

SOME MEASURES TO IMPROVE PIANO TEACHING FOR STUDENTS AT NOBEL HIGH SCHOOL, THANH HOA CITY, THANH HOA PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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Abstract: *from the current situation of piano teaching at the piano club of Thanh Hoa City High School, Thanh Hoa Province, we propose new teaching methods and measures to improve the quality of general piano teaching at the school piano club. The measures are comprehensively improved, from content, teaching program, to the way of approaching piano in practice hours. These solutions aim to help students approach piano in a gentle and fun way but still achieve the correct basic piano techniques. At the same time, it helps gifted students who want to study for a future career to have a solid technical foundation, helping them learn more difficult piano pieces well to develop their own talents.*

Keywords: *piano, high school students, art, music, improving teaching, Vietnam, Thanh Hoa.*

НЕКОТОРЫЕ МЕРЫ ПО УЛУЧШЕНИЮ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ПИАНИНО ДЛЯ СТУДЕНТОВ В СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЕ НОБЕЛЯ, ГОРОД ТХАНЬХОА, ПРОВИНЦИЯ ТХАНЬХОА, ВЬЕТНАМ

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Аннотация: *исходя из текущей ситуации с обучением игре на фортепиано в фортепианном клубе средней школы города Тханьхоа, провинция Тханьхоа, мы предлагаем новые методы обучения и меры по улучшению качества общего обучения игре на фортепиано в школьном фортепианном клубе. Меры всесторонне улучшены, от содержания, учебной программы до подхода к фортепиано в часы практики. Эти решения направлены на то, чтобы помочь ученикам приблизиться к игре на фортепиано мягко и весело, но при этом достичь правильных базовых приемов игры на фортепиано. В то же время это помогает одаренным ученикам, которые хотят учиться для будущей карьеры, получить прочную техническую базу, помогая им хорошо выучить более сложные пьесы для фортепиано, чтобы развить свои собственные таланты.*

Ключевые слова: *фортепиано, старшеклассники, искусство, музыка, улучшение преподавания, Вьетнам, Тханьхоа.*

Music is an art form that uses sound to express human emotions, attitudes, perceptions and thoughts. Nowadays, many parents want their children to develop comprehensively. Therefore, in addition to the main subjects at school, they are increasingly interested in gifted subjects such as singing, dancing, fine arts, or playing musical instruments. Among the socialized music teaching activities, Piano is still the subject that most parents trust and prioritize. Nobel High School is one of the leading high schools in Thanh Hoa province. The school always focuses on the comprehensive development of students, including the development of artistic talents. I am both a music lecturer at Nobel High School, teaching Music according to the program of the Ministry of Education and teaching piano at the gifted club. Over the years, I have noticed that the piano class has attracted quite a lot of students to participate. The school's piano club was established to meet the needs of students' learning and talent development. Over the years, piano classes at the school's piano club have attracted a large number of students, especially those aged 15-16. Piano

teaching activities here have achieved many positive results, helping students master basic music theory and play the piano at levels from basic to advanced. Students always show interest and love for this subject. However, piano teaching at the club still has some limitations that need to be overcome. The piano teaching method at the school's club is mainly traditional, focusing on teaching basic piano playing techniques, with little attention paid to developing students' creativity. The classrooms are not yet fully equipped with teaching aids such as projectors, speakers, etc. Lecturers also do not pay attention to the combination of music theory and practice, leading to students not mastering the necessary music theory knowledge. In addition, lecturers do not regularly communicate with parents about the learning situation of students, leading to parents not being fully aware of their children's learning progress.

• **Overview of Nobel High School, Thanh Hoa City, Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam**

Thanh Hoa City is the administrative, economic and cultural center of Thanh Hoa province, located in the North Central region of Vietnam. There are many large universities, colleges and high schools in the province, such as Hong Duc University and Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism, or Nobel High School, which plays an important role in training quality human resources for the region. All have the same mission of bringing the culture of the North Central region, with many traditional festivals and traditional craft villages to students, students, and those who are responsible for developing the future of the country.

Over the years, the school has always strengthened the construction and improvement of the teaching staff and management staff in the direction of ensuring quantity, synchronization of structure, and standardization of training qualifications. The rate of qualified and above-standard lecturers is in accordance with regulations, 100% of lecturers graduated from university, of which more than 30% have a master's degree, an excellent teacher.

The Board of Directors aims to build the school into a high-quality educational unit in accordance with the spirit of No. 07 of the Department of Education on developing high-quality education. Help students develop comprehensively in morality and intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and basic skills. Develop personal capacity, dynamism, creativity, will to rise and high adaptability. Provide basic knowledge according to the knowledge standards of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, ensuring high scores in excellent student exams, entrance exams to high-quality universities in the city and the whole country.

Through many years of striving, with the united efforts of the teaching staff, the dynamism, creativity and impartiality of the Board of Directors, Nobel High School has achieved encouraging results. The school was recognized with the title: "Friendly school – active students" at the city level and "National standard school". The school was recognized with the title of Excellent at the City level.

• **Purpose and role of teaching Piano for Nobel High School students**

First, to meet the needs of students. Currently, the demand for learning piano is increasing rapidly. Piano is becoming the top choice of parents and students, but in reality, the majority of high schools in Vietnam do not have the conditions to teach piano in a systematic way. The establishment of the Nobel High School Piano Club has partly met the needs and wishes of parents and students. Thereby, helping students learn gifted subjects right at school after regular school hours.

Second, to stimulate musical potential. Music has been formed and developed closely with humans since the beginning. Many scientific works have proven that exposing children to music early and properly will bring many physical and mental benefits. For piano, if taught systematically and with the right method, it will help children to awaken and develop their musical potential. The task of each teacher is to guide students to actively approach, acquire knowledge, and practice diligently to achieve high efficiency. The songs must be suitable for the psychology of the children's age, only then will each lesson and each exercise become endless inspiration. Conquering each new piece of music will help students feel the value of life, making them always want to improve themselves and have opportunities to show their talents when they have outstanding talent. Teaching piano to high school students in general and at Nobel High School in particular plays an important role in the comprehensive development of students, not only in terms of musical skills but also supporting their psychological, intellectual and social development.

Develop musical and artistic skills

Learning to play the piano helps students develop their musical appreciation and knowledge of music theory such as notes, scales, chords, rhythm and harmony. This helps them not only learn to play the instrument but also gain a deep understanding of how to create and feel music. Because the piano is considered a foundational instrument for learning other instruments, as it helps students master musical structure and the basic principles of composition and arrangement.

Develop intelligence and logical thinking

Learning and playing the piano requires coordination between the hands and eyes, as well as the ability to read music and translate it into playing actions. This process helps develop students' logical thinking, problem-solving

and concentration skills. Studies have shown that learning music, especially playing an instrument like the piano, can improve students' abstract thinking and mathematical skills, and handle complex problems in learning.

Helps reduce stress and develop emotions

Playing the piano is an effective way to reduce stress and improve the mood of high school students. With the pressure of studying and exams, playing music helps students have moments of relaxation and reduce mental pressure. Besides, the piano also helps them express and explore their emotions through music. This is a useful tool to develop emotional intelligence (EQ), helping students better understand themselves and manage their emotions.

Practice perseverance and discipline

Learning the piano requires regular and patient practice to achieve skills from basic to advanced. This helps students develop discipline, perseverance and time management skills, important skills not only in studying but also in life. Through facing challenges when learning music, students learn to persevere through difficulties and develop confidence when performing complex tasks.

Enhance Creativity

Piano provides students with opportunities to be creative through free-playing, composing melodies and improvising musical passages. This helps develop creative thinking, flexible thinking and personal expression. Because creativity is an important skill in today's world, it helps students cope well with changes and find new solutions to problems in their studies and life.

Enhance Social and Communication Skills

Learning Piano can provide students with opportunities to join music clubs, perform in school cultural events and interact with friends with similar interests. This helps them expand their social relationships and improve their communication skills. Performing or participating in school orchestras also helps students develop teamwork skills, respect for others' opinions and the ability to cooperate in common activities.

Supporting career orientation in the field of art

For students who have a passion and talent in the field of music, learning Piano in high school can be a good foundation for developing a future career, such as becoming a musician, music teacher, or professional performer.

In addition, learning music also helps open up many opportunities for scholarships and entrance exams to domestic and international universities and music academies.

In short, teaching Piano to high school students not only helps develop musical skills but also plays an important role in developing thinking, emotions, social skills and career orientation. This is a useful activity to help students develop comprehensively in an important stage of their life.

• Some measures to teach Piano to students in the Piano Club of Nobel High School

With the desire to improve the quality of piano teaching at the club of Nobel High School, we have constantly innovated and improved the curriculum. By dividing the learning stages scientifically and applying modern teaching methods, we believe that it will help students progress quickly and achieve high achievements. In addition, we rely on scientific research on piano teaching methods to build a systematic and effective training program for the school club. The curriculum is designed with the goal of helping students develop comprehensively in both piano playing skills and musical knowledge.

Playing the piano is not simply pressing the black and white keys but is also an art that requires the rhythmic and delicate coordination of the whole body, especially the hands. To create diverse and emotional sounds, players need to master basic techniques such as Legato, Non-legato, Staccato and Marcato. Practicing these techniques requires perseverance and meticulousness, but will help students have a solid foundation to conquer more complex musical works. To achieve the expected results, the teacher's role as a direct instructor in teaching piano is extremely important. Teachers not only impart knowledge of music theory but also guide students on how to practice and practice techniques. Depending on the talent and ability of each student, teachers will have different teaching methods. For gifted students, teachers can set higher requirements to help them develop their abilities to the fullest. As for students with limited abilities, teachers need to patiently guide and motivate them to overcome. Teachers need to clearly explain to students that learning piano playing techniques not only helps students develop musical skills but also trains many other skills such as concentration, perseverance, coordination and musical perception. Through the process of learning the piano, students will become more confident and creative.

• Legato

Legato is a basic technique in playing the piano, represented by a curve connecting the notes. When playing legato, the notes will be smoothly connected, creating a seamless and flexible sound stream. To achieve this effect, players need to practice pressing and releasing the keys rhythmically, avoiding interruptions between notes. Practicing legato technique requires perseverance and meticulousness. Students need to spend time practicing slowly and regularly. At first, it may be difficult to coordinate the fingers, but with regular practice, students will gradually master this technique and create beautiful sounds. Unlike the staccato technique, which creates short and broken

sounds, the legato technique helps create long and continuous sounds. The flexible combination of legato and staccato techniques will help players create diverse and rich music in color. The legato technique is not simply a playing technique but also a way to express musical emotions. When playing legato, players can create soft, flexible melodies that evoke deep emotions. To do this, players need to listen and feel the music deeply.

Example 1:

P 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1
T 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5

Right from the first stage, it is necessary to form basic techniques for students through practicing scales, so that the finger placement and movement of fingers up and down can be comfortable on the piano keys. This is an important time to form basic techniques. Teachers need to guide students to practice slowly with each hand, when both hands are proficient, then let students put the two hands together.

Example 2: Etude No. 11 op.599 by Czerny

In Etude No. 11 op.599 by Czerny, the right hand uses the legato technique continuously, so when playing, students need to play the notes continuously, pressing the next note before lifting the previous note to create soft sounds. Teachers need to guide students to play slowly, pay attention to their sound and perform the correct technique of each hand before combining the two hands. This is a suitable Legato technique exercise for students because it is quite easy, the left hand uses the full overlap in the chord. When studying, teachers should pay attention to remind students to perform correctly according to the number of fingers specified on the music sheet. During the teaching process, teachers can also assign students with good and quite good talent to accompany and help students with average talent so that the class becomes friendly and fun, creating an atmosphere and spirit of helping each other in learning for students.

- *Non-legato*

Example 3:

P 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5
T 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 3 2 1
4 3 2 1 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 3 2 1
2 3 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5

If the legato technique brings seamlessness and smoothness to the sound, the non-legato technique creates clear, separate syllables. The non-legato technique is one of the basic techniques that any piano player needs to master. It

helps the music become livelier and more diverse. To play non-legato, students need to focus on pressing and releasing the keys firmly, each note is played independently. Teachers need to guide students to relax their bodies, especially the wrists and fingers to adjust the force of the stroke and perform this technique accurately.

Example 4: Excerpt from Etude 1, op.599 by Czerny



Although this piece of music is not too complicated, when applying the non-legato technique, students often encounter some difficulties such as: wrong rhythm, beat, insufficient sustain or uneven sound. This requires teachers to patiently guide and explain thoroughly so that students understand the nature of this technique.

When students perform the non-legato technique, teachers need to observe carefully and point out common mistakes such as: pressing the key too hard, lifting the finger too early, or not keeping the beat steady. Correcting errors promptly will help students overcome mistakes and progress faster.

- *Staccato*

The symbol is usually shown by a dot (.) at the beginning of each note

Example 5:



If legato creates a seamless sound and non-legato creates a separate sound, staccato creates a short and sharp sound. Compared to legato and non-legato techniques, staccato requires the player to have a higher technique. To create short and sharp sounds, the player must have a smooth coordination between the wrist and fingers. This is a rather difficult technique, especially for those who are just starting to learn the piano.

The staccato technique requires a solid foundation, and is often used to create special musical effects, such as playfulness, playfulness, or wit. Therefore, practicing basic techniques such as legato and non-legato is very important before approaching the staccato technique.

Example 6: Excerpt from Etude No.16, Op.599, by Czerny



In the example above, we see; the right hand uses the legato technique combined with the staccato technique at the end of each musical phrase; the left hand uses the staccato technique. This is also a piece that is quite suitable for teaching general piano because it is not too difficult, the melody is in the right hand, the left hand mainly uses chords. When teaching, teachers should guide students to play each musical phrase carefully, practice each hand separately, then combine the two hands at a slow speed and gradually increase the speed. Explain to students that at each note at the end of the musical phrase and the 2nd, 3rd, 4th beats of the left hand, they must bounce their hand up quickly, feeling like we have just touched fire and pulled our hand back. Only by doing so can students perform this technique correctly.

- *Marcato*

The symbol is the vertical or horizontal stress mark on the musical note >, / \

Example 7: Excerpt from the piano piece Valse Alsacienne



In the example above, we see that the piece is written in 3/4 time. The author mainly uses accents on the first beat of each measure in both the G and F clefs to affirm the key and character of the piece. In this example, we emphasize to students how to play *Marcato* and *Legato* with the right hand. When playing, students must concentrate to break the piece and need to clearly perform the *Marcato* and *Legato* techniques in measures 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 (excluding the momentum measure). Teachers can choose to teach this piece to students after they have mastered the basic techniques. Depending on the development and talent of each student, teachers select and assign pieces to them according to the principle of ensuring suitability and appropriateness in teaching general piano.

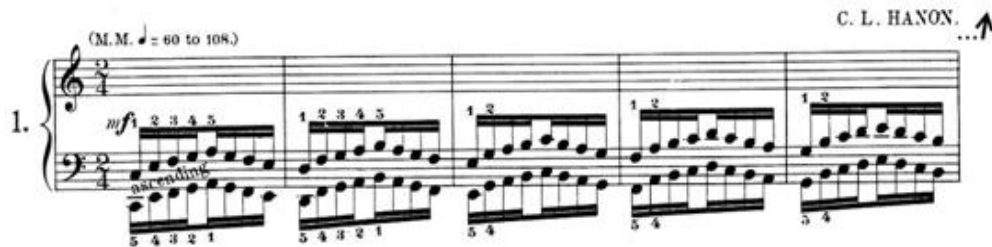
- **Finger exercises by author Hanon**

We have chosen to include in the piano teaching program the Hanon textbook from lesson 1 to lesson 15. This part focuses on training flexibility skills in the process of spreading the keys, stretching fingers 4-5 of both hands. Practicing the strength of 5 fingers is equal, helping to best express the strong and light symbols *f*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*.

For students who are new to the piano, the flexibility of the fingers is still difficult, in which fingers 4 - 5 are weaker than the other fingers. Therefore, exercises to strengthen fingers 4 and 5 are very important. It contributes to creating even and beautiful sounds for all 5 fingers when playing the piano. The Hanon lessons are relatively simple, suitable for high school students to develop finger techniques. Teachers need to guide students to practice slowly, requiring regular and persistent practice, repeating until proficient. The fingers are placed in the correct position, ensuring accuracy and the right method to achieve the highest efficiency. During the teaching process at the club, the lecturer can incorporate Hanon exercises to practice the students' fingers through each lesson. Hanon exercises

are introduced into the teaching program in the middle of the "Nurturing" stage when the students have practiced the Gamme part relatively stable. In the first stage, we include Hanon lessons 1 to 10 in the teaching program. In the "Care" stage, we include Hanon lessons 11 to 20 in the teaching program. Moving to the "Development" stage, we include Hanon lessons 21 to 40 in the teaching program.

Example 8: Exercise 1 by C.L. Hanon



In the above example, we see that Hanon 1 is quite suitable and can be applied for students who are new to piano to practice. Teachers need to give detailed instructions on the specific requirements and techniques of this Hanon exercise. The main requirement of Hanon 1 is to help strengthen fingers 4 and 5. If practiced regularly and continuously, it will help the weak fingers 4 - 5 become stronger, creating even and beautiful sounds for all 5 fingers when playing the piano. Teachers note that students practice slowly, practice each hand separately until proficient before combining the two hands. To create lively and emotional music, students not only need to play the notes accurately but also need to know how to adjust the intensity of the sound. Teachers will guide students on how to play the piano with different levels of intensity, from gentle (piano - p) to strong (forte - f). In addition, teachers will also focus on training students in the correct sitting posture and hand placement to ensure effective practice. Practicing Hanon exercises correctly will bring many benefits that we can quickly feel: fingers will be exceptionally strong, finger running ability and speed will increase, notes will not stick, sense of rhythm as well as the ability to listen to music, and remember the pitch of musical notes will develop clearly.

While exercises like Gamme and Hanon focus on practicing basic finger techniques in a simple way, Etudes are complete musical works, combining technique and art. Each Etude is like a new challenge, helping students develop comprehensive piano playing skills, from agile finger movements to expressing emotions through music. However, Etude is not simply a technical exercise but also an important stepping stone to help students progress quickly. Through practicing Etude, students will become familiar with many different piano playing techniques, thereby improving their ability to apply them to more complex musical works. Choosing the right Etude is one of the important factors that determine the success of the piano learning process. Teachers with experience and professional knowledge will know how to choose the most suitable Etude to help students develop comprehensively. For high school students, teachers can choose and include simple consecutive Etudes when they first learn and gradually develop techniques according to the students' level. Etudes are also taught in the middle of the "Nurturing" stage. At this stage, we choose easy Etudes to teach, mainly consecutive melodies with Legato and non-legato techniques. Moving on to the "Careful" stage, we choose Etudes with higher technical requirements such as: Practicing Etudes with 3rd intervals, Etudes combining Legato; Non-legato; Staccato techniques... Moving on to the "Harvest" stage, students practice Etudes with wider jump intervals than the 3rd and 6th intervals, requiring faster speed than the previous stages and combining Legato; Non-legato; Staccato; Marcato techniques.

Example 9: Excerpt from Etude No. 61, op.599, by Czerny.



In the above exercise, the right hand will practice the technique of continuously running the fingers on adjacent steps, while the left hand takes on the role of accompanying the chords. Although the notes are arranged simply, the rhythmic coordination between the two hands requires students to concentrate highly. To complete this exercise, students need to practice each stage persistently. First, the instructor should guide students to practice each hand separately until proficient, then combine the two hands. When proficient, gradually increase the speed to reach the required speed of the lesson.

Example 10: Excerpt from Etude No. 2, op.299, author Czerny.



As mentioned above, in the piano teaching method, it is always necessary to ensure the principle of suitability and appropriateness for students. Learn slowly, from slow to fast, from easy to difficult, from simple to complex, practice one hand proficiently and then combines both hands in all types of songs. Etude is no exception, after practicing the technique of sliding and threading the right finger, students will practice the technique of sliding and threading the left finger. Etude No. 2 by author Czerny has a continuous melody line in the left hand and a harmony line in the right hand. Usually, students will have more difficulty practicing continuous running on the left hand because it is not the dominant hand, so the fingers are weaker. This type of exercise will help students solve the technique of sliding and threading the thumb. With a simple and easy-to-learn Etude like this one, the teacher can completely divide the group and assign it to students with good or moderate talent, instructing students with average talent in the group to complete the practice part to combine the two hands for the correct notes, then the teacher checks and corrects the nuances for the students. After the practice time of the groups, the teacher organizes for the students to compete with each other to help them; consolidate the exercises, develop leadership skills, teamwork skills, and create a fun and exciting atmosphere for the subject.

After learning the Etude with the right and left hands in a row, the teacher can let the students practice the Etude exercises with intervals, or depending on the ability and talent of each student, assign appropriate exercises.

Example 11: Etude No. 5, op 599, author Czerny



This exercise requires students to coordinate their two hands. The right hand will perform the arpeggio technique, creating continuous and smooth sounds thanks to the jumps of 3rds and 4ths. Meanwhile, the left hand will be responsible for moving between 4ths, 5ths and 3rds. To play this Etude well, students need to spend time practicing thoroughly. The instructor guides students to start by practicing each hand separately, then combine both hands. Pay attention to playing the correct intervals and using non-legato techniques to create quality sounds. Through the practice process, students will gradually become familiar with the arpeggio technique and improve their ability to coordinate their two hands.

Example 12: Excerpt from Etude No. 60, op.599, by Czerny.



In this piece, students practice the technique of 3-step intervals with both hands. The right hand plays legato, the left hand plays non-legato. Note: When playing the notes, the instructor guides and reminds students to perform with even force and create even sounds on both notes. We have selected and included this piece in the “Careful” stage of teaching.

In addition, depending on the actual situation, the instructor can choose and assign appropriate lessons to each student. For students with average talent, the instructor should only choose easy-to-learn and easy-to-practice exercises that are suitable for them. For students with good skills, the instructor can assign more difficult Etude exercises that require higher techniques, have more performance colors and express music.

In short, practicing Etude exercises is very necessary in teaching piano. Etude not only helps students gradually perfect basic techniques, strengthens and makes fingers more flexible, but also increases the ability to express nuances in music. Practicing Etude requires learners to be persistent, regular, and continuous, and not to be hasty in ignoring the basic principles when practicing piano to achieve the highest efficiency.

From the current situation of piano teaching at the piano club of Thanh Hoa City High School, Thanh Hoa Province, we have proposed new teaching methods and measures to improve the quality of teaching piano at the school's piano club. The measures are comprehensively improved, from the content, teaching program, to the way of approaching piano in practice hours. These solutions aim to help students approach piano in a gentle and fun way but still achieve the correct basic piano techniques. At the same time, it helps talented students who want to study for a future career have a solid technical foundation, helping them learn more difficult piano pieces well to develop their own talents.

For each student with different talents, the lecturer has a separate approach, guidance and lesson assignment for each student, to ensure principles, suitability and ability for the students. Active teaching methods are regularly applied by the lecturer such as; organizing games; competitions; pairs of friends progressing together... creating a joyful atmosphere and helping each other in learning. In addition to focusing on the work, the lecturer also pays special attention to training basic techniques for students. From building the correct sitting posture, precise hand placement to practicing sound-making techniques such as legato, staccato, the teacher will help students form a solid foundation. In addition, adding technical exercises such as scales, Hanon exercises and etudes also helps students develop flexible finger movements, preparing well for more complex works.

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