

Teaching music reading to the beginner piano students

In my master thesis I am going to survey different methods of teaching music reading in Norwegian culture schools (music schools)¹. Music reading skills are considered an important part of traditional music study. I have been working as a piano teacher in several years and in my opinion reading music is a common problem for many students. Can one of the reasons be the teachings methods?

Research questions:

In my study I will try to answer three questions and use them as a starting point for further discussion:

1. How do piano teachers teach music reading?
2. Why do they use these methods?
3. Are they satisfied with the results?

There are two reasons why I chose piano teachers for my research: (1) reading music written for piano is relatively challenging compared to many other instruments, (2) I am a pianist myself and I have worked as a piano teacher for 10 years, so many of the problems related to this subject are familiar to me.

Method:

I decided to use a quantitative analysis as a method. One Norwegian county has been chosen (Hordaland fylke/county) as a research field. A detailed questionnaire has been made and sent to all the piano teachers who work in the culture schools in Hordaland. There are 32 culture schools and 103 piano teachers within the chosen area. The questionnaire consisted of closed questions mostly (with given answers). The teachers were asked to point out the answer that corresponded with their experience, point of view, practice, etc. on the scale from 1 to 5. The questions were concentrated on different activities used by piano

¹ In the culture schools children have a possibility to develop their art interests (music, painting, dancing etc). It's an afternoon activity. Normally each piano student gets an approximately 20 min long lesson weekly. There are no formal demands to the students, no exams and no formal levels of training that students are supposed to gain.

teachers and their influence on music reading skills of the beginner piano students (up to 2 years of music training). The teachers were also asked about their own experiences and musical background.

Discussion:

The three questions presented above will be a starting point for a discussion about different music reading methods. The questionnaire results will be analyzed with a starting point in earlier research on the field: (1) sight-reading. Good sight-readers have a certain way of reading music. Is it possible to teach this way of music reading to the beginners? Do any of the methods used by piano teachers include activities which can be directly connected to the way of reading music by professional musicians? (2) Methods used by recognized teachers/researchers. (3) Relevant experiments on music reading subject with participation of children. (4) What activities do the piano teachers in Norway find important and why is it so. I will search for patterns in my data, such as: do any activities used by the teachers seem necessary for achieving good results? As far as I know there is no research describing the teaching of music reading in Norway. The questionnaire will help to map out some interesting tendencies in this field.

Julia Katarzyna Leikvoll, December 2008