

# *How is Group Teaching Effective for Pianists?*

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**Abstract:** Group teaching is a necessary method to develop a pianist. Make sure the students in the group do the correct cooperative practice, guiding students to flexibly grasp the physical control during performance and accurately judge the piano timbre is of great significance for improving teaching efficiency. To more comprehensively predict the factors that may affect group teaching, in addition to analyzing and explaining the causal relationship between individual students and teaching, this paper also includes the possible impact of external factors on group teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

In music teaching, group teaching is a common teaching method. It is a kind of mutual aid and cooperation activity between students. This kind of activity mainly divides the students in the classroom into two or three groups to discuss piano practice or problems. In the process of continuous communication and discussion, it will promote contact and help between the members of the small group and takes it as the driving force of teaching activities. The overall structure of this research takes the form of three different parts, including: a) The analysis and application of scholarship. b) An understanding of the music theory of Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly and Swiss music teacher Emile Jaques-Dalcroze. c) The factors that may affect group teaching and what are the solutions.

## **2. The Basic factors affecting group teaching**

### **2.1. The teacher guides students to carry out group cooperative learning**

When teachers carry out a classroom collaborative learning plans, one thing that cannot be ignored is to ensure that all students understand how to carry out cooperative learning in groups. According to Svinicki and McKeachie (2014), teachers should confirm that every member of the group is involved in the discussion and task. When the teacher asks the students to discuss in groups how to touch the keys of "legato" and "staccato", each member of the group should express opinions and give reasons or demonstration playing. It is not allowed to think that everyone has reached a consensus just because no one provides another idea or choice, in this case, the result of the group discussion is the most convincing.

## 2.2. Correctly assign the key points of practice according to different performance abilities

After ensuring that effective communication methods and techniques are used in the group discussion. If the teacher wants to carry out effective group teaching of pianists, tutors need to be familiar with the teaching repertoire. According to Crappell (2019), one of the most basic and common classroom teaching tasks of piano teachers is to determine the repertoire that students will learn. This kind of teaching method is correct. However, when it is applied to group teaching, some minor changes need to be made. First, before choosing the repertoire, the teacher needs to have a basic understanding and division of the group members' learning ability and piano foundation, and then decide the difficulty of learning or playing. To clearly grasp the students' learning ability, the teacher can let the students play the first page of the same piece in class and divide them into groups according to the students' sight-reading performance level in the piano lesson, to ensure that the learning ability of each group remains at an equal level. The purpose of doing this is not only to maintain a fair attitude, but more importantly, in the discussion or practice of the repertoire, students with slightly higher ability can sometimes put forward better suggestions or practice methods, to improve the learning ability of the group. After the division of groups, the teacher will assign different pieces of music according to the advantages and disadvantages of each group, because the different music elements contained in the pieces can be divided into different learning categories and learning focuses such as contour, tonality, rhythm, dynamics, and pedalling (Crappell,2019). After selecting the practice repertoire of each group, the students will have a common practice goal in group practice. If the group encounter difficulties in performing, the team members can help each other to discuss. On the other hand, when they encounter serious performance issues that cannot be solved by the group ability, the teacher will inspire the students or give a demonstration performance on the piano. This manner can maximize the efficiency of group practice and try to improve the performance ability of each pianist.

## 2.3. Dalcroze's training method helps relieve physical tension during performance

A pianist not only needs to practice for a long time every day but also needs to master the control of the body flexibly. According to Brown (2009), practice is an indispensable, even the most important part of a pianist's daily life. Through daily practice, pianists can master and be confident in their repertoire. In addition, during practice, pianists should also continue to study how their bodies are able to perform with maximum relaxation and to present dynamics, phrases, and fingering in a relaxed state with greater grace and comfort. To allow group members to relax their physical tension and enhance their attention in class practice, a set of specific training methods proposed by Dalcroze can be adopted. This is a method of music education, which combines rhythmic movement, auditory training, and improvisation, mainly through body movement to learn music elements. According to Dalcroze, to improve and maximize musical expression, students need to be trained to listen and appreciate music with their minds and bodies. Therefore, to improve and maximize the musical expressivity of each group, the improvisation proposed by Dalcroze can be applied to classroom teaching. Due to the teacher has divided the study group according to the superiorities and drawbacks of each student before, the tutor needs to carry out training with different focuses based on the characteristics of each group. For example, if the first group is short of mastering the tempo of the piece when practicing the piano, then the teacher should focus on training students to master the rhythm and beat, in process of training, the teacher should follow the principle from elementary to complex and play different types of notes on the piano at will, while the students make corresponding body movements to respond to the music. During this process, the teacher should adjust the training content by observing the performance of each pianist in the group. After a few lessons of practice, the pianist's understanding of music and rhythm will be significantly

improved. Besides, another problem that should be noted is that almost every pianist will feel involuntary physical tension during practice, which is imperceptible to himself. The reason for this situation is the lack of control over the music, which leads to body stiffness during the performance. To alleviate this problem, groups can be used to supervise each other in class.

### **3. Internal and external factors that affect a pianists's practice**

#### **3.1. Identify music priorities**

On the one hand, to carry out effective piano teaching in the piano lesson, the correct classroom teaching order needs to be established. According to Swinkin (2015), before teaching more difficult music, it is more essential to determine the key points of music reading. Playing music directly too early cannot help pianists to make rapid progress in performing, on the contrary, it will have the opposite effect. Therefore, before various music activities are configured in the classroom, tutors can convey the music points in the form of experience, including the practice of simple counterpoint and basic harmonic progress. For example, the teacher first assigns the two learning contents to different groups, and the group members need to complete the learning tasks together within the specified time and select a pianist with the best performance to show. The teacher is responsible for evaluating the learning efficiency of each group. After completing the task of this stage, the teacher can continue to elaborate and fill in this learning point with fine details and finally, teach the complete work. This kind of teaching method can increase the detail processing and completion of the works, and on the premise of ensuring cooperative learning in groups, the performance ability of each pianist will be improved to varying degrees.

#### **3.2. Singing music has a positive effect on the understanding of repertoire**

On the other hand, effective music group teaching does not mean only teaching about piano, music education involves many aspects such as singing. According to Abril (2016), music education should start with the learning of music mother tongue and singing. Apart from that, Abril also states that Hungarian composer Kodaly's understanding of music education, he mentioned that Kodaly believes that students should participate in the music experience and use the knowledge to feel and strengthen the understanding of specific concepts. For example, for beginning pianists, teachers can ask each group student to find the melody lines of a piece before learning a new repertoire. When groups finding out the melody lines, the team members will hum to each other and accompany the body rhythm to increase the note memory, after singing several times the pianists can learn the new repertoire, because students have an excellent grasp of the melody of music. This kind of training method is quite effective, especially for the music repertoire with a complex sound pattern.

#### **3.3. The role of timbre in artistic expression**

Moreover, an excellent pianist needs a precise grasp of the piano's timbre and skills, according to Thompson (2018), timbre has always been considered the most important component in the music world, and only when the production of timbre is mastered can artistic expression be carried out. This point is very important for the beginner pianist, because only by mobilizing the emotions and physical energy can the pianist make great changes in the intensity of the tone in the performance, hence it is very necessary to correctly learn piano skills. Piano skills not only represent a kind of mechanical training, but also teachers can connect skill learning with daily life in classroom teaching. Firstly, beginner piano students can explore several different technique bases, finger

scratching, walking finger, and appropriate practice posture. During the study, the group pianists helped each other by putting their fingers on the other's arm to practice fingers and expressing their feelings. This practice method can increase students' interest in and understanding of skill learning. When students can have a basic understanding of the concept before using the piano to practice, it will increase the accuracy and efficiency of the practice. On the other hand, to relax physically while practicing the piano, teachers can help students with other objects, such as balls. Group members throw balls to each other and then play after relaxing their body tension.

### 3.4. Active classroom space helps students release physical pressure

Finally, to cultivate effective pianists in the piano lesson, in addition to group discussion, there are also some external environmental factors need to be considered. According to Snodgrass (2020), learning exists and is shared in a positive classroom space, teachers should create a safe space for students to a discussion, dialogue, and discover. To be more specific, an effective learning space can improve the learning efficiency of group students, the environment of the classroom is not only about the arrangement of desks, but also the amount of spare space that can be fully used and safe for students to conduct classroom activities and experiments. For instance, when the students are carrying out the experiment of Dalcroze, they need to follow the music of the teacher to carry out the physical improvement. When the students begin to relax their bodies and release their body tension at will, due to many of students, they are likely to be injured by touching the objects in the room inadvertently. In this situation, the teacher needs to prepare the solution before the course starts. For example, by halving the figure of study groups. When a group member begins to practice, other pianists can watch and follow the piano humming rhythm. In this case, each group member is involved in the classroom activities. Therefore, this solution has great advantages, which will not affect the efficiency of group teaching, but also ensure the safety of the classroom environment.

## 4. Conclusions

In group learning, teachers are required to have a certain control over the repertoire and can also quickly choose a piece that suitable for practice and can be really improved according to the ability of the students in the group. Secondly, teachers should also scientifically use the teaching methods advocated by Dalcroze to connect with the real classroom to cultivate effective pianists. On the other hand, group learning also requires every member to participate in classroom discussions and activities. Teachers should constantly observe the problems and progress of each group in the process of activities. For pianists, group study can constantly improve their understanding of and change their practice methods, which is an excellent manner of teaching.

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