STUDENT–FIRST PIANO PEDAGOGY:

BEST PRACTICES FOR CREATING DYNAMIC

RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS IN THE PIANO STUDIO

by

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A Document

Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

December
2021

APPROVAL

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Document approved:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the encouragement and support of my family, church family, and academic family at TCU and for the particular guidance of my former teachers: Carol Leone, Cathy Lysinger, Samuel Holland, and Rebecca Penneys.

I offer special thanks to Dr. Ann Gipson and Professor Harold Martina, who have been unforgettable mentors during my DMA journey. Your guidance, expertise, belief, and care have forever shaped me. I also thank the members of my DMA Committee for their interest, effort, keen eyes, and individual perspectives: Dr. Michael Bukhman, Dr. Blaise Ferrandino, Dr. Samuel Holland, and Dr. Timothy D. Watkins.

DEDICATION

To Tyler: you have listened to my early morning practice sessions for nearly a decade now—always without complaint and never tiring of my pursuits. You have cared deeply for me and sacrificed much to make my dreams a reality. I love you always.

To Lochlan: you have brought me unspeakable joy, broadened my view of life, and expanded my heart a hundredfold. I love being your Mama, and I thank God for the gift of your life.

To my parents and Julia: you have loved me regardless of success or failure, taught me to be resilient, encouraged me to pursue wellness in all respects, and have been merely a phone call away during this process.

To the teachers over the years who have cared for me—my dreams, my convictions, my family, my struggles, and my life both inside and outside academia and the concert hall: you inspire me to keep pursuing excellence in the field and to care for others as complete individuals.

Finally, to my students—past, present, and future: you make my days full of joy with your individuality, creativity, and dedication to beautiful music. You inspire me to continue learning and striving to be a better teacher.

Soli Deo gloria!

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"We speak with more than our mouths. We listen with more than our ears."

– Fred Rogers

"How can talent, or ability, be nurtured? How can children be brought up to be human beings with excellent talents and beautiful hearts?"

– Shinichi Suzuki

"The roots of resilience. . .are to be found in the sense of being understood by and existing in the mind and heart of a loving, attuned, and self–possessed other."

– Diana Fosha

"My primary goal as a piano teacher is to create a climate in which my students can experience continual musical, intellectual, and emotional growth, and to become increasingly dispensable to them in the process. Everything I do as a teacher, and every other teaching goal I have, relates directly to this first, most basic objective—to help my students grow by and for themselves."

– Frances Clark

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

The concept of student–centered learning and the importance of relational connection between student and teacher are by no means revolutionary. Researchers in the fields of education, child psychology, and human development have been studying the interactions between students and teachers for years, as well as advocating for a more child–centered approach based on their findings. This research has been primarily focused on classroom settings; in the field of piano pedagogy, anecdotal writings and teacher legacies explore the topic of student–teacher relational connection, but there remains a gap in the practical application of these philosophies and theories. In this document, I contend that best practices from these

interdisciplinary fields can and should be codified for the private piano lesson, as much of the student population receives its piano education in this individualized format.

Purpose of the Study

Prompted by the lack of research specific to piano pedagogy, I will explore recent findings within interdisciplinary fields—particularly exploring the element of human connection—and apply my findings directly to the private piano lesson. I will propose my own set of best practices from this interdisciplinary research for private music teachers in the piano studio. While it has been universally discussed in pedagogy textbooks that teachers should be *kind*, *helpful*, or generally *nice*, there has been little data–driven discussion of the practical ways private teachers can relationally connect with the individual student in the private lesson. Neither has there been extensive research on the application of literature on human connection to the piano studio.

The purpose of this document is to apply principles from the fields of education, psychology, neuroscience, and human development to the field of piano pedagogy, codifying a set of best practices and suggesting practical tools for fostering relational connections in the piano studio. The practical application to the piano studio comprises three parts, with a chapter devoted to each: a pedagogical philosophy; a set of principles that characterize relationally savvy teachers; and an examination of specific moments in the everyday lesson which provide a wealth of opportunity for teachers to intentionally build relational connections with students.

The proposed principles serve as practical application for teachers "in the field," working with students in the private lesson format. The pedagogical practices offered in this document focus on the private lesson, but they can also be applied to group instructional settings both in

and out of academia and especially to university piano pedagogy curricula—to train the next generation of piano teachers in a more student–centered, "connection–cognizant" approach.

Limitations

To determine the past and current priorities in the field of piano pedagogy, I have examined leading university piano pedagogy texts, materials from major publications and conferences (namely, those by the Music Teachers National Association and the divisions of The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy), and pedagogy–related dissertations. I acknowledge it is nearly impossible to identify what is being taught to students in a lesson or to pedagogy students regarding the importance of the relational element of piano teaching, as even with best intentions philosophy and practice are not always congruent. Without an in–depth survey or observation and evaluation of undergraduate and graduate piano pedagogy programs in the United States, one cannot be certain what legacy of teaching professors are passing to their students or what degree of importance professors place on the topic of relational connection. Neither can we be certain that the messages pedagogy professors communicate are received as intended.

What remains observable, however, are the publications and research in the field, which are strangely devoid of detailed discussion of relational connection between student and teacher in the private lesson. The related literature section will explore a brief history of the student–teacher relationship in piano pedagogy and then survey texts both inside and outside the field of piano pedagogy, illuminating the areas which call for further investigation.

Throughout the following chapters, fictional examples of student–teacher interactions will be included and discussed. No ages or developmental levels accompany these exchanges.

Instead, the author advises the reader to adhere to the principle of *attunement* as discussed in Chapter 5 and adjust as necessary to meet each student's age, musical level, and development.

Finally, the author acknowledges that the research, focus, and sources of this document come primarily from an American perspective, with roots in Western–European traditions. This emphasis does not intend to negate the teaching and performance traditions of other cultures, which have produced many respected artists and educators. The author's choice to focus on American traditions comes from her own experience as a piano student in America and her interest in the legacy of American pedagogues and academic curricula in the United States.

Organization and Procedure

Chapter 1 presents a rationale for the study, based on the needs both for further exploration and for practical application of connection research in the field of piano pedagogy, specifically within the private lesson environment. In this document, the author asserts that the field of piano pedagogy lacks specific research and professional training about relational connection between student and teacher and suggests that the application of findings from related fields would be both appropriate and beneficial for achieving a more holistic, "student–first" approach to education in the field of piano pedagogy and in the piano studio.

Chapter 2 includes a brief history of the student–teacher relationship within piano pedagogy and then explores related literature in the field, including textbooks, print and online publications, conference materials, and piano pedagogy dissertations. Chapter 3 expands the related literature to include interdisciplinary fields, specifically examining research and application in four fields: education, psychology, human development/connection, and attachment theory.

Chapter 4 is entitled “Practical Application to the Piano Studio, Part 1” and examines the student–teacher relational connection from both a philosophical and pedagogical perspective, discussing the importance of philosophy on pedagogical practice and drawing conclusions from the related literature. The chapter first addresses teacher philosophy, examining the ethical assumptions informing a “connective” educational philosophy and encouraging readers to examine their own implicit and explicit beliefs. From a pedagogical perspective, Chapter 4 then examines the interdisciplinary, data–driven benefits of a “connective” approach to piano education and argues that relational connection should become a core element of the teaching–and–learning experience both in the piano studio and in pedagogical training at the university level.

Chapter 5 introduces “Practical Application to the Piano Studio, Part 2,” drawing best teaching practices from related and interdisciplinary fields and applying them directly to the field of piano pedagogy. I have identified and arranged these as twelve foundational characteristics of relationally savvy teachers; each of these twelve features will be discussed in turn.

Chapter 6 features Practical Application to the Piano Studio, Part 3, focusing in detail on eight recurring and specific moments in the private lesson that afford rich opportunities for building strong relationships with students. The characteristics of relationally savvy teachers from Chapter 5 that serve to facilitate this connection in the lesson will be referenced as they overlap with these eight moments. My goal here is to make the philosophical tangible and practical, helping teachers put their understanding of relational connection into action.

Chapter 7 examines potential areas for future exploration in the topic of student–teacher relational connection in the private studio, considers lingering questions, offers recommendations for the application of this research to the university piano pedagogy curricula, and briefly considers next steps for future research and data–driven study.

Desired Outcomes of the Study

As a result of the research related to this study, I hope to achieve the following outcomes:

1. To reveal the need for further exploration of the topic of student–teacher relational connection.
2. To identify themes and principles from interdisciplinary research that are directly applicable to the field of piano education.
3. To encourage piano teachers to experiment with the connection strategies and pursue further education on the topic of student–teacher relational connection.
4. To encourage piano pedagogues to include connection research (including the strategies promoted here) in their university core curricula.

What is Relational Connection?

In this document, I routinely use the phrase *relational connection*, which I describe as follows: in the context of the private piano lesson, an authentic exchange between teacher and student in which the teacher explicitly and implicitly expresses *and the student experiences* that he or she is valued, accepted, and empowered as an individual and musician; also a professional interchange in which the exchange of ideas, sharing of stories, development of skills, and building of trust takes place. *Relational connection* differs from merely "connection," in that the musical and intellectual merging of student and teacher develop in the context of the personal relationship. It is possible for two individuals to connect through music or ideas and yet remain isolated from one another in an interpersonal sense. *Relational connection* merges the interpersonal, musical, and pedagogical elements of the student–teacher experience in the private lesson.

Definition of Terminology

Attachment: a healthy psychological phenomenon, often within the parent–child relationship, in which the child feels a sense of safety, bonding, and acceptance from the parent and is free to explore, self–regulate, and accept themselves

Empathy: the ability to put oneself in the place of another's emotional state; an attempt to understand how one is feeling and to adjust your own actions accordingly

Judgement: a statement or action that implicitly or explicitly equates one's worth or value with one's actions

Relational Connection: in the context of the private piano lesson, an authentic exchange between teacher and student in which the teacher explicitly and implicitly expresses *and the student experiences* that he or she is valued, accepted, and empowered as an individual and musician; a professional interchange in which the exchange of ideas, sharing of stories, development of skills, and building of trust takes place

Self–Efficacy: The belief in one's ability to make choices that contribute toward desired outcomes

Student–First Pedagogy: the application of Humanist learning theories and philosophies, that prioritize the learner herself over the material, to the piano lesson; also based on the "student–first" teaching philosophy of Frances Clark

Safety: a condition or environment in which students feel they can share opinions, feelings, and thoughts (as well as act on these musically) without fear of being judged as individuals

Shame: self–conscious feeling that one has erred and that this error has made the individual less worthy, valuable, or honorable

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF PIANO PEDAGOGY TEXTS & MATERIALS

History of the Student–Teacher Relationship in Piano Pedagogy

Choosing a starting point for the historical progression of piano pedagogy is difficult. While piano teaching has been ongoing since the advent of the instrument itself, even as recent as the 1990s piano pedagogy was viewed as an "emergent" field.[1] In her 1998 dissertation, Maria Montandon asserted, "what piano pedagogy really is and what it refers to is still not clear."[2] Montandon further contends that it is due to this lack of focus within the field that historical studies which "claim to examine the evolution of philosophies and techniques of piano pedagogy or the evolution of pedagogical thought in American piano teaching of the 20th–century are, in fact, studies about piano performance."[3]

Beyond the scope of this document, but worthy of the reader's further investigation, are important treatises and pedagogical writings by eighteenth and nineteenth century pianists, including C.P.E. Bach's *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (1753, 1762), Clementi's *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* (1803), Hummel's *A Complete Theoretical and Practical Course of Instructions on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte Commencing with the Simplest Elementary Principles and Including Every Requisite to the Most Finished Style of Performance* (1828), and Czerny's *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School from the First Rudiments of Playing to the Highest and Most Refined State of Cultivation; With the Requisite Numerous Examples, Newly and Expressly Composed for the*

[1] Maria Isabel Montandon, "Trends in Piano Pedagogy as Reflected by the Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy (1981-1995)" (PhD diss., The University of Oklahoma, 1998), 6.
[2] Montandon, "Trends in Piano Pedagogy," 6.
[3] Montandon, "Trends in Piano Pedagogy," 8.

Occasion (1839). In addition to the treatises named above, anecdotes about the teaching styles of many of the great pianists also exist, especially those regarding Liszt's methods of instruction.

This document's survey of relational trends within piano pedagogy begins with nineteenth century European traditions, as the roots of American piano education lie in Europe and eventually expanded to North America. While this survey is brief, it is essential to consider prominent pedagogical practices within the student–teacher relationship that were commonplace in nineteenth century Europe, since these influenced the development of American piano pedagogy.

In her article "In Music Nothing Is Worse Than Playing Wrong Notes" in the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, Lia Laor Discusses Friedrich Guthman's pedagogical treatise, *Methodik* (1805), which Laor describes as "mechanistic" and highly teacher directed.[4] Laor argues, "this pedagogical view encouraged teachers to suppress all their sensitivity to young beginners' vulnerability, leaving no room for dialogue with the young but only for the imposition of mere drill–and–practice."[5] She goes on to say that Guthman encouraged the use of corporal punishment in lessons, claiming, "diligent and patient students would understand that the method was for their own good and would thus comply gratefully."[6] Of great importance, Laor makes a case for how these ideas were implemented by "a whole generation of piano pedagogues," including the obsession with technical drills and mechanistic finger work (challenged later in the 19th century by pianists such as Robert Schumann in their development of musically–based pedagogical materials).[7] Guthman was not alone in his drill–based approach as other nineteenth century pedagogues such as Geary, Bertini, and Hunten also prioritized facility over education.

[4] Lia Laor, "In Music Nothing is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes: Nineteenth-Century Mechanistic Paradigm of Piano Pedagogy," in *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 38, no. 1 (2016): 5-24.
[5] Laor, "In Music Nothing is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes," 11.
[6] Laor, "In Music Nothing is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes," 12.
[7] Laor, "In Music Nothing is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes," 12.

While much could be said regarding the effects these pedagogues, among others, had on modern piano pedagogy, one thing is obvious: student–centered pedagogy was not yet even a seed planted in the minds of the leading nineteenth century European pedagogues.

In fact, Laor suggests that it was the field of general music education that first made progress in the realm of a student–centered, holistic approach in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Music educator Jeanne Bamberger asserted that "children's mistakes can serve teachers and researchers by offering a window into learners' basic assumptions and thinking processes," which must be followed by teacher reflection and development of next steps.[8] Lewis A. Benjamin, Sr. is thought to have been the first to organize group class instruction on orchestral instruments—reflecting the philosophy of music for the masses and likely influencing the later emphasis on group piano instruction.[9] Additionally, the rise of music appreciation classes in the late 1800s and early 1900s also made "high art" music more accessible and perhaps encouraged beginner study.

While piano instruction in the classroom was limited in the early twentieth century, piano teaching occurred primarily in homes, was dependent on the conservatory model (in which teachers primarily instructed as they were taught), lacked standardization, and was still far from a professional endeavor. Frances Clark is widely considered the "mother of modern American piano pedagogy," as her philosophies and methodologies incorporated educational and psychological research, standardized the intervallic reading method, raised the level of professionalism in piano teaching, and entirely upset the European traditions of the long–held, largely unquestioned master–apprentice model. In his dissertation on Frances Clark, R. Fred Kern discusses early twentieth century American piano teaching, stating there was "a growing

[8] Lia Laor, "In Music Nothing is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes," 23.
[9] James A. Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1982), 273.

feeling that piano study was for everyone and that aspiring to technical perfection on the way toward a concert career was not the only reason for piano study."[10] This idea of piano for every child led to what Kern calls a "new pedagogical branch" in piano education, in which "beginners were viewed as an area of specialization."[11]

Allison Hudak's dissertation on Clark includes an interview with Samuel Holland, student of Frances Clark and former Executive Director of The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy. According to Hudak:

> Holland stated that Clark's most revealing trait as a teacher concerned the hierarchical order of educating the child first, teaching music second, and teaching piano third. Clark believed that there was music in every person and the responsibility of the teacher was to find that and nurture it no matter how small the seed was. Holland stated: For its time, that was a really radical idea. Today it doesn't seem that radical, but if you look back in the 19th century, it was generally believed that musical talent was a very rare thing and that few people could do it. The whole purpose of any musical education was to find those few talented people, weed out the rest, and train those talented musicians. The idea that everyone could grow in music study was a radical idea. I remember still believing that as a young pianist there were those that were talented and those that were not. I thought it was the responsibility of the student to succeed, not the teacher. Frances Clark believed otherwise.[12]

Richard Chronister's memories of Frances Clark are recalled in the posthumous publication, *The Piano Teacher's Legacy*. Chronister discussed Clark's assertion that teachers must know the *what*, *how*, and *why* of teaching. He states, "an important part of the Frances Clark philosophy of teacher education is learning to teach in groups, where we are not allowed to

[10] Robert Fred Kern, "Frances Clark: The Teacher and Her Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1984), 28.
[11] Kern, "Frances Clark: The Teacher and Her Contributions to Piano Pedagogy," 28.
[12] Allison Lynn Hudak, "A Personal Portrait of Frances Oman Clark through the Eyes of Her most Prominent Students and Collaborators" (DMA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2004), 173-174.

ignore the student who does not respond to our teaching, where we must carefully prepare how we are going to present material so that all the students can respond with understanding."[13]

These philosophies, paired with educational research and the rise in instrumental classroom instruction, led to an early emphasis on group piano instruction. Janice Buckner writes, "group piano teaching in its infancy presented new challenges to teachers because (1) traditional piano teachers were musically skilled but lacked experience and expertise teaching groups of people, and (2) classroom teachers skilled in working with groups of people were not skilled in piano and fundamental keyboard skills."[14] All of these factors combined to show a need for specific piano teacher education and training, in addition to the instruction of pianistic skills.

Over the second half of the twentieth century, piano programs began incorporating pedagogy coursework; piano pedagogy graduate programs were started; and teacher training programs, conferences, and publications were launched. In 1991, Marienne Uszler wrote of the piano teacher's role, "the piano teacher is a music educator who uses the keyboard as a tool, who is more aware of process than product, and who leads the student to integrate assorted skills."[15] These words indicate an important shift in the role of the teacher but did not yet reflect the priority of a student–first approach to piano education.

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[13] Richard Chronister, *A Piano Teacher's Legacy: Selected Writings by Richard Chronister*, ed. by Edward Darling (Kingston: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, Inc., 2005), 8.
[14] Janice Bruckner, "Assessment of Teacher and Student Behavior in Relation to the Accomplishment of Performance Goals in Piano Lessons" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1997), 1-2.
[15] Marienne Uszler, Stewart Gordon, and Scott McBride Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000), xv.

Survey of Piano Pedagogy Textbooks & Supplemental Materials

It has long been noted in American piano pedagogy texts that teachers must have a "pleasant" personality and be willing to mentor students in an encouraging and nurturing manner.[16] While chapters are devoted to scale fingerings and hand position, however, many texts only mention the teacher's demeanor in a general and brief way, leaving the reader to fend for oneself in the *how* and *why*. As early as 1965, Gordon Terwilliger wrote in *Piano Teacher's Professional Handbook*, "the private piano teacher is far more than an instructor of music. She must begin with personal considerations before approaching the musical ones, for she is the confidante. . .and sympathetic supporter of all the student's interests."[17]

In *How to Teach Piano Successfully* (1973)—often considered the first American piano pedagogy text—James Bastien argues that "a teacher who is harsh and unsympathetic can interfere with the process of healthy development." He goes on to say that in such a toxic environment "the child can no longer be his forthright self, free to inquire and develop."[18] He even states that the teacher's personality is of "prime importance,"[19] and yet only scratches the surface of this element of successful piano teaching.

Another well–known and leading text, *The Art of Teaching Piano* (2004) by Denes Agay, also acknowledges the need for a "warm and inspiring *personality* conducive to easy, natural, and constructive communication with the student."[20] Agay contends that a personality of this sort "can be reinforced by familiarity with the pertinent tenets of psychology."[21] Later in the same

[16] James Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*, 2nd ed. (Park Ridge: General Words and Music, Co., 1997), 10.
[17] Gordon B. Terwilliger, *Piano Teacher's Professional Handbook* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 110.
[18] Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*, 11.
[19] Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*, 9.
[20] Denes Agay, "Foreword" in *The Art of Teaching Piano: The Classic Guide and Reference Book for All Piano Teachers*, ed. by Denes Agay (New York: Yorktown Music, 1981), vi.
[21] Agay, "Foreword" in *The Art of Teaching Piano*, vi.

work, Agay includes chapters by other contributors. In the chapter discussing the student–teacher relationship, Hazel Skaggs provides "common–sense rules" including:

> Show your students that you care about them. . .
> The teacher is a friend. . .not a pal. . . .
> Recognize individual differences
> Encourage students; don't be negative
> Work toward improving the student's self–esteem.[22]

While both Bastien and Agay recognize a need for the discussion of the seemingly "intangible qualities" of a teacher that contribute to successful lessons, both relegate in–depth study of these intangible qualities to the field of psychology and place the emphasis of discussion on the teacher, instead of acknowledging the student's role in this interchange. Furthermore, *how* is a teacher to show his or her students appropriate care, avoid crushing negativity, and improve a student's self–esteem? Are these appropriate goals for teachers who have little to no training in psychology?

In their 1991 publication, *The Well–Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, Uszler, Gordon, and Smith discuss a variety of learning theories in detail, specifically applying their logical ends to piano teaching and learning. This landmark text is still largely in use across university piano pedagogy programs. The authors assume a global, philosophical perspective of teaching and ask the reader to consider important questions, such as, "How does learning take place? In which state is the learner best suited to learn?"[23] In describing "gestalt" theorists' approaches, they assert that "experience is filtered through, and affected by, the individual's own consciousness. [Kurt] Lewin spoke of this as the *lifespace concept*, which holds that 'people do not behave

[22] Hazel Ghazarian Skaggs, "The Student-Teacher Relationship: Some Common-Sense Suggestions" in *The Art of Teaching Piano: The Classic Guide and Reference Book for All Piano Teachers*, ed. by Denes Agay (New York: Yorktown Music, 1981), 485-486.
[23] Uszler, Gordon, and Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 226.

solely because of the external forces to which they are exposed. People behave as they do as a consequence of how things seem to them.'"[24]

Well–Tempered's description of Humanist learning theory also incorporates much of psychologist Carl Rogers's work:

> For some theorists, however, no learning theory is adequate if it does not take into consideration how the learner *feels* while learning. They believe that a more holistic approach to the understanding of learning must also regard the affective field of forces that are part of each learning situation. These psychologists look at learning as a preeminently human activity. For them, the idea of education is very broad, including much more than what is, or might be, learned in formal learning circumstances.[25]

This text is one of the earliest, if not the first, to begin incorporating Humanist learning theories in the field of piano pedagogy, asserting the idea that, "growth of the whole person can be brought about only if there is allowance for development of intuition, creativity, feeling, and imagination."[26] The philosophy of this text clearly aligns with the work of Frances Clark and moves toward a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of student–teacher relational connection within piano education. And yet, the persistent question readers ought to be asking is, "How?" In what way does a teacher learn to do this? The authors leave these questions lingering and avoid specific viewpoints on these topics, instead encouraging teachers to maintain their own philosophies and personal approaches.

The 1992 publication *Questions and Answers*—a "Dear Abby" type series of published columns in which Frances Clark solicited questions from a wide range of subjects related to piano teaching and provided subsequent answers—is rich with practical advice for piano teachers. Frances Clark was arguably the first giant in the field to craft a teaching method based

[24] Uszler, Gordon, and Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 229.
[25] Uszler, Gordon, and Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 234.
[26] Uszler, Gordon, and Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 235.

on a conglomerate, holistic philosophy of piano education which included an understanding of psychology, learning theories, child development, and piano repertoire across levels. She drew attention to things like teacher body language and a student–teacher partnership in learning, while maintaining high standards of performance and excellence.

In response to a reader's question about understanding student reactions she wrote, "teachers can often avoid tears by paying closer attention to the student's reactions. Avoid using a voice or manner that seems cross. Try to anticipate the limits of a student's tolerance for firmness, precision, or high standards and back off before a crisis is precipitated."[27] The underpinnings of this response suggest a distinct awareness of both humanistic learning theories (attention to student needs) and foundational pedagogical practices (anticipating musical difficulties).

In *Practical Piano Pedagogy* (2004), Baker–Jordan glosses over the application of learning theories to the piano studio, generally advocating for teachers to believe that "all normal children are capable of learning and that teaching includes a never–ending journey of discovery to find out what enables children to be successful learners."[28] This statement raises several questions: "What does *normal* mean, and what responsibility does a teacher have to students outside this 'normal' range? What role does the teacher have in altering his or her approach?" Baker–Jordan asserts that the growth of piano pedagogy degree programs in the United States has led to an increased application of learning theories to the profession, resulting in "better teaching training and better teaching materials."[29] And yet, readers should question how and to

[27] Frances Clark, *Questions and Answers: Practical Advice for Piano Teachers* (Northfield: The Instrumentalist, 1992), 14.
[28] Martha Baker–Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy: The Definitive Text for Piano Teachers and Pedagogy Students* (Burbank: Warner Bros., 2004), 20.
[29] Baker–Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, 75.

what degree these philosophies are being passed down, especially when the training material is as brief in its treatment of holistic teaching as Baker–Jordan's text.

Professional Piano Teaching is published in two volumes, perhaps a tangible acknowledgement of the ever–increasing roles and skills a piano teacher must master and reconcile. The first volume (2006) provides an overview of general characteristics of "good" teachers. This text acknowledges that "unrealistically high standards will result in excessive stress" but that teachers "should not compromise their personal integrity."[30] This raises the issue: is this a false dichotomy? Must teachers choose between high musical standards and acting in understanding ways? Jacobson recognizes the duality of roles that many piano teachers balance and asks the reader to consider his or her comfort level with this.[31]

Joanne Haroutounian's *Fourth Finger on B–Flat* (2012) builds on Clark's and Uszler's ideas, exploring the interchange between student and teacher. She dedicates an entire chapter to "Connecting with the Kid on the Bench,"[32] and begins her discussion from a standpoint of learners as unique individuals and teachers as students themselves:

> From the moment a student comes through the door and sits on that bench, there is a dynamic interaction between teacher and student. This dynamic is what keeps teaching fresh to those who seek to understand how this student learns and how we can grow in teaching capabilities with each different student.[33]

This shift in language is staggering and entirely unique in piano pedagogy texts up to this point. Apart from the foundational work of Frances Clark, Haroutounian is the first to frame her text from a student–centered approach. She discusses both global, philosophical ideas (e.g., teacher legacy) and application of specific learning theories (e.g., learning styles). Near the end

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[30] Jeanine M. Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook*, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Van Nuys: Alfred Music, 2015), 5.
[31] Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching*, 13.
[32] Joanne Haroutounian, *Fourth Finger on B-Flat: Effective Strategies for Teaching Piano* (San Diego: Kjos Music Press, 2012), 123.
[33] Haroutounian, *Fourth Finger on B-Flat*, 124.

of the book, she charges teachers to "take time to reflect on the impact these lessons will make on your students ten or twenty years from now. What memories will they have to remind them of the legacy of your teaching in this their lives?"[34] While "Connecting with the Kid on the Bench"[35] breaks ground in its description of a student's personhood and scope of discussion, Haroutounian dedicates this chapter primarily to teaching approaches, learning styles, and learning modalities. These are, indeed, topics in which excellent teachers should be proficient, yet they fail to reveal the groundwork of *connection* upon which discovery learning, for example, is free to flourish.

Volume Two of *Professional Piano Teaching* (2015) includes an overview—much like Uszler's—of learning theories, theorists, and approaches to teaching. Jacobson makes an insightful connection to piano teaching in her discussion of Abraham Maslow:

> To understand piano study in light of Maslow's hierarchy, learning is inadequate if it does not take into consideration how the learner feels while learning. Facts and skills are less important than reaching one's highest potential, which involves experimental and intuitive learning, making choices, feeling, and imagination. In this holistic and individualized form of learning, the learner is included in decisions about what will be learned and what goals will be reached.[36]

This second book, especially, serves as a more comprehensive resource for graduate students and professional teachers interested in understanding the various philosophies behind piano teaching and in crafting their own viewpoints. There are entire chapters devoted to technique, rhythm, teaching transfer students, and memorized performance (among others), but attention to the relational aspect of working with the student in each of these moments is strangely absent.

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[34] Haroutounian, *Fourth Finger on B-Flat*, 305.
[35] Haroutounian, *Fourth Finger on B-Flat*, 123.
[36] Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy Textbook*, Vol. 2 (Van Nuys: Alfred Music, 2015), 27.

In the last decade, piano pedagogy professionals have become more aware of the need for further exploration of the role of the piano teacher in a holistic educational approach. In *The Piano Teacher's Survival Guide* (2017), Anthony Williams asserts, "a piano teacher needs the insight to understand the soul of the individual, to draw out their personality and emotions and help them forge strong personal links with the sound. . . ."[37] Furthermore, in his recent publication *Teaching Piano Pedagogy* (2019), Courtney Crappell makes a case that pedagogy students should be prepared to teach a variety of students, often outside the realm of classically–driven performance students, and thus will need to adapt the "pedagogical strategies they learn from their artist–teachers" and to "develop additional skills to successfully engage with wider audiences."[38] Crappell goes on to reinforce the widely–held view of the necessity of professional pianists receiving advanced pianistic training with artist–teachers but then asks an important question, which is highly germane to this discussion:

> Effective teachers must be proficient musicians themselves in order to pass this skill on to their students. Therefore, the question pertinent to this discussion is not whether teachers should study with experienced artist–teachers—they certainly should. The relevant question is, what are the limitations of performance training in the training of effective piano teachers?[39]

In her own survey of pedagogical texts up to 1997, Janice Buckner agrees that "the majority of time and emphasis" are "directed toward acquisition of content." She contends, "absent in these prominent texts is a thorough discussion of the teaching process itself—the actual communication of information and the imparting of skills from teacher to student. On the very core of the act of teaching, the literature of the discipline is notably silent."[40] Since 1997,

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[37] Anthony Williams, *The Piano Teacher's Survival Guide: Inspiring Teaching Strategies, In-Depth Technical Advice and Imaginative Ideas for Piano Teachers and Pianists* (London: Faber Music, 2017), 7.
[38] Courtney Crappell, *Teaching Piano Pedagogy: A Guidebook for Training Effective Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 19.
[39] Crappell, *Teaching Piano Pedagogy*, 17.
[40] Buckner, Janice, "Assessment of Teacher and Student Behavior in Relation to the Accomplishment of Performance Goals in Piano Lessons" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1997), 6.

more recent interdisciplinary research suggests that teachers must go beyond even the "act of teaching" and explore the nuances of connecting with students *in order* that lasting learning may occur.

Most recently, Derek Kealii Polischuk, professor of piano and piano pedagogy at Michigan State University, authored a book entitled *Transformational Piano Teaching: Mentoring Students from All Walks of Life* (2019).[41] This text, more than any other up to this point, begins the important work of bridging the gap between *teaching* and *connecting* with students.

Chapters include topics such as "Meeting the Needs of the Recreational Student," "Working with Pianists with Depression," and "Mentoring Graduate Students." In the introduction, Polischuk describes the profession in a simultaneously spellbound and daunting fashion. He writes,

> Piano teachers are not only instructors of music but also counselors, family mediators, performance coaches, temporary parents, life coaches, and more. Because our lessons usually are taught to individuals, these roles are multiplied. This responsibility is a great blessing and the kind of mentorship that I crave in my work.[42]

Polischuk describes his lessons with a leading performer and conservatory teacher: "His sincere inquiries were what reached me. He wanted to know me as a person. This famous pianist, teacher, and connoisseur of all things Russia and piano wanted to know if I would be going to football games."[43]

The most recent publications reveal that leaders in the field of piano pedagogy are beginning to see the need for further research into the student–teacher relationship and to

[41] Derek Kealii Polishuk, *Transformational Piano Teaching: Mentoring Students from All Walks of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[42] Polishuk, *Transformational Piano Teaching*, 1.
[43] Polishuk, *Transformational Piano Teaching*, 2.

communicate with pedagogy students the diverse roles a teacher plays in the life of a student. It is an encouraging step toward merging student–first, holistic instruction with musical knowledge and teaching skills.

Survey of Piano Pedagogy–Related Journals, Conference Proceedings, Programmatic Content, & Dissertations

The primary blind–reviewed and peer–reviewed publications for piano teaching are published by The Music Teachers National Association and The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy. *American Music Teacher* and the *MTNA e–Journal* fall under the former, and *Piano Magazine* (formerly *Clavier Companion* and earlier *Keyboard Companion*) and *Piano Pedagogy Forum* under the latter. These two groups are the main organizations for piano educators in the United States. (While MTNA is not a piano–centric organization, a vast majority of its members are pianists.) In addition to their print and online publications, MTNA holds both the National Conference and Collegiate Pedagogy Symposium annually, and The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy holds The National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (NCKP) biannually. (This was formally called The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy.)

American Music Teacher & e–Journal

Elizabeth Carr's *American Music Teacher* article from 1979 describes four types of piano students: shy, serious, overly ambitious, and superficial. While the labels themselves may be oversimplified and restrictive, Carr's student–first language captures an important philosophy that is pertinent to our discussion:

> The totality of the student must always be kept in the forefront of the teacher's thinking. Amy is not shy. She is Amy. Shyness is simply one of her qualities. To equate Amy with shyness does not

> take in her whole potential. And so it is with all students we will meet. . . .[44]

Steve Roberson's 1993 article entitled, "Ten Habits of Highly Successful Piano Teachers"[45] equates success with performance achievement, specifically observing teachers whose students were successful in the competition realm. The first tip is centered on the principle that teachers should expect *more* from students, so that they rise to the occasion. Applicable to this discussion, he notes that the teachers he observed never "made students feel bad or inadequate," suggesting that high expectations and strong connections are not mutually exclusive. Roberson concludes that "respect was always at the core of all the relationships."[46] He also notes that these teachers turned the focus to the students, encouraging them not to let themselves down, and accepted no excuses. Readers might wonder, however, if the students *felt* or *perceived* respect in these moments, even if a pedagogical observer felt the teacher's actions were respectful? In describing the myriad personalities of the teachers observed, Roberson argues, "teachers do not have to fit any mold other than one requiring superb musicianship, extremely demanding standards, respect for the student, and enthusiasm. The rest will take care of itself."[47] While this list of ten habits is thoughtful, insightful, and generally anecdotally true of great teachers, how does the environment of delivery impact the learner's success, specifically outside competition circuit? What if "the rest" does not take care of itself?

While it is outside the scope of this document to survey each volume of *American Music Teacher*, which has been published since 1951, a survey of the most recent years of publications does show an increased interest on the student–teacher relationship, interpersonal skills, and

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[44] Elizabeth Carr, "Curing the Shy, The Overly Serious, The Overly Ambitious, and the Superficial Piano Student," in *American Music Teacher* 28, no. 5 (April/May 1979): 30.
[45] Steve Roberson, "Ten Habits of Highly Successful Piano Teachers," *American Music Teacher* 43, no. 1 (August/September 1993): 10–74.
[46] Roberson, "Ten Habits of Highly Successful Piano Teachers," 10.
[47] Roberson, "Ten Habits of Highly Successful Piano Teachers," 11.

emotional wellness. In 2017, Canadian pedagogue Merlin Thompson compares piano teachers to "inclusive and sensitive hosts who welcome and appreciate others, hosts who happily give others their full attention, hosts who open up without reservation because they're comfortable with themselves as persons. Generous hosts readily foster unconditional and personal connections with others."[48]

Other topics covered in the last five years include conflict management in the private studio,[49] engaging all personality types,[50] promoting self–efficacy beliefs,[51] emotional considerations in memorized performance,[52] and teaching amid the chaos of a pandemic.[53] The increased awareness of the importance of student–teacher connection is evident—perhaps indicating a need for updated core pedagogy texts and expanded teacher–training curricula—but the lingering questions remain: how do teachers do this in practical ways? How does the philosophy of connection impact daily teaching tasks and interactions with students?

In September 2012, the *MTNA e–Journal* published an article by Vanessa Cornett entitled, "Nurturing the Whole Musician: Mindfulness, Wellness, and the Mind–Body Connection."[54] This article examines wellness initiatives in the field of piano pedagogy up to that point. Cornett makes a case for musicians to utilize mindfulness and awareness strategies in both performing and teaching. She writes, "in fact, each moment we choose to devote ourselves to

[48] Merlin B. Thompson, "Triggering and Holding On To Students' Interest," *American Music Teacher* 66, no. 7 (August/September 2017): 27.
[49] Janelle Scott, "Resolving Conflict: Essential Customer Service Skills for Independent Studio Owners" *American Music Teacher* 70, no. 5 (April/May 2021): 16–19.
[50] Matthew Hoch and Patty Holly, "Engaging All Students: Connecting with Different Personality Types in the Studio," *American Music Teacher* 68, no. 4 (February/March 2019): 29–28.
[51] Lynn Worchester Jones, "Teach Them to Believe: 12 Strategies for Promoting Self–Efficacy Beliefs in Piano Students," *American Music Teacher* 69, no. 6 (June/July 2020): 30–35.
[52] Jessica Welsh, "For the Long Haul: Maximizing Learning Effectiveness and Memory Retention in the Piano Studio," *American Music Teacher* 69, no. 4 (February/March 2020): 22–26.
[53] Savvidou, Paola, "How to Keep Teaching: When the Sky is Falling," *American Music Teacher* 70, no. 2 (October/November 2020): 14–15.
[54] Vanessa Cornett, "Nurturing the Whole Musician: Mindfulness, Wellness, and the Mind-Body Connection," *Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) e-Journal* (September 2012): 15–28.

something, and we do so with our awareness. Just as we can cultivate the ability to perform a rapid arpeggio or read complex music notation at sight, we can train the mind to be a powerful tool for good psychological health."[55]

Closely following in February 2013, Amy Boyes examines personality, learning styles, and learning theories in their application to student–teacher connection, arguing that an "astute teacher will also consider the emotional and psychological needs of the student."[56] She describes the goal beautifully: "When a teacher understands the importance of altering a teaching style to fit the learning style of a student, the teaching of every concept and skill can be transformed into a creatively fulfilling experience for both the teacher and the student."[57]

Clara Boyett examines "The Role of Teachers in Addressing Anxiety in Adolescent Students and Beyond" in her article of the same title in the February 2019 *MTNA e–Journal*.[58] She provides practical body movement exercises for teachers to incorporate in the studio, including breathing exercises and yoga poses. Echoing Rogers's views, Boyett asserts, "the close bond of the teacher–student relationship that results from private music lessons is comparable to the relationship of a psychologist and client. This relationship can be a powerful tool in a student's battle with performance anxiety."[59]

In September 2019, Yuan Jiang wrote an article entitled "Perceptions of Student Teaching in a Piano Pedagogy Practicum."[60] Even as recently as 2019, Jiang contends, "limited research exists that compares the teachers' and students' perspective regarding the same teaching

[55] Cornett, "Nurturing the Whole Musician," 26.
[56] Amy Boyes, "Strong Connections: Building Positive Teacher–Student Relationships Based on Personality Types, Learning Styles, Methods of Communication, and Contrasting Perspectives," *Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) e–Journal* (February 2013): 23.
[57] Boyes, "Strong Connections," 29.
[58] Clara Boyett, "The Role of Teachers in Addressing Anxiety in Adolescent Students and Beyond," *Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) e–Journal* (February 2019): 2–21.
[59] Boyett, "The Role of Teachers in Addressing Anxiety in Adolescent Students and Beyond," 13.
[60] Yuan Jiang, "Perceptions of Student Teaching in a Piano Pedagogy Practicum: Impressions of Student Teachers and Their Students' Perspectives," *Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) e-Journal* (February 2019): 13–24.

and learning setting. Investigating the perceptions from the teachers' and students' respective viewpoints may provide a richer understanding of applied music teaching."[61]

Keyboard Magazine & Piano Pedagogy Forum

According to its mission statement, the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy—dedicated to living out the legacy of Frances Clark—pursues its mission through four main branches: 1) the New School for Music Study in Kingston, New Jersey 2) *Keyboard Magazine*, a bi–monthly journal and accompanying website 3) The National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, held biennially and 4) specific legacy publications.[62] It is beyond the scope of this document to survey all the ways the Frances Clark Center continues to live out the legacy of Frances Clark and impact the field of piano pedagogy. This document will primarily examine publications within *The Keyboard Magazine* (and its predecessors, *Clavier Companion* and *Keyboard Companion*) and presentations at the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (as seen under "Survey of Conference Materials" below).

An interview with Louise Goss in the November/December 2009 edition of *Clavier Companion* references the student–teacher relationship in the context of communication. When asked about the most important skills a piano teacher must possess, Goss stated, "beyond musicianship itself, I believe that the most important skill the successful teacher needs is communication. . . .In short, will our students remember us ten years from now as a wise, compassionate, affectionate, skillful teacher who made music and piano lessons appealing, alluring, lively, and fun?"[63]

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[61] Jiang, "Perceptions of Student Teaching in a Piano Pedagogy Practicum," 14–15.
[62] The Frances Clark Center, "Our Mission," accessed 3 September 2021, https://www.keyboardpedagogy.org/mission.
[63] Craig Sale, "An Interview with Louise Goss," *Clavier Companion* 1, no. 6 (November 2009): 20.

My 2018 Collegiate Writing Contest winning essay in *Clavier Companion* discusses the non–musical education students glean from student–teacher interactions, providing five tips for engaging "the whole student" and promoting "healthy emotional development in the studio."[64] In "How's the Connection," a more recent article in *Piano Magazine* (2021), I consider the implications of online teaching in creating strong relational connections with students and provide ten practical tips for teachers to facilitate these connections.[65] Similarly, Vanessa Cornett's article "Mental and Emotional Well–Being in the Time of COVID-19" considers both student and teacher wellness during the stress of a pandemic.[66] Despite the many challenges, Cornett calls for piano teachers to "show our students we are here for them, and we're doing our best" and to "embrace new modes of learning with flexibility and compassion."[67]

The online journal of the Frances Clark Center, *Piano Pedagogy Forum*, which began in 1998, also features limited research on connection. In her article entitled "The Art of Communication" Gail Berenson states, "the learning environment plays a large role in establishing an intrinsic reward system. If students feel they are respected, they are more likely to begin taking responsibility for their own learning."[68] She further asserts that teachers must always exhibit acceptance of a student, "regardless of the student's behavior or performance."[69]

John Kenneth Adams's article "Notes on Centering Students in the Learning Experiences" raises significant questions about the teacher's role, specifically in the emotional development of students. He writes, "I think keeping a delicate balance between these two very different worlds,

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[64] Jessica L. Welsh, "Between the Lines: Lasting Lessons from the Studio," *Clavier Companion* 10, no. 6 (November 2018): 30–32.
[65] Jessica Welsh, "How's the Connection: Relational Lessons Online and In the Studio," *Piano Magazine: Clavier Companion* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 19.
[66] Vanessa Cornett, "Mental and Emotional Well–Being in the Time of COVID-19," *Piano Magazine: Clavier Companion* 12 (COVID-19 Special Issue, Summer 2020*)*: 49–54.
[67] Cornett, "Mental and Emotional Well–Being in the Time of COVID-19," 51.
[68] Gail Berenson, "The Art of Communication: Nurturing Resourceful and Spirited Students," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 1, no. 3 (September 1998): 89.
[69] Berenson, "The Art of Communication: Nurturing Resourceful and Spirited Students," 89.

ideally that of the questioning student and the nurturing master, is the real secret in developing the high level of trust and respect so necessary for a true learning experience."[70] While the author makes valid points and provides excellent practical tips, this starting point of "questioning student" and "nurturing master" seems counterproductive in achieving a more student–centered approach. This raises even further questions about teacher philosophy: how does (or how much should) a teacher assert authority in the lesson? Can a student feel safe within the confines of a "questioning student" role?

In Volume 12 of *Piano Pedagogy Forum*, Laura Amoriello explores "A Pedagogy of Authenticity: Creating an Open Dialogue with Secondary Piano Students." She asks pertinent questions about the student–teacher relationship in secondary group piano study—questions which could easily be applied to the pre–college private studio. Based on her own anonymous surveys of her students, Amoriello found "a connection between authenticity and performance."[71] Furthermore, in Volume 17, John Mortensen speaks of building "narratives of progress" with our students instead of viewing experiences as merely success or failure.[72] He includes highly practical strategies for setting students up for performance success, but the emotional/psychological component is strangely absent in the practical application.

Piano Pedagogy Forum also features many articles on teaching students with special needs, as the *Forum*'s Editor–in–Chief, Scott Price, is the leading researcher on teaching piano to students with special needs. One of these articles by Hannah Creviston theorizes, "child–led teaching does not mean that we lower our standards or that we lose our status as the teacher. It recognizes that, in order to learn and not just imitate, children must be involved in the learning

[70] John Kenneth Adams, "Notes on Centering Students in the Learning Experiences," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 3, no. 1 (January 2000): 39.
[71] Laura Amoriello, "A Pedagogy of Authenticity: Creating an Open Dialogue with Secondary Piano Students," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 12, no. 1 (January 2009): 85.
[72] John Mortensen, "Remediating Performance Aversion in Piano Students: From Narratives of Failure to Narratives of Progress," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 17, no. 1 (January 2016): 13.

process."[73] The emphasis on "people–first" language in the realm of students with special needs is also applicable and relevant to the full continuum of piano students. Even the most "average" or "talented" students need to know they are valued and accepted first and foremost as individuals.

Journal of Research in Music Education

Although not specifically dedicated to piano pedagogy, the *Journal of Research in Music Education* provides an interesting perspective on piano lessons in a 2005 article. Three researchers—in Texas, Ohio, and Bangkok, Thailand—discuss the behaviors of teachers and students in the context of lesson retention rate for beginning piano students. The authors contend, "given the value of a positive pupil–teacher relationship—especially in the early stages of learning—the issue of making musical corrections within a supportive and encouraging environment seems relevant to lesson satisfaction and perhaps continuation."[74] Additionally, they raise the question of the impact of musical achievement on retention, noting, "in the case of young children, achievement might consist of a feeling of accomplishment at small tasks or, perhaps, having a complete piece ready to play for friends and family."[75] The article includes a detailed analysis of lesson observations, including duration of teacher instructions, feedback given, and the "source" of the behavior (namely, teacher or student–led). From their study on second–year piano students, the authors conclude,

> In general, teachers provided approximately one approval and one correction per minute. But while students who continued the lessons received more approvals than corrections, students who

[73] Hannah Creviston, "A Child–Led Approach to Music Education: Reaching the Child with Autism," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 20, no. 1 (January 2019): 13.
[74] Patricia Flowers, Eugenia Costa–Giomi, and Wakaha Saski, "Piano Lessons of Beginning Students Who Persist or Drop Out: Teacher Behavior, Student Behavior, and Lesson Progress," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 53, no. 3 (2005): 236.
[75] Flowers, Costa–Giomi, and Saski, "Piano Lessons of Beginning Students Who Persist or Drop Out," 236.

> discontinued them received more corrections than approvals. Teachers gave many verbal prompts to both groups of students. . . .[76]

Survey of Conference Proceedings & Programmatic Content

My own survey of the *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy*, (which was held biennially from 1979–1994) reveals that the ideas of Frances Clark and her contemporary learning theorists (Maslow, Bruner, Rogers) regarding "student first" pedagogy were just beginning to take root. A sense of excitement leapt off the page of these historic proceedings. In 1982, a report from the Committee on Learning Theory/Piano Pedagogy—the committee's name itself shows the conference's recognition of the increasingly multi–faceted nature of the field—was ahead of its time in its discussion of ideas like success, failure, and motivation. The committee reports, "while most teachers are aware of the importance of success in motivating students, it is equally important that the student be allowed to fail if he is to take responsibility for learning, which is the ultimate source of motivation. . . .There are times when a student can learn an enormous amount struggling with a piece that the teacher would never have assigned him, just because he desperately wants to play it."[77]

In the 1984 proceedings, a paper entitled "Psychological Principles Applied to Piano Pedagogy" by Marilyn Zimmerman[78] discusses humanistic learning theories and specifically applies (at least in description and theory) the work of Maxine Greene[79] to piano pedagogy. The author writes, "yet teaching is more art than science and must at all times consider the

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[76] Flowers, Costa–Giomi, and Saski, "Piano Lessons of Beginning Students Who Persist or Drop Out," 241.
[77] Rebecca Schockley, et. al, "How Can A Current Understanding of Learning Theories Improve Piano Instruction and Piano Teacher Training?" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Madison, 1982* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 39.
[78] Marilyn Pflederer Zimmerman, "Psychological Principles Applied to Piano Teaching" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Columbus, 1984* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 82–87.
[79] Maxine Greene, *Teacher as Stranger* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1973).

humanistic element. Humanistic teaching frees students to make their own decisions, to choose reflectively from the diverse musical paths which confront them. The student must assume responsibility for his own learning."[80] Quoting Maxine Greene in *Teacher as Stranger*, the author concludes, "'he (the teacher) can only be present to his students as a human being engaged in searching and choosing, as someone who is willing to take the risk of new perspectives, as someone who cares.'"[81]

Also included in the 1984 proceedings, Steve Roberson shares his perspective on applying business and leadership practices to the piano lesson. He applies the Managerial Grid Model—a measurement of a leader's emphasis on efficiency and production versus relationships with people (as developed by Robert Black and Jane Mouton in 1964)—advocating for a "free exchange of ideas between teacher and student."[82] He identifies core philosophical aspects of teaching, stating,

> One of the most significant and relevant issues with which every piano teacher must deal concerns fundamental teaching style and approach. Succinctly stated, the question that begs for an answer asks whether the path to pedagogical success is best traveled with strict discipline or with kindness. Should teachers set rigorous standards for their students, or should they seek to inspire motivation via gentle encouragement. . .teachers adopt one or the other methodologies, failing to realize the possibility of an integrated solution. The dilemma of a dualistic approach, where task–oriented behavior and relationships–oriented behavior are viewed as dichotomized polarizations that demand mutual exclusivity, confronts all teachers. Yet, the problem has not been addressed satisfactorily in piano pedagogy literature.[83]

[80] Zimmerman, "Psychological Principles Applied to Piano Teaching," 86.
[81] Zimmerman, "Psychological Principles Applied to Piano Teaching," 86.
[82] Steve Roberson, "An Application of The Managerial Grid to Piano Pedagogy" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Columbus, 1984* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 75.
[83] Roberson, "An Application of The Managerial Grid to Piano Pedagogy," 75.

Roberson continued to be a voice of balance in navigating high standards and a humanistic approach to teaching. In the 1986 Proceedings, he speaks of "A New Look at Motivation," applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to the piano lesson.[84] He writes,

> Once a student feels comfortable about [physiological] needs, he is read to tackle the *safety needs*, which are freedom from performance anxiety, teacher hostility, and parental/peer pressure. Teachers have to be vigilant to help remove any fear or sense of threat the student may experience as a result of piano study.[85]

By 1990 the contributions of important pedagogue and learning theorist, Robert Duke begin to appear in the proceedings. Joyce Cameron describes Duke's keynote presentation, stating that "Duke favors a *positive approach*—i.e., an approach which couples successful first experiences with the subject matter with positive, nurturing interactions between teacher(s) and student(s). Unfortunately, this widely accepted idea has often been perverted by teachers who, in an attempt to remain positive, simply say 'good' a lot."[86] This presentation included Duke's own "Skills for Effective Management and Teaching" which touch on the social and environmental aspect of teaching, but still lack tools for navigating the relational aspect of teaching. Other presentations and papers included in the *Proceedings* through the 1990s include subjects such as teaching environment, emotion in adult students,[87] and even an investigation of the role of humor in the private lesson.[88]

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[84] Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370.
[85] Steve Roberson, "A New Look at Motivation" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Ann Arbor, 1986* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 64.
[86] Joyce Cameron, "The Presentations by Robert Duke" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Schaumburg, 1990* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 26.
[87] Susan Bruckner, Jean Stackhouse, and Rebecca Shockley, Report on "Learning Theory and the Piano Pedagogy Curriculum" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Schuamburg, 1992* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 124–126.
[88] Connie Arrau Sturm, "Training a Dramatic Teacher: An Investigation of Humor in the Piano Lesson" in *Proceedings of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy, Schaumburg, 1994* (Kingston: The National Conference on Piano Pedagogy), 190–191.

The Music Teachers National Association National Conference has been held annually since 1876, with few exceptions.[89] A brief survey of some of MTNA's most important pedagogical advances in the 21st–century related to this topic include the following:

1. The Wellness Symposium, with topics such as "Empowering the Whole Musician—Mind and Body" [90]
2. Pedagogy Saturday with its increasingly diverse tracks, as part of the annual National Conference
3. The *MTNA e–Journal*, which often features discussions of musician wellness
4. The Nationally Certified Teacher of Music program, which includes foundational pedagogical requirements for teachers, including writing a music philosophy, describing a healthy studio environment, and responding to ethical dilemmas in everyday teaching[91]

These will be described individually in further detail in the following chapters, as they apply.

Dissertations in the Field of Piano Education

Many dissertations in the field of piano pedagogy explore intermediate repertoire, the application of learning theories to group or private teaching, and the legacies of master teachers.

[89] "MTNA Conference History," accessed 3 September 2021," https://www.mtna.org/downloads/Conference/MTNAConferencesHistory.pdf.
[90] MTNA Wellness Symposium, "Empowering the Whole Musician – Mind and Body," accessed 3 September 2021, https://www.mtna.org/MTNA/Engage/Wellness_Symposium/Wellness_Symposium.aspx?WebsiteKey=17496be1-f933-420c-81ba-c03a4662ddca.
[91] MTNA Certification, "Teacher Profile Projects," accessed 3 September 2021, https://certification.mtna.org/Certification/Get_Certified/TPP/TPP_Projects.aspx.

Legacy dissertations include those about pedagogical giants such as Clark (Kern),[92] Goss (Jain),[93] Bianchi (Holland),[94] Blickenstaff (Ernst),[95] and Pearce (Van Kekerix),[96] to name a few. This raises the question, albeit an obvious and rhetorical one: what is the field's—or perhaps more generally, humanity's—preoccupation with legacy? How have these teachers touched the lives of so many, and what is their lasting impact? Is it their unmatched skill of performing, teaching, or both? Is there something beyond these foundational skills that continues to affect the field of piano pedagogy? The point here is that whether it has been *codified*, the existence and power of transformative, lifelong connections between piano teachers and their students cannot be denied.

As early as 1962, Sterling Cameron Adams's dissertation on "The Application of Two Learning Theories to the Teaching of Piano" discusses (in part) the relational–emotional element of piano education. Adams states, "the learner, at any given moment, represents the sum total of his past learnings. Through an understanding of his past learnings and the contemporary status of them, a person should be able to ascertain how desired responses may be evoked."[97] While the inclusion of student–centered learning and emotional responses is noteworthy, the framework for this "understanding" seems oversimplified and for the purpose of evoking "desired responses," rather than merely meeting students where they are.

[92] Kern, "Frances Clark: The Teacher and Her Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1984).
[93] Judith Jain, "Louise Goss: The Professional Contributions of an Eminent American Piano Pedagogue" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2012).
[94] Samuel Stinson Holland, "Louise Wadley Bianchi's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1996).
[95] Sara Marie Ernst, "The Legacy of Master Piano Teacher Marvin Blickenstaff: His Pedagogy and Philosophy" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2012).
[96] Todd Van Kekerix, "The Contributions of Elvina Truman Pearce to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 2020).
[97] Sterling Cameron Adams, "An Exploratory Study of the Application of Two Learning Theories to the Teaching of Piano" (PhD diss, Indiana University, 1962), 53.

In her 2006 University of Toronto Ph.D. dissertation, Brandi Lee Jacques broke pedagogical ground with her "Reflections on the Interrelational Art of Piano Teaching."[98] This is the first and only dissertation of which I am aware that examines the student–teacher connection as a prominent part of artist–teachers' pedagogy. Jacques coins this interrelational awareness "metapedagogy" and examines the teaching styles of three expert piano teachers.[99] Based on these interviews and observations, she draws conclusions about the chief importance of the interpersonal element of piano teaching in facilitating learning. She writes, "I propose that interrelational expertise is an essential element of expert piano teaching. . .it is interrelational expertise that *mediates* between the knowledge of the teacher (musicianship and educatorship) and the student–teacher experience."[100] Jacques' work, while an essential contribution to the field of piano pedagogy, largely relies on narrative and personal experience; the *codification* of "interrelational expertise" and support from broadly–based empirical data remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERDISCPLINARY MATERIALS

[98] Brandi Lee Jacques, "Metapedagogy: Reflections on the Interrelational Art of Piano Teaching" (PhD diss, University of Toronto, 2006).
[99] Jacques, "Metapedagogy."
[100] Jacques, "Metapedagogy," 157.

Music Education & General Education

One of the most influential schools of thought in instrumental music education has stemmed from the work of Shinichi Suzuki. It is worth discussing his strong emphasis on joyful, nurturing, and student–centered music lessons, especially for the youngest student population in the private studio. His holistic perspective on music education includes assertions such as "nurturing is the basis for developing ability"[101] and "children are seedlings. Unless the seedlings are well cared for, beautiful flowers cannot be expected."[102] Of his own pedagogical process he writes, "this education deals not merely with [instrumental] technique, but with the advancement of human nature. I, also, develop along with the child and his parents."[103]

Benjamin Bloom's groundbreaking text, *Developing Talent in Young People*, continues to serve educators today. Bloom discusses the results of a now well–known study of concert pianists and their early experiences with teachers. He writes:

> Perhaps the major quality of these teachers was that they made the initial learning very pleasant and rewarding. Much of the introduction to the field was as playful activity, and the learning at the beginning of this stage was much like a game. These teachers gave much positive reinforcement and only rarely were they critical of the child. However, they did set standards and expected the child to make progress, although this was largely done with approval and praise.[104]

Furthermore, he acknowledges the importance of the "pianists' emotional responses to their first teachers"[105] and states that "families, teachers, peers, and others play a critical role in what an individual learns, how well he or she learns it, and how long he or she continues the

[101] Shinichi Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, trans. Mary Louise Nagata (Los Angeles: Summy–Birchard Inc., 1981), 18.
[102] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 12.
[103] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 42.
[104] Benjamin S. Bloom, *Developing Talent In Young People* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 514.
[105] Bloom, *Developing Talent In Young People*, 498.

learning process."[106] Interestingly, Bloom goes on to suggest that it is not only the positive student–teacher relationships at the onset of study that aided the development of highly skilled, professional pianists. He considers, "what has been passed over too quickly, perhaps, is that it was similar bonds with subsequent teachers that helped the pianists maintain and expand their commitment to learning the art and science of music making."[107] Bloom's research focuses on the development of professional pianists, but studies regarding the parallel responses of non–professional pianists have yet to be conducted.

Howard Gardner's research on multiple intelligences intersects with connection literature in his discussion of nurturing gifted children. Gardner's words exemplify the struggle many piano teachers face in working with gifted piano students:

> What can be done to foster or educate facets of giftedness? It has sometimes been quipped, more in sorrow than in joy, that it is easier to thwart gifted and creative youngsters than it is to encourage their flowering. And, indeed, precisely because we know so little about these precious phenomena, it is most important that parents and teachers 'do no harm.'[108]

Part of Gardner's own response to this daunting question is prioritizing an "individual–centered education,"[109] where teachers consider "the differences among individuals very seriously."[110] Furthermore, he advocates for "educators [to] attempt to learn as much as they can about the learning strengths and proclivities of each student. As far as possible, educators make use of this information to craft the optimal education for each child."[111]

David J. Elliot's book, *Music Matters* (1995) explores the intersection of music education, music psychology, and music performance, among other topics. While he does not

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[106] Bloom, *Developing Talent In Young People*, 497.
[107] Bloom, *Developing Talent In Young People*, 498.
[108] Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 50.
[109] Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences*, 56.
[110] Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences*, 56.
[111] Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences*, 56.

specifically discuss student–teacher connection, Elliot builds on a Humanist educational philosophy, acknowledges the complexities that take place within the learning process, and characterizes the "matter of cognitive emotions" as "impressionist education knowledge"—a phrase he coined.[112] He argues, "educatorship is the flexible, situated knowledge that allows one to think–in–action to students' needs"[113] and also that teaching "is a reflective practice."[114] He goes on to describe excellent teaching as the "effectiveness of a teacher's actions, interactions, and transactions with students."[115]

Susan Bruckner, graduate of Eastman School of Music and The New School for Music Study authored a book entitled *The Whole Musician: A Multi–Sensory Guide to Practice, Performance, and Pedagogy* (1998). While she is a pianist, the book considers the larger field of music education, specifically discussing research on the brain, learning styles and modalities, body movement patterns, and performance preparation. Her title reflects the philosophies of Frances Clark and the New School for Music Study, and this book is one of the most thorough in its application of mind–body connections to piano education. In the first chapter, she writes,

> Behavioral psychologists in the earlier part of the century were mainly interested in quantifiable, observable emotion. Then the trend moved towards emotions as important, but separate from the workings of the brain. Now we have arrived at a model that says to be fully engaged in the learning process a student needs to experience some degree of emotional response. Emotions, motivation and higher level cognitive processes are all members of an interconnected network called learning.[116]

[112] David J. Elliott, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 263.
[113] Elliott, *Music Matters*, 252.
[114] Elliott, *Music Matters*, 257.
[115] Elliott, *Music Matters*, 257.
[116] Susan Bruckner, *The Whole Musician: A Multi–Sensory Guide to Practice, Performance and Pedagogy*, 5th ed. (Santa Cruz: Effey Street, 1998), 21.

In the chapter on building rapport with students, Bruckner speaks of "understanding the vantage point of a student"[117] and provides general principles for ensuring good communication that are applicable both inside and outside the lesson or classroom. These applications include matching students in their breathing rates, vocal tone, body language, and speech patterns. Of teacher communication she writes,

> Every great teacher dreams of attaining the kind of influence that inspires their students to higher achievements. Every great artist dreams of being able to influence an audience through their musical expression. Every great chamber musician dreams of achieving the kind of symbiosis with their partners that can free the musical spirit and that can make an orchestra, chorus, small ensemble, or duo sound greater than the sum of its parts. At the root of each these endeavors is rapport. *Your communication is only as meaningful as the response you receive*.[118]

Bruckner's work is an important contribution to the field, as she examines learning from a student–first perspective—a holistic standpoint of students as individuals with minds, bodies, and emotions. Her use of "rapport" could be seen as synonymous with "connection," though her strategies for building rapport are decidedly specific (e.g., matching the breathing rate of a student) and yet fall short of codifying these practices for everyday use in the piano lesson. While her work includes dialogue about the emotions (and mentions this inclusion is a result of newer research), the emphasis of the book remains centered on teaching in light of the mind–body connection.

In 2001 Stephanie Annette Rico authored a dissertation entitled "Weaving Connection: An Exploration of Student–Teacher Relationships,"[119] specifically examining connections between students and teachers in the classroom setting. She identifies four main contributors to

[117] Bruckner, *The Whole Musician,* 67.
[118] Bruckner, *The Whole Musician,* 68.
[119] Stephanie Annette Rico, "Weaving Connection: An Exploration of Student–Teacher Relationships" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2000).

connection in the classroom: helping, sharing, respect, and humor. She argues that the "study of the connection phenomenon should help us create more educationally connective environments for students. Connections—or the lack of them—have major positive or negative consequences for learning in the classroom."[120] In other words, it is not enough to observe or acknowledge this phenomenon (or its lack); teachers have a responsibility to identify the *how* behind creating rich connections with students, as they are "integral to most genuine learning experiences."[121]

Joseph Anthony Aniello's 2003 dissertation explores the connection between student–teacher relationships and creativity within the classroom environment. He argues that "having a climate of psychological freedom allows for the encouragement of symbolic expression. A feeling of psychological safety enables individuals to feel accepted as having unconditional value and worth."[122] Where, more than the private piano lesson—where teachers often focus on training solo performers in a creative art—is this of greatest importance?

Flutist and teacher Bonnie Blanchard explored the subject of student–teacher connection in her book *Making Music and Enriching Lives* (2007). As a well–known and successful teacher in the Pacific Northwest, Blanchard expanded her conference material to include a detailed understanding of her own success in teaching. While other publications mention the importance of student–teacher rapport, Blanchard goes so far as to say that we must focus on relationships first:[123] "To be successful, you must base your teaching on relationships. Once you've established these mutually trusting relationships, you'll not only be a better teacher, you'll enjoy the process more, and your students will be happier and more successful."[124] Again, "success"

[120] Rico, "Weaving Connection," 9.
[121] Rico, "Weaving Connection," 9.
[122] Joseph Anthony Aniello, "Teacher and Student Relationships for Improvements in Creativity" (EdD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2003), 32.
[123] Bonnie Blanchard with Cynthia Blanchard Acree, *Making Music and Enriching Lives: A Guide for All Music Teachers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 4.
[124] Blanchard with Acree, *Making Music and Enriching Lives*, 4.

remains undefined, but Blanchard's ideas indicate that students will not only be happier in these "connected" lessons, but teachers will, too. While not a pianist, Blanchard contributes much to the connection literature and bridges the gap between music education and independent teaching.

In December 2019, the *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* published an article by Roehl Sybing entitled, "Making Connections: Student–Teacher Rapport in Higher Education Classrooms." While the focus of this article is on academic classrooms, the research applies to private lessons, as well. Sybing states that "contemporary empirical research on rapport in higher education. . .has drawn connections between strategies for building rapport and facilitation of the learning process."[125] The author further contends, "rapport with students can be built through understanding students' perspectives and preferences, which is seen as a means to connect with students in a positive way."[126] The language here invites empathy, connection, and relational understanding.

In her 2017 Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Michigan, Shannan Hibbard explores "relational understanding" within the music education classroom setting. This is a particularly helpful source, both because of its musical application and its inclusion of recent research and literature on the importance of connection. In describing a study of in–service teachers, Hibbard writes of the classroom environment, "participants described the conditions of trust, safety, and community established through positioning themselves as co–learners with other participants, which helped them understand the nature of a healthy relational classroom environment."[127] A discussion of motivation research on the instructor–student model makes historical reference to the "master–apprentice" or "expert–novice" model after which studio teaching has been

[125] Roehl Sybing, "Making Connections: Student-Teacher Rapport in Higher Education Classrooms," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 19, no. 5 (2019): 20.
[126] Sybing, "Making Connections: Student-Teacher Rapport in Higher Education Classrooms," 20.
[127] Shannan L Hibbard, "Music Teacher Presence: Toward a Relational Understanding" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2017), 37.

fashioned. Hibbard describes the research conducted by Lehman, Sloboda, and Woody[128] regarding the "mentor–friend" model, conceding that the practicality and everyday expression of this remains to be seen.[129] Hibbard argues for future research to move beyond the hypothetical and theoretical and into the practical.[130]

In an interesting interdisciplinary link, Mary Gillespie's article on nursing education explores connection as "a place of possibility."[131] She describes the effects of positive learning experiences on students in clinical practice, stating, "the nature of the connected relationship and the connected teacher role supported an increased scope of learning, including the development of clinical judgement, communication and organization abilities, and increased ability to synthesize and utilize nursing knowledge."[132] She asserts that the value of connection goes beyond merely enhancing the learning environment and becomes transformative, "a value that arises from the essence of connection itself."[133] Gillespie explores the principles of knowing, trust, respect, and mutuality, transformative qualities she believes aid students to affirm "who they are in the present, become aware of their potential, and are supported in personal and professional growth. . . ."[134] Furthermore, occupational therapist Kelly Simpson argues in her 2019 dissertation that "using an inclusive approach and establishing interpersonal connections and nurturing relationships sustained positively perceived communication" in the neonatal intensive care unit[135] and that "education for staff members on the importance of therapeutic use of self, positive and healthy coping skills, and connection with families assists in positive

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[128] Andreas C. Lehmann, John Sloboda, and Robert Woody, *Psychology for Musicians: Understanding and Acquiring the Skills* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2007.
[129] Hibbard, "Music Teacher Presence" (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2017), 50.
[130] Hibbard, "Music Teacher Presence" (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2017), 51.
[131] Mary Gillespie, "Student-Teacher Connection: A Place of Possibility," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 52, no. 2 (2005): 211-219.
[132] Gillespie, "Student-Teacher Connection: A Place of Possibility," 212.
[133] Gillespie, "Student-Teacher Connection: A Place of Possibility," 212.
[134] Gillespie, "Student-Teacher Connection: A Place of Possibility," 212–213.
[135] Kelly Simpson, "Creating Confident and Connected Families: A Program to Improve Parental Self–Efficacy in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit" (Dr.OT diss., Nova Southeastern University, 2019), 28.

communication and outcomes."[136] A replacement of the medical–specific terminology with those of piano student and teacher provides a wealth of application to the piano studio.

Music Psychology, Educational Psychology, & Learning Theories

Carl Rogers, leader of the Humanist teaching movement, paved the way for educators of all fields—including Frances Clark and her "student–first" view on pedagogy—to approach learning in a holistic way. *Freedom to Learn* was originally published in 1969 and revolutionized educational psychology. Rogers' approach incorporated his experience as a therapist and psychologist as well as an educator, leading the way for a student–centered approach. He argued that education should be less teacher–directed and instead function as an exchange of ideas. In fact, he believed so strongly in this concept that he held the view that learning hinged not upon the curriculum or programming but instead upon "certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal *relationship* between the facilitator and the learner."[137] His writing is steeped in language that emphasizes the complete individual, the "Fully Functioning Person,"[138] and the facilitation of learning. It is precisely this emphasis on facilitation of learning which has directly impacted the field of piano pedagogy, especially regarding the "discovery approach"—a method in which teachers foster an environment for student discovery to occur organically and originate from the student's curiosity. I believe a survey of materials indicates that the field of piano pedagogy owes much to Rogers's philosophies and that the field would benefit to apply more of his student–first approach.

In *The Social Psychology of Music* (1997), edited by David Hargreaves and Adrian North, Jane Davidson discusses the "interesting social phenomenon" of the student–teacher

[136] Simpson, "Creating Confident and Connected Families," 28.
[137] Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1983), 121.
[138] Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*, 283.

relationship in the private lesson[139] and Bengt Olsson even advocates for further study of this "neglected" area of research.[140] Davidson, Howe, and Sloboda describe a study regarding early experiences of children with music educators, finding that "children who successfully acquired musical skills were more likely than less successful children to have regarded their initial teacher as a friendly, chatty, relaxed, and encouraging person."[141] This, of course, raises several questions: Who defines success? What is considered success? Are we only concerned about the musical experiences of "successful" children? Is success the focus, or the experience itself? In the chapter on music education, Olsson provides no answers to these questions but further asserts that additional research "might therefore deal with social psychological concepts such as attitudes and preferences, motivations, teacher expectations, attributional styles, competencies, identities, and institutions."[142]

The landmark publication, *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance* (2002, edited by Parncutt and McPherson) speaks to the relational environment in which learning occurs, connecting its importance to both success *and* length of study. In a chapter on "Environmental Influences," Gembris and Davidson write,

> We can see here how crucial the personal aspects are in addition to the professional ones; especially at young ages, they may motivate students to play. This highlights the importance of the emotional climate that surrounds musical experiences. Children who develop outstanding instrumental achievements tend to have learned in a positive emotional atmosphere that was enjoyable and free of anxiety. The learning context of children who drop out tends to be

[139] Jane W. Davidson, "The Social in Musical Performance" in *The Social Psychology of Music*, ed. by David J. Hargreaves and Adrian C. North (New York: Oxford University Press), 214.
[140] Bengt Olsson, "The Social Psychology of Music Education" in *The Social Psychology of Music*, ed. by David J. Hargreaves and Adrian C. North (New York: Oxford University Press), 290.
[141] Jane W. Davidson, Michael J.A. Howe, and John A. Sloboda, "Environmental Factors in the Development of Musical Performance Skill Over the Life Span" in *The Social Psychology of Music*, ed. by David J. Hargreaves and Adrian C. North (New York: Oxford University Press), 202.
[142] Bengt Olsson, "The Social Psychology of Music Education" in *The Social Psychology of Music*, 290.

negative and characterized by anxiety.[143]

In her 2012 publication *Melodies of the Mind,* professional musician and practicing psychotherapist, Julie Naffee Nagel, examines the unexpected similarities between her two professions. She advocates for a more interdisciplinary approach to music study and teaching, applying her perspective as a psychotherapist. She writes, "I emphasize the significance of mental life both *inside* and *outside* the consulting room and the concert hall. Here at the twenty–first century crossroad, there is a new window of opportunity for the development of interdisciplinary intersections on both aural and oral roads."[144]

Nagel's 2017 publication, *Managing Stage Fright,* also crosses into the educational realm, as one of the primary goals for many piano educators remains the development of performance skills. Nagal's holistic approach to understanding and ultimately managing performance anxiety is evident: "Students, like all people, want to be understood, or at least feel that someone is trying to understand them. Students want to know that their feelings are taken seriously, that they are listened to, and that they will not be mocked or shamed for worrying."[145] Her work addresses specific attitudes and dispositions teachers can adopt in helping students through performance anxiety, including an "Implications for Teachers" section in each chapter. Many of these approaches should be considered best pedagogical practices for *all* students at *all times*, not just those in the throes of performance anxiety.

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[143] Heiner Gembris and Jane W. Davidson, "Environmental Influences" in *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning*, ed. by Richard Parncutt and Gary E. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23.
[144] Julie Jaffee Nagel, *Melodies of the Mind: Connections Between Psychoanalysis and Music* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 114.
[145] Julie Jaffee Nagel, *Managing Stage Fright: A Guide for Musicians and Music Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 70.

In their recent publication, *Learning Theories for Everyday Teaching* (2020), Thompson and Spenceley share global, philosophical ideas, like those espoused by Rogers,[146] practical and useful in ordinary teaching experiences. They also make connections to recent research on human connection and the need for belonging that characterizes all individuals. Even as recently as 2019, the authors argue that "the focus [in educational training] tends to be on how to *deliver* the content of a lesson" when perhaps that focus should instead shift to understanding how a lesson "is *experienced* by an individual learner. . . ."[147] One of the most practical contributions includes a list of innovative teaching strategies for creating an emotionally intelligent classroom:

1. Remove the pressure to produce the right answers.
2. Value risk–taking.
3. Make learning engaging and fun.
4. Encourage interaction and challenge.
5. Promote learners' creativity.[148]

Building on the work of Carol Dweck's *Mindset*[149] (2006) and Angela Duckworth's *Grit*[150] (2016), Thompson and Spenceley promote the idea that creating an emotionally intelligent classroom contributes to developing psychological resilience and ultimately better functioning and healthier individuals. They write:

> Psychological resilience is a term used to describe a person's capacity to withstand stress without damaging consequences such as negative mood or mental illness. It could also be described as an individual's ability to thrive despite the presence of stressors. This means that, in some cases, resilient people will not only survive stressful situations but will be able to experience them as challenges from which they can learn and develop.[151]

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[146] Carol Thompson and Lydia Spenceley, *Learning Theories for Everyday Teaching* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2020), 94.
[147] Thompson and Spenceley, *Learning Theories for Everyday Teaching*, 20.
[148] Thompson and Spenceley, *Learning Theories for Everyday Teaching*, 113.
[149] Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine, 2006).
[150] Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016).
[151] Angela Duckworth, *Grit*, 128.

Research on Human Connection & The Brain

The Healing Power of Emotion (2009, edited by Fosha, Siegel, and Solomon) offers a variety of perspectives on the intersection of neurology and clinical practice. While centered more on psychotherapy than teaching, the application to the interpersonal element of teaching is evident. In the chapter by Stephen Porges entitled "Reciprocal Influences Between Body and Brain in the Perception and Expression of Affect," Porges explores how we are shaped by our human interactions in both psychological and physiological ways. He writes,

> Emotions, affect regulation, and interpersonal social behavior are psychological processes that describe basic human experiences in response to events, environmental challenges, and people. These processes shape our sense of self, contribute to our abilities to form relationships, and determine whether we feel safe in various contexts or with specific people.[152]

Porges goes on to say that "our brain identifies features of risk or safety. Many of the features of risk and safety are not learned, but rather are hardwired into our nervous system. . . ."[153] In discussing the effects of his own Polyvagal Theory[154] upon psychotherapy, Porges further explores the "profound positive impact of social interactions and interpersonal behaviors on the neural regulation of body state and behavior."[155] The connection to performance anxiety, teaching environment, and student–teacher interaction is rich and should be further explored.[156]

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[152] Stephen W. Porges, "Reciprocal Influences Between Body and Brain in the Perception and Expression of Affect: A Polyvagal Perspective," in *The Healing Power of Emotion*, ed. Diana Fosha, Daniel J. Siegel, and Marion F. Solomon (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 27.
[153] Porges, "Reciprocal Influences," 27.
[154] Dee Wagner, "Polyvagal Theory in Practice," *Counseling Today* (June 2016), accessed 3 September 2021, https://ct.counseling.org/2016/06/polyvagal-theory-practice/#:~:text=Polyvagal%20theory%20identifies%20a%20third,system%20helps%20us%20navigate%20relationships.
[155] Porges, "Reciprocal Influences," 29.
[156] Porges, "Reciprocal Influences," 28.

In *The Whole–Brain Child,* Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne consider the importance of understanding basic workings of the brain to assist with everyday interactions with children. While primarily a parenting text, *The Whole–Brain Child* also offers great insight to educators. Siegel and Payne write that "knowing about the way the brain changes in response to our parenting can help us to nurture a stronger, more resilient child"[157] and that "a person's brain works best when the upstairs and downstairs are integrated with each other."[158] They elaborate on their "two–storied" brain analogy:

> Imagine that your brain is a house, with both a downstairs and an upstairs. The downstairs brain includes the brain stem and the limbic region, which are located in the lower parts of the brain, from the top of your neck to about the bridge of your nose. Scientists talk about these lower areas as being more primitive because they are responsible for basic functions (like breathing and blinking), for innate reactions and impulses (like fight and flight), and for strong emotions (like anger and fear). . .Your upstairs brain is completely different. It's made up of the cerebral cortex and its various parts—particularly the ones directly behind your forehead, including what's called the middle prefrontal cortex. Unlike your more basic downstairs brain, the upstairs brain is more evolved and can give you a fuller perspective on your world.[159]

The authors further discuss the "truth that scientists have come to understand over the last few decades: that the brain is a social organ, made to be in relationship" and that "what happens *between* brains has a great deal to do with what happens *within* each individual brain."[160] Siegel and Bryson conclude that "when a child is upset, logic often won't work until we have responded to the right brain's emotional needs. We call this emotional connection 'attunement,' which is how we connect deeply with another person and allow them to 'feel felt.'"[161]

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[157] Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 3.
[158] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child*, 40.
[159] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child*, 39-40.
[160] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child*, 122.
[161] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child*, 24.

Michael Lee Stallard's *Connection Culture* (2015) applies neuroscientific research to the workplace and explores the benefits of creating a culture of positive relationships. Stallard discusses the neurotransmitters and hormones in the brain to understand the physical effects of connection (or lack thereof). He argues that "connection positively affects human wellness and well–being, including mental and physical health, performance, and longevity."[162] Applications of Stallard's "Best Practices"[163] and group collaboration strategies to the piano lesson transfer easily. The use of student–teacher exchange of ideas (in contrast to a teacher–directed approach) is one way the teacher can build rapport with students and seek to keep them engaged throughout the lesson.

In *Dare to Lead* (2018), Brené Brown discusses the importance of connection between a leader and his or her team in the workplace: "Daring leaders must care for and be connected to the people they lead."[164] She considers teachers "some of our most important leaders"[165] and calls them to these same standards:

> If we want people to fully show up, to bring their whole selves including their unarmored, whole hearts—so that we can innovate, solve problems, and serve people—we have to be vigilant about creating a culture in which people feel safe, seen, heard, and respected. . . .The data made clear that care and connection are irreducible requirements for wholehearted, productive relationships between leaders and team members.[166]

Vivek Murthy, nineteenth Surgeon General of the United States, makes a case for connection from a unique, medical perspective. His 2020 publication, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection*, was revised to include the reality of a socially–distanced

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[162] Michael Lee Stallard, Todd W. Hall, Katharine P. Stallard, and Jason Pankau, *Connection Culture: The Competitive Advantage of Shared Identify, Empathy, and Understanding at Work*, 2nd ed (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2020), 80.
[163] M. Stallard, Hall, K. Stallard, and Pankau, *Connection Culture*, 154–157.
[164] Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts* (New York: Random House, 2018), 12.
[165] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 13.
[166] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 12.

"togetherness" in the time of COVID-19. He states, "the social health of workers is closely intertwined with the overall health of the workplace."[167] Applying this to the piano lesson, one could argue that the social health of the student–teacher connection is closely intertwined with the overall health of the individual in society. Murthy makes a case for what he calls "high–quality connections"—connections that are "life–affirming and energizing" and which add "meaning to our lives."[168] He characterizes these connections as those "marked by warmth, generosity, and a sense of engagement," further emphasizing the importance of making connections with those who express "genuine concern and interest in our well–being."[169] This corroborates much of the research in educational psychology and supports the best practices of holistic teaching as described above.

Attachment Theory Applied to General Education

Attachment theory examines and describes relational patterns between young children and their primary caregivers; most studies in the field discuss the mother–child relationship in a youth's infancy and early years. In the last two decades, however, educational psychologists and researchers have begun applying these principles to the field of general education. An article entitled "Recent Trends in Research on Teacher–Child Relationships" (2012) summarizes the application of attachment theory to classroom education up to that point. The authors write, "some experts suggest that a relationship with at least one caring adult, not necessarily a parent, is perhaps the single most important element in protecting young people who have multiple risks in their lives, and for many children this adult is a teacher."[170] They further assert that "children

[167] Vivek H. Murthy, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* (New York: Harper Wave, 2020), 229.
[168] Murthy, *Together*, 232–233.
[169] Murthy, *Together*, 231.
[170] Terri J. Sabol and Robert C. Pianta, "Recent Trends in Research on Teacher–Child Relationships" *Attachment & Human Development* 14, no. 3 (2012): 213.

that have closer relationships with their teachers tend to have higher academic performance, lower externalizing behaviors, and better social skills"[171] and that studies show "insecure children had lower quality relationships with teachers than securely attached children throughout early childhood."[172]

A 2013 article examines the relationship between attachment research and teacher training. Philip Riley writes, "the postulate that relationships are fundamental to the education process is unchallenged. However, given the widespread agreement it is puzzling that relationship dynamics, as an important tool of the teachers' trade, are rarely studied systematically during pre–service education."[173] His hypothesis is that "pre–service and on–going education that included learning about self and others, relational vulnerabilities, mentalization, reflective function and emotional regulation strategies would produce more resilient teachers."[174] This article is unique in its examination of the importance of teacher–training in relational research.

A 2015 article on middle–childhood education extends attachment research on early years to older children in primary education. In describing middle childhood students, Karine Verschueren states that "attachment theory highlights the importance of affective, dyadic relationships between teachers and individual children"[175] and that "ample research has shown a link between social relationships in school and children's academic engagement and achievement"[176] Verschueren acknowledges that students' perceptions of their relationships with their teachers play a key role in forging healthy attachments. She writes, "the effects of teachers on students are thought to be largely determined by students' psychological responses to their

[171] Sabol and Pianta, "Recent Trends in Research on Teacher–Child Relationships," 218.
[172] Sabol and Pianta, "Recent Trends in Research on Teacher–Child Relationships," 217.
[173] Philip Riley, "Attachment Theory, Teacher Motivation & Pastoral Care: A Challenge for Teachers and Academics" *Pastoral Care in Education* 31, no. 2 (2013): 115.
[174] Riley, "Attachment Theory, Teacher Motivation & Pastoral Care," 126.
[175] Karine Verschueren, "Middle Childhood Teacher–Child Relationships: Insights from an Attachment Perspective and Remaining Challenges," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 2015, no. 148 (2015): 87.
[176] Verschueren, "Middle Childhood Teacher–Child Relationships," 88.

teachers"[177] and that "in building high–quality teacher–child relationships, teacher sensitivity plays a key role. To convey sensitivity to the child's needs, it is important that teachers observe, describe, and label the feelings of children correctly."[178]

A 2016 study on South Korean adolescents extended Verschueren's research beyond educational performance. The authors found that "higher levels of parent and teacher attachment were associated with delayed onset of alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking."[179] Han, Kim, and Lee emphasize that attachment theory is not limited to the study of parents and children but "can be widely applied to clarify how various relationships influence human behavior."[180] Their research on adolescent risk and adaptivity certainly seems to back up this claim.

A 2017 article in *Frontier in Psychology*, "Keeping the Spirits Up," is especially applicable to the piano studio, as it examines the effect of the student–teacher attachment on students' working memory. The authors examined "the role of parents and teachers as external stress regulators by means of offering emotional support to children in a stressful situation,"[181] agreeing with other researchers that "evidence now suggests that other significant adults, such as teachers, can also function as an attachment figure."[182]

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[177] Helma M. Y. Koomen, and Francine C. Jellesma, "Can Closeness, Conflict, and Dependency be Used to Characterize Students' Perceptions of the Affective Relationship with Their Teacher? Testing a New Child Measure in Middle Childhood," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 85, no. 4 (2015): 495.
[178] Caroline Vancraeyveldt, Karine Verschueren, Sofie Wouters, Sanne Van Craeyevelt, Wim Van den Noortgate, and Hilde Colpin, "Improving Teacher–Child Relationship Quality and Teacher–Rated Behavioral Adjustment Amongst Externalizing Preschoolers: Effects of a Two–Component Intervention," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 43, no. 2 (2015): 244.
[179] Yoonsun Han, Heejoo Kim, and DongHun Lee, "Application of Social Control Theory to Examine Parent, Teacher, and Close Friend Attachment and Substance Use Initiation Among Korean Young," *School Psychology International* 37, no. 4 (2016): 340.
[180] Han, Kim, and Lee, "Application of Social Control Theory," 342.
[181] Loren Vandenbroucke, Jantine Spilt, Karine Verschueren, and Dieter Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up: The Effect of Teachers' and Parents' Emotional Support on Children's Working Memory Performance," *Frontier in Psychology* 8, (2017): 2.
[182] Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, and Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up," 3.

In their article, the authors focused on working memory because that is the executive function "most consistently linked to children's general development and learning."[183] While acknowledging natural growth and age–appropriate development of the brain, the authors assert that "despite the clear importance of biological maturation processes in working memory development, the frontal brain regions and its related cognitive processes are characterized by plasticity and are sensitive to environmental stimulation, especially during periods of rapid growth."[184] They describe a healthy bond between child and adult:

> When children form a positive bond with significant adults, characterized by high levels of warmth and low levels of conflict, they will display two types of attachment behaviors. Both may enhance working memory performance and development. First, as children feel confident and have trust in their caregivers, they will explore their environment independently and engage more in stimulating and challenging activities at home and in the classroom. The caregiver functions as a secure base. This is likely to provide children with more frequent and more challenging opportunities to practice their working memory skills. Second, during moments of distress the child will return to the caregiver and look for comfort, which will reduce the child's levels of stress.[185]

Based on current brain research and their own study on working memory, the authors conclude that "the affective quality of teacher–student interactions is an important influencing factor for working memory in children"[186] and that "teacher–student closeness appears to be positively related to children's working memory, while conflict has a negative association with working memory performance."[187] The potential applications to the piano studio are striking: can a teacher's posture in engaging a student actually help him or her learn better, faster, and more enjoyably?

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[183] Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, and Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up," 2.
[184] Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, and Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up," 2.
[185] Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, and Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up," 3.
[186] Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, and Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up," 2.
[187] Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, and Baeyens, "Keeping the Spirits Up," 2.

The most recent research on attachment in the classroom confirms previous findings and yet still reveals need for further research. Interestingly, a 2019 article in *Teaching and Teacher Education* discusses the intersection of teaching effectiveness and student–perception of closeness. In discussing a study by Morris–Rothschild and Brassard (2006), the authors note that "teachers who demonstrated an insecure attachment style were more likely to use ineffective management strategies and struggled with classroom behaviour."[188] A 2020 article in *Social Development* considers the student–teacher relationship a symbiotic partnership and states that "early teacher–child dyadic interactions also make unique contributions to children's long–term behavioral outcomes. . . .Sensitive and responsive interactions with teachers may enhance children's behavioral regulation, in part, by providing children with emotional security to explore the classroom environment."[189] The authors further affirm that

> Substantial research now indicates that the quality of dyadic teacher–child interactions plays a key role in facilitating young children's active and positive participation in classroom activities. Generally, children demonstrate higher levels of task engagement when they experience warm and sensitive interactions with their teachers that support their autonomy.[190]

The authors conclude by acknowledging the need for further research, stating that "how the quality of dyadic teacher–child interactions and security operate together to regulate children's classroom behaviors is not well understood."[191] The application of this research to the piano student–teacher relationship remains completely uncharted. Many questions remain about the effectiveness of an "attachment–posture" in the piano studio—both in learning effectiveness and healthy development of individuals.

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[188] Davy Evans, Ruth Butterworth, and G. Urquhart Law, "Understanding Associations between Perceptions of Student Behavior, Conflict Representations in the Teacher–Student Relationship and Teachers' Emotional Experiences," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 82 (2019): 57.
[189] Alamos and Williford, "Exploring Dyadic Teacher–Child Interactions," 341.
[190] Alamos and Williford, "Exploring Dyadic Teacher–Child Interactions," 340.
[191] Alamos and Williford, "Exploring Dyadic Teacher–Child Interactions," 342.

CHAPTER 4

PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO THE PIANO STUDIO, PART 1

A Precursor: A Philosophy of Pedagogy

Before examining best practices for fostering a connective environment in the piano studio, one must stop and consider one's pedagogical philosophies. The reader might wonder, "Why is philosophy included in a section entitled 'Practical Application?'" Philosopher Anna Sentsenko considers one definition of worldview as "broader than just a representation of the world because it also includes theories of values and actions. . . ." She encourages readers to ask global questions about beliefs and life, asserting that "the proposed answers to each question constitute the *worldview components*, which articulated together form a worldview that we define as a coherent collection of concepts. . . ."[192] Educationalist Lisa Delpit agrees: "we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs."[193] Furthermore, theologian Kelly Kapic asserts that asking deep questions is "not reserved for those in the academy; it is an aspect of thought and conversation for all who live and breathe" and that "the conclusions we reach—whether the result of careful reflection or negligent assumptions—guide our lives."[194]

In a recent article examining the intersection of philosophy and education, Hansen, Laverty, and Varrato consider ideas about "teaching method, curriculum, education policy, and assessment," as well as "questions of justice, ethics, and aesthetics as these walk hand in hand with issues of practice."[195] They conclude that "all these terms—from 'method' to 'ethics'—

[192] Anna Stetsenko, "Moving Beyond the Relational Worldview: Exploring the Next Steps Promised on Agency and a Commitment to Social Change," *Human Development* 59, no. 5 (2017;2016): 283-289.
[193] Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 46.
[194] Kelly M. Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 15–16.
[195] David T. Hansen, Megan Jane Laverty, and Rory Varrato, "Reimagining Research and Practice at the Crossroads of Philosophy, Teaching, and Teacher Education," *Teachers College Record (1970)* 122, no. 4 (2020).

constitute heuristics for capturing aspects of the extraordinarily complicated, many–sided nature of teaching."[196] Educational coaching expert Elena Aguilar also describes the importance of operative beliefs. "Here's the thing about beliefs: we all have them and they drive our actions. . . .Some of our beliefs are tucked into our subconscious, where they operate without our awareness. . .we run the risk of rogue beliefs taking over our internal operating system."[197]

Given this premise, it follows that all teaching practices—and all life choices, big and small, to that matter—are the natural outworking of one's answers to life's biggest questions. These answers affect how one considers everyday teaching questions such as, "Am I willing to teach pop music?" or, "Am I comfortable with late beginners who have little to no chance of a professional career?" One of the most formative pedagogical "best practices" (if not *the* most formative, in my own view) is simply this: identify your values and intentionally craft a teaching philosophy.

In *Your Creative Brain,* Shelley Carson discusses the importance of intellectual curiosity and considers it "a trait of virtually every highly creative person."[198] Furthermore, research has shown that learning is more lasting when it is both concrete and connected.[199] Given these assumptions, the practices in the following chapters will become more permanent, more applicable, and more personal, if one first knows his or her *why*.[200] Whether or not one views the following chapters as advantageous or outlandish depends entirely on his or her assumptions and values.

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[196] Hansen, Laverty, and Varrato, "Reimagining Research and Practice."
[197] Elena Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 34-35.
[198] Shelley Carson, *Your Creative Brain: Seven Steps to Maximize Imagination, Productivity, and Innovation in Your Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 239.
[199] Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, *Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
[200] Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Portfolio, 2011).

My own philosophy is included in the appendix, as an attempt to be as academically transparent as possible. One need not agree with my philosophy, but should instead identify and craft one's own, recognizing that those beliefs *will indeed* be the bedrock upon which—among other things—one crafts curricula, chooses repertoire, maintains a studio, accepts or rejects ideas, and interacts with one's students.

Below are a series of questions for personal reflection, to further explore one's deep–set beliefs about education. In the following section, I make a case from the literature for a perspective that includes "relationally connective" teaching and learning. Certainly, readers should reflect on the perspectives included here, searching for the beliefs behind the viewpoints. Consider the following questions:

1. Do I believe individuals have innate value? Why or why not?
2. Do I believe every child has the potential to make beautiful music?
3. Do I see my role as one who is "in charge" or as one who is a partner in a student's learning?
4. Do I believe beautiful music can change individuals?
5. Do I believe intelligence is a process or a fixed ability?
6. Do I believe individuals are distinct from their skills, accomplishments, and failures?
7. Am I willing to admit I have much to learn, often from my students?
8. Am I willing to consider a perspective different from my own?

Table 1: Reflection Questions for Crafting a Teaching Philosophy

A Continuation: A Pedagogy of Connection

Several themes applying directly to the field of piano education have emerged from the literature, as discussed in Chapter 3:

1. That all individuals have the potential to create beautiful music
2. The link between student–centered learning and building strong personal relationships with students
3. The effectiveness of strong attachment between adult and child, especially for young students
4. The role of the teacher as more than "information–giver"
5. That learning is improved when students experience trust and a strong relational bond with their teacher (as research is now beginning to show)

Yet there remains no distinct "pedagogy of connection." This is partly because there is no discrete data–collection and lesson analysis process. Additionally, much of what happens in a one–on–one lesson and personal relationship is *experienced* by the learner and teacher, often both having very different perspectives. We have limited descriptions of these encounters from the "expert teacher" and "outside observer" perspective, none from the private piano student's standpoint, and even fewer ways to measure these observations. Secondly, this may be due to the multi–faceted nature of pedagogical study in academia. Rigorous graduate programs in piano pedagogy include both intensive performance studies and comprehensive education studies, often including a laboratory teaching setting in which graduate student teachers learn to blend these two subjects. The question of how to incorporate this literature into (an already rigorous and multi–faceted) piano pedagogy curricula is not an easy one to answer.

Nevertheless, the literature has shown that relational connection with students is important and yet still formally lacking in comprehensive study. Why is relational connection vital to the

piano lesson? This is the question I seek to answer in this section, combining the research from the fields of piano and general education, neuroscience and human connection, and educational and general psychology. The following chapters will apply both my own philosophical and pedagogical findings and codify practical ways of pursuing healthy relationships with students in everyday interactions.

The science of connection—approached from both the fields of neuroscience and psychology—is currently widely studied. Interest has increased over the last decade, and studies are revealing that connection is essential for human development. Medical doctor and psychiatrist Curt Thompson affirms, "there is nothing more crucial to our long–term welfare" than connection.[201] Daniel Siegel concurs, writing "the brain is a social organ, and our relationships with one another are not a luxury but an essential nutrient for our survival."[202] Shame researcher Brené Brown asserts, "in the absence of authentic connection we suffer. And by *authentic* I mean the kind of connection that doesn't require hustling for acceptance. . . ."[203] Therapist Aundi Kolber agrees, "we can try to run from the wisdom and experiences of our bodies. . .disconnection is one way we make it through uncomfortable relationships and experiences. But the truth is, our memories and experiences do not simply go away. Our bodies are their keepers, for better or worse."[204]

Psychology and social sciences professor Edward Deci discusses the individual's need for both autonomy and "relatedness"[205] and describes an ideal "synthesis" that applies to the student–teacher relationship in the piano studio:

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[201] Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices that Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010). 109.
[202] Daniel Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York: Bantam, 2011), 211.
[203] Brown, *Dare to Lead,"* 25.
[204] Aundi Kolber, *Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us Out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode—and Into a Life of Connection and Joy* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020), 148.
[205] Edward L. Deci, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self–Motivation* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 88.

> [W]e view human behavior and experience in terms of the dialectic between the person and the environment—the interaction (and potential opposition) between the active organism striving for unity and autonomy and the social context that can be either nurturing of or antagonistic toward the person's organismic tendencies. Synthesis occurs when there is enough support in the social context so that the natural, proactive tendencies are able to flourish. But in the absence of adequate supports, not only will intrinsic motivation be undermined, but so too will the development of a more integrated or coherent sense of self.[206]

In her 2015 publication, *Wired to Connect*, Amy Banks discusses how the brain reflects the interactions and connections with others. She writes,

> A new field of scientific study, one I call *relational neuroscience*, has shown us that there is hardwiring throughout our brains and bodies designed to help us engage in satisfying emotional connection with others. . . .Relational neuroscience has also shown that when we are cut off from others, these neural pathways suffer. The result is a neurological cascade that can result in chronic irritability and anger, depression, addiction, and chronic physical illness.[207]

In the same chapter, Banks makes an even stronger claim that "when you and I interact, an impression of the interaction is left on my nervous system. I literally carry my contact with you around inside me, as a neuronal imprint."[208] She concludes, "For good or bad, other people affect us, and we are not as separate from one another as psychologists once thought."[209]

Thompson discusses the "nature vs. nurture" quandary, describes attachment theory—often examined in parenting and psychology research—and makes an important statement regarding the role of secondary "parental" figures, such as coaches and teachers:

> How much influence, then, do genetic factors wield in the development of attachment? Some research indicates they play very little role. Rather, the profound relational dynamism that exists between the child and parent (and teacher). . .shapes both

[206] Deci, *Why We Do What We Do,* 83.
[207] Amy Banks with Leigh Ann Hirchman, *Wired to Connect: The Surprising Link Between Brain Science and Strong, Healthy Relationships* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2015), 3.
[208] Banks with Hirchman, *Wired to Connect,* 7.
[209] Banks with Hirchman, *Wired to Connect,* 8.

> brain and behavioral changes. Our chromosomes are the material stuff from which the rest of our bodies emerge. But a great deal of what those genes do is contingent on the experiences presented to them through our vast, interconnected nervous system.[210]

In his recent book *Building Resilience in Children and Teens* (2020), pediatrician Kenneth Ginsburg begins with the premise that a "genuine sense that [children] are worth being cared for offers the bedrock of self–regard that will affect their behaviors and emotional well–being during childhood and adolescence, as well as the security from which they will launch into adulthood."[211] He first describes the parent–child relationship but then extends these principles to the professional–client relationship, as well:

> [A]s a professional. . .the power of a loving relationship applies as well. Just as a parent loves a child, but may not like her behavior, you can be loving even as you hold young people accountable to be their best selves. Liking is a subjective thing. Approving is something earned with appropriate behaviors. Loving is an active process we can always achieve. . . .Professionals can adapt the best principles of loving parenting to create trusting, transformative relationships with the young people they serve. We know this will make a difference. Research has proven, for example, that students learn better when they know their teachers genuinely care about them.[212]

Bessel Van Der Kolk, in *The Body Keeps the Score*, argues for the mainstream use of "alternative" (i.e., non–medicated) methods of emotional–regulation techniques (e.g., yoga, movement, meditation, mindfulness, etc.) in the classroom. He states, "it would make an enormous difference if teachers, army sergeants, foster parents, and mental health professionals were thoroughly schooled in emotional–regulation techniques."[213] Moreover, he states, "study

[210] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 113.
[211] Kenneth R. Ginsburg with Martha M. Jablow, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings* (Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020), 1.
[212] Ginsburg with Jablow, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, 1.
[213] Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 211.

after study shows that having a good support network constitutes the single most powerful protection against becoming traumatized. Safety and terror are incompatible."[214]

Robert Hargrove's *Masterful Coaching* also resonates. He describes the "humanness" that must remain at the heart of coaching, which can also be applied to one–on–one teaching. He describes "a masterful coach" as "a leader who by nature is a vision builder and value shaper, not just a technician who manages people to reach their goals and plans through tips and techniques. To be able to do this requires that the coach discover his or her own humanness and humanity, while being a clearing for others to do the same."[215] In *The Inner Game of Work*, Tim Gallwey defines coaching as "the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner."[216]

Educational coach, Audrey Tang, describes how findings show that "social support causes physiological changes in the brain, which helps inhibit the stress response. . . . Anecdotally too, it is most common for stories of resilience to include someone or something the protagonist can believe in, despite feeling that the rest of the world is against them."[217] She emphasizes that "children learn, through their experiences within their environment to trust, develop autonomy, take initiative, become industrious, form their identity, engage in intimacy, generate productivity, and live with integrity."[218]

Furthermore, musical research is beginning to indicate the importance of connection with teacher and peers in creating positive musical experiences, especially for young students. Neurologist Oliver Sacks, in his well–known book *Musicophilia*, describes the role of music in

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[214] Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 212.
[215] Robert Hargrove, *Masterful Coaching* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2003), 18.
[216] W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work* (New York: Random House, 2000), 177.
[217] Audrey Tang, *The Leader's Guide to Resilience: How to Use Soft Skills to Get Hard Results* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2021), 195.
[218] Tang, *The Leader's Guide to Resilience*, 6.

society, noting its ability to connect individuals. He writes, "a primary function of music is collective and communal, to bring and bind people together. . . ."[219] He further contends that "there is clearly a wide range of musical talent, but there is much to suggest there is an innate musicality in virtually everyone."[220] Uszler even hints at the importance of connecting with our students on a personal level when she states, "teaching may become, in some cases, a matter of being able to work through the learner's resistances," though she does not detail what this includes. [221] She also speaks of how students view themselves and their own learning and the "enormous impact" all this has on "what the individual perceives himself or herself capable of learning."[222] This perspective aligns with the beliefs of Frances Clark, who famously wrote, "There is music in every child. The teacher's job is to find it and nurture it."[223] In the *International Journal of Music Education,* St.George, Holbrook, and Cantwell report their findings from a 2014 study on musical engagement:

> Connecting with others was also an important part of the early engagers' musical life, for descriptions of social interactions permeated their descriptions. . . .Role models also took on particular importance as young engagers developed their sense of self and their musical taste. When relationships with teachers were positive, these also played a significant and supportive role in young people's lives.[224]

The question, then, is not, "Is connection with our students important?" but instead, "How can we facilitate this life–giving, *crucial* element of human interaction in a piano education? Historical pedagogical giants have personified these characteristics, as described by their students, researchers, and biographers. In Kern's dissertation on the legacy of Frances Clark, he

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[219] Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 266.
[220] Sacks, *Musicophilia,* 101.
[221] Uszler, Gordon, and Smith, *The Well–Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 254.
[222] Uszler, Gordon, and Smith, *The Well–Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 254.
[223] Frances Clark, quoted in Gary L. Ingle, "Dear Reader: People Teaching People," *American Music Teacher* 59, no. 2 (October/November 2009): 2.
[224] Jennifer St.George, Allyson Holbrook, and Robert Cantwell, "Affinity for Music: A Study of the Role of Emotion in Musical Instrument Learning," *International Journal of Music Education* 32, no. 3 (2014): 2.

noted that all the philosophers that inspired Clark believed, "education should be centered on the child rather than upon the teacher or subject, and that learning takes place within the child's experience according to his [or her] natural rate of development."[225] In his 2019 publication, *Transformational Piano Teaching,* Derek Polishuk asserts, "historically, the greatest teachers of the instrument were more than instructors, they were transformative figures."[226] Polishuk goes on to describe the "humanness" of students. He writes, "the life of a young person, especially a teenager, is full of turmoil, doubt, self–deprecation, foolish imitation, constant evaluation of self–worth, great interpersonal triumphs, and debilitating failures. . . .The private music teacher can play a critical stabilizing and edifying role in what can be a very chaotic youth."[227] Educator Mary Gillespie further affirms that "a 'fruitful meeting' is most likely to occur when teachers are able to see beyond the external veneer of students: to see their humanness."[228]

The language exemplified in Jacques's "Metapedagogy" dissertation represents a paradigm shift in our approach to piano education and makes a case for incorporating interrelational expertise as core pedagogy. She writes,

> I use the term "foundational" elements of interrelational expertise because without the development of these mediating factors, the other types of teacher knowledge (musicianship and educatorship) can be irrelevant (at least to the kind of teaching that I have described as expert teaching: empowering, engaging, enjoyable and effective teacher–student interactions). For example, someone can be the best performer in the world, but without a nurturing personality, they may lack the ability (or perhaps even the desire) to make lessons empowering and enriching for each student.[229]

As discussed in Chapter 2, Jacques's assertion that "it is interrelational expertise that *mediates* between the knowledge of the teacher (musicianship and educatorship) and the student–

[225] Kern, "Frances Clark: The Teacher and Her Contributions to Piano Pedagogy," 63.
[226] Polishuk, *Transformational Piano Teaching,* 2.
[227] Polishuk, *Transformational Piano Teaching,* 3.
[228] Gillespie, "Student–Teacher Connection: A Place of Possibility," 213.
[229] Jacques, "Metapedagogy," 160.

teacher experience"[230] signifies the importance of our relationships with students in the teaching–learning process. Her following description of teachers represents a connective, holistic approach to education:

> Teachers who care about each individual student and his or her overall development seem likely to reflect *on, in* and *for* action to facilitate effective, empowering and enjoyable learning. These teachers have developed what I call *interrelational expertise.* They are able to relate in a positive and constructive way to each individual student (and, in some cases, to his or her family).[231]

Relational connection with students in the private piano studio is undeniably gaining attention, discussion, and interest. The increasing scope and depth of research, both in the field of piano pedagogy and in interdisciplinary fields, indicates that this foundational element of the student–teacher relationship in facilitating learning can no longer be denied, minimized, or left only to professional psychologists or child experts. Piano educators must acknowledge the research and begin to incorporate these findings into their everyday interactions with students. The following chapters will explore practical ways to do this.

[230] Jacques, "Metapedagogy," 157.
[231] Jacques, "Metapedagogy," 157.

CHAPTER 5

PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO THE PIANO STUDIO, PART 2

Twelve Characteristics of Relationally Savvy Piano Teachers

Practical Application to the Piano Studio, Part 2 is the practical expression of both the recent research findings and the philosophies espoused in Part 1. This section explores real–world elements of sound "relational pedagogy." The characteristics here are those that have emerged from the related literature; I have identified them with the goal of helping teachers to consider their beliefs and actions about the teacher's role in the student–teacher relationship and to practically apply them to the lesson environment. The following principles will help teachers become increasingly aware of positive relational practices and make relational connection the axis of all musical interactions with their students.

In the words of Brené Brown, "we have to hold our aspirational values up against. . .our practiced values—how we actually live, feel, behave, and think."[232] Brown then asks, "Are we walking our talk? Answering this can get very uncomfortable."[233] The practical applications included in this chapter and the next are the functional outworkings of a philosophy of connection. The twelve characteristics of relationally savvy teachers, drawn from the previously discussed related literature and found in Figure 1, will be explored in detail in this chapter.

[232] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 176.
[233] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 176.

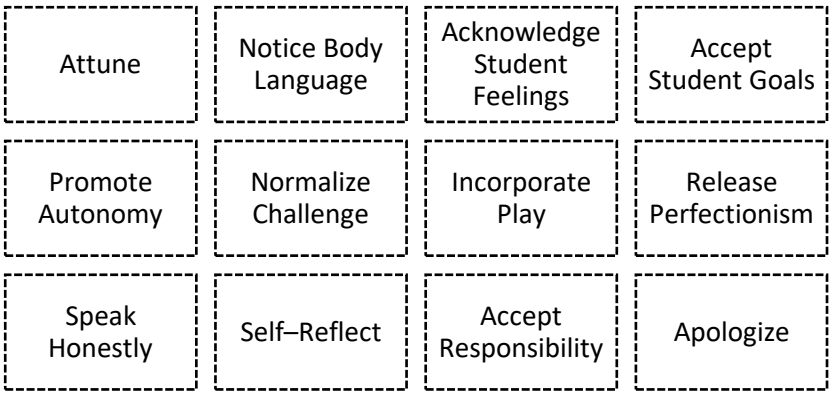

Figure 1:Twelve Characteristics of Relationally Savvy Teachers

In Figure 2, I have arranged these relational elements according to their foundational, quasi–hierarchal functions. As we will see, attunement is the basis for all subsequent characteristics; speaking honestly—while likewise built upon attunement—is also an important bedrock for the other communicative elements of relationally savvy teachers, reflected by its medium–large circle.

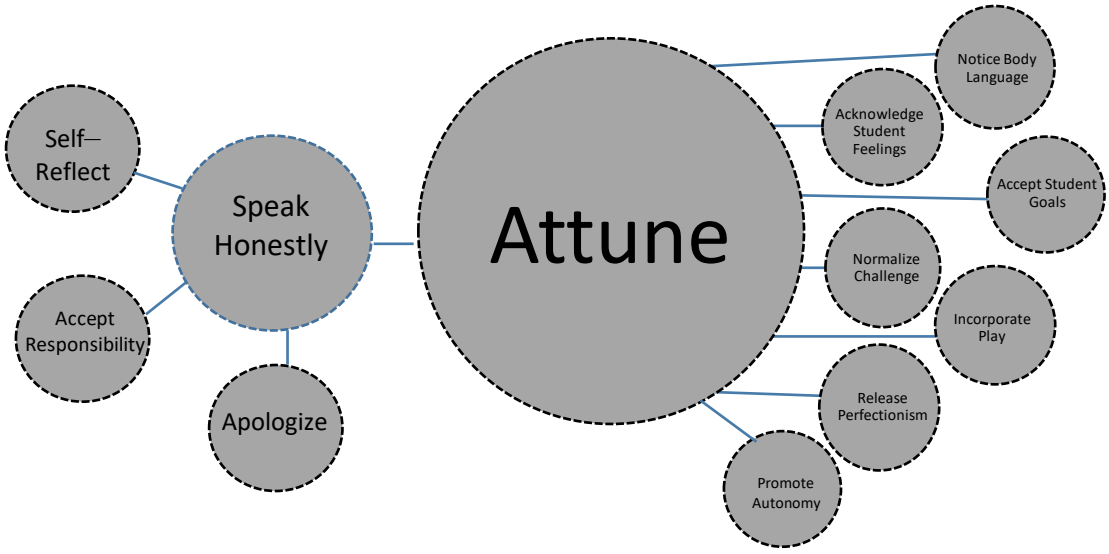

Figure 2: Twelve Characteristics of Relationally Savvy Teachers, Arranged

Attune

The most fundamental thing a teacher can do to facilitate relationships (and thus the learning process) with students is to simply attune to them. This is the basis for all interactions with students and it creates a foundation of mutual trust and respect. Often this looks like identifying emotional responses, asking intentional questions, and authentically listening to (and caring about) the response. In an article on student–teacher rapport in agricultural classrooms, Estepp and Roberts show through their studies that "professor/student rapport was the greatest contributor to the relationships with motivation and engagement."[234] Furthermore, they discuss how "teacher immediacy"—which could also be thought of as attunement—is "positively related to student motivation and engagement."[235] On a global scale, psychiatrist Bessel Van Der Kolk considers "human contact and attunement" to be the "wellspring of physiological self–regulation."[236]

Readers must also be aware that attunement should focus more on engaging in dialogue that *invites response*, rather than one that seeks a definitive—or, worse, a "primed"—answer. In *Crucial Conversations*, the authors assert, "mutual respect is the continuance condition of dialogue."[237] Inviting a response means that we value a student's opinion, express curiosity about his or her perspective, and seek to clarify our own assumptions. Questions that encourage dialogue are frequently open ended, without a singular "right" answer. While it may be obvious to avoid yes–or–no questions, even open–ended questions can unknowingly put the teacher in the driver's seat.

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[234] Christopher M. Estepp and T. Grady Roberts, "Teacher Immediacy and Professor/Student Rapport as Predictors of Motivation and Engagement," *NACTA Journal* 59, no. 2 (2015): 161.
[235] Estepp and Roberts, "Teacher Immediacy and Professor/Student Rapport," 161.
[236] Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 213.
[237] Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2012), 79.

For example, a teacher may perceive that a student is upset after an in–studio performance. Applying the questioning technique at face value, a teacher may seek to enter the student's internal state of mind by asking, "Are you upset because your performance didn't go as well as you'd hoped?" Pause, though, and reflect on the assumptions behind this question: the student did not play well; the student knows he/she did not play well; the student had a clear goal for his or her performance; and the student is "upset"—a singular mood that may or may not describe the student's emotional state. Additionally, this question does not invite an authentic, *student–led* response, as it labels a *perceived emotion* instead of allowing the student to describe his or her own feeling in that moment. It also has an undertone of expecting the student to agree with the teacher, perhaps unknowingly sending the student a message that the teacher desires a predetermined response. Consider, instead, how the following questions may invite a more authentic response:

1. What are two things you feel you did well and two things you'd like to improve?
2. How did you feel during your performance and now after?
3. What did you learn from that performance?
4. On a scale of one to ten, where you do place your comfort level during today's performance?
5. What did you most improve on this week?
6. What is the most challenging thing about this piece?
7. What would you like specific feedback on today?

Table 2: Open–Ended Questions for Promoting Teacher Attunement

Naturally, these questions must be viewed in the context of a student's disposition, tendency toward perfectionism (or not), performance deadlines, and teacher body language and vocal inflection. All these things—not just our words—affect how a student experiences or perceives a response in that moment. Daniel Kahneman writes, "attention is key. Our emotional state is largely determined by what we attend to, and we are normally focused on our current activity and immediate environment."[238]

From the first moment a teacher meets a student in an interview, he or she can lay the groundwork for strong a relational connection. Questions such as, "What do you enjoy doing for fun?" or "What do you enjoy most about school?" show that the teacher cares about the student's preferences and values his or her life outside of piano lessons, setting the stage for lessons to be an exchange of ideas.

Of course, any discussion of attunement–based dialogue would be incomplete without discussing the importance of attending to a student's response. Are we as teachers genuinely curious about a student's opinion (and even the emotional reaction) and mentally and visibly attuned to the response? Are we instead tuning out, obligatorily waiting for the student to respond, and biding our time until we can share our own thoughts? Coaching expert Elena Aguilar states that "clients sense the quality of a coach's attention, and in order for them to take risks, a coach must be fully present."[239] She extends the typical definition of listening by stating, "we also listen for what is *not* said: for what lurks below the surface—feelings, thoughts and beliefs, and for gaps in the story."[240] The connection to student–centered learning is evident here. Aguilar elaborates: "We can listen from the point of view that people don't need answers, advice, or wisdom. They can do their own thinking, discover solutions, and figure out their next

[238] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 394.
[239] Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching*, 41.
[240] Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching*, 151.

steps. It demonstrates respect when we listen to someone from this space, believing they will come to their own understanding. . . ."[241]

In *The Mindful Therapist,* Daniel Siegel describes attunement this way:

> The physical side of interpersonal attunement involves the perception of signals from others that reveal their internal world: noticing not just their words but also their nonverbal patterns of energy and information flow. These signals are the familiar primarily right–hemisphere sent and received elements of eye contact, facial expression, and tone of voice, posture, gesture, and the timing and intensity of response. The subjective side of attunement is the authentic sense of connection, of seeing someone deeply, of taking in the essence of another person in that moment. When others sense our attunement with them, they experience 'feeling felt' by us.[242]

While Siegel's words refer to the interaction between client and therapist, I feel these can be applied to the professional student–teacher relationship as well; indeed, they are reminiscent of Carl Rogers' philosophy, espoused in *Freedom to Learn*.[243] In *Unconditional Parenting,* Alfie Kohn extends the responsibility of attuning to children beyond parents and caregivers. He writes, "perspective taking is also important when you're spending time with someone else's child. It's remarkable how many adults barrel ahead with their own agenda, ignore strong nonverbal signals, and then pronounce the child who recoils from them 'shy' (or worse)."[244] In a more recent book, Dan Siegel and co–author Tina Byson discuss the benefits of attunement on child development:

> We're talking about simply being present with your children so you can help them become better integrated. As a result, they will thrive emotionally, intellectually, and socially. An integrated brain results in improved decision making, better control of body and emotions, fuller self–understanding, stronger relationship, and

[241] Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching*, 150.
[242] Daniel J. Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 34.
[243] Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*.
[244] Kohn, Alfie, *Unconditional Parenting: Moving from Rewards and Punishments to Love and Reason* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2005), 210.

> success in school. And it all begins with the experiences parents and other caregivers provide, which lay the groundwork for integration and mental health.[245]

Intentionally attuning to students' words, actions, and feelings will create an environment of give–and–take; of ongoing conversation and exchange of ideas; of student–led learning; of increased independence, and one of heightened creativity. Specific questioning techniques and strategies for engaging students will be examined in the following chapter.

Attunement is not optional. It must not be left only to classroom teachers and caregivers but should be embraced by piano educators in both the group class and the private lesson. Research shows an attuned response is the primary mediator between teacher and student, which allows them to meet in a place of mutual respect, safety, trust, creativity, and possibility. On this foundation, students are free to explore, fail, question, seek solutions, and pursue excellence without fear of their worth being rescinded or their acceptance based on a given week's progress or a single performance. On attunement hinge all the remaining qualities of connective teachers.

Notice Body Language

Playing the piano is a physical activity. It is also a mental activity, and at times a deeply emotional one. It is a whole–person activity, and often the way musicians feel during playing, performing, or practicing is expressed in our demeanor and stage presence. The same can be true for our students. Body language alone can certainly mislead us—indeed, all of us have misread an individual's body language on occasion—so teachers should view this characteristic in the context of attunement and always seek clarity. In *How Emotions are Made,* Lisa Feldman Barrett alleges, "to improve at emotional perception, we must all give up the fiction that we *know* how

[245] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child,* 10.

other people feel. . .and engage your curiosity to learn your friend's perspective. Being curious about your friend's experience is more important than being right."[246]

With this caveat, it remains true that a student's body language can often tell us a great deal about his or her experience in any given moment. This is especially true of younger students, who are often less adept at hiding feelings and acquiescing to social cues. Students inclined to "please the teacher" may also guise their feelings, intentionally or unintentionally. For example, a young student moving around on the bench and wandering with the eyes may be indicating mental fatigue, revealing it's time for an off–bench activity. Heavy breathing and sighing after working on a tough technical passage may imply it's time for a stretch break. Rigid shoulders could suggest nervousness or even intense concentration. The meaning may not immediately be evident, but it is our job as teachers to engage the whole person, and this includes seeking to understand the body of the student on the bench—whether that includes building physical ease, communicating the character visually, or—in this case—noticing non–verbal communication in a lesson.

In the time of COVID-19, when much of the world had transitioned to online instruction, it became increasingly challenging to perceive non–verbal cues. In my own article in *Piano Magazine*, I summarize the increased difficulty of reading student body language online, evidenced by an interaction with a student during a remote lesson:

> Perhaps the greatest difficulty I have found in online teaching is accurately judging my students' attitudes and feelings during the lesson. Eye contact is limited, I am restricted to a single–angle viewpoint, and vocal inflection is less distinctive. A few months ago, a student and I were working at a fast pace in small sections on a difficult passage. I pushed her to continue on at this pace until she turned to the camera with tears in her eyes and voice shaking, totally overwhelmed—even though from my perspective she was successful, simply modeling excellent, focused practicing. I was

[246] Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (New York: First Mariner, 2017), 195.

> blindsided. Had this lesson been in person, I feel I would have noticed "distress signals" much sooner and given her more time to process.[247]

This experience, along with many others, has convinced me that teachers must practice self–awareness and be mindful of their own non–verbal communication. Through remote teaching and video observation, I became more aware of my facial expressions, vocal inflection, pacing, and cadence. Just as we are cognizant of our students' body language, our students, too, notice slouched shoulders, yawns, strained eyes, smiles, sighs, and gestures.

Acknowledge Student Feelings

Building on the prior two characteristics, acknowledging student feelings can occur only when teachers have attuned to students' words and body language and invited student perspectives into the learning process. While teachers should not label student feelings (as in the prior example, "Are you disappointed?"), it can be appropriate to compassionately press in and ask students to express themselves. The authors of *Crucial Conversations* encourage curious and patient listening to get to the heart of what the speaker is communicating.

> When you want to hear from others. . .the best way to get at the truth is by making it safe for them to express the stories that are moving them to either silence or violence. This means that at the very moment when most people become furious, we need to become curious. Rather than respond in kind, we need to wonder what's behind the ruckus.[248]

Research supports the value of maintaining curiosity amidst moments of frustration and even shows that increased learning may follow these moments of awareness. In *Unconditional*

[247] Welsh, "How's the Connection: Relational Lessons Online and In the Studio," 20.
[248] Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, *Crucial Conversations*, 156.

Parenting, Kohn writes, "dictating to kids (even in a nice way) is far less productive than eliciting ideas and objections and feelings from them."[249]

Often students volunteer their perspectives, with statements like, "I don't know why it was so much better at home. I promise I can play it better!" These declarations are invitations to engage and connect. If we disregard the statement (and consequently the feeling behind it) all together— "It's okay, I know that happens!"—we miss both pedagogical and personal opportunities. First, we miss the chance to engage pedagogically. From a pedagogical perspective, what might be interfering with the student playing one's self–declared "best" in that given moment? Could it be nerves, lack of focus? Or did the student practice incorrectly, perhaps unbeknown to him or her?

Furthermore, dismissing a student's feeling or perspective (even under the well–intended pretense of wanting to make a student more comfortable) could send a message that only the teacher's view is valid and that there is no space for student feelings or expression. This again connects to Siegel's *attunement.* He argues that a lack of attunement can result in students feeling shame; this is especially probable when achievement and performance are on the line. He writes, "for some individuals, the feeling of needing connection but not receiving such attunement from another creates a state of shame. Shame often has the internal sense that something is defective about the self. . . ."[250] Siegel further asserts that attunement should move us into a place of *resonance*, "beyond understanding and into engagement."[251]

So how are teachers to engage students in this healthy way? Returning to the above example of a student playing "less than his best" at a lesson, a teacher could use this as an

[249] Kohn, *Unconditional Parenting*, 127.
[250] Daniel J. Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 47–48.
[251] Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist*, 55.

opportunity to use the questioning technique described earlier, then empathetically relate his or her own experiences. The following fictional interaction provides an alternate way of engaging with the same student:

> Student: "I don't know why it was so much better at home. I promise I can play it better!"
>
> Teacher: "It sounds like you practiced really hard this week and want to show me that progress. What strategies do you have for playing your best?"
>
> Student: "I can think about the character I want to portray, the tempo before I start, and breathing between musical phrases."
>
> Teacher: "Very specific! Why don't you try the opening again, starting only when you feel you've had time to incorporate those strategies and visualize your performance. Take all the time you need. And remember to enjoy the beautiful sounds and mood you create. This is a lovely piece, and you have much to offer!"

Notice the teacher does not simply say, "Play it again!" but instead offers an opportunity for the student to try again equipped with concrete strategies. The teacher's tone is encouraging and compassionate, but the teacher never builds up the student dishonestly. The teacher acknowledges the student's frustration without being misleading or merely offering unhelpful consolation. The section on speaking honestly will address this element of trustworthiness more specifically and in greater depth.

Accept Student Goals

The subject of short–term goal setting in the lesson will be explored in detail in the following chapter. This section takes a global view of goals regarding student expectations of lessons and long–term purpose and aims. Why is a student enrolled in piano lessons? What does he or she hope to achieve by or through piano study? What does a student want to be able to

demonstrate at the end of lessons, whether the length of study is ten months or ten years? Put another way, what is the student's (or his or her family's) *why?*[252] This is an important question to discuss before a student begins lessons, as the student, teacher, and student's family should all hold a shared perspective for lessons to be a mutually satisfying experience. It is common, however, for students' goals to shift, especially if the teacher has the privilege of investing long–term in a student's education; teachers should remain aware of the priorities and philosophies a student and their family may hold at any given time during study. This brings ethical questions to mind, which must be considered in light of each teacher's teaching philosophy:

1. Am I comfortable teaching "hobby" students, who wish only to play "for fun?"
2. Am I willing to work with students even when they have not practiced?
3. Am I willing to teach all styles of music?
4. Am I supportive of students' goals and priorities outside of piano lessons?
5. Am I interested in working with students whose families insist on high achievement?
6. What are my goals for my students, and I am willing to concede any of them in an effort to support my students?

Table 3: Teacher Goal Reflection Questions

[252] Sinek, *Start with Why.*

Ideally, each individual teacher should answer these questions before conflict arises. Personally, I feel teachers should join *with students* on their individual musical journeys, understanding that their goals may diverge, but simultaneously nurture students to reach their full potential. This paradox creates tension for teachers, but at the same time encourages teachers to view students as "equals" with different priorities, rather than merely "gifted" and "non–gifted," for example. In his chapter on teaching gifted students, Polischuk offers the caveat that teachers must "become aware of any and all biases, assumptions, and stereotypes they may have about who can and who cannot be gifted."[253]

Can teachers have goals for students? Absolutely, which is why teachers should make every effort to be transparent from the beginning about their expectations and foster communication with parents and students throughout the length of study. This idea of "touching base" will be explored in the following chapter. Gillespie's article on student–teacher connection within the medical field invites us to consider the implications of communicating our goals:

> Transparency is manifested in the actions of educators. For example, it is fostered when teachers share their vision of education with students and articulate the implications of that vision for students, themselves, and the teaching–learning process. It is enacted when teachers make evident to students the intentions underlying their actions. In its entirety, transparency becomes an overt expression of teachers' beliefs, intentions and the actions that arise from this foundation. Thus, through transparency, the teacher as person, educator and nurse becomes known to students in a meaningful way.[254]

I would argue this applies directly to piano lessons and that—in addition to being forthright about our values and goals for study—we also welcome students to share their values and goals. Only when these two systems of "belief" regarding study are irreconcilable should a student–teacher partnership desist.

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[253] Polishuk, *Transformational Piano Teaching*, 8.
[254] Gillespie, "Student–Teacher Connection: A Place of Possibility," 214.

On a practical note, I have taught motivated, talented students who have reached an advanced level of study while still in my precollege studio. These students received recognition at competitions, mastered challenging repertoire, practiced daily, and exhibited a natural ease and musical intuition. From a teacher's perspective, it is extremely tempting to encourage these students to follow in my footsteps. While I continue to believe these students can achieve a musical career if they so choose, I refrain from placing this expectation on them. At the same time, I encourage them (albeit imperfectly) to reach their own potential regardless of their ultimate career paths. The reader may rightly ask how a child is to know his or her musical goals from the onset of study (e.g., "I don't want to be a concert pianist."), and I would agree that in my experience few children accurately predict their careers at an early age. It is, therefore, exceedingly important that we have both robust pedagogy and strong musicianship as teachers, setting our students up for many possibilities and choices. We can (and should) create musical opportunity for our students, but ultimately it is their choice which path they take.

In addition to sound pedagogy and strong musicianship, we must also maintain enough self–awareness to ask deep questions about goals we maintain for our students. Kohn describes the phenomenon of parents placing their own goals and expectations on children; I believe the application to music study is apropos. He writes:

> Rather than just asking whether we're doing too much for our kids, it may be more useful (though potentially more unsettling) to ask *for whom* we're doing it. At first it may seem that parents who push are guilty only of placing their children's happiness ahead of their own, as a recent book about 'hyperparenting' put it. But look again: In some cases, what's really going on is a phenomenon known as BIRG (Basking in Reflected Glory).[255]

If we find ourselves in the tension of clashing expectations with our students or their families, it is worth asking *for whom* we have specific goals. Is it for our students, or is it for our

[255] Kohn, *Unconditional Parenting*, 77.

own acclaim and glory? No matter what profession our students choose, we have the same obligation to meet them in each moment, guide them toward their best on any given day, and foster a lifelong independence and enjoyment of music. I concur with Barry Green's conclusion in his iconic book *The Inner Game of Music*:

> I firmly believe that we all have 'a touch of Mozart' within us, that there is indeed something truly marvellous inside each one of us, a potential that is all or more than we ever imagined. . . .When it has a chance to be heard, it stops all the clocks, surprises our inner and outer critics, surpasses our expectations and brings us pure pleasure.[256]

Promote Autonomy

Accepting student goals works in tandem with promoting autonomy. Not only should we accept a student's long–term goals, but we should also encourage the student to make his or her own musical choices on a weekly basis. There are certainly moments in childhood when we are all asked to do things we dislike—like eating vegetables and brushing our teeth— and indeed those actions build healthy habits for us as adults. Practicing can feel like metaphorically eating our vegetables, at times, but the science of habit formation and motivation can help us understand how to guide our students toward healthy practice habits while also inviting their choice.

It is worth noting specific applications of motivational research to piano study. Kohn writes, "when kids feel forced to do things—or are too tightly regulated in the *way* they do things—they're likely to become less interested in what they're doing and less likely to stick with something challenging."[257] He goes on to say, "as a rule, it's interest that drives

[256] Barry Green, *The Inner Game of Music: The Classic Guide to Reaching a New Level of Musical Performance* (New York: Pan Books, 1987), 242–243.
[257] Kohn, *Unconditional Parenting*, 59–60.

excellence—and by that I mean interest in the task itself, not interest in being successful or in doing better than others."[258]

In her article on the effects of positive emotions, Barbara Fredrickson draws a parallel between experiencing positive emotions and sparking interest. She writes that interest "broadens by creating the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process.[259] An article in the *International Journal of Music Education* corroborates this with its claim that "research suggests that emotional responses to learning emerge in student appraisals of progress toward goals; these appraisals then influence decisions to participate in a given activity."[260]

According to Yarborough's and Fedesco's Vanderbilt University guide to motivating students, the three primary factors that influence student incentive are expectancy, value, and cost.[261] The emotional component of motivation clearly connects to student expectancy, as students must believe "they can actually succeed" and "feel empowered to meet the learning objectives"[262] to approach challenges. O'Neill and McPherson draw a clear parallel in their description of the teacher's role in nurturing students' expectancy beliefs. They write, "the challenge for teachers is to be receptive to each child's perspective on his or her own learning and to develop an understanding of the complex range of thoughts, feelings, and actions that either sustain or hinder the children through the many years that it takes to develop their musical skills."[263]

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[258] Kohn, *Unconditional Parenting,* 161–162.
[259] Barbara L Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden–and–Build Theory of Positive Emotions," *The American Psychologist* 56, no. 3 (2001): 220.
[260] Jennifer St.George, Allyson Holbrook, and Robert Cantwell, "Affinity for Music: A Study of the Role of Emotion in Musical Instrument Learning," *International Journal of Music Education* 32, no. 3 (2014): 266.
[261] Chelsea B. Yarborough & Heather N. Fedesco, "Motivating Students," on Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, accessed 3 September 2021, https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/.
[262] Yarborough & Fedesco, "Motivating Students."
[263] Susan A. O'Neill & Gary E. McPherson, "Motivation," in *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning,* ed., Richard Parncutt and Gary E. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43.

Clearly student interest and motivation are important for success and longevity of study. How can teachers incorporate this knowledge in everyday interactions with students? First, teachers must know their students—their likes, dislikes, favorite music, technical and musical strengths and weaknesses, and practice habits. Motivational strategies prove temporary "quick fixes" if divorced from a personal knowledge of our students. What drives one student toward consistent, disciplined practice may leave another debilitated and static. Open communication is key to nurturing relationships with our students and their families. This allows us to carefully select repertoire that interests each child and provides the appropriate amount of challenge (fitting with the goal). Providing many options, within a framework of what is developmentally appropriate, and allowing a student to make a choice not only invites his or her preference but further educates the teacher on what excites the student—both of which have been shown to increase student motivation.

Recently a student told me, "I don't like sonatinas." After some discussion, I realized she meant she did not particularly enjoy the last two Classic–era pieces we'd studied. I responded by acknowledging her preference, sharing that in my experience sonatinas can have a vast number of moods and characters, and that I'd love to help her find a sonatina she loves. The piano repertoire is nearly infinite, and there is no reason a student should labor over a piece he or she strongly and distinctly dislikes.

Alternately, it is worth noting that students often do not immediately like a piece of music that they may eventually come to love upon study. There are times, I feel, that we owe it to our students to introduce them to music "outside the Canon," and encourage them to give their full effort before deciding if they enjoy a piece of music. Many a piano teacher can relate to having labored over an assigned piece only to later find he or she connected with the music on a deep

level. Psychologist and physician Leonard Sax describes the role of parenting well–rounded children in a way that I find applicable to shaping and guiding well–rounded musicians:

> Part of your job as a parent is to *educate desire*. To teach your child to go beyond "whatever floats your boat." To enjoy, and to want to enjoy, pleasures higher and deeper than video games and social media can provide. Those pleasures may be found perhaps in conversation with wise adults; or in mediation, prayer, or reflection; or in music, dance, or the arts.[264]

The teacher's role includes *knowing each child*—and from this starting point—finding an appropriate balance of inviting choice and "educating desire" that suits each student. There is no science to this balance, but it is instead a relational art—a give–and–take. The lines of communication must remain, therefore, open as we attune to our students and invite their choice. The following chapter will further explore this idea in "Touching Base with Parents & Guardians."

Normalize Challenge

The idea of embracing difficulty will be explored from two interrelated perspectives here: first, from the perspective of teachers personally embracing musical and teaching difficulties within the profession, modeling this for students; secondly, normalizing the difficulty of practice and performance during our interactions with students. Astronomer Carl Sagan famously stated, "I think I'm able to explain things because understanding wasn't entirely easy for me. . .I had to work to understand. I can remember what I had to do to figure it out. The very brilliant ones figure it out so fast they never see the mechanics of understanding."[265] For many professional pianists, skill development may have come "easy," but at some point, all pianists will experience

[264] Leonard Sax, *The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-Ups* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 109.
[265] Carl Sagan, quoted in Joel Achenbach, "Star Power" *Smithsonian* 44, no. 11 (March 2014): 70.

the frustrations and joys of challenge. Teachers must keep this perspective of working hard to understand, as they work with students of all skill and intelligence levels.

Two landmark publications shed light on encountering difficulty in the learning process and have shaped my own viewpoint of teaching and learning. In her well–known book *Mindset*, Carol Dweck explores the idea that intelligence and skill are not merely fixed, inborn qualities, but instead variables which can be developed with hard work and the right tools.[266] In *Make it Stick*, the authors explore how difficulty—when embraced—is in fact a positive part of the learning process.[267] Shelley Carson describes the process of learning as moving knowledge or skill from explicit to implicit systems within the brain, stating, "it takes many years of practice to internalize skills in a particular domain of work to the point that they are represented in the *implicit* knowledge base."[268] Brené Brown's research on shame also connects the process of difficult learning to the emotions: "The simple and honest process of letting people know that discomfort is normal, it's going to happen, why it happens, and why it's important, reduces anxiety, fear, and shame."[269]

If teachers view difficulty in a positive light—as challenge, opportunity for growth, and the chance to develop new skills—this will drastically shape how they approach their own experiences, as well as how they aid students in navigating the myriad difficulties of learning to bring music to life at the piano. In my article in *American Music Teacher*, I examine best practices for lasting and effective learning, specifically highlighting the importance of the

[266] Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success.*
[267] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make it Stick*, 11.
[268] Shelley Carson, *Your Creative Brain: Seven Steps to Maximize Imagination, Productivity, and Innovation in Your Life* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 2010), 239.
[269] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 199.

"difficult."[270] The following statement examines the importance of problem solving in building new skills, and Figure 3 is included below for visual reference:

> [T]he act of finding a solution is actually proven to strengthen the learning and make it more enduring and reliable. . . .Short–term memories are stored in the prefrontal cortex (front of the brain) and must move to the hippocampus (middle of the brain) for long–term retention, which is called *encoding*. Interestingly, skill memories are stored in the cerebellum (back of the brain). For these memories and skills to actually *move through the brain*, problem solving is essential.[271]

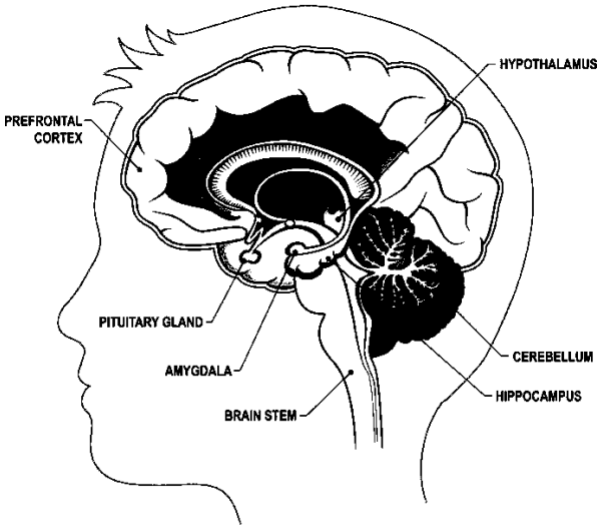

Figure 3: Diagram of the Brain

Art Markham, author of *Smart Thinking* asserts, "hard work during learning may be frustrating, but it leads to better learning in the long run than a situation in which you do not have to work hard."[272] Building on this concept, in "For the Long Haul," I provide practical strategies for teachers and students to capitalize on this "hard learning," affirming, "the connection to

[270] Jessica Welsh, "For the Long Haul: Maximizing Learning Effectiveness and Memory Retention in the Piano Studio," *American Music Teacher* 69, no. 4 (February/March 2020).
[271] Welsh, "For the Long Haul," 23.
[272] Art Markham, *Smart Thinking: Three Essential Keys to Solve Problems, Innovate, and Get Things Done* (New York: Perigee Books, 2012), 165.

music study is evident: if we can overcome problems ourselves, we will be better prepared for finding a solution the next time a problem arises. The same is true for our students. If we want them to learn independently at home, we must provide them with opportunities to discover solutions to difficult problems themselves, not just spoon–feed them explanations,"[273] thus constructing a false "independence" that cannot be achieved without teacher prompts.

At the same time, we must acknowledge (to ourselves and to our students) that practicing this way—while effective—is exhausting. We must explicitly normalize difficulty as an essential element of the learning process. Challenge should be the norm, not the exception. Some skills do come easily to students, but before long, students will encounter incredible musical and technical difficulties; it is our role as teachers to prepare students to tackle challenges with creativity, confidence, and resilience. In his book, *The Art of Learning*, world–class chess and martial arts expert Josh Waitzkin describes how failing to prepare learners for challenges can be a detriment to their long–term development: "Children who associate success with hard work tend to have a 'mastery–oriented response' to challenging situations, while children who see themselves as just plain 'smart' or 'dumb,' or 'good' or 'bad' at something, have a 'learned helplessness orientation.'" [274]

The research is clear that difficult learning is the most lasting and is an everyday part of the growth process. On the other hand, the research indicates that the state of feeling overwhelmed is an inhibitor to learning. This is where the relationship between teacher and student serves as a mediator; teachers must notice verbal and non–verbal cues that students may exhibit to communicate their mental or physical exhaustion. In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahnenman describes the toll this hard work takes on the body, in a very real and physical way:

[273] Welsh, "For the Long Haul," 24.
[274] Josh Waitzkin, *The Art of Learning: An Inner Journey to Optimal Performance* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 30.

> [M]ental energy is more than a mere metaphor. The nervous system consumes more glucose than most other parts of the body, and effortful mental activity appears to be especially expensive in the currency of glucose. When you are actively involved in a difficult cognitive reasoning or engaged in a task that requires self–control, your blood glucose level drops. The effect is analogous to a runner who draws down glucose stored in her muscles during a sprint.[275]

What does this have to do with our relational connection with students? I believe that how we approach difficulties ourselves—both instinctively and strategically—and the environment we create in which our students meet the many trials of music study has the power to change how our students view challenges and ultimately themselves. Do our students see themselves as "less talented" because they fail to grasp a concept or skill the first time? Do they view technical facility as something with which one is born? Do they view progress as linear and conversely failure as irreparable? The "Practicing Together" section of the following chapter will examine ways to implement this "hard learning" and the relational and personal repercussions—both positive and negative—that can come from how we pedagogically approach difficulties and normalize hard work in overcoming challenges. In the same section, we will also examine the juxtaposition of "hard learning" and setting students up for success.

Normalizing challenge is an effective way to create independent, confident pianists, but far beyond that it can shape individual character and build resilience in all aspects of life. In *The Leader's Guide to Resilience*, Audrey Tang writes:

> Resilient practice will enable you to appreciate the world as it is, while recognizing that it doesn't always have to remain that way. It will allow you to embrace vulnerability as it gives way to compassion and kindness, while being able to withstand failure or disappointment. Growth through learning and flexibility is always more robust than standing completely rigid, no matter how solid you are—it gives you the strength to succeed *because* of your excellence and sustain *in spite* of your shortfalls.[276]

[275] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 43.
[276] Tang, *The Leader's Guide to Resilience*, 249.

Is this not a goal of piano study? To share a "robust" education in which students thrive—not as "perfect" prodigies, but as intelligent hard workers, lovers of challenge, and ultimately resilient adults? Tang reminds readers that this type of resilience must be nurtured when she invites them to "think back to when you were a baby learning to walk. The environment was full of support and time. You weren't rushed, you weren't trying to master a skill to meet a deadline, and it didn't matter if you fell. That is the most appropriate environment for training."[277] As all pianists know, difficulties *will* arise; they will develop for us as teachers, too. How we frame challenges and approach difficulties with our students has the power to shape their view of hard work, music lessons, and personal worth—all for good or ill.

Incorporate Play

In *The Whole–Brain Child,* Siegel and Bryson describe the importance of play in promoting healthy development. They write, "we can also help produce dopamine squirts that reinforce positive and healthy desires. . . .Dopamine is the chemical of reward—and play and fun are rewarding in our lives."[278] For those of us who have made piano performance and education our careers, however, music making is often a highly serious activity. The power of great art does not escape us and the responsibility of passing this joy to the next generation is not something professionals take lightly. While based purely on speculation and anecdotal experiences, I wonder if many of us take our roles as musicians and teachers far too seriously? Research indicates that incorporating play enhances creativity, promotes engagement, and increases joy. This research has primarily focused on the early years in education, but I wonder:

[277] Tang, *The Leader's Guide to Resilience*, 90.
[278] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child,* 132.

is there something the field of piano pedagogy can learn from the fun of the early childhood classroom?

In *Wired to Create,* Kaufman and Gregoire discuss how a playful disposition serves to enhance creativity. They write, "positive emotions seemed to build a person's psychological resources, broadening attention, inspiring new thought and behaviors, and stimulating creative thinking."[279] They further assert that play and "serious" work are not in fact mutually exclusive—even for adults—as professionals may be tempted to think.

> When it comes to creative work, there is a time for seriousness and a time for play, and very often, the best work arises as a result of combining the effort and ease. This false dichotomy we've set up between play, on the one hand, and work, on the other, is not only illusory but also destructive. The science shows that hybrid forms of work and play may actually provide the most optimal context for learning and creativity, both for children and adults.[280]

Just as play and high art can operate in tandem, similarly, play and work are not mutually exclusive. The inclusion of play in the piano lesson certainly does not displace hard work but can instead *mediate* between the teacher and student in the moments of greatest focus, creativity, and solution–seeking. Suzuki states that "ability cannot be developed without a certain amount of training. . . .In order to carry out the repetition, the circumstances surrounding the repetition must be happy and without fuss."[281] He goes on to state that "children learn abilities best when they are having fun"[282] and that "if training can be combined with the fun, a child has the power to do things which surprise adults. . . ."[283] Similarly, in *The Inner Game of Music,* Green describes his observation of eight master teachers, noting that each had "a different personal style of teaching" and that "the more humour there was in a class, the better the results, and that the teachers who

[279] Scott Barry Kaufman and Carolyn Gregoire, *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*. (New York: Tarcher Perigree, 2016), 161.
[280] Kaufman and Gregoire, *Wired to Create,* 10–11.
[281] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 13–14.
[282] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 20.
[283] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 23.

'taught' and lectured least had the most success with their students. . .there was a minimum of thinking and talking, and a maximum of music making"[284]

In his well–known book *Play* (2009), Stuart Brown states that "neuroscientists, developmental biologists, psychologists, social scientists, and researchers from every point of the scientific compass now know that play is a profound biological process."[285] He argues that play binds individuals together emotionally, sustains social relationships, and enhances creativity.[286] Brown goes so far as to consider play as "nature's greatest tool for creating new neural networks and for reconciling cognitive difficulties. The abilities to make new patterns, find the unusual among the common, and spark curiosity and alert observation are all fostered by being in a state of play."[287]

A 2014 case study in *Journal of Music Technology and Education* describes learning as a process of creativity in and of itself. Hancock writes, "learning involves making things, and is associated with a playful attitude and. . .style of interaction. . . ."[288] Kounios and Beeman, authors of *The Eureka Factor* (2015), describe the results of a study on problem–solving, specifically noting the importance of keeping anxiety low for increased effectiveness:

> When in a positive mood, participants (both men and women) solved more problems, all due to an increase in the number of problems solved by insight. When anxious, they solved fewer problems overall, due to fewer insight solutions (with a slight increase in the number of analytic solutions). Anxiety, but not sadness, decreases insights.[289]

[284] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 186–187.
[285] Stuart Brown, *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2009), 4–5.
[286] Brown, *Play*, 4–6.
[287] Brown, *Play*, 127–128.
[288] Hancock, Oliver. "Play–Based, Constructionist Learning of Pure Data: A Case Study," *Journal of Music, Technology, and Education* 7, no. 1 (2014): 94.
[289] John Kounios, and Mark Beeman, *The Eureka Factor: Aha Moments, Creative Insight, and the Brain* (New York: Random House, 2015), 123.

Daniel Siegel concurs that lower anxiety allows individuals to be more fully present in the moment. He states, "a receptive state turns on the social engagement system that connects us to others. In a nutshell, receptivity is our experience of being safe and seen; reactivity is our fight–flight–freeze survival reflex."[290] So the question is, can incorporating humor and a spirit of play help lower anxiety in the private piano lesson and facilitate safety, creativity, and effective learning in the piano studio? While yet to be measured in the piano studio, the current classroom data (as well as countless anecdotes of master piano teachers across levels) suggests play has an overwhelmingly positive effect on learning.

Incorporating play is contingent upon knowing the student and exercising wisdom. In the chapter "Sacred Space: Where Possibilities Abound and Change is Engendered" in *On Becoming a Leadership Coach*, Shows and Scriber speak to the intuitive aspect of coaching, which also applies to teaching. They write, "the wise coach knows when to be silent; when to challenge; when to observe. . .and when to intervene with humor, a story, a poem, or a practice."[291] *The Body Keeps the Score* author Van Der Kolk speaks specifically to the way play fosters a connection between individuals, and the connection to improvisation is especially pertinent to piano study. He states, "when we play together, we feel physically attuned and experience a sense of connection and joy. Improvisation exercises. . .are a marvelous way to help people connect in joy and exploration."[292] Below I have included several practical ideas for incorporating play in the piano lesson, in hopes that they may spark the reader's own creativity and inspire one to creatively and playfully connect with students.

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[290] Siegel, *Mindsight*, 215.
[291] Julie K. Shows and Clarice L. Scriber, "Sacred Space: Where Possibilities Abound and Change is Engendered" in *On Becoming a Leadership Coach: A Holistic Approach to Coaching Excellence*, ed. Christin Wahl, Clarice Scriber, and Beth Bloomfield (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2008).
[292] Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 217.

Suggestions for Incorporating Play in the Piano Lesson:

1. Include movement activities
2. Embody the character of the piece (act out, sing in style, speak rhythm in character, etc.)
3. Create a narrative to accompany the music
4. Use tablet apps/games
5. Use props such as stuffed animals
6. Use tactile materials such as music staff boards, floor keyboards, silent keyboards, etc.
7. Use practice cards or “penny games” to make repetition more fun
8. Improvise together
9. Teach accompaniment patterns and lead sheet reading
10. Use of instrumentation to imagine different musical sounds for each line
11. Incorporate musical collaboration by chamber music, duets, and duos
12. Opposite character practice to engage imagination
13. Nicknames for postures and stretches, such as “karate pose” or “floppy fish” arms
14. Visual imagery to convey technical coordination
15. Host casual recitals, such as a “coffeehouse” night or a “pop showcase”
16. Incorporate familiar music in the lesson
17. Use student “playback” games to develop aural skills
18. Add student words to rhythms

19. Detect elements on the score and circle/color them before playing (e.g., intervals, phrase structure, fugal subjects, etc.)

Table 4: Suggestions for Incorporating Play in the Piano Lesson

In "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology," Barbara Fredrickson captures the way a playful approach and perspective influence individuals in such a dramatic way that creativity is enhanced, learning is increasingly enjoyable, and the mind is more flexible. Her summary serves as a fitting transition to the following section on releasing perfectionism. She writes:

> [T]he positive emotions of joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love appear to have a complementary effect: They broaden people's momentary thought–action repertoires, widening the array of the thoughts and actions that come to mind. . . .Joy, for instance, broadens by creating the urge to play, push the limits, and be creative. These urges are evident not only in social and physical behavior, but also in intellectual and artist behavior.[293]

Release Perfectionism

What constitutes a successful performance? Is it one devoid of mistakes, memory lapses, or inhibitions? For many musicians, achieving "flow" in performance is a primary goal. Chirico et al describe flow as "a sense of total absorption, concentration. . .distortion of time and intrinsic enjoyment during an activity that involves music."[294] Even for non–professional musicians, flow is linked to increased dopamine in the brain.[295] In describing one's disposition toward failure and

[293] Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology," 219.
[294] Alice Chirico, Silvia Serino, Pietro Cipresso, Andrea Gaggioli, and Giuseppe Riva, "When Music Flows. State and Trait Flow in Musical Performance, Composition and Listening: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, no. 906 (June 2015): 1.
[295] Dimitri Linden, Nattie Tops, and Arnold B. Bakker, "Go with the Flow: A Neuroscientific View on Being Fully Engaged," *The European Journal of Neuroscience* 53, no. 4 (2021): 950.

achievement while in a state of flow, Shelley Carson writes, "there is no worry of failure. Attention is focused on the here and now, and there is no room for concern."[296] Brené Brown's research has discussed the toll of perfectionism on personal growth. Brown describes how the research now indicates that "perfectionism crushes creativity—which is why one of the most effective ways to start recovering from perfectionism is to start creating."[297] If perfectionism inhibits creativity and growth, why is it so many professional musicians report a struggle with perfectionism?[298] By proactively addressing these issues in the studio, teachers have the opportunity to positively contribute to students' self–talk and inner development.

First, a caveat: perfectionism must not be confused with the drive to achieve and improve. Indeed, classical musicians *must* be detailed, highly aware of nuanced elements of performance, and concerned for correctly representing what is on the score. Healthy determination should absolutely include identifying one's shortcomings in a performance. The critical difference lies in how one views a shortcoming or failure and if one allows it to contribute in shaping one's identity. Brown explains, *"perfectionism is* not *the same thing as striving to be your best"* but is "at its core, about trying to earn approval and acceptance. . . .Healthy striving is self–focused—*How can I improve?* Perfectionism is other–focused—*What will they think?"*[299] In fact, perfectionism is linked to *unhealthy* habits, such as addiction, anxiety, and depression.[300]

Furthermore, perfectionism may even thwart one's ability to take calculated risks, try new things, and ask questions—all necessary elements of healthy growth. On the contrary,

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[296] Carson, *Your Creative Brain,* 236.
[297] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 135.
[298] Emese Hruska, "Exploring Performance Anxiety in Classically Trained Musicians in Relation to Perfectionism, Self–Concept and Interpersonal Influences" (PhD diss, University of Roehampton, United Kingdom, 2019).
[299] Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing, 2010), 56.
[300] Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection,* 56.

Brown states that current research indicates that "perfectionism hampers achievement."[301] She concludes, "the fear of failing, making mistakes, not meeting people's expectations, and being criticized keeps us outside of the arena where healthy competition and striving unfolds."[302]

If, in fact, perfectionism inhibits success and growth and failure is a normal part of the learning process, then teachers must embrace a disposition—both toward themselves and their students—of encouraging trial–and–error, embracing effort, setting realistic goals, and acting courageously. Markman and Duke consider the positive side of struggling to achieve a skill, writing, "successes generally don't teach as much as failures do, because it's usually difficult to diagnose exactly *what went right* that led to the success."[303]

In her dissertation on music performance anxiety, Lisa Marie Sinden discusses the "strong association between perfectionism and both state and trait anxiety."[304] She explains that perfectionism "consists of both personal and social components" which "can be directed towards self or others."[305] The implication here is that teachers may contribute (either positively or negatively) to the social component of perfectionism, while students may independently wrestle with their own internal dialogue. These two elements are not parallel tracks of perfectionism, but instead move in and out of one another; the overlap is indeterminable, but connection research has already indicated how individuals impact each other's neural processing by their interactions.[306]

The overlap with attachment research is also evident here. Sinden discusses the importance of positive attachment in wiring the brain for healthy versus unhealthy striving. She

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[301] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 129.
[302] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 129.
[303] Art Markman and Bob Duke, *Brain Briefs: Answers to the Most (and Least) Pressing Questions about Your Mind* (New York: Sterling, 2016), 144.
[304] Lisa Marie Sinden, "Music Performance Anxiety: Contributions of Perfectionism, Coping Style, Self–Efficacy, and Self–Esteem (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 1999), 32.
[305] Sinden, "Music Performance Anxiety," 30.
[306] Banks with Hirchman, *Wired to Connect,* 7.

writes, "growing up in an environment where love is conditional often impacts performance. In such an environment, love is equated to increasingly higher levels of performance and rejection is associated with loss of parental love."[307] What can teachers do about this? While the parent–child relationship is outside the teacher's control (and role), attachment research shows that a close relationship between teacher and student may function as an *ad hoc* parent–child relationship.[308]

In difficult parent–child relationships in which perfectionism is either explicitly or implicitly encouraged, the teacher has the responsibility to communicate studio values to both the parent and child, enforce studio standards when necessary, treat students equitably regardless of achievement, and encourage healthy striving in all interactions with students. Our beliefs about perfectionism will be passed onto our students, whether intentionally or not. We must always remind our students that instant success is not the goal, but instead encourage them to work hard, labor intelligently, learn from shortcomings, and try anew each day. In the words of Samuel Beckett: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."[309] These words hang in my studio and serve as a reminder—hopefully alongside my actions—to all who enter.

[307] Sinden, "Music Performance Anxiety," 31–32.
[308] Terri J. Sabol and Robert C. Pianta, "Recent Trends in Research on Teacher–Child Relationships," *Attachment & Human Development* 14, no. 3 (2012): 213.
[309] Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove, 1983), 7.

Speak Honestly

This element is a second foundational aspect of relationally savvy teachers. While it is also rooted in attunement (as attunement is the basis for any authentic response), speaking honestly creates its own (secondary) foundation from which authentic and connective communication with students can develop. Without a posture of honesty—both toward ourselves and toward our students—we are unable to foster connection in the moments of self–reflection, accepting responsibility, and apologizing. Piano teachers walk a line between uplifting our students and helping them identify areas in need of improvement (and consequently *how* to make necessary changes). I am not proposing lowering our professional and musical standards, handing out participation medals to superficially boost self–esteem, or proverbially "patting students on the back" when the musical product itself falls short.

Of course, this raises the age–old question of standards in the arts: who decides what is *good*? A teacher, of course, who has undergone years of musicianship training almost instantly aurally judges a musical product. This, in and of itself, is not a problem. A gifted pianist and musician can easily label a performance (or, worse, an individual) as good or bad (or a good or bad *pianist*, e.g., person), but a gifted musician and teacher finds ways to help students become their own critics, raise their own standards, and continually improve. If students are to grow in independence—ultimately refining their own performances and understanding themselves what is "good"—several things must happen during any type of student–teacher interaction surrounding musical assessment:

1. Students must feel safe to be musically and creatively vulnerable.
2. Teachers must understand and students must *experience* that critiquing a musical performance is entirely separate from judging the individual.
3. Teachers must involve the students in this process.

4. Teachers must speak honestly.

Often teachers want to encourage a student after a sub–par performance, and instantly retort, "Good job!" In that moment, the student may feel in his or her gut, that the teacher is insincere and perhaps even unconsciously tie this to the belief that either the teacher is unskilled or, "The teacher doesn't think I am any good." While "judgement exacerbates disconnection,"[310] I venture dishonest praise wreaks similar havoc. In *Lies My Music Teacher Told* Me, Gerald Eskelin writes,

> I think kids *can* be told the truth about things. They are more resilient and tough than we give them credit for. As a matter of fact, that's how we *get* tough. When we are confronted with real life, we might actually learn how to deal with it. Hot–housed little flowers simply don't last very long when exposed to a challenging environment.[311]

Brené Brown also discusses the importance of honesty in combating shame and promoting vulnerability in *Daring Greatly*. She writes, "without feedback there can be no transformative change. When we don't talk to the people we're leading about their strengths and their opportunities for growth, they begin to question their contributions and our commitment. Disengagement follows."[312] If we are to gain the respect and trust of our students and build strong connections, we must find ways to both encourage specific *efforts* (rather than merely achievement) and provide precise feedback for improvement.

In *Mindset*, Carol Dweck speaks to how having a growth mindset encourages an attitude of humility and desire for personal growth. She writes, "you can see how the belief that cherished qualities can be developed creates a passion for learning. Why waste time proving over and over how great you are, when you could be getting better? Why hide deficiencies instead of

[310] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 161.
[311] Gerald Eskelin, *Lies My Music Teacher Told Me: Music Theory for Grown Ups* (Woodland Hills, CA: Stage 3 Publishing, 1994), 168.
[312] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 197.

overcoming them?"[313] Later, in the chapter entitled "Parents, Teachers, and Coaches" Dweck advises authority and guidance figures to speak truthfully. She writes strongly that "withholding constructive criticism does not help children's confidence; it harms their future."[314] In the business world, expert Jim Collins speaks to how dishonesty breaks down the relationship between leader and employee, stating that "one of the single most de–motivating actions you can take is to hold out false hopes, soon to be swept away by events."[315] He goes on to say that "confronting the brutal facts" leads to increased resilience and an ensuing "sense of exhilaration that comes in facing head–on the hard truths. . . ."[316]

In my experience, students who are preoccupied with demonstrating their unmatched skill (therefore proving their personal worth) are often unwilling to acknowledge a need for growth. Contrastingly, other students are extremely perfectionistic and fail to objectively see what is indeed excellent. Our speaking truth to them—acknowledging what is in fact of the highest caliber and what we feel merits further exploration—normalizes the realities that we remain valued individuals regardless of our performance and that there is always room for growth. In this way, we create an opportunity for students to feel simultaneously validated and challenged.

Conversely, teachers must speak hard truth to students, at times, especially if a performance piece is not polished by curtain call. There is much that can be said about the process leading up to a performance (and the teacher's role during that time), but sometimes things are out of our control (and even the student's), and we must engage in the difficult conversation of advising a student *not* to perform or to reevaluate their goals. My own feeling is that teachers should guide students in making their own informed decisions about this, always

[313] Dweck, *Mindset,* 7.
[314] Dweck, *Mindset,* 185.
[315] Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap. . .and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 74.
[316] Collins, *Good to Great,* 81.

weighing the student's personality alongside the relative risk of a performance. If a student is excited to perform at a low–stakes performance class, I would truthfully express what I feel is still lacking in the preparation process but potentially even encourage the student to perform, using the performance class itself as an assessment and learning experience for the student. Contrastingly, if I feel a student is at risk of feeling *crushed* by a comment sheet from an adjudicator at a higher–stakes event, I may express to my student that I feel the comments would not be helpful at this stage. These decisions are never easy; therefore, I feel a teacher must adopt this value of honesty and bring the student into the conversation.

What kind of honest feedback is valuable? Can both positive feedback and constructive criticism play a role in these honest exchanges? Dweck ponders important follow–up questions:

> Does this mean we can't praise our children [or students] enthusiastically when they do something great? Should we try to restrain our admiration for their successes? Not at all. It just means that we should keep away from a certain *kind* of praise—praise that judges their intelligence or talent. Or praise that implies that we're proud of them for their intelligence or talent rather than for the work they put in.[317]

She goes on to discuss the importance of honest feedback in helping students grow. Rather than shield them from "harsh truth," we must help students see how to grow *from* their mistakes. In describing an interaction between a father and daughter, Dweck writes, "her father not only told her the truth, but also taught her how to learn from failures and do what it takes to succeed in the future. He sympathized deeply with her disappointment, but he did not give her a phony boost that would only lead to further disappointment."[318]

[317] Dweck, *Mindset*, 180.
[318] Dweck, *Mindset*, 185.

If honest communication is to be effective in both connecting individuals and facilitating positive change, it must be both honest and empathetic. These two types of communication are not necessarily mutually exclusive. David Elkin writes, "when we are polite to children, we show in the most simple and direct way possible that we value them as people and care about their feelings. . . .Politeness is one of the most simple and effective ways of easing stress in children and of helping them to become thoughtful and sensitive people themselves."[319] Teachers must navigate this carefully, both nurturing students and pushing them to reach higher than they themselves thought possible. In this way, the teacher not only meets the student where he or she is and acknowledges the effort but also empowers the student to continually strive for excellence. This underscores the teacher's discrete belief in the student's ability to ultimately succeed. Markham and Duke discuss how dishonest or inauthentic communication can backfire in the pursuit of growth:

> Instead of ignoring mistakes to boost self–esteem, it's much healthier and more productive to honestly assess what you do, accept the mistakes you make, and maintain a sense of self–compassion. Everyone makes mistakes. Only after you identify mistakes and acknowledge the role you played in them are learning and improvement possible.[320]

In summary, the words of Edwin Gordon continue to ring true and encapsulate the essence of honest communication within the piano studio. He writes, "a good teacher does not harass [students] about their deficiencies nor make them vain about their competencies. By being honest, direct, and relaxed with students, a teacher can act with integrity in providing the most appropriate instruction without sacrificing the students' well–being." [321] As we seek to create authentic personal and musical connections with our students, we must speak honestly,

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[319] David Elkin, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon,* 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 210.
[320] Markman and Duke, *Brain Briefs,* 147.
[321] Edwin E. Gordon, *Learning Sequences in Music: Skill, Content, and Patterns* (Chicago: G.I.A Publications, 1980), 233.

constructively, and vulnerably, always holding the student's best interest and innate value at the forefront—and always believing they can create music of the highest caliber.

Self–Reflect

Professional pianists are adept in the art of reflecting on performances, practice sessions, and collaborative experiences. Each one of these reflections is essential to the learning process. Music pedagogues often hold these same goals of self–reflection in high esteem for their students—as indeed it promotes student independence and musical growth. But what of the art of teacher self–reflection beyond performance and into the realm of pedagogical and personal interactions with students?

In her pedagogical dissertation, Brandi Lee Jacques writes

> Thus, to develop expertise in piano pedagogy, piano teachers require extensive, context–specific experience as musicians and extensive, context–specific experience as educators. In addition, expert teachers must also possess the cognitive ability to correctly structure and learn from their experiences. In other words, experts must reflect upon their teaching and self–regulate their learning.[322]

To foster positive relationships in the piano studio, teacher self–reflection should include both pedagogical and interpersonal aspects. First, pedagogical self–reflection includes taking time to evaluate our process, conceptual organization, pacing, and success of guiding students toward measurable accomplishment. The use of video recording and self–reflection questions can serve as helpful ways of identifying areas for improvement. Secondly, the use of regular "check–ins" with parents and students, or even private feedback through surveys can provide teachers with data to reflect upon. Additionally, a team of colleagues or a personal "board of directors" can provide valuable feedback from an outside perspective. When

[322] Jacques, "Metapedagogy," 25.

considering *what* to reflect upon, Duke offers a helpful framework. He writes, "since the point of instruction is to bring about change, meaningful observation and analysis of teaching must be organized around the changes that teachers intend to bring about what students do, say, think, and feel."[323]

Duke's connection to what students *think and feel* introduces the second, interpersonal type of self–reflection. Suzuki calls reflection a "wonderful human ability"[324] and elaborates on the value it contributes to personal growth and development. He considers it "the ability to understand faults and pursue the correct way"[325] and states that "people who contemplate their faults tend to be more human, and those who contemplate deeply are very great."[326]

What specific questions might teachers ask in interpersonal self–reflection? While it is impossible to truly know what another thinks and feels at a given moment, the questions in Table 5 may make teachers more aware of reflecting on the interpersonal and pedagogical elements of piano teaching.

1. How did I acknowledge my student's effort?
2. How often did I make eye contact with my student?
3. How many times did I smile at my student?
4. Did I ask the student personal questions before beginning the lesson? How many? List them here:

[323] Robert A. Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching: Essays on the Core Principles of Effective Instruction* (Austin: Learning and Behavior Resources, 2005), 159.
[324] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 30–31.
[325] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 30–31.
[326] Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, 30–31.

5. How many times did I give the student the lead and allow him/her to direct the pacing, activity, or approach?
6. What were my first words following a student's performance?
7. What specifics compliments did I give a student? How did I phrase these comments?
8. What specific areas of improvement did I identify? How did I phrase these comments?

Table 5: Interpersonal Self–Reflection Questions

(Additional self–reflection questions will be discussed in the following chapter, and a full teacher self–evaluation form is included in the appendix.)

Often these self–reflections reveal surprises about our own teaching styles—much like discovering unwanted habits or unexpected confidence when we watch our own performance recordings. Self–reflection remains an integral—if not non–negotiable—part of successful learning and teaching. Kaufman and Gregoire write, "when we're engaged in solitary reflection, the brain is able to process information, crystallize memories, make connections, reestablish a sense of identity and construct a sense of self, make meaning from our experiences, and even guide moral judgement."[327] In a description of her own teaching in the *International Journal of Music Education*, Leah Coutts unpacks the discrepancy between her teaching goals and the

[327] Kaufman and Gregoire, *Wired to Create*, 52.

reality discovered by self–reflection. She speaks poignantly to student–centered learning and the need to continually be aware of our pedagogical and personal interactions with students:

> I thought an effective lesson pattern was one in which the teacher modelled how to simplify challenges and had the student repeat sub–skills for mastery before putting them into the context of the piece. I built on prior knowledge through scaffolding and moved away from the score for technical development and conceptual understanding. I also treated lessons like a shared practice session, breaking down challenges into manageable chunks, isolating passages where required, verbalizing rhythms and coordination with students and encouraging slow and deliberate playing. Unpacking common interactions in lessons was revealing, however, as I came to realize that my teaching was actually teacher–led, rather than student–centered, focusing on what I believed was best for the student at any given moment instead of their perceived needs. . .Maintaining control of students' learning was the exact opposite of my intentions. Nevertheless, this type of interaction was common. . . .[328]

One additional caveat for self–reflection is this: teachers must always ask the hard question, "Is this about my students or about my own ego?" The pressures to constantly achieve that can engulf piano study are unending and relentless, and yet teachers still have a choice to either ascribe to these imposed demands and outside (or sometimes internal) forces or to alternately press into their crafted philosophies and the perceived needs of each student. Edward Deci, author of *Why We Do What We Do,* makes a relevant point regarding understanding our own motivations:

> People are entitled to their tensions and conflicts, but if they recognize these frustrations for what they are, if they own up to them, their children (or students or employees) will be less likely to pay the cost for the frustrations. By being aware of their own internal pressures and conflicts, people in one–up positions will be more able to facilitate effective accommodations between the individuals they teach, care for, or supervise, and the society that beckons.[329]

[328] Leah Coutts, "Empowering Students to Take Ownership of Their Learning: Lessons from One Piano Teacher's Experience with Transformative Pedagogy," *International Journal of Music Education* 37, no. 3 (2019): 497.
[329] Deci, *Why We Do What We Do*, 108.

Teachers must walk this line carefully, constantly assessing both their process and personal interactions so that students do not "pay the cost" for either their misguided teaching or inadvertence to meet student needs.

Accept Responsibility

Accepting pedagogical responsibility means that teachers—and not students—are ultimately responsible for a student's progress and disposition toward music study (as espoused by Frances Clark). Yes, a primary role of piano teachers is to teach students to move toward musical independence, which includes students taking responsibility for their own actions. It is also true that students are the ones who must put into practice the skills and knowledge gleaned from lessons. And yet, the teacher holds the power to motivate and inspire, to help students see their unique potential, and to push them beyond what they dreamed. As the mentor and guide, the one who often constructs the experience (though an increasingly student–centered lesson is the goal), and the adult in the relationship, the teacher must always first look inward when skills—both interpersonal and musical—do not develop as intended or hoped.

Does this mean that students are "off the hook," so to speak, and can shift blame for their own lack of effort or discipline? No, but rather it is the teacher who is responsible for *perceiving a student's needs and making changes to best help the student succeed.* Too many teachers label students as "disinterested," "lazy," or "untalented," when in fact students may simply need a different teaching approach, a change of perspective, or more diverse repertoire. Teachers must be honest first with themselves and then their students, reflecting, "Am I doing everything I possibly can to reach this student? How can I better help you in this process?" Accepting responsibility for students means that teachers recognize the musical and personal investments in

the relationship and make every effort to help students thrive. This coincides with a mindset of continual growth and exemplifies both strength and humility—understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses and seeking to improve in all aspects of teaching. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins describes this duality of leaders as "modest and willful, humble and fearless."[330] Parenting expert Leonard Sax discusses the importance of humility in developing healthy young adults in *The Collapse of Parenting*. He writes:

> Humility has become the most un–American of virtues. And partly for that reason, humility today is the most essential virtue for any kid growing up in the United States. Because so many American parents have confused virtue with success. The only real sin, for many middle–income and affluent parents today, is failure.[331]

Are we as piano teachers so results–oriented that we lose sight of the truly daunting responsibility of providing a holistic piano education? How much easier is it to shift blame to our students instead of accepting that perhaps a teaching process was not as organized or clear as initially thought? Every teacher—like every student—is different but must remain alert and continually ask oneself these tough questions, always remembering that the ultimate responsibility for learning lies with the teacher. Tables 6–8 below provide reflection questions on concept introduction, goal setting, and performance preparation and may assist teachers in understanding their responsibilities and roles in these elements of piano study.

[330] Collins, *Good to Great,* 23.
[331] Sax, *The Collapse of Parenting,* 160.

Concept Introduction:
1. Did I prepare the introduction of a new concept first by sound and feel, and then by sight?
2. Did I allow enough time for the student to internalize the sound and feel?
3. Did I provide the student opportunity to demonstrate his or her ability to transfer the skill in a new setting?
4. Did I provide the student opportunity to engage in trial and error?
5. Did I allow the student time to self–reflect?
6. Did I give the student the chance to ask questions, seek clarification, and/or describe his or her learning?

Table 6: Concept Introduction Reflection Questions

Goal Setting:
1. Did I give the student the freedom to set his or her own goals?
2. Did I ask the student about his or her feelings of mastery?
3. Did the student's body language and/or words convey a sense of confidence in the short and long–term goals?
4. Did the student describe what needs to change?
5. Did the student provide evidence of appropriate practice strategies?

Table 7: Goal Setting Reflection Questions

Performance Preparation:
1. Did I allow the student enough time to prepare for this performance?
2. Did I consider the level of stakes of this performance (e.g., recital, audition, casual performance, etc.)?
3. Did the student have multiple opportunities to practice performing in a similar setting?
4. Did the student and I discuss the difference between "practicing" and "practicing for performance?"
5. Did I discuss a pre–performance routine with my student?
6. Did I provide the student with strategies for recovering from memory slips and preventive practice tools for increasing memorization confidence?

Table 8: Performance Preparation Reflection Questions

A final caveat is this: while teachers should be first to accept responsibility, of course they cannot practice *for* students and should not make excuses for them. Promoting individuality and independence should neither be divorced from compassionate, humble teaching. Nor should teacher humility be confused with low standards or self–pity. The ability to grow includes admitting faults, recognizing the need for growth, and making these changes—this applies both musically (in performance and in pedagogical processes) and interpersonally. This posture of accepting responsibility makes way for the next characteristic of relationally savvy teachers: individuals who recognize the need to apologize.

Apologize

Apologizing is not an act that humans are inclined to perform. Offering an apology means admitting a shortcoming, accepting the consequences, seeking to repair the offense, and doing what you can to restore the relationship. In *Mea Culpa*, Nicholas Tavuchis writes, "there is a tendency to resist apologizing that must be overcome. . .failure to apologize may endanger valued social ties; some forms of transgression can be remedied only by apology; apology has the power to rehabilitate the individual and restore social harmony."[332]

Especially in competitive piano environments, there is intense pressure on teachers to prepare students to the highest level, evidenced by "right" teaching and flawless performances. Humility often seems missing in action, as piano teachers are not afforded the luxury of making mistakes, less they risk losing students or their reputation among colleagues. And yet, could there also be a risk of compromising relationships if teachers do *not* adopt a willingness to apologize as a necessary part of restoring social harmony and building connection in the lesson?

Current research suggests that "the willingness to apologize reflects healthy psychological functioning including concern for the plight of others."[333] In a study of the traits of those inclined to apologize, researchers found a correlation between empathy, compassion, and the proclivity to apologize. "We also predicted that the emotional disposition of compassion would be greater among those inclined to apologize, as compassion allows one to take the perspective of others and feel empathy for their plight." [334] Their predictions indeed proved true.

Piano teachers, like all humans, make mistakes. They are fallible. We, like our students, are in the process of growing and developing as musicians and teachers. We make mistakes in

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[332] Nicholas Tauvchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 9.
[333] Andrew J. Howell, Raelyne L. Dopko, Jessica B. Turowski, and Karen Buro, "The Disposition to Apologize," *Personality and Individual Differences* 51, no. 4 (2011): 509.
[334] Howell, Dopko, Turowski, and Buro, "The Disposition to Apologize," 512.

repertoire selection, in time management, in prioritizing our students' needs, to name a few. Rather than turning inward as a form of self–protection, teachers should communicate with students and own any perceived faults. Brené Brown states, "while some leaders consider apologizing to be a sign of weakness, we teach it as a skill and frame the willingness to apologize and make amends as brave leadership."[335]

Attachment research also contributes to the research on apology. In parent–child relationships (which, we have already seen, overlaps with the teacher–student relationship), a parent's willingness to apologize not only repairs the relationship but also sets the tone for a child to follow suit. In an article in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, the authors state, "the ongoing process of rupture and repair within the parent–child relationship has ramifications on the child's neurobiological development, ability to self–regulate emotion, and brain maturation, all of which occur in an interpersonal context and include social aspects of development."[336] Jeremy Ruckstaetter and colleagues also show the association between the disposition to apologize and healthy relationships. They write, "a positive orientation toward apologies is correlated with a secure attachment style in adults, and apologies help to repair relationships and foster empathy and closeness within relationships."[337]

Finally, the willingness to apologize provides an example for our students—one of not only musical flexibility and continual growth but also one of healthy relationships, humility, ethical integrity, and strong character. Ruckstaetter et al consider that "attuned responses, such as apologies. . .help to integrate the child's increasing cognitive understanding of self and other in social relationships, as well as the child's ability to self–regulate affective

[335] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 58.
[336] Jeremy Ruckstaetter, James Sells, Mark D. Newmeyer, and Daniel Zink, "Parental Apologies, Empathy, Shame, Guilt, and Attachment: A Path Analysis" in *Journal of Counseling and Development* 95, no. 4 (2017): 390.
[337] Ruckstaetter, Sells, Newmeyer, and Zink, "Parental Apologies, Empathy, Shame, Guilt, and Attachment," 390.

responses and to develop the capacity to appropriately convey empathy and offer apologies when needed."[338] In *The Leader's Guide to Resilience*, Tang describes the importance of those in leadership positions demonstrating a willingness to apologize. She considers a sincere apology one that accomplishes the following:

1. Acknowledges that you made a mistake/take responsibility for your actions
2. Describes what happened and outlines how you will fix the situation
3. Pledges to be better next time
4. Shows awareness of how you hurt or inconvenienced the recipient[339]

If teachers are to keep the student's needs at the forefront, they must remain vigilant in monitoring for any relational conflict. Lessons, after all, are a partnership between teacher, student, and parents. Without a willingness to apologize, teachers run the risk of losing students—both in a real and metaphorical sense. Tavuchis describes an apology as an act that "seeks, through speech, to recover a precious, but tenuous, sense of continuity and to reclaim the unquestioned right to participate as a member."[340] This acknowledgement of error will build rapport in the student–teacher relationship, and it evidences both teacher attunement and honesty in the most core, vulnerable sense of the words.

CHAPTER 6

PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO THE PIANO STUDIO, PART 3:

[338] Ruckstaetter, Sells, Newmeyer, and Zink, "Parental Apologies, Empathy, Shame, Guilt, and Attachment," 397.
[339] Audrey Tang, *The Leader's Guide to Resilience: How to Use Soft Skills to Get Hard Results* (London: Pearson Education, 2021), 199.
[340] Tauvchis, *Mea* Culpa, 24.

EIGHT OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH STUDENTS IN THE PRIVATE PIANO LESSON

The following chapter builds on both the philosophical framework in Chapter 4 and the description of relationally savvy teachers in Chapter 5 and now turns its attention to the everyday interactions with students. Given the emphasis on the importance of a student–led approach, an examination of best practices for building connection with students would be incomplete without considering *the students themselves* in this discussion. I have found the following eight opportunities to connect in the private piano lesson, shown in Figure 4, occur in most lessons and can be used as a framework for intentionally building positive relationships with students.

These will be explored in detail in this chapter, applying research from related fields and including anecdotes from my own teaching experience. These moments in the lesson are not linear but, instead, are quasi–cyclical. While all lessons begin with "the greeting," some elements may occur repeatedly over several sections of a piece, or within multiple pieces, within a singular lesson. The relationship between these cyclical moments within the lesson will be discussed later in this chapter.

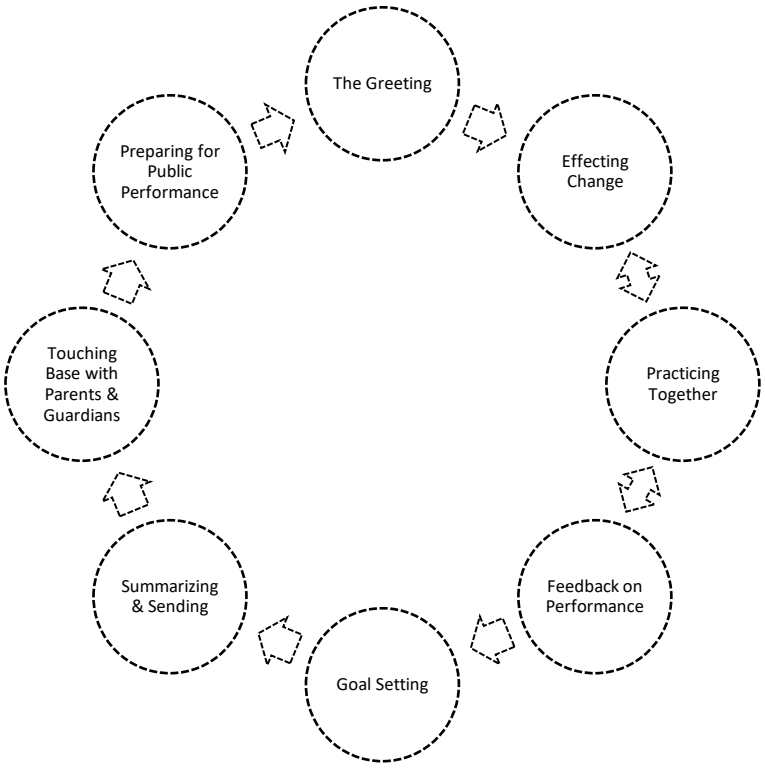

Figure 4: Eight Opportunities to Connect in the Private Piano Lesson

The Greeting

One of the most personal elements of piano teaching is the ongoing exchange between two individuals. While group teaching has many benefits, only the one–on–one interaction between student and teacher affords the opportunity to truly *know* the other individual—often for a decade or more. In my recent article in *Piano Magazine*, I discuss the opportunity to connect with students during the seemingly mundane moment of arrival:

> When a student enters my home studio, takes off shoes, and washes hands, I have a natural opening to check in on his or her week, and relate on a casual level, individual to individual. . . .Take a few moments at the start of a lesson and inquire about your student's week. Make a point to remember important events like birthdays and holidays or school exams and major deadlines. This shows students we care about them and not just about their musical abilities or progress; it sets the tone for a

> lesson that functions as an exchange of ideas, rather than a teacher–dictated information firehose.[341]

My own experience with students corroborates the work of learning theorists such as Maslow and Rogers: only when I have truly attuned to my student, learned about his or her week, and acknowledged the excitement, frustration, anticipation, nervousness (to name a few emotions) the past week has brought—or the following will usher—can I begin to meet my student in a place primed for growth.

In her article in the *International Journal of Music Education,* Leah Coutts observes that "starting with students' reflections and insights from the week was much more conducive to actively engaging them in lessons than starting with playing."[342] This attitude is congruent with a student–directed approach and promotes student self–awareness, self–reflection, and independence.

The following list in Table 9 provides practical ways teachers can set the tone for a dynamic, attuned, and student–led lesson experience:

1. Make eye contact with a student when he/she arrives, even if you are in the middle of wrapping up another lesson.
2. Smile when you greet the student.
3. Acknowledge the student's arrival and remind him or her of the protocols. For example, "It's great to see you! Go ahead and wash up, and I'll be with you in just a moment."
4. Ask an open–ended question about his or her week; avoid questions that will evoke the typical, "Good!" response. For example: "I am so happy to see you today. What is going on in your world this week?"

[341] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 19.
[342] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 19.

5. Acknowledge the emotion or feeling expressed in the student's response. For example: "Wow, it sounds like you have had a busy week. I'm so sorry you have been swamped with homework. Let's spend time today enjoying your music and helping you feel caught up on your piano assignments."
6. Ask the student to share highs and lows of his or her practice week. For example, "Which piece are you most excited to share today?" or "What is going well in your practicing this week?" Or even, "What's been the biggest challenge in your piano study this week?" These responses tell the teacher a great deal about the student's practice priorities, progress, and struggles throughout the week of independent study and provide a starting point for the teacher to prioritize the many tasks within the lesson.
7. Let the student choose the starting piece. Typically, a student has a favorite work or section of a piece he or she is most excited to play. Providing the student with this choice promotes autonomy and sets the tone for a student–led experience.
8. Consider "warm–ups" from the repertoire before jumping into a performance. Is there a particular section a student would like to review? It may have been a while since the student touched a piano; providing a moment to review small sections before merely performing may help the student relax and focus.

Table 9: Strategies for Creating an "Attuned" Lesson Experience

In her same article, "Empowering Students to Take Ownership of Their Learning," Leah Coutts describes the importance of prompting the student's response throughout the lesson, but especially at the start. She concludes that it creates an environment in which students feel psychologically safe and readied for learning. She shares her own experience:

> I endeavored to elicit more reflections from other students from the beginning of their lessons. . . .The main difference this approach creates is that explicit intention comes from the student before playing commences. It also allows students to express difficulties and ask questions prior to playing, removing the perception that they need to "perform and be judged."[343]

Prioritizing the greeting in this manner prepares the way for all other moments within the lesson to follow a similar student–focused trajectory that encourages heighted engagement and creativity.

Effecting Change

Effecting change in the lesson includes the moments of student self–assessment, teacher feedback, teacher demonstration, student trial–and–error, and student self–reflection. This moment, perhaps more than any other, may be the most challenging for teachers, as we must find the appropriate balance of student–led and teacher–led learning. In the above order, I have placed student self–assessment and self–reflections as the bookends to this process. Yes, there are moments when teachers choose to "tell" instead of leading students to discovery. All teachers must make decisions regarding time management, student personality, and impending performance deadlines, among others. Beginning and ending this process with the student's perspective, however, serves as a reminder to both teacher and student that independent student success is the goal.

[343]Coutts, "Empowering Students to Take Ownership of Their Learning," 499.

How teachers choose to communicate their own assessments and opinions should be centered around effecting positive changes and *seeing the student demonstrate those changes*. Robert Duke writes in *Intelligent Music Teaching,* "meaningful observation and analysis of teaching must be organized around the changes that teachers intend to bring about in what students do, say, think, and feel."[344] Duke goes on to say that

> [U]nlike some academic instruction, in which students respond either infrequently or not at all during the course of an instructional presentation, music performance instruction provides numerous assessment opportunities throughout each lesson and rehearsal. Every student performance trial is an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which students have accomplished what the teacher set out for the students to do.[345]

As we teach students to reflect on their own changes, teachers must also reflect on what worked and what didn't—how effective was my instruction? How could I better communicate? How can a student *experience* the desired sound or gesture? The following list of strategies in Table 10 includes ways to effect change in the lesson, and ultimately prepare students to do this independent of teacher prompts. This list can be applied to entire performances in a lesson and/or sections of a piece, regardless of level.

1. Be cautious of first words: both teacher's and student's. *Good* and *bad* are not helpful words in describing a musical performance or execution of a skill. Instead, both teacher and student should focus on the sound, the character, and the communication between performer and audience. Consider the following questions, which encourage deeper reflection from both teacher and student and serve as starting places for effecting change:

[344] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching,* 159.
[345] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching,* 160.

a. How would you describe your performance experience?
b. What is the emotion or mood you most wanted to convey?
c. What went well in your performance?
d. What would you like to change next time you perform?
e. Where do you feel least confident in the piece?
f. What is the most challenging part of performing this piece?
g. What is your favorite part of the work?
2. Find the good. As a student performs, teachers ought to listen not only for what needs to change, but also for what is excellent. Teachers are frequently in such a hurry to make corrections or improvements that we forget to acknowledge a student's effort and progress. Often students are waiting for this encouragement, even if much needs to change. Starting with the good teaches students to do the same and encourages them to keep making progress.
3. Consider a top three. Once discussing what is going well in the performance, solicit the student's own reflection of a "top three" things to improve. As students perform in a lesson or master class setting, I make a mental list of my top three priorities—things which we can immediately improve upon in the lesson. My students all know I listen for a "top three," and many of them like to make a game out of guessing the priorities. This encourages increased

student–awareness and independence. Furthermore, it helps students remember their goals for the week. (More on this in “Feedback on Performance.”)
4. Analyze. At times, methods of effecting change should include analysis. Is a student aware of the form of a work? What about the harmonic progressions and major cadence points? Can the student identify the key areas or name the arpeggios in a section of passagework? Not only does this connect music theory to performance, but it also helps students simplify the score, often expediting the process of bringing sound off the page and to life. Questions like, “What is easy about this long scalar passage?” or “How can we simplify this left–hand accompaniment pattern?” may help students see the core elements of the music instead of becoming bogged down with all the details, especially in the early stages of learning a work.
5. Encourage imagination. As teachers assist students in making changes to sound (a fleeting aural experience), we must encourage students to tap into their creativity. This could include a list of adjectives of the characters, a “colorscape” description of the changing moods, a narrative to fit the musical story, themed words to match the rhythm, or an instrumentation of the work, just to name a few. The possibilities here are endless, and often students take the lead in crafting the most original and memorable ideas. Research

tells us that students are more likely to remember these changes if they are personalized.[346]
6. Model. Description alone may fall short and often students need to hear, see, and feel a sound. Modeling can and should include exaggerated to increasingly nuanced examples, demonstrating artistry and providing opportunities for students to recreate the sound. This is how teachers build precision, reflection, and aural comparison, setting the stage for the student to exercise independent trial–and–error.
7. Build practice toolboxes. An important part of effecting change (with the goal of independence) includes building a student's practice toolbox. What strategies does the student have for practicing sixteenth–note Alberti bass patterns? Or scalar passagework? Or memorization? Each performance (and by this, I mean performance trial in the lesson) reveals whether the student's practice was effective and affords the opportunity to build the student's practice toolbox wherever lacking.

[346] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make it Stick*, 11.

8. Ask students to show you how they practiced. This step of effecting change serves as the bridge to the next moment in the lesson, which is "practicing together." Questions like, "What strategies do you have for practicing voicing?" or "How do you practice keeping your left–hand accompaniment pattern quiet? —always followed by a student–demonstration—reveal a student's practical understanding and/or gaps in learning.

Table 10: Strategies for Effecting Change in the Piano Lesson

In conclusion, the words of Robert Duke serve as a reminder to structure the lesson with numerous opportunities for students to demonstrate desired changes:

> The positive change in the student's *performance* doesn't come about only because of what the teacher *tells* the student but because of *what the teacher has the student do*. Thus, the skill in affecting change resides in the intelligent arrangement of instructions, feedback, and, most importantly, student–performance trials that facilitate the accomplishment of proximal goals.[347]

Practicing Together

At times, piano teachers are guilty of overemphasizing the "effecting change" moment of the lesson and leaving little to no time for the next moment in the lesson: practicing together. This moment in the lesson is based on a broader view of practicing, which differs from the isolated conservatory practice room hours. For the purpose of this document, "practicing together" includes a set of skills in which the student troubleshoots problems, sequences steps,

[347] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching*, 161.

and finds solutions *in the presence of the teacher*—with the primary goal of the student achieving independent practicing in a variety of contexts.

Duke defines this element of practicing together as "transfer," and it is the moment in the lesson in which the student demonstrates full independence of practicing in both similar and new contexts. This evidence of transfer must take place within the studio and within the teacher's presence. How can a teacher be confident that a student will practice correctly and efficiently unless the student has demonstrated correct and efficient practice within the lesson? Teachers may provide similar or (contextually) easy sections for student demonstration of mastery. But does this prove the student is equipped to follow the practice steps in a harmonically complex development section, or within a section of increased textural complexity? Unless the student has demonstrated this in the lesson, the teacher should have no expectation that the student will succeed independently. This is not a lowering of standards—of course, there are appropriate moments to "test" or assess a student's independence—but instead a building of confidence and a specific understanding between teacher and student of *what* needs to change and *how* the student will accomplish this change. Duke writes,

> The more varied the contexts in which students practice the knowledge and skills they are working to master, the greater the likelihood that they will effectively apply these skills in unfamiliar contexts in the future (i.e., the greater the likelihood that they will transfer). *Contextual variety* develops flexibility, because thinking and doing in different contexts provides learners with experiences that illustrate the application of knowledge and skills beyond the limited circumstances in which they are first taught.[348]

As previously mentioned, teachers must walk this line of both assisting and empowering students as well as providing them opportunities to "fail" and consequently discover solutions during the lesson. The challenge for teachers is to not simply "spoon feed" students answers but

[348] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching*, 165.

instead guide them to uncover new methods, approaches, and techniques for musical and technical mastery. In *The Inner Game of Music,* Green aptly describes this dilemma; he writes that a "sense of dependency arises in the relationship between teacher and student, and when these students need to 'go it alone' in the world outside, they may find it a difficult adjustment to make."[349] He contends that students have not been afforded the opportunity "to solve problems for themselves, to listen to the music they are making, or to draw on other sources for additional understanding."[350]

The authors of *Wired to Create* agree that dependency on the teacher is ultimately a disservice to the student, asserting that direct instruction alone may impede student independence and creativity. Kaufman and Gregoire affirm that when a student is "shown what to do rather than given the opportunity to figure it out for herself" it can "hamper the child's ability to solve problems independently and creatively and may instead encourage mindless imitation."[351] They concede that a method of direct instruction may expedite the learning process, but at the cost of "important real–world skills of asking questions and sleuthing out new information about a problem."[352]

Does this mean that teachers cannot have clear and immediate goals for students? Of course not. A master teacher not only has highly specific goals for student success but also creates an environment in which the student discovers both answers and processes. In this way, the student demonstrates independence, creativity, and the ability to replicate the process in new contexts alone in a practice room. This step is essentially the same as "effecting change," only in this part of the process students demonstrate increased independence, transfer of skills, and

[349] Green, *The Inner Game of Music,* 158.
[350] Green, *The Inner Game of Music,* 158.
[351] Kaufman and Gregoire, *Wired to Create,* 174.
[352] Kaufman and Gregoire, *Wired to Create,* 174.

troubleshooting in increasingly challenging and diverse contexts. As I stated in "How's the Connection," as students "continue to troubleshoot independently, we as teachers can begin to take a backseat role. . . .This ensures that the skills have taken root and will flourish under the daily task of effective practice."[353]

Research supports this idea of practicing together, as increased autonomy is connected to a greater sense of accomplishment and motivation. Deci writes that, "perceived competence must be accompanied by the experience of autonomy for the most positive results. As people gain competence. . .and as they become more autonomous in doing that, they will perform more effectively and display a greater sense of well–being."[354] Because piano performance is also a physical work, students need time and ample repetition to truly internalize the motions that create a desired sound. This is a very individualized process, and no two hands move exactly alike. As students experience the physical movement patterns of playing (especially in increasingly complex technical passages), they make the learning their own, further solidifying their newfound skills. Green describes how learning is much more successful "when we learn through our senses and our experience. . .music is something the body is going to have to perform and it's best learned by the body that's going to do the performing."[355]

In the words of Baker–Jordan, "some of the most valuable lessons the student will ever have will take place when you are silent, listening, and learning to see if the student is grasping good practice habits that will lead to achieving realistic practice goals."[356] Does this mean that teachers should not engage with students during the "practicing together" moment of the lesson? On the contrary, this is a moment of trial–and–error, give–and–take, and intellectual and musical

[353]Welsh, "How's the Connection," 21.
[354] Deci, *Why We Do What We Do,* 70.
[355] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 147.
[356] Baker–Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy,* 120.

conversation between the teacher and student. Teachers must balance equipping students with increasingly more specific tools and allowing them to utilize them independently. In his 2003 dissertation on "Teacher and Student Relationships for Improvements in Creativity," Aniello writes that "students must be challenged by the work assignments and need to work out their problems independently while not becoming overly reliant on the teacher" and that "role modeling is one of the best methods to evoke more creativity from students."[357] Aniello further contends that this creative interplay between teacher and student "can only be done in a safe, supportive, and spirited refuge from conventional, noncreative behaviors."[358]

In this way, the "together" element of practicing and "transfer" are not at all mutually exclusive. What about showing students how we practice, not just on their music (which they may perceive as "easy" for teachers), but on our own challenging sections of repertoire? Some of my best lessons in practicing occurred while I sat outside my teacher's door, awaiting the start of my lesson. A widely respected performer and teacher, she practiced in a way that was intentional, rhythmic, and focused, and I learned a great deal by her own execution of the strategies and tools she provided. Often during the lesson, we would alternate practicing, so that I could begin to take ownership of the skills she demonstrated. The power of practicing together is found in highly skilled teachers demonstrating beautiful, artistic practice, breaking that "performance" down into the smallest elements, and guiding students toward independently discovering their own beautiful playing through a multitude of effective strategies.

[357] Aniello, "Teacher and Student Relationships for Improvements in Creativity," 27.
[358] Aniello, "Teacher and Student Relationships for Improvements in Creativity," 27.

Feedback on Performance

Chapter 5 explored the importance of speaking the truth in our interactions with our students. Perhaps nowhere else is this more applicable than in the moments of giving feedback to students. Speaking the truth with compassion should always follow assessment, and assessment is non–negotiable to learning. Robert Duke describes assessment as "finding out" and feedback as "communicating what you've found out."[359] He further asserts that feedback "influences behavior."[360] Duke beautifully depicts how the context of providing feedback is rooted in knowing our students *themselves*. He writes, "at the heart of every skillful instruction is the keen perception of what's going on in the room. . . .Teachers who are said to be with–it know what's going on around them, accurately perceive students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes moment to moment, and incorporate this information into the ongoing process of instruction."[361]

Green further describes the critical nature of student perceptions of teacher feedback. He writes:

> [A] teacher or parent who has little faith in a child's ability to learn can transmit doubts to the child. Critical comments and judgements such as 'That sounded terrible' reinforce the pupil's tendency to insecurity and self–doubt. But it isn't enough simply to 'find something positive to say'. Even seemingly positive comments like 'That sounded terrific' can contribute to a child's anxiety when used manipulatively.[362]

If the short–term goal of feedback is to make a change, then the long–term goal is for students to change—and by this, I mean that they become their own agents of change. In "How's the Connection," I refer to this as the teacher's "responsibility to encourage students to find their own creative voices and analyze their own performances without teacher prompts."[363] The

[359] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching*, 51.
[360] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching*, 123.
[361] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching*, 55–56.
[362] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 181.
[363] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 20.

overlap with the process of effecting change is obvious: the goal of feedback is to create change, and supplementary feedback informs future change.

Duke refers to this as positioning a student for success by providing specific tasks that we anticipate one will complete with some rate of success. By setting students up for success, we also train them to independently learn from the feedback of their performances—what worked and what didn't? As we train our students to attune to their own feedback loops, we move them toward more independent musicianship. This way they will be less reliant upon both our approval and criticism and begin to listen for detail and cultivate their own opinions and voices.

Aniello's dissertation examines the importance of the interpersonal relationship with students in developing creativity. His assertion that valuable feedback suspends judgement of an individual, remains authentic, and is both positive and precise connects with many of the principles explored in this document thus far.

> I always tried to "listen as a therapist would listen" to student concerns. This would include trying to be open–minded, suspending judgement, having compassion, focusing on one event at a time, trying to limit my own talk (no easy task by any means), and asking probing questions whenever possible. This required always reacting in a genuine manner with students, giving as much positive regard as possible, remaining very precise with my feedback, and as authentic as possible with my own creativity.[364]

Green offers practical ways teachers can facilitate learning within the framework of positive and authentic feedback. He asserts that teachers must communicate with students that they "accept them the way they are and will allow them to explore without feeling constantly under pressure to measure up to some standard."[365] He includes several tips for helping students "develop and retain their own understanding of their progress,"[366] including the following:

1. remaining calm and confident before and during performance;

[364] Aniello, "Teacher and Student Relationships for Improvements in Creativity," 54.
[365] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 183.
[366] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 183.

2. asking your student or child after the performance about their own experience: "How did you feel about the music?"
3. avoiding judgement;
4. expressing your own experience and feelings: "I really noticed and enjoyed the subtle ending you gave the piece."
5. acknowledging the growth that you see from performance to performance.[367]

These moments of effecting change, practicing together, and giving feedback on performances often overlap multiple times during a single lesson, as Figure 5 shows. They may even loop back, for example, to a session of practicing together if a student is not yet confident in a specific section in a performance trial. Or a student may be unclear on the practice strategies after trying them out independently and need to return to the brainstorming (effecting change) moment. This process connects directly to building relationships with students in that it requires the teacher to remain engaged, empathetic, and perceptive to the student's musical and personal needs at any given moment.

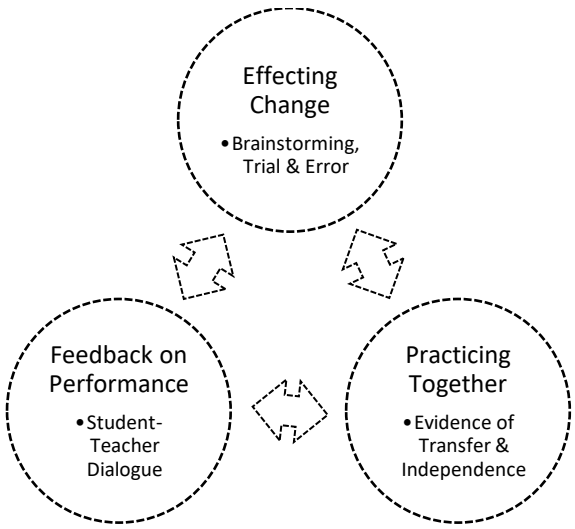

Figure 5: Cyclical Moments within the Piano Lesson

[367] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 183.

Goal Setting

Another way teachers can connect with students in the lesson is through the process of goal setting. This process should also remain student–centered and student–led, with students setting the specific short and long–term goals. By acknowledging a student's feelings about his or her progress, allowing the student to set the goals, and prompting the student to envision his or her own success week–to–week, the teacher encourages student independence. The teacher also has an opportunity to relate on a personal level—empathizing with the student on the necessary time commitment, any impending deadlines, and practice struggles—while also empowering the student to believe in the seemingly impossible. Research indicates that goal setting should be individualized, specific and measurable, evidence–based, process–oriented, and assessed regularly. These are explored below.

First, goals should be individualized. If teachers are to center the student's lesson experience around the student's humanity instead of isolated talents or skills, then the goal must originate from the student and reflect his or her life as a whole. On a practical note, if the student is overwhelmed with school exams or has recently experienced the loss of a family member, then the week's goal must reflect the multi–dimensional reality of the student's life outside the studio. This prioritization of the student first is not only pedagogically sound but also research based. Edward Deci writes,

> To be most effective, goals need to be individualized—they need to be suited specifically to the person who will work toward them—and they need to be set so as to represent an optimal challenge. When they are too easy, the person is likely to be bored and unmotivated; when too difficult, anxious and inefficient.[368]

Secondly, the student should craft specific and measurable goals. Descriptions that are nebulous or too long–term are no different than mere dreams or ideals. Goals must include

[368] Deci, *Why We Do What We Do*, 152.

specific benchmarks and measurable standards. This is the moment when students describe the way they want the music to sound. In "How's the Connection," I describe how my students and I set specific goals together in the lesson. I ask them to "describe how they want to play these sixteen measures" because "envisioning this success is the first step toward achieving it, and the more precise the goal, the more the student will take the individual responsibility for achieving it."[369] How does this relate to student–teacher connection? As teachers provide students with the opportunity to set their own goals, they have the chance to attune to student needs, dreams, and self–efficacy beliefs. The descriptions students use to describe their future success reveal much about their beliefs and desires. Teachers need only listen and remain aware.

Next, the goals should be based on evidence. Has the student demonstrated effective practicing both inside and outside the studio? What prior actions indicate that the student will in fact be successful in achieving this goal? Prior success serves as the motivator because the goal is perceived as possible, and this belief is rooted in the hard evidence of effective practice, which the student demonstrated in the "practicing together" moment of the lesson. Without this, the teacher runs the risk of being merely a "motivational speaker," without providing students with the necessary tools and strategies to create lasting change. The danger here (beyond the pedagogical failing) is that students may begin to doubt both their own abilities as well as the teacher's word and/or expertise.

Fourth, goal setting must be process–based. While the goal may be the desired outcome, the student must have a clear process of how to achieve that goal. What practice strategies will he or she utilize in pursuit of this goal? How will the student overcome fatigue and frustration? Teachers must equip students with enough strategies that independent progress and realization of goals is not just possible but also highly likely. This process–based learning is a replication of

[369] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 21.

effective practicing that has occurred in the lesson. Coutts writes, "research illustrates that effective learning occurs when students are oriented towards mastery rather than performance, with a focus on the processes involved in learning as opposed to being focused on the end goal."[370] If the goal is to play a descending arpeggio with a diminuendo at performance speed, then students must have clear steps for getting from where they are today to where they hope to be next week. The risk here is that students try to "just do it," which can result in inefficient practice, increased frustration, and possible overuse injury. All of these may de–motivate the student and potentially cause distrust of the teacher, decreased long–term ambition, and reduced self–worth.

Finally, goals should include assessments throughout the process. As previously quoted by Duke, "music performance instruction provides numerous assessment opportunities throughout each lesson or rehearsal."[371] This assessment process should take place in the studio, post–stage performance, and throughout the independent practice process. The first assessment must include the student accurately acknowledging his or her *current* state. Before setting a goal for where the student hopes to be in a week, two, or four, he or she must acknowledge—as objectively and judgement–free as possible—where the repertoire progress stands today. From this honest starting point, students can set more realistic goals and craft intentional assessments for measuring progress throughout the process. Deci writes, "the great thing is that if people have participated in setting their goals, then they can also participate in evaluating their own performance."[372] Perhaps the teacher's primary "connective" role in facilitating these mini assessments is helping students to accurately describe their performance without risking their

[370] Coutts, "Empowering Students to Take Ownership of Their Learning," 494.
[371] Duke, *Intelligent Music Teaching,* 160.
[372] Deci, *Why We Do What We Do,* 153.

individual worth. As student and teacher practice this together in the lesson, these skills—like musical skills—can begin to become strong habits for the student outside the studio, as well.

Summarizing & Sending

In the final moments of a lesson, the teacher can reflect on the lesson with the student, hear from his or her experience, and send the student off with a final encouragement. The "summarizing" is centered on the student and should primarily be led by the student. This first aspect—shown in Table 11—may include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. The student restating the big ideas from the lesson
2. The student summarizing the goals for the week (that he or she set)
3. The student expressing his or her level of confidence to achieve said goals
4. The student naming his or her favorite moment of the lesson
5. Discussing any mid–week follow–ups (e.g., practice videos)
6. Discussing preparation and protocol for any upcoming performances (e.g., performing daily for family and friends in preparation for a recital)
7. Discussing any lingering questions from the lesson

Table 11: Elements of Student Lesson Reflection

In contrast, the "sending" aspect is largely teacher–centered, as the teacher has the chance to wrap up the lesson with a final charge. In "How's the Connection," I compare this sending aspect to the final moments of benediction within a sacred liturgy:

> The close of a lesson is like the benediction of a liturgical service. This is where we send our students, even if only figuratively. This "sending" must include a final charge, an encouragement to affect change, and space for questions and clarification. . . .[373]

Just as first words are important, final words hold a particular power to influence. They are the words most often remembered and reflected upon between meetings. The busyness of back–to–back lessons that many independent teachers experience may make this sending challenging, especially when it overlaps with greeting the following student. It is imperative that teachers allot specific time at the close of a lesson for both summarizing and sending, allowing space for students, parents, and teacher to bring mutual closure to the lesson experience. (Depending on the age and level of the student, the parent may take a greater or smaller role in this process. This will be covered more in the following section.) In the same *Piano Magazine* article, I describe the importance of wrapping up a lesson this way: "Ending with success, clarity, and an action plan—all of which the student has demonstrated independence in or contributed input about—is imperative for keeping students engaged. . .and committed to daily practice."[374]

Touching Base with Parents & Guardians

The importance of parents and guardians in a successful piano study experience cannot be overstated. A survey of piano pedagogy texts reveals the significance of the parental role in the "triangle" format of parent, teacher, and student. In *Questions and Answers*, Frances Clark writes, "parents are indispensable for student progress at the piano. If we take the time to help them understand what we are doing and why, their cooperation will be limitless."[375] Baker–Jordan agrees that "successful piano teaching derives from more than just the effort and skill of

[373] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 21.
[374] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 21.
[375] Clark, *Questions and Answers*, 327.

the piano teacher. . . ." and that it "requires the dedicated involvement of three or (as family structure indicates) four people."[376] Jacobson also asserts that "the success of piano lessons depends on the teacher, the students and the parents"[377] and that "regular communication with parents ensures that students will continue taking lessons."[378]

Well–known pedagogues and authors, Agay and Bastien both consider the relationship between the teacher and parents as fundamental to student success. Bastien writes, "parental cooperation and periodic supervision is extremely important in maintaining a healthy rapport between all parties concerned—the student, parents, and teacher."[379] Agay extends this concept of "rapport" and writes, "the first and most important step is to establish and maintain a relationship which is based on cooperation and mutual understanding."[380] Most—if not all—pedagogues consider the piano lesson to fit this "triangle" model of parent, teacher, and student. All the experts agree this is important, but how does a teacher do this in the everyday busyness of lessons? Furthermore, how does it contribute to the aspect of the student–teacher relationship? Much could be said regarding how the relationship with a student's family functions most successfully (often correlating to the student's age and level), but for the purpose of this document we will consider how touching base with parents contributes to the connective lesson environment.

Touching base with parents provides a more complete understanding of our students themselves: their struggles and joys surrounding music study and their interests outside of the piano studio. Connecting with parents (or legal guardians) is another way to connect with our students. A parent may have insight regarding a student's practice habits, motivation,

[376] Baker–Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy,* 1.
[377] Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching,* 381.
[378] Jacobson, *Professional Piano Teaching,* 387.
[379] Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*, 152.
[380] Denes Agay, "Parental Involvement" in *The Art of Teaching Piano*, 487.

performance anxieties, favorite music, etc. that the student does not reveal in the lesson setting. Secondly, communicating with parents outside of the lesson time shows the student's family that the teacher values the student, cares about his or her progress, and wants to be a team player. Additionally, this communication shows the parent that the teacher values his or her perspective and wants the best for his or her child.

In "How's the Connection?" I describe the importance of reaching out to parents during the week, especially following a difficult lesson:

> If I felt a student and I did not connect well or that the assignments were unclear, I make a point to reach out to parents and simply check in on their family. Frequently a parent's response reveals there was something unrelated to piano study at play during the lesson. Other times, the parent reveals that his or her child is struggling with practice, and this information helps me reevaluate my own methods and make changes to fit my student's need or life stage.[381]

The following list in Table 12 provides practical ideas for connecting with parents both inside and outside the lesson time:

1. Send a copy of the student's assignment sheet to parents, with clear goals and notated deadlines
2. Assign mid–week video check–ins and follow up with parents regarding submissions
3. Send regular newsletters highlighting studio events, student achievements, and upcoming opportunities
4. Hold parent conferences at regular intervals
5. Offer office hours for parents to drop in, meet virtually, or call
6. Create shared progress video folders for parent, teacher, and student

[381] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 21.

7. Reevaluate student goals with parents and student at the start of each academic year
8. Offer practice challenges in the studio and explain participation to both student and parents
9. Send open–ended surveys or email prompts to parents, inviting their perspective and/or specific feedback
10. Greet parents before and after performances
11. Invite student families to participate in your own performances or pedagogical events
12. Share teaching experiences with parents (e.g., normalizing the struggles of piano lessons, setting expectations)
13. Ask students to share their lesson "takeaways" with parents at the close of a lesson

Table 12: Strategies for Connecting with Student Families

These small but important steps will go "a long way in creating a safe and caring atmosphere in which students can thrive."[382]

Preparing for Public Performance

While there are diverse goals for music education, two of the primary goals remain the acquisition of a skill and the ability to demonstrate it. The assumption here is that a student will in fact share his or her music with another person—regardless of the size of venue or audience. Even a "run through" at a lesson can be considered a performance. "Public performance," in this

[382] Welsh, "How's the Connection," 21.

case, means any performance outside the studio, in any venue, for anyone other than the performer himself or herself. I recognize there may be exceptions to this; for example, some adult students prefer not to participate in recitals and some children with extreme cases of stage–induced anxiety may choose to abstain from performance altogether. For the vast majority of students, however, there is at least one annual "culmination" event in which they demonstrate their skills, hard work, and ability to capture the character of a work and convey it to the audience.

In *Beyond Talent,* Angela Beeching raises important questions about peak performance and offers a holistic perspective. She questions, "what does it take to perform at your best? Of course, preparation is paramount. But assuming that a musician is well prepared, the quality of the performance experience itself is a fascinating balance of physical, emotional, and intellectual factors."[383] How teachers interact with students regarding the art and skill of performance can have a lasting impact of their musical study and personal development. Diana Fosha writes, "the roots of resilience. . .are to be found in the sense of being understood by and existing in the mind and heart of a loving, attuned, and self–possessed other."[384]

I have identified a set of principles for connecting with students while preparing them for public performance. These are divided into two interrelated categories—perspective and practice—and will be explored in turn. Figure 6 indicates how perspective influences the strategies we devise and how the application and results of these may equally impact our perspective. While each one of these principles deserves its own exploration, it is beyond the scope of this document to detail all the elements of performance preparation. For this document,

[383] Angela Myles Beeching, *Beyond Talent: Creating a Successful Career in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 225.
[384] Diana Fosha quoted in Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 107.

however, I will examine core principles from the research which may aid in increased performance skills, more holistic preparation, and stronger relational connection between the student and teacher.

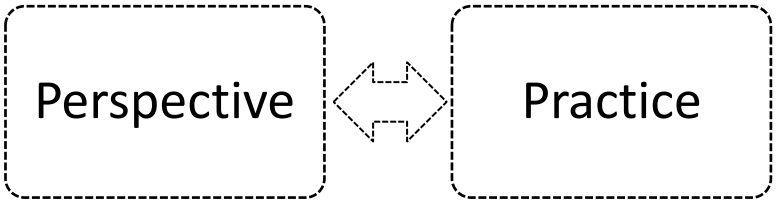

Figure 6: Intersection of Philosophical Perspective & Practical Strategies

First, our perspective on performance *will* impact that of our students (see Chapter 4). The implicit beliefs we hold easily become the truths they believe about music–making, performance, and even themselves. Every performance is a risk, a moment of vulnerability. Admiral William H. McRaven (U.S. Navy, Retired) writes, "the potential for failure is ever present, but those who live in fear of failure, or hardship, or embarrassment will never achieve their potential."[385] He encourages taking "calculated risks" so that we may know our potential and "what is truly possible."[386] The goal here is not to showcase students' failures and offer ensuing consolations, but instead to set them up for success and give them opportunities to learn and grow in ways that only the performance process itself provides.

In my 2021 *American Music Teacher* article, "Strive for Ordinary," I encourage readers to humbly accept challenges:

> The reason we can accept challenges is that we know we are more than a single event, performance, competition or application. While our habits are indeed formative in shaping who we are and who we become, our identity is not solely tied to what we do. Our value supersedes our contribution to society or our achievements

[385] William McRaven, *Make Your Bed: Little Things that Can Change Your Life. . .and Maybe the World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017), 63.
[386] McRaven, *Make Your Bed*, 63.

> on a given day. . .we learn, we grow and we repeat the process the next ordinary day. The more our work is merged with our everyday lives, and yet distinctly separate from our innate value, the more freedom we will have to take calculated risks and rise above.[387]

Leonard Sax states, "failure comes to us all. The *willingness to fail,* and then to move on with no loss of enthusiasm, is a mark of character. The opposite of fragility. . .is the willingness to fail."[388] In order for students to take these "calculated risks" and be willing to walk on stage with courage and vulnerability, we must first remind them of their innate value and our unshakable acceptance of them as individuals—no matter what happens on stage. Similarly, teachers can remind students that one performance is only a snapshot of their musical careers (professional or amateur)—one moment of one day from which they can learn and grow.

A second aspect of this performance *perspective* is to maintain high standards of performance for all students. Ginsburg and Jablow discuss the marriage of high standards and unreserved acceptance. They write

> At first glance the need to have high expectations would seem to be in conflict with the imperative of being unconditional in our love. In fact, however, unconditional love yields its greatest power when paired with high expectations. The key is understanding that high expectations here do not refer to grades, scores, or performances. They are about holding young people accountable to being their best selves.[389]

Brown concurs that leaders can be "compassionate and accepting while we hold people accountable for their behaviors. We can, and in fact, it's the best way to do it. . . .The key is to separate people from their behaviors—to address what they're doing, not who they are. . . .[390] From the bedrock of unconditional care and acceptance, teachers can begin to push students to reach increasingly higher levels of performance, take calculated risks, and honestly evaluate a

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[387] Welsh, "Strive for Ordinary: Where the Magic Happens," *American Music Teacher Magazine* 70, no. 6 (June/July 2021): 29.
[388] Sax, *The Collapse of Parenting,* 113.
[389] Ginsburg with Jablow, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens,* 5.
[390] Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection,* 18.

performance without fear of ultimate defeat. At the same time, this promotes a healthy and strong student–teacher relationship built on communication and trust.

A third perspective shift includes emphasizing the process over the product. Just as a physical motion at the keyboard must serve to produce the desired sound, so, too, the process must bring about the anticipated result for it to be successful. Dweck writes, "if a student has tried hard and made little or no progress, we can of course appreciate their effort, but we should never be content with effort that is not yielding further benefits."[391] A vital part of preparing students for performance is helping them find the most effective ways to prepare for and practice the skill of performance. It is not enough to merely prepare and hope for the best on recital day. Performance trials provide students the opportunity to discover for themselves what is working and what needs to change. Dweck continues in *Mindset*:

> We need to figure out *why* that effort is not effective and guide kids toward other strategies and resources that can help them resume learning. . . .In all our research on praise, we indeed praise the process, but we *tie it to the outcome,* that is, to children's learning, progress, or achievements. Children need to understand that engaging in that process helped them learn.[392]

As students prepare for performance, teachers must remind them of the work they have invested and of their growth through the course of study. This perspective may increase a student's confidence while reminding him or her to continue the same efficient work leading up to a performance. When students know that performance is not tied to an arbitrary "talent" or "gifting," but instead largely dependent upon the intentional time and effort invested in the preparation process, they can begin to develop the skill of performance. Green writes, "when we

[391] Dweck, *Mindset*, 216.
[392] Dweck, *Mindset*, 216.

can acknowledge these achievements with opportunities for children to perform, we are not only encouraging new growth, but also building confidence and trust."[393]

Another important perspective includes having open conversations about stage fright and performance anxiety with students. There is a great deal of overlap between performance anxiety, normalizing challenge, and perfectionism (much of which has already been discussed in the prior sections in Chapter 5 and will not be repeated here). Angela Beeching states, "in fact, when musicians focus on technical perfection, paradoxically, they may actually shut down the essential element of peak performances, which is a freedom from controlling thoughts."[394]

The interaction between perspective and practice is fluid, often with overlap between the two. Naturally our perspective influences our strategies, but it is not enough to merely encourage students to "do their best." While maintaining a healthy person–first perspective on student performances, teachers must also equip students with the tools to be successful and notice the practiced habits surrounding performance. (An important caveat here, but beyond the scope of this document, is that teachers must help students select repertoire wisely and provide ample time to both learn a piece and learn to perform it convincingly and confidently.) To equip and connect with our students—and in turn, help them connect with their future audiences—as they prepare for performance, several key practices in Table 13 may assist:

1. Focus on the character first and foremost—what mood does the performer hope to evoke? What story does he or she hope to tell?
2. Provide many opportunities to perform (and receive feedback and self–assess)
3. Make performance a normal, everyday part of the learning process

[393] Green, *The Inner Game of Music*, 191–192.
[394] Beeching, *Beyond Talent*, 224.

4. Include low–stakes and "same stakes" settings
5. Engage with mindfulness and breathing techniques (alternate nostril breathing, 2–to–1 breathing, body scans, etc.)
6. Include movement activities (active stretching, yoga, outdoor walks, etc.) Siegel and Byson state that, "research shows that when we change our physical state—through movement or relaxation, for example—we can change our emotional state."[395]
7. Consider a variety of practice & memorization techniques (half tempo, "double" playing, reference points, chordal analysis, backward practice, eyes closed, etc.)
8. Create a pre–performance "routine"—this may include intentionally increasing the heart rate, a mirror pep talk, a protein boost, or virtually anything that serves to ground the student before walking out on stage. In *Performance Success,* Don Green discusses the benefits of "Performance Simulation" and states, "you've got to evoke in yourself the symptoms you will feel in actual performance, and do well in spite of them."[396]
9. Create a pre–performance checklist (character, sound, dynamic, first note, etc.). This is a type of mindfulness, and by focusing on specific tasks at hand, the student has a better chance of drowning out voices of negativity and distractions during a performance.

[395] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child,* 58.
[396] Don Greene, *Performance Success: Performing Your Best Under Pressure* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 97.

10. Discuss the brain/body connection that occurs in performance—talk with students about the brain's reaction to stress and normalize the "fight–flight" response to stress. Paul Tough writes, "the [hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal] axis can't distinguish between different types of threat. Unfortunately, this means you often experience stress responses that are not at all helpful—like when you need to speak before an audience, and suddenly your mouth goes dry."[397] If students are aware of these normal reactions, they can implement stress management strategies to cope with pre–performance jitters.

11. Acknowledge that sometimes we do get in our own way of playing our best. While honest evaluation is needed ("Did I prepare adequately and give this performance my best?"), Nicola Cantan acknowledges that "sometimes the issue with *I–played–it–better–at–home is* not one of an inaccurate view of practice but rather is caused by pure nervousness."[398] Cantan argues for training students to cope with these nerves. She writes, "while we can't get rid of these nerves, we need to learn to cope with them. Explain how the best way to do that is to expose ourselves to more opportunities to play when we are nervous."[399] Elizabeth Booker recognizes that "implicit and explicit memories can trigger latent patterns of

[397] Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (New York: Mariner Books, 2012), 13.
[398] Nicola Cantan, *The Piano Practice Physician's Handbook: 32 Common Piano Student Ailments and How Piano Teachers Can Cure Them for GOOD* (Dublin: Colorful Keys, 2017), 23.
[399] Cantan, *The Piano Practice Physician's Handbook*, 23.

thoughts, emotions, and behaviour that maintain and exacerbate non–helpful behaviour."[400] In the case of stage performance, especially when the stakes feel high to the performer, these patterns can either focus or derail a performance. Even if the performance did not seem to reflect the level of preparation, teachers must guide students "to view the situation not as a basis for criticism but as a problem to be solved."[401]
12. Share our own stories—what better way to normalize the struggles of performance anxiety than to share our personal experiences with students? All performers have experienced the glories and pitfalls of adrenaline, and our experiences may encourage students that they are not alone in their mental and physical reactions to stress.
13. Look outward, not just inward (sharing music is about others)—as we equip students with strategies for coping with performance stress, we ought also to remind them of the larger picture at hand. Music is not only about the performer but is instead primarily about a shared experience between audience and performer. Remind students that music is a gift, one they can be excited to share, one that transcends their own experiences, and one that has the potential to connect individuals.

Table 13: Strategies for Preparing Students for Public Performance

[400] Elizabeth Brooker, "Music Performance Anxiety: A Clinical Outcome Study into the Effects of Cognitive Hypnotherapy and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing in Advanced Pianists, *Psychology of Music* 46, no. 1 (2018): 108.
[401] Deci, *Why We Do What We Do*, 154.

Much more could be discussed regarding preparing students for public performance, but these practices promote a holistic perspective, invite collaboration between teacher and student, encourage honest discussion, and acknowledge the student's perspective in the performance process.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Conclusions & Recommendations

It would be foolish for teachers to expect perfection of themselves or their colleagues in applying the principles and strategies of connective teaching to our daily lives. Individuals are complex, multi–faceted, and ever–changing. Amy Banks writes, "all relationships have a rhythm of connection and disconnection. It's impossible to resonate with another person all the time. The point is not to be perfect in your reading of the relationship but to be more aware of how you're reading them, and to check out what you're sensing."[402]

Just as a flawless performance is not the goal in each stage appearance—but instead a deep musical connection with the sound and with our listeners—so, too, the goal in teaching is similar. Rather than micromanaging each interaction to create the "perfect" lesson, we must be authentically present in each student–teacher interaction. We must connect with students in the mundane and the miraculous, the expected and the surprising, the seamless and the frustrating, and the musical and non–musical moments of every piano lesson. In *Playing Beyond the Notes*, Deborah Rambo Sinn exhorts performers not to get "caught up in the minutiae, miss the big picture, and forget that making great sound and communicating with one's audience should be the final goal."[403] Similarly, as teachers balance the unending pedagogical and musical challenges of fostering a communicative art within the context of a personal relationship, they must strive to maintain rich connections with their students.

[402] Banks with Hirchman, *Wired to Connect*, 230.
[403] Deborah Rambo Sinn, *Playing Beyond the Notes: A Pianist's Guide to Musical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

Furthermore, it would be utter hubris to in any way imply that this is a complete or rigid set of practices. The potential irony here is glaring: in an attempt to truly connect with students, teachers may be deceived in thinking they have "solved the puzzle" or found a cure to the relational and interpersonal challenges of teaching. (After all, the historical assumption is that teachers are the experts.) These principles and strategies represent my current best understanding of the literature, my students, my experiences, and the experiences of my colleagues, but they are only a starting point for the field of piano pedagogy. The principles of human connection are fluid, and the needs of our students are everchanging. The field must remain therefore flexible, with teachers and researchers ever rising to the myriad needs of their specific and global students.

An important caution must be explicitly stated. The line between caring professional and friend must be carefully drawn by each teacher. This boundary can be altogether dissolved, resulting in an enmeshed, emotionally unhealthy, or—worse—an unethical relationship. Teachers must remain vigilant that their influence in students' lives is not used for ill. Brown cautions, "sharing yourself to teach or move a process forward can be healthy and effective, but disclosing information as a way to work through your personal stuff is inappropriate and unethical."[404] Kenneth Ginsburg also includes a "note to professionals: You will express loving kindness but should avoid the world 'love,' because it can have multiple meanings. Instead let young people know how much you enjoy being with them and how deeply you care about them."[405]

The MTNA Code of Ethics also offers some guidance here. The commitment to students states, "the teacher shall conduct the relationship with students and families in a professional

[404] Brown, *Daring Greatly,* 162.
[405] Ginsburg with Jablow, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens,* 2.

manner."[406] Likewise, the commitment to society reads, "the teacher shall maintain the highest standard of professional conduct and personal integrity."[407] The sub–points of these headings include the following:

> - The teacher shall respect the personal integrity and privacy of students. . . .
> - The teacher shall treat each student with dignity and respect, without discrimination of any kind.
> - The teacher shall strive for continued growth in professional competencies.
> - The teacher is encouraged to be a resource in the community.[408]

A second caveat cannot be overstated: the principles espoused here are only part of what I consider strong pedagogy. Foundational and non–negotiable as the research indicates, connection is not a singular marker of strong pedagogy; the complementary outstanding elements in a great teacher remain his or her musicianship and particular ability to guide students in independent learning and self–discovery. By no means are these core elements exclusive of one another. The challenge of becoming a stellar piano pedagogue—as the research shows—is based on this trifecta of specializations: musicianship, mentorship, and relationship. By all means, teachers must continue crafting their performance skills, attending concerts, and learning new repertoire; they must also remember that the value of these practices goes beyond the individual level. This value extends to their students and contributes to fostering an environment in which students can thrive. In essence, it becomes an environment of strong musicianship, robust pedagogy, and rich connection.

How does a teacher balance student achievement and a personal connection with his or her students? Once again, there is no foolproof protocol, no golden ratio. Instead, teachers can take

[406] MTNA "Code of Ethics," accessed 3 September 2021, http://www.mtna.org/MTNA/Explore_MTNA/Code_of_Ethics.aspx.
[407] MTNA "Code of Ethics."
[408] MTNA "Code of Ethics."

their cues from the research on motivation and process (vs. product), vigilantly self–reflect on their own pedagogical processes, and expect great things from their students. These things (among others), the research is beginning to show, result in greater student success—may that be increased length of study, high musical achievement, or a positive, lasting experience of personal growth. The point here is that a strong personal connection is what facilitates these many successes.

Further research on relational connection may more specifically address:

1. How does the field of piano pedagogy overlap with attachment theory?
2. How does the field of piano pedagogy overlap with personhood philosophy?
3. How does a student–centered teaching approach change across ages and levels?
4. How does a teacher's philosophy of connection impact student perception?
5. Is there a hierarchy between student goals and teacher standards?
6. What are the limitations of these principles cross–culturally?

Need for Further Research

Where does the field go from here? It is evident that the field of piano pedagogy—still young, compared to its close relatives of piano performance and music education—is lacking in research regarding the student–teacher personal relationship. The field as a whole should reflect on its roots and fully embrace the philosophies of pedagogical giants such as Frances Clark, who embodied and imparted a holistic approach to piano education. Pedagogues must also embrace the field's failures and shortcomings as moments of growth, vowing to continually learn, and striving to connect with our students (however imperfectly) in each moment of each lesson.

Practically, there is a need for data–driven research, specifically in the realm of independent teaching and one–on–one instruction. Researchers are needed to study students' perceptions of

pre–collegiate piano lessons; teacher phrases, actions, and body language used in the lessons; and the correlation between student perception and both the longevity of study and development of skill. Additionally, research is needed on professional pianists' perceptions of their own piano education beyond the early years, both inside and outside academia, as these highly trained pianists often play a crucial role in the instruction of the next generation of pianists.

There is certainly a need to study these principles in different teaching and learning environments outside the private studio, as well. For example, how can a teacher connect with students in a functional skills piano class, or how must a teacher adapt these strategies for a preschool beginner in contrast to an intermediate college–elective student? It is my goal and hope that the principles included in this document would apply beyond the individualized format of the precollegiate private piano lesson, but more research is needed to verify this.

Secondly, the topic of student–teacher connection is beginning to catch the attention of piano pedagogy publications and conference planning committees. It is my hope that this topic will continue to be featured in leading publications and research presentations and thus pique the interest of teachers across levels and stages—from early childhood to higher education. This exposure may be the first step toward encouraging professional pianists and teachers to engage with the interdisciplinary research and pursue their own study. In the field of piano education, there remains a need for piano pedagogues to merge the fields of piano performance and music education by both continuing to develop their own musicianship and credentials—thus gaining the credibility of their students and colleagues—and expanding their knowledge base beyond the world of piano. This includes the study of learning theories, psychology, and human development—and consequently evaluating one's own teaching in light of these fields. As the adage says, "one dull pencil is worth six sharp minds." At the risk of stating the obvious, piano pedagogues should not leave the transference of connection pedagogy to chance or dismiss it

merely as "a good idea." As we observe it brought to life in the everyday interchanges between master teachers and their students, we must label it, share it, and impart it as a core element of teaching.

Furthermore, to bridge the gap between what is taught in undergraduate and graduate piano pedagogy programs and what precollegiate piano students experience, there must be a more concrete pedagogy of relational connection, so that piano teachers—although highly trained in pianistic skills and principles of learning—do not merely continue teaching as they were taught, often without consideration for the personal relationship between teacher and student. In *Dare to Lead*, Brown writes, "as much time as I spend trying to understand *the way*, I spend ten times as much researching *what gets in the way.*"[409] We may know "the way" a nocturne by Chopin should sound and even "the right way" to teach it, but do we know how to reach the student at the center of this exchange?

Another related area of needed research is the understanding of emotional memory and trauma within the general field of music performance and pedagogy. Research on the effects of negative implicit memory within music making and learning—specifically regarding stage fright and unhealthy teacher–student attachments—as well as an understanding of methods for reversing or rewiring these neural connections is needed. Sacks states in *Musicophilia*, "there are clearly many sorts of memory, and emotional memory is one of the deepest and least understood."[410] In *Wired to Connect*, Banks further asserts that implicit memories are the "'truths' we fail to question."[411]

This is again where interdisciplinary research can fill the gap. The fields of neuroscience, psychology, psychotherapy, attachment theory, and child development—among others—have

[409] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 7.
[410] Sacks, *Musicophilia*, 217.
[411] Banks with Hirchman, *Wired to Connect*, 244.

much to offer piano pedagogy and may inform musicians' understanding of teaching, learning, and performing from a more holistic perspective.

Finally, the development of curricula (together with case studies and additional data–based research) can also contribute to a more complete approach to piano pedagogy. It is my hope that the twelve characteristics of relationally savvy teachers and eight moments within the lesson described in this document may serve as a sounding board, an idea ignitor, and a call to continually be our best for our students. Additionally, a complete teacher self–assessment form included in the appendix may serve as a starting point for teachers and teachers–in–training to reflect on all aspects of their teaching.

Ending Where It All Began: Humanity & Compassion

At the core of this document is the foundational principle that all individuals are innately worthy of acceptance and care, apart from their talents, skills, and achievements. Recognition of humanity as sacred enables teachers to do the challenging work of meeting students where they are in each moment of the lesson. This humanity is shared, and teachers must remember to view themselves in this light, as well. It is important to mention that teachers must accept and acknowledge their own humanity in this process of creating dynamic relationships in the piano studio. Siegel and Byson remind parents and adults that a connective approach "involves being intentional about what we are doing and where we're going, while accepting that we are human. Intention and attention are our goals, not some rigid, harsh expectation of perfection."[412] Just as teachers should not expect perfection of themselves on stage, in the classroom, or in the studio, neither should they presume perfection in the relational art of teaching. Teachers, like their students, must embrace a mindset of continual growth, change, reflection, and adjustment. The

[412] Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole–Brain Child*, 148.

goal here is not to "figure out" a theory of relational connection, but to be present in the moments we share with students, always remembering that "kids are whole human beings whose behavior never can be fully explained by any textbook or single theory."[413]

Instead of aiming for perfection, we can practice gratitude for the moments we share with our students, for the intersection of our humanity, and for the chance to effect and experience change. Aguilar reflects on her own experience as an educational coach. She writes, "I remind myself of how grateful I am to have this client's trust and how privileged I am to be a witness to his growth and development. I can't take this for granted. This visualization often helps me transition into a more compassionate stance. . . ."[414] As we practice this gratitude, we embody compassion and continue to meet our students right where they are. This is at the core of our work, the root of our change—musical, pedagogical, and interpersonal. Aguilar continues, stating that if our "work is not infused with and coming from compassion, there is no possibility. . .to positively affect the world. Meeting people where they are means exercising compassion, and it really is the only place to start when trying to make meaningful change."[415]

As teachers practice the diverse, multifaceted work of providing a piano education in the private studio, we can learn from the history of our rapidly growing and changing field of piano pedagogy, apply principles from related fields, and continually grow in our musicianship and understanding of the world. Teachers in the private studio have the unique opportunity to change the world from the inside out—one child at a time, one lesson at a time, and one student–teacher relationship at a time.

[413] Ginsburg with Jablow, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, 27.
[414] Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching*, 236.
[415] Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching*, 40.

APPENDIX 1

Full Teacher Self–Evaluation Form

1. STUDIO ENVIRONMENT

A. How did I greet the student and express a sense of welcome? (Provide specific language.)

B. Did I engage in any "small talk" to break the ice?

C. How did I encourage a growth mindset in the lesson?

D. Did I allow time for the student to ask questions and seek clarification?

E. How does my teaching environment invite student creativity?

F. How did I acknowledge my student's feelings during the lesson?

G. Did I communicate the learner's progress and goals to the parent/guardian?

2. PLANNING/PREPARATION

A. Was my sequencing logical and well-organized?

B. Did I "start from scratch" on both new and review pieces?

C. How prepared were my performances/musical demonstrations?

D. How did I incorporate discovery learning in my lesson plan?

E. What challenges and additional materials did I prepare for this lesson?

F. How did I anticipate student difficulties and prepare him/her for success?

3. COMMUNICATION/ENGAGEMENT

A. How often did I make eye contact with the student?

B. How often did I solicit the student's opinion *before* sharing my own?

C. What specific questions did I ask to encourage creativity?

D. How many times did I give an instruction followed by *no* musical experience?

E. How did I allow the student's interest to dictate the pacing of the lesson?

F. What were the most effective things I did to connect with my student on an interpersonal level?

G. Did I allow enough time for the student to process instructions and demonstrate skills?

I. How many yes–or–no questions did I ask?

J. How many times did I respond with the word "good?"

K. How many times did I play/model for the student?

L. How did my verbal and non-verbal communication convey interest, engagement, and attunement to student needs?

M. How did my words exemplify a growth mindset?

4. STUDENT INDEPENDENCE

A. How did the student demonstrate musical independence?

B. How did the student demonstrate mastery of a skill?

C. What specific goals did the teacher and student set together? (Who took more ownership?)

D. What changes did the student demonstrate in the lesson?

E. What musical/practicing strategies did the student demonstrate?

F. How confident am I in the student's ability to achieve independent success outside the studio?

5. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

A. Did I ask the student about (non-musical) events in his or her life?

B. Did I ask the student personal questions before beginning the lesson? How many? List them here:

C. Did I share any of my personal experiences of practicing and performing?

D. How did I create a partnership/teamwork environment during the "practicing together?" part of the lesson?

E. How did I empathize with the student during the lesson?

F. How did I remind the student of his or her value and worth?

G. How did my *first words* following a performance or student demonstration foster a nurturing environment?

H. How did I create a space for the student to express his or herself?

I. How did I express care for the student's needs?

J. How did I respond during a frustrating moment?

K. How could I better connect with my student in the future?

6. TEACHER TRIAGE

A. How did I anticipate this lesson?

B. How quickly did I diagnose underlying musical problems?

C. How quickly did I identify underlying non-musical problems?

D. What were the most effective teaching strategies I used in the lesson?

E. What would I change about my instruction in the lesson?

F. What new technique or strategy did I try today?

G. How did I encourage student trial-and-error?

H. What new approach might I take in the future?

I. How did I feel after the lesson?

J. What were my goals for the lesson? Did I achieve them? If not, why?

APPENDIX 2

My Philosophy of Piano Education

Why devote a lifetime of study to the art of music and the art of teaching? My answer is simple: I believe a piano education can change lives, instill a sense of beauty and wonder, and prepare students for any profession. My passion for music extends beyond my personal journey and intersects with the lives of musicians of all ages. The core of my teaching philosophy is built on three essential beliefs: all students have innate value and were designed in the image of God (Genesis 1:26); all students can experience musical success and it is the *teacher's* job to discover how to make this a reality; and music education is best experienced within an interpersonal relationship. I affirm a holistic view of students as physical, spiritual, psychological, and emotional human beings—not just pianists—and seek to help my students reach their goals in practical, concrete ways. It is my highest aim to value my students for their individuality and guide them toward discovering their own voice through efficiency, perseverance, and stylistic understanding. I believe all students can experience success through a relationally–connected student–teacher partnership merged with correct practice techniques; I consider it my primary job to meet students wherever they are, musically or otherwise, and guide them toward musical independence and lifelong learning. Additionally, I aspire to provide performance experiences for my students in both solo and ensemble settings and in both the traditional concert hall and the community, so that they may step out of their practice rooms and share their hard work with others. To set an example for my students, I also aim to practice what I preach by continually expanding my knowledge and experience through professional development, interdisciplinary studies, and regular performance.

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PUBLICATIONS

- Welsh, Jessie. "Strive for Ordinary: Where the Magic Happens." *American Music Teacher Magazine* 70, no. 6 (June/July 2021): 26–29.
- Welsh, Jessica. "How's the Connection: Relational Lessons Online and in the Studio." *Piano Magazine: Clavier Companion* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 18–21.
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- Welsh, Jessica. "Becoming Dispensable: Developing Independent Learners" *Clavier Companion* online publication (Autumn 2016).

AWARDS

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ABSTRACT

STUDENT–FIRST PIANO PEDAGOGY:

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR CREATING DYNAMIC

RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS IN THE PIANO STUDIO

by

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The topic of student–teacher *relational connection* has been prominent in the general education classroom and recurring throughout pedagogical anecdotes. In this document, the phrase *relational connection* in the context of the private piano lesson is defined as an authentic exchange between teacher and student in which the teacher explicitly and implicitly expresses *and the student experiences* that he or she is valued, accepted, and empowered as an individual and musician; also a professional interchange in which the exchange of ideas, sharing of stories, development of skills, and building of trust takes place. Research on human connection, learning theories, child development, and neuroscience indicate that the student–teacher relationship is essential to both human existence and the learning process.

The aim of this document is to explore related literature to the topic, reveal the need to codify the interpersonal aspect of teaching, develop practical strategies to create dynamic relational connections with students, and conclude with recommendations and suggestions for further study. The phrase "Student–First" is built upon the philosophies of pedagogical giant, Frances Clark; this philosophy, combined with current research on human connection, is the basis for creating dynamic student–teacher relational connections in the piano lesson. The

strategies provided in this document include twelve characteristics for relationally savvy piano teachers and eight specific opportunities to connect with students within the context of the private lesson.