PIANO PLAYING STUDY PROCESS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGES IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

SUMMARY

Introduction. Practice shows that the conceptions of the development of contemporary piano playing pedagogy are bristling with discrepancies: on the one hand, high achievements, results in festivals, competitions, on the other – an obvious decrease of interest in piano playing. A decline in the popularity of professional education institutions testifies not only to a general social apathy of the society, but reveals a range of problems in professional music education.

The Aim of the Study. To explore the opinions of Latvian piano teachers about the changes in the piano playing study process.

Methods and Materials. Analysis of scientific literature on the research problem, opinion survey of piano teachers in children's music schools; cluster analysis.

Results. Research questions were investigated: What pedagogical paradigms do Latvian piano teachers use as the basis? Do Latvian piano teachers create the environment for the development of a free, creative and independent pupil's personality?

Main Conclusions. The process of teaching piano playing, being part of the system of education, fully mirrors the on-going changes in the whole society under the situation of crisis. The influence of a social factor (the decline of the general intellectual level of the society, cultural crisis, re-assessment of values) on the level of popularity of the process of teaching piano playing is obvious.

Keywords: piano playing study process, piano teacher, pedagogical paradigm, humanistic approach in education, the aims and objectives of the piano playing teaching process

INTRODUCTION

The changes that have taken place in the ideological, social, economical and spiritual sphere in Latvia entail the necessity to have a basically new approach to the evaluation and assessment of the study process. Professionally oriented studies are treated as a system of procedures of psychological, didactic interaction between a teacher and pupils, which is intended for a selection of content, methods, forms and teaching aids in compliance with the new education paradigm.

The principal problems of contemporary musical education are:

- The necessity to account for and prevent the discrepancies between innovations and conservative tendencies in contemporary music pedagogy;
- The necessity to determine the influence and tendencies of the interaction taking place between the paradigm of knowledge and the paradigm of values, which will ensure the comprehension of wholeness of musical values.

Practice shows that the conceptions of the development of contemporary piano playing pedagogy are bristling with discrepancies: on the one hand, high achievements, results in festivals, competitions, on the other – an obvious decrease of interest in piano playing. A decline in the popularity of professional education institutions testifies not only to a general social apathy of the society, but reveals a range of problems in professional music education.

The historical and pedagogical reflection of these problems is to be found in works by Cipin (Цыпин, 2003), Savshinsky (Савшинский, 1976), Stile (Stile, 2003A, 2003B), Zariņš (Zariņš, 2005), Barenboim (Баренбойм, 2007).

Research questions:

- What pedagogical paradigms do Latvian piano teachers use as the basis?
- Do Latvian piano teachers create the environment for the development of a free, creative and independent pupil's personality?

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

To explore the opinions of Latvian piano teachers about the changes in the piano playing study process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aims and objectives corresponding to the humanistic paradigm are implemented during the pedagogical work of piano teachers. The basic piano teachers' positions demonstrate their conformity or nonconformity with the requirements of contemporary education. The main positions are as follows:

- The principal value in a pedagogical activity;
- The level of professional skills (performance, methodological, communicative);
- Openness to innovations (experiments, research);
- The role of creativity (for all participants of a study process).

Research methods:

- Analysis of scientific literature on the research problem;
- Opinion survey of piano teachers in children's music schools;
- Cluster analysis.

Aims of the piano teachers' survey:

- To investigate piano teachers' attitude to innovations in pedagogy and methodology of piano playing;
- To analyze the paradigmatic position of piano teachers;
- To explore the piano teachers' general notion about the present situation prevailing in the study process of piano playing (in public, subjective meaning);
- To analyze levels of piano teachers' self-evaluation.

Attitude is dynamic, it cannot be measured. Attitude is a medium – intensive emotional expression, which prepares the respondent for a supportive or denying reaction in the interaction with other phenomena. It is possible to determine or evaluate attitude by fixing actions or expressions which are typical of this attitude or relate to it. Therefore, to measure attitude, comparatively extensive and structurally complicated complexes of expressions (statements) are created, which the respondent is to give answers to. The versions of answers are offered as peculiar scales which allow us to fix the respondent's opinion. After summarizing the answers, it is possible to judge about the respondent's attitude.

Depending on the way the statements are arranged and what answer variants are offered, there are various kinds of attitude scale. Likert's scale, the most frequently employed scale in research on elucidating attitude, has been used in this survey. Likert's scale consists of a list of statements and prepared evaluating answers to them. Likert's scale is very convenient, because it helps to avoid possible ambiguities which occur in cases of free answers. Likert's scale is also very convenient for developing indicators used to elucidate the factors that influence the researched parameters.

In our case, Likert's scales for measuring attitude in the research on education issues have been used in the following way:

1. I avoid doing it;
2. I can do it, but not sufficiently well;
3. I can do it;
4. I can do it well;
5. I can do it better than others.
6. Further, the list of statements follows.

The assessment and ensuring the validity of attitude scales are the principal problems to solve for the researcher who employs opinion surveys for collecting data needed to measure attitude. The validity of attitude measuring can be influenced by two factors:

- Social stereotypes – the respondents provide answers which do not show their real evaluation or attitude, but those which reflect opinions that are conventional and considered as correct in the society;
- Agreement in case of doubt – respondents are inclined to give positive, adequate answers or agree with the statement given to characterize the attitude, if they have doubt about their own opinion or if they have a contradictory attitude (geske, grinfelds, 2006).

45 Piano teachers from various regions of latvia (latgale, zemgale, kurzeme, vidzeme) took part in the opinion survey. The majority of the participants (25) were from Latgale (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by regions

Nr.	Name of the region	The number of respondents
1.	Latgale	25
2.	Zemgale	3
3.	Riga	11
4.	Vidzeme	6

The age range of piano teachers participating in the survey was from 23 to 67.

In our research, four groups of teachers were formed according to Slobodshikov's age periodization (Слободчиков, 1991):

- 1) 25 years – 32 years;
- 2) 33 years – 42 years;
- 3) 43 years – 54 years;
- 4) older than 55 years.

We have used Slobodshikov's conception of age periodization in our research, because in it:

- Psychophysiological developmental peculiarities of a personality have been taken into account, and characteristic features of teachers' professional activity have been projected;
- Alongside the psychophysiological developmental peculiarities of a personality, the trajectory of the development of teacher's pedagogical position is shown;
- Age characterizations of a teacher as an individual are given
 - as a personality;
 - as a teacher;
 - as a member of a society.

The survey consisted of three parts which by their content can be divided into:

- Part 1 includes statements by means of which we can determine the degree of agreement or disagreement with the problematic factor and the possibility to solve this problem;
- Part 2 consists of statements by means of which the self-evaluation of teachers' professional skills is determined;
- Part 3 is concerned with two basic questions:
 - What is the most important thing in your pedagogical activity?
 - Why, in your opinion, has the popularity of piano playing program declined today?

Part 1 included statements which enabled us to reveal the correlation of significance of one or the other indicator within the context of the set problem and the possibilities to solve it. These statements can relatively be divided into three groups of indicators of correspondences, according to the principle of whether they correspond or do not correspond to the contemporary aims and objectives of teaching piano playing.

The statements showing teachers' attitude towards the manifestations of the humanistic position in pedagogical activity were included in the first group (it could relatively be designated as a factor 'teacher'). In the survey these statements are formulated by the following indicators:

- To defend pupils' interests before the pedagogical staff;
- Tolerant attitude to pupils' independent opinion;
- Careful attitude to pupils' environment (school, family, friends);
- To be able to emphasize priorities in each individual case;
- To appraise new forms of conducting lessons;
- To pilot experimental methodology;
- To use methods observed in other teachers' work;
- To freely interpret curriculum requirements;
- To show the pupils the possibility of peaceful coexistence of all interests.

The second group (it could relatively be designated as a factor 'pupil') incorporates statements which demonstrate teachers' attitude to various forms of manifestation of humanistic position in respect of a pupil. These statements are expressed by such indicators as:

- To identify pupils with average and weakly pronounced musical abilities;
- To explain to and convince the potential pupils about the necessity of musical education;
- In due time to strengthen pupils internal motivation by constantly bringing it into focus;
- To teach positive attitude to performing in public;
- To increase motivation to participate in competitions;
- To convince about usefulness of the piano playing process not only as means of achieving great success, but as a process itself;
- To evaluate some pupils' hobbies which, perhaps, negatively influence studies at music school;
- To emphasize pupils' independence in spending their leisure time;
- To defend pupils' interests before the pedagogical staff.

The third group (it could relatively be called 'the society') incorporates statements which demonstrate teachers' attitude to various forms of manifestation of the influence of social phenomena on the researched problem. The statements are formulated by the following indicators:

- To involve the society to participate in rousing potential first-form pupils' interest about studying at music school;
- To experience success and failures of pupils' public performance together with their parents;
- To talk to parents who do not realize the usefulness of learning piano playing;
- Despite private problems, to maintain stamina;
- To promote the improvement of microclimate among the teachers;
- To evaluate professional achievements of colleagues;
- To search for solutions to problems together with parents;
- To promote the increase of the piano playing in popularity by applying various original methods;
- Together with parents to work out a common strategy for developing pupil's personality.

During the research several assumptions concerning mutual links between the components were made. Thus, hypothetically, we can assume as possible:

1. Correlation of respondents' age with their attitude to the problem. It was assumed that piano teachers whose age is from 54 to 60 and older are not flexible enough in their manifestations of democracy and contemporary views concerning teaching piano playing. Their conservatism will not allow them to be free and self-critical in their attitude to teaching piano playing. And, vice versa, it was also assumed that piano

teachers within the age range of 25–42 are sufficiently loyal and support the humanistic, creative position in contemporary piano playing study process.

2. The correlation between respondents' length of service and their attitude to the problem. It was assumed that piano teachers whose length of service varies from 25 to 40 years are much more conservative and feel distrust concerning various kind of manifestations of creative independence and scientific innovations. And vice versa, piano teachers whose length of service varies within the limits of 10 years extensively use new methodologies, scientific discoveries and their own experiments in their pedagogical activity.
3. The correlation between the respondents' age and the length of service at the level of pedagogical skills. It was assumed that a piano teacher, whose age varies from 54 to 60 and older, but the length of service is from 25 to 40 years, evaluates his level of pedagogical skills much higher. A long and rich work experience is quite an essential basis for giving a high self-evaluation to one's pedagogical skills.
4. The correlation between the respondent's age and the length of service at the level of pedagogical skills. It was assumed that a piano teacher, whose age varies from 25 to 40, but the length of service is from 5 to 10 years, does not evaluate the level of his pedagogical skills adequately. Not a very extensive experience in work is quite an essential basis for being critical at evaluating one's pedagogical skills.
5. The correlation between the level of education and the level of evaluation of problem factors. It was assumed that the higher the respondent's level of education is, the deeper and broader is his understanding about the interconnectedness between reasons and consequences of the researched problems. The more obvious is the level of agreement or disagreement of the respondents in the statements of factors.

RESULTS

At analyzing the results yielded by Part 1, we can conclude that from 35 statements 21 were explicitly significant at evaluating factor problems. Others were quite disputable. The greatest number of statements with an obvious significance of evaluation of the problem factor relates to the first group, and to a lesser extent – to the second and third group. Statements that have been divided into three groups had their own indicators (see Table 2). These indicators were the basis for designing the statements in the questionnaire.

The statistic data processing allows us to conclude that the three statement groups–factors have been correctly identified. They (statements–factors) may be possible reasons for problems, for instance, by evaluating the level of problem factors similarly in all groups–factors. Factor features have different values: from minimal to maximal. Therefore each factor has an absolute mean value, which, consequently, is a demonstrating factor (SPSS computer program is used) (see Table 3).

The data of the first part of the survey allow us to draw such conclusions:

1. All three factors may create problems, both each separately and all taken together;
2. The degree of agreement or disagreement demonstrates piano teacher's position not only in some concrete context, but projects other kinds and forms of work;
3. The higher the education level is, the higher is the evaluation of the problem factor;
4. Piano teachers – master degree holders have the highest factor significance tendency.

The second part of the survey included statements by means of which the level of self-evaluation of piano teachers' professional skills could be identified. Criteria and indicators that best of all enable us to reveal the essence of the piano teachers' activity and show how to determine the level of their self-evaluation were used as the basis (see Table 4).

Kolmogorov-Smirnov's test has been employed for information processing. By means of this test it is possible to identity hidden factors which correlate between the main factors. Results yielded by the test allow us to determine the interconnectedness between criteria and factors. According to the

Table 2. Factor Correlation of Criteria and Indicators

Factor	Criteria	Indicators
First factor 'Teacher'	1. Professional performing skills	1.1. Piano playing mastery 1.2. Creative music playing, playing by ear 1.3. Mastery of means for technical progress
	2. Pedagogical methodological activity	1.1. Introduction of new, contemporary forms of work 1.2. Practical application of knowledge acquired at in-service training courses, seminars, by attending open lessons 1.3. Pedagogical self-perfection (in-service training courses, seminars, attending open lessons, open concert performances)
	3. Personal positions	1.1. Maintenance of a favourable microclimate among the teaching staff 1.2. Shaping and development of progressive professional positions 1.3. Openness, loyalty and realistic approach to the manifestations of creative freedom
Second factor 'Pupil'	1. Communicability	1.1. Tolerant attitude to children's independent 1.2. Demonstration of peaceful coexistence of all interests 1.3. Having enough stamina despite encountering private problems
	2. Active personification	1.1. Identification of children with average and weakly pronounced musical abilities 1.2. Encouraging pupil's internal motivation, independence, activity 1.3. Emphasizing priorities in each individual case 1.4. Positive and productive mutual relations among the teaching staff
Third factor 'Society'	1. Social-communicative activity	1.1. The use of piano playing skills as a form of socialization 1.2. Piano playing a good form of education
	2. Enlightening activity	1.1. Active reflection at planning contacts with parents 1.2. Involving parents in the activities of school and pupils

test, the applied criteria have a normal distribution, which allows us to apply parametrical criteria for a further analysis. Parametrical criteria take into account parameters of probable distribution of indicators. Respondents having a different level of education have a significant difference in professional-performing criterion. Answers of respondents – master degree holders are considerably different from answers of respondents having secondary-special education.

The social-communicative, professional-methodological and attitude-to-work criteria exhibit a tendency to have a significant difference. Answers of respondents – master degree holders considerably differ from answers of respondents having secondary-special education in all the above listed criteria. The level of significance of correlation between the factors and indicators of criteria of master degree holders is high. The level of correlation of factors and indicators of criteria of respondents belonging to other groups is less significant (see Table 5).

Table 3. Indicators of the validity of factors

Factors	Minimal significance	Maximal significance	Mean absolute significance	Interpretation of significance
Factor 1	1.73	4.55	3.33	Teachers evaluate problem factors sufficiently identically, increasing a bit the possibility of the third factor (social environment, material problems, social apathy)
Factor 2	2.00	4.29	3.42	
Factor 3	2.17	4.50	3.55	

Table 4. Criteria and indicators for self-evaluation of piano teacher's professional skills

Nr.	Criteria for skills	Indicators for skills
1.	Mastery in piano playing/K1	1.1. Skills of performing before public 1.2. Organizing and conducting interesting concerts 1.3. Free music playing during the study process
2.	Social-communicative skills/K2	2.1. To create a healthy competition among pupils 2.2. To build and maintain trust in interpersonal communication 2.3. Organization of out-of-school activities
3.	Professional-methodological skills/K3	3.1. Application of wide spectrum techniques and methods 3.2. Planned and active implementation of increasing one's professional efficiency 3.3. Application of analytical-synthetic methods in information processing (developing plans, analyzing methodological information)
4.	Professional-personal priorities/K4	4.1. Conviction about the usefulness of piano playing process not only as a means of achieving great success, but as a process itself 4.2. Requirements to fully carry out tasks 4.3. Making up a repertoire program based on pupils' psycho-physiological peculiarities
5.	Attitude to work/K5	5.1. Creative approach to developing teaching and visual aids 5.2. Using self-critical approach 5.3. Participation in public discussions and methodological and pedagogical meetings

After this a cluster analysis was carried out in which criteria from various groups were collected. The analysis made with the help of cluster method divides respondents' answers concerning the determination of the level of self-evaluation into two groups (30 and 15 respondents respectively) (see Table 6).

The level of self-evaluation in the first group is higher than that in the second. The level of significance of factors correlated to the level of self-evaluation of professional skills is higher in the first group. This group does not differ either according to the length of service or age. However this group is represented by respondents – master degree holders and by those having higher education. Only the level of education revealed a tendency of significant differences at the level of determining the significance of the researched problem.

Table 5. The correlation of the criteria for professional skills self-evaluation with education levels (mean absolute significance)

Criteria for skills/education level	Secondary special	Higher (bachelor)	Master
Piano playing mastery	3.33	2.91	4.16
Social-communicative	2.92	3.07	3.68
Professional-methodological	3.41	3.08	3.75
Professional-personal priorities	3.74	3.81	3.92
Attitude to work	3.31	3.05	3.82

Part 3 of the survey was concerned with the study of the degree of correspondence or non-correspondence of aims, objectives of the contemporary process of teaching piano playing and their realization during the practical piano teachers' activity in music schools of Latvia.

The questions of Part 3 were as follows:

- What is the most important thing in your pedagogical activity?
- Why, in your opinion, has the popularity of piano playing program declined today?

The answers to these questions allowed us:

- To ascertain that the theme investigated by the author is topical;

Table 6. Significance of the correlation between factors and criteria for self-evaluation of skills (min. 1.60 – max. 4.00)

Skills criteria/group/factor	Group	First factor 'Teacher'	Second factor 'Pupil'	Third factor 'Society'
Piano playing mastery	1(30) 2(15)	3.84 2.11	3.56 2.86	3.33 3.26
Social communicative	1(30) 2(15)	3.53 2.35	3.48 3.29	3.25 3.13
Professional methodological	1(30) 2(15)	3.59 2.73	3.60 3.45	3.60 3.30
Professional personal priorities	1(30) 2(15)	3.88 3.66	3.80 3.05	3.81 3.80
Attitude to work	1(30) 2(15)	3.77 2.26	3.83 3.16	3.60 3.27

- To ascertain to what degree factors of the problem correspond or do not correspond to reality;
- To determine possible variants of prognosticating piano teachers' pedagogical activity at solving the problem.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The results of the survey testify the topicality of the research theme which is concerned with studying the correspondence of the aims and objectives of the piano playing teaching process to the contemporary humanistic approach in education. The survey respondents' answers identify the spectrum of problems which exist in the process of teaching piano playing today.
2. The most significant factor in the survey results is piano teachers' attitude to the problem of the loss of interest in the process of teaching piano playing. Three groups of statements – factors have been determined correctly. According to the data yielded by the research, they (statement factors) are the main causes of the problem.
3. The process of teaching piano playing, being part of the system of education, fully mirrors the on-going changes in the whole society under the situation of crisis. The influence of a social factor (the decline of the general intellectual level of the society, cultural crisis, re-assessment of values) on the level of popularity of the process of teaching piano playing is obvious.
4. A tendency towards the decline of the popularity of the process of teaching piano playing has been displayed. These tendencies reflect general social-economic and cultural changes, revision of priorities of the society.
5. The level of self-evaluation of professional skills is quite high, which testifies the fact that piano teachers possess a wide spectrum of professional skills.

REFERENCES

1. Geske, A., Grīnfelds, A. (2006) *Izglītības pētniecība* [Research on Education]. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 276 lpp. (in Latvian)
2. Sīle, M. (2003A) *Latvijas klavierspēles skolas attīstība* [The Development of Latvian Piano Playing School]. Rīga: RaKa, 117 lpp. (in Latvian)
3. Sīle, M. (2003B) Veseluma pieeja klavierspēles mācību procesā. *Zinātniskie raksti*, 3. laidniens [The Wholeness Approach to the Process of Piano Playing. Scientific Articles]. Daugavpils Universitāte: Saule, 116.–121. lpp. (in Latvian)
4. Zariņš, D. (2005) *Radoša pieeja klavierspēlē* [Creative Approach to Piano Playing]. Rīga: RaKa, 169 lpp. (in Latvian)
5. Баренбойм, Л. (2007) *Фортепианная педагогика* [Piano Playing Pedagogy]. Москва: КЛАССИКА-XXI, 190 с. (in Russian)

6. Савшинский, С. (1976) Детская фортепианная педагогика. Об учителе игры на фортепиано. Натансон, В. (Ред.) *Вопросы фортепианной педагогики*, вып. 4. [Children's Piano Playing Pedagogy. On the Teacher of Piano Playing. V. Natanson (Ed.) *Issues of Piano Playing Pedagogy*, 4th emission]. Москва: Музыка, с. 3–31. (in Russian)
 7. Слободчиков, В. (1991) Категория возраста в психологии и педагогике развития. *Вопросы психологии*, вып. 2 [The Category of Age in Psychology and Pedagogy of Development. *Issues of Psychology*], с. 37–49. (in Russian)
 8. Цыпин, Г. (Ред.) (2003) *Психология музыкальной деятельности. Теория и практика* [Psychology of Musical Activity. Theory and Practice]. Москва: Академия, 359 с. (in Russian)
-

Professor Dr. paed. **Jelena Davidova**
University of Daugavpils
Address: Parādes 1-205, Daugavpils, LV-5401
Mob. phone: +371 29140287
E-mail: jelena.davidova@du.lv

Student **Olga Gončarova**
Master degree study program, 2nd year
Daugavpils Universitāte
Address: Parādes 1-205, Daugavpils, LV-5401
Mob. phone: +371 29455078