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Abstract

The life and career of master teacher Mary Craig Powell (1940–2019) is documented in this study through an investigation of her pedagogical philosophy, teaching techniques, and her contributions to the field of piano pedagogy. Powell's legacy was centered around teaching pre-college students for over fifty years. She shared her knowledge and experience with other teachers through workshops, training seminars, and published writings on teaching. Her major professional positions included teaching at Campbell College for one year (1965–1966), Erskine College for two years (1966–1968), Augustana College for one year (1971–1972), and Capital University for twenty-one years (1984–2005).

The primary sources for this study were all of Powell's publications and interviews along with answers from survey questions given to former colleagues and former students. To encompass the scope of Powell's career, three former colleagues and eight former students were surveyed. The information collected from the surveys demonstrated how Powell's work as a teacher impacted teachers and students all over the world. The major publications that Powell contributed to are *Focus on Suzuki Piano* and *10 Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano*. Powell's articles in the *American Suzuki Journal* and *Keyboard Companion* were also consulted.

The five chapters of this study document Powell's career, pedagogical philosophy, and teaching techniques. In the first chapter, the purpose and need for the study is established. The methodology and related studies are also presented.

The second chapter presents a biographical sketch of Powell's life and career. Chapter three discusses Powell's writings and gives a detailed account of her twelve teaching strategies. Chapter four contains personal reflections of the principal investigator taken from notes from Powell's teacher-training seminars in Columbus, Ohio during the summers of 2014 and 2015. The fifth and final chapter offers a conclusion by answering the research questions posed in chapter one and gives suggestions for further study. The three appendices include a list of Powell's publications and articles, as well as reproductions of the questionnaires administered to former colleagues and students.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Mary Craig Powell (June 3, 1940 to January 20, 2019) enriched the field of piano pedagogy with her contributions to the piano profession for over fifty years. She impacted the field of piano pedagogy through various avenues including her teaching at the university level, her work as an independent piano teacher, leadership responsibilities in both national and international organizations, authorship and editorship of national piano publications, and writings in various music journals.

Her work as a Suzuki piano teacher-trainer has influenced an entire generation of piano teachers. Through her various workshops and organizational activities, her teaching philosophy and techniques have become accessible to numerous piano teachers. As a master teacher, Powell was integral in the enrichment of the piano pedagogy field and influenced both educators and students with her pedagogical philosophy and teaching techniques.

A Brief Overview of Mary Craig Powell's Legacy

Mary Craig Powell was an internationally recognized teacher and was the recipient of multiple awards. At the Ohio Music Teachers Association state

conference in 2007, Powell was honored with the State Teacher of the Year award.¹ During the tenth conference of the Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA) in 2002, Powell received a Creating Learning Community award for Excellence in Teaching which is designed to celebrate significant contributions by individuals involved in Suzuki education. The award recognizes those who have worked for the expansion and preservation of the Suzuki legacy.² She had been previously recognized with a similar award by the SAA in 1996, the Excellence in Teaching Award, for her work as a Suzuki piano teacher.³ Powell also received the Distinguished Alumna Award from East Carolina University in 1994.⁴

Although known for her work with pre-college students, Powell held several academic positions. Beginning in 1965, Powell filled several short-term teaching positions at Campbell College, Erskine College, and Augustana College. In 1984 Powell accepted a full-time faculty position at Capital University as Community Music School Faculty Suzuki Piano Instructor, Adjunct Instructor in Applied Piano, and Instructor of Intermediate Piano Pedagogy.⁵ Powell remained at Capital until

¹ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

² Suzuki Association of the Americas, "Awards," <https://suzukiassociation.org/teachers/membership/awards/> (accessed March 10, 2021).

³ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

2005, when she began her independent piano studio teaching out of her private residence in Columbus, Ohio.

Throughout her teaching career Powell held various positions of leadership in the SAA, and the Ohio Music Teachers Association (OMTA). In 2008 as Chairman of the International Piano Committee for the International Suzuki Association, she helped revise the New International Edition of the Suzuki Piano School volumes one through seven. Through her work with the SAA, Powell was able to share her knowledge as a teacher-trainer. In 1984 she became one of the first accredited Suzuki piano teacher-trainers for the SAA in the United States and conducted several training seminars a year until her retirement in 2018. On the state level, Powell's work with OMTA involved coordinating piano competitions as well as appearing as a guest clinician at workshops.

Powell's pedagogical philosophy has been disseminated among teachers around the world through her work as a teacher-trainer, workshop clinician, and author. Her reputation as a teacher reached international proportions and she was invited to teach in Central and South America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Bermuda, Italy, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan.⁶ In her 31 years as a teacher-trainer, Powell influenced an incalculable number of teachers on a national and international level. Powell's pedagogical philosophy was further promulgated to teachers through her book, *Focus on Suzuki Piano*, her contribution to *10 Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano*, journal articles, and published interviews.

⁶ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

Powell also served as the piano editor of *Suzuki World Magazine* from 1982 to 1988, during which she published articles concerning various aspects of her teaching philosophy. Her book, *Focus on Suzuki Piano*, is a compilation of these articles and provides a detailed account of her teaching techniques. Powell was also a contributing author to Gilles Comeau's book, *10 Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano*, in which she commented on various issues related to the Suzuki method. Between 1992 and 2006, Powell published seven articles in the *American Suzuki Journal*, and one article in *Keyboard Companion*.

Powell's stature as a pedagogue is documented through her colleagues and students. She earned the respect of colleagues through a combination of professionalism and personality, and her organized approach to technique and artistry produced students who consistently played well. Powell's commitment to excellence is illustrated by a colleague's reflection:

I still wonder how she did it. How she turned out young musicians who played exquisitely, passionately and accurately...and never ruffled her serenity. I worked with many of her students in my improvisation class at the Capital University summer institutes. They had imagination, creativity and wisdom not only in their standard repertoire pieces, but on their own journeys into music.⁷

This admiration and respect for Powell's teaching abilities radiates from her former students as well:

Mary Craig Powell was the best teacher I have ever seen. Her pedagogy, organization, and relational demeanor were unparalleled. She was a true

⁷ Catherin McMichael, "Remembering Mary Craig Powell," <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/remembering-mary-craig-powell> (accessed March 10, 2021).

pioneer and a giant in the field of piano instruction. She was also just a wonderful lady.⁸

For Powell, the relationship between student and teacher was extremely important. She maintained high standards and her approach to teaching was both detailed and organized. However, she took great care to create experiences that were positive and rewarding for her students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to document the legacy of Mary Craig Powell's career as a piano teacher and her contributions to the field of piano pedagogy by investigating her life and career as a teacher, author, and teacher of teachers. This study delineates the foundation of Powell's pedagogical philosophy and illuminates her impact on the field of piano pedagogy. To accomplish this objective, the study collected various forms of information that, when analyzed, organized, and compiled, provide an extensive resource for piano students, teachers, and pedagogues. The following questions guided the study:

1. What personal experiences led Powell to become a pianist and teacher?
2. What was Powell's teaching philosophy and how did it change throughout her career? What significant changes occurred in her teaching?
3. What teaching techniques and methods characterized Powell's teaching style?

⁸ Adrielle Van Bibber, "Remembering Mary Craig Powell," <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/remembering-mary-craig-powell> (accessed March 10, 2021).

4. What were the major contributions of Powell's career at Capital University? How did she impact fellow faculty members?
5. What were the major contributions of Powell's career as an independent piano teacher?
6. What were Powell's major contributions as a teacher-trainer? What techniques and methods characterized her teaching?
7. Given the various aspects of Powell's professional career as a teacher and pedagogue, how can her contributions best be characterized? What can students and teachers in the field learn from Powell's diverse career and experiences that will impact and improve their own study of piano pedagogy?

Need for the Study

The last five decades have witnessed a substantial growth and expansion of piano pedagogy as a field of study. In the United States, piano pedagogy continues to expand in scope at colleges and in professional organizations of teachers. Its development is due to the endeavors of pedagogues considered leaders in their field. However, research and documentation of prominent piano pedagogues has produced few resources.

Biographical research concerning the lives and careers of these pedagogues is crucial in understanding the motivation and inspiration behind their life's work. The writings of educational researchers call for a better understanding of the past and the lives of master teachers who have enriched the field of music education. Carter V. Good echoes this desire in the following statement: "...history is an

integrated narrative or description of past events, written in the spirit of critical inquiry, to find the whole truth and report it.”⁹

The work of researchers George Heller and Bruce Wilson often presents itself in current historical and biographical studies. Heller defines a critical issue of understanding the past by saying, “The problems of music education history and American musical scholarship in the past have been not enough historical research by music education historians...”¹⁰

Heller further explains the nature of such research in the following manner:

Research is the careful, systematic study in a field of knowledge, undertaken to establish facts or principles. The goal of research is knowledge. Research includes such things as investigation, study, scrutiny, examination, inquiry, and questioning. It implies the attributes of care, system, patience, diligence, and criticism. It requires the capacity to doubt, willingness to question, and persistence to search for truth.¹¹

Piano pedagogues have also noted the problem of historical research in the field. Often cited, Gayle Kowalchuk highlights the importance of understanding the development of piano pedagogy in America while documenting those who have made significant contributions. She puts forth three reasons for examining historical research:

⁹ Carter V. Good, *Introduction to Educational Research: Methodology and Design in the Behavioral and Social Sciences* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), 180.

¹⁰ George Heller, “Music Education History and American Musical Scholarship Problems and Promises,” in *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 11 (July 1990): 75.

¹¹ George N. Heller and Bruce D. Wilson. “Historical Research in Music Education: A Prolegomenon.” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 69 (Winter, 1982): 2.

1. There has been very little research conducted in the field of piano pedagogy.
2. Piano pedagogy is firmly established in the curriculum, and yet, we know little about the instructors that are teaching these courses.
3. We can learn from the experience of those who are actively involved in the field and find out from them how to best prepare future piano pedagogy instructors.¹²

These statements from educational researchers highlight the importance of constant evaluation of the state and direction of piano pedagogy. Others have joined Kowalchyk in calling for research focusing on teachers who actively make contributions to the field. Steven Betts echoes this sentiment in his dissertation by stating, “As the profession continues to grow, a history of the leaders during the last half of the twentieth century will be necessary for piano teachers in the twenty-first century.”¹³ Similarly, Karen Beres asserts the importance of this line of research:

Leaders in the field of music education have long attested to the need for history in music education. The understanding of the motivations, philosophies, and legacies of noted educators gained through historical research aids in encouraging new professionals in carving their own paths in the field of music education and piano pedagogy.¹⁴

¹² Gayle Kowalchyk. “A Descriptive Profile of Piano Pedagogy Instructors at American Colleges and Universities” (Ed.D diss, Columbia University Teachers College, 1989), 108.

¹³ Steven Betts, “Lynn Freeman Olson’s Contributions to Music Education” (Ph.D. diss, University of Oklahoma, 1995).

¹⁴ Karen Elizabeth Beres, “Marianne Uszler’s Contributions to Piano Pedagogy” (DMA document, University of Oklahoma, 2002).

Barbara Fast notes the importance and extent of research in music education by summarizing, “As the field had grown so extensively, it is surprising that so little research had been done on the individuals who laid its foundation.”¹⁵

The disciplined study of the philosophies and legacies of noted teachers through historical research is vital for those active in the field. To understand the pedagogical philosophies of Powell and other pedagogues throughout history, and to research her life and contributions to the field, is an endeavor which holds benefits for future students and teachers.

The majority of sources about piano teaching are books, journal articles, and dissertations, yet few produce a detailed study of prominent piano pedagogues. There currently exists no study that documents Powell’s contributions to the field of piano pedagogy. While Mary Craig Powell passed away during the course of this study, many of her former colleagues and former students are still alive, and a thorough investigation of her legacy is necessary. A comprehensive study of Powell’s contributions to the field based on established research procedures is crucial to the expansion and understanding of piano pedagogy.

Procedures

Modeled on the design of similar historical dissertations that document and explore the contributions of pedagogues and master teachers, this study employed basic research techniques to gather and interpret data. It was the original intent of the study to feature Mary Craig Powell as a primary source by gathering

¹⁵ Barbara R. Fast, “Marguerite Miller’s Contributions to Piano Pedagogy” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1997), 9.

information from extensive interviews. However, due to serious illness, Powell was unable to be interviewed for this study. Powell did provide the principal investigator with a list of former colleagues and former students to be surveyed for this study. In order to understand and evaluate Powell's teaching techniques and pedagogical philosophy, the study drew biographical and professional data from varied primary and secondary sources. Information was obtained from the following primary sources:

1. Powell's complete published writings including all books and journal articles authored by Powell.
2. Powell's personal resume.
3. Two published interviews with Powell were found in an academic journal and a dissertation.
4. Selected personal files including notes and recollections of the principal investigator of this study who completed two teacher-training seminars with Powell (June 22–29, 2014 and June 20–24, 2015). The principal investigator stayed at Powell's private residence during the seminar in 2015.
5. Primary information was gathered from questionnaires sent to former colleagues and surveys of former students and teachers who completed teacher-training seminars with Powell.

This study collected written responses through a questionnaire sent to three former colleagues. The questionnaires were originally intended to be a framework for questions to be asked during a phone interview. All three participants, however, chose to submit written responses to the questions rather than conduct an actual interview. Participants were allowed to remain anonymous or have their names be associated with their responses. This study uses participants' names in

parenthesis alongside direct quotes taken from their responses. The three former colleagues included:

1. Fay Adams: Associate Professor of Piano Emerita at the University of Tennessee and Director of the Suzuki Piano School of Knoxville. Professional colleague of Powell through the SAA.
2. Gail Berenson: Professor Emerita of Piano at Ohio University, Athens. Professional colleague of Powell through OMTA.
3. Rebecca Grooms Johnson: Independent piano teacher and past-president of MTNA. Former colleague of Powell at Capital University.

The cover letter and questionnaire emailed to participants is contained in Appendix B.

This study conducted a survey to both former students of Powell and teachers who completed a teacher-training seminar with Powell via the web-based application SurveyMonkey.¹⁶ Surveys were conducted online to participants from around the world. Links to the survey's webpage were sent via email to all participants. Participants were allowed to remain anonymous or have their names be associated with their responses. This study uses participants' names in parenthesis alongside direct quotes taken from responses. Participants included two former piano students:

1. Adrielle van Bibber: Parent of a student who studied with Powell. Also, a close personal friend.
2. Sarah Howels: Former student of 15 years.

Participants who completed teacher-training seminars with Powell included:

¹⁶ SurveyMonkey™, Palo Alto, California: SurveyMonkey.com, LLC, www.surveymonkey.com.

1. Anna Salmon: Independent piano teacher, Denver, Colorado.
2. Joey Loh: Independent piano teacher, Singapore. Loh made several international trips to attend teacher-training seminars with Powell in Columbus, Ohio.
3. Jennifer Tripi: Owner of Imagine Music and Arts, Norman, Oklahoma.
4. Arthur Villar: Member of the piano faculty for the Hartt School Community Division, University of Hartford, Connecticut.
5. Samantha Steitz: Manages a private musical production and education firm in Gratz, Austria.
6. Brianna Matzke: Assistant Professor of Music at Wilmington College, Wilmington, Ohio.

Questions covered aspects of Powell's teaching philosophy and teaching techniques. Responses from teacher-trainees documented her impact on their development as teachers and their subsequent careers. The survey questions and corresponding cover letter are found in Appendix C.

Secondary sources for the study include the following:

1. Writings that discuss Powell and her teaching techniques, methodology, and philosophy.
2. Writings that discuss the Suzuki method and its philosophical background.
3. Dissertations and theses related to prominent figures in piano pedagogy.
4. Texts relevant to the study of piano pedagogy and the Suzuki piano method.

Secondary sources were used to provide background information necessary to understand the development and structure of Powell's pedagogical philosophy and teaching techniques.

To the greatest extent possible, this study uses direct quotes from Mary Craig Powell's writings and interviews to depict her pedagogical philosophy and teaching techniques. The information gathered from questionnaires, survey responses, and the personal notes of the principal investigator serve as an eyewitness account of who she was as a person and teacher.

Limitations

This study was designed to document the legacy of Mary Craig Powell through an examination of her pedagogical and philosophical tenets. A complete and detailed biography was beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, only biographical information necessary to understand important events in Powell's development as a teacher, teacher-trainer, author, and leader in the field of Suzuki piano is presented.

The focus of the study was to document Powell's teaching career and her contributions to piano pedagogy. Although Powell did hold several positions at colleges and universities, her legacy as a Suzuki piano teacher who worked primarily with pre-college students receives greater emphasis. Powell's association with state, national, and international music organizations was considered and limited to information that directly correlates to Powell's

contributions to the organization. Moreover, only Powell's most significant contributions are explored.

To the greatest degree possible, evaluations of Powell's contributions as a teacher and colleague were taken from responses to survey questions sent to her former students and questionnaires sent to former colleagues. Conclusions were drawn concerning Powell's influences on her students, colleagues, and the field of piano pedagogy through her teaching, writings, and service in national and international organizations.

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. Chapter one is expository in nature, presents an introduction to Mary Craig Powell's legacy, explains the purpose and need for the study, procedures, delineates its limitations, and provides an overview of similar studies in the field of piano pedagogy. Chapter two presents a biographical sketch of Powell's life and career. Chapter three investigates Powell's publications and explores the different elements and influences that shaped Powell's teaching philosophy. The chapter explores Powell's teaching philosophy and pedagogical tenets that distinguished her as a mentor and leader in the field of piano pedagogy. Information was gathered from her published writings and interviews, and from responses to questions posed to former colleagues, students, and teachers who completed teacher-trainer seminars with Powell. Chapter four contains personal reflections of the principal investigator of this study concerning experiences and observations as a participant

of Powell's teacher-training seminars during the summers of 2014 and 2015.

Chapter five offers conclusions and suggestions for further study.

Appendix A provides a list of all journal publications and books authored by Powell. Appendix B contains the cover letter and questionnaire for former colleagues of Powell. Appendix C contains the cover letter and survey questions sent to former students and teachers who completed Powell's teacher-trainer seminars.

Similar Studies

Mary Craig Powell was a master teacher with an illustrious career that lasted more than fifty years. This study examines Powell's pedagogical philosophy and establishes how her work has impacted the field of piano pedagogy. The literature reviewed for this study was drawn from two categories: 1) literature providing a historical background of the Suzuki method, and 2) similar studies documenting the contributions of piano pedagogues.

Historical background of the Suzuki piano method

Without question, Mary Craig Powell's teaching techniques and philosophies were heavily influenced by the Suzuki method. To fully understand how she arrived at the conclusions that led her to embrace the Suzuki piano method, the core elements of the Suzuki philosophy are discussed.

Ability Development from Age Zero,¹⁷ by Shinichi Suzuki, provides a firsthand account of the philosophies behind the Suzuki method. The nine-chapter text covers topics essential to the method's development and implementation. Topics discussed include the ability to find talent in any person, the mother tongue approach, and the role of parents in the student's development as both a musician and a person.

Considered the definitive text on Suzuki's core teaching philosophies, *Nurtured by Love*¹⁸ provides an autobiographical account of the events and experiences that resulted in the creation of the Suzuki method. The book, translated from the original Japanese text, presents a series of personal stories which illustrate the various influences responsible for the inspiration behind his pedagogical philosophy. Suzuki discusses two concepts in this book which became the cornerstone of his philosophy. The first concept was deeply rooted in the belief that talent was not something innate in children. Instead, Suzuki proposed the idea that any child could achieve a high level of musicianship given the right environment and proper instruction. The second concept centers around the method's mother tongue approach. Suzuki observed that a child's ability to learn music mirrors the process by which they learn language. This "mother tongue approach" mimics how children acquire verbal skills before they can read or write.

¹⁷ Shinichi Suzuki, *Ability Development from Age Zero* (Miami, Florida: Summy-Birchard Music, 1981).

¹⁸ Shinichi Suzuki, Trans. Kyoko and Lili Selden, *Nurtured by Love: The Classic Approach to Talent Education, Revised Edition* (Van Nuys, California: Alfred Publishing, 2012).

As a result, the development of a student's aural awareness is the central component to a beginner Suzuki student.

*How to Teach Suzuki Piano*¹⁹ is the only resource Suzuki wrote documenting his ideas on teaching piano. Although not a pianist, Suzuki's ideas apply to the pedagogy of any instrument. The self-described brochure reiterates core elements of the method's philosophy such as the fostering of ability, the belief that every child can achieve excellence, development of musical sensitivity, and the concepts behind the mother tongue approach. This source is unique in that Suzuki provides a detailed discussion of important teaching points in his own words concerning technique, artistry, rhythmic pulse, listening, and musical expression.

Written by Haruko Kataoka, a leading figure in the Suzuki Piano School, *Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School* attempts to show how the method teaches students to play with ease.²⁰ Kataoka's ideas focus on the early stages of a child's musical development. Unlike the Suzuki brochure, Kataoka addresses specific points concerning the piano method and piano pedagogy in general. She lists eight crucial points for teachers working with beginner students: listening, tone, lesson pacing, technique, music theory, learning through repetition, learning from peers, and the importance of parental involvement. The final segment of the book details Kataoka's ideas for proper lesson plan implementation for a student's first lesson. An in-depth discussion on "Getting Ready" follows a brief discussion about bowing

¹⁹ Shinichi Suzuki, *How to Teach Suzuki Piano* (United States of America: Summy-Birchard, 1993).

²⁰ Haruko Kataoka, *Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School* (Princeton, New Jersey, Birch Tree Group, 1985).

and proper positioning at the keyboard. She asserts that this approach fosters concentration and prepares the student for immediate success.

Since its publication in 1979, *Studying Suzuki Piano: More Than Music*²¹ has become the definitive handbook for understanding the Suzuki piano method. Intended as a pedagogical guide for teachers, parents, and students, Bigler and Lloyd-Watts comprehensively cover the core tenets of the Suzuki philosophy. The first nine chapters explore the elements necessary for using the method successfully and speak to both parent and teacher in regard to the core philosophy of the mother tongue approach and its ability to develop skills essential to music making. The initial chapters also guide teachers through crucial pedagogical concepts such as stop and prepare, working with parents, student motivation, effective lesson planning, and basic piano technique. The remainder of the book explores each of the seven volumes of the piano method. Bigler and Lloyd-Watts provide three points for each repertoire selection in every volume. These present a preview of new or challenging concepts of each piece including technical and musical elements.

*The Suzuki Approach*²² by Louise Behrend contains a collection of articles originally published as a ten-part series in the journal *Allegro* in 1971. In four chapters, Behrend provides an overview of the history of the method, the educational philosophy, and the teaching process. The book also includes several

²¹ Carol Biggler and Valery Lloyd-Watts, *Studying Suzuki Piano: More than Just Music* (Athens, Ohio: Ability Development Associates, 1979).

²² Louise Bhrend and Sheila Keats, *The Suzuki Approach* (U.S.A.: Summy-Birchard Music, 1998).

question-and-answer segments aimed at clarifying the process of teaching the core elements of the Suzuki piano method.

Martha Stacy's article "History of the Suzuki Piano School in America," published in the *American Suzuki Journal*,²³ provides a timeline of the Suzuki method's evolution from the birth of Shinichi Suzuki in 1898 until the article's publication in October 1988. This source provides a brief synopsis of the events leading up to the creation of the piano method, the establishment of the SAA's teacher-training program in America, and the activities of early Suzuki piano teachers such as Constance Starr, Valery Lloyd-Watts, and Doris Koppelman.

Published in 1978, Doris Koppelman's *Introducing Suzuki Piano*²⁴ is one of the first publications on teaching the piano method. A portion of the book covers questions from parents and teachers about the method. Koppelman also includes core pedagogical concepts for listening, practicing, technique, reading, and performing.

Studies documenting the contributions of piano pedagogues

Studies which document the careers and lives of leading teachers who contributed to the field of piano pedagogy will be the primary topic of this section. Although research concerning the pedagogical tenets and teaching techniques of master teachers is expanding, documentation of such research is sparse. According

²³ Martha Stacy, "History of the Suzuki Piano School in America," *American Suzuki Journal* 16.5 (1988): 20-21.

²⁴ Doris Koppelman, *Introducing Suzuki Piano* (San Diego, CA: Dichter Press, 1978).

to a ProQuest search conducted during October of 2018, 30 biographical research studies concerning individuals who have made substantial contributions to the field of piano pedagogy were found. Among these dissertations, three categories of topics present themselves: 1) dissertations that examine prominent pedagogues, 2) individuals who composed music for pedagogical purposes, and 3) pedagogues who have advocated change or new initiatives in the field. A selected list of pedagogues examined by authors include: Jane Smisor Bastien,²⁵ Frances Clark,²⁶ Louise Goss,²⁷ Marianne Uszler,²⁸ James Lyke,²⁹ Celia Mae Bryant,³⁰ Louise Wadley Bianchi,³¹ Marguerite Miller,³² Marvin Blickenstaff,³³ Howard Ferguson,³⁴ Robert

²⁵ Elaina Burns, "The Contributions of Jane Smisor Bastien to Teaching" (DMA document, University of Oklahoma 2011).

²⁶ Robert Fred Kern, "Frances Clark: The Teacher and Her Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1984).

²⁷ Judith Jain, "Louise Goss: The Professional Contributions of an Eminent American Pedagogue" (DMA document, University of Cincinnati, 2012).

²⁸ Karen Elizabeth Beres, "Marianne Uszler's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA document, University of Oklahoma, 2002).

²⁹ Chee Hyeon Choi, "The Contributions of James Lyke to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA document, University of Illinois at Urbana, 2012).

³⁰ Carol Ann Baskins, "The Contributions of Celia Bryant to Piano Pedagogy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1994).

³¹ Samuel Stinson Holland, "Louise Wadley Bianchi's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1996).

³² Barbara R. Fast, "Marguerite Miller's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1997).

³³ Sara Marie Ernst, "The Legacy of Master Piano Teacher Marvin Blickenstaff: His Pedagogy and Philosophy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 2009).

Pace,³⁵ Lynn Freeman Olson,³⁶ Clarence Burg,³⁷ Maurice Hinson,³⁸ Willard Palmer,³⁹ Jon George,⁴⁰ and Boris Berlin.⁴¹

Julie Knerr's dissertation features Powell along with three other prominent piano teachers. Knerr conducted extensive interviews in an effort to understand each teacher's approach to teaching technique. Her interview of Powell, conducted on September 19, 2006, at Powell's residence in Columbus, Ohio, is one of two interviews of Powell used as a primary source for this study. The interview centers around technical issues and is similar to the information disseminated in Powell's teacher-training seminars. While the interview does contain a brief biographical background, Knerr's primary focus is to document Powell's detailed approach to

³⁴ Nicole Elizabeth Biggs, "Howard Ferguson's Contributions to Piano Literature and Pedagogy" (DMA document, University of Oklahoma, 2011).

³⁵ Jan Jones Forester, "Robert Pace: His life and Contributions to Piano Pedagogy and Music Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Miami, 1997).

³⁶ Steven Lee Betts, "Lynn Freeman Olson's Contributions to Music Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1995).

³⁷ Linda Joyce Owen, "The Contributions of Clarence A. Burg to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA document, University of Oklahoma, 1997).

³⁸ Vernon Twilley Cherrix, "Maurice Hinson: An Annotated Bibliography of His Writings" (DMA document, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997).

³⁹ Kathleen Louise Schubert, "Willard A. Palmer's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1992).

⁴⁰ Dianne Evans Garvin, "Jon George: The Composer and His Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA document, University of Miami, 1998).

⁴¹ Laura Beauchamp, "Boris Berlin's Career and Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA document, University of Oklahoma, 1994).

teaching technique rather than exploring her life, career, and contributions to the field of piano pedagogy.

While the cumulative scope of these studies is broad and far-reaching, their research methods display significant commonalities. The similarities found in these studies may be surmised in the following five points:

1. The inclusion of biographical background.
2. An investigation of each subject's teaching philosophy.
3. Personal interviews with the subject and associates along with surveys from former students and colleagues.
4. A survey of publications authored by subjects.
5. Appendixes which include lists of publications, workshop notes, outlines of presentations, lists of administrative positions, interview guides, survey questionnaires, consent forms, and the names of participants in surveys.

The information found in this study can be categorized under these five points as well. This study seeks to adhere to the scope and design of past biographical dissertations that document the lives and careers of other prominent piano pedagogues.

CHAPTER TWO

For more than fifty years Mary Craig Powell influenced the field of piano pedagogy through her teaching, teacher-training seminars, writings, and her role in professional organizations. This chapter contains her biography and an account of her career, focusing on events related to her stature as a teacher and international figure in piano pedagogy.

Biography and Professional Activities

Mary Craig Powell's career as a pianist and teacher unfolded over the course of five decades. A native to North Carolina, she began her musical instruction in the fourth grade.⁴² Although her pre-college piano lessons were sporadic, Powell went on to complete her undergraduate degree in music at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. During this time, she studied with teacher Elizabeth Drake who nurtured Powell's talents and perhaps instilled the sense of empathy and compassion in the teacher-student relationship that Powell would later embrace as a Suzuki teacher. During her senior year, she received the school's Outstanding Senior in Music award and was also a winner of the school's Concerto

⁴² Julie Knerr, "Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique in Elementary Level Piano Students: An Exploration of Teaching Elementary Level Technical Concepts According to Authors and Teachers from 1925 to the Present" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 2006), 848.

Competition.⁴³ In 1962, Powell graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Music Education with a piano emphasis. Powell immediately began work on her Master's Degree in Piano Performance at Wichita State University where she studied for two years under the guidance of Dr. Robert Steinbauer. She completed her Master of Music degree in Piano Performance in 1964.

Powell's teaching career began in 1964, following the completion of her Master's Degree. Her lengthy career can be categorized into the following four stages: early academic career (1964–1972), the transition to teaching the Suzuki method (1973–1984), Capital University faculty (1984–2005), and independent piano teacher (2005–2018).

During her early academic career, 1964–1972, Powell held short-term faculty positions at various colleges and universities. They were part-time positions made vacant by faculty on sabbatical. The first of these assignments was at Campbell College in North Carolina, a school south of Raleigh. During her one-year stay at Campbell (1965–1966), Powell taught applied piano and served as staff accompanist. During this time, she continued her piano studies making frequent visits to Duke University for lessons with Loren Withers, and also performed as a recital soloist for the North Carolina Symphony Solo Series.⁴⁴ Her subsequent teaching assignment took her to Erskine College in South Carolina (1966–1968), where she again taught applied piano and also accompanied student choirs.

⁴³ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Following her teaching position in South Carolina, Powell lived in Iowa City for four years, 1969–1973, while her husband completed his doctoral degree in choral conducting at the University of Iowa.⁴⁵ During these years, Powell began teaching children out of her home studio. She also became a church organist and held a one-year adjunct faculty position, 1971–1972, at Augustana College in Illinois teaching applied piano one day a week.⁴⁶

Following her resignation from Augustana in 1972, Powell relocated to Athens, Ohio where she taught as an independent piano teacher from 1973 to 1984. Athens also became the place where she raised a family and, as a parent, had her first encounter with the Suzuki method. In the early 1970's she enrolled her sons, Michael and John, in violin lessons with local teacher Lorraine Fink. Having witnessed the effectiveness Fink achieved through using the Suzuki method, Powell became interested in applying the same techniques to teaching piano. Seeking more information, she attended her first Suzuki teacher-trainer course at Stevens Point, Wisconsin during the summer of 1978.⁴⁷ While at Stevens Point, she studied under the direction of prominent Suzuki teachers Haruko Kataoka, Carol Biggler, and Valerie Lloyd Watts.

As Powell began implementing the Suzuki method in her piano teaching, she became increasingly involved with the Suzuki movement in America. In 1982 she

⁴⁵ Knerr, 845.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Knerr, 620.

became the Piano Editor of the international periodical, *Suzuki World Magazine*.⁴⁸ Additionally, she published several articles of her own in the journal between 1982 and 1988. The magazine was forced to halt production in 1988 due to financial constraints and is no longer in print.

Powell's final move took her to Columbus, Ohio where, in 1984, she accepted a full-time position at Capital University. During her 21 years at Capital University (1984–2005), she served as Community Music School Faculty in Suzuki Piano, Adjunct Instructor in Applied Piano, and Instructor of Intermediate Piano Pedagogy.⁴⁹ The 21 years at Capital University were the most productive years of Powell's career. During this time, she became a Suzuki piano teacher-trainer, began speaking as a guest clinician, and authored several journal articles and books.⁵⁰ She also continued her personal development as a pianist taking lessons with Earl Wild and Seymour Fink at Ohio State University.⁵¹

Her influence and contributions during this time are apparent in the following quote from a Capital University colleague and professor:

Few individuals have made a lasting difference in the lives of teachers in such an exemplary manner as Mary Craig Powell. For Mary Craig, piano teaching is a noble, principled calling undertaken with reverence, love,

⁴⁸ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Knerr, 848.

patience, understanding, discipline, and with the highest musical standard. She represents the best of what we do in the piano teaching profession.⁵²

Powell's work has not only influenced her colleagues but has also touched the lives of her students and impacted piano teachers through her work as a Suzuki piano teacher-trainer.

In 1984, Powell became one of the first accredited Suzuki piano teacher-trainers in the United States recognized by the SAA. This accreditation allowed her to train other piano teachers how to use the Suzuki method. According to the SAA, Powell registered more piano teacher trainees than any other Suzuki trainer of any instrument.⁵³ Trainees have been known to travel great distances and often retake courses taught by Powell. These courses rely heavily on learning through observation and have allowed Powell to share her teaching techniques and philosophies with other teachers.

Her impact on other piano teachers through her teacher-training seminars is evident in the following statement from a teacher who attended one of Powell's teacher-training seminars:

What I observed...was a state of grace regardless of circumstance. Mary Craig never seemed to get frustrated, never seemed rushed, never appeared overwhelmed. She had opinions, strong ones, that were conveyed with compassion above all else. Parents and children seemed to listen intently when she spoke and would diligently do as she said not because they were being forced to, but because they wanted to.⁵⁴

⁵² Joni Hoffman, "Mary Craig Powell," *American Suzuki Journal*, 31 (2002): 50-51.

⁵³ Hoffman, "Mary Craig Powell," 50.

⁵⁴ Samantha Steitz, "What I learned from Mary Craig Powell," <http://www.samanthasteitz.com/blog> (accessed June 28, 2015).

Having completed a similar teacher-training seminar, another teacher stated the following in a letter written to Powell:

I honestly feel that it was more valuable than all the piano pedagogy courses combined that I have ever taken. You are truly an inspirational person and the embodiment of all that is wonderful about the Suzuki philosophy.⁵⁵

Powell's reputation as a master teacher grew through her work as a Suzuki teacher-trainer and numerous workshops. Through these sessions, Powell gave many teaching demonstrations and made her teaching philosophies and techniques readily available to those in attendance. An incalculable number of teachers have learned the pedagogical tenets of her teaching philosophy. She was a frequent and sought-after workshop clinician and lecturer throughout the United States, Canada, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Bermuda.⁵⁶

By 1995, Powell's international work had taken her to South America where she continued her teacher-training seminars.⁵⁷ She witnessed students and teachers who were committed to music, yet lacked the resources needed for teaching materials and instruments. Upon her return to the United States, Powell conveyed what she had seen to other Suzuki piano teachers in the Columbus area. Together they organized a charitable event called "Project Peru." With the combined efforts of thirty violin, piano, and guitar teachers, the project took the form of an intensive workshop which raised money for Peruvian music teachers.

⁵⁵ Hoffman, "Mary Craig Powell," 50.

⁵⁶ Hoffman, "Mary Craig Powell," 50.

⁵⁷ Gunderson, "Central Ohio's Project Peru," 45.

The money raised through the event was used to purchase and ship a piano to Peru.⁵⁸

Powell retired from Capital University in 2005 and began teaching Suzuki piano from her home studio in Columbus, Ohio.⁵⁹ She continued to teach pre-college piano students and teacher-training seminars until terminal illness forced her to retire in 2018.

Powell held several positions of leadership within national and international music organizations beginning with her work with the SAA in 1988 and continuing until her retirement in 2018. Involved on both the state, and national levels of the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), she helped coordinate and adjudicated piano competitions. Past President of the state organization OMTA, Gail Berenson, recalled her experiences working with Powell:

It was wonderful to be able to call Mary Craig to invite her to serve as a guest clinician for our Southeast District's OMTA group. She would always graciously agree to help her fellow teachers and never worried if she would receive a fee or not. She just wanted to help by sharing her experience with her colleagues. (Berenson)⁶⁰

On a global scale, Powell served for eight years (2006–2014) as Chairman of the International Piano Committee of the International Suzuki Association (ISA). As a member of this committee, she contributed to the editorial process of the New Revised International Edition of the Suzuki Piano method. Working in

⁵⁸ Gunderson, "Central Ohio's Project Peru," 45.

⁵⁹ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

⁶⁰ Gail Berenson, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, September 8, 2019).

collaboration with Alfred Publishing Vice President E.L. Lancaster and Suzuki piano teachers from across the globe, including Fay Adams, the committee oversaw several editorial revisions. Their collaboration resulted in several changes including page layout modifications, change of repertoire, adding composer dates, a new set of recordings, and the inclusion of a picture of the method's founder, Dr. Suzuki, in every book.⁶¹

Powell proved to be an accomplished author through her output of numerous articles and books. In 1988, Powell compiled her articles written for the journal, *Suzuki World*, and used them in publishing her book, *Focus on Suzuki Piano*.⁶² The book has become one of the definitive texts concerning the Suzuki piano method. Powell was also a contributing author of the book *10 Teachers' Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano* published in 1998.⁶³ A complete listing of Powell's publications is compiled in Appendix A.

Two printed interviews with Powell were discovered, one published in an academic journal and the other in a dissertation. In 2006, Powell was one of four exemplary teachers studied in Julie Knerr's doctoral dissertation. The teachers were selected based on their reputations for working with pre-college piano

⁶¹ Powell, Mary Craig and E.L. Lancaster, "Video about the New Piano Books" Suzuki Associate of America Web site, JW Player video file, 73:53, <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/video-about-new-piano-books> (accessed September 19, 2016).

⁶² Mary Craig Powell, *Focus on Suzuki Piano* (Secaucus, N.J.: Summy-Birchard, 1988).

⁶³ Mary Craig Powell, *10 Teachers' Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano* ed. Gilles Comeau (Vanier, Ontario: CFORP, 1998).

students. Knerr conducted an extensive interview with Powell and observed her teach four lessons. From the information collected, Knerr summarized several key elements of Powell's teaching philosophy. Many of these points correlate to Powell's teaching points discussed in chapter three.

The amount of information presented in Knerr's study is a testament to Powell's organized and detailed approach to teaching. Powell spoke at length about her teaching philosophy, touching on key concepts such as parental involvement, stop and prepare, being specific about expectations, use of creativity, and, above all else, attention to detail and a solid foundation from the start.⁶⁴ This foundation was comprised of two basic components, technique and aural awareness. Powell's technical approach started with the student's posture. She cultivated a relaxed hand position with curved fingers and an emphasis on wrist motion. In developing a student's aural awareness, Powell placed a great deal of importance on listening. She taught her students to listen for basic musical inflections such as articulations, dynamics, balance between the hands, tone quality, and tempo.⁶⁵ Because of her organized and detail-oriented approach to teaching, Powell's students learned to play with technical facility and musical expression.

Powell was also featured in an interview for *Clavier Companion* in 2013. In this interview, Powell expressed her desire to share her ideas with other teachers. She talked at length about aspects of her teaching philosophy that other teachers

⁶⁴ Knerr, 649.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

may benefit from. The topics discussed in this interview include parental involvement, developing aural awareness, attention to detail from the first lesson, respect for the child, and the notion that every child is capable of learning.⁶⁶ These concepts represent some of the core elements of Powell's pedagogical philosophy.

In addition to her professional publications, Powell has multiple listings in *Who's Who Among Musicians*, *The World's Who's Who of Women*, *Personalities in America*, *Directory of Distinguished Americans*, *World's Who's Who of Intellectuals*, and *Dictionary of International Biography*.⁶⁷

For her exemplary work as a teacher, Powell has earned numerous accolades and awards. The Ohio Music Teachers Association awarded her State Independent Music Teacher of the Year in 2007. In 2002, the Suzuki Association of the Americas presented her with the Creating Learning Community Award for "Excellence in Suzuki Teacher Education," and in 1996 honored her with the Excellence in Teaching award. East Carolina University School of Music recognized Powell with the Distinguished Alumna in 1994.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Rebecca Grooms Johnson, "Exploring the Teaching of Mary Craig Powell," 44.

⁶⁷ Mary Craig Powell, Resume, September 5, 2014, Personal Files, Private Collection.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

Writings and Philosophy

Through her experience with the Suzuki Method and her research on child psychology, Mary Craig Powell developed a unique pedagogical philosophy that guided her throughout her fifty years of teaching and enhanced her ability to work well with students. This chapter takes an in-depth look at Powell's pedagogical philosophy, extracting ideas from her writings and information collected from former colleagues, students, and teachers who completed training seminars with her.

The first section of this chapter examines the literature written by Powell. The second section of this chapter identifies the specific elements of the Suzuki philosophy that had the most impact on Powell. The third section explores how the influence of the Suzuki philosophy, along with conclusions drawn from research on child psychology, led Powell to develop twelve teaching strategies that became the centerpiece of her pedagogical philosophy.

Literature by Mary Craig Powell

Powell's book, *Focus on Suzuki Piano*,⁶⁹ comprises her most significant written contribution to the field of piano pedagogy. Her nine-chapter book

⁶⁹ Mary Craig Powell, *Focus on Suzuki Piano* (Secaucus, N.J.: Summy-Birchard, 1988).

contains explanations and in-depth discussions of the essential components of her teaching philosophy and techniques. The content is a compilation of articles written by Powell for *Suzuki World* magazine between the years 1982 and 1987. Published by Summy-Birchard in 1988, the book explores key aspects of both the Suzuki method and Powell's approach to piano teaching in general.

The first chapter lists eight fundamental ideas found at the core of the Suzuki method. They are as follows:

1. *Early Beginning.* The method believes that children seven years old and younger have the ability to learn aurally rather than through reading musical notation. While children over the age of seven may use the method successfully, this approach allows for children as young as four or five to begin music lessons.
2. *Emphasis on Listening.* This idea consists of two components. The first involves listening to recordings of the repertoire taught in the Suzuki piano method. Students are expected to listen to these recordings repeatedly at home. Secondly, there is an emphasis on teaching by demonstration with the expectation that students will imitate what they hear.
3. *Reading.* The ability to read musical notation is delayed in the Suzuki method. The young student learns aural skills and basic piano technique before the introduction of notation.
4. *Psychology.* A positive and non-judgmental psychology is stressed in the method. Powell writes: "Dr. Suzuki developed his method as a result of his love for children and a desire to create a more beautiful world for them. A method based on love and concern for the child must embody such a psychology."
5. *One-Step-at-a Time.* The learning process is broken down into individual concepts. Each concept must be mastered before proceeding to the next.
6. *Repertoire.* Suzuki students constantly review repertoire they have already mastered. This allows students to not only strengthen skills

and concepts already learned but also to apply new ideas to improve their playing.

7. *Parental Involvement.* The method views the student's progress as the combined efforts of the teacher and parent. Parents are expected to attend every lesson to learn how to model from the teacher and to supervise practicing and listening at home throughout the week.
8. *Group Involvement.* Along with the private lesson, Suzuki teachers are encouraged to provide students with a group class. The group environment is meant to provide motivation for the student and also allows time for teachers to discuss music theory and music history.⁷⁰

Many, if not all, of these ideas were woven into Powell's teaching philosophy and techniques. They provide the basis for understanding the influence of the Suzuki philosophy on Powell's teaching.

In the chapters that follow, Powell elaborates on the role of the parent, the structure of home practice, developing aural awareness through listening, and her ideas on psychology. Three chapters are dedicated to Powell's ideas on teaching technique, musicality and music history. In the final chapter, Powell poses several questions designed to help teachers examine and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

Powell was a contributing author to the book, *10 Teachers' Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano*.⁷¹ Edited by Gilles Comeau, this book contains contributions from ten Suzuki piano teachers including Fay Adams, Beverly Fest, Doris Harrel, Doris Koppelman, Christopher Liccardo, Barbara Schneiderman, Marilyn Taggart, Sarah

⁷⁰ Powell, *Focus*, 6-7.

⁷¹ Mary Craig Powell, *10 Teachers' Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano* ed. Gilles Comeau.

Williams, and Michiko Yurko. In the book, Comeau presents topics or questions covering various aspects of teaching Suzuki piano for the contributing authors to expand upon. The nine chapters cover a wide variety of pedagogical issues including the Suzuki philosophy, parental involvement, performance skills, technical skills, and lesson planning. The book concludes with a brief biography of each contributor followed by appendices of teaching materials such as practice charts and other resources.

Powell's ideas about piano pedagogy also appeared in a three-part installment found in the *American Suzuki Journal*. The three articles, "The Beginning Student,"⁷² "Transition to Book Two and Music Reading,"⁷³ and "Book Two, Issues and Motivation,"⁷⁴ were written by Beverly Tucker Fest and posed questions to prominent Suzuki piano teachers including Rita Hauk, Dianna Galindo, Doris Koppelman, and Doris Harrel. In a format similar to *10 Teachers' Viewpoints on Suzuki Piano*, these teachers, along with Powell, address various pedagogical issues faced by Suzuki piano teachers. Powell's response on the first article emphasizes the importance of developing a student's aural awareness and the careful introduction of hands-together playing. In the second article, Powell speaks to the difficulties faced in teaching an advancing student and the pace and content

⁷² Tucker Fest, Beverly, "The Beginning Student," *American Suzuki Journal* 21, no. 1 (1993): 30-32.

⁷³ Tucker Fest, Beverly. "Piano Forum: Transition to Book Two and music reading," *American Suzuki Journal* 21 no. 4 (1993): 39-42.

⁷⁴ Tucker Fest, Beverly, "Piano Forum: 'Book Two' Issues and Motivation," *American Suzuki Journal* 22, no. 2 (1994): 26-28.

of a typical lesson. In the third and final article, Powell discusses her use of supplemental materials in the lesson for sight-reading and technique.

Powell also authored three journal articles in which she addressed some of the core concepts behind her teaching philosophies. Explored from the vantage point of a young piano student, Powell's first article, "Hannah's Journey,"⁷⁵ illustrates many essential elements of the Suzuki method. The article follows the progression of a piano student from the elementary level through the advanced repertoire and shows how teaching techniques must evolve to meet the needs of the student throughout the various stages of learning. Powell highlights the importance of teacher demonstrations, the group lesson experience, and the development of a student not only as a musician but as a person as well.

Powell's second article, "One Thing at a Time Please,"⁷⁶ illustrates the importance of addressing one aspect of a student's playing at a time during the lesson. The goal is to not overwhelm students with too many demands which leads to students feeling more relaxed and confident. Powell discusses the advantages of using the one-point-focus approach when working on repertoire, sight-reading, and technical studies. Teachers may utilize this tactic successfully during the lesson and parents can encourage more productive practice sessions at home by following the same guidelines.

⁷⁵ Mary Craig Powell, "Hannah's Journey," *Keyboard Companion* 17, no. 4 (2006): 32-33.

⁷⁶ Mary Craig Powell, "One Thing at a Time Please," *American Suzuki Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 35-36.

The article, "A Suzuki Quiz: How Effective Is Your Teaching,"⁷⁷ presents a series of questions to help teachers evaluate their own teaching. The article follows a format similar to the final chapter of her book *Focus on Suzuki Piano*. Powell often used these moments of self-reflection, as a means for teachers to assess and improve their teaching. While some of the questions are specific to the repertoire found in the Suzuki piano method, Powell also touches on parental involvement, one-point-focus, and giving specific assignments to students.

While many of Powell's writings concern her own teaching strategies and pedagogical philosophies, she has contributed to other discussions related to piano pedagogy. In 1993 she interviewed Canadian pianist William Aide, who had just recorded the entire Suzuki piano repertoire.⁷⁸ The opening questions concern Aide's performance career but the focus shifts to teaching ideas and techniques. He answers questions about tone production, listening, and concludes with some general advice for piano teachers.

In a book review published in 1999, Powell writes about Gilles Comeau's supplementary workbook *Comprehensive Musicianship Program*.⁷⁹ Comeau developed the workbook to teach transposition, musical form, music theory, and composition. The workbook was designed to be incorporated into private lessons and group classes and compliments the Suzuki piano method's core curriculum.

⁷⁷ Mary Craig Powell, "A Suzuki Quiz: How Effective is Your Teaching?," *American Suzuki Journal* 25, no. 3 (1997): 32-33.

⁷⁸ Mary Craig Powell, "An Interview with William Aide," *American Suzuki Journal* 21, no. 3 (1993): 32.

⁷⁹ Mary Craig Powell, "Comprehensive Musicianship Program," *American Suzuki Journal* 27, (1999): 42-44.

The brief article, “*Excellence in Teaching Awards, 1996*,”⁸⁰ provides a brief biographical sketch of the three teachers, Alice Joy Lewis, Nell Novak, and Mary Craig Powell, who were recognized by the SAA Board of Directors for notable excellence in their teaching. While the article provides no by-line, it is clear that the information was most likely written by Powell as it reflects similar information found on her personal resume.

The Influence of the Suzuki Philosophy on Mary Craig Powell

At its core, the Suzuki philosophy endorses a style of teaching that nurtures a student’s abilities with love and respect. It relies on teachers creating a learning environment that is non-judgmental and filled with copious amounts of positive reinforcement. The aim is to help each student reach their maximum potential as a musician while also building character. Powell wrote, “The Suzuki teacher endorses a philosophy which is based on love for the child, and which embraces the belief that all children have the potential to learn.”⁸¹ She further stated:

Where love is deep, much will be accomplished. These famous words of Shinichi Suzuki reveal much about the depth of the man and his philosophy. It is a powerful and beautiful philosophy which emerged from his strong love for children and his desire to maintain the inherent love, joy, and trust in them.⁸²

In summing up the goal of the philosophy, Powell wrote, “Dr. Suzuki’s emphasis, however, has been and remains on using the method primarily to develop human

⁸⁰ Mary Craig Powell, “Excellence in Teaching Awards, 1996,” *American Suzuki Journal* 24, no. 4 (1996): 7.

⁸¹ Powell, *10 Viewpoints*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid*, 8.

beings who will make a better world filled with peace rather than war. It is a message of love.”⁸³ By adopting this idea, she aimed to not only teach a child how to play the piano, but to fill students’ lives with joy.

Many of Powell’s teaching strategies relate back to this fundamental aspect of the philosophy: the student should have a positive and enjoyable experience while learning. She believed in reaching children through the joy of music while giving them confidence, discipline, and the opportunity to mature both musically and personally.⁸⁴ Former colleague Rebecca Grooms Johnson surmised how Powell incorporated these ideas into her teaching, “With patience and love, don’t lower what you expect from a student, their parents, or yourself as their teacher.”⁸⁵ Ever present is the idea of maintaining high standards through compassionate means. Fellow Suzuki piano teacher Fay Adams said the following about the philosophy’s role in Powell’s teaching:

Just as Dr. Suzuki said, “Every child can.” She didn’t seem to give up on children. She used Suzuki’s philosophy points constantly, move in small steps with a lot of repetition. She had good communication with parents. She taught the parent to be good home teachers with a toolbox full of ways to interact with their child.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁸⁵ Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, August 13, 2019).

⁸⁶ Fay Adams, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, August 29, 2019).

While Powell went to great lengths to express her expectations to parents, she was equally focused on the child. Former colleague, Gail Berenson, observed:

Placing the student's needs first. Technically, she balanced a focus on ease of playing (natural technique) and quality of sound. Much of this grew out of her Suzuki training.⁸⁷

Powell's teaching was greatly enhanced by the elements she took from the Suzuki philosophy.

Another element of the Suzuki philosophy that influenced Powell was the Mother Tongue approach. She summarized her interpretation of the approach in the following way:

The Suzuki philosophy embraces a belief that all children have great potential and that their abilities can be developed best by making use of that learning process, which is universally most natural to all children, the Mother Tongue approach. Therefore, the Suzuki method of musical instruction parallels virtually without modification the same course that the child experiences from infancy in the learning his language skills.⁸⁸

The Mother Tongue approach develops aural awareness through an emphasis on listening. Powell wrote, "Listening is considered the most important part of the Suzuki method."⁸⁹ From the beginning of their music studies students regularly listen to recordings of the repertoire as well as the sound of the instrument. Powell attested to the power of the Mother Tongue approach with the following personal story:

⁸⁷ Gail Berenson, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, September 8, 2019).

⁸⁸ Powell, *Focus*, 6.

⁸⁹ Powell, *Focus*, 7.

I'm a native of North Carolina and I'm told I've never quite lost my southern accent. I remember my son coming home from school one day and said that people at school are saying that he sounds like a southerner when he talks, and, he added, it was all my fault. He had never lived in the south, but he picked up on my inflections when I spoke. The mother tongue approach taps into this ability to listen.⁹⁰

Teaching students to listen to their sound production was a core element of Powell's pedagogical philosophy. She believed that a child's ability to learn by ear was most prominent from birth until age seven.⁹¹ Developing a student's ear was equally as important as learning the basic technique of the instrument.⁹² She considered the ability to listen to oneself fundamental to fine playing.⁹³

Powell's incorporation of the compassionate and non-judgmental aspect of the Suzuki philosophy seemed to effect how she presented herself in the lesson.

Those who studied with Powell noted the embodiment of these ideas in her teaching:

Mary Craig was a ray of light in the world of piano pedagogy and Suzuki Methodology. She exuded a bright, caring and wise spirit. Never cold, she was professional and timely, communicating her high expectations extremely clearly. Mary Craig was a magnetic human being. Those around her wanted to please her, to play their best, show up fully. Though lessons were intense, and expectations were high, interactions between her and others ended with a hug or smile. It is for these reasons that every teacher I have ever spoken to deems her as an inspiration and role model. (Steitz)⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Personal Notes.

⁹¹ Powell, *10 Viewpoints*, 6.

⁹² Rebecca Grooms Johnson, "Exploring the Teaching of Mary Craig Powell," 44.

⁹³ Powell, *Focus*, 26.

⁹⁴ Thomas R. White, "Survey Questions for Former Students," (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com>, 2019-2020).

Powell was able to connect with people in a way that was inspirational and left them with a feeling of accomplishment and the desire to improve.

She taught in a way that made you feel ready to implement her teachings without any questions. One could never leave her class not feeling confident on the material that was covered. I have never experienced a learning situation like hers since. (Salmon)⁹⁵

Although she was a highly respected teacher, Powell remained humble. She was approachable and helpful.

Mary Craig was such a down-to-earth person who genuinely cared about others. She was professional and honest, but kind-hearted and loving at the same time. She would rather ask questions about you and what you were doing than talk about herself. She genuinely took an interest in you as a person and as a teacher. (Tripi)⁹⁶

The collected survey responses have a common theme in describing Powell's pedagogy. Descriptors such as warm, encouraging, kind, and inspiring were used across the board in reference to Mary Craig Powell's personality and teaching. These character traits aligned perfectly with the Suzuki philosophy.

Powell's Twelve Teaching Strategies

Combining the influences of the Suzuki philosophy and research on child psychology, Powell developed twelve basic teaching strategies that she called "The Hows of Teaching". This list of twelve strategies is taken from a handout used in her teacher-training seminars.⁹⁷ All of her strategies center around the student

⁹⁵ White, "Survey for Former Students."

⁹⁶ White, "Survey for Former Students."

⁹⁷ Principal investigator, personal notes.

having a positive learning experience and she encouraged teachers to integrate these strategies into their teaching. Throughout the course of a typical lesson, Powell used many, if not all, of these strategies in various ways.

1. Good Psychology — positive and non-judgmental.

Perhaps the most essential element of Powell's teaching philosophy is the idea of cultivating a good psychology in the lesson. She stated, "Our Suzuki philosophy endorses a positive and non-judgmental psychology."⁹⁸ For Powell, using a good psychology meant creating learning environment where students felt encouraged, confident, and safe. She accomplished this by utilizing research of child psychologists. Her interest in the subject matter is reflected in her writings:

If I could return to school and select a second discipline to facilitate my teaching, it would be the field of child psychology. For years I have read books on the subject in order to enrich my approach toward my students.⁹⁹

The end goal of this approach was for the student to have a successful experience at the piano while feeling encouraged by the experience. For Powell, establishing a positive relationship with students was a multifaceted process that relied heavily not so much on what she said to her students, but how she said it.

Most of Powell's thoughts on this strategy can be found in the fifth chapter of *Focus on Suzuki Piano*. In this chapter Powell gives a detailed account of the different elements that make for a good psychology. She started by establishing

⁹⁸ Powell, *Focus*, 33.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

clear boundaries in the lesson while still allowing the child to make his or her own choices. She understood that children enjoy making their own choices rather than being told what to do, leading to a feeling of security.¹⁰⁰ Powell often communicated the impact of healthy boundaries through a retelling of a personal experience she had as a mother, when her sons were learning to ride a bicycle. Powell explained that her sons were allowed to ride their bikes anywhere in the neighborhood except for one particular road which she felt had too much traffic and was too dangerous. One day, after riding bikes with a neighborhood friend, Powell's sons returned home and stated that their friend's mother must not care about her son as much because she allowed him to ride his bike on the dangerous road they were forbidden to ride on. By setting clear boundaries, Powell's sons understood that her rule came from a place of love and genuine care for their well-being.¹⁰¹

At the same time, Powell believed that a teacher should be ready to alter boundaries in the case of students new to this type of discipline, or the occasional bad day. This allows the teacher to give the student the freedom to fail. Relating this concept to teaching she stated, "They, students, fear they will not meet with adult approval if they are not perfect. I am convinced that some children misbehave in their lessons rather than try to learn because it is better in their

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Principal investigator, personal notes.

minds to misbehave than to fail when they try.”¹⁰² By cultivating a good psychology, she was able to extinguish the fear of failure.

Her thoughts on using praise or criticism during the lesson come from Haim Ginott’s book *Between Parent and Child*.¹⁰³ Ginott argues that doling out praise indiscriminately can do more harm than good. It is critical to distinguish the child’s efforts and achievements from aspects of the child’s personal characteristics.¹⁰⁴ Ginott writes, “Words of praise should mirror for the child a realistic picture of her accomplishments, not a distorted image of her personality.”¹⁰⁵ Powell gave the following example:

...when a child has played a piece beautifully, helpful praise from the teacher should be “Your performance was beautiful” (praise for the act) rather than “You are wonderful” (praise of the child).¹⁰⁶

In the lesson, Powell strove to use praise to highlight the positive aspects of a student’s playing. Filling a lesson with positive, yet honest, comments was her goal. She was genuine with her praise and saved constructive criticism for moments when it was necessary.¹⁰⁷ Being honest also meant being able to express her feelings to a student. She gave an example of this expression during a lesson:

¹⁰² Powell, *Focus*, 35.

¹⁰³ Powell, *Focus*, 33

¹⁰⁴ Haim G. Ginott, *Between Parent and Child* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 1965), 32.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Powell, *Focus*, 33.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

...our feelings for the child must be separated from feelings about the act. After an extremely trying lesson with Johnny, I stated, "I feel unhappy and frustrated today when I try to work with you and cannot. I always like you, Johnny, (feelings for the child) but I do not like to have such a difficult time working with you." After such a strong statement, be sure to remember another time to state as strongly the opposite reaction. "Your lesson today made me feel so happy, Johnny. It was not only beautifully prepared, but it was such a pleasure to work with you!"(feelings about the act).¹⁰⁸

Powell's pursuit of good psychology as a teaching strategy led to the creation of her most influential teaching tool, a stuffed animal named Fred the Frog. Taking the lead once more from the writings of Ginott, she felt the need to first capture the playful and creative side of a child before engaging them intellectually.¹⁰⁹ Fred's presence in the lesson was a playful way to open a channel of communication to express praise or criticism. Powell would pretend that Fred was whispering comments about a student's playing in her ear. She described the experience this way:

Years ago, I read that psychologists say children take no offense from dialogue with a puppet or stuffed animal, and consequently I went shopping for Fred. Sometimes he closes his eyes with horror (I take his arms and cover his eyes). I complain to him that he is too critical and then turn his back to us while we work to improve. When he turns around again and sees the improvement, he jumps for joy. The psychologists are right—the children love Fred, and he can get by with things that I cannot. ¹¹⁰

By using a stuffed animal, Powell was able to give constructive criticism during the lesson in a way that was playful and nonthreatening to the student. She often joked that the stuffed animal industry owed her royalties for all of the stuffed frogs

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 37.

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Grooms Johnson, "Exploring the Teaching of Mary Craig Powell," 44.

students have given her as gifts and all of the teachers who have purchased stuffed animals for their own studios.¹¹¹

2. Parental Involvement

The Suzuki method requires the participation of three people: the teacher, the child, and the parent. The interaction of these three factors is often referred to as a triangle where the combined efforts of the teacher and parent translate to the success of the child. A parent is always present at the lesson and serves as a practice partner at home, reinforcing concepts highlighted in the lesson. When taking on a new student, Powell would meet first with the parent to lay the groundwork for success by explaining the expectations for the parent both during the lesson and at home.

Powell communicated the parent's role in the lesson by stressing several points.¹¹² Both parent and child were expected to attend every lesson. This policy is best illuminated by this statement from a parent: "I had a fourth baby on Sunday and took Alex to his lesson on Monday. It was THAT IMPORTANT that I be there." (Bibber)¹¹³ Without a parent present, the learning process would falter, and the student's progress would greatly diminish.

During the lesson, the parent was required to take notes and, if possible, record the lesson. Powell also stipulated what kind of notebook should be used in

¹¹¹ Knerr, 861-2.

¹¹² Powell, *Focus*, 9-10

¹¹³ White, "Survey for Former Students."

order to produce organized notes that would later be easily accessible. To ensure the undivided attention of the parent, Powell asked that some sort of childcare for siblings be arranged for the duration of the lesson. She had a specific chair placed in a spot where the parent would sit to observe the lesson. The expectation was that the parent would model techniques used by the teacher during home practice. Powell surmised this idea in the following way:

Since the parents must implement our ideas in the home practice, it is imperative that they be attentive during the lesson...Involve them as much as possible to ascertain that they are developing the musical taste, understanding and refinement of the ear needed to be effective at home.¹¹⁴

Along with teaching the student how to play, Powell was also training the parents to be competent musicians. This allowed her to place a great deal of burden and responsibility on the parent while still maintaining a positive relationship with the child.

As the practice partner at home, the parent was responsible for guiding the student's practicing and to ensure repeated listening of repertoire recordings.¹¹⁵

Powell was very specific as to how often students listened to the repertoire they were learning. An hour of listening was required every day for beginning students. Practicing was to consist of several short sessions that were to become a daily routine. Above all else, Powell stressed that the relationship with the child, both during the lesson and at home, was to be positive and encouraging. A parent described their role as such: "They, the parents, were involved and held to the

¹¹⁴ Powell, "Quiz", 32.

¹¹⁵ Powell, *Focus*, 10.

same standard as the kids, making sure that they got the notes and could do what was needed to be done before the next lesson.” (Howles)¹¹⁶

Consideration was also given to the extent of the parent’s musical background. During the initial meeting, Powell would take note of their experience with music so that she knew how to best help them understand musical concepts. The first lesson was usually devoted entirely to teaching the parent beginning piano techniques such as sound production and hand position. Whenever possible, she encouraged the parent to play the repertoire along with the child during the lesson and encouraged them to learn the beginning pieces hands-separate.¹¹⁷ Parental involvement in the learning process laid the groundwork for success in the lesson and home practice.

3. Being specific in the lesson and in the assignment

Being specific about assignments and expectations during the lesson was an important element to Powell’s teaching. Powell understood how important it was for the teacher to clearly communicate with both the parent and student. A specific notebook was used by the parent to not only take notes but also to keep them organized. Powell would also help the parent plan practice sessions and summarized specific assignments at the end of each lesson. Powell’s specific assignments often focused on listening for a certain sound in a piece and using

¹¹⁶ White, “Survey for Former Students.”

¹¹⁷ Powell, *10 Viewpoints*, 31.

different practice techniques to achieve it.¹¹⁸ Her thoughts on this matter were as follows:

The less we assume, and the more specific we are in assigning, the better results we achieve. When we give specific directions, mothers get bright eyes because they are confident of what to do when they arrive home.¹¹⁹

Powell explained further:

We can be much more effective when we become specific with our requests...this leaves no uncertainty as to how a section is to be practiced. Children and parents feel confident and practice more effectively when they know exactly what is expected of them.¹²⁰

Powell's attention to concise communication is further illuminated by the following responses from teachers who observed Powell's teaching during teacher-training seminars:

Powell was an effective teacher because she made her expectations very clear both through verbal CLEAR communication and through the way she held herself with an air that said, "I expect your best." She motivated students through this unspoken language as well as the tangible instructions she gave to the parents. (Steitz)¹²¹

This sentiment was echoed by another response:

Mary Craig was very clear and specific when telling the parents what to practice with their child each week. She tells them how many times to practice something, as well as the intended goals for practice. (Tripi)¹²²

¹¹⁸ Principal investigator, Personal notes.

¹¹⁹ Powell, *Focus*, 14.

¹²⁰ Powell, "Quiz", 33.

¹²¹ White, "Survey for Former Students."

¹²² *Ibid.*

Having clear communication was just another facet to Powell's meticulously detailed and organized approach to teaching, an approach that did not go unnoticed. Powell was described as, "...very organized and made it very clear what each lesson was about." (Villar)¹²³ A former parent described Powell's teaching approach as, "Incredibly organized in materials, thought, and speech. I've seldom seen a teacher able to form such specific sentences. She got right to the point and it avoided so much confusion." (van Bibber)¹²⁴ Clear communication was vital to Powell's success as a teacher and was used in a way that achieved positive results while avoiding frustration.

4. Follow through on assignments

With such specific assignments and high expectations, it was vital for students to follow through on completing assignments from week to week. This not only required Powell to monitor a student's progress but to hold the parent accountable as well. Rather than assume every point was being followed at home, Powell noted, "...it is not human to work hard in preparation and not be honored with a hearing of it."¹²⁵ One parent remembered:

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Powell, *Focus*, 43

Mary Craig Powell was gentle, calm, concise, and genuine. Love was her language. She was also completely terrifying. If she assigned it, it would be accomplished. Show up unprepared? Never. She believed in her students and expected them to meet the standard. It was a magic balance that worked miracles. I've never seen it replicated. (van Bibber)¹²⁶

Following through was just another aspect of Powell's attention to detail and organized approach to teaching and shows how she was able to place the onus of responsibility on the parent and not the child.

5. Stop and Prepare

This teaching strategy was developed by Dr. Suzuki as a way for students to practice very slowly.¹²⁷ This strategy involves two procedures: first the student stops playing or freezes before a difficult section of a piece. Once stopped, they prepare both physically and mentally for the challenge that follows. This can be applied to any challenge presented by the repertoire and avoids unnecessary mistakes. Powell first applied this to her practice and found that she gained a great deal of control over her sound.¹²⁸ When she used this strategy with students, the benefits were remarkable. She explained:

I constantly show my own students how to do this in their own practice. I mark the word (Stop) at the appropriate places in their scores, we practice the technique in their lesson, and I send them home with the assignment to do this several times a day in their home practice. The results are exciting.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ White, "Survey for Former Students."

¹²⁷ Biggs, Lloyd-Watts, *Studying Suzuki Piano*, 19.

¹²⁸ Powell, *Focus*, 53.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Powell also used the Stop and Prepare technique to help students relax physically before a technically challenging passage. By having students stop, she was able to create rest points where the students could mentally and physically relax, and then continue playing.¹³⁰

Highlighting the Stop and Prepare strategy's ability to create a positive learning experience for the student, Powell explained further:

I put that word "Stop" before sudden dynamic changes. I put it where they've missed a fingering over and over. Then I put the word "Stop" on the note right before it, so that the parent and child never miss it. They stop and get ready to do it successfully. And it eliminates doing it 19 times out of 20 wrong until you get it right the 20th time and wanting to quit lessons because you're so frustrated. You keep practicing doing it correctly. So, the Stop and Prepare technique is a fabulous technique for any teacher to use. I play policewoman and I say, "Red light," and when it's good "Green light" and things to keep it light and fun for them. But it's all still an integral part of the importance of what we're doing, the stopping.¹³¹

By avoiding initial mistakes, this strategy guarantees that the student learns things correctly and leads to a positive learning experience and greater confidence in the student's playing.

6. Steps — breaking things down into manageable steps

The Suzuki philosophy considers every detail of a piece, either technical or musical, an individual step in the learning process. Steps are then broken down to the smallest segment of a musical phrase. The student does not move on to the next step until the previous one is mastered. Each piece is then a conglomerate of

¹³⁰ Powell, *10 Viewpoints*, 93.

¹³¹ Knerr, 855

mastered steps leading to overall proficiency.¹³² Powell stated, “Mastery is accomplished by a one-step-at-a-time approach. Each step, no matter how small, is to be mastered before continuing to the next step.”¹³³ This careful approach to learning avoids frustration while laying a strong foundation of technique and artistry.

7. One-point focus

Breaking the learning process into manageable steps also allows the teacher and student to focus on one aspect of playing at a time rather than attempting to address multiple issues at once. Each step of the learning process must be mastered and focusing on the individual steps creates a more targeted and detail-oriented approach to teaching. Powell described the idea of one-point focus in her article “One Thing at a Time Please”:

A one-point focus does not have to imply that an entire lesson or practice be devoted to one idea, however. It can simply mean that we work on only one thing at a time. There might be five points that need to be covered about a particular passage, but the teacher or parent must bite her lips and zip up her gums if necessary and ask for only one of them at a time...None of us can easily think of more than one new idea at a time, so it seems only a kindness to practice in this manner.¹³⁴

In fostering a learning environment that is both positive and encouraging Powell summarized the one-point focus teaching strategy in the following manner:

“If you are calling out several ideas to remember as the child is playing, you are

¹³² Biggler, Lloyd-Watts, *Studying Suzuki Piano*, 17-18.

¹³³ Powell, *Focus*, 7.

¹³⁴ Powell, “One thing at a Time Please”, 36.

probably frustrating the child, even though your effort is genuine in trying to help.”¹³⁵ She illustrates how too many demands can discourage students through a story about a student who had to leave Powell’s studio due to scheduling conflicts. The young student began studying with another Suzuki piano teacher in the Columbus area but had a much different experience with the new teacher:

The problem was that the teacher asked Joshua for too many things at once leaving him frustrated and in tears every week. For example, she would ask Joshua to correct his fingering on a piece; while he was repeating the piece to correct this problem, she would remind him to watch his posture, then his dynamics, then his balance between the hands, etc. ¹³⁶

In summing up the importance of this strategy, Powell stated, “Within its use lies one of the keys to success in achieving mastery, while we simultaneously endorse the love and respect for the child which is such a basic and integral part of our Suzuki philosophy.”¹³⁷ For Powell, the focus always falls on the student achieving their maximum potential while feeling good about themselves and the learning process.

8. Teacher Demonstration

Powell advocated that teachers demonstrate the playing techniques for students as much as possible rather than verbally explain musical concepts. In lessons, Powell used an “I play-you play” approach where she would demonstrate a

¹³⁵ Powell, *Focus*, 73.

¹³⁶ Powell, “One Thing at a Time Please”, 35.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 36.

certain dynamic or articulation for the student to imitate back. Powell stated simply:

In the Suzuki method we are taught to teach by demonstration. If we are working to achieve all our results verbally, then we are not really teaching as Suzuki teachers. We must constantly strive to improve ourselves in this area and teach by demonstration on the instrument for the child.¹³⁸

This strategy aids the development of the ear while allowing the teacher to use a minimal amount of verbal instruction.

Teaching through demonstration has a direct correlation with the Mother Tongue approach. Powell's efforts are constantly focused on developing the student's aural awareness. She concluded, "The demonstration and imitation process is the key to success in developing the student's ability to learn to listen to himself. Coupled with this are other techniques to further develop and heighten the listening ability."¹³⁹ This heightened aural awareness enables students to play musically and learn at a faster pace.

9. Discovery Learning

Learning through discovery allows the student to discover concepts on their own while avoiding lengthy explanations from the teacher. Powell related this strategy to Teacher Demonstration in the following manner:

In my opinion, imitation is the finest way to approach almost every musical and technical problem because it undergirds a basic principle of learning — the principle of learning through discovery. Something discovered (in this case through imitation) is something learned well, far better than if the child

¹³⁸Powell, "Quiz", 32.

¹³⁹ Powell, *Focus*, 27.

is simply told what to do...it is the simplest, quickest, and most efficient way to elicit beautiful results.¹⁴⁰

Once again, the ultimate goal of the teaching strategy is to achieve exceptional playing through careful guidance and positive reinforcement. Students are more engaged and confident when they discover their own solutions to problems rather than having the answer explained to them.

10. Use of Creativity

The successful integration of Powell's teaching strategies relies on the teacher's use of creative ideas and games to help maintain a positive learning environment. Her ideas were heavily influenced by child psychologist Hiam Ginott who asserted the following:

Teachers who want to improve relations with children need to unlearn their habitual language of rejection and acquire a new language of acceptance. To reach a child's mind, a teacher must capture his heart. Only if a child feels right can he think right.¹⁴¹

Powell developed many creative approaches to teaching. She used games and other captivating ideas to ensure a positive experience and an enjoyable learning process. A former student recalled Powell's effective use of creativity:

She motivated by expecting I could achieve what was needed and gave me many options to go about it, to learn how to get there. She had Fred the frog to entertain and carry tough or boring messages, she had many games and ways to teach repetitively that didn't feel terribly repetitive. (Howes)¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ginott, *Teacher and Child*, 81.

¹⁴² White, "Survey for Former Students."

Along with games and stuffed animals, Powell used vivid imagery or storytelling whenever possible. In the piece *Goodbye to Winter*, she used lyrics that matched the rhythm of the last few measures. Her lyrics were, “Goodbye, goodbye I’ll miss you.”¹⁴³ To explain the tied dotted half notes in the final two measures, she would tell the student to imagine six teardrops running down their cheek.¹⁴⁴ This creative approach made certain the student would play with rhythmic accuracy while avoiding tedious explanations or rhythmic counting.

When teaching dynamic contrast, Powell found imaginative ways to explain the difference between loud and soft using creative imagery that a student could relate to. She explained:

Another favorite analogy (not original with me) is the use of “brother-sister” dynamics. For example, in a piece such as *Christmas Day Secrets*, I have the child choose the person who would be the noisier at his house on Christmas day. He can choose as it relates best to his own family, whether it be a brother, sister, dad, or the dog. The noisier person then becomes the one singing or talking on the *mp* passages and the other child takes the *p* passages.¹⁴⁵

Powell also had creative techniques to teach crescendos and decrescendos. For the piece *A Short Story* by Heinrich Lichner, she concocted an elaborate story about a birthday party for the section of the piece requiring the left hand to crescendo through scale passages. She explained:

In this part, the ascending scales of the left hand represent the footsteps of the boys and girls as they approach the party from a distance. They begin softly and grow bigger as they come closer. As they approach, mother

¹⁴³ Principal investigator, personal notes.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Powell, *Focus*, 56.

exclaims that everyone is too noisy, so they step softly again until, alas, the children forget mother's request and become noisy again. Not only are my students sparked by such analogies, but my own teaching is also. Dynamics as well as the piece, come to life.¹⁴⁶

Another favorite activity relating to dynamics was to pretend the student was a vending machine. She described the activity:

This vending machine has two buttons on it - a big one and a soft one. First, I deposit some pretend money in his head so that the machine will work. When I push his right leg, it makes the 'big' or forte button work; his left leg is for the "soft" or piano button...If the child flounders with one of his dynamic levels, I complain that the vending machine is not working properly. Mother understands how to play the game at home, so she and the child play it until we reach our goal - that the vending machine learns to work automatically.¹⁴⁷

Powell acknowledged the difficulty in playing with a soft dynamic level and developed an effective practice technique, that she termed ghosting, to help students control their sound. She had students shadow-play passages that required a soft dynamic. She described the technique in the following manner:

Shadow-playing is the process by which the student plays the passage silently on the surface of the keys. I enjoy telling my students that we are "ghosting" because it sounds as silent as a ghost would if he were playing the piano.¹⁴⁸

Combining this idea with Stop and Prepare, Powell would have students stop before a soft passage, and then have them ghost, or shadow-play, the next phrase. The result was a greater range of dynamic contrast. Powell found that the ghosting practice technique worked with students of all ages and levels of playing.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 54-55.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 54.

11. Role Reversal

This simple yet effective teaching tool involves the teacher and student switching places so that the student corrects the intentional mistakes of the teacher. Powell summarized the process, "Role reversal in which you make mistakes for the child to correct is excellent. He consequently feels freer to make and then allows you to correct his mistakes. I often demonstrate a passage a good and a bad way for a child and ask him which way he prefers."¹⁴⁹ This strategy also eliminates verbal explanations and trains the student's ear to listen for mistakes.

12. Preparation for Success

In many ways, every element of Powell's teaching philosophy prepares students to have a successful experience at the piano. While giving students the tools for technical proficiency and musical taste, Powell constantly prepared them for new experiences in regard to repertoire, sight-reading, and performance opportunities. Her process of preparation used several strategies in tandem such as breaking down into steps, demonstration, being specific, and parental involvement.

To prepare students to be successful with new repertoire, Powell followed a three-step procedure. Before beginning a new piece, she would preview challenging sections by demonstrating for the child and giving verbal explanations to the parent. She also expected parents to have an understanding of the physical

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 35.

motions needed for good technique while incorporating as many musical ideas as possible. Next, the new piece was divided into sections making sure that each section was learned correctly before proceeding to the next. Finally, Powell marked the sections that would require extra attention during the home practice. In summing up this process, she stated, “All of this is done with great care, for I am strongly committed to preparing them for success.”¹⁵⁰

Powell utilized several strategies when working with students on sight-reading so that they could have a successful experience learning to read music. She explained:

I treat the arrival of learning to read with great excitement in my studio. At first I spend a rather large portion of the lesson with it so that I can prepare the parent and child for success by demonstrating the steps involved in successful reading.”¹⁵¹

For the first step, Powell had the student tap and count the rhythm on the fallboard so that the student understood the rhythms in each hand. Secondly, the score was examined for information such as key signature, dynamic markings, phrase indications, or articulations. The student also identified intervals and their direction. When possible, chords were identified and labeled. Next, the student was to play through the piece silently on the surface of the keys to further bolster their confidence. Powell stated, “If the first three steps are followed carefully, there

¹⁵⁰ Powell, *10 Viewpoints*, 125-126.

¹⁵¹ Rebecca Grooms Johnson, “Exploring the Teaching of Mary Craig Powell,” 44.

is a strong possibility that the results of this final step will be as desired.”¹⁵² Once these steps were completed, the student played the piece in its entirety.

To prepare children for performances, Powell extensively used play-acting.

She described the process:

Young children love to play-act for their ‘pretend audiences’ of stuffed animals and dolls at home. Before recitals they enjoy the assignment of practicing walking to the stage, bowing, assuming fine posture and rest position before playing, getting into ready-set position, playing, resuming rest position, bowing, and returning to their seats from their pretend stage. After this kind of preparation, the uncertainty is gone and they normally approach the stage with great confidence, even for their first recital.¹⁵³

When preparing students for adjudicated events such as competitions and festivals, Powell would again play-act using a doll as the adjudicator. She described the activity:

Each child went through the ritual of presenting him (the doll) the music as we walked into the pretend festival room. After being seated, the child would then ask the doll if he could test the piano before beginning his piece. Every step was play-acted so that the stress of the unknown was relieved... Confident, secure performances emerged from the children who knew what to expect.¹⁵⁴

By knowing what to expect, students would be less anxious and would ultimately perform better. Powell would go to any length to provide her students with a positive, fun, and enriching experience.

Powell’s twelve teaching strategies are an amalgamation of elements taken from the Suzuki philosophy and concepts she encountered in her research of child psychology. The way in which she used them added a sense of organization to the

¹⁵² Powell, *Focus*, 43-45.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

lesson and provided students and their parents with the skills necessary to learn how to play the piano proficiently. Teachers, whether Suzuki or traditional, can utilize any number of Powell's strategies to enhance their teaching.

CHAPTER FOUR

Personal Reflections

Mary Craig Powell's career as a piano pedagogue spanned five decades and her impact on students and teachers was profound. The contents of this chapter are taken from notes and recollections of the principal investigator, along with personal reflections of those who participated in collected surveys for the study. Conclusions will be drawn from this information combined with information presented in the study. Powell's contributions to the field of piano pedagogy, her career, and philosophy are a culmination of her influences as a teacher and her compassionate demeanor.

The principal investigator's initial introduction to Powell came at the Piano Pedagogy Symposium during the summer of 2011. The Symposium took place in the Catlett Music Center on the campus of the University of Oklahoma and was coordinated by Dr. Jane Magrath. Anna Salmon was also present at the Symposium and gave the following account:

Powell was recommended to me by my graduate studies teacher, Jane Magrath who introduced me to Powell at a summer pedagogy symposium held at the University of Oklahoma. I was already interested in taking Suzuki piano teacher training. After watching Powell's presentations at the OU symposium, I asked if I could do training with her during the same summer and she invited me to Ohio to do so.(Salmon)¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ White, "Survey for Former Students."

Powell gave a two-part lecture at the Symposium in which she discussed the main concepts of the Suzuki philosophy, showed videos of her teaching, and introduced the audience to Fred the Frog, her puppet that she consistently used as a teaching aid.¹⁵⁶

The principal investigator was fortunate to have attended and completed two of Powell's teacher-training seminars before she was forced to retire due to her terminal illness. The first session was held from June 22 until June 29, 2014 and included the primer course Every Child Can as well as Unit 1 of the Suzuki Piano curriculum. The second seminar was the following summer, June 20 to June 24, 2015, which covered Unit 2 and Unit 3. During this training seminar, the principal investigator stayed at Powell's personal residence in Columbus, Ohio for the duration of the course.

The teacher-training seminars were coordinated through the SAA which requires the completion of a certain number of hours of lecturing and observation to fulfill the requirements of the seminar. A typical seminar was five to six days in length and convened in the recital hall at the Graves Piano and Organ Company store in Columbus, Ohio. These seminars were attended by roughly 15 teachers who were either in the early stages of their Suzuki training or were re-enrolling in Powell's seminar for a second or third time. Teachers traveled great distances to take her training courses, with some coming from Indonesia to study with Powell.

The two teacher-training seminars attended by the Principal Investigator covered and completed Piano Unit 1, 2, and 3. Over the course of these seminars

¹⁵⁶ Principal investigator, Personal notes.

Powell explained her teaching process from the beginner student through the intermediate level. She was very detailed and organized about starting new students. For Powell, the learning process began with listening. She asked her students to listen to recordings of the repertoire one to two hours a day with some of that time focused on listening to the piece currently being studied. Students on her waitlist were also asked to begin listening prior to the first lesson. Developing a student's aural awareness was always one of her top priorities.

In her opening remarks, Powell impressed upon the class the sentiment that teaching is a noble profession. The emphasis was not so much on what skills teachers were giving their students, but how they were achieving their pedagogical goals. Powell's view of teaching being a noble pursuit carried over to how teachers presented themselves in the lesson, carrying with it an air of professionalism and the expectation of high standards. Above all else, Powell acknowledged that achieving these standards was to be done with love and respect for the student. She adamantly believed that the manner in which teachers interact with students has a powerful and lasting impact on their future success.

She also stressed that any piano method, be it Suzuki or traditional, was only as good as the teacher behind it.¹⁵⁷ This statement held a double meaning. On one hand, an effective teacher can teach effectively and be successful using any piano method. Conversely, any piano method will not achieve its maximum potential without a competent, well-trained teacher guiding the instruction. Powell often used moments of self-reflection, such as this, to help teachers assess and improve

¹⁵⁷ Private investigator, Personal notes.

their teaching. In her article, "A Suzuki Quiz: How Effective is Your Teaching?", as well as her book *Focus on Suzuki Piano*, Powell used a similar style of reflection for teachers to evaluate not only how they present themselves during the lesson but also how they are presenting information to both the student and parent.

The importance of technical skills was evident in Powell's teaching and writings. She strove to establish and develop a proper technical facility from the first lesson. She was specific about how the student was seated at the piano, their posture, and hand position. She used vivid imagery such as a tree to describe their posture, a car driving across a bridge to show that the forearm should be straight and parallel with the floor, and fingers arched tall enough that a pencil could slide under the hand or, as Powell described it, a kitten going underneath a bridge. All of this was conducted with the parent taking notes and participating in the lesson. To help support a hand position that was relaxed with firm, yet curved fingers, Powell would hold a student's arm with one hand while the other supported the knuckle closest to the fingertip. She had the participants of the seminar demonstrate this technique on her hand as if she were the student. Her technical approach fostered a hand position with a relaxed wrist using arm weight to produce a rich tone from the instrument.

Powell's approach to teaching the repertoire was equally well-thought-out. She followed a process where the right-hand begins learning a piece and the left-hand catches up later on in the learning process. Once a piece was mastered hands alone, Powell would put the hands together very slowly, often one note or one measure at a time. This style of learning relied heavily on the Stop and Prepare

technique. New repertoire was introduced through preview sections which highlighted new skills or challenging sections. This organized approach guaranteed greater success for the student by avoiding frustrating mistakes.

An important component to the teacher-training seminars were the hours spent observing Powell teach. A typical day consisted of four hours of lecture and four hours of observations with an average of four to six lessons being observed. Powell would arrange for students from her studio or from studios of local teachers to have lessons during the week of the training seminar so the class could observe her teaching.

She required the teachers in training to take notes during the observations which were submitted for Powell's review at the end of each day. She asked the teachers to note the various activities conducted during the lesson and identify which of her teaching strategies were being employed. Powell could move seamlessly from praising a student's effort to addressing what needed to be improved upon. The following example comes from the notes of the principal investigator with the teaching strategies in bold:

Student plays first, several tempo and rhythm issues. Powell, "Thank you for playing that for me."**(Positive psychology)** Suggests using metronome and tells mom what speed to use and explains how it will help fix rhythms.**(Parent involvement/being specific)** Tells student that the piece is a dance form and that she can hear that the parents dance first and then the children dance.**(Use of creativity)** "When the children dance do you think it would be softer than when the parents dance?"**(Discovery learning)** On the student's forearm the teacher plays with the weight needed for the parents' dance and then has the student play on the teacher's arm.**(Demonstration)** Then transfers this idea to the keyboard.**(Breaking down in to steps/One-point focus)** Student plays with stark dynamic contrast. Next teacher puts out small frog erasers and big Fred to show a visual representation of the sound. **(Creativity)** Suggests to student and

mom that they play this five times a day using the metronome. (**Specific assignment**)¹⁵⁸

Powell did not use her teaching strategies in isolation, rather, they were used in chorus with one another. Nearly everything she did or said during a lesson could be traced back to one or more of these strategies. Another observation had a similar flow:

Student plays right-hand alone. Powell compliments student on such good behavior and how he handles himself at the piano. (**Positive psychology**) Addresses hand position which seems very flat. Powell demonstrates a better hand position by sliding a pen under the student's hand. The pen is car going under the bridge, or the hand. (**One-point/Creativity**) The next song is played hands separate. Powell asks student look at one hand to focus on that part. (**One-point Focus**) Next teacher plays RH as student plays LH and then trade hands, and finally the student plays hands together. (**Breaking down into steps**) Using the broken CD idea they repeat one small section several times in a row. (**Preparation for Success/One-point focus**) Focuses on one beat where hands come together using a familiar rhythm to get the physical feeling. Adding one note at a time they continue feeling how the hands work together. (**Steps**) Tells mom that she's just giving suggestions for practice techniques. (**Parental involvement**) Previews the next piece. (**Preparation for Success**) Teacher plays RH and student blocks the LH chords. (**Steps**) Has student listen to the harmonies and where the chord changes. (**Discovery Learning**) Then with hands on lap they go through the opening rhythm beat by beat adding a beat each time. (**One-point focus/Steps**) Then addressing the parent, Powell gives more instructions about the rhythm. (**Parental involvement/Being Specific**)¹⁵⁹

Powell would often begin by complimenting the student and would then seamlessly transition to specific areas of improvement.

Powell rarely needed to discipline a student during these lessons. Having a piano lesson in a large recital hall with other piano teachers watching was enough

¹⁵⁸ Principal investigator, Personal notes.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

to ensure they were on their best behavior. There was only one instance that required Powell to be stern with a student, and the manner in which she did it was extraordinary. After a jittery child was asked twice to keep their legs still, Powell simply stopped the lesson and said, "I'll wait until you are ready to play and keep your legs still." The entire room sat there in complete silence for about twenty seconds until the student finally complied. It was a unique moment in which Powell was able to correct the student's behavior without saying a word, she simply stopped the lesson until the child was ready to relax her feet and focus.¹⁶⁰

Outside of the lectures and observations, there was ample time for the participants to get to know each other and interact with Powell. There were coffee breaks throughout the day where the class would mingle in the breakroom of the music store. Powell would also arrange for the participants to go out to lunch together in the beginning of the week and on the second to last day of the seminar, the class would go out for dinner. At the end of the dinner Powell would always insist on buying dessert for everyone.

While attending the Unit 2 and Unit 3 teacher-training seminar, June 22–26 of 2015, the principal investigator, along with Arthur Villar, had the privilege of staying at Powell's residence for the duration of the course. Powell was extremely hospitable. She understood the time commitment and financial burden involved in attending a week-long training seminar and would house as many participants as possible. While staying with Powell, there was time in the morning and evenings to share meals together and she allowed us to practice on her piano whenever we

¹⁶⁰ Personal notes.

wanted. Her finished basement was also available to her guests as a place to study or relax and watch television. Powell was an easy person to talk to and conversations with her were always interesting. Vilar described his personal interactions with Powell in the following manner: “She was one of the kindest people I have ever known. She inspired the ones around her not necessarily by what things she said but by being who she was.”¹⁶¹

On a separate occasion, Jennifer Tripi also stayed with Powell during her teacher-training and had the following recollections:

My favorite memories are staying at her house during training and eating dinner with her, Jim, and Anna Salmon. We would all cook dinner together and drink wine. We called her house “Hotel Powell” and when she had a bigger house after marrying Jim, a couple others stayed there as well. I loved getting to hear all the stories from her travels to Asia or South America to teach, or how she got into teaching Suzuki in the first place. (Tripi)¹⁶²

Powell was admired not just by the teachers who trained with her, but by her colleagues as well. She earned the respect of those she worked with and her genuine, caring personality was also evident in those relationships:

It was an honor to know and work with Mary Craig. Her legacy will live on in her students, the many teachers all over the world that she trained, in her publications, and in the hearts of all who knew her. (Johnson)¹⁶³

Fellow Suzuki piano teacher, Fay Adams, shared personal stories that showed that while Powell carried with her a sense of professionalism, there was also a fun-loving side to her personality as well:

¹⁶¹ White, “Survey for Former Students.”

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, August 13, 2019).

Mary Craig and I were at a Leadership Retreat together and wanted to see the sights in Carmel, California. We slipped away from the retreat not knowing that both of us would be introduced at a meeting that evening. We were not there, and we caught so much grief from our friends, but we had a great time. On another occasion she and I went to the top of Snowmass Mountain at one of our institutes at Snowmass, Colorado. She did not have good hiking shoes and she and I slid all the way down. We could not quit laughing. Wish I could think of more, but she loved to have a good time. (Adams)¹⁶⁴

The warmth of Powell's personality also made a lasting impression on her former students. One former student recalled:

Her smile is infectious and captures your attention. She made me capable of playing musically and I'm proud of and thankful for. She taught me to listen, pay attention to the overall theme and story of the piece, but also the details that make it special. She expected excellence and got it. She also expected piano to be enjoyable, which it was. (Howels)¹⁶⁵

It seemed that Powell was equally concerned about establishing a personal bond with those she knew as she was about being professional.

Finding any shortcomings with Powell as a teacher or person was a difficult task. When asked what Powell's weaknesses were as a teacher, many struggled to name one. Reluctantly, only one participant offered any information on this subject saying, "I hate this question and feel bad answering. If forced, I'd say she was bad with technology, and the internet, and Facebook."¹⁶⁶ Powell was so admired by the people in her life that they could not recall any ill feelings towards her. She was an inspiration and role model for all who knew her.

¹⁶⁴ Fay Adams, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, August 29, 2019).

¹⁶⁵ White, "Survey for Former Students."

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

The principal investigator's interactions with Powell were limited to two teacher-training seminars completed in 2014 and 2015. The summer of 2015 was the last time she was able to offer teacher-training seminars. Shortly thereafter she was diagnosed with a terminal illness and was forced to stop teaching. It was also because of her illness that the principal investigator was unable to interview her for this study. It would have been an invaluable resource to have Powell describe her teaching philosophy in- depth with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. Instead, the principal investigator has utilized Powell's writings, interviews, and the memories of those who knew her well to reconstruct the best possible account of who she was as a teacher and as a human being.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Further Study

Mary Craig Powell's career as a piano teacher and piano pedagogue unfolded over fifty years. Through Powell's teaching, training seminars, writings, and roles in professional organizations, her contributions to students and teachers were profound. This chapter attempts to answer the research questions posed in the Purpose of the Study, found in Chapter one, that guided the study. Suggestions for further study conclude this final chapter.

Summary of Mary Craig Powell's Philosophy and Pedagogy

What personal experiences led Powell to become a pianist and a teacher?

Powell's teaching career began in 1964 after graduating with a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Wichita State University. Her career as a teacher can be categorized into four distinct stages. In her early academic career, Powell held several adjunct faculty positions at Campbell College, Erskine College and Augustana College between 1964 and 1972.

The second stage of Powell's teaching career began in 1973 when she and her family relocated to Athens, Ohio. It was during this time that Powell's pedagogical philosophy began to take form. Not only did she establish herself as an

independent piano teacher, but also made the shift to the Suzuki piano method. Her introduction to the method was the result of her experience as a mother after enrolling her two sons, Robert and John, in Suzuki violin lessons. As a parent, Powell was impressed by the method's effectiveness and, at the suggestion of the violin teacher, Lorraine Fink, she began to explore the method's approach to piano instruction. She began her formal training in the piano method during the summer of 1978 under the direction of prominent teachers such as Haruko Kataoka, Carol Biggler, and Valerie Lloyd Watts.

The Suzuki method's philosophy of creating a learning environment that is positive and non-judgmental became the foundation of Powell's pedagogical philosophy. She was attracted to the method's ability to develop a child as an artist while also building character. She stated, "it's been extremely exciting to start the preschool child and to have that many years to develop them."¹⁶⁷ Powell's love for working with children became the hallmark of her legacy.

In 1984 Powell began the third stage of her career with two major accomplishments. She accepted a full-time teaching position at Capital University as Community Music School Faculty in Suzuki Piano, Adjunct Instructor in Applied Piano, and Instructor of Intermediate Piano Pedagogy. Concurrently Powell completed training to become the one of first accredited Suzuki piano teacher-trainer in the United States. From that point on, Powell's prominence and legacy as a master teacher began to grow.

¹⁶⁷ Knerr, *Strategies*, 846.

The fourth and final stage began in 2005 when Powell retired from her position at Capital University. From 2005 until her retirement in 2018, she continued to teach pre-college students out of her home studio in Columbus, Ohio. She continued to conduct her teacher-training seminars until a terminal illness forced her to retire in 2016.

What was Powell's teaching philosophy and how did it change throughout her career? What significant changes occurred in her teaching?

Powell's teaching philosophy can best be described as a synthesis of elements of the Suzuki philosophy and the work of child psychologists such as Haim Ginott. The most significant change in her teaching came in 1978 when she began her training in the Suzuki piano method. Many of her teaching strategies, such as stop and prepare, one-point focus, good psychology, parental involvement, breaking things into steps, and teacher demonstration come directly from the Suzuki method. Similarly other strategies such as role reversal, use of creativity, discovery learning, and preparation for success, stem from Ginott's notion of capturing a child's heart in order to captivate their mind.

The evolution of Powell's teaching philosophy began in 1978 when she began her Suzuki training at Stephens Point, Wisconsin after seeing how well it worked in her sons' violin lessons. Over the course of the next forty years, Powell's teaching became more detailed, organized, creative, and more effective. The amount of detailed information found in her writings and interviews reveals a systematic approach to teaching technique and artistry. Perhaps more importantly, Powell knew not only what to teach, but how to teach it. She took

great care in how she communicated with students and parents. She explained the powerful effect of clear and concise instruction:

I've had people from places like Julliard. And I'll never forget that this one young teacher came one summer for training with me. At the end of the course, she said to me, "If I could manage it, to get here from New York City, could I come in about once a month or every 6 weeks and study with you?" And she said, "Because you know how to help people. And my teacher doesn't." And I've realized that all across the world on the international scene, from the babies who start to the people who are studying at the Julliards of the world, their teachers might know what they want, but they don't know how to get it across except just to tell you that you can't do it.¹⁶⁸

For Powell, knowing how to teach meant choosing her words carefully, following an organized approach to teaching piano, and holding the parent accountable for practicing and assignments while providing the student with a safe, non-judgmental learning environment.

What teaching techniques and methods characterized Powell's teaching style?

Powell's core teaching techniques are embodied in her twelve teaching strategies. The strategies were the foundation of her pedagogical philosophy and are the result of a combination of influences. As illustrated in Chapter three, Powell used these teaching strategies in chorus with one another throughout the course of a typical lesson.

Another crucial element to Powell's teaching style was the way in which she engaged the parents during the lesson. The Suzuki method relies heavily on the parent guiding the practice at home throughout the week. In doing this, Powell was able to shift the responsibility of the student's progress from the child to the

¹⁶⁸ Knerr, *Strategies*, 855.

parent. If the child was unprepared for the lesson, it was the parent's failing, not the child's. Former parent and student summed up this approach the following way: "Both Alex and I owe everything we are today as pianists, and myself as a teacher, to Mary Craig Powell and her brilliant tough as nails, soft as a feather approach to high level teaching and student-centered results."¹⁶⁹

This style of teaching allowed her to be warm, kind, and gentle with the student, while being firm yet specific about expectations with the parent.

What were the major contributions of Powell's career at Capital University? How did she impact fellow faculty members?

Powell's prominence as a master teacher grew substantially during her tenure at Capital University, 1984–2005. Her work as a guest clinician and teacher-trainer steadily increased during this time and her reputation grew to international proportions as she traveled across the world to appear as a guest speaker and workshop clinician. Powell took her teaching duties very seriously and, while she worked primarily with pre-college students through the University's Community Music School, she also taught applied piano and an intermediate piano pedagogy class. Unfortunately, not much is known about what materials or curriculum she followed as an instructor of intermediate piano pedagogy or applied piano lessons. Powell was adamant about devoting all of her effort to teaching regardless of the

¹⁶⁹ White, "Survey for Former Students."

setting.¹⁷⁰ A student who studied with Powell during this time recalled her experience:

She was very warm, she played on my arm a lot and I played on hers. She captivated me in a way that is sincere and inspired me to do my best. I had to work hard and show up, she did the same thing. It was a reciprocal relationship that she had and once I caught on to that, it was easier for me to put in the work. (Howels)¹⁷¹

The combination of a warm, compassionate personality and high expectations and strong work ethic made Powell a unique teacher.

It would seem that Powell played a positive role in the lives of those who knew her including her colleagues at Capital University. As a colleague and friend, Rebecca Grooms Johnson reflected on her experiences working with Powell, “Her pedagogic knowledge and instructional skills reach far beyond the confines of a particular method or philosophy. Watching Mary Craig teach is a revelatory and inspiring experience.”¹⁷² As a person, a colleague, and teacher, Powell inspired those who came in contact with her in a way that was both professional and endearing.

What were the major contributions of Powell’s career as an independent piano teacher?

Following her departure from Capital University in 2005, Powell maintained a private studio at her residence in Columbus, Ohio. She continued to teach until

¹⁷⁰ Principal investigator, Persona Notes.

¹⁷¹ White, “Survey for Former Students.”

¹⁷² Rebecca Grooms Johnson, “Exploring the Teaching of Mary Craig Powell,” *Clavier Companion*, vol. 5, issue 5, 44.

poor health forced her to retire in 2018. Her work as an independent piano teacher carried on the same work ethic and teaching philosophy seen during her time at Capital University. She continued teaching pre-college students and expected the same high standards from students and parents. If anything, Powell refined her teaching techniques as she accumulated more experience as a teacher. However, the core elements of her pedagogical philosophy and her teaching strategies remained as steadfast as ever.

What were Powell's major contributions as a trainer of teachers? What techniques and methods characterized her teacher-training seminars?

In 1984 Powell became one of the first accredited piano teacher-trainers recognized by the SAA in the United States. For thirty-four years she shared her knowledge with an incalculable number of teachers from all over the world. During these teacher-training seminars, teachers learned about the Suzuki philosophy, the important teaching points in the Suzuki repertoire, and Powell's twelve teaching strategies.

During her numerous teacher-training seminars, teachers spent a good deal of time observing Powell teach piano lessons. She asked that teachers observe when and how she implemented a teaching strategy during the lesson. She had a way of seamlessly transitioning from one strategy to another, using them in chorus to address any issue the student might be having with a piece.

Above all else, Powell stressed the important role that teachers play in a child's development as a musician and as a person as well. She often stated that

she considered teaching to be a noble profession and thought carefully about her actions and words when teaching.

Given the various aspects of Powell's professional career as a teacher and pedagogue, how are her contributions best summarized? What can students and teachers learn from Powell's diverse career and experiences that will impact and improve their own study of piano pedagogy?

The information collected for this study revealed two aspects of Powell's teaching that seemed to be present throughout her career and can be interpreted as her most impactful contributions to field of piano pedagogy. The first was her way of teaching with kindness. Using the non-judgmental psychology of the Suzuki method combined with her research on child psychology, Powell cultivated a way of communicating with students that was positive and encouraging. One teacher surmised this process the following way:

Her love and respect for kids, and her deep understanding of their psychology were genuine and noble. When I was struggling with the dilemma of balancing high standards and student resistance, she advised me: if you need to choose between music and the child, choose the child. This important lesson has informed my teaching to this very day.¹⁷³

Close friend and colleague Fay Adams echoed this sentiment:

Mary Craig was a wonderful teacher but also a wonderful friend. She treated her friends just like she treated her students, with love and respect. I feel so fortunate to have known her and to have studied with her. What a legacy she leaves as a teacher. I think about her every day in my teaching!
(Adams)¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Marina Obukovsky, "Remembering Mary Craig Powell," <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/remembering-mary-craig-powell> (accessed March 10, 2021).

¹⁷⁴ Fay Adams, Questionnaire Response (Questionnaire for Former Colleagues, August 29, 2019).

Another teacher remembered Powell's teaching:

When Mary Craig worked with a student, it seemed as if the whole world fell away, there was nothing more important to her than being there, in a moment with each student. She always maintained eye contact while speaking to children and had an incredible gift of holding and maintaining their attention. To Mary Craig every student had potential, every student was cherished, and every effort, no matter how feeble, was applauded and celebrated.¹⁷⁵

It seemed that everyone who came in contact with Powell was drawn to her dignified character, her compassion, and empathetic personality.

The second component of her legacy as a master teacher was her adherence to high standards. To meet these standards, she relied heavily on the parent being involved with the practice at home and observing every lesson. She took great care in interviewing parents before they were allowed to join her studio. She made it clear that there was a level of dedication and commitment expected of both the child and parent. During the lesson, she placed the bulk of the responsibilities on the parent thus avoiding too many demands or stress on the student.

Powell was also extremely detailed oriented and strove to be as specific as possible when explaining assignments and expectations. Her writings are a testament to how detailed her approach was to teaching artistry and technique. Her book, *Focus on Suzuki Piano*, along with the information collected in Julie Knerr's dissertation show how well-thought-out every step of the learning process was. She spent a great deal of time considering how to teach, from the physical

¹⁷⁵ Malgosia Lis, "Remembering Mary Craig Powell," <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/remembering-mary-craig-powell> (accessed March 10, 2021).

motions needed to play the piano, to the way she worded her instructions to be as clear and precise as possible. Addressing her expectations Powell stated:

I really feel that children can do just about anything I ask them as long as I find a childlike approach to make it attractive for them and make it so appealing that they don't mind doing whatever I ask.¹⁷⁶

With the right combination of encouragement and high standards Powell consistently produced students who played with technical ease and sophisticated musicality.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study contains an analysis of the career of Mary Craig Powell, her pedagogical philosophy, and teaching strategies. The following projects are recommended as possible studies to expand the research in the field of piano pedagogy.

1. Replicate this type of study with other master teachers. Investigate the pedagogical philosophies of other piano teachers, Suzuki or traditional, who work primarily with pre-college piano students. This would include teachers of varying statures, not necessarily those with an international reputation such as Powell.
2. Design a study which includes a survey of teachers' beliefs and opinions related to the teaching philosophies used as the structure for this study.
3. Survey the video archives of workshops, conferences, and teacher-training seminars featuring Powell, in order to document her unique style of teaching and philosophy. These videos may contain important information concerning Powell's teaching philosophy and strategies.

¹⁷⁶ Knerr, 626.

4. Document the archives and history of the conferences of the Suzuki Association of the Americas. Information regarding presenters and the content of each conference is not readily available.
5. Document the development of the Suzuki Piano Method, including its beginning and the growth. This study should be conducted as soon as possible because of the age of key human resources.
6. Conduct a study on the status of the independent piano teacher as a profession and how it has changed throughout the last fifty years. Other teachers, like Powell, have devoted their careers to teaching pre-college students and sharing their knowledge with other teachers. Such a study could examine the growth of the profession through the work of other prominent teachers.

The true legacies of piano pedagogues are not completely defined by their perceived contributions to the field as a whole. The most significant contribution of any teacher is who they taught, what they taught, and, perhaps most importantly, how they taught. The principal investigator hopes that this study will spur future interest into documenting the philosophies and approaches of our most prized teachers so that future pedagogues can truly emulate and learn from their excellence.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY MARY CRAIG POWELL

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- Powell, Mary Craig. "One Thing at a Time Please." *American Suzuki Journal* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 35-36.
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APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FORMER COLLEAGUES

3820 Springvalley Rd. Apt. 614
Addison, TX 75001

April 1, 2015

The contributions of Mary Craig Powell to piano pedagogy are the subject of my D.M.A. document at the University of Oklahoma. Mary Craig has given me her approval for this study. Because of your work as a Suzuki Piano Teacher, you are in a position to provide important information for this research. I would like to request twenty to thirty minutes of your time in order to complete an individual interview by telephone. I have designed interview questions for you about your remembrances, impressions, and opinions of Mary Craig Powell.

I will be sending a list of interview questions to you prior to our phone conversation. Please answer all questions as honestly and completely as possible, giving all remarks or details you think are helpful in explaining your answer. With your permission, I will record the audio from the interview. My goal is to arrive at a fair, balanced, and historically accurate document that will preserve the significant contributions of Mary Craig Powell for future generations of piano pedagogues and students.

I would like to quote you by name in my document. However, if you wish to keep your answers confidential, I will certainly honor this request. You can notify me of this by responding accordingly to my inquiry at the opening of the interview.

Please feel free to call me at (484) 707-8781 or faculty supervisor Dr. Barbara Fast at (405) 325-5444 if you have any questions. All correspondences can be handled by email if you prefer.

Thank You very much. Your consideration is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. White

Home Phone (484) 707-8781

Email: Thomas.r.white-2@ou.edu

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FORMER COLLEAGUES

1. Do you wish to participate in this research?
2. Are you willing to be named and to be quoted as an individual in the document resulting from this research?
3. How long have you known Mary Craig Powell professionally?
4. What was your professional relationship?
5. How would you characterize Powell as a person?
6. How would you describe Powell's personality?
7. What, in your opinion, motivated Powell in her professional life?
8. Can you share any extraordinary, colorful, or other anecdotes that would illuminate her character, personality, and teaching style?
9. How would you characterize Powell as a teacher?
10. How would you characterize Powell's teaching style?
11. What skills does she possess that set her apart as a teacher?
12. What could other teachers or students learn from Powell's teaching style?
13. How would you characterize Powell as a professional collaborator?
14. How would you describe Powell's philosophies of piano pedagogy?
15. What, in your opinion, are Powell's greatest contributions to the field of piano pedagogy?
16. Is there anything that you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER AND SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR FORMER STUDENTS

COVER LETTER FOR SURVEY OF FORMER STUDENT

Online Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Thomas White from the Music Department and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Mary Craig Powell and her Contributions to Piano Pedagogy. This research is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma. You were selected as a possible participant because of your professional relationship with Mary Craig Powell. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to document the life and career of master piano teacher Mary Craig Powell by collecting documents and information collected from interviews of professional colleagues and former students.

How many participants will be in this research? About 30 people will take part in this research. This includes 8 professional colleagues and 22 former students.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to complete an online survey.

How long will this take? Your participation will take approximately 45 minutes.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

Data are collected via an online survey system that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to the use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

What will happen to my data in the future?

We will not share your data or use it in future research projects.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at

Thomas White Ph: (484)-707-8781

Tom.white@suzukimusicdallas.org

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR FORMER STUDENTS

SECTION A: For all Students

1. Where did you study with Mary Craig Powell?
 Capital University
 Other: _____

2. What did you Study with Mary Craig Powell? (select all that apply)
 Piano, pre-college undergraduate Piano Pedagogy,
 Piano, undergraduate graduate Piano Pedagogy,
 Piano, graduate Teacher Training

3. What prompted you to study with Powell? What factors, such as location, reputation, advertising, professional development, etc., influenced your decision?

4. Describe the role that music plays in your life?

5. Describe the amount and type of contact you have had with Powell since being her student. Please include any professional collaborations.

6. Describe Powell as a person:
 A. Describe her demeanor.
 B. What personal interactions with Powell can you share?

7. Describe the relationship that you had with Powell as your teacher.

8. Describe the impact Powell has had on your life and career.

9. According to your own experiences, what do you think are Powell's strengths as a teacher

10. According to your own experiences, what do you think are Powell's weaknesses as a teacher?

11. Describe Powell as a teacher:
 - A. What traits made her an effective teacher?
 - B. How did she motivate students?
 - C. How did she encourage students?
 - D. What standards and expectations did she have?

SECTION B: Former Piano Students of Mary Craig Powell

12. Approximately what age were you when you took lessons with Powell?
13. Please list dates of study with Powell. Years (such as 1998-2000)
14. Did your musical education begin with Powell or were you a transfer student?
15. Were you a Suzuki or traditional student? If you were a Suzuki student, please indicate what book levels you studied with Powell.
16. Describe a typical lesson with Powell:
 - A. Describe the teaching environment.
 - B. Describe the content and sequencing of the lesson.
 - C. Describe the goals and assignments given during a lesson.
 - D. Describe the feedback given during the lesson.
 - E. Describe Powell's most effective teaching techniques.
17. Describe her approach to teaching the following:
 - A. Phrasing and musicality
 - B. Technique
 - C. Sight Reading
 - D. Listening
 - E. Parental Involvement
 - F. Rhythm
 - G. Music Theory
 - H. Practicing
 - I. Performing
 - J. Piano literature
 - K. Other topics

18. Describe any games, activities, props or additional materials used during the lesson.
19. Describe any group classes you attended:
 - A. Describe any class activities or games.
 - B. Describe the role of performance.
 - C. Describe Powell's approach to teaching music history.
20. Describe Powell as a teacher of children.
21. Did you participate in piano competitions when you studied with Powell? If yes, what awards, prizes or scholarships did you receive?
22. What aspect of Powell's teaching impacted you the most?
23. Please list any other memorable experiences you have from studying piano with Mary Craig Powell.
24. In addition to lessons, did you ever receive Suzuki Teacher Training from Mary Craig Powell?

SECTION C: Suzuki Piano Teachers who received their teacher-training from Powell.

25. When and where did you complete your training with Mary Craig Powell?
26. How were you first introduced to Powell? What circumstances led you to enroll in a teacher-training course?
27. What level of training did you complete with Powell? Have you ever retaken a course taught by Powell?
28. Describe what you learned in each of the following areas during your training with Powell.
 - A. Teaching reading and rhythm.
 - B. Teaching technique.
 - C. Teaching musicality.
 - D. Teaching music theory.
 - E. Teaching how to practice.
 - F. Teaching group classes
 - G. Beginning students

- H. Intermediate students
- I. Advanced students
- J. Repertoire for students
- K. Sequencing and pacing
- L. Lesson planning and curriculum
- M. Motivating students
- N. Standards and expectations
- O. Working with parents
- P. Professionalism

29. Describe Powell's approach to working with children.
30. Describe Powell's interaction with students' parents.
31. Describe any unique or effective teaching techniques used by Powell.
32. Did you observe Powell teaching a lesson? If yes, please describe the content, pacing, effectiveness, and techniques used by Powell during the lesson.
33. Which key concepts, philosophies or teaching techniques do you feel make Powell a successful teacher?
34. How has your training with Powell changed your own teaching?

SECTION D: Concluding Questions for All Former Students

35. Have you or do you currently use any of Powell's teaching techniques or philosophies in your own teaching? Please describe what has impacted you the most.
36. Describe at least two specific events, such as parts of lessons or classes that are most memorable about your experiences with Powell.
37. What, in your opinion, are Powell's lasting contributions to the field of piano pedagogy?
38. Additional comments.
39. May I include your name with your remarks? If yes, please list your name here.

40. May I contact you for additional participation in this study? If yes, list your name and contact information.