

Suzuki  
Piano  
Basics  
Foundation News

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

**Piano Basics  
Foundation News**

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# Inconsequential, Yet Most Important

**By Haruko Kataoka**

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We often overlook things that are seemingly unimportant or of no concern or consequence. It is because we take those things for granted and think that they are not noteworthy enough to be concerned about them.

There are many examples of these inconsequential things. Every day we take for granted the air that we breathe to stay alive. Our bodies breathe air, walk, run, and eat so naturally, we give no thought about these things. Instead, we are concerned about the myriad issues of daily life, such as material goods or money. We are drawn to issues that are difficult, challenging or expensive.

Similarly, in regards to the piano, whether playing or listening, the one thing that people all too often neglect is the quality of one tone. Too few are deeply concerned with how to produce one single tone. We must endeavor to understand how to produce one tone that embodies our heart and soul, the tone that is musical. Furthermore, we must develop the practice of listening with great concentration, focusing on that one tone with repetition in order to achieve the ability to be able to listen properly.

Because people are able to hear with their ears, we take for granted that we already know how to listen and therefore much attention is not given to listening. It is necessary to place importance on the seemingly trivial lest we be unable to embrace what is true.

There are two kinds of technique that produce a ringing single tone: staccato and legato. Please focus your thinking every day on both of them. Please focus on listening to them.

The piano so easily makes a sound that we take this sound for granted. The majority of people think that any casually-produced sound is the sound of the piano. However, if you listen carefully, you discover that there are so many different kinds of sounds.

Let's divide the kind of sound that a piano makes into two general categories. One is noise and the other is musical tone. Because noise is made when one thing crashes into another, in this case the finger into the piano key, the result is noise, cacophony, the sound of shock that is unpleasant to human beings. Musical tone on the other hand is absent of shock and after the sound is produced the tone rings with harmonic overtones that convey beauty to the heart and soul of human beings.

Next, when one note is followed continuously to another note or more, are you aware how difficult it is to play them legato? Each and every note must be played with soft fingers that move over the keys smoothly. This is very much like the way human beings use the bottom of the feet to walk. The heel touches the ground, then the bottom of the foot gently touches the ground and the tip of the toes push backward as if grasping the ground. This is exactly the same method for moving on the keys with the fingers. When you can do this well, your legato will be very calm and natural so it sounds beautiful like water flowing. Most people think that as long as they are playing a string of notes together they are playing legato. I would like to see more research into that which seems to be inconsequential.

It is the same for the *do sol mi sol* [Alberti bass], a common left hand accompaniment. It is made up of four notes. The first and third notes in this pattern are the stronger pulses, and notes two and four are simply marking time. However, because notes two and four are struck with a stiff thumb, the result is the opposite of the basics of playing four beats where they become the stronger notes instead. Among people who can play the piano, not enough people believe that they cannot play *do sol mi sol* or the 3-beat *do mi sol* properly. It is because *do sol mi sol* is so simple and uncomplicated.

Also, thumb-crossing during scales and arpeggios is a simple task that everyone thinks it not worthy of much care. When playing 12312341-*do re mi fa sol la ti do*, there are finger changes from three to one and four to one. The position of the palm of the hand stays constant while the thumb passes under the middle finger or finger four. This is seemingly of not much concern but it is an extremely important technique for pianists that this Basic of playing the piano must be taught carefully to beginners.

A teacher who has been researching consistently brought in a book written about Mendelssohn. In this book, there is a letter to his sister in which Mendelssohn writes about the joy of teaching his daughter piano. He wrote, "Marie is learning the C major scale now. I was working so hard showing her how to move her thumb so it passes under the middle finger that Cecile's (his wife) entrance startled me." Of course, a great composer like Mendelssohn knew extremely well that the technique of thumb-crossing, a technique that everyone tends to have little concern over, is an important basic technique to the point that he would forget the passage of time as he worked with his daughter with utmost effort.

So let us assign importance to those things of little or no consequence. This is the shortcut to becoming first rate.

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***Piano Basics Foundation***  
***Upcoming Workshops/Events***

**October 4-6, 2015**

**Omaha, Nebraska**

Suzuki Piano Basics Fall Workshop  
with Bruce Anderson  
Contact Carol Novak 402-572-0105  
[carolnovak@cox.net](mailto:carolnovak@cox.net)

**February 2016**

**Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher**

**Research Workshop**

**With Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara**

Dates and Venue TBA: See next newsletter!

**The events listed above are for the information of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members and others. Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation does not endorse, sanction, or sponsor events.**

To add or change items on this list and on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact  
Karen Hagberg ([kh@hagbergsuzuki.com](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com), 585-978-0600).

# *Learning by Observation*

*By Karen Hagberg*

Recently I had the opportunity to return to my *alma mater*, the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and I observed a scene very familiar to me from the old days: a student waiting on a bench outside a teacher's studio until the previous lesson was finished and the door open to let the one student leave and the next one in. This was the norm when I attended school there 50 years ago, and apparently remains the norm today.

**...the masterclass, where a teacher teaches a student before an audience, happens once in a while, but if this scenario is useful once in a while, why not replicate it all the time?**

I recalled my very first Suzuki Method lessons during workshops here in the United States and Canada in a masterclass setting with an audience. After being in rooms alone with a teacher all my life I found this rather daunting, and it took years actually for me to begin to feel comfortable in this situation.

After about eight years of attending workshops, I decided to go to Japan to study for an extended period of time. I looked forward to being able to study with Dr. Kataoka outside of the workshop environment, imagining that I would find myself alone in a room with her, without an audience. But this was not the case, as literally all lessons at the Talent Education Institute were conducted in front of observers. People were always welcome, encouraged, required to enter the studio during a lesson and not wait out in the hallway for their turn.

And here I was in the beginning, not understanding Japanese, being told to sit in Dr. Kataoka's studio and observe lessons, all sorts of lessons for children at all levels and for teachers at various stages of their training. I quickly learned not to ask questions, but simply to observe and to grasp whatever I could from the experience. It was a totally new way of learning.

I soon had to get accustomed to the fact that my own lessons were, of course, always in front of observers and very brief compared with the hours and hours of observation I was doing. Once I settled into this routine, I noticed all kinds of things I was learning from the observation that I was not getting in my own lessons. And this method of learning began to make so much sense. In traditional circles, the masterclass, where a teacher teaches a student before an audience, happens once in a while, but if this scenario is useful once in a while, why not replicate it all the time? It is a good question.

When it comes to teaching children, especially very young children, the presence of observers is most important. Remember Dr. Suzuki's advice, "One teacher, one parent, one child, bad environment." What did he mean by this? We have all had 3- and 4-year olds who don't cooperate during a lesson, who won't follow directions, who won't even stay at the piano. This often happens when there is only one teacher, one parent, and one child. But put that student in front of others, especially other piano students, and he/she will rise to the occasion and try hard. If they are unable to do this on a given day (and this will happen), they can be relieved and still get the benefit of

watching the next lesson. **Observation is the sole element that allows Suzuki Method teachers to teach 3- and 4-year olds.** It is the key to early childhood learning, since young children learn *solely* by observation and not by explanations.

**“One teacher, one parent, one child, bad environment.”**

In Japan I saw several beginners come to the piano studio at the same time. They came before the teacher arrived and socialized. When Dr. Kataoka came in, she participated in their socializing for a few minutes before the first lesson began. When a student came to the piano, everyone but those under three years old became quiet. (Babies are not expected to be able to be quiet or to follow directions at all in Japan, so there were times when parents had to remove them when they became too noisy, but they were always welcome to be there.) Because of the concentration of the observers, the student was able to concentrate and diligently follow directions. When the student’s ability to concentrate faded, the lesson would end, sometimes after only a minute or two, and another student would begin. On the rare occasion when a student were entirely uncooperative, the lesson would not even begin. This group would stay in the studio until all the lessons were over. I recall the entire session being around one-and-a-half to two hours. Between lessons, Dr. Kataoka often addressed the parents with various advice on how to practice, how to do enough listening to the recording at home, why they needed better instruments, and generally how to raise a child. The students would busy themselves with workbooks or coloring, and the parents would really observe, with concentration, throughout.

As students became older, there was a considerable amount of overlapping of lessons. It seemed as if they were asked to arrive an hour before their lesson would begin so that they would be in the room for at least one other full lesson in addition to their own. This continued observation was an integral part of their education. Perhaps they saw a less-advanced student struggling with something they just recently grasped, deepening their understanding of what they can now do; or perhaps they saw a more-advanced student and heard pieces they look forward to playing in the future. So much of Suzuki Method depends on the students’ exposure to others who can model the future for them. It is so much easier teaching violin, where many students can bring their instruments into a room together and actually play together and in front of each other in a group lesson once a week. For piano, frequent observation is more difficult to achieve.

***...having another family involved with our lesson gives us a sense of community.***

A young teacher recently asked me to write about how to make observation possible in our studios. First, I have to say that I do not achieve nearly the amount of observation I saw in Japan. Dr. Kataoka often was “running late” to the point that students saw more than one full lesson before their own, and I know that my families, with their heavy schedules, would not be able to sit in my studio that long every week. With my older students, I encourage arriving early and staying a few minutes afterwards so that they may see a portion of two other lessons. I do have parents who understand the value of observation and who therefore arrive earlier and stay later than others. Those are the

students who progress faster, almost without exception.

I have solved the observation issue with my youngest beginners by forming a class they attend before they begin lessons and while they are studying Book 1. In this class, the more advanced students will play Book 1 pieces while the other students and parents

**I have never had a student who was afraid to perform or who refused to perform.**

sing them in *solfège*. Total beginners demonstrate their bow or hold ready positions at the piano while the class counts to ten for each finger. Those who have just begun lessons might demonstrate ready-go Twinkles while the class claps the rhythm. We do some ear training with *solfège*. There is socializing before and after the class.

I have heard Suzuki teachers who say that they do not start students until the children are older because they believe 3- and 4-year-olds are just not ready for piano lessons. True, they are certainly not ready for a lesson in a room with one parent and one teacher giving them directions and trying to explain things to them. But they are all ready to try doing things they see other children doing and to behave the way they see other children behaving. When a very young child begins this class (I take them as young as two), it is easy for both the parent and for me to see when he/she is ready for individual lessons, and the readiness happens months, even years, before it would without the experience of the class.

I asked one of my parents to express the value of overlapping her son's lesson with

that of another beginner and here is what she said:

*Not knowing what to expect, my son and I have experienced many benefits from having his lesson observed and from observing a fellow student. We look forward to spending time in the company of the other family, and this adds to our enjoyment of the lesson. Observing another's lesson has allowed my son to learn a new perspective. While being observed, he gets to act as a role model which supports improved behavior and patience.*

*Beyond these benefits, having another family involved with our lesson gives us a sense of community. We feel connected and supported by them. These benefits have been invaluable in helping to achieve success and to manage expectations, as piano study has its challenges and, of course, countless rewards.*

An added benefit is that both of these families have younger siblings in the room who are preparing to become piano students, if that is what they want, simply by being there.

Always having a lesson before an audience is such wonderful experience. Compare this with having an audience *only* during infrequent recitals. It is no wonder that children who have lessons by themselves have to deal with stage fright. I have never had a student who was afraid to perform or who refused to perform. As Dr. Suzuki always said, "We are the children of our environment."

## ***Kataoka Archive Expands and Improves***

Great news for all those who never had the benefit of witnessing the teaching of Dr. Haruko Kataoka and for those of us who wish to re-visit these amazing lessons! The Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation web site director, Dr. Kenneth Wilburn, assisted by Suzuki piano teacher Carol Wunderle and the staff of the Media Department at Eastern Carolina University have made available over forty lesson and lecture videos on our web site. Although these are all produced by amateur videographers, they have been brought up to optimum quality, and written transcripts of lectures have been provided.

We encourage our members, especially parents, to view lessons of the piece(s) your child is currently learning. Although all pieces in the repertoire are not yet represented, chances are your piece is there. And don't forget to treat yourselves often to a Kataoka lecture. This is a great way to sustain your motivation as Suzuki parents and teachers.

You may access this archive at the following URL:

<https://mediasite.ecu.edu/MS/Catalog/catalogs/suzukipianobasics>. The Passcode (password), registration and sign in is: HKataokaSPBF. If you have any problems accessing this site, you may email Kenneth Wilburn at [wilburnk@ecu.edu](mailto:wilburnk@ecu.edu) and he will send detailed instructions.

Many thanks to all teachers who have contributed their videos to this important and historic archive. We encourage you not to discard those boxes of VHS tapes in your storage, but to send them to Dr. Wilburn for safekeeping in cyberspace:

Professor Kenneth Wilburn  
History Department, Brewster A318  
East Carolina University  
East Fifth Street  
Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353

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## ***What is the Suzuki Method?***

***By Linda Nakagawa***

We often hear this question. Over the past 30 years, since my introduction to the Suzuki Method, I've debated various ideas and answers. My latest thought is that every one of us Piano Basics teachers and members should read (or re-read) Kataoka Sensei's book, *Thoughts on the Suzuki Method*.

In addition to that, here are a few more principles I remind myself.

1. We all must have dreams.
2. Environment is most important. We teachers must create the best environment for our students and for

ourselves. I started out teaching on one piano. I went to a workshop and Kataoka Sensei happened to mention it is impossible to teach the Suzuki Method on one piano. I was devastated but determined to work out a way to get another piano. I finally got an upright. I was so proud! At another lecture Kataoka Sensei said that an upright is not a piano. OMG! However, her admonitions pushed my dreams to the point that I finally bought another grand. Words cannot express the difference in the awareness of my teaching. Now I know what she meant. We must always strive for the best. Like it or not, we have to accept the fact that we teachers are part of the students' and parents' environment.

3. As the teacher, students and parents see our entire selves. We can talk and explain things to parents about important matters because, as adults, they can understand the world of talk and explanation. But children live in the world of sensibility. It is what we are, who we are, and how we are at the lesson with them that will determine success or failure for the child. It is totally our responsibility.
4. Kataoka Sensei talked often about exposing children to delicious homemade foods, fine art, great classical artists etc. Many of her lectures were about the fact that children have a "floppy" disc and what they are exposed to in their childhood stays with them for life. I strongly believe this.

5. I believe that there is hope for adults, but we must take great care and be extremely selective about the things to which we expose ourselves. I am so grateful that so many teachers have attended workshops by Kataoka Sensei and now Senseis Ogiwara and Kawamura. We all need repetition. We have a "floppy" too. The more we are exposed to Sensei's way of teaching, the more we have to pull from our experiences. Every child is unique, but every child has the potential to learn to play the piano musically from the heart.

We teachers too must continue to work towards our own potential. We continue to take lessons so we can learn how to make better, more musical sound using our bodies more and more naturally. Words can only help 10%. As we practice using our bodies more naturally, we learn how to help our students. As we pursue our own potential and work persistently to a higher level, so will our students. We can give them a gift that will stay with them forever. Let's keep trying. There is hope if we just never give up!



Left to right: Keiko Kawamura, Keiko Ogiwara  
See you at the next workshop with the Senseis!



# Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation Educational Materials

## Compact Discs

<u>Artist</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Member Price</u>	<u>Non-member Price</u>
Dr. HarukoKataoka performs	Suzuki Piano Repertoire volume 1	\$14.00	\$17.00
Dr. HarukoKataoka performs	Suzuki Piano Repertoire volume 2	\$14.00	\$17.00
Dr. HarukoKataoka performs	Suzuki Piano Repertoire volume 3	\$14.00	\$17.00

## Additional Discography

Mineo Hayashi, cello Seizo Azuma, piano	Fun Classics, 12 Pieces: The Swan/ Après un Rêve/ Clair de Lune/ Prayer from òJewish Lifeö/Song of the Birds/ Paraphrase on a Japanese Folk tune Sakur, Sakura/ Song without Words in D major Op. 109/ Etude, Op. 8 No. 11, Bb minor/ Songs my Mother taught me Op. 55 no. 4/ Elegy Op. 24 / Adagio und Allegro in A-flat major Op. 70/ Polonaise Brillante, Op. 3, C major	\$20.00	\$25.00
Mineo Hayashi, cello	Six Suites for solo cello, by J. S. Bach	\$28.00	\$30.00

## Books

<u>Author</u>			
Dr. HarukoKataoka	Sensibility and Education, 2 <sup>nd</sup> printing	\$12.00	\$14.00
Dr. Shinichi Suzuki	Nurtured by Love	\$13.00	\$16.00
Dr. HarukoKataoka	Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School	\$ 6.00	\$ 8.00
Dr. HarukoKataoka	My Thoughts on Piano Technique	\$ 6.00	\$ 8.00
Dr. HarukoKataoka	How to teach beginners	\$13.00	\$15.00
	Full color edition of Memorial Piano Basics Foundation Newsletter	\$ 3.00	
	Print of pencil portrait of Kataoka Sensei, 6öh x 4ö w, drawn in Matsumoto in 1992. Drawn and donated by Huub de Leeuw. (Proceeds to benefit the Memorial Fund.)	\$20.00	\$25.00
	10-Piano Poster: 1999,2001, 2003, 2005	\$10.00	\$15.00
	10-Piano Poster: 2001 Autographed by Dr. Kataoka and Juri Kataoka	\$25.00	\$30.00
	10-Piano Poster: 2003 Autographed by Dr. Kataoka	\$25.00	\$30.00

### For a Limited Time Only: For the membership only

<b>Starter Pack #1 \$50.00</b>	<b>CD's: Kataoka recordings of Books 1-3</b> <b>Books: Nurtured by Love, by Shinichi Suzuki</b> <b>Sensibility and Education, by Haruko Kataoka</b> <b>How to Teach Beginners (Books 1-2), by Haruko Kataoka</b>
<b>Starter Pack #2 \$25.00</b>	<b>Books: Nurtured by Love, by Shinichi Suzuki</b> <b>Sensibility and Education, by Haruko Kataoka</b> <b>How to Teach Beginners (Books 1-2), by Haruko Kataoka</b>

*Shipping always free to members!*