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# An investigation into the factors influencing teachers' inclusion of improvisation in piano lessons

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## Abstract

Despite the evidence of the benefits of improvisation in instrumental teaching, research indicates that many piano teachers do not include it in their lessons. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influences on piano teachers' pedagogy to determine what factors impacted the teaching of improvisation. A total of 117 UK-based piano teachers participated in the survey. The data obtained indicates that an understanding of how to teach improvisation is a significant influence on teachers' pedagogy. The conclusion argues that there is a need for piano teachers to have greater access to instrumental teaching courses to encourage them to reflect on their teaching practice.

**Keywords:** Piano teaching; improvisation; teacher training; teacher pedagogy

## The use of improvisation in piano lessons

Research reports that many piano teachers in the UK focus on teaching notation, repertoire and technique, while skills such as improvisation and composition are less commonly taught. The results of the Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) indicated that whilst the majority (95.6%) of respondents frequently taught note reading, 41.3% rarely taught improvisation. This focus on note reading at the expense of creating new music has not always been the case. Gellrich and Parcutt (1998) report that before the 1850s, piano performance was a creative art. Improvisation and composition were considered important skills for pianists and it was expected that both would regularly be included in their education. However, since the mid-1800s, classical piano lessons have focused on the reproductive approach of notation and repertoire (Gellrich and Parcutt, 1998), and the teaching of improvisation has become less common. In contrast, improvisation is commonly taught in the context of jazz. This has resulted in a prevailing mind-set where improvisation is generally associated with jazz piano and classical piano is associated with notation (Ashley, 2008; Beckstead, 2013). This focus on notation at the expense of other skills is problematic for two reasons: firstly, an emphasis on note reading has been linked to a number of difficulties in instrumental learning (Chappell, 1999; Priest, 1989; Rooke, 1991); secondly, there are many benefits to the use of improvisation in instrumental teaching (Chappell, 1999; Peggie, 1985; Rooke, 1991).

## The benefits of improvisation

Improvisation places the ear at the centre of the musical experience, developing aural acuity (Chappell, 1999; Peggie, 1985). It gives students opportunities to experience musical concepts for themselves, thereby developing their musical understanding (Azzara, 1993 and 1999; Rooke, 1991). This increase in musical understanding also aids in the development of note-reading skills (Azzara, 1993). Additionally, improvisation provides both students and teachers with a method of assessing and consolidating their musical understanding (Azzara, 1999). Students' technique is

positively impacted by regular improvisation, in part because it helps relieve physical tension (Priest, 1989; Rooke, 1991). This relief of tension also has an impact on the general attitude of the student, leading to increased confidence, motivation and enjoyment of playing (Addison, 1988; Rooke, 1991).

In addition to these benefits, improvisation is worth teaching in instrumental lessons for its own sake. Azzara argues that ‘improvisation in music plays the role that speech and conversation play in language’ (1999: 22). This definition asserts the importance of improvisation and moves it from being an additional skill limited to certain genres into its place as a fundamental skill in instrumental learning. Without learning how to improvise, students are confined to playing music by other people (Priest, 1989). Developing students into complete musicians must involve teaching them how to ‘speak’ on their instrument for themselves by creating their own music.

### The place of improvisation in piano lessons today

Little investigation has been done into private piano teaching in the UK (Cathcart, 2013). Indeed, until the last 25 years, little research has been carried out into instrumental teaching as a whole (Barton, 2019; Cathcart, 2013). The lack of exploration in this area is evident in the studies available in the teaching of improvisation. Much of what has been written investigates its inclusion in classroom music lessons (Addison, 1988; Kanellopoulos, 1999; Koutsoupidou, 2005; Peggie, 1985) or in teacher-training courses (Wright and Kanellopoulos, 2010; Bernhard, 2012). Of the research that has been done into improvisation in instrumental playing and teaching, much of it has focused on jazz music and musicians (Wilson and McDonald, 2012; Ashley, 2008). There has been little research into the teaching of improvisation in classical instrumental lessons in the UK. Additionally, the majority of the teaching literature available focuses on jazz music (Kenny and Gellrich, 2002; Pressing, 2001). The resources produced by instrumental examination boards highlight this distinction between the genres with the traditional classical exams focusing on notation and the jazz and popular music exams including improvisation (ABRSM, no date; ABRSM, 2022; London College of Music Examinations, 2021; RSL, no date a). Trinity College London and Rockschool go some way to bridging the gap between the genres, with both boards including improvisation as a supporting test in their classical piano exams (RSL, no date b; Trinity College London, no date). However, in both cases improvisation is an optional supporting test, leaving it possible for students to progress through the grades without being examined on it.

### Influences on teachers’ pedagogy

Despite the benefits of teaching improvisation, reports reveal many classroom music and instrumental teachers are reluctant to teach it (Cathcart, 2013; Scott, 2007; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Priest, 1989). Whilst some causes for this reluctance have been identified (McPherson et al., 2012; Priest, 1989), little is known about the influences on instrumental teachers’ pedagogy or the reasons behind their decision on whether to teach improvisation. In addressing the imbalance in how frequently improvisation is taught, the first step is to discover the root of the problem: what factors influence piano teachers’ decisions on whether or not to teach improvisation? Understanding this issue will help provide a way forward to encouraging more teachers to include improvisation in lessons.

### Methodology

The purpose of the study was to investigate what factors influence teachers’ piano pedagogy and, more specifically, their decision on whether or not to teach improvisation. This central purpose led to three research questions:

1. What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?
2. What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?
3. How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?

## The Survey

Answering these research questions required the study to collect information from a large number of piano teachers in order to correlate the relationship between various factors and the teaching of improvisation. The study would also need to ask questions about teachers' behaviour, experiences and opinions on improvisation. Given the isolated nature of private instrumental teaching (Burwell, 2005; Purser, 2005; Robinson, 2012), it was important to choose a method that would allow easy distribution to a wide population. For these reasons, an online survey was chosen as the best means of data collection.

As the use of an online survey can lead to a high non-participation rate (Cohen et al., 2010), it was important that the survey was designed in a way that encouraged completion. Cohen et al recommend a sequence of questions, where factual questions to do with age and qualifications are asked first, before moving to closed questions involving rating scales and ending with high-interest, open-ended questions that ask for reasons for the opinions given. This sequence was used as the general outline for the survey. The questionnaire was designed in four sections and collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Section A asked general questions about respondents' qualifications and membership of professional organisations. Section B was interested in respondents' own musical experiences, including what they had been taught as beginners and how much training they had received overall in various musical activities. The activities stipulated were limited to those that specifically involved playing the piano: composing, improvising, memorising music, note reading, playing by ear, sight-reading and technique (scales and studies). To ensure consistency, this list was used in all questions throughout the survey that referred to specific musical activities. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they had been taught these activities using a four-point Likert scale of regularly included, sometimes included, rarely included and never included.

In section C, the survey moved on to ask questions about respondents' teaching practices, including their professional development and what activities they regularly taught in lessons. The final section asked respondents about their opinions on improvisation in piano teaching, including their personal definition of improvisation and examples of resources they used in its teaching. Respondents were also asked to identify what areas of instrumental learning they thought would be improved through the use of improvisation in lessons. All the choices listed were skills that research has demonstrated are improved by improvisation: aural skills, note reading, problem-solving skills, students' enjoyment of lessons, students' motivation to practise, technique and theory knowledge (Azzara, 1993 and 1999; Peggie, 1985; Rooke, 1991).

The data reviewed the impact of five different factors on the teaching of improvisation:

1. teachers' awareness of current research in instrumental teaching
2. their musical experiences as learners
3. their musical identity
4. their confidence in how to teach improvisation
5. the literature and resources they used that influenced their pedagogy

Answers to each question were reviewed individually. The correlation coefficients were calculated in Excel and this information was reviewed against the five categories to reveal the impact of each factor on the data set.

## Ethics

As the study was aimed at adult piano teachers, there were few ethical concerns, and it was given favourable ethical opinion for conduct. Participants were given information about the project and were also provided with the contact details of the researcher in case they had additional questions or wished to withdraw at any point.

## Participants

The survey was carried out in 2015 and was distributed via email and social media to several teaching organisations and online forums. In total, it attracted 134 responses from piano teachers across the UK. Some responses were incomplete and could not be used for correlation purposes. In total, 117 completed surveys were analysed.

Participants taught in a range of settings, including own homes, students' homes, local schools, and universities, with 56.4% of respondents teaching in more than one setting. Private settings were the most common, with 92.3% of respondents reporting that they taught in their own homes, students' homes or both. In total, 36.7% taught in primary or secondary schools, 14.5% taught in either a local music school or for the local music service and three respondents (2.5%) taught in a university or conservatoire.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation*

Respondents predominantly came from a traditional background; their own lessons as beginners were focused on notation and technique with few learning how to compose, improvise or play by ear. A total of 84.6% of respondents reported improvisation was never included in their lessons as learners. Respondents rationalised this by explaining they came from a classical background: '[Improvisation] was never included in any of my lessons on two instruments. Both teachers were strictly classical musicians'; 'I was classically trained so didn't have much cause to improvise'. Some respondents commented that they were actively discouraged from learning to improvise: 'I started playing by ear at 5 years old. I still remember the teacher nipping it in the bud'; '[Improvising was] discouraged in early years so have never had the confidence'.

The focus on notation continued throughout their training and consequently had an impact on their practice in the present. Note reading, sight-reading and technique were the skills that respondents had received the most training in and in which the majority felt most confident. Improvisation remained an activity in which few regularly engaged, and fewer felt confident. Only 33.6% reported that they improvised regularly themselves, and only 14.1% reported they felt confident in improvisation.

Despite these traditional beginnings, it would seem that many piano teachers are not content to continue teaching in the way that they were taught. Although most teachers had received little training in improvisation themselves, 72.6% of them reported including it in their piano lessons sometimes or frequently. Whilst this figure contrasts with the number who taught note reading (100% of respondents taught it sometimes or frequently), it does indicate that many piano teachers are committed to developing their skills as musicians and teachers. This aligns with the findings of Robinson (2012) who reported that the teachers he interviewed taught 'not as they were taught, but as they wish they had been taught' (2012: 368). A number of respondents to this survey reported that they had worked to develop their skill in improvisation through courses and self-study after receiving little training in it as students: 'Non-existent training [in improvisation] as a child and music student - anything I've learned has been through self-study over the last decade or so'; '[Improvising and composing] were never really taught and

definitely not in a structured way but, as a teacher, I've researched various books, been on various training courses etc'.

### **Factors influencing piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in lessons**

#### *Teachers' awareness of research into improvisation*

Much research (Addison, 1988; Priest, 1989; Peggie, 1985; Rooke, 1991) has been done into the benefits of improvisation in instrumental lessons. However, there is little focus on teachers' awareness of this research or the impact it has on their teaching practice. Respondents were asked about their understanding of the benefits of improvisation to assess their awareness of the research. The hypothesis was that more knowledge of the benefits of improvising could encourage teachers to include it more frequently in lessons.

Respondents were given a list of musical skills and were asked to choose which ones they believed would be improved through improvisation. All the skills listed were ones that research has indicated improvisation develops: aural skills, note reading, problem-solving skills, students' enjoyment of lessons, students' motivation to practise, technique and theory knowledge (Azzara, 1993 and 1999; Peggie, 1985; Rooke, 1991). Respondents were able to choose multiple options. The majority of teachers indicated a number of benefits, with 64.8% ( $n = 72$ ) of respondents indicating four or more. Just 6.3% ( $n = 7$ ) of respondents indicated only one benefit.

The results in this section indicated that there was a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.46$ ) between the number of musical skills respondents believed would be improved through improvisation and how frequently respondents taught improvisation in lessons. However, this correlation does not necessarily imply causation. It is possible that respondents' awareness of the benefits was the result of teaching improvisation more frequently. For this reason, this study was not able to confidently determine if awareness of research influences teachers' pedagogy. Nevertheless, it seems likely that greater access to research into the benefits of improvisation would have a positive impact on how frequently it is taught. Comments left by respondents, who frequently taught improvisation, indicated the benefits they had witnessed in their students: '[Students] are inclined to ask questions about theoretical knowledge they might not have otherwise been interested in'; '[It secures] technical elements in a musical way'; 'I can see pupils are motivated to explore and be creative and it often breathes more musicality into their other pieces'.

#### *Teachers' musical experiences*

With few respondents having much experience in improvisation, the results in this section were mixed. However, they did indicate that those who had received training in improvisation were more likely to teach it in their piano lessons ( $r = 0.34$ ). Of the respondents who had been taught improvisation sometimes or frequently as beginners, 85.7% of them also taught it sometimes or frequently in their piano lessons. 91.6% of the respondents who had received a lot of training in improvisation later in their career through self-study or courses, taught improvisation in their piano lessons sometimes or frequently. The results demonstrated that experience in improvising at any stage of their pianistic career had a positive impact on how frequently respondents taught improvisation; the benefits were not merely limited to those who experienced improvisation as beginners.

#### *Teachers' musical identity*

Teachers' musical identity was shown to be a significant influence on personal pedagogies with all the factors discussed positively impacting how frequently improvisation was taught. In particular, frequency of personal improvisation ( $r = 0.47$ ) and confidence in improvising ( $r = 0.41$ ) played a significant part in determining how often teachers included it in lessons. In total, 79% of those who sometimes or frequently improvised also reported they taught it sometimes or frequently.

However, the results in this section also reveal the complexity of the issue and demonstrate that personal experience in improvisation does not always encourage teachers to include it in lessons. Over half (56%) of the respondents who never taught improvisation reported that they personally improvised sometimes or frequently. Few of these teachers gave reasons as to why they did not include it in their lessons. Those that did provide reasons identified lack of time in lessons and uncertainty in how to teach improvisation as the main factors. This backs up research by Priest (1989) who found that teachers who could improvise were not always confident in their ability to teach improvisation. Whilst personal experience in improvising is clearly beneficial, in isolation, it may not have a significant impact on teachers' pedagogy.

#### *Understanding of how to teach improvisation*

Understanding how to teach improvisation was a significant influence on the teaching of improvisation. Those with training in this area were more likely to teach improvisation in their lessons ( $r = 0.36$ ), with 86.1% of the respondents who had received some or a lot of training in how to teach it reporting they taught it in their lessons sometimes or frequently. In addition, the majority (75%) of respondents who never taught improvisation reported they had received no training in how to teach it. Confidence in teaching also appeared to be a significant factor ( $r = 0.57$ ) with 96.8% of respondents who frequently taught improvisation reporting they were fairly confident or very confident in teaching it. It is likely that more experience in teaching an activity leads to greater levels of confidence in how to teach it, which could account for these results; however, respondents' comments indicated that a lack of confidence discouraged them from teaching improvisation regularly: 'Very seldom. I am not confident to teach it and use it at the early stages only'; 'I can improvise but don't know how to teach it'; 'I rarely include it but I try to as I recognise its importance - I have very little confidence in teaching it . . . '.

A total of 71.5% of respondents had completed a course that led to a music teaching or instrumental teaching qualification. A range of qualifications were listed by respondents, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), bachelor's and master's degrees in Music Education, instrumental teaching diplomas, the Piano Teachers' Course UK (CertPTC) and the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music's Certificate of Teaching (CT ABRSM). There was a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.31$ ) between the variables. The general music teaching qualifications were evenly spread between the four categories of frequency of teaching, suggesting that these qualifications had little impact on respondents' piano teaching practice. This supports research by Baker (2006) and Cathcart (2013) who both found that the PGCE had limited influence on what happened in the instrumental teaching studio. In comparison, 96.4% of teachers who had done an instrumental teaching course taught improvisation sometimes or frequently. Whilst it is not known if all these courses included instruction on teaching improvisation, the two most common courses mentioned by respondents (CertPTC and CT ABRSM) both do. These results also support research by Cathcart who reported that teachers who had attended specific instrumental teaching courses presented 'a more reflective and questioning approach to their teaching' (2013: 373).

The difference in impact on pedagogy between the teaching qualifications and the music and performance qualifications (which had no impact on how frequently respondents taught improvisation) is of particular significance, as the latter were more common amongst respondents. In total, 94.8% of respondents held a music or performance qualification of Grade 8 or above, including bachelor's degrees in music and performance diplomas. In comparison, only 46.5% held a qualification from a taught instrumental teaching course. Other research suggests that the gap between these types of qualifications is even greater. Cathcart (2013) reported that 78% of the Piano Survey 2010 respondents had a performance qualification of Grade 8 or above, whilst only 9% had a qualification from a taught instrumental teaching course. The results of this survey



illustrate the importance of instrumental teaching courses and suggest that the piano teaching community would benefit from more teachers having these types of qualifications.

It is also interesting to note the disparity between the amount of training respondents had received in different activities: 62% of respondents reported they had received a lot of training in how to teach note reading, but only 6% had received a lot of training in teaching improvisation. The reasons for this inequality are unclear but it does raise the possibility that the traditional nature of piano teaching has created more training opportunities in teaching notation and less in teaching other skills. The problem is amplified by the fact that, as a profession that requires no qualifications, piano teachers are largely in charge of the training they undertake. As a consequence, it is possible that some teachers may gravitate towards courses on skills with which they are already familiar and neglect other skills with which they are less confident. The association of improvisation with jazz compounds the issue – if teachers identify themselves as classical piano teachers and so do not see the need to teach improvisation, they are less likely to undertake training in this area.

### ***How improvisation is taught in piano lessons today***

#### *Teaching beginners*

Many respondents reported that they often included improvisation in lessons with young beginners. For some teachers, this was due to the positive impact they had observed: ‘I try to include improvisation, especially for beginners as it gives them the opportunity to play anytime, anywhere’; ‘It is an excellent way of encouraging beginners to make music and develop a feeling for rhythm, especially in very young pupils’. Other respondents commented that it was due to their lack of confidence in teaching it at higher levels: ‘I am not confident to teach it and use it in the early stages only’; ‘Less experience/tuition on [improvisation and composition] although beginners-intermediate I feel confident with’. Tutor books were popular ways to teach improvisation to young beginners, and visual prompts, toy animals and storybooks were also mentioned.

#### *Playing with others*

Many respondents reported improvising with their students. Examples included providing an accompaniment whilst the student improvised over the top and improvising in a ‘call and response’ style. The most popular resource listed by respondents was the *Pattern Play* series by Forrest Kinney (2010), which facilitates pianists playing together. Other teachers mentioned the use of backing tracks from YouTube or CDs, allowing students to play with ‘virtual’ musicians.

#### *Providing boundaries*

Asking students to improvise within set boundaries was a common theme. Examples included restricting the notes played (e.g. using five finger positions or just the black keys), using a set rhythmic pattern or improvising over a chord progression. One teacher commented on how helpful providing boundaries could be: ‘I find that giving parameters helps students to relax and focus on one specific thing. It’s intended to support not limit their improvisation’.

#### *Linking it to learning*

A number of teachers gave examples of how they linked improvisation to other parts of the lesson. One suggestion was to base the improvisation on concepts being learned: for example, using the black keys when exploring keyboard geography or improvising in the ‘scale of the week’. In total, 72.1% of respondents reported that they used improvisation to develop musical understanding, indicating that this was a common way of including improvisatory activities.

Another suggestion was to use improvisation to aid the learning of repertoire. This was less common, with only 27.8% of respondents reporting they used improvisation in this way. Examples included taking the bass line of a piece and improvising over the top or using the rhythm of a phrase and creating a new melody. Teachers demonstrated how this could be done with students of all ability levels: a number of teachers mentioned doing this with pieces in tutor books, whilst one gave the example of Chopin's *Prelude in C minor*. It was noted that as well as providing a useful opportunity to improvise, it also aided in the learning and performance of the repertoire: 'We always start with the repertoire they are using at the time: this develops an "inner" knowledge of the piece in question that undoubtedly enhances understanding and performance'.

#### *Using stimuli*

The use of stimuli, such as pictures or stories, was often spoken about in the context of teaching beginners. Teachers mentioned the use of photos, storybooks or toy animals to spark students' imaginations. Examples of teaching activities included asking students to imitate animal noises or 'painting pictures' with music.

#### *Use of musical devices*

The use of different musical devices was also often related to the teaching of beginners, with examples of manipulating pitch, tempo or dynamics to accompany a story. One respondent gave the example of using arpeggios and plagal cadences to create a sense of peace in the music. Another teacher mentioned the use of musical sequences as a way of showing students how to develop their melodies.

#### *Improvising within musical genres*

Improvisation was predominantly associated with specific musical styles in the minds of many respondents, and a number commented that they only taught improvisation in the context of jazz: 'I include it with some students, those who are interested in jazz'; 'I do have a few students interested in jazz and I teach improvisation to them'. At least one respondent did not teach improvisation because they considered themselves to be a classical piano teacher.

The pentatonic scale, twelve-bar blues and walking bass lines were all mentioned as helpful starting points. A number of teachers also reported using resources such as the ABRSM *Jazz Piano Pieces* (1998) and London College of Music's *Jazz Piano Handbook* (Corbett, 2007); real books; or repertoire books such as *Microjazz* (Norton, 2011) and *Higgledy-Piggledy Jazz* (Cobb, 2006) to encourage students to solo within a melody.

The results suggest that many teachers predominantly use improvisation as a method of learning and developing other musical skills. Few respondents mentioned ways of teaching students how to develop their improvisatory skills. Of those that did, most approached it at a basic level by discussing tempo or dynamics with young beginners. Only two respondents demonstrated how they would encourage more advanced students to improve their improvisations. It is likely that this is linked to the report from some respondents that they lacked confidence in teaching improvisation at higher levels. Additionally, respondents' comments indicated that improvisation is often taught in the context of jazz and blues and less so with classical music. Whilst the use of improvisation as a teaching method is certainly to be encouraged, this combination of factors could result in a situation where, although improvisation is included in lessons, students do not develop into confident improvisers and remain unable to confidently 'speak' on their instrument for themselves.



## Conclusion

The results from the survey suggest that the influences on teacher pedagogy are complex. However, a significant thread throughout all the factors examined has been the need for teachers to have more access to instrumental teaching courses. Whilst teaching diplomas are a popular choice amongst many piano teachers (Cathcart, 2013), the fact that they are taken by individuals and are not part of a taught course does limit the impact that they have on teachers' pedagogy. Although they can be studied alongside an experienced teaching mentor, teaching diplomas are unlikely to give access to the same breadth of knowledge and experience that taught courses provide. Taught courses offer participants access to a range of experienced teachers with different backgrounds and approaches, who can provide models of good practice and opportunities for them to reflect on their own methods. These courses also allow teachers to become familiar with current research in instrumental teaching and adjust their teaching practice accordingly. In addition, having a systematic teacher-training programme would address the current imbalance in the training teachers receive, ensuring that skills such as reading notation were not emphasised at the expense of improvisation and that teachers were given guidance on how to teach improvisation at all levels.

The results indicate the strong link in the minds of some teachers between improvisation and jazz. Whilst it is undeniable that improvisation is a significant part of jazz piano it is disappointing that the perception that it is not equally a part of classical piano has developed. It is clear from the vast heritage of classical piano works that improvisation and composition are intrinsically linked to classical music. It is equally evident from the research of Gellrich and Parncutt (1998) that it is possible for the teaching and practice of classical music to be immensely creative. An increase in teacher-training opportunities could also shift teachers' perceptions on this matter and encourage them to view improvisation as a skill that is essential for developing students into complete musicians, and not one that is limited to particular genres of music.

## Impact of the survey

The results are particularly relevant to the providers of professional development courses for piano teachers. This research has indicated the importance of raising the status of such courses in the UK due to the significant impact they have on teachers' pedagogy. The results also highlight the imbalance in the training that teachers receive, suggesting the need for more training opportunities in teaching improvisation to be made available.

Whilst there were certain limitations caused by using social media as a research tool (it precluded any teachers not involved in professional development groups, for example), it also provided unexpected benefits. The use of Facebook and teaching forums allowed 'real-time' contact between the researcher and respondents. Not only did this allow certain difficulties in completing the survey to be addressed, leading to greater participation in the survey, but it also enabled respondents to leave comments about their experience. This feedback indicated that the act of taking part in the survey gave respondents the opportunity to reflect on their teaching and consider the influences on their pedagogy: 'Survey done and quite illuminating to me'; 'this survey really made me think and self evaluate'; 'a thought-provoking survey'; 'it really made me think about the strong connection between the way I learnt and the way I now teach piano'. Other comments suggested that taking part in the research encouraged some respondents to consider changes they could make to their teaching practice: 'Survey done – feels like a wake-up call'; 'Really useful to reflect on my teaching and where the gaps are!'

Cain (2008) discusses the importance of teachers participating in research, specifically action research, as a way of improving their professional practice. The comments above suggest that taking part in research on any level, whether as a respondent or as a researcher, could cause teachers to reflect on and evaluate their teaching. It is hoped that, as well as having a bearing on

the wider piano teaching community, the survey will have had a positive influence on the developing professional practice of the teachers who contributed to the research.

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