

# Teaching Process of a Piece/Song – Cheat Sheet

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What is your process for teaching (students learning) a piece to play on the piano? Meaning, what do you do with a piece from the first time you introduce it to students, to after they play it at the piano. What is the process you guide them through? I'm thinking of younger students within the first 2 or 3 years of lessons.

## Acculturation

- This is done in lessons before the piece is formally learned (may be 1 to 3 weeks before they learn the piece)
- Movement activities
  - Include FLOW, BOUND, SPACE, TIME movement, but emphasis should be on FLOW.
  - I usually include two contrasting movement activities. Often students will offer suggestions and if possible I do incorporate those suggestions into a movement activity.
  - Use movements that appear at the ends of the continuum, “We learn what something is by what it isn’t”.

## Establish Tonal or Rhythm Context

- Either one or the other
- Often this can be done by what precedes the piece/song. E.g. another activity in that meter or tonality
- If I will be concentrating on rhythm for that piece/song for that lesson, then I’ll be sure to establish meter. If I will be concentrating on tonality for that piece/song for that lesson, then I’ll be sure to establish tonality.
- Note: When doing Acculturation activities, context does not need to be established. However, when moving to formal instruction activities, then context must be established.

## Defining the Tonality and/or Meter

- Sing the RT. Our RT is DO so we are in Major, our RT is LA so we are in minor.
  - Ask students to move in a particular way (as in acculturation stage) and instruct them that when you stop singing/playing, they will freeze and sing the RT
- Move and find the MB/mb. What meter are we in?

## Separate Rhythm Patterns and Tonal Patterns

- Do RP one lesson and TP next lesson (seldom, if ever will I do both in the same lesson)
- RP are usually 4 MB in length
- TP are usually 2 to 5 pitches per pattern
  - Base these on harmonic structure, although at times they will include non-chord tones

Continued

- Aural/Oral Level (Introduce new patterns on a neutral syllable [NS] first)
  - Chant RP on BAH
  - Sing TP on BUM
- Verbal Association (Can be done in the same lesson after chanting and singing on NS)
  - Use appropriate syllables for TP (moveable DO, LA based minor) and RP (beat function syllables)
- Count the patterns
  - Select a specific RP or TP and ask students to listen and indicate how many times that TP or RP appears in the piece/song.
    - Play/sing the piece/song and ask students how many times they heard the pattern
  - Some students will struggle with this at the beginning. Play/sing the piece/song and indicate, for the student, each time it appears.
  - Then play/sing the piece/song again, and have students indicate the pattern along with you.
- Bridge to Improvisation on TP and/or RP
  - Select a RP and ask students to chant it, audiate it, then play it [CAP = chant, audiate, play] on the piano (this could be on one note, specified notes, at random – do give some guidance for this at the beginning)
  - Select a TP and ask students to sing it, audiate it, and then play it [SAP = sing, audiate, play] on the piano (this can be in a specified range, or with a specified rhythm pattern)

### Establishing Form

- Usually done phrase by phrase – same or different?
  - Have students indicate with hand signals (both open or closed for same, one open and one closed for different)
- Compare similar phrases E.g. Phrase 1 & 2 are same. Phrase 1 & 3 are different, Phrase 1 & 4 are the same/different OR perhaps Phrase 2 and 4 are the same. If phrases are similar but change at the end, discuss the difference with the student.

### Where do we begin/end?

- Our RT is DO/LA we begin on MI/DO etc
- We end on DO/LA etc
- Have students listen, does it begin on the note it ends? (Stage ?/Type ? of Audiation)

### Sing

- **Everything should be sung before played on the instrument**
- The singing may occur earlier in the process – many times once students have heard it enough they will start singing along.
- Note: If students start to sing, but are singing inaccurate, stop and ask them to listen. Sing while they are listening, then ask them to join you to sing. You do not need to tell them what they are sing inaccurately, rather, engage their ears by having them listen. You may need to repeat this process a few times, or better yet, wait until later to have them sing (if singing begins earlier in the process).

## **Harmonic Structure**

- Sing chord roots I/i and V – done by imitation at first
- S sing chord roots, T sings melody or plays melody on piano
- Play on boomwhackers or bass bars
  - Have students play chord roots as an accompaniment while singing the melody
- T play melody S play chord roots on piano
- Have one group of students sing the chord roots, while the other group of students sing the melody, then switch

## **Play the Piece**

- Take the piece to the piano/instrument.
- Show students where to begin (what range on the piano)
- Show students what note to begin
- Play the piece as a whole, allowing the student to watch your hands
- Break the piece down into phrases/sections
  - Play the phrase/section, then have student play
  - Go through this process until the piece is learned
- After the sections and phrases have been learned, play the piece as a whole.
- Students (when applicable) should play the melody in the RH then in the LH
- Once students can play the melody in RH and then in LH, ask them to play it HT (this may occur in subsequent lessons)
- At a later lesson as student to play melody and sing chord roots, then play melody and play chord roots.
- Once the piece is learned and played with ease, it can be used for improvisation activities, arrangements, mashups, medleys, transpose, add accompaniment patterns, and so on. In other words, allow INTERACTION with the music. You want students to ENGAGE with the music they have created. This will make it their own and solidify the learning.