

***Foundational Piano Pedagogy:
Boiling It Down***
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Effective teachers can “boil things down”

Effective teachers:

- Are well-versed in the subject
- Know what is at “the core”
- Can successfully communicate the essence

Our job is to SIMPLIFY, not to complicate

- Key to our ability to simplify is the understanding of the importance of SAMENESS and DIFFERENCE

What is being taught here?

Musical concepts are best learned through experience:

- Experience prior to encountering notation

Published materials are limited. This can lead to:

- Lack of preparation activities in the student’s lesson experience
- Teaching the materials rather than the actual concepts

Presentation of repertoire

- What is the character, musical goal?
- What are the challenges?
 - Reading
 - Technical
 - Rhythmic
 - Expressive

- Which challenge is the highest priority with this student?

The challenge of teaching technique

The use of patterns

- Why use patterns?
- What are we teaching?
- Are we teaching patterns?

We need to be sure we are teaching TECHNIQUE and not just theoretical patterns.

We need to “boil it down” to our understanding of technique (“how to” rather than “what to”), setting clear priorities/goals for students.

Major scale fingerings – sameness and difference

Boils down to a fingering concept of grouping of fingers (1-2-3 and 1-2-3-4.)

- C#, F#, B, F (simultaneous crossings, same finger groups)
- C, G, D, A, E (alternating groups of 3 and 4 fingers, non-simultaneous crossings, finger 3 plays HT)
- Eb, Ab, Bb (LH 321 4321; RH 4 always on Bb)

SIMPLIFY. Not complicate!

Teaching key and scale as THEORY concepts

Theory or technique?

- Use tetrachord fingering
- Twelve scales/keys or one concept?

Boiling down to one concept leads to future learning

A pattern of whole and half steps:

- WWHWWWH
- Creates tonality and mode
- Key signatures are a result
- Can lead to future understanding

Boiled down to the basic building blocks:

- Half and whole steps

Musical performance

What lies at the core of musical performance?

SOUND

Student must know how to listen to self. Teacher-student communication depends on this.

- Developed through preparation activities – hearing and recreating sounds
- Student understands that the sounds we hear can be represented in notation

Implications for diagnostic skills

Find the essence of the problem

- Technical issue?
- Reading issue?
- Focus issue?
- Deficient training?
- Do they know how to listen to themselves?

Know the material beyond what appears on the page.

Have a clear concept of the piece and deep understanding of its joys and challenges.