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The Group Method of Piano Instruction:
What May Be Taught and How to Teach it

prepared for

Dr. William Trantham, Advisor
Special Studies in Music
Honors Seminar
May 23, 1967

by

Carolyn Yeldell

Honors Paper #52

The Group Method of Piano Instruction:
What May be Taught and How to Teach it

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The Group Method of Piano Instruction:
What May be Taught and How to Teach it

Piano teaching is a Classical profession, and, as is often the case for other of the noble and age-old orbits of life, it tends often to lose its inventiveness and "fizz" and to forsake these "learning guarantees" for only the barest gray essentials of the pianists' art. In recent years advancements have been made to revitalize the piano teachers' curriculum, one of the most successful being the group teaching method. After hearing much unfavorable criticism and only bits of praise for the group piano method, the writer was motivated to take on the study of the group method in depth, hoping to glean from the research some insights into what may effectively be taught in groups and how to successfully teach it.

It is the purpose of the writer in preparing this research paper to present to the interested reader these findings. The paper is aimed primarily toward the teachers of children, but also includes objectives for teaching the high school and college preparatory student.

Learning to play the piano is, at best, a creative learning experience which involves essentially three elements--searching, playing and listening. The underlying objective should be the consistent striving for the productive mind. The most assured and efficient way to accomplish this is the small, homogeneous cooperative group where individual attention can be focused not only on individual performance but also on an individual listening process and to

individual queries from which the entire group may learn.¹ Any size group, from two pupils up, may be considered a class. The size may be adjusted as the teacher becomes more confident and accustomed to these method of instruction.²

The young mind is the most creative and imaginative instrument in existence. Therefore, why should music be taught as if it were a body of scientific facts established before music began? We want humility and respect for the "better and spirit of music," but not without daring, imagination and challenge. The distinguishing element is perspective. The creative person who is constantly preoccupied with details--fingers and notes--without a perspective in which to place the less interesting part of his devotion--practice--usually becomes a "drop-out." Let compositional theories and performance skill be a search for truth not a problem of routine.³

The teacher must encourage the students to be creative. All the group should ponder over questions and answer from the class. The teacher should ask more questions than he answers, and should challenge a student's listening not just to performance, but to the building of a performance. Listening and examining problems on their aural merit must have every opportunity to develop it a discriminating ear is to be trained.⁴

With these unalterable standards fixed in mind let us proceed to the first year student's group.

No age is too early to begin piano lessons.⁵ The earlier the

¹Duckworth, Guy, Music Educators Journal, Vol. II, pp. 23-24.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁵Maier, Guy, The Piano Teacher's Companion, Mills Music, Inc., 1963, p. 83.

better, if the child is musical and eager to learn, and if the teacher is stimulating and imaginative enough.⁶ But the teacher must realize that expression at the piano during the pre-school years is purely physical--the joy of swing (relaxation), movement and sound--therefore all stiffness and conscious striving must be guarded against.⁷ Those unyielding muscles are caused by self-consciousness and fear. If the beginners are taught in small groups, self-consciousness will soon drop away, and concentrated listening and eagerness to participate in the music will take its place.⁸ The student must be carefully made to forget himself, and this is best accomplished by the relating the piano playing to his everyday life--its thrills and excitements--and striving to successfully express these feelings through the piano. Unconsciously, the pupils will relax and be more readily taught and quicker to respond.⁹

At the very first lesson the piano should be introduced to the group. This is most quickly accomplished by letting the class observe the keyboard, etc. and see that the patterns of the black notes are the most obvious of the keys. The beginner should start on the black scale keys and be kept there for a month or two.¹⁰ Black key fingering becomes automatic at once. When the white keys E ~~sharp~~ and B are added to complete the scale, they are played by thumbs or fifth fingers.¹¹

At this same time, the teacher must make sure that the pupils know to which hand he is referring, when he calls out left hand and right hand in giving instructions. This is readily learned through

⁶Maier, op. cit., p. 83.

⁷Ibid., p. 83.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Trantham, Dr. William, "Class Discussion", Special Studies.

¹⁰Maier, op. cit., p. 64.

¹¹Ibid.

fun games such as "Simon Says."¹² The numbers of the fingers may also be taught this way. Example:

"Simon says Right Hand out!" "Simon says Left Hand out!"
"Simon says second finger, Left Hand, out," etc.

Periodic "tests" should be given to the group--tests of both imaginative creativeness and also progressive ear training. Tests for determining high and low pitches, short and long distances between two notes of the interval, parallel and contrary motion and loud and soft, may be administered both individually and collectively. Another good idea is to ask the students to "sing middle C" (etc.) as they come into the lesson, testing for absolute pitch and helping train the ear.¹³

Among objectives of technique to be introduced to the first year students are the simple rhythmic patterns as follows:¹⁴

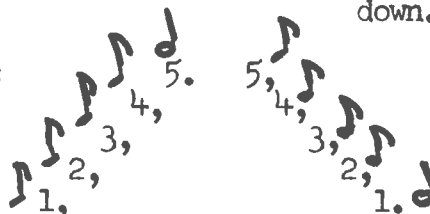
Write on the chalk board while singing numbers:

5.
4,
3,
2,
1,

Then write and sing 5,
4,
3,
2,
1.




Sing: Up, Then come
Climb, climb, run-
Climb, ning
Climb, down.

Now add notes near numbers:

Musical notation for numbers 1-5. The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 are arranged in an ascending curve. Below each number is a musical note: a quarter note for 1, a quarter note for 2, a quarter note for 3, a quarter note for 4, and a half note for 5. The notes are connected by a line that follows the curve of the numbers. The same notation is repeated for a descending sequence from 5 to 1.

¹²Bowden, Evelyn, Piano Pedagogy Class Notes, April, 1967.
¹³Pace, Robert, Workshop Notes, February, 1967.
¹⁴"Keyboard Experience and Piano Class Instruction," Music Educators National Conference, Washington D. C., 1957, pp. 9-10.

Sing and clap the kinds of notes. "Run, run, run, run, slow note, run, run, run, run, slow note." (Be sure to clap-hold on the "slow note.")

The beginners should be able to easily learn simple rhythmic values and patterns by relating physical activity to the patterns such as  "walk, walk, walk, walk" or  "running, running, running, running," or  "walk, walk, walk, hold."¹⁵ Rhythmic sense is also taught through practicing simple rhythmic movements (two-four, three-four, six-eight and four-four time) in bending the torso, in walking, in skipping, and running, and above all--since the arm muscles are probably the freest swinging muscles of all, and the ones used for instrumental playing--in exercises for the arms, singly and together.¹⁶ The earlier mentioned rhythmic patterns should be taught, though, before time signatures. Rhythm bands will generally prove another enjoyable and successful way of introducing rhythm.¹⁷

Sight reading must be included as a technical teaching objective in group methods, although it obviously contributes to theoretical facility. Sight reading should begin at the first lesson and the teacher must never cease for a moment to drill on it.¹⁸ One of the most important paths to follow is the interval "feel" road. Show the beginners the notation of any simple third, then without looking at the keyboard let them play any white note third with any fingers anywhere on the piano, progressing steadily to seconds, fourths and so on.¹⁹

While practicing sight reading, the students should be encouraged not to look at their hands. Guy Maier has solved this problem with his

¹⁵"Keyboard Experience and Piano Class Instruction," op. cit. pp. 10-11.

¹⁶Maier, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁷Pace, op. cit.

¹⁸Maier, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁹Ibid.

own son by inventing the "Chinese Guillotine" which is simply a piece of cardboard over the keyboard with two pieces of string attached and hung over the ears. The fateful Chinese Guillotine does its deadly work by cutting off the player's vision of the keyboard.²⁰ Children usually love this (boys particularly).

Another excellent Maier idea for sight reading is "blind flying" which in simpler terms is playing prescribed notes in clusters or phrases or chords with out looking at the keys. The teachers get as much "kick" from making up the exercises as the children do in working them out.²¹ A sample exercise for "blind flying" might proceed as follows: instruct the student to find all groups of two black notes without looking and rhythmically "squash" them up and down the keyboard (ready, let's squash!). Not only does this exercise compliment sight reading, but it also proves a relaxing, concentrating process,²² and during this time automatic keyboard control and pianistic facility are developing simultaneously.

As the students are beginning work at the piano from the very first, it is perhaps a good procedure to begin discovering notes at the earliest lessons.²³ This has proven to be very advisable especially with young children, although their earliest associations with notation may be made very casual like a "picture" of the melody line played.²⁴ This "rote" procedure is obviously successful, and the pupil at the same time, is being made aware of the inextricable relation between the printed page and keyboard. But it should be coupled from the start with notation. The longer an association between symbols of notation

²⁰Maier, op. cit. p. 6.

²¹Ibid., p. 5.

²²Ibid.

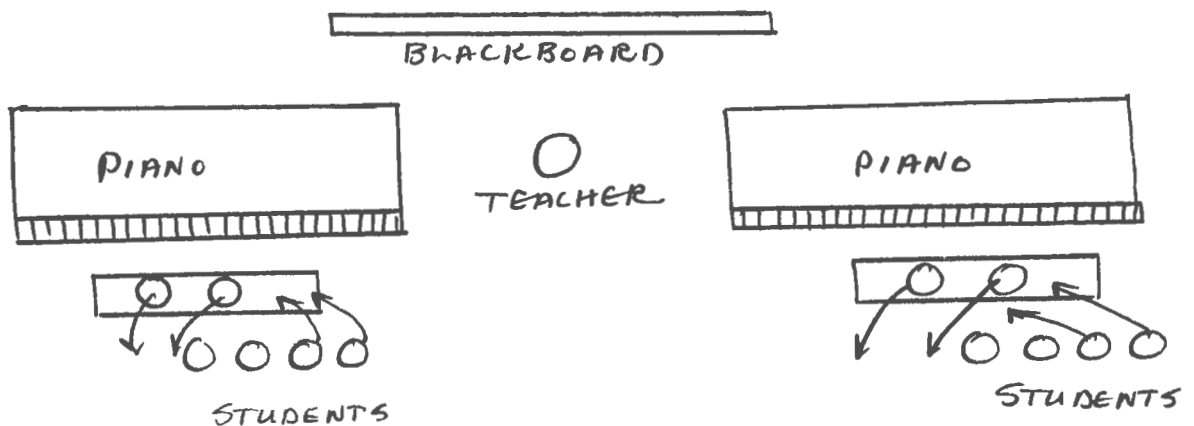
²³Ibid.

²⁴Bowden, op. cit.

and the student's aural and physical approach to the piano is delayed, the more difficult it becomes for students to adjust and coordinate the simultaneous reading-playing process.²⁵ The teacher should be constantly watching to make sure that the student is looking ahead when sight reading. This helps facilitate more speed and a steady rhythmic beat.

Touch and tone technique are principles that should be encouraged from the earliest lessons. Two of the simplest exercises advocated by leading group teachers are "skip-flips" and the "lame-duck."²⁶

"Skip-flips" are used to teach getting from one place to another in a hurry. First, relax. Always a loose elbow but strong fingers. The left hand and right hand begin with the third finger, hands separately.²⁷ Choose two notes at least the interval of a third apart. Play the first one, flip quickly to the second note and stay for a second, but do not play it. Play and flip simultaneously. After a few flips, play the second note to test for accuracy. A game may be made with this technique study called "catch me."²⁸ The teacher may work with each student separately ^{at} the pianos using the following suggested plan for taking turns in all keyboard activities.²⁹



²⁵Maier, op. cit. p. 70.

²⁶Ibid.

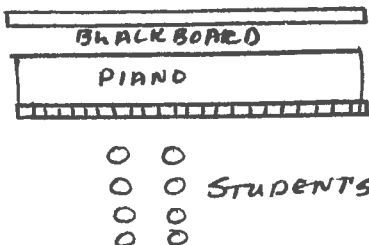
²⁷Bowden, op. cit.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Pace, op. cit.

The second finger exercise technique that may be taught is the "lame duck," or, for older students, termed the "up touch."³⁰ This two note phrase device is to teach the student how to get up out of the keys. It is accomplished by beginning with a loose elbow, and playing down on the second finger, holding it firm enough only to support the weight, and up on the third finger. Any two rote phrase may be used with this exercise. This should all be one gesture, down, up and done slowly at first. The student should begin and end with the finger in contact with the keys. There must be silence at the end of the two note phrase. The student should never thump out the second note if it fails to sound.³¹

Theory, though spoken of apart from technique in this paper, cannot be separated at any point from the beginning student's discovery of the fundamentals of piano playing. As before mentioned while speaking of sight reading and the "note-rote" dilemma, the teaching of notation should not be delayed for a steady diet of rote learning at anytime. In a few weeks when the students are ready, start notation.³² In groups, establish certain patterns of organization such as standing in groups of two in front of the piano as such:



Have them come to the piano in groups of two and play a group of notes--A,B,C,D,E--then the next group, etc. (use tricky slogans often to help the memory--"Hey Diddle Diddle, D's in the middle," etc.).³³ Teach notation and names of lines and spaces by intervals

³⁰Bowden, op. cit.

³¹Ibid.

³²Pace, op. cit.

³³Ibid.

and forget the "Every Good Boy Does Fine" routine. It is extremely too slow. Also teaching by melodic intervals as the music goes is good.

Use a blackboard to teach students to draw the treble and bass clef signs. Then ask them to write A,B,C,D,E,F,G in the treble, the same in the "middle" staff and lastly, in the bass.³⁴ Then have speed relays asking the group to write the letter names in the bass and treble clefs. The first one of the two students through, turns around first. Be excited about what the group is doing and about what you are asking them to do. Call the letter names with vitality and the students will respond with vitality. Point to lines and spaces and have the group shout the names. Flash cards are necessary and should be flashed quickly; when the students are playing they see the note for approximately one-hundredth of a second.³⁵ Then let the students "play work" with the flash cards themselves. This, too, makes a great game to be played alone. The student puts the ones he does right in the "good" pile, and the ones he misses in the "bad" pile. At the end of the first round, go over the bad pile until learned.³⁶ Flash cards are a good investment for each student and the parents should be encouraged to help his own child with the flash cards.

When speaking of noteheads and their values, call them always by their real name. It is good to make teaching colorful, but regretful when in the high school years to have to regress and say "I was only kidding; those are not fairy princesses after all but half notes."³⁷ Why not call them by their legitimate names from the first.

³⁴Pace, op. cit.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Bowden, op. cit.

³⁷Ibid.

As the students progress through the year they should do as much ensemble playing as possible. Duets, trios, etc., are always fun for all, and teach many aspects of musicianship.³⁸ Also valuable is the question and answer method of ensemble and composition combined, as one student plays a simple 2, 3, 4, or 5 note phrase and another student replies with a complementary answer.³⁹

Not to be overlooked particularly now as music is more commonly being used with these children, are the terms and symbols found in music. Both of them offer much to the accurate interpretation of the piece, for which the teacher must continually strive.⁴⁰ Encourage the group to offer creative ideas as to what words or symbols might mean, and use their ideas, if correct, to describe the same idea in other works. Also keep a good music dictionary near and an "unabridged" edition of another and compare both definitions, trying to relate the terms to familiar objects or ideas already formulated by everyday living.

A recital on which every student should participate may be held at any time that the students are introduced to their pieces, and know them well enough to perform for family and friends. Some pieces should always be taught to the group that can be enjoyed at a "coke and cookie" party.⁴¹ The students will enjoy being listened to and enjoy knowing that their songs are enjoyed. Most preparation for recital work will be done when the teacher meets with the students individually, but the group experience gives the students ample opportunity to perform their pieces before time for the other class

³⁸Bowden, op. cit.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Pace, op. cit.

⁴¹Ibid.

members and dismisses almost completely all "fright" on recital night.

If the preceeding plan has generally been followed during the first twelve months or "class term" it will be safe to assume that the students have a firm foundation in fundamentals, and everything "to be taught" following is directly connected with material learned thus far. Of course, variations in school situations and differences existing between groups must be carefully considered in regard to results possible at specific grade levels.⁴²

The suggested work is to be regarded only as a guide to instruction and should be adapted to fit the children and groups taught.⁴³ In many cases, it is hoped the group will be capable of additional work, and in this event it should be given as needed.

The succeeding early years of study, from middle elementary to upper elementary, are well prepared to explore new musical dimensions. The teacher will find himself constantly refering to past group meetings and earlier outcomes of instruction. This will certainly be true in the ear training studies.

One new aspect of ear training is the addition of dictation to the curriculum. With only the clef and beginning note given, the students should become adept at interval associations and be able to reproduce the sounds they hear, starting with a very simple melodic line and progressing to exercises using only interval association for recognition of placement on the staff.

In aural development, too, the group should become very familiar with major and minor sounds and the distinguishing characteristics

⁴²"Keyboard Experience and Piano Class Instruction," op. cit.

⁴³Ibid.

of both. With the introduction of scales, the actual "mechanics" of minor will best be learned, but at this point the group can learn to hear the difference. This is an excellent opportunity for creativity and early enhancement of interpretation as the students are asked to react to the way in which the music makes them feel--the mood the tune suggests. The teacher may play different, very original improvisations at the keyboard as the students, out of their seats, do what they can to best represent the character of sound. On sight, this may appear to be an interpretive dance class. Still, the children can learn happy sounds and sad sounds, major and minor (though minor, of course, may not be sad at all, i.e. some Russian folk melodies, etc.).

Now, what makes these slightly strange differences in sound? What an excellent introduction to scale playing--not to be taught all in one lesson, of course.

Scales should be thought of as scale formations and not just scales. As early, too, as reading notation is begun, scales can be taught to great advantage. After all, what makes up the sounds of the whole piece anyway? Let the group discover scales in their music, in hymnals--in conventional patterns at first, later to introduce modulation. The group should be quickly responsive to scale playing when shown its purpose and perspective to total musicianship and understanding of musical form.

One very successful method of understanding the scale pattern, once it has been lifted from the music, has been the tetra chord system, which teaches scales as two groups of two whole steps and one-half step aside with one whole step in between.⁴⁴ It may first

⁴⁴Bowden, op. cit.

be introduced using the fingering 5,4,3,2 (Left Hand), 2,3,4,5 (Right Hand), and omitting the thumb for awhile. Soon, though, the conventional scale fingering should be introduced and the scale formations may be used and understood both as ingredients of music and excellent finger drills.⁴⁵ Most important, make scale playing challenging, interesting, and fun (a most important aspect of success in scales is listening, keep in mind). An additional scale teaching and learning aid is blocked scales.⁴⁶ Properly practiced, blocked scales compel swift, hard thinking before each pattern is played.⁴⁷ The pupil is forced to concentrate every second, as the scale formations are played in groups, most often, of five and three, as clusters, using correct scale fingering.⁴⁸ At the same time, the student increases their scale speed beyond their's or their teacher's expectation, and they love the process. Let scale playing be a discovery. This can be accomplished by letting the student make up pieces using scales or perhaps two different scales at the same time.

For the advanced beginners and intermediate student, as these students are, scales should be learned in all major keys and the "white key" minors. The "circle of fifths" is an excellent way of explaining key relationship, but it need not be dryly explained. The circle is a very obvious pattern and easily discovered by the group with little "prodding", and ultimately stays with the students much longer than if merely explained as a remotely related part of music and taken completely aside from perspective.

⁴⁵Bowden, op. cit.

⁴⁶Maier, op. cit.

⁴⁷Ibid. p. 27.

⁴⁸Bowden, op. cit.

Maier suggests that minor scales should be taught first only in the harmonic form, and then only as lowerings of the third and sixth of the majors.⁴⁹ Minor scales should not be introduced as "relatives" such as C and A minor. It often befuddles students from the beginning. Instead the minors should be introduced as parallels as C major and C minor, G major and G minor, and so on. Later when harmonic minors are well learned, it is time enough to explain "natural" and "melodic" minor.⁵⁰ Explaining scales theoretically ultimately develops their technical benefit when the student progresses to more advanced theory.

Rhythm with "intermediate" level students includes mainly continued clapping and tapping and bodily response to rhythm. Also an interpretive opportunity for expression, as was the major and minor sounds, perhaps a tom-tom or clapping could be used as the group responds interpretively to rhythms.⁵¹

The blackboard can be used to great advantage, as can flash cards, for speed relays and drills in recognizing rhythms.

Syncopated rhythms will be found in much of the intermediate books and is best explained by counting in unison, or clapping and tapping the syncopated phrases. The student should be warned against three "sins" of syncopation: (1) dynamically accenting the syncopated note, because any syncopation is already stressed by its apparent rhythmic displacement, (2) Being in too much of a hurry to play the syncopation, (3) Learning the syncopation too soon.⁵² If learned correctly from the first, this explanation would not likely prove necessary, though.

⁴⁹Maier, op. cit. p. 28.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹"Keyboard Experience and Piano Class Instruction," op. cit., pp. 11-13.

⁵²Maier, op. cit. p. 67.

Rhythmic dictation is an excellent drill and test of understanding note values. During the intermediate years, rhythmic dictation should progress steadily to even the most complexly syncopated examples. The group may do this either at their seats or taking turns at the blackboard. Dictation is also a successful method of learning time signatures, and this might frequently be a drill in itself. Enthusiasm for learning would certainly be enhanced if these drills were incorporated into relay games and "shout when recognized" sports. Also having the students improvise a piece in the basic rhythm of a classical suite--such as minuet, sarabande, etc., is another excellent rhythmic study.

Technical studies in touch and tone should be added to the two earlier mentioned exercises of the first year. Their picturesque names should give the students a good idea of what to listen for in their playing.

The "ice-skater" is simply an up touch with four note phrases, getting up out of the keys. The right hand thumb goes down on any note on one, then second finger, third finger and up on four, playing and coming up at the same time. Descending, begin with five, transfer weight down to four, then three, up on two and then the thumb back at the beginning.⁵³

The "up-swing" is a beginning of chord technique. With the right hand on E and the left hand on C, begin with flat fingers even with the keys and elbows close to the body. As the interval is played, the body goes forward (bows to the piano) and the fingers come immediately to the tops of the keys with elbows up. As the

⁵³Bowden, op. cit.

student bows and plays, the elbows come up.*⁵⁴ The students should make big chord sounds with this exercise.

The "paint-brush" is also known as the "half way down" touch. The entire exercise is done *pianissimo*, very quickly stroking the key and only going halfway down into the key, to the "tone spot" and up. On both this exercise and the "up-swing," the student should "work" to pull sounds out of the piano, not to push them in. Three steps are involved in the "paint brush:" step 1, "Up swing" as before, go forward with the body, elbows up, step 2, The body comes back, elbows still up, fingers relaxing on the keys, step 3, Go in with the body again, very quickly, but the hands do not leave the keys and only push down half-way to make a very tiny, soft, brushed sound, and then back up to the surface of the keys.⁵⁵

Another good touch-tone exercise is "skip flips." With chords it is done exactly as two note skip flips are done, but flipping instead from one note to a chord. This, as are the other touch drills, is found very often in the student's music, and these spots may be "lifted" to create exercises of them and give the touch tone exercises greater value.

Additional technical work for intermediate students includes octave practice, for which is often suggested "thumb" octave practice because the loose, rotating thumb establishes the habit of shaking the octaves freely in impulses "out of the sleeves," thereby assisting relaxation and speed and endurance.⁵⁶ Especially in small hands, the *If a syncopated pedal can be used, do so. If not play without pedaling.

⁵⁴Bowden, op. cit.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Maier, op. cit.

thumb practice reduces tension. When the fifth finger is added, the octaves should be practiced by octaves, relaxing almost completely on the first count of each octave

and in different rhythm patterns as needed.⁵⁷

Introduction to the pedal should follow as early as possible, especially when the "up swing" and "paint brush" are being taught. The group may begin with single tones (later isolated chords): first putting down the damper pedal, two or three seconds later playing the single tone with fingers touching the keys before playing, and letting the arm bounce into the air and back into the lap the moment the sound is heard. Next, just sit and listen relaxedly, as the pedal is held, to the sustained sound. Practice this pp to ff with single and both hands in widely spread positions. The syncopated pedal may follow later, depending upon how much progress and coordinative ability the students exhibit. This pedal method first strikes the keys and instantly catches the tone with the pedal. The una corda should be used for a muted effect, mainly, not only for soft touches.⁵⁸

Theoretically, as well as technically, some reviewing back to fundamentals will be done at each lesson. This is necessary. Chords are a theoretical novelty to intermediate groups, though they should ~~leave~~ ^{have} already been experimenting with scale tones to form chords.⁵⁹

The composition of the simplest chord must be: hearing each note, singing each note, and controlling the chord muscularly with the fingers. First, the students should hear the sounds of the tonic chord. Then each note should be sung. Next, the notes are played quickly one after the other and then ⁿ simultaneously.⁶⁰ Bring to the attention

⁵⁷Bowden, op. cit.

⁵⁸Maier, op. cit. p. 22.

⁵⁹Axtens, Florence, Piano Class Instruction, Hawkes and Sons, London, p. 36.

⁶⁰Ibid. p. 36-37.

of the group that the triad is really only two thirds, and that the interval between the extremes is a perfect fifth. Triads should be practiced chromatically down and up. Also at this time, inversions may readily be explained and incorporated into exercises. Minor chords have a lowered third, just as the minor scale does, establishing a correlation of the term "minor." Diminished seventh chords should be easily understood when broken down into minor thirds (and when played chromatically or in skips all over the keyboard, are an excellent exercise for hand stretching).⁶¹ Again, exciting group drills may be "merely" dashing to the piano and building a diminished seventh chord on a given note. Learning is always more retainable when made impressive.

The tonic chord can be taught with the dominant, subdominant, and submediant chords as they relate to cadences. The authentic, perfect, half, deceptive and plagal cadences should be easily understood at this level by thorough explanation, and practiced in similar relays and group games. By this means the students themselves will be able to discover what is going on thus eliminating the dry theory subject.

Form and analysis is an interesting and exciting discovery to make in students' music. As each student plays for the class, the listeners can discuss the pieces' form and analyze it harmonically to some extent. This can also be done with the student's own pieces. (This constant creativity of the mind, needless to say, leaves the student no time to be preoccupied with anything other than the lesson). The pieces may be divided into phrases, and periods, etc. and sequences should easily be determined by groups. Compositional styles may be

⁶¹Maier, op. cit., p. 8.

discussed, too, leading into briefings in the history of music, its periods, and characteristic compositional techniques. These aspects never fail to add interest to music and aid the student to better musical interpretation immeasurably. ⁶²

Ensemble playing should be more a part of lesson time now in the intermediate level since chords and cadences have been introduced and improvisation and harmonization has been discussed before to some degree. This is especially enjoyable in groups, as the students may be moved from one part of the piano to another, thus guarding against any monotony of sitting in one place too long. Also the stimulation of having a partner is conducive to mental activity.⁶²

The question and answer idea of ensemble playing is exceptionally good creative training.⁶³ This is accomplished with two students at each piano and the question being consistently the same each time, but the answer different, and students taking turns answering the question.⁶⁴

A recital should be in the planning at the beginning of each term and the students should have their recital pieces from the beginning. If the recital pieces are difficult, be sure that all other music studied is easier--this is for contrast and relief. Recitals are necessary in that they "drive home" the necessity for constant, careful practice.⁶⁵ Too, recital pieces should never be assigned that are not completely capable of self analysis by the students.⁶⁶ A short, easy piece that is understood is much more practical than

⁶²Pace, Robert, "Greater Rewards Through Creative Piano Teaching," p. 6.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Maier, op. cit. p. 56.

⁶⁶Pace, op. cit.

a big, showy one that is poorly performed because of a lack of understanding.

A week or two before the recital, the teacher may want to make as many occasions as possible for the students to play the numbers before different groups of people. Being a part of a piano groups' instruction class relieves much of this tension in itself.

It should not be surprising to discover, when reaching the Junior High and High School levels of group instruction, that the bulk of all group objectives is review and a steady progression, in varying degrees of difficulty, following the same paths of early discovery. More advanced drills in technique and theory will at this point vary widely with the progress of the instruction groups.

There will always be a place for private instruction. It may be needed to clarify specific questions and solve specific problems in performance. It may also be necessary when there are not enough students of similar age or background to make up a group. But the importance of teaching basic concepts to groups instead of individuals has been discovered and has proven invaluable, and serves as a distinctive complement to any private teacher's curriculum.

While learning to play the piano is important, and the group approach teaches this very well, it is not the total and complete goal. It is of great value that students learn through an overall perspective that music is an art to enjoy, that listening is as creative as playing and that independent thinking is ultimately more rewarding than rote learning.⁶⁷

A piano instruction group is an experiment; an experiment is an

⁶⁷Mason, James A., "New Dimensions In Music Lessons," 1967, p. 165.

adventure. **Most** students, especially the youthful ones, will greet with cheers any experiments a teacher decides to make.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Maier, op. cit. p. 43.

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