

# Pedagogic Multiculturalism From A Korean Perspective

**W**hen I began to teach piano in the United States, I was surprised by the challenges I encountered when working with American students. I noticed this was particularly evident during my interactions with pre-college students. Additionally, I have faced some unexpected reactions and misunderstandings with parents with whom I have worked. In all of these contexts, my sense was that these challenges were related to the cross-cultural dimensions of our teaching and learning relationships. This recognition both surprised and concerned me as I came to believe that few, if any, people I worked with seem to be aware of these issues.

Reflecting upon such matters, I began to realize I had never been explicitly introduced and thoroughly exposed to aspects of cross-cultural teaching in my piano pedagogy coursework. I started to wonder whether more extensive discussions and in-depth study about cross-cultural teaching would have helped prepare me for more successful communication with students and parents during my initial teaching in the United States. As a result, I decided to begin looking into these issues in more detail.

## Literature Review

Most music schools in North America continue to become more culturally and ethnically diverse than in years past. In an article in *American Music Teacher*, Kenneth Williams, director of graduate programs in piano pedagogy at Ohio State University noted:

Although my university is situated in the heart of the American Midwest, none of the graduate students enrolled in the pedagogy class were Americans. They were from Malaysia, Korea, and Taiwan...

...It is especially true in higher education that students are willing and even eager to cross cultural boundaries to pursue advanced studies with master teachers at prestigious institutions. Today, many pianists studying in American conservatories and university schools of music are international students, and a large percentage are from Asian countries.<sup>1</sup>

This is no exception at my music school, the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A large percentage of graduate students come from Asian countries in both my piano and pedagogy studio. Currently, among five doctoral piano pedagogy students, three students are Korean.

Among pre-college populations, Asian international students and Asian-American students also comprise a large percentage of students in music schools in the United States. Grace Wang claims in her research, *Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: "Music Moms" and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities*, that Asians and Asian-Americans constitute from 30–50 percent of the student population at leading music schools and departments in the United States. The numbers are often higher at the pre-college level, where they constitute more than half of the student body. Also, Wang reports, "The two largest groups represented are students of Chinese and Korean descent studying the violin and/or piano."<sup>2</sup>

This growing participation of pre-college Asians and Asian-Americans, as well as Asian international students in higher education piano study, suggests an understanding of cross-cultural teaching and learning needs to be a component of current piano pedagogical practices. For Asian international student teachers in higher education, it is important to think about how to approach teaching with pre-college students from the United States, beyond simply the idea of "how to teach piano" that is addressed in pedagogy class. For the student teachers from the United States, it is important to prepare and discuss how they can approach their initial cross-cultural teaching with pre-college Asian and Asian-American students, which includes the triangular relationship with students and parents.

Namely, training the next generation of musicians and student teachers will require music educators to be well-prepared with culturally diverse pedagogy. However, the extant literature lacks attention to the complex issues, challenges and opportunities associated with cross-cultural approaches to teaching piano.

It is true that considerable research encompassing the fields of education and sociology has been conducted to address interaction between teachers, pre-college students and parents in contemporary multicultural and cross-cultural realms. For example, some scholars have explored the pre-college level, identifying issues of cultural discontinuities

between home and school.<sup>3</sup> Additional research has dealt with communication between teachers and students, explaining the necessity of understanding students' different cultural learning styles.<sup>4</sup> More recently, some scholarship has focused on the importance of teachers' cross-cultural skills to develop positive relationships with parents, especially immigrants.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Cross-cultural research has also been conducted to demonstrate the difference between parental expectations and students learning styles.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

However, most music education research addressing multiculturalism and cross-cultural realms still focuses primarily on philosophies of music, curriculum, materials and program.<sup>11,12,13</sup> Such research does not, for example, adequately attend to relationships between teachers, students and parents. Additionally, this music education scholarship is sometimes too general for application within the piano studio. This is because piano teaching often necessitates a more particularized curriculum and activities more appropriate to intimate one-on-one relationships.

While some research within the field of piano pedagogy has recently been undertaken to address more cross-cultural teaching and learning studies, such scholarship attends either to overly general cultural factors between "Easterners" and "Westerners" that affect communication and learning,<sup>14</sup> or it focuses on interaction between students and teachers who both belong to the same culture (Chinese in the case of Lin<sup>15</sup> and Xu<sup>16</sup> or Taiwanese in the case of Kou,<sup>17</sup> Li<sup>18</sup> and Wang<sup>19</sup>). It is especially noteworthy to recognize the lack of studies combining cross-cultural pedagogic interferences and teaching involving all three groups of parents, teachers and students in piano studios.

### Purpose

As I am primarily interested in exploring such issues more substantively, this article will fill an important gap both by investigating the existing challenges and unexpected situations involving the triangular relationships of parents, students and teachers within cross-cultural teaching (Korean-American setting), and by examining other relevant scholarship and aspects of Korean culture relating

to the challenges and unexpected situations to be successfully navigated within the realm of cross-cultural piano pedagogy. More specifically, I am interested in the following main research questions:

- ▶▶ Is there any aforementioned cultural challenge involving the triangular relationships of parent, students and teachers within the realm of cross-cultural piano pedagogy (primarily in a Korean-American milieu)?
- ▶▶ What are the principal beliefs and values that undergird and guide Korean educational culture? (Sub-questions: How does Confucian philosophy affect Korean students' learning and teaching styles? What are the cultural models of success from Korean parents and the Korean community as a whole? And so on.)
- ▶▶ How do these beliefs and values manifest themselves in the context of music education, particularly as connected to piano learning and teaching? (Sub-questions: How do these systems of reasoning impact music educational relations between students, parents and teachers? What are the potential misunderstandings when two cultures such as Korean and American meet in the piano studio, and why?)
- ▶▶ How can piano instructors better negotiate the cross-cultural dynamic of the teaching and learning process?

## Method And Design

The research method for this study is based on the model in Bartel Lee and Leonid Sprikut's "Adapting Pedagogic Culture: The Experience of Four Immigrant Music Teachers in Canada."<sup>20</sup> My study examines participant opinions and perceptions related to cross-cultural teaching, particularly in a Korean-American setting. Before starting the project, I had prepared and submitted the human subjects protocol and obtain informed consent from human subjects. Data sources were used to accommodate language and expression needs: written data to provide descriptive data, and one individual semi-structured interview.

Six participants (pseudonyms used) were selected from currently Korean and American graduate piano or piano pedagogy students

at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who have teaching experience with both a pre-college Korean student and a pre-college student from the United States. All Korean participants grew up in South Korea through age 17 and held at least a high school degree in their home country. The Korean students speak English as a second language and the U.S. students are native English speakers who do not speak Korean. Each participant was teaching in an English language setting at either the piano laboratory program at UW-Madison, or private music institutions in the United States.

The interview protocols included open- and closed-ended questions relating to each participant's background and professional experience prior to and during the period after cross-cultural teaching experience (Koreans in the U.S. and Americans with Korean students). The interview included questions about pedagogical beliefs, teaching style and how participants believe intercultural teaching might influence these. In the interviews, participants reflected on their experiences teaching students with the same background as theirs (that is, Korean teachers teaching Korean students, or American teachers teaching American students), as well as teachings students with dissimilar backgrounds (Korean teachers teaching students from the U.S. and American teachers teaching students from Korea).

Each interview was audio-taped. The interviews were conducted in English with American participants and in Korean for the Korean participants, which were then translated into English. Interview transcriptions were given to the participants to verify accuracy. A third person who is bilingual in Korean and English was asked to read the quotes from interviews with Korean participants to ensure accuracy of translation.

Once transcribed, the entire interview was analyzed using a qualitative research approach. Although each participant's experience of cross-cultural teaching and their adjustment to a new context was unique, common themes were evident in challenges involving the triangular relationship between parent, student and teacher within the realm of cross-cultural piano pedagogy (primarily in

a Korean-American milieu). Although parents were not directly involved in the interviews or observations, their role emerged as pivotal in understanding cross-cultural implications for this study.

### Qualitative Findings And Analysis

In the following sections, I offer the qualitative results of the interviews and analyze several key areas of interest: negotiating power in the teacher-student relationship, learning and teaching styles, discipline in music practice and objectives for piano lessons.

#### Negotiating Power In The Teacher And Student Relationship

The power relations between teachers and students manifest in different ways in different cultures. In the interview, American participants discussed the power relations between teachers and students based on their upbringing and cultural experiences:

"American students seem to place a higher value on their curiosity, often challenging the teacher's authority with a question like, 'Why?' or 'How?' They do not intend to be disrespectful, but instead express their desire to have ownership of their understanding."—Bethany

"There are many different ways to motivate students. Not just, 'I am the teacher and you do what I say.'"—Joy

Like the American participants, Korean participants also comment on Korean students' perceptions of the role of the teacher. Korean participants had given their own teachers the same kind of respect when they were students; as teachers, they expected the same from their students, for example:

"I think the fundamental rule between teachers and students is that students have respect for teachers. It could be from Confucian philosophy..."—Min-Young

"I would not talk back to my piano teachers, and when teachers gave instructions, I did not even think I could object or raise differences with them."—Song

"An elder is an elder... Children should say 'hello' to teachers first."—Bo-Young

"When I was a student... if the teacher asked students to play *Hanon no. 1* one hundred times... then they just did it." —Bo-Young

As the quotes above show, a marked difference in the perception of the role of the teacher exists between Korean and American participants. Participants from the United States place a high value on teacher quality, but respect for the teacher's authority is not a primary concern or even an expectation. In contrast, for Korean participants, respect from students was expected in large part because of embedded ideas of social hierarchy. Teachers are seen as elders and students are to respect their authority.

Korean teachers identified this different view of authority issue as a challenge in their work with students from the United States. In many cases, Korean teachers believed they did not have authority when teaching students from the U.S., for example:

"... You need to force yourself to try to give compliments... Even when students play well this much [*indicating a tiny amount with her fingers*], you should say 'Wow!' or something like that."—Min-Young

"I remember before coming to the U.S. to study one of my college friends talking. She told me that teaching young kids in the U.S. feels like doing baby-sitting... She said if you have to teach piano to young kids in the U.S., first you have to be the best baby-sitter to the students... even if they are not prepared for the lesson and their attitude is not respectful, you have to give lots of compliments and encourage the student..."—Song

I believe these responses highlight cultural differences, such as the influence of Confucian philosophy, in which formal and serious relationships between teachers (elders) and students (youth) and teacher-oriented approach are implicitly accepted. For instance, since Song's friend grew up in a Confucian society, new teaching styles, such as a student-oriented teaching approach, with lots of compliments and encouragement, might make her think her authority was not being respected and her job had been reduced to pleasing young children (as Min-Young implied).

To offer some context, let me introduce a brief history of Confucianism in Korea and its teaching philosophy. Confucianism, which was derived from China, was accepted by the Korean government as its model for

education in 372 AD. According to Kwang-Kyu Lee, in the Silla kingdom (starting in 682 AD), it was customary to teach subjects related to the state examination, in addition to the Confucian classics; later Confucian scholars of the 16th century developed ethical and moral education.<sup>21</sup> Lee states that although Confucianism declined during industrialization and modernization, the Confucian influence in Korean society and culture is deeply ingrained and still exists in education today.<sup>22</sup>

The practical ethics of Confucianism, which also strongly influenced China, Taiwan, Japan and Vietnam, are defined by the five moral responsibilities in human relationships. One of the five moral rules is the relationship of respect between age groups. For this relationship, Confucianism teaches there should be respect for seniority and respect for elders should be revealed in all actions including greetings. Also, in Confucianism, since younger and older generations must maintain distinctions in all actions, when a youth expresses his or her opinion to an elder, especially when it is a differing opinion, it can be regarded as bad behavior.<sup>23</sup> For example, in Korea, young people still bow or tend to greet an elder before they are given a greeting. Song-Ae Han states that these moral responsibilities can be seen in the relationship between a teacher and a student.<sup>24</sup> According to Victor C. X. Wan and Lesley S. J. Farmer, Confucius developed his teaching philosophy as "let the teacher be a teacher, the student a student."<sup>25</sup> In Wan and Farmer's analysis, this means students are supposed to have respect for their teachers and not challenge their teachers as authority figures.

Along with Confucianism, the research found that Korean language also can be another factor that affects the teacher-student dynamic in Korea. The Korean language has a built-in structure that reflects the social relationship between the speaker and the person being spoken to. As such it reinforces respect toward teachers and elders. According to Charles McBrian, "Language forms an integral component of stratification systems. While this may not be so obvious in societies such as the U.S., the possible relations between language and social stratification

become much clearer when we examine a Confucian society such as Korea."<sup>26</sup> It is true that special features of the Korean language serve to create and reinforce categories in the social hierarchy.

McBrian explains the forms of address in Korean as opposed to English: "In English, the pronoun 'you' is used to refer to old and young... There are also in Korean levels of politeness in personal pronouns and terms of address."<sup>27</sup> In Korean, there are two common pronouns for "you"<sup>28</sup>: one is used between friends, but only those who have known each other since childhood, or by adults to younger people. It is common for a teacher to call students by their given names or with the less formal "you." People are also addressed in terms of social roles, such as "teacher." The suffix, "-nim" is also always attached to these titles of address to indicate special deference.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in Korea, students are not allowed to address their teacher as "you"; instead, both students and parents need to address teachers as "teachernim," which means "honored teacher." This helps reinforce the playing out of teacher's authority in piano studies.

### Learning And Teaching Styles

Comparing the American and Korean participants' upbringings and personal experiences with learning styles, and preferred teaching approaches, it is clear the largest differences exist in the areas of behaviors of the teachers and students, as well as in verbal interactions between the teachers and their students. Participants reported that verbal interaction between students and teacher is the learning style favored in the United States:

"Young American students do not wait to speak until spoken to... Young American students often feel quite comfortable speaking when they feel like it..."—Sara

"Maybe because of the culture, most American students answer well, and even if their answer is not quite right, they did not seem to be uncomfortable answering the questions."—Bo-Young

Also, participants believed American students care about the relationship between students and teachers, as they seemed

to prefer a teacher who is supportive and encouraging. American students also seemed to take ownership of their learning:

"My American students seem to know very well what they do well and what they do not do well, and they want teachers to meet their expectations.... As a teacher, you have more controls versus American students who are a lot more demanding."—Bethany

"I think here in the U.S., society accepts and supports autonomy. Personal interests and expressions are valid and unique, and ought to be respected, so I think...they (my American students) care more about their interest in music and piano than Korean students..."—Min-Young

"I think they want someone who is nice and caring. Sort of another adult cheerleader who encourages them with positive motivation."—Joy

Much of the discussion seemed to indicate that independent learning, verbal relationship and student-oriented teaching style (encouraging and compliments) are the model in the United States. In contrast, participants reported that less verbal interaction seemed to be the preference in Korean educational culture, including piano lessons. Asking or answering questions of the teacher does not seem to be a preferred style of learning for Korean students. Also, Korean students seem to prefer a more directive, structural approach in which they were told what to do. Some participants related this issue to the more serious and formal (hierarchical) Korean relationship between students and teachers, Confucian philosophy or the emphasis on performance in the piano studio.

"Asking the teacher questions is not a common thing in Korea. From the Confucian philosophy, we learned that pretending not to know in front of teachers or in a group conversation is virtuous and modest."—Min-Young

"Mostly a performance-based style is preferred when I worked with Korean students, so most of them did not answer or were very shy or puzzled when I asked theory questions during the lesson."—Min-Young

"I like the teacher who I can trust. For instance, when I was preparing for the piano

competition with the pianist Hye-Sun Paik at Seoul National University, since I could trust her capacity and experiences and respect her personality, I could easily follow her suggestions about what I needed to do...even her choice for my competition repertoire pieces.... I even felt better when she checked my dress before going on the competition. I did not want to look stupid in the competition by wearing a weird dress..."—Song

"When I taught in Korea, most young Korean students did not know what to do, what they wanted to do.... I think young Korean kids and their parents prefer the teacher who can tell to their children/students what to do.... It does not really matter whether the teacher is strict or not."—Bo-Young

Significant differences were evident in the area of behavior, and verbal interaction between students and teachers. A divergence of learning styles, teaching styles and verbal interactions has the potential to mislead both teachers and students. American participants agreed these differences account for the challenges and frustrations in cross-cultural teaching:

"... [Korean students] were not as comfortable with my questioning approach in which I tried to ask a lot of questions and sort of help them to discover the concept on their own... but I think they sometimes got frustrated with that approach, and they would rather have me tell them how it is supposed to be: ... But doing something like composing a song, or improvising, or getting really creative with something was not as satisfying to them.... "I want to learn the notes so I can play the song faster and better now."—Bethany

"My Asian-American students often wait so much, or they feel uncomfortable when I ask questions. People [my Asian-American students] who are afraid of speaking; it is harder to draw them out..."—Sara

Then, why does Korean/Asian culture prefer less verbal interaction with teachers and a more directive and structured approach in which they are told what to do? Confucian philosophy might also explain the Asian student's less-frequent fewer verbal interaction with teachers, and a more directive approach.

An Asian participant, Min-Young, said, "I know that asking the teacher questions is not a common thing in Korea. From the Confucian philosophy, we learned that pretending not to know in front of teachers or in a group conversation is virtuous and modest." Indeed, according to my research, in Confucianism, since younger and older generations must maintain distinctions in all actions, when a youth expresses his or her opinion to an elder, especially when it is a differing opinion, it can be regarded as exceptionally bad behavior.<sup>30</sup> This could facilitate less verbal relationship between teacher and students.

Language also can be another factor. In Korea, depending on the degree of deference in the relationship between speakers and listeners, a different inflection is used.<sup>31</sup> Elders, or people who have authority, generally use inflections, both of which resemble commands and a more direct conversational style when they talk with younger people. This may naturally facilitate a more direct method of instruction. A direct method might allow students to participate less during lessons (such as asking the teacher a question).

### Discipline In Music Practices

The issue of discipline presents another philosophical distinction between teachers from the United States and Korea. Practicing behavior is one of the most important elements of discipline. It indicates a student's level of responsibility toward preparing for lessons:

"I really did not have to do anything [to motivate Korean students]... Even though I think they do not like what I asked them to do as far as practicing is concerned, they still did it. They did all the theory homework, all the composition assignments."—Bethany

"When I taught at the students' houses in Korea, most mothers made sure their child prepared for the lesson; had their child practice or do their assignment until I showed up.... Also ... they prepared desserts for me."—Bo-Young

"Teachers have come to expect that American students will usually be very busy in many extracurricular activities, of which piano is just one..."—Sara

"I have a little motivational activity for them [two American students who are not practicing] like a star or sticker charts, or something. When they don't practice they can see that they are not keeping up. That way I do not have to say as much, they are aware that they are falling behind their peers, but even with that, I've noticed this semester, that does not seem to bother them or their parents.... I am setting the expectation pretty low for them because they haven't even met any high expectations.... They just don't work during the week 'cause they are always so busy.... they're not claiming to be a competitive pianist...they just want their life to be full in that way. So ... if they are happy with moving with that pace, I guess that is okay with me for now."—Bethany

As the quotes above show, for the American teachers, the qualities of discipline and hard work were not the teacher and students' primary concerns or expectations. They acknowledged that students can take lessons just for fun and seemed to be cautious in telling students they needed to practice more. In contrast, Korean participants agreed that discipline is one of the most important elements in piano studying in Korea. Since Korean private teachers seem to have much greater expectations of their students in the area of discipline, such as preparing for lessons and being responsible for practicing assignments, most Korean participants expressed concern about the challenge of disciplining their students in the United States:

"Most of students I met in the U.S...they want to have fun...so it's hard to challenge them or develop musicality or piano technique, and it is hard to give sincere advice or correct their behaviors compared to Korean students, so sometimes I feel less motivated as a teacher."—Song

"... Even if practicing the piano is not fun, I believe if people start to practice, they will sometimes find interest which they do not expect at first.... However, I feel some students here do not even try to practice at first because it does not look fun, and tend to rationalize the reasons why they do not practice because of that...which makes me think they are not well-disciplined..."—Min-Young

Interestingly, the research found these results seemed consistent with the curriculum of private piano institutions in Korea and the study of Asian mothers of Juilliard pre-college division. Korean pre-college piano students ages 6–12 go to the piano institution every day to practice the piano for approximately an hour, and have a 10-minute lesson a couple of times a week, American students tend to do most of their practicing at home and go to the private music institution one or at most two times a week for their lesson(s).<sup>32</sup> Although this may have something to do with having access to a piano, it may also be that having multiple lessons during the week, even if they are short, and having the teacher make sure the student is practicing in their practice room every day for approximately an hour, are ways of instilling self-discipline in young Korean students.

The study of Asian mothers of Juilliard pre-college division showed their greater expectations of their children in the area of discipline. Wang claims in her research, *Music Mom and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities*, that many of the Asian interviewees in her study—including Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean mothers of Juilliard pre-college division students—cited discipline, diligence and persistence as critical reasons for enrolling their children in music lessons.<sup>33</sup> It might be possible that this is also connected to the influence of Confucian philosophy, where self-discipline is considered to be one of the most important moral principles.

### Objectives For Piano Lessons

Another area that may arise as a challenge in cross-cultural teaching is that of objectives for piano lessons. Participants believe some American students think piano can be one of many enjoyable activities. For American students, the emphasis seemed to fall on individual responsibility; however, in pointing out Asian mothers' extreme involvedness, both Korean and American participants reported that these mothers were likely to focus on tangible results, such as competitions and progress on repertoire, and they tended to be more competitive than American parents. These characteristics of Asian motherhood

appear to create considerable challenges to American student teachers works with young Asian students:

"There was one situation with one of my Chinese students. Her mom was really involved with correcting her when I was correcting her. I was kind of expecting it...that is why it surprised me that it was true. Because that was the stereotype about Asian moms and then here it was true in this case.... [She was] really involved with children. I keep a journal for my students, I accidentally sent it home with her, and I think she read it... because she stopped correcting her daughter."—Joy

"I started him with a more creative approach and a little bit of a slower process to reading, and I got a lot of resistance from his parents. They asked many times if he was stupid.... [There were] a lot of emails and phone calls.... 'Is he not good enough? Why is he doing this?' Saying, 'This is not what his sister did. ...He just seems to be progressing so slowly.' Even though I was saying, 'He is brilliant. He is grasping the material.' The end of the story, they quit and went to her former teacher who is a Korean."—Bethany

"The [Korean] parents...and the students are aware...what their friends were playing, how they are playing...whether they are going to the same festival or not."—Sara

Why do Korean parents tend to compare themselves with others and focus on tangible results in piano studies? While there are no definite beliefs and values that explain this in the context of piano education, several theories may offer an explanation.

First, Korean students are, in many ways, encompassed within a more competitive environment than American students, including the strong competition to get into a top university after high school. For some Korean parents, tangible results from a music competition or festival can be another tool that helps their child gain acceptance into a prestigious school. Therefore, people want to achieve tangible results as proof that their child is succeeding in music study to get into a top school.

Second, parental comparison may have to do with the Korean commitment to collectivism. Collectivistic cultures that predominate



in Asia, place great emphasis on groups,<sup>34</sup> and think more in terms of “we” than “I.” And in these cultures, knowing neighbors and sharing information are very important practices. It is quite possible these cultural practices are still embedded in the Korean parents’ sharing of their child’s personal piano education information such as what repertoire they are playing, information about festivals, teachers, competitions, institutions and the like. Again, this could lead to comparing their child with their child’s peers, and becoming more competitive.

Finally, these responses can be related to the cultural model of success, which might equal one’s visible accomplishments in education<sup>35</sup> and to the cultural value of the “dedicated mother” commonly held in Asian societies (Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean).<sup>36</sup> Since some mothers think success might equal one’s noticeable results in education, they think parent involvement in education is necessary and is the one way to show their sacrifice for and dedication to their children.

### Limitations Of The Study

Although the study has broadened cross-cultural understandings of the experience of teaching piano in a Korean-American context, it also has limitations. First, because of the locale in which the study was conducted, it only included a few participants. Another limitation is the sample of participants, all of whom I knew personally outside of this study as they were part of my piano graduate program. If we had not had previous contact, and if the sample set had included students outside of this institution, the sample size would have been larger and the results would have presented a more diverse pool.

My own bias as a researcher also presents some limitations for this study. I believe different dimensions of my identity influenced this research. I was born and grew up Korea until age 19. I am a bicultural and can speak English as a second language. I understand the society Korean participants and Korean young students come from and the society the Korean participants are trying to reach. My identity as a Korean, teacher and a doctoral piano student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison also helped shape the kind of inter-

action I had with participants. Several of the issues that came up in the interviews were familiar to me, particularly issues of discipline with American students arises because of cultural differences.

### Conclusion

I realized I am not the only one who has faced some unexpected reactions and misunderstandings with parents with whom I have worked through this research. Actually, by the time I embarked on this research, my American colleague, who is now an assistant professor, came to me and expressed her challenge/issues with young Korean students and their parents from the music institution where she was employed. She asked about the general Korean piano education system and environment, including parents’ expectations. I was thankful for her candid reflections, which gave me confidence that this research can be accessible for those who have just started cross-cultural teaching.

This research clearly shows values and attitudes are, in part, demonstrated via educational priorities and expectations of a society’s members including parents, students and teachers. Confucian philosophy and Korean language have been affecting social roles among teacher, students and parents. Collectivism and a cultural model of success in Korea emphasize the potential challenges are occurred when two cultures such as Korean and American meet in the piano studio. Most Korean participants (teachers) had challenges with discipline and authority when teaching young American students and most American participants (teachers) had challenges with Asian students’ dependent learning styles and Asian parents’ expectations towards their children’s education.

What, then, are ways to negotiate the cross-cultural dynamic of the teaching and learning process? To date, there is not a universal application for piano pedagogy in cross-cultural teaching. Perhaps a good place to start is to reflect on their own potential biases toward specific teaching methods or learning styles from other cultures. If they do so, teachers can keep more positive perspectives when the challenges or conflicts arise and can better sympathize with students and

parents from other cultures instead of taking conflicts personally.

Furthermore, reflecting their own biases towards other methods as well as their own method could give opportunities for teachers to learn other pedagogical cultures and their own cultures. Many of us are familiar with the challenge and rewards of teaching a transfer student. Even transfer students from a similar culture bring with them the culture of their previous studio or teacher. We are often aware of this musical or pedagogical culture and try to accommodate the transfer student. By retaining some traditions from their previous learning while introducing our own pedagogical philosophy, these students often feel a smoother transition to a new teacher. In a similar vein, a beginning student from another culture brings similar expectations that we should strive to understand respond to, just like our transfer students.

For instance, from my past experiences in Korean and American settings, trying to put less on emphasis on technical accomplishment and performance-based style with young American students were more successful at the beginning. Recognizing their interest and curiosity in music opens their interest in music more, and avoiding a directive teaching style seemed to make my students believe I respect their self-esteem. These efforts definitely have helped me to set up a better relationship with student or parents from the United States at the beginning.

Whereas, with young Korean students who just came from Korea, explaining directly what the teacher wants in working with the student, as well as expectation of the student, might be more effective. If you give many choices—you can think about it this way, or another way—the students can be easily overwhelmed and confused at first. The Korean mother, especially those who have just come to the United States, might be uncomfortable talking about her expectations with the teachers right away because of the cultural challenges; Korean mothers tend to be hesitant to say something directly to the teachers at first. So, initiating discussion of the students' progress and participation in competitions or recitals will make the parents feel more welcomed and comfortable talking about their expectation. I believe these

little efforts can help teachers set up a great relationship with parents and students from the beginning.

Once a good and reliable relationship is established among teachers, parents and students, teachers can easily introduce their own teaching methods to students. Eventually, teachers will be likely to combine and experiment with multiple approaches when necessary. This will help teachers not only to have a variety of teaching techniques, but also to develop their own methods/approaches in a future cross-cultural setting.

Cultivating more positive cross-cultural relationships with students and parents can be an absolutely necessity in a piano studio. Although my research primarily utilized a Korean-American setting, my hope is this research will enable readers to have better understanding of their questions from cross-cultural teaching with a different perspective than before and can provide an opportunity to learn about other pedagogical cultures and their own culture to have a successful teaching experience in a cross-cultural setting.



### Notes

1. K. Williams, "Cross-Cultural Communication in the Music studio," *American Music Teacher*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 23–28, August-September 2002.

2. G. Wang, "Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: Music Mom and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities," *American Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 881–903, 2009.

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