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How Music Theory Sequencing Can Improve Classroom Management and Attention Issues in Beginner Students' Piano Lessons

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How music theory sequencing can improve classroom management and attention issues in
beginner students' piano lessons

This research has been inspired by an observation of the different music-theoretical concepts and their sequencing in different piano methods. After working in three different countries as a piano teacher I wanted to explore differences and similarities as well as improve my lesson engagement level by beginning students, which is admittedly the most complicated level to teach mainly due to the focus maintenance issues. This is the evidence of my preliminary research which can be used and explored by any piano teacher who is interested in incorporating music theory concepts in their classroom, to help with attention issues, more all-rounded teaching, and overall sequencing of various theoretical concepts.

Articles

1. **Hepp, Christopher. "Reviews: Books - 'Intelligent Music Teaching: Essays on the Core Principles of Effective Instruction,' by Robert Duke." *American Music Teacher* 55, no. 5 (April 2006): 93–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43544696>.**

This short review of Duke's *Intelligent Music Teaching* provides the reader with a versatile view on some opinions in teaching practice. He views this text as a teacher himself and evaluates the context with an open mind. He acknowledges the fact that not every teacher will agree with Duke's idea that successful music teaching can be measured by the number of hours spent teaching. Hepp emphasizes the beneficial part of this collection of essays about the planning of the lessons, execution of successful discipline and strategic sequencing and transfer of concepts. Hepp provides his approval of specific essays related to music theory inclusion in the lesson and provides the reader with a distinction between what should be taken into consideration when teaching or writing about teaching. Hepp is an acclaimed pianist, teacher, and administrator of higher education. He is a Doctor of Musical Arts and worked in the Office of University Development at the University of Kansas.

2. **Lancaster, E. L. "Are Piano Students Really Different Today?" *American Music Teacher* 56, no. 2 (October/November 2006): 30–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43545721>.**

The author presents the main issues piano teaching is facing in present-day western countries. The article is divided into clear sections using bullet points, which allows the reader to jump straight into the relevant section. The main ideas that Lancaster is emphasizing are how to teach listening, how we can develop a love for music by example, he talks about meeting students where they are, making connections, and integrating theory learning. This article is a great pathway to upgrading the music teaching in the studio and

group lessons to an interesting, engaging, and rewarding experience for our students, which is exactly what the author of *Teaching Piano in Groups* (Christopher Fisher) and *Dynamic Group Teaching* (Pamela D. Pike) will engage in as well. Lancaster is vice president and keyboard editor-in-chief of Alfred publishing company, founder of graduate piano pedagogy programs at the University of Oklahoma.

Dictionary / Encyclopedia Articles

3. **Ribaupierre, Anik de. "Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development." *International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Geneva, Switzerland: Elsevier, 2015. 18. 120-24.**

Piaget's developmental (child) theory is one of the major contributions to twentieth-century research. De Ribaupierre who is a professor (Ph.D.) at the University of Geneva School of Psychology, first reviews some key epistemological concepts, then summarizes Piaget's theory of the development of intelligence (main stages). She also reviews and summarizes the major criticisms and legacy of Piaget's theory. She accurately describes present and future directions for the research. This article engages a critical view by Hopkins (2011). He criticizes three factors of Piaget's theory. Ribaupierre accepts the criticism of Piaget's work from the psychological side, however, she explains why it is not applied to his epistemological work. She makes a clear distinction between those two fields and guides the reader to a full understanding of both views.

Dissertation

4. **Nelson, Mary Janean. "A comparison of Unilateral, Coordinated, and Aural Model Practice Procedures in Learning Piano Music." D.M.A diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.**

The main goal of this paper is to compare the benefits of one-hand versus both hands practice procedures while learning piano. The author also investigates the effectiveness of the aural model during unilateral piano practice. The findings include learning efficiency, concert accuracy and musical expression. This dissertation presents some evidence that aural and theory-based practice can improve practice efficiency in learning piano music. This research does not speak about group piano teaching or beginning students. Nelson has received her Doctoral degree from the University of Texas, Austin.

Essays in Collections

5. **Cambell, P. S. "Global Practices." In *The Child as Musician: A Handbook of Musical Development*, edited by Gary McPherson, 556-76. New York: Oxford University Press 2017.**

This chapter on Global Practices encirclements a wide variety of settings and circumstances in which children's music learning occurs. Informal learning in communities and the socialization aspect of music directly feeds into formal learning at schools, studios and another institutional settings. The author considers children's musical identities as a product of family, peer, and teacher authority products, which are also mentioned in L. Simone's "Guidebook", Cambell then briefly reviews a variety of geo-cultural contexts while focusing on cross-cultural and culture-specific features. This chapter relates to the comparative study of pedagogical methods between countries and can help to get a better perspective for future research in the field of international pedagogy.

Monographs

6. **Coats, Sylvia Curry. *Thinking as You Play: Teaching Piano in Individual and Group Lessons*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.**

This piano pedagogy book focuses on how to teach, with practical suggestions based on pedagogical research. She addresses many issues of interest to a private piano teacher and college pedagogy student. Main topics include training students to think independently and play expressively, a large part of the book focuses on group teaching discussion. The author provides teachers with the presentation of musical concepts, principles that students will understand, strategic curriculum planning and ways to develop an awareness of learning modalities and personality types. The author grasps the practical side of teaching including grouping of student groups to maximize productivity, cooperative learning strategies and group dynamics to facilitate groups better. Sylvia Coats is a Professor of Piano Pedagogy and Class Piano at Wichita State University. Served on the board of directors for Music Teachers National Association.

7. **Fisher, Christopher. *Teaching Piano in Groups*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2010.**

Within fifteen chapters, it covers learning theory, group process and dynamics within the group-piano instruction. This book helps teachers transfer the learned theory into the practical classroom context. This is a versatile pedagogy textbook, useful resource for graduate teaching assistants and professional piano teachers. The book provides a detailed examination of learning theory, students' needs and specific issues that group-piano teachers might be facing. This book has a practical aspect as well as a scholarly based on research and observation. This monograph is one of the best sources for piano teachers seeking to improve the quality and engagement in their studio. It covers all aspects of

lessons including theory, technique, sequencing, assignments and interviewing potential students. Christopher Fisher is an associate professor of Piano at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Active performer with Fisher Duo and member of Music Teachers National Association and vice-president of Conferences for the Ohio Music Teacher Association.

8. Pike, Pamela D. *Dynamic Group-Piano Teaching: Transforming Group Theory into Teaching Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

In this book Pike addresses many group teaching issues and techniques complimenting C. Fishers (*Teaching Piano in Groups*) and S. Coats (*Thinking as You Play*). Chapter 9 “Group Piano for Children in the Independent Studio and K-12 Schools” supports the theory that incorporating macro movements and theory activities can help manage the classroom for the beginning piano students. This book is an essential resource for any piano teacher whether a group or private. Dr. Pamela D. Pike is the Herndon Spillman Professor of Piano Pedagogy at Louisiana State University, where she coordinates the group-piano and piano pedagogy program.

9. Simones, Lilian. *Certificate for Music Educators Guidebook: Teaching Children and Young People*. New York: Routledge, 2022.

The guidebook is focused on learning outcomes for music educators. Through reflective questions and teaching observations, readers become familiar with research findings relevant to teaching children specifically in the private setting. Simones condensed the best most successful teaching practices in day-to-day teaching that educators can transfer to their teaching instantly. Simones guidance can be applied to instrumental and vocal teaching; early, primary, and secondary schools and community-based settings. Simone presents the main ideas by Piage, Vygotsky, Welch and Cambell (2016). This guidebook is a good starting point for continuous education for any private or classroom teacher. Lilian Simones is the Director and founder of Enact Music in Belfast, UK, and Research Development Consultant at Queen’s University, Belfast, UK. She is the direct mentor to the students who enroll in the Music Teachers Certificate (accredited by Trinity, London and Associated Board of Royal School of Music, London).

Music Score

10. Fisher, Katherine, Julie Knerr. *Piano Safari*. Ohio: self-published, 2017.

The Piano Safari method is a relatively new self-publication developed by two pedagogues who combined many years of experience and a large variety of teaching and pedagogical research into one method. This approach is one of the newest approaches to teaching beginning students. The authors created *Piano Safari Level 1* for children up to ten years old and another version called *Older Student Method*. The Safari method includes intervallic reading, teaching by rote, animal-themed technique exercises,

holistic approach to ear training. This method does not introduce the notation the conventional way, it focuses on free staff notation and demonstration lead learning. Katherine Fisher has a master's degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy, she is a faculty member at the Athens Community Music School at Ohio University and a member of the Fisher Piano Duo. Dr. Julie Knerr holds a Ph.D. in Music Education with an emphasis in Piano Pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Knerr teaches piano at her home studio in Windsor, Connecticut.

11. Harewood, Marion, and Fanny Waterman. *Me and My Piano*. London: Faber Music, 2019.

One of the widest used piano methods in the UK. The book is formatted to suit the youngest learners with large print, an attractive layout made easy to read, recognizable designs, and vibrant illustrations. This method takes the young pianists through the early stages of piano technique, elementary theory through games and puzzles, rhythms and songs relate to familiar characters like Ostrich and Sammy Squirrel. This method focuses on introducing the notation as early as the first lesson. Suitable for children that learn to read early. Dame Fanny Waterman was a British pianist and academic piano teacher, one of the founders of Leeds International Piano Competition and president of the Harrogate International Music Festival. Countess Marion Harewood joined the founder of Leeds Piano Competition and author of piano method books as well as piano tutor, a graduate of the Royal College of Music.

Video

12. Bellelo, Rebecca. "Piano Class 1--7-8 years old." Uploaded September 8, 2020. Piano Pathways, 46:55. <https://youtu.be/6rFSLzEr1yg>.

By observing the lesson taught by Bellelo we can identify some of the methods described in C. Fisher *Teaching Piano in Groups*. Dr. Bellelo is an independent music professional and owner of Piano Pathways in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She received her Doctoral degree in Music from Louisiana State University. She specializes in group piano instructing. The main constructs covered in the class are note values, repertoire piece learning, transposition, duet playing, listening skills, and performance/stage discipline. Bellelo shows the good practice of classroom management techniques and how music theory games can engage students and help to manage the focus during the lesson. Cooperative learning is one of the main concepts to consider from Fisher's *Teaching Piano in Groups* and in this video, we can see a direct example of this concept.