

Analysis of the Current Situation and Improvement Strategies for Piano Beginner Teaching Methods

-- A practical study based on domestic general music education

Letian Yang

Music Performance, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK.

Abstract: This paper focuses on the current status of piano beginner teaching in domestic general music education. Through practical observation and analysis, it identifies core issues within the current teaching system, including a single-minded evaluation model, a neglect of process-based teaching, and an incomplete knowledge structure for some teachers. These issues hinder the effectiveness of teaching and the comprehensive development of students. Based on this, this study, incorporating relevant educational theories and successful practical experience, proposes improvement strategies: constructing a diversified process-based evaluation system, strengthening teacher professional development and knowledge updating, promoting a student-centered teaching model, prioritizing the comprehensive cultivation of musical literacy, and strengthening parent-school collaboration. This study aims to provide a reference for improving the quality of piano beginner teaching in China and promoting the healthy development of students' musical literacy.

Keywords: Piano Beginner, Teaching Method, Teaching Evaluation, Musical Literacy, General Music Education, Teacher Development.

1. Introduction

Piano learning, as an important component of domestic general music education, especially extracurricular arts education, undertakes multiple functions, including musical enlightenment, aesthetic cultivation, and skill training. The quality of teaching at the beginner level directly impacts students' subsequent learning interest, musical cognitive ability, and artistic expression. However, within the current widespread practice of piano instruction, particularly in numerous private training institutions and some grassroots music education institutions, the teaching philosophies, methods, and evaluation systems still require significant discussion and improvement. Many teaching practices exhibit a pronounced utilitarian and technical orientation, failing to fully adhere to the laws of children's physical and mental development and the essential goals of music education. Based on practical observations and reflections on piano instruction for beginners in the field of general music education in China, this study aims to systematically identify the prominent issues in current teaching methods, conduct an in-depth analysis of their causes, and, drawing on educational and psychological theories as well as beneficial domestic and international experience, propose targeted and practical improvement strategies, aiming to promote the transformation of early piano instruction towards a more scientific, humane, and comprehensive musical literacy development.

2. Review of the Current Status of Piano Instruction for Beginners

Piano instruction for beginners within the general music education system in China covers a wide range of students and involves a large number of participants, but the homogeneity of its teaching models is prevalent. In-depth observation reveals the following key characteristics of this

current situation. First, the teaching evaluation system exhibits a significant degree of uniformity and results-oriented focus. The core, and often the sole, criterion for evaluation is anchored on a student's ability to accurately reproduce key technical points, such as notes, rhythm, and time signatures, for specific exam or practice pieces[1]. Classroom feedback, interim assessments, and even competition selections often revolve around "whether the playing is correct," "whether there are any wrong notes," and "whether the tempo is stable." While this approach to evaluation may be simple and intuitive, it's inherently shortsighted. It conveniently overlooks the flashes of musical intuition, the bursts of artistic imagination, the sheer concentration, the tenacity to confront challenges, the ingenuity to problem-solve, not to mention the unique sonic understanding and expressive potential nurtured over the years. Even more worrying is the frequent pitfalls of everyday instruction: technique is prioritized over artistry; results are repeatedly demanded, while the process itself is largely ignored. Teachers meticulously hone the fundamentals of performance—hand shape, fingering, pitch, and rhythm. However, the core soul of music—the personal emotions flowing between notes, the desire and exploration for rich timbre and subtle nuances, the genuine appreciation of the musical temperament of different eras, the keen ear for subtle sounds, and even the impulsive impulse for free expression in improvisation—is often forgotten or even discarded amidst this meticulous refinement. The result is that learning becomes a repetitive, automated process driven by the cold standard of "perfection." The children's inner throbbing, blazing enthusiasm, and those fleeting yet precious sparks of creativity have not only failed to be ignited and nurtured, but have been silently ignored.

The deeper problem may lie with the teachers themselves. Many piano teachers are indeed skilled performers themselves, but teaching piano requires more than just playing. They often lack a deep understanding of how

children learn the piano, the physical and mental developmental characteristics of children of different ages, and what modern music education advocates, and even tend to assume things for granted. This often leads to off-target class arrangements—failure to truly address the comprehension abilities, attention spans, emotional needs, and physical developmental status of children of different ages. Teaching methods can also easily become rigid and boring, lacking in interest and inspiration. Naturally, the class loses its appeal to children, and its effectiveness is significantly diminished.

3. The Foundation of Teaching Improvement: The Integration of Theory and Practice

Promoting innovation in introductory piano teaching methods requires a solid theoretical foundation and the nourishment of practical experience.

3.1. Innovation in Teaching Philosophy:

Application of the Constructivist Learning Perspective: Piano teaching should draw on constructivist thinking, recognizing that knowledge is actively constructed by learners. This means teachers should carefully design learning situations to guide students in independently discovering the inherent connections between musical elements and encourage them to individually understand and express musical works, rather than passively imitating them. The teacher's role also shifts, becoming a collaborator and guide in students' musical exploration journey.

Inspiration from Multiple Intelligence Theory: Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences identifies differences in students' intellectual strengths. Based on this, teaching should provide diverse teaching approaches and assessment methods. For example, tablature can be used to help visually advantaged students understand structure, body movements can be used to help kinesthetically advantaged students develop a sense of rhythm, and ensemble activities can be used to develop interpersonal intelligence. The goal is to help students with diverse characteristics find ways to demonstrate their potential and experience a sense of success, thereby effectively enhancing their confidence and effectiveness in learning[2].

3.2. Key Support from Psychological Foundations:

Guidance from Child Developmental Psychology: Child developmental psychology reveals the cognitive characteristics, attention development levels, and social needs of students of different age groups. These research findings provide the fundamental basis for scientifically designing teaching content, pacing classes, and organizing interactive activities. Ignoring these principles can easily lead to "adult-oriented" teaching content and "cramming" teaching methods.

The Driving Role of Motivational Theory: Educational psychology emphasizes the core value of intrinsic motivation for sustained learning. Therefore, teachers need to carefully design activities that spark student interest, empower students with choices within appropriate boundaries, and provide encouraging feedback that focuses on the learning process. This fosters and nurtures students' intrinsic enthusiasm for learning, avoiding over-reliance on external rewards and punishments that can alienate or diminish learning motivation.

3.3. Valuable References to Practical Wisdom:

Inspiration from Classic International Teaching Methods:

The Orff Method: Its core concepts—"elementalism," "improvisation," and "participation"—emphasize the integration of language, singing, movement, and musical instruments. This method comprehensively cultivates students' sense of rhythm, auditory acuity, cooperative spirit, and improvisational creativity. Its progressive teaching approach, from easy to difficult, from imitation to creativity, is particularly well-suited to beginners' inherent need to build musical confidence and interest.

Kodály Method: This method views singing as the core of music education, firmly believing that "quality hearing stems from quality singing." Through the systematic application of tonic solfa, rhythmic syllables, and a rigorous progressive teaching system, it strives to solidly enhance students' musical literacy and intrinsic listening abilities. Its emphasis on folk music and cultural heritage also provides important methodological inspiration for incorporating local musical elements into piano instruction.

Dalcroze Body Movement: Its essence lies in directly experiencing and internalizing musical elements through body movement, strengthening musical perception and responsiveness that integrates the body and mind. This profound "music-body" connection is crucial for understanding and ultimately achieving musical fluency and expressiveness in piano performance.

Exploration of Local Innovative Practices:

It is worth noting that valuable explorations are also emerging in China. Some outstanding teachers and institutions are working to develop piano teaching methods that are more distinctively Chinese, engaging, and comprehensive. For example:

Cleverly incorporating the artistic conception of Chinese folk tales or ancient poetry into musical interpretation;

Using vivid metaphors and associations to help students understand abstract musical emotions and images;

Designing creative music games to enhance learning motivation.

These practical innovations, rooted in local cultural contexts, also have important reference value and promotional significance.

4. Theoretical Foundation and Practical Reference to Support Teaching Improvement

When teaching piano to beginners, neither theory nor experience is effective. The key is to bring both into actual teaching and let them play a role. In introductory piano classes, I've come to realize more and more that children are more than empty bottles waiting to be filled with knowledge! They are each curious little explorers. This forces us teachers to think creatively: how can we transform boring notes, rhythms, and melodies into treasures they want to explore? For example, we can design fun music games or ask them a few questions that tickle their fancy, allowing them to discover for themselves, "Oh! These notes sound so good together!" Rather than having them mechanically imitate my every movement, I prefer to encourage them to express their own feelings, even if it's just a thought like, "This phrase would be more interesting if played softly," or for their little hands to try to produce a few notes they find appealing. At this time, the role of the teacher has to change - don't always

think about being a carrier of knowledge, but try to be a partner who accompanies them in adventures, gently support them when their boat is a little shaky, and remind them when they are scratching their heads and confused.

Every child is unique, with different learning styles and strengths. In piano instruction, we need to provide a variety of "entry points" and "exit points." For example, children who are sensitive to patterns can use color cards and charts to visualize musical structures. For those who can't sit still and prefer to move, let them clap, stamp their feet, or move their bodies to feel the pulse of the rhythm. Organizing simple four-hand piano duets or small group ensembles not only fosters collaboration but also makes music learning engaging and fun. The goal is to enable children of all abilities to find ways to express themselves in piano learning and experience a sense of accomplishment, truly stimulating their passion for learning and improving their learning outcomes. Teaching practice shows that there's no one-size-fits-all approach; the key lies in the teacher's keen observation and flexible adaptation, creating space for each beginner's musical potential to flourish[3].

At a psychological level, research in child development psychology on the cognitive characteristics of children of different ages, attention development levels, and social needs, provides the fundamental basis for designing age-appropriate teaching content, class length, and interactive methods. Ignoring these developmental patterns can easily lead to adult-like and mechanical teaching. Motivational theories in educational psychology emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation for sustained learning. Therefore, teachers should nurture and stimulate students' intrinsic motivation by creating engaging activities, providing appropriate room for independent choice, and providing encouraging feedback that focuses on the process rather than just the results, avoiding over-reliance on external rewards and punishments that can lead to motivational alienation.

For practical reference, internationally renowned music teaching methods offer rich insights. The Orff method emphasizes elementalism, improvisation, and participation. Through the integrated use of language, singing, body movement, and musical instruments, it cultivates students' sense of rhythm, auditory acuity, collaborative skills, and improvisational creativity. Its core principles of "from simple to complex" and "from imitation to creation" are highly suitable for beginners to build musical confidence and interest. The Kodály method emphasizes singing as the core foundation of music education, believing that "good hearing stems from good singing." It also systematically utilizes tonic solfa, rhythmic syllables, and a rigorous progression system to cultivate students' musical literacy and inner hearing. Its emphasis on folk music and cultural heritage also provides insights into incorporating local musical elements. The essence of Dalcroze's body rhythmic method lies in directly experiencing and expressing musical elements through body movement, helping students develop a musical sensitivity and responsiveness that integrates body and mind[4]. This is crucial for understanding the fluidity and expressiveness of music in piano learning. It's encouraging to see that some outstanding teachers and institutions in China are actively exploring more engaging and comprehensive introductory teaching methods that integrate local culture. These include integrating Chinese folk tales and the artistic conception of ancient poetry with piano learning, using picture associations to aid musical comprehension, and designing music-themed

games. These innovative practices, rooted in local culture, also hold important reference and promotional value.

5. Strategies for Improving Piano Beginner Teaching Methods

Based on current situation analysis, problem analysis, and theoretical and practical foundations, the following targeted teaching improvement strategies are proposed:

Establishing a Diversified, Process-Based Teaching Evaluation System: This fundamentally changes the current practice of single-track technical evaluation. Evaluation dimensions should encompass: technical foundation, musical expression, learning process, musical literacy, collaboration, and communication. Evaluation entities should include teacher and student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and even parent observation and feedback. Evaluation methods should incorporate a variety of methods, including immediate classroom feedback, learning portfolios, small concerts, and informal exchanges, emphasizing the tracking and affirmation of students' learning progress.

Strengthening Teacher Professional Development and Knowledge Renewal: Education authorities, universities, professional associations, and qualified training institutions should collaborate to establish a systematic and regular teacher training mechanism. Training content should focus on strengthening the following: foundations of child development psychology, principles of educational psychology, modern music education theory and teaching methods, comprehensive methods for cultivating musical literacy, practical reforms in teaching evaluation, and techniques for effective communication with parents. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in teaching and research activities, observe high-quality lessons, and conduct teaching reflection and action research.

Promote and implement a "student-centered" teaching model: Instructional design should fully consider students' age, interests, cognitive level, and individual differences. Teaching content should appropriately include works that are relevant to children's lives, engaging, and expressive, avoiding premature descent into boring, purely technical exercises. Teaching methods should be diversified, flexibly utilizing games, stories, situational creation, exploration, group collaboration, and improvisation to stimulate students' active participation and intrinsic interest. Respect students' musical perceptions and initial desire for expression, encourage their personalized interpretations of music, and create a safe, supportive, and encouraging classroom atmosphere. Emphasize guidance on learning methods, cultivating students' aural skills, music reading skills, practice strategies, and independent thinking.

Deepen the comprehensive development of musical literacy: Expand the teaching scope from simple performance skills to comprehensive musical literacy. While ensuring necessary technical training, instruction should also incorporate aural training, music appreciation and analysis, basic music theory and sight-singing, simple improvisation and variation, and an introduction to musical cultural background knowledge. Students should be encouraged to express their feelings and understanding of music through words, movements, or drawings, developing their musical perception, imagination, and aesthetic judgment.

Strengthen home-school collaboration and promote a scientific approach to education: Teachers should proactively

strengthen communication with parents. Through parent-teacher conferences, open days, WeChat groups, and learning feedback forms, they should convey scientific educational concepts and teaching objectives, explain the significance of process-based assessment, and demonstrate students' progress in all aspects of musical literacy. Parents should be encouraged to focus on their children's learning interests, study habits, courage to overcome difficulties, and incremental progress, reduce excessive anxiety about exams and competition results, and foster a supportive, rather than pressure-based, family music learning environment. Parents should be encouraged to participate in their children's musical experiences, such as listening to music together and sharing their experiences[5].

6. Practical Pathways and Guarantees for Improvement Strategies

Effectively implementing the above-mentioned improvement strategies within the complex ecosystem of general music education in China requires a clear practical path and necessary safeguards. This practical path can begin with a combination of specific and comprehensive approaches. First, encourage and support teachers, teaching and research groups, or training institutions with a desire for reform to pilot these strategies first, becoming "experimental fields." Based on their own circumstances, they can select one or several strategies for small-scale exploration, accumulate experience, identify problems, and make adjustments and optimizations to develop replicable and scalable case studies. Education authorities and industry associations can organize experience exchange sessions and showcase outstanding lesson examples to promote these successful practices. Second, promote substantive reforms in the teacher training system. Core topics such as child development psychology, modern music pedagogy, and teaching evaluation design should be incorporated into compulsory modules for pre-service and in-service piano teacher training, ensuring that the training content is both practical and instructive. Explore the establishment of regional "piano teaching research communities" to provide continuous professional support and a platform for teaching and research for frontline teachers. Regarding safeguards, the first step is to update the guidance of teaching evaluation. Education authorities should revise relevant art assessment or evaluation standards, reducing the absolute emphasis on single technical indicators and increasing the assessment of musical expression, the learning process, and overall literacy, thereby playing a positive guiding role. Secondly, developing supporting teaching resources is crucial. Experts and outstanding teachers should be organized to compile or recommend advanced teaching materials and supplementary repertoires suitable for beginners of different ages, integrating fun, technical, and musical elements. Tools suitable for diversified assessment should be developed, and video resources of demonstration lessons incorporating modern teaching methods should be produced. Thirdly, policy support and social recognition need to be sought. Relevant departments should be called upon to focus on the quality of early arts education and allocate resources to teacher training, teaching and research activities, and other areas. Furthermore, through media publicity, public

lectures, concerts, and other means, a scientific perspective on music education should be disseminated to the public and parents, changing the one-sided perception of "technique-only" and "exam-only" approaches, thereby creating a more relaxed and favorable social environment for teaching reform.

7. Conclusion

Beginner piano instruction in general music education in China is at a critical stage requiring reflection and transformation. Overreliance on technical accuracy in assessment, neglect of the holistic development of musical literacy and the value of the learning process, and the incomplete knowledge structure of some teachers have become bottlenecks hindering teaching effectiveness and students' long-term development. Based on practical observations, this study analyzes the underlying causes of these problems, including biased evaluation approaches, outdated teaching concepts, and insufficient support for teacher development. Drawing on insights from constructivist learning theory, multiple intelligences theory, child development psychology, and internationally advanced music pedagogy, we propose systematic improvement strategies, including establishing a diversified process-based evaluation system, strengthening teacher professional development, promoting a student-centered teaching model, deepening the cultivation of holistic musical literacy, and strengthening parent-school collaboration. The effective implementation of these strategies requires specific approaches, including encouraging pilot programs, reforming teacher training, refining evaluation approaches, developing teaching resources, and securing policy and social support. Only by shifting the focus of teaching from purely skill-based training to the comprehensive cultivation of students' musical literacy and the stimulation of a lifelong musical interest can the value of early piano education be truly realized, laying a foundation for students' healthy, rich, and promising artistic lives. The discussion in this study is intended to stimulate further discussion. We hope that more educators and practitioners will participate in this reform process and jointly promote the teaching of piano beginners in China towards a more scientific, humanistic and dynamic future.

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