Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag

Intention-based Piano Pedagogy

Syllabus for piano methodology

Part 2 – Practical applications

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1 INTRODUCTION

This booklet presents you with a collection of practical approaches for common pianistic skills. It is intended to show you how the learning process of these skills can be approached based on pupils' musical intentions and by activating their ability to listen and feel: intention-based piano pedagogy. As you will see, musical imagination (inner representations of intended musical outcomes) plays a central role in this process. Put simply, the learning process starts with pupils acquiring ideas of musical goals. As has been described in part 1 of this syllabus, in early stages of learning, demonstrations of pianistic skills are very useful for pupils in order to get an inner image of the possibilities in terms of sound of the piano. Additionally, many pianistic skills can be prepared by singing, for example dynamic differentiation and various articulations. For certain pianistic skills, musical metaphors intended to clarify musical goals will be presented. Next, pupils need to (internally) discover playing gestures that lead to the intended musical result. This step can be facilitated by various pedagogical tools. You will find many examples of in-between steps, movement metaphors and educational games. These educational tools have a common theme: they intend to reduce or avoid literal movement instructions. In other words: they promote implicit motor learning in pupils. The advantages of implicit motor learning are explained in part 1.

The practical working forms collected in this booklet originate from various sources. In the first place, many of my colleagues have contributed to them, for which I owe them a lot. Secondly, some are simply part of common practice within piano pedagogy. Lastly, students of piano methodology in previous years have suggested additional working forms during fruitful discussions in the lessons. I aim to continue adding to this collection in the future, including contributions by students and colleagues.

This booklet intends to give you ideas how intention-based learning of pianistic skills can take place. Hopefully it encourages you to come up with your own applications of it during your own lessons.

2 POSTURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Posture and movement arise and develop automatically and naturally throughout the development of a human being. Children generally go through the following stages of motor development:

- ➢ Lying on their back (after birth)

- ➢ Turn over to their belly

- ➢ Raise and support their head

- ➢ Sit (within the first year)

- ➢ Stand with support of the hands (around one year old)

- ➢ Stand without support

- ➢ Walk a couple of steps, unsteadily

- ➢ Walk steadily (around the age of two)

- ➢ Run with raised arms

- ➢ Run with arm participation

All of this happens **spontaneously**, without instructions how to do it. Triggers in the environment (toys, attention from other people, etcetera) stimulate discovering new ways of holding and moving the body. Here is a video on the so-called "baby milestones": https://youtu.be/vwfwFsE8Hfk (Source: Tiny Medicine YouTube-channel)

Posture is influenced by several factors:

- ➢ Social factors – Posture expresses emotions: eager-bored, anxious-at ease

- ➢ Health factors – Diseases such as rheumatism and asthma have a visible influence on posture. Also, muscle weakness related to ageing is influential.

- ➢ Postural deviations – There are numerous deviations in posture: scoliosis, hyperlordosis, loosed posture, backward carriage, Scheuermann's disease, short hamstrings. This is only a limited selection.

- ➢ Task factors – Posture unconsciously adapts to the demands of the task at hand. The more demanding the task gets in terms of fine motor control, the more active the posture will become.

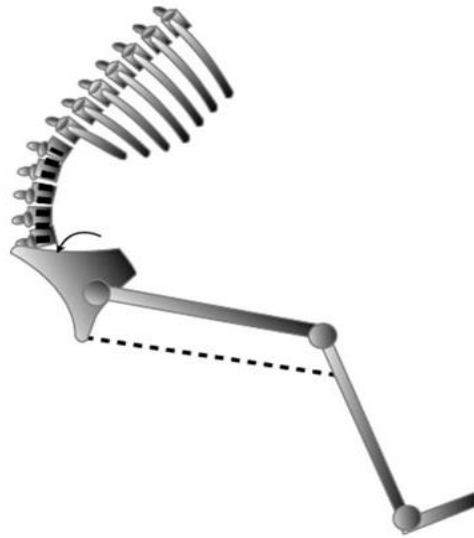Some examples of postural deviations are shown on the next page:

Figure 1. Influence of short hamstrings on sitting posture. Source: http://www.mychhs.colostate.edu/david.greene

a. Lordosis: increased anterior lumbar curve from neutral

b. Kyphosis: increased posterior thoracic curve from neutral

c. Flat back: decreased anterior lumbar curve

d. Sway back: decreased anterior lumbar curve and increased posterior thoracic curve from neutral

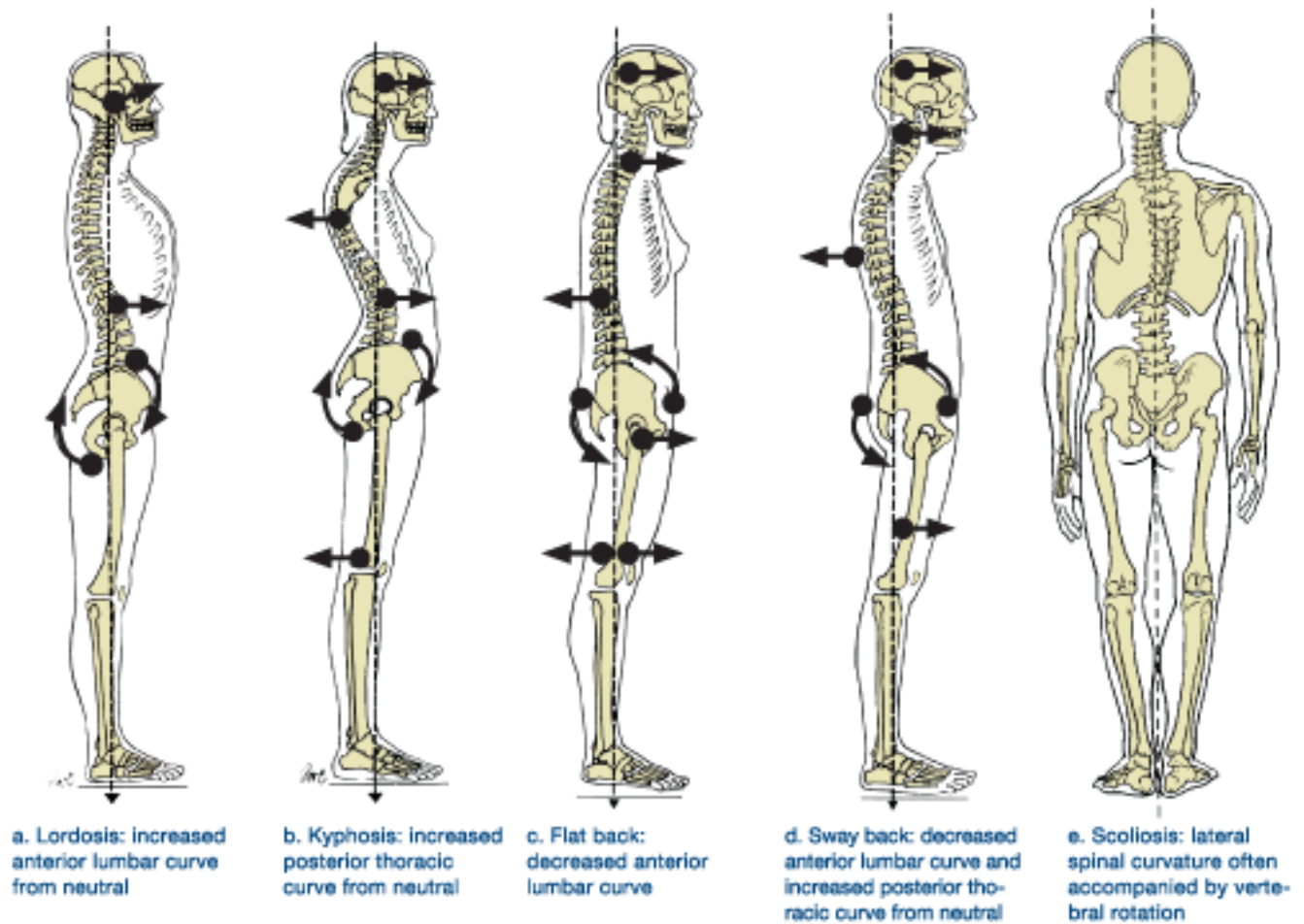e. Scoliosis: lateral spinal curvature often accompanied by vertebral rotation

Figure 2: Overview of postural deviations. Source: American Council on Exercise

Health factors and postural deviations are in my opinion beyond the scope of a music teacher. However, social factors and task factors can be influenced by music teachers to help their pupils.

2.2 CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH A SUITABLE POSTURE EMERGES

Within a piano lesson, pupils differentiate their posture in accordance with the musical demands at hand. In case of a not so challenging task in terms of motor control, such as finding out a melody by ear, many pupils adopt a less active posture, for example with a rounded back. As soon as they get a task that is challenging in terms of pianistic quality (for example: to play a song in one specific dynamic, or to play fluently and legato) unconsciously they adopt a more active posture, which suits the musical task. It would be unnatural to ask the pupil to sit in an active way, whilst the task is not inviting it.

When pupils feel **safe,** are **challenged** in terms of pianistic quality, and are **concentrated** on pianistic quality, they will automatically find a posture that is suitable for the current musical task. In this video you can observe the influence that a simple pianistic challenge ("Play this song softly") has on posture and playing gesture: https://youtu.be/NG8RcX4y3t8. Note that no instructions on posture and movement were given in this example. If one of the three conditions is lacking, a pattern of movement and posture that is unfavourable for pianistic quality will emerge:

➢ When pupils feel **unsafe** and/or do not dare to make mistakes, this is visible in their body language. Young pupils (5-7-year-old) sometimes display clown-like behaviour in this situation: their posture is exaggerated, and their playing gesture is deliberately clumsy. In case of withdrawn behaviour, the posture expresses a lack of involvement with the musical task, for example a rounded back or a turned-away posture. The remedy is to gradually take away the emotion behind the anxious behaviour, by creating a lesson climate in which making mistakes is acceptable.

➢ Pupils who are bored with the current musical activity will show postures that express their being bored. Once again, the remedy is to take away the emotion behind the posture: you look for ways to bring back your pupils' attention. You could for example do this by a funny remark, expressive use of your voice, finding challenging tasks or applying lots of variation in the lesson content

➢ Overly enthusiastic pupils generally have favourable postures but apply playing gestures that are too rough. In these situations, the musical demands are too low: these pupils can play more beautiful, but they temporarily have no attention for pianistic quality. The remedy is to let these pupils settle down and focus their attention on aspects of pianistic quality. Besides these moments of concentration and attention for pianistic quality, it is wise to also keep space for overly enthusiastic pupils to occasionally fly of the handle.

2.3 DIDACTIC APPROACHES TO POSTURE

1. By means of literal instructions (Instruction Based Approach – explicit motor learning)

   "Sit up straight", "Put your feet straight on the floor, in front of the pedals"

2. By means of movement metaphors (implicit motor learning)

   "Sit like a real pianist", "Sit like a king"

   ⇒ *Can you think of other metaphors that might help your pupil to find a suitable posture?*

3. By means of physical exercises (or games) in which your pupils feel the benefit of an active posture. For example:

"Slide with both hands over the keyboard. Let your fingertips touch the keys gently. Do this as fast as you can. Now play a soft note with both hands as soon as you reach the outer area of the keyboard. Do you feel that you sit differently now? (Reflection) Now play [name of song or piece], sitting in the same way."

Or:

Let the pupil stand up and sit down on the piano chair. Repeat this a couple of times. "Sit in such a way that you can stand up immediately. When I clap, you must stand up as quickly as you can. (This game triggers a very active posture) Play the song once more. How did that go? Did you hear a difference? Did it feel differently?"

This is a game for finding a suitable distance to the piano:

"Move the chair forwards, so far that you sit with your belly touching the piano. Play the song/piece. Now move the chair backwards, so far that you can barely reach the keys. Play the song/piece once more. Now you decide the position of the chair. Put it in such a position that you can play the song/piece most easily."

⟹ *Can you think of other physical exercises or games that might trigger a suitable posture?*

4. Based on trusting the inborn capacity of the bodies of your pupils to find personal postural optimums naturally. Do something about posture at the moment that your pupils can experience musical benefits from changes in posture. The consequence of this approach is that you must accept that some pupils (temporarily) sit in ways that are not in accordance with postural norms that are conventional and traditionally transferred among piano teachers. In this approach to sit "correctly" is not the goal. Rather, the goal is that pupils develop postures that suits them, in accordance with their physical possibilities, motor development and musical development.

5. By means of your "helping hands". You assist the pupil to find a suitable posture through physical contact. Technically, this is called a guided or facilitated movement.

6. By means of making pupils aware of their sitting bones.

"Wiggle on your sitting bones. Now make your back rounded. Can you still feel your sitting bones while wiggling?"

⟹ *Which approach to posture did the teacher(s) in your childhood have?*

2.4 PRACTICAL THINGS TO DO ABOUT POSTURE

➢ Make sure you have a proper, adjustable piano chair in your teaching room

➢ Make sure pupils have proper, adjustable piano chairs at home

➢ For pupils who cannot yet reach the floor with their feet, let them put their feet on a bench. Also, make sure that they have something similar at home.

➢ If your pupil is ready for using the pedals, but cannot yet reach them, you could use a pedal extender. There are many options. You can buy it, for example: https://www.amazon.com/Adjustable-Piano-Pedal-Extender-Pedals/dp/B00KH5P1RA

You can also make one yourself. Here is a construction plan: https://www.instructables.com/id/Simple-Piano-Pedal-Extender-for-Children/

If for some reason you cannot arrange for a pedal extender, you could either do the pedalling when your pupil plays, let your pupil do the pedalling when you play, or let your pupil stand rather than sit.

➢ Take some time for pupils to adjust the height of the chair. Let them compare different heights. Let them decide which height they want. Later in the lesson you can repeat experimenting with the height of the chair. It is an ongoing process aimed at finding a personal optimum.

⟹ *Are there other useful ideas you could add to these practical things to do about posture?*

3 FINGERINGS

In some situations, there is only one fingering that is practically possible in order to play a passage properly. However, in many situations there is *more than one* possible fingering that might lead to a good result. Pianists therefore have the luxury of choice. Each pianist has his or her preferences as to which fingering to choose. To find an appropriate fingering is essential for a pianist. Sometimes a better fingering can make the life of a pianist so much easier...

Which fingering is best can be approached **individually**: *which fingering enables pupils to produce the sound they have in mind? Which fingering do they perceive as most easy/comfortable/natural?* Finding and choosing fingerings thus becomes a personal matter. It is not approached as a goal, rather it becomes a **tool**: a fingering is intended to produce the musical effect pupils have in mind in the easiest possible way, as perceived by them. This approach to fingerings requires letting go of dividing fingerings into the categories "right" and "wrong". Rather, fingerings should be categorized as "suitable" or "unsuitable" for a person in a context. For example, there are pianists who use unconventional fingerings for certain pianistic patterns (for instance the chromatic scale) and seem to have no difficulty doing so. In summary, I recommend a pragmatic and personalized approach towards fingerings.

Which fingerings suit pupils depends among other factors on their age and the stage of their pianistic development. This chapter is therefore organised progressively: the first five paragraphs apply to young pupils in an early stage of pianistic development, the later paragraphs apply to more advanced pupils.

3.1 FINGERINGS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Young children move differently from adults. They are on the way to develop their fine-motor skills. As a result, they have different preferences for fingerings than adults. The two most striking differences are:

➢ In an early stage they prefer not to use their thumbs in melodies

➢ In a later stage they prefer to play triads in root position with 125, rather than 135

In my experience, these two phenomena should be approached differently. It is a good idea to encourage young pupils to use their thumbs in melodies. Possible approaches are described in the next paragraph. About the fingering of a triad in root position, it is better to let them play with their preferred fingering. This allows them to play with a good sound and little effort. When asked to play with 135, you can clearly observe that this makes it much more difficult for them, and they struggle to play all notes together in good balance. When they grow older, their preferences regarding fingerings change naturally. There is no need to force them to play fingerings that are artificial for them.

3.2 MAKING TEN FINGERS AVAILABLE

Children of the age of five or six will often automatically play with one finger at first, most often they choose the index finger. Children of the age of seven and up will generally automatically start playing with multiple fingers, although there are exceptions. This is related to the stage of their fine motor development. For many young children, to use individual fingers is still hard. When finding out their first songs by ear, they simplify the task by using only one finger, thereby being able to focus on the pitches and rhythms. This solution is perfectly natural.

In teaching children who have difficulty playing with multiple fingers, it is a good idea to introduce legato and staccato playing (see chapter 4: Articulation). Legato playing creates a musical necessity to use multiple fingers, because you cannot produce legato with only one finger. As a result, you can challenge your pupils to play legato, *implicitly* challenging them to use multiple fingers.

A nice educational game for stimulating young pupils to play with all fingers is the "River-Path-Forest" game. The goal of this game is to learn to use all parts of the key surface, including the key surface of the white keys between the black keys. This is useful in situations where the thumb or fifth finger plays on a black key. Also, this exercise encourages pupils to keep all fingers "available" during playing.

"In front of the keys there is a river. The white keys are a path along the river. The black keys are the trees of a forest. Play the song on the edge of the path, with the thumb and little finger swimming in the river. Play the song at the edge of the forest, just before the trees. Play the song between the trees. Now play the song at the place you prefer."

Young children tend to put their long fingers (2, 3 and 4) on the front edge of the white keys. Their thumbs and fifth fingers hang in front of the keyboard. In this situation, children play with a "pushy" playing gesture. When they play more forwards on the keys, their thumbs and fifth fingers become available for playing, even when they are not used in a song. When pupils play between the black keys, the pushy way of playing is not possible anymore. This situation encourages pupils to play more with their fingers. Their playing gestures are influenced by the *limitation* caused by the deeper position of the hand. Therefore, this is an example of the Constraints-led Approach: a form of implicit motor learning.

Some children get annoyed by having to play with multiple fingers. Here are some advices how to deal with this:

➢ Formulate playing with multiple fingers as a challenge. For example, in a Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol song: "You played the whole song and you found all the notes. Good job. Now, let's see whether you can also do this using all five fingers."

➢ Explain that playing with multiple fingers is a tough task, and that they don't have to succeed right away. It is all right if they take their time to practice it, both in the lesson and at home. This way your pupils realize that the reason they do not succeed immediately is not because they are stupid, but because it is a hard task. Also, when they succeed, they know they have achieved a major job.

➢ Alternate between playing with one and multiple fingers, both in the lesson and at home. Playing with one finger is not wrong or forbidden. Allowing your pupils to play with one finger creates space for focusing on other aspects of the music.

If necessary, you can support the learning process by doing the following activities:

➢ Finger-tapping on the lid of the piano, or a table top.

➢ The metaphor of the spider: your pupils imitate a spider with their hands. Their fingers are the legs of the spider. Let them crawl over the piano lid as if their hands are spiders.

➢ Games that involve moving specified individual fingers. For example: the wiggling game. Pupils open both hands and put them in the air. You call the fingers that should wiggle: "Let your pinkies wiggle". Note: it is not productive to aim for independence of the fingers, it is completely natural that other fingers wiggle along a bit.

3.3   Playing melodies with both hands

After learning to play a melody with the dominant hand, let's start to use the other hand as well. The first step is to play the melody with the other hand only. If your pupils say something like: "That's hard", it is a good idea to validate this: "Yes, it is hard". If your pupils know it is a tough task, it is easier for them to accept that they do not succeed right away. Also, when they succeed, they know they have achieved something, which is good for their self-efficacy: the expectation that they can accomplish a task.

The next step is to play the melody with both hands. Young children (until the age of six) occasionally do this in mirror motion spontaneously. Children aged seven and older generally play in parallel motion automatically. If you feel it is useful to do so, you could teach your pupils to play both mirror motion and parallel motion. In this case you can also teach them the names for these two ways of playing.
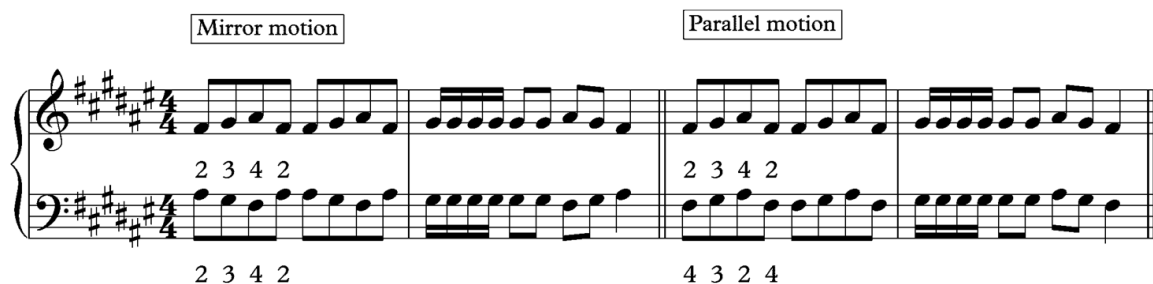
Listening game: you play a song, either mirror or parallel motion. Your pupils have to say which way of playing they heard.

3.4   Learning finger numbers

Learning the conventional finger numbers can be done at an early stage of pianistic development. It is useful for your pupils to know the finger numbers since it creates the opportunity to communicate about fingering with the conventional words.

There are many games with which you can introduce and train the finger numbers to your pupils. I will describe two of them: The Wiggling Game and the Finger Dictation Game.

3.4.1   The Wiggling Game

"Hold both hands in the air, as if they are waving at each other. [Described explicitly this means open, with the fingers pointing upwards and the palms facing each other.] I say a number, and then you wiggle the fingers that have that number. Let these fingers wave at each other, as if they say "Hi" to each other."

Variation (difficult!): Let both hands wiggle with a different finger.

3.4.2   The Finger Dictation Game

"Put finger 1 of your right hand on a G. Find the melody Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol. Now all five fingers have a key of their own. I will sing a fingering, and you play it."

In this game you can start with easy motives, such as Do-Re-Do. Build up the complexity gradually.

3.5   SINGING THE FINGERING

Melodies with a range of more than a fifth generally require shifts of hand position and sometimes passing under the thumb or crossing over the fingers. With pupils who are trained in a song-based approach, a nice preparation/reinforcement for a complicated fingering is to sing the fingering. Additionally, you can ask your pupil to sing along the fingering whilst playing.

3.6   LEARNING TO SELECT A SUITABLE FINGERING INDEPENDENTLY

Being an experienced pianist, you can find functional fingerings by yourself. You want your pupils to develop this ability too. It is therefore a good idea to frequently put your pupils in the position of finding solutions to fingering issues in complicated passages **themselves**. Let your pupils write their solutions in pencil. If they overlook options, you can present them with alternative fingerings.

When there is more than one fingering solution (which is often the case in piano playing), the best thing to do is to let your pupils try them out and reflect on their experiences:

➢   Were there differences in how the passage sounded?

➢   Which fingering felt easiest?

Based on this, they choose their fingering. As an example, here is a passage from Mozart's Sonata in a-minor KV 310, that can be played with various fingerings.

Note: even more fingerings are possible than presented here. The first fingering is more suitable for a legato sound, the second fingering better suits a non-legato sound. In summary, I recommend letting pupils try out various fingering and allowing them to choose their favourite themselves.

3.7   CHANGING FINGERINGS PUPILS ARE ALREADY USED TO

To have a clear idea how a passage is supposed to sound is a prerequisite for finding an appropriate fingering. When pupils have a legato sound in mind, they will come up with a different fingering compared to when they do *not* have a legato sound in mind. How you want a passage to sound is the goal. The fingering is the practical solution to reach this goal. If approached this way, fingerings are not that hard to learn or change, even if your pupils have played the "wrong" fingerings for many years. If it is clear for your pupils which improvement in the sound they could make, they will recognize the shortcomings in their playing when they use the old fingering, for instance a "gap" between two notes. As a result, they have musical "reminders" and musical reasons to play the passage again and use the new fingering. This is the l**aw of effect** at work: movements that have a musical purpose are easy to remember.

As an example, let's imagine that you have a pupil who plays a "wrong" fingering for the descending chromatic scale, using the 1st and 2nd finger in the wrong order on the two adjacent white keys:

If this pupil can play the chromatic scale with this fingering fast and fluently, and with the sound he has in mind, there is no musical reason to change. However, it is more likely that this pupil is rhythmically not very fluent in fast tempos. To be able to play fluently in a fast tempo now becomes the learning goal in terms of pianistic quality. Let's also imagine that this pupil is playing Für Elise and is experiencing difficulties with the speed and rhythmic fluency of the descending chromatic scale towards the end of this piece:

Now there is a clear musical reason to work on the fingering. Here are some steps that you could take:

➢ First, make sure that your pupil has the **correct rhythm** for this fragment in his musical mind. One of the ways of doing this, is by clapping the pulse ("heartbeat") of this piece, and speaking ("scatting") the rhythms, focussing on the transition from sixteenth notes to sixteenth triplets and back. When using the rhythm language Takadimi[1], these rhythms are pronounced as "Tadi" and "Takida". When your pupil can pronounce these rhythms fluently in the tempo required by the piece, you know that his musical imagination of the rhythm is correct.

➢ At this point, your pupil might spontaneously realize that he does not quite reach the required fluency when he plays this passage. In other words, there is a gap between his musical imagination of the passage and his ability to perform it on the piano. If your pupil does not spontaneously realize this, you can help him by giving a demonstration of how this passage sounds when played fluently and in tempo.

➢ After showing the new fingering, let your pupil try it out. Afterwards, let your pupil alternate between the old and the new fingering, and let him reflect on the differences. This practising approach is called "mediation". **Rather than labelling the old fingering as "wrong" and the new fingering as "right", your pupil now *compares* both fingerings.** By doing this, he learns to recognize the differences between the two fingerings. This allows him to recognize which fingering he took when he plays the piece in tempo. After all, this passage is supposed to be played in a speed in which you do not have time to think about each note before you play it. The old fingering is not something that has to be "erased" and "replaced" by the new fingering by lots of repetitions, avoiding the old fingering. Rather, the more the superiority

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[1]Takadimi is a rhythm language developed by Richard Hoffman, William Pelto, John W. White and others:
www.takadimi.net

of the new fingering is experienced, the more likely it becomes that it will emerge when playing the passage fast.

➢ Let your pupil apply **"variability practice"** on this passage. This practice approach is based on making variations in (amongst other elements) speed, dynamics, articulation, and rhythm for each repetition of the passage. This stimulates the formation of "open automatisms": your pupil develops speed whilst maintaining the capacity to play flexibly. This practice approach is superior to plain repetition, especially in this type of situation.

4 ARTICULATION

The skill to play legato and staccato is preferably introduced in an early stage of the development of pianistic skills. To play a short and soft staccato is a good challenge for finding a light playing gesture with a quick release. To play legato creates a musical necessity for playing with multiple fingers (see chapter 3: Fingering).

Below I describe steps for the learning process of playing staccato and legato. The rules of thumb that apply to this learning process are:

➢ First experiences, then concepts

➢ Learn by doing ("procedural learning"), as little explanation ("declarative learning") as possible

➢ Give instructions and feedback based on the desired musical outcome (Perception Based Learning). Avoid literal and/or normative movement instructions (Instruction Based Learning).

When introducing legato and staccato, we can see that there are huge differences between pupils regarding fine motor skills: some can do it easily, spontaneously and naturally, others can learn to do it with a bit of assistance, some have serious difficulties in learning it. With pupils who do it easily, you can choose to skip some of the mentioned steps, or to do them only briefly. With pupils who have difficulty learning it, you can choose to spend as much time on an exercise or in-between-step as you feel is appropriate.

4.1 STEPS FOR THE LEARNING PROCESS OF PLAYING LEGATO AND STACCATO

4.1.1 Prepare staccato and legato by singing
Let your pupils sing the same song several times, alternating between legato and staccato singing. Do this with a variety of songs, keep doing it over a couple of weeks. Start with you demonstrating and your pupil imitating how to sing legato and staccato. As much as possible, avoid explaining in words how to sing. Instead, be very clear in your demonstration. Make sure your vocal demonstrations are as musical as possible. After all, you also want to invest in the vocal quality of your pupil.

4.1.2 Demonstrations of legato and staccato on the piano
Play a song, first legato then staccato. Ask your pupils to explain in their own words the difference in sound between the first and second performance of the song. Take over and use the words that your pupils chose to describe the sound. Afterwards you can teach your pupils the official words for these sounds: staccato and legato. Generally, children enjoy learning "real music words" for the things that they can sing and/or play.

➢ Game: you play random songs and pieces, either completely staccato or legato. Your pupil tells which type of playing he heard.

4.1.3 Optional: connect gestures to legato and staccato.
In the PI-program[2], we chose to represent legato by a gesture that you might call "walking with thumbs and index fingers":

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[2] PI is a music-educational program for pre-school children organized by the Conservatory of The Hague: https://www.kon-con.nl/en/programmes/school-for-young-talent/school-for-young-talent/school-for-young-talent/pi-music-for-pre-school-children

➢ *"Contact thumb and index finger of opposite hands, then contact the other (unused) index finger and thumb, now release the first finger-duo and bring them back into contact above the second finger-duo."*

⟹ *Please watch this video:* https://youtu.be/JwxVPCBE1X0

We chose to represent staccato by the gesture of shooting away a small object with the index finger:

➢ *"Gently nestle the nail of the index finger into the soft part of the top phalanx of the thumb. Now imagine a small object lying on the tip of the thumb and shoot it away with the index finger."*

With this gesture we intend to stimulate the idea of an opening/releasing movement.

⟹ *Please watch this video:* https://youtu.be/49J6r9VF5n4

Learning these gestures creates opportunities for listening games, such as:

➢ Someone (either the teacher or one of the pupils) plays, alternating between staccato and legato. The (other) pupils show with the gestures whether they hear staccato or legato.

⟹ *Can you think of other gestures that might represent staccato and legato?*

4.1.4 Playing legato and staccato

Let your pupils play the song staccato and legato. In your instructions, use words that describe the musical result, for example "short" and "connected". Avoid literal descriptions of the movement.

An example of describing the movement literally would be: "Play a note. Now you keep that key down and play the next note. Only then release the previous key." This approach triggers your pupils to focus on how they move their fingers (Internal Focus of Attention). Instead, it's better to encourage your pupils to focus on the sound that comes out of the piano (External Focus of Attention). You can do this with instructions such as: "Listen for the connections between the notes".

Pupils generally succeed in producing a staccato way of playing. Some pupils play legato spontaneously, without realizing it and without any assistance (such as instructions by the teacher) how to do it. Others find it hard to play legato. If necessary, you can apply the following in-between steps:

➢ "The legato-man". Your pupil plays all white keys of the piano, with the fingering 2-3-2-3. Your pupil stands (!) with his side to the piano and then "walks" with two fingers over the white keys. Let him do this with both hands, in two directions.

⟹ *Please watch this video:* https://youtu.be/3IC9ZQ217Sg

➢ Play legato in a simple melody first. You could (for example) use the following learning sequence. Note: Do these exercises by ear or by rote, not by reading.

Learning sequence for preparing legato playing

4.1.5   Improving the quality of staccato

If your pupils succeed in making a recognizable distinction between legato and staccato, start working on improving the quality of them. In staccato, it is challenging to play sharp, soft and audible at the same time. Here are some movement metaphors that can assist your pupils in finding a suitable playing gesture:

➢ *"Imagine that you play out of the keys"*

➢ *"Imagine you play upwards"*

➢ *"Imagine that your hand goes up like a frog"[3]*

➢ *"Imagine your fingertips are jumping on a trampoline"*

➢ *"Imagine your fingertips are bouncing a ball"*

Some piano teachers use the metaphor:

➢ *"Imagine the key is hot"*

Many pupils respond to this metaphor with a sudden, forced gesture that is not helpful for the musical task – to play sharp, soft and clearly. The reason for this might be that the reflex gesture of pulling your hand back in response to pain is a gross-motor gesture.

⟹ *Can you think of other movement metaphors that might help your pupil to play a more beautiful staccato?*

4.1.6   Improving the quality of legato

In legato playing, we can differentiate the amount of connection between the notes. On the one hand we can play with a lot of overlap between the notes, which is called legatissimo. On the other hand, we can play a type of legato in which the notes connect to each other but do not overlap. Metaphorically speaking, we can play a "sticky" or a "clear" legato, and many legatos between the two extremes.

The first step is to teach your pupils to recognize by ear the different types of legato. You play a song or piece in both extremes of legato: sticky and clear. Then you ask them to reflect on the difference they heard between both versions. Finally, you give your pupils the opportunity to try it out themselves. Promote external focus of attention by giving instructions (listening assignments) based on the desired musical outcome, such as:

➢ *"Listen for the clarity of the connection between the notes"* (clear legato)

➢ *"Listen for the overlap between the notes"* (sticky legato)

Occasionally, the overlapping type of legato is hard to reach for a pupil. In this situation the following preparatory exercises can be used. Teach these exercises by ear or by rote, not by reading.

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[3]Source of this metaphor is Mieke Glasbergen, piano teacher and student in the 2017-2018 methodology course in Royal Conservatory in The Hague

Preparatory exercises for overlapping legato

Sticky legato can also be prepared by letting your pupil play extremely slowly and listen deliberately to the two notes that sound together. Finally, legato playing can be facilitated by the movement metaphor "imagine that your fingertips are walking on the keys of the piano". Walking has a similarity with playing legato: in walking there is a phase in which both feet are on the ground, in legato playing there is a phase in which to notes are sounding together.

4.2   DIFFERENTIATING STACCATO, STACCATISSIMO AND PORTATO

When pianists play with a disconnected articulation, they differentiate between staccatissimo (very short), staccato (short) and portato (broad). The choice of articulation can be influenced (amongst other factors) by the character of the piece, the articulation notated by the composer and stylistic conventions. At a certain point, your pupil needs to learn this differentiation as well.

The learning process starts with developing the ability to recognize these articulations by ear. This requires clear demonstrations by you and lots of opportunities for your pupils to try it out by themselves. The recognition of these articulations can be supported by the following musical metaphors, which were created by Mieke Glasbergen, who joined the piano methodology course at the KC in the season 2017-2018:

Staccatissimo – Hail

Staccato – Rain

Portato – Snow

4.3 TOUCHÉ PERLÉ – THE "PEARLY" SOUND FOR RUNS

Some styles of piano music require a "pearly" sound for runs, for example classical pieces, certain Baroque pieces and "elegant" early romantic pieces. In this "pearly" sound, the notes are slightly disconnected. An example of a run that requires this articulation is the following passage from the 1st movement of Mozart's Sonata KV 545:

Learning this type of touch starts with recognizing and appreciating the sound of it. Therefore, it is very helpful if you can provide your pupil with demonstrations. Also, it is helpful when you demonstrate the difference between a sticky legato and a pearly touch for a passage.

The movement metaphors that facilitate a clear piano and pianissimo sound (for instance The Spider), described in paragraph 5.5.1., are also applicable in learning this skill. Additionally, when your pupils have clear ideas of the sound they want to produce, but cannot produce it on the piano, the following game can be helpful:

4.3.1 The one-finger game.

The goal of this exercise is to let pupils experience that they can move freely, and do not have to be stuck to the keys. Pupils are presented with a simple limitation which stimulates them to find a different (freer) way of moving. Therefore, it is an example of the Constraints-led Approach: a form of implicit motor learning.

"Let's play a game: the one-finger game. The finger that plays, can touch a key. The fingers that do not play touch the air. How does this feel? Does it sound different now?"

Traditionally, many piano teachers give the literal movement instruction to "raise your fingers". In my experience this might lead to an unnatural, exaggerated playing gesture, whereas the one-finger game triggers a more natural gesture.

4.4 DIFFERENT ARTICULATIONS BETWEEN THE HANDS

A typical aspect of piano playing is to play different articulations with both hands. This skill can be hard to learn for pupils. In daily life there are not many tasks that require asymmetric actions for the hands, generally the hands cooperate symmetrically (for example in clapping) or with clear roles such as stabilizing an object (non-dominant hand) and manipulating an object (dominant hand). The skill of articulating the hands differently requires new connections in the brain. The general approach for learning this skill is:

- **Make sure your pupils have a clear musical goal in mind**. You can do this by playing the lines together: you play one line; your pupil plays the other. This way your pupil can experience what the combination of articulations sounds like.

- **Apply in-between steps**. Start from a simplification of the skill and build up the complexity stepwise.

- ● **Make sure you give your pupils enough time to try it out**. Postpone feedback or further instructions.
- ● **Apply self-feedback**: ask your pupils what they heard (listening assignment)

Here is a learning sequence that can (if necessary) serve as an additional preparation for this skill:

1. Play a note with both hands. One hand plays the note staccato, the other hand lets the note sound long. Tip: If this is hard for your pupil, it sometimes helps to exaggerate the upward movement of the hand playing the staccato note.

2. Play a simple melody in unison with two hands, one hand plays staccato, the other hand plays legato.

3. Play a slightly more complicated melody in unison with different articulations

In the following lesson fragment pupil and teacher work on the articulation of this bar from the Minuet in D minor by Leopold Mozart:

The preparatory step of creating a clear musical goal has already taken place. You see the in-between steps and the integration of the bar into the phrase. Additional exercises were not necessary.

4.5   ASSIGNMENT

Find an easy piece (comparable in difficulty to the middle of Die Russische Klavierschule, book 1) that requires a different articulation by both hands.

5 DYNAMICS

Characteristic for the piano are its possibilities for differentiating the dynamics of every note that is played. The dynamic range of a piano is huge, and the use of dynamics is the main factor in the personal sound of a pianist.

This chapter focuses on the introduction of dynamics and the improvement of the quality of it. The skill of differentiating dynamics between musical layers (for example melody and accompaniment) is dealt with in chapter 8.

It is a healthy pianistic challenge to play songs or pieces in different dynamics. This makes demands on listening skills and fine motor skills. Therefore, it is a good idea to introduce dynamics in an early stage of pianistic development. The auditory phase of musical development is ideal for the introduction of dynamics, since the absence of a score allows your pupils to completely focus on what they hear.

5.1 PREPARE BY SINGING

The first step in the process is to sing in different dynamics. Start with piano and forte, later add mezzo-piano, mezzo-forte, pianissimo and fortissimo. Apply "learning by doing":

➢ You sing a song twice: once piano, once forte

➢ Your pupil sings the same thing after you

➢ Pay attention to the quality of forte singing: it's not shouting, we should still hear a nice voice

➢ Pay attention to the quality of piano singing: it's not whispering, we should still hear the melody clearly

➢ Sing the song a couple of times together, alternating between forte and piano

➢ Ask your pupil: "How did we sing?" [Reflection. It is good to know which words your pupil chooses to describe his experience.]

➢ Introduce the concepts of piano and forte: "This way of singing is called piano; this way of singing is called forte".

➢ Apply it to the piano. Start by giving a demonstration. Then let your pupil try it out many times by himself.

➢ At the end of the learning process, give your pupil the very challenging task to play a song or piece six times, starting with pianissimo for the first round, piano for the second round, and so on until he reaches fortissimo in the sixth round. The other way around (from fortissimo to pianissimo) is also nice.

5.2 COMBINE DYNAMICS AND ARTICULATION

It is a good idea to let your pupil experience that dynamics and articulations can be combined in many ways.

➢ Sing combinations like piano+staccato, piano+legato, forte+staccato, forte+legato.

➢ Do listening games with this type of combinations.

➢ Let your pupil decide which combination to sing. A card system with all learned concepts of dynamics and articulations can be useful for this type of activity.

- ➢ Apply these combinations of dynamics and articulations to the piano. Again, your demonstrations are helpful.

- ➢ When your pupil does not (clearly) play the indicated dynamic or articulation, use listening questions such as: "Did you hear piano? Did you hear legato?". This stimulates your pupil to use his own listening skills.

5.3 CRESCENDO AND DIMINUENDO

After learning to distinguish different dynamics, learning to sing and play crescendo and diminuendo is a useful next step. Gradual changes in dynamics are even more challenging for listening and fine motor skills.

Teach your pupils the following ways of playing by ear, not by note reading:

5.4 PLAYING FORTE AND FORTISSIMO WITH A PLEASANT SOUND

Some pupils think forte means "loud", which triggers them to shout instead of sing forte, and to produce a harsh, ugly forte sound on the piano. We can observe that their playing gesture is too rough, too pushy. It is tempting for us (piano teachers) to try to solve this by correcting the playing gesture directly, using instructions like: "Don't push with your fore-arm", "Keep your shoulders relaxed", "Keep your hand steady, play with the fingers". This approach is based on literal movement instructions that are isolated from the musical goal (Instruction-based approach). Even though this approach will also produce results, below I will show you an approach to this problem that primarily uses the musical imagination and perception of the pupil: Intention-based approach:

5.4.1 Intention-based approach to learning to produce a pleasant forte sound

- ➢ Be mindful of the word choice in your instruction: the words "loud" or "strong" may trigger an unfavourable type of playing gesture. Rather, teach your pupils that forte means "a big and beautiful sound".

- ➢ Give plenty of demonstrations, both in singing and in playing.

- ➢ Use a whole song or phrase (a meaningful musical unit) rather than isolated notes for practising this skill

- ➢ Demonstrate both the harsh sound and the nice sound, so that your pupils can learn the difference

- ➢ Let your pupils describe in their own words the difference between a harsh and a nice forte sound

- ➢ Let your pupils try out to play both the harsh and the beautiful forte sound

- ➢ Let your pupils reflect on the sound they produce: "How did your forte sound now? Which one do you find more beautiful, this one or the previous one?"

- ➢ If necessary: Give goal-oriented feedback, you tell pupils what you heard (not what you saw)

- ➢ If your pupils find it difficult to produce a beautiful forte on the piano, a useful movement metaphor might be: "Be kind to the keys"

- ➢ When your pupils occasionally fall back into a harsh sound, challenge them to produce a higher pianistic quality, for example: "Let's see whether you can produce a nice forte sound."

⇒ Can you think of other movement metaphors that might help your pupil to produce a beautiful forte sound?

5.5 PLAYING PIANO AND PIANISSIMO WITH A CLEAR SOUND

To play soft **and** clear at the same time is very challenging for listening skills and fine motor skills. Therefore, it is a very healthy pianistic challenge. The softer you play, the more likely it becomes that notes sound too soft or not at all, causing a muffled, unclear sound. Also, we hear that the melodic line is interrupted. In speech, this is comparable to someone who speaks with occasional unclear syllables, causing difficulty understanding this person. Some pupils spontaneously and naturally produce a nice, clear pianissimo sound. Others need more time and some assistance.

Here are some steps you can use when working on this skill:

- ◉ Start by letting your pupils sing softly **and** clearly. Note: we should hear the melody, it is not whispering

- ◉ Give plenty of demonstrations, both in singing and in playing

- ◉ Use a whole song (a meaningful musical unit) rather than isolated notes for practising this skill

- ◉ Demonstrate both the unclear sound and the clear sound, so that your pupils can learn the difference

- ◉ Let your pupils describe in their own words the difference between a clear and an unclear sound

- ◉ Let your pupils try out to deliberately play both the unclear and the unclear pianissimo sound

- To support learning, the following listening assignments can be helpful: "Listen for the continuation of the melody", "Listen for the long line of the melody", "Listen whether the notes have the same sound/intensity"

- Let your pupils reflect on the sound they produce: "How did your pianissimo sound now? Which one do you find clearer, this one or the previous one?"

- If necessary: Give goal-oriented feedback, you tell pupils what you heard (not what you saw)

- When your pupils occasionally fall back into an unclear sound, challenge them, for example: "Let's see whether you can produce a clear pianissimo sound."

5.5.1 Movement metaphors to facilitate a clear piano and pianissimo sound

If your pupils find it difficult to produce a clear pianissimo sound on the piano, you can assist by presenting them with a movement metaphor. Below are some options. Note that these movement metaphors can be used for any situation in which you want to stimulate your pupils' fine-motor control, for example when playing scales.

1. **The spider**: "*Your hand is a spider. Your fingers are the legs and your hand is the body. Crawl like a spider over the keyboard. [Pupil lets his hand crawl over the keyboard] Now the spider will play a song. Play this song with the same feeling in your hand.*"

The goal of this exercise is to encourage motor initiative in the fingertips. With many pupils you can initially observe a gross-motor playing gesture, the motor initiative is in the lower arm. Their playing looks "pushy". By setting higher standards to the sounding result (quicker, softer, more regular, nicer legato) pupils are encouraged to play more with a fine motor playing gesture. The spider is a movement exercise that can help pupils to find more refined playing gestures. I prefer this approach over the traditional approach of describing the movement literally: "Hold your hand still and play with the fingers". Also, I think this approach is more natural than the traditional exercise of placing a coin (or even two coins on top of each other) on the back of the hand of pupils.

2. **The itchy piano.** "*Let's pretend that your arm feels slightly itchy. [Pupil scratches the itchy area gently with his fingertips]. Now let's pretend that the piano is also slightly itchy. The piano would like you to scratch its keys gently. [Pupil gently scratches the keys.] Do you feel which part of your fingertip is touching the keys? Now let's play this song with the same part of your fingertips. How did it sound now? How did it feel?*"

This is an example of using a movement from daily life to assist pupils in finding a suitable playing gesture.

3. **Touch a pet, a baby or your own hair.** "*Do you have a pet at home? Can you touch it? Can you show me how you do that? Now imagine the piano is your pet. Play the piece once more. How did it sound now? How did it feel?*"

When you touch a pet, you automatically use fine motor-control hand gestures. Pupils can recall this sensation and apply it in piano playing.

4. **Drumming your fingers when you are impatient**

When people are impatient while waiting for something, sometimes they drum their fingers on a tabletop. Generally, we see a rapid pattern from fifth finger to thumb, sometimes the other way. This gesture comes

very close to the gesture you need for playing rapid runs on the piano. Sometimes it is helpful to recall this movement sensation and apply it in piano playing.

5. Soft and quick repeated notes.

First the pupil plays soft and quick repeated notes with one finger. You can choose a sequence of notes from a piece to perform this exercise with. To play soft and quick staccatos is only possible by a light playing gesture in fine motor control, you can't do it with a "pushy" playing gesture in gross motor control. The exercise can be performed in any way, not necessarily as written in the example. It is a nice idea to let pupils "fiddle around" with the exercise (which is called "informal practice").

After the exercise, jump immediately back to the piece and ask your pupils to play with the same feeling in their hand. Reflect on how it sounded and felt.

This is an example of designing a situation or task that elicits a new pattern of movement (which is officially called the constraints-led approach).

6. The caterpillar.

First let your pupils imitate with their hand how a caterpillar moves. Their hands creep forward on their legs, a table-top or on the lid of the piano. When the caterpillar moves forward, the fingers gently curl and uncurl. The caterpillar can also walk backwards. If it goes well, extend this exercise to imitating a caterpillar with individual fingers.

Then transfer the exercise to the piano. Let your pupils creep like a caterpillar on the keys. Then let them play (a fragment of) a piece "with caterpillar fingers", or some other instruction that connects the sensation of the caterpillar exercise to playing a piece. Have them reflect on how it sounded and felt.

7. **Narrow and broad part of the fingertip.** "*Touch the keys with the broadest part of your fingertip. Play this passage with that part. Now feel the keys with the narrowest part of your fingertip. Play the same passage. Did you hear a difference? How did it feel?*"

This exercise can be used for pupils who play "pushy" or with "collapsed fingers", which limits the possibilities for refined playing. Notice how this very simple point of attention (the point of contact between fingertip and key) may have a lot of influence on the whole movement pattern of pupils. Let pupils free to find the hand, wrist and arm position that suits them best.

5.6 ASSIGNMENT

Find an easy piano piece (comparable in difficulty to the middle part of Die Russische Klavierschule, book 1) that you find challenging in terms of dynamic differentiation.

5.7 DYNAMICS AND RHYTHMIC STABILITY

Often pupils automatically accelerate when playing louder, and slow down when playing softer. The musical challenge in this case becomes to play with a steady pulse **and** clear differences in dynamics.

In the following lesson fragment, the pupil gets this challenge.

⇒ *Please watch this video:* https://youtu.be/IUIUft8CAKQ

6 SCALES

The skill to play scales and arpeggio's legato is essential for a pianist. As for motor control, this requires the ability to pass the thumb under the other fingers and the ability for the other fingers to cross over the thumb. These motions are different from the motions required in daily life activities. As a result, it takes time to develop the ability to play scales or scale-like melodies smoothly, with an even sound and a nice legato. The rate at which pupils acquire this ability differs widely, depending on (among other things) their natural talent for fine-motor skills, their ability to listen to the quality of their playing and their effectiveness in practising. The natural talent for fine-motor skills cannot be influenced. Fortunately, the ability to listen and the ability to practice effectively **can** be influenced. Also, the learning process can be supported by well-chosen movement metaphors and in-between steps. Finally, supported by a couple of simple rules, your pupil can learn to find the standard fingering patterns for all scales.

6.1 PREPARATORY EXERCISES: 2-, 3- AND 4-FINGER PATTERNS
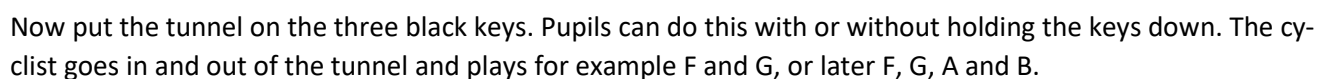

It is possible to play a scale on the white keys with patterns 1-2-1-2, 1-2-3-1-2-3 and 1-2-3-4-1-2-3-4. Let your pupils "play around" with these fingering patterns. They can choose a fantasy name for these patterns, for example "The Cat". The starting point and the turning point are freely chosen, the exercise therefore has the character of an improvisation. It can be considered an example of "informal practice". Apply articulations and dynamics to these exercises. At first, let your pupils play them with one hand. After a while, playing them with

two hands in mirror image can be fun. Playing scales with two hands in parallel motion only becomes useful much later in the learning process, for advanced pupils.

Already at this early stage, you can challenge your pupils to raise the pianistic quality of their playing. You can do this by:

➢ Applying lots of variations in dynamics, articulation and rhythm

➢ Giving your pupils demonstrations of how beautiful these patterns can sound

➢ Giving them listening assignments such as: "Listen for the evenness of the rhythm", "Listen whether the notes form a line", "Listen for the connections between the notes"

➢ Giving them pianistic challenges such as: "Let's see whether you can play this even softer", "Maybe you can do it even more fluently"

6.2   MOVEMENT METAPHORS TO FACILITATE THE QUALITY OF SCALE PLAYING

- **The cyclist in the tunnel[4]**

When pupils have difficulty finding the gesture of passing under the thumb, this exercise can be helpful. Young children sometimes try to pass *over* their thumb or turn their whole arm outward in order to reach the key played by the thumb. This limits speed and fluency.

Put fingers 2, 3 and 4 in the shape of a tunnel. Pupils can place this tunnel on a table top, the lid of the piano or his other arm. The thumb is a cyclist that drives in and out of the tunnel.

Keep down silently…

Now put the tunnel on the three black keys. Pupils can do this with or without holding the keys down. The cyclist goes in and out of the tunnel and plays for example F and G, or later F, G, A and B.

- **Happy fingers.**

The goal of this exercise is to shift the motor initiative to the fingertips in situations where the thumb needs to pass under, or the fingers need to be put over the thumb. Sometimes you can hear in the playing of pupils that the first note after passing under the thumb sounds too strong: an unintended accent. The first step is to help pupils to hear this by themselves, by means of a listening assignment. Often this is already enough for finding a suitable playing gesture. When pupils hear what happens but are *not* capable of finding a suitable playing gesture, the following exercise can be useful.

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[4]This exercise is a variation of the "Hedgehog in the Tunnel", from Two Hands Twelve Notes, book I by Klaus Runze (Mainz: Schott, 2001)

"Play this melody (descending scale with the right hand, or ascending scale with the left hand) until you arrive at the thumb. Now imagine that your fingertips are happy to go over the thumb. Let them go through the air towards the next key. How did this feel? Now play this melody once more, with the same feeling."

- **The tail of the squirrel**

Pupils may have difficulty with passing under the thumb in a scale. You hear that the note played by the thumb sounds too late and too loud. You probably notice that your pupils use compensatory movements in order to reach the key played by the thumb, for instance they raise their whole arm. The solution might be to help them in finding a hand position that creates more space for the thumb, by opening the hand from the fifth finger. One way to stimulate the open position of the hand is by imagining that the fifth finger is the tail of a squirrel. The tail helps the squirrel to stay balanced while running over branches.

6.3 RULES FOR FINDING THE STANDARD FINGERING OF SCALES

There are booklets with the fingerings for all scales. Pupils can learn the fingerings for the scales by playing through the booklet and memorizing them one by one. A better approach to learning the standard fingerings of the scales is for your pupils to find them out **by themselves**, based on five simple rules:

➢ Black keys are played by a long finger: 2, 3 or 4

➢ The thumb plays a white key

➢ The 5th finger is only used on a turning point, only when it is a white key

➢ The fingering you choose for the 1st octave is also used for the 2nd octave

➢ The fingering for the way up is the same as for the way down

After letting pupils find out the fingering of a scale, let them "doodle" with the scale: improvise melodically up and down the scale, turning around the direction of the melody at any moment they choose. This bridges the gap between "dry" exercise (the isolated scale, starting and ending on a root) and real music. The chances that pupils will apply the discovered fingerings in a piece increase as a result of this creative application of them.

As mentioned before, the skill of playing scales with two hands in parallel motion only becomes relevant later in the learning process. If introduced too early, it might create frustration. Also, it consumes a lot of time, which would be better spent at improving the quality (rhythmic evenness, dynamic evenness, legato, speed) of playing the scale with one hand.

7   PLAY MELODIES LIKE YOU SING THEM

The assignment "play this melody the way you sing it" can be a very helpful one. For young pupils who are taught by song-based auditory music education the fact that they sing everything they play creates a wonderful opportunity to use singing as a tool for working on pianistic quality. Teenagers and adults sometimes experience singing as an awkward activity, which makes it less applicable as a working form. Rarely pupils cannot sing at all, for example as a result of problems with their vocal cords. Singing is not an option then.

Singing can have a positive influence on pianistic quality in several ways:

- By singing a melody a pupil can naturally find a suitable **tempo and a fluent rhythm**

- Singing can create a natural sense of **articulation**

- Singing can help to get a sense for **building up a phrase, finishing a phrase and where the emphasis is placed**

Some pupils sing poorly. It is a good idea to work on their singing skills in the piano lessons.

The following working forms are examples of using singing as a tool to improve the musical and pianistic quality:

1. **Play and sing along**. This encourages transferring intuitive qualities of singing into piano playing, such as: a suitable tempo, a fluent rhythm, etcetera. This working form is already applicable for pupils who recently started to have lessons in an auditory, song-based approach. It can also be helpful for more advanced pupils, under the condition that they have overcome their shyness for singing.

2. **Play and sing along mentally**. For young pupils you can phrase this instruction like this: *"Play and sing along in your head"*. The purpose of this exercise is the same as for the previous one, the difference being that this exercise allows for more concentrated listening to the sound of the piano.

3. Deliberately sing and play without any melodic intention: **monotonously**. For pupils who play monotonously, it can be helpful to provide them with a respectful imitation of their playing. You sing the melody, deliberately avoiding any melodic intention: you sing it very unmusically. Often this demonstration already gives pupils ideas what to improve. If not, then also sing the melody musically. Let pupils reflect on the differences between the two ways you sang. Also sing the melody together, once monotonously, once melodically. Then let your pupils play the same thing on the piano, both monotonously and melodically. Additionally, to imitate the speech of a robot (to speak on one pitch) can be informative and clarifying for pupils.

4. **Sing and focus on one aspect.** In the example below: breathing points. Then apply this in piano playing.

   "Sing this melody. Pay attention to where you breathe. Now play the melody on the piano. Listen whether you can hear where the breathing points are."

5. **Build up and finish a phrase**. Especially in Romantic music, phrases need to be built up and finished dynamically and in timing. Often, composers do not give indications how this should be done, expecting performers to play the phrases according to their sense of style.

   Study the first phrase of "The Sick Doll" op. 39 nr. 7 by Tchaikovsky:
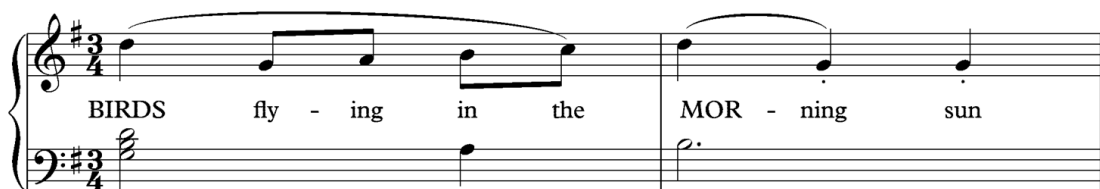
Marcato il basso
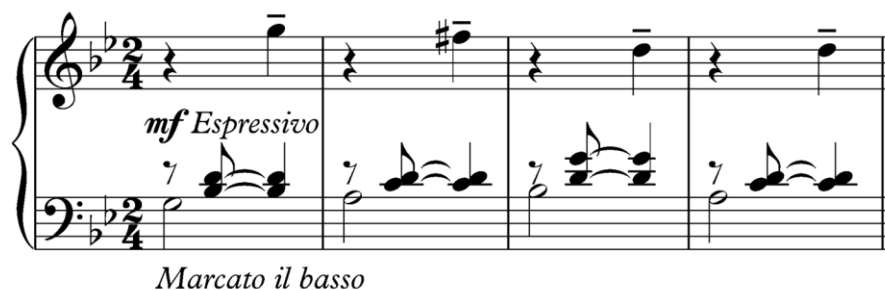
Generally, the emphasis is played on the third bar of this phrase. There are several ways to guide your pupils in that direction, here are some examples:

➢ Sing the bass line together. Exaggerate singing "towards" the third bar. Let your pupils play and sing along with the bass line, creating the same sense of building up and finishing the phrase.

➢ Demonstrate the whole phrase the way you have it in mind. Let your pupils imitate your playing.

➢ Let your pupils experiment with placing the emphasis on different points of the phrase:

"Place the emphasis on the first bar, let the sound diminish towards the end of the phrase. Play the emphasis on the second bar, let the sound grow towards the second bar and diminish afterwards. Play the emphasis on the third bar... Play the emphasis on the fourth bar. Which way of playing sounded best in your ears?"

Note: If you choose this approach, it might happen that your pupil makes a choice that does not match your personal preference.

6. Clarifying the emphases by **adding lyrics**. To add lyrics to an instrumental piece can help to create a natural sense for emphasis, especially when you sing them expressively. Here is an example:

7. **Sing and play individual lines of a piece**. In practising polyphonic pieces, a common practising approach is to sing and play the voices one by one. This exercise can also be used to train melodic playing.

    When the learning goal of your pupil is to play the voices of a Two-part Invention by Bach more melodically, a nice working form is to play the piece together, dividing the voices. You can exaggerate the melodic shape, implicitly encouraging your pupil to take over this melodic shape. By playing together, a lot of musical ideas that are hard to explain in words can be transferred and exchanged intuitively.

8. **Let your pupils listen for harmonic tension and release.** Listening for harmonic tension and relaxation can trigger a sense for how to build up and finish a phrase. Example:

Arietta op. 12 nr. 1

E. Grieg

Poco Andante e sostenuto

Note: The crescendos and diminuendos are added by me. In these two phrases, the second bar starts with a dissonance in the melody. It sounds melodic to play "towards" this dissonance. You can help your pupil to learn to perceive the harmonic tension and relaxation of a phrase by letting him play a reduction of the phrase. In this case you could use something like:

9. **Let pupils play song transcriptions.** These pieces can be a nice tool for learning to play like you sing. You can let pupils listen to several recordings of the original song. This way they can experience that

there are many ways of singing beautifully, and as a result there are many ways of playing melodically on the piano. There are song transcriptions that are not hard to play and have a high artistic value. A nice example is Wiosna op. 74 nr. 2 by Chopin, transcribed by the composer.

7.1 ASSIGNMENT

Find an easy piece (comparable in difficulty to Die Russische Klavierschule, book 1) that you find very suitable for developing the skill to play like you sing.

8   DYNAMIC BALANCE

The dynamic balance between melody and accompaniment is a very important factor for the sound of a pianist. Every pianist has a personal way of differentiating main voices and accompanying voices dynamically. When pupils learn to influence the balance between melody and accompaniment, a whole world of pianistic possibilities opens itself. To achieve a beautiful, singing sound is from that moment something pupils can actively search for.

The first part of this chapter describes the learning process of the pianistic skill to differentiate dynamically between both hands. In paragraph 8.7 the learning process of the more difficult pianistic skill of differentiating within one hand is described.

Like playing different articulations, to play different dynamic levels with both hands requires a coordination that is not trained in daily life activities and can therefore be hard to learn. New connections must be created in the nervous system, which requires time, patience and (above all) clarity about the musical goal to be reached. The first step in the process is therefore to learn to **recognize by ear** the differences in sound that result from adjusting the balance between melody and accompaniment. In other words: learning to listen to the piano is the starting point of the learning process of this pianistic skill. After establishing the ability to recognize differences by ear, the skill can be built up by means of **in-between steps**. Finally, the skill can be **applied in a piece**. Below follows a stepwise approach of teaching this pianistic skill.

This skill can be taught in an early stage of pianistic development, already when pupils play songs by ear with simple accompaniments. It is beneficial for pianistic development to introduce pianistic skills such as this one when pupils are learning by auditory music education, since the absence of a score enables pupils to focus on what they hear.

The example that is used is the first phrase of the 2nd movement of Clementi's Sonatina op. 36 nr. 1.

8.1   INTRODUCTION: THE METAPHOR OF FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND

Learning this new skill can be introduced and facilitated by the metaphor of the **foreground** and **background** of a drawing or painting. An introductory conversation might go like this:

Teacher: "Do you make drawings?":

Pupil: "Yes."

Teacher: "What kind of things do you like to draw?"

Pupil: "Horses."

Teacher: "And what do you draw behind the horses?"

Pupil: "Grass."

Teacher: "What is more important in your drawings: the horses or the grass?"

Pupil: "The horses."

Teacher: "Then we call the horses the foreground of your drawings and the grass the background. In music there is something similar. Some things we play are more important, others less. The song you play has a melody and an accompaniment. Which one do you think is the foreground of the piece?"

Pupil: "The melody."

Teacher: "And what would be the background of the piece?"

Pupil: "The accompaniment."

8.2 LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCES BY EAR: DEMONSTRATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Play the phrase in different ways: with the melody on the foreground, with the accompaniment on the foreground and with melody and accompaniment in balance. Let pupils reflect on what they heard, based on the question: "What did you hear on the foreground?". Start with huge differences, gradually make them more subtle.

8.3 EXPERIENCE DIFFERENCES IN BALANCE BY ENSEMBLE PLAYING

Divide melody and accompaniment and play the phrase together. One person plays the melody, the other the accompaniment. Listen for the difference between foreground and background. Also do it the "wrong" way: with the accompaniment on the foreground. Switch voices, so that your pupils can experience playing melody and accompaniment.

8.4 IN-BETWEEN STEPS

➢ Play the first note with both hands, the accompaniment piano and the melody forte.
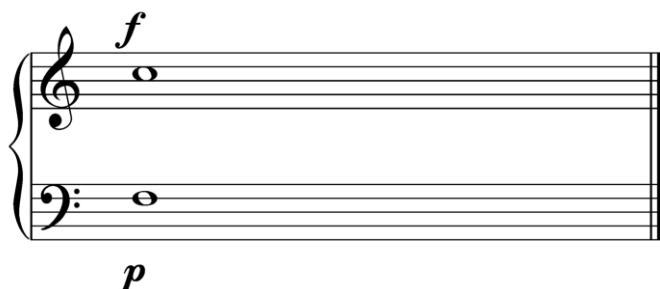
This can already be hard to achieve! Only a minority of pupils can produce this effect right away. Most of them need more time and sometimes more preparatory exercises. In order to facilitate the learning process, you can do the following:

➢ Give demonstrations to ensure your pupils have an idea of the musical effect to be achieved

➢ Let the pupil play the notes first one by one, then together:
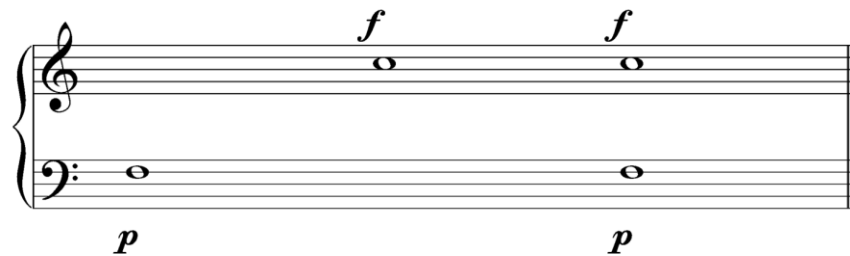
➢ *The church bell game*: Let the pupil bring both notes rhythmically closer gradually, until they are played exactly together:
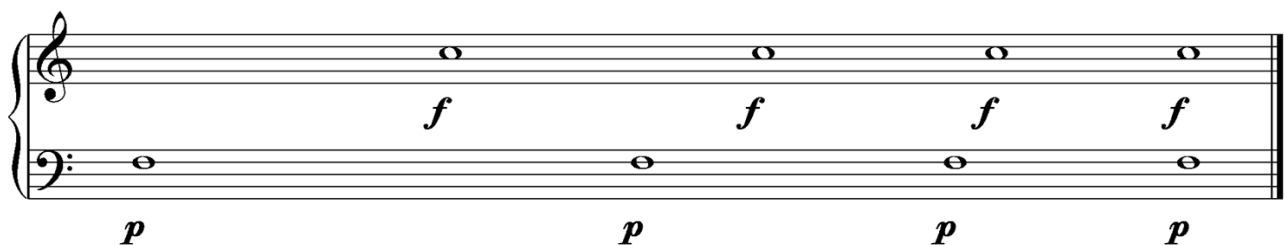
➢ It can be helpful to **exaggerate** the playing gestures: the hand that plays piano stays on the surface of the key, the hand that plays forte falls from a considerable height.

➢ What typically occurs on early stages of the learning process of this pianistic skill is that pupils focus on the hand that plays piano, causing the other hand to play piano as well. When they notice this, they switch their attention to the hand that plays forte, resulting in the other hand playing forte as well. If this happens, it helps when pupils focus on the **difference between the sound of both notes**, rather than what each hand should do. Give this hint to your pupils, so that they focus on the total musical result rather than on individual actions of their hands.

➢ When pupils manage to create a clear difference between the dynamic levels of the hands, first celebrate this! They have achieved something that is hard to learn by patience and perseverance, emphasize this.

➢ The next step is to alternate the dynamics between the hands:
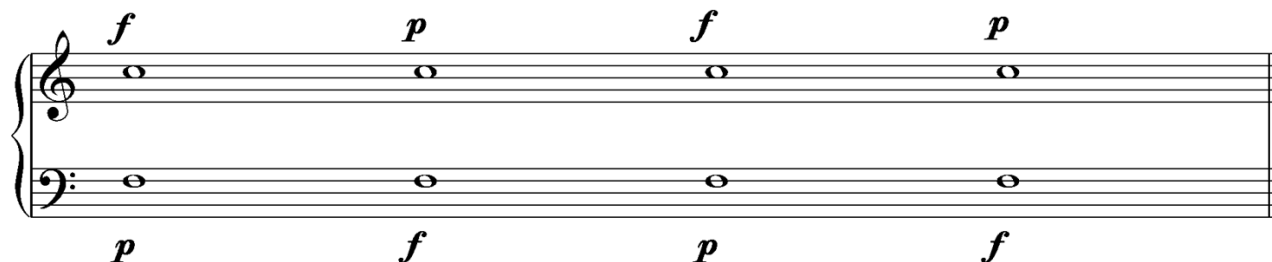
8.5 APPLY IN THE PIECE

Let your pupils try it out in the piece. Also let them try it out the "wrong" way, with the accompaniment on the foreground. At first, the goal is to make a clear and big difference between foreground and background. Later, pupils can adjust the amount of difference to what the piece requires and to their personal taste.

8.6 ASSIGNMENT

Select a piece from Die Russische Klavierschule book 1 that you find suitable for introducing this pianistic skill to pupils.

8.7 DYNAMIC BALANCE BETWEEN TWO OR MORE NOTES WITHIN ONE HAND

In piano pieces it often happens that one hand plays both melodic and accompaniment notes, either simultaneously or successively. The melodic notes are supposed to sound on the foreground, the accompaniment notes on the background. Pianists can do this, but it is very hard to explain in words how this differentiation is produced. Fortunately, this skill can very well be learned *without* literal instructions how to move.

At this stage of pianistic development, pupils already possess the skill of influencing the dynamic balance between both hands. The in-between steps for this pianistic skill are like those for learning to differentiate the balance between both hands as described in the first part of this chapter. Below, I will use two fragments of pieces as examples:

1. Le Courant Limpide op. 100 nr. 7, by F. Burgmüller – In this piece the notes are played successively

2. Bittendes Kind, from Kinderszenen op. 15 by R. Schumann – In this piece the notes are played simultaneously

8.7.1 Experience differentiation by ensemble playing

Divide the melody and accompaniment over two players. Play together and make a dynamic balance between foreground and background. Also do it the "wrong" way. With this working form pupils develop their musical imagination in terms of the balance between melody and accompaniment. They get a clear musical goal, which is the starting point for developing this pianistic skill.

8.7.2 Divide melody and accompaniment over two hands

Let your pupil play the right-hand part divided over two hands: one hand plays the melody; the other hand plays the accompaniment. Your pupil now makes the differentiation by himself, facilitated by the division over two hands.

8.7.3 Play with one hand with dynamic differentiation

Let your pupil play the right-hand part with the right hand alone. He now imitates the dynamic balance he produced with two hands. Give your pupil plenty of time to try it out. After all, this is a completely new pianistic skill which requires moving in a way that is not required in any daily life activity.

If necessary, let your pupil repeat the division of the previous step, to refresh the musical goal.

8.7.4   Church bell game

When your pupil finds it hard to produce a dynamic differentiation between two simultaneously played notes (like in the Schumann example), the "Church Bell Game" can be a useful exercise. In this game, both notes are first played one by one in a regular rhythm. Like two church bells they get closer and closer until they finally sound together.

8.7.5   Alternate the emphasized voice

The pianistic skill of producing a dynamic balance between two or more notes within one hand is applied in many ways, depending on the musical demands of a piece. Also, the amount of differentiation is very influential on the overall sound and atmosphere of a performance. Therefore, it is a good idea to let your pupils *actively explore* the options they have in terms of dynamic balance. After all, the goal is that your pupils develop sensitivity, taste and flexibility. The first step of the process of improving this pianistic skill is to let them alternate between emphasising the upper and lower note.

8.8   Lesson excerpt

In the following lesson excerpt, pupil and teacher work on playing the melody on the foreground. In this excerpt, no in-between steps are used since this pupil already has experience in playing the melody on the foreground. The didactic approach in this excerpt is:

- Respectful imitation of the pupil's sound

- Demonstrations of different sounds

- Reflection by the pupil on the differences

- Listening assignment

⟹ *Please watch this video:* https://youtu.be/7294C0HSohQ

9 LEGATO PEDALLING

The right pedal is a very inspiring part of the piano. It can create wonderful sound effects and it is indispensable for a large part of the piano repertoire. Many adult pupils have difficulties with the timing of the pedal. Especially the phenomenon of creating a "gap" between chords that are supposed to sound connected can frequently be observed among adult pupils. A possible explanation for this phenomenon might be the fact that legato pedalling requires a delicate timing between the actions of hands and right foot: when the hands release the keys to go to the next chord or bass note, the foot should *keep* the pedal. As for motor control, this is harder than releasing hands and foot at the same time. In this chapter you can find practical advices on how to approach the learning process of this subtle but indispensable pianistic skill.

Let's examine some in-between steps that you can use to assist your pupils in developing the skill of connecting sounds (chords, bass notes) with the pedal. This technique is called "legato pedalling". Before you start working on this skill, your pupils can already play legato and staccato. They know the function of the right pedal and have experience in mixing sounds in the pedal, for instance by improvising. Now, let's take a piece that requires using the pedal to connect sounds. Example: Gymnopédie nr. 1 by Erik Satie.

9.1 IN-BETWEEN STEPS FOR LEGATO PEDALLING
1. The "one-finger" scale.

a. Demonstrate that you can play a scale (or any other melody) with connected sounds, even though you play it with just one finger. You might ask your pupils: "Can you figure out how I do this?"

b. Also demonstrate what happens when you hold the pedal down continuously, or when you release the pedal at the same time as the key: you hear a disconnection of the sound.

c. Pupil plays the scale with one finger, you move the pedal.

d. You play the scale with one finger, pupil moves the pedal

e. Pupil performs the exercises by himself. If necessary, you can create a "reminder" of the sequence of actions: "Play, Up, Down, Release". You might even rehearse this text before playing the exercise on the piano.

f. Speed up the exercises. By doing it in a high speed, the pupil cannot rely on thinking the actions one by one, he must integrate them into one smooth action. Note: some pupils reach this in 10 seconds, others in 10 weeks!

g. Let the pupil also do the exercise with the pedal held down continuously and with deliberate disconnection of the sound (by releasing the pedal too early). In this way the pupil learns to recognize the results of his actions. In other words: practice the "mistakes" as well.

Note: it is useful to do all these exercises *without a score*, so that pupils can focus on how it sounds. Also, it promotes fluency since they can integrate the separate actions into one smooth action more easily.

2. Connecting chords

Take some easy chords. For instance:
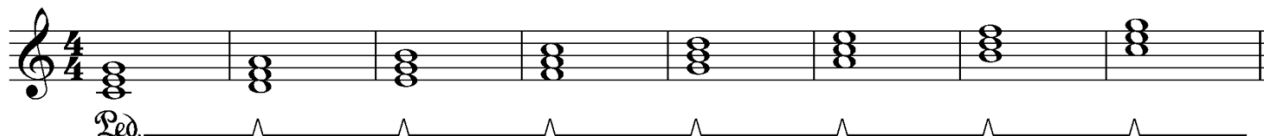
If necessary, you can repeat some of the previous steps.

3. Apply pedalling to the piece.

First left hand only, like in the first four bars of the Satie piece. Also let the pupil experience what happens when you *don't* change the pedal or when you lift the pedal *too early* (disconnection of the sound).

10 ORNAMENTS

A very well-known in-between step for learning a piece with ornaments (mostly Baroque and classical reper-
toire) is to first learn it *without* the ornaments, and only add the ornaments after the piece has been learned.
When learning to play the ornaments, another in-between step is to first perform them *metrically*, i.e. in a
specified rhythm. The rhythm of the ornament can then gradually be changed towards the desired rhythm. Ex-
amples:

10.1 PRALLTRILLER ("UPPER MORDENT")

This is the first bar of the Minuet in G minor by C. Petzold, BWV Anh. 115. These are in-between steps for a per-
formance of the pralltriller **on** the beat.

10.2 MORDENT

This is the second bar of the Minuet in G major by C. Petzold, BWV Anh. 114. These are in-between steps for a
performance of the mordent **before** the beat.

10.3 TURN

This is the start of the Rondo op. 51 nr. 1 by L. van Beethoven.

10.4 TRILL

This is a fragment from the first movement of Mozart's Sonata KV 545.

10.5 GRACE NOTES

Pupils sometimes have difficulty producing rapid grace notes. When this occurs, a good preparatory step is to play them **together** with the main note. Here are two examples.

Example 1: A fragment from Chopin's Grande Valse Brillante op. 18

Example 2: A fragment from Chopin's Valse op. 64 nr. 2:

11 POSITION CHANGES

Some pupils experience difficulties in getting the desired sound for a note or chord *after* a position change (a lateral shift on the keyboard). Even though they know what type of sound they want to produce, the result is unpredictable: sometimes too loud, sometimes too soft, sometimes the notes of a chord do not sound simultaneously.

Here is an example of a passage that is hard for some pupils to play with a good touch, a fragment from the Nocturne, op. 9 nr. 2 by F. Chopin:

11.1 PREPARATORY EXERCISE: DIVIDE THE PASSAGE OVER TWO HANDS

The first step is to make sure pupils have a clear musical imagination of the sound they want to produce. This can be done by letting them play this accompaniment divided over two hands:

This way the difficulty of the position change is avoided, and pupils are free to search for their ideal balance between the bass line and the chords. When they are satisfied with the sound, ask them to play the same sound with just the left hand. Often it already goes a lot better, since they now have a clearer idea of their musical goal.

11.2 MOVEMENT METAPHORS

The following movement metaphors can promote a fine-motor gesture and help your pupils to produce the sound they now have clearly in mind. One element of these metaphors is that they help your pupils to shift the motor initiative to their fingertips.

> ➢ Magnetic train.

"Your hand is a magnetic train. It doesn't roll on the rails, but it hovers over it. Because of that it can move very easily. Now let your hand hover over the keys, in such a way that you can almost feel the keys. Now play this piece once more. When you arrive at the position change, you imagine that your hand is a magnetic train. How did it sound now?"

➢ Sweeping a layer of dust from the lid of the piano

"The piano is dusty. Can you sweep a layer of dust from the lid? Did you notice how light that gesture felt? Did you notice how lightly your fingertips touched the lid of the piano? Now let's go back to the piece. Play this fragment again with the same feeling in your hand that you had when you swept the lid of the piano. How did it sound now?

12 WIDE INTERVALS AND CHORDS

Some pupils experience difficulties in playing wide intervals and chords, even though the interval or chord is within their reach, based on size and flexibility of their hand. As a result, they delay the timing of these intervals and chords, disturbing the rhythmic continuity of the piece. Also, the sound of the interval or chord does not coincide with their intention: either too loud or unclear, with notes that are missing. Visually, we can observe that the gesture to prepare the interval or chord takes a lot of unnecessary effort.

Here are two movement metaphors that can assist pupils to open their hands effortlessly:

➢ **To wave to someone**

When you wave to someone, intuitively you open the metacarpal bones without effort. Pupils can recall this sensation and apply it in piano playing. By means of this exercise they can experience that they can open their hands without effort.

"Wave to me. Do you feel your hand is open now? Play these octaves once more, with the same feeling in your hand. How did it feel?"

➢ **To shake someone's hand**

This metaphor can be applied in the same way as the previous one.