

Intrinsic Motivation Infusion Project

Charolet James

TE 866

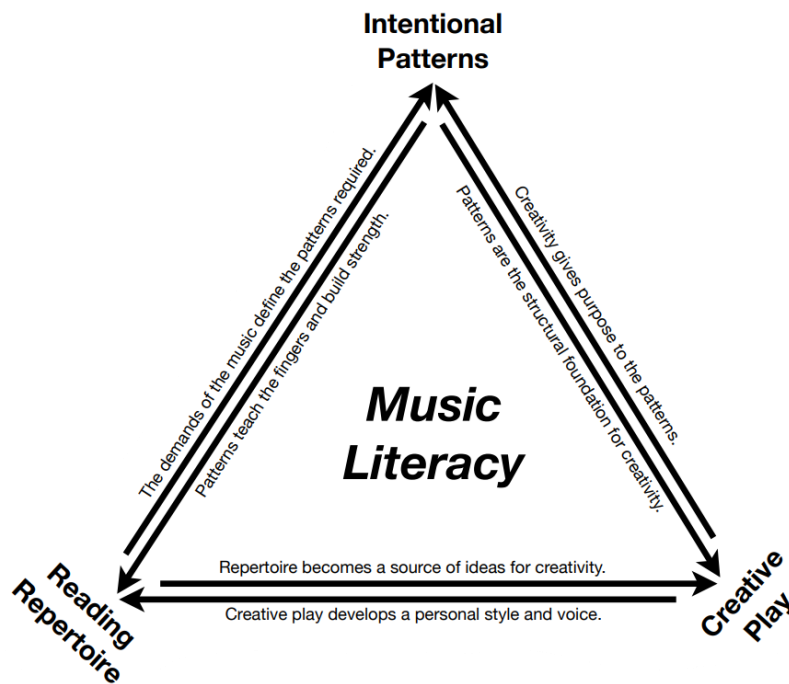
Motivating the 21st Century Learner

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Introduction

Over time, my teaching experiences have influenced my personal development of a three-pronged approach to becoming a proficient and musically literate pianist. I have captured it in this diagram:



Therefore, early on in a pianist's instruction, I, as the teacher, introduce the student to the execution of scales, which are "Intentional Patterns." Two-octave scales also begin to be a requirement at Level 1, in the syllabus for the Royal Conservatory of Music:

Level 1

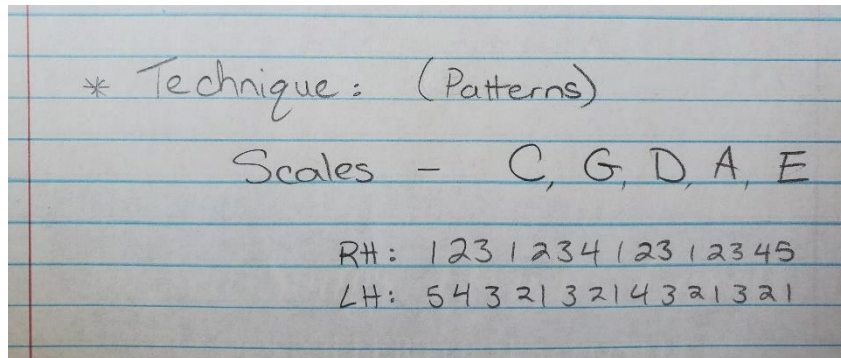
Technical Tests	Keys	Played	Tempo	Note Values
Scales				
Two-octave	C, G, F major A, E, D minor (natural and harmonic)	HS 2 octaves	♩ = 69	♪
Contrary Motion	C major	HT 2 octaves	♩ = 69	♪
Chromatic	Starting on C	HS 1 octave	♩ = 69	♪
Chords				
Tonic Triads				
• broken	C, G, F major A, E, D minor	HS 1 octave	♩ = 50	♪♪
• solid/blocked		(root position and inversions)	♩ = 100	♪

All scales are to be played *legato*.

Illustration from the Piano Syllabus of the Royal Conservatory of Music, 2015, p. 24

Original Lesson Plan

The original lesson plan for learning scales is as simple as this:



The first step in teaching the lesson on scales is to ascertain what the student already knows. If the student has had some prior exposure to scales, there are some typical mistakes that they will make, so I watch for these. Then, I demonstrate how I would like the student to play a scale. I point out naturally curved fingers and proper, conventional fingering. Then, I have the student try the C-major scale, one hand at a time, while I play along. Once the student understands what is expected for that first scale, I review (or teach) the key signatures for G, D, A, and E –major. I point out that the fingering is the same for all five scales. I send the student home with the expectation that the student will master consistent fingering and use it to play all five scales. Often a student will get stuck on this assignment for several weeks, not really gaining fluency.

Intrinsic Motivation Strategy #1

Connecting academic content to real-world application

To help a student develop intrinsic motivation, I would link this lesson plan to the other two points on my *Music Literacy* triangle. My first strategy would be linking the pattern learning to “Reading Repertoire,” utilizing real-world application by looking at real music literature. My rationale for this is stated by York University, that “incorporating connections between course content and real-world examples and experiences can [not only] encourage and help students develop deeper content knowledge... [but] can also cultivate curiosity and genuine interest to learn...” (“Connections,” n.d.).

Initially, I could engage the student’s interest through listening. Heather (2018) has compiled her 6 favorite piano pieces that highlight scales “in action.” Then, I would find an easy study for the student to read and learn that incorporate scales. Two examples from The Royal Conservatory of Music repertoire list are:

- 1) *Ecossaise*, in Repertoire Album 1, 1994
- 2) *Progress* (Grade 4 Study #12), in Studies Album 3 & 4, 1994.

Intrinsic Motivation Strategy #2

Reducing the effort needed

From there, I would introduce the C-major scale, in much the same way as the original lesson plan. However, to make the lesson plan a little more bit-sized, I would reduce the expectation from all 5 scales (C, G, D, A, & E), to only one scale, for the first week. My rationale is that research indicates that when there is a “reduc[tion in] the ‘effort’ needed to complete an academic assignment... [the student] will more willingly attempt it” (Wright, 2014). So, I would expect the student to return to their lesson, one week later, being able to play the scale fluently and with proper and consistent fingering. Capitalizing on this feeling of confidence and competence, I would then expect the student to learn the remaining four scales that require the same fingering.

Intrinsic Motivation Strategy #3

Active experimentation

“Active experimentation leads to mastery” according to Aster’s (2021) summary of Young’s (2019) book entitled *Ultralearning*. This serves as my rationale for now linking the pattern learning of the scale to “Creative Play,” from my *Music Literacy* triangle. I show the student how the three most important chords in music can be found—we build a triad on the first, fourth, and fifth notes of the scale. Melodies are built from the scale, putting the notes in different order combinations, supported by these chords. But, to begin with, I show the student an example of playing the scale in one hand and the three triads in the other hand. Then, I swap hands. I direct the student to try, explaining that there can be many different combinations of sounds and rhythms. Aster (2021) continues her summary to explain that “active experimentation... [as a] self-directed form of learning leads to personalized learning, efficiency, and originality.” However, at the beginning I expect that the student will likely be a bit frustrated, especially as fingering falters and the sounds are strange. However, I will encourage the student to keep experimenting, like an artist that is creating colors on a canvas.

Materials list:

- Device to play the videos of the piano pieces that demonstrate the scales in context
- Hard copy of the study that the student is to practice
- Simple diagram that gives the fingering for the scales¹

¹ Note: some teachers would choose to use a book that notates the scale and gives the fingering, such as “The Brown Scale Book,” for sale here, with a great description: <https://www.jwpepper.com/Brown-Scale-Book/6309199.item>. However, I “prefer to teach this type of technical work without any reference to printed material... believe[ing] that memorizing patterns, key signatures, and fingerings helps students concentrate more on the physical act of playing (finger stroke, thumb movement) and listen more closely for tonal evenness and dynamics” (Uszler, Gordon, & Smith, p. 168). This is connected to “Russian School” technique.

References

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