

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Answering the research questions

5.1.1 Main research question

Which movements should young beginners be taught in order to develop a well founded, basic piano technique?

The basic recommendations by the leading authors are:

- a proper sitting position (the whole body) as prerequisite for:
- position and movements of the lower body
- position and movements of the upper body
- use of the whole arm in the 'free fall' and 'float off' movements
- use of the forearm in rotation movements
- use of the hand as a unit in a staccato movement
- finger movements.

5.1.2 Sub-questions

Which different levers are used in piano playing?

- The whole body
- the lower body
- the upper body
- the whole arm
- the forearm
- the hand as a unit
- the fingers.

What are the basic movements that the different levers should be able to perform?

A proper sitting position and the position of the lower body and torso is a prerequisite for performing the basic movements. The basic movements are:

- use of the whole arm in a 'free fall' and a 'float off' movement
- use of the forearm in a rotation movement
- use of the hand as a unit in a staccato movement
- finger movement from the phalanx joining the hand and fingers, supported by the bigger levers
- use of the thumb alongside, underneath and over the hand.

Which beginner books using the adjacent five finger legato method are generally accepted and regularly used by music teachers?

The study was done on the following beginner courses:

- Thompson (1956) - *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course - Part 1*
- Burnam (1959) - *Step by Step piano course - Book one*
- Pace (1961) - *Music for Piano - Book 1*
- Clark and Goss (1973) - *The Music Tree - A plan for musical growth*
- Bastien (1985) - *Bastien Piano Basics - Piano - Primer Level*
- Waterman & Harewood (1988) - *Me and my piano - very first lessons for the young pianist - part 1*
- Schaum (1996) - *John W Schaum Piano Course - Level pre A - The green book*
- Palmer, Morton and Lethco (1999) - *Alfred's basic piano library - Lesson book Level 1a.*

How do these beginner books measure up against the recommendations by authors in the field of piano technique?

When the process of evaluation on the generally accepted and most regularly used beginner courses was completed, the researcher came to the following conclusions:

The basic requirements for a beginner pianist are:

- a proper sitting position
- use of the whole arm in a 'free fall' and a 'float off' movement
- use of the forearm in a rotation movement
- use of the hand as a unit in a staccato movement
- finger movement from the first phalanx (never without support from the bigger levers).

The sequence, structure and explanations of how (and with which lever) the different movements should be executed, do not measure up to the recommendations by the leading authors.

In most instances as shown throughout chapter 3, the bigger levers are not addressed at all. All the levers and their specific movements should be addressed from the very first lesson. Concentrate on the bigger levers (giving the support), which perform slower and easier movements, and then move on to the smaller levers, which perform the faster and more complicated movements.

How can solutions in the form of exercises be provided for each basic movement, easy enough for the beginner to perform within a regular beat?

- Make sure that the explanation is clear
- exercises should concentrate on one specific movement at a time, within a regular beat
- present the different movements (exercises) from easy (big, slow movements) to more complicated (smaller, faster movements)

- different stages of the movement should be presented structurally
- illustrations or photographs of the specific movement should be provided
- keep repeating a specific movement until it is comfortably mastered.

5.2 Recommendations from this study

- It is the researcher's belief, based on the literature study mentioned in chapter one, that all the levers and their specific movements should be addressed from the very first lesson. It is only a logical motoric and educational process to concentrate on the bigger levers (giving the support), which perform slower and easier movements and then move on to the smaller levers, which perform the faster and more complicated movements.
- Another suggestion is to form correct habits of movement from the very beginning. All these slow (big) and fast (small) movements are easy enough for the beginner to learn during the first few months of piano lessons.
- The majority of information in these beginner books can be taught in a theory class preceding the individual lesson. When the pupil then arrives at the individual piano lesson he/she can concentrate on learning the motoric and aural aspects of the instrument. He /she can concentrate on the specific movements and results in sound.

5.3 Recommendations for further study

The next stage in the young performer's tuition is **control** over the quality, quantity and balance of sounds produced by the relaxed movements, which he/she has just mastered.

The main aim of playing an instrument is to make music (express emotions). There is only one possible way to achieve this: when the sounds produced are under the control of the instrumentalist; in this case the pianist. The characteristics of the instrument are all-important factors in this process and therefore a brief overview of this is given. This

important information will have to be taken into account when starting the next stage of tuition.

5.3.1 Characteristics of the piano

To teach the piano successfully and in order to be able to evaluate a pupil's performance, knowledge of the characteristics and technical demands of the instrument is essential. Without this knowledge tuition can never succeed.

5.3.1.1 Sound production, sound possibilities and limits

Sound is produced when a key is pressed down. As the key is pressed, the damper (covered with felt) moves away from the strings and a hammer moves towards them. When the hammer strikes the string a sound is produced. Note that the key offers definite resistance against the pressure of the finger and the movement of the key mechanism is similar to a seesaw.

After striking the strings, the hammer bounces back slightly in order to let them vibrate freely. As soon as the key is released the hammer moves back to its original position, as does the damper to its position against the strings, thus stopping the sound (Smith 1990:6).

5.3.1.2 The moment of sound production and sound reduction

Sound starts before the key is down and sound reduction starts immediately. The higher the pitch, the quicker the reduction. The top 24 strings (this may differ from one piano to the next) do not have any dampers. Sound stops before the key has returned to its original position (Smith 1990:6).

5.3.1.3 Speed of the key and hammer in relation to the quantity of sound

There is a direct correlation between the speed of the key, the hammer and the quantity of sound. The quicker the key moves down, the quicker the hammer moves towards the strings. The quicker the hammer hits the strings, the louder the sound.

Control over the quantity of sound thus requires control over the speed of the key and, secondarily, the hammer (Smith 1990:7).

5.3.1.4 Quality of sound

Quality of sound depends on:

- the size of the piano, the length of the strings, the type of wood used for the soundboard and the quality of felt used for the hammers
- quantity of sound. There is a direct correlation between the quantity and quality of sound. Within certain limits, alterations in volume brings about changes in tone colour
- control over noise elements such as sounds made by the pianist and the mechanism of the piano before the hammer hits the string and after the damper is released.

Four noise elements may be distinguished:

- noise caused by contact of the finger against the key
- noise caused by the mechanism a) friction when the key is pressed down b) the vibration of the hammer and strings at the moment of impact. This is more obvious when the pitch is higher
 - noise of the damper when the key is released, especially when playing softly
 - noise caused by the contact of the wood of the key against the frame of the piano (i.e. the key against the key bed).

The more initial noise, the fewer overtones and the quicker the sound reduction.

The sound of the instrument is ultimately a mixture of musical sounds and percussive noises. The required sound depends on the control that the pianist has over the momentum of the key (Smith 1990:8).

5.3.1.5 Pedals

The damper pedal:

The damper pedal (right pedal) has different functions:

- to enrich
- to join
- to strengthen (to reinforce)
- to lengthen
- to work against sound reduction.

To ensure noise elimination when using the damper pedal, the foot must be kept in contact with the pedal at all times. The double action of the pedal i.e. the distance of approximately one centimetre that the pedal moves before it actually begins to work must be taken into account. To ensure elimination of the noise of the pedal against the wood of the piano frame, the pedal should not be pushed down or released completely.

The sostenuto pedal (middle pedal):

This pedal only allows a specific sound or sounds to continue (i.e. it allows specific strings to keep on vibrating), while another passage or chord is played (without vibration of any other string not used).

The una corda (left pedal):

This pedal reduces the volume of the sound mechanically, hence its common name of 'soft pedal'. When using the una corda the mechanism of a grand piano moves slightly to the right, allowing the hammers to hit only one or two of the strings. In the case of the lower register only part of a single string is hit. The point of contact is the soft part of the

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hammer where the felt has not been indented. The use of the una corda changes the whole sound spectrum (Smith 1990:9).

5.3.2 Conclusion

A possible study for future research is the following: How can a pupil be taught control over sounds produced through the execution of the different basic movements in piano playing