

2019

# Improving Piano Teaching at International Schools in a Suburban District of Beijing

Wei Xie

*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Wei Xie

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the review committee have been made.

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Abstract

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by

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PD, Boston University, 2011

MA, Baylor University, 2007

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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## Abstract

The quality of piano education in international schools in China has been affected by an increasing number of piano students and piano teachers experiencing heavy teaching loads. The research questions in this qualitative case study included both teachers' and parents' perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning in piano classes at multicultural international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. The 4 principles of the Suzuki method provided the conceptual framework for the study. Data were collected through interviews with 10 experienced piano teachers, 10 selected parents of K-12 piano students, and observations of 3 group piano classes, 8 individual lessons, and 3 student recitals. All data were coded and analyzed using the Suzuki principles of character, use of the mother tongue, parental involvement, and positive environment. Findings indicated that school leaders, teachers, parents, and students need to understand each party's expectations to build and maintain a healthy relationship and positive learning environment as promoted by the principles of the Suzuki method. A professional development program, *Piano Teaching in a Beijing Suburb: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano Teaching*, was created to engage and support local piano teachers' needs and to improve their understanding of various eastern and western teaching approaches, traditional and functional piano teaching, and effective teaching strategies to better prepare them for teaching in diverse classrooms. Implementation of the project might affect social change and benefit the local international community by providing a professional development model for all piano teachers to help international piano students during their transitional years in China.

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## Section 1: The Problem

Today, an estimated 40 million children are learning piano in China (Montefiore, 2014). The instrument has become increasingly popular among China's growing middle class. However, the quality of piano instruction in China at all levels is being affected by the rapidly increasing numbers of piano students (Huang, 2005). Ensuring quality piano education in the future may become more challenging due to China's Central Government's decision in 2016 to permit all couples in China to have a second child (Levenson, 2017). Under this new policy, the number of newborn babies has already increased by approximately 7.9% from the previous year (Levenson, 2017). Many K to 12 international schools in Beijing recently included piano study to their curricula or after school activities (Whittaker, 2018). However, due to expanding student enrollment, the quality of group piano classes and individual lessons has suffered (Huang, 2005; Yang, 2015). According one of the piano teachers in the First International Beijing School, heavy teaching loads have affected teaching quality, teachers' enthusiasm, and teachers' ability to engage in professional development. Therefore, reforming how piano is taught is imperative (Huang, 2005; Iwaguchi, 2012; Pike, 2014; Wang 2010). In this study, I aimed to discover what can be done to improve the quality of teaching and provide help for piano teachers for the key issues they are facing in their daily teaching.

Some schools have tried to overcome this problem by offering group piano classes in addition to individual lessons (Huang, 2005). Traditional approaches do not meet the growing demand because one-on-one teaching requires a teacher and a dedicated space for each student. Small group piano teaching could be a viable solution

due to its economic efficiency. In numerous studies, researchers discussed whether group piano classes or one-on-one piano lessons were more effective (Bachus, 2012; Chang, 2005; Geffen, 2012; Meulink, 2011; Pike, 2013). The researchers suggested that although individual lessons create better opportunities for teachers and students to build a relationship and for the teachers to adapt the individual needs of each student, the social aspect of group piano classes may more effectively motivate younger piano students (Bachus, 2012; Chang, 2005; Geffen, 2012; Meulink, 2011; Pike, 2013). In a group piano class, students have the chance to experience a varied music education of theory, ear training, and sight-reading activities, and more opportunities to play ensemble repertoire (Chang, 2005), which are additional advantages of group piano instruction.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The problem in this study was that due to the increasing demand for piano instruction, piano teachers have great teaching loads, yet there is no standardized curriculum for the teaching of piano in the international schools. More information was needed about the teaching strategies the teachers are using to maintain quality piano education. Piano being added to school curriculum has become one of the special features for many of the international schools in Beijing. The numbers of piano students are increasing rapidly. More and more parents value studying music and send their children for piano lessons to show improvements in both their social status and living standards (Zhang, 2016). Concert pianists like Lang Lang, Yundi Li, and Chen Sa have become idols to millions of new generation piano students (Montefiore, 2014). Many parents dream that their children will be just like these superstars. With the growth

of the Chinese economy, these parents now can afford expensive instruments and piano lessons. Parents wish their young children to take piano lessons to cultivate their talents and intelligence and to show their wealth and class (Zhang, 2016). However, the high student to teacher ratio has caused unsatisfactory outcomes for piano classes, as students do not learn much after several years of piano studies (Yang, 2015). According to Montefiore (2014), many less accomplished piano educators are not able to keep pace with this expeditious growth of demand.

Moreover, there are problems related to the teaching approach and belief in students' learning ability, parental involvement, and positive learning environment. Domestic piano teaching has struggled due to its formality (Lin, 2011) and curriculum (Zhang, 2008). A large percentage of piano teachers are still using outdated teaching methods. Those method books or Chinese piano exam syllabi have remained unchanged for decades and have not been effectively adapted to the development of piano education (Zhu, 2011). Meanwhile, many parents spend a fortune to send their children abroad to study piano because they want their children to receive an "authentic" western piano education in advance (Lin, 2011). Zhang (2016) discussed that parents place high value on piano lessons to improve their children's self-discipline and ensure that their children get into a top-ranking university. However, parents are also concerned about the limited after-school time and do not want piano learning to interfere with other academic studies. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate both parents' and teachers' perspectives on piano studies and how to work collaboratively together to build a positive learning environment.

The investigation of both parent's and teachers' perspectives on piano studies dealt with specific questions that could be used in survey form to better understand perspectives and learning environments, which led me to conduct a survey in 2014 for local parents. In the survey, questions were asked if parents prefer in-school piano programs or private piano teachers, one-on-one piano lessons or group lessons, and how they would find a teacher. The results showed that even though international schools offered both group piano classes and individual lessons, parents were not satisfied with the outcome of piano classes offered at schools, and they usually hired private teachers at home to prepare their children for piano certification exams (Xie, 2014). Therefore, piano teachers who teach in the local international schools need to take measures to improve their educational strategies and to improve the outcome of the classes.

To improve the quality of piano teaching, both group and individual lessons require some reform (Huang, 2005; Iwaguchi, 2012; Pike, 2014; Wang 2010). Although group piano classes have been included in some public school's curricula in the United States in the early 90s (Pike, 2013), they have just been introduced to music institutions and conservatories in China in recent years (Huang, 2005). Group piano classes in China are all at the experimental stage (Huang, 2005). They are facing several issues: (a) School administrators and piano teachers are unfamiliar with group piano teaching instruction, materials, and equipment (Enoch, 1996; Huang, 2005; Luke, 1996; Yang, 2015; Young 2010; (b) compared with an individual lesson, there is a lack of effective group piano curricula and effective teaching methods for the class (Enoch, 1996; Huang, 2005; Luke, 1996; Yang, 2015; Young 2010); (c) there is a high student to teacher ratio (Huang,



2005); and (d) piano teachers are generally working independently and are separated from the rest of the school (Huang, 2005; Yang, 2015). It is necessary to improve the quality of these classes and use available resources effectively.

## **Rationale**

### **History of Piano Education in China**

The history of piano education in China is relatively short when compared with other countries (Lin, 2002). Although the instrument was first introduced to China in the 1600s by Christian missionaries (Kang, 2009), its boom did not occur until the early 1900s (Lin, 2002). Piano education expanded rapidly among China's elite in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and became a necessary part of “proper” education in the cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong (Lin, 2002; Melvin, 2015). Since then, several conservatories and music departments were established, and many foreign piano teachers have joined the faculty of these institutions (Melvin, 2015). After World War II, economic and cultural exchange took place more rapidly between China and the West. More Chinese musicians were educated in the West and became aware of the importance of bringing better piano education back to China (Kang, 2009). Many Chinese pianists have developed research on piano teaching philosophies and professional piano education in the conservatories and universities in China (Kang, 2009; Lin, 2002). In the last several decades, China has produced many world-famous concert pianists and has sent many child prodigies to countless international piano competitions.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of educators and scientists have recognized the importance of piano education. Learning to play instruments helps to build students’

character, confidence, and other skills that will assist them to succeed (Elpus, 2013; Wilcox, 2012). Many researchers have suggested that learning to play an instrument can improve students' ability to handle stress, increase concentration, memory, and intelligence (Costa-Giomi, 2004, 2015; Darrow, 2014; Kertz-Welzel, 2015). In fact, music training has been linked to children's brain development, reading skills, math abilities, and general intelligence scores (Habib & Besson, 2009; Skoe & Kraus, 2012; Wilcox, 2012).

As a result, an increasing number of parents have bought instruments and paid for their children to learn to play the piano to establish their intellectual development (Chang, 2005). The increasing number of piano learners is also reflected in the growing piano production numbers. According to Melvin (2015), in the 1980s, comparatively few pianos were being manufactured in China (about 10,000), but by 2013, piano production saw an increase of more than ten-fold (100,000 pianos). Meanwhile, according to Melvin, the number of Chinese piano students is equal to or greater than the entire population of Canada. Currently, China is the world's largest piano consumer and producer, covering 76.9% of global piano output since 2012 (Montefiore 2014). The growing industry has led to a problem of how piano teachers can maintain quality control over their teaching while student numbers continue to soar.

### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

Since the number of piano students has increased so dramatically, some schools and universities in China have started trying to use a group piano teaching format; however, since teachers are unfamiliar with group piano teaching materials, most are

teaching group piano class based on their own one-on-one piano learning experiences (Yang, 2015). Therefore, the group piano teaching results are not ideal. This practice illustrates the problem related to piano teachers' professional development. Lack of familiarity with the newly developed curriculum has led to ineffectiveness of their teaching. Yang (2015) explained further that some Chinese piano teachers simply decide to leave concepts out if they are unfamiliar with them.

Zhang (2008) described a problem related to the piano curricula for beginner students. The piano curriculum in the United States and Europe is constantly changing in regards to the development of pianistic technique, new pedagogy theories, and new compositions. To improve piano teaching and students' motivation, countless varieties of new piano curricula are created for the market each year. However, in China—and more specifically in Beijing—the curriculum selections are limited, and piano teachers tend to use only traditional teaching materials. Local piano teachers need to explore new teaching materials to motivate their students and to improve their teaching. Chang (2005) argued that selecting the most suitable teaching materials is important for piano teachers to stimulate each student's interest in playing piano. An additional way to motivate students is to work together with others from the music department and create opportunities for the students to regularly perform in front of classmates and learn from their peers (Chang, 2005; Lyke, 1996).

Meanwhile, both Zhang (2008) and Chang (2005) mentioned that most of the local piano teachers only focus on technique training and ignore students' comprehensive development and interests in music. They have forgotten that great music is only created

when students are playing piano with their heart and have a deeper understanding of the music background, stylistic characters, and composers' lives. At an early stage of piano learning, students not only need to learn finger techniques but also need to develop their music reading ability, ear training, and other musicianship skills (Li, 2011). It is important to develop students' musician's ear from an early learning stage.

Furthermore, among the increasing number of piano students, many students are entering/taking part in piano level exams. However, there are not enough qualified piano teachers to satisfy the rapid increase and demands of these students. Many piano teachers need further professional development so that they will be able to adequately help students prepare for the various piano exams (Zhu, 2011). Preparing students for a piano exam requires higher quality and more professional skills of the teachers because taking piano exams has its pros and cons. Progress depends on each student's learning stage and the approach from that their teacher uses. In many cases, piano learning becomes less enjoyable due to the pressures of the exam. Sometimes teachers and parents forget about the main purpose of piano learning--students' character development--and only care about exam results (Li, 2011). They misunderstand the purpose of learning music and take it in the wrong direction. Sometimes, the only goal of piano learning is passing the exam and getting a certificate (Li, 2011). Zhu (2011) also mentioned that piano exams sometimes mislead the direction of piano study. Students only work on the exam repertoire and became very bored with practicing piano.

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The issues related to quality teaching and class effectiveness for both individual piano lessons and group piano classes are reflected in the piano classes of the First International Beijing School. Piano class is one of the required featured courses for all primary school students. However, the heavy teaching loads make it difficult for teachers to provide strong instruction for piano students. According to one of the piano teachers in the First International Beijing School, the piano department had eight teachers on their team in the 2011-2012 school year, and they were responsible for teaching all the elementary and junior high school students; both group classes and one-on-one lessons covered approximately 1,000 students. Due to a large number of classes and students, the piano teachers could not carefully plan each class or pay enough attention to individual students and monitor each student's progress. As a result, one of the piano teachers in the First International Beijing School stated that many students were not learning much nor were they interested in the piano classes offered at school, and more than half of the students sought private piano teachers outside of the school.

According to the course leader at the First International Beijing School, in regards to the piano classes, there is no standardized curriculum, and each teacher can select his/her own teaching materials. In addition, the course leader at the school shared that there are no professional development meetings for in-house training or weekly meetings for the teachers to work collaboratively and no evaluation of the students following any standardized learning outcome at the end of the semester. Meanwhile, teacher turnover

rates are high. In the academic year of 2011 to 2012, five out of eight piano teachers left the school.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions help to understand the terms of piano teaching.

*Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM):* The ABRSM offers “graded music exams, assessments and diplomas” (ABRSM, 2018, para. About Us).

*Class piano instruction:* A number of students meet together regularly under the tutelage of an instructor for the purposes of performing certain assigned repertoire, technique, and related materials. Much of this (including solo repertoire) is performed in ensemble because of the difficulty in covering the assignment with that many students (Pace, 1978).

*Diverse students:* In this case study, diverse students refer to students with different nationalities, age groups, and piano learning backgrounds.

*Ear training:* “Ear training is the process of connecting music theory (notes, intervals, chords, scales, melodies, etc.) with the sounds we hear. In other words, studying ear training builds a bridge between the language of music and the sounds that are designated by that language” (EarMaster, 2018, para 2).

*Group piano class:* “Group piano class is a learning situation in which two or more piano students interact under the guidance of the teacher in a dynamic learning complex” (Pace, 1978, p. 2).

*Individual piano lesson:* “An individual piano lesson consists of teaching or tutoring one student at a time” (Pace, 1978, p. 1).

*Keyboard*: “Any instrument resembling an acoustic piano and used in the instruction of piano skills and literature; usually refers to an electronic or digital version of an acoustic piano” (Meulink, 2011, p. 7).

*Keyboard lab*: A classroom comprised of a teacher’s keyboard and a number of student keyboards, with all of the instruments capable of being linked via a headphone controller system; the room might also have a digital music display that allows the students to see in both staff notation and keyboard placement each note being played on the teacher’s keyboard (Meulink, 2011).

*Music theory*: The study of the theoretical elements and the structure of music including notation, rhythm, melody, harmony, form and texture (OnMusicDictionary, 2016).

*Sight singing*: “Sight singing is the ability to read and sing music at first sight, also referred to as vocal sight reading or prima vista” (EarMaster, 2018, para 1).

### **Significance**

Learning to play the piano is a complex long-term process as it takes years of effort and discipline. According to Chang (2005), “Particularly, child beginners need music educators to use specialized methods to guide them to recognize the basic elements of music” (p. 1). The purpose of this research was to investigate teachers’ and parents’ perceptions towards the piano curriculum in the multicultural international schools in a suburban district of Beijing to improve the quality of both their individual piano lessons and group piano classes, to determine the goals for their piano teaching, and to find ways for piano teachers to work together and collaborate with parents to create positive

learning environments. I also wanted to discover how to help local piano teachers explore different teaching approaches, technologies, and theories to benefit students with diversity in the international school. I interviewed teachers and parents to gain their perspectives on the various piano curricula and teaching methodologies for students of all levels and observed group piano classes, individual lessons, and student recitals.

After analyzing the findings, I discovered the steps identified as needed to improve the piano course, close the gaps among students, and stimulate students' interest in piano learning. I used the findings as a guideline to create a professional development plan for the local piano teachers who are teaching in the international schools. The goal of this professional development plan was to help local piano teachers learn how to define students' learning goals and select suitable piano pedagogy and teaching methods for each student who may have varied piano learning experience and/or cultural background. The plan also allows participants to discover different modes of piano instruction and learn how to work together and collaborate with other teachers and parents to create positive learning environments.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

In this study, I examined teachers' and parents' perceptions regarding piano classes of the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing and explored how to improve the quality of piano classes to suit all participants since students have various levels of piano abilities and come from different provinces in China, as well as from other countries. The main research questions were created in alignment with the key principles of the Suzuki method. They were as follows:



1. How do piano teachers and parents define the goals and purposes of piano learning? (Principle 1)
2. What outcomes do piano teachers and parents expect from a group of diverse students? (Principle 2)
3. How do parents collaborate with the teachers to support their children's daily practice? (Principle 3)
4. How can piano teachers, parents, and students work together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the students? (Principle 4)

### **Review of the Literature**

This research helped to clarify both parents' and teachers' goals for students to learn to play piano and set a direction for their learning process while following the principles of Suzuki's philosophy. Suzuki believed that all children could learn to play instruments and have the potential to learn well. His method was also referred to as Talent Education (Powell, 1988, p. 6). Powell (1988) also clarified that the Suzuki piano method was adapted from Suzuki violin since Suzuki himself was a violinist. The research questions for this study were constructed via the principle ideas of the Suzuki method. Suzuki believed that all students could learn to play piano, just like all infants can learn their native language, when a positive learning environment is created (Suzuki Talent Education Association of Australia, 2005). In addition, positive environments are created when teachers understand how to communicate with parents, educate parents, and collaborate with other piano teachers. The conceptual framework for this study was the four principles of Suzuki's philosophy (see Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983).

In Principle 1, Suzuki emphasized “character first, ability second” (Suzuki Talent Education Association, 2005, para 2). According to Suzuki, the goal of music education is to not only develop student’s musical skills but also to develop “their character and sensitivity which will stand a person in good stead no matter what their ultimate path in life” (Suzuki Talent Education Association, 2005, frequently asked questions). Character development is a part of the regular lesson routine, while additionally, the Suzuki method emphasizes issues regarding “nature, meaning, purpose and societal value of music” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 139).

In Principle 2, the mother-tongue approach, Suzuki believed that every child has the potential to learn and that a good character could be taught. There is a connection between the piano students’ ear and heart (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998).

In Principle 3, Parental involvement, the parents play a crucial role in Suzuki’s philosophy. They function like teaching assistants for the student to practice at home.

In Principle 4, positive environment, Suzuki believed that learning needs to take place in an environment where co-operation occurs between students, teacher, and parent (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983). The selected articles in this literature review are related to Suzuki’s method, piano learning motives, issues related to different instructional modes, student motivation, technology in piano teaching, and piano assessment in China.

### **Suzuki Method**

Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1998), Hendricks (2011), Powell (1988), Suzuki and Suzuki (1983), and Suzuki (1993) focused on the Suzuki method in relation to character development, the mother tongue idea, and parents’ involvement. These studies and books

addressed the background and history of the philosophy. Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1998), Hendricks (2011), Powell (1988) also gave critiques and responses to the Suzuki method. I discuss some of the essential aspects of the method in detail. Specifically, the Suzuki method was created around the ideology of Zen thinking (Hendricks, 2011). Suzuki believed that music could help children create a superior character, noble mind, and the ability to express beauty; he also believed that love could be developed (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983).

Hendricks (2011) placed emphasis on Suzuki's intentions for his followers to continually reflect upon and improve their own way of teaching. Meanwhile, the article addressed the theoretical divide between other Western music educational philosophers and Suzuki teachers. Hendricks also noticed that "the philosophies of Suzuki have been influenced by his Japanese upbringing and environment which are foreign to Western music educators" (p. 139). In addition to learning to play instruments, students were also given social service assignments to aid their community throughout the week (Hendricks, 2011). Hendricks maintained that Suzuki philosophies may bring peace to the world if every child in the world receives Suzuki training.

Suzuki explored methods to teach young children in the same way that children learn to speak their native language. According to Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1998), "Dr. Shinichi Suzuki's method of education is based on a single idea he calls this idea mother tongue" (p. 1). He believed that children could speak their native language with accuracy and ease due to the fact children are surrounded by these languages from birth. Therefore, if children are surrounded by musical sounds from birth, they will build up an equally

extraordinary capability in music (Bigler and Lloyd-Watts, 1998). The Suzuki Talent Education Association of Australia website (2005) explained the benefits of becoming a Suzuki teacher. The association offers classes for piano teachers on child development and Suzuki repertoire studies. Meanwhile, the association mentioned that parents play an essential role in the Suzuki method, such as playing CDs or attending and taking notes in lessons. Also, Suzuki believed that positive learning could happen in an environment where collaboration occurs among teacher, parent, and student (Suzuki Talent Education Association of Australia, 2005). Cooperating with parents benefits the teachers in developing individualized learning plans for each student. Parents are the primary resource for teachers to get to know the student because they have been educating their child since birth.

Another major proposal of the Suzuki method is that a positive learning environment educates children. He believed that a child's surroundings could affect the development of their abilities (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983). Most obviously, when a child is learning a language, the language that one is exposed most to is the language one learns quickest and best (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983). The same could be said with music—if the student only hears good music, they will reproduce good music (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998). Parents of Suzuki students must provide quality attention and love to their children's learning process and achievements as children need to be greatly motivated by their parents' everyday attitude (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998).

### **Piano Learning Motives**

The number of piano students is proliferating in China due to the increased

spending power of the Chinese consumer, and a greater number of studies are publicly suggesting the benefits of learning to play the instrument (Costa-Giomi 2015, Darrow 2014, Elpus 2013, Habib & Besson 2009, and Kertz-Welzel 2015). Parents in China have high expectations for their children to achieve more than others, so students compete in every aspect. Learning instruments has become a modern necessity and fashion and an important part of household expenditures (Lin, 2011). According to Lin (2011), data showed that in 2011, there are more than 30 million children in China learning piano.

Harris (2007), the founder of the early childhood music education programs “Montessori Mozarts” and “Mozart and the Young Mind,” unfolded a research outcome that music is beneficial for children’s early brain development. Children earn notably better scores on math tests if they are involved in the Montessori music curriculum. Costa-Giomi (2004, 2015), Darrow (2014), Elpus (2013), Habib and Besson (2009), and Kertz-Welzel (2015) provided evidence of the positive effects of music instruction on learning and suggested that both education in music and the development of one’s intellect are inextricably linked; music can nurture and enhance children’s emotions.

For instance, many piano exams require piano students to memorize their pieces and perform their music by memory. Schons (2008) discussed how the brain functions when one is learning different skills and concepts. He explained, “The more senses that are used in learning and memorization the more storage sites the brain will have from which to recall the information” (Schons, 2008, p. 33). In addition, Schons explored how to apply the knowledge received from piano lessons to other subjects and how to create varieties of activities to help piano learners to memorize music, such as using “different

senses to encourage students to use multi-sensory practice strategies between lessons for optimal retention” (p. 34).

### **Issues Related to Different Instructional Modes**

**Individual piano lessons.** Lyke (1996) explained that “individual piano instruction is based on the traditional tutorial system. This approach is the most widely used in piano teaching” (p. 29). There are millions of students who start to learn piano every year all over the world, but often the reason they choose to learn to play piano is because of their parents (Enoch, 1996). Only a small number of students are born with talent and will become concert pianists. The process of piano study requires much discipline. Enoch (1996) argued that the piano teacher should design lessons toward most students, rather than just for the few who are gifted; some of the private teachers only want to accept students who have talent.

Moreover, in the traditional individual lesson’s instruction method, teachers tend to “pump knowledge into their students, lesson time being spent largely in showing them how to do this, that or the other” (Enoch, 1996, p. 25). Enoch (1996) suggested that teachers and students should switch roles instead of only telling students what to do because students have a higher chance to drop out if they are not motivated. More importantly, teachers need to train the students how to discover information on their own, which will help them have a sense of achievement, be more excited about what they are discovering, and enable them to see the future of piano learning in their lives.

The Suzuki method places emphasis on the importance of the beginning learning stage, and teachers need to plan enough time in the beginning to set a solid foundation

(Powell, 1988). Enoch (1996) pointed out that it is not a good idea to avoid teaching music theory, sight reading, sight singing, aural training, styles of music, and different composers. In an individual lesson, many teachers only focus on teaching the fundamentals of piano playing (Enoch, 1996). Enoch suggested that “all musicianship subjects should be started as soon as possible in the piano lesson, for the students have to be helped to think musically and positively” (p. 25). It is important to build a solid foundation for the beginning students and not rush through the early learning stage.

Teaching students with various learning ability, age, and character can be challenging (Johnson, 2017). Differentiated instructional approaches are often selected according to each student's different learning ability (Johnson, 2017). Each student learns piano in his/her own unique learning style (Gordon & Sisler, 2008). It is beneficial for teachers to continuously research and build a firm working knowledge of up-to-date piano pedagogical theories to select the most effective method for each student (Zhang, 2008). Yang (2015) used the qualitative methodology to interview five Chinese piano teachers and two American piano teachers for comparison of their choice of teaching methods. Yang conducted discussions with each teacher about how and why they selected their teaching materials and what impact these materials had on student motivation and the building of a strong foundation for piano.

Yang (2015) revealed that the teaching materials Chinese piano teachers are using are very limited. There is a lack of variety in materials published in China (Yang, 2015). According to Yang, piano materials published in China are identical with the ones in the United States for both content and images, except they are translated into Chinese.

Chinese teachers primarily use John Thompson (Yang, 2015) and gradually started to try other available western pedagogy methods. In comparison, a broad range of music educational philosophies and piano pedagogy methods are used for piano teaching in the United States, including Alfred's, Suzuki, Thompson, Hal Leonard, Piano Adventures, Bastian piano methods, and so on. Nevertheless, there are many differences amongst each method, beyond some of their shared links. Each method presents piano technique, note reading, rhythm study, music theory, and other musical concepts differently (Alexander, Kowalchuk, Lancaster, MacArthur, & Mier, 2005; Bastien, 1985; Clark, Goss, & Holland, 2000; Faber, 2013).

Thomas-Lee (2003) discussed and analyzed nine early childhood piano methods for teaching beginning piano students to determine whether these methods contain a variety of styles of repertoire, which fulfill the need of early childhood piano education. Using the correct teaching method may help increase student performance since each method emphasizes different critical elements of a young child's piano learning (Clark, 2013). Meanwhile, Clark (2013) asked piano teachers to rethink piano teaching philosophies and the importance of teaching practice for piano teachers and to believe there is music in every child. Reviewing these methods helps to identify how to select suitable curriculums for the individual piano lessons offered in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing.

**Group piano instruction.** According to Young (2010), selecting and recruiting teachers for group piano classes has always been challenging. School leaders prefer hiring classroom teachers who have little piano experience for the class than highly



skilled private piano teachers who have no training in teaching group classes (Young, 2010). Meanwhile, research has shown that although there are several common group piano texts, there is no evidence that one particular text is used consistently (Young, 2010). Yang (2015) stated, “Some schools in China use group piano teaching for students based on the heritage of their own learning” (p.2).

Many private teachers are not willing to teach group piano classes for many reasons. They think (a) group teaching places more weight on keyboard skills, not performance, (b) group piano only works well for beginners, (c) it is hard to group the students effectively, and (d) many piano teachers are unfamiliar with group piano class instruction. Lyke (1996) debated that effective group piano teaching emphasizes keyboard and performance skills equally. Lykes found that students can learn more from criticism and discussions of collected practice procedures with each other; to increase the efficiency of group piano teaching, teachers need to be well prepared for each class, select varied activities, and switch them rapidly to keep students’ concentration and interests. Whereas, Enoch (1996) pointed out that it is more important to group students by their intelligence level rather than their age to create a positive learning environment.

Pike (2014), Iwaguchi (2012), Meulink (2011) provided information on teaching strategies for group piano classes. Pike (2014) conducted a case study for children’s group piano lessons, which examined the best implementation in introducing group piano instruction, and it also discussed several traditional pedagogy methods and the benefits of MIDI accompaniments and digital pianos. He made a comparison between inexperienced piano class and expert piano class teachers. The problem discussed in the study reflected

many of the problems in the piano classes at the international schools in Beijing. In the inexperienced teacher's class, classes were presented as individual lessons; students had no chance to play ensemble music, nor integrate and learn from each other. There was no systematic method to assess students' improvement. Lastly, the instructions were very much teacher-centered. In comparison, the expert teacher offered consistent instruction of a longer period of class time, using clearer syllabus and expectations in writing at the beginning of the class, and weekly practice sheets were offered for each student to use at home. The teaching materials selected were suitable for the students' age and activities are well-sequenced (Pike, 2014).

Iwaguchi (2012) discussed the difference between piano class and other classes. The study revealed the relationship between "instructor's effort", "student's effort" and "student's feeling of enrichment" (p. 81). Meulink (2011) delved into the pros and cons of the cooperative learning methods for group piano. Group piano class would benefit students of all ages and skill levels. A positive learning environment helps students' motivation, exploration, and expression (Meulink, 2011). According to Powell (1988), "Although Suzuki students usually take private lessons, many Suzuki piano teachers encourage group involvement as well" (p. 7). Suzuki piano students have the chance to perform in ensembles regularly which greatly increase their level of enrichment and the students can reap reward from their continued effort.

### **Student Motivation**

Understanding a student's learning style is an important aspect for educators to motivate and help their students become better learners. After learning each of the

students' learning styles and needs, piano teachers can plan their instruction accordingly. Cestaro (2008) identified the three primary learning styles of piano students: visual, auditory and tactile. She noted to motivate all students, teachers should be mindful of each student's learning style, with special focus on those students who learn at a slower pace (Cestaro, 2008).

Costa-Giomi, Flowers, and Sasaki (2005) and Kurtuldu (2012) presented their research on teacher's and student's behavior, lesson progress and motivation for piano education. Costa-Giomi, Flowers, and Sasaki's (2005) study found the reasons why most children drop out of piano "before reaching a level of accomplishment that would allow the musical independence and satisfaction to which they aspire" (p. 1). Costa-Giomi, Flowers, and Sasaki (2005) stated the importance of building a positive student-teacher relationship and the need to complete pieces for performance to achieve a sense of accomplishment. Iwaguchi (2012) mentioned that positive feedback is related to beginner students' motivation for practice and willingness to practice. All these facts led to the importance of carefully selecting assignments that fit each student's level.

Teachers can help students stay focused and motivated by using a mixture of sensible approaches to inspire their interest in music. Kurtuldu (2012) created a motivation scale to assess students' motivation for learning piano and their performance in a piano exam. He addressed some of the issues that affect student motivation levels, which include: "student attitudes, studying principles, studying environments, musical works and some personal issues" (p. 77). Some of the crucial aspects of motivation are

students' learning targets and goals, and the teacher's instruction method (Kurtuldu, 2012).

Battersby and Bolton (2013) addressed the issue of diversity in the classroom; numerous American schools have large diverse classrooms with immigrants who have limited vocabularies in the English language. Similar to the American schools, there is a large diversity in the classroom of international schools in Beijing. To construct a successful music program, educators need to be prepared to teach students from all different cultures. Like other subjects, music educators also need to be creative and explore innovative and effective methods to communicate with the “ever-changing student population” (Battersby & Bolton, 2013, p.2).

### **Technology in Piano Teaching**

Alexander (1996), Gordon and Sisler (2008), and Meulink (2011) suggested that to motivate piano students and make traditional piano instruction more engaging, technology can add new dimensions to piano teaching. Piano teachers can increase the creativity level and plan lessons through the use of a computer as a teaching assistant (Gordon & Sisler, 2008). The computer software is a self-paced learning method and easy to be used. While many aspects of music education remain deep-rooted in the past, to meet the needs of contemporary students, piano teachers are creating music lab curriculum to assist students on theory, sight-reading, music history and other topics (Gordon & Sisler 2008).

Gordon and Sisler (2008) and Meulink (2011) explained the benefit of using 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology resources for piano instruction and designing a piano lab into the

curriculum. According to Alexander (1996), piano courses should use instructional software and include modern computer technologies. Alexander also mentioned that it would be helpful for the piano instructors to attend pedagogy courses or software assessment seminars to increase their knowledge of MIDI applications and Computer Based Music Instruction (CBMI).

Independent piano teachers Gordon and Sisler (2008) have organized seminars on using technology in piano education at both the National Conference and the MTNA National Conference. Gordon and Sisler (2008) discussed how to incorporate technology as an assistant in their studio for students to learn music theory and musicianship. It is advantageous and beneficial to use modern technology in a laboratory music curriculum. *Hearing Rhythms Lesson in Music Ace, Interactive Musician, and Musition* are some of the music programs that are suitable for students of any instrument and inspire students to compose and play their own music (Gordon & Sisler, 2008). Using technology is beneficial to fight time constraints, as students can study on their own time. If teachers can successfully develop a well-rounded assignment plan, the laboratory program may help students achieve the greatest benefit and reinforce concepts taught during lessons (Gordon & Sisler, 2008).

### **Assessment of Amateur Piano Students in China**

Amateur piano exams have become popular in China, as parents want their children to receive level certificates to prove their ability (Zhu, 2011). In some cases, the certificate will help with adding extra credit for students' entry exam grades into middle and high schools. The original purposes of the level exams are to popularize instrumental

study and promote music education to improve people's quality of life and students' all-round development (Li, 2011). However, Zhu (2011) suggested that there have been many negative effects from these level exams. For many teachers and students, taking exams has become the center of their piano study. Students work extremely hard to practice only the exam pieces for a year or even more extended periods of time (Zhu, 2011). Many other important aspects were ignored in instruction, including training of basic pianistic techniques, musicianship, stylistic issues, and more importantly, the enjoyment of making music (Zhu, 2011).

Li (2011) also analyzed the pros and cons of taking piano level exams. The pros included: (a) promoting music culture among the youth, (b) promoting the comprehensive development of music education, (c) producing many outstanding professional musicians. However, there are many downsides to taking these level exams, including a lack of fundamental training, note reading practices, music theory, ear, and rhythmic training (Li, 2011).

Mahamuti (2013) expressed similar arguments and discussed the history and development of piano study assessments in China. Over the past twenty years, greater numbers of organizations have begun to offer different piano exams nationwide. Piano level exams are used for both student evaluations and teaching standards. Millions of Chinese piano students register for these exams each year. According to Mahamuti (2013), the most authoritative piano examinations are offered by the Central Conservatory of Music, the China Conservatory of Music, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and the Chinese Musicians Association; and, in recent years, the ABRSM exam

offered by the Associated Board Royale School of Music also became popular. Piano exams have changed the nature of piano teaching. Passing these exams has become the primary goal for many Chinese piano students and their teachers. Teachers tend to focus only on the exam repertoire and piano technique training as opposed to teaching students how to appreciate music, enjoy music, and construct a firm foundation of musicianship (Mahamuti, 2013).

### **Implications**

It was necessary to investigate teachers' and parents' perceptions towards the piano classes at the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. I used the key components of the Suzuki method as the conceptual framework to evaluate classes and explore how to help the teachers to make their classes more effective. It would be helpful if piano teachers further understand each of their students' learning goals and select teaching material accordingly; meanwhile, they may consider creating a collaborative learning community. Additionally, it may be beneficial for local piano students if teachers are able to identify suitable class modes and select instructional materials for the students who are at various levels. On a more fundamental level, piano teachers who cooperate with parents and students, understand students' learning styles, and provide students with the appropriate learning instruction may help students become more enthusiastic about what they are learning.

For those piano teachers who were working together in the international schools, it was important to understand each teacher's needs and make group decisions on what strategies and aspects need to be developed to improve the quality of the class. This study

helped to find out if piano teachers, parents, and students had the same vision and goals, and to create and design instructions that can align with the learning goals. The plan was to interview experienced piano teachers who have taught in the international school's piano courses in conjunction with the issues of piano curricula, teaching strategies, instructional design, assessment choices, student motivation, concert planning, and possible professional development. Additionally, parents of different nationalities were interviewed regarding their expectations for their child's learning to play piano and the parents were also asked how they help their children practice at home. This was done so as to better identify any expectation gaps between teachers, students, and parents which the professional development program could address. The project was to create a professional development plan to help piano teachers who are teaching in the international school in a suburban district in Beijing to improve the quality of teaching in positive learning environments.

### **Summary**

Piano learning is a long-term process, so the establishment of short and long-term goals is important for all students, along with continually motivating their learning interests. Due to the increasing number of piano students in China, it is important to create effective piano classes that would suit most students. Schools and organizations should provide the necessary training for piano teachers to work collaboratively with parents, implement new ideas and technologies into the piano curricula to motivate students, and gain more knowledge about group teaching. It is critical to improve the outcome of courses and close gaps between students. Section 1 clearly stated the



problem, due to the increasing demand for piano instruction in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. Piano teachers had great teaching loads, yet, there was no standardized curriculum for the teaching of piano in the international schools. More information was needed regarding the teaching strategies the teachers were presently using to maintain quality piano education.

The chosen research method for this study was an instrumental case study. In Section 2, the qualitative research procedures are discussed. Information includes research design, data collection, data analysis, and research findings. Data collection methods include semi structured interviews of a group of experienced piano teachers and a group of parents, observations of group piano classes, individual piano lessons and students' recitals. Data were collected to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of different teaching formats and approaches. All data were transcribed and coded with narrative codes, summarized by common themes, and organized by the four Suzuki principles.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project study was to improve the quality of both group piano classes and individual piano lessons in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. While conducting this research, I paid close attention to what local piano teachers needed, then tried to find out how to help them improve the quality of teaching and to work collaboratively with each other to fulfill the needs of the entire spectrum of students. Furthermore, I delved into how piano teachers aligned their teaching method(s) with their students' learning goals. The purpose of this section is to discuss the qualitative research methodology and the design that was used, including a description of the participants, data collection methods, data analysis methods, ethical treatment of human participants and the validity and reliability of the design.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions designed for this case study helped deepen my inquiry in this qualitative research and allowed me to investigate scholarly research. They required in-depth answers from both teachers' and parents' personal experiences. The participants needed to provide data in their own words and in their own way. The research questions helped me explore teachers' and parents' perceptions towards the piano curricula in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. The questions focused on how to help teachers improve the quality of teaching and to find ways to work collaboratively with each other to fulfill the needs of the entire spectrum of students. The main research

questions were created in alignment with the four key principles of the Suzuki method.

They were as follows:

1. How do piano teachers and parents define the goals and purposes of piano learning? (Principle 1)
2. What outcomes do piano teachers and parents expect from a group of students who have various levels? (Principle 2)
3. How do parents involve themselves in their children's daily practice and collaborate with the teachers? (Principle 3)
4. How can piano teachers, parents, and students work together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the students? (Principle 4)

### **Research Design and Approach**

The chosen research method for this qualitative research study was an instrumental case study. According to Lodico and Spaulding (2010), “Case studies typically focus on an individual, small groups, or individuals within a group and document that group’s or individual’s experience in a specific setting” (p. 35); meanwhile, “case study research seeks to situate a case in its historical, social, and cultural context” (p. 159). According to Colorado State University (2018), a case study is a form of qualitative “descriptive research that is used to look at individuals, a small group of participants, or a group as a whole” (para. main page). The case study method was useful for narrowing down a broad studiable field into one easily researchable topic. Data collection methods for this research were qualitative from multiple types, including

interviews and observations. In addition, all collected data were analyzed and compared for triangulation.

In this case study, I sought to investigate teachers' perceptions on balancing different styles of teaching approaches in a diverse environment of international schools in this suburban district of Beijing. It was designed as an instrumental case study, where Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explained, "a researcher is interested in studying the particular case only as a means to some larger goal" (p. 431). The research outcome could be beneficial for those piano students and be able to help improve the piano classes' long-term development. Furthermore, the research could potentially provide a model piano teacher's professional development plan. Table 1 shows how the study problem and purpose, research questions, data collection tools and data sources were consistently aligned with each other.

Table 1

*Research Study Alignment*

Study problem and purpose	Research questions	Data collection tools	Data source
<p>The problem in this study was that due to the increasing demand for piano instruction, piano teachers have great teaching loads, yet there was no standardized curriculum for the teaching of piano in the international schools and more information was needed in regard to the teaching strategies the teachers were using to maintain quality piano education.</p> <p>This case study investigated teachers' and parents' perceptions towards the piano classes at the international schools in a suburban district in Beijing.</p>	RQ 1: How do piano teachers and parents define the goals and purposes of piano learning? (Principle 1)	Semistructured interviews were conducted with two groups: experienced piano teachers who have taught in the international school's piano course, and parents of various nationalities.	10 interview transcripts from each group were collected and coded to move methodically to a higher conceptual level guided by the four Suzuki principles.
	RQ 2: What outcomes do piano teachers and parents expect from a group of diverse students? (Principle 2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Semistructured interviews with piano teachers and parents.</li> <li>2. Observations with individual lessons and group piano classes in the suburban district of Beijing.</li> <li>3. Observation of students' piano recitals in the suburban district of Beijing.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 10 interview transcripts from each group were collected and coded to move methodically to a higher conceptual level guided by the four Suzuki principles.</li> <li>2. Completed observation protocols and field notes of three group piano classes, eight individual lessons (including six regular weekly lessons and two one-on-one master classes) were collected and coded.</li> <li>3. Completed observation protocol and field notes of three students' piano recitals were collected and coded.</li> </ol>
	RQ 3: How do parents involve themselves in their children's daily practice and collaborate with the teachers? (Principle 3)	Semistructured interviews were conducted with teachers and parents.	10 interview transcripts from each group were collected and coded to move methodically to a higher conceptual level guided by the four Suzuki principles.
	RQ4: How can piano teachers, parents, and students work together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the students? (Principle 4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Semistructured interviews with piano teachers and parents.</li> <li>2. Observations with individual lessons and group piano classes.</li> <li>3. Observation of students' piano recital.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 10 interview transcripts from each group were collected and coded to move methodically to a higher conceptual level guided by the four Suzuki principles.</li> <li>2. Completed observation protocols and field notes of three group piano classes, eight individual lessons (including six regular weekly lessons and two one-on-one master classes) were collected and coded.</li> <li>3. Completed observation protocol and field notes of three students' piano recitals were collected and coded.</li> </ol>

## **Interviews**

Conducting interviews enabled more complex aspects of teachers' and parents' perceptions to be studied. All participants had the chance to provide data in their own way and in their own words. Lodico and Spaulding (2010) explained that the goal is to "understand the uniquely individual aspects of the case as well as their commonalities" (p. 158). For this study, there were two different sets of questions designed for teachers (Appendix B) and parents (Appendix C). Specifically, interview questions were designed around the framework of Suzuki's philosophy to discover how piano teachers and parents could help the students both become better learners and make the learning process more fun and productive. Several experts had reviewed the interview questions before the interviews were conducted. I asked several piano teachers and music teachers to read through my interview questions to ensure that all the questions aligned with my research questions and purposes. Moreover, all questions were designed in dual languages, and I made sure that they made sense in both languages.

First, Suzuki believed that every child has the potential to learn and that a good character could be taught (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998). Therefore, the interviews helped me to discover if all the teachers believed that every student could learn and should learn to play piano as well as aspects of piano studying teachers and parents valued (Principle 1).

Second, individual interviews helped me discover how each teacher chose suitable approaches for students who have various learning styles and backgrounds (Principle 2). Selecting an appropriate teaching approach had a large impact on students'

achievement and performance outcomes. Çakiroglu (2014) explained that including different learning styles could influence learning performance. Students who were taught with a learning style they liked or preferred better were more engaged and showed better outcomes.

Third, it was necessary to find out if teachers were aware of students' prior educational experiences, were sensitive to students' diversity, understood students' home-community issues, and were enthusiastic about providing meaningful instruction for all students (Principle 3). Successful cooperation and communication between teachers and parents might assist teachers in discovering unknown facts about the students, such as what spoken language was used in their students' previous piano lessons, what repertoire they had studied, what methods they had been exposed to, and what their purpose was for learning piano. Some students approached their piano study seriously. They wanted to earn certificates from piano level exams and might go on to be professional musicians, while others just wanted to learn piano for their own pleasure and have fun. Burnard (2012) stated, "Finding out what our students know, feel, and think about what they know and do requires attending very carefully to them and respecting their abilities, backgrounds, and beliefs" (p. 177). Asking these questions helped me to understand how piano teachers should select their teaching material accordingly and assist parents and students with their daily practice.

Lastly, it was essential to motivate students and inspire their interest in learning. I focused the interviews on what approaches different teachers chose to stimulate students' passion and create a positive learning environment to inspire their students to learn

(Principle 3). In the interview questions, I asked the piano educators how they chose the appropriate instructional method and how teaching materials were chosen to address their students' abilities, interests, and unique learning styles. In addition, the piano educators were asked if they designed lesson plans with clear objectives, engaged students in learning activities, gave students opportunities to practice new piano techniques and pieces, and provided effective assessment on what they learned about the teaching experience. The interview questions also helped me to determine how to build both long and short-term goals and design instructions to encourage positive learning and increase self-esteem and confidence for piano students.

### **Setting and Sample**

Ten teachers and ten parents were interviewed for this research study. Participants who were invited to take part in this study were parents of K to 12 children who were currently taking piano lessons and piano teachers who were currently teaching or have had experience teaching in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. Questions were semi structured and contained queries regarding background, knowledge, experience, opinion, and feeling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

I conducted the interviews in person, by phone, via email, or Wechat. Prior to that, participants were first contacted in person, by phone, email or Wechat to ask if they would be willing to participate in this study, and if so, to sign the consent form. All participants were asked to review the study information and sign the consent form 24-48 hours prior to the interview. I first sent the consent form to the participants who were doing the interview in person, by phone, email or Wechat, and asked them to sign and



email me a scanned copy or take a photo of the form and/or Wechat me back before interviews took place. Face-to-face interviews took approximately 30-40 minutes. Interviews were scheduled at the interviewees' convenience-at times and locations of their choosing, and were all recorded via tape recorder, saved faithfully and transcribed for further study. I also took notes during the interviews to facilitate analysis. Email and Wechat interviews were also saved on an external and secure hard drive and were printed out as records.

### **Observations**

In the study, observation data were collected through informal classroom and lesson observations. Classes, lessons, and concert observations were scheduled and conducted at various locations. I observed three piano group classes, eight individual piano lessons (including six normal weekly lessons and two one-on-one master classes), and three students' recitals. Before each observation, a clear vision and purpose for the observation were shared with the teachers and students. Observation protocols were designed prior to the process (Appendix D, E, F). The performers did not realize they were being observed. The classes and lesson observations were non-covert observations since I was easily identified and the students knew that they were being observed.

There were three phases to the observation process: pre-observation discussion, observation, and post-observation discussion (Hayes & Robnolt, 2007), all of which were used to make sure the observations were effective at identifying the international schools' piano class effectiveness and teaching methodology used in classes. In the pre-observation discussion, the purpose of the study was identified and explained to those

who were being observed. I explained what kinds of data I would be recording, and the procedures for recording those data. For individual piano lesson observations, minors aged 7-17 were also asked to sign a child assent form before the observations took place because the observation was clearly of only that child. Parental consents to observe the individual piano lesson were also obtained prior to asking the child. Meanwhile, all class/school related observations contained school leader and teacher consent forms. The students were informed that if they agreed to be in this project, they would be asked to have their piano lesson as usual. I would observe the class and would not ask them any questions or participant in their lessons.

Protocols were used for recording information while observing classes or lessons. Field notes were coded by date and time of the observation, class setting, length of the class, number of students, level of students, goals and activities, teaching methods and material used, teaching strategies, student and teacher collaboration, lesson environment and atmosphere, intended outcomes and level of achievements, technology used, students' attitude toward classes or lessons. For the recital observations, field notes were taken in relation to concert organization, students and teachers' attitude, behavior and collaboration, students' readiness, intended outcomes and level of achievements, student's motivation and confidence building, and concert environment and atmosphere. The above data provided evidence to compare which format of piano classes received better achievements and created more positive learning environments. Then, all information was analyzed to draw any parallels with the goals of this research study. After analyzing the data, I shared the draft findings with all interviewed teachers to

receive further feedback and asked these teachers to check the data pertaining to them on the findings to ensure accuracy.

### **Description of Participants**

Participants who were invited to take part in this study were parents of K to 12 children who were currently taking piano lessons and piano teachers who were currently teaching or have had experience teaching in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. The participants represented different backgrounds and levels. They were also related to different international schools throughout a suburban district of Beijing. It was a great opportunity to receive diverse perspectives from each of them.

To ensure all the participants understood the purpose of this research study, interviews were designed in dual languages-Mandarin and English. I have also conducted a review of the interview protocol to make sure that all participants understood the interview questions in the same way, and to test the interviews' length (Center for Evaluation and Research, 2011). The interview reviews also helped me to adjust or reword any unsuitable questions. I asked several parents whom I know personally to review the interview questions for clarity.

To establish a research-participant working relationship, I first checked out each school's requirements for conducting research in their school setting and found out who had the authority to grant me permission to conduct this research study in their school. Then, I met each school's owner or leader to discuss my research study and asked for volunteer piano teachers and piano students' parents to participate in this study. To avoid bias, my own students' parents were not involved in the study. Since I am currently not

teaching in any of these international schools or music schools, there was no conflict of interest between these institutions and me.

### **Ethical Treatment of Human Participants**

Before conducting all the interviews, the “Ethics Review Form” was submitted to the Walden University’s IRB committee for review. The purpose of receiving approval for the “Ethics Review Form” was to certify that for this case study, the potential benefits outweighed the potential risks, and the researcher was in full compliance with all relevant regulations. The interviews proceeded only after receiving the necessary approval (IRB approval #02-19-18-0445103). Meanwhile, a consent form describing the purpose, voluntary nature, potential risk(s) and benefit(s) of the study was given to all the interviewees via email or Wechat to read and sign. Participants were then asked to email me a scanned copy of the consent form before the interview took place to obtain written permission.

All comments and discussions from the interview were treated in the strictest confidence and no responses were attributed to specific individuals. All participation in this study was voluntary. The decisions of all participants to take part or not in this study were respected. In addition, participants were able to stop participating at any time or skip any questions they wished during the study. The study protected the confidentiality of all participants. I assigned the participants pseudonyms to protect them, and to ensure their confidentiality in the study. All names of teachers, parents and schools were disassociated from responses during the data analysis process. Moreover, interviews did not include any verbiage or language that was biased against persons because of their

race, gender, or ethnic group (Creswell, 2009). All information provided by participants was kept confidential. I would not use this information for any purpose outside of this research project. All collected data and audio recordings were stored on an external hard drive and will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

### **Data Sources and Triangulation**

The data sources collected in this research study were interviews with teachers and parents and observations of group piano classes, individual piano lessons, and students' recitals. All types of data were collected for triangulation and to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of different teaching formats, and to find out effective ways to improve instructions. Triangulation means using more than one method to collect research topic data to help guarantee the validity of said research by way of a variety of methods to collect data. The intention of triangulation is to encapsulate different dimensions of the problem studied (Lodico & Spaulding, 2010). Different formats of piano lessons and classes were discussed and compared. Data sources included the following:

1. Ten semi structured interviews with experienced piano teachers who have taught in the international schools' piano course to find out how they define their goals and purposes of piano learning.
2. Ten semistructured interviews with a selected group of parents of K to 12 children who are currently taking piano lessons.

3. Observations of three group piano classes, eight individual lessons (including six regular one-on-one lessons and two one-on-one master classes) and three student recitals.

The above data provided evidence to compare which format of piano classes received better achievements and created more positive learning environments.

### **Data Analysis**

Following data collection, the next essential step was to analyze the interview transcripts and observation protocols. The collected data were summarized by codes, themes, relationships, and patterns related to the four principles of the Suzuki method: “character first, ability second”, “mother-tongue approach”, “parental involvement”, and “positive environment”. These data helped to clarify issues and identify solutions to the problem.

After finishing organizing transcripts of the interviews, transcriptions were used for reviewing and coding the data, to analyze them with common themes. I have used member checking to ensure that my own biases did not influence the participants’ perspectives. According to Lodico and Spaulding (2010), many researchers sent the transcribed interviews or researchers’ conclusions back to the participants for review to avoid bias. Participants were invited to discuss the findings with me and provide any clarification or correction to their own data included in the finding. When the study was completed, and prior to submission to Walden University, participants were invited to review and discuss the information contained in the study to make sure that all

information I recorded was correct, and to see if what was written was what they intended. A copy of the study and the project will be sent to all participants.

### **Coding Procedure**

For the interviews, the overall theme for coding was narrative codes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), “Narrative codes describe the structure of talk itself. When informants tell you their stories, they offer an account of their lives framed in a particular way” (p. 178). In this case, my participants told me about their personal experiences of learning and teaching piano in China. Codes were based on topics, concepts, ideas, and keywords. I first highlighted all the common themes, ideas and subjects with the same color and labeled them for further comparison and analysis. The keywords from each interview and observation field notes were summarized immediately, following the four principles of the Suzuki method after each event when my memory was fresh and clear. Coding all information allowed me to arrange the items into related groups, and examine each feature of these groups, and gain insight from them. 10 teachers’ interview results were labeled from Teacher A-Teacher J, and 10 parents’ interview results were labeled from Parent A- Parent J.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Design**

Credibility and trustworthiness are important concepts in case study research. It is essential to make sure that what the researcher heard and saw were not misleading (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), “Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the inferences researchers make based specifically on the data they collect, while reliability refers to the consistency of

these inferences over time, location, and circumstances” (p. 453). In this case study, there were some possible biases: first, reliability and trustworthiness depended on my perspective. Secondly, a large portion of the data were collected through face-to-face interviews and interviews via other styles of social media. It was difficult to determine the credibility and trustworthiness of these linguistic data. Thirdly, since the group acted as its own point of reference, internal validity is automatically established in qualitative research (De Vaus, 2001).

To avoid these biases, I used a variety of instruments to collect data for triangulation and documented all processes in detail. I asked permission to audio record the interviews while carefully taking notes during each one. Through previous experiences, I noticed that it is difficult to take notes for all the needed information during the interview process. Audio or video recordings are excellent ways to make sure that there is no misunderstanding of certain words or issues and nothing is being left out. During the interview process, I was aware of not letting my own opinion lead the conversation. Additionally, it was necessary to pay attention to the interviewee’s body language and tone and to take notice of non-verbal behavior, like eye contact, general body posture, facial expressions, and other gestures. To enhance the credibility of the observations, I had to be aware of personal bias when collecting data, and not let my prejudices bias the data while making sure that observations were presented as facts, and all interpretations were supported by evidence. I also asked a peer to review my data to make sure that all data were accurately translated and all the language was understood, then had him sign a confidentiality agreement.



As the researcher, I considered my role was etic to the research. According to Simon (2011), an etic role means “from an outside view, more of an objective viewer”; in comparison, an emic role means “an insider, who is a full participant in activity, program, or phenomenon” (p.1). I am currently running a private piano studio in a suburban district in Beijing and am separate from these international schools. However, some of the participants were previous colleagues and friends.

To ensure trustworthiness and transferability, each interview and observation was described in detail in this study regarding how it was conducted and, “how the findings will be derived from the data” (Merriam, 2009, p.234). According to Merriam (2009), whether the results of a qualitative study can be transferred is debatable. In this case study, I was focusing on how to help piano teachers in the international schools of a suburban district of Beijing to be able to teach effectively; however, the situations and problems were similar to those in other international schools in Beijing, so it is possible that the findings are transferable to other piano classes.

### **Research Findings**

Past research provided information about the Suzuki method (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998; Hendricks, 2011; Powell, 1988; Suzuki, 1993; Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983), piano learning motives (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Costa-Giomi, 2015; Darrow, 2014; Elpus, 2013; Habib & Besson, 2009; Harris, 2007; Kertz-Welzel, 2015; Lin, 2011), issues related to different instrumental modes (Clark, 2013; Enoch, 1996; Iwaguchi, 2012; Lyke, 1996; Meulink, 2011; Pike, 2014; Thomas-Lee, 2003; Yang 2015; Young, 2010), student motivation (Battersby & Bolton, 2013; Costa-Giomi, Flowers, and Sasaki, 2005;

Kurtuldu, 2012), technology in piano teaching (Alexander, 1996; Gordon and Sisler, 2008) and assessment of amateur piano students in China (Mahamuti, 2013; Li, 2011; Zhu, 2011). I developed my interview questions based on the framework: the four principles of the Suzuki method, and analyzed research findings to align with these four principles. I discovered the teachers' and parents' perceptions towards various piano curricula, researched methodologies for students of all levels here in a suburban district of Beijing and discussed some of the main themes. These main themes consist of a comparison of teachers' and parents' perceptions on the pros and cons of an individual piano lesson and group piano class, the importance of participating in piano exams and competitions, how to build a positive learning environment for teachers, parents, and students to all work together, how to respect one another, and diversity issues that have developed in piano teaching in the international schools in this district.

### **Ten Teacher Interviews**

Ten teachers who participated in this study were currently teaching or had experience teaching at the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. Although they were all teaching piano lessons, including one-on-one lessons and group piano classes, their teaching experiences varied. The length of piano teaching experience ranged from two to 10 years. Five of the 10 teachers held master's degrees and five bachelor's degrees. However, only three of the 10 teachers held degrees in piano performance. Two teachers had music theory and composition backgrounds, two teachers had music education backgrounds and three teachers studied non-music related subjects while playing piano as a hobby. Four of the 10 teachers had some group piano teaching

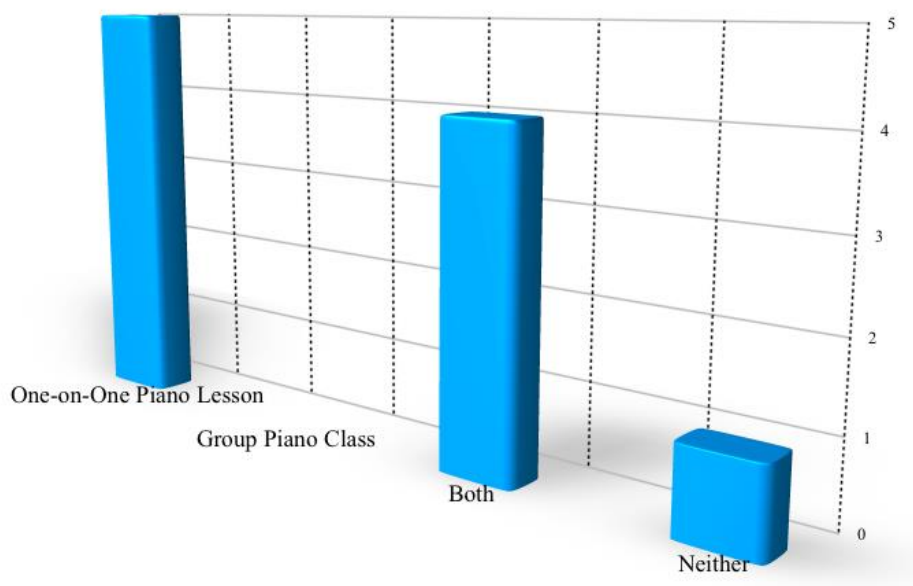
experiences. Six of the 10 interviews were conducted face-to-face. The other four were conducted by Wechat.

**Teachers' piano lesson format preferences.** All the interviewed teachers thought that music theory, harmony, and accompaniment studies are more beneficial through group piano classes and one-on-one piano lessons were more effective for sight reading training, style interpretation, and pianistic technique study. Teachers often focus on teaching the fundamentals of piano playing during individual lessons (Enoch, 1996) and emphasize more on keyboard and performance skills during group piano class (Lyke, 1996). Even though Suzuki teachers teach mainly one-on-one lessons, many also support group lessons and combine performance with theory enrichment in those lessons (Powell, 1988). Five teachers thought one-on-one lessons were more effective because the teacher could choose the teaching style and lesson plans accordingly. One-on-one lessons were more targeted toward each student's problems and goals. Four teachers thought it was better to have a mixture of individual and group piano classes. The teachers provided the following reasons for not limiting lesson formats:

1. Even though the one-on-one lesson helped to focus more on each student's problems and level of acceptance, group piano class brought in more new technology and greater opportunity for interaction.
2. Piano lessons should not be limited to one format. For group piano class, students had the chance to learn and influence each other and do more ear training activities and learn music through all aspects. By comparison,

students who were taking one-on-one lessons were quite lonely and were only dealing with the teacher.

3. Group piano classes were more beneficial for collaboration and chamber music study.



*Figure 1.* Teachers' lesson format preferences.

Teacher B explained that currently, most schools offer one-on-one piano lessons, and only basic music theory, rhythm and aural training classes were in a group format.

Teacher B thought that the effectiveness of piano teaching was not directly related to the format of teaching, but mainly depended on the knowledge base of the piano teachers and the teacher's teaching ability.

Meanwhile, one teacher did not directly answer this question. Several teachers also mentioned that there was an ever-growing selection of piano learning related

computer software which was available on the market. Teachers were interested in exploring these new technologies in detail and considered using them in their daily teaching or student's daily practice. However, teachers were concerned about the limitations of practicing piano with a computer program. Figure 1 displays teachers' preferences for different formats of piano education.

**Principle 1: “character first, ability second”.** According to Suzuki, the goal of music education was not to merely develop student's musical skills, but also to develop a child's sensitivity and character, helping the child achieve a better life path (Suzuki Talent Education Association, 2005). Character development was part of the regular lesson routine, while additionally, the Suzuki method emphasized issues regarding “nature, meaning, purpose and societal value of music” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 139). So how did all the teachers define the goals and purposes of piano learning? How did they value students' life-long growth and success through piano studying? Moreover, did they think piano exams and competitions are important and necessary in the piano learning process?

***Teachers' views on goals and purposes of piano learning.*** Almost all teachers agreed with Suzuki and thought that learning musical instruments was only a medium, and more importantly, learning musical instruments stimulate the emotion and psychology of human beings. Suzuki believed that his method was developed around his love for students, with a purpose of “creating a more beautiful world” for children (Powell, 1988, p. 7), which aligned with the Principle 1, the goal of music education is to not only develop student's musical skills, but also to develop “their character and

sensitivity which will stand a person in good stead no matter what their ultimate path in life” (Suzuki Talent Education Association, 2005, frequently asked questions). Teacher A thought there were two things that children should master early. The first thing is language and the next is music. Teacher A also thought it was essential to give students “better soil” as a foundation and then let them choose a musical instrument on their own later. Teacher A stated,

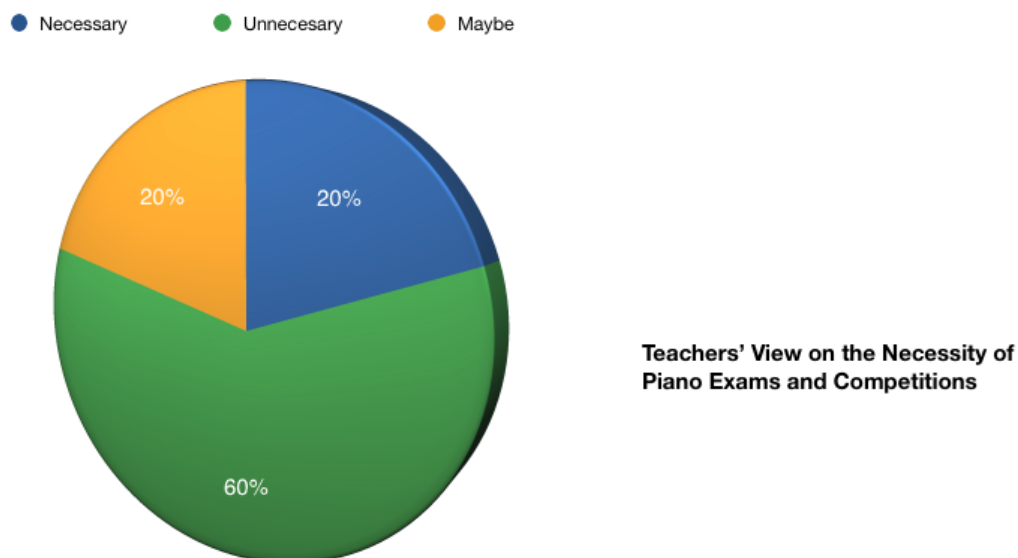
Many people equated music learning with musical instrument learning; however, music learning was more important than musical instruments studies. People could love music in a broader dimension, and more extensively, making music accompanying them for a lifetime.

Therefore, according to Teacher A, some of the universities have started paying more attention not just on how to play an instrument, but also on music appreciation and music history to learn about the various styles of music and art.

Teacher E mentioned that she hoped to improve her students’ concentration and memory and increase students’ self-confidence and abilities to do well in school. However, Teacher E was aware that since there were differences between families, every student would develop in different directions. An old Chinese saying goes, “art was created to uplift the mind and the spirit”. It was important to guide students to feel the music with their heart. The music itself could cultivate a child's character. If students learned music correctly, it could also establish good habits in life.

***Teachers’ views on piano exams and competitions.*** Even though all teachers agreed that learning piano was not just about learning an instrument, but also benefited

students as a whole and built better characters, there were different opinions on taking piano exams and joining piano competitions. Previously I discussed the different piano assessments in China in the literature reviews. There are multiple pros and cons in regard to taking piano exams (Li, 2011; Mahamuti, 2013). While the exams could enhance teacher's teaching standards, they could also change the purposes of piano studying from "music-making to exam passing business" (Mahamuti, 2013, p50). An exam-based piano education would shift the goal from learning piano to simply receiving certificates (Li, 2011; Mahamuti, 2013). Two teachers thought it was necessary to do so. Six teachers thought it was unnecessary, and two teachers said it depended on the students' learning stage. Figure 2 illustrates these 10 teachers' opinions:



*Figure 2.* Teachers' views on the necessity of piano exams and competitions.

Teacher D and Teacher I liked the idea that participating piano exam or competition is beneficial. Both Teacher D and Teacher I have asked students in their

organization to attend at least one of the activities each semester, which include piano exam, competition, or public performance. Teacher D stated,

In the practical learning process, the reality was students do not usually complete every piece 100%. Normally, for a typical pace of progress, teachers would move on to a new piece after a student's current pieces reached an approximately 80% completion. However, if students were attending a master class, piano competition, piano exam, or a public performance, students would have a chance to try their best and learned their music to a higher level. It was not that easy for students to improve that last 20%.

Students who joined exams and competitions have to focus on details and put in much effort to improve their performance. This dedication and focus would benefit students for their entire lives. Furthermore, according to Teacher D, this experience could also be a good challenge for students and an excellent exercise for their psychological and self-confidence improvement.

Meanwhile, the other six teachers opposed the idea of piano exams and competitions for the following reasons:

1. These six teachers did not want their students to think a piano exam was the final goal of their music study; it should only be a small step within the long-term learning process.
2. Piano exams were generally more popular among Chinese students because the traditional Chinese education system is more exam based. Chinese students thought it was normal to take exams, just like in any other subjects.



They were accustomed to striving for high scores in everything, and their parents were also more competitive. By comparison, foreign students from international schools in Beijing cared less about piano exams and competitions, and the parents were more willing to consult and listen to their children's opinions.

3. Preparing for a piano exam or competition sometimes limited the range of piano repertoire. Sometimes students practiced the same pieces for years to get to the "perfect" stage; however, by doing so, they lost the chance to expose themselves to more varieties of musical styles.
4. Lastly, these six teachers did not want their students to pay too much attention to the results. They thought it was also important to enjoy the process and love what they were doing.

In addition, two teachers mentioned that the notion of taking exams or joining competitions should differ from student to student. It could be beneficial if the students were motivated and willing to join themselves. It could also have the opposite effect if only pushed by teachers or parents. The results of the event might encourage the students and prove to them that if they have worked hard, they could achieve their goal; however, it might also be detrimental if the results are not good and students are sensitive.

**Principle 2: "mother-tongue approach".** The Suzuki method was based on an idea Suzuki called "mother tongue approach". Suzuki observed that all children learn to speak their native languages with fluency and accuracy because they are surrounded by these language sounds from birth. Therefore, if children were exposed to and surrounded

by musical sounds in the same way they were with their language sounds, they would also develop an equally exceptional ability in music. If a child did not learn, it did not mean there was a lack of ability, but rather that the teaching methods were not compatible with the child's present development or that child had not been properly stimulated. Therefore, I wanted to find out if all the piano teachers believed all students could learn piano at a high level. What outcomes did they expect from students with diverse backgrounds (different levels, nationalities, and years of piano studying)? And what approach did they use to motivate and inspire their students?

*Teachers' views on students' learning levels.* Most teachers agreed that if a student tried hard and put in significant effort, all students would be able to reach a certain level; however, it is hard to major in music at a university or become professional musicians. Studying piano could train a student's concentration and toughness. Students would indeed learn to do more independent study and understand success does not come easily. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a good learning habit when students are young. Suzuki teachers believe that learning begins at an early age, and that the mother-tongue approach (Principle 2) helps a child to "develop their concentration, ability to memorize, coordination, sensitivities to patterns, sensitivities to beauty, promotes self-esteem and a more harmonious family life" (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998, p.8). All of these abilities would help students to organize their way of thinking and improve results in their school works. Meanwhile, teachers should appreciate all the small steps students have achieved and give more support to encourage students to continue towards their goals while enjoying each small step along the way (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998).

However, teachers debated whether all students could achieve a high level.

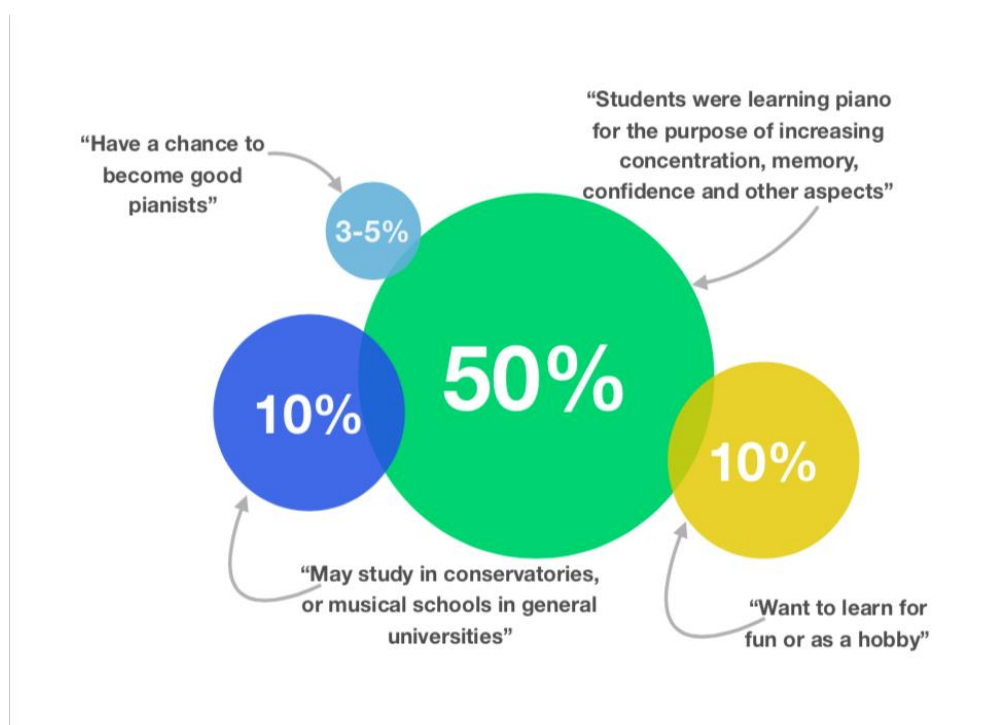
Several teachers questioned what “high level” means for piano learning. They all agreed that piano learning is a lifelong process. Teacher A added that she thought everyone’s music performances are subject to each listener’s opinion. Some in the audience would think that the child played well, while others might feel the child’s performance was boring. It was essential to train not only their pianistic techniques, but also their emotional aspects. More importantly, the students needed to learn how to express music through their own heart. Rather than directly copy their teacher, or only emphasizing on pianistic techniques, Teacher A preferred to emphasize emotional aspects.

Teacher B summarized his reasons for believing all children can learn piano at a high level. The reasons were,

1. The basic intelligence level of human beings is almost the same.
2. In ancient times, music was created through imitation; reciting words formed certain rhythms and melodies, and slowly developed into music. The ability to learn music has passed on to our human genes. Everyone should be able to learn if he or she is awakened to one’s ability.
3. Teacher B did not think of himself as a smart person, but he had learned piano to a certain level. He meant that as long as people accumulate and explore their knowledge, they should all be able to achieve to a high level.

Teacher C disagreed that everyone could learn piano to a high level because to play piano well requires talent. For example, according to Teacher C, in piano school, 3-5% of the students in the teacher’s school might have a chance to become good pianists.

10 percent of their students might be studying in conservatories or music schools in general universities. 10 percent of the students probably just wanted to learn piano for fun and as a hobby, and 50% of the students were learning piano for increasing concentration, memory, confidence, and other aspects. Teacher C thought that teachers needed to categorize their students as a percentage chart (Figure 3) and set different goals accordingly. Their teaching strategies were based on the conditions of the child and the willingness of the parents to cooperate.



*Figure 3.* Teacher C discussed students' different learning purposes in her school.

Teacher H pointed out that whether students could learn piano at a high level depended on their first teacher's enlightenment. For example, if the first teacher was a vocal teacher, the students have learned many wrong techniques and bad habits, which would prevent their achievements later. Teacher H stated that if the students began to

study piano with a professional piano teacher, the students would follow correct and suitable methods, and would have a chance to reach a higher level later. However, if the students began their piano studies with nonprofessionals, they would not be able to learn at a very high level. On the other hand, according to Teacher C, many children may be talented and teachers may be willing to cultivate them, but these students lacked the support of their family and they knew they would not be able to study music in the future. As a result, piano teachers could not change the reality that the student lacked support at home. An old Chinese saying is that “it takes the favorable climate and geographical position and support of the people to succeed”. To learn piano at a high level depends on the child’s talents and efforts, support from the family unit, and also the ability to pay for expensive lessons.

*Teacher’s views on students with diverse backgrounds.* Teachers need to understand the issues and values of diversity in the classroom since parents and students from different countries have different views on the purposes and goals of piano studying (Principle 1). These teachers’ views also answered the question related to Principle 2: What outcomes do piano teachers expect from a group of students who have various levels? There is a need to recognize the importance of diversity training even when it comes to music lessons and music educators (Rodinson, 2017). During the interviews, four teachers thought they would not have different expectations for students who have diverse backgrounds. The common goal for all is to continuously love piano and learn to express themselves through music. The other six teachers thought their teaching methods

and materials needed to be diverse according to three aspects: student's mobility, multiculturalism, and maturity.

Teachers A and D mentioned students' mobility, which is a unique problem facing these international schools. The teaching plans depended on how long the students would be staying in Beijing. Because all students from international schools travel frequently, they may also follow their families and move to different countries frequently, participate in school functions internationally, or merely travel on holidays. Many foreigners are based in Beijing on short-term working contracts. Sometimes two years, sometimes five years, so teachers have to talk to the parents and understand their family plans to create suitable short and long-term plans for the students. Teacher A argued that it is important to link their current study with their past and future. It does not matter how long Teacher A will be with the students-one lesson or one year-Teacher A wanted to make sure that the students learn good habits and love music.

Teacher B and C mentioned multiculturalism. Teacher B discussed that in multicultural environments, no matter what level it is, one needs to consider its uniqueness. This is also true in learning music. It was not only necessary to take into account the culture of the countries and regions where the students are from, but also the influence of their traditional aesthetic ideas, and differences in characters. Teacher C compared and contrasted three different nations' education styles: UK, US, and China. She thought both Chinese and British education styles were relatively conservative compared with the American style. The British style is a little bit more flexible than the Chinese style with the American style the most open. However, students from American

international schools needed to be more focused and imply more rules in their piano studies. These students needed more discipline to learn good habits and pianistic technique. In terms of the overall music education, Teacher C thought the British schools were doing a better job. The British schools offer well-planned music curricula. In comparison, the American schools have less systematic music instructions.

In comparison, the Chinese schools are more unilateral. First, Chinese teaching materials seldom change. The piano level exams offered by the Central Conservatory are invariance and unitary (Li, 2011). Teacher C gave me an example from when she was little; she was trained by the traditional Chinese piano teachers. They required all piano students to practice finger lifting; no matter what the style or composer. As a result, all students played everything with an ugly harsh tone. These students should have been more flexible and paid more attention to the quality of sound, articulation, touch, and dynamics. Instead of teaching student's different style and musical features, Chinese teachers are often too priggish about hand positions and finger clarity. In the end, piano is not the same with a percussion instrument. Students need to learn how to play legato and beautiful musical phrases. Not just fast fingers and rhythm. In brief, the research findings showed that teachers must recognize the pros and cons of both traditional Chinese piano teaching methods and western piano teaching methods and try to synthesize the good parts from both. This was supported by Suzuki's Principles 1 and 2: Every child has the potential to learn and students need to learn how to develop their talent and understand what art really is (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983). These interview findings allowed me to

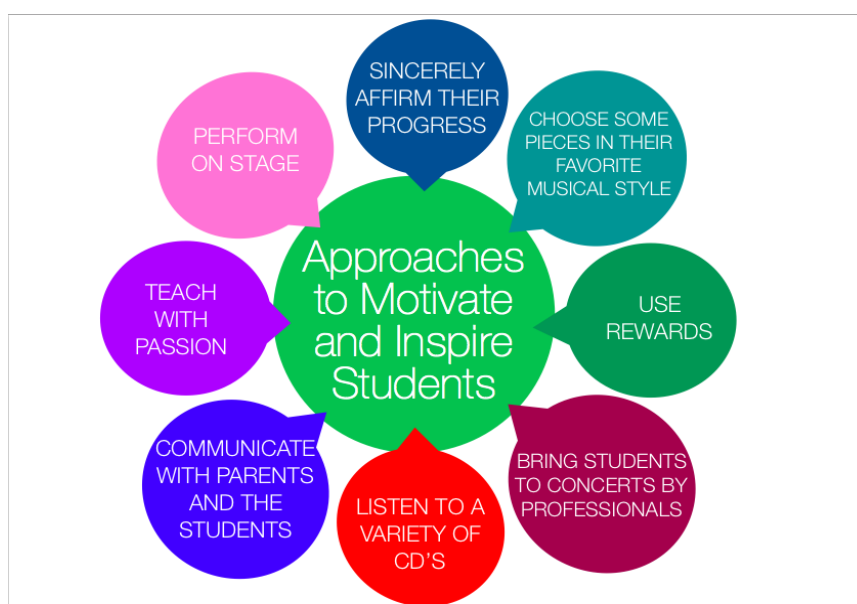
rethink about the creation of the most suitable method for the multicultural students whom make up the international schools.

Teacher E and Teacher I both mentioned that they would arrange their lesson differently according to the age of their students, not nationalities. Both Teacher E and Teacher I suggested focusing more on technique training for younger students and in-depth understanding of the style and characteristics of different periods for older students. According to Teacher E, it did not matter if students were from international schools or Chinese schools; they were usually more interested in learning piano in primary school. When students started junior high school, they had to adjust to school work and also going through puberty. Students' minds were less focused on piano learning. So, during this time, teachers needed to be more flexible and understanding of the situation, try different approaches since students this age are sensible at the time. There are many different changes during adolescence regardless of what country or nationality the children are. Therefore, Teacher E pushed students to achieve a level of 7 or 8 for the piano exam before middle school. From primary school to junior high school, children are too busy to allocate time and need some time to adapt. Students might slow down their learning process during that period until they were successfully adapting to their new life.

***Student motivation.*** At the end of this section of questions, all 10 teachers illustrated their way of encouraging and motivating students-mainly young children. Mostly this depended on the students' character and mental maturity. Many of the motivation techniques were similar with the Suzuki method, including praise,



enthusiasm, specific instructions, rewards, games, and good experiences (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998). Common methods such as praise in class (and as much as possible), distribution of rewards (small candy, study supplies.), stage performance were often applied. The general situation is a concrete analysis of specific issues. If a child did not like music, teachers were willing to pick a genre in the student's interest. If a child was born to love music, then they would ask them to try different styles of music in a variety of musical forms to enhance their knowledge of all the characteristics of different periods. The following figure 4 summarized the different approaches all teachers mentioned to motivate their students in detail, which include: perform on stage, sincerely affirm their progress, choose some pieces in their favorite musical style, use rewards, bring students to professional's concerts, listen to varieties of CDs, communication with both parents and students, teaching with passion.



*Figure 4.* Teachers' approaches to motivate and inspire their students.

Communication between teachers, parents and students are also essential for students' motivation. For instance, Teacher A explained one case where a fifteen-year-old girl and her twelve-year-old brother were taking weekly lessons together. Both students attended an international school, and both of their parents are teachers in the school. Their mom is Chinese and the dad is American. The older sister is very quiet and does not say a word in the lesson, while the younger brother loves critical thinking. He would argue with the teacher on all the topics that he was not convinced. Teacher A said even though the older sister did all the work and practiced regularly, she felt that she had no interest at all in learning piano. Then she had a conversation with the mother and found out that the mom thought both students have no interest in learning piano. However, the mom insisted on piano is a necessary subject which her children must continue to learn. She had to push them very hard to practice daily. Even more, she set up daily practicing rules and if they missed one day of practice, they had to double their practice time the next day. On the other hand, the father allowed the students to do whatever they liked. After discussing the situation with both students, Teacher A found out that the brother loved piano, but hated being forced to practice. This teacher felt that it was essential to balance the relationships in the family. Aligning with Principle 3, there are different ways of involving parents in the lesson and helping parents to learn how to listen (Powell, 1988). Suzuki teachers suggested giving parents specific directions through the child and suggested making sure that students always felt involved and interested (Powell, 1988). Teacher A hoped everyone in the family could cooperate more effectively to motivate the students. Thus, Teacher A asked the mom to loosen up a little

bit and try to inspire each of the students from her point of view and she felt more communication between students, parents and teacher were needed.

Teacher E also discussed two of her cases. One of her younger students had taken an interest in a celebrity. For that reason, Teacher E agreed with the student that if that student practiced hard for her level exam, the teacher would get the celebrity's signature for this student. With one of her older students, after she passed piano exam level 8, she was allowed to choose a pop song to boost her interest, but as an agreement, she had to play better than their classmates. According to Powell, "Children need and like to be able to make choices" (1988, p. 33). Teachers could give student choices—with boundaries—to make them feel there was some flexibility in their study (Powell, 1988).

**Principle 3: "parental involvement"**. The most significant influence in a child's environment comes from the parents. Parents are a crucial role in Suzuki's philosophy. Parents function like teaching assistants for the student to practice at home. Parents need to demonstrate love, focus on a child's efforts and accomplishments, and make sure it is a pleasant learning experience. When focusing on talent education, parents play an important role in providing good examples (music for the child to hear, seeing live concerts, etc.) and motivating their child to learn. I asked the teachers, what kind of instruction do they provide for parents to coach their children at home? (For example: detailed plans for daily practice, listening to recordings before practice, the length of each practice session, and so on.) Also, how did they design detailed weekly lesson plans and provided detailed assignment sheets for students' weekly lessons or classes?

Powell (1988) discussed his efforts of helping Suzuki parents. Parents were required to take the first lesson and participate in the lessons in the beginning. Teachers needed to give parents guidance in regard to their child's home practicing and be very specific in all assignments. The interview findings in this section align with Principle 3—parents are a crucial role in their child's piano learning process. All teachers I interviewed agreed that parents played an important role in students' piano learning journey. Seven teachers strongly requested the parents' involvement to assist the students' daily practice; two teachers strongly disagreed with parents interfere for student's daily practice, while one teacher said it depends on students' age and maturity level. There were seven main methods for these seven teachers to support parents coaching their children at home, and many of these techniques were also used by Suzuki teachers to improve their communication with the parents (Powell, 1988). 1. Teachers all provided detailed instruction of reviewed materials and new pieces for current weekly practice, including difficult rhythm patterns, passages, and technique; background information of the pieces and composers; and stylistic and characteristic features of the new pieces. 2. Four teachers clearly stated that they schedule their students' daily practice time in detail and strictly control the total practice time of each practice session and even the number of repetitions of individual pieces. At the same time, several teachers argued that they wanted to give their students flexibility in their daily practice to encourage and promote self-interest. They believed productivity and efficiency are more important than the lengths of time spend or how many times they play each piece. 3. Several teachers suggested making weekly practice tracking cards would keep a record of students' daily

practice progress. 4. Several teachers required students to send practice videos to teachers via Wechat for timely comments and advice. 5. Most teachers mentioned selecting teaching materials and design learning goals for each student following their aptitude. 6. Many of them required parents to sit through each lesson and learn together with their child, to be able to instruct at home correctly, especially younger children who have weaker attention and understanding of their piano lessons. 7. Many of them made demonstration videos to help students practice at home. Teacher D explained,

Take our teachers and me for example. We were asking all parents, maybe dad, mom, grandparents, or nannies to record the last five minutes of the student's practice and send it to the teachers. This way, teachers could correct them quickly if they see a problem. Meanwhile, we also required each teacher to reply to their students before their next classes, or before their next day's practice. Because WeChat is very convenient now, we hope to benefit student by using this tool. With the help of the age of internet, we could improve the efficiency of our children's piano learning process.

Teacher C opposed the idea of parents' coaching their children at home. She thought parents must have some qualifications; otherwise, it might have an opposite effect. For example, some parents would get very angry and emotional when they thought their children were doing something wrong. If these types of parents watch their children practice, they may damage their relationship, dispel the children's interest in learning and create a negative learning attitude. Some children did not hate learning piano, but they disliked their parents' attitude toward their daily practice and the heavy atmosphere in the

family. So, in those cases, the school would not allow these parents to accompany the children to practice at home, instead demand the students to take “practice lessons” with different teachers in their school. On the other hand, if the parents understood education and qualified to help their children, the school would offer specific advice and steps to help the students. If not, teachers preferred just to let the teacher help their children completely.

According to Teacher C, only less than 10 percent of the students were accompanied by parents in her school. Most of the children had “practice lessons” with different teachers in the school. These “practice lessons” could help them to achieve their goal more effectively. Students came to school at least two or three times a week, which helped them going through the most challenging process of learning notes of a new piece, so that the students would not feel as painful and setting a good foundation for them to practice further on their own.

Teacher C’s school also designed their “practice lessons” according to the different circumstances of each student. The “practice lessons” are very diverse. Some students were learning more than one musical instrument at the same time; some took the ABRSM piano exam. The ABRSM piano exam includes four sections: 1. perform three prepared pieces selected from the exam syllabus; 2. scales and arpeggios from memory; 3. sight- reading; 4. aural test. Students who were taking the “practice lessons” would have the one-on-one opportunity to practice the desired sections and subjects with different teachers. The goal was to assist students all-round. The school hoped to match each student with the most effective teacher and offer them the greatest help.

One thing all 10 teachers agreed on was the importance to communicate with parents as frequently as possible to discuss students' problems, family issues, emotion phases, and progress. Teachers felt that they needed to educate parents not to force their child and to encourage interest and self-initiative actions. In addition, teachers wanted to make sure that they were on the same page with the parents and parents should not be giving wrong instructions at home to confuse the students. This supported Principle 3 that teachers also need to educate and prepare parents based on the parents' individual needs (Powell, 1988).

**Principle 4: “positive environment”.** Suzuki believed learning needs to take place in an environment where co-operation occurs between students, teacher, and parent (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983). Children can have high standards and develop great ability in a happy environment. The teacher, parent, and child form a triangle, the strongest structure found in nature. The teacher and parent represent two sides, giving strong support to the third side--the child. The three sides supporting each other provide the strongest foundation for learning. A positive parental response made the learning pleasurable. The teacher must have an attitude of love, support, and encouragement for the child. According to Principle 4, “good environmental conditions produce superior abilities” (Suzuki & Suzuki, 1983, p. 13). Suzuki teachers are often faced with the question of how to best and most efficiently work with parents of the students (Powell, 1988). Therefore, I wanted to find out how did teachers foster relationships with parents and colleagues to support their students' learning? What's the best way to work collaboratively with their colleagues?

Most teachers I have interviewed thought it was their responsibility to plan their students' future and piano study path. It is the most beneficial if teachers, parents, and students can work together, and the best way to work collaboratively with their colleagues is to use a unified curriculum and teaching philosophies. For Principle 4, Suzuki believed that a good environment helps to educate students. This good environment includes the great many influences from parents, the love and support from teachers, and a strategy to develop an ear for listening (Bigler & Lloyed-Watts, 1998). Many of these teachers were working for organizations like international schools or music schools. They discussed their schools' rules and regulations. One school was using a piano teaching method from the US. They regularly invited trainers (the creator of the method books and the creators training teachers) from the US and Southeast Asia to come to the school and provided training courses for the teachers. Their method books were divided into different levels and stages. The trainer would point out all the differences to approach different age groups and gave demo classes for the teachers to explain how to interpret each activity from the books for their group piano class and ask the local teachers to share their experiences in using these method books teaching in the local district. For new teachers, this was an excellent opportunity to learn and get familiar with the books, and for the experienced teachers, they felt that it is interesting to share their stories and learn new activities to refresh their teaching. Every year different trainers would visit bringing different ideas and materials.

Another school hosted teacher's meeting twice a week to discuss their students and the problems they confronted during their weekly teaching. Their school's situation



was unique since every teacher knows all the students and each student had a chance to take lessons from different teachers within that school. Teachers could meet and discuss each student's problem and exchange ideas for solutions. They also created their own teaching supplemental materials outside of the piano exam syllabus. Different teachers were assigned different tasks in that project, so they could collaborate to complete this huge mission. After that, they created their own web system for teachers and parents to post their lesson notes to keep track of the students' progress. Teachers were required to write down comments after each lesson or "practice lesson" for the next teachers to understand each student's progress and be able to take over immediately. Since this institution was using their unified supplemental materials and all parties communicated weekly online and face-to-face, this school was quite successful and expanding rapidly in its area.

Moreover, Teacher D mentioned in his school, regular teachers must record some of their lessons and send them to the head teacher for quality control. Their school leaders encouraged teachers to sit in other teachers' lessons and observe each other's teaching and provide suggestions. The school occasionally hosted different forms of concerts, each with a different theme. For example, one theme might be related to piano exams, piano accompaniment, or varieties of chamber concerts. Teacher D thought all these were great mediums for teachers to learn from each other, since all teachers' qualifications were uneven.

While these teachers were talking about the positive situations, Teacher G also mentioned a common issue. Oftentimes piano schools were founded by people who saw

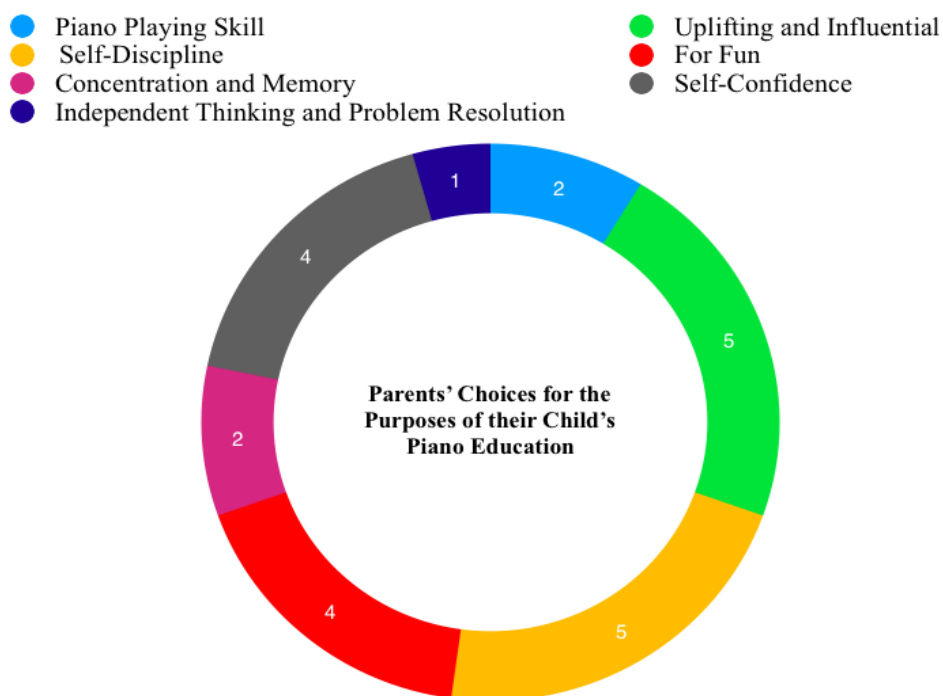
the potential of the market and wanted to benefit from it. The owners of the piano schools might be just a businessperson and had very limited knowledge of piano education. They often forced their ideas into the school and tried to influence the teachers. The owner thought they were in a higher position and could ask the teachers to follow their direction. However, some orders were unreasonable, and teachers would not obey their boss. Therefore, instead of discussing teaching matters, they often talk about problems with the school owner. Thus, a vicious circle had formed which was not beneficial for creating a good learning environment (Principle 4).

### **Ten Parents' Interviews**

Participants who were invited to take part in this study were parents of K to 12 children who were currently taking piano lessons. 10 interviews with parents were done through Wechat and emails. Among all parents, five out of 10 were from one of the music schools in this suburban district of Beijing. The other five parents were from different international schools in this district. Children's ages varied from seven to twelve. Of the 10 families, six were Chinese, one Canadian, one New Zealander, one German, and one Danish family. Interestingly, parents for all 10 families preferred the one-on-one lesson format for their children.

**Principle 1: "character first, ability second"**. How did all parents define the goals and purposes of piano learning for their child? How did they value their child's life-long growth and success through piano studying? Moreover, did they think piano exams and competitions are important and necessary in the piano learning process? There were many cross-points among parents' and the teachers' responses.

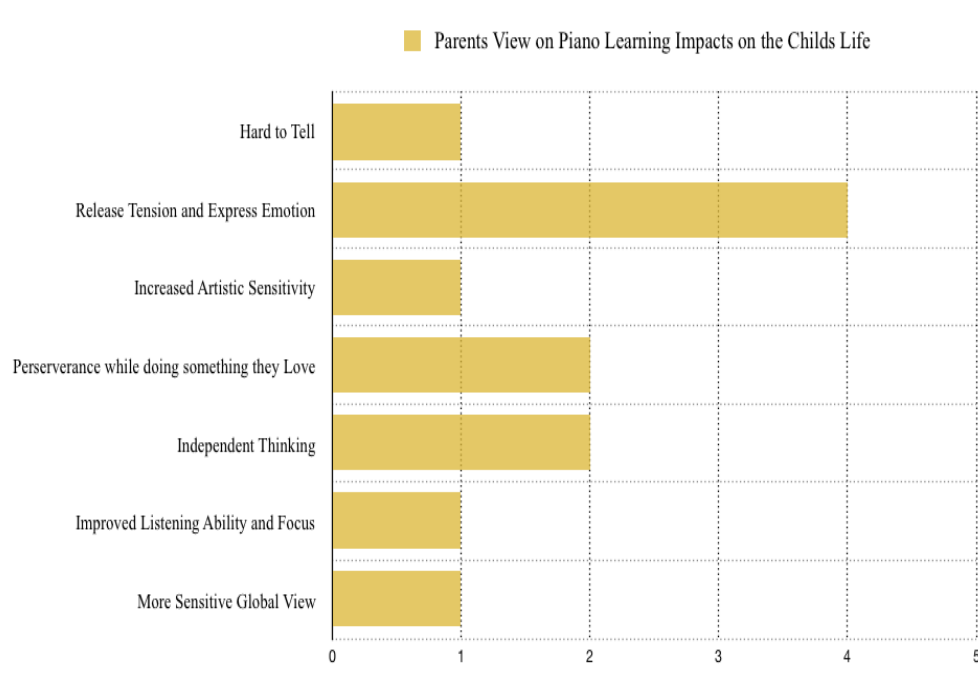
***Parents' views on goals and purposes of piano learning.*** Compared with teachers' perspectives, all 10 parents mainly discussed this topic in seven areas: learn piano to improve piano skill, feel uplifting and influential, increase self-discipline, improve concentration and memory, learn about independent thinking and problem solving, enhance self-confidence, or just for fun. Two parents mentioned that they wished their children would master a skill they love. Five parents discussed their wish that their children feel uplifted and influenced through music learning. Letting music be an important part of their life, an intimate friend who accompanies their children through different times and emotions. The following Figure 5 showed the number of parents who had mentioned each idea.



*Figure 5.* Parents' choices for their child's piano education.

For example, Parent H explained that her child felt relaxed and happy when playing piano. Parent H thought that music is a form of freedom. Music relates to emotion and consciousness. It could be classified as "temporal art." In the passage of time, music gradually transformed. Five parents thought learning piano helped to increase their children's self-discipline. Parent G said learning piano would equip their children with the ability to overcome obstacles and carry out prolonged and continuous effort toward their goals, especially when the process is not so exciting and easy. Four parents mentioned learning piano for fun. Parent B wanted their child to reach a level where they could enjoy playing piano for themselves and be able to host family concerts on the weekend. Two parents mentioned learning piano helped to increase concentration and memory since practicing piano required long hours of focus and pieces were often required to be performed by memory. Four parents mentioned self-confidence. Parent I thought it was important for their child to get more confident in front of people and train their brain in this unique way. Lastly, Parent J hoped to cultivate their children's independent thinking and problem-solving skills and let them benefit for life.

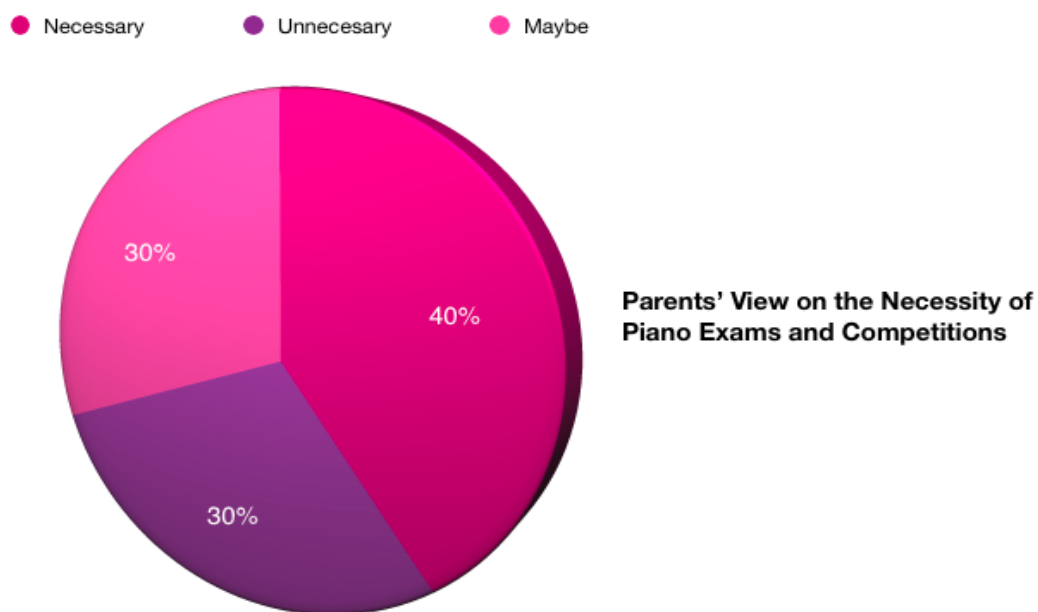
*Parents' views on piano learning impacts on the child's life.* Being a good piano student demands time, effort, and follow-through. These are also important qualities that can help them do well in their careers in the future. I have summarized this question into seven points: hard to tell the impacts on the child's life, release tension and express emotion, increase artistic sensitivity, perseverance while doing something they love, independent thinking, improve listening ability and focus and more sensitive global view.



*Figure 6.* Parents’ views on piano learning impacts on the child’s life.

One parent said it was hard to tell the impact for now. Four parents mentioned learning piano helped their children to release tension and express their emotion. Parent C stated their child had increased artistic sensitivity after learning piano. Two parents indicated learning piano builds perseverance while doing something their children love. Two parents implied independent thinking. Parent G noticed that her children started learning piano during an early age which improved their ability to listen and to focus—essential to learning other subjects in school. Lastly, Parent H felt when her child is alone; music can be a great companion, and she could also gain an in-depth understanding of history, art, and the world, which could help the child be a better person which aligns with Principle 1 that “character first, ability second”. Suzuki believed that all successful men in all fields must first be a person of fine character.

***Parents' views on piano exams and competitions.*** The results were surprising. Four parents thought it is necessary to take piano exams or join competitions, three said unnecessary, and three said maybe. Comparing these parents' views with the teachers' views, only two teachers thought it is necessary to take piano exam or competition, two said maybe, and six teachers disagreed with the idea of piano exams and competitions.



*Figure 7.* Parents' views on the necessity of piano exams and competitions.

Most parents thought they needed to set goals and requirements for their children because children needed to prove themselves to gain confidence. Some parents thought setting small goals and joining examinations and competitions could conduct a periodic inspection to enhance children's sense of accomplishment. Parent G argued that parents also should prepare their children for failure. Children would learn from their failures. The reason three parents said "maybe" was that they wanted to consult with their children about joining competitions or exams; they would only schedule these activities if their

children showed interest and were willing to join themselves. Three parents said “no” because they do not wish to add more pressure on their children. Their piano learning goals were not becoming concert pianists.

**Principle 2: “mother-tongue approach”.** Suzuki believed that children would be able to develop equally remarkable abilities in learning piano and their native languages. According to Suzuki (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998), if a child does not learn, it does not mean he or she lacks ability, but rather because the teaching methods are not compatible with the child’s development and cannot stimulate the child. Again, I wanted to find out if all the parents believed their children can learn piano at a high level and learning piano can be similar to learning a language.

Of the 10 parents, only two parents thought maybe every child could learn piano at a high level, and eight parents said not possible. Most parents opposed the idea that every child could learn piano at a high level because they thought individual differences determined their children’s ability to learn. Playing piano required specific talent and a child’s willingness to practice which not all children have the patience or discipline. Therefore, the results of the piano study achievements were different since everyone put in different amounts of effort. Most parents thought despite given all the identical environmental factors, there are still genetic differences between individuals which can also be correlated with the ability of music instrument performances. Still, all parents hoped every child gets the same joy and satisfaction from the piano learning experience. Two parents mentioned the important role as an abecedarian. Their children’s progress was closely related to how the teacher motivated them. Parent H noticed that there is a

big difference to encourage appreciation of music instead of just teaching pianistic techniques. Parent E discussed that they have not discovered the best method to motivate her child in learning piano.

Eight parents agreed that learning piano is similar to learning a language. Both skills required learning auditory input and repetition. Both were learned skills which would less likely be forgotten and more easily and quickly retrievable once learned. Parent H discussed that music cultivates sensitive ears and a good heart. Music and life were closely related, it stimulated the desire to express and create. This was the same as writing; the article itself could show beauty and strength, and let people become immersed in the world created by the composition. Meanwhile, Parent I and J argued that learning piano was similar to learning a language as learning a language depends on a personal talent. However, there was a significant difference between learning to be proficient or not. On the other hand, Parent G stated that she thought learning piano was a much more complex cognitive process than learning a language. It requires coordination of minds, eyes, muscles, and brain.

**Principle 3: “parental involvement”.** I asked the parents if they were involved in their child’s daily practice? How and why? If not, why not? (For example, do they help their child to follow the detail plans the teacher has provided for daily practice, help them play recordings before practice, or keep track the length of each practice session and so on). The interview results showed that all parents were involved in their child’s piano learning process in different degrees and ways. Most parents tried to supervise their child to practice at home. Some pushed harder than others. Two parents did not wish to push



too hard and try not to intervene too much; nevertheless, they urged their child to follow their teachers' arrangements. Parents C, H, and J regularly took their child to listen to professional concerts to inspire their interest. Parent H stated,

Since my child's birth, I would often play different genres of music at home.

When she reached the age of three, I started to bring her to the theatre, plays, and music dramas. We traveled to many places together and stayed in the mountains sometimes, as I wished to raise her aesthetic standard and learn to appreciate the beauty of nature. She gained interest in music and enjoyed practicing piano on her own for about 45 minutes every day.

Parent G also mentioned that

My son is currently at a very beginner level. The teacher does not want to push him too much yet, so he practiced on and off on his own will. When he does, at this stage, I gave him lots of encouragement and occasionally I would point out his mistakes, like wrong notes or wrong rhythm and so on.

Meanwhile, Parent B had a unique way to motivate her child by organizing weekend family concerts for her son. Parent B hosted solo concerts for their son every weekend, with audience members usually comprised of just family members and grandparents. This method has been very effective and had a very positive effect. Both the parents and child valued these weekend concerts very much. It had become a great family event and a great way to unite everyone.

**Principle 4: "positive environment"**. All 10 parents stated that they were collaborating with the teachers and receiving instructions from their teachers. These

parents all agreed that parental involvement affected their children's interest in learning piano. All parents mentioned that the teachers were making plans for their children and gave instructions on what matters the most during home practice. Meanwhile, these parents received advice and information on competitions, exams, and concerts from the teachers.

Most parents mentioned that they were communicating with teachers via Wechat or by sitting in the lessons. To follow Principle 3, Suzuki teachers usually suggest that parents read Suzuki's book *Nurtured by Love* to educate and inspire the parents with Suzuki's philosophy on how the parents can advise and aid their child's practice at home, and the importance of the parents' role (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998). Communications usually happened regularly after each lesson. However, they all had preconditions: 1. They would like to choose a teacher who had the right chemistry with their child. 2. Both parents and children needed to like and approve the teacher. 3. All parents required their child's teacher to have similar education values with them. Then, trust could be built and a solid foundation could be set. Several parents specifically argued that they were much more willing to collaborate with the teacher and follow their instructions when they trusted and approved of the teacher.

Parent G also explained that she kept the positive and constructive conversations going with the teacher, and tried to give the teacher enough space and time to experiment different strategies to teach her child. Opinions and feedback were exchanged between them regarding home practice. She felt that as a parent, her duty was to fulfill and

implement the teacher's requirement; there should be no discrepancy of what the children have been taught in the lesson and what they do during home practice.

### **Eight Individual Piano Lesson Observations**

Observation data were collected through individual lessons. Each lesson observation was scheduled and conducted at various locations and schools in the district. I observed eight individual piano lessons (including six regular weekly lessons and two one-on-one master classes). The individual observations were designed to align with Principle 2 and Principle 4, to find answers to whether piano teachers had different expectations for diverse students and how piano teachers, parents, and students could collaborate together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the student.

Teachers whom I observed came from three different countries: Russia, US, and China. Students included two beginner students, one intermediate, one late intermediate, and four advanced students. Both beginner students were using Faber Piano Adventures with extra supplemental materials. The intermediate student was working on traditional teaching materials like Hanon, Czerny, Mozart, and a pop piano piece by Richard Clayderman. The late intermediate student was working on ABRSM level 7 repertoires. Four advanced students were working on ABRSM level 8 and diploma repertoires. These works are much more sophisticated and include the likes of Beethoven Sonatas, Chopin Etudes, Bach Preludes and Fugues, Schubert Impromptus and so on.

**Principle 2: “mother-tongue approach”.** Suzuki believed all children can learn and it is the teachers' responsibility to choose the correct teaching methods that are compatible with the child's development and to stimulate the child (Bigler & Lloyd-

Watts, 1998). During my observation, I noticed different teaching approaches and attitudes affect students' behaviors and achievements, which aligned with Principle 2. For beginner level students, teachers tended to break everything down for the students, and work on very detailed elements with the students like rhythm, notes, dynamics, and phrases. Lots of hand separate practices, demo playing, four hands playing, singing melodies, and tapping rhythms during the lesson. Teachers tried to bring in varieties of ideas and activities during the lesson to control their young students' concentration and motivation.

In comparison, for the intermediate and late intermediate students' lesson, many homework and practice assignments were given prior to their weekly lesson. However, the intermediate students had many excuses and did not practice much during the week. Lessons were mainly focusing on correcting mistakes and learning notes together with the teacher. In my opinion, the students' attitude toward the lesson were too relaxed, but mostly engaged. During the late intermediate student's lesson, the teacher was only focusing on two things: correcting mistakes and rhythms for one of the student's exam piece and sight-reading practice. The student looked very challenged, but she did well to continue to stay focused to the end of her lesson.

Lessons with advanced students showed teachers were doing a good job motivating these students since students were all very confident and eager to achieve their current goals. Many of them were preparing for exams and other performances. These goals gave them pressure to work harder. One student was preparing a recording to apply to a summer camp and school scholarship, she had a two hours lesson straight with

two different teachers and two hours of “practice lesson” right after. Two teachers mentioned different issues in their playing and one focused on helping her tempo and evenness, working on sections and slow practice with a metronome, and the other teacher mainly helped her with style and analyzing the structure of the piece, also gave an opportunity to play through the entire piece by memory. I thought she had a productive morning at the school.

Students who were playing for the master class were generally much more serious because of the format of the class and they were also much more prepared. The teacher who was giving the master classes was from the US and was a Steinway artist. She approached these students like her university students. Lessons were professional, straightforward, and intense. However, students had great respect for her and were much more focused compared with the regular lesson. Therefore, observations showed that teachers were setting different goals and approaches toward different ages and levels of students. To motivate intermediate and advanced students, teachers tended to require them to participate more in piano exams and master classes to encourage them and build more confidence. This result aligned with Principle 2 that every child can learn, but teachers need to decide what each student’s goals are, create a desire to achieve these goals, and provide piano lessons that are well organized in structure (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998).

**Principle 4: “positive environment”.** Children can have high standards and develop great ability in a happy and positive environment. The teacher, parent, and child needed to build a strong bond. Teachers also need to have an attitude of love, support,

and encouragement for their students (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998). To align with Principle 4, I wanted to find out how teachers foster relationships to support their students' learning, and how piano teachers, parents, and students could work together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the student.

Surprisingly, I noticed that students were more serious and willing to follow orders with the Russian and American teachers. Students asked fewer questions during those teachers' lessons. They were more focused in their playing during the master classes. On the other hand, students were more talkative and relaxed with the Chinese teachers. They asked more questions; even some non-piano related conversations took place. Perhaps they felt closer to these teachers because of the language, or maybe they have more respect for the foreign teachers. Chinese teachers seem to have a different attitude toward different students depending on their relationship, and the foreign teachers seem to react the same. Two Chinese teachers acted like they were friends with the older students. Therefore, the results of the observations indicate that students reacted differently for western teaching approaches as compared to eastern teaching approaches. Meanwhile, the results aligned with Principle 4 that "environment educates student, and teacher is an important part of the learning environment" (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998, pp. 2-5). When parents were sitting in the lessons, teachers did communicate with the parents, giving suggestions on specific issues and answering their questions. Parents who came to the lesson seemed more involved or tried to pay more attention to their children. Parents gave teachers more inside information about how their children practiced at home and what they wished their child to achieve. Most of the parents were cooperative in the

lesson. This observation showed that parents has an important role during their children's piano learning process. According to Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1998), "parent can and should enjoy this time of musical discovery and learning with their child just as much as they delighted in the child's first words" (p.5).

### **Three Group Class Observations**

Three group piano classes were observed in a music school in the district. These observations were also designed to align with Principle 2 and Principle 4, to find answers to two research questions: 1. What outcomes do piano teachers expect from a group of diverse students? 2. How can piano teachers, parents, and students work together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the student?

I observed three different group piano classes in the same piano school. They were following one series of music courses. Their teaching purposes were to help children build a healthy personality and cultivate an uplifting spirit through multiple senses, including physical, intelligence, emotion, and interpersonal relationship. The objective of these classes was the cultivation of students' comprehensive ability from a very early age to bring out student potential by stimulating the brain and improving the motor skills. These music courses were all in the format of group classes. The courses were designed to follow young children's physiological and psychological development at each stage.

The three different group classes were for age two to three, three to four, and four to six. The length of each class was 45 minutes and average 5 students per class. All classes required parents to join, learn to play all the activities and games with their child

so that they could exercise together later at home. Teachers were able to remember about 20 different activities for each class session and use a variety of tools and props for each game to inspire the students. The materials used in class and exercises were geared toward the children's age and learning styles. The two to three age group class and three to four age group classes involved more singing and feeling rhythm, while the four to six age group class involved more keyboard exercises and score readings.

**Principle 2: “mother-tongue approach”.** Traditionally Chinese children start to learn piano with one-on-one lesson and directly play on piano and read scores. These elicitation group courses synchronized with the western education, which not only allowed Chinese children to learn music in a new way, but also improve their English at the same time. Since children could start to take these group classes at a very young age, it is similar with learning their native language. These children were learning how to appreciate music and building a solid foundation for their future instrumental studies.

**Principle 4: “positive environment”.** These group piano classes were designed for young children to learn piano together with their parents. Parents were asked to engage and interact with their child and join each activity as partners. During the group classes, students were taught sight singing, notation reading, rhythm, aural, improvisation, music theory, and ensemble playing. They were generally happy and engaged during the entire class time because the teacher changed the activities in class constantly to maintain the attention of the students and used games to engage the students. Everyone was singing, dancing or drawing. All three classes had a warm atmosphere and teacher, parents and children were collaborating closely.



### **Three Student Recital Observations**

I observed three students' recitals hosted by different teachers and organizations at the Beijing Steinway Hall. Even though the location was the same, they had very different formats and atmospheres. Recitals A and C were hosted by one teacher, and Recital B was hosted by a studio composed of 12 teachers. Each concert exhibited its unique style and pros and cons, which pointed out several important issues, related to Principles 2 and 4. These recital observations helped me find answers for two research questions: 1. What outcomes do piano teachers expect from a group of diverse students? 2. How can piano teachers, parents, and students work together as a team to create a positive learning environment for the student?

**Principle 2: “mother-tongue approach”.** Suzuki believed that children can learn piano at a very young age like learning their native language (Powell, 1988). According to Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1998), students should be taught to be happy when their studio-mates succeed, and that they too can succeed with hard work. All performers I observed in the three student concerts were K to 12 students. Students were performing together and learning from each other. The younger students were influenced and motivated by the older students. Although some of them were only 4 to 6 years old, they could perform on stage confidently. However, the qualities and levels of the three recitals were very different. Recital A had 20 beginner students and only lasted 30 minutes; the teacher had no previous experience hosting a concert. This was the first student recital for that studio, and many of the students were performing for the first time in their life.

**Principle 4: “positive environment”.** Recital B and C were much more formal and organized than Recital A. Both had printed programs. Performers were slightly older. The 12 teachers from Recital B were working together as a team to make sure that the concert went smoothly. Everyone had a clear division of duties. One teacher was the main host and spokesperson, some were helping students get ready to walk on the stage, and the rest of the teachers were standing in a line on the side of the concert hall. The teachers’ behavior showed that the studio had a strong faculty team.

For Recital C, prior to the performance, the teacher announced rules for the parents and students:

1. Dress formally.
2. No food in the hall.
3. Turn off cell phones or put them on silent.
4. Do not walk around during performances.
5. Be quiet walking to your seat if you are late.
6. Follow the program order and move to the front seat three persons earlier.
7. Parents, take care of your younger children, no loud noise.

The recital was mainly orderly. This studio invited a professional announcer for the events to introduce all the performers and the background information on the pieces. The program was designed in two sections. The first half of the concert was joined by eleven young students ranging in ability from beginner to intermediate level. The second half was played by one student who has passed ABRSM level 8 with Merit and received several awards from competitions in the US, Hong Kong, and Macao. All the younger

students watched this advanced students' performance with interest and parents of other students were interested in learning this role model student's piano learning journey and asked many questions during her interview time. The concert announcer interviewed this student and her mother on the stage to motivate other students and parents after her performance. Teachers, parents, and students were immersed in a good learning environment during the performance and interview. These concert observations results showed that creating a positive learning environment is essential for students to learn from each other. To be successful, teachers need to prepare students for their performances and nurture them by love (Powell, 1988) and cooperate with parents, students, and other teachers and school leaders to build an effective learning organization.

### **Discussion**

The 10 interviews with teachers and 10 with parents allowed both to provide their perspectives on the various piano curricula and teaching methodologies for students of all levels. I triangulated the results from all the interviews and observations and discussed how they complement each other. In this section, I discussed and summarized several key issues and findings supported by the collected data and aligned with my research questions.

#### **Comparing Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions**

The result of the interviews showed that most teachers believe all students can learn (Principle 1), but it is essential to design a teaching approach that addresses the needs of the students. Students may respond differently to each teaching approach and classroom environment (Felder & Brent, 2005). According to Felder and Brent (2005),

the results of many studies approved that “greater learning may occur when teaching styles match learning styles.” (p. 62) All the piano teachers saw benefits of group piano classes, and many of them thought that music theory, harmony, and accompaniment studies are more effective through a group piano classes format, while one-on-one piano lessons are better for sight reading training, style interpretation, and pianistic technique study. Five teachers preferred a one-on-one lesson format because they could choose the teaching style and lesson plans accordingly. They preferred to plan their lessons so they were targeted toward each student’s problems and goals. Four teachers thought it was better to have a mixture of individual and group piano classes. All of them were interested in learning more about newly developed technologies and computer software. Teachers would love to incorporate new technologies into their daily teaching to motivate students. However, most of the teachers have not had the time or opportunity to learn or research these technologies. Additionally, teachers and parents talked about the pros and cons of an individual piano lesson and group piano class. No one mentioned “functional piano skills” or “practical piano skills” in his or her teaching. Since no one theory works for all, it is useful for teachers to explore new teaching materials, technologies, and theories to benefit students with different backgrounds, learning styles, and purposes for learning. Compared with the teachers, all 10 parents preferred a one-on-one lesson format for their children. Parents mentioned that liked the special attention their child received from the teacher that this type of lesson provides.

All the teachers agreed that practicing piano was not just about learning an instrument, but also benefited students as a whole and allowed them to build better

characters (Principle 1). Two teachers thought joining piano exams or competitions were necessary, six teachers opposed the idea of piano exams and competitions, and two teachers said it depended on the students' learning stage. In comparison, four parents thought it is necessary to take piano exams or join competitions, three said unnecessary, and three said maybe. Teachers mentioned that the notion of taking exams or joining competitions should differ from student to student. The results of the event may encourage students and show them that if they have work hard, they may achieve their goal; however, it may also be detrimental if the results are not good and students are sensitive.

Therefore, it was essential for teachers to determine who would benefit from these piano exams and find the best ways to approach the exam syllabus to make sure that students understand the mission and goals for taking these exams because all students have the right to access high-quality music learning and fulfill their potential with music (Principles 1 and 2). Since 10 teachers I interviewed had varied teaching backgrounds and experiences, it might be beneficial for these piano teachers to receive further training on how to approach different piano teaching methods and exams. Good experiences for the students could also be a good challenge for themselves and an excellent exercise for their psychological and self-confidence improvement.

### **Respecting Each Other**

To build a positive learning environment (Principle 4), teachers, parents, and students must work together to succeed. During the interviews and observations, I discovered an interesting point: "respect each other" was an issue for collaboration. First,

teachers brought up the “respect” issue between school leaders and regular teachers. Oftentimes, school leaders were only business people who had very little knowledge of education and piano education. Forcing their ideas into the school’s management or teaching system caused complaints and problems. Secondly, parents only wanted to choose teachers who were “approved” by both them and their children, and all parents required their child’s teacher to have similar education values as they. Several parents specifically argued that they were much more willing to collaborate and follow instructions from the teacher when they approved of the teacher; many stated trusts could only be built on that foundation. Thirdly, students showed different attitudes and levels of respect toward Chinese piano teachers versus foreign piano teachers due to their different approaches.

Therefore, I wanted to find out what teachers could do to earn more respect from school leaders, parents, and students. Times have changed, and parents and students treat teachers much differently than in previous decades (Weller, 2017). All parties need to communicate frequently so that parents and teachers know what each wants and how to build an effective partnership, and the teachers have the responsibilities to help and encourage the parents (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1998; Suzuki Talent Education Association of Australia, 2005). According to Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2018), communication leads to not just an effective partnership, but ultimately leads to the student attaining higher achievement levels than peers who do not communicate, and it positively impacts their development socially and academically.

## **Diversity in the Classroom**

It is important to understand how and in what ways diversity is functioning in piano lessons (Principle 2). According to Felder and Brent (2005), “three important aspects of student diversity includes learning styles, approaches to learning and orientations to studying and intellectual development.” (p.58) Four teachers thought they would not have different expectations for students who have diverse backgrounds. The other six teachers thought their teaching methods and materials need to be diverse according to three aspects: student’s mobility, multiculturalism, and maturity. Most teachers talked about students’ diverse learning styles from various education systems and children’s stage of development; however, no interviewees discussed multiculturalism in its specific elements i.e. religion, ethnicity (Song, 2009). Several studies showed that teachers should also have some idea about and be sensitive to diversity issues such as religious beliefs, culture expectations/superstitions (Costes-Onishi & Lum, 2015; Robinson, 2017). It is important for teachers to understand multicultural, religion and diversity (Costes-Onishi & Lum, 2015; Robinson, 2017). For example, the piano teachers should not automatically assign Christmas carols/Christian holiday hymns to a student regardless of their students’ religious background (Gelb & Longacre, 2012). According to Florida Center for Instructional Technology (2013), Hitler and Goebbels’s considered Beethoven, Wagner and Bruckner are “the three German master composers that represented the 20<sup>th</sup>-century German music”. To assign works by Wagner to an Orthodox Jewish student would be highly insensitive due to Hitler's very public support of Wagner. Beyond pieces, diversity in the lesson could

affect even scheduling a concert. Christian students would not be able to participate in concerts/events that take place on Sunday morning and sometimes in the evening because they need to attend Sunday church services (Hyde, 2014). Therefore, teachers need to learn how to “appreciate the value of diversity” (Robinson, 2017, p.14). It is important to understand the value and needs for diversity training for all teachers (Robinson, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

In Section 3, I will discuss the purpose of this project study. In this research, I paid close attention to what local piano teachers needed and tried to find out how to help them improve the quality of teaching and work collaboratively with each other to fulfill the needs of the all levels of students. Analysis of the data revealed the important aspects that still need to be discussed to improve the teaching quality and close the gaps among students and stimulate all students’ interest in piano learning.

To solve these issues, I created a five-day professional development plan for the local piano teachers who are teaching in the international schools to learn how to: 1. define students learning goals and select suitable piano pedagogy and teaching methods accordingly for students who have different piano learning experience and cultural background (Principles 1 and 2), discover different modes of piano instruction (Principles 1 and 2), and learn how to work together and collaborate with other teachers and parents to create positive learning environments (Principles 3 and 4). The detailed project description, goals, objectives, rationale, implementation and timetable will be explained in Section 3. Meanwhile, project evaluation method and important social change will be



included. This professional development plan is comprehensive and covers the uniqueness of teaching piano in this district in Beijing.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project study was to improve the quality of both group piano classes and individual piano lessons in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. Due to the growing economy and the change in birth policy to allow a second child, there is a growing demand for piano learning (Yang, 2015). Many schools try to overcome this issue by offering both individual and group piano classes. However, the high school student to teacher ratio (Yang, 2015) and unequal qualification of the teachers has caused dissatisfaction with the class outcomes (Yang 2015).

My project study involved triangulating data from 10 semistructured interviews with experienced piano teachers who have taught in the international schools' piano course; 10 semistructured interviews with a selected group of parents of K to 12 children who are currently taking piano lessons; and observations of three group piano classes, eight individual lessons (including six regular one-on-one lessons and two one-on-one master classes), and three student recitals. Based on the research findings, I created a professional development program called "Piano Teaching in a Beijing Suburb, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano Teaching." Its shorthand title is 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT. The goal of the professional development program is to close the gaps among teachers with various backgrounds. I discuss the key issues for teaching piano in this area and explore the most up-to-date teaching methods, materials, and technologies. In addition, there is instruction on how to handle diversity in each classroom and how to maintain a healthy relationship between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. This PD program and its

subsequent materials were created and followed by a scholarly review of literature related to traditional piano teaching verses functional piano teaching, diversity in the classroom, respect each other, and the stages of childhood development.

## **Description and Goals**

### **Project Description**

The 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT contains 5 days of training to build skills around teaching methods, piano exams/certificates, diversity, and respect. The target audiences are piano teachers who are working in the international schools or teaching students of the international schools. This 5-day program will take participants beyond their current teaching capabilities and expose them to multiple up-to-date and commonly used teaching methods and address some of the key issues these teachers encounter during their daily teaching.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The primary goal of this 21<sup>st</sup> EPT is to make piano teaching in international schools more effective and to produce better results. Participants will be presented with some of the key issues everyone is facing and how to approach these issues, and teachers will have a chance to compare and contrast eastern piano teaching approaches to the western piano teaching styles, traditional piano teaching verses functional piano teaching, and Chinese piano exams versus the ABRSM exam. The ABRSM exam is offered by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM, 2018). Teachers will also have an opportunity to explore some of the new technologies available for piano learning.

This PD program will provide piano teachers with suggestions for accomplishing their teaching objectives while improving both themselves and their institutions. Exploring both eastern and western teaching materials and approaches may help these participants employ their framework of teaching so that they can have a consistent set of tools. Meanwhile, this program will assist piano teachers and school leaders, parents, and children to build teamwork and collaboratively work with one another to create effective learning environments and discuss some of the key issues/problems they are facing in their daily teaching. During the 5-day training, teachers will also have the chance to sustain, grow, and develop a network of support.

### **Rationale**

One of the issues I have found in my data is that piano teachers in Beijing are not always familiar with the different teaching approaches and newly developed technologies. According to Danielson (2013), for teachers to demonstrate their knowledge of resources, they need to extend their professional skill extensively, including opportunities through “school or district, in the community, professional organizations, universities or internet” (p. 21). This 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program may provide local piano teachers a chance to become familiar with all the available resources, which may help those teachers design their lesson plans to be more aligned and coherent with their teaching goals.

In addition, a guest speaker will be invited to coach on the topic of functional piano pedagogy during Day 2 of the PD training. This piano pedagogy, created by the dean of Xing Hai Conservatory, is designed for the general public piano education and is

becoming popular in China (Xin, 2015). It is based on the rapid development of the popularization of piano education in China and is in line with the education concept of cultivating students' sustainable development ability. This piano pedagogy targets the general population and the majority of students, different from the traditional piano teaching methods, and creates a new dimension for piano education in China (Xin, 2015). It mainly features rapid learning, creativity, imitation, improvisation, and composition. The purpose of the functional piano pedagogy is to inspire interest, happiness, musical imagination, and quick achievement (Xin, 2010). Xin's functional piano pedagogy echoes the psychology of many students and teachers and may benefit local piano teachers.

Furthermore, this outside-in PD approach will be applied to the Day 3 training session on piano exams and the ABRSM exam. According to Killion and Roy (2009), outside-in PD means inviting experts from outside the institute to help local teachers to learn instructional strategies. Alba (2012) stated, "External experts have a wide range of knowledge and skills in their own specialist area" (p. 5), and "external experts can bring valuable specialist knowledge to areas of the curriculum" (p. 6). This outside-in PD approach may not only benefit teachers who collaborate with their colleagues through inside-out PD training, but teachers who are self-employed. In this case, the guest speaker may be a certified instructor or representative of the ABRSM, who has a broad knowledge of the mission of the exam committee and the design of the exam and new syllabus. This guest trainer may increase local piano teachers' knowledge and understanding of the principles of the exam, offer them an opportunity to improve their

teaching skills of the exam concepts, and explain the emphasis of each level's syllabus. Furthermore, the ABRSM instructor may provide support and inspiration for the local piano teachers and share practical ideas of how to work with young students in piano education.

During the 5-day 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program, participants will discuss some of the common needs and barriers faced during a normal teaching day and how to conquer these problems. This discussion may particularly benefit those who are working on their own or who are in schools that do not offer regular meetings for piano teachers. Therefore, this project may be a solution to the problems addressed in Section 2 and enhance professional practice in piano education to benefit local piano teachers, international schools, local music organizations, and communities.

### **Review of the Literature**

In the second literature review, I focus on elements relating to PD, traditional piano teaching verses functional piano teaching, diversity, ages and stages of development, and respect. All these topics are related to the findings and discussions from the interviews. After analyzing the research findings, I identify the main themes for creating a 5-day PD plan for the local piano teachers who are teaching in the international schools. The target was to help local piano teachers to learn how to (a) define students' learning goals and select suitable piano pedagogy and teaching methods accordingly for students who have different piano learning experience and cultural background (Principles 1 and 2), (b) discover different modes of piano instruction (Principles 1 and 2), and (c) learn how to work together and collaborate with other teachers and parents to

create positive learning environments (Principles 3 and 4). The keywords used in researching for this PD program are *professional development, PD implementation, effective teaching strategies, traditional piano pedagogies, functional piano pedagogies, Eastern piano teaching approach, Western piano teaching approach, diversity in the classroom, multicultural music education, child development, student behaviors, piano exam, and trust and respect*. Efforts to find related research included reading research papers on the successes and potential pitfalls of PD programs, obtaining human resource materials in regards to diversity, and obtaining membership to business and music education journals.

### **Professional Development**

The improvement of piano classes at the international schools in Beijing is linked with many different factors, but among all, quality teachers are the most essential components. If the piano teachers do not have the knowledge or tools they need to teach, the teaching result will suffer. According to Solis (2018), it is not simply enough to engage teachers in a single PD event but to ensure the PD is continuous and ongoing. Doing so allows teachers to apply PD knowledge and skills to their own classes and school events. This 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT is designed to strengthen piano teachers' knowledge and improve the quality of piano classes and one-on-one piano lessons based on research findings and data analysis.

During my interviews with teachers, I learned that some schools currently host teachers' meetings regularly to discuss students and problems they confronted during their weekly teaching and used unified teaching materials, but others did not have the

chance to work collaboratively. Therefore, every teacher's situation is unique, and some of the key components to create a PD program are to know the teachers' needs and how the staff development plan serves the curriculum as well as discovering what the teachers believe they need to be better teachers (Sha Tin Government Secondary School, 2016; Wiles, 2009). Darling-Hammond, Huler, and Gardner (2017) explained that effective PD "incorporates active learning: Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students" (para 4).

Teachers need to choose materials carefully according to each learner's age, ability, character, learning style, and total duration of studies. According to Wiles (2009), administration and staff must connect all elements of an institution--from PD to class curriculum--to help increase positive learning outcomes. Scientific, coherent, and systematic quality teaching materials are the foundation of instruction. Abankwa (2016) discussed "issues for consideration in curriculum development of piano teacher education to enhance the teaching and learning of piano playing and to ultimately increase musical practice" (abstract). Therefore, to select the most effective method for the students, piano teachers should continuously research and learn about up-to-date piano pedagogical materials to ensure they have a solid working knowledge.

Moreover, the background and qualification of piano teachers varied in my interviews with piano teachers from the international schools or those who were currently teaching students from the international schools. Geldens and Popeijus (2014) explained that it is useful to organize PD in the school, collaborate with effective professional



development programs and educate teachers together to provide highly qualified teaching professionals, following the characteristics that make a workplace learning environment powerful. Additionally, only four of the 10 teachers had group piano teaching experience, and many of them thought lesson format should not be limited. According to Pow and Wong (2017), the most common considerations in implementing small class teaching were workplace factors. Therefore, during the PD training, teachers will have a chance to discuss some of the key issues that affect their participation in small group piano class teaching at their current school and how to apply the knowledge they learned from PD to their teaching.

This PD program follows three key aspects of an effective PD program: personal, social, and occupational (McComb & Eather, 2017). According to Barrera-Pedemonte (2013), and Getenet, Trimble, and Nailon (2013), PD is only effective if it is sustainable when using a future-forward outlook and allows for all the staff to work together towards the same common goal. During the 5-days of training, these piano teachers will be confronted with their personal beliefs on key issues in their daily teaching process, receive new ideas and information and at the end reflect and question what they have learned to transform their teaching practice. An important emphasis for this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program is to be relevant to the local piano teacher's needs and improve student engagement and outcomes for the piano classes.

### **Traditional Piano Teaching Versus Functional Piano Teaching**

The traditional piano teaching methods came from the western culture, and as such mean some domestic piano teachers may not be familiar with western teaching

materials and philosophies. They contain Western cultural elements which place more emphasis on pianistic technique training and understanding musical styles. Fisher (2015) mentioned that it is essential to select the right repertoire at the right level and the right time for students. It must provide a suitable amount of challenge to motivate the piano students and teach them rhythm, technique, stylistic interpretation, expression, artistic interpretation, memorization, and performance (Fisher, 2015). Traditional piano teaching focuses on preciseness and is not easy to popularize (Xin, 2015). It is favorable for students who want to achieve a higher standard (Xin, 2016). However, it has weaknesses: most students who learned to play piano in the traditional way do not know how to improvise or harmonize melodies (Xin, 2016). Traditional piano lessons are mostly one-to-one in style (Xin, 2016).

By comparison, the functional piano teaching method employs more Chinese culture and ethnic elements for its popularity. It is more focused on improvisational and composition skills. Such teaching is easier to cultivate the imagination and creativity of music. The teaching contents include: composing a melody on top of a chord progression, harmonizing given melodies with chords, improvisation, and transposition training. The model of piano teaching usually is in the format of one-to-one piano lessons, 2-4 student group lessons, and large group digital piano classes (Xin, 2015).

This functional piano pedagogy combines the characteristics of the Chinese piano educational philosophy with the essentials of the western piano education, inherited and developed into a systematized teaching method, including children's piano education, adult piano education, piano foundation, piano performance, piano accompanying,

transposition, composition, harmonization, and jazz piano. According to Xin (2016), in the last few years of the implementation process, more than 140 training courses had been held throughout China, and more than 2800 vocational training lecturers had been developed. Up to now, more than 200 colleges and universities have applied this piano serial course into their piano curriculum. Its innovative style has attracted great interest from the music education community and the method has been developing rapidly (Xin, 2016).

During the PD program for piano teachers, participants will have a chance to discuss methods of teaching in four sections: Eastern approach, Western Approach, functional piano pedagogy, and new technologies, including both one-on-one lesson and group piano class formats. According to Pike (2014), “employing cognitive strategies and collaborative learning into group piano class may improve test scores, self-efficacy, problem-solving, deliberate practice and demonstrated persistence in completing piano assignments” (Implication section, para 1). Furthermore, Callahan (2015) has presented his strategies and positive impact to solve issues of using *SmartMusic* software to assist the student in learning keyboard skills outside of the classroom. During the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT training, teachers will have a chance to exchange ideas of how to incorporate effective collaborative activities into a group piano class. Teachers will select or build curriculum for teaching all levels of students, listen to demo interpretations of different levels of repertoires, learn how to build confidence in performance, and encourage musical development for their students.

## **Diversity**

Many international students are living and studying in this suburban district of Beijing due to their parents' jobs. Selecting an appropriate curriculum for these international students has become a difficult issue. I have learned from my data analysis in Section 2 that most teachers were aware of their students' mobility, multiculturalism, and maturity. Many of these students do not speak Chinese, some speak English, and some are able to speak three or more languages. As they will only be living in Beijing for a few years, finding the right teaching method and design of a good plan for them can set a solid foundation for their future studies after they move back to their own native countries.

A background check for each student helps the piano teacher learn a few facts about their students, allows the teacher to understand what language was used in their previous lessons, what method they have been using, what their repertoire is, and what is their purpose for studying piano. According to Burnard (2012), knowing about a student's background, skills, and faith is necessary to understanding what a student feels and thinks in a lesson. Greater numbers of teachers recognize the importance of diversity training. Robinson (2017) stated that although music teachers entered the profession with sufficient skills to instruct music content, most were not equipped with the abilities to teach "dispositions required to navigate the cultural and social facets they will encounter in their music classroom" (p.22). Social identity can be categorized into 10 elements: race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, ability/disability, age, education, and geographic location (Banks, 2014; Robinson, 2017). According to Costes-Onishi and

Lum (2015), music is an important element to cultures across the globe and engaging children in a music education setting which is multicultural allows said children to develop and enrich themselves via music and culture. In this district of Beijing, multilingual and multicultural students represent a large percentage of the international schools' population. Training related to diversity, culture and race should be a norm in PD for piano educators.

### **Ages and Stages of Development**

One of the elements many teachers have mentioned during the interviews was that they would arrange their lessons differently according to the student's age and maturity. One teacher said she would push her students to practice and complete more exams before middle school since that is a big transition for many of the children and they might be occupied by other activities and trying to adapt their new life during the transition period. According to the Child Development Institute website (2018), "Ages and Stages is a term used to broadly key periods in the human development timeline" (para 2). During each stage, a child's physical, intellectual, language and social-emotions get developed. Piano teachers need to understand a child's brain and body development within each stage, and provide students with the necessary and correct support, and design lessons and plans based on the characteristics of the child's current developmental progress.

When I observed the group piano classes, I noticed how important the games were to attract young students' interest and attention. To teach group piano class to young children, teachers need to construct and plan their class activities carefully in detail prior

to each lesson and each activity must have clear purpose. Kamii (2014) explained the three types of knowledge in children's learning: "physical knowledge, social-conventional knowledge and logico-mathematical knowledge" (p.72). Research showed that it is more desirable to use indirect instruction to encourage children to think and games are very effective for engaging students from kindergarten through primary school (Kamii, 2014). Many group piano classes were designed for young children to build a solid foundation for their musicianship learning and future instrument studies. Sinno, Tamim, Faytrouni, Mikati, and Charafeddine (2018) mentioned in their study that "Early child development is a crucial determinant of an individual's potentials, specifically health, education and economic status, throughout the life span" (p.61). Generally, more parental involvement and companionship are needed in a multilingual environment to help young children's development.

Most piano teachers realized that they need to have very different approaches for their older to ensure these older students are fully engaged in their piano studies. Grant-Skiba and Orwa (2018) shared their six ways of engaging students:

1. Engaging through having high expectation of students;
2. Engaging through making learning relevant;
3. Engaging through building a strong and safe classroom environment;
4. Engaging through having a differentiated curriculum;
5. Engaging through creativity
6. Engaging through technology. (p.iii)

These ideas also apply to piano teaching. Therefore, it is more challenging to find effective teaching strategies for these young adolescents who are transitioning through puberty as well as making social changes (Allison & Rehm 2007).

### **Respect**

No matter what one's title or position is within a school, everyone must find the appropriate role while working collaboratively with others with respect under the umbrella of a larger learning organization (Schlechty, 2009; Wile, 2009). To build and maintain a healthy relationship, schools' leaders, teachers, parents, and students need to know what each party's expectations are. In the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT, piano teachers will be discussing how to build respect between 1. Teacher and parents, 2. Teacher and students, 3. Parents and children, 4. Administration and teachers. Studies showed that workplace respect is an essential condition for promoting "embeddedness". Workers usually feel more embedded when they are respected by their colleagues in the organization (Ng, 2016).

During the interviews, there were complaints about principals' and school leaders' responsibilities and leadership skills. School principals need to focus on being a leader of a learning organization, working with teachers, parents, students and local business-leaders or bureaucrats. A principal for a piano school should understand the role of piano education. The job of a principal-while undoubtedly multifaceted-need to be to engage students in their work while also seeing to employees being engaged; they must not simply control the environment, but yield direction (Schlechty, 2009). According to the University of Georgia Study, there are five key functions for school principals, which

include “vision, plan and goal setting, sharing the decision-making process, empowering and taking imitative, and development of faculty and staff” (The Room 241 Team, 2013, para. cultivating a positive learning environment). Meanwhile, Gonzalez (2014) discussed that teachers often complain that their expertise is ignored when it comes to academic decisions. Many teachers felt that they are more educated and have more teaching expertise in their field and those school leaders who have no academic background in the field or teaching experiences should not determine how teachers should teach in their classroom.

Parental partnership is also an essential element for piano teaching in the Suzuki method. Communicating with parents helps the teacher to formulate an individualized learning plan for each student. Since parents have been educating their child since birth, they should be respected as the primary resource for teachers to get to know the student. Teachers and parents can exchange ideas and expertise to find more solutions to challenges when they are working together (Andrews, 2015). Teachers can use a “solution-focused approach” to communicate with the family and work together to find solutions to the child’s benefit (Andrews, 2015, p.136). This encourages mutual respect between teachers and parents. Meanwhile, Cestaro (2008) stated that when parents are made to feel like experts about their children by the teachers, the parents are willing to open up and give valuable insight about the child. Teachers and parents need to communicate with each other to align with the educational philosophy and future plans for the students. Results from my interviews showed that most parents thought it is most important for the teachers to have the same values in education with the parents.



Therefore, communication with the parents about what they want their children to get out of the lessons have--or should have--great influence on how teachers develop the curricula for individual students.

Building respect and trust between teachers and students is also a key element for success. According to Christie (2018), “respect involves intentional caring in which the teacher displaces her own ideas and motivations to truly understand the needs and wishes of the child” (p. 15). McKinney and Berube (2018) introduced their 10 strategies to build respect and trust between teachers and students. These steps will help teachers to create a positive impression for students and develop a meaningful relationship. This relationship will be the solid foundation in the students’ learning process. Lastly, expressing love through respect and appreciation effects the parents and children’s relationship and the children’s future success (Wu & Chao, 2017). According to Wu and Chao (2017), the purpose and prevalence of the parental involvement and behaviors differ from culture to culture. Piano teachers need to understand any cultural differences and promote positive relationships between parents and students to encourage appreciation and respect.

### **Implementation**

After completing the project, I will share my research findings and introduce the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano Teaching professional development program with related piano teachers and school leaders. First, I will determine the key stakeholders and explain to them the significance of the problem with evidence found during my research. I will make sure all stakeholders understand the needs to attend this professional development program to improve the quality of piano lessons and classes in this suburban district of

Beijing and explain the need to create a positive learning environment. An implementation timeline and potential costs/budget will be discussed in detail with the school leaders.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Support**

Professional development is invaluable for piano teachers. There are many existing supports offered by music teacher organizations which provide opportunities to organize or participate in conferences, workshops, or professional development training. For this project, many existing supports are available for my 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program. During the interviews and observations, I have received permission from local music school owners and leaders to conduct this study, and all of them have shown great interest in this research, and willingness to participate and discuss their problems and needs. These local music schools could potentially offer their large performance room or small stages for this PD program. These rooms are usually occupied for master classes and small performances. Guest speakers and experts for the functional piano pedagogy and ABRSM exam are not difficult to invite since I am familiar with some of them. I could also advertise this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program through piano teachers Wechat group, music association websites, or international school websites to invite potential participants.

### **Potential Barriers**

**Lack of acceptance by leadership.** To successfully recover, one must first is admit there is a problem. No matter how great a professional development (PD) program is, the school leaders must know and be willing to accept that there is a lack of

development within the piano department. Accepting this situation may be hard for some leaders, they may feel it is not really their responsibility, but the duty of the head of the music department. Instead of investing in PD they may choose to fire the acting head of piano or director of performing arts and bring in someone they think can better manage the staff in that department. According to Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005), the outcome of professional development programs is affected by the support shown for PD from administrators and other policymakers. Additionally, successful outcomes require teachers and staff having multiple or continuous exposure to PD rather than it being a single and exclusive event. Knowing and accepting that there is a problem is an issue that all industries face within the leadership positions. A far simpler, and sadder possibility is that the leadership simply passes-on the idea of PD. Maybe they do not personally consider it valuable. Maybe they are completely disinterested. Regardless of the rationale, if the leader says, “No,” PD at the institutional level is dead before it starts.

**Lack of funding.** Unfortunately, in every situation, education included, money is important. Effective PD often determines teachers’ success and satisfaction, but the cost is often an issue (Rebora, 2011). Many institutions are seeing cuts to funding, even to long-established programs. If this is the case at the school under concern, they may be hard-pressed to choose to add a new program to the school. Even if said program is to advance staff and improve an area of the school. The simple fact is PD costs money. Sometimes experts/guest speakers need to be brought in. Venues need to be booked. Name tags, and handouts need to be printed. “Money spread thinly when it comes to PD is unlikely to produce change...it may be wiser to involve fewer teachers than produce

less significant change among many” (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005). Independent music schools in Beijing have teachers’ pay fees themselves if they wish to take, for example, ABRSM training programs. As of 2018, “ABRSM teacher training costs 3,980RMB [\$617.42USD] per person for a three-day training” (ABRSM Beijing Representative Office, 2018). This does not include the books which are covered during the training, which are an “additional 1645RMB [\$255.19USD]” (ABRSM Beijing Representative Office, 2018).

**Scheduling conflicts for the PD session.** People’s time is valuable. Family pressure and social responsibilities mean many find it hard to justify giving more of their time to their job. To avoid this, a PD program could be held during work hours, but this creates a barrier within the school. According to Solis (2018), schools often schedule PD during the school year and invite experts in new teaching methods and strategies to come and train the teachers during class time or dismiss their students early for the teachers to have workshops. However, in this situation, if the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program takes place during school’s hours, all piano lessons during the length of the PD program would need to be canceled or rearranged. Schools may find this to be too great an inconvenience or viewed as a loss of money if the lessons need to be canceled. This conflict only leaves the possibility of holding PD sessions during winter and summer holidays. Yet, this creates another problem. These holidays are the teachers’ personal time and even though salaries are still paid (for full-time staff), teachers view these holidays as well-earned time off. Teachers may not wish to attend training during the holiday. To mandate the PD is questionable. It is well established that mandatory work functions create an atmosphere

in the workplace which is counterproductive to building a better environment (Ryan, 2017). Furthermore, if a staff member is part-time, holding the event during a holiday could mean those teachers are losing income from any other employment obligations that they hold on the side.

The outline below lists the main components of the proposed 21<sup>st</sup> c. EPT. Detailed timelines and activities of the program are also explained:

Professional Development Program Agenda: Piano Teaching in a Beijing Suburb,  
21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano Teaching (21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT)

Day 1

A. Welcome (9-12pm):

1. Introduction

- Overview of 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT strategies
- Discuss the expectations of participants and introduce the PD leader's role in the process.
- Review the timetable for the program

2. Group work- understanding the needs

- Mixed experience/seniority of teachers (group size dependent on attendance numbers).
- One member of each group is “group head.”
- Groups brainstorm both positives and negatives of their current piano teaching environments, making a list.
- List barriers unique to each teacher's workplace.

B. Elicit (1-4pm):

1. Summarize the “key issues” from group heads around the room.
  - Focus should be on common themes/issues or issues of interest.
  - Related to Methods, ABRSM, Diversity, Perceptions.
2. PD leader oversees commitment.
3. PD leader creates a “master list” to cover over the five days.

Day 2

A. Teaching Methods (9-12pm):

1. Eastern Approach
  - Exam focused, technique, memorization, achievement.
2. Western Approach
  - Creativity, musicality, independent learning, for fun.
3. Functional Piano Pedagogy
  - Systematized teaching method.
  - Exploration, mimic, improvisation, creativity.
  - Developing rapidly in China.
4. New technologies
  - Computer software, electronic keyboards, available music learning apps, online classes.

B. Teaching Methods and Strategies (1-4pm):

1. Beginner—Early Intermediate Level
  - One-on-one vs. group lesson.

2. Later intermediate—Advanced

- One-on-one vs. group lesson.

Day 3

A. Piano Exams/Certificates (9-12pm):

1. China Conservatory Grade Examination

- Useful for non-study abroad students, popular amongst Chinese teachers, uphold Communist ideologies, principles, and social values.
- Pros and Cons.

2. Central Conservatory Grade Examination

- Useful for non-study abroad students, popular amongst Chinese teachers, uphold Communist ideologies, principles, and social values.
- Pros and Cons.

B. ABRSM Exam (1-4pm):

1. About ABRSM

- Global, most popular, converts to college credit, useful for students planning to study abroad.
- Pros and Cons.

Day 4

A. Diversity (9-12pm):

1. Common areas for diversity issues

- Religion, race/ethnicity, culture, learning style/teaching style, expectations.

2. Current social trends that diversity is facing
  - Specific to this district in a suburb in Beijing.
3. Approaches/Solutions
  - How to handle, overcome, and proactively deter potential risks.
4. Ages and stages of development
  - Dealing with students of all ages and development, how to approach all different learning abilities.

B. Respect (1-4pm):

1. Teacher and Parents
  - How to build and maintain a healthy relationship, know what each party expects.
2. Teacher and Students
  - How to build, maintain, and encourage, know what each party expects.
3. Parents and Children
  - How to encourage, apply pressure or give independence, clear roles, and expectations.
4. Administration and Teachers
  - Respectful dialogue, clear division of duties, everyone on the same page, school purpose.

Day 5

A. Conclusion (9-12pm):

1. Wrap-Up any conversations/topic from previous day(s).



2. Summarize main points from Days 2-4.
  3. Potential actions to address the Barriers listed on Day 1.
- B. Goodbyes (1-4pm):
1. Feedback and discussions.
  2. Q&A session and return the evaluation forms.
  3. Hand out any external materials
    - ABRSM locations and contacts, swag bags, sample teaching materials.
  4. Allow networking and business card time for teachers taking part in the event
  5. Goodbye and thanks.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Trainees and Trainers**

The purpose of this project study was to improve the quality of both group piano classes and individual piano lessons in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. Based on my research findings, I created this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program to improve the quality of piano teaching and to close the gap between teachers with various backgrounds. Participant teachers will have a chance to discuss the key issues for teaching piano in their daily teaching, explore the most up to date teaching methods, materials and technologies, identify effective teaching strategies for different age group of students, strategies to handle diversity in the classroom, and how to maintain a healthy relationship between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Participants will be responsible for preparing some of the training materials listed prior to attending the PD training, and attending the five-day seminar punctually and thoroughly. I will be the main organizer and representative of this PD training. I will

explain the needs for this PD program, share some of the research findings with the participants and lead the discussion for the key issues. On Day 2 and Day 3, a vocational training lecturer for the functional piano pedagogy and an ABRSM specialist will be invited to share his inside knowledge and views.

### **Project Evaluation**

After conducting this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT training, I want to find out if this training program has refreshed participants' mind, if they learned useful information, and if it gave them new ideas to employ in their future teaching. To answer these questions, goal-based formative and summative evaluations will be conducted. I will first conduct formative evaluations during the training program. According to Killion and Roy (2009), "a formative assessment looks at how well teams work, their actions, and the interim outcomes they produce" (p.143). I will ask each participant to fill out two forms: 1. Individual Professional Development Log of Activities; 2. Reflection on the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT train program. For the *Individual Professional Development Log of Activities*, participants need to complete the log every day for each identified subject, activity, goal, and benefit:

Name:	School:	Currently Teaching:		
		1. One-on-one lesson		
		2. Group piano class		
		3. Both		
Date	Subjects	activities	goals	Benefits
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

*Table 2.* Individual Professional Development Log of Activities.

On the last day of training, participants will be asked to fill out the *Reflection on the 21<sup>st</sup>*

*C. EPT Program* form. On this form, I will ask five questions:

1. Which of the activities or subjects did you find most useful?
2. In what way were the PD trainer and experts helpful to you?
3. Is there anything other issues you would like to receive more information about?
4. Did this program meet your expectations?
5. Is there any aspect that could use improvement?

Moreover, I will keep in touch with all the program participants and ask them to complete another five-question feedback one semester after they attended the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program for a summative evaluation.

1. Did you employ different teaching methods in your lessons or classes in the new semester?
2. Did you employ any new strategies for different ages or ethnic groups of students?
3. Were there any changes to results or outcomes in the course?
4. Were you able to successfully build a collaborative environment based on respect?
5. Do you have any interest to attend/hold a future PD program?

This summative evaluation will help me to determine whether the PD program have achieved the goals and what subjects need to be modified for improved in the future.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

This 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program is designed to engage and support the local piano teachers and community and to enhance the future of piano lessons and classes in this suburban district of Beijing. Based on the collected data in Section 2, identified issues and two literature reviews, this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT was created. The goal is to help local piano teachers to improve their teaching quality and gain new strategies to benefit students of different ages and diversities. This may benefit local community dramatically since the top international schools are concentrated in this

suburban district of Beijing. The international community may benefit the most from this study.

### **Extended Reach**

If this program is successful, it can be a potential PD model for all piano teachers who are involved in an international community around China. Due to the economic growth and the pro-business policies, greater numbers of foreigners moved to China to live and work. Most of them are concentrated in the metropolitans around China, like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and so on. They brought their family and children to China to study and experience and vibrant culture. Many of them stayed in China for less than five years, depending on their parents' work contract (Global expansion simplified, 2017, para. limited time). According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2018), "489,200 international students were studying in China in 2017" (para. 1). The numbers of international students are increasing every year. Meanwhile, "international students have enrolled in over 935 higher education institutions throughout the country" (education in China, para 1). Many of these younger foreign students went to the international schools to receive the most expensive educations since tuitions were paid by their parents' companies. Therefore, the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT is a very practical PD program to make sure that local piano teachers are familiar with the western culture and teaching approaches, western exams and effective teaching strategies for the diverse classroom to help these children during their transitional years in China.

## **Conclusion**

Section 3 explained the overall project plan. A second literature review was conducted to support the basic ideas of the PD program, including professional development, traditional piano teaching verses functional piano teaching, diversity, ages and stages of development, and respect. A detailed implementation plan with an outline of the main components of the proposed 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT was provided. Three potential barriers were discussed: lack of acceptance by leadership, lack of funding, and scheduling conflicts for the PD session. Using a combination of the goal-based formative and summative evaluation, I will make sure that this professional development program will achieve its attempted goals and modify any improvement for the future.

In Section 4, I will discuss the project strengths and limitations, and what I have learned through research and developing this project. Recommendations and future research will be suggested in the next section.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project study was to improve the quality of both group piano classes and individual piano lessons in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. In this research, I paid close attention to what local piano teachers needed. I attempted to discover how to help the educators improve the quality of teaching and work collaboratively with each other to fulfill the needs of an entire spectrum of students. Based on the results of my data analysis and two literature reviews, I developed a PD program for the local piano teachers who were teaching in the international schools or who had students from the international schools. The name of this PD program is 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT. Through the implementation of this program, teachers can improve their teaching tools and learn new strategies to benefit their daily teaching. The local community can benefit from this study, and the quality of piano lessons and classes can improve. Additionally, piano teachers will confront their barriers and face key issues while having the chance to receive feedback.

In this section, I provide information on the project's strengths and limitations and recommendations for remediation of these limitations. Moreover, I discuss what I have learned during my research process and project development and analyze myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. The potential impact for positive social change in this suburban district of Beijing is further described. At the end, I terminate this section with the implications, applications, and directions for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

In this research, I identified several issues with my findings supported by the collected data and aligned with my research questions. The strengths in this research include that it was built on evidence from literature related to piano teaching strategies, teacher/student collaborations, key issues related to local piano teachers' daily teaching, and other successful PD programs (see China Education Center Ltd, 2018; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Reborá, 2011; Solis, 2018; Xin, 2010; Yang, 2015). This led to the project containing multiple strong elements. The 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT was developed based on those findings plus literature reviews. One of the strengths of this study came from my previous education in both piano performance and collaborative piano from Baylor University and Boston University with an additional 7 years of piano teaching experience in international schools and/or with students from the international schools in this area.

I collected data from several types of sources, including

1. 10 semistructured interviews with experienced piano teachers who have taught in the international schools' piano course to find out how they define their goals and purposes of piano learning.
2. 10 semistructured interviews with a selected group of parents of K to 12 children who are currently taking piano lessons.
3. Observations of three group piano classes, eight individual lessons (including six regular one-on-one lessons and two one-on-one master classes), and three student recitals.



Triangulation of these resources provided me insight for in-depth discussions with teachers and parents, which helped me to develop an educational PD program to engage and support local piano teachers. Piano teaching requires almost endless special training, not only in relation to pianistic technique and music education but also regarding many other common issues like diversity and collaboration with parents, school leaders, and students. Currently, there are some PD programs specifically for training in the ABRSM exam and summer workshops for Faber piano adventures and the Suzuki method, but there is not a comprehensive piano teacher PD program like this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT. I not only explored both eastern and western teaching materials, approaches, and exams but also common classroom issues, including diversity and respect. From my previous teaching experiences, this type of the comprehensive PD program for piano teachers does not exist in this suburban area in Beijing. However, one of the potential barriers for implementing this PD program is lack of funding. If a school is cutting funding in music, it is hard to bring in guest speakers and trainers, so an alternative approach could be employed. The alternative could be to modify the PD schedule into a more approachable length of time and reduce the number of guest speakers (reducing costs). I would also be the main organizer for the PD program and lead the discussion among the teachers internally. This would allow for only a single guest speaker to be needed. This required guest speaker would be focused on functional piano pedagogies.

### **Project Limitations and Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

There are two limitations to this project. First, the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT will be limited to helping the international schools in this suburb district of Beijing and possibly become a

PD model to the piano teachers at other international schools in Beijing or international schools in other cities in China. However, noninternational schools do not have a diversity issue. Foreign students are not permitted to attend these schools. In the second literature review, one of the main issues I discussed was diversity. Diversity is a common issue that is widely discussed in the United States but is rarely talked about in China. With the growth of the Chinese economy and President Xi Jin Ping's reform and opening up policy, increasing numbers of foreign students have followed their parents to China and are studying in the international schools and universities. Therefore, diversity is becoming an issue in these particular schools. Meanwhile, diversity is not only a key area for classroom teachers but also for the schools' piano teachers. This topic is seldom explored in the piano teachers' PD. All the international schools should address the diverse challenges in the piano lessons and piano classes and engage these diversity issues to foster understanding and open-mindedness among each student. If any piano schools or music programs are interested in this PD program, but have no diversity issues, the scheduled Day 4 morning activities can be adjusted to focus only on strategies to teach students with different age groups.

Second, since this project was in association with my dissertation, I have planned it by myself. I have analyzed the problems and issues from my perspective. If I have a chance to implement this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT, I will need to organize my project and present it to the school leaders or the lead teachers of the piano department to make sure that they understand the seriousness of the problem and discuss the basic strategies and steps in the process. I will also need to review the program plan and see if any content needs to be

adjusted and convince the Chinese piano teachers it is important to combine the western teaching methods with eastern ones. All piano teachers should update their knowledge and teaching strategies regularly. Most importantly, the timetable, funding issues, and scheduling conflicts will have to be discussed first with the leaders before I can implement this program successfully.

### **Scholarship**

Prior to doing this doctoral degree, I received my bachelor's and master's degrees in piano performance and a performance diploma in piano performance at Boston University. After graduating, I came back to Beijing and worked at an international school, a privately-owned piano center, and an international investment company. In 2013, I opened my own private piano studio in Beijing. Therefore, I have a more than adequate understanding of the research. Meanwhile, while attending Walden University, the "Leadership for Today's School," "Applied Research in Education," "Research in Practice," and "Effective Professional Development" Classes have prepared me to build a good foundation for conducting this research project.

Although I had a rather good understanding of the process of conducting research and writing a scholarly paper from many years of studying in university, it took a much longer time to complete Section 1 and Section 2 of the proposal than originally planned. Alignment always needed to be clarified, especially regarding the alignment of data collection sources with research questions with the conceptual framework. Getting approval from URR also took longer than anticipated. During this time, I was a little discouraged and lost some of my confidence. However, after many months of hard work,

I finally passed my URR committee and the IRB application and was able to move forward. This experience taught me that “everything comes to him who waits.” If I do not give up, I will be able to make the finish line.

During the research courses, I learned about data-driven decisions. Data-based decision making relates to most of the activities and decisions made by schools and districts. These multiple forms of assessment include formative, benchmark-common, observational, and summative assessment. Two among them that are being used in this study are the formative and summative assessment. Analyzing assessments not only helps teachers to identify problems and determine what instruction is needed for improvement but also helps learners to know their own learning needs and goals. With the first literature review, I identified that the high student to teacher ratio has caused unsatisfactory outcomes for piano classes, and many less accomplished piano teachers are unable to keep up with this rapid growth of demand. This unequal qualification has caused undesirable teaching results in the piano lessons and piano classes. After all the interviews and observations were completed, I addressed several main causes of this problem and ran the second literature review to develop the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT. This PD program will be a comprehensive training for the piano teachers to learn on the job and refresh their teaching strategies in order to improve the viability of the piano lessons and classes of the international schools.

### **Project Development**

During the development of the project, I learned that the identification of the problem needs to be based on the research findings from triangulating data. Then, the program

goals were set based on the findings and literature reviews to close the gaps between teachers with various backgrounds; discuss key issues for teaching piano in this suburb of Beijing; explore the most up to date teaching methods, materials and technologies; how to handle diversity in each classroom; and how to maintain a healthy relationship between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students.

I learned that it is important to evaluate the created program to make sure that it is fulfilling its purposes so that the program will be effective. Therefore, I have developed the evaluation plan to help identify gaps and needs, and improve future PD. I will need to collect data and examine how the data lines up with previously determined standards or benchmarks. After conducting the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT training, goal-based formative and summative evaluations will be conducted. Formative evaluations will be conducted during the training program. Meanwhile, I have learned that when evaluating professional development, I need to make sure that everyone's voice is heard and respond to their concerns. Also, it is important to communicate the strategies and results of the PD with other stakeholders. Therefore, I will conduct meaningful conversations with all teachers, have them share their opinions and ideas about the program, and then implement those ideas into the future program.

For implementation, I will share my research findings and introduce the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano Teaching professional development program with related piano teachers and school leaders. Meanwhile, I will discuss the implementation timeline and potential costs/budget with the school leaders, and make sure that this PD program will

help the international community in this local area in Beijing and make sure that local piano teachers can help these students during their transitional years in China.

### **Leadership and Change**

During my doctoral study, I had a chance to expose the multifaceted world of leadership ideologies. There are many leadership approaches, each with its own merits and faults. If only one methodology is read, there is no guarantee that it will be the best for one's situation. As for me, multi-methodology approaches are something that I strive for in all aspects of my education; teaching, curricula, leadership, etc. Now that I am a “future-focused” leader, I believe one thing I can do at this time is to continue to educate myself. To be successful as an educator or as a leader, one can never stop learning. Each day a new approach, technology, or methodology is developed, and one of them could just be the game changer a piano teacher could need. Having effective leadership abilities is essential to overseeing a successful piano program. Four leadership styles discussed in this study are instructional leadership style; transformative or transactional leadership style; situational leadership style and servant leadership style. Every leadership style has countless pros and cons.

According to Blase and Blase (1999), the characteristics of instructional leadership style are, “encouraging and facilitating the study of teaching and learning, facilitating collaborative efforts among teachers, establishing coaching relationships among teachers, using instructional research to make decisions, and using the principles of adult learning when dealing with teacher” (Marzano et al., 2005, p.18). Meanwhile, Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, Mesa, and Mitman (1983) identified “three general functions of

the instructional leader: defining the school's mission, managing curriculum and instruction, and promoting a positive school climate" (Marzano et al., 2005, p.19). The instructional leadership style leader is active in supporting the daily instructional activities and programs by they themselves modeling desired conduct, participating in in-service training, and consistently giving precedent to instructional concerns. They have clear goals for the school and articulate those goals to faculty and staff, engage in frequent classroom observations and this type of leader is highly accessible to faculty and staff. However, Fullan (1991) makes the statement that as the position and job of a principle continues to become ever-more complex. The role of the principal has modulated from instructional leaders to the other end of the spectrum of transformational leaders.

The transformational leadership style has a lot of similarities to the situational leadership style. In order to find ways to motivate the followers to focus on achieving performance goals, and being culturally proficient to mobilize staff to include everyone in the decision-making process, the leaders adopt a certain style depending upon the individual or group of people that they are dealing with. They have the potential to become the most ideal leaders if they can successfully achieve "the four I's:" Individual consideration, Intellectual stimulation, Inspirational motivation and Idealized influence" (Sosik & Dionne, 1997). According to Bertocci, "transformational leaders have the ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve results greater than originally planned through internal rewards rather than external reward. They motivate followers to work for

longer-term and more substantial goals than short-term self-interests” (Bertocci, 2009, p.48).

The situational leadership style is also an effective style because it uses an adaptive approach to deal with their different followers. Based on a work by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard, “Situational leadership is the principle of a leader adapting their leadership behavior to the followers' maturity. Four leadership styles match high and low willingness and ability of the followers to perform a task” (Marzano et al., 2005, p.17). Every teacher works differently, and every student learns differently. There is no single method that could possibly fit them all. Therefore, it is important to know their followers and make a choice from “telling style”, “participating style”, “selling style” and “delegating style” to motivate them.

For servant leadership style, “the servant-leader is a servant first. Becoming a servant-leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1973, p.6). Many of the school leaders here in China have adopted the instructional leadership style. It might be beneficial if some of them are willing to adopt servant leadership style, which understands personal needs and being an effective listener, solving problems and conflict within the organization, are inspiring, collaborative, and empower others to greatness. Alcala stated that “in schools where greater degrees of servant leadership are being practiced, students are achieving at a higher rate than in schools where lower degrees of servant leadership are being practiced...researchers found the servant leader model had a positive influence on the organizational culture” (Alcala, 2009, p.34).



School leaders need to understand the role of piano education. Piano education is a natural consequence of economic, political, and cultural forces. Schlechty mentioned that: a school principal or leader should not merely use their position for control, but as a position of leadership. The main goal for the school leader should be to help employees and students work well, be engaged, and be effective (Schlechty, 2009). School leaders should prevent detachment between the piano school and business aspect of the organization. Many business leaders drive bureaucratic assemblies in the education arena. Teachers who motivate the organization and their students may not satisfy business leaders. Appropriate steps should be taken to bridge the gap between the two.

No matter one's role within a piano institution, everyone must find their appropriate niche while being both involved and cooperative under the umbrella of a larger learning organization. This issue can start with parents not just being the child's parent, but actively participating--under parameters set by the teacher--in the education process. The organization continues encouraging teachers to not just teach, but to continuously pursue their own education. This coupled with non-traditional teaching methods allows the teacher to be a curriculum designer instead of using a typical rote style. On a more fundamental level, the students need to be enthusiastic about what they are learning. School leaders too, should break out of the normal mold found at an educational institution and be more focused as a leader of a learning organization. Working with teachers, parents, students and local business-leaders or bureaucrats, principals can help change and remold the currently failing educational formula.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

The coursework for this doctoral program has provided me the tools and fundamental knowledge of conducting the research study. Previously I have three degrees in piano performance and took four years of DMA courses in collaborative piano. However, Walden has prepared me as a scholar and education leader. After teaching in China for 7 years, I am eager to conduct research on key issues that I have encountered, and offer my ideas and contributions to the situation. Doing a research study empowered me to achieve my career potential. In the future, I would like to make an impact on piano education in this district of Beijing, to organize and manage a piano school or take on a leadership role in the music program of an international school.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

Piano teachers need to continuously update their knowledge of both past and current teaching methods. Teaching students every day is a process for teachers, students, and parents to learn together, explore new things, and get to know each other better. One of the reasons that I am studying in this online Ed.D program is to improve myself. The significance of being a reflective practitioner is to constantly update my knowledge of the most advanced teaching technologies and methods. Analyze and summarize daily teaching experiences, research how to improve teaching quality of the piano lessons and classes in the international schools in Beijing to increase students' learning motivation and piano playing ability. Meanwhile, spending time to assess myself, study new teaching materials, choose the most suitable methods for every student according to his or her learning types and find new inventions that will help local piano teaching.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As a project developer, I understood the importance of fostering relationships with all stakeholders and to promote social changes. Through this qualitative research, I have applied the qualitative research techniques to collect and analyze data, and conducted a case study to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the investigation. Then, using supporting literature reviews to provide evidence for developing the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program to improve the quality of piano teaching and to close the gaps between teachers with various background. I will work with all stakeholders and school leaders to implement this program and present the PD proposal to key stakeholders, and be flexible in relation to financial issues. As a project developer, I understand data-driven decisions and the importance of establishing an evaluation strategy for future development.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The potential impact for this project not only to improve the quality of piano lessons and piano classes, but also have positive social change among school leaders, piano teachers, parents and students. Piano teachers need to continuously update their knowledge of both past and current teaching methods. Teaching students every day is a process for teachers, students, and parents to learn together, explore new things and get to know each other better. There is no one teaching method that can possibly fit every student because everyone learns differently.

Teachers need to participate in continued professional development. One beneficial way of finding support and sources is to join a music teacher organization

which makes it easier to attend conferences, workshops, and observe lessons taught by colleagues. Joining regular meetings and study sessions to discuss the current, most popular, or recently published teaching method books so that everyone has extensive knowledge and a solid understanding of all the methods that are available in the market is also crucial to self-development. There are some well-known conferences and organizations in the United States: Music Educators National Conference (MENC), Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (NCKP), and National Conference on Piano Pedagogy (NCPPI). Moreover, on the Chinese Musicians Association Website (CMAW), there is a list of more than seventy Chinese music associations categorized by instrument, location, and music genre.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program is a good model and example of a PD program for the piano teachers. It will potentially improve the teaching quality of international schools in the suburb district of Beijing and be applicable to all the international schools in other districts. However, it is important to keep updating the new teaching strategies and technologies. For future research, there is a demand to continue to research new apps and software. A successfully developed and well-rounded assignment plan using a laboratory program will help students achieve the greatest benefit, and reinforce concepts taught during lessons (Gordon and Sisler, 2008). Piano teachers can increase the creativity level and plan lessons through the use of a computer or cell phone app as a teaching assistant. For example, for study and research one could implement the use of ABRSM Piano Practice Partner, ABRSM Scales Trainer, ABRSM Sight-Reading Trainer, ABRSM Aural

Trainer and so on. I have requested students who are participating in the ABRSM exam to try out these digital apps, and would like to collect data and analyze the results of the effectiveness of using these exam companions.

Secondly, more studies can be done by exchanging teaching strategies between Western and Eastern piano teaching approaches. More western piano teachers or piano pedagogy professors should be invited by the music organizations to come to China and give lectures about the most up-to-date discovers and studies. There are lots of existing support offered by music teacher organizations in the US. There need to be more of these types of organizations for piano teachers and music teachers here in China to provide similar opportunities for individual piano teachers or teachers from institutes to participate in conferences, workshops, or professional development training. More studies and formative and summative evaluations need to be conducted.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to develop a professional development program to engage and support the local piano teachers and the community and to enhance the future of piano lessons and classes in this suburban district of Beijing. The 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT was created based on the collected data and two literature reviews. Local piano teachers needed help to improve their teaching quality and gain new strategies to benefit students of different ages and diverse backgrounds. Since this suburban district of Beijing is home to a major concentration of top international schools, the international community and enrollees of the international school will benefit greatly from this study.

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## Appendix A: The Project

Piano teaching in a Beijing Suburb, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano TeachingShorthand title is: 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT

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## **Executive Summary**

Due to a booming economy and a change in birthing policy which now allows a second child each family in China, there is a growing demand for piano learning. However, the high student to teacher ratio (Yang, 2015) and unequal qualification of the teachers has caused dissatisfaction with class outcomes (Yang 2015). As such, many schools try to overcome this issue by offering both individual and group piano classes. The purpose of the project study was to improve the quality of both group piano classes and individual piano lessons in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. This research paid close attention to what local piano teachers need and tried to find out how to help them improve the quality of teaching and work collaboratively with each other to fulfill the needs of the entire spectrum of students.

This project study involved triangulating data from 10 semi structured interviews with experienced piano teachers who have taught in the international schools' piano course; 10 semistructured interviews with a selected group of parents of K to 12 children who are currently taking piano lessons; and observations of three group piano classes, eight individual lessons (including 6 regular one-on-one lessons and two one-on-one master classes) and three student recitals.

A professional development program was created based on the research findings. It was named "Piano teaching in a Beijing Suburb, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Effective Piano Teaching." Its shorthand title is 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT. This PD program will help to close the gaps between teachers with various backgrounds; discuss key issues for teaching piano in this suburb of Beijing; explore the most up to date teaching methods, materials and



technologies; how to handle diversity in each classroom; and how to maintain a healthy relationship between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students.

### **21st C. EPT**

The 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT contains five days of training to build skills around teaching methods, piano exams/certificates, diversity and respect. The target audience is piano teachers who are working in the international schools or teaching students of the international schools. This 5-day program will take participants beyond their current teaching capabilities and expose them to multiple up-to-date and commonly used teaching methods, and discuss some of the key issues they encounter during their daily teaching.

#### **Program Needs**

**Local Community.** This 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program was designed to engage and support the local piano teachers and the community, and enhance the future of piano lessons and classes in this suburban district of Beijing. 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT was created based on the collected data and two literature reviews. Local piano teachers needed help to improve their teaching quality and gain new strategies to benefit students of different ages and diverse backgrounds. This program will benefit the local community dramatically since this suburban district of Beijing is home to a major concentration to top international schools. The international community and applicants of the international school will benefit a lot from this study.

**Extended Reach.** If this program is successful, it can be a potential PD model for all piano teachers who are involved in an international community around China. Due to

the economic growth and pro-business policies enacted by the government, greater numbers of foreigners have/are moved/moving to China to live and work. Most are concentrated in the metropolitans around China, like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong and so on. They brought their family and children to China to study and experience a vibrant culture. Many of them stayed in China between two and five years, depending on their parents' work contract. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2018), "489,200 international students were studying in China in 2017" (para. 1). The numbers of international students are increasing every year. Meanwhile, "international students have enrolled in over 935 higher education institutions throughout the country" (education in China, para 1). Many of these younger foreign students went to the international schools to receive the most expensive educations. Therefore, the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT is a very practical PD program to make sure that local piano teachers are familiar with western culture and teaching approaches, western exams, and effective teaching strategies for a diverse classroom to help these children during their transitional years in China.

### **Program Goals and Outcome Objectives**

The primary goal of this 21<sup>st</sup> EPT is to make piano teaching in international schools more effective and produce better results. Participants will understand what some of the key issues everyone is facing and how to approach these issues; meanwhile, teachers will have a chance to compare and contrast an eastern piano teaching approach to the western piano teaching style; traditional piano teaching verses functional piano

teaching; Chinese piano exams versus ABRSM exam; and have an opportunity to explore some of the new technologies available for piano learning.

This PD program will help piano teachers accomplish their teaching objectives while improving both themselves and their institutions. Exploring both eastern and western teaching materials and approaches will help these participants to employ their framework of teaching so that they can have a consistent set of tools. Meanwhile, this program will assist piano teachers and school leaders, parents, and children, to build teamwork and collaboratively work with one another to create positive learning environments and discuss some of the key issues problems they are facing in their daily teaching. During the 5-day training, teachers will also have the chance to sustain, grow, and develop a network of support.

### **Program Description**

The purpose of this project study was to improve the quality of both group piano classes and individual piano lessons in the international schools in a suburban district of Beijing. Based on my research findings, I created this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program to improve the quality of piano teaching and to close the gaps between teachers with various background. Participating teachers will have a chance to discuss the key issues for teaching piano from their daily experiences; explore the most up-to-date teaching methods, materials and technologies; identify effective teaching strategies for different age groups of students; strategies to handle diversity in the classroom; and how to maintain a healthy relationship between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Participants will be responsible for preparing some of the training

materials listed prior to attending the PD training, and for attending the five-day seminar punctually and thoroughly.

### **Resources and supports**

Piano teachers need to participate in continued professional development. For this project, many resources are available for this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT professional development program.

#### **1. Support:**

During my interviews and observations with piano teachers, and receiving permission to conduct this study with local music school owners and leaders, I have been shown great interest in this research, and a willingness to participate and discuss their problems and needs. These local music schools could potentially offer their large performance room or small stages for this PD program. These rooms are usually occupied for master classes and small performances.

#### **2. Resources:**

Guest speakers and experts for the functional piano pedagogy and ABRSM exam are not difficult to invite since I am familiar with some of them.

#### **3. Advertisements:**

Advertise the information through social media and local international schools' magazines like Beijing Kids/ or TimeOut magazines to invite potential participants:

- Through piano teachers Wechat group
- Music association websites
- International school websites

**Learning Materials**

- 1) ABRSM piano exam syllabus 2019 & 2020
  - a) Pieces
  - b) Scales and arpeggios
  - c) Sight-reading
  - d) Aural tests
- 2) Faber Piano Adventures Curriculum Level 1-5
  - a) Lesson book
  - b) Theory
  - c) Technique & Artistry
  - d) Performance
  - e) Other supplementary series
- 3) Hal Leonard Student Piano Library
  - a) Piano Lessons 1-5
  - b) Piano Theory Workbook 1-5
  - c) Piano Technique Book 1-5
  - d) Piano Practice Games 1-4
  - e) Piano Solos
- 4) Alfred's Basic Piano Library
- 5) Bastien Piano Basics
- 6) XinDi's Functional Piano Curriculum
- 7) The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature

8) Other traditional teaching materials

**Potential Barriers**

**Lack of acceptance by leadership.** The first step to recovery is admitting there is a problem. No matter how great a PD program is, the school leaders must know and be willing to accept that there is a lack of development within the piano department.

According to Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005), the outcome of professional development programs is affected by the support shown for PD from administrators and other policymakers. Additionally, successful outcomes require teachers and staff having multiple or continuous exposure to PD rather than it being a single and exclusive event. Knowing and accepting that there is a problem is an issue that all industries face within the leadership positions. School leaders have to recognize the problem, consider it valuable and are interested in making a difference.

**Lack of funding.** Effective PD often determines teachers' success and satisfaction, but the cost is often an issue (Rebora, 2011). Many institutions are seeing cuts to funding, even to long-established programs. If this is the case at the school under concern, they may be hard-pressed to choose to add yet another new program to the school even if said program is to advance staff and improve an aspect of the school. The simple fact is PD costs money. Experts/guest speakers need to be brought in. Venues need to be booked. Name tags, and handouts need to be printed. "Money spread thinly when it comes to PD is unlikely to produce change...it may be wiser to involve fewer teachers than produce less significant change among many" (Ingvarson et al. 2005).

**Scheduling conflicts for the PD session.** People's time is valuable. Family pressure and social responsibilities mean many find it hard to justify giving more of their time to their job. To avoid this, a PD program could be held during work hours, but this creates a barrier within the school. According to Solis (2018), schools often schedule PD during the school year and invite experts in new teaching methods and strategies to come in and train the teachers during class time or dismiss their students early for the teachers to have workshops. However, in this situation, if the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program takes place during school hours, all piano lessons during the length of the PD program would need to be canceled or rearranged. Schools may find this to be too great an inconvenience or viewed as a loss of money if the lessons need to be canceled. This conflict leaves holding PD sessions during winter and summer holidays. Yet, this creates another problem. These holidays are the teachers personal time, and even though salaries are still paid (for full-time staff), teachers view these holidays as well-earned time off. Are teachers going to come in during the holiday? Is the PD going to be "mandatory"? It is well established that mandatory work functions create an atmosphere in the workplace which is counterproductive to building a better environment. Furthermore, if a staff member is part-time, holding the event during a holiday could mean those teachers are losing income from any other employment obligations that they hold on the side.

### **Consultants and Costs**

Location: Free ( Local piano school)

Customization:

To provide local piano teachers the opportunity to get familiar with all the available resources, and help them to design their lesson plans to better align and be more coherent with their teaching goals, three consultants will be involved with this program: one main organizer and two vocational training lecturers for the functional piano pedagogy and an ABRSM specialist.

1. I will be the main organizer and representative of this PD training. I will explain the needs for this PD program, share some of the research findings with the participants and lead the discussion for the key issues.

Cost: TBD

2. A guest speaker will be invited to coach on the topic “functional piano pedagogy” during day 2 of the PD training. This particular piano pedagogy, created by the dean of Xing Hai Conservatory, is becoming popular in China. It is based on the rapid development of the popularization of piano education in China, and is in line with the educational concept of cultivating students' sustainable developmental ability. This particular piano pedagogy targets the large population and majority of students, breaks the traditional piano teaching methods, and creates a new dimension for piano education in China. It mainly features rapid learning, creativity, imitation, improvisation, and composition. The purpose of the functional piano pedagogy is to inspire interest, happiness, musical imagination, and quick achievement (Xindi, 2010).

Cost:



- 3000 Yuan for one hour of lecture by a consultant
  - Or 6000 Yuan for an executive consultant
  - Air or Train ticket
3. The outside-in professional development approach will also be applied to the Day 3 training session on piano exams and the ABRSM exam. The guest speaker will be a certified instructor--or representative--of the ABRSM who has a broad knowledge of the mission of the exam committee, and the design of the exam and new syllabus. This guest trainer will increase local piano teachers' knowledge and understanding of the principles of the exam, offer them an opportunity to improve their teaching skills of the exam concepts, and explain the emphasis of each level's syllabus. Furthermore, the ABRSM instructor will provide support and inspiration for the local piano teachers, and share practical ideas of how to work with children and young students in piano education.

Cost: 10,000 yuan for three hours lecture

For the participants:

- 5000 yuan per person for five days of training
- 2000 yuan for training materials

### **Agenda**

The outline below lists the main components of the proposed 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT.

Detailed timelines and activities of the program are also explained:

**Professional Development Program Agenda: Piano Teaching in a Beijing Suburb-****“Becoming an Effective Piano Teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT)”****Day 1****A. Welcome (9:00am-12:00pm):**

## 1. Introduction (2 hours)

- Overview of 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT strategies
- Discuss the expectations of participants and introduce the PD leader’s role in the process.
- Review the timetable for the program

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Understand the needs of joining this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program and the importance of active learning.

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## 2. Group work--understanding the needs (1 hour)

- Mixed experience/seniority of teachers (group size dependent on attendance numbers).
- one member of each group is “group head.”
- Groups brainstorm both positives and negatives of their current piano teaching environments, making a list.
- List barriers unique to each teacher’s workplace.

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Know what the teachers’ needs and interests are.

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**B. Elicit (1:00-4:00pm):**

1. Summarize the “key issues” from group heads around the room.
  - Focus should be on common themes/issues or issues of interest.
  - Related to Methods, ABRSM, Diversity, Perceptions.
2. PD leader oversees commitment.
3. PD leader creates a “master list” to cover over the five days.

---

Organize and present the information in a clear, concise manner.

---

**Day 2****A. Teaching Methods (9:00am-12:00pm):**

1. Eastern Approach (30 min)
  - Exam focused, technique, memorization, and achievement.
2. Western Approach (1 hour)
  - Creativity, musicality, independent learning, for fun.
3. Functional Piano Pedagogy (1 hour)
  - Systematized teaching method.
  - Exploration, mimic, improvisation, creativity.
  - Developing rapidly in China.
4. New technologies (30 min)
  - Computer software, electronic keyboards, available music learning apps, online classes.

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A comprehensive overview of the most popular, commonly used, and up-to-date piano pedagogy methods

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Scientific, coherent, and systematic quality teaching

materials are the foundation of instruction.

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**B. Teaching Methods and Strategies (1:00-4:00pm):**

3. Beginner—Early Intermediate Level

- One-on-one vs. group lesson.

4. Later intermediate—Advanced

- One-on-one vs. group lesson.

---

Continue the discussions on different approaches for

various age and level groups

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**Day 3**

**A. Piano Exams/Certificates (9:00am-12:00pm):**

1. China Conservatory Grade Examination

- Useful for non-study abroad students, popular amongst Chinese teachers, uphold Communist ideologies/Ministry of Education requirements, principles, and social values.

- Pros and Cons.

2. Central Conservatory Grade Examination

- Useful for non-study abroad students, popular amongst Chinese

teachers, uphold Communist ideologies, principles, and social values.

- Pros and Cons.

**B. ABRSM Exam (1:00-4:00pm):**

1. About ABRSM

- Global, most popular, converts to college credit, useful for students planning to study abroad.
- Pros and Cons.

---

Understand the pros and cons of every exam format and be able to choose the most suitable one for their individual student, and have enough knowledge to assist them with passing the exams.

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**Day 4**

**A. Diversity (9:00am-12:00pm):**

1. Common areas for diversity issues

- Religion, race/ethnicity, culture, learning style/teaching style, expectations.

2. Current social trends that diversity is facing

- Specific to this district in a suburb in Beijing.

3. Approaches/Solutions

- How to handle, overcome, and proactively deter potential risks.

4. Ages and stages of development

- Dealing with students of all ages and development, how to approach all different learning abilities.

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Not only equip piano teachers with sufficient skills to instruct piano, but also be able to navigate cultural and social aspects.

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Create multicultural piano education

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## **B. Respect (1:00-4:00pm):**

### 1. Teacher and Parents

- How to build and maintain a healthy relationship, know what each party expects.

### 2. Teacher and Students

- How to build, maintain, and encourage, know what each party expects.

### 3. Parents and Children

- How to encourage, apply pressure or give independence, clear roles, and expectations.

### 4. Administration and Teachers

- Respectful dialogue, clear division of duties, everyone on the same page, school purpose.

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Promoting motivation and positive relationships with respect

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**Day 5****A. Conclusion (9am-12pm):**

1. Wrap-Up any conversations/topic from previous day(s).
2. Summarize main points from Days 2-4.
3. Potential actions to address the Barriers listed on Day one.

**B. Goodbyes (1-4pm):**

1. Feedback and discussions.
2. Q&A session and return evaluation forms.
3. Hand out any external materials
  - ABRSM locations and contacts, swag bags, sample teaching materials.
4. Allow networking and business card time for teachers taking part in the event
5. Goodbye and thanks.

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Building connections and receiving feedback for future improvement.

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**Project Evaluation**

After conducting this 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT training, goal-based formative and summative evaluations will be conducted. Formative evaluations will be conducted during the training program. According to Killion and Roy (2009), “a formative assessment looks at how well teams work, their actions, and the interim outcomes they produce” (p.143). Participant will fill out two forms: 1. Individual Professional Development Log of Activities; 2. Reflection on the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT train program. For the *Individual Professional*

*Development Log of Activities*, participants need to complete the log every day for each identified subject, activity, goal, and benefit:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>School:</b>	<b>Currently Teaching:</b>		
		1. One--on--one lesson		
		2. Group piano class		
		3. Both		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>activities</b>	<b>goals</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

On the last day of training, participants will be asked to fill out the *Reflection on the 21<sup>st</sup>*

*C. EPT Program* form. On this form, I will ask five questions:

1. Which of the activities or subjects did you find most useful?
2. In what way were the PD trainer and experts helpful to you?
3. Is there anything other issues you would like to receive more information about?
4. Did this program meet your expectations?
5. Is there any aspect that could use improvement?



Moreover, I will keep in touch with all the program participants and ask them to complete another five-question feedback form one semester (approximately 4 months) after they attended the 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT program for a summative evaluation.

1. Did you employ different teaching methods in your lessons or classes in the new semester?
2. Did you employ any new strategies for different ages or ethnic groups of students?
3. Were there any changes to results or outcomes in the course?
4. Were you able to successfully build a collaborative environment based on respect?
5. Do you have any interest to attend/hold a future PD program?

This summative evaluation will determine whether the program has achieved its goals and what subjects need to be modified or improved, and what other aspects need to be addressed in the future.

### **Conclusion**

In this project, a detailed implementation plan with specific timeline and the major components of the proposed 21<sup>st</sup> C. EPT was provided. Three potential barriers were discussed: lack of acceptance by leadership; lack of funding; and scheduling conflicts for the PD session. Using a combination of the goal-based formative and summative evaluation, this PD plan is set to achieve its attempted goals and any improvement for the future can be adjusted. It is one of kind, comprehensive, and practical goal focused PD plan designed for piano teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## Appendix B: Interview Questions for Piano Teachers 钢琴老师采访提纲

**Background information on interviewee:****受访者的背景信息:**

Q: What is your education level?您的教育程度是什么?

Q: What degrees or diplomas do you hold in music performance or music education?您在音乐表演或音乐教育方面所获得的最高学位及文凭是什么?

Q: How many years have you been teaching? 您从事钢琴教育有多久?And how many years have you been working in the international school?您在国际学校任教多久?

**Questions related to piano instruction and curriculum design:****关于钢琴教学与教材策划方面的问题:**

Q: What class format do you teach or prefer teaching? Why?您使用的教学形式或您认为最有效的钢琴课教学形式是什么?为什么?

(Principle 1 原则 1): “character first, ability second 品德第一,能力第二”

Q: How do you define the goals and purposes of piano learning? 您是如何定义钢琴学习的目标及目的的?

Q: How do you value your students' life-long growth and success through piano studying? 您认为钢琴学习对于一个学生终生的发展与成功有何帮助?

Q: Do you think taking piano exams and participating in piano competitions are important and necessary in the piano learning process? Please explain. 您认为参加钢琴考级和钢琴比赛是必须和有必要的么?为什么?

(Principle 2 原则 2): “Mother-tongue approach 母语理论”

Q: Do you believe all students can learn piano at a high level? Why? 您认为所有的学生都可以学到一个较高的水平么?为什么?

Q: What outcomes do you expect from students with diverse backgrounds (different levels, nationalities, years of piano studying)?您对不同背景的学生有怎样的期望(不同程度,国籍,和学琴年限)?

Q: What approach do you use to motivate and inspire your students? 您用怎样的方式及方法激励和启发学生?

(Principle 3 原则 3): “Parental involvement 家长的参与”

Q: What kind of instruction do you provide for parents to coach their children at home? 您作为老师对学生家长在家辅助孩子练习钢琴有何具体的指导和建议?

Q: How do you design detailed weekly lesson plans and provide detailed assignment sheets for students' weekly lessons or classes? 您是如何策划每周具体的上课内容和安排练习作业的?

(Principle 4 原则 4): “Positive environment 积极的环境”

Q: How do you foster relationships with parents and colleagues to support your students' learning? 您认为怎样可以以支持学生为目的,加强与同事及家长之间的良好关系?

Q: What's the best way to work collaboratively with your colleagues? 您认为与同事合作的最佳途径是什么?

## Appendix C: Interview Questions for Parents 家长采访提纲

**Child's age and grade:**

您孩子的年龄及在校年级:

**Your nationality:**

您的国籍:

**Questions relate to piano lesson or piano class:**

关于一对一钢琴课及大班课的问题:

Q: What format of piano lessons or classes has your child been involved in and is currently involving in? 您的孩子目前及曾经所上钢琴课的形式是什么?

(Principle1 原则 1): “character first, ability second 品德第一,能力第二”

Q: How do you define the goals and purposes of piano learning for your child? 您是如何定义您孩子学习钢琴的目标及目的的?

Q: How do you value your child's life-long growth and success through piano learning? 您认为钢琴学习对于您孩子终生的发展与成功有何帮助?

Q: Do you think taking piano exams and participating in piano competitions are important and necessary in the piano learning process? Please explain. 您认为参加钢琴考级和钢琴比赛是必须和有必要的么?为什么?

(Principle 2 原则 2): “Mother-tongue approach 母语理论”

Q: What outcomes do you expect from your child's piano study? 您对孩子学习钢琴有怎样的期望?

Q: Do you believe all children can learn piano at a high level? Why? Or why not? 您是否认为所有的孩子都有可能学到一个很高的水平? 为什么?

(Principle 3 原则 3): “Parental involvement 家长的参与”

Q: Are you involved in your child's daily practice? How and why? If not, why not? 您是否对您孩子每天练习钢琴提供帮助及支持? 怎样的帮助及原因? 如果没有, 为什么?

(Principle 4 原则 4): “Positive environment 积极的环境”

Q: Do you collaborate with the piano teachers? How and why? If not, why not? 您是否与孩子的钢琴老师沟通与合作? 原因及方式? 如果没有, 为什么?

Q: What kind of instruction do you receive from the teacher for coaching your children at home? 您孩子的钢琴老师是否对您在家辅助孩子练琴提供过指导和建议?

Q: What are your opinions on how to work collaboratively with your child and the piano teacher to creating a positive learning environment? 您认为如何与老师和孩子共同合作建立积极良好的学习氛围?

## Appendix D: Protocol for Piano Class Observation

## 钢琴大班课观察

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Date of observation 日期:

Time of observation 时间:

Setting 课程形式:

Length of the class 课程长度:

Number of students 学生数量:

Level of the students 学生程度:

---

Goals and activities during the class 课程目标及活动:

---

Teaching methods and materials used 教学法及教材的使用:

---

Teaching strategies 教学策略:

---

Student and teacher collaboration 学生与老师的配合:

---

Classroom environment and atmosphere 课堂环境及氛围:

---

Intended outcomes and level of achievements 预期成果及实际成效:

---

Technologies used in the class 教学设备使用:

---

Students' attitude toward the class 学生对本堂课的态度:

---

Other observer's reflections 其它感想:

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## Appendix E: Protocol for Individual Piano Lesson Observation

## 一对一钢琴课观察

---

Date of observation 日期:

Time of observation 时间:

Setting 课程形式:

Length of the class 课程长度:

Level of the students 学生程度:

---

Goals and activities during the lesson 课程目标及活动:

---

Teaching methods and materials used 教学法及教材的使用:

---

Teaching strategies 教学策略:

---

Student and teacher collaboration 学生与老师的配合:

---

Lesson environment and atmosphere 课堂环境及氛围:

---

Intended outcomes and level of achievements 预期成果及实际成效:

---

Technologies used in lesson 教学设备使用:

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Students' attitude toward the lesson 学生对本堂课的态度:

● Is the student focused during the lesson?

Focused for entire lesson (5)	Slightly above normal (4)	Normal levels of focus (3)	Slightly below normal (2)	Not focused at all (1)
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● Is the student motivated during the lesson?

Incredibly motivated (5)	Slightly above normal (4)	Normal motivation (3)	Slightly below normal (2)	No motivation (1)
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● Does the student have respected the teacher?

Great amount of respect (5)	Slightly above normal (4)	Normal level of respect (3)	Slightly below normal (2)	No respect at all (1)
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Other observer's reflections 其它感想:

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## Appendix F: Protocol for Student Recital Observation

## 学生音乐会观察

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Date of observation 日期:

Time of observation 时间:

Location of the recital 地点:

Length of the recital 音乐会长度:

Number of performers 表演人数:

Level of the students 学生程度:

---

Concert organization 音乐会组织工作:

---

Students' attitude and behavior 学生的态度和行为:

---

Teachers' attitude and behavior 老师的态度和行为:

---

Student and teacher collaboration 学生与老师的配合:

---

Students readiness 学生准备程度:

---

Intended outcomes and level of achievements 预期成果及实际成效:

---

Students' motivation and confidence building 学生的积极性以及信心的建立:

---

Concert environment and atmosphere 音乐会的环境与气氛:

---

Other observer's reflections 其它感想:

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