



TWINKLING THE IVORIES

November 2017

REFLECTIONS ON CREATIVITY IN MUSIC

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At the Fall Workshop, I had the privilege of introducing music improvisation and composing to our ESPS students. We discussed what improvising vs. composing means, and explored some easy ways students could try either at home. I was happy to see that there were students in every class who had ventured into this territory—some even shared their own compositions. Equally, there were students who were experiencing this for the first time, and it was wonderful to see them come out of their shells and grow in confidence. As a summary to our weekend, I'd like to share with you, as parents, a different perspective, namely why I feel nurturing creativity is inherently important for a young person's development and how you can help.

Have you ever found yourself exclaiming "quit banging on the piano" or "quit goofing around and practice"? Students who are noodling at the piano are exploring sound and their own ideas, creating something from nothing, even if it seems unstructured. It is the equivalent of what child development specialists call free play. When we tell them to stop doing this, we are (unconsciously) implying that they should suppress exploring and experiencing sound in their own way or worse, that this is somehow wrong or a bad instinct.

As teachers—myself included—we have these unconscious biases as well. I am sure my teaching colleagues would agree that finding time for yet another thing in lessons is challenging. After doing scales, theory concepts, working on pieces, reviewing and prepping for performances, there never seems to be enough time to include something as superfluous as creating freely at the keyboard. So, we leave it, and it becomes an extra 'that would be nice' activity we never quite get to. Students receive an unconscious message from this that the performing aspect of music is the most important part, and the creating of it is a separate activity that happens in a far-off universe. But, as our ESPS students so aptly put it, without creators we would have no music to play! The two are intricately linked and both are a vital part of the musical arts. I'm grateful that in all the diligent instrumental lessons Leopold Mozart gave his son, he quite likely didn't say, "stop creating and just master your performance skills." Now of course none of us say that to our children and students, but we do send them this message by exclusion.

There are many easy ways you can encourage creativity in lessons and at home. Instead of telling them to stop noodling around on the piano, ask them what they are creating and if they can add a title to it to give it meaning. Instead of getting frustrated if they seem to be wasting time at the keyboard, have them notate what they are doing if they are reading fluently, or record it to archive it, or prepare to play it for a visitor next week.

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REFLECTIONS ON CREATIVITY, CONTINUED

If a student is apprehensive to do this, start simple. Ask them to come up with a different way to play a chord or scale they recently learned in their lessons (as long as they don't change the fingering!), alter the rhythm or add an accompaniment part. Ask them to play the chords of a piece they know and create their own melody, or simply try to play the chords in a different manner, pattern or time signature.

This gets them thinking out of the box and builds confidence to try new things. Teachers could do this in group classes so as not to lose valuable lesson time, and use materials they are already teaching to reinforce the concepts in a different way (such as improvising within a particular key signature, trying specific types of touches, limiting the dynamics, using a tempo marking, etc.). Teenage students could find friends who play instruments and try to create together.

If you are worried about the noodling getting in the way of practicing for lessons, simply let them explore, and when they are done, remind them they still need to practice. You're simply saying each has it's own time and place in the day. Composers actually practice their craft everyday, just like instrumentalists. If you'd like more formal ideas, there are a lot of great written materials such as Forrest Kinney's Pattern Play series, numerous jazz/blues improv books (jazz being the style where improv really is in its full glory), even Youtube tutorials, and Edmonton has many excellent young composer workshops for students of all ages.

Now, perhaps you are thinking you're not really interested in your child learning to compose or improvise, so I'll ask you to ponder a few final thoughts. Our modern world is a very difficult place for children and teens to be alone with their thoughts. Some researchers have even gone so far as to say childhood has fundamentally changed in a way that stifles creativity, with prefabricated games, play dates and constantly structured time replacing free play and self-discovery. Allowing creativity at their instrument allows them a place where they can still do this, and in a very sophisticated way. Creativity teaches us who we are, what we enjoy, and the gifts we can give the world. It is empowering to developing minds to be able to formulate complex ideas and share and express these with others. It takes immense concentration and courage to bring together ideas into a complex thing such as an original piece of music. It encourages our children to be open-minded and willing to try new ideas, and fosters a highly sophisticated level of problem solving. Engaging in musical creativity fosters mental growth and allows children to explore their ideas in a safe, rewarding environment—this builds confidence and self-esteem.

All the above traits are of course valuable life skills, but perhaps there is something deeper. Creativity allows us to experience that wonderful part of the human condition that desires expressing or improving upon our humanity. This impulse is the reason we have music to play, art to enjoy, literature to read, entrepreneurship to create a better world, innovative thinkers in research and policy development, the list goes on. Most importantly, it shows children that there are things valuable in life for their own sake, and that their ideas are valuable, that their voice matters, and they have something beautiful to share that is uniquely their own. I encourage you to encourage them. You might just be delighted, as I was, with what's hiding in your child or teen waiting to come out if you crack the door for them. As Mozart said, "You think because I am little and young, that nothing great can reside within me, but you shall see very soon." Happy music making!

Heather Hindman, ESPS teacher

*Heather and
ESPS students
Jocelyn, Anna,
Samuel, and Eric*



WHAT DO STUDENTS REALLY THINK ABOUT THE FALL WORKSHOP?

The annual Fall Workshop is an exciting time for teachers, students and their families. Students, whether they are beginners or advanced players, receive a master class from a guest teacher. This unique opportunity is very special since master classes are traditionally available to advanced students only. I hope my students will love the experience, gain valuable ideas and receive affirmation from the master teachers.

But what do the students really think about the Fall Workshop?

I asked a few students whom I randomly came across in the Fall Workshop some questions. The students who answered my questions were Dan Z., Sam H., Jayden D., Mia P., Hannah T., Sara V., and Muskaan V.

Why do you come to the Fall Workshop?

Dan: Listen to the master teacher's skills, get advice and polish more.

Sam: Just another reason to play.

Mia: I don't know...

Hannah: Because I want to!?

Sara: To get new perspective of songs that I already know.

(Phew! It was a big relief that nobody told me they were forced to come).

What did you learn at the Fall Workshop?

Dan: How to pedal properly and make the pedal lengthen the notes.

Jayden: Improvise!

Hannah: Learn to practice more.

Muskaan: Having a steady speed and that I am good at improvising!

What's your favorite part of the Fall Workshop?

Dan: When the teacher teaches strategies and how to aim for the goal.

Sam: Performing.

Jayden: Improvisation class!

Mia: Eating snacks!

Hannah: Learn drumming and rhythm.

Sara: Masterclass.

Will you come to the Fall Workshop again?

Dan: Probably will.

Sam: Yeah!

Mia: I think so!?

Hannah: Probably!?

Sara: Yes!

Their answers make us proud! I believe this is an encouraging sign that the annual Fall Workshop is successful and meaningful. All the hard work by everyone is definitely worth it. Make sure you come next year!!

Eleanor Tsui, ESPS Teacher



Guest Teachers Joyce, Susan, Nena and Alejandro and a few of our excellent ESPS students!

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SUMMER PRACTICE CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS!

Congratulations to all the ESPS students who successfully completed the Summer Practice Challenge! In addition to receiving a souvenir medal, practice challenge students were entered in a prize draw. Prizes winners were randomly drawn at our Annual General Meeting. Congratulations to these recipients:

Sara V
Weiran S
Evan K
Halleluya G

Ephraim Z
Alexander Z
Muskaan V
Erika S

COMING IN JANUARY: MUSIC READING CLASS FOR PARENTS!

Would you like to learn to read music? Sign up for a 4-week course for Suzuki Book 1 & 2 parents! You'll learn how to read notes, rhythms, terms & signs, and participate in basic ear training. We'll have fun playing together on multiple pianos just as your children do!

Dates: 4 Saturdays from Jan 13 to Feb 3, 2018

Time: 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Place: Room 4/5, SCS

Fee: \$125 (Includes course material & "Music Note Teacher")

Maximum: 10 participants - *so sign up early!*

Minimum: 6 participants

To register, complete the form below, enclose a cheque for \$125, and return it to your ESPS teacher. Or, register and pay online by credit card (<https://www.edmontonsuzukipiano.ca/shop/>).

Questions? Contact Gail Olmstead at (780)435-6453.

Parent Reading Class Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ **Email** _____

Your Child's Name _____

CONGRATULATIONS NOVEMBER GRADUATES

Congratulations to the following students for their hard work and well-deserved graduations:

Volume 1

Arjun Kotecha
Bhavisha Kotecha
Jolie Lam
Evan Li
Nicolas Ruiz
Lucas Wanderley

Volume 2

Rhett Giesbrecht
Toby Johnson

Volume 3

IreOluwa Oladunni
Jenna Xu

Volume 4

Pauline So

Volume 5

Samuel Heintzman
Mason Kruger
Micah Truong

Volume 6

Thaddaeus Truong

"If children hear fine music from the day of their birth and learn to play it, they develop sensitivity, discipline and endurance. They get a beautiful heart."

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki