

As a piano educator, my foundational teaching goal is the development of self-expressive young musicians who are equipped to serve as conduits for the communication of complex emotions and cultural histories through accurate interpretation. I want all students in my studio, regardless of musical tastes, long-term goals for piano study, or natural competency to leave my studio more confident, rewarded, emotionally equipped, skilled in the fundamentals of music performance, and culturally engaged than when they began.

Because music is a communicative art, expressive performance is the most essential skill I can impart to my students and the most fundamental test of my ability as a teacher. Those who dislike performing in public still play for an important audience of one! I believe that all the sounds we produce as pianists ought to be crafted with intention, even if all sounds need not be beautiful.

In order to achieve expressive performance, fundamental skills in music reading, rhythm, free and easy technique, and knowledge of the intentions of great composers must become second nature. Interval-based note reading practice, rhythm reinforcement, technical exercises, and music theory are a regular part of my weekly lessons in addition to in-depth repertoire study. Improvisation and composition projects allow students to demonstrate creativity, study form, practice notation, and discover the underlying structure of music. Interpreting scores readily and accurately is the first and most foundational step in expressive playing.

I favor demonstration and listening as the primary means of teaching expressive playing. I frequently demonstrate sections of each student's repertoire after basic notes and rhythms are learned and ask them to copy both what they hear and what they see. I frequently share excerpts of the pieces I'm studying as listening activities and incorporate home listening into practice assignments. Side by side duet playing also serves a number of important purposes: Children can easily glimpse hand position, hear tone and phrasing, sense rhythm, and mimic the quality of the

sounds they hear. I find that clunky or inattentive playing is often immediately transformed! Rote learning is important for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is the demonstration of phrasing, articulation, tone, and hand position from the earliest days of study. Students are expected to create appealing sounds even on their most basic technical exercises.

Elementary students are particularly responsive to imagery and giving names to expressive conventions. Two note slurs become “Mozart slurs,” phrase marks turn into “mountain peaks,” and phrase endings become “tiptoes.” Arms fall into feather pillows when we play with arm weight, and staccatos sound like popcorn. Elbows sometimes turn into “monkey swings.” Code phrases allow for the easy transmission of complex ideas after they become part of our standard interactions.

Emotional imagery, singing, story telling, screen play writing, and artwork help students step into the shoes of others and experience through imagination things that they may not have experienced themselves. Video and audio recording and frequent performances to varied audiences allow both students and I to evaluate our end results and aid in self-assessment.

As the world becomes ever more demanding, students increasingly need avenues for healthy self-expression and coping. Character development, self-discipline, cultural connection, and transformative emotional power are real and lasting benefits of piano study. Interactive performances from dedicated students have the ability to deeply change both the pianist and the audience, and I consider it a great privilege and responsibility to prepare the young children I teach for becoming quality world citizens and cultural and emotional ambassadors.