

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

# Knowledge Versus Ability

*By Haruko Kataoka*

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Teri Paradero  
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## ***Piano Basics Foundation News***

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There is such an absolute difference between knowledge and ability: knowing something versus being able to do something. We have mistakenly used these terms synonymously. Likewise, we erroneously believe that knowledge is what gives us the power to do anything. I started thinking about how this applies to teaching piano. When adults, with their abundant knowledge base, are shown how to play the piano by a kind and polite instructor, they immediately claim that they understand and therefore assume they are able to play as shown. However, even if the adult tries actually to use the body correctly at the piano to reproduce what was instantly “understood,” in reality it is not possible either to make the desired sound or to move the fingers. Then the adult becomes impatient which in turn causes physical and emotional tension, even further creating the inability to use the body as intended.

I keep repeating this to everyone. The human brain, being so powerfully clever, is able to understand things easily. Assuming no handicap, one is able to comprehend from hearing information just once. In sharp contrast, the human body is not so clever. It takes many, many repetitions, many hundreds and hundreds of repetitions, for the body to comprehend a task. This condition even

applies to bodies of very intelligent people. God was impartial to all when creating humans.

To our amusement, the mind that understands instantly is certainly very convenient but unfortunately is also given to forgetting. On the other hand, when the 'slow to learn' body repeats a task many thousands, many tens of thousands, of times, the body will most likely never forget as long as it is alive.

The most important thing learned in the study of piano is what children hate the most, the act of practicing itself. It is the task of training the body, which absolutely necessitates repetition of the same thing day after day.

This may be easier to understand if we put it in terms of how we acquire everyday, ordinary words that we use to communicate in our language. From the time of birth we hear the same words every day. Those same words are repeated daily over and over using our own mouths without much thought, yet we are able to learn to communicate. No matter in what country we are born, the mother tongue we learn when we are very young is never forgotten. Because the ability to speak did not come from knowledge of the language, but from daily listening with our ears and repeatedly mouthing the words, being able to do without understanding first is the faster way to acquire such an ability.

Naturally, it is far more efficient to start practicing piano from a very young age because young children have not accumulated a lot of knowledge and ability becomes absorbed into their bodies more easily. While practicing over and over without problematically thinking *how*, *what*, or *why* they are practicing, eventually they are able to play the piano. "I don't understand, but I can do" applies to children and "I understand, but I can't do," applies to adults.

From grade school to college, instead of filling the mind of children with a lot of knowledge and accumulating a mountain load of "I understand" and not being able to do anything, I feel that it is better to have a single area of concentration. For instance, let them cook and see them excel in it, become the best gardener in the world for planting trees, or be a pianist who can play so well that performances bring happiness to people. This would be preferable. Even if it means they do not have the feeling of, "I understand," I think that they would be more valuable as human beings.

Unfortunately, I feel that lately the majority of adults feel that mere understanding is more important [than being able to *do*]. This is because adults can only think or learn through the use of their intellect and their accumulated knowledge.

In music pedagogy it has become popular for world-renowned piano teachers to lecture in various places. However, the reason why not too many good pianists exist is because there isn't anyone who is good at teaching *how* to teach. In other words, they are turning out people who understand but are not able to do.

Finally, I would like to share my enthusiasm about one of my favorite books by Saint-Exupéry. Saint-Exupéry was born in 1900 in France and flew as a commercial pilot. Despite his insistence that he was not a writer but rather an aviator when interviewed by a newspaper journalist, his literary creations, though limited in number, are all fabulous. In contrast to the safe, modern airplanes we have today, he piloted small single-seat airplanes with no canopy and no radar. He was in several crashes and endured many harrowing experiences. During World War II on July 31, 1944, he left on a reconnaissance mission from which he never returned. In his book most well-known to most of you, *The Little Prince*, he shows us the importance of being able *to do* instead of just *to know*. The plight of the human

condition and matters of the heart are addressed in *Wind, Sand and Stars*. It may be a

little hard to understand, but please try reading them.

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## ***The Body Remembers!***

***By Narumi Yoshida***

The other day, my daughter visited and announced, to my surprise, that she wanted to play the piano. She asked if we could play a piece for four hands together six months hence. I was astonished because, although she had taken lessons when she was a little girl, it has now been ten years since she played seriously.

So, how well does she play? First, I asked her to play the Twinkles so I could listen to the sound she could make with her fingers. Her hands went to the keys, but the fingers could not move. However, her good posture at the piano was as it was when she was young. Furthermore, she started with Twinkle A. When she was finished, she realized, "My fingers are not moving like they used to." It was to be expected. The fingers had not been moving for many years. Needless to say, she could not produce musical sound either.

I suggested, "Play this way. Listen carefully to your sound," while I played at her side. I don't know exactly how much time we devoted to this task but her sound started to change. As I watched her, fondly reveling in the memory of her sitting at the piano as a

three-year-old, her posture unchanged since then, she said, "I feel that I would be able to play. My fingers are not moving as well as I want, but with practice, I would be able to play." Perhaps, to some extent, her sense for playing had returned.

With such a long absence from the piano, I felt that playing would not come back to her easily. I don't know how she will be playing in six months, but one thing was clear to me. Her body still remembered. I am convinced that this is the result of practicing the same things over and over again when she was a child.

As Kataoka Sensei had always said about the body, a slow learner, the same task that is practiced repeatedly over and over will never be forgotten. Doing the repetitive practice necessary for the body to learn is a very important thing. If you can't do something, it only means that you haven't practiced enough. While children are young when their bodies are still without unnecessary tension and can endure repetition, let's make sure they do the repetitive practice that the body requires to make any task a true ability.

## ***Congratulations Teachers/Welcome Family Members\*!***

It is with great pleasure that we welcome the numerous new family members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation listed here. We hope that your interest in the activities of this organization and your regular receipt of Dr. Kataoka's writings will deepen your commitment and understanding of your child's piano study. Please let your teacher know whenever you find something particularly meaningful in the newsletter, and make requests for things you might like to see there, so we can provide you with the support you need as parents of Suzuki Method students.

We hope you will become interested in attending a 10-Piano Concert or a workshop or an institute with your child after reading about these various events. As Dr. Kataoka's article in this issue states, children learn best through their bodies and through repetition. The more numerous their opportunities to interact with other Suzuki-Method students, the more easily they themselves will develop their piano skills. Parents also receive invaluable support and motivation through interaction with other parents, and there is time for such interaction at these dedicated events. Going outside your daily environment, possibly outside your comfort zone, is guaranteed to refresh your return to your home studio with renewed enthusiasm and energy.

We congratulate teachers who have chosen to have their families participate in this way, and are certain that positive results will be experienced in your studios. In fact, we encourage you to report feedback, positive

or negative, from your families who are receiving the newsletter. Hearing from our families will bring a welcome dimension to our Suzuki Piano Basics community as a whole.

Family memberships also have enabled us to continue to subsidize airfares for the Japanese teachers when they come to the United States to conduct workshops. With the recent increase in airfares, this has become a crucial function of our Foundation in order to keep this pedagogy available to our members. Our very reason for existence is to continue the pedagogy of Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-founder of the Suzuki Piano Method, by keeping contact with the teachers in Japan who trained with her since childhood. These teachers are our strongest link to Dr. Kataoka's unique teaching.

We encourage other teachers to reap the benefits of having your families become members of the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation. Strong family membership will enable projects we have not yet had the resources to consider. We look forward to having your families with us.

Karen Hagberg, President  
Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation

\*Numerous family members have requested that their contact information not be included in our directory, and so the decision has been made not to include contact information for any families. If you want to contact someone on the Family Member list, please contact their teacher to be put in touch.

## ***Students and Teachers from Japan Return for Workshops this Summer***

Again this summer we are so fortunate to have teachers and students from Japan coming to the United States to conduct two 5-day Teacher Research Workshops. Whether repeat attendees or first-timers, we welcome all of you to join us for a week of learning and renewal.

The first will take place July 31-August 4 in Honeoye Falls, a delightful suburb of Rochester, New York where Teri Paradero hosts masterclass lessons in her spacious studio. Teachers may relax in this woodland setting and enjoy lunch together every day between sessions. You may bring students to have a lesson and/or to perform in a Friendship Concert on Monday, August 3 at 7

p.m. in the gorgeous Hochstein Recital Hall in downtown Rochester. Out-of-town students may join the Japanese students and their homestay families on a trip to Niagara Falls on the day after the concert.

Then in Sacramento, California on August 8-12 a similar workshop will be held with another special Friendship Concert in which attending American students may perform along with students from Japan.

Please consider taking advantage of this opportunity for you, and possibly your student(s), to participate in one of these amazing events. You will be glad you did! (See Upcoming Events for contact information.)

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## ***Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation: Announcement & General Membership Meeting***

The Board of Directors of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation has accepted the resignation of Gloria Elliott, and has appointed Hannah Hall as a new Director to take her place. Hannah has served as Secretary of the Foundation for the past three years.

Many thanks to Gloria Elliott for her contributions during her long tenure on the Board. She served as Recording Secretary for Board meetings, and kept us on track with procedural matters. Her rational input kept our various discussions focused and aided in our decision making. She will be missed.

The meeting of the General Membership will take place during the Suzuki Piano Basics Institute at the University of Louisville, date and time to be announced. At this meeting the following slate of officers will be presented for approval by members present:

President: Karen Hagberg  
Vice President: Renee Eckis  
Treasurer: Linda Nakagawa  
Secretary: To Be Determined

Members may submit nominations for these offices to our Nominations Chair, Ann Taylor [ann@anntaylorstudio.net](mailto:ann@anntaylorstudio.net), before May 30, 2015. Agenda items for this meeting may also be submitted to Karen Hagberg before that date.

# ***Piano Basics Foundation***

## ***Upcoming Workshops/Events***

**June 22-26, 2015**

**Conway, Arkansas**

Suzuki Piano Basics Five Piano  
and Chamber Workshop  
with Bruce Anderson, Rita Burns and Bruce Boiney  
Contact Pam Werner [501-425-2862](tel:501-425-2862)  
[info@suzukiprg.org](mailto:info@suzukiprg.org), [www.suzukiprg.org](http://www.suzukiprg.org)

**Friday, July 31-Tuesday, August 4, 2015**

**Rochester, NY**

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop  
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura  
Contact Karen Hagberg 585-978-0600  
[kh@hagbergsuzuki.com](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com)

**July 17-20, 2015**

**Tacoma, Washington**

Suzuki Piano Basics Summer Festival  
with Rita Burns  
Contact Jacki Block 253-759-7213  
[Jblock@ups.edu](mailto:Jblock@ups.edu)

**Saturday, August 8-Wednesday, August 12, 2015**

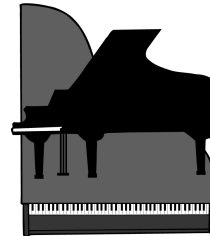
**Sacramento, California**

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop  
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura  
Contact Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952  
[g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto:g.nakagawa@comcast.net)

**July 20-24, 2015**

**Louisville, Kentucky**

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute  
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921  
[boiney@suzukipiano.com](mailto:boiney@suzukipiano.com)  
[www.suzukipiano.org](http://www.suzukipiano.org)



**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).

**Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:**

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