THE INTRODUCTION OF PIANO PEDAGOGY
TO A UNIVERSITY LEVEL
PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAM

Michelle Yoder Sensenig

Abstract

Elemen-elemen apa saja yang menjadi pertimbangan para pengajar tatkala hendak menyajikan mata kuliah pengajaran piano bagi mahasiswa Perguruan Tinggi Seni? Tulisan ini sendiri meneliti tentang pengajaran piano bagi siswa pemula yang dilakukan oleh sebelas orang mahasiswa Fakultas Seni Pertunjukan di Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga. Kesebelas mahasiswa mengikuti mata kuliah, mempelajari dua buku teks yang diberikan, menganalisis metode pengajaran piano, melakukan wawancara pada salah satu guru piano privat yang dianggap berhasil di Semarang, mengobservasi pengajaran yang dilakukan oleh beberapa orang guru piano profesional, melakukan praktik mengajar selama enam minggu tatap muka, mengobservasi cara pengajaran rekan-rekannya, dan diberi kebebasan untuk merancang peraturan kursusnya sendiri. Tulisan ini diakhiri dengan penarikan kesimpulan terhadap kelemahan dan kelebihan dari perkuliahan yang berdurasi satu semester ini.

Kata-kata kunci: pedagogi, holistik, buku-buku ajar, pengajaran piano

Introduction

As a new piano lecturer at Satya Wacana Christian University in 2005, I was eager to find out what my students knew. What were they studying? How were their reading, scale-work, musicianship and performing abilities? It was not long before I learned that almost all of my piano students aspired to be teachers—piano teachers and elementary, middle school and high school teachers. Very few of my students were headed down the performance track. So I considered my personal challenge to be centered around the following question: How can I best prepare my students to be good piano teachers?

My university's Faculty of Performing Arts is only eight years old, and the music education degree has not yet been fully developed. The class that I am analyzing, Piano Pedagogy, is one of the first education classes in my department. The eleven students in my class have chosen to major in either Music Composition, Church Music, or Music Performance. All of them have chosen the piano concentration as their major instrument with the exception of one, who has chosen piano as her minor. My students are a mixture of second, third, and fourth year students and this class presented most of the them their first opportunity to formally study and analyze pedagogical techniques.

This paper examines the first Piano Pedagogy class taught at Satya Wacana Christian University. The eleven students taking the course read materials from two course books, analyzed piano methods, interviewed a successful piano teacher, observed

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1 Michelle Yoder Sensenig (michellesensenig@yahoo.com) is a piano lecturer at Satya Wacana Christian University, Jl.Diponegoro 52-60 Salatiga, 50711.
professional piano teachers, taught a six-week practicum, observed their peers teaching, and designed their own Studio Policy. I will outline much of the course content and discussion and conclude with an analysis of the semester-long course's strengths and weaknesses.

I centered my classroom discussion around two texts: *Creative Piano Teaching* by James Lyke, Yvonne Enoch, and Geoffrey Haydon, which is a selection of essays written by various piano teachers and educators; and *How to Teach Piano Successfully* by James W. Bastien. My class lectures covered the following subjects: the preparation of a piano teacher, developmental aspects of children, methods reviews, modes of instruction, early beginners, first-year students, intermediate students, advanced students, teaching reading, teaching independence problems in teaching, and setting up a studio. The students were required to present an analysis of a method series, teach a beginner student for six weeks, conduct peer observations, visit a local piano studio and conduct observations of the teachers in action, and design their own piano Studio Policy. I also gave a short quiz on the assigned reading at the beginning of each class.

The Teacher

Many of our teachers teach the way we have been taught. And if our role model was somebody well-educated, imaginative, innovative, cheerful and the creator of student-centered lessons, then that just might be a good enough model to follow. But if our model was someone who only used the lesson book and plowed through the pages lesson after lesson, keeping us on the bench naming lines and spaces, then we would do well to consider other aspects, methods and components of teaching piano lessons.

So what are desirable characteristics for a piano teacher? James Lyke writes, "Mastering the art of teaching, though seldom an easy task, is always a rewarding one—providing, of course, that the teacher genuinely enjoys interacting with people." Our first class, entitled "The Piano Teacher," was centered around the qualities that a good piano teacher possesses. Each student in the class was invited to talk about his or her previous teachers, teaching styles, and how they personally view themselves as a learner. We then discussed the ideal qualities of a piano teacher and the kind of teacher we wanted to become. James Bastien lists four desirable characteristics that every piano teacher should try to portray when meeting with the student: pleasantness, enthusiasm, encouragement and patience.

For most, the process of becoming a teacher is just that, a process. As new teachers, we may faithfully assert our ideals, but most long-time teachers would concede that experience is also a teacher and that the longer we do it, the better we become. Good teachers know how to involve and excite their students, and a good piano teacher considers the complete process of studying music. In his book *Teaching Piano*, Max Camp urges teachers to approach piano lessons from a holistic point of view. He writes, "Learning to play the piano involves the mind, body, emotions, and the senses of sight, hearing, and touch. Within these involvements, a child must develop an approach to reading, rhythm, musical understanding, a technique of playing the keyboard, artistry and style interpretation in order to learn, interpret and perform music." He calls this

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process a holistic point of view because “success in teaching and learning is very minimal if each component is considered separately.”

So how can piano teachers make sure to give careful attention to the mind, body, emotions, and the senses of sight, hearing and touch? How can we strive to teach with a holistic point of view, all the while working to develop a student's musical literacy? In her article “For Piano Teachers Who Love to Teach: Tools for Developing Music Literacy,” Christy Vogt responds to the challenge of keeping students involved in music learning for life by suggesting that we teach students to become musically literate. The musically literate student will most likely continue through her life looking for opportunities to play music, attend concerts, learn new styles of playing, and have support the arts. The piano teacher should be aware that teaching music literacy goes way beyond teaching pieces and technique.

Vogt defines musical literacy as the ability to understand music theory enough to recognize the phrase and structure of a piece. The musically literate person can demonstrate their knowledge of theory in the creative skills of improvisation, harmonization, composition, and transposition. Being musically literate includes having an understanding of music history and how the historical background of a piece affects its performance. It also means having the ability to accompany others with ease. The musically literate can sight read well but are not afraid to pick out melodies by ear and harmonize them. Essentially, a musically literate student is one who has an intimate grasp of music as a language and can utilize it in a variety of dialects.

The teacher who is thinking holistically, to use Camp's term, is more concerned with teaching students to harmonize, transpose, memorize, improvise, create, ornament, and analyze. Vogt later goes on to explain that today's piano teacher is thought of as a music educator who considers the keyboard a tool in the quest for musical literacy. This teacher values the “process more than the product” and is aware of the many components and skills that a piano student must obtain to become musically literate.

Parker Palmer, well known educator and author writes about his experience becoming someone else's student during various points of his teaching career: “I was forcefully reminded that education is not just a cognitive process, not just the transmission of facts and reasons. It is a process that involves the whole person, and so involves deep feelings as well.”

Selecting a Piano Series

Each student was either paired with another or put into a group of three. The students were given a particular series of method books to examine and then were required to present their findings to the class. The method series available for the students to analyze were: Piano Adventures by Faber and Faber, the Bastien Piano Basics by James and Jane Smisor Bastien, Alfred's Basic Piano Library from Alfred Publishing, John Thompson Series by John Thompson and The Music Tree series by Frances Clark. The students were introduced to four educational philosophies: The

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Middle C Method, Landmark Reading, Multiple Key Method and Reading by Intervals. The students then considered the following aspects of the methods they were reviewing: the design and format of the book, the progression of materials, the purpose of the method, the note range, methods of counting, the presentation of rhythm, chords and scales, theory, and supplementary materials. The students considered the early beginner, the slow learner and the adult beginner and looked at the progression of books accordingly. Throughout the presentations and class discussion, the following questions were raised: Do these method books seem to move too quickly for a young beginner? Would an adult find this series too slow, or even childish? What should we consider when teaching the adult beginner? Would this series work if we were teaching group lessons?

The United States has produced more method books than any other country. Some well-suited methods books may be difficult for teachers in Indonesia to obtain. Therefore, what concepts and ideas could students glean from examining different method books that could later be applied to their own teaching, regardless of the chosen method book? If a teacher only has the outdated Middle C Approach method books available to her, in what ways could she structure her lessons to introduce students to reading by intervals from the very beginning?

No one method book is the perfect book. The teacher would do well to familiarize herself with a variety of methods and choose a program that is best suited for a particular child. Teachers should also realize that a method book alone will not be the only answer for a child. The teacher needs to persist in thinking creatively and finding appropriate ways to meet the needs of each child.

Max Camp writes, “The musical selections that a student experiences should display proper sequencing of the majority of notational complexities, including intervals, note values, articulation, voicing, scalar and arpeggiated passages, chords and inversions, keys, phrasing and pedaling . . . these complexities need to be properly sequences as well as all the physical demands of executing these complexities. In all aspects of the process, sequencing is the key!” Proper sequencing is the responsibility of the teacher, however, good literature can be a big help in organizing an approach.

The Early Beginner

Deciding when a child is ready to begin music lessons, is a question that both the parent and teacher should seriously consider before beginning lessons. In our pedagogy class, we looked at a brief profile of the early beginner. The profile of a four to five year old child usually shows a increased interest in independence and self-confidence. They are often asking the question “Why?” and are looking for ways to be noticed and valued and to gain assurance. This age group can use simple percussion instruments and “match sounds with reasonable accuracy in pitch and duration.” Children this age usually enjoy chanting, action songs, creating patterns and moving rhythmically.

The six to seven-year-old child may be at a more typical age to begin taking piano lessons. This age group possesses a high level of energy that contributes to their love of games and physical activities. Children this age enjoy singing and to release

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6 Bastien, p. 47.
7 Camp, p. 17.
energy, often tend to “shout-sing.” Sally Monsour writes, “Typically they are able to play mallet instruments quite well and can both follow given patterns as well as create or improvise their own...individual finger dexterity improves on a keyboard instrument such as piano, but coordinated movements may be a bit awkward.”

In examining the profiles of the four to five-year-old and the six to seven-year-old, several questions surface in relation to piano readiness. In our Piano Pedagogy class, we came up with a list of questions that we think important when having the introductory meeting with the parent.

1. **“Does the child want to take piano lessons?”** The answer to this question may seem obvious, but there are often cases where music lessons are desired more by the parent than by the student. The student should have a certain level of enthusiasm for music or the piano before even beginning this new challenge!

2. **“Does the child have access to piano for regular weekly practicing?”** It is important that both the child and parent understand the commitment level that piano lessons require. I encourage my piano students to be open and honest when speaking to the parent regarding practice and commitment expectations.

3. **“Does the child have an attention span long enough to sit on a piano bench and practice for at least 10 minutes at a time?”** It is not necessary for a beginner to think of practice time in terms of hours, but rather, in minutes. I encourage my pedagogy students to discuss the child's daily schedule with the parents and suggest times to practice. For example, would the child be able to practice for 10 minutes before school and 10 minutes after school for at least five days out of the week?

4. **“Are the child’s motor skills adequate?”** Can the child keep her hand steady to press the piano keys? Is the parent willing to help as the student practices new motor skills? Piano educator James Bastien writes, “Parents who have taught their child how to draw letters, numbers, and how to write his or her name will probably be willing to assist with practicing.”

If any of the answers to these questions raise a red flag in the mind of the teacher, then perhaps the teacher would do well to suggest the student wait six more months or even a year before beginning piano lessons. Piano lessons should be an enjoyable experience for both the young child and the teacher. However the parent and teacher should caution themselves to not rush the student and begin only when the child is ready to absorb instruction and follow a regular practice routine. (Bastien, 82)

**The First Lesson**

What should the first lesson entail? Every teacher has their own system and method but there are few ideas that the beginning teacher should consider. The teacher should begin by setting the child at ease by smiling and maintaining a friendly disposition. The teacher should be ready with a course book and possibly a notebook.

Even from the very beginning, the teacher should try to keep the lesson student-centered. In the book *Creative Piano Teaching*, Yvonne Enoch cautions teachers against showing and telling them how to do things. But rather, “teachers need to remember that what a student discovers for himself is the greatest achievement and one not to be forgotten so easily... teaching students to discover as much for themselves as then can,
reverses the role of the teacher into one who asks the question, guiding the pupil into discovering as much as he possibly can for himself, thus avoiding the telling process whenever possible.”

The first lesson should be a combination of singing, rhythmic exercises and playing the piano. The teacher can use her voice to sing various notes and have the pupil identify high sounds and low sounds. The pupil can also sing some pitches back to the teacher to reverse the role. The teacher can move on to some rhythmic exercises that involve stepping, clapping, patting or snapping. The teacher could even make up a short accompaniment to encourage the child to maintain a steady beat. It is wise to give the child a song to play on the piano. A simple black keys-only pentatonic bass accompaniment could be provided by the teacher while the pupil composes various melodies on the black keys in a higher octave. These activities are fun and usually set the child at ease with the teacher. The teacher may want to look at the first couple of pages of the lesson book if there is time. But more importantly, the student should be sent home having learned something to play and practice. That is to say, a continuation of the black-key melody, a short rhythmic exercise, or a song that the teacher taught the student to play by rote. “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” and “Mary Had a Little Lamb” are two examples of songs that do not require too many leaps and are already familiar to the pupil. It is valuable for the pupil’s sense of accomplishment to be able to go home and show her family what she learned during her first piano lesson.

Music Reading

Like the average beginner, I began piano lessons at the age of six. My teacher dutifully started me on the green John Thompson primer, inherited from my mother. I learned to read and read well at a young age. I memorized the lines and spaces and practiced enthusiastically. In short, it was several years before I found piano lessons to be challenging!

It was in college that I was first introduced to new opinions regarding the subject of music reading. I learned about the various beginning approaches: 1) middle C method, 2) multiple key method, 3) intervallic method, and 4) landmark reading. My professor advocated the intervallic method, and while originally a skeptic (what is so wrong with All Cows Eat Grass—it worked for me!), I was soon won over.

“Music reading is NOT music spelling,” writes William Richards, “Music spelling is individual note naming; music reading involves interval recognition, and to be effective must establish relationships among notes.”\(^\text{12}\) Arriving at note names by counting lines and using mnemonic devices does not teach musicianship or note relationships, both important factors establishing a good foundation for the beginning pianist. According to Richards, “Pianists taught by interval possess a great sense of musical flow in playing meaningful groups of notes.”\(^\text{13}\)

Max Camp discusses problems related to reading in his book Teaching Piano. He writes, “The slower a child learns to read music correctly, the slower musical understanding and rhythmic control develop...How a child approaches reading music

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\(^{13}\) Richards, p. 57.
during the early years of study has a tremendous effect upon all future musical developments." He goes on to say that poor reading does not necessarily have to be attributed to reading approaches. But rather, "what fails is the system or pattern that the student develops for learning to read the material." 

As we discussed pros and cons related to method books, we came to the conclusion that teaching reading is the responsibility of the teacher, not the method book of choice. If there was a perfect book to follow, all students who follow that method should in fact be perfect readers. But we know that is not true and no matter what method is followed, there will be students who excel and those who struggle.

The Implementation of Intervallic Reading

In our class, we talked about the practicalities of teaching by intervals and how to implement this method, regardless of the series used. Throughout my teaching career I have used two excellent piano method series, Piano Adventures (Faber and Faber), which introduces intervals to beginners during the first weeks and Alfred's Basic Piano Library. However, teaching reading by teaching intervals can be a method used no matter what method series you are using. I have my beginner students recognize note movement. And I have them identify note direction by saying "up, down or same note." I also ask the students to follow with their finger on the page, up and down, as they recognize note movements. This is easily be taught with pre-staff notation. Later, the beginner can be introduced to line notes and space notes. Seconds (or steps) and Thirds (skips) are a logical progression of order.

When songs are written in a way that emphasizes intervals, it can be a relatively easy concept for the beginner to absorb. Note names are introduced along with 5-finger hand position, but I do not emphasize note names. What is most important is that the beginner knows where to begin. Many teachers teach "Anchoring Points" to help beginners learn to find their way around the keyboard. As Richards notes, "Not only is the bulk of first year piano music written near the range of the Anchoring Points but more importantly they enable the beginner to achieve a measure of independence." 

Upon observing some of my students teaching, I saw that they were eager to implement the intervallic method. However, I also noticed that a few of them were just as insistent on spending a large portion of the lesson reviewing note names with their early beginners. One of the important things that I needed to reminded my students, was that teaching reading by intervals should enable the student to read without having to focus on naming notes. I have no fear that the beginners will eventually learn all the note names to perfection! But in the early stages, I have found that the teaching of intervals is far less confusing for the students.

Six Week Practicum

Each student in the class was required to teach a beginning student for six weeks. My students had little difficulty finding willing pupils after the word spread that free piano lessons would be offered for six weeks for pupils who were willing to join the program. My students carefully chose the appropriate method series for their beginner. The beginners ranged from age four to young adult. My students then set up 30-minute lessons with their pupils, meeting in Satya Wacana Christian University's practice rooms. For each lesson, the student was required to write up a short lesson plan

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14 Camp, p. 13.
15 Richards, p. 59.
that described what they hoped to accomplish. They were also required to write an evaluation of each lesson and note whether their goals had been achieved.

After three weeks of teaching their beginner, the students began observing each other. Each student was required two peer observations during the second three-week block. I wanted the students to be able to gain confidence by teaching for three weeks unobserved before their peers observed and critiqued their teaching. During the second 3-week block, I also observed each student's one time and wrote an evaluation of their lesson. In the evaluation I commented on what seemed to go well and areas where I could see the need for improvement.

A common trend that I noticed during my observations was that my Piano Pedagogy students had the tendency to talk to much; to be rather laborious in their explanations. I believe this to be a common fault among new teachers. In my student's desire to be thorough, they failed to keep track of how much time the beginner was actually playing the piano.

Professional Observation

Three-quarters of the way through the semester, I took my students to visit a professional piano teacher who owns and runs a large piano studio. Midya Wirawan is a seasoned piano teacher who lives in Semarang, Central Java. A one time concert pianist, Midya received her piano education in Indonesia, Australia and the United States. She graciously invited my Piano Pedagogy students into her spacious studio and talked with us for one hour about several issues related to piano teaching. She began with the question, “Do you want to be a teacher or a performer?” Midya went on to explain the rigors of the piano performance track and talk about her experience as a performer. She then went on to discuss what she considers to be the single most important element when teaching. “Above all, a teacher must be kind-hearted and must love the students as their parents love them,” explained Midya. She also shared how she accepts beginner or transfer students into her piano program and what she focuses on as a teacher. She also encouraged the Pedagogy students to be a “low profile” teacher with a humble heart. She encouraged the students to never stop studying, learning, and joining piano masterclasses.

Midya went on to share a bit about technical development. She stated, “What I have learned is that correct rhythm is more important than correct notes.” Her careful attention to scale work and speed was obvious in the lesson of the young girl we observed. This particular girl was quite skilled at rhythmic exercises. Midya recommends composers such as Hanon and Czerny as approaches to rhythmic exercises. A long time user of Alfred's Basic Piano Library, Midya's current favorite method series is the Piano Adventures Series by Faber and Faber.

After the interview with Midya, the Piano Pedagogy students had the opportunity to observe Midya's teaching assistants while teaching. Four of her seven assistants were teaching that particular afternoon and each Piano Pedagogy student observed two half-hour lessons. The students were able to observe the teaching assistants implementation of scale requirements and teaching practices. Following these observations, they were required to write a report detailing their observation and experiences.

Setting up a Studio

The last class of the semester dealt with issues related to setting up a private piano studio. Before opening a studio, the teacher should have worked to obtain as
much musical, pianistic, and pedagogical training as possible. The teacher should be able to play intermediate to early advanced levels of music very comfortably. Above all, teachers should keep in mind that they should still consider themselves learners. Teachers should always look out for workshops, master classes and performing experiences that may come their way. Denise Edwards recommends taking classes which are not directly related to the field of piano teaching: French, German, and Italian or a vocal diction class, a course in human anatomy and a computer keyboarding classes.16 Midya Wirawan warns teachers to “not become easily satisfied.” The successful teacher will continue to learn from others, practice and stay current on teaching practices.

In this class, we also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of both the home studio and the studio outside the home. We talked about how to equip the studio, lesson length, and fees. It is important for the teacher to think about how to attract students to his studio.

My students had an assignment to write their own Studio Policy. The Studio Policy requirements included the following components: a short summary of the teacher's philosophy of teaching, teacher contact information, scheduling procedures, fees, missed lessons, practicing, recitals and lesson book purchases. The Studio Policy was not limited to these facets, and the Pedagogy students were welcome to address any other concerns and exercise creativity when designing their own Studio Policy.

The Piano Pedagogy students were also introduced to the idea of a Studio Registration Form. A registration form helps the teacher organize his or her piano studio and keep valuable information concerning each student. This form is especially important at the beginning of a term when the teacher is setting up the schedule.

The mode of instruction is an important consideration when setting up a studio. Single piano lessons are the most traditional form of teaching; however, more and more teachers are moving towards group piano lessons. Teaching group piano lessons can be a very rewarding for the students and the teacher and only require one piano. James Lyke writes about his experience: “The teacher introduces a broad curriculum which includes an interrelated program of repertoire, technical and keyboard theory. The teacher groups students by mental and emotional maturity and considers chronological age as well.” He encourages the skeptical by writing, “When parents are shown the essence of group teaching in a demonstrations, they react positively.”17 The teacher may also choose to combine a private piano lesson with a group for a musicianship lesson. He may see each student privately for 30 minutes each week and then offer, say, two group musicianship lessons a month for the students to attend. In the musicianship lessons, the children could play music games, do rhythmic activities, note recognition games, and listen to and perform for each other. These sorts of activities keep the children enthusiastic about music and facilitate interaction with peers while continuing their music education.

Piano teachers should also be open to teaching adults. Romona Kime Graessle outlines the numerous benefits that can be gained through teaching adults. She mentions the opportunity to develop friendships as well as the energy and motivation that adult

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students often bring to the lesson. She discusses how adult students are often very motivated to learn: “They come to the lesson because they want to, not because a parent is requiring piano lessons. They also often have great self-discipline, drive, and enthusiasm.” She goes on to say how adults come to piano lessons with developed work habits and that their goals may different from that of a child’s. Adults often choose piano lessons to fulfill a life-long dream and are often just playing for their own enjoyment.

Midya Wirawan suggested the model of a triangle when commenting on the relationship between the parent, the student and the teacher. Each person is connected and involved and the child’s progress will develop optimally and at a faster rate when all persons are interested in a positive outcome. It is important for the piano teacher to inform the parent how much involvement is expected.

Conclusions

Studio Policy

During the class entitled Setting up Studio, I gave my students an example of a Studio Policy that an experienced teacher had created. My Pedagogy students observed this Studio Policy and then we discussed its contents. Many of my students agreed that this particular example of a Studio Policy “would not work for Indonesia.” Upon furthering questioning, my students explained that they found the set of “rules” to be too rigid. The example Studio Policy addressed studio basics such as fees, the yearly calendar, missed lessons, payment options, and book purchases. However, it also addressed issues such as chewing gum, washing hands and the student’s responsibility to keep their fingernails trimmed appropriately. One of my students commented that she would like to be a bit more relaxed when opening a studio and seemed to think that addressing so many issues was excessive information.

Six Week Practicum

During the majority of my observations, I noticed my students seemed comfortable with their beginning student and seemed to have an easy rapport. As mentioned earlier, I found that my Pedagogy students were reluctant to replace note-naming drills with intervallic reading. One student used the John Thompson series which focuses on the middle C approach. However, her beginner was a bright young boy who had no trouble recognizing note names and locations. Another student taught a five-year-old girl and spent the majority of the lesson trying to get to her recognize and remember five notes on the staff.

After observing the majority of my Pedagogy students, I wrote up a report of what I had witnessed, including their strengths and areas in which I thought they could improve. I also gave a few general critiques to the entire class. Among those were:

1. Do not talk so much, or do not “over-explain.” The student learns more by doing than by listening.

2. Be careful with rhythmic count-offs. If a piece is in $\frac{3}{4}$, give a 3 count off. If the piece is in 4/4, give a four count off. I encouraged my students to only count-off if they felt like the beginner was having trouble or needed rhythmic reinforcement. Otherwise, let the beginner experience starting a piece by choosing a tempo themselves and working toward their own rhythmic accuracy.

3. Do not be afraid to play the duets. Duets provide a wonderful opportunity for making music together, creating a bigger sound, learning to play in different octaves, and helping the student learn to keep a steady tempo.

4. Do not always “tell” but rather, “ask.” Think of creative ways to ask questions and help the students discover what is on the page—don’t just tell them.

5. Be clear about your expectations. If you are assigning pages for homework, write down the page numbers in a note-book. Explain and write in the notebook exactly how the student should practice at home. (Some lesson books do this for you.) For example, “Pg. 14. Clap the rhythm the first time through. The second time through, say the direction the note is headed (up, down or same note. Then play it through two times. Do this at least one time each day.” This amount of direction at the beginning is helpful for the student to know what to do when they are practicing at home, as well as the for the parent who may be assisting them in their practicing.

Results of the Questionnaire

At the close of the course, I gave a questionnaire to my students as a way to learn more about their experience. My students responded positively to the course in general; all said that they still endeavored to continue piano teaching. When asked what they enjoyed most about the course, many of them listed the observation of the professional studio and the six-week teaching practicum. In the questionnaire, I asked them to consider their practicum and think about what material from class best prepared them for teaching experience. To this question, the majority of my students responded positively to the review of method series and to the discussions centered around teaching the young beginner. Many of them mentioned technical development, practicing techniques, setting up a studio and child development as other important information that they gained from the course. My students had some suggestions to improve the course too. Among those were, trips to visit other professional piano studios or teachers and extending the teaching practicum to two months.

Results of Professional Observations

My students had an overwhelmingly positive response to the professional observation conducted at Midya Wirawan’s studio in Semarang. They were impressed with Midya’s talent and modesty and keenly observed the patience and intelligence with which the assistants taught. One student was particularly impressed with how one of the teaching assistants controlled an active four-year-old. She wrote, “The teacher did coloring and clapping activities to help keep the child involved.” My student observed that the teacher worked with the energy that the child produced instead of trying to make her sit still and instruct her in a more traditional way. Several of my students also commented on the implication of Midya’s method of blocking notes when teaching scales. This method received a positive response.

Conclusions

When reflecting on the class Piano Pedagogy, I am drawn to a few conclusions. First, I found the length of the semester-long class to be a challenge for me. I think there is so much more material that we could have covered and explored together. I was frustrated because time did not allow us to talk about subjects such as: fingering principles, memorization techniques, a more in-depth study of technical development
and intermediate piano literature. As it was, I was only able to devote one entire class period to the discussion or repertoire from the Baroque Period to 20th Century music and think this to be inadequate. Second, I believe that the students would have benefited from a semester-long practicum. Ideally, a class such as this could be comprised of a semester-long study of methods, literature and teaching practices, followed by a semester-long practicum. Also, it would have been a good experience for my students to have experience teaching group piano lessons to two or more pupils. Many of them are interested in trying this teaching method but have not yet had the opportunity. Third, I think that as a teacher, I could have improved my method of feedback after I observed their practicum lesson. I promised my students that I would observe one of their final lessons, the fifth or sixth lesson, during the practicum. My reasoning was that I wanted them to establish good rapport with their pupil and begin to feel comfortable teaching before they were observed by their instructor. However, since my observation was their last, or nearly last, lesson, I did not give them much time, if any, to implement any of my suggestions for improvement. I think the student would have benefited more if I had observed them at least two times over a 2-3 month period.

This course had several strong points. The class size was adequate for intimate class discussions even though the students were not as talkative as I would have liked. The amount of varied content that the class provided was a good balance of theory and hands-on experience for the students. My students responded very favorably to teaching practices and ideas that were new to them. I believe the biggest benefit from this course is that each one of my surveyed students stated that they would like to go on to teach piano lessons. I observed, and they confirmed, that the confidence in their teaching abilities was greatly strengthened as a result of the coursework and the teaching practicum.

In conclusion, this class has reminded me that teachers are not necessarily born, but rather, are made. Teaching is a skill that can be acquired. And with practice, willingness, and varied experiences, one can develop into an educator that is genuine, skilled and enjoys his or her work.

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