The MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD

Questions and Answers

Private vs Group Lessons

Q: I still haven't been able to move past the "private lessons are better than group piano lessons" mentality of most of my parents. I'm curious how you explain this to your parents, Colleen. - M.L.

A: I have copies of our brochure at my registration open house, and I refer parents to the "About" section of this website; both of which explain the benefits of group piano. I also tell parents who doubt the benefits of group piano something like: The question shouldn't be, Why do we now teach in groups? The question should be, Why did we ever teach privately when everything else, including how to do brain surgery, is taught in a class? Answer, we taught piano privately because of the piano itself; it is a big, loud, and expensive instrument that a teacher could only afford one of. If you only have one piano, you can only teach one student at a time. Now that we have affordable, volume-controllable digital pianos, we can finally teach piano in groups just like we teach everything else to children in groups. Children love engaging in an activity with their friends; there is unsaid peer pressure to keep up with friends in piano class, therefore group piano students practice more; children often learn better from each other than from an adult; we get to play games which reinforce theory concepts; we get to play ensembles which students love plus ensembles and group classes require students to count rhythm perfectly and to keep going when they make a mistake. We teach in groups simply because it provides a stronger piano education for the students, something I talk about in my webinar 'Converting a Private Lesson Studio to Group Piano.' We no longer send telegrams, we no longer travel on horseback, we no longer read by candlelight, we no longer put leaches on sick people, and we no longer teach private piano lessons. Can you tell how much I love teaching in groups? --Colleen

Q: Great stuff, Colleen! Hope you don't mind if all of us copy and paste your ideas into our parent emails and conversations! Checking out your Webinars now. Thanks for all the supportive material!! - M.L

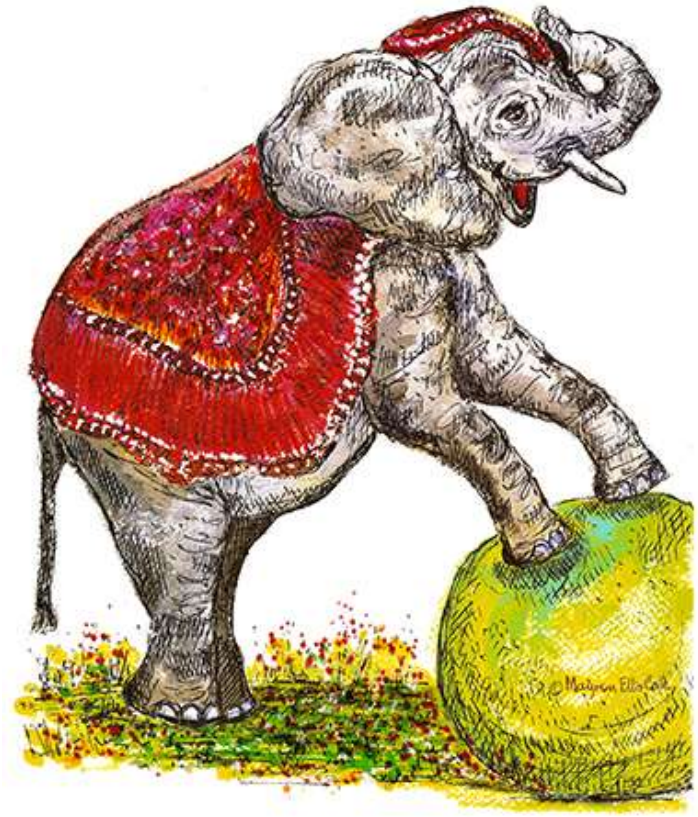
A: I don't mind if you use my verbiage if you teach The Mayron Cole Piano Method! --Colleen

Q: Thank you, thank you!! The Mayron Cole method has always been, and continues to be, so supportive to their teachers. - M.L.

Fingering

Q: Hello Colleen, Here (below) is an email comment from a parent on teaching fingering. Would you happen to have any suggestions? I find that many students just don't want to use their first fingers and getting them to follow the correct fingering is such a challenge. I joke that they might be "allergic" to playing with their first fingers and fifth fingers. Thanks so much. J.

"Hello J, I'm happy with the progress B. is making now, so please don't take the following comments as an overcritical parent. I think he needs to learn and pay attention to correct finger position (whatever happened to thumbs on middle-C?). I try to point out to him the finger notations in his music, but he complains and goes right back to using whatever fingers suit him to play the notes. The result is that he rarely strikes any keys with his thumbs or pinky fingers. When do you start reinforcing proper finger position in your classes? Thanks, K."



A: The parent that sent you the e-mail was really asking 2 different questions. First, why are you not teaching the student to put both thumbs on middle C? And second, why are you not teaching the student to play with the thumbs and little fingers? I'll address these questions separately.

To answer the first question... The Mayron Cole Piano Method goes to great lengths to NOT train students to always put their thumbs on middle C. If they are locked into that hand position, then they will find it very difficult to ever play more than those 9 keys. Also, when locked into that hand position, those students quickly realize that instead of reading the notes, all they have to do is read the fingering, thus not learning to read notes. The catch is that obviously there are more than 9 keys on a piano. Starting as early as the beginning of Level 2, students will be moving their hands to other parts of the piano. Those that are locked into both thumbs on middle C find it virtually impossible to move past Level 1. Take a look at any advanced piece of music (whether it is in our method or not) and you will realize that if a pianist is locked into only playing certain hand positions - both thumbs on middle C or any of the other short-cut hand positions that are out there - they will NOT be capable of reading advanced music. We as advanced pianist are reading the NOTES, not the fingering, and are prepared to play any key with any finger. We need to train our beginners to also be prepared to play with any finger on any key so they will have to ability to become advanced pianists. By the way, the classical composers never wrote fingering in their manuscripts. Fingering is a recent addition intended only as a helpful tip. When I teach fingering, I tell the students that when they get more advanced they will be moving their hands to play keys all over the piano. So, the composer uses the fingering numbers as a helpful hint because she knows what is coming up in the music - she knows how many fingers you are going to need to play the upcoming keys. With the fingering numbers the composer is whispering to you, "Psst... in your right hand, you should put your thumb on this E, because three measures from now, you will need to have a finger available to play that B." As far as requiring students to always play the keys with the finger numbers that are indicated, that comes down to the age and piano level of the student. As beginners, especially young beginners, teach them what the fingering numbers mean. Have them start the piece with the correct fingering, but if they move their hands in the middle of the piece, I suggest you let it slide. The youngters are doinig their best to figure out what the staff notes mean, then push down the correct key, and hold it down for the correct length of time. That is a LOT of information for a beginner to process. If we start bogging them down with too many details, they will get frustrated and quit - thus never becoming advanced pianists. If beginners know what the fingering means and why it is there, then as they become more advanced and actually need the finger numbers to move their hands, then they'll use them.

The answer to the second question about playing with all 10 fingers completely depends on the age of the student. Young beginners are still learning fine motor skills - they can barely write - so requiring them to use fingers that they naturally don't use could cause the same frustrations as the fingering issue above. So, I would approach it the same way as the fingering issue above. At the beginning of a piece, tell the student to put all 10 fingers on the keys. As he/she plays the piece, the thumbs and little fingers might drop off the keys, but I suggest to let that slide. Continue to tell all the beginning students to put all 10 fingers on the keys and as they become more advanced, they will start remembering to play with all of their fingers. One example of worse case scenario, 4 years ago I had a tiny kindergarten student that didn't play with thumbs or little fingers. For years at the beginning of EVERY piece we played, I told the class to put all 10 fingers on the keys. During every piece we played, her thumbs and little fingers dropped off the piano. But one day the music became so difficult, that without my saying a word, she started using all 10 fingers - try playing a sixth with only 3 fingers! She is now in Level 4 and plays with perfect hand position. Of course I would have preferred for her to play with perfect hand position from the start, but I knew that when the music hit a certain level of difficulty, she

could no longer afford to short herself out of 4 fingers. If the students are older beginners (I'd say 4th grade or older), yes, go ahead and stress using all 10 fingers form the beginning of their piano career. They are old enough to have control over their fine motor skills and should always play with all 10 fingers.

I know my response is a bit longer than you expected, but fingering is a much bigger issue than most people suspect. Improperly teaching the correct use and function of fingering is in my opinion one of the biggest problems in piano teaching today. Hope this helps! - Colleen

Beginner Ensembles for 3-4 Students

Q: Do you know of a book I can purchase for my students (I prefer an actual book, not pages I have to print off) that is only ensembles for 3-4 students? In varying levels, I need beginning, level 1 and 2 mostly. - C.C

A: Most of our textbooks books have ensembles scattered throughout the book, plus we also have 55 ensembles that can be printed individually. Most ensembles are at one level since all students in a piano class are all the same level, but our "Patriotic Medley" ensemble is multi-level. Another option for you is that our beginner level ensembles all come with a teacher's part. I very often have an intermediate or advanced student play the teacher's part with the beginners for an all-student performance. There is also a webinar "How to Teach Ensembles". Just wanted to add that The Mayron Cole Piano Method has orchestrations as midi or mp3 for almost all of our products which really help when students are learning ensembles. Hope this helps. -Colleen

Group vs Private Lesson Benefits for the Child

Q: I am planning on moving as many of my students as possible to group lessons. But, I have a few parents who are worried that their child won't get the benefits of private lessons. Can anyone send me a link that talks about group vs. private lessons? I have not taught group lessons, yet, and so I'm not strong on promoting the benefits of this concept. TIA!!! - S.A.

A: We have a "Converting a Private Lesson Studio to Group Piano" webinar that you might find helpful. Plus, we have the Mayron Cole Piano Method Brochure that you can give to parents which explains the benefits of group piano.. --Colleen

Pricing Group Lessons

Q: I am addressing my pricing as I look to switch to group lessons in the fall. In some ways I feel like I should decrease my rate since I'm adding more students per hour- which increases my hourly income. However, I also feel like I should keep my rates the same as they are getting an hour lesson instead of a 30 minute lesson. What are your thoughts and what has been successful in your studio? - T.F

A: If you charge less for group classes then you are telling parents that you feel group classes are inferior to private lessons. If you feel classes are inferior, then your parents and students will feel that group classes are inferior. Quite the opposite is true: students excel faster in group, they practice more, they are more enthusiastic about sticking with piano, they become better sight-readers, they count rhythm perfectly, etc. -- Colleen

Q: Thanks so much for the input! So... Then, do you charge any fees on top of that?? Registration fee, recital fee, book fee, material fees?? - T.F.

A: I discuss book fees and registration fees in my "Creating Your Teaching Schedule and Student Contract Webinar." I think you will find it helpful. -- Colleen

Partner Lessons

Q: As a private lesson teacher only (for nearly 25 years), I'm weighing whether offering partner lessons is something I want to try. My studio is overflowing, and the wait list has grown all year. I hate to have to send that potential income away if only a few time slots come available. I don't have time to do a major studio curriculum revision and teach in 3s or 4s, but with good planning, I think I could do partners. Keeping all of my private students and adding some partner lessons to the mix is what I'm looking at -- for now. - J.B.

A: Two is a group, so you can teach them just like you would teach a class of 3 or 4. You will find group piano is so much fun for you and the kids! Best of luck with this new change to your studio! Keep us posted on how it's going. --Colleen

Teaching Group Piano in a School

Q: Good afternoon, I teach at a middle school grades 7-8. I have a beginning piano class of currently 15 students with the understanding that it could go up to 20 students. I am looking for a class piano method that will enable me to stop going from keyboard to keyboard listening to individual students progressing at different levels, which is what is happening now. My background is teaching band and choir, and your method appeals to me because it has some of those teaching methods built into it. However, I noticed in perusing your site that the classes are usually much smaller than what I can offer at a public school. Also, my class is part of the regular school schedule, and meets daily for 50 minutes. Would your method be a good fit in these circumstances? Thank you for your time and expertise. - D. S.

A: Thanks for your interest in The Mayron Cole Piano Method. Yes, you can use our curriculum in a school classroom setting; we have many teachers who do. Your middle school students will begin in Older Beginner Level 1 which includes 72 compositions (3 of which are multi-piano ensembles which students love) along with corresponding theory fun sheets.

Yes, we mostly market our method to home-studio teachers because, unfortunately, not very many schools offer piano lessons, but luckily that is changing. Getting to meet with your students each day is a blessing for a piano teacher rather than an obstacle to overcome; I'm sure that every home-studio teacher would love to have that opportunity.

You are correct that with our method you will be teaching to a single class rather than trying to teach 20 simultaneous private lessons. Our method offers many opportunities for a state-certified school teacher to differentiate the classroom while still keeping the class together on one assignment, just like middle school student's core curriculum teachers do.

Since you are lucky enough to have so much time each week with your students, you can create projects in addition to our standard textbooks, such as:

- **Have students set their own goals like "memorize ten pieces" or "answers all staff note flashcards correctly" (only the staff notes that have been covered up to that point in the textbook; students will add flashcards as they learn new notes). One student may set a goal of memorizing one composition while another student sets a goal to memorize 15 compositions. You can set aside a few minutes in each class period for working independently towards meeting their goals.**
- **Differentiate the classroom by having students who are doing well work with students who are struggling; they can work on flashcards and worksheets together.**
- **Divide the class into small-groups and give them a choice of research projects on topics such as the invention of the piano-forte, the invention of writing staff note music, or historical biographies on famous composers. You could further differentiate these projects by giving students choices on how to present their research: video, photo, written, oral, or artistic.**
- **Assign supplemental music to students who desire more of a challenge. The supplemental music is not the next lesson in the textbook (that would then split your class which would eventually result in**

teaching multiple private lessons), rather it is an additional composition at the same level as the current lesson. Our Level 1 Folk Song Favorites, Level 1 Summer Stunners, Level 1 Jack and the Beanstalk Operetta, and Level 1 Ensembles are perfect for supplemental assignments. For the ensembles, you would have a handful of students work together.

Another main difference with teaching a large class rather than a small one is the way you will organize and implement the games. The goal of the games is of course to teach, drill, and quiz students on piano and theory knowledge, so any classroom game that will allow you to ask questions of the students will suffice. We also carry a Piano Bingo Game which is good for large groups. There are 8 student cards in our bingo games, so you would need to use 3 sets in your class. Bingo is a great way to keep all students engaged in each question during the game.

Even though you will be meeting with your students each day, I would still only teach only one or two lessons each week and spread it/them out among five classes because young pianists need time to process, absorb, and practice the concepts before progressing forward. So in addition to the differentiation techniques suggested above, I would recommend that you build practice time into each day's lesson in which students work on their own to learn the compositions just as they would do at home. You will also have plenty of time to complete worksheets in class, something many teachers have to assign for homework because meeting once a week often leaves them short on time. Basically, you will have class time for students to complete all of the work that most piano students must do alone at home, which is a wonderful opportunity for a teacher. You will also have time to spend a few minutes each week one-on-one with each student in your class (while other students are working on one of the projects listed above).

Hope this helps. - Colleen Cole, M.Ed.

Memorization

Q: Do you require your students to memorize their recital songs? - T.S.

A: I require students to have their music in front of them at the recital even if they have memorized it. If they panic during the performance, then they have their music to refer to so they can keep going. Keeps the recital fun and low stress for the students. -- Colleen

Scheduling

Q: How do you schedule groups with siblings of different ages/levels? Do the parents make multiple trips? - B.H.

A: I teach in a small town, so some of my students only travel a few blocks while students who live on ranches travel up to half an hour for lessons. I usually try to schedule siblings in back-to-back classes, but when I can't make it work for everyone, I at least try to put those who travel the furthest in back-to-back classes. Usually texting parents while scheduling helps. I also give preference to students who have been taking the longest. Hope this helps. --Colleen

Make-up Lessons

Q: I'm planning on moving to a makeup policy... I have a studio of 15 students, so I'm not sure how often canceled lesson slots would be available, and I would also like to offer video lessons and group lessons every other month. I'm concerned about what will happen if myself or my daughter is sick and I have to cancel lessons for one or two days. Thoughts? - S.C.

A: I have never given a make-up lesson. Do parents expect the soccer coach to show up on Saturday morning and teach a private practice to their child just because the parent decided to go to a spaghetti supper at the

church instead of taking the child to soccer practice? Heck no. You train people how to treat you; the parent is paying for my time for 45 minutes each week during their assigned lesson time whether they show up for the lesson or not. I state in my policy: "No tuition credits or make-up lessons are given. The *(name of my piano studio)* **is giving each student 2 FREE lessons, so the student may miss two classes without any cost to the parent. Therefore, please do not send sick children to piano or guitar class."**
About the 2 free lessons, my school year course is 32 lessons, they pay for 30. In 16 years of teaching group piano,I have never had a parent who had an issue with this policy. If I have to cancel because I'm sick, I add a lesson at the end of the school year. For more info, check out my webinar titled "Creating Your Teaching Schedule and Student Contract" Hope this helps. --Colleen

Conflict with My Daughter's Teacher



Q: My daughter told me to email you and tell you that she likes your method best! My daughter takes piano privately from someone else. When she started taking I didn't know about your method or I probably wouldn't have started her in private lessons with *(some other method)*. She has struggled through *(some other method)* and hates it. Even though I am a piano teacher, I have not been able to help her through *(some other method)*. I am organizing all my Mayron Cole books for lessons and classes that are starting this week and the next. Today, I let her play through some of your books. She went to her lesson and went on strike and told the teacher she wanted to play out of "mommy's books." Of course, the teacher was not too happy about this! She and I feel differently about this. She is afraid that my daughter will not progress fast enough in your method and that it will be too much repetition for her. The teacher has only seen level 1 though so she doesn't know how it does seem a bit slow in level 1, but by the time they are in the second level, they are far beyond other students at that stage. The teacher and I seem to disagree about a fundamental point- I feel that a child needs that repetition to be able to move on to harder things. I feel like, though she may not realize it, the teacher is coaching her through the pages of the *(some other method)* book rather than having her learn it. We talked through this today after her lesson but did not seem to come up with an answer. I am at a loss of what to do at this point. I would rather her be switched to your method, but I don't have any spaces open in my classes to teach her in my group classes. And I have actually hired another teacher who is going to through your training webinars and teach with me but her classes are at the same time as my classes so my child can't go to them. Do you know of any other teachers in my area? Should I try to teach her privately on my own? - L.T

A: Thank you and your daughter for your loyalty to our piano method! As to "what to do": If it were me, I would purchase another keyboard for my piano classes and put your daughter in my piano class. Or, do the same with the other teacher who will be working for you. Just add another keyboard. I could tell you ghastly stories of transfer students who have come into my music school from other methods. One little girl could find the G keys above and below Middle C but didn't know that there were many other G keys on the keyboard. I was trying to put her into a beginning Level 2 class (which starts on G2 below middle C, as you know!) She was so stressed that there were tears! She had had THREE YEARS OF PIANO LESSONS when she transferred into my school. It turns out, she didn't know how to count rhythms, either. Her mother said, "No wonder practicing was so traumatic for her. She doesn't know anything!" The teacher had been playing the music for the child, and the child merely copied what she saw. She had no understanding of music! After consulting with her mother, we decided to put her back into a Level 1 class. She loved it and stayed with

piano for six more years! She became a good little pianist! Let me know what you think of adding the extra keyboard to your class. --Mayron

A: L.T., Wanted to throw in my 2 cents worth, as well. I definitely agree with Mayron. Have your daughter take from you; make room for her in one of your classes. I took from Mayron (my mom), and I loved it! I would walk down the hall for my class with my friends... it was wonderful! I don't think a private lesson with "mom" would be as successful as a group. As for our Level 1 moving slower than "the other methods," in our method we take the time to build a strong foundation upon which a student can grow into an accomplished pianist. Other methods have big results at the beginning because the students rely on reading fingering, yet they can never become accomplished pianists... at some point you have to start moving your hands and you must know how to READ the notes to do so. So, yes, I would agree that our method moves more slowly than others at the beginning and that is one of the wonderful facets of The Mayron Cole Piano Method! Repetition, repetition, repetition building a strong foundation until the information is second nature. With that strong foundation, our students can become very accomplished! As proof, The Mayron Cole Piano Method is the only method that takes our students to the college level. No other method goes up that high. As for the other teacher coaching too much rather than teaching, that is one of the big arguments FOR group piano. Many private lesson teachers hover so closely that they end up telling the student all of the answers. If a schoolteacher gives a student all of the answers in math, the student never learns math. Same goes with piano. By teaching a class, however, the teacher is requiring the student to pay attention, do his/her part, and actually learn the information. We wish you the best with the upcoming school year. - Colleen

Thank you for your responses. It is just frustrating to have your own child having trouble! If that is not a testimony against some of these other methods I don't know what is! I just started group last January, and this fall I am changing all of my private students to Mayron Cole! After switching one student to Mayron Cole halfway through Level 2, I noticed the huge difference between this method and the others! This girl is far beyond where she would be if she were in *(some other method)*.

Wising you all the very best! - Mayron

Piano Discovery Camp

Q: I am thinking of adding a piano discovery camp for little ones this summer. Any curriculum you'd recommend? I can come up with my own curriculum, but I'd rather not reinvent the wheel. Thanks in advance! - S.D.

A: For your "little ones,"ages 5 & 6, The Mayron Cole Piano Method has a Blast Off Jr course which is a 5 lesson summer camp intro to piano. We have a webinar dedicated just to marketing and teaching Blast Off; we also have orchestrated accompaniments. Hope this helps. ----Colleen

Changing from Private to Group

Q: I am transitioning over the summer to group for all my beginners, Level 1 and Level 2. I'm looking to make a few investments for my studio to make this transition -- what would be the BEST use of my money? I will still be based out of my home and am thinking of investing in 1 decent keyboard. (I have access to 2 others + my piano for class, so this would make 4.) What are your favorite games? What other items do you think I should consider, other items I might not think about because I've only been doing private lessons up until now? - C.C.

A: The Mayron Cole Piano Method has a "Staring a Group Piano Studio from Scratch Webinar" that discusses all of the equipment and supplies that you'll need, along with talking about some of the business issues that you'll need to address when running a group piano studio. Hope this helps. -Colleen

Piano Music Camp

Q: Do you have experience running a 5 day piano/music camp with full days instead of just mornings or just afternoons? Am I completely insane for tackling this as a first-timer? My very early research is showing that parents in my area like full week/full day camps so they can keep their school-aged children busy throughout the summer. - L.F.

A: I recommend you take a look at our operettas. Students don't need any piano experience to perform the show. In your camp, you can spend as much time as you want on choreographing the dances, designing costumes, and making scenery. You could even combine the operetta camp with a Blast Off course. I would do Blast Off for 45 minutes at the beginning of the day, then spend the rest of the day on the operetta. I would also have some piano-type movies standing by in case students get tired of working all day. "Beethoven Lived Upstairs" is a great movie for kids of all ages. -Colleen

"Parented" Classes

Q: Colleen, Would you do all parented or non-parented classes? - H.J.

A: I'm not sure what you mean by "all parented" classes, but I assume you mean a class in which the parents attend along with the child. My answer to that is a resounding "NO." First of all the parent is paying for one piano lesson; if the parent attends with the child, then that parent is also learning to play the piano, but you are not getting payed for the additional student. Second, having the parent in the room causes discipline issues for the child. When the child misbehaves, who corrects him/her? The parent isn't going to correct the child in YOUR class, but you can't exactly correct the child's behavior while the parent is sitting there acting as if the behavior is acceptable. Furthermore, we had a teacher call us one time in tears saying that a parent had sat through the child's class for an entire year, then turned around and opened her own group piano studio and took most of this teacher's students! Remember, we train people how to treat us, so in the first class of the school year when parents bring new students in to the studio, I sweetly turn to the parent and say, "You can pick him up at 5:30." The parent says "ok" and leaves. Hope this helps. - Colleen

Writing a Proposal for Mayron Cole Group Piano Method

Q: Hello, I am writing a proposal to teach your method of group piano classes at a local Fine Arts Institution. I hope you can help me: Do you recommend a certain brand of keyboard for beginners?

A: We do not recommend any special brand, but you need keyboards with standard-size keys. Please do NOT purchase the "teacher's headphone console." It is not necessary and hampers teaching by isolating you from the students.

Q: I understand that they need to be regular sized keys, but not necessarily 88 keys?

A: The keyboards do not need 88 keys if you are teaching mostly beginners. -Colleen

Curriculum Questions

Q: I started teaching group piano classes in the fall at a public school. Two classes are beginning (few had any background knowledge) with 17-18 students at 9 pianos. The third class is 'intermediate/advanced' with many musical knowledge gaps, even after piano class with another teacher last year and previous years. I taught elementary music for nine years and also have piano teaching experience with small groups of three, four and five year old children. When I was offered this job I did my research on teaching group piano as I did not want my students to be given a piece at the beginning of each semester to perform at the end of the semester. I want them to LEARN! I found your

method and ordered the books for my classroom. They have been learning a lot and I have been pleased with their progress, having moved at least halfway through the older beginner level one books. My principal, however, does not see it this way. Even though all he has seen was a 30-minute portion of a one and a half hour class at the end of last semester. Having never been in my room all year, I was shocked when he did not think I was doing my job correctly. I know that I am and when I started to try things his way, my classes fell apart. I am trying to build from the ground up, which your method does, and I feel as though I'm being told to build a building starting at the third story and then the fifth story, and so on. The online method being used in the classroom before I arrived does this. My question, if all of this makes sense and you can possibly give me any advice, is how do I convince administration that the method I am using is the best way for the students to actually learn music theory and piano? I was unprepared to back up my choice of method since I was blindsided in our meeting with him thinking the students weren't progressing. If I taught in my own studio, whether group or individual lessons, I would use this method. It is the only one that progresses at the proper pace and that builds the foundation needed to succeed in piano. Thank you. Allison O.



A: Allison, WHEW!!! What a conundrum!!! You are teaching under the auspices of an administrator who obviously knows nothing about the learning process in music!!! Here is my advice: Tell him/her exactly what you said in your email below. You are building a foundation of musical knowledge. It's much like teaching any other subject--like math for instance. A math teacher does not introduce students to numbers zero-through-nine and jump to algebra 16 weeks later. A foundation must be laid! You may also tell the administrator that teaching one composition in a school term may make the teacher look good at the final performance, but it short-changes the students who take that music class to learn to play the piano. And please tell him/her that the previously taught students in that school came to your piano classes with tremendous holes in their knowledge. You are trying to re-teach all the information that they did not learn previously. I am going to forward your email to daughter Colleen. She has a master's in education and can offer great insights. --Mayron

A: Allison, I agree with everything Mayron said and would like to add to it: Learning to read music and play the piano is literally learning a new language. You must take the time to build a strong foundation then gradually build into more complex conversation. Would your principal walk into a first year Spanish class and chastise the teacher for the fact that the students are not yet reading poetry? He wants you to take first year Spanish students and spend all year teaching them to memorize one poem in Spanish. At the end of the year that poem will sound quite impressive to the principal and parents, but would the students know how to speak Spanish? No. Would the students have a strong foundation of first year vocabulary on which to build future knowledge of the language? No. Will the students get frustrated and bored enough to drop out of the Spanish class? Yes. As a piano teacher, you must start with the basics of the language of reading music and gradually build from there. Our method is a student centered learning environment which starts at the very beginning of the knowledge pyramid and gradually builds all the way to the college level. It is because we take the time to build such a foundation that our method is the only piano method that takes students from kindergarten to college. Hope this helps, Colleen

Grouping Students of Similar Ages

Q: When grouping similar ages, would it be ok to combine a 10 and 12 year old. I usually group a year a part for younger students but wanted to know your experience with this age group. I have siblings this age that are interested in taking and didn't know if I could place them together. Thoughts are appreciated.
Jeanie H.

A: Jeanie, Well, the 10 year old will have trouble keeping up with the 12 year old, and older siblings have been known to belittle the younger sibling who is struggling simply because of the age difference. So, you could do one of two things: Explain your concern to the parents and start out with them in a class together but be aware of any struggling or belittling. If that occurs, separate them into private lessons. If they are the only 2 students in the class, I would do what I call a "one-room school house" which I have done with siblings before and it worked out well, but my siblings were in drastically different levels. They still have the 45 minute class, but you spend 15 minutes with one student while the other student is doing worksheets or practicing quietly, then for the next 15 minutes you switch, then for the last 15 minutes you play a game. I would explain to them and the parent why you are not teaching them together, and put the 10 year old in Level 1 with he 12 year old in Older Beginner 1 so they won't feel like they should be on the same page. Hope this helps. --Colleen

Placing Blast Off Graduates

Q: Colleen, So would it be correct to say that taking Blast Off during the summer can save an entire year of instruction in Pre-Level 1, by going straight into Level 1? Then, if a student does NOT take Blast Off, place them by age in Pre-Level 1? I think I'm getting it. Thank you, Judi

A: The music in Blast Off Jr teaches most of the concepts taught in Pre-Level 1, so going through both books would be redundant. Blast Off Jr graduates go into Level 1; Blast Off graduates go into Level 1 ; Pre-Level 1 graduates go into Level 1. - Colleen

Q: Ok, I think I've got it now! I just wanted to make sure I understood it all properly, because I will need to be able to explain it to the education VP. Thank you for the extended explanation. - Judi

A: Judi, Blast Off Jr graduates will spend the first few weeks in the pre-staff note pages at the beginning of Level 1. Pre-Level 1 is approx 15 lessons, not a full year course. Graduates of Pre-Level 1 can either skip the first few pages of Level 1 or quickly move through them as a review. So there is really only a few lessons difference between Blast Off Jr to Level 1 and Pre-Level 1 to Level 1. Another option for Blast Off Jr graduates is to go into our Pre-Level 1 Folk Song Favorites or Pre-Level 1 Classical Favorites book for a few lessons to give them more time with the pre-staff note reading before starting Level 1. A further option for Blast Off Jr graduates, is to put them inBlast Off which has six 3 or 4 piano ensembles that the kids really love to play together. Lots of choices, all of them good. There is no wrong answer here. The key is to give young students time to absorb rhythm counting and the keys on the piano before moving into staff note reading. Pre-Level 1 goes into more depth with the pre-staff note reading instruction; but we had many customers who needed a short summer course for students; so we created Blast Off Jr which covers the same information but in less detail. Whether you use Blast Off Jr or Pre-Level 1, your young students will have a strong pre-staff note reading foundation upon which to build. Young students who go into Level 1 either from Blast Off Jr or Pre-Level 1 will move through Level 1 much more slowly than 8 or 9 year old students. Hope these additional comments help. - Colleen

Recent Book Revisions

Q: A number of years ago I bought some books and materials for teaching your method. My question is - Is the material in the Pre-Level 1 book still the same? You used to have EZ Keys and Menehune. - P. P.

A: The music in the Pre-Level 1 book is the old Menehune music. We used the best of the theory fun sheets from the old Menehune and EZ Keys in the newly revised Pre-Level 1. The supplemental fun sheets are from the old EZ Keys. - Colleen

"Note Finder"

Q: Mayron & Colleen, I have seen you using on the seminar video, a stave with clefs on cardboard and a string which you can change the position of a crochet when asking questions at gametime. Could you help me find one of these? Regards - Catherine M.

A: Catherine, It's called a "Wright Way Note Finder" (yes, that is spelled "wright") which is available at a few online stores. They last for only about a year, but they are inexpensive and very useful. You could also print our staff note flashcards in the Supplemental Items for Teachers section of this website. - Colleen

Questions About Method

Q: In reading your website, I have some questions about the method. I have been a successful teacher for many years and am not throwing out one method to exclusively begin another but like to explore other options. In fact, many years ago I attended a seminar with Mayron in Kansas City. First of all, how many do you consider a "group" and do I need a keyboard for every student? Secondly, if students learn ONLY in a group, how do they play alone? Is the music in parts and therefore the student does not have the entire piece? I will have a group of beginners this fall and may like to experiment to see what would happen if I started this group exclusively in a group lesson format. - A.M.

A: Thanks for your interest in The Mayron Cole Piano Method. To answer your questions: First of all, how many do you consider a "group" and do I need a keyboard for every student? **A "group" would be more than one. Most group piano instructors teach 4 - 8 students in a class. Sometimes, you will find that you only have 2 or 3 that you can put together. As soon as students start reading staff notes in Level 1, you will need a keyboard for each student in the class. Before they begin reading staff notes (textbooks: Blast Off, Blast Off Jr, Pre-Level 1), you can put two students at each keyboard.** Secondly, if students learn ONLY in a group, how do they play alone? Is the music in parts and therefore the student does not have the entire piece? **The students all have the full piece of music. In class, the group learns the piece together just like subjects taught in school. They play that piece alone at home and at times for you in class. It is only when the class is playing an ensemble, that the students have and play just a portion of the piece. - Colleen**

Number of Lessons per Level

Q: I have noticed that each of your books do not have the same number of suggested lessons. Is this method not designed to finish a level per year? I just need some clarification on that. Obviously, I could add supplemental stuff for the shorter books, but wasn't sure what you had in mind.

A: When students have completed one level, they then begin the next level regardless of the date. The Mayron Cole Piano Method encourages a student-centered learning environment in which classes move at a pace that meets students' needs, not necessarily a pre-planned schedule of lessons. For beginners, older students might complete more than one lesson per week, while younger students might need more than one week to finish a single lesson. Advanced students may need two to three weeks to complete a lesson: practice the composition hands-separately for the first week, then hands together for the second week, and if needed a third week can be spent working on the composition's dynamics. - Colleen

Missing the 2nd Lesson

Q: Colleen, I need to ask your advice. I have 3 little girls in my Level 1 course. They all three came the first time last week but this second week 1 of them didn't come for some reason. I just don't know how to handle this. If I don't teach her alone before next lesson, how will she possibly understand CDE when she has never had them? What would you do? I know you have said to tell them to pick up their music and learn it on their own but I don't possibly see how she could do that so early on.... - J.S.

A: It's always difficult when someone misses one of the first lessons. People are surprised that the first few lessons are the most important. When you get further into the curriculum it won't be such a big deal when someone misses. At next week's lesson after you hear everyone's homework, do a review. "Let's show Sally what we learned last week. Everyone play all of the Ds on your piano." While the other 2 girls are playing all of the D's, show Sally where the D key is. Do the same for the other keys. Of course at game time be sure to review these keys with her. She will be learning new keys as well today. When you get to the pianos, go through at least one of the songs from last week. You can assign that piece again to the whole class; it never hurts to review. Then learn the new songs. It is ok if you do not get through all of the pieces you had planned on for this week. That will give you next week to still be working on the pre-staff note music so everyone will be really good at recognizing the keys. At the end of the class, have her mom come in and say that she learned a lot of information today because she learned everything from this week and last week. Show the mom the key drill and have her do that with her daughter at home this week to help her catch up: "Play all of the Ds on your piano. Play all of the As on your piano." etc. Tell her it is important that she does not do the keys in alphabetical order; mix 'em up. Even if the mom does not know how to play the piano, she can look in the book to see which key is which. - Colleen

Colleen, Wow! What a tremendous help you are! Thanks so much!! - J.S.

Summer Teaching Options & Music Choices for Advanced Students

Q: I have a few questions regarding using your course. The first has to do with summer lessons. Do most teachers using your course just not teach during the summer other than doing Blast-Off? Or do they do some kind of supplementary material? I am assuming that because during the summer attendance will be sporadic that you can't really continue with the regular curriculum. The next question has to do with the older, more advanced students. As a private teacher I have discovered that once they reach a certain level and age they have the desire to choose their own music, usually pop or classical. Second: How do you handle teaching individual pieces in a group session? I look forward to your answer. Thanks, - D.T.

A: Most of our teachers teach some during the summer. You are correct that not all students will sign up for summer piano and you will want to keep classes together in the fall, so in the summer you can teach music that is not in the textbooks. We have quite a few options for summer classes: supplemental solos, ensembles, and operettas. We also have an "Ideas for Summer" Webinar that goes into more detail for creating summer classes. - Colleen

Class Size & Varying Abilities in Students

Q: I have been teaching piano privately for about 27 years, and never thought much about class lessons. I took a piano class once in college, but the class and teacher was hooked up to headphones. Recently, a school asked me to develop and teach piano classes, which has led me to your website. I was particularly impressed with the first bit of advice that you had about not teaching individuals, but letting the whole crew go along for the ride. I was also wondering what the recommended maximum class size should be. And also, what do you do with varying abilities in students? Eventually some will pull out ahead, or some will have difficulty. Do you split off kids into more advanced classes? - D.B.

A: Thanks for your interest in The Mayron Cole Piano Method. It sounds like the piano "class" you took in college was multiple private lessons being taught simultaneously. That is not the type of class we recommend teaching. Our piano classes are taught just like all other school classes: the entire class is working on the same page together while the teacher instructs the class as a whole. Your class size should be as many students that you feel comfortable teaching. Most of our group piano teachers have class sizes of 4 to 8, although we do have some school teachers who teach as many as 25 at one time! As for students who move at a different pace, everyone is expected to keep up with the class (just like a school class). Anyone who does not do their piano homework is now behind and has to work to catch up. Teach the class at the pace of the best students; do not slow down good students to accommodate a student who is not

practicing. This approach will push the mediocre students to excel far more quickly than they would in private lessons. - Colleen

Grouping High School Students in Piano Classes

Q: I currently started teaching band and chorus at a high school with a piano lab. It is a fledgling program, and the previous teacher ordered adult, private instruction books as opposed to class piano books. Also, all students were grouped together despite their skill level. I have students who cannot read music at all grouped with students who are composing 2-handed pieces. How would you suggest I approach this situation and differentiate my instruction? Thank you, A. M.

A: Thanks for your interest in The Mayron Cole Piano Method. The only way for group piano classes to be successful is for everyone in the class to be at the same piano playing level. Just like with a math class, you cannot have some students studying first grade math while others are studying 8th grade math. If students of various piano levels are grouped together, you end up teaching multiple simultaneous private lessons rather than teaching a class. Try to re-schedule your classes and group them by piano playing level. - Colleen

Classical Music, Certification, Groups, Theory Pages, and Accompaniments

Q: I'm and a professional harpist and piano and harp instructor and I came across your materials as I was looking for a new opportunity to enhance my teaching studio. So here are a few questions. --Is classical music incorporated into your program? --Do I have to be "certified" in your program to use your materials? I appreciate your help with these questions. Sincerely, - A.W.

A: Thanks for your interest in The Mayron Cole Piano Method. Below are my answers to your questions... --Is classical music incorporated into your program? **Yes. Mayron has interspersed classics with composer biographies researched and written by Mayron throughout the method. She picked classics that would specifically teach the new theory that she presents in the lesson. Of course, most of the classics are in the higher levels, but even Level 1 has a couple of arrangements of classics. We also have a supplemental book of arrangements of Beethoven classics for the little kids (Pre-Level 1 Classical Favorites). For more details about the classics that are interspersed in the method, please click on each level peruse the description of what is included in that level.** --Do I have to be "certified" in your program to use your materials? **No. you don't have to be certified in our method to teach it. We are a music publishing company and are happy to give or sell our products to anyone who is interested in teaching or learning piano. - Colleen**

Q: Colleen, Thank you for your quick response to my questions yesterday. Some additional thoughts that I have . . .. Is the curriculum geared for the student to take private lessons at the point that they get to level 2? --Do the materials continue to have theory papers and game activities included with the music for the older beginner and level 2 and up? --If I am reading correctly, the mdi files and mp3 files have the same music accompaniment—correct? I just need to select the one that fits my studio the best. I appreciate your help as I continue to ponder your curriculum. Sincerely, - A. W.

A: You are very welcome. We enjoy helping teachers who are new to our method get their studio up and running. -- Students can continue in group for their entire piano education. --Yes, the theory pages and game activities continue all the way through Level 9. --Yes, our 2 types of accompaniments have the same sound files on them. The mp3 files are convenient, but are only available at full speed. With the midi you can completely control the speed which is helpful when the students are first learning a piece of music, but you need to download a midi sequencer app. - Colleen

Keyboards

Q: How many keyboards do you think that I should buy? - M.

A: Depends on how many students you plan to teach at one time. At the very beginning, you can put 2 kids at each keyboard, but once they start reading staff notes they will each need their own. You could see how many sign up to get an idea of how many you will have in each class and then buy the keyboards; or you could start out with just a few and if you need more then add some later. - Colleen

Q: Keyboards sitting on a big table? - M.

A: The table is a good idea. But, you have to get a table with adjustable heighth legs. A regular folding table is too high. Hope this helps. - Colleen

Thanks, Colleen! All these great tips that you're giving me will make my initiation into group teaching much more pleasurable. I'll look into the table today. I can see that I'll be introducing this method to other teachers that I know. I've talked to a few teachers already about this course. Thanks again, M.

What to do with a Very Young Student

Q: This is my fourth year teaching the Mayron Cole method. I love it! A few years ago I talked a colleague into trying it and she loves it too. This summer we opened our own studio, I have a question: Last year I started teaching Pre-Level 1. I tried teaching 4 and 5 years olds many years ago and they could not handle the intensity of a private lesson. Group is a completely different story. The students all did fantastic! This year they are in Kindergarten and not yet readers, but great piano players! They have been very successful with the Pre-Level 1 book and will complete it in January. They could have completed it sooner, but we slowed it down for them since they are younger than usual for that level. We are concerned about them beginning Level 1 because they are not yet reading. We are not sure where to go from here. Do you have any suggestions as to what we can do for the remainder of this year? We offered another Pre-Level 1 class this year and again they are doing great! My guess is we will have the same issue next year. Thank you for your time! Sincerely, Alice

A: Alice, Thanks for your nice email! It is truly appreciated! We don't normally recommend Level 1 for Kindergarten students, but there is no sense in keeping your students at the pre-staff note reading level when they are ready to move on to learning staff notes. So yes, graduate your great young Kindergarten kids to our Level 1 in January since they have completed Pre-Level 1. But go slowly with them! You can read all the theory questions to them (since they cannot yet read) and let them answer the questions orally. Play lots of theory games where the students identify staff notes in order to move on the game boards. They love playing theory games! Remember that you do not need to teach a complete "lesson" from the book each week. Sometimes, only 1/2 a lesson is all that these very young students need. Just always be sure that they understand the concepts before you move on. --Mayron

Failures and Complaints

Q: Why did most group piano teaching fail in years past?

A: Most "group" teachers were not actually teaching group piano in years past. Most of them were wrongly trying to teach many little "private" lessons to students that they had put together in a piano "class". Most piano teachers were trained in private lessons and had prior teaching experience only in private piano lessons. Because of their training limitations, they didn't have any idea how to teach piano in a class environment. That's why we offer group piano training webinars.

Q: What do I say to a parent who complains that this method goes slower?

A: Tell the parent that there are basically two ways to learn to play the piano: by rote and by note. The "rote" method involves the piano teacher playing music for the child and the child attempting to replay the music by ear. Yes, the child is able to make a sound come out of the piano, but obviously, the child is musically illiterate and is dependent on the piano teacher to play the music. A variation on the "rote" method is to teach the child to put his hands in various keyboard locations and read fingering numbers. This approach is found in most piano method books. Again, with at approach the child is too often musically illiterate and hits a "brick wall" without the "hand positions". This is why you hear so many adult students say they took piano lessons for years as a child but can't read music now. THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD is built upon the "note" method. This means that the child actually learns to read the notes and rhythms that he sees in his music. We must take the time to build a strong foundation upon which the child's knowledge can grow. This is an active learning process and takes more time. But it is ultimately more successful and pays off years later when the student can easily read music by himself.

Scheduling Classes

Q: How many students should I put in a piano class?

A: If you have a home studio, we recommend that you start with four students. As you gain confidence, you can increase the number of students. School teachers are accustomed to teaching larger classes.

Q: How long should each piano class be?

A: Most piano classes work well within a 45-minute time frame.

Q: How does one divide the time in a piano class?

A: Most classes can be divided into four periods: "Old" music time, "new" music time, game time, and theory time. "Old" music means hearing, as a group, the music from the previous lesson.

Q: How do I customize every piano class for each student in the class?

A: You don't. Every student in the class will study the same music at the same time. It's like any other school class. Students study the same page of Algebra at the same time, don't they?

Q: What if I feel more confident teaching only younger students?

A: Specialize! Teach our Pre-Level 1 and Level 1 books. When your students graduate, send them to some of the other teachers in your town.

Keyboards

Q: Does every student need a keyboard in the piano class?

A: Yes. And the keys should be full-sized, too. The teacher also needs a keyboard.

Q: Do the keyboards need to have 88 keys?

A: A 60-key keyboard will suffice through Level 4. A 72-key keyboard will suffice through Level 7. By Level 8, you will need an 88-key keyboard.

Private or Group



Q: Can I use THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD with private lesson students?

A: Yes! Just make sure your private lesson students complete all of the theory fun sheets since you will not be reviewing the theory in "game time" like you would with group taught students.

Q: I'd like to teach my beginner students in piano classes because I think the group learning environment would be beneficial to them. What do you think?

A: I agree with you! Most small children like to learn in a group environment because more musical activities can be offered! Private piano lessons for young children can be very tedious for the student as well as the teacher!

Q: Do you think group piano lessons are for every student?

A: No. But as the bell curve shows, piano classes are great for the large majority of students! Even extremely fast students can benefit from a piano class if it is made up of other extremely fast students. We have had several of these "fast" classes through the years, and they are fantastic to teach!

Q: I'm convinced of the benefits that piano classes give to students: Motivation to practice, musicianship, improved rhythm counting skills, sight reading skills, performance skills, ability to follow a conductor, etc. However, I have several teenagers who have been trained only in private piano lessons and who could never make the change over to group piano classes. Yet, I feel that a piano class would offer them a lot. What should I do?

A: Try teaching your advanced teenagers three private piano lessons and then a group piano lesson with other teens every fourth lesson. Give them some of our great ensembles. You are right about the benefit of group piano classes for your teens. I find it interesting that we train pianists to play the piano by themselves and then expect them to play with organists on Sunday and accompany choirs on Wednesday and wonder why it is so difficult for them to work with other musicians. I think playing the piano with other musicians and following a conductor's directions should be part of every pianist's training.

Increasing Business

Q: I really need to build my piano studio enrollment this summer. What are your suggestions?

A: You need to advertise and market your studio, and consider offering a Blast Off With Piano summer course. Blast Off is a five lesson course that should be taught in one week. Parents are invited to attend the last lesson and hear some of the fun ensemble music that's been learned. Since it's only one week long, you can offer this course many different times during the summer.

Q. I am very impressed with your webinars and seminar. Your company is the only one of which I am aware that teaches the piano teacher how to run a studio like a real business! Why do colleges neglect this area of teaching?

A: I have no idea. But we love filling that niche!