?" How-To hints give you new ideas, but they sometimes confirm that you're already moving in the right direction or finding your own way of going beyond what's on the page or in the method.

No matter how long you teach, you can always be stimulated and surprised by observing what others say and do. After watching another teacher interacting with students or after listening to someone else's "take" on a particular subject, I can't tell you how often I've said, "Now, why didn't I think of that?" It may be just a striking word, an expressive gesture, a convincing explanation, or a creative step beyond the expected or tried-and-true. But it's often an eye-opener. Or an ear-opener.

Students at all levels make the same mistakes and need the same advice. I don't believe that good teachers are merely patient. The most successful teachers are those who know a hundred different ways to say the same thing. They are ready with the next question, the next challenge, the next demonstration, and the next reminder—each reaching in another way for what will trigger a "connection" for the student in front of them.

How do you learn those hundred different

ways? I've spent my teaching life like a bag lady. I've watched and read everything I could, then stuffed my own bag with the bits and pieces I learned from others. The more that's in there, the better I can teach. If I'm searching for a magic word or if I seem to be dealing with a sphinx, I dig down into my supply, and I can usually come up with a trick or two. Even though the ideas are not all mine, I've made them mine by finding original ways of integrating or using them.

How does this relate to making lesson plans? Getting new ideas or finding multiple ways to vary an explanation or demonstration is only part of the equation, of course. But it's a good way to start "packing your own bag." New ideas get you to think about things in another way. They might also pull you out of a teaching rut. You have a deeper and richer supply from which to choose teaching strategies and make plans.

You'll notice that in this issue one of the "How To" columns focuses on a more difficult piece. A number of teachers have asked for this. Although the *Piano Adventures®* levels are rising chronologically and will be succeeded by further developing Faber publications—thus the materials and music will naturally advance in difficulty in upcoming issues—we're happy to begin discussing some higher-level standard literature now. And we hope you'll find the teaching tips just as practical and on-target.

I'll close with a suggestion. Let's consider this newsletter our collective "bag." Take what you need to add to your own collection. But consider making a personal contribution, too. Tell all of us what you've discovered or what works for you. Some other reader might say, "Now, why didn't I think of that?"

Frank Hackinson  
([frankh@fjhmusic.com](mailto:frankh@fjhmusic.com))  
Marianne Uszler  
([muszler@pianoteaching.com](mailto:muszler@pianoteaching.com))  
Randall and Nancy Faber  
([faber@pianoteaching.com](mailto:faber@pianoteaching.com))

