

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

*How to Capture
the Hearts of Children*

(Part 3a of 3)

By Haruko Kataoka

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Until recently, I had been living peacefully by myself, but I am now living with my grandchildren and their family. As a result, I have truly been given the opportunity to study.

Recently, I found my granddaughter, a fifth grader, sitting at our table impolitely slouched and propped up by her elbows. So I promptly proceeded to tell her, "Hey! Why are you sitting like an old woman. Tables are not made to support your elbows!" She responded, "Mom does it." Her mother who was nearby jumped to her feet startled by the comment. Her immediate reaction was to claim that she had no recollection of doing such a thing. Understandably, she felt put on the spot in the presence of a strict mother-in-law.

After mulling it over all next day, she was apologetic but wondered when she could have possibly sat hunched over leaning on her elbows. However, she finally realized that she would sit at the table in the same exact way while she read the newspaper. Those of us from the older generation have a saying, "Children are mirrors of parents." Children do what parents do. Working with my students, I can truly attest to being able to actually envision their parents just from watching the children's behavior.

Long ago, I had a student whose family was originally from Shimazu Domain (one of the most powerful feudal clan from the Edo era), Kagoshima. As an adult, he attended the medical school at the Shinshu University. It was rumored that his family was very proper. Since he was very young, his manners were quite exemplary. At some point, I had given him a piece of candy at his lesson. At the very next lesson, he stood erect in a well-mannered posture and said, "Sensei, thank you so much for the treat last week!" I had to ask him what treat I had given him because I had already forgotten the incident. He politely replied, "I received candy from you." Observing his perfectly proper manners and his

carrying her very favorite purse. Our guest's child really admired and wanted the purse. Though it was an item that was not easy to find, I insisted that my daughter give it to the child and I promised to buy her another one. My daughter must have been five or six years old at the time. She told me that to this day she still begrudges what happened. I had assumed that since she

tendency to be a little on the stiff side when he played the piano, I asked curiously, "At your house, if you lay about watching TV, who scolds you?" He said that it was his father. I came to the conclusion that their household must be conducted in a very strict manner in accordance to their Shimazu tradition of very proper etiquette and manners. Children truly grow up watching and observing their parents' behavior.

It is so true that it is easy to capture the hearts of children. All you have to do is relate to them as individual human beings. You cannot think that they are merely children. Of course, when it comes to playing with children, I join right in playing with their childish toys. I refer to them by their nicknames. However, when the lesson begins, I never use Nicknames. Instead, I use 'you'. I will say, "You must do this properly!" Using their nicknames when they are engaged in studying or having to do tasks in a correct way changes the whole mood of the situation. It results in reverting to the world of treating them like children.

There is an old adage: Within a word contains the soul. You should not say to children, "You are such a good child." It is fine to say it when they are at play. However, when discussing a serious subject with them and you do not treat them like children, they will not only understand the gravity of important issues, but they will remember it forever. They will remember good issues as well as bad ones.

Just recently my forty-year-old daughter brought up an incident that happened over thirty years ago. We were bidding guests from Europe farewell. She happened to be

was such a young child, she would have forgotten about it, but one should never do such a thing. By unilaterally deciding to give a child's most prized possession away and quickly dismissing the action by a promise to replace it, a child's feelings can be hurt. You have to ask their permission, first. Without asking her, "Is it okay to give this away?", I ended up treating her like a child. Childhood is truly a wonderful stage in life. I believe that we as adults, those of us

who are part of children's lives, must take the treatment of children very seriously.

There have been terrible incidents recently involving children in the news that were very upsetting to me. A child was pushed off a tall parking garage. A teenager who lied to her parents about her whereabouts so she could go to Shibuya (city in the middle of Tokyo where youth like to hang out and can get themselves into trouble) was found out and quarantined by her parents. One of the Cabinet Ministers harshly criticized the parents for the abuse of their children, and stated that the parents should be severely and publicly punished like in the olden days when they would tie up a criminal with a long rope and let a horse drag him around the village in public and then behead him. This minister was not aware that what happened was his responsibility, too. He should be beheaded. All the adults should be beheaded. They did not protect the children. Parents, however,

because of their immediate proximity to their children, must bear direct responsibility for their children. Unfortunately, it is the trend of our modern society where parents themselves are weak human beings. Everyday we witness murderous acts on TV. In Shibuya, the store shelves are lined with merchandise to entice anybody's desires. With such temptations, it seems too daunting a task for mere parents and children to tackle. Nevertheless, children need extraordinarily strong parents to be able to handle this world such as ours.

Of course parents are not the only ones to bear this responsibility. Because this is a sign of our times, responsibility is inherent in what has become the reality of the present. This should already be apparent to the very people who run our country, the ones who should bear the very punishment that they say should befall abusive parents. Shouldn't it be their top priority to enlist change? Watching their happy smiling faces on TV, I felt that they are devoid of such awareness or responsibility.

As I mentioned before, because the left-brain intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge are not fully developed until children become adults, not only the parents, but all adults in their environment must look out for their best interest. We must be earnest in teaching children everything since this is their most crucial stage for learning.

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“All children learn, depending on their environment.”

Shinichi Suzuki

The Language Learning Experience and an afterthought

*By Janet Kaido
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

A few years ago, during a visit to Yellowstone National Park, I was surprised to hear around me, in several different locations on different days, so much German. Hearing other languages in such a spectacular, internationally known destination is no surprise, but hearing so much *German* in particular was surprising to me.

My heritage is mostly German; while I did not have much contact with my mother's relatives who spoke German when they were together (her grandmother, whom she recalled speaking almost exclusively German, died before I was born, and I heard her uncles only at special occasions at my maternal grandparents' house), my dad taught high school German and taught us a few words. Every other year or so he would host a colleague from Germany for a week, and I would hear them speak German for hours every evening. Most significantly, after college I spent a year studying organ in Germany, finally becoming fairly fluent. So, I've lived where the main language all around me was German, spoken by Germans.

It was while walking down a wide, gravel road to a popular Yellowstone site that I realized that the German I was hearing was from two parties back. Furthermore, with a careful listen, I noticed that the party directly behind us was speaking another different language.

How was it that I could recognize the German from farther away than the other group, and it took me a while longer to realize that they were even speaking another language? What struck me was that, even before I could make out individual words, I just had the *feeling* it was German I was hearing. I recognized the cadence, speed, flow, lilt, sense of expression and emotion, even more than the words. In fact, once it struck me that, wait, isn't that German I'm hearing, I wanted to listen quite carefully to pick out some words I recognized, just to be sure. (It was over 20 years ago, now, that I lived there, after all!) With other languages I do not know or had studied but not heard spoken at length by natives, it was not until I heard individual words within earshot that I could even tell another language was being spoken. Hearing and recognizing German this way gave me a very happy feeling, bringing back wonderful memories of my experience and friendships during the year I lived among German speakers.

This experience reminded me so much of our "language learning" method. It's not so much the notes and rhythm that we want our students to pick up while hearing the music. More important, it is the expression, feeling, and flow of the music that we want them deeply to know—to know so intuitively that they do not have to think about it but just *know* it, can connect with it, and share it easily with others, as though they are having a conversation in their native language.

Related Afterthought:

Now that I am a parent of a two-year-old, my realization about the permanence of early memories has been reinforced. When our daughter was about four months old, I was sitting with her in my lap with a fine recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony playing in the room. I held her while the whole



Janet Kaido and her daughter

symphony played, and I bounced her along with the rhythm and sang along with various instrumental lines (which quite well from my years as an oboist). Perhaps due to the mastery of the composition and/or her mood, or the time of day, or some developmental milestone, she actually seemed quite attentive, awake, and engaged the whole time, enjoying the sounds and the sensation of the rhythm.

Recently one of my students' families gave us a book about the orchestra which uses that symmetry to introduce the

instruments used in the piece via a computer chip and buttons on the side of the book to push and play back recorded sounds (awful tone, indeed, but fun and informative). Recently, after she played with this book, feeling that she should hear the real thing with real tone, I put the good recording of that symphony back on, and she lit up and started dancing and singing (in the way that two-year-olds sing). I know she recognized the clips from the book, but she seemed to enjoy the music on a deeper level with a distant expression, and I'm convinced that in some part of her brain is the memory of that first experience of the piece from when she was four months old. After the 5th was over, I started to play the 7th, which I find about as joyful and rhythmically compelling and thought she would also enjoy, but she got upset and indicated that she wanted to hear the 5th again. She obviously has some deeper connection to that piece. Indeed, young children are never *too* young for significant aesthetic experiences to take place.



After a two-year hiatus because of the pandemic, Judy Wely's students have returned to performing for residents of the Brookdale Retirement Senior Center in San Jose, California. Pictured is student Nathan Kang as he performed his senior recital. Congratulations, Nathan!

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Wishful Thinking

*By Linda Nakagawa
Sacramento, California*

I have been studying to teach the Suzuki Piano Basics Method for almost 40 years. Everything I have learned has come from my lessons with Kataoka Sensei, the lectures, books and articles from both Suzuki Sensei and Kataoka Sensei, the lessons I've observed, and from teaching my own students. Learning how to listen and what to listen for is critical in our teaching. Knowing the difference between *music and noise* is important in *how* we teach. But the most important ingredient in our teaching is to have the **ability to demonstrate**.

In the beginning, I could not tell the difference between a good sound and a bad one let alone demonstrate it. But with patience and perseverance from me and from my students and their parents, I learned to believe in myself. I worked hard. I gave up playing difficult pieces. I stopped accompanying. I worked on my own posture, tension, and body balance. How? Playing many Twinkles (especially Twinkle A at first, then "down ups") with every finger, trying to listen for a better sound, working to get tension out of my body. I was very lucky. I had many beginning students. Their lessons were my practice. I started to hear better. (It is too easy simply to play the correct notes.) My ears really began to hear musical tone. Teachers would ask me if I ever got tired of hearing so many Twinkles and the same pieces over and over. My answer was always "no," because they always sounded different.

Because of the way I was practicing, I did not attempt to perform pieces from

beginning to end, but I continually tried to demonstrate a clear, beautiful single soft, and then a loud, legato tone. And now I can demonstrate a beautiful single soft and loud sound with chords too. It is not enough simply to bring out the top note when "voicing" chords. It is important to voice every note. Twinkles help. It is impossible to make a good chord sound with tension. Now I can demonstrate a variety of colors of staccato and legato sounds. My Alberti bass still has much to be desired, but it has improved immensely from the time I first starting learning how to teach this wonderful method.

Improving our own sound so we can demonstrate (teach) to our students is a neverending and a lifelong commitment. That is what is so wonderful about this method. We learn how to overcome our own weaknesses and if we persevere and are patient with ourselves, we learn how to become better teachers for our students and to teach them the best way to learn.

By the way, this has to do with learning how to live a better life. Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Kataoka did not stop teaching with music and with their instruments; they both constantly reiterated that their education extended into all aspects of their students' lives. Their aim was to educate people to be well-adjusted citizens who make positive contributions to society.

I am in my twilight years and I truly feel I still have much to give, but I am running out of energy. I wish I could collect all of my experience and knowledge and my ability to demonstrate and give it away to young, interested teachers so they could start where I am leaving off. But this is not how the world works. We are mortal, with a finite number of years on this planet. And we each have but one lifetime to accumulate whatever knowledge and understanding we can. Imagine if the lives of great teachers could extend for another 100 or 200 years. Would this benefit everyone? It is a silly fantasy, because it is not going to happen. All we can do is, wherever we are in life, to continue to strive to become better. And never give up.

Speaking “Piano”

Part 1 of 3

By Karen Hagberg

From *Matsumoto News*, Vol.3, no.4, November 1990

The Suzuki Method was born when Suzuki Sensei realized that all Japanese children speak Japanese. This realization has been cited over and over again in Suzuki literature, and it often appears to be such an obvious fact that it can seem to have no meaning at all. My initial reaction to this statement was, “Yes, of course. But then, so what? How does a method for teaching music spring from this simple truism?”

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During my past two-and-a-half years in Japan, I have been teaching English to Japanese people. This is a fairly formidable task, as Japanese schools teach English in a strange way, almost as if it is a dead language that nobody speaks. The teachers are Japanese people who usually cannot themselves speak English well at all. Their pronunciation is very strange, mostly because English, in Japanese textbooks, is transliterated into a Japanese alphabet called *Katakana* which cannot replicate the sounds we use in English at all. The resulting pronunciation is often unintelligible to an English-speaking person. I have actually met a number of people in Japan who, I discover after have been speaking Japanese because my Japanese is better than their English, are English teachers.

Students study English very hard for six years, throughout junior high school and high school. They actually learn a lot

“about” English, but cannot use it in conversation. Kataoka Sensei reports that she read Shakespeare in school. Sometimes it is embarrassing when English students ask me about fine points of grammar I have not thought about since ninth grade, or when they want to discuss the intricacies of the International Phonetic Alphabet, which I have never actually needed to use despite having studied a number of languages over the years.

Foreigners in Japan notice how few Japanese people are even willing to try to speak English, and even among those who do try how few can carry on the simplest conversation. It is amazing that Japan, as a leader in the world’s economic and political life [as of 1990], has been able to function so well without having better trained its citizens in an International language. It is quite a different situation from European countries and even in most other Asian countries where, in order to function on the world stage, the educated citizenry is at least bi-lingual.

When I began teaching English the pronunciation problem seemed fairly hopeless. Not only were people unable physically to make many of the sounds of English speech but they could not *hear* the sounds either. Pairs of words such as she/see, work/walk, law/raw, hood/food sounded exactly alike to them even when I said them. Nor were they able to say a sentence with the natural inflections of an English-speaking person. If they tried to speak with any fluidity, saying more than one distinct syllable at a time, they would stumble over the words, often getting literally tongue-tied. In the beginning, I felt the situation was so bad there was no way to cure it. I was content if I could, with effort, make out a student’s meaning at all. Every word out of their mouths was wrong. It sounded nothing like English. What was I going to do, correct every single sound they made?

Finally, after two years of feeling that I had not really been helping my English students, I began to do just that. I started with the idea that they should learn to say “the” so that it did not sound like “za” or “dza,” “is” so it did not sound like “eezu;” “it” so it did not sound like “eato.” I began with only a few very

simple words but, I reasoned, how could students ever speak English if they could not say words such as this? Consequently, I began stopping them after the very first word of the sentence, repeating what they had said, then saying it correctly, and asking them to repeat it over and over again until it was right. Sometimes I described to them the position and movement of the tongue and lips as the word was pronounced and where the sound came from, whether from the back of the mouth or the front. I drilled the sound repeatedly, recorded it on tape so that students could hear it every day during the week, and I did not let up until they could first hear the sound and then say it. Maybe my students would not win elocution contests but, by God, they would be able to say “the” after studying with me.

My students began exclaiming that I had lately become a very strict teacher, because whenever they would slip and mispronounce a sound I knew they could now make I would scream, “No!” Or I would gesture wildly or bang the table with my notebook. I let my frustration show when they could not hear the difference between “light” and “right,” telling them to open their ears, that the difference was very, very distinct. How could anyone *not* hear it?

I realized I had taken for granted my own expertise in English and how well my ear had been trained to hear these sounds. I

conducted experiments with English-speaking friends. Yes, we could all hear the difference between “three” and “free” even out-of-context and with our backs turned away from each other. I demanded this level of listening from my students, knowing that until they could do this they would never speak English. This is what it *means* to speak English.

Once single words were said correctly, a second word could be added. If the lips and tongue were in the correct position they did not get tongue-tied. English, like any language spoken the analogy is, indeed, very apt and far-reaching.

(To Be Continued)



Matsumoto News Republication: From September 1988 through January 1992, Karen Hagberg lived and studied in Matsumoto with Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-Founder of the Suzuki Piano Method and the founder of the Suzuki Piano Basics Method. During that time she published a newsletter with nine issues annually that was distributed to Suzuki piano teachers in North America and Europe. In addition to news of upcoming workshops and multi-piano concerts, each issue contained an article intended to share what it was like as a foreigner to live in Japan and to study with Dr. Kataoka and Dr. Suzuki.



Over thirty years have elapsed since the first issue of Matsumoto News: an entire generation. By popular demand we are re-publishing the articles here. They have been edited from the original, but they remain under copyright and may not be

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Message From the Editor

Hi Teachers. We hope you're having an enjoyable summer.

This is a double issue of the newsletter, May-August, 2022. Not having received any notifications, we assume that no workshop activity is happening over the summer vacation time. We hope that the pandemic will allow it to resume sometime soon. Please make sure to notify me if and when you schedule workshops or events that you want our entire membership to know about. In the meantime, we hope you can get together locally with other teachers to research, or take some time to study videos of Kataoka Sensei teaching on our web site. If you need help accessing those videos, you may email Ken Wilburn for assistance [wilburnk@ecu.edu]. There are now videos available there for most of the Suzuki Piano repertoire. You can watch these and have your own workshop right there at home.

As usual, I welcome news of any kind from your studios. Thanks to Judy Wely for her report of students returning to performing in nursing homes since the beginning of the pandemic. The residents are, of course, thrilled to be able to hear young people performing for them. We music teachers bring joy to a troubled world.

Karen Hagberg, Editor