



## TEACHING ACTIVITIES DIRECTED TOWARDS THE BEGINNING STAGE IN PIANO EDUCATION: VISUALIZING, DRAMATIZING, ASSOCIATING WITH LIFE

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### ABSTRACT

Due to its technical and musical features, the piano is the head of the suitable instruments for young children who take their first step towards a systematic music education. When taking into account young children who have many interesting, rich stimulants in their environment nowadays, instead of traditional teaching methods, it is considered necessary that piano education is changed into a more enjoyable education which provides concentration and permanent learning. With this approach, it is believed that piano education which develops and uses new teaching tools, is visualized and made more interesting with games. Also, it is believed that it presents samples associated with life, concretizes abstract information and satisfies every kind of learning need of the student to provide a helpful educational process. With this belief, in this study, the introduction of activities providing a permanent learning and making piano playing enjoyable for the young piano learner is aimed at.

Towards the specified aim in this study, the expected features of a piano teacher in these days' conditions have been specified, note teaching at the beginning stage of piano education, visualization that can be used in the technical development and musicality development stages, and dramatization and activities directed towards associating with life are arranged. The contribution to learning provided by the mentioned activities used in young piano learners' piano education is examined with the observations of the researcher.

The study with its presented activities is seen important in guiding teachers who are commencing piano teaching and with this, it is also considered important in bringing upon a new approach towards the development of different activities.

**Key Words:** *Piano education, Visualizing, Dramatizing, Associating with life*

### INTRODUCTION

Due to its prepared sounds, appropriateness to the structure of the hand and similar technical features, the piano is considered to be the head of the suitable instruments for young children who are taking their first step towards a systematic music education.

Experts have stated various views related to the beginning age of playing the piano. Although the views of most music teachers show variation according to the child's interest, talent, cognitive and physical development, they unite with the view that generally ages 5 or 6 are appropriate. It is specified that the small muscles of children develop (<http://egitimevim.blogcu.com/okul-oncesi-donem-bedensel-ve-motor-gelisim/4872407>) and the eye-hand coordination reaches a high level (M.E.B: 2007) at these ages. Therefore, children

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are able to use both hands independently to play the piano. Also, their concentration span has extended, they have gained a study habit through school discipline and they have reached a level in which they can carry some responsibilities.

The present day pedagogy understanding is that piano education at the beginning level directed towards the mature student is a scientific process and that during this process scientific methods are benefited from (Gültek). While the piano teacher, with this consciousness, provides the pianistic development his/her young piano learner needs, it is required that he/she keeps in mind the developmental features of the age group in the very first lesson and that he/she knows the importance of this during the developmental process.

Ömür (2004) has set forth that according to Bossing, a good and successful teacher in terms of piano teaching should enjoy his/her profession and be informed, well educated, disciplined, hardworking, tolerant, patient and creative. It is believed that every piano teacher should have all the qualities specified.

It is necessary that instrument training is carried out in a more interesting dimension because the time children in the present day especially Turkish children spend for games and extracurricular activities including instrument training are limited as a result of the intensities of the current education system and the technological products as well as the rich stimuli found in their environment. With this approach, the creativity feature of a piano teacher in Ömür's classification takes more importance in instrument training. Using creativity in educational identity, giving examples directed towards the learner's interest, and providing examples from daily life and the environment to make learning interesting and appealing increases the professional success of a teacher (Ömür, 2004).

Burton (1989) defines creativity as "combining known factors with new ways in order to gain new results – new product, new thinking and comprehending method, new performance method". The piano teacher should gain new teaching tools by acting according to Burton's statement and combining traditional teaching methods with new approaches in order to permanently keep the attention of his/her very young piano beginner and to maintain the continuity of education. Also, he/she should make the lesson interesting for children by getting them to achieve the developed tools through games because Otacıoğlu (2008) states that playing games is the main learning situation for children. The teacher should provide the opportunity for the student to concretize abstract concepts through active participation. In the present day, it is necessary that piano education is dealt with a modern approach with examples from daily life and that it is visualized through games. A piano lesson dealt with this approach is thought to satisfy the learning style of every student in terms of visual, auditory and kinesthetic/tactile learning (Boydak, 2001) as Camp states (1992) 'Learning to play the piano involves the mind, body emotions and the sense of sight, hearing and touch'.

Dr. Martha Baker Jordan (2005), who emphasize the similar idea, state that teaching aids with their purposes of use will help piano teachers to be more successful and professional.

Towards the explanations mentioned above, as Jordan emphasizes, the use of tools set forth in note, technical and musicality teaching, visualization, dramatization and activities related to associating with life are outlined below in order to make piano teaching enjoyable and more productive.

**Table 1.** Teaching aid and teaching purpose

Teaching Aid	Teaching Purpose
Magnetic Note Boards	Intervals, note names, chords
Grand staff note board with single movable note	Instantaneous note recognition
Flash cards for every new element taught Grand staff board on which chalk or dry markers can be used	Illustrating all elements taught
Music dictionaries and resource books	Reinforcement of knowledge of history and theory
Board Games	Motivation and knowing more about music

### 1. Activities which can provide easy note learning at the beginning stage of the piano:

While preparing the children to play the piano in an appropriate technical way in piano lessons, note teaching should be carried out in parallel with these studies. The treble and bas clefs are used while playing the piano. The lines and intervals of the staff vary according to the note clefs arranged above them. This is thought to form difficulty for young children at the beginning stage of the piano. The places of the notes which have different values on the staff in both clefs are learned one by one and are reinforced with small tunes to take place visually with time in the mind. By passing this process, the student who recognizes the notes of the staff at a glance can play the melody consisted of different note values lined consecutively in a shorter time. The learner who succeeds in achieving the melody in a short time enjoys the work he/she does, and therefore it is believed that studies gain continuity. The activities set forth in order to recognize the notes in a short time are outlined below:

#### 1.1 The note in the middle line of the staff

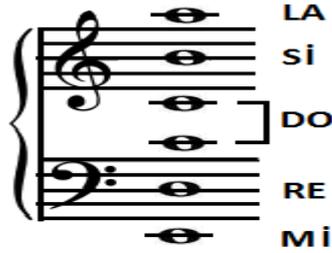
In note teaching, when the student knows what the notes are in both clefs (B in the treble clef and D in the bas clef) on the 3rd line which is exactly in the middle of 5 lines of the staff, it is easier for him/her to find the notes on the other lines of the staff. In this context, cards are prepared by drawing a 'sinek' ('sinek' means the animal 'fly') picture on the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of the B clef in order to remind the learner of the 'si' note (this note is the B note), and also a 'reçel kavanozu' (means 'jam jar') is drawn on the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of the F clef to remind him/her of the 're' note (this note is the D note). It is shown like it's a tale in which the fly is waiting to enter the jam jar.



**Picture 1:** Cards formed by making use of objects that remind the notes on the 3rd line of the G and F clefs.

### 1.2 The relationship of the note on the middle line with the other notes

The relationship between the other two consecutively arranged notes and the learned note on the middle line in the above activity is pointed out on another prepared card. Therefore, finding quickly the other notes left in between is aimed at.



**Picture 2.** Cards which show the relationship between the note on the middle line and the other consecutively arranged notes.

### 1.3 The mirror of C

As it is shown below, it is pointed out that by putting an imaginative mirror between the great octave, small octave, first, second and third octaves C notes found on the staff, the notes reflect each other. With this method, the aim is to easily establish the places of all the required C notes of the staff through visualization in the learner's mind.



**Picture 3:** Mirror reflecting all the C notes

### 1.4 Jumping game on the staff

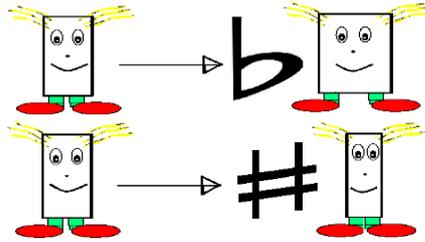
5 pieces of string which are equal in length are put on the floor of the classroom to form the lines of the staff, and with a new string a treble clef or a bas clef is put on the staff. During the game, the child jumps on the strings or in between them to identify the place of the note he/she is asked on the staff. Therefore, learning is aimed to be enjoyable by including all the three learning styles, auditory, visual and kinesthetic.



**Picture 4:** A staff prepared with 5 pieces of wool.

### 1.5 Sharp – Flat Cards

The term flat which lowers the note in front of it a half tone and the term sharp which raises the note usually confuse the children at the beginning stage. The prepared cards below which show the note that is lowered (in Turkish language it is said to be ‘thicken’ the note) with a flat and the note that is raised (in Turkish language it is said to be ‘thinning’ the note) with a sharp are used to give the student the opportunity to concretize abstract information.



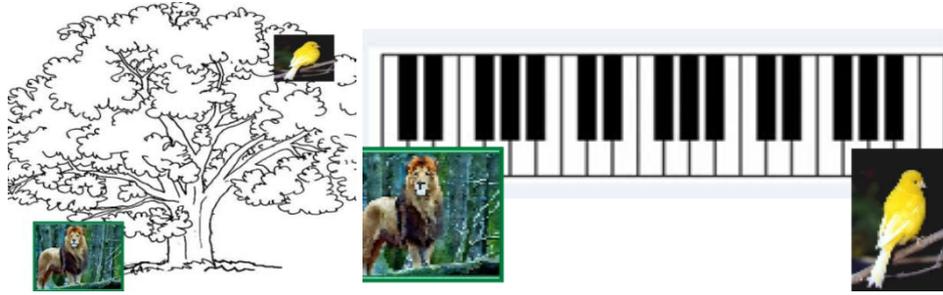
**Picture 5:** The term flat which lowers the note in front of it and the term sharp which raises the note in front of it.

### 1.6 Walking Game According to the Values of the Note

When the name of a note is said, the child is asked to clap his/her hands according to a crotchet as he/she takes a step to walk. This reinforces the value of every note, and aims to get the student to feel the rhythm physically in the game.

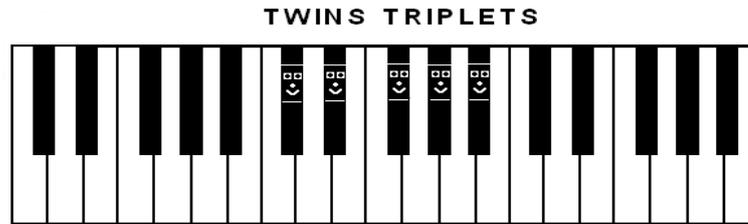
### 1.7 Game and Cards Directed Towards Staff – Keyboard Relationship

As notes go up on the staff, they become higher. As they go down, they become lower. Piano keys produce a higher sound towards the right, and a lower sound towards the left. On the piano, the right side, where the higher sounds are, is called the upper side and the left side, where the lower sounds are, is called the lower side. This is in parallel with the notes arranged on the staff. At the beginning stage of piano education, young learners confuse the upper and lower sides, so a bird is drawn above a tree for higher sounds and a lion is drawn below this tree for lower sounds on a card in order to avoid this confusion. By explaining this in an epic way, the students are taught that the higher sounds are at the top and that the lower sounds are at the bottom. With the prepared visuals, the aim is to get the upper and lower part of the piano keyboard to be comprehended easily.



**Picture 6.** The card which gets the sides of the piano to be comprehended.

It is important that the student finds the piano key that corresponds with the note of the staff. To get this comprehended in a short time, it is necessary that attention is paid to the arrangement of the black keys. It is appropriate to identify the dual black keys as “twins” and the triple black keys as “triplets”. The twins and triplets make the process easier when specifying which piano key belongs to which sound.



**Picture 7:** Twins and Triplets formed with the black keys

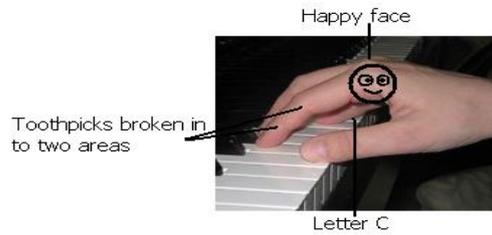
Cards showing the treble clef, bas clef and staff have been prepared to find the piano key which corresponds to a note on the staff. The student is asked to place the backgammon counter or button or a similar object put on the lines and intervals of the staff on a corresponding key. The aim of this game is to quickly find the related key with the note on the staff.

One of the most important acts in piano playing that needs to be gained is the comprehension that the piano keys have a related note on the staff, and that once the note on the staff has been comprehended, the required finger is placed quickly on the key which corresponds to that sound. This act needs a certain time in order to be gained appropriately. However, it is believed that the enjoyable activities will shorten the process of acquisition. Thus, the student is asked to quickly place the expected finger on the key according to the prepared card which shows the finger number of the note, and is also asked to vocalize this sound. By playing this game, it is believed that the student will quickly understand the note and instantly hit the key with the expected finger.

## **2. Comparisons which can help in forming the main piano playing technique at the beginning stage of the piano**

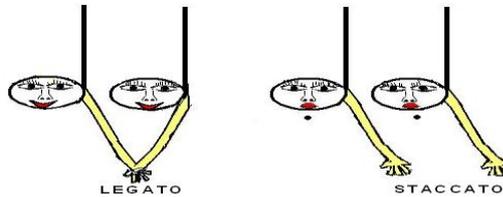
The technical development in piano playing is carried out in parallel with musical development as well as note teaching (Watermann, 1983). According to Gasımova (2010), one of the difficulties the piano teacher comes across is getting the student to gain technical skills. Gaining the practice of technical skills is evaluated as the most important aim in all the stages

of music education (Gasımova, 2010). Technical skills begin with the appropriate placement of the finger, hand, wrist and arm on the keyboard. It is necessary that every practice is done comfortably in order not to have contractions, pains and disabilities (Gökbudak and Tutun, 2005). Producing qualitative sound should form the primary principle of technical studies. The first step for a qualitative sound production is trying to capture the best colour by feeling that sounds can be produced in various tones just like a colour can have different tones. The correct positioning of the finger, hand, wrist, forearm and upper arm on the keys with qualitative sound production are the directly proportional elements in piano playing. Positioning correctly the hands on the keys is frequently likened to having a ball or an egg in the palm, and the position of the fingers on the keys is likened to a toothpick broken in two areas. The position of the wrist according to the white keys must be paid attention to by placing a book under the wrist to keep it in line with the white keys. The shape the thumb and index finger form is similar to the letter C. The fingers need to be placed on the keyboard in parallel with the black keys. As it is seen in the picture, the aim is to get the fingers in parallel with the black keys by drawing a happy face on the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger of each hand and having these hands look at each other.



**Picture 8:** The position of the hand on the keyboard.

The term legato is illustrated with a movement in walking in which one leg touches the ground before the other moves upwards. This is at the stage in which the learned places of the notes on the staff are vocalized with the correct hand position. The student comprehends this act by walking with the teacher. When the student moves onto playing after the walk, the aim is to get him/her to play with better legato. The exact opposite of this is staccato in which the dots above or below the notes (  $\uparrow$   $\downarrow$  ) symbolizing the staccato are likened to a pin, and the withdrawal of the finger from the key is likened to a wince because of a pinprick. The difference between the two techniques is comprehended by using this comparison: Staccato is like a dripping tap whereas legato is like a tap that flows continuously. Also in the following picture, the two notes which are hand in hand visualize legato, and the separate notes visualize the staccato (Onuray, 1998)



**Picture 9:** Legato and Staccato

The hand is likened to a bridge during the transfer of the fingers when playing the scales and the thumb which goes under this bridge is likened to a train. The bridge slides on the track after

the train has completed its passing under the bridge. The aim of expressing the movement in this way is to get the act to be comprehended easily.

### **3. Comparisons that can easily reinforce the musical expressions during the musical development process:**

It is seen necessary that the places of the notes on the staff, the values of notes and which piano key is related to which note are learned gradually. Also, it is important that musical expressions are learned at the same time with the start of producing qualitative sound using the correct technique, and that these expressions are applied to the work of art.

Dynamics such as *piano* “soft”, *mezzo-forte* “moderately loud” and *forte* “loud” can be comprehended by playing the piano, and also by saying in a low voice “I’m talking piano now” and at a medium-pitch “Come on, you talk mezzo-forte”. In addition, these expressions can be taught through a game by adding physical movements like stepping lightly on the floor and saying “Let’s walk piano” or stepping strongly and saying “Let’s walk forte”. These terms are reinforced through various activities by tapping different parts of the body such as the palm. For example, the palm is tapped softly when the term piano is said and it is tapped stronger when the word forte is expressed. The term crescendo is aimed to be comprehended with a sentence that begins as a whisper and gets louder, and the complete opposite term diminuendo is aimed to be understood with the reverse action.

The terms used for tempo such as andante (slow), moderato (medium) and allegro (fast) are aimed to be comprehended by walking at different speeds or making comparisons with transport. These matches can be made: andante with a bicycle, moderato with a car and allegro with a plane. The term accelerando is aimed to be comprehended through a walk that begins with slow steps and gets faster, and the complete opposite term ritardando is aimed to be understood with the reverse action.

## **RESULT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this study, note teaching for children at the beginning stage of the piano and activities which can be useful during the technical and musical development process have been presented. The mentioned activities, games in piano teaching, samples associated with life concretizing abstract concepts through visualization and visual, auditory, motional and sensual activities are prepared to diversify learning.

Examples of cards which have been presented above, games and comparisons have been used for ten years and are being used by a researcher at different times in amateur piano education for young children who have different personalities. The traditional practices used before have provided the chance to compare both methods. At the end, it has been observed that cards and games used in the note teaching stage in piano education help young piano learners acquire the places of the notes on the staff in a much shorter time and more correct answers are given by these children when asked the places of these notes. The student who can recognize the notes at a glance is able to reach the tune easier, and therefore shows quicker progress in piano education. It can be said that the aimed acts are gained in a shorter time and while using the traditional methods, learning becomes more permanent when the suggested activities are used. In comparison with the traditional methods, it has been observed that young piano learners concentrate more when cards and games are used in piano education.

In summary, in this study, it has been observed that students enjoy the lesson, their concentration increases and learning becomes permanent when the presented activities are used during the process of educating.

Many musical acts can be gained by young children through various methods. Activities of which samples have been given can be increased with diversification. The important thing in piano education is determining the direction of education by identifying the age group features and the individual characteristics of every child.

It is being suggested that through diversification the observed activities which are highly beneficial in piano teaching be collected into a guide book for piano teachers. By increasing the suggested activities in this way and presenting them to piano teachers is seen to be important in terms of the activities being reachable.

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