A PEDAGOGICAL GUIDE TO TEACHING TONE PRODUCTION FOR ELEMENTARY-LEVEL PIANO STUDENTS, WITH EXAMPLES FROM APPROPRIATE ELEMENTARY-LEVEL MUSIC

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The early stage of piano students’ training is one of the most important, because it is then that they establish their habits for life. Those who teach beginners need clear principles for developing a solid technical foundation and for preventing bad technical habits. One of the most difficult principles to inculcate in young students is that of tone production and quality. The primary purpose of this study is to provide a pedagogical guide to help piano teachers teach tone production to elementary-level students. To accomplish this purpose, the strategies of the twentieth-century pedagogues Josef Lhévinne, Josef Hofmann, and Heinrich Neuhaus are examined, and applied to the elementary-level piano literature. This study offers practical training suggestions to teachers of elementary piano students as well as musical examples from high-quality piano literature to accompany these suggestions.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The early stage of students’ training is one of the most important, because it is then that they establish their habits for life. Both Josef and Rosina Lhévinne, two of the most prominent Russian pianists and teachers of the early twentieth century emphasized the importance of the first teacher in planting the seeds of “love, understanding, and interest in music.”¹ Josef Lhévinne was extremely aware of the importance of not skipping steps and spoke of the “…enormous disadvantage of the student in later years.”² In Russian school pedagogy, the greatest respect is accorded to the teacher of beginners.³ Clearly, those who teach beginners need clear principles for developing a solid technical foundation and for preventing bad technical habits.

Many world-renowned pianists state the importance of studying technique in the early stages. The Polish pianist Moritz Rosenthal notes that “in [the] early stages the pupil should naturally learn [the] principles of touch and movements for arm, wrist and fingers, and how to apply them in trills, scales, chords, arpeggios and octaves.”⁴ The prominent French pianist Alfred Cortot also spoke about the importance of correct “…hand position, finger action, relaxation and so on.”⁵ One of the most popular Russian pianists and composers, Sergei Rachmaninoff, wrote as

¹ James W. Bastien, How to Teach Piano Successfully (Park Ridge, IL & San Diego: General Words and Music Co./Neil A. Kjos, Jr., 1973), 399.
³ Ibid.
well about the need for a precise and well developed technique.\textsuperscript{6}

Many books, articles, and dissertations have been written on piano technique. Julie Knerr studied the piano methods of fifteen pedagogues and analyzed books and articles related to piano technique. Her work offers a valuable and well-organized review and analysis of these pedagogues’ approaches. According to Knerr, however, “many method books that are used to teach beginning students provide few explanations about developing technique.”\textsuperscript{7} She also points out that “most of the major pedagogy texts from the past 30 years devote less than 9% to a discussion of piano technique.”\textsuperscript{8}

The lack of examples from high quality piano literature is a drawback to the technique books written over the course of the twentieth century. Josef Hofmann was an advocate for finding examples of “technique” in the literature, rather than in exercise books.\textsuperscript{9} One of the greatest piano virtuosos, Ignaz Friedman, also observes that “Even if you acquire a good technic, it is not of much use unless you employ those principles in the piece you study.”\textsuperscript{10} Similarly, the Russian pianist Alexander Siloti, while acknowledging that he occasionally practiced scales, etc., also clearly understood that the best “technical” work occurred when he applied those finger principles to an actual piece of music.\textsuperscript{11}

Clearly, it is critical that even at the beginning stage piano technique should be imparted


\textsuperscript{7} Julie Knerr, “Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique in Elementary Level Piano Students: An Exploration of Teaching Elementary Level Technical Concepts According to Authors and Teachers from 1925 to the Present” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2006), 5.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.


through appropriate musical literature. However, many students are limited not only by the lack of emphasis on this aspect of piano technique but also by the lack of exposure at an early age to high-quality musical examples, such as works from Bach’s *Anna Magdalena Book*, Mozart’s early keyboard pieces, Schumann’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, Prokofiev’s *Music for Children*, Op. 65, Kabalevsky’s *Thirty Pieces for Children*, Op. 27 and *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39, Stravinsky’s *Les Cinq Doigts*, to name but a few.

Among other aspects of piano technique, one of the most difficult principles to inculcate in young students is that of tone production and quality, the most important and often neglected area of piano technique. The most influential pedagogues and pianists of the twentieth century emphasized the importance of tone production. Heinrich Neuhaus, one of the most significant Russian pedagogues, wrote in his book *The Art of Piano Playing* that “Since music is a tonal art, the most important task, the primary duty of any performer, is to work on tone,”12 and “the mastery of tone is the first and most important task of all the problems of piano technique that the pianist must tackle…”13 Teaching tone production requires not only visual but also aural demonstration. Therefore, it is crucial to teach tone production with examples from appropriate elementary-level music in order to be meaningful.

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a pedagogical guide to help piano teachers teach tone production to elementary-level students. Strategies of the twentieth-century pianists and pedagogues Josef Lhévinne, Josef Hofmann, and Heinrich Neuhaus will be examined, and then paired with appropriate elementary-level musical literature. This guide offers practical training suggestions to teachers of elementary piano students and most importantly,

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13 Ibid., 56.
musical examples from high-quality piano literature to accompany these suggestions.

1.1 Backgrounds

Tone production is closely related to piano technique. Neuhaus said as much;\textsuperscript{14} and undeniably the finest Russian pianists have made “an unforgettable impression” around the world for decades.\textsuperscript{15} They are justifiably famous for their technical ability. Rachmaninoff declared that “In the music schools of Russia great stress is laid upon technic. Possibly this may be one of the reasons why some of the Russian pianists have been so favorably received in recent years.”\textsuperscript{16} Both Josef and Rosina Lhévinne acknowledged the importance of technical study in Russian music school and conservatories.\textsuperscript{17} Rosina Lhévinne wrote that “As students in Russia, we were taught from the earliest age to strive for a perfect technique, in other words, a complete command of the instrument.”\textsuperscript{18} It should be abundantly clear that there is great value in closely examining the strategies of the great Russian pianists and pedagogues in teaching tone production.

Three of the most important primary sources in this dissertation are Josef Lhévinne’s \textit{Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing}, Josef Hofmann’s \textit{Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered}, and Heinrich Neuhaus’s \textit{The Art of Piano Playing}. Lhévinne and Neuhaus were brilliant Russian pedagogues, and Hoffmann was born in Poland but trained with a Russian

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{15} Christopher J. Barnes, \textit{The Russian Piano School: Russian Pianists and Moscow Conservatoire Professors on the Art of the Piano} (London: Kahn & Averill, 2007), ix.
\textsuperscript{18} Lhévinne, \textit{Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing}, v.
master, Anton Rubinstein. Both Hofmann and Lhévinne were also world-famous performing artists. They all had influential and acknowledged careers as pianists and pedagogues.

1.1.1 Josef Lhévinne

Josef Lhévinne (1874-1944) was one of the remarkable concert pianists of the twentieth century. From 1885 to 1891 he studied the piano at the Moscow Conservatory with Vasily Safonoff and graduated with the gold medal.19 At the age of fifteen Lhévinne made his debut playing Beethoven’s fifth piano concerto, the Emperor Concerto, under Anton Rubinstein as conductor.20 He married Rosina Bessie in 1898, and they started to give concerts together.

Rosina Lhévinne (1880-1976) also studied with Vasily Safonoff at the Moscow Conservatory and graduated with the gold medal as the youngest woman to win the award.21 Josef Lhévinne taught in Tbilisi from 1900 to 1902 and at the Moscow Conservatory from 1902 to 1906. After that his principal residence became Berlin because of his concert career.22 In 1906 he made his debut in New York and gave six concert tours in the United States.23 Harold C. Schonberg, distinguished music critic of The New York Times, raved about Lhévinne’s sound and technique, comparing him favorably with Hofmann and Rachmaninoff.24 During World War I the Lhévinnes, as Russian citizens, were forced to remain in Berlin. They

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22 Moore, “Lhévinne, Josef,” 626.
23 Ibid.
moved to New York once the war was over. They started to teach at the most prestigious music school in the United States, the Juilliard School, in 1924. Soon Josef Lhévinne became one of the most famous teachers of his day.

David Dubal states that “Lhévinne’s approach to the piano was, first and always, pianistic: correctness of note and steadiness of rhythm foremost.” He praises Lhévinne’s musicality, and his willingness to let “…the music speak for itself.” His technique was “allied to a sure control of tone and phrasing, and a magisterial projection of line.”

Josef Lhévinne’s main thoughts are contained in his book Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, originally written in 1924, and republished in 1972 with a new foreword by his wife, Rosina. A long chapter, “The Secret of a Beautiful Tone,” lies at the heart of the book. His principles of piano technique and musicianship are presented with specific musical examples, not only his own but some by Anton Rubinstein and Lhévinne’s teacher, Vasily Safonoff. Lhévinne provides exact technical instructions. For example, for the movement of the fingers he states that “Thus, in the manipulation of the fingers on the keys, I direct my pupils to cut out any action upon the part of the fingers except at the metacarpal joints.”

1.1.2 Josef Hofmann

Another important figure is Josef Hofmann (1876-1957), an American virtuoso pianist of

26 Ibid.
27 Dubal, Art of the Piano, 216.
28 Ibid., 217.
29 Ibid., 218.
31 Lhévinne, Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, 12.
Polish birth and a prominent teacher at the Curtis Institute of Music. Hofmann was born in Podgorze, Poland, into a musical family. Dubal observes that “his father, Casimir, was a remarkable musician, a composer of ballets and operas, a good pianist, and a fine conductor. Mrs. Hofmann, the sturdy underpinning of the family, for a time flourished as a singer at the Cracow Opera.”

Josef Hofmann began his piano lessons at the age of three with his sister Wanda, and soon his father Casimir taught his son himself. Hofmann was one of the most remarkable musical prodigies. According to Dubal his debut at the age of six was a sensation. At the age of seven he toured Europe, and he made his American debut in 1887 at the Metropolitan Opera House, which caused “an unprecedented public furore.” At the age of nine he played Beethoven’s first Piano Concerto with Hans von Bülow conducting in Berlin. He went to Germany for further studies, notably with Anton Rubinstein, who had founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, and who now lived in Dresden. Rubinstein had never taught privately, but fortunately when Hofmann was sixteen years old, Rubinstein accepted Hofmann as his only private pupil in 1892. Therefore, Hofmann was greatly influenced by Rubinstein, and later he stated that the relationship with the old master Anton Rubinstein was the most important of his life.

In 1924 Mary Curtis Bok founded the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Hofmann

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32 Dubal, *Art of the Piano*, 163.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
taught there, becoming its director from 1926 to 1938. Hofmann and Bok were responsible for establishing the foundation of the school, which became and remains today one of the world’s foremost conservatories. Hofmann went on to have a huge influence on both pianists and composers of the early twentieth century (the Third Concerto of Rachmaninoff is dedicated to him). His concertizing continued until late in his life when memory issues began to affect his performances.

Hoffmann’s book *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered* has two parts. The first part deals with general rules, touch, technique, and the use of the pedal. He stresses the importance of the early training, as well as the concept of learning technique through repertoire. In the introduction to his book, Gregor Benko tells us that Hofmann studied with Anton Rubinstein, taking two lessons weekly for two years. The chapter “How Rubinstein Taught Me to Play” is a valuable source for accessing the legacy of Anton Rubinstein, a master of piano technique and one of the great virtuosos.

The second part of the book contains Hofmann’s highly useful answers to questions on various issues. Mostly the questions came from young students, and Hofmann covers a large number of important matters. For example, he suggests that “The arm should be held so that the wrist is on a line with it, not bent, and by concentrated thinking you should endeavour to transfer

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Schonberg, *Great Pianists*, 357.
42 Ibid., part I, 82.
43 Ibid., part I, vi.
44 Ibid., part II, v.
the display of force to the finger-tips instead of holding the tension in your arm.”45

1.1.3 Heinrich Neuhaus

Finally, one of the foremost Russian pedagogues of the twentieth century was Heinrich Neuhaus (1888-1964). He was the nephew of the famous pianist Felix Blumenfeld and a cousin of the composer Karol Szymanowski.46 His mother, Blumenfeld’s sister, was musically gifted. As professional musical pedagogues themselves, his parents taught him. He also studied with Blumenfeld and Aleksander Michalowski47 and then with Karl Heinrich Barth and Leopold Godowsky.48 After he completed his lessons with Godowsky in 1913, he started to study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia, graduating two years later.49 After teaching in Tbilisi and at the Kiev Conservatory, he taught at the Moscow Conservatory and remained there until his death.50 His classes in Moscow were crowded with students who wanted to get inspiration from him.51 Among others, two world-renowned pianists, Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels, studied with him. “As a teacher, Neuhaus utilized every facet of his wide culture and depth of imagination to develop a pupil’s capacity for appreciating both the style and expressive content of the music.”52 Not only was he one of the most famous teachers, but also he was a noted

47 Dubal, Art of the Piano, 254.
48 Methuen-Campbell, “Neuhaus, Heinrich,” 782.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Dubal, Art of the Piano, 254.
52 Methuen-Campbell, “Neuhaus, Heinrich,” 783.
pianist, especially in the music of Chopin, Debussy, Scriabin, and Szymanowski.53

He wrote an important book, *The Art of Piano Playing*, which was translated into English and remains as valuable today as it was when it first appeared.54 His chapters “On Tone” and “On Technique” contain not only detailed descriptions but also useful examples as short exercises from the piano repertoire. Neuhaus understood the importance of a multicolored tone combined with flexibility and relaxed arm weight.55 Irena Kofman describes the essence of Neuhaus’ methodology as being focused on repertoire rather than technical exercises. “…technique should not exist by itself, separated from music; it should be inseparably merged with the artistic vision.”56

1.2 Overview of Remaining Chapters

This dissertation is a pedagogical guide to teaching tone production for elementary-level piano students with examples from selections of the appropriate elementary-level piano literature. The main aspects of this are dealt with in six further chapters: posture, fingers, hands, wrists, arms, and tone production, each of them examining the strategies of the twentieth-century pianists and pedagogues Josef Lhévinne, Josef Hofmann, and Heinrich Neuhaus, and applying them to the elementary-level piano literature.

The second chapter provides guidance to developing correct posture, including proper sitting distance and height. In order to achieve correct posture, a natural and relaxed body is emphasized. A slightly lower seat is suggested in order to enhance the employment of the fingers

53 Ibid., 782-83.
54 Ibid., 783.
and to develop finger strength for young students. An appropriate sitting distance, one which is far enough away from the piano to permit freedom of arm movement is encouraged. In order to teach correct posture, use of an adjustable piano bench or cushions to achieve the proper height and a footstool to support children’s feet is recommended.

The third chapter focuses on fingers. In one of the sub sections, the proper placement of the fingertips is discussed with the goal of developing finger technique properly for young students. Care is taken to acknowledge that young students have small hands and many variations in size of hands and length of fingers. Two practical guides are provided to deal with correct finger placement. The most important elements for tone production are addressed, namely to play with the fleshy part of the finger and to curve the distal interphalangeal joint. In order to obtain strength in the fingertips, the positions of the three smaller joints (firm) and the three larger joints (flexible) are discussed. No. 5, “Playing,” from Kabalevsky’s *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39, and No. 3, “En jouant á la balle (Playing Ball),” from Kabalevsky’s *Scenes of Childhood*, are suggested as appropriate musical examples. In these examples, among other piano techniques, playing staccato is addressed. In order to help younger students who have weak fingers, a supported-finger exercise is provided. In the last section of the chapter, suggested repertoire is discussed, including a table of suggested repertoire for developing firm fingertips.

The fourth chapter presents the correct hand position, finger movement, and five-finger position. In order to produce a good tone, playing by using only the metacarpal joint, thus eliminating any unnecessary finger movement is recommended. As a teaching suggestion, “a holding-a-cup” exercise is provided. Musical examples, such as No. 6, “A Little Joke,” and No. 12, “Scherzo,” from Kabalevsky’s *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39, are provided. For the five-finger position, two musical examples are presented: one is *Musette*, BWV Anh. 126
from Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Anna Magdalena Book*, and the other is No. 40, “In Yugoslav Mode,” from Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, Volume II. Either a non-legato touch or a legato touch is suggested in these two examples. In the last section of the chapter, suggested repertoire is discussed including a table of suggested repertoire for developing a correct hand position.

The fifth chapter focuses on wrists. In order to obtain a good tone, flexible wrists are emphasized. This chapter introduces several natural motions of the wrist, such as upward and downward motion, circular motion, and rotary motion in order to prevent stiffening of the wrist. Some gymnastic exercises are also provided for circular motion and rotation of the wrist, including those of Tobias Matthay which help younger students relax their wrists and forearms. Musical examples, such as No. 9, “Attrape qui peut (Playing Tag),” from Prokofiev’s *Music for Children*, Op. 65 for upward and downward motion, “Trällerliedchen (Humming Song),” from Schumann’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, and *Menuett*, K. 5 from Mozart’s *Klavierstücke* for both upward and downward motion and wrist rotation are provided. In the last section of the chapter, suggested repertoire is discussed including a table of suggested repertoire for developing a flexible wrist.

The sixth chapter focuses on arm weight. This chapter is divided into three parts dealing with free fall, floating arm, and relaxed shoulder. In order to help young students understand the concept of using gravity, an arm-drop exercise is provided, which gives students a sense of the basic idea of playing with arm weight. In order to teach students to use arm weight, using the term, “a floating arm” instead of a relaxed arm, is recommended. Relaxed shoulders are required in order to achieve a floating arm. An effective shoulder-release exercise of Tobias Matthay is provided. Helpful musical examples, such as No. 1, “Morning,” from Prokofiev’s *Music for Children*, Op. 65, and *Menuett*, K. 61g II from Mozart’s *Klavierstücke*, are presented for using
arm weight and floating arm. In these two examples, two piano techniques – playing chords and octaves – are discussed. In the last section of the chapter, suggested repertoire is discussed including a table of suggested repertoire for using the arm.

The seventh chapter is divided into five sections dealing with voicing, ear training, pedaling, inspiration, and daily practice. In the first section, voicing in two voices – melody and accompaniment and voicing in three or four voices is addressed. For voicing between melody and accompaniment, No. 4, “Tarantella,” from Prokofiev, *Music for Children*, Op. 65, is provided as an example for right-hand voicing, and No. 2, “Polka,” from Kabalevsky’s *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39, is provided as an example for left-hand voicing. For voicing in three or four voices, No. 2, “Soldatenmarsch (Soldier’s March),” from Schumann’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 68 is provided as a musical example. Practicing the top voice separately from the other voices - the top voice with legato and the other voices with staccato - is recommended. Ear training – a critical element in mastering tone production – is discussed. In order to help students form a concept of the tone in their imagination and develop their ear, practical teaching guides are provided, such as asking students to compare different types of sound and having them record their own playing. In the pedaling section, the correct way to press the damper pedal is dealt with. With a musical example, No. 4, “Ein Choral (Chorale),” from Schumann’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, detailed instruction is provided on using the damper pedal correctly. For the more advanced student, more sophisticated pedal techniques are mentioned, such as the half-pedaling technique. In the section on inspiration, the importance of listening to one’s own playing is stressed. Suggestions for ways of using mental practice are offered. In the last section, daily and regular practicing every day is recommended; and clear and detailed instruction on the various ways to practice are suggested. This includes such standard things as practicing hands
separately and slowly. The importance of breathing while playing is noted.

The final chapter deals with the rationale for introducing the technique of tone production at the elementary level and provides a summary of the main points of the study. In closing, the value of the pedagogical approaches of Josef Lhévinne, Josef Hofmann, and Heinrich Neuhaus is reemphasized as well as the importance of detailed teaching guides.
2.1 Proper Sitting Distance

Correct posture, including sitting at the proper height and distance from the keyboard is one of the first concerns to be addressed, because fine tone production can be cultivated only through natural posture and a well-coordinated body. Therefore, correct posture is where many great piano teachers start to teach.

Children can be tempted to sit all the way back on the bench, with their feet swinging in the air. This posture does not support their feet, and the chair tends to be too close to the piano. Also, this posture restricts the movements and use of the arms, especially the upper arms. When the torso is not able to move freely, the body becomes stiff. A stiff and unnatural posture of the body affects tone quality.

Students should sit straight facing the middle of the keyboard and in the middle of the bench. They should sit on the front half of the bench rather than all the way back on the bench. Since children are generally not yet tall enough, their feet are likely to swing in the air, and they can exacerbate the bad habit by intertwining their feet around the bench legs when they sit on the front part of the bench. Without supporting their feet, their body becomes unstable.

In order to teach a younger student correct posture and position on the bench, the teacher should use a footstool to support the student’s feet. A footstool should not be too high because this forces the child to overcompensate the bent angles of their knees. A footstool of suitable height should be placed in front of the pedals. The use of a footstool can be a key to correct posture for elementary-level students not only for supporting their feet but also for forming

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correct habits. Hofmann recommends that the pianist’s feet touch the pedals in order to be ready to use them without losing time. Even though students might not yet be able to use the pedals at the early stage, their feet should be not only supported and firmly planted but also ready for using the pedals later.

Not only is a free and natural position of the body critical in order to find a suitable distance from the piano, but also it is crucial for good tone production. Neuhaus uses a military metaphor: “the condition *sine qua non* for a good tone is complete freedom and relaxation of the arm and wrist from the shoulders to the tips of the fingers which should always be at the ready, like soldiers at the front.”

A proper sitting distance is achieved when children are able to feel that their body is natural and free. They should not be close to the keyboard, as this restricts their ability to use their arms freely. József Gát recommends being seated in such a way as to have complete freedom of movement of the forearm, upper arm, and torso. If a proper sitting distance has been achieved, students will have enough space to move their arms freely, and it should be possible to incline slightly forward in order to carry and feel their body weight in their fingertips. In order to produce a good tone, maintaining natural posture and a well-coordinated body, students should avoid any unnecessary motions of the head and body.

2.2 Proper Sitting Height

Not only must students be taught how far to sit from the piano, but they also must be

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taught how high to sit. In general, the appropriate height is considered to be when students’ hands, wrists, and forearms are in a straight line on the same level with the keys. However, each teacher has slightly different suggestions. While some great piano teachers, such as Carl Czerny and Theodore Leschetizky, preferred a seating height a little higher than the surface of the keys, Hofmann and Isabelle Vegerova suggest a slightly lower one. In his book, Czerny suggests that the height of the chair be in comfortable alignment with the height of the pianist.62 Leschetizky warns students not to hug their torso with their elbows.63

According to Gát, a high arm position produces “an entire dynamic unreliability of the finger technique,”64 He recommends a lower arm and finger position in relation to the keyboard.65 Hofmann also recommends a slightly lower seat, arguing that sitting too high forces the pianist to use more arm and shoulder rather than fingers.66 Not only Hofmann but also Vengerova seemed to prefer a slightly lower seat. In Schick’s book, The Vengerova System of Piano Playing, he recommends that the pianist’s hand be on a level with the depressed keys — which is slightly lower than the surface of the keys.67

In order to induce the employment of the fingers rather than the arm and shoulder, and to promote finger strength for young elementary-level students, a slightly lower seating position could be preferable. Finger technique is one of the important aspects for tone production because tone is eventually made in the fingertips through the movement of the arm and shoulder.

63 Ibid., 280-81.
64 Gát, Technique of Piano Playing, 53.
65 Ibid., 54.
67 Schick, Vengerova System of Piano Playing, 22.
Therefore, firm, independent, and accurate finger movements should be cultivated in order to control the fingers. In order to train for finger technique, students should feel the weight of the keys beneath their own fingertips. A slightly lower seat — in which the elbow is a little lower than the keys or on a level with the depressed keys — helps students to feel their arm weight more and to press the keys deeply. However, the seat should not be too low. In the event that the seat is too low a young student is likely to play the piano with raised shoulders, and this causes extra body tension and makes their arms stiff. William S. Newman says that “Sitting too low, which is perhaps the worse of the two evils, constrains the finger action by raising the wrists and knuckles; sitting too high constrains the hand action by lowering the wrists and elbows.”  

Finally, because individuals have physical differences, teachers should understand the physique of each individual student and find a suitable approach to the piano for them. Gyorgy Sandor also recommended suiting the height of the bench to the physique of the player. To be specific, the proper sitting height for correct posture is mainly determined by the length of the trunk and upper arm; for example, someone who has a long trunk and short upper arms needs to use a lower seat than one who has a short trunk and long upper arms.

One can conclude that a proper sitting height is when the arm is in line with the wrist, so that the wrist does not bend. The weight of the arm should transfer to the fingertips instead of being held in the arm, and the elbow should be slightly lower and away from the torso, not too

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72 Ibid.
close or too far but hanging down freely. Lev Oborin recommended an elbow held in “…a low ‘suspended’ position.”73 As young students continue to grow, teachers should regularly check and adjust their seat height. An adjustable piano bench or cushions are recommended in order to achieve the proper height for each individual student.

Teachers should emphasize and correct repeatedly for correct posture until a good posture feels natural. Once young students are on the way to understanding how it feels to maintain good posture and a proper distance and height in relation to the keyboard, they should receive instructions with check points so that they are able to maintain good posture when they practice by themselves. Students should ask themselves whether their feet are supported, whether they sit on the front part of the bench, whether they sit straight, whether there is enough space in order to move their arm freely, whether the seat is neither too high not too low, whether their body is natural and relaxed. The most important aspect in the early stage is to form correct habits. Hofmann wrote that “bad habits are so much easier acquired than good ones!”74

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CHAPTER 3

FINGER

3.1 The Proper Part of the Fingertip

Once proper sitting height and distance have been taught, the next consideration is finger placement. Since young students tend to have small hands, and since there are many variations in size of hands and length of fingers, it is important to teach all students the finger placement that best suits them in order to develop finger technique properly. Well-developed finger technique and proper use of the fingertip is key to producing a beautiful tone, and finger technique is one of the most important aspects of piano playing. Lhévinne certainly understood this as well as Feinberg, who spoke on “…the gradual development of sliding, or gliding, hand and arm movements in place of the vertical finger work.”75 Someone who has fine finger technique can create a beautiful tone, whereas poor technique renders control of the fingers difficult if not impossible. In short, producing a beautiful tone is closely associated with good finger technique.

In order to obtain fine finger technique and a beautiful tone, the distal interphalangeal joint must be curved. Younger students tend to have less finger strength, so it is easy for them to cave in at the distal interphalangeal joint. When the interphalangeal joint is rounded, and the student’s fingers make contact with the keys at the center of their fingertips, they can stroke the keys accurately and focus on their tone.76 Recall that Neuhaus said: “an arm which is relaxed from the back and shoulder to the fingertips touching the keys, for all accuracy is concentrated in the fingertips!”77

75 Feinberg, “The Road to Artistry,” 9.
76 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part I, 28.
77 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 66.
Another key element to producing a beautiful tone is learning how to play the piano with the proper part of the fingertips: the fleshy part of the finger, not the part immediately behind the fingernail.78 Lhévinne suggests that the keys be touched with “felt-like cushions of human flesh.”79 He asked for a beautiful, round tone produced by a “resilient” part of the fingertip.80 Rather than using an overly-curved finger, which can produce an uneven quality, the fingers should be gently curved so that “the cushions of flesh” touch the keys. 81

When Chopin taught a student for the first time, he would teach a five-finger position, using the notes: E, F-sharp, G-sharp, A-sharp, and B-sharp.82 These five notes represent “the most convenient, the most natural, the most relaxed position of the hand and fingers on the keyboard, since the shorter fingers — the thumb and little finger — are on the white keys, which are lower, and the longer fingers (second, third and fourth) are on the black keys, which are higher.”83 Hofmann was also a proponent of this five-finger position for achieving a flexible hand on the keys. 84 (Chapter 4 deals with aspects of teaching five-finger positions in more detail.)

In dealing with correct finger placement with a natural hand position, there are two ways to practice: using the black keys for the longer fingers or using only the white keys. In the first way the black keys are used in the manner that Chopin taught: E, F-sharp, G-sharp, A-sharp, and B-sharp. However, for young students who have very small hands, the teacher can modify

78 Lhévinne, Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, 18.
79 Ibid., 15.
80 Ibid., 18.
81 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 7.
82 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 84.
83 Ibid., 84.
84 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 7.
Chopin’s five-finger position to make the outer interval shorter by changing B-sharp to B-natural, or changing both E to E-sharp and B-sharp to B-natural, so that the students can reach easily without excessive stretching of their small hands. As for using the white keys, according to Schick, “When one plays a basic five finger position in both hands on the white keys…. The third finger (the longest) is nearest the black keys, the second and fourth fingers a little behind, the fifth finger about midway between the edge of the white keys and the black keys, and the thumb placed with just its nail on the key.”85 In addition, because it is important to make allowances for physical differences, a suitable approach must take into consideration the individual physique, placing the fingers on the keyboard based on the lengths of the individual’s fingers.

When working with finger placement using the black keys, first, students must elongate their middle three fingers (2, 3, and 4) and then put them on the black keys: F-sharp, G-sharp, A-sharp. While students have their fingertips on the keys, they should gradually and gently curve their fingers. There are three main aspects to check: fingertips must remain in one place as the fingers are curving; the distal interphalangeal joint must remain out, and the fingers should not be too curved in order to enable placement of the fleshy part of the fingertip on the key. The thumb and little finger should rest naturally on the white keys: either E or E-sharp for the thumb and either B or B-sharp for the fifth finger. (See Fig. 3.1.)

In order to teach correct finger placement with natural position only on white keys: C, D, E, F, and G, instead of the three middle fingers, two things must occur. First, teachers should have young students elongate four fingers (2, 3, 4, and 5) and place them on the white keys: D, E, F, and G. Second, the students should be encouraged to curve their fingers little by little,

85 Schick, Vengerova System of Piano Playing, 22.
keeping the fleshy part of the fingertip still on the key. Finally, the students should place the thumb naturally on C and play the key with the side of the tip. This is basically the same principle as the original five-finger positioning, except on the white keys. (See Fig. 3.2.)

Figure 3.1: Suggested Natural Finger Position on the Black Keys, Based on Individual Finger Lengths

Figure 3.2: Suggested Natural Finger Position on the White Keys, Based on Individual Finger Lengths

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86 Diagram by the author.
87 Ibid.
Hofmann suggests that a student should “change the curving little by little until you find out what degree of curvature suits your hand best,”\(^8^8\) Figure 3.3 shows an incorrect finger position. Since each finger is placed at a different part of the fingertip, longer fingers (such as 3 and 4) are more curved than the others. This results in an uneven sound and a different quality of the sound, because finger numbers 3 and 4 are played with harder parts of the fingertip, and fingers 2 and 5 with softer parts of the fingertip.

**Figure 3.3: Incorrect Finger Position on the White Keys\(^8^9\)**

Students should be advised to keep their fingernails short in order to help them better feel the placement of fingertips on the keys. This will enable them to curve their fingers properly. Recall that Hofmann mentions: “Extreme cleanliness and care in cutting the nails the proper length are necessary to keep your hands in condition for playing the piano.”\(^9^0\) It would also be helpful if they not only see and touch “the cushions of flesh” with their other hand but also try to work on gradually curving their fingers, using a covered piano lid or a table top.


\(^{8^9}\) Diagram by the author.

3.2 Firm Fingertip

Finger strength is essential for pianists.\(^{91}\) In the early stage of training it is essential to develop firm fingertips in order to establish the basis for a good tone. Hofmann insists that students should “Prepare the finger for great force, imagine the tone as being strong, and yet strike moderately.”\(^{92}\)

In order to obtain strength in the fingertips and produce a full and round tone, young students should press the keys deeply enough with the fleshy part of the fingertip. Lhévinne adhered to the principle of “…striking key bottom.”\(^{93}\) Playing to the bottom of the keys does not mean pushing or hitting the keys, but rather, using body weight, especially the arm.

Understanding and using well-coordinated body weight is important, because not only do tensed muscles result in a forced sound, but also completely relaxed muscles make a sloppy sound.\(^{94}\) Also, neither tensed nor excessively relaxed muscles are easy to control. In order to avoid making either a forced sound or a sloppy and inaccurate sound, the three smaller joints (finger joints) should be firm, but the three larger joints (wrist, arm, and shoulder) should be flexible: neither completely relaxed nor tight. Figure 3.4 shows the positions of all six joints. Also, students should keep their knuckles up and maintain an arched palm shape to support the fingers. Sandor states that “It seems clear that when a child begins his musical studies, he usually possesses a considerable amount of innate coordination. If a teacher can take good advantage of

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\(^{91}\) Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 93.


this and doesn’t interfere with it, he can shape a much better and happier pianist."95

Figure 3.4: Positions of the Three Smaller Joints (Firm) and the Three Larger Joints (Flexible)96

The teacher has a responsibility to assign repertoire thoughtfully, using it as an age-appropriate tool to help their students’ technique develop along with their musicianship.

Technique exercises can actually be harmful, especially repeated muscle-building exercises, because they create body tension, which causes poor tone production. Not only are many of these exercises mechanical, but they can be practiced the wrong way if not carefully supervised. Leschetizky mentions that in the old days “Technique was very little valued in itself, and was useful only as a means of expressing beauty.” 97 The most essential goal for piano technique is producing a good tone quality.


Example 3.1: No. 5, “Playing,” from Kabalevsky, Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39, mm. 1–798

A piece such as No. 5, “Playing,” from Kabalevsky’s Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39 is a good example for developing firm fingertips. (See Ex. 3.1.) This piece includes the

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The concept of playing staccato by using all five fingers with full tone in *forte*. The piece consists mainly of skipping notes in four-measure phrases, and the pattern is distributed equally between the hands.

Students should press the keys accurately and deeply enough to the bottom with the fleshy part of the fingertip. When teachers teach staccato, young students have a tendency to play the staccato notes too short by striking the keys only halfway down and letting their hands go up in the air. However, in order to obtain finger strength and produce a good tone, they should play the staccato notes firmly by pressing the keys all the way down. When students play the black keys, in particular, they should be sure to press firmly and accurately because the black keys are narrower and higher than the white keys. This extra attention will assist in making a sound equal in quality to that made on the white keys. Student should also be encouraged to think not about staccato, as if touching a hot stove, but simply about releasing each finger before playing the next note: in other words, a lightly detached touch.

Students should practice slowly and play with an even tone by focusing on their fingertips. Playing each note firmly will also help young students to play the piece in a steady tempo. The pattern of each measure has the first two notes played by one hand and the last note played by the other hand, which makes it easy for young students, who have not yet developed their finger strength, to rush the first two notes. In order to play the rhythm correctly and without rushes, each note needs to be played *forte* with an equal quality and volume of tone, no matter which hand is used or which finger, and the tone should be full, round, and warm rather than hard and metallic.

When the hand is required to move to another position, the shift should be prepared immediately. For example, in the right hand after playing the first two measures, the right hand
should move down to the new position. In order to prepare the new hand position while playing the left-hand note (E-flat) on the third beat of m. 2, the right hand should move immediately after playing A in m. 2 so that the right hand is already ready to play B-flat in the third measure. The left hand makes a similar preparation between mm. 6 and 7. Also, in the right hand between m. 6 and m. 7, instead of stretching the fifth finger to play the note, F in m. 7, the right hand’s position should shift one step up so that the fifth finger of the right hand is prepared to play F without any tension from stretching fingers after playing C in m. 6.

“En jouant à la balle (Playing Ball),” from Kabalevsky’s *Thirty Pieces for Children*, Op. 27 is another good piece that can be used for developing firm fingertips. This piece contains three repeated notes, which allows students to focus on their fingertips by playing these same notes with different fingers in both hands. (See Ex. 3.2.)

**Example 3.2: “En jouant à la balle (Playing Ball),” from Kabalevsky, *Scenes of Childhood*, mm. 30-42**

This piece includes the concept of playing repeated notes by using fingers 4, 3, and 2, in

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both hands. Almost every measure of this piece contains three repeated notes. This helps to develop firm fingertips as well as finger independence. The first note is played by the fourth finger, one of the weak fingers, in both hands. Students should practice playing the first note loud and full. Students might think of hitting the keyboard instead of using weight because they react to the accent mark. When students use their weight, however, they can make a warmer and fuller tone. In order to play the first note accurately and firmly, students should keep their fingers as close as possible to the keyboard, especially when playing a black key. With fingers kept close to the keyboard, not only can the students be ready to play more accurately, but also they can avoid any unnecessary movement. Hofmann says by playing in the air energy is lost.\textsuperscript{100} For Lhévinne, “With me, touch is a matter of elimination of non-essentials, so that the greatest artistic ends may be achieved with the simplest means.”\textsuperscript{101} Students should start to practice very slowly by focusing on the fleshy part of the fingertips and keeping the correct hand shape. Teachers should ensure that students press the keys accurately and deeply enough with the fleshy part of the fingertip in order to gain finger strength and make a round and full tone.

By playing three repeated notes with different fingers, students develop finger independence. Developing finger independence allows them to control each finger better; and when they are able to control their fingers, they can shape phrases better. The repeated notes should be played as evenly as possible, with attention paid to the weight of their fingertips. Instead of playing the three repeated notes individually, students should play these notes in one motion. These three notes should be connected to one another by transferring and sinking the weight from one fingertip to the next over the three notes, so that they can be played not only

\textsuperscript{100} Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part II, 23.

\textsuperscript{101} Lhévinne, \textit{Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing}, 12.
firmly but also rapidly. Attention should be paid in particular to the first eighth note in this repeated note pattern. A student is likely to make the mistake of playing it too staccato. Since it is a longer value note than the preceding repeated sixteenth notes, it actually functions as a landing note, so should be held down firmly before slurring upwards to the final note in the measure, which is staccato.

Understanding the structure of the piece can also help the students’ playing. For example, this excerpt can be divided into three sections. The first section is from mm. 30 to 32 in which a descending melody, F - E - D - C - B-flat, appears in both hands alternately. The second section is from mm. 33 to 38 in which an ascending chromatic scale, A - B-flat - B-natural - C - C-sharp, appears only in the left hand. The last section is from mm. 39 to 42 in which a passage is repeated in the next measure but played an octave lower. Understanding this particular pattern arrangement will not only help the students at the sight-reading stage, but hopefully will help in the memorization process. While this dissertation is not concerning itself with that part of the learning process, it certainly helps tone production when the pianist’s brain is free from worrying about what note comes next.

Schick states that “Initially students must think carefully about the system’s application to literature. Gradually it becomes easier and more comfortable for them to use, until eventually it should feel perfectly normal and natural.” Teachers need to be vigilant about the physical relaxation of their students and intervene the moment a student begins to play incorrectly. Focusing on firm fingertips with the fleshy part of the fingertips and on playing to the bottom of the keyboard is fundamental for tone production. Lhévinne tells us that: “It is almost an axiom to

say that the smaller the surface of the first joint of the finger touching the key, the harder and blunter the tone; the larger the surface, the more ringing and singing the tone.”¹⁰³ Lhévinne recommended that a passage be practiced first slowly, and only gradually increase the speed with further repetitions.¹⁰⁴ Slow practice helps students control their fingers better and allows them to focus their attention, making inaccuracy disappear. The teacher should also encourage them to always play musically, even under tempo.

3.3 Supported Finger

Younger children tend to cave in at the first joint of their fingers, because they have weak fingers.¹⁰⁵ Caving in of the first joint is one of the common faults young students are likely to have, but it is not limited to younger students. Many older students also have this issue, and some of them could have already had it for years. Yoshinori Hosaka writes about this issue: “A common problem with children’s finger joints is to have weakness in the first joint, resulting in buckling. While it is more obvious in small children, this weakness of the first finger joint can be found in many older students as well, causing them certain problems with tone production and excess tension.”¹⁰⁶ The best solution is not to form such bad habits in the early stages of learning; and if the habit has already been developed, it should be corrected as soon as possible. Hofmann recognized that this could be a very difficult bad habit to break, but counseled patience, time, and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 34.
¹⁰⁵ Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*, 144.
the constant surveillance of a dedicated teacher.\textsuperscript{107}

One teaching suggestion to help younger students who have especially weak fingers is to support their fingers with the thumb, as shown in Fig. 3.5. Students can use and support any weak fingers with the thumb to avoid caving in of the first joint. Supporting a finger with the thumb will help to give a feeling of security and to impart the correct sensation of supporting the curved joint.\textsuperscript{108}

\textbf{Figure 3.5: Supported Finger}\textsuperscript{109}

Another practice technique would be to support the fingers with arm drops. This can be helpful especially for the left hand when students are required to play bass notes with a full and ringing tone. James W. Bastien introduces a way to practice arm drops:

Tell the student to: (1) support his third finger with the thumb and raise his forearm in the air over a named key; (2) drop the finger onto the key, hold it for a short time, and lift off again. The teacher may direct the student to play a high key with the right hand, a low key with the left hand, three high keys that go up, etc. Other fingers may be supported and used in the same manner.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{107} Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part II, 8.

\textsuperscript{108} Bastien, \textit{How to Teach Piano Successfully}, 145.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 146.

\textsuperscript{110} Bastien, \textit{How to Teach Piano Successfully}, 145.
A piece such as No 5, “Playing,” from Kabalevsky, *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39 provides an excellent way to introduce the concept of supported fingers in both hands. (See Ex. 3.3.)


In mm. 15-18, students should play the note on the third beat in the right hand, using only finger no. 3 instead of 3, 3, 2, 1 for all four descending notes. When they practice mm. 19-22, they can successfully support their fingers by similarly using only finger no. 3 instead of 3, 2, 1, 3 for the ascending notes. As a teaching suggestion, students should practice only the right-hand part in mm. 15-18, and then only the left-hand part in mm. 19-22. Students should play the first four notes with the right hand and the following four with the left hand. When students practice these eight notes, they should count and practice in the correct time with the correct rhythm and try to make one phrase over the course of eight measures. Later when playing with normal fingering, they should be able to make just as secure and solid a tone as they did with supported fingers.

This excerpt can also be used in order to train any weak finger by supporting that finger with the thumb. (See Fig. 3.5.) For example, if a student’s fourth finger is so weak that the first joint of the fourth finger tends to collapse easily, the student can use this excerpt to train the

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111 Kabalevsky, *Twenty-Four Pieces*, 3.
fourth finger. In mm. 15-18, the student should play each note in the right hand using only the fourth finger. In order to avoid collapsing the first joint, the thumb should support the fourth finger while the student is practicing. Also, in mm. 19-22, the student can practice the four left-hand notes with only the fourth finger, supported by the thumb. Once again, when doing this kind of fourth-finger training, the practice tempo must be slow enough to allow the student to prepare and support the fourth finger without feeling rushed.

3.4 Suggested Repertoire for Developing Firm Fingertips

Teachers should keep exploring great literature written by important classical composers of all eras in order to provide high-quality musical examples that are the most suitable for individual students.

Bach’s Anna Magdalena Book contains many excellent pieces that can help develop firm fingertips. Not only does working on these pieces contribute to the development of detached touch and clear articulation, but it also enhances a student’s understanding - even at a basic level - of the characteristics of Baroque style. In these pieces a student will find pieces that have a melody in the right hand and an accompaniment in the left hand as well as contrapuntal works. Among these is Menuet, BWV Anh. 120 which provides an excellent introduction to counterpoint and can help prepare elementary-level students for Bach’s Inventions.

Bartók’s music for children, such as For Children and Mikrokosmos, are wonderful pieces for elementary students. Mikrokosmos, Volume I is especially suitable for beginners. The pieces at the beginning of Volume I are very simple and are based on short unison melodies, which allows students to focus on their finger strength and their tone. While the pieces in Mikrokosmos are composed based on scales, rhythm, syncopation, change of position, parallel or contrary motion, etc., For Children is based on folksongs. Volume I is based on Hungarian
Folksongs, and Volume II is based on Slovakian Folksongs. It would be an excellent idea for teachers to pair a piece from Mikrokosmos with a piece from For Children. It is quite possible to find pieces in the two collections which complement one another based on the particular skill set being introduced in one or the other. Additionally, it exposes elementary students to a variety of musical styles at an early age.

Kabalevsky’s pieces for children are also excellent for beginners. His pieces contain very short and simple pieces. In general, pieces in Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39 are easier than pieces in Thirty Pieces for Children, Op. 27, so it would be best to start with opus 39. In order to develop firm fingertips, a piece that contains staccato technique is helpful. Many of Kabalevsky’s pieces utilize staccato technique, such as No. 5, “Playing,” and No.7, “Funny Event,” from Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39. Since these two pieces require the hands to play in alternation instead of simultaneously, they allow younger students to focus on one hand at a time.

Mozart and Beethoven are two of the most representative composers from the Classical era. Mozart’s early keyboard pieces require firm fingertips, and good examples for elementary students includes Allegro, K. 1b, Allegro, K. 1c, and Menuett, K. 6. Beethoven’s works, such as Écossaise No. 1, No. 10 from Bagatelles, Op. 119, and the theme from Six Easy Variations in a Swiss Song, Op. 14 are high-quality musical examples as well. No. 10 from Bagatelles, Op. 119 is the shortest piece (only thirteen measures) out of the eleven Bagatelles. The left-hand part is very simple - the part has only three notes, B, E, and A, which are played in different octaves. Since the right-hand part contains mainly 6th chords with thirds and octaves, it can be suitable for slightly older students whose hands can stretch an octave. The theme from Six Easy Variations in a Swiss Song, Op. 14 is also an excellent example to work on for firm fingertips, especially
finger 2, 3, and 4.

One of the greatest composers in the Romantic era was Robert Schumann. His *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, contains wonderful music. Additionally, there is excellent repertoire for elementary pianists written by three famous Russian composers: Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Prokofiev’s *Music for Children*, Op. 65, Stravinsky’s *Les Cinq Doights*, and Tchaikovsky’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 39. All contain music from elementary level to advanced level. Stravinsky’s No. 1, 2, and 5 from *Les Cinq Doights* are suitable for an elementary-level student, Schumann’s “Soldatenmarsch (Soldier’s March),” from *Album for the Young*, Op. 68 and Tchaikovsky’s “The Sick Doll,” are suitable for a late elementary-level student, and Prokofiev’s No. 3, “A Little Story,” is a more challenging piece.

### Table 3.1: Suggested Repertoire for Developing Firm Fingertips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Composition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bach</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Menuet</em>, BWV Anh. 115 from <em>Anna Magdalena</em> Book</td>
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<td><em>Polonaise</em>, BWV Anh. 119 from <em>Anna Magdalena</em> Book</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Marche</em>, BWV Anh. 122 from <em>Anna Magdalena</em> Book</td>
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<td><em>Marche</em>, BWV Anh. 124 from <em>Anna Magdalena</em> Book</td>
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<td>“Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille,” BWV 510 from <em>Anna Magdalena</em> Book</td>
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<td>Bartók</td>
<td>No. 6, “Study for the Left Hand,” from <em>For Children</em>, Volume I</td>
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<td>No. 8, “Children’s Game,” from <em>For Children</em>, Volume I</td>
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<td>No. 15 from <em>For Children</em>, Volume I</td>
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<td>No. 1-21 from <em>Mikrokosmos</em>, Volume I</td>
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<td>No. 49, “Crescendo - Diminuendo,” from <em>Mikrokosmos</em>, Volume II</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beethoven</td>
<td>No.1 from <em>Écossaise</em> in <em>Easier Favorites</em></td>
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<td>No. 10 from <em>Bagatelles</em>, Op. 119</td>
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<td>Theme from <em>Six Easy Variations on a Swiss Song</em></td>
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<td>Composer</td>
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<td>No. 9, “Little Fable,” from <em>Thirty Pieces for Children</em>, Op. 27</td>
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<td>No. 9, “A Little Dance,” from <em>Twenty-Four Pieces for Children</em>, Op. 39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
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<td>Allegro, K. 1c from <em>Klavierstücke</em></td>
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<td><em>Menuet II</em>, K. 6 from <em>Klavierstücke</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>“Soldatenmarsch” from <em>Album for the Young</em>, Op. 68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stravinsky</td>
<td>No. 1 from <em>Les Cinq Doigts</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No. 2 from <em>Les Cinq Doigts</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No. 5 from <em>Les Cinq Doigts</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>“The Sick Doll” from <em>Album for the Young</em>, Op. 39</td>
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CHAPTER 4
HAND

4.1 Hand Position and Finger Movement

Hofmann sought to develop a “…natural position of hand and fingers into which they fall when you drop your hand somewhat leisurely upon the keyboard.”¹¹² The best way to achieve what Hofmann recommends is to maintain a horizontal hand position, with the knuckles up rather than flat. This position supports the fingers. This advice is clarified by Schick who further elaborated on the arched position of the knuckles, with the hand balanced between thumb and fifth finger.¹¹³

Students should keep their hands still but not stiff.¹¹⁴ Incorrect finger movement makes the hand stiff and hard which in turn produces a hard and unexpressive tone. The hand position and incorrect finger movement that Lhévinne mentions is shown in Fig. 4.1. Incorrect training of the hand and finger also leads to potentially injurious rigidity of the wrist, traveling upwards to the upper arm and shoulder.¹¹⁵

Figure 4.1: Incorrect Finger Movement from Lhévinne, Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, 13

¹¹² Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 7.
¹¹³ Schick, Vengerova System of Piano Playing, 22.
¹¹⁵ Feinberg, “The Road to Artistry,” 12.
A teaching suggestion would be to move only the protruding knuckles to create a ringing tone. Both Lhévinne and Feinberg were in favor of simplicity of motion and gesture. Less being more, teachers should teach their young students to move their fingers only at the metacarpal joint. (See Fig. 4.2.)

Figure 4.2: Correct Finger Movement from Lhévinne, *Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing*, 13

As a teaching suggestion, teachers can have students hold a cup, so that they naturally use the metacarpal joints. (See Fig. 4.3.) This approach can help students understand Lhévinne’s principle and have a sense of how to use their fingers and hand.

Figure 4.3: Holding-a-cup Exercise

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118 Diagram by the author.
After doing the holding-a-cup exercise with both hands, students can also practice it on the covered piano lid or a table, where it might initially be easier to achieve and maintain the correct hand shape while touching the hard surface with only the fleshy part of the fingertips. Students can then practice the correct finger movement by gently tapping each finger on the lid or table. While one finger is moving up and down, the other four stay on the table in order to keep the hand still. When students practice this exercise, teachers should supervise to ensure that the finger movement is made by only the metacarpal joint.

A piece such as No. 6, “A Little Joke,” from Kabalevsky’s *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39 is a good training example for the correct hand position and finger movement, as shown in Ex. 4.1.


![Example 4.1: No. 6, “A Little Joke,” from Kabalevsky, *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39, mm. 1-16.](image)

This piece includes the concept of playing a two-note slur followed by two staccato notes based on the five-finger position and various broken chords. This piece mainly contains broken-

chord positions, thus helping the hands to keep still for the correct hand position. Students should maintain the same hand shape when they move to another position; for example, from m. 8 to m. 9, m. 10 to m. 11, and m. 12 to m. 13. According to Schick, “The hand must follow the fingers in whatever pattern they play.”120 Students will need to press the keys accurately and deeply enough to the bottom with the fleshy part of the fingertip by moving only their metacarpal joints.

In order to produce a clear articulation, students should release the finger after playing the second note of the first two slurred notes even though it is not marked staccato. When they play staccato, the fingers can be raised high in order to create finger strength and produce a good tone; the power comes from the knuckles. Hofmann observes that “highly-lifted fingers produce strength through their fall.”121 In addition, students should play the staccato notes firmly with a lightly detached touch. They should practice slowly, hands separately, with the most important aspect being to focus on their knuckles, eliminating any unnecessary finger movement. Also, the hands should remain free and natural, not stiff or tensed. Students are encouraged to play each note with equal quality and volume of tone, even though they use different fingers, and they should be able to create a full and strong tone with all fingers.

A suggestion for a more advanced student would be to use finger staccato. The students should use the same movement, from the metacarpal joint, but instead of releasing each finger as usual they should use a “scratching” motion. The hand should remain still, and the wrist should be resting. This finger staccato technique can be used later in advanced pieces that contain fast and non-legato scale passages in order to produce clear articulation.

Once students have developed a solid mezzo-forte sound, their teachers should encourage

120 Schick, Vengerova System of Piano Playing, 12.
121 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 18.
them to make the music interesting by changing dynamics. For example, since the title is “A Little Joke,” and the tempo indication is scherzando, students can express the playful character by heightening dynamic contrasts. The student could play forte in mm. 1-4 and then switch to playing piano in mm. 5-8. Likewise, the student can play forte in m. 9, piano in m. 10, forte in m. 11, piano in m. 12, forte in m. 13, piano in m. 14, and forte in mm. 15-16 - producing a sort of echo, or “call-and-response” effect. While playing piano, they should still concentrate on maintaining a full tone.

4.2 Five-Finger Position

According to Bastien, “Rather than playing single line melodies exclusively in the beginning, triads and five-finger positions are helpful for shaping the fingers and developing the correct hand position.”122

In addition to the previous example (Ex. 4.1), a piece such as No. 12, “Scherzo,” from Kabalevsky’s Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39 can also be used as an excellent training piece for the correct hand position, with triads in both hands on the white keys, as shown in Ex. 4.2. This piece focuses on playing broken and block chords of the various triads. As a teaching suggestion, students should retain the correct hand shape while moving from one chord to another; and when students are required to change hand positions, the new position must be prepared before they play it. Students should practice slowly and accurately with firm fingertips by using only their metacarpal joints. For the right hand, when students play the third and fifth notes together, they should listen carefully to ensure that both notes are played simultaneously.

122 Bastien, How to Teach Piano Successfully, 143.
Example 4.2: No. 12, “Scherzo,” from Kabalevsky, Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39, mm. 1-16

12 Scherzo

Neuhaus was aware that a beginning student might tense up when asked to play legato. Therefore, as with the right hand, students should practice with non-legato, a lightly detached touch for the left hand the first time, and then play as written with legato. This piece can also be used as good training for the left-hand little finger. The downbeat of each measure uses the little finger to form the root of the triads. The first note is not only the tonic but also the foundation of the passage, so it has to be firm and strong, despite being played by the weakest finger and the left hand. Since it is the weakest finger, it is easy for the first joint to cave in when a young student has not developed enough finger strength. Students should play firmly by pressing the keys all the way down, as long as they can maintain curvature of the first joint. Students can also practice with their fifth finger raised in order to obtain finger strength. The most important aspect is to keep the first joint curved in order to produce a good tone. If the passage is marked forte

123 Kabalevsky, Twenty-Four Pieces, 6.
124 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 85.
and the student initially has trouble achieving that dynamic without the joint collapsing, they should start with a gentle touch and then gradually put more energy into it. In order to make a strong downbeat effectively, students need to remember that they must not put an accent on the third note in the left hand. Since this note is played by the thumb, and it is obviously one of our strongest fingers, it is easy to make an accent. In order to avoid an unwanted accent, students should release the thumb gently by sliding lightly off the note.

An interesting way for the student to see the piece as “the forest” rather than “the trees” would be to practice it by playing only the first note of each measure. With their teacher’s encouragement, they can even sing these notes out loud, in order to perceive the long melody line constituted by these single notes. Once they have confidence in the sound of their downbeat, they can then add the next two notes to the first note, playing them together as a block chord in the left hand. Once students obtain sufficient finger strength, they should carefully connect the three notes of the broken chord to one another by transferring the initial weight from the first note to the second and third notes with a slur.

A piece such as Musette from Johann Sebastian Bach’s Anna Magdalena Book can be useful for learning the concept of the correct hand position and five-finger position. It calls for a non-legato touch, as shown in Ex. 4.3. J. S. Bach (1685-1750) composed this collection in 1722 and 1725 for his second wife, Anna Magdalena. It contains many fine pieces for young students. Bach’s music provides us with many excellent examples in order to develop the fingers “with

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125 “For the highest example of the type of teaching method I have mentioned — the complete coordination of musical and instrumental teaching (with the former prevailing) — we have to go back to the great Bach. All his Inventions, small Preludes or Fugues, the Anna Magdalena Book and even the ‘Forty-Eight’ and the Art of the Fugue were intended in equal measure for teaching music and the playing of music as well as for the creative study of music, the study of its very nature, which probes the musical cosmos and fashions the inexhaustible wealth of ‘tonal ore’ concealed in our musical universe…. It must be thoroughly understood that Bach’s method consisted of combining the technically useful (from the locomotor point of view) with the musically beautiful, and that he
thematic characterization as well as musical expression.”

Example 4.3: *Musette*, BWV Anh. 126 from J. S. Bach, *Anna Magdalena Book*, mm. 1-13

This piece involves mainly the D major five-finger position with an octave bass. This music can be a challenge piece for elementary-level students because of the octaves and constantly changing positions, so it might be considered as leading to the next level of difficulty. However, when teachers choose a piece for students, they should try to achieve a balance between repertoire that is age- and level-appropriate; and then perhaps introducing repertoire that presents the next level of challenge to their students.

As a teaching suggestion, students should keep the correct hand shape when they move from one D major five-finger position to an octave lower or a higher D major five-finger

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position. Hofmann advises that “The position of the hand in relation to the keyboard must not change.”\textsuperscript{129} Due to the big leaps every two measures, students are required to prepare the new hand position before they play it, always remembering to keep the natural hand shape. Also, when students move their hand position, they should keep their hand as close as possible to the keys. Students of all levels need to be occasionally reminded that their work surface is the keyboard - not the air.\textsuperscript{130} Students should start to practice slowly and accurately with firm fingertips, as discussed in the previous chapter, all the while remembering not to hold their hands stiffly while working to produce a ringing tone. Also, they should play with a non-legato touch, which is not only stylistically suitable but also helps to avoid unnecessary tension of the hands and fingers by using the metacarpal joints.

Since it is difficult for young students who have small hands to reach an octave, maintaining a stretched hand position creates extra tension. Therefore, when students play octaves in the left hand, they should keep the natural hand shape in which the fingers are close to each other rather than spread out. When students need to play the octave interval, they should simply move their entire hand. At m. 9 in the right hand when the position changes, the hand must follow the fingers. Students should follow the fingering carefully, especially in m. 12 where they play the descending scale with a finger turn. If needed, teachers should provide students with a good fingering. Like many of the finest pianists and teachers, Hofmann understood that fingering frequently involves “playing out the hand” as much as possible before changing hand positions.\textsuperscript{131}

The greatest Hungarian composer after Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók (1881–1945), composed

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{130} Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part II, 23.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., part I, 35-36.
Mikrokosmos, Sz. 107, BB 105 - a six-volume collection of 153 progressive piano pieces. This work is considered one of the great contributions to the piano literature for younger students. Volumes I and II are suitable not only for elementary-level students but for helping young students learn tone production. They can even be used for slightly older students who need to improve their sight-reading abilities.

A piece such as No. 40, “In Yugoslav Mode,” from Bartók’s Mikrokosmos, Volume II is a good example of writing for the five-finger position. The piece is written in E Mixolydian mode, but it shares the same five-finger position as E major, as shown in Ex. 4.4.

Example 4.4: No. 40, “In Yugoslav Mode,” from Bartók, Mikrokosmos, Volume II, mm. 1-12

![Example 4.4](image)

This piece includes the concept of playing legato with five-finger positions, mainly using these five notes: E, F-sharp, G-sharp, A, and B. These five notes overlap with Chopin’s five notes, helping young students to shape the correct hand position. Neuhaus mentions that “Chopin made his pupil play these five notes … as a light portamento, using the wrist, so as to feel in every point complete freedom and flexibility.”

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133 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 85.
practicing this piece first with a non-legato touch first before attempting to play it legato. When students practice with a non-legato touch, they should practice slowly, and each finger should have independent movement with firm fingertips, using their metacarpal joints. When students practice non-legato, teachers should make sure that they do not hit the keys. When students accelerate the finger speed toward the attack point, they can easily make a hitting sound. Instead, in order to obtain a good and even tone, the speed should be evenly maintained while pressing all keys all the way down. The goal is to develop a high degree of accuracy at a fast tempo.\textsuperscript{134}

Playing legato is the most important technique for obtaining a singing tone. Once students get used to the finger movements focused on their metacarpal joints, eliminating any unnecessary stiffness with non-legato, they should play the piece legato. The most important aspect of playing legato is to keep and feel the same freedom they had with non-legato. They should keep their fingers close to the keys when they practice legato. Students should start with two notes: carefully connecting them and then one note at a time until they can play a long phrase. The first two phrases of this piece are three-measure phrases, which students should play in one line with a legato touch and a singing tone. When students practice beautiful melodic passages, they should try to take a much slower tempo than the original one in order to express the beauty of the line with a singing tone.\textsuperscript{135}

For cantabile playing with a legato touch, students should start and end each measure softly, and each phrase should have one peak point. For example, in the first phrase, mm. 4-6, the peak point is G, the downbeat of the fifth measure; similarly, the peak of the second phrase is also G, the downbeat of the eighth measure. Students should be encouraged to make a natural

\textsuperscript{134} Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part I, 34.

\textsuperscript{135} Neuhaus, \textit{Art of Piano Playing}, 59.
and proportional crescendo and decrescendo around the peak point. Also, even though the left-hand part starts *forte*, for a good balance between the voices, students should bring out their right hand more and the left hand less, starting in m. 4.

No. 3 from Bartók’s *For Children*, Volume I would be an excellent complementary piece because these two pieces share musical elements. Like Ex. 4.4, No. 3 from *For Children* contains singing melodies based on a Hungarian Folksong in the right hand and an accompaniment based on the fifth interval, which is tonic and dominant in the left hand. The slow tempo of this piece allows students to practice a singing legato touch.

4.3 Suggested Repertoire for Developing a Correct Hand Position

Bach’s *Anna Magdalena Book* contains many excellent examples that can help develop a correct hand position and use of the metacarpal joints in various five-finger positions. For example, *Menuet*, BWV Anh. 114 includes mainly the G major and C major five-finger positions, and *Menuet*, BWV Anh. 122 contains mainly the D major and A major five-finger position. In the middle E major section, a five-finger position is also used. These five notes overlap with Chopin’s five notes (E, F-sharp, G-sharp, A-sharp, and B-sharp), helping young students to shape their hand position correctly. Bach’s music provides wonderful examples for developing a good tone in both hands equally because in his music the left-hand part is more than a simple accompaniment. Since the “cello” line contributes equally to the musical structure, the left hand must develop the same solid technique and tone as the right hand. Therefore, if a student has weaker fingers in the left hand than in the right hand, Bach’s pieces are ideal.

Many pieces from Bartók’s music for children are also wonderful examples that can help to develop various five-finger positions. For example, No. 13, “Change of Position,” from *Mikrokosmos*, Volume I, includes two five-finger positions (C and G major), and No. 15,
“Village Song,” contains four five-finger positions (C, D, G, and A major). A variety of the five-finger positions in Mikrokosmos include not only major scales but also minor scales and modes. For example, No. 43, “In Hungarian Style,” is based on various minor five-finger positions (d, e, g, and a minor). No. 32, “In Dorian More,” is based on D Dorian mode. No. 34, “In Phrygian Mode,” is based on E Phrygian mode. No. 37, “In Lydian Mode,” is based on F Lydian mode. No. 40, “In Yugoslav Mode,” is based on E Mixolydian mode, etc. No. 41, “Melody and Accompaniment,” is the first piece to use a compound mode, G Mixolydian and Lydian. Instead of playing a five-finger position with the fingers elongated, the student is required to develop a flexible hand position which moves easily between the black and the white keys.

Kabalevsky’s pieces for children also include many great examples for developing a good hand position. While playing five-finger scales are definitely more appropriate when trying to train the metacarpal joints, playing triads can be more useful for developing various hand positions. No. 9, “A Little Dance,” and No. 18 “Galop,” from Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39 are great examples, including various patterns of triads for the left hand. No. 19, “Prelude,” from Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39 is another excellent example for the left hand. This piece requires the student to play five-finger scales continuously with a legato touch.

Mozart’s Menuett, K. 7 and Beethoven’s No. 2 from Seven Country Dances provide further excellent examples of pieces that will allow the student to focus on using their metacarpal joints. These two dance pieces share many common elements. Both pieces are composed in D major and ¾ time and have the same left-hand patterns based on triads. Thus, it would be a great

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136 Benjamin Suchoff, Guide to the Mikrokosmos of Béla Bartók (Silver Spring, MD: Music Service Corporation of America, 1956), 61.
idea for students to work on both pieces simultaneously.

Stravinsky’s Les Cinq Doigts is another excellent piece for working on strengthening the fingers in the five-finger position. The title of the work means “The Five Fingers.” This work includes eight short pieces, and each piece is based on a five-note pattern. It is very suitable for elementary-level students; and each piece contains a mixture of styles, rhythms, and unique characters. The colorful texture of the work is a welcome and unusual addition to the common elementary-level repertoire.

Table 4.1: Suggested Repertoire for Developing a Correct Hand Position

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<td></td>
<td>Marche, BWV Anh. 122 from Anna Magdalena Book</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Musette, BWV Anh. 126 from Anna Magdalena Book</td>
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<td>Barber</td>
<td>III. Minuet from “Three Sketches” in Early Piano Works</td>
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CHAPTER 5

WRIST

5.1 Flexible Wrist

Teaching how to play with a flexible wrist is another critically important aspect in the pedagogy of good tone production. Both Lhévinne and Vegerova wrote extensively about the necessity to have a flexible wrist in order to produce a variety of tone colors.\(^{137}\)

In chapter 3, the three firm parts and the three flexible parts of the anatomy (See Fig. 3.4.) were discussed in connection with producing a good tone. Unlike the finger joints, which have to be firm, the wrist, arm, and shoulder are the three flexible parts. Once students have developed enough finger strength to handle their arm weight, they need to incorporate use of a flexible wrist in order to achieve a singing and warm tone. According to Lhévinne, a student needed to work every day on producing a beautiful sound.\(^ {138}\) In order to obtain a singing tone, the flexible wrist is crucial because the stiff wrist not only makes inelastic movements but also obstructs carrying the arm weight to the fingertips. Moreover, playing with a stiff wrist can result in a harsh and excessively loud sound.

5.2 Upward and Downward Motion

Several natural motions of the wrist, such as upward and downward, circular, and rotary motion, help students to obtain a good tone; and this motion can only be achieved with a flexible wrist. Hofmann suggests “…an average position; neither high nor low.”\(^ {139}\) Making an occasional

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upward and downward motion of the wrist is a good way to check for looseness of the wrist, and this motion counteracts stiffening of the wrist.\textsuperscript{140} An upward and downward motion is important because not only does it prevent stiffening of the wrist but also it helps students to play singing phrases naturally. Lhévinne and Neuhaus introduce some exercises to practice for a flexible wrist. Lhévinne suggests the following exercise:

Poise the hand about two inches above the keys. Hold the hand in normal position as you would upon the piano keyboard (not with the fingers dropping down toward the keys). Now let the hand fall a little with the first joint of the second finger, the wrist still held very flexible so that the weight of the descending hand and arm carries the key down to key bottom, quite without any sensation of a blow. It is the blow or the bump which is ruinous to good tone. The piano is not a typewriter to be thumped upon so that a sharp, clear type impression will be made. Rather imagine that you are actually playing upon the wires, ringing them with soft felt-covered hammers and not with hard metal bars.\textsuperscript{141}

Neuhaus suggests another exercise:

With the wrist raised and the hand hanging loosely down play a note on the keyboard from above, gradually lowering the wrist as far down as possible, in a quick, measured movement, then raise it again above the keyboard until the finger an naturally no longer hold down the key and is carried away quickly and smoothly, together with the hand and wrist. This to be repeated many times with each finger.\textsuperscript{142}

When students practice these exercises, they should do so slowly and focus on not only their wrist but also their fingertips. While the wrist is flexible, the fingertips should be firm. Since a young student’s fingertips tend to collapse easily, they should practice these exercises with supported fingers first. (See Fig. 3.5 in chapter 3.) Both the upward and downward motion of the wrist should be natural and gradual without any tension. It might be useful to think of these motions like the “follow-through motion” of throwing or batting a ball.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{141} Lhévinne, \textit{Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing}, 21.
\textsuperscript{142} Neuhaus, \textit{Art of Piano Playing}, 99.
\textsuperscript{143} Schick, \textit{Vengerova System of Piano Playing}, 23.
The Russian composer and pianist Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) was one of the major composers of the twentieth century. He composed some works for children in 1935–36. One of his most famous works for children is of course *Peter and the Wolf*, Op. 67 (1936), which was written for the Central Children’s Theatre in Moscow. A symphonic fairy tale for children, this work includes a narrator who tells a children’s story while the orchestra illustrates the story. In 1936 he also composed *Three Children’s Songs* for voice and piano, Op. 68, and in 1935 *Music for Children*, twelve easy pieces for piano, Op. 65. Six years later he composed *A Summer Day*, a suite for orchestra based on seven pieces from *Music for Children*. Robinson Harlow mentions that “According to Soviet cultural ideology, children were almost the most important audience for the arts. They were the hope of the communist future.”

*Music for Children* is actually not easy for beginners because of the colorful texture, unusual in early piano literature for children, so it can be challenging, although some of the pieces are still suitable for helping elementary-level students learn tone production.

A piece such as No. 9, “Playing Tag,” from *Music for Children* is good for learning upward and downward motion for a flexible wrist, as shown in Ex. 5.1.


![Circular Motion Example](image)

This piece includes the concept of playing scales and broken and block chords in the five-

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finger position with thirds in the left hand. Even though the tempo of this piece is fast, students should practice slowly with hands separately. When practicing the left-hand chords in thirds, students should start with a raised wrist and let the left hand fall down by naturally lowering the wrist (downward motion). As soon as the notes have been played, the wrist should be raised, and the hand and fingers naturally release the keys by following the upward motion. Eventually as students begin to increase their rate of speed, the left-hand chords should become light and bouncy rather than heavy, and the wrist motion has to remain flexible. More importantly, their fingertips need to remain firm and strong in order to handle the arm weight. In m. 5 the new position in the left hand should be prepared immediately after playing m. 4.

In the right hand, students should play the first note staccato with an upward motion, and the next three notes as one group by starting these three notes with a downward motion and ending with an upward motion. When students play repeated notes with different fingers, they should play them with a lightly detached touch by keeping their fingers close to the keys. They should put more weight gradually into both the three repeated notes on B in m. 2 and the three repeated notes on C in m. 3. This is best accomplished with a downward motion in order to make a crescendo, and the crescendo should continue to G. Measures 3–4 offer an opportunity to practice circular motion for the C major broken chord. A gymnastic exercise for circular motion can help to relax the wrist before students practice a piece. Student should put their five fingers on the first five notes of the C major scale, gently press down to the bottom of the keys, and move the wrist clockwise and counterclockwise while keeping the fingers down. When students do this exercise with both hands together, it is better to move symmetrically: clockwise for one and counterclockwise for the other. In mm. 3–4 students should play G with a downward to upward motion followed by E and C with a counterclockwise motion. The fingering in m. 4
should be 5 – 3 – 1 – 2 in order to play the repeated notes clearly. In m. 5 the student should practice with a downward and upward motion again as in the first two measures.

Later when students are able to play this piece at a fast tempo, they should use finger staccato in order to produce clear articulation. They should remember to continue using the metacarpal joint while employing finger staccato, and during the entire staccato sections, they should feel the sensation of a downward and upward motion with a flexible wrist.

5.3 Rotation

Besides upward and downward motion, rotary motion of the wrist is another good technique to prevent a stiff wrist. Sandor states that “Rotation is very helpful in adding power and speed to the fingers…. Rotary motion is applied whenever notes go zig-zagging, up and down alternately.”\textsuperscript{146}

Tobias Matthay was a celebrated English piano pedagogue. In his book, \textit{Relaxation Studies in the Muscular Discriminations Required for Touch, Agility and Expression in Pianoforte Playing}, Matthay introduces gymnastic exercises for rotation of the wrist that can be helpful for teaching younger students how to relax both their wrist and their forearm, as shown in Figs. 5.1 and 5.2. When students practice these gymnastic exercises, they should focus on not only the movement of the wrist but more importantly the direction of the movement. Figure 5.1 is an exercise for the little finger, which can be helpful when students play a passage where the outer voices need to be brought out more. Figure 5.2 is an exercise for the thumb, which is helpful when playing a passage where the inner voices need to be brought out more.

\textsuperscript{146} Sandor, \textit{On Piano Playing}, 79.
One of the great composers of the Romantic era, Robert Schumann (1810–1856), composed his famous *Album for the Young*, Op. 68 in 1848 for his daughters. This work is a collection of forty-three short pieces which is suitable for helping elementary-level students learn

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148 Ibid.
tone production. There are two parts; the first part is from No. 1, “Melodie (Melody),” to No. 18, “Schnitterliedchen (The Reaper’s Song),” and the second part is from No. 19, “Kleine Romanze (Little Romance),” to No. 43, “Sylvesterlied (New Year’s Eve).” The second part, labeled Für Erwachsenere which means “for adults,” of course has more challenging pieces.

No. 3, “Trällerliedchen (Humming Song),” from Album for the Young is a piece in which students can practice both concepts of upward and downward motion and wrist rotation at the same time in different hands, as shown in Ex. 5.2.

Example 5.2: No. 3, “Trällderliedchen (Humming Song),” from R. Schumann, Album for the Young, Op. 68, mm.1-149

Students should practice with the right hand alone from m. 1 to m. 8 and then switch to the left hand only from m. 9. In order to practice with wrist rotation, they should start to practice with the left hand only from m. 1 to m. 8 and then switch to the right hand only from m. 9.

The quarter-note passages are singing lines which need to be played with a legato touch. When students practice these passages, they will have a better chance of maintaining a legato touch if they carefully transfer the weight from one key to the next by keeping the fingers close

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to the keys. According to Hofmann, the best way to produce a beautiful legato is to slide the fingers over the keys, minimizing the sense of individual finger stroke.\textsuperscript{150} Lhévinne’s advice is to stroke the key surface rather than to land on it.\textsuperscript{151} As ever, students should make sure to press the keys to the bottom of the keyboard with the fleshy part of the fingertip.

The downward and upward motion helps to shape phrases naturally as well as to relax the wrist. Students should practice this piece with a flexible wrist, first in two-measure phrases and then in four-measure phrases. The natural upward and downward motion of the wrist continuously follows the musical line. In order to play long beautiful melody lines, Lhévinne suggests that “The tone is produced in the downward swing of the hand…. The key is touched ‘on the wing,’ as it were, in the down passage. All this concerns only the first note of the melody or phrase. The other notes, if the melody is to be played legato, must be taken with the fingers quite near the keys, raising or dropping the wrist according to the design of the melody.”\textsuperscript{152} In the first phrase students should play the first note, E with a downward motion followed by counterclockwise motion for D, C, D. In m. 2 the wrist goes down again for E and up for G to finish the phrase. Lhévinne has a very particular suggestion for the ends of melodic passages:

\ldots at the end of the tones in melodic passages the student reverses the process by which he produces the tone. The wrist must be gradually raised until the finger leaves the key, as an airplane leaves the ground; and, of course, the key itself ascends gradually and the damper touches the wire without the “bumping off” sound. Many, many students strike the keys right but do not seem to have mastered the very simple, but very vital principle of releasing them so that there is no jerkiness.\textsuperscript{153}

The eighth-note passages should be played with wrist rotation. Since the outer voices are

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{150} Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part II, 23.
\textsuperscript{151} Lhévinne, \textit{Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing}, 21.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 23.
more important than the inner ones, a gymnastic exercise for rotation towards the little finger can be helpful. (See Fig. 5.1.) Students should practice only the outer voices first. For example, they could practice only the bass melody lines except G, using the same fingerings as when they play as written in mm.1–8. In practice, students should hold the eighth notes a little longer than their actual rhythmic value, and then later revert to correct rhythm, but using finger pedal. (See Ex. 5.3.)

Example 5.3: No. 3, “Trällerliedchen (Humming Song),” from R. Schumann, Album for the Young, Op. 68, mm.1-11\textsuperscript{154}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example53.png}
\end{figure}

When students add the repeated G notes in the inner voice, they should play these notes slowly using wrist rotation. The inner G notes need to be played so lightly that they are actually softer than the bass line. Students should ensure that their arm weight is on the bass line and not the G notes which are played with the upper part of the left hand. Students should practice the right hand in the same way as the left hand from m. 9. The top lines are quarter notes: when students practice only the top notes first, they should play with a legato touch. When students add the inner voices, the volume of the inner voices should be less than the top melody: in other

\textsuperscript{154} Schumann, Album für die Jugend, 3.
words, the hand is divided into two parts, with the top notes receiving more weight, and the inner line being played with lighter weight. In order to achieve the desired voicing, the arm weight goes to the little finger instead of the thumb with wrist rotation. The forearm can help the rotary motion. Vengerova said that “one could swing the wrist — either from left to right, or right to left — in addition to tilting, to help get the weight into the melody note.”155

Finally, when students put the hands together, they should begin by practicing only the outer voices together first without the repeated note inner voice. For example, in mm. 1-8 students should play the right-hand melody and only the moving line in the left hand without G. Likewise, in mm. 9-11 they should play only the right-hand top notes without the inner voice and the bass line. By deconstructing the music in this manner, students should be able to better understand the structure of the piece. In mm. 1-8 the melody and the bass line move together in a parallel motion with the exception of mm. 3, 7, and 8 in which the melody and the bass line move in a contrary motion. When students put all the voices together, they should strive for a four-bar phrase that has a peak point at the half note. One of the most important principles of producing sound on the piano is that long notes (half notes and whole notes lasting several measures) “must, as a rule, be played with more force than the shorter notes that accompany them” (eighth notes, sixteenth notes, thirty-second notes, etc.).156

A piece such as *Menuett*, K. 5 from Mozart’s early keyboard pieces is another good example for learning both concepts of upward and downward motion and rotation for the flexible wrist, as shown in Ex. 5.4. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) is one of the great

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156 Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 76.
composers of the Classical era. This work is one of his earliest works. Mozart’s early keyboard pieces are an important part of the great early piano literature for children.

Example 5.4: *Menuett, K. 5* from Mozart, *Klavierstücke*, mm. 1–9

![Menuett](image)

This piece includes the concept of using a flexible wrist with not only downward and upward motion but also rotation. Playing with a clear articulation is important for this work. From mm. 1 to 4, playing with a downward and upward motion of the wrist helps to produce a clear articulation. In m. 1 instead of playing all three eighth-note triplets equally, students should play each eighth-note triplet as a group with a downward and upward motion. Students should play the first note of the group with a strong and firm tone using a downward motion and play the next two eighth notes lightly using an upward motion. Following the fingering, which requires that the first note is played by the thumb, is strongly recommended. Students should make a natural crescendo through the triplets toward the down beat in m. 2. Students should prepare for the downbeat in m. 2 with a raised wrist and allow the hand to fall down by naturally

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lowering the wrist. Then the wrist is raised, and the second and third beat are played lightly with a detached touch by releasing the hand and fingers naturally from the keys with an upward motion. This motion always has to be naturally continuous with a flexible wrist. In m. 3 the movement of the wrist includes not only the downward and upward motion but also circular motion clockwise to follow the melody lines. In mm. 2–3 the left hand can be played with the first two notes slurred in order to match the articulation with the right hand by using the down – up – up motion. From mm. 5 to 8, by using the rotary motion students can play the passages rapidly and easily in the right hand, while maintaining a light touch in the left hand. In m. 5 students should start with a piano dynamic and then make a crescendo through m. 6. Likewise, in m. 7 they should begin their dynamic in piano again and make a crescendo through m. 7. In mm. 5–8 using a rotary motion of the wrist, students should bring out the top notes as they make a crescendo in the right hand. In order to avoid any fatigue, students should use various wrist motions as required so that the wrist never tenses up. One should always be mindful of how the wrist in being used.158

5.4 Suggested Repertoire for a Flexible Wrist

Bach’s Anna Magdalena Book contains many dance pieces, such as Menuet and Polonaise. These dance pieces are typically in ¾ time. Using a down – up – up motion of the wrist not only prevents a stiff wrist but also allows students to make a clear articulation and to approximate the correct dance rhythm. The Menuet, BWV Anh. 113 is another piece which can be used when working on developing wrist rotation. In addition to simple rotation, it also requires counterclockwise circular motion. Rondeau, BWV Anh. 183 is another great example

158 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 33.
for wrist rotation in the left hand. Marche, BWV Anh. 122 can be useful when working on upward and downward motion of the wrist. Syncopated rhythms are used throughout this piece. Using an upward and downward motion helps students to play syncopated rhythms more naturally. Teachers are urged to familiarize themselves with the pieces in this collection in which they can find many more great examples for the further development of wrist motion techniques.

Bartók’s Mikrokosmos, Volume I, contains many pieces that require a legato touch throughout a long phrase. When students play pieces in this volume, teachers should check the looseness of their wrist by asking them to make an upward and downward motion when they hold a long note at the end of the phrase. Volume II contains more stylistically varied examples than Volume I for developing various wrist motions. For developing an upward and downward motion, No. 38, “Staccato and Legato,” No. 43, “In Hungarian Style,” and No. 49, “Crescendo-Diminuendo,” are great examples. For developing circular motion, No. 41, “Melody with Accompaniment,” is a good example, in which both clockwise and counterclockwise motions are used in the left hand. For developing a rotary motion, No. 40, “In Yugoslav Mode,” and “No. 45, “Meditation” are good examples. Kabalevsky’s pieces for children also provide many great teaching pieces for beginners, since a simple and short piece is ideal for allowing a young student to focus on one motion. No. 4, “Cradle Song,” from Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39 is an excellent example of a typical short piece, focused on a downward and upward motion with two slurred notes.

Mozart’s early keyboard pieces include many passages written in various patterns, which provide opportunities for students to work on various wrist motions. In Menuett, K. 7, the Alberti bass in the left hand can be used to work on a rotary motion. Beethoven’s Sonatinas in F major and G major can also be excellent pieces for this kind of work. When playing Beethoven’s
Sonatinas, his patterns not only require wrist motions in order to play the patterns but also are utilized for expressing dynamics, making a phrase, and showing a clear articulation.

More advanced repertoire from Schumann’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 65, Prokofiev’s *Music for Children*, Op.65, and Tchaikovksy’s *Album for the Young*, Op. 39, for flexible wrist is also listed in Table 5.1. Schumann’s examples are useful primarily for developing a rotary motion in the left hand while utilizing a legato touch. For developing circular motions in both hands, Prokofiev’s No. 4, “Tarantelle,” from *Music for Children*, Op. 65 is recommended.

**Table 5.1: Suggested Repertoire for a Flexible Wrist**

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<td><em>Menuet</em>, BWV Anh. 114 from <em>Anna Magdalena Book</em></td>
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<td>No. 43, “In Hungarian Style,” from <em>Mikrokosmos</em>, Volume II</td>
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CHAPTER 6

ARM

6.1 Free Fall

A good tone is accomplished by “relaxed weightiness.” It is commonly accepted that "The correct application of weight into the key is essential." According to Lhévinne, one’s awareness of the relationship of hand to arm is a major part of being able to make a good sound. Since arm weight is very important for tone production, many teachers work on teaching their students how to relax their arms while playing. However, this is not an automatic success. It can be more difficult for younger piano students because relaxing their arms is an invisible sensation. There is a helpful arm-drop exercise to help young students understand this concept.

There are two sources of energy: the power of gravity and the power of one’s own muscles. Playing with arm weight is more related to using gravity. If an arm is completely relaxed, the arm is free to move toward the center of the earth. The arm-drop exercise utilizes the power of gravity. In order to teach the arm-drop exercise, teachers should lift students’ arm by holding their wrist and letting the arm fall naturally. If a landing motion of the arm is stopped in the middle of the air, this means arm muscles are engaged. Teachers should help students to be able to relax their arm completely and repeat the exercise again until they feel the sensation of the relaxed arm. Once a student has developed enough finger strength to handle arm weight, the student can progress to practicing the arm-drop exercise at the piano, but this is not necessary for younger students. Sandor introduces some guidelines for the free fall:

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159 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 66.
160 Schick, Vengerova System of Piano Playing, 12.
161 Lhévinne, Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, 18.
1. The shoulder should not participate actively in the free fall. It should not move; it merely holds and releases the arm.

2. The upper arm must be active; the forearm should not act alone since full impact will result only in conjunction with the upper arm.

3. Don’t sit too near the piano or too far away from it; the correct position is the one in which the fingertips fall completely vertical with the fingers slightly curved.

4. The head and body should not participate actively in the motion; they are immobile during the free fall.

5. Do not slide your fingers on the keys after they have landed — and certainly not while they are landing. In stage one the fingers should be brought up vertically by the combined upper arm, forearm, and hand motion.

6. There should be no pressure on the keys after the instantaneous impact nor while the fingers are in process of being lifted by the upper arm. Simply hold the key down with a minimum amount of weight until you abandon it. The shoulder will carry the full weight of the arm during lifting.

7. The joints of the fingers and wrist should be elastic, neither stiff nor loose.

8. Avoid supination of the forearm while raising it.

9. Differentiate between white and black key position by changing upper arm level.

10. It is most important that you do not influence the speed generated by the force of gravity, either by acceleration or by slowing down.

11. Since the fingertips have to move up and down in a perfectly vertical line, be sure that you observe the proper ratio of motion for the hand, forearm, and upper arm. Too much forearm motion raises the fingers in the shape of an arch away from the piano; too much upper-arm motion brings them too far forward. Also make sure that the fingers are lifted no more than about ten inches from the keys.

12. Lifting the arm is a successive, not a simultaneous, motion of the equipment, while dropping is synchronized.\(^{162}\)

6.2 Floating Arm

The arm-drop exercise gives students a sense of the basic idea of playing with arm weight. When students actually play the piano, they combine the two sources of energy: the

power of gravity and one’s own muscles. If only gravity were used, the result would be an inaccurate and unfocused tone with a completely relaxed arm, whereas if only muscles were used, the result would be a harsh tone, and the arm would be tense and tired. Both Lhévinne and Sandor understood that it was not possible to play with a totally limp arm. It is physiologically clear that some muscles will be engaged at any time that an arm or hand is active. It therefore becomes necessary for both teacher and student to work on using gravity and on becoming conscious of how and when they engage the other muscles needed in a given passage.

In order to teach students to use arm weight, it is better for teachers to use the term, “a floating arm” instead of a relaxed arm because a completely relaxed arm does not help to make a good tone. Moreover, the relaxed and hanging arm also limits approaches to a horizontal position. It is entirely possible for an arm to hover horizontally over the piano keys while remaining relatively relaxed. In order to understand the concept of the floating arm, students should leave a certain amount of space between their torso and arm, and the arm should be in a line with the wrist, so that the wrist does not bend. As students practice the arm-drop exercise, they should try to feel their arm weight, and most importantly the arm weight should be transferred to firm fingertips upon landing. Since this is an invisible process, teachers’ close attention is needed. Students should focus mentally on feeling their arm weight through their

166 Lhévinne, Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, 26.
fingertips not their arms.

6.3 Relaxed Shoulder

Floating arm is one of the principles for producing a good tone, but more is involved. In order to control and carry the arm weight, shoulders should be relaxed downward. It is the fingers that are actually playing the piano, as Hofmann reminds us.168

Figure 6.1: Shoulder-Release Exercise from Matthay, Relaxation Studies, 65

It is quite a common problem for young students to hold their shoulders up when they play the piano. This happens either because they are sitting too low or because they are carrying tension in their shoulders. If their shoulders are carrying tension, their teachers should check whether they are sitting straight, whether their sitting height is proper, and whether they have enough space between their torso and arm. Also, letting students imagine that they have a little extra weight on top of the shoulders can be helpful to relax their shoulders. If a gymnastic exercise is described and shown visually, it can help students understand and feel the sensation

168 Ibid., 27.
better. Matthay’s shoulder-release exercise is a good example of an effective exercise for young students, as shown in Fig. 6.1.

Students should raise their shoulders up as high as they can, hold for a few seconds, and then let the shoulders completely fall. When students drop their shoulders, they should release the tension by letting gravity bring their shoulders down naturally instead of actively using their muscles. The resulting position is the position they should always have at the instrument.

A piece such as No. 1, “Morning,” from Prokofiev, *Music for Children*, Op. 65, is a good example for addressing the floating arm, as shown in Ex. 6.1.


This piece includes the concept of playing block chords in the five-finger position in C major. Prokofiev’s *Music for Children* is full of colorful textures, and all twelve pieces have a title which helps students to understand the character of the piece. “Morning” allows the student to explore various registers of the instrument from bottom to top. Not only is playing the wide range of block chords helpful as an exercise to keep the arm floating, but also the stretching motion to reach each triad in both hands helps the shoulders to stay relaxed. Stretching motion is a horizontal movement of the arm, while holding the shoulders up is a vertical movement, so the

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stretching motion (horizontal motion) can prevent unconscious lifting of the shoulders.

When students play the triads in m. 1, they should start with each hand separately to focus on a floating arm and transferring their arm weight to the fingertips. Young students might need to shift their torso slightly to the left in order to play the low triad. Likewise, it might be necessary for them to move their torso slightly to the right in order to comfortably play the top triad. They will need to hold the first triad until they are in the process of playing the second one so that the sound of the two triads is well connected. However, in mm. 2–3 since students need to play both hands simultaneously, they should make an effort to keep their torso centered in the middle of the keyboard. In order to achieve a good tone with floating arm, students should lift their upper arm, forearm, and hand sequentially and naturally. Then, with an upward motion for preparation, they should let the arm fall, and play the chords by transferring the weight to their firm fingertips. When they drop their arm, the speed does not change, and the arm motion should not stop on the landing. The arm rebounds and floats while the fingertips remain on the keys. Lhévinne states that “The tone is produced in the downward swing of the hand. If it were possible to take one of the exaggeratedly slow-moving pictures of this touch, there would be no spot, no place, no moment where the movement seemed to stop on the way down. If there were such a place it would produce a bump”170 Teachers should encourage their students to listen carefully when playing both hands simultaneously in order to produce a well-blended sound of the two triads. Without either bringing out or missing any notes, students should transfer their arm weight equally to the fingertips. When students play melody lines after the chords, they should keep carrying their arm weight from one finger to another.

In m. 2 when students play all four voices, they should bring out the inner voices more.

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Voicing is an important element of tone production, and it can be difficult for elementary-level students to bring out inner voices. Neuhaus supplies us with an excellent exercise for simple voicing.¹⁷¹ (See Fig. 6.2.)

Figure 6.2: An Exercise for Acquiring Variety of Tone from Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 70

![Musical notation](image)

Students should practice the parts separately instead of playing together. In the first measure students should play E (which is marked *forte*). While continuing to hold the E, they should next play the G, marked *piano*, with a lighter touch. They should listen to the balance of the sound between two notes. Their teacher should ask them to carefully feel the difference in weight within their hand. Once students are able to transfer their arm weight to a particular note more, they can then attempt to play both notes simultaneously, continuing to listen carefully to the balance of sound between the two notes. The voicing should be very clear and obvious. For chords with four and five parts Neuhaus suggests to practice “alternately playing one part legato, the other staccato.”¹⁷² In m. 2 students should practice the inner voices with legato and the outer voices with staccato so that they can bring out the inner voices by transferring more weight to the inner voices and less to the outer voices in both hands.

Even though students begin by playing softly in order to convey the atmosphere of tranquility in this piece, they should still play the chords with arm weight but using a slower

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¹⁷² Ibid.
speed of attack. Lhévinne speaks about the need to always have some arm weight behind the sound, even at a very pp dynamic marking. He observes that the process that often determines subtle gradations of weight is a personal one - one which the pianist must determine for themselves, through awareness and experimentation.\textsuperscript{173}

A little Menuett, K. 61g II by Mozart provides another good example for using arm weight and floating arm with octave passages, as shown in Ex. 6.2.

**Example 6.2: Menuett, K. 61g II from Mozart, Klavierstücke, mm. 1-8\textsuperscript{174}**

![Menuett](image)

This piece is full of octave passages in which a floating arm movement can be utilized. Playing octaves is one of the important piano techniques which students need to learn, and necessarily they must be practiced with relaxed arm weight. A bad habit that unfortunately can sneak in early is that of trying to play all octaves from the wrist.\textsuperscript{175} From the outset, a teacher needs to supervise this stage of their student’s development very carefully, taking into account the size of the student’s hand, and choosing pieces with octave passages that do not need to be played too fast or too loud. They should begin their practice of octave passages by playing the top notes only, maintaining a relaxed but stretched position so that the bottom note is not played, but the thumb rests above the note. Next they should practice the same way but sounding the

\textsuperscript{173} Lhévinne, “The Art of Modern Pianism,” 77.

\textsuperscript{174} Mozart, Klavierstücke, 13.

\textsuperscript{175} Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 31.
bottom notes. Neuhaus states that “If the player learns the octaves well with the fifth finger alone (if necessary, alternating with the fourth) and also plays them sufficiently often with the thumb alone (which is considerably easier) the execution of whole octaves will become infinitely easier for him.”

According to Hofmann, there are two ways to play octaves; “For light octaves use the wrist, for heavier ones draw more upon the arm…. For wrist octaves I recommend the low position of the hand, for arm octaves the high one.” He also mentions that “The wrist alone is to be used only in light, graceful places.” For this piece students should use their arm weight in order to obtain a full and round tone. When students play the octaves passages, they should let the hand fall with arm weight and “observe a certain roundness in all the motions of your arms and hands.” The high position of the wrist helps utilization of the whole arm. They should practice slowly with a full and strong tone because the true principle of technical work is to play slowly with a warm, supported sound.

6.4 Suggested Repertoire for Using Arm Weight

Playing with arm weight makes a tone richer than if it were produced only with the fingers. Therefore, teachers should encourage their students to learn how to make sound by transferring their arm weight to the fingertips. Bach’s Menuet offers a good opportunity to do this. A longer value bass note should be played by using arm weight in order to produce a full tone which resounds longer without having to use the pedal. Examples include Menuet, BWV

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176 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 126.
177 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part II, 30.
178 Ibid., part II, 32.
179 Ibid., part I, 30.
180 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 91.
Anh. 114 or 115, in which bass notes are played on the down beat and remain sounding through the entire measure, and *Marche*, BWV Anh. 124, in which low pedal-point notes are played through two measures in the middle section. “Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille,” BWV 510 from *Anna Magdalena Book* is a choral piece. There are three parts in the right hand. Beginners should start by playing only two voices, soprano and bass, always focusing their arm weight; and then they can add each additional voice one by one. Each half note in both hands should be supported by arm weight. Since this piece is in a slow tempo, after playing each half note, the arms should remain floating instead of staying in the keys. A more challenging piece would be Prelude No. 1 in C major, BWV 846. This piece is an excellent example for using a floating arm.

The pieces in Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, Volume I are not only wonderful for working on fingers but also can be beneficial for working on arm weight. A simple unison melody allows young students to focus on their tone. A good suggestion would be for the teacher to assign simple pieces from Volume I which their students have already worked on. The second time around, instead of focusing only on finger work, they can proceed to incorporate arm weight into their sound. Playing both ways - with arm weight and with fingers only - helps students to understand the differences in sound. Having already worked on the simple piece, they will also be able to notice the difference in tactile sensation between using only fingers and using arm weight behind the finger work. Most pieces in volume I are written in unison in both hands, and the melodies move by simple intervallic steps, which facilitates the transfer of weight from one note to the next.

While the pieces in Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, Volume I are based on a legato touch, Kabalevsky’s *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39 provide an opportunity to work on a variety of musical styles. Pieces which are playful in character and demand a staccato technique
are recommended when looking for repertoire that helps to develop firm fingertips or correct hand positions. Pieces based on singing melodies and using a legato touch are recommended in order to train transferring arm weight to fingertips. These would include No. 1 “Melody,” No. 11 “Song of Autumn,” No. 16 “A Sad Story,” etc. from *Twenty-Four Pieces for Children*, Op. 39. However, Kabalevsky also wrote pieces which require a legato touch in one hand and a staccato touch in the other hand, such as No. 2, “Polka,” No. 13, “Waltz,” No. 19 “Prelude,” etc. These examples are useful for developing technique individually between two hands and can be assigned to slightly more advanced elementary students.

If one attempts to play octaves using only fingers, the result will be a stiff and unattractive sound. The best technique for playing octaves involves using either the wrist or the arm. If properly supervised while being introduced to octaves, students should be able to distinguish the sensation of using arm weight from that of using only fingers. Mozart’s pieces provide opportunities for students to work on various techniques, including octaves. *Menuett*, K. 1d contains many octaves and thirds which should be played by using arm weight. In this example, not only octaves and chords, but also light scales should be played by using arm weight. *Menuett*, K. 61gII is another example containing octaves.

Beethoven’s Scherzo section from No. 2 of the *Seven Bagatelles*, Op. 33 can be excerpted in order to practice arm weight in a slightly later Classical style. This piece contains various rhythms, five-finger positions, thirds, triads, octave, etc. Having to continuously play triads and octaves help students drop their arms down into the keyboard. In Scherzo from No. 2, the octave passages are in the right hand. In another example, *Minuet*, WoO 82, Beethoven writes octave passages not only in the left hand but also in both hands in the middle of the trio section. More examples for octaves are Var. IV and VI from Beethoven’s *Six Easy Variations on*
a Swiss Song. In order to work on scales played with arm weight, consider No. 5 from Seven Country Dances. In this piece a long crescendo throughout a lengthy scale section is a great exercise in carrying arm weight to the end of the scale.

For more advanced students, some good repertoire includes Stravinsky’s No. 8 “Pesante” from Les Cinq Doigts. This piece contains strong triad passages which require arm weight. Schumann’s “Ein Choral (Chorale),” from Album for the Young, Op. 65, Prokofiev’s “Morning,” from Music for Children, Op. 65, and Tchaikovsky’s “In Church,” from Album for the Young, Op. 39, are challenging examples for developing the skill of releasing arm weight after playing notes, and the examples from Schumann and Prokofiev require the pianist to play piano while using arm weight.

Table 6.1: Suggested Repertoire for Using Arm Weight

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<td>Menuet, BWV Anh. 115 from Anna Magdalena Book</td>
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<td>Prelude No. 1 in C major, BWV 846 from Anna Magdalena Book</td>
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<td>No. 19, “Prelude,” from <em>Twenty-Four Pieces for Children</em>, Op. 39 (Finger &amp; Arm)</td>
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<td>Tchaikovsky</td>
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CHAPTER 7
TONE PRODUCTION

7.1 Voicing

The piano is an instrument capable of producing many different sounds and colors. When a pianist plays a piece, they play not only the melody, but also the bass and the harmony. Once students have learned how to use their body correctly, from fingertips to arms and shoulders in order to make a good tone, they must learn the more sophisticated skill of voicing. Even though voicing is a crucial part of tone production, many students overlook this important aspect. There is a tendency not to think carefully about the balance between melody and accompaniment, and yet this is a skill that can be very easily introduced at the most elementary stage.

Musicians who play in an orchestra or other ensemble naturally understand and work in order to balance the various voices in a piece of music. Not everyone plays a solo part, but they collaborate with one another, acting either as a supporting part or playing a solo part. In an orchestral setting, voicing is particularly essential. When a musician plays a solo part, even though the part may be marked piano, she or he should play a “solo piano” which means to play a bit more strongly in order to bring out the solo melody over the entire ensemble.

One can say that piano music is an ensemble piece since it consists of multiple voices. However, unlike a large ensemble, there is no conductor to control the balancing of the various voices. This becomes the responsibility of the pianist. Even though all parts of a piece are there to serve a specific purpose, they should not be played equally: one part will always be more dominant than the others. The most dominant part will be the melody, which is usually played in the top voice. However, just as the first violin section does not always play the melody in an orchestra, so can the melody in a piano piece be found in other parts, such as the inner voice or
the low voice. The next dominant part is the bass which is the harmonic foundation. The third most dominant part is any part that also supports the harmony. Students need to become aware of these various voices and work on how to deliver each voice properly and clearly by using ten fingers independently.

In general, the melody is in the top line and is played by either the fifth or fourth finger. Although the fifth finger is the weakest finger in the hand, it has the most important role in bringing out a melody, the most dominant voice. Students need to be able to produce a full and strong tone with the fifth fingers of both hands. The two main voices, melody and bass, are usually played by the little finger. Thus, it is obvious that this finger needs to be well developed. Neuhaus advises to “develop the little finger in every way, make it into the strongest pillar under the dome of the hand.”\(^{181}\) In order to produce a full and strong tone with the fifth finger, students should have firm fingertips so that they can handle the weight that is transferred from the floating arm. Also, in order to use fully engaged arm weight, students should keep their shoulders relaxed and their wrists flexible. It is much more difficult to handle voicing in a piece with three or four voices as opposed to just two voices – melody and accompaniment. In the event that a student plays a piece with three or four voices, it is helpful to focus on the fifth finger mentally as well as physically in order to bring out the top notes. Not only will this finger generally have a major role to play in the right hand, but if there is a long note in the bass, the fifth finger of the left hand will also have a voicing responsibility.

A piece such as No. 4, “Tarantella,” from Prokofiev, *Music for Children*, Op. 65, provides an excellent opportunity to work on voicing between melody and accompaniment, as

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\(^{181}\) Neuhaus, *Art of Piano Playing*, 75-76.
shown in Ex. 7.1.


In this excerpt, even though it is a dance in a rapid tempo, students should practice slowly at first. In the right hand, almost every downbeat is played by either the fifth or the fourth finger but mostly the fifth finger. Since the downbeat is the strong beat, students will need to produce a full and deep tone with sufficient arm weight. Although the fifth finger is the weakest finger, students can manage to produce a strong tone by keeping their fingertip firm. The downbeat of each measure is followed by an eighth note upbeat, which provides a preparation that helps the pianist to use their arm weight on the downbeat. This piece offers many opportunities to develop strength in the little finger.

When students play hands together, they should try to play the right hand *forte* and the left hand *piano*. By exaggerating the difference in dynamics between the two hands and paying

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attention to the difference in physical sensation, they should begin to develop a sense of how to
voice the passage.\textsuperscript{183}

A piece such as No. 2, “Polka,” from Kabalevsky’s \textit{Twenty-Four Pieces for Children},
Op. 39, provides another good example of voicing between melody and accompaniment (the left-
hand voicing), as shown in Ex. 7.2.

\textbf{Example 7.2: No. 2, “Polka,” from Kabalevsky, Twenty-Four Pieces for Children, Op. 39, mm. 1-8}\textsuperscript{184}

In this piece, the melody is in the left hand, and the accompaniment is in the right hand,
so the students need to bring out the left hand more than the right hand. Once again, as in the
tarantella, students should try to play the left hand (melody) \textit{forte} and the right hand
(accompaniment) \textit{piano}.\textsuperscript{185} Students should listen carefully to the melody in the left hand and
focus on transferring more arm weight to the left hand than to the right. It is also necessary to
bring out the contrast in articulations: legato in the melody and staccato in the accompaniment.
Students should make the right-hand part light and bouncy and the singing part deep and strong.

A piece such as No. 2, “Soldatenmarsch (Soldier’s March),” from \textit{Album for the Young} is
an advanced example for voicing in three or four voices, as shown in Ex. 7.3.

\textsuperscript{183} Neuhaus, \textit{Art of Piano Playing}, 71.
\textsuperscript{184} Kabalevsky, \textit{Twenty-Four Pieces}, 2.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.

This piece can be used to work on the concept of playing three or four voices. This strong march offers an excellent opportunity to work on producing a sound based on firm fingertips with arm weight, while simultaneously voicing in three or four voices. In order to help students bring out the top voice, Vengerova suggests tilting the hand toward the top voice so that more arm weight can be transferred to the fifth finger. This principle can also be combined with downward and upward motions of the arm.187 Students should be encouraged to tilt their hand toward the thumb in order to bring out inner voices. In order to more easily tilt toward the top voice, teachers should suggest that the student create less space between the arm and torso. Conversely, having more space between these two can help to tilt toward the inner voice.188

As another practice suggestion, students should practice the top voice separately from the other voices. They should practice the top voice legato, ignoring the eighth note rests, and the other voices with staccato so that their arm weight is transferred more to the top voice and less to

188 Ibid., 46-47.
the others. In order to use proper terms for younger students, Alexander Goldenweiser offers some excellent suggestions: “Children will understand if one says ‘louder’ or ‘clearer’, but will hardly grasp such expressions as ‘bright’, ‘deeper’, or ‘more buoyant’ tone, and so on and so forth.”

7.2 Ear Training

Ear training is another important element in the study of tone production. Students, who can listen to not only how great pianists are playing but to how they themselves are playing, are on the way to being able to play with a good tone. Once they have learned to recognize a good tone, they can listen to themselves critically when practicing. Even though ear training is essential, most students seldom know how to listen to themselves. Hearing what they do is quite different from listening to how they do it. Hofmann tells us that “Hearing is a purely physical function which you cannot prevent while awake, while listening is an act of your willpower — it means to give direction to your hearing.”

In order to produce a good tone, students should have a concept of the tone in their mind. Naturally elementary-level students do not automatically know how to recognize good tone. They should be introduced as early as possible to the joys of listening to the great composers’ piano music, performed by great pianists, so that they can begin to develop their sense of tone. Listening to music is similar to learning a language. When a baby is born, she or he hears a great deal of speaking before she or he can communicate by saying a simple word. Likewise, students

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need to be exposed at an early age to various performances of great music so that they can begin to form their own concept of playing with a good tone.

When students begin to work on a piece, their teacher should play the piece for them using first a good tone and then a bad tone. By asking them to compare the two types of sound, listening carefully and thinking critically, they will begin the process of learning how to differentiate types of sound on the keyboard. Another good way to teach listening is for the students to listen to recordings. While students are listening to either their teacher’s playing or to a recording, they should have the score in front of them, so that they can listen to tone in the context of the structure, the dynamics, the tempo, and so on.

Another formative experience in developing their ear would be for students to record their own playing. While students might have a good tone in their imagination, they may not always be able to translate that idea to the keyboard. Feinberg mentions that “In order to achieve a beautiful sound, a pianist must have the capacity to control it. But in order to control this sound, he must also know how to hear it.”

Neuhaus suggests a unique exercise to improve students’ listening skill: “One of my favorite pieces of advice is the following: play a note, or several notes simultaneously with a certain amount of force and hold them until the ear ceases to detect even the slightest vibration of the strings, in other words until the tone has completely died away.” His thesis is that it is necessary to learn how to listen to the beginning, the middle, and the end of each sound we produce. Teachers should encourage students to listen to the quality of the tone they produce when practicing. In order to make students listen to themselves actively, teachers should ask

195 Ibid.
them what they heard after they have played. After the student verbalizes what they themselves thought they did, the teacher then steps in to offer constructive corrections and asks them to play again. Every note must be heard physically without missing any notes. Neuhaus states that “it is essential first to predetermine with the ear the finest shade of difference and quality of tone and then execute it with the fingers; but this requires a well-developed ear and touch.”

7.3 Pedaling

Pedaling is another important aspect for tone production. Some teachers do not allow young students to use pedal, and unfortunately it can often be the thing that is taught very late. When students work on reading a new piece and are focused on finger work, it is useful to practice without pedal for clarity and accuracy; once they have passed the initial note-learning phase, they should be taught immediately how to use the pedal. In order to learn the principle of using pedal, some younger students might need a pedal extender.

One of the biggest mistakes made by elementary students when first encountering the pedal is pressing the damper pedal down at the same time as the notes are played. The correct way is to press the damper pedal down immediately after a note has been sounded in order to hold the sound with a clear resonance. The pedal should be released just before the next notes or passages are played, in order to connect the two passages clearly without any mixture of sound. Of course, there are exceptions when a mixture of sounds is desired for special effect. Pressing the pedal asynchronously with the fingers can be extremely confusing for

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196 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 76.
197 Hofmann, Piano Playing, part I, 41-42.
198 Ibid., part II, 39.
young pianists. Clear instructions are required from the teachers.

A piece such as No. 4, “Ein Choral (Chorale),” from *Album for the Young* is an excellent and simple piece to begin instruction on correct use of the damper pedal, as shown in Ex. 7.4.

**Example 7.4: No. 4, “Ein Choral (Chorale),” from R. Schumann, *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, mm.1-32**

![Example 7.4: No. 4, “Ein Choral (Chorale),” from R. Schumann, *Album for the Young*, Op. 68, mm.1-32](image)

This piece, a chorale in four voices, will combine the skills of voicing as well as correct use of the damper pedal. Students will have to change the pedal every half note when the harmonies change. In order to assist the younger student in coordinating right foot with the hands, the teacher should start by having them practice up – down motions with the right foot. Students should put their heel down and only use the area near the toe rather than the middle of the foot. The teacher should count two beats continuously by saying “one and two” in rhythm for two eighth notes and one quarter note. When the teacher says “one,” the student should lift their

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foot up; and when the teacher says “and,” they should press down and hold until the teacher says “two.” When the teacher says “one” again, the student should lift their foot up again. After the student has read through the piece and finished working on fingers and voicing, they should play through again, this time using the pedal. Even though the piece is written “alla breve,” students are advised to count two quarters for a half note and four quarters for a whole note. While students are playing this piece, they should use the pedal in rhythm, “one and two.” “One” is when students lift the foot up with an up motion, “and” is when they press the damper pedal down, and “two” is when they keep holding the pedal (for a whole note, students should keep holding the pedal from “two” to “four”). This exercise will help younger students to understand the principle of pedaling clearly and asynchronously.

As students become more adept at using the pedal, they will need to listen carefully to their tone in order to control clarity of harmony and melody. It is most important that they release the pedal completely so that the strings stop vibrating at the moment when a chord is changed. Students can use the damper pedal in order to make the tone richer, to connect a series of chords, to hold notes which cannot be held long enough by the finger, and so on, but they should not use it just to make a big sound. The una corda pedal should be used not to make a tone softer but to change tone color (timbre).

As students progress to a more advanced level, they should be made aware of more sophisticated pedal techniques. Neuhaus and Vengerova both wrote about the different degrees of foot pressure that must be considered for sophisticated pedal use. Even though the elementary-level student will not need to use all these pedal techniques, they should still be made aware of the principles involved, as it will be important for them in their future study. If their

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teacher feels that it would not be too confusing for them, they could even practice the half-
pedaling technique when they play a piece such as No. 4, “Ein Choral (Chorale),” from Album
for the Young. (See Ex. 16.) Certainly, as piano students get older, and as they decide to pursue
piano professionally, they should be guided to read the excellent books cited in this dissertation,

7.4 Inspiration

Tone production is initiated from inspiration. Neuhaus points out that tone quality is
acquired in conjunction with one’s “psychological, technical, and physical make-up.”201 The
importance of listening to one’s own playing in order to develop a good tone has been discussed
previously.

Inspiration is closely related to listening to oneself, but inwardly. Listening to one’s own
playing means listening to what is produced while playing, whereas inspiration is what one
wants to produce and listen to. Working on the fingers, hands, wrists, and arms helps to achieve
a good tone physically only when people have a beautiful tone already in their imagination.
Leschetizky insists that instead of playing over and over, students should listen to the inward
singing, which is much more valuable; and he suggests making time for thinking away from the
piano where the beauties of music are more easily discovered than in actual playing.202

Hofmann also references four ways to study:

1. On the piano with the music.

2. Away from the piano with music.

201 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 81.
202 Newcomb, Leschetizky as I Knew Him, 18.
3. On the piano without the music

4. Away from the piano without the music.\textsuperscript{203}

When teachers teach elementary students, practicing mentally is ignored in most cases. However, practicing mentally is as useful as practicing physically when seeking to develop not only a good tone but also to solidify memorization. Hofmann states that “Since every action of a finger has first to be determined upon by the mind, a run should be completely prepared mentally before it is tried on the piano. In other words, the student should strive to acquire the ability to form the tonal picture in his mind, rather than the note picture.”\textsuperscript{204} When students practice a piece, they should include time to sing the melodies out loud. It would also be constructive to play the piece mentally, away from the instrument.

7.5 Daily Practice

In order to obtain a good tone, the last aspect of tone production is daily practice, because a good tone is achieved by “particularly hard, persistent, long-term, constant, obstinate work at the instrument.”\textsuperscript{205} The quality of the practice is more important than the quantity, and it is better for students to practice every day regularly for less amounts of time than to practice occasionally for excessively long amounts of time. Excessive practice often causes muscular fatigue, which in addition to potential injury can also be detrimental to a good sound. For younger students who have a short concentration span, teachers should suggest two practice sessions of 30 minutes’ duration each, instead of an hour’s daily practice.

Also, students should be cautioned against mindlessly repeating passages over and over.

\textsuperscript{203} Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part II, 52.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., part I, 37.
\textsuperscript{205} Neuhaus, \textit{Art of Piano Playing}, 57.
In order to practice purposefully rather than mindlessly, teachers need to provide clear and detailed instruction on the various ways to practice, such as practicing specific passages, working on longer phrases, trying various touches (staccato or legato), studying the dynamics and so on. For example, if tackling the study of dynamics, Neuhaus suggests that when students see a crescendo mark, they should start softly and then get gradually louder; and similarly, when they see a decrescendo mark, they should play loudly at first and then gradually get softer.206

Generally, for elementary-level students it is recommended to practice with a strong mezzo forte sound in order to develop secure firm fingertips. Along with this suggestion, the following question should be posed:

- Is my arm floating?
- Am I striking each note to key bottom?
- Am I keeping my fingers on the surface of the keys?207

Practicing the hands separately is always recommended so that a student can concentrate on one thing at a time. This method of deconstructing allows the young pianist to understand the role of each hand as well as to clarify both physically and acoustically how the piece is built.

Tempo is critical when practicing for a good tone. Not only should students practice hands separately, but they should practice slowly. When students practice in a fast tempo, they do not have the time –literally– to listen for the quality of every note. Consequently, due to lack of control, the playing may become insecure with a dull tone.

Breathing is also important for tone production. In order to play with a beautiful singing tone coming from a relaxed body, it is essential to breathe. Holding one’s breath makes the body

206 Neuhaus, Art of Piano Playing, 71.
207 LHévinne, Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing, 27.
stiff, which of course affects tone production. Therefore, teachers need to ensure that students are physically breathing when they play. It can be helpful to ask a young student to inhale before they start to play.

Students should keep their hands clean and fingernails short and well cared for, so that they are in optimum condition to produce a good tone.\footnote{Hofmann, \textit{Piano Playing}, part II, 19.}
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Among the many facets of piano technique, one of the most difficult to inculcate in young students is that of tone production and quality. This is perhaps the most important and the most often neglected area of piano technique, particularly with younger students. The majority of the major pedagogy texts for elementary-level students contain neither a sufficient discussion of piano technique nor good examples from the piano literature, so many students are limited not only by the lack of emphasis on the aspects of piano technique but also by the lack of exposure at an early age to high-quality musical examples.

This study provides a pedagogical guide to help piano teachers teach tone production to elementary-level students by examining strategies of Josef Lhévinne, Josef Hofmann, and Heinrich Neuhaus, who are among the greatest of the twentieth-century pedagogues and pianists. Josef Lhévinne, a brilliant Russian pedagogue, was not only one of the remarkable concert pianists of the twentieth century but also one of the most famous teachers at the most prestigious music school in the United States, the Juilliard School. In his book, *Basic Principles in Pianoforte Playing*, his principles of piano technique and musicianship are presented with exact technical instructions. Josef Hofmann was a world-famous virtuoso pianist and a prominent teacher at the Curtis Institute of Music. His book, *Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered*, contains not only general rules, touch, technique, and the use of pedal but also highly useful answers to questions on important matters. Heinrich Neuhaus was one of the foremost Russian pedagogues of the twentieth century. He taught a lot of famous pianists, including two of the most renowned Russian pianists, Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels. His book, *The Art of Piano Playing*, provides important insight into piano performance and experienced knowledge.
In addition, this book contains detailed descriptions as well as useful examples from the piano repertoire. These three books are the most important primary sources for this dissertation.

Even though their strategies are highly valuable, the principles and musical examples in their books are more suitable for advanced students than elementary-level students. This study focuses on how their strategies can be applied to teach elementary-level students, including practical teaching suggestions and most importantly, appropriate elementary-level musical examples from the classical piano literature. Each example is selected in order to address not only the strategies but also various piano techniques, such as playing of staccato, legato, chords, octaves, etc.

It is critical that even at the beginning stage, piano technique should be imparted through appropriate musical literature since teaching tone production requires not only visual but also aural demonstration. It is of course necessary to teach tone production by using examples from appropriate elementary-level music in order to be meaningful. These examples should come from the great composers in order for even the youngest students to develop their musicality. Part of this development naturally comes from introducing the joys of listening to the great composers’ music. Teachers should encourage their students to listen to classical music performed by acknowledged great artists as much as possible because the more music students listen to, the easier it is for them to develop their musical language. Teachers should introduce their students to great pianists and their recordings, and encourage them to attend various concerts: solo recitals, orchestra concerts, choral concerts, operas, etc.

When using this study as a teaching guide, a teacher can take a specific chapter with musical examples to work on a specific issue. More suggested musical examples can be found in tables in chapters 3-6. While each of the chapters is subdivided into smaller sections focusing on
individual issues such as fingers, hands, wrists, arms, etc., teachers should bear in mind that the human body functions organically, so comprehensive understanding is necessary.

While this study mainly focuses on teaching young students, it does not need to be limited exclusively to younger students. This study is valuable for any students who are in the early stage of playing the piano, including college students and adults, as well as teachers and pedagogy students. Even advanced students can find valuable information from strategies of the great twentieth-century pedagogues quoted in this study.

Teaching elementary-level students may often be wrongly considered to be an easy task. Since students play relatively easy pieces, one might think that children only need a professional teacher once they have gone on to play more advanced pieces. However, the early stage of students’ training is one of the most important, because it is then that they establish their habits for life. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to have teachers who can build the proper foundation for future study. In order to teach elementary-level students successfully, it is always recommended for teachers to learn continuously from many great pianists and pedagogues who have contributed to piano technique and to research appropriate elementary-level compositions from piano literature. Pieces such as J. S. Bach’s Anna Magdalena Book, Mozart’s early keyboard pieces, R. Schumann’s Album for the Young, Op. 68, Stravinsky’s Les Cinq Doigts, Prokofiev’s Music for Children, Op. 65, Shostakovich’s Children’s Notebook, Op. 69, Tchaikovsky’s Album for the Young, Op. 39 are only some of the very great literature written by important classical composers of all eras, specifically for children. In closing, this author urges teachers to explore this literature, including that which is listed in tables in chapters 3-6, and to search ceaselessly for only the very best quality music on which to nurture their students.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Scores


