

Mr. Blickenstaff began the meeting by sharing that Mariys Saltzer, NEPTA president from 1977-79, grew up in the same small town as he, Nampa, ID, and studied with the same teacher, Fern Davidson.

September is a time to start over, when schedules become more predictable. Returning to old routines is comfortable, but limits creativity and the chance to do new things. Last year Mr. Blickenstaff tried dividing the year into two month units. The final lesson of each unit was an assessment. It worked well because students are geared to work toward tests. Every unit should include a "YOYO" piece ("You're On Your Own"), below the student's level. A sample assessment is included in the handouts.

STUDIO PROJECTS

The development of studio-wide projects was encouraged. For example, the 300th anniversary of the composition of Bach's 2 part Inventions is 2020. Studios could do marathons, recitals, retirement center performances, or do listening, playing one hand of an Invention while someone else plays the other, etc. In 1985, the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth, Mr. Blickenstaff put up charts for a student sight reading project with the goal of the studio playing through the complete works of J. S. Bach. Studios can do a composer of the month project or a listening project. Studio charts of student accomplishments such as scale speed, etc. can be displayed.

TEACHER GOALS FOR THE YEAR

Mr. Blickenstaff asked that we all write down the quote, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Long term planning is important. Frances Clark was a great planner. She told teachers that at the beginning of Fall they should know what their students will play at the end of the year recital. Long range goal examples can include such things as scale speed or number of arpeggios learned. Teachers should keep their long range goals in their own notebook.

LESSON PLANNING

Lessons should always start with stretches to stimulate circulation in the hands, which is what warm-ups are for. Hands are flexed wide in the air, then relaxed. Also, students can hold keys down one finger at a time, bending the wrist and hand up and down, pulling on the finger.

Lessons should also start with a duet, so student and teacher are making music together as a team.

ROTATION

Most important is to do a warm-up using rotation, the most important technical gesture, as using fingers 1-2-1-3-1-4-1-5-1 etc. in major, minor and diminished five finger patterns. These are hand exercises, not finger exercises. Beginning students can do thirds, saying as they do so: "Rock the hand to play the skips." Later they can say the finger numbers as they do this. A basic rotational exercise would be to use the following fingers in contrary motion: 5-1-4-1-3-1-2-1-3-1-4-1-5-1. Hanon exercise #11 is a helpful exercise because it combines rotation with gesture; say "stop on the top and roll around and stop on the top and roll around" etc. Use the hand to change direction. Another helpful warm up is five finger scales with one hand twice as fast as the other.

SCALES

When introducing scales, start with an ascending RH five finger scale, LH crosses over to step 6 at top, RH descends, then LH plays step 7 under the tonic, ending with the tonic. Step 6 wants to go to dominant, and step 7 to tonic. This is a more musical representation of the key and sense of key. Afterward, play a "summary": a harmonic 5th, 6th (tonic and 6th), 5th, 6th (7th and dominant), 5th. This leads to cadence patterns. Mr. Blickenstaff has a rule: students are not allowed to play a scale without an announcement naming the key, the sharps or flats in order, its related major or minor key, and which notes are played by finger 4. Scale fingerings can be learned in groups by rules, which are included on the "Scale Fingerings" handout. Scale preparation can be primarily hands separate, because most scales in the piano literature are not done hands together. In playing scales, stop on the thumb and flare the hand. This integrates rotation movement into the scale without calling it "rotation." Scales can be played in eighths, then triplets, then sixteenths to improve scale fluency and speed. One hand can play quarter rhythms against triplets in the other, in 3 octaves and then 2 octaves. Scales can be played against an Alberti bass in either RH or LH.

ARPEGGIOS

When practicing arpeggios, stop on the thumb and flare the hand. When finger 2 is down, the thumb flips under. Students can name a note, then name all the major and minor chords that include that note. Use that note to play all six arpeggios containing it. Example: E is the root of E major, the root of E minor, the third of C major, the third of C sharp minor, etc. More advanced students can add Dominant 7th chords.

One warm up does more for hands than any other: playing one octave broken chords without thumb turns. When doing so, lift each finger as high as possible, rocking the hand.

EAR TRAINING

Every lesson should include ear training, which can take less than two minutes time. We cannot afford not to do ear training. We are in the business of sensitizing ears. An ear training example is singing middle C. At the third lesson, Mr. Blickenstaff tells students, "One sound on the piano is most important: middle C. Listen to it. Can you find where middle C lives in your throat? Sing 'this is the sound of middle C.'" Students are invited to feel their throat to find the sound and feel of middle C. Later, students can close their eyes, listen to a melody, sing the melody first, then play it back. Tonic and dominant in the LH can be integrated with the melody.

One of the biggest piano teaching fallacies is that teachers do a disservice playing for students. Teachers must play for students. Playing rather than using words is most effective pedagogically.

SIGHT READING

Sight reading is best learned through doing. A college student Mr. Blickenstaff encountered had become an excellent sight reader because his teacher gave awards for anyone who read 100 pieces in a year. In students' notebooks, pieces sight-read over the week can be noted. When students sight read, have them name the key and dynamics before playing. At lessons, look for patterns in music before reading. The "Four Star Sight Reading" books are recommended for sight reading practice.

HANDOUTS

The first handouts in the packet are for students' notebooks. Teachers are free to reproduce these sheets.

RULES OF THUMB – there is space under each category to add new rules as they are learned.

DROP OF A HAT REPERTOIRE LIST – These are pieces the student always has ready to play.

SCALE FINGERINGS – these help students see how scales are the same within groups.

MASTERWORK OF THE MONTH – Most students don't listen to classical music. Assign a piece for the student to listen to many times over the month.

SAMPLE COMPOSITION ASSIGNMENTS – assign composition from the earliest lessons. Limit severely what the student can use; not "go home and compose something." Every assignment must have a title.

Why? We need to convey that sound expresses feeling. Ask "what is the emotion of this piece?"

SHAPING THE SOUND: RULES OF THUMB FOR THE STUDENT – this is for teachers, not students, as it is overly simplified.

TECHNICAL ROUTINES FOR BUSY TEACHERS -

"Teachers must practice." This is very important. Mr. Blickenstaff told a story about a fellow student who would always arrive late for her lessons so she could hear her teacher play. When his first student of each day arrives, he makes sure he is practicing so the student knows that his or her teacher loves to play and practice.

The last handout sheet is a practice guide for teachers. Below are a few notes about items on the sheet:

I STRETCHES

Play finger 3, then turn palms toward each other; see how far you can play with finger 2? The angle of the hand increases the reach. Then hold finger 2, turn backs of hands toward each other and return to finger 3. Do the same with 4 and 3, 5 and 4.

II ROTATIONS

Rotations are indispensable. Include rotation in trill practice.

III BROKEN OCTAVE CHORDS

This is the most important exercise for teachers, and will improve technique more than any other.

Use big rotation in and out, out and in. Raise fingers high above keys with rotation. "Zig zag" means 1-3-2-5, 1-4-2-5, etc.

VI DOUBLE NOTES – two ways to play are with rotation and straight up and down. Double notes use a pushing motion with the arm.

At the conclusion of the presentation, a teacher asked how teachers can practice when they are so tired from teaching at the end of the day? It was recommended that teachers try practicing earlier in the day, or as the first student is arriving for the lesson.

Mr. Blickenstaff is planning to perform a recital in May in celebration of his 85th birthday. It may include music by Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Copeland and Ginastera.

Marvin Blickenstaff

*Curriculum Innovations
for the
New Year*

The Pianist's Rules of Thumb

(Add more rules to each category as you discover them in your practice and lesson discussions.)

Rhythm

1. Shorts go to longs.

Phrasing

1. The last note of a phrase is the quietest.

Melody

1. Locate the most important note in the phrase. Make the sound go to that note.

Harmony

1. Stress the dissonance; relax the resolution.

Texture

1. The melody is always louder than the accompaniment.

Basic Musical Terms

Tempo

lento
adagio
andante
moderato
allegretto
vivace / vivo
allegro
prestissimo
alla breve
l'istesso tempo
ritardando
accelerando

Dynamics

pianissimo	<i>pp</i>
piano	<i>p</i>
mezzo piano	<i>mp</i>
mezzo forte	<i>mf</i>
forte	<i>f</i>
fortissimo	<i>ff</i>
diminuendo	<i>dim.</i>
crescendo	<i>cresc.</i>
sforzando	<i>sfz</i>
accent	<i>></i>
morendo	
smorzando	<i>smorz.</i>
perdendosi	

Modifiers

subito
poco
piu
meno
molto
non troppo
leggiero
scherzando
simile

Drop-of-a-Hat Repertoire List

To qualify for this list, a piece must be successfully performed from memory. To be maintained on this list, the piece(s) are to be practiced three times during the week, two times reading carefully from the score, and one time from memory. Further reinforcement of the pieces on this list comes when you sit away from the piano, close your eyes and "see and hear" your fingers playing the piece – securely "naming" each note you play.

Title of Composition

Composer

(with key and opus number)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Scale Fingerings

All major and minor scales group themselves into recurring, alternating patterns of **123** and **1234**. Because the 4th finger plays only one time in each octave, scale fingering rules focus on the location of the 4th finger.

To learn scale fingerings, it is helpful to block out the patterns of **123** and **1234** and learn the visual and tactile characteristics of each scale.

Rule I: 4th finger next to I (key note, tonic)

RH: 4th finger on the 7th scale degree

LH: 4th finger on the 2nd scale degree

(3rds play together; 1's play together on the key note -- tonic)

RH: 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 1

LH: 1 4 3 2 1 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

Majors: C G D A E

minors: c g d a e

Rule II: RH: 4th finger on B-flat

LH: 4th on the 4th scale degree (start 3214)

Majors: *F Bb Eb Ab

minors: *f ab

*LH starts 54321 (Rule I)

Rule III: 234 on the 3 black keys

RH: 4th on A#/Bb

LH: 4th on F#/Gb

Majors: F# (Gb) C# (Db) B (Cb)

minors: b eb bb

Exceptions: f# minor and c# minor

RH starts 341

LH follows Rule III (4th on F#)

Pat Puenpatom
Assessment: Unit #2 (November/December)

TECHNICAL SKILLS

rotations

5141312131415 M-m-dim (5)

1525354535251 M-m-dim (5)

12321 – 54345 M-m-dim (5)

trills: play each pair four times: 12 32 34 54 (5)

Hanon #11 (starting on any white key) (5)

broken octave scales -- white key majors only (two-inch rule!!)
 lo – hi; hi – lo; out-in; in-out (5)

broken octave chords –
 M, m white keys
 hands together, parallel motion / contrary motion (5)

scales starting on any key – majors

starting on any white key -- minors
 announce the scale and play...
 h.t. 2s 3s 4s (10)
 four beat units (quarters, 8ths, 16ths)
 formula pattern

arpeggios starting on any white key – majors and minors (5)
 h.t. 2s 3s 4s

Etudes

Czerny: 160 8-measure Exercises
 no. 1 **from memory** (5)

Solfeggietto (5)

REPERTOIRE

p. 50 Chopin: *Nocturne in E-flat Major, op. 9, no. 2 (with music)* (10)

Olson: *Applause!* Bk. I
 p. 12 Paradisi: *Toccata (first half)* (5)

YOYO (You're On Your Own)
 Rollin: p. 11 *Valse Noble* (10)

READING / EAR

Sight reading of an intermediate level piece. (5)

Identify intervals: m2 M2 m3 M3 P4 P5 M6 m6 P8 (3)

Identify chords: M, m, diminished (2)

CREATIVE PROJECTS AND RESEARCH

Create (compose) a variation on *Happy Birthday*. (5)

Know country and period for each composer on your Assessment.

Masterwork of the Month

Beethoven: *Sonata in F Minor, op. 57 "Appassionata"*

Listen to this masterpiece by Beethoven a minimum of two times each week. Find or download a score to follow as you listen. After you have listened several times, answer the following questions.

1. What is the primary emotion projected in each movement?

First movement:

Second movement:

Third movement:

2. What are the keys of each movement?

First movement:

Second movement:

Third movement:

Why did Beethoven not write this piece in C Major?

3. What is the form of the second movement?

4. Describe the technical challenges of the piece.

First movement:

Second movement:

Third movement:

5. In what year was the "Appassionata" composed?

How old was Beethoven when he wrote this sonata?

Sample Composition Assignments

I: (Early Elementary)

Make up a piece in which you use
black keys (only) going downward to the left
you may use the pedal (on the right)

Title: *Falling Leaves*

II: (Early Elementary)

Make up a piece in which the LH plays clusters low on the keyboard in the rhythm

Lo-ong short short; Lo-ong short short (over and over)

The RH plays white key steps.

Title: *Elephants on Parade*

III: (Intermediate)

Think of the color blue and sounds that might be associated with that color (sky, water).

Make up a piece in which the LH plays notes from the C chord and the RH plays notes from an F# major chord. The chords can move around the keyboard.

Use the pedal. Let the sound float!

Your Title: _____

IV: (Intermediate)

ABA is one of the most frequently chosen forms by composers. The A sections hold the piece together, and the B section provides contrast.

You are to create a piece in ABA form.

LH A section: Alberti bass pattern

LH B section: blocked chords and scales

The RH can have a similar contrast between the A and B sections.

Title: *My First Sonatina*

SHAPING THE SOUND

Rules of Thumb for the Student

RHYTHM

1. Shorts go to longs (cresc.)
2. Downbeats are magnetic – the sound is drawn to them...but..
3. No two successive downbeats should be alike.
4. Upbeat figures are interesting and have great musical energy.

HARMONY

1. Stress the unusual; de-emphasize (relax) the predictable.
2. I 6/4 chords are magnetic. (Think what a downbeat I 6/4 must be!)
3. Harmonic considerations are more powerful than either rhythmic or melodic ones. Look to harmony first when determining the sound.

MELODY

1. The last note of the group is the quietest.
2. High notes must be supported from below. The important notes are the low ones – they have the energy and push.
3. Composers often place their musical goals on long notes. Go to the long notes. Make them project.
4. Musical sound is either going to or coming from. Avoid playing a succession of notes at the same dynamic level.
5. When in doubt, ... swell (crescendo).

TEXTURE

1. Piano sound is most interesting when the hands are never the same volume.
2. When playing two or more notes within a hand simultaneously, make the volume different for each note.

PHRASING

1. Place the focus of your phrase as late as possible. ("The later, the better.")
2. Tradition says:
 out of 4, go for 3
 in a two-measure phrase, focus on the downbeat of the second measure
 the Question is more interesting than the Answer
 two-note phrases or relationships favor the first note
3. Avoid successive "down" motions. Drop-lift is the answer!

GENERAL

Variety is the spice of musical life. Vary the sound. Do not repeat a phrase exactly the same way.



Technical Routines for Busy Teachers

Marvin Blickenstaff

I. STRETCHES

single finger

pairs 3-2, 2-3; 4-3, 3-4; 5-4, 4-5

II. ROTATIONS

5141312131415 M-m-dim

1525354535251 M-m-dim

12321 (3x) -- 54345 (3x) M-m-dim

broken octave scales

low-high; high-low; in-out; out-in

Hanon #11

trills: 1-2 3-2 3-4 5-4 3-4 3-2 1-2 M-m-dim

III. BROKEN OCTAVE CHORDS

Major – minor – diminished 7th – dominant 7th

Play each chord in all inversions, one octave up/down

parallel straight

contrary straight (LH starts in 2nd inversion)

parallel zigzag

contrary zigzag (LH starts in 2nd inversion)

IV. SCALES – Major and minor

preparation:

the "announcement"

h.s.: stop on thumb and "flair" the fingers

routines:

2s, 3s, 4s

2 octaves in 8ths; 3 octaves in triplets; 4 octaves in 16ths

four-beat units

unit I: quarters; unit II: 8ths; unit III: 16ths

formula scales ("preposition scales") up/out/in/up/down/out/in/down

a. in one-octave units

b. in two-octave units

"Anne Farber" routine

one hand in quarters, up/down one octave

the other hand in triplets, but limited to a two-octave range

accompanying a scale with a I, IV, I, V7, I Alberti bass

chromatic scales in 2s, 3s, 4s

one octave 8ths; 2 octaves triplets; 3 octaves 16ths

V. ARPEGGIOS

preparation: h.s., stop on thumb and "flair" the fingers
thumb tucks under the hand as finger 2 plays

routines:

choose a note and play all M/m arpeggios which use that note

ex: CM, Cm, AbM, Am, FM, Fm

M5/3, m5/3, M6/3, m6/3, M6/4, m6/4

use this routine to play dominant seventh arpeggios:

ex: C7, Ab7, F7, D7

V7, V6/5, V4/3, V2

VI. DOUBLE NOTES - controlled by the arm ("push")

Major, minor, diminished

RH 3 4 5 4 3

1 2 3 2 1

LH 1 2 3 2 1

3 4 5 4 3

"Rachmaninoff drill"

position: blocked octave chord with added 6th

ex: C E G A C

Play with the same pairing of fingers shown above.

VII. FINGER INDEPENDENCE

"Jane Allen" - holding 1 and 5 and playing 2 3 4 3 2. Shift up by steps in the key.
single fingers 4x, 8x, 12x

VIII: OCTAVES

repeated octaves 2x, 3x, and 4x with a wrist lift

2x = "throw-lift"

3x = "throw and lift"

4x = "throw and lift-ing"

then play the same rhythmic groups in ascending and descending step motion

IX: ETUDES

Select a technical study for focused practice.