

TEACHING PIANO PEDAGOGY

Plan to Involve the Student

BY SYLVIA COATS

A lesson is not only about getting a student to learn a piece, but especially about getting the student to develop a *learning process*. Planning a lesson, then, is a consideration of possible ways to involve students in decision-making. Instead of listing what is played when, the lesson plan should reflect possible problems that may occur in the music and outline musical concepts that may assist the student to solve these problems. By anticipating what issues may arise, the teacher plans music, activities, and interaction that will guide the student to *think* about the music.

Consider the following lesson plan. It is written for a student who has progressed to Level 1 of *Piano Adventures*®, but still has some trouble reading.

Objective: Recognize pitch and rhythm patterns

Materials: *Piano Adventures*® Level 1

Au Clair de la Lune, Lesson Book, p. 47

I've Got Music, Performance Book, p. 24

It's Up to You!, Theory Book, p. 34

Concepts that may contribute to possible solutions:

Pitch, rhythm, tempo, coordination, phrase

Concrete experiences to encourage insight and help solve problems

- ◆ Work with hands separately, short phrases [limit conditions]
- ◆ Sightread, transpose, memorize, and harmonize
Improvise two-measure question and two-measure answer phrases using the rhythm pattern of Au Clair de la Lune [Transfer concept to other skills]
- ◆ Sing melodies while clapping rhythms of Au Clair de la Lune, I've Got Music, and It's Up to You! [Eurhythmics, singing, imagery]

Teacher/Student Interaction: Use a balance of praise, questions, lecture, and directions to provide concrete experiences emphasizing patterns.

An Integrated Lesson

In an integrated lesson, the teacher directs the student to apply a concept learned in one piece to other pieces and technique exercises. In a nonintegrated lesson, the teacher follows an order of materials and tasks to be accomplished, but may feel frustrated because of lack of time to complete the agenda. With a conceptual approach, however, the teacher motivates the student to apply the concept to music practiced at home. A concept used in similar yet different contexts enables the student to think independently in his practice. Therefore, there may not be time to hear all the music and do all the tasks that were planned, but the instructor should trust that the student could apply the concept to his practice with music not played in the lesson.

The plan suggested is designed to create opportunities to develop student insight. The lesson focus—recognizing pitch and rhythm patterns—is emphasized in the concrete experiences. The teacher will ask questions about similarities and differences in pitch and rhythm patterns in each piece and summarize what is learned in each activity.

Stimulate Insights and Connections

Encourage the student to make intuitive connections. (Refer to the lesson plan.)

- ◆ Choosing to work with one phrase of the music, or perhaps with one hand, enables the student to be successful by *limiting the conditions*.
- ◆ Sight reading, transposing, improvising, and harmonizing are all ways to reinforce the concept—in this case, pitch and rhythm patterns. These *symmetrical activities* support and stimulate the student's comprehension.
- ◆ Moving to the rhythm by clapping, directing, or dancing, singing the melody or scale, and using imagery or stories to describe the music help the student make connections between the concept and other experiences. These *analogies* promote opportunities for student insight and analytical thinking.

Student-Centered Interactions

Rather than a session for correcting mistakes, plan the lesson so that the student takes an active role in analyzing music and correcting his own mistakes. In a student-centered lesson, the communication between the student and teacher is characterized by questions about the student's perception of the music. After the student sings and claps Au Clair de la Lune, the teacher may ask, "Are there repeated sections in this piece?" The question assesses if the student is listening and evaluating visual and aural information. The teacher accepts the answer and builds on it by further justification from the music or asks questions to guide the student to a more thoughtful answer. This collaborative discussion nurtures the student's belief that he can make informed decisions about the music.

I encourage pedagogy students and experienced teachers to plan activities that integrate the learned concept into all the music played. The reward for your time and effort? The student will likely say, "I get it!" ■■■

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