

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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positive or negative direction depends on our environment. The stage of life when children are obedient and listen to their parents is from birth to, roughly, middle school age. I can almost

**Amazing Power
When We Decide to Take
Action**

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
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Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg

It is very difficult to educate a human being from birth. In other words, how an individual grows up depends on whatever you do, but still it is fun to anticipate the future. As human beings each of us is born with our own distinctive personality, and whether we develop in a hear some of you disagreeing, "Not a chance! My child is in second grade and already doesn't listen to what I say." Nevertheless, at this stage, even though they

may disagree or resist, as long as a parent is firm children eventually listen to their parents. This is the stage in which all the basics of human life must be completely learned. Examples of things that must be taught diligently range from spoken civilities: "Thank you," "Please," "Hello," "Goodbye," etc. to the ability to demonstrate goodwill towards others (generosity), to be considerate of others, to offer mutual help and support, to be patient and tolerant, to strive and put forth effort, to carry oneself with proper posture, to use proper speech etiquette and manners. This is the stage when children have the ability to listen to you. So if parents single-mindedly focus with patience, children will learn and be able to utilize their life abilities for the rest of their lives.

When human beings reach the age of twelve or thirteen, they start maturing physically into adulthood. They are not the former children who had previously been totally dependent on their parents. What this means is that they have arrived at the 'starting line' of life where they will begin to assert their independence as adults. Not only are they developing physically, they are simultaneously developing mentally and

psychologically into adults. This is the emergence of their striving to become totally independent and to take responsibility for their own behavior. They are no longer able just to listen to what adults are telling them. When parents unwittingly repeat themselves as they had done in the past, children of this age are bound to tell their parents that they are annoying.

This becomes painfully apparent during piano practice. While still in grade school, children would complain and be unwilling to practice. However, when they are middle school (exactly when this happens is a bit variable, some children get there sooner than others), they have an aversion to anything parents ask them to do. They are purposefully obstinate and averse to any kind of interference. Mothers lament, "It's impossible, he refuses to listen now." However, when mothers tell me this I always say they should go home and cook a celebratory meal because their hard work up to this point to bring up their child properly is the very reason why his body and mind have grown so splendidly. Strong resistance is proof that she is striving to become independent.

So, when this happens, how do you continue to educate your children?

In my experience, if you want to direct their education toward positive things, it won't happen by giving them orders. It is necessary to build an environment where self-motivation and internal drive can be developed.

Here is a simple example in the area of piano study: when older children are self-motivated to participate in a concert and not ordered to perform, three or four days prior to the event they will exert themselves with concerted effort without being coerced into practicing. At the concert, together with their nervousness and their sheer effort, they will relish their achievement. Let's provide them with these kinds of opportunities.

In my personal experience, when my two children were getting ready to take their high school

exam, being prone to thinking differently than most parents I suggested that they didn't have to go to high school. However, they wanted to go to high school with their friends so they began studying on their own accord. I didn't even once say anything about studying. I found out that, within a very short time, they had gotten higher scores than they had ever gotten in their entire three years in middle school. I realized that when human beings are self-motivated and earnestly focus, they can demonstrate up to five to ten times more power with extraordinary results that are so different from normal day-to-day events. It is possible to regain three years of study even in a limited timeframe. My children proved to me what we are all capable of doing.

When adults study piano, and a teacher points out a bad habit, and we try to fix it in a lackadaisical way, all the time wondering to ourselves if we really play that way, it is very difficult to implement the change necessary to acquire good technique. First of all, we must realize that there is a problem and then it is necessary to have the determination to change it with concentration and perseverance. What can conceivably take three years can be corrected in one year.

Human beings must decide for ourselves what it is we want to accomplish. We can merely observe what other people are doing and become confused, wondering what we are doing and having no particular direction, but do we have the time and energy to waste complaining like this? We may as well tell ourselves we can do it! When we finally decide, and become committed to concentrate and to carry out what we have to do, then we can achieve our goals with unimaginable power and strength. Human beings are wonderful! I am so moved by how wonderful human beings are.

This year let us all, adults and children alike, decide to do everything with the kind of effort that produces great results.

Learning to Do My Best

*by Taj Costa, age 19
Suzuki piano student of
Rita Burns in Carmichael, CA*

Last July, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to live one year in Japan and study piano with Mrs. [Keiko] Kawamura. I have been to Japan before for 10-Piano Concerts, but I was able to learn much more of the culture due to the amount of time that I spent there. One of the big things that I learned was that the Japanese view piano lessons as part of a child's education which means that, like reading, writing and math, they insist that their children learn it, because they believe that even though they may not like it, it will be beneficial to their future.

This greatly influenced me because even though I had taken piano lessons for many years before, I had always viewed everything outside of school as an extra-curricular activity and therefore I would not put as much work into it as I should have. This was different from the Japanese way of thinking, which is that you should try hard in everything you do. I was immersed in a culture which forced me to incorporate all the habits of practicing which Mrs. [Rita] Burns had tried to instill in me for years and Mrs. Kawamura finally made me come to realize.

Mrs. Kawamura forced me to take a hard look at myself. She saw my poor work ethic as a reflection of the type of person I was, that I didn't try my best at **anything** I did. I realized through her that it wasn't only in my piano that I lacked focus. It was in other areas of my life as well. This was very difficult for me to come to terms with. But as a result of her honesty, I now know what I need to do to improve myself. I have to put my full concentration and focus on my practicing and apply the same dedication to all aspects of my life.

Mrs. Kawamura taught me that the role of a Suzuki teacher is not only to teach good technique and produce good sound but to instill good values and a good work ethic in students in the hope that they will become good people. I believe that this was also the vision of Dr. Kataoka as well. Dr. Kataoka saw piano students apply themselves and work very hard just prior to the 10-Piano Concerts. She saw this determination in the parents as well, with both students and parents coming together to make the 10-Piano Concerts succeed. Without the pressure of the concert, however, students would quickly lose this focus during the rest of the year.

But it was this kind of dedication that produced the most improvement in each student, and I believe it was Dr. Kataoka's hope that students would retain this dedication throughout the year, and ultimately for the rest of their lives.

At first I believed that it would be impossible for me to change my bad practice habits, but I learned from Mrs. Kawamura that until Dr. Kataoka was 30 years old, **even her** technique was ineffective. As a result, she then began to develop her techniques to play the piano properly, with ease and good tone

by studying many great pianists. Similarly, when Mrs. Kawamura was 19 years-old, she also played the piano with poor technique. But she was also able to change the way she had always been practicing and learn the new techniques that Dr. Kataoka was developing.

During my stay in Japan, I realized that even though I **thought** that the Japanese students and teachers practiced perfectly, in actuality they struggled with many of the same issues that I did. But through their hard work, dedication, and focus they were able to overcome many of the same problems that I had with practicing. This gave me confidence that I too could overcome years of incorrect practicing, and that it is never too late for anyone to change their bad habits.

We should always strive to improve everything we do. We should never become satisfied with anything, because we can always improve.

Lastly, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Mrs. Kawamura, the other Japanese teachers, and the host families for allowing me to stay in Japan the past year and for all their hard work with each 10-Piano Concert. I also want to thank Mrs. Burns

for her many years of dedication and perseverance in upholding the standards of excellence of the Suzuki method (and for simply putting up with me).

Lastly, I want to thank my family, especially my grandmother, Gaga, for introducing me to the Suzuki method as a child.

February 2010 Workshops ***Suzuki Piano Basics on the Move***

Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura have agreed to come to the United States to conduct workshops in Phoenix, Arizona (February 5-8, 2010), and Louisville, Kentucky (February 11-15, 2010). In Louisville, there will be a Friendship Concert featuring students from attending teachers. In both events, lessons will be given to students going to Japan for the Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert in April. Contact information is found in the Upcoming Events listing. All members plan to attend (and don't forget to bring students and other interested teachers with you!).

To add or change items on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact
Karen Hagberg (kh@hagbergsuzuki.com, 585-244-0490).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

<http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/SuzukiPianoBasics>

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***Views of the 6th Sacramento Suzuki Piano Basics
International 10-Piano Concert
August 15, 2009***



Kaiko Nozawa Sensei rehearsing the Chopin Waltz, Op. 34, no. 3
Photo by Kyle Kumasaki



The Mondavi Center for the performing Arts, UC Davis, Saturday August 15, 2009
Photo by Kyle Kumasaki



Kaiko Kawamura Sensei rehearsing the Schumann Novelette, Op. 21, no. 1
Photo by Kyle Kumasaki



Kaiko Ogiwara Sensei rehearsing the Chopin Waltz, Op. 34, no. 3
Photo by Kyle Kumasaki



Director Linda Nakagawa (far left) delivering speech after final bow
Photo by Kyle Kumasaki