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SPECIAL SECTION

Using video in your teaching

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Using video recording to improve your teaching

by Margarita Denenburg

Do you remember teaching your very first piano lesson, perhaps facing a “scary” five-year-old boy or girl, not knowing what to do, how to do it, or even where to start?

When I teach piano pedagogy to university students, they are often interested in learning how to survive that first terrifying teaching day. While I must help students acquire fundamental teaching skills, I also want them to embark on a lifelong path of self-evaluation and improvement.

Video technology

Contemporary video recording technology makes this an easily achievable goal. My pedagogy students routinely record, submit, evaluate, and revisit every lesson they teach. Our use of video technology has provided an effective means of providing constructive feedback on a regular basis in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Video recording can be useful not only inside the walls of the pedagogy class, but also in the private teaching studio. Exchanging ideas, receiving feedback, and seeking advice from colleagues are all compelling activities that can help any piano teacher, from novice to experienced. The weekly teaching improvement I have seen from my pedagogy students has been impressive.

If the results seem so favorable, why don't we record lessons more often? What do teachers need to know to optimize video recording sessions and incorporate them into everyday teaching? How can we utilize mobile recording devices to grow our teaching skills?

Fortunately, there are many easy and fun ways to utilize video technology that are applicable to any piano teacher who wants to advance his or her skills.

Practical considerations

The first step to incorporating video into a lesson is to learn how to set up a situation that makes the recording process





Video: A valuable tool for teachers

easy, unobtrusive, and effective. Fortunately, when it comes to video recording gear, you have many choices, including devices that are inexpensive and easy to use.

Acceptable video recording devices range from “i-products” (iPhone, iPad, and similar Android devices) to high-definition digital cameras with wireless microphones. Although sound quality is important in all stages of piano learning, even the most basic digital video recorder will produce a decent audio recording that will serve the desired purpose. In fact, you may already own a perfectly serviceable device!

If you decide to go with a high-end video recorder, make sure to get a wireless lavalier microphone that the teacher can wear. There is no need to have a dedicated microphone to capture the sound of the piano. A lavalier microphone will pick up the piano along with the words of the teacher, whereas a microphone that is dedicated to the piano will only pick up the piano and not what the teacher is saying.

When deciding where to place your recording device, try to achieve a wide-angle shot that covers the entire keyboard, student, and teacher. The student’s entire body should be visible in order to capture muscular tension or technique problems. The reactions of the student to the teacher and the lesson material will also play an important role in the evaluation process later on.

In most cases it is best to place the camera opposite the teacher. If the teacher sits on the left side of the keyboard, place the camera on the right side.

Sharing videos

To share a video with students in a class or with a colleague, you must upload it to a video-sharing website. Websites such as *Vimeo* (www.vimeo.com) or *YouTube* (www.youtube.com) can be used as long as your teaching videos are set to “unlisted” or “private.” These settings keep the video from being accessible to the general public and allow you to control who can see the video.

My students and I use *Vimeo*, where videos can be protected by a password. Although *YouTube* may be more familiar to most teachers, it can be rather cumbersome. I have found *Vimeo’s* password-protection system to be simple and effective.

Note: Even though a lesson video is password protected, it is important to get written permission from a parent or guardian if a minor is shown in the video.

Video in the pedagogy class

To get pedagogy students used to using video, I begin one semester prior to the actual scheduled class. While there

might be a lot of resistance to the “self-recording” process, the feelings of intimidation are significantly reduced if students are prepared for the concept ahead of time.

Once a week, I send students a link to the video of a thirty-minute lesson that I have taught to a young beginner. These recorded lessons provide a good starting point for the class, and they demonstrate how best to create a video recording of a lesson. By the time my pedagogy students teach their first lessons, they are comfortable with the video concept.

Analyzing teaching

The goal of using video should be two-fold. First, the students in the class should get into the habit of recording their lessons for self-improvement. Secondly, the students should learn how to evaluate their teaching.

Each of these evaluative processes can be instructive to independent teachers wishing to analyze their own work.

Once the students have recorded themselves teaching a lesson, they need to learn how to evaluate what they are seeing. In my class, we approach the issue from several perspectives. I provide my own evaluation, students evaluate themselves, and students participate in peer-evaluation exercises as well. Each of these evaluative processes can be instructive to independent teachers wishing to analyze their own work.

Teacher evaluation

Each recorded video should undergo a detailed written analysis by the class teacher. The rubric for evaluation can be divided into two large sections: evaluation of the pedagogy student and evaluation of the young student who was taught. Subcategories for each section are as follows:

Pedagogy student evaluation

- recording quality and timely submission
- overall professionalism (dress code, preparation, demeanor)
- clarity during the lesson
- appropriateness of the homework assignments
- effectiveness of compliments and criticism offered to the young student
- other creative ideas

Young student evaluation:

- sitting posture
- hand position
- quality of sound
- body-tension
- engagement
- behavior

Additional subsections might be added depending upon the age and level of the student who was taught.

The pedagogy teacher should be very critical of the pedagogy student, diligently pointing out mistakes that the student teacher makes. Remember: this is a unique opportunity for the pedagogy student to learn as much as possible before entering the world of independent piano teaching!

All that being said, we should keep in mind that the purpose of the rubric is not only to criticize, but also to praise the student for improvement, creativity, innovation, and much more. This evaluation provides us with the opportunity to build confidence and to foster an exciting teacher.

Self evaluation

Although the evaluation of the pedagogy teacher is important, pedagogy students often learn more from their own self-evaluation. When properly directed, it is amazing how much students learn from watching their own lessons on video. And when pedagogy students learn to critique themselves, they have acquired a skill that they can use when the pedagogy teacher is no longer around.

In my class, the self-evaluation process begins during the second half of the semester. After receiving my weekly evaluations and observing short teaching segments from their peers, my pedagogy students are ready to begin evaluating their own teaching.

I have found that it is important to guide my students as they view their videos. As part of that guidance, I require them to fill out the evaluation form. They use the same rubric described earlier.

When guided in this way, my pedagogy students generally produce excellent comments on their own teaching. I have noticed that with every passing week, their comments become better constructed and more detailed, which demonstrates how much they are learning about the teaching process.

At the end of the semester, I often receive comments from my students such as these:

The class was challenging, lots of work, but I learned a lot.

I feel more comfortable as a teacher.

I would take the class again!

These comments have assured me that in spite of a heavy workload during the course, the use of video recording has

been a great teaching tool that provides pedagogy students with the necessary experience and expertise to launch their own teaching careers.

Professional evaluation

Independent teachers may wish to share their videos with a colleague for professional evaluation. When engaging an outside mentor, it is important to draw up an evaluation form with clearly established rubrics for the mentor to complete. Although similar in concept to the rubric discussed above, the actual evaluation form may differ according to the particular circumstances. The professional evaluator should discuss the rubric with the teacher before the evaluation process begins, and both should agree on the categories to be addressed.

Group evaluation

A group discussion of these videos can be very effective, and it can take place in a pedagogy class or in a small gathering of professional colleagues. I choose video teaching segments that spark interest and benefit the entire group. I look for segments that show various teaching traits such as creativity, hesitancy, insecurity, musicality, innovation, clarity, and humor. As the semester progresses, my pedagogy students become comfortable enough to evaluate each other's teaching and discuss issues openly, honestly, and constructively in the class.

It is important to remember that consistency is the key to success. Weekly evaluations of the same student will result in the desired progress, and you will see noticeable changes in the way that lessons are taught.

A lifelong journey

While it might be intimidating or uncomfortable at first to share videotaped lessons, we should all remember that we serve the music and our students and aspire to do so in the best way we can. Constructive criticism should not be met with hostility or as an insult but should be embraced with open arms. We all can better ourselves no matter how experienced we may be.

Hopefully, this process of video recording and sharing lessons will become the norm for both young and established teachers and, in time, will result in a lifelong process of improvement. ▲



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