

## **Pedagogy – Mentoring the Next Generation of Teachers**

Some years ago my 13 year old grade 8 piano student, casually mentioned to me that she had started teaching several students. I was taken aback! What, I wondered, did she know about teaching, and why had she decided to do this without even consulting me? It was the same year that RCM announced their new pedagogy program and it immediately peaked my interest as I saw this as the structure that could help me appropriately mentor my students who were interested in teaching. I studied the topics and sample exam, and spent my summer of 2005 researching many pedagogy books which were helpful, but it became clear to me that there was no single text book that would adequately prepare students for this course, so I developed my own Elementary Rudiments Workbook for students. The book covers one topic per chapter, based on the criteria listed in the syllabus. Three of my teenage students took the course that first year. It was the riskiest thing I've ever done in my career, as it was a brand new course, with no actual exams or past experience to refer to. The girls completed Written in May of that first year of the program, and Viva Voce in June, with First Class Honours in all exams. Most importantly, they were ready to teach with skill and integrity. Since then, I have taught Elementary and Intermediate each year, always with great success.

### **Elementary Pedagogy**

- The first level, Elementary, is the most essential and crucial aspect of this program. Students learn to critically evaluate and compare numerous beginner methods.
- Lesson Planning: they learn the importance of having a plan, not only for the individual lesson, but also for the full year.
- Business aspects, such as developing an appropriate studio policy, and how to conduct interviews with prospective students and their parents are discussed.
- They learn to strategize the teaching of technique, ensuring that good habits are learned from the very first lesson, and they discover how to diagnose and solve problems.
- Taking this course ensures that the student teacher learns how to incorporate ear training, sight reading, and theory into the lesson.
- Questions on how to deal with potential problems and difficulties that arise in the course of teaching lead to stimulating discussion as students share their ideas.
- Preparation for the Viva Voce exam shows the student teacher how important it is that their own playing set an example of excellence to their students. They are usually quite surprised that the pieces are not as easy as they look, and have to practice them diligently. Their goal should be to play each piece so that it would rate 90% or higher.
- So much of teaching involves thinking on our feet. We prepare to the best of our ability, but must constantly come up with immediate solutions and inspiration in the course of each lesson. In the same way, the Viva Voce exam requires that the students be creative and quick in their responses.
- It is not necessary that candidates have any of their own students while taking the Elementary level, in fact, ideally – they should have some training before the very first

lesson they ever teach. It is very helpful if the student teacher can observe their mentor teacher working with students at those levels.

- There are many benefits to teaching this course in a group setting as students learn so much from each other.
- I firmly believe that every student who is considering teaching should take *at least* Elementary Pedagogy. One of the benefits of this three level program is that it gives the student teacher a chance to try their hand at teaching at the beginner, grade 1 and grade 2 level without having to make a full commitment to the entire program. For students with an ARCT Performers, taking Elementary Pedagogy would ensure a sound start in their own teaching.

### **Intermediate Pedagogy**

- Structured much the same way as Elementary, but deals with the teaching of grade 3 – 6 students, including intermediate repertoire and technique at this level.
- Challenges that may arise specific to transfer students are covered at this level.
- Emphasis is also placed on supplementary music, giving the student teacher the opportunity to explore additional repertoire outside of the RCM books.
- Teaching the intermediate student involves the changing dynamic with an older student and the unique challenges this presents, the different kind of role parents play, and teaching the student how to be a more independent learner.
- There are a number of textbooks available that are suitable for preparation at this level. Researching topics based on questions from previous exams is helpful.
- It is expected that the candidate have some teaching experience.

### **Advanced Pedagogy**

- The culmination of the course. Requires that the applicant has significant teaching experience. While the “old” ARCT dealt with teaching up to the grade 8 level, advanced now covers Gr 7 – 10. I am waiting for some clarification from RCM on how much teaching experience is required, and how comprehensive the questions might be. I have had some discussions with RCM examinations and am confident that they are listening to our concerns about this level.
- Watch for changes in the syllabus – coming soon.
- There have yet to be any workshops at this level.

The problem of unqualified teachers, with no pedagogical training, is not likely to go away. Just last week I had a discussion with one of my piano students who is interested in teaching. I described the elementary pedagogy course to her with all the enthusiasm that I naturally have for this topic, and her response was that she doesn't think she will take the course because she “just wants to teach for fun”! Usually, however, I have found my students to be very sincere in their desire to do the best job possible with their students. Many have commented that – regardless of the mark they may receive – taking the course was extremely helpful in building their skill and confidence as a teacher.

There are still some growing pains with this program. After each exam session, feedback from my students results in modifications to my course. According to their experience, it seems that not all Examiners are following a consistent approach with the Viva Voce examination; however, in spite of these difficulties this three level in depth program provides us, the experienced teachers, with an effective and flexible structure with which to mentor our students – the next generation of teachers. We have a great responsibility as music educators to ensure that our students and their parents understand the importance of sound pedagogical training.

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