**Proceedings from the**

**2006 National Group Piano/**

**Piano Pedagogy Forum**

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**Conference Presentation: *Understanding the Millennial Student***

**Presenter: Craig Vickio**

**Reporter: Kathryn Duarte**

Craig Vickio is a clinical psychologist and director of the Bowling Green State University Counseling Center. His presentation, Understanding the Millennial Student, identified the qualities and characteristics of millennial students, reviewed the apparent consequences through a listing of merits and drawbacks of these traits, and discussed the instructional implications for teachers.

**Who belongs to the “millennial” generation?**

Persons considered to be of the “millennial” generation were born approximately between 1982 and 2002. In his opening remarks Vickio offered a reflection of the differences between the life experiences of the “millennials” and those who were born thirty or more years ago. For instance, today’s youth have no fear of nuclear war, no memory of the Iranian hostages, and know only one Germany. Furthermore, they have always had answering machines and cable but have not used typewriters, a rotary phone, a record player, or an eight-track player.

Vickio identified five fundamental characteristics of “millennial” students. These characteristics paint a picture of today’s youth as being:

1. Used to structure and respectful of authority

2. Sheltered and protected

3. “Techno-savvy” and used to instantaneous results

4. Connected and team-oriented

5. Special and confident in their ability to achieve

Vickio cautioned that these are common generalities and would not be true of everyone.

**Used to Structure and Respectful of Authority**

Today’s youth have highly structured lives. Activities may include sports practices and games, choir rehearsals, piano lessons, etc. Parents lay out their children’s schedules in minute detail and often know where they are at all times and with whom. Vickio took us on a trip down memory lane to demonstrate the contrast between life today and life in the fifties and sixties. In this earlier era, for example, there was a greater amount of free time and the primary restriction was that you be home in time for dinner.

The apparent consequences are that these students are receptive to guidance and mentorship but have minimal experience with self-advocacy and little need for self-initiative or forging their own path. They are compliant, obedient, and trust teachers and parents to make decisions on their behalf.

As teachers, we might make the most of this trait by building syllabi that clearly define the course aim, specify our rules, and detail our performance expectations. Our challenge is to prepare our students for real life where there is no specific guide. We need to help them to create their own structure and realize they must be flexible and able to create contingency plans. Vickio also encouraged us to embrace a broad definition of respectful that would not inhibit their critical thinking.

**Sheltered/Protected**

Nowadays parents, teachers, and mentors tend to act and make decisions for their charges. Being so sheltered sends the message that we cannot trust them to take care of themselves. It is a fact that suffering leads to active coping and growing. It is important that adults let them face life even when it hurts so that they may learn to cope and move forward.

The apparent consequences are that today’s youth are inclined to feel valued but not empowered. They are not used to functioning autonomously and lack opportunities for developing problem-solving skills.

As teachers and mentors, we can cater to this trait by creating a classroom environment that feels like a safe haven. Be available to help our students with their problems but at the same time assist them in developing coping and problem-solving skills for themselves. Point out to them that if we play it too safe we end up as spectators rather than participants in life. Vickio noted that psychologists have found that most people feel regret for things they held themselves back from doing or missed opportunities rather than from things they had done.

**Techno-savvy and used to instantaneous results**

Their immersion in a large variety of technical devices has contributed to the ability of today’s youth to multi-task. Vickio introduced a second trip down memory lane to recall that in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, the Wizard of Oz was broadcast on television once a year and that it was a highly anticipated event. Today, kids can watch a movie at any time. Additionally, they are used to the convenience of microwaves, computers, bank machines, cell phones, and more.

An apparent consequence is that today’s youth are able to navigate in our technologically advanced world with ease but are used to immediate results and lack patience. A key aspect of coping involves patience and the ability to tolerate setbacks. Vickio reported seeing worrisome trends in college mental health and needs for immediate services that support this consequence. He offered as evidence a chart documenting the number of emergency contacts recorded over a four-year period from 2002 to 2006 at Bowling Green. The number rose from 350 to 600 during this brief span and every year set a new record. Twenty years ago, emergency coverage did not exist. Currently, there is a 24-hour call service that is often double-booked. This is telling and says something about the coping and problem-solving skills, or lack there-of, that today’s youth possess.

**Connected/Team-Oriented**

This quality points to students being comfortable with collaboration and extending support and assistance to others. “Millennial” students tend to be civic-minded and community service oriented. They will also say that their parents are close friends. A third journey down memory lane recalled that in an earlier time there were few group projects and interaction with others usually applied to kids living nearby. What is more, it was typical to call parents only once a week. Today, group projects are the norm as are daily contact with all kinds of people, parents included.

The apparent consequences are that today-s youth are comfortable with collaboration, adept at establishing support networks, and are interested in helping others. As psychological findings have found that relationships with other people are a buffer to stress and give meaning to life, this is good news. Less positively, today-s youth are not used to flying solo and find interdependence much easier than independence.

We, as teachers, can appreciate and applaud their attitude of working together. However, we should also encourage and promote the attitude that it is okay to be by oneself. Challenge them to think individually.

**Special/Confident in their Ability to Achieve**

Today’s youth and young adults receive an unprecedented amount of certificates, awards, and honors. In his fourth and final look back in time, Vickio described receiving one trophy as a small boy. Today, kids get awards for everything-more trophies than can fit on a mantel, in fact. They receive certificates simply for participating. The apparent consequences are that they believe in themselves and are optimistic about their chances of success but may be unrealistic in their expectations.

Research shows that people can accomplish great things when they believe in themselves. As teachers, we should assist students in understanding that success requires mistakes, setbacks sometimes occur, and there is room in the big picture for mistakes and setbacks to occur along the way. Remind them that success is a process, not a single act. For example, a single piano performance is not the measure of a pianist. Furthermore, it is easier to take risks when we can separate our self worth from the outcome of our individual acts.

**Concluding remarks**

Vickio encouraged us to appreciate the tremendous opportunity we have been given any time we step into a classroom. He concluded his presentation by describing five aspects of being a good teacher that he believes transcend generational differences.

A good teacher...

* Strives to balance challenge and support
* Treats students in a holistic manner
* Is a good role model
* Is genuine with students
* Conveys the message to students that “The material I am teaching is important, you are important, and our collaboration is important.”

Vickio’s parting wish was that we be the kind of teacher who feels privileged to be an influence in the lives of today’s students.

**Kathryn S. Duarte** earned a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from Appalachian State University and a Master of Music in Piano Performance from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music. She completed a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma where her teachers included Dr. Jane Magrath, Dr. E. L. Lancaster, and Dr. Digby Bell. Competition awards include First Prize in the OMTA State Piano Competition, Graduate Division and the ASU Concerto-Aria Competition, and Prize Winner in Asheville’s Young Artist Concerto Competition. Recent professional activities include adjudication of the Southwest Youth Music Festival and the California Association of Professional Music Teachers’ District Three Festival, as well as a master class presentation at the invitation of the Diamond Bar Music Teachers’ Branch of MTNA. In addition to fifteen years of experience as an independent teacher, Dr. Duarte has served on the faculties of the School for Creative and Performing Arts in Cincinnati and the Preparatory Department of Northern Kentucky University. In the spring of 2007 Dr. Duarte will assume the duties of Visiting Instructor of Piano Pedagogy in the Crane School of Music at the State University of New York at Potsdam.

**Conference Presentation: *Working Together to Learn: Cooperative Learning in the Group Piano Classroom***

**Presenters: Alejandro Cremaschi and Christopher Fisher**

**Reporter: Grace Huang**

Presenters Alejandro Cremaschi (University of Colorado-Boulder) and Christopher Fisher (Ohio University) discussed essential principles of the cooperative learning approach and its application to the field of group piano teaching. Drs. Cremaschi and Fisher, who have utilized cooperative learning extensively in their own teaching, shared their research findings and provided numerous ideas for creative application in any group piano setting, for students at any level.

**Cooperative Learning Defined**

Developed in the 1970s and 1980s by educational theorists David and Roger Johnson (University of Minnesota), Spencer Kagan (University of California), and Robert Slavin (Johns Hopkins), cooperative learning can be defined as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning” (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec). Students are actively involved in every stage of the learning process, whether through collectively discovering concepts and principles, participating in research and teaching, or drilling and reviewing material. The instructor’s role is transformed into one of facilitator and moderator.

Benefits of the cooperative learning approach were highlighted:

1. Learning is not passive but participatory in nature.

2. Cooperative learning allows for immediate application of the information learned.

3. Students have the support and encouragement of their peers, a crucial factor in lowering anxiety and producing a safe learning environment.

4. Cooperative learning utilizes higher level critical reasoning strategies.

5. Students are challenged to view situations from several perspectives, to share information and resources, and to assist each other for the good of the group.

6. Cooperative learning produces higher retention rates, resulting in higher achievement.

The presenters showed further proof of the latter by displaying the Learning Pyramid, which reports the average retention rates from various methods of teaching. Lectures resulted in a 5 percent rate of retention. Audio and Visual Aids increased student retention rate to 20 percent; Demonstration resulted in a 30 percent rate. Immediate Use of Learning (when students were asked to apply what they had just learned by teaching it to others) resulted in a 90 percent retention rate.

**The Successful Cooperative Learning Activity**

Cremaschi emphasized five important elements necessary in creating an effective cooperative learning activity:

* Face-to-face interaction: students must have the opportunity to interact with each other, whether through discussion, listening, or teaching each other.
* Cooperative skills: students should develop skills such as dealing with multiple viewpoints and accepting and giving constructive criticism.
* Group interdependence: students must realize that they need each other in order to complete the task. The instructor-s responsibility is to ensure that students share common responsibilities and goals and may choose to assign students specific roles within the group as well as provide the possibility of joint rewards.
* Individual accountability: in a group setting, it is still necessary to insure that individual work is done. Teachers should frequently assess students on an individual basis, at random times.
* Group processing and self-evaluation: the students are autonomous; at the end they must evaluate their own work (both the process and end result) and evaluate how well they worked together.

**Cooperative Learning Structures**

Some important cooperative learning structures for use in the classroom were described:

* **Jigsaw**: Each student within the group receives a task to learn or knowledge to master. Students then work individually to master the task and teach each other what they learned. One or more students from the group share the whole with the class.
* **3-Step Interview**: Student A quizzes, coaches, or teaches Student B and vice versa. At the end, each student shares with the class the information received from his/her partner. (This is an effective way to polish repertoire, read new repertoire, find tricky spots within a piece, or do a flash card review of concepts.)
* **Think-Pair-Share**: Students first work individually on material presented by the teacher. They then pair up to discuss and come up with a single best solution (Interdependence). Each pair shares their answers with the rest of the class (Accountability). (This structure is well-suited for harmonization exercises where students can compare chord choices and decide on the best answer. This is also effective for reading a new piece, transposition exercises, and more.)
* **Group Investigation**: Designed by Sharan, another pioneer in the field of cooperative learning, this is an effective learning structure for long-term class projects. Students form groups based on a common interest or topic and devise strategies for how they’ll approach their investigation. The group synthesizes the information they find and presents their findings to the entire class.
* **Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)**: The teacher presents the material. Students then study and review the material together, quizzing each other on the material taught. At the end, students are quizzed individually, receiving an improvement score according to how well they are performing compared to their usual level. Teams receive recognition for the sum of their improvement scores.
* **Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)**: Similar to STAD but consisting of games instead of quizzes, team members work and study together. They then divide to compete in tournaments with members from other teams. Points are awarded for successful completion of a task.

**A Few Specific Applications of Cooperative Learning Techniques for Group Piano**

Several effective cooperative learning activities in group piano were illustrated, either through video clips of group piano classes in action or through active participant involvement. These activities are based on the structures described above.

* **Note Reading Jigsaw**: A video clip showed a teacher with a group of younger students engaged in the task of note reading, an activity that was described to the students as “a game where you’re going to teach each other.” The teacher assigned each student an acronym, asking the student to memorize it silently. Each student then taught the acronym to the group (EGBDF, for instance, was taught as “Every Grizzly Bear Digs Fish”). The acronym was repeated by the group as a whole, and the teacher tested individual students by asking them to review it out loud.
* **Sight Reading Drill Pair with Eye-Check**: Student A plays the role of Performer/Thinker/Observer, scanning through a new piece and verbally identifying any potential problems (accidentals, rhythms, articulations, etc.). Student B, as Coach/Motivator, then provides additional suggestions. Student A sight reads the excerpt. During the performance, Student B monitors accuracy and eye movement, making note of how many times Student A looked down at his/her hands. (This activity was demonstrated at the beginning of the presentation, when Cremaschi and Fisher divided participants into dyads to read through “Dance” by Michael Praetorius.)
* **Technique Tournament**: A video clip showed a group piano class engaging in a tournament where student teams worked together to help each other learn required technical skills (major and minor scales and arpeggios, Hanon exercises, etc.). Teams competed in a play-off tournament that consisted of various rounds with each round containing a specific required skill. Prizes such as candy or bonus points were awarded to the winning team. Fisher found this activity to be a great motivating tool for learning keyboard technique and was an enjoyable way for students to develop their skills. Students also developed a sense of camaraderie and team spirit in the process.
* **Improvisation Investigation**: A video clip was shown of a group piano project, “Group Improvisation,” which involved student research on various genres of American music (jazz, swing, bebop). The clip showed one group of students playing sound clips of their group’s selected genre, describing characteristics of that genre, and performing their ensemble improvisation in that particular style for the rest of the class. This proved to be a good introduction to the concept of improvisation in a stylistically appropriate manner.

Several detailed handouts were provided which contained further applications of cooperative learning techniques to group piano teaching, group project ideas, and a comprehensive list of resources. Resources included literature on cooperative learning theory, technique, and its application to the classroom, written by Johnson and Johnson, Kagan, Slavin, Sharan, Kaplan, as well as Drs. Cremaschi and Fisher themselves.

**Grace Huang** received her DMA and MM in Piano Performance from the University of Minnesota and her BM in Piano Performance from Vanderbilt University. Solo and collaborative performances have taken her throughout the United States as well as to festivals such as Aspen, Madeline Island, Eastern, and Hampden- Sydney. She is an active adjudicator and clinician, and recently published an article in the fall issue of Georgia Music News. She previously taught on the faculties of St. Cloud State University, St. Joseph’s School of Music (Minnesota), and the University of Georgia, where she served as Class Piano Coordinator.

**Conference Presentation: *“*eMirror*”: An Interaction Analysis Software Program for Group Piano***

**Presenters: Ann Porter and Michelle Conda**

**Reporter: Chung-Ha Kim**

Developed by Dr. Birch Browning, Cleveland State University and Dr. Ann Porter, University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, eMirror is designed to facilitate the observation of group teaching and subsequent evaluation. Dr. Michelle Conda, head of the secondary piano department at the University of Cincinnati, worked with Dr. Porter on a component geared specifically towards group piano teaching, in order to better evaluate her teaching assistants. She summarized the problems that arise with the traditional method of videotaping her teaching assistants, followed by written comments as follows: “I have nine graduate assistants teaching in my department: watching their videotaped classes already takes a minimum of nine hours, with me stopping the tape frequently to write comments. And no matter how careful I am, some of them still get offended once they read my comments. Asking them to watch the tapes themselves also doesn’t help: they tend to focus on their appearance rather than their teaching performance, getting distracted by the way their hair looks, their clothes, etc... Getting them to watch themselves in the first place is not an easy task either!”

The videotape and written comments are two entities that Dr. Porter sought to combine with the Interaction Analysis Software. Once the equipment is assembled (a digital/video camera, a computer that will convert the video to *QuickTime*, and the software itself), everything is in one place, with the observer being able to insert comments directly into the video. At this time, the software is still in a trial phase: it is currently only available as part of a research project and for Mac OS X. However, Drs. Conda and Porter hope to have it available for everyone and compatible with PCs as well in the near future.

Besides the option of inserting individual comments, this software program also has modules that facilitate the evaluation of certain teaching aspects. For example, the current model has four different modules: headphones (on/off), group instruction, individual instruction, and small group instruction. Ideally, teaching assistants should include all of these in their teaching to maximize effective management of class time, and to keep classes interesting. Once an activity, such as small group instruction, is pursued for more than three seconds, the corresponding module is selected and activated by the observer. The module then keeps track of the amount of time spent on this particular activity, converting it into a percentage grade at the end.

The advantages of this program are clear: teaching assistants and pedagogy student teachers can now evaluate their teaching performances themselves, rather than relying on a supervisor. The modules give them clear criteria to focus on while watching the video. Selecting one module at a time, teaching assistants will code the events while watching, and afterwards, print out the results and/or e-mail them to their supervisor - a powerful learning and sharing tool indeed.

Relying on her many years of observing secondary piano teaching assistants, Dr. Conda acknowledged that pianists often have a greater need for self-evaluation when it comes to teaching in a classroom setting: “Sitting behind a keyboard with music in front of them makes it difficult for them to maintain eye contact with the class. My TA’s are wonderful pianists who bring a lot of knowledge to the classroom. Yet the delivery of it is often poor.” With another module for eye contact almost finished, this software program would help to alleviate this problem as well.

For those who are too impatient to wait for *eMirror*’s completion, there is a similar program available already, called “Scribe.” It was developed by Dr. Robert Duke at the University of Texas. Instead of modules, this program lets you choose which behavior you want to evaluate.

If you would like more information on *eMirror*, or would like to participate in the trial phase of it, please contact Dr. Michelle Conda (condajm@ucmail.uc.edu) or Dr. Ann Porter (porteram@ucmail.uc.edu).

**Chung-Ha Kim** currently teaches applied piano, class piano, and piano pedagogy at Western Illinois University in Macomb. She holds a Bachelor of Music-degree in Piano Performance from the Manhattan School of Music, a Master of Music-degree in Piano Performance from the University of Cincinnati, and a Doctor of Musical Arts-degree from the University of Cincinnati, with Piano Performance as her main, and Piano Pedagogy as her cognate area. Dr. Kim has published articles in *Clavier* (“Clementi’s Last Piano Sonata,” April 2004) and *Piano Pedagogy Forum* (“Class Management Software: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Blackboard in Group Piano Classes,” January 2005). She is an active member of MTNA and ISMTA, and currently serves as a State Competition Coordinator.

**Conference Presentation: *Technology Demonstration: What is Podcasting***

**Presenter: Mario Ajero**

**Reporter: Kathryn Koscho**

Mario Ajero shared with us the joys of podcasting in his lively technology mini-session. Throughout the session, he answered the following questions: 1) What is a podcast? 2) What equipment is needed to watch or hear a podcast? 3) Where can a consumer find and subscribe to podcasts on the internet? 4) How much does it cost to access a podcast? 5) What equipment is needed to produce a podcast? 6) How can a piano teacher use podcasting in the studio?

1. What is a podcast? Ajero’s definition of podcasting is as follows: “a way to deliver audio or video content over the internet automatically to an audience.” Some podcasts have audio content only, like a radio show. Other podcasts contain video content as well, like a slide show or a movie. Podcasts can cover any number of topics, but Ajero quickly honed in on those dedicated to piano pedagogy.

2. What equipment is needed to watch or hear a podcast? To hear or watch a podcast, no iPod is needed, just a computer. Podcasts can be produced and viewed on all types of computers, not just Macs. Additionally, podcasts can be transferred to a mobile device, like an iPod, and it is this capability that has led to the name podcasting. Many different types of software will run podcasts. Podcatching software, like iTunes and Juice, allows the content to be viewed or heard on a computer and transferred to a mobile device. Also, websites like podcast.yahoo.com, podshow.com, and podcastalley.com run podcasts using a Web browser.

3. Where can a consumer find and subscribe to podcasts on the internet? In addition to the Websites listed above, podcasts can be found on the iTunes store. From the main page, click on the Podcasts link in the left sidebar. This opens a page devoted to podcasts sorted by topic. Unfortunately, browsing through the listings under music could be cumbersome, so it might be better to search for specific terms using the search engine. Ajero searched for “piano teaching” and found his own podcast! After locating an episode title of interest, double click on it to hear a preview. Podcasts that have a TV icon by the title have video content, so they can be watched like a television show. By clicking on the Free Subscribe button, any new podcasts in the future from the series will be downloaded to you automatically.

4. How much does it cost to access a podcast? Listening to podcasts is free on iTunes.

5. What equipment is needed to produce a podcast? To produce a podcast, one needs a computer with broadband internet access, a video camera, and a microphone. Producers can record their audio and video content with the video camera and microphone, edit the content using software like iMovie, and then publish on the web.

6. How can a piano teacher use podcasting in the studio? According to Ajero, teachers can broadcast student recitals and performances. Recently, he podcasted an adult student’s performance, since that adult student did not have a recital on which to play. We can share teaching tips with each other, as Ajero does in many of his podcasts. Also, we can show video of playing on the keyboard and show written notation and fingering so that viewers can learn to play songs. This can be very motivating for viewers and lead them to seek out piano lessons and buy sheet music!

Ajero cautioned against infringing on copyright; he showed a site for Podsafe Music, music.podshow.com, where artists make their compositions and performances available for podcasting for free as long as the use is acknowledged.

Linking podcasting to the overall theme of the forum, Ajero noted that podcasting connects us with the technologically-savvy Millennial Generation and taps in to their desire for technological communities as witnessed by the overwhelming popularity of Websites like MySpace.com.

Readers may contact Mr. Mario Ajero at mario.ajero@gmail.com. To watch his podcasts, go to marioajero.blogspot.com.

**Kathryn Koscho** teaches Class Piano, Piano Pedagogy, and Applied Piano at Oklahoma City University. She is a doctoral candidate for the DMA in Piano Performance with an emphasis in Piano Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma and holds degrees from the University of Kansas and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Conference Presentation: *Technology Demonstration: Integrating Smart Board Technology Into the Group Piano Lab***

**Presenter: Courtney Crappell**

**Reporter: Kathryn Koscho**

In the technology demonstration, “Integrating Smart Board Technology Into the Group Piano Lab,” Courtney Crappell presented an overview of the University of Oklahoma’s new piano lab, provided uses of Smart Board technology for group piano, and showed video clips on using Yamaha Clavinova features for special needs students by Dennis Stanfill.

The University of Oklahoma piano lab contains sixteen Yamaha Clavinova keyboards that are connected to a Yamaha console. Audio from the teacher console can be sent to the student keyboards or to the desktop Mac computer, which can then be heard through the classroom sound system. Video from the computer runs through a projector onto the Smart Board; the projector also is connected to a document camera.

Crappell explained how he integrates one use of the computer in his classes. Students can save performances as mp3 files in the keyboard lab using recording software on the computer, and then the instructor can post these recordings on Desire 2 Learn, a web-based learning interface for classes.

The Smart Board, a touch-sensitive board mounted on the wall like a chalkboard, provides an interactive visual atmosphere for the classroom. Teachers can write on the Smart Board like a white board using Smart Board. Once a pen is lifted, that color is activated on the board, and any writing done with the pen or with the finger will appear on the board in the designated color.

Smart Boards come with Smart Board software, which allows the screen to be used in many different ways. Using the Notebook software, teachers can create numerous slides of information. One touch on the toolbar will provide a new, clean screen, which eliminates the need to erase. However, the old information is not deleted; it is treated as a separate slide, which the teacher can bring back in view at any point by simply touching the thumbnail of the slide in the right sidebar. In fact, slides can be prepared in advance, saved, and quickly referred to in class by opening the saved file. Crappell mentioned that slides containing standard information like scale fingerings could be made prior to class, saving time. Smart Board slides can be saved as notebook files or can be exported as tif, jpg, html, or pdf files.

Crappell noted that using a Smart Board allows the teacher to stand at the screen near the visual information. In other classrooms which project information from a computer onto a screen, the instructor would need to sit near or hover over the computer and use the mouse to manipulate information on the screen. With the Smart Board, teachers can just touch the screen.

Crappell then discussed creative ways of working with notated music. Teachers can project scanned pdf files of music onto the Board. By using the Smart Board pens to mark on the projected score, the messy clean-up required for overhead projector slides vanishes. The view zooms in and out with one touch on the toolbar, making adjustment on the screen easy. Also, for visual clarification of scores, the Spotlight tool highlights a certain area of the board and darkens or dims the rest. This allows the teacher to draw attention visually to specific sections of the projected piece.

Projecting Finale files onto the Smart Board yields even more interactive opportunities for the classroom. Teachers can make use of the playback feature in Finale to immediately hear any projected notation. Crappell says that using Finale files for long-term notation projects works well; students can modify a score over time without having to re-write the example for each class meeting. He shared that his students enjoy entering notation directly onto the touch-sensitive Smart Board and suggested having students write out their improvisations on the Board.

In the question and answer portion of the presentation, Crappell said that to run a Smart Board, one needs a computer, a Smart Board, and a projector. The Smart Board is not connected to the piano keyboards. He recommended purchasing a projector with a high number of lumens; in a well-lit classroom, the screen will need to be bright in order to be legible.

Crappell also showed video clips of Dennis Stanfill discussing the use of the Yamaha Clavinova for special needs students. Mr. Stanfill showed two ways that special needs students might use the Yamaha Clavinova. First, the Any Key Mode in the Guide Mode allows a player to press a single key, either with a finger or with a paddle, and have a fully orchestrated part sound. It does not matter which key is played, but in order for the piece to sound like it should, the player must follow the lights behind the key and press the key in rhythm. Students with little to no mobility in the hand can make music at the keyboard using this function and learn about rhythm.

Second, the Follow Lights Mode works like the Any Key Mode, but the player must press the correct key for the fully orchestrated music to sound. Students follow lights which light up behind a specific key when it is time to play. Stanfill noted that this can work well for students who need to learn how to focus. Generally, students tend to start playing with just one finger, but eventually change to using more than one finger and then adding the second hand.

In conclusion, Stanfill told of a visit to a music class with special needs students at Boca Raton High School in Boca Raton, Florida which made use of these two functions. A young woman with MS used a paddle to successfully play a piece in the Any Key Mode. Also, a young man with Downs Syndrome used the Follow Lights Mode to play a piece with both hands in a focused manner.

**Kathryn Koscho** teaches Class Piano, Piano Pedagogy, and Applied Piano at Oklahoma City University. She is a doctoral candidate for the DMA in Piano Performance with an emphasis in Piano Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma and holds degrees from the University of Kansas and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Conference Presentation: *Working with Special Needs Students***

**Presenter: Tami Bush**

**Reporter: Oscar Macchioni**

The focus of the 2006 GP3 Conference at the University of Oklahoma was The Millennial Student. Mrs. Tami Bush’s presentation on “Working with Special Needs Students” opened the Friday forum. Mrs. Bush has more than 22 years of experience teaching students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder impairments. She is a learning specialist, counselor and school psychologist, certified in learning disabilities, mental retardation, autism, blind and visual impairment, counseling and psychotherapy.

Disabled learners (DL) do not lack intelligence, most of them have an average or above average I.Q. Mrs. Bush stressed the importance of timing and clarity: “they just have a different time to process the information and they have to process not only the answer but also the question.” Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder students (ADHD) have a slower learning curve and therefore require more time to reach the same place as the rest of the class. They are not always hyperactive; there is another classification called *inattentive type*. Examples of famous people with learning disabilities including dyslexia are: Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, George Frideric Handel, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Louis Pasteur, General George Patton, J.F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Alfred Hitchcock, Stevie Wonder, and Tom Cruise.

Tami discussed the pros and cons of medicating an ADHD student and provided an example of performance on a spelling test, before and after taking the medication within the span of two days. The results were incredible; the medication helped the student concentrate and achieve an almost perfect score. Scientific examples of normal and ADHD brain tissues were also shown.

Mrs. Bush advised that in order to diagnose DL students, an analysis spanning at least six months must be made regarding performance in different aspects of their life, such as music lessons, school and home. DL children may have at least two or three of these problems:

1. Short attention span

2. Low tolerance for frustration

3. Insatiability

4. Low self-esteem

5. Learned helplessness

6. Sequencing and memory deficits

7. Hyperactivity

8. Anxiety disorders

9 Deficient motor skills

Regarding DL to teaching music, Mrs. Bush made the following recommendations for teachers:

* Students need constant reassurance and praise.
* These students work better if parents are not present during the lessons.
* Use white-out to cover irrelevant information on the page.
* Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
* Give only one direction at a time and have the student repeat the direction to you.
* Set a predictable routine: these students dislike changes.
* Be consistent with everything including terminology and color coding.
* Break the lessons into smaller segments so as to help them concentrate better.

Many of these students have sensory integration issues, it may be necessary that they:

* Chew gum in order for their brain to organize.
* Smell scents, avoiding sweet smells like flowers. Use warm scents such us vanilla and cinnamon.
* Use as much natural light as possible, avoiding fluorescent lights. Some students can hear the 60 beat cycle of a fluorescent light bulb and are unable to concentrate.
* Rock back and forth or move as they play. If students rock sideways let them rock back and forth also; this may help organize their brain.
* Use ball chairs; having to maintain their balance helps students concentrate.
* Replace behaviors, do not suppress them. For example: if they tap on the table, ask them to tap their foot on the floor instead, then just their toe.

Mrs. Bush also made the attendees experience what it is like to be a learning disabled person through a few exercises. One of them was to see what a Dyslexic child may be looking at when reading a text: words are randomly separated and/or connected to other words without space; and “p”, “b”, “q” and “d”‘s randomly replace each other, signifying that a Dyslexic child may see just a circle connected to a line without discriminating different shapes. Another interesting exercise was to trace a shape on a piece of paper looking at its reflection in a mirror. This experiment generated a lot of laughs, including this reporter’s, since many attendees couldn’t follow the lines and became somewhat dizzy.

**Oscar Macchioni** is an Assistant Professor of Piano and Piano Pedagogy at the University of Texas at El Paso. Upon his graduation from the National University of Tucumán in Argentina, he received a scholarship from the Polish Government to study piano at the Krakow Academy of Music. He received his Master of Music from Louisiana State University and his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance from the University of Arizona. He has been sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. (Fellow Graduate Student, summer 2000), the Polish Government, and the Organization of American States (OAS). Most recently, he received the Music Teachers National Association “Student Achievement Award” (StAr), was named “Distinguished Graduate Student” by the University of Arizona School of Music, and was featured in the French Magazine *Piano, La Lettre du Musicien*. Oscar Macchioni has performed extensively in his native Argentina, Poland, Mexico, and in the USA. In March of 2005 he presented a solo recital at the esteemed Myra Hess Memorial Concerts at the Chicago Cultural Center. Dr. Macchioni has served as a lecturer and adjudicator for the Arizona Music Teachers Association and El Paso Music Teachers Association. In the summer of 2006, he was hired by the International Piano Performance Examinations Committee of Taiwan to conduct piano examinations to about 1,200 students nationwide. He also enjoys research activities and presented lecture recitals at national and international conferences.

**Conference Presentation: *Using Recording and Sequencing Technology in the Group Piano Curriculum***

**Presenter: Lisa Zdechlik**

**Reporter: Siok Lian Tan**

Dr. Lisa Zdechlik presented a session on how she used recording and sequencing technology to enhance her teaching of keyboard skills and comprehensive musicianship in her group piano classes at the University of Arizona. She shared her ideas on teaching repertoire, harmonization and transposition, improvisation, and score reading with the conference participants in a Yamaha Clavinova Lab.

When teaching repertoire, Dr. Zdechlik asked her students to record, listen, and evaluate their own playing at different junctures in the learning process and prior to testing and performance. Using a skill checklist, her students were guided to develop strategies for improvement and practice based on the listening and reflecting process. Dr. Zdechlik also used recordings to provide feedback to her students and to serve as a performance portfolio and “journal” of development.

In learning to harmonize a melody, Dr. Zdechlik’s students recorded the melody first and “accompanied” themselves by playing appropriate chords along with the melody. They were encouraged to explore every possible choice of chords to harmonize the given melody and select their best choice. Using two-track recording, her students recorded their chosen set of chords on top of the pre-recorded melody. Dr. Zdechlik also extended this assignment to include ear training and harmonic dictation components. In this case, each student recorded a harmonization on a disk and exchanged the disk with a partner. The student had to listen critically and notate the partner’s harmonization. To develop transposition skill, her students used the “transpose song” feature on a recorded melody. They then played the harmonic changes along with the melody in the new key.

Using a completed harmonization recording from above, Dr. Zdechlik’s students could improvise and record a countermelody or additional parts on top of the melody and accompaniment.

Finally, to enhance score reading skills, Dr. Zdechlik assigned her students to record a two- to eight-track sequence of an ensemble or vocal score. The assignment helped to develop a better understanding of the overall texture of the music and how different parts of a score integrated with each other. In order to hear each part clearly, students sang each individual part before they recorded them. They were also encouraged to be creative in their instrumentation for their sequenced ensemble.

This was an informative, hands-on session. Each participant at the session sat at a keyboard and was given the opportunity to record two musical excerpts during the presentation.

**Siok Lian Tan** is Associate Professor of Piano at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. She teaches applied piano and piano pedagogy, and coordinates the class piano program at the Department of Music. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano from University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). A native of Penang, Malaysia, Tan went to Cincinnati in 1988 as a scholarship student of Frank Weinstock at CCM. She has been heard in live broadcasts on Cincinnati Public Radio Station WGUC and has appeared as soloist with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Miami University Symphony Orchestra. As an active pianist, Tan has performed in Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa, and the United States. Her recent performances include solo and chamber music concerts in New York, Chicago, Luxembourg, Cologne, Cape Town, Hong Kong, and London. She also performs regularly with her violinist husband, Tze Yean Lim. An active clinician and adjudicator, Tan has presented lectures at College-Music Society-Great Lakes Conference, Ohio Music Teachers’ State Conference, and the National Group Piano and Piano Pedagogy Forum. She has also presented master classes at University Sains Malaysia, Sedaya International University in Malaysia, Hong Kong Baptist University, and the University of Cape Town.

**Conference Presentation: *Application of WebCT to Group Instruction***

**Presenter: Pamela Pike**

**Reporter: Christy Vogt**

The integration of technology into the classroom continues to change with the ebb and flow of technological developments. College professors currently seek to support and streamline student learning through the use of university based websites. One such platform is called WebCT. Pamela Pike has been utilizing WebCT to provide practice tools for her piano classes at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Pike began her session by explaining the dynamics of her current academic environment at the university. The school is considered a commuter campus with an enrollment of approximately 12,000 students. The average age of students is 27 and most have families and full time jobs. Most of Pike’s undergraduate students are unable to read music when beginning the program. In order to facilitate learning for this type of student, Pike utilizes WebCT to provide 24 hour access to assignments, class information, and video tutorials that help students practice more effectively.

WebCT is very similar to Blackboard, being on online tool for making information and study tools available to students 24 hours a day. The content module includes the syllabus and course schedule, a calendar which is updated weekly, practice and written assignments, Power Point or video tutorials, quizzes, and a discussion room. Pike requires students to check the site three times a week. Pike also includes links to other websites and university services on her WebCT site. Instructors can enter student grades in the Grade Book, which can be linked to an Excel grade book.

Because this session took place in the piano lab, Pike was able to access her WebCT site directly and show us her class website first-hand. While some elements of the site were expected, it was exciting to see how Pike has spent time creating video tutorials for her classes. We briefly viewed video tutorials for playing a G major scale correctly and for learning a repertoire piece.

Pike’s students have reportedly accessed the site frequently and found it immensely helpful. One of the specific benefits they have noted are the 24/7, round-the-clock availability of the tutorials. Pike found that it also puts more responsibility for learning on the students, allowing them to review tutorials often. The tutorials allow students to see and hear technical facets to assignments they might have missed during class. The video also provides a musical or aural example for them to follow.

Because so many students are “commuter” students, the discussion rooms helped create a sense of community among the students. Quite often, they would help one another with questions, coming to correct conclusions independently.

Pike found that using WebCT, while time consuming at first, was a better use of her time. Students could find all class materials in one place. By providing a hub of information, she found that it gave the adult learner a sense of control over the learning environment. It also provides the opportunity to present materials in a variety of ways, meeting the needs of the different learning styles that students have.

**Resources:**

*Understanding by Design*. Wiggins & McTighe

*141 Practical Tips for Teaching Online Groups*. Hanna

**Christy Vogt** is Assistant Professor of Piano/Piano Pedagogy at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. She holds graduate degrees in piano pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma and the University of Miami where she studied pedagogy with Kenon Renfrow, E.L. Lancaster, and Jane Magrath. Christy has taught in pre-college programs at Wheaton College and Texas Christian University. Additionally, she was director of Keyboard for Kids, the preparatory program at the University of Miami, during her doctoral studies.

**Panel Presentation: *Teachers of Special Needs Students Discuss Teaching Techniques, Materials, and Experiences***

**Panelists: Sue Steck-Turner, Dan Craig and Cynthia Pullin**

**Reporter: William Budai**

The 2006 GP3 Forum featured an excellent panel presentation entitled “Teachers of Special Needs Students Discuss Teaching Techniques, Materials, and Experiences.” Three very experienced teachers of special needs students shared their thoughts and expertise on how to effectively work with this population of students. Sue Steck-Turner provided a detailed account of how students with Asperger’s syndrome and autism learn, Dan Craig discussed how to effectively teach ADD/ADHD students, and Cynthia Pullin described the difficulties dyslexic students face in learning to read music.

**Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism**

Students with Asperger’s syndrome and autism typically exhibit a number of distinct characteristics. These students may have problems with ordinary social interactions and communication. They may have difficulty making eye contact, initiating or sustaining conversation, and will often take what you say very literally. In addition, these students usually will have a preoccupation with one interest that is abnormal in intensity (such as an intense fascination with storms or thunder) and will strictly adhere to certain routines or rituals. An additional distinguishing characteristic of autism is their repetitive motor movements.

In working with these students, the teaching environment must be comfortable, teacher-controlled, and consistent: if you must make changes, you will need to prepare the student well in advance. Lesson plans should establish a routine and consist of much repetition. Within the framework of a routine, however, it is helpful to provide the student with opportunities for choice. As always in teaching, it is important to correct errors immediately.

The teaching materials used should be very “friendly”—simple, large print, and uncluttered on the page. The teacher should feel free to manipulate the materials as needed, such as removing (i.e., cutting out) the pictures and teacher notes on the page. The use of manipulatives or tactile activities (especially kinesthetic activities away from the piano) is also ideal, as well as the use of color or other visual effects, which can be quite effective. For example, one could use colors to highlight the different hands or different notes.

In addition, teachers of students with Asperger’s or autism will need to think and work small: work on short pieces, give little assignments, and set small, incremental goals. In the end, the teacher will need to be flexible and adjust to the student; if the student is uncomfortable, he or she will withdraw from the lesson.

**ADD/ADHD**

There are three main types of ADD/ADHD: 1) predominantly inattentive, 2) predominately hyperactive/impulsive, and 3) the combination of the preceding two. Symptoms of these disorders typically surface between 6 months and age 7 and affect 4–6% of the U.S. population. Children are more likely than adults to have ADD/ADHD, and males are more likely than females. While the most common form of treatment is a stimulant or other medication, treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy and psychotherapy can be used in some instances.

In terms of music education, these students typically find it difficult to engage in the lesson; they progress at a slower pace, have less retention of the material, and experience greater frustration. There are also behavioral concerns that can affect the lesson: these students may have difficulty staying on the piano bench, will be easily distracted, have difficulty with a practice routine, and have off-topic responses and comments.

To be successful with these students, the teacher can employ a number of important strategies. As with most any student, motivation is a key factor. Determine the student’s musical and non-musical interests to find pieces that are fun and enjoyable. It is also important that the teacher attempt to reduce distractions for the student. This may include closing doors in the room, looking at only one page at a time, enlarging the score, pointing as the student plays, and providing clear, simple instructions. The teacher should only present one item at a time and maintain eye contact as much as possible when teaching. In addition, allow frequent breaks (every 5-10 minutes), and change activities frequently.

Depending on the student, neurological techniques may be employed as a strategy to manage behavior. These techniques include the use of weighted vests or heavy blankets, or providing the student an opportunity to “self-regulate” using an inflated cushion seat or ball. It is important, however, to discuss the use of any neurological technique with the parent first.

**Dyslexia**

Dyslexia can manifest itself in a variety of ways, the most common being visual perception problems. To a dyslexic person, “p” “q” “b” and “d” all consist of a circle with a line on it. Specific trademarks of dyslexia include inconsistency in performance, difficulty finding place after looking away, omitting words or writing the same word twice, and greater difficulty with numbers. Dyslexic students may typically rely on kinesthetic or aural skills to compensate for difficulty in reading. These students are typically very bright students, although they may tire more quickly than others since greater concentration is needed.

Many of the same strategies mentioned previously would also work well with dyslexic students. For example, enlarging the score or copying music onto colored paper to avoid the glare often found with white paper and black print can be very advantageous. Preparing carefully planned and sequenced lessons that build in small steps and establishing a quiet and organized work environment to eliminate distractions can also help. As dyslexic students may have great difficulty with directional reading and spatial awareness, multi-sensory instruction - combining hearing and seeing along with singing and movement - will help the student remember patterns of notes and patterns of rhythm.

With all special needs students, a great deal of patience is required. With the proper instruction and a supportive environment, these students can indeed be quite successful in music lessons.

**William Budai** is the coordinator of group piano at Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) where he teaches group piano, applied piano, and serves as the director of the IUPUI Music Academy, a community music school affiliated with the University. Dr. Budai holds degrees in Music Education from Central Michigan University and Piano Performance and Pedagogy from Bowling Green State University (OH). He recently completed a PhD in piano pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma, where he studied with Dr. Jane Magrath, Dr. Reid Alexander, and Dr. Edward Gates. In addition to his IUPUI responsibilities, Dr. Budai maintains a studio of pre-college students and has spent 12 summers serving as an accompanist and as part of the group piano faculty at Interlochen Arts Camp.

**Panel Presentation: *Group Piano and the Millennial Student***

**Panelists: Jamila McWhirter, Garth Alper and Fred Kern**

**Reporter: Lesley Sisterhen**

In a panel discussion dedicated to the topic of “Group Piano and the Millennial Student,” panelists presented their viewpoints on the needs of millennial students who are enrolled in group piano classes. They were asked to consider what keyboard skills are necessary for this generation of music students and whether class piano teachers are delivering this information in ways that make it relevant for the students. Panelists included Jamila McWhirter, Garth Alper, Brad Beckman, Karen Beres, and Victoria Johnson. The five panelists provided their own unique insights in the areas of technology, jazz and popular music, and the practical application of functional piano skills.

**Jamila McWhirter**

Dr. Jamila McWhirter, who teaches at Middle Tennessee State University as an assistant professor of choral music education, presented her research on functional piano skills for secondary choral music educators. Stating that there is a lack of consistency among piano proficiency requirements at different universities, McWhirter designed a research study to assess whether collegiate preparation in piano is related to what will actually be used by teachers in the classroom.

McWhirter created a survey for secondary choral educators regarding what piano skills are utilized in the classroom. The educators who were surveyed were also asked about their expectations of what piano skills should be possessed by student teaching interns. The study focused on how frequently educators used the skills and how important they believed these skills were for student teaching interns. The online survey was completed by members of the Southwest Division of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). The results of the survey were presented for the 2006 National Association of Music Educators (MENC) National Convention.

Data from the survey indicated that the majority of secondary choral music educators use many functional piano skills “daily” or “frequently.” Additionally, most secondary choral music educators believe that functional skills are “important” to “extremely important” for student teaching interns. Many secondary choral music educators stated that they would use functional piano skills more often if they were more proficient at these skills, particularly with regard to accompanying.

Survey results also indicated that secondary choral educators frequently use the piano to play warm-ups and to prepare for teaching and conducting. The majority play the piano in their classes. Other uses of the piano include playing or sight-reading vocal parts from an open score at the piano, singing one vocal part while playing one or more parts on the piano, and playing or sight-reading accompaniments. The categories of harmonization, transposition, and improvisation received lower ratings as having less frequent practical applications. In written comments, the educators suggested placing less emphasis on memorized solos in piano classes or excluding them altogether.

The survey also asked respondents to rate the importance of particular skills needed by student teaching interns. The highest number of responses was given for playing the following: a single vocal part at sight, warm-ups, open score, simple accompaniments, and four-part chord progressions. Respondents were also asked to rate the piano skills of student teaching interns. The majority of those surveyed felt that the piano skills were “somewhat adequate” or “not adequate.”

Using the results of this study, McWhirter made recommendations to help guide collegiate music departments in their creation of piano proficiency requirements. She recommended that piano proficiency requirements may differ depending on the specific music education area. Given the importance of basic piano skills for choral music educators, she suggested that some courses might be eliminated to allow for more piano course work. In addition, functional piano skills should be reinforced across the curriculum, rather than just in group piano classes.

**Garth Alper**

Garth Alper is a jazz pianist and educator who believes that popular music and jazz should be included in the class piano curriculum. He presented ways in which keyboard skills combined with the use of technology can lead to improvisation and composition in popular and jazz styles. In Alper’s opinion, music schools are not keeping up with current technological trends. Additionally, the training of many class piano teachers is limited to Western art and these teachers may not feel comfortable teaching jazz or popular music. For these reasons, most class piano instruction focuses on the analysis and performance of classical music but ignores contemporary music that may be motivating and relevant for the millennial generation.

Group piano labs are an ideal setting for teaching students about the components of popular music. Many pianists believe that popular music lacks complexity, but Alper called this believe a myth and cited the rhythmic complexity of music by The Roots, the harmonic complexity of music by Steely Dan and Stevie Wonder, and the timbral complexity found in music by the Chemical Brothers as evidence that popular music is not always “simple.”

Students may be given assignments to help them become familiar with the components of popular music. For example, students might be required to transcribe the bass part, drum beat, and chords from an assigned contemporary pop tune. This transcription can then be entered into a sequencer, which is often built into the electric pianos in group piano labs. Alper gave three examples of current songs that would work well for a transcription assignment. These included “Real Gone” by Sheryl Crow and “Put It Behind You” by Keane. These songs, which exhibit clearly heard chord changes and fairly simple rhythm and bass parts, can be found under “Today’s Top Albums” in iTunes. An example of a more rhythmically complex song that might be more appropriate for a percussion major is “Feng Shui” by Gnarls Barkley.

According to Alper, the most important jazz skills that students should learn are the following: playing major and minor triads and seventh chords, as well as half-diminished seventh chords; reading a lead sheet; improvising over some basic song forms; and playing the ii-V-I chord progression over standard rootless voicings. Jerry Coker’s *Keyboard for Pianists and Non-Pianists* and Bill Boyd’s *Jazz Chord Voicings for Keyboard* are two books that contain helpful explanations of jazz chord voicings.

Alper also suggested that time should be spent in group piano classes on listening. If the task of transcription is too time-consuming, teachers may elect to give listening assignments and quiz their students on the pieces. The discography found in *The Jazz Piano Book* by Mark Levine and *“Down Beat*’s Guide to 50 Essential Piano and Keyboard Jazz Recordings” from the September 2002 issue of *Down Beat* are two guides that can help teachers identify important jazz piano recordings.

Students might begin improvising by using major and minor scales. For the purpose of learning to improvise, they should also become familiar with the blues scale and some commonly used modes such as Dorian and Mixolydian.

For teachers who are not jazz pianists and may not feel comfortable teaching students to play in the jazz style, Alper offered the following advice: take lessons from a jazz pianist or attend a summer workshop by Jamey Aebersold in order to learn these skills. Alternatively, one might choose to bring in a jazz pianist from the community to teach a few weeks of the course.

**Fred Kern**

Fred Kern was unable to be present at the conference, so Dr. Brad Beckman took his place and delivered Kern’s remarks on the needs of music majors in diverse specialties. Piano classes may fall under different headings, such as group piano, class piano, secondary piano, or keyboard skills, but the functional skills presented in these classes remain the same. Kern divided piano skills into four categories: know it, read it, play it, and fake it. Students should know scales, chords, chord progressions, and transposition. They should be able to sight-read simple scores in real time. Students should have the adequate technical ability to be able to “play it” and must also be able to “fake it” by improvising and comping patterns at the keyboard.

In reference to the question of what has changed for contemporary class piano courses, Kern states that there is less emphasis on memorizing and polishing repertoire or on pure technique. He added that the future of class piano teaching depends on changes in requirements given by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM).

Most importantly, class piano teachers must be able to communicate effectively with students and faculty. If students do not see the relevance of learning basic piano skills, they may not be motivated to learn these skills and may have a negative attitude toward the course. Teachers can deter this attitude by learning how to communicate effectively with students of the millennial generation.

**Karen Beres and Victoria Johnson**

Dr. Karen Beres and Dr. Victoria Johnson shared their findings on how applied music teachers use the keyboard as a tool in their teaching and practice. Dr. Beres is the coordinator of group piano and piano pedagogy at the North Carolina School of the Arts, while Dr. Johnson is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Piano Pedagogy at Louisiana State University.

The two panelists collaborated in a research study in which they surveyed applied music faculty regarding how they use the keyboard. They used an online Front Page survey and received 171 responses, with at least one school surveyed from each state. Respondents included performers in each of the following categories: vocalists (35%), wind instrumentalists (40%), and string instrumentalists (19%).

Johnson discussed the results of the survey in which participants ranked piano skills by their importance for the performer or studio teacher. More than half of the participants rated accompanying as the most important skill, while ratings for other skills were much lower: 15% cited chord progressions as the most important skill, and 11% named score reading as most important. Technique, harmonization, improvisation, playing by ear, and solo repertoire received the lowest number of responses.

The responses in the survey highlighted the importance of basic piano skills for music majors. Over eighty percent of those surveyed felt that piano skills were “important” to “very important.” When asked about the frequency of their current piano use, the musicians surveyed were asked to answer with “weekly,” “monthly,” or “never.” In studio teaching, 30.6% of the respondents sight-read accompaniments daily, while 21.7% sight-read accompaniments in their own practicing.

Beres discussed how the research findings might be implemented in group piano classes. Performance majors tend to have fewer piano requirements than music education majors, but their learning goals are similar. Given the fact that sight-reading accompaniments received such a high rating, Beres suggested that this should be the class piano teacher’s main goal for performance majors. Sight-reading every day should be part of the class piano curriculum. An early emphasis on sight-reading, chord progressions, and technical command can provide the building blocks for learning to accompany at the piano. In teaching chord progressions, class piano instructors should emphasize the fact that chords have a function. Musical literacy can be built through an understanding of harmonic analysis.

Suggestions for the class piano teacher included using “real-life assignments” with a practical application of piano skills. Teachers should also incorporate technology and include collaborative activities in their lessons. In addition, students should be involved in the planning for the class. If they design their own goals and chart their own progress, students will be more motivated to learn and will be more likely to see the relevance of class piano.

One of the challenges in teaching the millennial student is the fact that many students feel entitled to receive an A in the class. As a way of solving this problem, Beres states in her syllabus that attendance, preparation, and class participation make up 10% of each student’s grade. However, it is a skill-oriented class, and 90% of the grade depends on the students’ performances on daily grades, a midterm exam, and a final exam.

Grading expectations should be clarified early in the semester. A teacher might demonstrate a performance that would qualify for the grade of A, B, or C, so that students are aware of how polished an exam must be to receive an A. Students can also listen to a recording of their own playing and assign themselves a grade through the process of self-evaluation.

It is the group piano teacher’s responsibility to help students become both versatile and marketable. The skills necessary for professional musicians include score reading, especially for a church position; transposing, especially for accompanists in a voice studio; jazz chords, especially for music theater majors; and fluency at reading figured bass and sight-reading.

During the last three weeks of class, an instructor may illustrate the importance of piano skills in the “real world” of professional musicians by having students demonstrate their piano skills in a mock interview. The teacher might ask the class “Who would I hire from this class?” Engaging in this type of scenario may help class piano students to see the importance of learning to play the piano. It may also prompt them to become more diligent in their preparation for the class.

**Summary**

Group piano teachers must continue to re-examine their teaching with an eye toward the relevance of piano skills for millennial students. Incorporating the newest technological trends and integrating jazz and popular music into the curriculum may help to draw in the current generation of piano students. However, teachers must place the highest priority on developing proficiency in skills that students will use in their career as professional musicians.

**Lesley Sisterhen** serves as Assistant Professor of Piano Pedagogy at Baylor University, where she directs the piano pedagogy program, teaches class piano and piano pedagogy, and supervises the Piano Laboratory Program. She holds degrees in performance from the University of Houston and Florida State University and recently earned the Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Sisterhen has written articles for *American Music Teacher* and the online *Piano Pedagogy Forum*. An active clinician and researcher, she gave a presentation at the 2006 national convention for the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) and has presented for numerous music teacher organizations. Her previous faculty position involved teaching group and applied piano on the faculty at the University of Central Oklahoma.

**Panel Discussion: *Teaching to the Millennial Generation***

**Panelists: Martha Hilley, Peter Jutras and Lauren Walworth**

**Reporter: Kathy Thompson**

The question for the panel discussion was “Are our teaching methods in sync with the core tendencies and personality characteristics of the millennial generation?” The three panelists were all piano teachers, each representing one of three different generations. Martha Hilley, coordinator of class piano and piano pedagogy at the University of Texas at Austin, represented the Baby Boomers. Peter Jutras, piano and piano pedagogy professor from the University of Georgia in Athens, spoke for Generation X. Lauren Walworth, recent M.M. graduate from the University of Oklahoma, shared perspectives from the Millennial Generation.

Panelists began by attempting to clarify the question. Hilley asked if the question pertained to methods or teaching styles. Jutras asked if it referred to teaching piano teachers in pedagogy classes or teaching piano students. Walworth thought the question was inclusive of methods, styles, computer use, and group lessons, but moreover, how to help millennial students considering their particular characteristics. Most of the discussion evolved in two directions - how to appeal to their characteristics, and how to lead them out of limitations typical to the millennial generation.

Panelists referred to characteristics of the millennial students from Craig Vickio’s presentation from the previous session and from Robert DeBard’s article, *Millennials Coming to College* (New Directions for Student Services No. 106, Summer 2004, copyright Wiley Periodicals, Inc.) Typical millennial students were sheltered and highly protected by “intruding” parents. Having highly structured schedules from childhood, they also like structure in their classes. From playing video games they are used to immediate feedback, and they are quite savvy technologically. Millennials generally have a high level of trust toward authority. They tend not to question as much as Generation X students, and often avoid thinking for themselves. Millennial students are team-oriented and enjoy working in groups.

Walworth agreed with the characterizations of her own generation and mentioned that she and her peers had often been showered with trophies and medals not just for winning, but for effort, and that they were used to making A’s in high school if they came to class and followed the rules. As current college students, they are most concerned about how to make the grade in college and have the perception that without the 4.0 one can’t land a job or get into a good graduate school.

As the panel continued their dialog, several recommendations surfaced for teaching millennial students.

1. *Syllabus and Structure*: A very specific syllabus provides the structure that makes millennial students more comfortable in knowing what to expect from the course, and therefore frees them from some of the worry. Breaking down long-term 200 assignments into smaller steps or check-points also appeals to this need for structure.

2. *Motivation*: Walworth suggested not to include only minimum standards for assignments, but to appeal to higher achievement. Giving examples of high quality is one way to motivate. To encourage the student to get away from trying just to please the pedagogy teacher, one might suggest to students, “Make this project meaningful to you.”

3. *Grading*: Hilley suggested explaining that the traditional meaning of A is exceptional, B excellent, and C average, not tantamount to failure. Explain to students often that not everyone will make an A because skills do not develop as soon for some as for others. Explaining rubrics and giving feedback satisfies the student’s desire for structure. On the other hand, to lead them away from the need for constant feedback, Hilley does not constantly tell her students how they are doing. Walworth agreed that this is not a disservice because it may be hard to separate self-worth from the feedback.

4. *Self-assessment*: All agreed that there is a need to help students become goal-oriented for intrinsic rewards rather than the A grade. Jutras encouraged moving feedback from the teacher’s realm to the student’s by asking questions, such as, “Do you think that was too loud?” and “What did you hear?” Another suggestion for taking ownership of assessment was to have students record and evaluate their playing.

5. *Practice*: Hilley commented that students want the short cut to a good grade. She recommended that teachers capitalize on millennial students’ characteristic trust of authority and show them how to practice to conquer a skill. “Trust me and try it.”

6. *Teachers’ use of technology*: Hilley cautioned teachers to use technology in a genuine way to enhance and serve our teaching, not to impress millennial students who likely are more computer-savvy. On the other hand, teachers must keep learning the new technology to be current and effective for this generation.

7. *Students’ use of technology*: Jutras mentioned that as amazing as it is, technology is an obstacle for trusting, unquestioning millennial students, who report all kinds of information from web sites without knowing who wrote it or judging its authority. Teachers should demand that students learn to think for themselves and give them tools to judge the quality of information. Today’s students avoid working with books in favor of websites, so teachers need to require other sources as well.

8. *Diversity*: Hilley mentioned that diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for students. Jutras agreed that millennial students have experienced more diversity and are more sensitive to accept differences. We can use their awareness of differences to equip them with skills to reach students of all generations. Walworth suggested that appreciation for diversity has come from the technology of communication, and that celebrating diversity should become easier as students want to reach out to the world.

This panel was quite effective in bringing generational perspectives to bear on teaching today’s college students. Ms. Walworth provided credibility to the characteristics ascribed to the millennial student and reinforced the suggestions made by the experienced professors.

**Kathy Thompson** is Associate Professor of Music at Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City, where she teaches piano, piano pedagogy, music theory, and music education courses, and supervises the OC Music Academy. She is currently the Vice President for Membership for the Oklahoma Music Teachers Association. She holds a M.M. degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy and a Ph.D. in Music Education from the University of Oklahoma.

**Discussion Group Report: *Friday Discussion Groups with Panel Presenters***

**Presenters: Sue Steck-Turner, Dan Craig and Cynthia Pullin**

**Reporter: Julie Knerr**

After a panel presentation by three teachers of special needs students, Discussion Groups were led by each of the presenters in order to allow more interaction with teachers specifically interested in a certain type of learning disability. The three discussion group panelists were Sue Steck-Turner, who focused on Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism; Cynthia Pullin, who discussed students with Dyslexia; and Dan Craig, who dealt with the topic of ADD/ADHD.

Sue Steck-Turner Sue Steck-Turner’s discussion group was organized in a question and answer format. Following are some of the questions asked by the attending teachers with Steck-Turner’s answers. The discussion focused on three topics: general questions on the disabilities, parental attitudes, and specific materials and teaching strategies.

**General Questions on Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism**

1. What are some of the primary differences between Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome? There are many aspects to the diagnoses of these conditions. However, Autistic children usually are higher functioning intellectually than Asperger’s Syndrome students, and they are usually extremely sensitive to sound and to environmental factors such as the weather. Asperger’s Syndrome students make little eye contact with people. In teaching them, much repetition is required, and few master the fine details of playing. Most children with Asperger’s Syndrome are boys

2. Do some Autistic students interact with other students? Steck-Turner said that she does pair some of her Autistic students and that in recitals she mainstreams all students, grouping them according to age. She said that her regular students treat her Autistic students kindly. Steck-Turner also noted that piano can be life changing for many disabled students, because it helps boost the students’ self-esteem. For example, Steck-Turner said she taught a student who was missing fingers on one hand. He had trouble with relationships in school, but he inspired the students when they heard him play a piano solo at the end of the year. This kind of positive attention, plus the relationship that can be developed through music between disabled students of all types and regular students, enriches the lives of all students.

**Questions Regarding Parental Attitudes**

* Do you work with the parents in any special way? Steck-Turner said she checks in with the parents regularly to stay informed about the student’s life. She also noted that often the child’s doctors are interested in how the student is progressing in piano lessons.
* I have a student whose parents do not want to tell the next piano teacher about a diagnosis. What do you think? The new teacher must know about the diagnosis in order to teach the student well. It is important for people to learn what these students are capable of accomplishing, so that parents will not be ashamed of the diagnosis. For instance, one of Steck-Turner’s students was on TV and in the newspaper after his success at Guild auditions. This kind of attention creates positive publicity for all learning disabled students.

**Questions Regarding Specific Materials and Teaching Strategies**

* Would an Autistic student do well with an aural approach like Suzuki? The Suzuki approach would probably be much too complex for an Autistic student. Both Autistic and Asperger’s Syndrome students need an incredible amount of repetition. An example of the extreme need for repetition was presented by another teacher in the discussion group, who noted that her student was resistant to learning the white keys after having spent quite a bit of time playing on the black keys. Steck-Turner said this is probably because the student needed even more repetition on the black keys and was not yet ready to move to the white keys. She encouraged the teacher, noting the student would eventually be ready to take the next step, especially if the teacher looked for ways to make the white keys attractive to the student.

Steck-Turner noted that in addition to repetition of material, these students need the repetition of a strict lesson routine. To help learning disabled students focus, clutter should be reduced in the studio as much as possible, and especially in the learning materials. Reducing unnecessary material on the page can be accomplished by cutting a piece of music from a method book and pasting it on a blank sheet of paper. Steck-Turner also noted that most piano methods go too fast for learning disabled students and recommended Vogt and Bates’ *Piano Discoveries*, *My First Folksongs* by Kowalchyk and Lancaster, or pre-school methods such as Bastien’s *Piano Party* to meet the need for slow pacing and repetition of concepts. If suitable materials do not exist, the teacher can create materials to suit individual students in order to help each student succeed.

**Cynthia Pullin**

In the discussion group on Dyslexia, Pullin emphasized that not all Dyslexic students are the same. Some reverse numbers, some reverse letters, and some reverse both. Using color and enlarging the music print can help these students with music reading, and the teacher should experiment to find which colors work best with each student. Although Dyslexic students will have difficulty sightreading, they can become proficient at memorizing. Having the student listen to recordings of a new piece for several weeks before beginning to learn the piece can be helpful. In the lesson, Pullin suggested starting with a piece the student is successful at and enjoys and then working on learning a few lines of a new piece, alternating tasks so that the student does not get frustrated with the difficulties of music reading.

Pullin emphasized that patience is the main requirement for teaching learning disabled students and said that pedagogy students should be given opportunities to discover whether teaching learning disabled students is something that they would like to include in their careers. To help pedagogy students learn about this specialized branch of teaching, Pullin suggested having them observe teachers of learning disabled students and teach some lessons to learning disabled students if possible.

**Dan Craig**

Teachers in Dan Craig’s discussion group completed a Quick Learning Assessment to determine their individual learning styles, whether visual, aural, or tactile. Craig then had the teachers break up into groups based on their learning styles. It was noted that half the teachers were visual learners. Craig asked the teachers in each group to discuss ways to help students learn according to their preferred learning style. Interestingly, the dynamics of each group of teachers mirrored the learning style represented in each group. For instance, the visual learners quietly perused their learning assessments before discussing strategies for teaching, the aural group read their thoughts aloud to each other, and the tactile group made many gestures while talking.

The visual learners presented the following strategies for helping students who are visual learners:

In private lessons:

* Stay in the student’s line of vision.
* Make frequent eye contact with the student.
* Arrange the room in a pleasing way.
* Have the students write their assignments.
* Use pictures to illustrate concepts and ideas.
* Use post-it notes to list practice steps.
* Use colored pens or removable tape to mark places in the score that need attention.
* Construct a colored map of a piece to discuss form.
* Point to things in the score often.
* Email students.
* Use visualization and stories.
* Use paper keyboards.

In group lessons:

1. Use a Visualizer.

2. Demonstrate concepts away from the piano by playing in the air.

3. Use a step by step approach.

4. Have students observe each other.

5. Use teacher demonstration.

The teachers who were aural learners suggested the following teaching strategies to help students who are aural learners.

1. Teach by rote.

2. Sightread familiar pieces.

3. Have the student read through pieces they have already learned.

4. Sing.

5. Teach the sound before introducing the symbol.

6. Improvise and compose.

7. Use teacher demonstration.

8. Perform aural exaggerations.

9. Use mnemonic devices.

10. Tape-record the lessons.

The teachers who were tactile learners suggested the following strategies to help students who are tactile learners. Craig noted that ADD/ADHD children tend to be tactile learners.

1. Include off the bench activities frequently throughout the lesson.

2. Use computer software and games.

3. Have students perform expressive movements.

4. Touch the student’s arms to demonstrate technical concepts.

5. Assign physical movements to theoretical concepts. For instance, in ear training, have students stand on tiptoes when they hear a V7 chord and relax when they hear a I chord.

6. Allow students to place their hands on the teacher’s hands to feel motions.

7. Rotate to different pianos if possible.

Craig emphasized that instead of being frustrated by concepts a student has trouble with, teachers should focus on what a student can do well and build on the student’s strengths. Because learning disabled students may take longer to master concepts, the teacher must be creative to find the best approach for each student.

**Conclusion**

The three panelists presented a wealth of practical information for teaching learning disabled children with a variety of diagnoses. The panelists all held the following three suggestions in common for working with learning disabled students. 1) Encourage students and provide them opportunities to build their self-esteem. 2) Be patient and individualize teaching to conform to each student’s individual learning pace. 3) Be creative in finding ways to teach so that students can live up to their potential. In doing so, the lives of learning disabled students can be enriched through piano study.

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**Discussion Group: *Share Your Favorite Piano Pedagogy and Group Piano Projects that Relate to the Millennial Student***

**Reporter: by Erica Minneman**

The Millennial Piano Student differs from piano students of previous generations in many ways. As piano teachers, we are called to teach fundamental piano skills in a variety of ways so as to meet the needs of diverse students. These projects, discussed by teachers in breakout sessions, are examples of ways in which we can teach today’s students essential skills in ways they find meaningful.

Craig Vickio, in the keynote address, outlined several unique characteristics of millennial generation students. He described students born since 1982 as comfortable with structure, team-oriented, techno-savvy, and sheltered. Vickio also suggested these students need to be challenged to take ownership of their education and to develop independence. The following projects discussed at the conference breakout session are organized according to the characteristics of the millennial student to which they apply.

**Creating Structure, Inspiring Organization**

Dr. Vickio pointed out that today’s piano students are comfortable with structure. They enjoy knowing exactly what is expected and frequently feel uncomfortable in unstructured situations. Through these pedagogy projects, we can provide students with needed structure or challenge them to create their own structure within open-ended assignments.

1. *Syllabus and project structure*. Several teachers emphasized the importance of providing students with syllabi that are highly structured. By carefully outlining project requirements and expectations, teachers can facilitate student work.

2. *Piano pedagogy notebook*. Many piano pedagogy courses require that students develop a notebook of materials relating to music teaching. Course notes, handouts, projects, music reviews, etc. frequently form large parts of these notebooks. The notebook can be a valuable reference tool for the student long after the course is over. Often, millennial students are uncomfortable with the freedom involved in selecting materials to include in their notebooks. By providing students with notebook models or giving students lists of types of materials to include, teachers can help students develop their own structure with this project.

3. *Repertoire lists*. Several teachers indicated that they ask students to compile repertoire lists of elementary, intermediate, and advanced level pieces. Some teachers give the projects to student groups, assigning one student to each style period. This type of highly structured project appeals to millennial students.

4. *Discovering resources*. Making an annotated bibliography of library materials that relate to piano pedagogy helps students learn about pedagogical topics and provides awareness of valuable resources. At the same time, this project can help students develop organizational skills.

5. *Video self-evaluation of teaching*. In this project, piano pedagogy students are required to record lessons or segments of lessons that they teach which they then review to provide a self-evaluation of their work. Students are instructed to include positive qualities that they demonstrate in teaching and areas that they feel need improvement. This open-ended project can be given a structure that appeals to millennial students by providing them with a checklist form to guide their self-evaluation process.

6. *Design a beginning piano method book*. The name of this project says it all! Students develop the music, explanations of concepts, and exercises used to teach a beginning student. Moreover, they must develop organizational skills as they order materials in a logical teaching progression.

**Fostering Teamwork, Independence and Creativity**

All students benefit from being able to work well individually and in groups with their peers. Millennial students enjoy working in teams with other students, but frequently feel uncomfortable working independently. Some of the projects below can be used to capitalize on students’ team building skills; others are specifically designed to help students achieve greater independence and creativity.

* *Team method reviews*. Teachers can foster teamwork by requiring each student to review method books or other materials with another classmate. Students tend to think more deeply about the materials being studied when they can discuss their ideas with a colleague than they do when they work alone. They also tend to develop their own ideas about materials, rather than merely adopting opinions found in books and internet articles.
* *Jazz improvisation teams*. A group piano teacher at one breakout session has had much success in team building through a project involving jazz improvisation. In this project, students are grouped as trios: one student plays a bass line, one comps jazz chords, and one improvises using the blues scale. Students develop skills in working together musically, communicating verbally about music, and helping one another learn to play better.
* *Team composition project*. Using WebCT or Blackboard, one group piano student posts a theme he has composed. Each student in the class downloads the student’s melody and creates his own variation on the theme, which he then posts back to the group. Students then discuss the theme and the variations created by classmates over the internet.
* *Developing a philosophy of teaching*. In this project, students are asked to elucidate their personal philosophy of teaching. Teachers can stimulate students’ thought processes by posing specific questions, such as: Who should you teach? What topics should piano students learn? What lesson format(s) should be used? What music should students learn? Why is music education important? This project challenges students to think independently about music learning and to present and defend their opinions concerning piano teaching.
* *Composition for the piano studio*. Several piano pedagogy teachers indicated that they emphasize student composition in projects. One teacher asks students to compose pieces of various levels of difficulty. This helps students more deeply understand the demands of different difficulty levels and fosters their creativity. Another teacher requires piano pedagogy students to compose scale accompaniments.

**Encouraging Student Ownership**

Today’s piano students are often receptive to guidance from authority figures. However, they have little experience with forging their own paths. By developing projects that encourage students to take ownership of their education, we give students the opportunity to build confidence and self-reliance.

* *Curricula that meet student interests*. One teacher said that she has graduate piano pedagogy students fill out a survey on the first day of class to learn what the students hope to learn from the class. The teacher then uses this information to mold course content.
* *Exploring your past*. In this project, each piano pedagogy student is asked to recall a piece that he was successful in playing in the past and present it to his peers. In the presentation, the student discusses what he was able to accomplish through his study of the piece and how he did it. This project helps students develop ownership of their musical development.

**Teaching through “Real World” Projects**

Dr. Vickio described students of the current generation as sheltered. Because they grew up in protected environments, many millennial students lacked opportunities for developing problem solving skills. Piano teachers can facilitate the development of these vital skills through projects based on “real world” scenarios.

* *Students interviewing students*. Today’s piano pedagogy students can learn about the needs of millennial piano students by interviewing pre-college and adult leisure piano students. Through asking open-ended questions, piano pedagogy students can learn about what piano students value about their current teacher and music study.
* *Parent interviews*. Piano teachers are part of a service industry, and parents of piano students are their clients. Piano pedagogy students gain valuable information about how to be successful business people and teachers by interviewing parents to discover what they value in a teacher, what they feel is important to their child’s music study, and what they have found to be successful with their child.
* *Group piano tutoring internship*. At some schools, piano pedagogy students serve as tutors for group piano students who fail their piano proficiency examinations. The tutor is responsible for giving the group piano student individualized instruction on materials selected and provided by the group piano instructor. This provides piano pedagogy students the opportunity to work with intermediate level college-aged piano students.
* *Master class series*. To facilitate this project the piano pedagogy instructor invites local piano teachers to send elementary and intermediate piano students to perform in master classes taught by piano pedagogy students. Piano pedagogy students benefit not only from the opportunity to teach in a master class situation; they also have the opportunity to observe and analyze the teaching of their peers.
* *Group class series*. Through this project, piano pedagogy students provide group classes for local piano students. The piano pedagogy teacher contacts local piano instructors to recruit pre-college piano students to participate in the classes. Piano students are carefully assigned to groups of six based on the length of their piano study, their age, and the musical concepts that they have learned. Piano pedagogy students develop a curriculum, select materials for the classes, and teach all class segments. Each group class is organized around a theme (i.e. review of 4ths and 5ths), and class activities include sight-reading, theory, ear training, ensemble, technique, and creative activities. All class teaching is video taped, and class teachers review the tapes together to determine what activities worked well and which could be improved. The teaching team then plans the next class.
* *Design a piano studio or a community music school*. In each of these projects, students are required: to create studio policies, a sample budget, and marketing strategies for the business; to select equipment and materials used in the business; and to describe how physical space in the studio or school with be utilized. One teacher interviews each student about his or her studio plan, asking probing questions and generally playing devil’s advocate.
* *Networking for the future collegiate teacher*. By having piano pedagogy students work as interns with local teachers or requiring student attendance at conference sessions and performances, the pedagogy teacher can help students learn to make the personal contacts that are necessary for success as a collegiate teacher.
* *Adjudication preparation*. Piano pedagogy students observe adjudicators at festivals and competitions and give written commentary on how the adjudicator interacts with the student, the types of comments made to the student, and the criteria used in judging.
* *Professional development projects*. Conference attendees mentioned several projects that help piano pedagogy students develop materials that will help them to secure employment. Some teachers have students prepare resumes. Others require that students develop teaching portfolios for MNTA certification. Additional professional materials that frequently are evaluated by piano pedagogy instructors include studio websites, online job portfolios, and online piano studio marketing materials.
* *Teaching preparation exercises*. To help student teachers learn how to plan lessons, one teacher has piano pedagogy students do research on several intermediate level pieces. Students research and report information concerning the piece’s composer, level of difficulty, and technical demands. Finally, the student lists what he or she would address when teaching the piece.
* *Intermediate repertoire study*. In this project, piano pedagogy students learn to play various intermediate level piano pieces and then receive lessons on the music from both their pedagogy and applied piano instructors. After having lessons on the music, these student teachers are well prepared to teach the works to their own students.
* *Piano technique scavenger hunt*. One of the most important skills of a piano teacher is the ability to find music that will challenge or reinforce specific technical skills. In this project, students are given a list of technical problems. They must then find repertoire pieces that could be used to help a student overcome each technical challenge.
* *Mix and match methods, or the Supplement game*. In this project, the pedagogy instructor has students explore beginning piano methods while imagining how different materials could be used to supplement or complement one another.
* *Modifying lesson plans*. Piano teachers must be prepared to teach students with a variety of different strengths and weaknesses. To help pedagogy students become flexible in teaching essential skills to a variety of students, one teacher gives a project in which students develop a basic lesson plan for a beginning student and then modifies it to meet the needs of a dyslexic student. The same basic lesson plan could be modified again to be used with an ADD/ADHD student.

**Challenging the Techno-Savvy Student**

Millennial piano students are frequently very adept at using modern technology. The internet and computer technology have always been a part of most of their lives. Projects can help students learn how to use technology effectively to do anything from creating Power Point tutorials to advertising their private studio online.

1. *Creating student tutorials*. One piano pedagogy teacher requires that students use Power Point to create three student tutorials, one for an elementary piano student, one for an intermediate student, and one for an advanced student. Tutorial slides include information used to introduce a new repertoire piece, review an old piece, or complete a creative activity.

2. *Creating a website*. Several teachers give projects in which piano pedagogy students develop websites.

3. Using the iPod for practice. One teacher designed a project in which students are challenged to find innovative ways to use the iPod in their practice.

4. *Dream Studio Grant Proposal*. In this project, students are required to write a grant proposal to obtain financing for equipment used to enhance their teaching or studio operations. Equipment listed in the proposal can include hardware, software, and keyboards. Pedagogy students may choose to request equipment for use in studio marketing or operations, professional development, group teaching, or student performances. Pedagogy students research current technology and resources, list skills that they will need to develop in order to use the equipment, provide a time frame for gaining these skills, articulate how student-learning outcomes will be enhanced by the materials, and give the total cost of the equipment.

5. *Design a piano lab*. A teacher requires that pedagogy students provide a plan for a complete piano lab, including all essential equipment. Students are required to keep all purchases within a specified budget.

6. *Student designed independent projects*. Pedagogy students frequently have better ideas about how to incorporate technology into their teaching than their instructors do. Consequently, some pedagogy teachers let students design and execute their own technology projects.

7. *Putting Music Theory Software in Context*. In this project, pedagogy students fully explore music theory software programs and then determine how concepts presented and tested in the software correspond to and align with concepts that appear in the state music teachers’ theory syllabus.

8. *Evaluating websites*. As preparation for this project, teachers lead class discussions in which students learn how evaluate the credibility of a variety of websites. Then students explore the internet, select a few websites, and evaluate them. The project culminates with in-class tours of selected websites and discussions of the credibility and value of the sites.

Interestingly, several teachers mentioned that they found their students to be too technology-savvy. To make sure that students explore a variety of resources when preparing papers and assignments, some teachers require that students cite at least two non-internet sources.

The many projects discussed in breakout sessions give specific ways in which piano pedagogy and group piano instructors can meet the needs of millennial piano students. By building on their characteristic strengths and bolstering their weaknesses, college teachers can prepare today’s piano student to meet the needs of future generations.

**Erica Minneman** is a piano teacher, accompanist, and organist in Tacoma, WA. She earned master’s degrees in piano pedagogy and piano performance from the University of Illinois and a doctorate from the University of Oklahoma. Teaching piano and music theory, Minneman has been a faculty member at Georgia State University, Georgia Southwestern State University, and the University of Puget Sound. Minneman is an active adjudicator and has authored articles on piano teaching appearing in *Piano Pedagogy Forum*. Honored for excellence in teaching, Minneman received the Provost’s Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award at the University of Oklahoma and was named to the List of Teachers Ranked as Excellent by Their Students at the University of Illinois. Minneman has enjoyed teaching ISYM piano camps eight times in the past nine years.

**Discussion Group: *Group Piano and the Millennial Student***

**Reporter: Lesley Sisterhen**

On Saturday, August 5, participants in the 2006 GP3 Conference broke into seven discussion groups to converse about the topic of “group piano and the millennial student.” Much of the conversation that occurred during the breakout sessions revolved around issues presented during previous sessions on the millennial student. On the previous day, Craig Vickio had given an overview of characteristics of the new generation of students. A panel discussion on Saturday morning about group piano and the millennial student also provided fuel for discussion.

Given the broad nature of the topic, a diverse range of issues was addressed among the seven discussion groups. Prior to the conference, participants had been asked to bring ideas for projects or assignments that they have used in their group piano classes that seem to work particularly well with today’s generation of students. After sharing these ideas, participants conferred about the following issues: characteristics of the millennial student and how these affect group piano teaching strategies; changes in technology that affect group piano classes; what kinds of skills are most important to implement in class piano, such as theory, aural skills, and accompanying; and problems that arise in the setup of a typical four-semester sequence of class piano.

**Activities for today’s group piano classes**

Teachers were asked to bring their own ideas for activities or projects that are useful for today’s group piano students. Linda Owen, who teaches at the University of Central Oklahoma, uses what she referred to as the “chopsticks project” on the first day of class. For this activity, she teaches students to play “Chopsticks,” which most students have already heard. Students can be taught by rote to play the piece in the key of C by only using finger 2 with both hands. This motivating and enjoyable activity may be used to reinforce the names of notes on the keyboard. Once students learn the piece, Dr. Owen teaches a simple accompaniment using alternating hands on the tonic and dominant notes C and G. Half of the class then plays the melody while the other half plays the simple accompaniment.

Carlyn Morenus from Illinois State University enjoys teaching jazz scatting with her group piano classes. The students listen to pre-recorded MIDI backgrounds and record their own improvisation. Another teacher has his students perform for a fundraiser. Using the Hal Leonard book *Your First Fake Book*, the students improvise two-hand accompaniments while singing.

Students are often motivated by games or competitions. One instructor plays the game of “Jeopardy” to reinforce scale fingering. In this version of the game, students play scales for 200 points each and the winners receive brownies. Another participant came up with a version of “musical chairs” that incorporates an improvisation activity. In this game, one student improvises and then comes to a sudden stop while the other students in the class rush to find a chair. The student who does not get a chair then becomes the next improviser.

**Characteristics of the millennial student**

During the presentation on millennial students, Craig Vickio mentioned that one characteristic of students in this generation is their need for connection with other people and their typically team-oriented approach to learning. Teachers in one discussion group agreed that this characteristic intensified the need for using grouping and partnering activities in group piano. It is well documented that partnering is one of the most effective means of learning, and teachers agreed that most of their students were comfortable working in pairs or small groups.

Most millennial students are techno-savvy. Given the interest and ability of today’s student in using technology, some of the discussion groups debated the role of technology in today’s group piano classroom. Many students now own iPods, and some participants wondered how they might be used in group piano classes.

Valerie Cisler from the University of Nebraska at Kearney suggested that students could bring in pieces that have been downloaded to their iPod and transcribe them. She added that students enjoy this activity because it allows them to feel successful when they see the end result. Ann Porter, who teaches at the University of Cincinnati, mentioned that a piece of music can be automatically transcribed if it exists in an mp3 format by using a notation program such as Finale or Sibelius. The extra editing that is required makes this an educational activity, and Porter uses this process with her music education students. When questioned about copyright laws, Porter stated that using the transcribed piece for study purposes is fine, but problems arise when the pieces are used for performance.

A participant in another group stated that music files relevant to the group class can be converted to mp3 files and then downloaded to the iPod. A free converter is available from iTunes. For teachers in labs using 3.5” disk drives, it is possible to download the files from these disks by using an external drive that is plugged into the computer. The files can be converted to an mp3 format and then made available to iPods.

**What skills should be taught in group piano?**

Teachers from various discussion groups agreed that aural skills and music theory concepts should be integrated into class piano courses. By investigating the relationship between these skills, teachers can illustrate the relevance of piano skills across the music curriculum. At one university, all NASM standards for keyboard are fulfilled through aural skills classes rather than class piano. The instructor who represented this particular university explained that students meet three times per week for this class and are required to work at the keyboard during one of the class days each week.

The importance of teaching accompanying was highlighted during the panel discussion on Saturday morning. Research findings by Jamila McWhirter, Karen Beres, and Victoria Johnson illustrated the fact that accompanying should be taught in class piano. Accompanying is a practical skill that is used often by professional musicians. For future choral directors, the importance of developing accompanying skills becomes especially evident at competitions where the director often doubles as the accompanist. This point led teachers in various discussion groups to address the skill of accompanying and how it should be included in a class piano curriculum.

In the groups that addressed this topic, few teachers presently include accompanying in the curriculum. One individual suggested that vocalists should learn to accompany themselves. If the written accompaniment is too difficult for the students’ current skill level, they may work instead on analyzing the harmony and playing “boom-chuck” patterns while they sing. Another suggestion was for students to record part of an accompaniment on a sequencer and then play the other part along with the recording.

Group piano teachers differ widely in the amount of time spent on repertoire pieces during a group piano class. Some people were interested in hearing other teachers’ perceptions of the importance of learning repertoire and how many pieces should be assigned during a semester. Carlyn Morenus espoused her philosophy that “we are not teaching these students how to be pianists, but how to be functional at the piano.” Therefore, she felt that more emphasis should be placed on functional skills rather than polishing solo repertoire. Other teachers in the discussion group argued that repertoire can be a motivational tool for class piano students and is therefore one of the most important components of the curriculum.

**Problems with the typical class piano sequence**

In two separate discussion groups, some teachers lamented the perceived problems with a typical four-semester sequence of class piano. They noted that after completing their requirements in piano, most students do not continue to practice at the instrument. By the time these students graduate, their piano skills have often deteriorated considerably. The subsequent lack of keyboard skills may have a negative impact on the student’s ability to obtain or be successful in a teaching position, especially for choral directors. One teacher remarked that it might be beneficial for students to delay enrolling in group piano until the last two years of school. Another solution cited by a participant was to require students to utilize piano skills regularly in upper-division music courses.

It was noted in one discussion group that group piano might be more beneficial if it is offered after freshman theory is passed. In addition, piano skills should ideally be addressed across the music curriculum rather than only in class piano settings so that the usefulness of these skills is reinforced. The biggest challenge faced by many teachers of class piano is knowing how to teach all of the necessary piano skills in only four semesters.

**Summary**

Deciding what should be included in a piano curriculum is a difficult task when there are so many skills that must be included. A high priority should be placed on the practical skill of playing piano accompaniments. Aural skills and theory concepts should also be integrated into group piano classes for a well-rounded music education.

Group piano teachers today face many challenges, not the least of which is helping music majors to understand the importance and relevance of learning basic piano skills. Instructors may be able to reach the millennial generation by incorporating technology such as iPods into their classroom activities or placing students into small groups for team-oriented activities. In order for students to be successful in class piano, today’s teachers must analyze the traditional structure of group piano teaching and decide how effective these strategies are with the current student population. The need for basic piano skills remains the same for professional musicians in the millennial generation, but the way in which these skills are taught may need to be modified.

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