**Beyond “Piano Proficiency”: Creative Connections to Meaning and Motivation in Class Piano**

**National Group Piano and Pedagogy Forum GP3/ Oberlin College, OH**  
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**Description**

- creative projects, collaboratively conceived based on student interest and input  
- need to be easily accessible since no computers at student pianos (older Yamaha clavinova piano lab); room has single computer with internet access and a screen and projector at the front  
- textbook Alfred’s *Group Piano for Adults, Book 1 and 2*

**Purpose**

- activities to answer student question of “why” do we need piano proficiency?  
- to create broad musical meaning both contemporary (to capture student interest with references to popular music) and historical (students do not have a Music History course until after they pass Piano Proficiency)  
- to add a Liberal Arts component (we do not offer a BA music degree) and an Interdisciplinary perspective (UWG just created a Bachelor in Interdisciplinary Studies degree)  
- to increase student motivation by experiencing a broad approach to the piano so that they can “find the best way to practice for themselves”

**Outcomes**

- data has been collected but this is not a statistical research project; rather this is a creative, practical approach (what works with my student population)  
- increased enthusiasm and participation in class  
- increased attendance grades, increased final grades

**Real-Ideal Life Scenario**

- 1 student performs on principal applied as a “guest artist”, excerpt from textbook  
- classmates play appropriate piano parts  
- instructor designs use of the piano for appropriate music major (education, performance, composition) in an ideal situation (concert stage, performing arts high school) and real life situation (beginning 6th grade band or choir class; class piano “guest artist” deliberately makes mistakes)  
- piano used to correct pitches and tuning, transpose instruments

**Stravinsky**

- famous quote: “The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one’s self”  
- view youtube BALLET performances of *Rite of Spring*  
- discuss the radical, novel nature of the music and the dance movements, yet noting that Stravinsky imposed constraints on himself  
- compare to textbook improvisations that “follow a given pattern” to motivate students to understand the creative aspect of and be willing to engage with non-free improvisation
Football
-live in region of the country where football is a huge part of the culture
-marching band students are largest number of music majors
-GP3 session by Paul Alexander who wrote *Perform: A Journey for Athletes, Musicians, Coaches and Teachers* (2011)
-Alexander is former coach of Cincinnati Bengals, and now Dallas Cowboys; studied piano with Albert Muhlbock at Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music (pre college division)
-early in Fall semester, during football season and to make immediate meaningful connections and to motivate students for the course, view youtube “Paul Alexander: Renaissance Man”
-discuss applications to principal applied and for spring semester Piano Proficiency piano recital (one memorized solo piece to connect to interpretive qualities of the piece)

Synaesthesia
-research project with UWG psychology professor Dr. Christine Simmonds-Moore, examining the role of color in music
-also discuss use of color coordination for time management strategies, for highlighting different parts in choral and band scores, and musical performers (Helene Grimaud)

Neuroscience
-students mentioned their interest in the award winning documentary “Alive Inside” which shows improvements in Alzheimer’s patients’ memory when listening to music from their youth
-discuss numerous studies which show that learning a musical instrument can reduce the effects of Alzheimer’s disease
-discuss studies which show that through Music Therapy (discuss as possible future career) neural pathways can be rebuilt in the brains of stroke victims

Improvisation for Fun
-instructor leads and plays the foundational part
-each student is given opportunity to solo for the entire class
-start with improvisation on black keys only which means that all notes sound correct-instructor sets the mood
-then improvisation on the textbook exercises following the chord structure, but with free rhythm-instructor sets the mood

“Dies Irae” from Mozart’s Requiem
-listen to youtube recording
-for many students it’s the first time they hear an orchestra
-understand real life uses of choral score reading
-“wow” factor motivates them to want to practice choral score reading

Lightening Talks
-optional, for bonus points
-topic of interest to the student with instructor approval
-encouraged to explore any topic related to music
-expandes musical understanding beyond Piano Proficiency