

PORTFOLIOS IN PRACTICE: A Piano Pedagogy Internship Portfolio

Laura Umbro's exhibits are excerpts from her Music-in-Education Cumulative Portfolio required for earning the MIE Concentration from New England Conservatory as a Performance major. Her portfolio was given exemplary portfolio status because of its thorough documentation of her work and its relevance to the NBPTS standards of portfolio content coded into NEC's digital portfolio assessment system.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO EXHIBIT 1

Documentation

This section includes a lesson plan, lesson transcriptions, transcription reflections, and recital programs. Also included in my documentation, though not on paper, are recorded lessons on film. Gathering this documentation provided for endless reflection opportunities. Never have I been able to assess myself with such objectivity. A more detailed assertion of the content of the transcriptions is also included. I believe that all material in this section is evidence of my dedication to my students, and to my musical/life aesthetic. The recital programs in the back are from February, and there is another recital planned for June 13th. My aunt, who is a piano teacher as well, allows my students to attend her bi-annual recitals, and we have been organizing these performances together for the last two years. They demonstrate my collaboration and partnerships in the music education process.

Commitment to documentation of student work. This page from Laura's portfolio describes for the reader the varied kinds of documentation employed for the purpose of reflective analysis of her piano students. As an experienced studio teacher, she states that "never have I been able to assess myself with such objectivity" through the process of transcribing and coding her sample lessons with students and presenting video clips and the analysis of her results to the Music-in-Education Guided Internship Seminar.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO EXHIBIT 2

Transcriptions:

The following documents are selected transcriptions of private piano lessons. Being sure to ask the permission of all parents, I set up a camera in the corner of my studio. I was also very sensitive to the students' comfort level. If anyone did not want to be taped, the camera was immediately turned off. Of course, I usually first responded with an "Are you sure?"

In order to attain a balanced age range, I chose to transcribe Matthew Zanin (6 yrs. old), Laura Zanin (9 yrs. old), Elizabeth Johnson (9 yrs. old), and Gerry Chase (67 yrs. old). This allowed me to observe differences in teaching style and in student response. With Gerry, I saw that I was able to focus on technical difficulties for a much longer period of time, and was able to go into more detail without fear of her getting disinterested. In Matthew's case, I think I should try to make the note-learning aspect more fun. When analyzing these transcriptions in class, Andreea suggested that for scales, have the student play them according to different scenarios (i.e. happy child skipping, lonely person crying, giant stomping, etc.). I found that I struck a wonderful balance with Laura. After color-coding the transcriptions, I saw that there was a tremendous variation of color. What I was most pleased about with her was the teacher/student equality- she spoke nearly as much as I did and was extremely involved. I greatly encouraged her to experiment when I saw this curiosity.

Some notable moments that I found especially interesting include when Matthew discovered a canon on his own, Elizabeth's take on the painting/lake analogy, and Laura's misunderstood idea about playing quickly and perfectly. Perhaps this shows overall differences in learning related to age. Perhaps very young students are mostly about curiosity and imagination while children older (9-12) look for more concrete answers to problems.

These transcriptions are also evidence of the artistry I incorporate into lessons. I enjoy playing for the students so that they have a model to listen to, and also for ear training skills. I want them to hear how subtle changes make a big difference, and also to show them where the limits are (or aren't). One thing I noticed about myself is that I need to stop saying the word 'right' as a hypothetical question/remark. I said it twelve times in Laura's half hour lesson! That would become annoying for anyone.

Transcriptions are highly valuable documents that I would encourage every private teacher to create. I've realized things about myself and about my students that will change the way I teach. I also deeply appreciated the feedback I received from my colleagues and the time that was taken to help me in my pursuit.

An Introduction to the Transcriptions of her Piano Lessons. As the seminar facilitator, Larry Scripp requires transcription of one's own teaching to be an essential ingredient of an MIE pre-professional portfolio. As Laura indicates in her statement, her methodology of transcription enhanced her ability to determine evidence of individual learning styles and how she differentiates her instruction accordingly. By coding these transcriptions, she notices how the inclusion of artistry (her performance) in the lessons balances time allocated for modeling the music with time spent on guided inquiry into the student's learning process. Laura notes that sharing her transcripts and their analysis with peers not only heightened her awareness of some 'annoying' teaching habits, but also helped her better appreciate the joy of discovering how to make learning more fun and rewarding for her student.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO EXHIBIT 3

Transcription Color Code

Blue: Technical work (including note-learning and posture)

Blue Bracket: Technical explanations

Green: Statements that encourage the student to feel involved and give them freedom in the lesson. Sometimes demonstrates teacher/student equality

Orange: Statements that demonstrate student involvement

Pink: Musical explanations or suggestions

Yellow: Compliments; statements of positive reinforcement

Purple: Statements/evidence of reflection

Black Underline: Explanations of terms/definitions. Any interdisciplinary connections included as well

Black Circle: Statements of concern or confusion

Pencil Circle: Demonstration of artistry on part of teacher

Silver Underline/Bracket: Particularly special moments

Black and Silver Circle/Underline: Statements of frustration

Purple Underline: Statements that demonstrate getting to know each other

Constructing a Coding System for the Transcription Data. The construction of a coding system resulted from a careful examination of Laura's techniques and values as a teacher. To attain a semblance of 'objective analysis,' it is just as important to code evidence of student frustration or confusion as it is to gather evidence of student involvement and positive reinforcement. Process statements or behaviors are balanced by indication of content or technical focus. Artistic demonstration is as important as the citing of interdisciplinary connections. Evidence of reflective thinking may be just as important as the piano performance.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO EXHIBIT 4

Student: Laura Zanin

Age: 10

Time Studying: 3 years (2 with me)

S: The new piece was the hardest. I got to here.

T: That's ok. You know, it's new- So we'll do that after. So let's see Liebestraum Take your time.

<playing>

T: Up, let's start again. Take your time sweetie

<playing>

T: Keep it even... 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3 etc.

<playing>

T: Nope, hold on. Let me stop you for a second. This is going well, but sometimes the left hand gets a little uneven. Slow down a little. 1-2-3, 1-2-3

<playing>

T: Nope, make sure this lines right up.

<playing>

T: Count and slow down... Count with me.

<playing>

T: Laura, take it off and take a deep breath. Count with me, out loud- keep that left from running head. Very Slow, I want to hear every single note. Just do this- start on this A and freeze there. So we're just doing from here to here, ok?

<playing>

T: Again, very even- slowly

<playing>

T: Freeze- again

<playing>

T: Freeze- again. Slower

<playing>

T: Ok, now let's try it from here. Count out loud with me

<playing>

T: Keep an eye on the notes! Ok let's stop there. Let's start from the very beginning and stop there. Remember to keep it very even- don't let it rush ahead.

<playing>

T: Good. Let's stop here for a second. Wow! That's like a breath of fresh air. I have a feeling that you only practiced it up to tempo and fast

S: Yeah...

T: Yeah? I know- because last week everything was perfectly even. And now we were rushing, we were stumbling and that showed me that you never practiced it slowly. And you know what happens when we just practice it fast, right? It starts to just kinda fall apart.

S: I thought you'd be mad if I went slowly because I already know this part.

T: No, no, no- what do I always tell you? You can play this slow as molasses as long as..

S: it's perfect

T: no, it doesn't have to perfect. But as long as your notes are there and its even, right? I'd much rather it be slow and even than fast and sloppy. It wasn't that sloppy, but it was just enough that I now you can do better. Ok? So whenever you feel yourself rushing, stop

Coding Displays of the Transcription Data. In this excerpt, the code suggests a primary focus on technique and increased evidence of positive reinforcement as the lesson proceeds. In the seminar, students acknowledge this pattern of instruction to positive feedback as a distinctive template for the successful lesson – especially for 10 year olds!

UMBRO PORTFOLIO EXHIBIT 5

take a deep breath, and slow it down. The tempo's moderato. That means moderate- not too fast, not too slow? Right? So take it a little bit slowly. It's a beautiful song, right?

S: Um-hum.

T: Yeah, so let's take it from the next section.

<playing>

T: That's it.

<playing>

T: Nice! That was gorgeous! Very nice. Good, so as long as we're steady, there are a lot of wonderful things happening. Ok? So hold back- that's my biggest concern is that we don't start playing it too fast.

WRITTEN: Slower, don't rush. That way everything will be even.

T: Now, let's talk about musicality. This is the beta part. Remember? Our dynamics?

S: I did it piano

T: You did, and it was a great dynamic at the beginning. How can we make it more interesting?

S: Maybe forte the second time.

T: um-hum, so you might want to do something a little different the second time around? I think that's a good idea. What about this? Dolce, do you know what dolce means in Italian? It means sweet. And that makes sense, right? It's a very sweet piece.

S: How about mp here?

T: Yeah, maybe- let's see what that sounds like.

<playing>

S: How about forte?

T: It may be too loud-maybe mf. Go ahead and try both. The reason I'm not sure about forte is because don't we want to save some volume for the good stuff later?

<playing>

T: Careful- make sure you're starting the right spot. Take your time, think about what you're doing. Think about where you're going.

<playing>

T: You gotta be thinking about this A!

<playing>

T: Good let's stop there and talk about it. What did you think of that, did you like that? I thought it was good But you know what? I have a nice cool little thing happening at this D, don't we?

<playing>

S: oops, I went to here and then I went here.

T: That's ok- just be careful of that. When does the melody start to different from the first time? From that D, right?

S: what if we start like this? (demonstrates)

T: you mean start soft? Yeah, I like that crescendo you just did. Let's experiment a bit

S: And then, get here when it's soft.

T: Yup- I think these are all good ideas. So, I'm starting to think that if it starts to get different over here, we don't want to get f too soon. Maybe we should keep it piano for a second and then crescendo, what if we do that?

S: Crescendo, and then get loud.

<playing>

Instances of complexity in teaching. Here the seminar students marvel at the shifts of focus that can occur during a relatively short amount of time during a piano lesson with this same child. The orange and purple coding suggest that a much more personal and reflective approach is taking place and that the teacher is employing a wider range of explanation, interdisciplinary connections, and collegiality.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO EXHIBIT 6

Reflection
26 April, 2004
Laura Umbro

[Typed for clarification]

It's difficult to find a balance between instilling solid technical work and musical expression. One needs the technique in order to express emotion through an instrument, but it seems easy to detract from the student having fun (usually the younger students). How can I teach notes so that they know them well, while still making it as enjoyable as the actual playing? With the mid-ranged students, I have them work from beat to beat or measure to measure with a lot of repetition in order to smooth out technical problems. But perhaps I have them repeat it too much. Maybe I should leave more for them to practice at home. But then I'm afraid they may not get it worked out. Maybe I should trust them more. I realize that kind of technical work is what my teacher did with me, and it worked very well. But I took to that kind of intensity- many students probably would not. This is clearly an ongoing process.

A Commitment to the Self-Evaluation of Teaching. Another critical component of the portfolio is the willingness to document and reflect on one's self-evaluation of one's own teaching. In this example, Laura reflects on the content and process of her teaching experience with a nine-year-old student. The reflective comments written immediately following the lesson capture the throughline of the lesson and its connection with past work. Later on, transcriptions of the lessons add considerable detail and new discoveries that will, in turn, affect Laura's preparation for the next lesson.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO
EXHIBIT 7A

Lesson Reflection

Name: Laura
Age: Zarin (9)
Time Studying Piano: 2 1/2

Date: 5/1/04

1. What were some things you did in today's lesson?

learn the left in a new piece

2. What has been the most challenging thing about learning the piano?

learning hands together

3. What has been the easiest?

learning notes.

4. What do you enjoy most about playing piano?

playing pieces when they were finished

5. How do you think you've improved?

I have improved a lot since I started

6. Do you think learning piano has helped you in other ways? (If you don't know, that's ok)

yes, in music class in school on reading notes.

Learning from Student Evaluation of Teaching. The final critical component of the portfolio is the willingness to document and reflect on student evaluation of one's own teaching. In the following example, Laura discovers how her nine-year-old student evaluates the content and process of her lesson. The sparseness of the child's comments reminds Laura Umbro and the seminar

UMBRO PORTFOLIO
EXHIBIT 7B

Teacher Assessment

Date: 5/1/04
Student's Name: Laura Zarin Age: 9 Time Playing: 2 1/2 yrs

1. What did we do?

Fixed note confusion in left hand of new piece.

Discussed ways to make learning them easier (looking for common tones, Good Guys Describe Fudge Always, All Cats Eat Grass)

2. What were some specific problems that occurred?

Articulation (staccato)
Forgetting Accidentals
Forgetting to count

3. What were some things the student did very well?

Went through notes easily after discussing what to look for.

Adding character to the part she knew better.

4. How has the student progressed since the last lesson?

Speaks/contributes more every lesson.
Beginning to have real opinion about musical shaping

5. What were some overall things that need work, and how will I focus on that?

Getting over the hump of learning notes for a new piece.

How: work on figuring it out in lesson, providing methodical ways to make it easier (ie. common tones etc)

students of the developmental differences in age groups that music teachers will face in their teaching careers. The example also demonstrates why written reflections are perhaps more valuable as points of departure for discussion with a student than they are evidence of objective understanding of the learning process that goes on in one-to-one instruction in music.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO
EXHIBIT 8A

DATA ANALYSIS OF LESSON CONTENT

Qualitative Scoring Code

BLUE: Statements Concerning Technique

(Note learning, working out technical passages, repetition)

YELLOW: Statements of Encouragement

(Compliments, positive reinforcement)

PINK: Statements/Suggestions about Musical Expression/Structure

(Phrasing, dynamics, articulation, aesthetics, mood, structure of piece)

ORANGE: Moments of Creative Student Input

(Suggestions, ideas, and thoughts presented by the student)

GREEN: Encouragement of Student Input

(Opportunities created by the teacher to foster suggestions, ideas, and thoughts from the student)

PURPLE: Reflection/Review

(Student's review of lesson content)

Quantitative Analysis of Statements

Matthew (6) – 30 Min. Lesson

15% Technical Work: 29
11% Encouragement: 20
13% Musical Explanations: 25
33% Creative Student Input: 62
23% Encouragement of Student Input: 43
5% Reflection: 10

Total Statements: 189

Elizabeth (9) – 45 Min. Lesson

34% Technical Work: 82
24% Encouragement: 59
14% Musical Explanations: 34
14% Creative Student Input: 34
9% Encouragement of Student Input: 21
5% Reflection: 11

Total Statements: 241

Laura (9) – 30 Min. Lesson

17% Technical Work: 19
21% Encouragement: 23
22% Musical Explanations: 24
21% Creative Student Input: 23
14% Encouragement of Student Input: 16
5% Reflection: 6

Total Statements: 111

Gerry (67) – 60 Min. Lesson

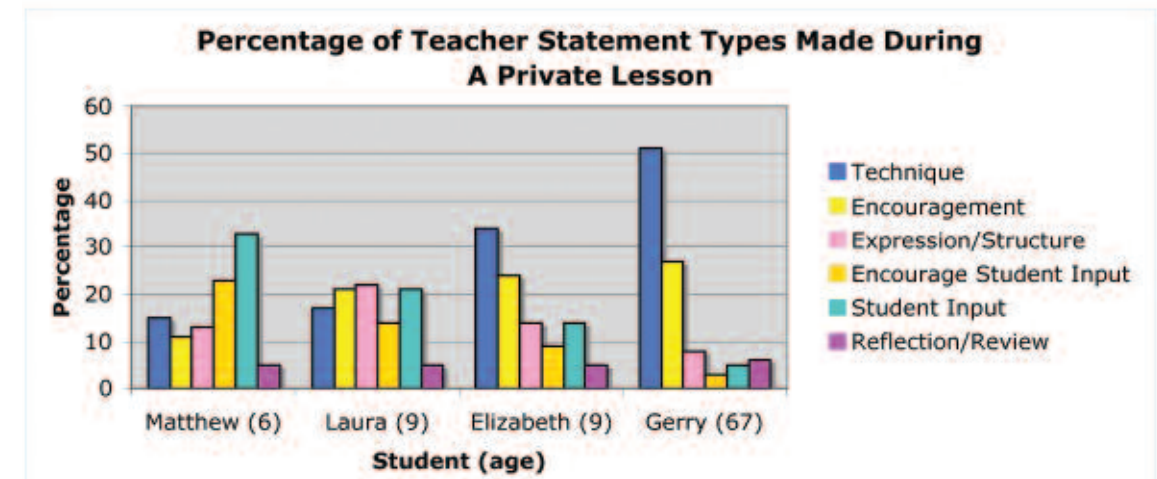
51% Technical Work: 54
27% Encouragement: 29
8% Musical Explanations: 9
5% Creative Student Input: 5
3% Encouragement of Student Input: 3
6% Reflection: 6

Total Statements: 106

Note that the amount of statements per lesson varies greatly and appears not to be related to the length of the lesson.

Charting profiles of types of statements made during student lessons can help teachers to reflect on variations in teaching approaches taken according to individual differences in student development and learning styles. Although the trends depicted here seem to indicate that younger students require more freedom for creative input and less instruction on technique, it should be emphasized that these results represent only a moment in the larger continuum of instruction that will vary from week to week. Thus, more extensive research would need to be conducted in order to formulate accurate generalizations. Nonetheless, when the teacher is made aware of trends, adjustments in emphasis in lessons can be monitored and adjusted with greater attention to the flow of statements during the course of the lesson.

UMBRO PORTFOLIO
EXHIBIT 8B



RESULTS

The analysis of time spent on different topics in private lessons presented here suggests striking differences in a teacher's focus on individual needs of her students. In this chart the data indicate that the teacher spends more time on technical work according to the age of the student. Whereas all students get approximately the same amount of encouraging statements with their work, Laura's lessons focus primarily on expression and structure, while Elizabeth and Gerry are spending more time responding to statements concerning technique. The relationship between encouraging the student and getting student input is constant across all students, although the teacher's priority for encouraging student creative input appears to be declining according to the age of the student. According to this chart, every student receives equal amount of attention to reviewing and reflecting on the lesson.

As Laura states in her portfolio:

"Qualitative analysis is a highly useful tool that I encourage every private instructor to use as a way to observe, assess, and remediate not only their own teaching methods, but also their students' development. Though the results of my data only capture a moment in time, this research sets the foundation for more extensive exploration and demonstrates the extent to which teachers may seek to improve and critically evaluate their methods of instruction."