

MTNA Webinar May 24, 2019

“Transforming Elementary-Level Music Instruction”

Presented by Lori Rhoden

Please feel free to email me if you have any more questions. lrhoden@bsu.edu

Chat questions

1. Could you clarify the difference between microbeats and melodic rhythm?

Macrobeats are larger pulse beats within the tempo of the music. Microbeats would be a division of the macrobeat into smaller units, usually either duple or triple. There could be multiple levels of microbeats, but generally we think of the macrobeat as the beat and the microbeats as the division of the beat. An example would be compound meter, in which the dotted quarter note is the macrobeat, and the microbeats are the three eighth notes. Depending upon the tempo of the piece and the meter, these levels could change so that you had a larger macrobeat and different level of microbeats. Melodic rhythm refers to the actual sequencing of different note values that create the melody.

See this link for the Gordon Institute’s explanation of these.

<https://giml.org/mlt/lisa-rhythmcontent/>

2. Does every student need all of these steps, or do some students just "get it?"

Some students will definitely just “get it” and make transfers and patterns in their own experience. But there are many students who are not able to make these transfers, so I believe it is important to lead all students to be successful and not just the more talented ones. Linking the sounds with the syllables and symbols then helps all students be able to read and perform music fluently. Even students who seem to get things easily still need a system of counting rhythm and a system for comprehending pitch. Once a student is understanding all of this and demonstrating the ability to count and perform rhythmically, they don’t need to go through all of these steps all the time.

3. Is there single hand work on five notes on staff before using combined hands?

When I am teaching 5 finger patterns on the keyboard, I leave it up to the students at first. Generally, I start with hands separate but I also tell them that if they want to play both hands they can. Some of them can definitely do this. My goal is for them to be able to do both hands together as soon as possible. I am a big promoter of hands together as much as possible at the elementary level – they need to develop this coordination and especially reading synthesis from the beginning.

4. Do you find that learning single hand learning ends up being using both hands that you learn 3 pieces instead?

I have students play hands together as soon as they can, very early on in the method books, and together in rote playing as possible. I do not follow the instructions in most method books that tell students to play one hand at a time and then play the other, then put them together. I believe that playing hands together forces the students to read patterns and intervals, while hands separate encourages letter-name and individual note reading. Hands together will also force them to have to play a little slower but this is fine. If a student needs to temporarily play one hand to discern a pattern or fingering, they should focus on a limited area of the music and then immediately put their hands back together on this same portion. Intermediate and advanced students will need to do more hands separately playing to master more refined control of all musical elements, but again, they need to isolate small sections and immediately put their hands back together.

5. How do you send recordings home if they don't use CD's?

So far my students have all had CD players, so we have not had to venture beyond that yet. It is a good point, and it is definitely possible I am going to need to provide other media options this fall. There are lots of possibilities to disburse files in this digital age – any of them should work. Since this is something that we created just for our students, we will go with what works for them.

6. Some method books include online recordings. What about Suzuki?

Yes, many of the commercial products do have online options. Each of them usually is focused on the methodology of that particular method book or series. If

you don't find that these do what you want, then you can make your own recordings for your students. I am not trained in Suzuki.

7. When should students switch over to counting with numbers?

I think this depends upon the student. Some would be ready to do this very soon, but most would need to wait until they are really comfortable with the counting system you are using, in my case, takadimi. Rhythm counting systems provide a way for the student to decipher the rhythm. With both hands playing at the same time, obviously you can't speak the rhythm syllables for both hands at the same time. But if the students understand the rhythms and can perform them accurately, then they can start counting just the beats or subdivision of the beat, rather than counting the specific melodic rhythms. You can offer it as an option once it seems that students are doing well with their comprehension of the rhythms.

8. Since you have students use lots of books do you loan them or have them buy?

I have a library of supplementary materials that I loan to students to take home each week for sightreading. Most parents can't afford the number of pieces I want them to be playing each week. I usually have them buy their method book and any theory/notespeller books. Once they get up to the intermediate level, I have them start purchasing mostly all of their music.

9. Most students in my area use the Kodaly system at school. Would takadimi or du da de be less confusing?

I don't really know the answer to this question. There likely will be some confusion if they are counting one way at school and another in lessons, but I think this happens with some regularity. As with anything, try it and see what works for you and what does not work.

10. How do I help students who can't hold a pitch?

Very few people are what we call "tone deaf" and this is usually due to some sort of anatomical problem in which they literally are not able to hear sound properly or produce sound properly. Most of the ones who don't appear to be able to hold a pitch have not found their singing voice. I would use lots of experimenting with their voices such as glissando random sounds to get them to see how to make their voice go up and down. If you want them to sing a song, ask them to start it and you join in singing with them at whatever pitch they use. Don't force them to find

your pitch in order to be able to sing with you if they are having trouble matching pitch. Lots of practice here will help them find their singing voice.

When I interview students for lessons, I do a lot of listening tests such as up/down, high/middle/low, same different, find the wrong note in a familiar song, etc. Most students do fine on these. If a student does poorly, I sometimes council the parents to wait a little for piano lessons. Hopefully some more music experiences at school, church, and in community will help them begin to hear things better before they start piano lessons.