**Proceedings from the**

**2004 National Group Piano/**

**Piano Pedagogy Forum**

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***The Piano Class in the 21st Century: Opportunities, Challenges, and Innovations***

**Presenter: Julianne Miranda**

**Reporter: Karen Beres**

“The introduction of digital pianos had a significant impact on piano pedagogy and group teaching. Instructional methods centered around the capabilities of digital instruments flourished. This proliferation of literature was accompanied by the rapid improvement of both keyboard sounds and functionality, resulting in a significant body of pedagogical materials for applied and group study. Coupled with a rapidly growing collection of software tools, the resources available to us are astounding.”

The above quote, which headed Julianne Miranda’s handout for her conference presentation, encapsulates the premise upon which this technology presentation began and from which it expanded. Recognizing that the growth of technology in recent years has been exponential, Miranda stressed the importance of remaining up-to-date with current innovations while understanding that technology’s place is simply to support the needs of the teacher and student and the establishment of strong pedagogical goals.

Six fundamental needs were identified as crucial points of continued focus for advances in music technology. These needs include: representing music visually in the form of printed scores, representing music aurally in time with printed notation, supporting musical development and effective practicing, fostering the creative process in students of all ages, enriching the learning experience through access to resources, and developing collaborative learning spaces, ensuring that pianists do not have to grow up in isolation. Miranda then divided her comments about specific innovations into the following categories: digital instruments, music software, intelligent software, office suites and productivity software, internet applications, and pen-based technology.

**Digital Instruments**

Two instruments of current interest are the Roland Digital HP-i series and the Yamaha DGX505. The Roland HP-i is the flagship digital piano in Roland’s line, embodying the future of keyboard technology. Although it is not portable, its many benefits include an LCD screen showing music right in the music rack, tutor/replay buttons for use in creating practice drills, a specialized metronome, a touch screen, a visual lesson interactive tutor, and the ability to work with any standard MIDI file, including Finale and Sibelius files. The Wonderland feature, which Miranda says will be part of all keyboards in the future, contains educational games and different metronome sounds. Its USB compatibility allows for exportation of playing as notation for printing but does not permit editing of played examples.

The Yamaha DGX505 contains many of the same features as the Roland model such as a touch-sensitive LCD screen; its additional strengths include adjustable touch sensitivity, a “lesson mode” that gives feedback on performance, a chord dictionary function, and improved sounds. The DGX505 uses SmartMedia flashcard technology and is easily portable, allowing its use in a variety of situations.

One of the most important points that a teacher can remember about the new keyboard technology is that the more intelligently a keyboard responds to the user, the more likely it is to be a useful learning tool. The new advances in keyboard technology are certainly leading the way to such a consistent and important use by today’s teachers.

**Music Software**

Today’s abundance of software packages and MIDI disks ensures that teachers and students have access to applications useful in virtually every component of music study. Music software of note for teachers and students includes: sequencing software (Cakewalk, Band-in-a-Box), notation software (Finale, Sibelius, Notepad), studio management software (Office Suite), and presentation software (PowerPoint, Dreamweaver, FrontPage).

**Intelligent Software**

Home Concert and Digital Music Notebook both were mentioned by Dr. Miranda as cutting-edge technologies worthy of note in today’s marketplace. Yamaha’s Digital Music Notebook, offered as a free download, is a good program for people who do not live or work in close proximity to a music store. Its capabilities involve not only access to an extensive library of music scores available for around $3 each but also a keyboard learn mode, where the score will wait to move ahead until the student has played the correct note on the keyboard.

**Office Suites and Productivity Software**

Traditional tools, such as Office 2003, are now being used in new and innovative ways. A few of these innovations utilitze Powerpoint and Publisher, two of the programs found in the Office suite. Powerpoint now has the ability to imbed MP3 files, enabling musicians to include audio examples in Powerpoint presentations. Publisher has come out with templates useful in creating e-newsletters, a function helpful to both teachers and students in numerous settings.

**Internet Applications**

The internet is the most rapidly expanding source of tools that we have. Important additions to the musician’s internet sources are Macromedia’s Robodemo and open source tools such as Wiki and Blog. Robodemo, priced at under $200, captures anything that you do on your PC computer screen. Its ability to produce flash documents with no knowledge of flash is its most widely-applicable tool. Wiki and Blog also have valuable uses for musicians in their possibilities for internet collaboration, allowing students to submit entries to online journals and read similar entries from other students.

**Pen-Based Technology**

Dy-Know Vision, a collaborative, pen-based application, works through a tablet PC (available for around $40) to transmit teacher hand-written notes, images, and web content to individual student workstations. It can be used as a stand-alone teaching tool and also is designed for two-way transmission. The program replays the thought process of the written notes and can imbed web pages into the teacher’s notes as well.

A lot of technologies will continue to come and go, but software and hardware applications that respond best to the needs of teaching and learning are those most likely to remain viable for years to come. The most important thing to remember when considering technology for use in the music classroom is that the technology can only be as effective as the teacher using it, and the aforementioned tools work best when driven by thoughtful teachers who place the technology in its proper context.

**Karen Beres** holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Music Education (summa cum laude) from Lebanon Valley College (PA) and a Master of Music in Piano Performance from Bowling Green State University (OH). In the spring of 2003, she completed a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma under the direction of Dr. Jane Magrath and Dr. Edward Gates. While at OU, she served as Interim Coordinator of Group Piano and Undergraduate Piano Pedagogy during the 2000-2001 year and was awarded one of three campus-wide Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant awards. Ms. Beres has also served on the faculty of Bowling Green State University in the position of Coordinator of Group Piano. Active as a solo and collaborative artist, she has performed throughout the United States. In addition, she has spent five summers as a member of the Accompanying Staff of the Interlochen Arts Camp.

***How to Help Your International Students Adjust to Academic and Professional Life***

**Presenter: Ronald Cushing**

**Reporter: Victoria Johnson**

Ronald Cushing is Director of International Student Services at the University of Cincinnati. His presentation, How to Help Your International Students Adjust to Academic and Professional Life, addressed the legal, academic, and personal adjustment issues facing foreign students.

**Legal Issues**

The United States Department of Homeland Security’s Student in Exchange Visitor Information System (SIEVIS) tracks international students’ adherence to regulations governing living arrangements, degree programs, employment, and foreign travel. Violation of regulations may result in termination from SIEVIS and deportation. According to Cushing, six major legal issues impact foreign students:

1. All students must report a change of address within 10 days of moving.

2. Students must pursue a full course of study during fall and spring semesters, with very few exceptions (these include medical reasons, pregnancy, and childbirth). Additionally, students in their last semester of school may study part-time, as may graduate students who have completed all coursework and have only university-mandated thesis/dissertation hours remaining.

3. Students must adhere to strict employment regulations.

* On-campus employment is restricted to 20 hours or less per week during semesters, but is unregulated between semesters.
* Limited options exist for students to work off-campus in their field of study: - *Optional Practical Training requires application for a work permit from the Department of Homeland Security, a process that takes 90 days. Music students might play with a professional orchestra under this option. - Curricular Practical Training is authorized by the university’s international student office, not the Department of Homeland Security, and must be an integral part of the student’s curriculum.* (Cushing suggested that professors consider building professional requirements into coursework, so that students may take advantage of this option.)

4. In order to transfer to a new university, students must receive authorization from their present school and have their records released in the SIEVIS system.

5. All students are given a time period in which to complete their program of study, and must pay close attention to its expiration date. Extensions must be applied for before the expiration date. In addition, changes in major or degree must be documented within 15 days of starting the new program.

6. Students need authorization from the university’s international office to leave and reenter the United States.

**Academic Issues**

The biggest academic hurdle facing international students is the English language, as many students come to the United States with very weak English skills. This challenge is magnified for doctoral students, who must take written and oral comprehensive exams, write numerous papers, and complete a thesis or dissertation. As a result, foreign students at the University of Cincinnati take an average of 10 years to complete a doctoral degree, whereas domestic students generally finish in six years.

International students also must adjust to differences in the classroom. According to Cushing, in many foreign cultures, students are expected to “sit, listen, and regurgitate,” rather than understand, theorize, think critically, and produce original work. Additionally, professors in other nations have an almost “Godlike” stature; as a result, foreign students are often very uncomfortable asking questions, sharing opinions, or voicing disagreement in the classroom.

**Personal Adjustment Issues**

International students typically face several personal adjustment issues. First, they have left family, friends, and normal ways of doing things behind, and must adapt to an entirely new environment. Even trivial items such as doing laundry and making meals can present significant challenges. Second, foreign students often find that studying and making friends in a new culture are much more difficult than they had anticipated. Finally, students must take conscious steps to become integrated into American life. This is a particular concern in music schools where there is a large international community. Students often congregate with others from their own country, forming “national clumps,” and do not get to know many American students. Furthermore, music students spend countless hours practicing and performing; therefore, they rarely have time to take advantage of special programs for international students that can help them improve their English skills and develop an understanding and appreciation of American culture.

Every day, international students deal with a variety of legal, academic, and personal adjustment issues that domestic students do not. An awareness of these issues can help university professors give foreign students the assistance, support, and empathy necessary to live and study comfortably and successfully in the United States.

**Victoria Johnson** serves as Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Piano Pedagogy and teaches piano pedagogy and applied piano and supervises the group piano program and the Music Academy (LSU’s preparatory division). Dr. Johnson earned the Bachelor of Arts in Music and German from Luther College. She earned the Master of Music in piano performance from Bowling Green State University and completed additional studies at the Westfalische Wilhelms-Universitat, Munster, Germany. Dr. Johnson recently completed the Doctor of Philosophy in music education with an emphasis in piano pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma. She served as OU’s Interim Coordinator of Group Piano and Undergraduate Pedagogy during the 2000-2001 academic year and received one of three campus-wide Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Awards. Dr. Johnson has written articles for *Keyboard Companion*, *Alfred’s Piano Rendezvous* and *Piano Pedagogy Forum* (a web-based periodical), and has presented at the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, the Louisiana Music Teachers Association State Convention, the University of Oklahoma Seminar for Piano Teachers, the Luther College Dorian Keyboard Festival, and numerous local music teacher meetings. She is a member of the Adult Learning Committee of the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, the Music Teachers National Association, and Pi Kappa Lambda. Her pedagogy teachers have been Jane Magrath, Reid Alexander, Barbara Fast, Anna Belle Bognar, Virginia Marks, and Cathy Albergo. Johnson’s former faculty appointments include four years as Alumni Lecturer in Music at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, as well as positions teaching group and private piano for children at the Harper Music Academy and North Central College Piano Academy in suburban Chicago.

**Panel Discussion: *Teaching and Mentoring International Students***

**Reporter: Alejandro Cremaschi**

During the session devoted to Teaching and Mentoring International Students, four panelists drew from personal experiences to address the critical and sensitive issue of how to teach, interact with, and meet the needs of international students enrolled in pedagogy classes in American universities. Two of the presenters were students the piano pedagogy program at the University of Cincinnati: Maira Balacon, who was born and raised in Romania and came to the US as a teenager, and Di Zhu, from China, who arrived in this country as a college student. The other two presenters were faculty members in American institutions: Oscar Macchioni, an Assistant Professor of Piano Pedagogy at the University of Texas El Paso, a native of Argentina and former international student in the US and Poland, and Kenneth Williams, an Associate Professor of Piano Pedagogy at Ohio State University, whose interest in this area was awakened a few years ago when he was confronted with the fact that most of the students enrolled in his pedagogy courses came from non-western cultures.

Maira Balacon immigrated to the US with her family as a refugee when she was 14 years old. She went through a difficult period of adaptation when she entered high school - everything, from language, food, cultural traditions and the educational system, was new to her. During her presentation she focused on several aspects teachers should take into account when dealing with international students, and offered useful tips and advice. She addressed how to overcome the language barrier by using clear, simple words, avoiding American idioms, and having a patient disposition when explaining new expressions or repeating ideas using different words. She offered suggestions for lectures: allowing time for note-taking, correcting students in a gentle and tactful way in front of others and using discussion groups to allow the students to practice the new language in a non-threatening environment. Also, she cautioned pedagogy teachers that students coming from other cultures may not be as fluent as Americans in things such as using technology or elementary teaching methods. When advising students, don’t assume that they can navigate the “red-tape world” as well as Americans do - students may need help with things that seem natural to us, such as registering for a course, contacting a professor or choosing classes. Observe student teaching and be aware of cultural differences; in some cultures teachers are used to exercising a totalitarian role in the classroom, and your TAs may be used to being either too strict or too lenient with their students. In conclusion, Maira suggested that international students may need special emotional support, and advised teachers to be sensitive, open and caring.

Di Zhu, from China, has been in the US for six years as a graduate student. He pointed out characteristics of the American system that might be completely foreign to a Chinese music student. For instance, in the US students are responsible for registering, classes tend to have a tighter and faster-paced schedule, there is more student participation and discussion, different points of view (even if they conflict with the teacher’s) are welcome, and there is much more writing and critical thinking. In the Chinese system, students tend to regard the teacher with great respect as an authority that is not to be challenged with questions or differing opinions, there is much less discussion, students are less independent, and even things like direct eye contact are avoided, as they may be construed as signs of disrespect. Zhu advised teachers to instill creative and independent learning skills in their Asian students, to involve them in active learning by asking frequent questions and to encourage the flow of communication. He also suggested the teacher be aware of students’ personal lives, as they may be going through difficult times adapting to the new culture.

Oscar Macchioni warned teachers that international music students may come to the US very well prepared in some areas, but with tremendous gaps in others. This is the case with many international pianists who enter American schools with a formidable technique and a vast repertoire, but are completely uninformed in the area of teaching elementary repertoire or class piano. He pointed out that, unlike the US, many schools in western and non-western countries do not include adequate piano pedagogy training. Oscar reminded teachers that not only may the spoken language be different from country to country, but also the musical language; a simple example: the notes “C-D-E” in the English-speaking world are called “do-re-mi” in countries that speak Spanish. He also drew attention to the fact that administrators often do a poor job understanding the needs of international students, and advised teachers to help students with administrative paperwork.

Kenneth Williams indicated that there are a great number of international students currently attending American music schools. Problems posed by differences in cultural and educational values between the American and Asian systems became evident when he first taught a pedagogy course to a group of Asian students. He had planned several activities for the course, but later had to revise them to accommodate the students’ cultural background. His students had problems, for instance, with practicum teaching because of communication difficulties or cultural differences; students had troubles comparing and evaluating methods because they were not used to thinking critically or challenging the authority of the book; students had problems engaging in discussion and exchanges because this modality of learning was new to them. He then sought help at places like the ESL (English as a second language) program in his university, and read articles and books about cross-cultural communication and multiculturalism. This developed an awareness of cultural differences such as gender and authority perceptions, and prompted changes in his approach to teaching this class. He started asking students to compare methods or articles to encourage critical thinking, and tried to stimulate discussion by addressing specific students with specific questions rather than expecting voluntary participation, among other things.

**Alejandro Cremaschi** teaches piano, piano pedagogy and class piano at the University of Colorado at Boulder. A specialist in the areas of group piano, technology, and Latin American piano music, he has been a presenter at national and international conferences. An active performer, he has recorded for the labels IRCO and Marco Polo. Dr. Cremaschi holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Minnesota.

**Panel Discussion: *Assessment in Group Piano***

**Reporter: Suzanne Schons**

Three panelists, Mary Tollefson, Susanna Garcia, and Cynthia Benson, shared their assessment tools in this session, offered useful teaching tips, and discussed important philosophical aspects of teaching group piano. All are established group piano teachers who have developed effective tools for maintaining objectivity and consistency in group piano assessment.

**Mary Tollefson**

The primary feature of Tollefson’s assessment method is the use of specific checklists for each item to be tested. For each testing item, the checklist includes a list of features that should be present in student performances. The instructor then indicates whether the required elements were present by circling “Y” or “N” (YES or NO). Tollefson illustrated the checklist method with several examples, including one for folk song performances. Students in one of her keyboard classes must do two folk song performances per semester, in which they play a chordal accompaniment while leading the class in singing. For the first performance, the following features must be present:

*Folk Song Performance #1* Y N Announce song to class Y N Play correct starting pitch for singing Y N Have class sing starting pitch on “loo” Y N Smile Y N Begin playing at appropriate tempo Y N Play correct chords Y N Change chords at appropriate times Y N Keep going (no pauses) Y N Continue playing at a steady tempo

For the second folk song performance, all of the items included in the first checklist appear again, but the following are also added:

*Folk Song Performance #2* Y N Play in appropriate style Y N Play correct rhythms Y N Play appropriate introduction

Tollefson awards one point for each “Yes” on the list. Students end up with about 100 possible points by the end of the semester. The checklist method fosters objectivity and consistency on the part of the instructor, and also provides students with concrete objectives to work for in each activity.

An interesting assignment included in Tollefson’s second semester keyboard class is to have students record several pieces to disc on a Roland MT-300. Those pieces have their own evaluation checklists, which include basic items such as rhythms, notes, etc., as well as recording to a pre-assigned metronome marking. Tollefson noted that in addition to providing more keyboard playing experience, using the MT-300 helps students learn to use technology.

**Susanna Garcia**

Garcia explained that consistency is a critical issue in the class piano program at her school because it is a large program, with a mix of instructors that includes both faculty and graduate teaching assistants. Differences among instructors can vary widely, including issues such as philosophical ideas regarding the purpose of keyboard classes, what is taught, what is tested, how tests are evaluated and weighted, how to evaluate slower students, what kind of feedback to provide, etc. Garcia has dealt with consistency by providing graduate assistants with a detailed course outline that includes what to teach, what steps to take, what to assign, what to test, and what grading criteria to use. Grading is based on a point system, so that teachers and students know what to listen for. The grading criteria are posted on Blackboard for students.

Each area to be tested is worth a certain number of points (i.e. Keyboard Theory, Technique, etc.) Each area is then broken down into components, each worth a certain number of points (i.e. Notes, Continuity, Rhythms, etc.). A guide is also created for interpretation of points. For example, on a 0-4 point scale, 4=Superior, 3=Excellent, 2=Good, 1=Fair, 0=No Credit. A reporting document is created for each student and updated throughout the semester. The document includes test name/number, test area, grade, comments, and total grade. Current and past tests are included on the document so that students can see all their scores for the semester.

Garcia noted that using a point system removes the emotional component from grading. It helps teachers be objective and consistent, and also helps students learn by providing them with specific feedback.

**Cynthia Benson**

Benson’s discussion centered around her use of an e-portfolio as an alternative to the traditional piano proficiency. She began by explaining why using an e-portfolio was conducive to achieving her goals as a class piano instructor. These goals include the following: create independent learners, have students learn the value of the skills developed and form links to contexts beyond the classroom, have students be involved in the learning process, motivate students to continue using the skills learned, and have them experience successful music making. The e-portfolio supports her philosophy by prompting students to take part in setting their own goals, evaluating themselves, documenting their progress, and linking the skills to other contexts.

Creation of the e-portfolio includes several steps:

1. Student performances are videotaped with a digital camera in class, on one tape.

2. The tape is given to a graduate assistant, who converts the performances from iMovie to QuickTime.

3. Movies are saved to email format and sent to students’ email accounts.

4. Students are given a detailed assessment sheet, which they complete as they watch the performance, and email it back to the instructor.

Students must also keep a practice log, and set goals for their next performance. At the end of the semester, students compile a final e-portfolio that includes all performances, self-evaluations, and practice logs.

Benson warned that using an e-portfolio requires organization and involves a considerable amount of paperwork. However, she noted that this system fosters objectivity by allowing student and teacher to work together in evaluating performances and setting goals. It also helps students prioritize listening skills and improvement over receiving a certain grade.

Although each panelist took a different approach to addressing objectivity and consistency, it is clear that all three systems are effective for achieving those goals. What is also apparent is that each panelist devised an evaluation system that fosters student learning and growth. Each method of assessment provides specific feedback for students and provides clear criteria for improving on each task.

**Suzanne Schons** is Assistant Professor of Music at the Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam, where she coordinates the Piano Pedagogy and Class Piano programs. She is an active researcher and clinician in piano pedagogy, and has recently presented at the national convention of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), the Julia Crane International Piano Competition, and the University of Oklahoma Seminar for Piano Teachers. She has upcoming presentations at the 2005 national convention of Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), and a research publication forthcoming in the journal Contributions to Music Education. Ms. Schons holds degrees in Piano Performance and Piano Pedagogy, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Oklahoma in Music Education with a Piano Pedagogy emphasis.

**Technology Demonstration: *The Pedagogy/Group Piano Intelligence Room***

**Presenters: Michelle Conda and Adam Clark**

**Reporter: Carol Gingerich**

**Part I: “You are Being Watched”**

In this session, Dr. Michelle Conda of the University of Cincinnati demonstrated various uses for videotaping in the piano lab. At the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, a class piano lab of twelve keyboards is connected to a room next door, the Viewing Room, via a doorway and a two-way glass window. The class piano room has two video cameras and two ambient mikes suspended from the ceiling which feed into a MIDI TV monitor in the Viewing Room. Using MC100, all sounds from the Teacher Console and headset, and all student piano sounds are recorded. The purposes of the two rooms are multiple. Together they can be used to: videotape teaching, watch and instruct graduate student assistants without interfering with the class piano students, create videotapes for job applications, tape “problem” situations, and archive GP3 sessions. A thirteenth keyboard is located in the Viewing Room. The pedagogy professor can use its call button to privately instruct the student teacher. Additionally, it can used for a very real life problem; students who are late can take their test on it. The Viewing Room also contains a pedagogy library, and can be entered by a separate, outside door so that the student teachers do not know when the pedagogy professor has entered to observe them.

The class piano room also contains a Document Camera, manufactured by Samsung, which is essentially a computerized overhead projector. Sight reading scores can be placed on it, and DVD, VCR, laptop, and internet connections to it allow their images to be projected by an LCD projector onto the screen in the front of the room. The class piano room also contains a traditional Visualizer. All electric cords and cables in this room are connected underground to the Viewing Room, which creates an uncluttered floor space, but means that the pianos cannot be moved, and repairs would require that the floor be torn up. The technology in both rooms was funded by IT Student Technology fees, and can be purchased from Yamaha. Michelle suggested that a future improvement would be to purchase digital cameras that could zoom in and out and follow the teacher’s movements. She mentioned that potential problems include the “hum” as the system feeds back, a weak input, and recording directly to DVD.

This was a most informative session. Being able to see technology demonstrated in a hands-on fashion was very useful, and Dr. Conda’s open discussion of both strengths and weaknesses of the system made for a well-informed session with direct applications to individual teaching settings.

**Part II: “Wasp Bar Code: Inventory Control”**

Adam Clark, a graduate student at the University of Cincinnati, presented a step-by-step demonstration of the creation and utilization of a bar code system for the pedagogy library contained in the Viewing Room. This bar code system allows any professor to electronically monitor pedagogy materials which are not housed within their university library system. The Wasp Nest Bar Code, Business Edition, can create and print labels which contain item descriptions and location. It is able to monitor item check-in and check-out by the use of barcode scanning, and to specify loan periods with the due date automatically being set based on the check-out date. It can search for inventory items via keyword searches, and can locate item holder names and due dates. Ordering information follows at the end of this article.

The clear explanations and easy-to-follow format of this session made it extremely useful for individual applications to home universities. Implementation and utilization of this software could be made into a student Independent Study project. Students could use this to gain familiarity with new technology, review literature, and determine levels of difficulty for repertoire.

**Ordering Information**

**Wasp Nest Bar Code, Business Edition** - $199.00 (also called Wasp Nest CCD Barcode Kit/Suite). Includes CCD Scanner ($180.00 if bought separately), WaspLabeler v5 ($125.00 if bought separately), and WaspTrack - Inventory management software.

**Carol Gingerich** is Assistant Professor of Piano at the State University of West Georgia where she teaches applied piano, pedagogy, literature, collaborative piano, and keyboard skills. She is a graduate of Columbia University Teachers College from which she received a Doctor of Education in the College Teaching of Music degree. There she studied piano with Karl Ulrich Schnabel and piano pedagogy with Robert Pace. She holds a Master of Music in Piano Accompanying and Coaching degree from Westminster Choir College and an Honours Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Western Ontario. As a scholar Dr. Gingerich’s research focuses on French piano style and learning style theory, in particular Neuro-Linguistic programming. She has given presentations on these topics at the European Piano Teachers Convention (Rome, Italy) and the World Piano Pedagogy Convention, in addition to numerous teacher workshops. Her articles have been and are being published in “American Music Teacher”, “Clavier”, “European Piano Teachers Journal” and “Keyboard Companion”. She is active as both a solo and collaborative pianist and has been a guest artist at Catholic University, Columbia University, the University of Florida and the University of Miami. She is a frequent adjudicator for piano competitions and her students have been winners of MTNA sponsored competitions.

**Technology Demonstration: *Intelligent, Interactive Software for Group Piano Instruction***

**Presenter: Linda Christensen**

**Reporter: Carol Gingerich**

**Description**

Home Concert 2000 can be played along with any standard MIDI disc, including those that accompany class piano textbooks or personally created MIDI files. The score is projected on the screen as students perform, and a two measure count-off is given. Home Concert files can be stored on a campus wide computer network, such as Blackboard or WebCT, and thus made available to any student with a laptop who can then pull up the files and practice at home. A site license needs to be purchased for multiple keyboards. Home Concert 2000 is both PC and MAC compatible, and both formats are included on a single disc which costs $89.00. The disc also contains one Mozart Piano Concerto, although other concerti can be purchased from the website.

It has three modes: Learn, Perform and Jam. In Learn Mode, the software stops and waits until the student plays the correct note. In Perform Mode, the software follows the player’s tempo and dynamics, even including such sophisticated fluctuations as ritard and fermata. Just as in a good performance, it does not stop for wrong notes. Jam Mode does not follow the rhythmic fluctuations of the student, but rather requires them to keep going at a steady tempo. However, the overall tempo and volume of the piece can initially be adjusted.

**Drawbacks**

Linda highlighted several problems present in the software. On the screen only notes from the original MIDI files appear. Unfortunately, no fingering, pedaling, articulation marks, key signatures or clefs from the original are projected. However, since key signatures are not displayed, you are able to customize and add them yourself. Another issue concerned repeat signs. None from the original are written out, but rather the software rewrites the entire repeated passage so students are forced to perform the repeats. Lastly, Home Concert can only display two tracks, or two hands, and not four tracks or ensemble music.

**Applications**

Linda gave numerous excellent demonstrations and examples of applications to class piano teaching. All three modes are useful for teaching sight reading, which can be done hands separately or hands together. A student’s most recent performance may be recorded so they can play it back and hear themselves. The Perform mode is useful to check for accuracy of pitch in repertoire practice. Spot practice can be accomplished by repeating a small section over and over using the Loop Mode, which highlights the section of music to be repeated. However, the Loop Mode repeats the measures after one second of time, regardless of your original tempo. To solve this problem, if the measures are near the beginning, highlight and include one or two of the count-off measures in your Loop Mode designation, so as to know exactly when to enter. However, this does not work if the measures are not adjacent to the indicated blank count-off measures at the beginning. The developer is working to fix this problem. A new version is coming out very soon which should be able to display the clefs, dynamics and articulations of the original MIDI disc.

**Carol Gingerich** is Assistant Professor of Piano at the State University of West Georgia where she teaches applied piano, pedagogy, literature, collaborative piano, and keyboard skills. She is a graduate of Columbia University Teachers College from which she received a Doctor of Education in the College Teaching of Music degree. There she studied piano with Karl Ulrich Schnabel and piano pedagogy with Robert Pace. She holds a Master of Music in Piano Accompanying and Coaching degree from Westminster Choir College and an Honours Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Western Ontario. As a scholar Dr. Gingerich’s research focuses on French piano style and learning style theory, in particular Neuro-Linguistic programming. She has given presentations on these topics at the European Piano Teachers Convention (Rome, Italy) and the World Piano Pedagogy Convention, in addition to numerous teacher workshops. Her articles have been and are being published in “American Music Teacher”, “Clavier”, “European Piano Teachers Journal” and “Keyboard Companion”. She is active as both a solo and collaborative pianist and has been a guest artist at Catholic University, Columbia University, the University of Florida and the University of Miami. She is a frequent adjudicator for piano competitions and her students have been winners of MTNA sponsored competitions.

**Technology Demonstration: *PowerPoint Applications for Group Piano***

**Presenters: Kevin Richmond and Sandra Ramawy**

**Reporter: Gary Graning**

Kevin Richmond and Sandra Ramawy presented a session on PowerPoint applications in the group piano curriculum. Use of this software in the classroom requires a screen and projector. The value of this software is that it can focus the class on what you want them to see in the music; for example, the instructor may want the piano group to notice the key signature, meter, bass line, essential patterns in the melodic line such as sequential groupings/ and/or inner lines. The suggested harmony may be emphasized by removing the nonharmonic tones in the melody, leaving only the chord tones.

The instructor can add graphics, such as directional arrows. By using Adobe Photoshop, the notation can be in gray or black score. The changes are added in layers and any slide can be reviewed. Voice-over can be added for use on web-site tutorials.

Little time was available for questions. The only question was, why use Photoshop rather than Finale or Sibelius with this program. The presenters answered that any of the three programs can be used, but that size is easier to maintain with Photoshop.

**Gary Graning** is currently on the faculty at the University of Akron. He received performance degrees from the Oberlin College Conservatory and the University of Michigan, and his doctorate in Performance Pedagogy from Columbia University Teachers College. with a Dissertation on the piano works of Polish composer, Karol Szymanowski. Gray Graning has taught at Greenwich House Music School, Piano Partners in New York City and Suburban Community Music Center, New Jersey. He has given solo, accompanying, and chamber music performances in New York and New Jersey. Gary Graning studied with with John Perry, Jack Radunsky, Vitya Vronsky, and Lucille Greene.

**Technology Demonstration: *Security Cameras Come to Piano Class***

**Presenter: Timothy Shafer**

**Reporter: Erica Keithley**

While group piano teaching is an efficient, economical, and engaging way to instruct piano students, the layout of many digital piano labs limits visual connections between students and teacher. Many elements of piano technique are best taught through teacher demonstration, a technique that requires that both the teacher and the student have clear views of each other’s hands. The students must see the teacher’s hands to be able to imitate motions, and the teacher must be able to see students’ hands to monitor their progress, make corrections, and offer suggestions. Few digital piano labs are designed to offer this type of visual communication between teacher and students. To overcome this problem Dr. Timothy Shafer designed a group piano lab at Pennsylvania State University that uses surveillance cameras to insure that all students can easily see the teacher’s hands and pedaling foot. The increased visual contact between students and teacher allows the teacher to use more demonstration in teaching and provides the teacher with more opportunities to address the physical and technical aspects of piano performance in a group piano setting.

**Classroom and Equipment**

The classroom Dr. Shafer designed is 29 feet long and 22 feet wide. Equipment used in the room includes one teacher’s digital piano and controller, 12 student digital pianos, 4 student Disklaviers, three 20-inch televisions, and four surveillance cameras. The cost of the surveillance cameras and televisions ten years ago was about $6,500. Purchase of one additional camera and a device to display all four camera views simultaneously on a split screen cost $1,700 in April 2004. A smaller system used in Dr. Shafer’s home studio that is self-contained and includes four cameras and one display unit was purchased at a local Sam’s Club at a cost of $1,000.

**Keyboard layout: Enhancing Teacher View of Student’s Hands**

The digital pianos in this lab are placed in such a way that the teacher can view all students’ hands while standing at the teacher’s station. The teacher merely needs to move his or her head in order to scan all 320 fingers. The teacher’s digital piano is placed in a corner of the classroom, facing out diagonally into the classroom. The students’ instruments are placed in rows radiating out from the teacher station like the spokes of a wheel.

**Surveillance Camera and Television Placement: Enhancing Student View of Teacher’s Hands**



The four surveillance cameras in the lab are placed to capture two different views of the teacher’s hands and two views of the teacher’s pedaling foot. One camera, suspended from the ceiling above the teacher’s keyboard, shows a view of the top of the teacher’s hands and the keyboard. This “birds’ eye” view is similar to what a pianist sees when he looks down on his own hands. The other hand view is from the side of the teacher, providing a “profile” view of the hand and arm. This view shows what a pianist would see if he were watching on hand level from one extreme of the piano. A third camera is placed on the floor by the teacher’s piano and shows a “profile” view of the right foot and pedal mechanism, and a fourth camera is mounted below the teacher’s piano and shows a top view of the teacher’s right foot.

The views of the teacher’s hands and foot captured by the cameras are fed into three televisions in the room. As may be seen in the above diagram, when facing forward at their pianos, the 16 students have 6 sight lines or viewing perspectives. These are indicated on the above diagram with arrows. Using these sight lines as a guide, Dr. Shafer placed three televisions in the classroom, two in corners of the room and one against the opposite wall. To see a television, students merely look up from their piano or look up and slightly to the left or right. By glancing up at the televisions, students have instant access to several views of the teacher’s hands and foot.

**Teaching Applications**

Dr. Shafer uses camera images to demonstrate many aspects of piano technique to students. The teacher can demonstrate hand expansions and contractions by modeling movements and directing student attention to the images captured by the camera that is focused down on the hand and keyboard. In addition, the teacher can show students hand positioning and position changes easily using this camera angle. The side-angle or hand “profile” camera can be shown to students to help them develop good hand position and to demonstrate how the wrist drops down and then lifts in the performance of a two note slur.

Demonstrating how the pianist’s thumb passes under the palm in scale passages is also easily shown by this camera. Camera shots of both the right foot and the hands can help students understand better how to coordinate both in passages requiring syncopated pedaling.

**Erica Keithley** is currently a Visiting Lecturer in Piano and Piano Pedagogy. She received her Bachelor of Music in piano performance at the University of Oklahoma, graduating with special distinction. At the University of Illinois in Urbana, she was a University Fellow and completed Masters degrees in both piano performance and piano pedagogy. Ms. Keithley is currently completing a Ph.D. in music education and piano pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma. Her dissertation explores the musical nuances used by advanced and intermediate level pianists in the communication of emotion. Ms. Keithley has taught on the faculties of the University of Illinois and Georgia Southwestern State University. In recognition of her teaching, she was listed as a “Teacher ranked as excellent by their students” at the University of Illinois. In addition, she was invited to give a teaching demonstration at the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy and was selected as one of three to receive the Provost’s Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award at the University of Oklahoma in 2002. Ms. Keithley teaches applied piano, advanced keyboard skills, and piano pedagogy courses at the Georgia State University School of Music, and also serves as coordinator of group piano.

**Group Discussion: *How Do You Monitor or Influence Practice Between Classes?***

**Reporter: Jenny Cruz**

The perennial question always remains... how do you get a student to practice? Richard Chronister once said, “Never send a student home, unless you’ve shown them how to do what you want them to do.” It is possible that this is where the answer to the question begins. The self-selected discussion group at the GP3 Conference attempted to confront this issue.

**Demonstration**

1) Inspiration can come from many places. Demonstrating for a student what you feel about the piece or your individual interpretation of the piece can provide this impetus.

2) Using the class piano as a huge demonstration setting. Functional skills can, in fact, be more difficult than repertoire, so showing a student how to practice harmonization or scales in front of the entire class could be helpful.

**Attitude**

1) Changing the significance of practice from a torturous procedure to a process that is extremely fulfilling can inspire students to practice more often.

2) Reflecting on the “Butt to the Bench” mentality - the hardest part can sometimes be just sitting down and starting. The more often the student can sit down, even if it’s just for 10-15 minutes between classes, the faster and further along they will progress. Getting them into the habit of practicing is half the battle.

3) Instill the motto that “Cramming is useless.”

4) Choosing good repertoire - appropriate for the student’s level and appealing to the student - can make or break a student’s willingness to practice.

**Teaching How to Practice**

1) Teaching a student HOW to practice can in itself inspire practice.

2) For two weeks, have a student make practice tapes, recording EVERYTHING that goes on in a session. This would be turned into the teacher so that they can give input on what they’re doing correctly and what they can improve on.

**Practice Opportunities**

1) Give the student as much time to practice as possible.

2) Offer a tutorial website using MIDI files.

3) Encourage students to attain a keyboard for their room, so that in their spare time they can practice.

**Pair Work**

1) Have students practice in pairs.

2) Have them turn in partner evaluations. Therefore, the student not only acts as a student, but becomes a teacher as well.

**Community**

Build a sense of community in your classroom. Give a test to your class, grading them on their knowledge of their fellow classmates i.e. name, primary instrument. Creating a sense of community encourages students to have pride in what they and their fellow classmates produce, thus encouraging them to be prepared.

**Accountability**

Pop quizzes - everybody hates them, but they send the message to the student that they are responsible every class period for what was covered the previous period. This self-selected discussion was very well attended - most likely because every teacher has to deal with this issue. The overall reactions were practice doesn’t have to be like pulling teeth. The teachers in this discussion proved that there are many motivators for students.

**Jenny Cruz** is currently pursuing a DMA in Piano Performance from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where she studies with Eugene and Elizabeth Pridonoff. She recently completed an internship in Lucca, Italy, and teaches piano at Xavier University and through the University of Cincinnati Communiversity Program.

**Group Discussion: *Open Your Gradebook***

**Reporter: Ann Gipson**

The following is a summary of group discussions on the topic “Open Your Gradebook” which followed a panel presentation by Mary Tollefson, Cynthia Benson, and Susie Garcia on *Assessment in Group Piano*. Discussion participants were asked to respond to three questions:

1. How do you calculate grades?

2. What weight is given to keyboard patterns vs. prepared repertoire vs. functional skills like sight-reading, harmonization, transposition and improvisation?

3. What computer programs, if any, do you use to help you keep track of grades?

**How do you calculate grades?**

Responses to how grades are calculated were quite brief, but this topic generated discussion of several related topics. In one discussion group, nearly 90% of the participants consider a point system in grading efficient and effective. Another participant commented on the use of daily assignments to evaluate student progress and issue grades. For a few participants the final exam is worth one-third of the final grade. Some participants give more weight to a student’s progress, while others weigh the final musical product alone. At one school, grades are evaluated depending on the degree program. Separate sections, syllabi, and grade books are used for music education, performance, composition, etc. One discussion group wanted to ask the panelists “What is the difference in the various group piano curriculums between instrumental and choral majors?”

**Means of Assessment**

Most of the discussion groups spent more time exploring a means of assessment. One participant suggested that an entire piano class can record sight reading examples at the same time on individual keyboards allowing the teacher and students to listen and evaluate the performance. Many participants evaluate student performances via recorded disks. While some participants expressed concern about the time needed to evaluate all recordings, some teachers find time to assess the recordings by having students do self-assessment.

Several benefits of recorded exams were cited by participants. In addition to encouraging students to use the technology, students can hear their own mistakes and musical weaknesses. Since students are allowed to record as many performances as needed and submit the best one, the recording assessment can build confidence by allowing the student to show his/her best work. Some participants argued that being able to see the student’s hand and sitting position are important aspects of assessment. Most participants agreed that a recorded exam could minimize grade disputes.

Participants were also reminded of the benefit of using recordings for pedagogical purposes. One teacher makes a recording of a piece being studied by the class and students are instructed to mark all errors in the score. This ear training activity is certainly an important aspect of self-assessment.

**Grade Inflation**

Grade inflation and standards were discussed and all seemed to agree that assigning an “A” for “B” work is a disservice to the student. Students must know the criteria by which they are graded and need feedback to know why they receive a certain grade. Often students do not read written comments, but look only for the grades. Some participants use student and teacher conferences to provide an avenue of communication. The suggestion was made that the student not be allowed to see the grade until the comments had been read or he/she attended a conference with the teacher. Web CT and Black board were mentioned as confidential secure ways of disseminating information. Some participants use Web CT to publish criteria and examples for practice. Participants stated the need to include information about the grading scale in the course syllabus.

**Consistency Among Teachers**

Consistency among teachers was another related topic discussed by participants. Whether those assessing student performance were graduate teaching assistants or faculty, participants agreed that wide discrepancies on grading can exist. One discussion group suggested that teachers in a group piano program with more than one teacher should follow a plan. Several participants agreed that planning sessions were useful.

When working with graduate teaching assistants, structure is needed both in developing the curriculum and assessing student performance. Exams heard by both graduate teaching assistants and their supervisors provide consistency and objectivity. Participants also stated that teaching assistants should be offered to the best teachers, not just the best performers.

**Piano Proficiency Exams**

Participants also discussed the manner in which piano proficiency exams are graded. Some universities still keep the piano proficiency exams separate from course grades. In many cases, teachers teach group piano courses that have grades, but proficiency exams are recorded as pass/fail. Schools that have a Computerized Grade Management System often do not allow the student to receive a pass/fail for the piano proficiency and a grade for the course. In these cases, the proficiency exam grade is averaged into the grade for the course.

Regarding retakes on the proficiency exam, some allow parts of the proficiency exam to be retaken once, but most who spoke were opposed to this practice. According to one participant, it is possible to pass the piano proficiency at two different times during the semester; the first opportunity as outlined by the syllabus and then a 2nd try at the final. Some participants use the proficiency as a barrier, with the student required to pass all components at once.

**What Weight Is Given to Repertoire, Technique, and Functional Skills?**

A variety of answers were provided in response to the weight given to various elements in the group piano class. A small number of participants give more weight to repertoire and technique than other functional skills. According to some participants, harmonization and transposition are closely tied to the theory and ear-training classes, allowing more time to be spent on repertoire and technical skills during the piano class.

The majority of participants responded that all elements (functional skills, technical skills, and repertoire) are given equal weight. Participants cited a possible issue with giving equal weight to repertoire; students are concerned that they spend more time preparing solo repertoire than other functional skills but repertoire and functional skills get equal weight in grading. Another member of the discussion group suggested that the teacher needed to help students establish their practice priorities.

One participant responded that repertoire becomes less important as a student progresses through the group piano sequence. Several people expressed a concern that too much weight has been given to chord progressions that are perceived as unnecessary to a student’s future musical career. Regarding scales, some participants weight these equally with other skills, while other participants weight scales 30% of the final grade.

A consensus of two discussion groups ranked sight reading at the top of the most important skills. Participants believed that the principles of good reading that they learn at the keyboard can apply to whatever instrument/voice is their major area and agreed that the study of piano can help students become better musicians.

Another participant spoke about the use of improvisation as an important skill that is developed in his group classes. He stated that it was important for the students to develop the ability to improvise in the style of a classical sonata/sonatina with three movements incorporating themes and key changes. This activity allows the students to apply their theory and listening skills as well as their playing skills.

Although the approach to grading seems to vary among those institutions represented, the participants generally agreed that the development of piano skills must continue beyond the formal training period to be a truly effective and useful skill for the student in a professional setting.

**What Computer Programs, If Any, Do You Use to Help You Keep Track of Grades?**

Very little discussion time was devoted to the third question regarding the use of computer programs to keep track of grades. A large number of participants use *Blackboard* computer software to keep track of grades. *Blackboard* allows students to always have access to their grade book as well as being able to see class averages without a teacher violating privacy issues. A built-in calculator adds to its ease of use. One participant also suggested using *Blackboard* for posting power point presentations. The ability for students to print the presentation after class rather than taking notes was cited as particularly beneficial to international students. Another effective tool for teachers is *Gradebook*, a program available online that can be downloaded for a nominal fee. Other computer programs mentioned as a means to keep track of grades included *WebEasi*, *Micrograde*, *Excel*, and *File Maker Pro*.

**Conclusion**

Although the three original questions suggested for discussion in “Open Your Grade Book” served as a valuable initial point for discussion, it is evident from the variety of topics covered in all the discussion groups that there are many issues related to grading the group piano student that remain ambiguous and uncertain for many teachers. Approaches to curricular design, assessment of student performance and understanding, and the method for feed back vary widely among institutions. As group piano teachers continue to wrestle with issues of consistency, grade inflation, weighing various musical elements/skills, ways to assess student performance, and ways to calculate grades, hopefully greater clarity can be achieved through continued discussions.

**Ann Gipson** is Associate Professor of Piano and Director of Piano Pedagogy Studies at Baylor University in Waco, TX. She holds the Bachelor of Music degree from Eastern Illinois University and the MM in Piano Performance and Pedagogy and Ph.D. in Music Education/Piano Pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma where she studied with Jane Magrath and E. L. Lancaster. She has held faculty positions at Oklahoma Baptist University, Delta State University, and the University of Kentucky and currently serves as the 2005 MTNA National Conference Program Chair.

**Group Discussion: *My Favorite Test: Share Your Best, Most Creative Assessment Tool for Group Piano***

**Reporter: Erica Keithley**

Group Piano and Piano Pedagogy Forum participants have developed stimulating methods for selecting test materials and preparing students for evaluation. Teachers suggested assessment tools that focus on skills and materials that relate to students’ interests or majors. In addition, teachers discussed methods used for selecting exercises included in exams. Other activities shared by conference participants have been developed to aid students in preparing for tests. These include activities that stimulate peer evaluation of student performances and guide students to think like a teacher.

**Tests That Are Relevant to the Student’s Background, Interests, or Major**

* Accompaniment performances - Many group piano teachers incorporate accompanying experiences into examinations. Students learn simple piano accompaniments for solos of their own instrument and then perform these with a student soloist. Not only do the group piano students then know the piano part of pieces they might teach in future years, but they also have the experience of working as an accompanist with a soloist.
* Test contents that correspond to the student’s major - At one university, students in their final semester of group piano take a final exam that includes portions specific to their majors. General music education majors and choral music education majors perform a four-voice, open score work; voice performance, instrumental performance, and instrumental education majors play a simple accompaniment for their instrument or voice; jazz study majors comp chords to a jazz standard; composition majors play an intermediate level 20th century solo of their choice.
* African-American anthem, “Let Freedom Ring” - At an historically African-American college, one teacher requires that all students learn to play “Let Freedom Ring.” This anthem has an important meaning for the students, and the teacher finds that they enjoy being able to perform it.

**Processes for Selecting Test Items**

* Lucky draw - When testing students over scales, arpeggios, or chord progressions, teachers often place slips of paper with required keys in a box. Students then draw from the box to determine the key for each exercise. Knowing that keys are determined randomly stimulates students to practice all assigned keys.
* You choose, I choose - Another technique for determining the key in which students have to perform scales, arpeggios, and chord progressions is “you choose, I choose.” Students are told that they must play each exercise in two keys, one that they choose themselves, and one that the teacher chooses. This allows students to prepare very well at least one key, but it still encourages them to practice all keys assigned.
* Allowing students to select items on the exam - Teachers frequently give students choices of exercises to prepare for exams. For example, in class a teacher may present and assign three solos over the course of three weeks, but allow the student to select one for the exam. Some teachers allow students to decide whether they want to perform an improvisation or an accompaniment for their test.
* This technique allows student to pick test items that most interest them or those at which they can excel.

**Peer Evaluation as a Preparation for Formal Exams**

* Team evaluation - To teach students to think critically about piano performances and to stimulate student practice, one teacher reported using a team game prior to exams. Students are divided into two teams. Each student performs an exercise or a piece. Members of the other team discuss the performance and as a group give the performance a rating-grade on a scale of 1 to 5. The team with the most points at the end wins. By providing an in-class performance opportunity, this activity stimulates student practice. Student critiques of performances benefit performers by giving them feedback and suggestions for improvement. Moreover, in developing critiques of performances, students learn to think like a teacher, a skill that can inform their own practice in preparation for exams.
* Written critiques - Another teacher stated that when students perform in class as preparation for examinations, she often has other class members write brief comments on the performance. Written critiques are then given to the performing students. This activity is done two weeks before the test to help students guide their practice. One benefit of this type of critique is that it diffuses some of the emotional charge that can be created when students verbally present critiques of their peers in the classroom.
* Partner activities - Many teachers use student pairing to aid in the preparation for group piano tests. This technique can be used in work on many types of activities. For instance, one student can play the teacher role by randomly selecting keys for scales or chord progressions and then evaluating the other student’s performance. This benefits the student in the student role because he or she is put into a situation similar to that in the real test: the student is on the spot and performing for an audience. It benefits the student in the teacher role because the student must be able to evaluate the performance and give meaningful feedback.
* “Horse” game - In this variation of the children’s playground game, group piano students are paired to work on exam exercises. One student selects an exercise for the other to perform. If the performing student does it correctly, he or she gets to select an exercise for the other student. If the performer makes an error, he or she gets assigned the first letter of the word “horse” and the other student must then perform the same exercise. As students make mistakes, they are assigned letters from the word “horse.” The first student to spell the entire word loses.
* Improvisation teams - This activity is geared to help students develop meaningful improvisations, to foster cooperation among students, and to stimulate peer evaluation. Students begin by learning a simple harmonization. When this is fluently prepared the teacher pairs students who then create a duo - one student plays the melody while the other person plays a two-handed accompaniment using the harmonies. Next, students are grouped in quartets: one student plays melody, one plays a two-handed accompaniment, one improvises a bass line, and one improvises a descant. Finally, the original melody is discarded and all students improvise at once. At the end of the activity, quartets perform for each other in a competition-type activity. Students discuss and evaluate each other’s improvised quartet and declare a winner.

While the activities suggested by teachers for the preparation and execution of group piano exams varied widely, three common themes were present throughout. First, teachers strive to make group piano assignments and test requirements applicable to students’ anticipated pianistic needs. Giving students opportunities to accompany soloists and testing students over specific skills relevant to student majors both relate group piano activities to the piano skills students will use when they become music professionals. Second, teachers try to make classroom activities (and even tests) fun for students. This can be seen in the many game or competition-like activities suggested above as preparation for exams. Finally, teachers endeavor to develop students’ critical thinking by challenging them to evaluate performances of their peers in the classroom. Teaching students how to listen by guiding them to provide meaningful verbal or written critiques of performances helps them to become better musicians.

**Erica Keithley** is currently a Visiting Lecturer in Piano and Piano Pedagogy. She received her Bachelor of Music in piano performance at the University of Oklahoma, graduating with special distinction. At the University of Illinois in Urbana, she was a University Fellow and completed Masters degrees in both piano performance and piano pedagogy. Ms. Keithley is currently completing a Ph.D. in music education and piano pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma. Her dissertation explores the musical nuances used by advanced and intermediate level pianists in the communication of emotion. Ms. Keithley has taught on the faculties of the University of Illinois and Georgia Southwestern State University. In recognition of her teaching, she was listed as a “Teacher ranked as excellent by their students” at the University of Illinois. In addition, she was invited to give a teaching demonstration at the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy and was selected as one of three to receive the Provost’s Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award at the University of Oklahoma in 2002. Ms. Keithley teaches applied piano, advanced keyboard skills, and piano pedagogy courses at the Georgia State University School of Music, and also serves as coordinator of group piano.

**Group Discussion: *Class Management Software: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Blackboard for Group Piano Classes***

**Reporter: Chung-Ha Kim**

Blackboard is an Internet-based software that facilitates classroom teaching. Developed in1997, it is used not only at universities and colleges, but also in primary and secondary schools, government agencies, and businesses. The version used at universities and colleges is currently available in 11 languages.

Once an institution has acquired Blackboard, instructors can set up their own websites within the system. A student can access these websites after logging in. Instructors can post announcements, syllabi, assignments, and maintain a grade book on Blackboard. Class lists also facilitate e-mailing the entire class or individual students.

Participants cited many uses for the software. Dr. Andrew Hisey from the Oberlin Conservatory uses Blackboard to host discussion forums. Students post questions and opinions, and discuss various topics outside of class. Dr. Barbara Fast from the University of Oklahoma values Blackboard’s instant accessibility by students and teachers, and its ability to keep all of her graduate assistants informed and coordinated. Dr. Ken Renfrow from the University of Miami asks students to send their assignments through Blackboard, using a “Digital Drop Box.” These assignments can take the form of MIDI-files or Sibelius-scores. Posting PowerPoint-presentations on Blackboard also enables students to review them after class. Dr. Susanna Garcia from the University of Louisiana in Lafayette posts MIDI-files of repertoire pieces and accompaniments on Blackboard. For many students, this is the only way to listen to a variety of pieces that are not available as regular sound recordings in the library.

As a relatively new “member” to the Blackboard-community, the author of this article values the coordinating aspect of Blackboard most: once all teachers add their classes to the system, students no longer need to check several different websites set up by individual professors. And with more and more students coping with an increased credit hour-load and part-time jobs, anything that can save them time and hassle is greatly appreciated.

As with all things, Blackboard comes with disadvantages, too. The system is rather expensive to purchase and install, and when it breaks down there is not much a teacher can do about it. However, in light of its many advantages, these points should not prevent instructors from using it.

**Chung-Ha Kim** is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Cincinnati’s College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), majoring in piano performance with piano pedagogy as her cognate area. Ms. Kim has appeared as soloist with orchestras in Germany, and has received numerous prizes in the “Jugend musiziert”, and Steinway-Competitions in Germany, as well as an award for outstanding performance of music by J. S. Bach from the Manhattan School of Music in New York. Ms. Kim worked as a teaching assistant at the College-Conservatory of Music from 1999-2004, teaching both group piano and private lessons. She has been invited as a judge for the OMTA Auditions Festival for the past three years, and has twice been nominated for the “Excellence in Teaching Award for Graduate Assistants” at CCM. She is currently teaching class piano and in the Preparatory Department of Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. Ms. Kim holds a Bachelor of Music-degree from the Manhattan School of Music (NY) and a Master of Music-degree from the University of Cincinnati.

**Group Discussion: *How Do You Incorporate Intermediate Teaching Literature into Your Piano Pedagogy Course?***

**Reporter: Pamela Pike**

**Separate Intermediate Literature Classes and Learning Objectives for Students**

Discussion in almost all of the groups during this break-out session began with teachers sharing whether or not they were able to offer a separate pedagogy class devoted to exploration of the intermediate teaching literature. While many participants favored a one-to-two semester undergraduate intermediate literature class, many were not able to offer such a course within the confines of their limited pedagogy curriculum. Many participants agreed that the most pressing issues included: acquainting pedagogy students with the vast quantity of intermediate piano music that is available and; equipping students with the essential knowledge and tools needed to level and sequence their teaching of intermediate literature.

One of the most revealing comments came from a group of recent graduates in attendance who noted that as students they believed they had spent ample time on intermediate literature during undergraduate pedagogy classes. However, once they started teaching intermediate students after graduation they realized how inadequate their preparation had been. For the remainder of the discussion, participants offered various suggestions for achieving the learning objectives noted above.

**Familiarizing Students with the Various Levels of Intermediate Literature and Appropriate Sequencing of the Repertoire**

It was suggested that pedagogy students should explore less well-known repertoire to become better acquainted with the literature. Many participants expressed concern about the difficulty in covering the vast amount of teaching literature that is available, within the context of a pedagogy course. It might be a good idea to assign each applied piano student a couple of intermediate pieces to play during studio class so that all piano students are exposed to this literature. Review of anthologies of teaching literature, which included lots of analysis and reference to Jane Magrath’s ten levels of literature as described in *The Pianist’s Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*, was a popular assignment for pedagogy students.

One teacher assigned pedagogy students several intermediate pieces each week. Students were required to fill out detailed reports on these works, then discuss and perform them during class. It was noted that students find it difficult to get to the salient features of intermediate pieces. Giving students a template of what to look for in a new piece can be helpful, as can having students work together in groups so they can share and discuss thoughts and ideas about unfamiliar music. Another pedagogy teacher sends students, equipped with scores, to an hour or so of an intermediate piano competition to expose them to a vast array of the literature. Some teachers change the list of repertoire that is explored each year, as this expands the pedagogy teacher’s horizons as well. The Federation of Music Clubs Junior Festivals Repertoire List, the *Celebration Series* and the Illinois State Music Teachers Association Repertoire List were cited as additional useful resources.

One participant had students put together an intermediate teaching literature reference book, in order of ascending difficulty. Since students should be sure not to violate copyright laws, a thematic index assignment was suggested as a valuable alternative that has been used by some teachers and can help students to become aware of how to sequence pieces when teaching intermediate students. Several teachers gave graduate students a diagnostic exam where they were given ten pieces from Jane Magrath’s *Pianist’s Guide to the Standard Teaching and Performance Literature*. These students were asked to arrange the selections in order of difficulty, listing specific techniques that intermediate students must have mastered in order to achieve success with these particular pieces.

Another participant suggested exploring the level ten literature to begin with and work backward so that future teachers might begin to understand how the techniques presented in the early-level literature will be expanded upon and eventually lead students toward a mastery of the more difficult repertoire. One teacher had students look for intermediate repertoire that might prepare students to play a specific, more advanced, piece. It was suggested that a valuable assignment could be to develop a spiral curriculum around a particular concept that encompasses several levels of literature. Since organizing and synthesizing all of this information can be overwhelming, pedagogy students could create a database or excel spreadsheet to organize the teaching literature that they are studying. Also, projects designed around choosing literature for an intermediate transfer student have been helpful.

**Artistic Performance of the Intermediate Repertoire**

Discussion-group participants were emphatic about the fact that they expected their pedagogy students to perform intermediate music as artistically as they would play artist-level repertoire. Yet, many people expressed dismay over the unmusical interpretations that numerous pedagogy students displayed while performing their intermediate teaching repertoire assignments. While many participants said that they would like to see their pedagogy students study intermediate repertoire during their applied piano lessons, most believed that this accommodation would not be made at their schools. Since it will be important for future teachers to play this music with a high level of artistry when they demonstrate for their intermediate students, several suggestions for improving the quality of musical interpretation of intermediate literature were offered.

One teacher had students present one or two recitals of solo and duet teaching literature, complete with typed program notes. Another teacher had four dates throughout the semester when pedagogy students performed, in public, intermediate repertoire that had been chosen by the instructor. Additionally, the students were expected to hand in a written description of how each piece would be presented to an intermediate student. One person had students perform intermediate repertoire for the final exam. Another teacher had the class do a group lecture-recital where each student performed one intermediate teaching piece while giving a brief description of the pedagogical attributes of the work.

Additionally, students have been given various recording assignments that have led to increased performance artistry. One pedagogue had students make a professional compact disc with three pieces from each of Jane Magrath’s ten levels. Another teacher has had students perform and record intermediate music on a Disklavier, while several others had their pedagogy classes perform intermediate music in the recital hall, with those performances being burned to compact discs. Having students listen to high-quality performances on CDs containing intermediate literature has also proved helpful in convincing students of the value and significance of performing the intermediate teaching literature with artistry and musicality.

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**Group Discussion: *What Do You Do in the First Three Sessions of Your Pedagogy Course***

**Reporter: Leslie Sisterhen**

Participants were asked to share the activities they used and topics they addressed during the first three sessions of their pedagogy courses. This report is a compilation of the many practical and creative ideas shared by pedagogues from colleges and universities across the United States.

Course Design, Syllabus, and Projects

Many teachers elect to dedicate the first piano pedagogy class to practical elements by presenting an overview of the course, the curriculum, and the entire pedagogy class sequence. It is important to define the class for the students as a literature-based or theory-based class. During this time, teachers may have the students talk about their own course expectations and what they want to get out of the class. By bringing student needs and expectations into the class discussion, teachers can demonstrate a genuine concern for the students and learn more about how to generate an effective discussion within the dynamics of that particular class.

The course syllabus is often handed out during this first class period. Pedagogy teachers agreed that the syllabus should usually be somewhat flexible in order to accommodate students with different levels of teaching experience. Many pedagogy classes include both undergraduate and graduate students, so the class must cover material that will be beneficial to all members.

Some teachers believed that it is best to wait until the second class to present the syllabus. In this situation, the teacher would first get information from the students about their previous teaching experience, which method books and levels they have previously used, and other pedagogy classes they have taken so that they can mold the syllabus to address the needs of all students. The syllabus should always include a limited number of ground rules regarding absence, late work, grading, and general decorum.

The first day may also be a good time to hand out supplemental study aids such as library resources, supplemental readings, and project assignments. It is also helpful to explain to students how much time they will need to prepare projects and study for the course. A list of sample test questions might be appreciated during the semester so that students will know how to prepare for the final exam.

Teachers agreed that student projects should be flexible and should be designed in such a way that students can build the project according to their own skill level and interests. By offering pedagogy students choices on the components of a project, or allowing students to modify a project according to their own needs, teachers celebrate the needs of each individual and enable all students to fill in the gaps in their teaching knowledge.

**“Getting Acquainted” Games and Activities**

In an attempt to build a community of learners from the beginning, some pedagogy teachers spend time on the first day letting students get to know each other with group activities. One teacher has students sing major and minor triads in different inversions. Other teachers have their students sing songs that may be used for preschool or kindergarten music classes. These types of creative activities can help the students loosen up and feel comfortable with each other. In addition, it gives students the opportunity to experience child-like activities, which will get them in the mindset for understanding and working with elementary-level students.

**Toward a Philosophy of Teaching**

Most teachers agreed that class discussions on the first day of pedagogy classes should be directed toward developing a philosophy of teaching. To that end, many teachers begin by discussing the students’ prior experiences as a beginning piano student. Ideas for discussion include when they first learned how to play the piano, which method books they used, what repertoire they played, and what they liked and did not like about their first piano lessons. These questions offer an excellent opening discussion because most students remember their first piano lessons well and enjoy talking about the impact of those lessons on their later musical development. Students from different countries can add much to the discussion because they may have learned from different method books. In addition, the type of teaching prevalent in their country may be quite distinct from the pedagogical approach used in the United States.

Such a discussion can lead easily into the development of philosophical ideas about how students become intrinsically motivated, what makes a piano lesson enjoyable, and how students learn. Additionally, many pedagogy teachers agreed that an important question to be addressed on the first day of class is “What are the qualities of a good teacher?” One teacher approaches this topic as a group activity in which students interview each other to talk about the qualities they encountered in previous teachers. The class may then come up with a checklist of good habits of teachers and good habits of learners. Students can reflect on the above questions and come up with their own list of qualities that they want to bring to their teaching. One teacher elected to have students keep a journal in which they regularly answer questions regarding their music philosophy. Another teacher saved the answers until the end of the term, and then asked the same questions again. By revealing the change in answers to students at the end of the term, the students can see their progress over the semester and appreciate how much they have developed in their understanding of basic pedagogical concepts and issues. Students may be more inspired to write about their teaching philosophy after reading articles such as “The Quality Music Teacher” by Lynn Freeman Olson in the January 1986 issue of *Clavier* or “The View from the Second Floor” by Robert Weirich in the April 1992 issue of *Clavier*.

**Topics for the First Three Days of Class: Gaining an Appreciation for Pedagogy**

As an introduction to pedagogy, many teachers have the students discuss what it means to be a professional piano teacher. Some students, especially in performance schools, will not want to be in a pedagogy class. Teachers should take time in the initial class to win over these performance-oriented students. One teacher explained this as an opportunity to “romance the Steinway jockey” into teaching. Students might first discuss their career plans, being reminded to maintain a healthy dose of pragmatism and realism. This will naturally lead to the realization that most musicians are going to teach at some point in their life. Many teachers also try to get their pedagogy students to pinpoint their inspiration to pursue music professionally. By doing this, some students will realize that the desire to share music with others is naturally satisfied through a teaching career.

**Topics for the First Three Days of Class: Personality and Learning Styles**

An excellent offshoot from the philosophical questions about what makes an ideal teacher and an ideal student is a discussion on how personality interacts with teaching and learning. During the process of learning about different personality and learning styles, students often enjoy taking a personality test such as the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory. Such a test is a useful device for helping the class members get to know one another, and it also helps them to learn more about themselves and how they will teach.

**Writing Assignments: Article Reading**

After the first class, many teachers have students read an article from such publications as *American Music Teacher, Clavier*, *Keyboard Companion*, or *Piano Pedagogy Forum* and assign students to write a summary of that article. This type of assignment can serve two purposes. First, it introduces students to the written resources available for professional teachers. Secondly, it can facilitate classroom discussion on the day that students turn in their written assignments. Some teachers might assign specific articles from any of the above resources. Other teachers give students a specific topic, such as functional skills or sight-reading, and students must find an article on that topic on their own. This type of assignment requires students to learn how to use the library and online resources while enabling students to pursue individual interests by choosing their own article.

**Developing a Niche**

In graduate classes, one pedagogy teacher expressed a need for graduate students to begin to develop their own niche in the field. To serve this purpose, students must complete a writing assignment in which they explain their individual goals within the course and the entire degree. Such an assignment may direct the graduate students to take measure of their own skills, interests, and entrepreneurial spirit to describe a career path they envision for themselves. The responses can address the students’ passions, strengths, personal motivations, or needs that must be addressed in the field. Uszler’s introduction to the *Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* on pages xiii-xvi may be useful in helping students outline a career based on their own skills and interests.

**Student Teaching**

In explaining the content of the first three classes, many instructors began to expound upon their particular student teaching requirements as a component of the piano pedagogy class. Some teachers had students begin teaching during the fourth or fifth week of class. Students in these classes often had one or two private students that they taught on a regular basis during the semester. Other students had only occasional teaching practice teaching requirements.

One teacher had her undergraduate pedagogy students teach private students in a demonstration piano class right away. She therefore chose a more organic approach in creating the content of the course, so that the first semester was built on the problems and concerns as they occurred in student teaching. By creating a general syllabus, there was a great deal of freedom in the sequencing of course topics, and the students felt more involved in the unfolding of the course.

There were several elements mentioned that should be addressed with students before they begin teaching. First, students may feel consoled after their first teaching experience if they are told beforehand that they will not be perfect and will probably make mistakes. Students should also be given a lesson plan ahead of time with a list of specific teaching items. These items should be ordered or leveled according to their priority, because many beginning teachers are not efficient enough in their pacing to get through all of the skills that a seasoned teacher might expect to cover.

It is also helpful to have students write out exactly what they will say during the first lesson and practice teaching it on their own or with another student in the class. Although they may not use that exact wording during the lesson, it may be helpful by preventing students from straying from the task at hand or using extraneous words.

One instructor said that adult beginners are the easiest students to begin teaching. She explained that adult students are generally more accepting of beginning teachers, and their communication style may feel more comfortable for pedagogy students who have not had much interaction with children.

**Summary**

Teachers have a great deal to cover during the first three days of a piano pedagogy class. They should assess student needs and experience, and then modify the syllabus to meet those needs by designing projects that allow for some flexibility. The pedagogy teacher should generate a list of goals for the course that includes information every piano teacher must know. They can then mold the other parts of the course requirements to account for differences among students.

Teachers should introduce pedagogy to their students as a profession, in which every teacher can decide who they want to teach and where they want to specialize. They should charge their students to come up with their own philosophy about what constitutes good teaching. It is during these first few classes that a community of learners can be built, so games and activities to help students get acquainted with one another can be useful. Generating class discussions is also helpful for creating a comfortable and positive environment. Most importantly, these first three class days offer a chance for students to begin to assimilate their previous experiences and their own character and values so that they can begin to devise a personal philosophy of what it means to be a professional piano teacher.

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