Engaging Adult Piano Students Through Transformative Pedagogical Approaches

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Abstract

As the number of adults seeking to learn the piano increases, so too does the need for piano teachers to understand how to better facilitate their learning. This research offers detailed pedagogical insights into understanding and meeting the learning needs of six adult piano students through the author’s practitioner-based study. It investigates the use of transformative pedagogical strategies aimed at engaging adult students in all areas of their learning. The main themes explored are relevance and repertoire selection, lesson interactions and home practice.

Using self-direction and experiential learning as the theoretical framework for this study, the author uncovers skill sets and mindsets associated with engagement in the contexts of adult piano students’ one-to-one piano lessons and home practice. The experiential learning cycle encompasses the metacognitive and cognitive skills associated with deliberate piano practice and self-direction. These include planning and implementing appropriate practice strategies, observing and reflecting on outcomes and adapting approaches to tasks accordingly. Developing and utilising these skills, however, is dependent on mindset factors that students bring to their learning. These include expectations, self-efficacy levels, epistemological beliefs, goal orientations and attributions. This nine-month study explores how these mindsets impacted students’ learning and how altering the author’s teaching strategies contributed to fostering mindsets conducive to student engagement.

Transformative pedagogical approaches to piano lessons explored throughout this study centre on student-teacher collaboration and reflective practice. Strategies implemented include aligning repertoire with students’ musical tastes, goals and values, creating a ‘culture of inquiry’ through collaborative discussions, effective questioning and adapting the structure of lessons, and helping students to plan their home practice effectively. This study highlights the efficacy of these communicative and collaborative modes of teaching in engaging adult piano students. It finds that fostering self-direction is not as straightforward as offering the balance between guidance and freedom that some experts suggest. Building rapport and showing empathy towards students’ challenges were paramount to engaging students in their
learning. Through open discussions, ownership of lesson structure shifted from the author to the students. Curiosity, questions from students, discussions and the use of deliberate practice strategies all increased, indicating an increase in engagement with their learning.

Self-reflection and uncovering subconscious assumptions that drove her teaching choices was the catalyst for the author learning to make better pedagogical decisions in relation to adult students’ needs. Of significance is the author’s shift from focusing lesson activities on her perceptions of students’ musical needs, to providing students the opportunity to direct her to their perceived needs. This changed the lesson environment from one that inadvertently created performative pressure and anxiety to one where students felt safe to explore, participate freely and ask their own questions.

This study also included the implementation of a home practice journal designed to facilitate and encourage deliberate practice between lessons. The inclusion of weekly reflective questions did not result in the critical insights into learning for which they were originally designed; rather, they created an opportunity for students’ self-judgement and disappointment in their perceived slow progress. Competing priorities, lack of time, inability to focus effectively as a result of environment, mood and lack of teacher guidance contributed to students’ negative feelings around their practice. Despite this, the use of deliberate practice strategies increased throughout the study as students could increasingly share their concerns in a way that allowed them to engage in activities in their lessons.

The conclusions drawn from this study may be of benefit to other studio music teachers in several ways. Firstly, they advocate for reflective practice as a valid and powerful form of professional development. Secondly, they indicate that critical teacher reflection can act as a bridge between theory and practice. This enables teachers to uncover discrepancies between espoused theories and theories in use and to reconcile actions with intentions. This heightened awareness has the potential to positively impact student learning outcomes. Finally, teachers may be interested in implementing the transformative pedagogical strategies explored throughout this thesis within their own studio. While the author’s journey shared here is uniquely her own, the approaches used to engage adult students with their learning may be applicable to other studio contexts.
Keywords

transformative pedagogy, adult piano students, self-direction, teacher-as-researcher, practitioner-based research, piano pedagogy, self-reflection, mindsets
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed:

Leah Coutts
Date: 29 September 2016
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# Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii  
Keywords ............................................................................................................................... iv  
Statement of Originality ........................................................................................................ v  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ vi  
Contents ................................................................................................................................ vii  
List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... xi  
List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... xii  

Chapter 1: Engaging Adult Piano Students ................................................................. 1  
1.1 Rationale for the Study ................................................................................................. 1  
1.2 Identifying the Need for this Study ............................................................................. 2  
1.3 Aim and Scope of the Study ......................................................................................... 3  
1.4 Significance of the Study ............................................................................................. 4  
1.5 Structure of the Thesis ................................................................................................. 5  

Chapter 2: Engaging Adult Learners—Self-direction, Mindsets, and Transformative Pedagogy ......................................................................................................................... 7  
2.1 Self-direction .................................................................................................................. 8  
2.1.1 Experiential learning ............................................................................................... 10  
2.1.2 The role of mindsets in learning .......................................................................... 13  
2.1.3 Transforming problematic mindsets through premise reflection ......................... 21  
2.1.4 Ethical dilemmas and criticisms of premise reflection .................................... 24  
2.1.5 Reflecting on content and process of learning ..................................................... 25  
2.2.6 Teacher transformation ......................................................................................... 26  
2.2 Transformative Pedagogy ............................................................................................ 27  
2.2.1 Relevance of content ............................................................................................. 29  
2.2.2 Communication and student-teacher interactions .............................................. 31  
2.2.3 Creating a ‘culture of inquiry’ ............................................................................. 32  
2.2.4 Feedback and modelling ...................................................................................... 37  
2.2.5 Facilitating deliberate practice at home ............................................................... 39  
2.3 Chapter Summary ........................................................................................................ 43  

Chapter 3: Methodology and Study Design .................................................................... 44  
3.1 Pedagogical Framework for this Study ....................................................................... 44
3.1.1 Content and repertoire ................................................................. 44
3.1.2 Lesson strategies and interactions ............................................... 45
3.1.3 Encouraging strategy use and reflections during home practice ........ 46
3.2 Research on Teaching ................................................................... 46
3.3 Teacher-as-Researcher Methodology ............................................... 48
  3.3.1 Knowledge-in-practice. .............................................................. 49
  3.3.2 Knowledge-of-practice .............................................................. 50
3.4 Study Design ................................................................................. 51
  3.4.1 Teaching and learning contexts .................................................. 51
  3.4.2 Length of study ........................................................................ 51
  3.4.3 Participant selection ................................................................. 52
  3.4.4 Ethics ..................................................................................... 54
3.5 Data Collection Methods ............................................................... 54
  3.5.1 Uncovering frames of reference through semi-structured interviews ..... 55
  3.5.2 Student home practice journal ................................................... 58
  3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews, round 2 ............................................ 61
  3.5.4 Capturing lesson interactions through video recording lessons .......... 62
  3.5.5 Learning to be critically reflective and reflexive through my journal ..... 63
3.6 Thematic Analysis ......................................................................... 69
3.7 Generalisability ............................................................................ 73
3.8 Chapter Summary ......................................................................... 74

Chapter 4: Relevance and Repertoire Selection .................................... 75
  4.1 My Original Pedagogical Framework for Repertoire Selection ............ 76
  4.2 Understanding the Role of Self-Efficacy and Values in Choosing Repertoire ......................................................................................... 79
  4.3 Relevance Determined by External Goals ......................................... 80
  4.4 Creating Our Own Framework ....................................................... 83
    4.4.1 Perceptions of ease .................................................................. 84
    4.4.2 Lack of commitment and structure .......................................... 85
    4.4.3 Inspiring aural output increases motivation to commit ................. 86
    4.4.4 Perceptions of difficulty, progress and challenge ....................... 87
    4.4.5 When hard is too hard ............................................................ 90
    4.4.6 When future goals are not relevant to the present ...................... 92
  4.5 Collaboration and Relying on a Student’s Prior Knowledge .................. 93
    4.5.1 Unrealistic comparisons ......................................................... 94
6.3.3 Autonomous consultation of resources. ........................................ 158
6.3.4 Playing versus practising .......................................................... 161
6.4 Use of the Home Practice Journal .................................................. 163
   6.4.1 Types of responses to the reflective questions ......................... 163
   6.4.2 Experiences and perspectives on the home practice journal .......... 166
6.5 Students’ Overall Feelings of Progress .......................................... 169
6.6 Key Insights into Students’ Home Practice .................................... 172

Chapter 7: Final Reflections .................................................................. 174
7.1 What Role Do Mindsets Play in Adult Students’ Engagement with Their
   Learning? ......................................................................................... 175
7.2 What Pedagogical Approach Can Foster the Skill-Sets and Mindsets
   Required for Self-Direction? ............................................................ 176
7.3 How Do I Effectively Examine My Teaching and the Impact of My
   Pedagogical Decisions on My Students’ Learning? ......................... 181
7.4 Achieving the Aim of this Study ....................................................... 183
7.5 Implications for Future Research ..................................................... 184
   7.5.1 Improvements to data collection methods .................................. 184
   7.5.2 Methodology ........................................................................... 186
   7.5.3 Pedagogical approach ............................................................... 186
7.6 Final Reflections .............................................................................. 187

Appendix A: Study Information Sheet for Students .............................. 189
Appendix B: Participant Selection Survey .............................................. 192
Appendix C: Ethical Clearance .............................................................. 197
Appendix D: Informed Consent Package for Students ............................ 198
References ......................................................................................... 201
List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle. .................................................. 11
Figure 3.1. The action research spiral ................................................................. 49
Figure 3.2. Contexts involved in the study .......................................................... 51
Figure 3.3. Conceptual framework for teaching journal influences ..................... 64
Figure 4.1. Discontinuous model of motivation ......................................................... 79
Figure 5.1. Example 1 of teacher control of the experiential learning process ...... 102
Figure 5.2. Example 2 of teacher control of the experiential learning process ...... 103
Figure 5.3. Examples of students’ scores ............................................................. 120
Figure 5.4. Example of teacher-written practice notes for a student’s home practice ................................................................. 131
Figure 6.1. Placements of circled responses to goal achievements ......................... 143
Figure 6.2. Linear process of reflecting ............................................................... 152
Figure 6.3. Stages of skill acquisition ................................................................. 153
Figure 6.4. The use of post-it notes to isolate a section of music ......................... 155
Figure 6.5. Sean’s annotations demonstrating his problem-solving process ......... 157
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Fixed Mindset v. Growth Mindset ............................................................... 16
Table 2.2 Examples of Bugos and High’s (2009) Practice Strategies ..................... 40
Table 3.1 Student Participant Background ................................................................. 53
Table 3.2 Outline of Data Collection Time Frames and their Purposes .................... 55
Table 3.3 Themes and Examples of Relevant Codes ..................................................... 71
Table 4.1 Students' Musical Backgrounds ................................................................. 77
Table 6.1 Students’ Ratings for Goal Attainment and Feelings towards the Week’s Practice ........................................................................................................... 144
Chapter 1: Engaging Adult Piano Students

Early in my piano teaching career, I attracted many adult novice students and quickly became passionate about this demographic of student, enjoying the diversity and challenges they brought to my teaching. Yet while I felt equipped to teach them the subject of music and how to play the piano, I often found that they struggled to engage with their learning. This appeared to be due to nervousness and low confidence created when their experiences were at odds with their expectations of ease and quick progress at the piano. As a result, many inevitably ceased lessons after only a few short months, without ever engaging fully with their learning or experiencing the potential joy that their musical journeys could have offered.

In 2009, three years prior to this investigation, I studied foundation piano pedagogy courses in my Honours year at university, and undertook research into teaching to personality types and student-centred pedagogy. Despite these conceptual insights into studio teaching, my retention of adult students continued to suffer. I wondered whether there was something missing from my teaching practice itself. Perhaps there was something more I could do to help my adult students enjoy their musical journeys, achieve musical growth and satisfaction, and feel motivated to continue learning long term. This feeling of unrest and my drive to understand how to better engage adult students with their learning led to this investigation.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

Over the last few decades, with the expanding population of those with more expendable income, more time (in the case of retirees), and an increased desire and opportunity to fulfil childhood dreams (Jutras, 2006), the number of adults seeking piano lessons has increased. As such, many studio piano teachers have diversified their teaching to include adult novices (Uszler & Upitis, 2000). Retention of adult students, however, is challenging. They often have unrealistic expectations, with a desire for immediate perfection rather than the time and repetition required to learn, and feel frustrated at motor-cognitive disconnect, whereby procedural memory occurs slower than cognitive understanding (Cooper, 2001; Maris, 2000; Smeltzer, n.d.; A. Taylor, 2011; Uszler & Upitis, 2000; Wristen, 2006). It is noted that mindsets, which encompass assumptions, attitudes and expectations, can interfere
with a student’s ability to engage with their learning (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Master, 2012; Mezirow, 2003), and this is evident here. While piano teachers might empathise and have strategies to address musical challenges, they may not be equipped to address the extra-musical challenges relating to mindsets that can hinder adult students’ progress at the piano (Bowles, 2010).

While still a relatively young field, research into adult piano students has been growing steadily since the 1980s (Bowles, 2010; Jutras 2006). The majority of studies to date have sought to understand the students’ demographics, motivations for learning, and perceived benefits gained from piano tuition (see Cooper, 2001; Jutras, 2006; Smeltzer, n.d.; Swenson 2006; A. Taylor, 2011; A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008; Thornton, 2010; Wristen, 2006). Their rationale is that if we, as teachers, understand who adult students are and what they want, we can adapt lessons accordingly, potentially helping to retain students long term. Other studies have focused on student-teacher interactions within lessons (H. Chen, 1996; Elliott, 2012; Siebenaler, 1997) to uncover signs of effective teaching, as well as the characteristics, skill-sets and perceived challenges of teachers with adult piano students (Bowles, 2010).

Some studies have looked to adult learning theories to uncover the learning needs of adult piano students, arguing that self-direction is a key requirement for musical learning, which studio teachers need to be aware of (see H. Chen, 1996; Dabback, 2003; Mizok-Taylor, 2008; Wristen, 2006). H. Chen (1996) found that opportunities for self-direction, however, were either completely absent from piano lessons or ambivalent at best, and that students relied heavily on their teacher for guidance, showing no signs of seeking self-direction. While it has been posited that it is the role of the teacher to facilitate self-direction (Dabback, 2003; Mizok-Taylor, 2008, p. 20; Wristen, 2006, p. 390), Brookfield (1985) argues that adult students require an internal change of consciousness that goes beyond managing external instructional events in order to become self-directed. It is this internal change that piano teachers struggle most to cultivate (Bowles, 2010).

1.2 Identifying the Need for this Study

There has been minimal research regarding specific behaviours of teachers and adult students in the piano studio or the mindset factors associated with learning to play the piano (Mackworth-Young, 1990; Montemayor, 2008; Siebenaler, 1997). While it may be argued that there are many complexities to work through and much
content to explore in lessons (Mackworth-Young, 1990), if mindsets govern
behaviour and behaviour governs learning (Dahl, Bals & Turi, 2005), then it
certainly warrants exploration in the context of the piano studio. Bowles (2010)
argues that further discussion and research attention is required around teachers’
roles in, and strategies for ‘changing habits that hamper or delay [the] progress and
success’ (p. 57) of adult piano students. Others identify a need in relation to the
interactions between the teacher and adult student within the piano studio,
specifically examining the relationship between teacher behaviour and student
success (Siebenaler, 1997), cultivating musical thinking (H. Chen, 1996) and
teachers to take the time to learn about the characteristics and needs of adult piano
students and to choose methods and pedagogical approaches accordingly.
Subsequent studies have offered recommendations for teaching adults, such as
making the content relevant to students’ musical tastes, honouring their goals, and
instilling realistic expectations (Jutras, 2006; Uszler & Upitis, 2000; Wristen, 2006).
Insights into how this might unfold practically in a studio setting, however, require
further investigation.

1.3 Aim and Scope of the Study

The primary aim of this thesis was to learn how to better facilitate adult
students’ learning at the piano, with a specific emphasis on cultivating self-direction.
In doing so, I sought to better understand myself as a teacher and the complexities
involved in facilitating the musical growth of my students. While much of this thesis
and the pedagogical strategies it explores may be relevant to all age groups, given
my personal challenge with and love of teaching adults, and the aforementioned gap
in the piano pedagogy literature, the focus of this research is adult novice piano
students.

Given the deeply contextual nature of private studio teaching, and the fact
that I came to this research as an experienced practitioner, I chose to investigate this
topic within the context of my own studio teaching. While studying other piano
teachers’ studio practices would offer insights into the strategies they use with adult
students, I would need to recontextualise these strategies for use within my studio.
As I was most interested in adapting my teaching choices and understanding the
aspects that both positively and adversely affect my adult students’ capacities for
self-direction, it made more sense to adopt a practitioner-based approach. Teachers
are arguably best situated to research their own teaching challenges and can bring unique insights and perspectives to the research. As Stenhouse (1975, as cited in Leiper 2012) explains, teachers are able to develop a disposition to examine their own practice critically and systematically, which allows them to understand their own teaching better. Despite this unique advantage, very few investigations of studio music teaching adopt a self-study approach (see Leiper, 2012). Owing to the strong advocacy for this approach (McPhee, 2013) and its growing popularity within teacher education research in formal educational settings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004), and being inspired by Leiper (2012), I decided to take this research approach for my study.

In order to address the primary aim of better facilitating adult students’ learning, my research was directed by three key questions:

1. What role do mindsets play in adult students’ engagement with their learning?
2. What pedagogical approach can foster the skill-sets and mindsets required for self-direction?
3. How do I effectively examine my teaching and the impact of my pedagogical decisions on students’ learning to ensure I am meeting their needs?

It is not my aim to uncover a ‘correct’ approach to teaching (Cleaver & Ballantyne, 2014) adult learners at the piano, as the situational context of one-to-one teaching is unique to each teacher and student. Rather, I explore my interpretations of theory, and how they resulted in certain teaching and learning behaviours with my adult learners.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study contributes both theoretical and practical outcomes to the field of piano pedagogy. On a theoretical level, I focus on learning theories that are yet to be explored in great depth within the field of piano pedagogy. This contributes to expanding the awareness of key issues surrounding effective learning for adult students. I also contribute to the small but growing body of teacher-research studies within the field of one-to-one music tuition. I hope to encourage other teachers to study their own studio practices and to grow professionally through this medium.

This study provided me with an opportunity for professional and personal development. As studio teaching is an isolating profession and formal professional
development opportunities are relatively rare in this field, studies based on a teacher’s own studio teaching may be one of the best sources of professional development (Leiper, 2012). Thus, on a practical level, I intended to come to a better understanding of myself as a teacher, the adults that I teach, and what affects their learning. In this way, my study not only contributed to my professional development as a piano teacher, but also allowed students to benefit from the increased knowledge, experience and skill-sets I obtained throughout the study.

While the isolated context of piano lessons may make it difficult to generalise about adult learning at large, it is understood by the educational community that much can be learned from the unique experiences of individuals (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Flyvbjerg 2006; L. Richardson, 2003). As such, this study may contribute to other teachers’ professional development. As the practical wisdom of teachers is acknowledged as an important role in informing pedagogical strategies (Gelder, 2005, p. 41), I hope that my research and experiences can assist other one-to-one teachers to better understand the needs of their adult students and to better facilitate their learning and musical growth.

Finally, there is a gap between theory and practice that is noted frequently in education research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). While there is much discussion about how practice can inform theory, validating its importance as a subject of research, there appears to be less focus on how theory can inform practice. Understanding something conceptually, however, does not mean one can necessarily use that information in practice, and so this warrants attention. By researching my own practice, I aim to bring more discussion to the implementation of advice within the literature and the practical and reflective processes involved in aligning professional knowledge and actions.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six further chapters. Chapter 2 consists of two parts and outlines key insights from the literature that have informed this study. The first part investigates processes involved in self-direction and the role of mindsets in learning. The second part uncovers transformative pedagogy (Carey, Bridgstock, Taylor, McWilliam & Grant, 2013) as a starting point from which to investigate potential teaching strategies conducive to effective learning. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design of this study. It includes a discussion on the teacher-research methodology chosen, as well as the pedagogical framework I use
throughout my study, which resulted from the exploration of the theories in Chapter 2. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the practical implementation of this pedagogical framework, sharing key experiences and reflective insights learned through the process. They successively explore the three main themes of the framework: content and repertoire, lesson interactions, and home practice. Finally, in Chapter 7, I share reflective thoughts on the study and respond to the research questions listed in this chapter. I share my expanded understanding of the pedagogical framework as a result of this study, and offer recommendations for other piano teachers. Acknowledging the limitations of this study, I conclude with recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Engaging Adult Learners—Self-direction, Mindsets, and Transformative Pedagogy

In Chapter 1, I explained that piano pedagogues advocate for adult novice piano students to be self-directed, and that this does not frequently occur within the one-to-one studio. With this consideration, and the overarching aim of better facilitating my adult piano students’ learning in mind, this chapter first investigates the processes associated with self-direction. I examine how self-direction has been investigated within piano pedagogy to date and identify the need for more clarity around its processes and the teachers’ role in its cultivation. Referring to the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), I discuss the skill-sets associated with self-direction and the place of both cognitive and metacognitive processes in engaged learning. I also seek answers to the question of how suboptimal mindsets interfere with this engagement.

The second half of this chapter focuses on pedagogical strategies that aim to foster mindsets most conducive to active engagement with learning within the context of the one-to-one piano studio. Transformative pedagogy (Carey et al., 2013) provides a framework from which to discuss specific strategies with active engagement of students at their core. Such strategies include involving students in planning lesson content, employing different communication styles to engage students in their learning process and strategies for encouraging self-directed deliberate practice between lessons. I highlight the paradigm shift required for this type of teaching and the importance of teacher reflection as a catalyst for this shift to occur.

Since John Dewey’s writings on the role of reflective practice in learning (Dewey, 1933), there has been a prevalence of research on the importance of reflection within education research for students (W. Chen, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2012; Snyder & Snyder, 2008; E. W. Taylor, 2008) and teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Leiper, 2012; Murray & Lawrence, 2000; Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). Arguably, an educator’s ultimate aim is to enable their students to learn independently. The ability to self-reflect is a central proponent of this. Cranton (1996) argues, ‘it would be rare to find an educator
in Western culture who would not agree that he or she wanted learners to be more self-directed, more independent, or freer’ (p. 57). Burwell (2005) shares this sentiment in relation to music, stating, ‘the development of student independence is central to instrumental teaching and learning’ (p. 201). This is especially important given that students are expected to practice their instrument at home independently for the majority of their learning. This goal of cultivating independence in students is mirrored in adult learning theories, which shows a growing trend towards self-direction, experiential learning and critical reflection (Shannon, 2003).

2.1 Self-direction

While it has been argued that self-directedness is the most distinctive of all learning styles in adulthood (Brookfield, 1985), the term self-direction often lacks formal definition within piano pedagogy. Instead, it has been linked with self-learning, freedom, independence and a lack of guidance (Swenson, 2006; A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008; Wristen, 2006), and learning without a formal teacher (A. Taylor, 2011). Despite this apparent synonymity with autonomy, Wristen (2006) explains:

The teacher needs to provide for the adult student’s need for self-direction without completely removing him/herself from the process. Too much freedom can be stressful—adult students need parameters for making judgments about lesson content and direction. The teacher needs to strike a balance between providing opportunities for self-direction, and providing structure and guidance. (p. 390)

This implies several elements of self-direction within the context of a piano lesson: Firstly, the need for teachers to provide opportunities for students to be self-directed; secondly, it is a ‘need’ of adult students; and lastly, it implies freedom and a lack of guidance that requires balance. Dabback (2003) also stresses the need to balance the implied freedom associated with self-direction with structure and support. She argues that self-direction does not mean an absence of guidance, but rather more responsibility and accountability being placed with the student.

While Wristen’s (2006) advice to offer parameters to students in relation to selecting lesson content and shaping the direction of lessons might be sound, no further details are offered. This leaves a practitioner to wonder at how this, as well as the balance between freedom and guidance, might be achieved.
Mizok-Taylor (2008) and H. Chen (1996) investigate the characteristics of self-direction in relation to learning materials and the context of a one-to-one lesson, respectively. They both look to adult learning theories for a formal definition of self-direction and use the definition given by Malcolm Knowles (1975). Here, self-direction is described as ‘a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning’ (p. 18). Based on this definition, H. Chen (1996) identified four aspects of learning the piano to be related to self-direction: Decision-making in choosing the learning content; learning strategies; practice management; and self-awareness. H. Chen (1996) explains, ‘the more active role an adult learner plays, and the more control he or she has in each category, the more self-directed the individual is’ (p. 12). On this basis, H. Chen (1996) investigated one-to-one piano lessons in a studio context. He found that little self-direction is evident with adult learners. Chen explains that teachers generally offer little freedom for self-discovery and that fostering self-direction was either completely absent from lessons or ambivalent at best. The lessons observed in his study showed that students relied heavily on their teacher and did not ask many questions.

This leads to the question of what type of ‘need’ Wristen (2006) was referring to. If adults revert back to dependence of their school days in piano lessons (Belzer, 2004; A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008) and do not actively seek to be self-directed, then perhaps self-direction is a need insofar as it is a requirement for active engagement with learning, rather than an explicitly sought-after need from the students themselves. This highlights the teacher’s role in not only providing opportunities for self-direction, but also guiding the process and emphasising its role in learning. To date, the meaning of this in relation to one-to-one piano teaching with adult novices is yet to be fully realised, and clear pedagogical guidelines for implementing advice are absent.

Mizok-Taylor (2008), in response to H. Chen’s (1996) study, focuses on how the choice of method book sets students up to act in a self-directed way. This shifts the emphasis away from the role of the teacher in creating opportunities for self-direction to the materials being used. While Mizok-Taylor claims that books can encourage self-direction, she also concurs with H. Chen (1996) that self-direction is
not just about the ability to work autonomously within external parameters or the chance for structured freedom, but also about the internal parameters of mindsets. In this way, self-direction goes beyond self-teaching to include the nature of being inquisitive, probing and learning to problem solve. Even if method books provide opportunities for choice and self-learning, the student must have the right mindset and the problem-solving skills to approach the task independently. In this way, self-direction is a process that includes both a set of personal attributes and specific skills (Merriam et al., 2012).

Self-direction is more complex than the field of piano pedagogy currently acknowledges. It appears that cultivating self-direction in adult students is dependent on much more than ensuring the lesson environment provides a balance between freedom and guidance. The teacher also needs to understand how to facilitate the growth of the skills required for self-direction and to be aware of potential limitations of mindsets and how to foster those conducive to engaged learning.

The skills associated with self-direction—diagnosing learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning—require cognitive and metacognitive involvement and highlight the need for planning, acting, observing outcomes, and reflecting on what those mean for future actions. How this unfolds in practice is best represented by David Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle. Kreber (2001) argues that this is a meaningful framework for fostering self-direction.

### 2.1.1 Experiential learning.

One of the main premises of adult learning is that learning needs to be experiential in nature. The main tenet is that it is not experience that leads to learning, but rather reflection on experience (Jarvis, 2010; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2011; Mezirow, 2003). The underlying assumption is that ‘learning is not something that happens to students; it is something that happens by students’ (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012, p. 31; see also Knowles et al., 2011; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow 1991; Rinaldo & Denig, 2009), requiring their active engagement and full participation. Kolb (1984) explains that postponing immediate action to have time to observe and reflect is essential for purposeful action. His experiential learning cycle (Figure 2.1) has become a central image of this reflective process due to its simplicity (Jarvis, 2010).
Within this cycle, the learner goes through four stages, beginning with a concrete experience where a new experience or situation is encountered (Wiezbicki-Stevens, 2009). This is followed by reflective observation, where the experience is reviewed and reflected upon from multiple perspectives. This is especially important if experiences are inconsistent with expectations or understanding (McLeod, 2013), as is often the case with adult students. In the abstract conceptualisation stage, these reflections give rise to new understandings and insights or modify prior conceptual awareness or perspectives. In this stage, the learner draws conclusions or makes meaning from their experience. Finally, in the active experimentation stage, learners plan and implement new actions based on what has been learned. This leads to another experience to start the next iteration of the cycle. Akella (2010) explains that the learning cycle can be entered at any point, but the stages then follow in sequence, with several cycles usually required for learning to take place. This cycle is akin to deliberate practice at the piano, whereby students need to implement appropriate practice strategies and evaluate their outputs according to the standard they are wishing to achieve. Most importantly, students need to be able to adjust their focus and approach accordingly in order to continue to improve.

The experiential learning cycle takes many forms within different disciplines. Examples of variances include Do-Observed-Correct (Sterner, 2012), Forethought–Performance-Self-observation/Self-reflection (McPherson & Renwick, 2001; Schunk, 2012), and Plan-Act-Observed-Reflect (Mitchell & Coltrinari, 2001). Some also include different sub-processes, such as self-observation, self-judgement, self-evaluation and self-reaction (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012). Further complicating these variations, some experts use the same term to mean differing processes or different terms for the same process. Maehr, Pintrich and Linnenbrink (2002) argue
for the need for a consistent nomenclature in relation to this cycle. In relation to music, Jørgensen (2004) argues that regardless of the labels given, this cycle ‘matches general advice teachers give about the need to plan, execute, and evaluate one’s practice’ (p. 86) and acts as a metaphor for what is needed to practice deliberately at home. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect for its simplicity.

In order for piano students to apply the strategies represented in the experiential learning cycle, they first need to identify and implement effective practice strategies. These are deliberate cognitive methods chosen to improve specific aspects of performance (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 1998), and assist learning by ‘reducing a task to its essential parts and reorganising the parts meaningfully’ (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012, p. 19). This optimises the process of learning a skill as it reduces mental requirements of complex motor tasks through focusing attention and directing motoric execution and coordination (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 1998).

Choosing effective practice strategies alone, however, may not be enough for progress. Unless outcomes are monitored and used to direct future actions accordingly, effective learning is unlikely to occur (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002). Metacognition plays an important part in this monitoring and adjusting.

While cognition is how one acquires, retains and transfers knowledge, metacognition is being aware of one’s own thinking and taking control of one’s focus, attitudes and commitments to tasks while learning in order to direct mental effort. It has been argued that knowing the process of learning is just as important as the content of what is learned (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). A range of studies demonstrate that the more students are aware of their thinking processes and the more this is made an explicit feature of instruction, the more students can control goals, behavioural tendencies, and attention (Maclellan & Soden, 2012).

Metacognitive reflection has been highlighted as being essential to practicing a musical instrument (Bathgate, Sim-Knight & Schunn, 2012) and cultivating a music student’s independence (Burwell, 2005), making it a significant factor for pedagogical design. While the experiential learning cycle incorporates metacognitive reflection into the second and third stages, Jarvis (2010) cautions that this cycle is over-simplistic and does not convey the complexities of the processes involved in learning. While it has been promoted widely for adult educators, Wilson and Hayes (2002) caution that it has become ubiquitous and limiting ‘because it restricts the
way we see and understand experience’ (p. 174). This may be due to the fact that it does not account for the internal motivational processes involved in effective self-direction. As noted earlier, this is not just a skill-set that involves purposeful selection of strategies and reflecting on outcomes observed, but also requires certain internal parameters that affect students’ mindsets towards their learning, and thus their ability and willingness to engage (Merriam et al., 2007). Before discussing the role of the teacher in cultivating self-direction and the reflective skills required for deliberate practice at the piano, it is important to understand the role that these internal parameters play in engaged learning.

2.1.2 The role of mindsets in learning.

It is the natural human condition to try to make sense of our experiences and the world around us. We do this through our frames of reference, which encompass sets of fixed assumptions and expectations, habits of mind, meaning perspectives, and mindsets, which shape our interpretation of experiences (Belzer, 2004; Mezirow, 1991, 2003). Frames of reference are acquired through life experiences. They reflect our cultural and psychological assumptions and are often acquired without explicit awareness. Dirkx (1998) describes our perspectives as lenses through which we view the world. The role of these lenses is to organise and make sense of incoming sensory information, filtering irrelevant stimulus and helping us to interpret or make meaning from experiences. In relation to learning, our mindsets are the attitudes, motivations and filters for interpreting our learning experiences.

When young, mindsets are more readily susceptible to change, but with time and experience, they ‘become more ingrained in our psyche’ (E. W. Taylor, 1998, p. 6). Some belief systems, such as epistemological beliefs, start to become stable by as young as 12 years old (Maehr et al., 2002), which makes them less likely to change during adulthood. While they are helpful for organisation purposes, if new experiences or ideas challenge long-held assumptions and beliefs, resistance and frustration may ensue (Argyris, 1982), creating a barrier to a fuller and more engaged learning experience. There are several mindsets identified in educational psychology that impact on a student’s ability to engage with learning. These shed light on the frustrations that adult students experience at the piano. These mindsets include motivation, self-theories, goal orientation and causal attributions.
2.1.2.1 Motivation.

Motivation consists of the value a student places on the pursuit or task and the student’s self-efficacy level, which is a belief about one’s ability to learn or perform effectively (Schunk, 2012). Value depends on the relevance of the content learned to the student’s goals, as well as the perceived benefits reaped. Ensuring lesson content is congruent with a student’s goals is a key component of adult learning (Jarvis, 2010; Knowles et al., 2011; Mezirow, 2003) and can increase motivation through increasing relevance of the content learned.

While Wristen (2006) argues that adults typically arrive at piano lessons with specific musical tastes and goals in mind, over half of the 21 adult piano students who participated in H. Chen’s (1996) study explained that they did not enter into lessons with precise goals and trusted the teacher to choose pieces appropriate to their skill level and capabilities. They expressed the opinion that it is the teacher’s responsibility to choose the material to learn, and that while they have ‘a clear idea of what they should learn, they are not necessarily studying what they want to learn’ (H. Chen, 1996, p. 49). This may be a sign of the regression to the teacher-dominated paradigm of learning that A. Taylor and Hallam (2008) referred to. H. Chen (1996) notes that ownership of musical choices is generally transferred to students over time, based on musical experience and development. The danger with deferring ownership to later in a student’s musical journey is that it requires them to engage in less meaningful content and to trust that this will pay off at a later date. Enjoyment of the music learned, however, is integral to an adult’s sustained involvement in learning piano. In Wristen’s (2006) study, dislike of the music was one of the main reasons adults gave for ceasing lessons.

Another element of value is the benefits that the pursuit offers. In Chapter 1, I observed that this has been an area of focus in studies of adult piano students. These range from large-scale quantitative studies (Cooper, 2001; Jutras, 2006) to small, in-depth case studies (A. Taylor, 2011; E. W. Taylor, 2008; Wristen, 2006). These studies found that the two predominant benefits sought by adult piano students are personal benefits and skill development. Personal benefits include personal growth, challenge, enjoyment, dream fulfilment, accomplishment and self-fulfilment. Skill development includes musical and technical growth at the instrument, as well as musical knowledge and theory. Wristen (2006) found that lack of perceived skills is closely linked with lack of enjoyment of practice and feeling nervous and
embarrassment in lessons, decreasing the enjoyment felt in lessons. She cites this lack of perceived skill as the other predominant reason adults cease learning. Jutras (2006) notes the interrelated nature of benefits sought, with personal benefits depending somewhat on skill development and ability. He also found self-confidence, self-discipline and self-esteem to be important to adult students, albeit to a lesser extent than the aforementioned categories. Regardless of how explicit these are to students’ awareness, these are important to the internal processes associated with motivation, as illustrated through self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy includes a student’s expectancy for success, judgement of ability, and confidence in their skills (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005). It is a key internal factor of motivation, as it affects one’s actions, choice of tasks, persistence, effort and ultimately their achievement as a result (Schunk, 2012). As Schunk (2012) explains, ‘people who believe they can perform better persist longer and work harder’ (p. 127). They also experience less negative emotions surrounding slow progress (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 1998). Given that perceived lack of skill is a major issue contributing to adults ceasing piano lessons, self-efficacy is a fundamental concept to consider. Bugos and High (2009) note that self-efficacy within a piano practice context is influenced by attitude, motivation, achievement and coordination. These insights highlight the interconnected nature of mindsets and skill development, which ultimately also affect students’ abilities to reap their sought-after benefits.

High self-efficacy has been noted as fundamental for those learning a musical instrument, as it relates to sustained music practice (McCormick & McPherson, 2003) and use of deliberate practice strategies (Bugos & High, 2009), resulting in engaged learning at the instrument (Nielsen, 2004). While Lehmann, Slobada and Woody (2007) argue that self-efficacy is inextricably linked to competence, Zimmerman (1995) argues that it is the perception of competence that explains issues of effort, persistence and task choice, rather than actual competence, and that these are not necessarily congruent. Jones (2009) claims that self-efficacy is the most important determinant for knowledge and skill resulting in action. Even if a student knows what they need to do, if they have low self-efficacy levels, they will not be motivated to try, as they do not believe it will result in success or obtaining their goals or desired benefits.
2.1.2.2 Self-theories.

While self-efficacy is situational, depending on shifting factors such as environment and mood (Maehr et al., 2002; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012), epistemic beliefs are global beliefs about the acquisition of knowledge. As with self-efficacy, these influence learning behaviours and actions, which in turn affect cognitive processes of thinking and reasoning (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 88). Educational psychologist Carol Dweck and her colleagues (Deiner & Dweck, 1980; Dweck, 2000, 2002; Dweck, Chiu & Hong, 1995; Dweck & Master, 2012) define two different frameworks for understanding intelligence and achievement that someone might hold: Fixed mindset (also known as ‘entity theory’), and growth mindset (also known as ‘incremental theory’).

Those with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is a fixed trait that one is born with, whereas those with growth mindsets (‘incrementalists’) believe that intelligence is something that can be cultivated through learning. There is a scale between fixed and growth mindsets and each person will find themselves on a different degree of the scale, but examining the extremes on the continuum illustrates how students’ predilections affect their approach to learning. Table 2.1 highlights the differences between the two.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed mindset</th>
<th>Growth mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence is static</td>
<td>Intelligence can be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to a desire to look smart and therefore a tendency to:</td>
<td>Leads to a desire to learn and therefore a tendency to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid challenges</td>
<td>• Embrace challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give up easily due to obstacles</td>
<td>• Persist in the face of obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• See effort as fruitless</td>
<td>• See effort as a path to mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ignore useful feedback</td>
<td>• Learn from criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be threatened by others’ success</td>
<td>• Be inspired by others’ success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result, they may plateau early and achieve less than their full potential</td>
<td>As a result, they reach ever higher levels of development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Self-theories (n.d.).
Those with a growth mindset thrive on challenge and expect that working at something will improve their current skill level. They focus on the task at hand and generally have a higher level of intrinsic motivation than entity students. They persist when faced with difficulties (Lehmann et al., 2007) and work to overcome them by increasing their efforts. They also do not expect learning to be quick. While Dweck and Master (2012) argue that incrementalists will seek to improve regardless of their confidence levels, this increased effort has the potential to build self-confidence, as skill levels also increase through effort.

Those with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is innate and thus expect that if they are not good at something straight away then they must not be talented in that area. Musically, entity theory equates to the belief that musical talent is an innate trait rather than a skill that can be developed over time (Maehr et al., 2002). Students with this mindset tend to exert less effort and persistence in the face of challenges due to a fear of being judged as untalented. They also expect learning to be quick (Dahl et al., 2005, p. 26). This results in superficial learning rather than deep and critical understanding, adversely impacting students’ abilities to be self-directed (Zimmerman, 1995). They are also concerned with proving their ability to others, and so any negative feedback or constructive criticism is seen as a threat to the self. Thus, entity theory promotes a helpless response, often accompanied by negative emotions, negative predictions of future outcomes, and low persistence. These reactions are associated with avoidance of practice and poor practice skills (Thompson & Musket, 2005).

Interestingly, conceptual understanding often occurs quickly for adult piano learners. Their expectation is often that conceptual understanding will translate into quick procedural understanding at the instrument. This is predominantly not the case (Maris, 2000; Smeltzer, n.d.; Uszler & Upitis, 2000). Maris (2000) notes that content is often understood the first time it is explained, while muscles require substantial repetition before automation occurs. Procedural skill acquisition is comparatively slow, and takes much focus, repetition and deliberate action akin to self-direction. This is contrary to many adult learners’ expectations of learning the piano. When experiences are contrary to those expected, self-efficacy and confidence could also be negatively affected, further compounding the challenges for engaging with learning.
Dweck and Master (2012) explain that those with fixed mindsets will not seek guidance, as it is a threat to their sense of self. Experiments conducted by Dweck (2007), in which brain wave activity was monitored while participants received feedback, demonstrate the impact self-theories have on learning. She found:

People with a fixed mindset were only interested when the feedback reflected on their ability. Their brainwaves showed them paying close attention when they were told whether their answers were right or wrong, but when they were presented with information that could help them learn, there was no sign of interest. Even when they’d gotten an answer wrong, they were not interested in learning what the right answer was. Only people with a growth mindset paid close attention to information that could stretch their knowledge. Only for them was learning a priority. (Dweck, 2007, p. 18)

Other studies support these findings. Mangels et al. (2006) conducted a study that illustrates how incrementalists learn more from their mistakes than students with entity theory beliefs. They observed that entity students appeared less likely to engage in sustained semantic processing of learning-relevant feedback. This lack of attention also then affected their recall and recognition. Another study found that those with entity theory displayed less activity in the left temporal negativity—the area of the brain responsible for processing corrective feedback (Wulf & Lewthwaite, 2009, p. 2). This highlights the importance of growth mindsets for students to learn through constructive feedback and to continue to learn and develop.

Epistemic beliefs are closely related to a student’s goal orientation, another factor influencing engaged learning.

2.1.2.3 Goal orientations.

There are two types of goal orientation: process and outcome. Process goals focus on the steps to achieving mastery, whereas outcome goals focus on achieving the end product. Experts agree that the most productive goal orientation for learning a skill comes from being immersed in the process, rather than being focused on the end product or goal (Dweck, 2000; Mangels et al., 2006; Thompson & Musket, 2005; Wulf & Lewthwaite, 2009; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012). This focus on process over performance leads to the development of strategies conducive to growth and focusing on strategies that help to acquire mastery. Zimmerman and Schunk (2012) explain that this sustains motivation and improves skill acquisition and performance more than outcome goals. In contrast, dwelling on
the outcome before a skill is mastered increases the complexity of the task at hand, as focus is not directed to the process required for success (Kitsantas, Reiser & Doster, 2004, p. 271).

It is difficult to attend to multiple cues or processes simultaneously. Thus, it is best to limit goals and shift them systematically as skills develop over time (Zimmerman, 1995). Process goals are more effective in this regard, as they operate as ‘proximal regulators of the more distal outcome goals’ (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012, p. 17). As they convey evidence of progress towards larger goals, they can be more meaningful to the student and help to focus them on the immediate task at hand. This is not to say that process-oriented students do not have outcome goals. Rather, they break these larger goals into the processes required to achieve them, and make those the focus of their attention. The use of hierarchical goals facilitates selective self-observation by giving specific tasks and outcomes the focus.

In relation to motivation, goals need to have value to students and be obtainable within a short time frame. Motivating goals, which are proximal, specific, and of appropriate difficulty to be challenging but attainable, increase motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). The closer and more specific the goal, the greater the student’s self-efficacy and motivation, as it is easier to judge progress being made. Those with outcome goals who expect learning to be quick are disadvantaged as they have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in a short time frame and do not pay attention to feedback that can help to make progress. This also impacts how they attribute outcomes.

2.1.2.4 Causal attributions.

Students’ perceived explanations for their outcomes—whether positive or negative, expected or unexpected—can affect their expectations, behaviours and affective reactions. In turn, this has an effect on perceptions of ability and difficulty of the task, further validating mindsets and affecting their motivation to engage with tasks moving forwards (Schunk, 2012). Pintrich and Schunk (2002) explain that causal attributions may be seen as stable or unstable (talent versus effort), within or out of the control of the learner, and internal or external (mindset or environmental). Lehmann et al. (2007) caution that while it may appear that success breeds more success, and that those who discontinue music believe that their prospect for succeeding musically is minimal, attribution theory also considers the perceived reasons behind success or failure as important determinants of continued effort. They
explain, ‘in general, it appears that music students choose between practice (overall effort and strategies) and talent to explain music performance achievement and that they draw their motivation to pursue their own musical growth from these beliefs’ (Lehmann et al., 2007, pp. 56–57). This highlights strong associations between self-efficacy, self-theories, and attributions made.

Those with high self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to attribute failures, which in this context simply refers to when playing does not yet meet the desired standard, to strategy use rather than ability (Lehman et al., 2007). Kitsantas et al. (2004) suggest that those oriented to process goals and mastery also tend towards strategy use attributions. This gives students a sense of agency and control over their learning, and thus increases their drive to choose and control their behaviours rather than reacting to circumstances through emotive responses. Schunk (2012) argues, ‘negative evaluations will not necessarily decrease motivation if students believe they are capable of improving’ (p. 126). In this way, attribution and self-efficacy are linked (Chaffin & Lemieux, 2004). If a learner attributes failures to effort and also possesses high self-efficacy levels, it creates an attitude of ‘It didn’t work, so more practice is needed’.

If outcomes are attributed to effort, but the student has low self-efficacy levels, it can result in an attitude of ‘I tried, but I couldn’t do it’. Further to this, someone with low self-efficacy is more likely to attribute failures to lack of ability (Chaffin & Lemieux, 2004). Ability, as discussed in the previous section on self-theories, is seen as fixed and unable to change, thus being out of the learner’s control. This decreases motivation to pursue a task, as any effort is perceived as futile. The learner’s attitude is, ‘The harder I have to try, the less ability I must have’. Thus, they are at the risk of avoiding effort to protect their self-worth (Maehr et al., 2002). Furthermore, these learners are also more likely to have outcome goals, which are linked with maladaptive, helpless patterns of attribution (Maehr et al., 2002). Pintrich and Schunk (2002) explain that these factors combined have ‘the most detrimental consequences for future expectancies of success’ (p. 118).

Self-efficacy, self-theories, goal orientation and causal attribution each inform the mindsets that students bring to their learning. As Bomia et al. (1997) summarise:

Whether a student feels he/she has control (autonomy) of the experience; or the ability (self-efficacy) to complete the work; or the belief of success
(expectancy); or the interest to finish; or the willingness to put forth the effort, all affect the outcomes of the experience and whether or not the student will feel satisfaction with that outcome. (p. 20)

Mindsets, however, do not need to remain fixed and unchanged. They are informed by new experiences, new ways of reflecting on learning, and new interactions with the learning context. This is an important assumption to uphold in relation to learning if piano teachers are to cultivate self-direction in their adult novices. Believing that mindsets are adaptable through learning experiences gives the teacher the drive to uncover strategies most conducive to this shift.

As this section has uncovered, mindsets are multifaceted, and include the epistemic beliefs, outcome expectations, goal orientation, self-efficacy levels, causal attribution and affective responses (McPherson & Renwick, 2001; Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012). These processes impact both the ‘will’ and ‘skill’ (Maehr et al., 2002) of students to act in a self-directed way. Thus, the experiential learning cycle and its self-directive processes are only effective for students’ learning if these motivational attributes are aligned. This highlights the importance of transforming mindsets that are not congruent with deep learning, in order to foster self-directed learning in students.

2.1.3 Transforming problematic mindsets through premise reflection.

It is well established within adult learning theories that past experiences influence an adult’s approach to learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2011; Mezirow, 1991, 2003). Prior experiences contribute to the values, goals and reasons students seek learning experiences. Influencing their motivation to learn, they serve as building blocks on which to make sense of new information and experiences and as reminders of consequences of certain choices made. While ‘learning from experience’ is a common term, however, think about how many times negative experiences are repeated, or how frequently people do not learn from their mistakes, even if they are aware of their errors and explicitly claim they will make better choices in the future.

Within adult education, experience often refers to accumulation of events, information and knowledge that learners can draw upon to construct new understanding (Knowles, 1986; Fenwick, 2000). The challenge with this perspective is that it assumes that past experiences are static and only take place within existing frames of reference (Yorks, 2005). While some past experiences may provide useful
information on which to build new understanding, experiences that negatively shape mindsets may cause a resistance to new ideas that challenge long-held assumptions and beliefs (Argyris, 1982; Mezirow, 1991). Jack Mezirow (1991, 2003) argues, however, that lived situations do not have to remain static and can also be reflected on, evaluated and manipulated to offer new perspectives on past experiences and new ways of being moving forward.

Mezirow’s conception of transformative learning is centred on the ability for adults to reflect on the underlying assumptions and mindsets that influence perceptions of experiences, and to transform the ways in which they make meaning. He calls this ‘premise reflection’, which he describes as ‘conscious and explicit reassessment of the consequence and origin of our meaning structures… a process by which we attempt to justify our beliefs, either by rationally examining assumptions… or challenging its validity through discourse with others’ (Mezirow, 1991, p. 46). Mezirow (1991) argues that reflection is at the heart of intentional learning, problem solving and meaning-making, yet has been underemphasised in adult learning, as it has been taken as synonymous with thoughtful action. Mezirow does not support this assumption, instead building on the work of Dewey in the 1930s, which focuses on reflections of assumptions themselves, rather than just the actions and processes involved in problem solving. Given that self-direction involves mindsets that are conducive to deep learning—including curiosity, self-confidence and self-discipline—and problem-solving ability, and that challenges with adult piano students often stem from the absence of these personal attributes, the exploration of transformative learning could uncover insights into cultivating adult piano learning.

Mezirow first introduced transformative learning (also known as transformational learning theory) in 1978 as a way to explain how adults change their interpretation of the world, often in response to acute personal or social crisis, such as political and cultural upheaval, natural disaster, severe injury, death of a loved one, retirement or loss of a job, which creates a conflict between current ways of being in the world and new experiences (E. W. Taylor, 2008). This focus on cognitive dissonance as the catalyst for critical reflection and change has diversified since the 1990s to include other elements of the human condition, such as social emancipation, the role of spirituality, psychoanalysis, positionality, emancipatory learning and neurobiology (Ettling, 2006; see also E. W. Taylor, 2008). The most relevant strand to the context of piano learning is psychodevelopmental, which seeks
to reflect continuous, incremental and progressive growth, with epistemological change at its core (E. W. Taylor, 2008). Arguably, part of an educator’s role is to understand their students’ perspectives and help them to interrogate their interpretations of their experiences, working directly and effectively to address mismatches in expectations of learners and teachers (Belzer, 2004; Usher et al., 1997). Premise reflection is at the heart of this.

E. W. Taylor (2008) defines Mezirow’s conception of premise reflection as ‘a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning’ (p. 7), whereby adult learners are able to question their ‘deeply held assumptions and beliefs’ (p. 7) and to reinterpret past experiences in new ways, informing the way they experience and interact with new situations. Transformative learning thus uses reflective discourse to call into question the mindsets themselves, and to reconcile ‘disorienting discrepancies between expectations and experiences’ (Belzer, 2004, p. 43). This can promote active engagement with new learning moving forwards. Once assumptions (that are taken for granted) have been uncovered, they can be critically questioned to check if they are valid (Cranton, 1996).

Premise reflection can easily be absorbed into the ‘abstract conceptualisation’ or ‘reflection’ stage of the experiential learning cycle. As it involves ‘redefining our problem and acting upon our transformed insights’ (Mezirow, 1991, p. 197), it also contributes to the planning stage of the experiential learning cycle, which informs the following learning actions. Instead of unquestioningly and habitually reacting to circumstances, using this cycle allows students and teachers to assess behaviours, strategies and outcomes, and to make adjustments where necessary. Including premise reflection in the cycle allows mindsets to be critiqued and transformed as required.

If we take the example of musical talent given in relation to epistemic beliefs, the idea would be to uncover the root of that belief. Perhaps the student has never been exposed to music at various stages of development, only ever seeing professional musicians performing with apparent ease and grace. Without any reference to what skill development entails, and the copious numbers of hours of deliberate practice that led to those effortless performances, it becomes apparent why the student sees any struggles as a sign of a lack of talent. Without reflecting on their assumptions, the student might continue to simply play, in the hope of finding some talent, as opposed to critically assessing the strategies being used during practice.
The idea in transformative learning would be to critique the idea of talent, perhaps finding a different scenario to draw on for comparison that relates to the student’s world. This could be finding a skill that the student developed through practice, such as driving, a sport or another hobby, from which to draw correlations. Debunking ‘talent’ could also involve exposing students to the skill-sets and practice strategies musicians use to build up to their ‘effortless’ performance, shedding light on the processes involved in developing musical skills. With this new information, the student is more likely to understand the necessity of good practice strategies, and to be more willing to use them in their practice.

2.1.4 Ethical dilemmas and criticisms of premise reflection.

Premise reflection creates discomfort in students, and even when outcomes will be positive, can cause fear and resistance in students (Ettling, 2006). As such, students are unlikely to reflect in such a way independently. It has thus been argued that it is the educator’s role to create conditions that promote premise reflection and encourage students to question their basic beliefs and values (Mezirow, 2003; Tisdell, Hanley & Taylor, 2000). Explicitly aiming to adapt frames of reference however brings with it a myriad of ethical implications. It is unethical to label a student’s frames of reference or perspectives as ‘incorrect’ or ‘wrong’ (Belzer, 2004; Ettling, 2006; Fenwick, 2000). It also assumes that the student is wrong and that the teacher knows better, going against one of the main tenets of adult education, whereby the student’s prior knowledge and experience are honoured (Knowles et al., 2011). As such, Ettling (2006) questions whether encouraging premise reflection is the role of the educator:

Do educators have the right to ask people to examine and change their basic assumptions as part of our educational programs? Should one expect learners to seek this kind of learning experience? Is it justified to pose real-life dilemmas that force examination of one’s life story and lived assumptions? And do adult educators have the expertise to lead participants through the transforming experience? (p. 63)

Further compounding the ethical challenges around premise reflection is that it is unrealistic for the teacher to expect transformation from every student, as not all adults have the maturity or cognitive development for critical engagement; the student has to be ready and willing to adapt (Merriam et al., 2007). Mezirow (1991), however, disagrees that premise reflection is unethical, as long as adults have
complete and accurate information and are free from coercion and manipulation from the teacher. Cranton (2006) agrees with Mezirow, explaining that critical reflection is a choice and requires voluntary engagement from the learner, allowing the power to remain with the student.

In considering premise reflection in relation to one-to-one studio teaching, at the start of this investigation, I also questioned the appropriateness of premise reflection and whether directly calling mindsets into question is appropriate for the context of piano lessons. Students come expecting to be taught music, not to have their mindsets challenged. As Fenwick (2000) argues, this approach is intrusive to the learner. Furthermore, if it is an active choice belonging to students, where does this leave the educator if this willingness is absent? It also cannot be forgotten that learning to play piano is a highly complex skills that requires other metacognitive and cognitive skills associated with self-direction, such as choosing appropriate strategies and monitoring the outcomes of actions. There are other ways of reflecting, however, that are involved in self-direction and metacognitive thinking. As will be seen throughout the remainder of this chapter, this does not make premise reflection obsolete. Rather, this serves to contextualise when this approach might be appropriate to use, and positions it in relation to other reflective approaches to teaching and learning.

2.1.5 Reflecting on content and process of learning.

Explicitly questioning a student’s frames of reference is not the only means to arriving at change conducive to engaged learning. Mezirow (1991) himself acknowledged that premise reflections themselves are also only useful for learning if new insights result in new behaviours moving forwards. Furthermore, there are other ways of reflecting on experiences around learning, including content reflection, which involves identifying what is happening and what the potential issues are, and process reflection, which involves critiquing the strategies chosen to address any challenges and understanding why certain outcomes occurred. Mezirow (1991) explains that content and process reflections are important for thoughtful and deliberate action that can help us to monitor our learning outcomes and choices moving forwards. This, he argues, may or may not involve transforming meaning perspectives through premise reflection, which would then also involve questioning the reasons and assumptions that underlie the chosen actions and making meaning through exploration of emotions, intentions, and values (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).
Returning to the experiential cycle described in section 2.1.1, one of its strengths is that it allows for all types of reflection—content, process, and premise—to be built into the abstract conceptualisation (reflection) stage, which aims to make sense of reflective observations through metacognitive reasoning. It affords students the opportunity to reflect on experiences and actions in order to adapt and alter how they are perceived (Abrahams, 2005).

Throughout the first half of this chapter, I have highlighted that one cannot assume that adult students are innately self-directed in taking control of their own learning, and that this depends on skill development associated with choosing and implementing appropriate strategies, observing outcomes, and reflecting on outcomes to determine the most appropriate actions moving forwards. It also depends on a student possessing mindsets conducive to deliberate action and reflection, including being process-oriented, with high self-efficacy, incremental beliefs about the nature of learning, and an intrinsic desire to learn. These skills and mindsets can be cultivated through pedagogical design.

While adults have the capacity for becoming self-directed, Merriam et al. (2012) argue that it requires teachers to become aware of their students’ needs, wants, and interests, and to have an understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical influences that underpin them. This shift in emphasis from content to be learned to internal processes within the student places transformative learning and the role of different types of reflection as integral to self-direction (Merriam et al., 2012). It also requires teachers to become aware of their own actions and the reasons behind their teaching choices, and to adapt their approaches according to the needs of the student.

2.2.6 Teacher transformation.

Mezirow (2009) explains that in order to teach in a transformative way, adult educators need to first educate themselves in the capacity for critical reflection. It is not only students who have mindsets that can affect the learning context; teachers also come to lessons with their own perspectives regarding their students, their education and content to be covered, which are shaped by their own past experiences and future expectations. Transformative learning encourages teachers to transform their own frames of reference through the teaching experience (E. W. Taylor, 2008). In order for transformative pedagogy to be fully realised, teachers need to be open
and be willing to self-reflect and enquire into their practices so that they may continue to grow (Gaunt & Carey, 2016; McAllister, 2008).

To teach in a transformative manner does not just require implementing an instructional design that actively engages students in the content and strategies to be learned. As argued throughout this chapter, it also involves developing an awareness of students’ motivations and mindsets, understanding how they are perceiving their learning and making meaning from their learning experiences, and building a trusting and supportive rapport that allows for communication to flow in both directions. Through this dialogic communication, the teacher also learns from their students, enabling both teacher and student to transform through the learning process (Abrahams, 2005; Ettling, 2006; Mezirow, 1991; E. W. Taylor 2008). Weimer (2012) argues that such ‘learner-centred teaching is transformative in that it regularly changes beliefs about teaching and learning’ (p. 442). The student, rather than being a recipient of the teacher’s knowledge and skills, becomes a fellow collaborator in their learning journey. This synergistic relationship, whereby ‘better’ teaching results in ‘better’ learning experiences, has the ability to transform both the teacher and the student (Weimer, 2012). In this way, a transformative pedagogical approach to lessons focuses on students coming to understand the learning processes, developing the skills of self-reflection, and places prime importance on the meaning making that is so integral to self-direction.

2.2 Transformative Pedagogy

Traditional modes of one-to-one studio teaching are characterised by a master-apprentice teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher transmits knowledge and skills to the student. Students’ predominant learning thus occurs through imitation (Burwell, 2005). Carey et al. (2013) describe this as transfer pedagogy, which is ‘characterised by instruction, scaffolding that promotes mimicry, less flexibility, orientation towards assessment, and decontextualized learning. Its objective is “defined” excellence versus the “expansive” excellence of transformative learning’ (p. 362).

In contrast to this didactic teaching approach, which focuses on performative outcomes, transformative pedagogy (Carey et al., 2013) focuses on learning outcomes. This not only includes the acquisition of knowledge and skill-sets pertaining to the subject matter, but also creates a conceptual change in how learning is structured and understood (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This requires a shift in the
student-teacher relationship from the master-apprentice model described in transfer pedagogy to a collaborative model in which lessons become a shared exploration of possibilities (Carey et al., 2013; E. W. Taylor, 2008). Carey et al. (2013) describe transformative pedagogy as an approach to teaching that places emphasis on a ‘depth of student understanding and ownership’ (p. 361). They continue:

> It is characterised by a ‘deep’ approach to learning orientation on behalf of the teacher, and pedagogical agility in terms of its collaborative, explorative, scaffolded, meaningful, and contextualising qualities … with deep learning and an emphasis on sense-making and contextualising content … within the learner’s experience. (Carey et al., 2013, p. 361)

Its focus on learning goals, as opposed to only outcome goals, aligns with the mastery orientation that is most effective for students’ learning. Its emphasis on deep learning and developing an understanding around learning processes and strategies also makes it relevant to cultivating a student’s metacognitive understanding and the skill-sets involved in self-direction, making it relevant to the aims of this study.

Shifting the education paradigm from transfer to transformative approaches has a myriad of challenges due to societal perspectives of education (Schmidt, 2005) and long cultural traditions that are difficult to break. Despite this, Abrahams (2005) argues that it is most likely easier for informal adult educational settings to make this shift because of the lack of a ‘formal’ setting. Given that studio teaching outside of a formal institution such as a university does not necessarily aim to arrive at externally determined performative outcomes such as exams, this potentially helps the teacher to shift approaches to their teaching (Belzer, 2004). An informal setting does not negate, however, the fact that adults’ prior experiences with formal educational settings have informed the lenses through which they perceive their current learning experiences. Adult students often regress to the dependency of their former schooling (A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008), as they bring with them prior experiences heavily dominated by teacher-directed and traditional educational practices (Belzer, 2004). Furthermore, studio teachers often do not have extensive pedagogical training outside of professional experience. Teachers usually teach in the way that they were taught, and with the long traditions steeped in the master-apprentice model, many studio teachers continue that tradition without being aware of alternatives. As such, there is an explicit need for the teacher to become aware of alternatives and to
prepare the learner for new engagements with their learning. This inevitably requires a different approach to teaching, changing the role of the teacher to that of facilitator.

Knowles (1986) explains that the facilitator’s role is to prepare procedures that foster self-direction in students as follows:

1. Preparing the learner;
2. Establishing a climate conducive to learning;
3. Creating a mechanism for mutual planning;
4. Diagnosing the needs for learning;
5. Formulating objectives that will satisfy these needs;
6. Designing a pattern of learning experiences;
7. Conducting these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials; and
8. Evaluating the learning outcomes and rediagnosing learning needs. (p. 115)

These steps are not achieved alone. Transformative pedagogy emphasises the need for the teacher to work with the student through each step of the process in order to align this plan with their perceived needs. It acknowledges the student as a whole, including their histories, frames of reference, mindsets, goals and values. As such, teachers need to be empathetic, to get to know their students, and to provide an environment in which they feel safe to participate freely without fear of judgment (Jarvis, 2010). One of the benefits of getting to know students is that it allows teachers to better align learning content with their students’ values and motivations.

2.2.1 Relevance of content.

Rather than simply assigning repertoire for students to learn based on the teacher’s perceptions of students’ needs and skill-sets, transformative pedagogy requires a teacher to spend more time getting to know the student in order to uncover their goals and musical tastes. Adult piano students have positively received this approach. Those surveyed in Cooper’s (2001) and Wristen’s (2006) studies described positive lessons as one in which their goals are taken into consideration. A. Taylor and Hallam (2008) advise piano teachers to allow students to choose what and how to learn. This takes involvement beyond listening to the student’s wishes and making learning choices for them, and letting the final decision rest with the student. A. Taylor and Hallam (2008) link this with opportunities for student achievement,
enjoyment and self-confidence. These, they explain, contribute to the formation of students’ musical identities and their desire for self-fulfilment through learning.

Aligning repertoire and activities with students’ goals and offering choice of what is learned increases motivation (Jutras, 2006) and task involvement (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002). Ownership of learning also increases responsibility towards what is being learned, another powerful factor of motivation (Knowles et al., 2011). This does not remove the teacher from the process. Rather, collaboration and discussions are required in order to uncover choices that are relevant, allowing teachers to draw on students’ frames of reference as a powerful resource for their learning.

It is also important to consider the difficulty level to avoid frustration and adverse effects on self-confidence and self-esteem (Jutras, 2006). The optimum level of challenge—not too easy to invoke boredom, nor too hard to create anxiety, and requiring effort to master—can facilitate process orientation and help increase self-efficacy as they overcome challenges just beyond their current skill level (Maehr et al., 2002). For this reason, teachers cannot simply leave choice of repertoire to students; support, guidance and discussions around the benefits and challenges associated with each piece are required. By having such discussions, teachers can also help students to increase personal value in tasks and address any unrealistic expectations around their learning, such as the effort and time involved for success (Bohlin, Milheim & Viechnicki, 1993; Maris, 2000). Thus, the relationship between the learner and subject matter becomes the focus (Rinaldo & Denig, 2009), as well as the interpersonal relationship of the student and teacher who collaborate to find the most suitable content for the individual.

Motivation does not just concern the content learned, but also the way learning is approached. Deep approaches to learning arise from a desire to engage meaningfully with the task and to choose appropriate strategies. This occurs most readily when students feel motivated to understand (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Even if a student arrives at lessons oriented to superficial learning and entity theory, this can still change through lesson experiences. As Biggs and Tang (2011) explain, “‘motivation’ is not something that students must first possess; motivation is as much a product of good teaching as its prerequisite’ (p. 23). This ‘good teaching’ is transformative in that it uses collaborative communication, with dialogue that shapes, elaborates on and deepens students’ understanding.
2.2.2 Communication and student-teacher interactions.

When it comes to communication, piano pedagogy literature consistently proffers the message that telling is not teaching (Coats, 2006; Darling, 2005; Gumm, 2003, p. 61; McAllister, 2008, p. 17). The challenge lies in discovering and understanding the alternatives. One such alternative that found popularity in classroom education in the 1960s and 1970s is discovery learning. With the fundamental constructivist principles that knowledge is constructed by the learner and is idiosyncratic in nature at its core (Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006), the idea behind discovery learning is that students are more likely to remember concepts if they discover them independently (Smitha, 2012). As Smitha’s (2012) review of the literature found, some argue that this can increase motivation and interest in the task at hand. He also found, however, that discovery learning has not stood up to the scrutiny of all research. While discovery learning actively engages students in their learning, it is argued that this is most successful when students already have an understanding of prerequisite knowledge gained through structured experiences (Smitha, 2012).

Mayer (2004) argues that too much freedom and a lack of constraints may result in students failing to notice information relevant to the task at hand. This then burdens the limited capacity of working memory, as high levels of complex stimulus compete for the student’s attention (Kirschner et al., 2006). The shortcomings of discovery learning, and the noted requirements for structured experiences, do not mean that instruction needs to remain didactic in nature, however. Social constructivism, in contrast to the constructivist strands that led to discovery learning, argues that teachers ‘should not just stand by and watch’ (Smitha, 2012, p. 85). Rather, they should focus students’ attention to relevant stimuli through providing guidelines and asking questions that provoke thought. Students still arrive at new understandings themselves, just with support in developing the important skills of ‘selecting, organising and integrating knowledge’ (Mayer, 2004, p. 17).

Mayer (2004) claims that this guided discovery is more effective than pure discovery for learning and transfer of knowledge. Further, ‘students need enough freedom to become cognitively active in the process of sense making, and students need enough guidance so that their cognitive activity results in the construction of useful knowledge’ (Mayer, 2004, p. 16). Guided discovery therefore provides the balance between support and freedom, noted by Maris (2000) as important for
cultivating self-direction in adult piano students. Smitha (2012) also notes that guided discovery is effective in developing cognitive abilities and practical skills, aligning it with the requirements for learning to play the piano. The teacher’s role here aligns with transformative pedagogy, consisting of posing problems and encouraging problem solving (Schmidt, 2005). This creates what Snyder and Snyder (2008) refer to as a ‘culture of inquiry’ (p. 95).

2.2.3 Creating a ‘culture of inquiry’.

Effective questioning by a teacher has been posited as promoting critical thinking, metacognitive reasoning and deep, engaged learning in students (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Elder and Paul (2010) argue, ‘through our questions, we raise the process of decision-making to the level of conscious and deliberate choice’ (p. 19). Without this, students act habitually as opposed to deliberately, which means that active learning is not taking place. Despite many students’ initial resistance to making the effort to engage in deep learning and critical thinking (Gelder, 2005; Maclellan & Soden, 2012; Snyder & Snyder, 2008), it is possible for teachers to foster this through questions that inspire these levels of thought. Savage (1998) argues that students rise to the requirements of their teacher’s questions.

While little research has been conducted into the role of questioning in one-to-one piano lessons, Kim Burwell’s (2005) study provides insights into the types of questions typically seen in a tertiary piano studio. Rather than studying interventive applications of questioning, she sought to investigate how tertiary one-to-one teachers currently used questioning in their teaching. She found several forms of questions used in the lessons she analysed, each with different functions and benefits. The first, and perhaps lowest form of question was the ‘disguised instruction’, which is barely a question at all. An example of this is, ‘Why don’t we have a look at one of the others?’ She posits that the choice of phrasing instructions in this way serves to ‘soften the commanding impression they might otherwise give’ (Burwell, 2005, p. 204) and ‘may have an important impact on student morale and confidence’ (Burwell, 2005, p. 212). This question also creates a feeling of mutual exploration, rather than giving the impression of authority that an instruction, such as ‘play one of the others for me’, might. It also negates the feeling of being put on the spot to perform, which Dweck (2000) explains can create undue anxiety and tension in the student and cause premature focus on the end result.
A further type of question identified by Burwell (2005) was the rhetorical question, such as ‘And straight away the music starts to sound quite different, doesn’t it?’ Once more, such questions do not require much cognitive engagement from students. Despite this, Burwell explains that they can still hold value for students as they offer insights into the teacher’s thought patterns, which can serve as a model for students.

Questions that require responses from students included those that are interrogative or exploratory. Burwell (2005) explains that interrogative questions are used to check the student understands what is being taught, and to summarise points covered, such as ‘what have we talked about?’ While declarative, and not learner-centred (Weimer, 2012), these questions allow teachers to understand the learning that is taking place in the student and to become aware of any gaps in a student’s understanding. Conversely, exploratory questions are most relevant to fostering independence, as students are required to develop and articulate their responses more fully (Burwell, 2005; Elder & Paul, 2010). Exploratory questions not only seek to uncover understanding, such as ‘What did you choose there?’ but also probe further, asking questions about the significance of information or how students might approach tasks moving forwards. ‘Why’ questions are typically a way to provoke further insights. If students in her study failed to answer such questions, Burwell (2005) notes that the teachers would often answer on the student’s behalf, but that more could be elicited from the student if teachers persisted, framing questions in a more specific manner to aid with the student’s focus. In this way, questions might range from specific to general, depending on the degree of support the student needs.

While explorative questions were the rarest type identified in Burwell’s (2005) study, Lysaker and Furuness (2011) explain that questions without prescribed answers allow teachers to uptake students’ ideas during discussions, authentically acknowledging students’ knowledge and experience as immediately relevant and important to the learning context. Weimer (2012) argues that the most transformative of questions are those that the teacher does not already know the answer to, or even more so, questions that are posed by the student, rather than the teacher. This places importance on an environment where the teacher welcomes students’ questions, and also their responses to open questions, rather than maintaining control of the lesson through declarative questions. This is a necessary element of transformative
pedagogy, and one that until now has not received enough attention in the context of one-to-one tuition.

Another music study that offers insight into effective communication in the piano studio is Bathgate et al.’s (2012) study. The goal of the study was to teach metacognitive practice strategies to novice students, which included ‘teaching students to ask questions, explain their processes, and reflect on performance may increase their quality of playing, study habits, and their ability to transfer their learning across a variety of musical pieces’ (Bathgate et al., 2012, p. 404). The purpose was to ascertain whether this proved beneficial to practice and performance, as posited by Pintrich (2002). The design of the metacognitive structure was akin to the experiential learning cycle and self-direction, consisting of the cyclical stages plan, play, evaluate, and deciding on new strategies. The six participating instructors received training on how to teach metacognitive skills to their students. While not explicitly describing the types of questions used in student-teacher interactions, they explain, ‘teachers were trained in metacognitive teaching that promotes discussion from students’ (Bathgate et al., 2012, p. 405). It is not a stretch to assume that questions formed part of such discussions to elicit responses from students and engage them in dialogue.

Bathgate et al.’s (2012) findings illustrate that metacognitive skills can be effectively taught to novice music students through an instructional design that encourages students to verbalise their processes and reflect on their challenges and successes. Students became more active in guiding their own learning, including verbalising their progress and identifying the strategies they were using. This led to an increase in achievement at the piano. Interestingly, metacognition did not result in an increase in self-efficacy. The authors posit that this could be due to poor initial estimates of their ability from the students. In these instances, reflections corrected these original biases, potentially being a step towards creating more realistic expectations for their learning. Bathgate et al. (2012) posit, ‘our results suggest that prompting novice students to be explicitly reflective earlier may produce deeper learning and better skill advancement’ (p. 409). This study supports Barry and Hallam’s (2002) claim that music teachers who promote discussion of more general metacognitive skills, including personal strengths and weaknesses, selecting appropriate practice strategies, setting goals, monitoring progress, evaluating performance, time management and improving concentration, with their students
may foster better practice skills. Such discussions help students to become independent learners (Barry & Hallam, 2002) because, as Usher et al. (1997) argue, they encourage students to interrogate their experiences as much as possible to help create meaning from them.

Dialogic approaches to teaching allow for students’ knowledge and experience to become immediately important to their learning, which Lysaker and Furuness (2011) argue allows for ‘ongoing opportunities for personal and social dialogue’ (p. 186). These discussions can involve assessing students’ emotions, beliefs and values (Mezirow, 2003) and emphasise the importance of authentic questions without prescribed answers (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011). This allows the teacher to uptake student ideas during discussions, involving them in shaping the course of the lesson and placing the learner at the centre of their learning.

In order to teach in a transformative way, teachers need to remain open minded, listen empathetically, suspend judgement and seek a common ground with their students. This results in effective communication (Mezirow, 2003) that is ‘dependent upon the need for support, trust, friendship and intimacy’ (E. W. Taylor, 2008, p. 188). Teachers need a strong sense of self-awareness, a deep awareness of the needs and interests of the student and how they may differ from their own, and to encourage and foster openness of dialogue. Through dialogue, critical reflections can transfer into meaningful actions (E. W. Taylor, 2008).

Snyder and Snyder (2008) explain that through creating a culture of inquiry rich in questions and dialogue, students will become more willing to reconsider and revise their thinking, which is important if suboptimal frames of reference are at play. Once students are considering their learning critically, they will potentially feel comfortable to open their minds to critically questioning their frames of reference and learning perspectives. Snyder and Snyder (2008) argue that this goes beyond questioning, and is about asking the right type of question. Such questions include not just asking what students think and why, but also questioning the underlying assumptions, as expressed by Mezirow (1991, 2003). As Cranton (1996) explains, ‘critical questioning is not just asking questions. It is working to get underneath the assumptions we hold and sorting out whether or not they hold up under scrutiny’ (p. 86). She also acknowledges, ‘it is difficult to ask such questions of ourselves and others in an open, authentic, and non-threatening way’ (Cranton, 1996, p. 87). As such, E. W. Taylor (2008) implores teachers to trust the process of transformative
learning, ‘allowing for students to live with some discomfort while on the edge of knowing, in the process of gaining new insights and understandings’ (p. 187). Through questions, teachers can guide students’ premise reflections and acknowledge and support their discomfort. Students can then link their new critical insights to their actions at the piano.

Teachers can also increase the likelihood of students following through with good strategies at the piano by monitoring and adapting the language used in lessons. B. Green (1986) explains that the way questions and instructions are phrased affects their interpretation by students. ‘Doing’ instructions, such as ‘do this…’, ‘try to…’, or ‘play it like this…’ (B. Green, 1986, p. 135) have a tendency to create tension and result in students trying too hard. Likewise, telling a student to relax, or to ‘get it right’ usually inadvertently creates more tension, or less focus on the process, leading to more errors and an increase in anxiety. Conversely, ‘awareness’ instructions allow students to experience and give themselves feedback by noticing what works and what doesn’t without judgment. It promotes a process-oriented perspective, rather than a focus on performance. Some examples given by B. Green (1986) include ‘Listen for…’, ‘Be aware of…’, ‘How does it feel when you…’, ‘Pay attention to…’, and ‘What do you hear when you…’ (p. 136). Notice that not all of these phrases are questions, but still draw students to specific elements of their playing, rather than the task at large, potentially contributing to encouraging a process orientation to learning.

Wulf and Lewthwaite (2009) explain that instructional language can manipulate mindsets. If someone is told that their natural capacity is being assessed, versus undertaking a learnable skill, different thoughts are generated. Acquirable skill language produces greater self-efficacy, increases positive affective self-reactions and increases interest. This results in increased improvements in the task. Thompson and Musket (2005) explain that studies indicate that those with entity beliefs can respond positively to mastery goal priming. If a teacher adapts their language to focus on strategies and decisions that are in the student’s control, this can contribute to a feeling of personal efficacy and promote mastery behaviour. This then allows students to become open to questioning their strategy choices and consequent outputs, potentially leading to a transformation of perspectives moving forwards (Mezirow, 2003). This suggests that instead of targeting a change in the core beliefs of the student, which is fraught with ethical challenges and potentially
results in much discomfort for the student, teachers can guide a change in focus to strategy adoption through their language choice. This could result in the positive self-efficacy and mastery mindsets, which in turn provides new experiences that consequently inform the transformation of mindsets.

Teachers also guide students’ thought processes, focus and actions through feedback and modelling. As with language use described above, the approach to these tasks has the ability to either help or hinder students’ learning.

### 2.2.4 Feedback and modelling.

There are two types of feedback: inherent, which comes from within the students, and augmented/instructional, which comes from an outside source such as a teacher (Schmidt, 2005). Adult piano students have commented positively on receiving frequent and specific praise and feedback from teachers (Cooper, 2001; Wristen, 2006). The challenge with relying on teacher feedback, however, is that it can be a sign of dependence and indicative of the master-apprentice model of learning. Biggs and Tang (2011) argue, ‘if the teacher always assesses how well the student is doing and never allows the student to self-assess, the student lets it go at that and consequently doesn’t see the need for, or acquire the skills of, reflection’ (p. 61). Compounding the challenge of relying on augmented feedback is that students need to learn to use inherent feedback in order to practice effectively at home. Effective inherent feedback involves students comparing actual output with desired output and evaluating their results before attempting to reduce the difference between the two (Dul, Pieters & Dijkstra, 1987). In order for inherent feedback to be most useful, guidance from the teacher is first required so that students learn how to interpret the results of their playing output. This often includes modelling, where verbal instructions are supported by physical demonstrations at the piano.

Aural modelling from the teacher has been described as useful for students to attempt to replicate the desired sound and to have a comparison on which to base their feedback (Lehmann et al., 2007), especially when the teacher models both student output and desired output (McAllister, 2008). McAllister (2008) claims that modelling is an essential component to music teaching as it stops teachers relying on simply telling students what to do, by also showing them how to do it. She explains, ‘in general, musical concepts must be experienced rather than just explained, so students should be allowed to imitate the teacher’s model, using repetition as necessary to correct their performance’ (p. 17). But this imitation is in contrast to
independent thinking and self-directed behaviours. Speer (1994, p. 17) found that the more teachers modelled through Play/Talk (simultaneous) episodes, the more positive student performance scores were. This raises questions as to whether students were, as suggested by McAllister, merely imitating the teacher rather than obtaining deeper understanding and the ability to apply and transfer their learning, and also whether these experiences translated to productive practice at home. Would the students be able to continue to learn independently, or does what McAllister and Speer describe create a dependence on the teacher?

It is not just the aural output or the desired end result that can be modelled. Strategy use and technique and feedback can also be modelled, serving to illustrate the thought processes, decisions, and subsequent actions and results used in deliberate practice. Arguably, these are of paramount importance if students are to learn how to monitor their own learning effectively. Hallam (1997) suggests that this form of modelling is usually required for students to acquire a range of task-oriented strategies to draw on before practice can be purposeful and self-directed. This may include providing corrective feedback through modelling, but also providing hints as to how to proceed, and embedding evaluation strategies so students can determine the success of their strategy choices as they proceed (Ley & Young, 2001). This can include scaffolding metacognitive questions (Elder & Paul, 2010) in relation to music being learned (theoretical, technical, practice) and relating prior knowledge to current context and facilitating contextual transfer (Knowles et al., 2011). In this way, modelling becomes a form of cognitive apprenticeship (Ley & Young, 2001).

Augmented feedback also does not need to be retrospective; it can also prepare students for what is required moving forwards. This has ‘powerful effects on students’ expectations of success’ (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 39). Discussions of what is required for success prior to commencing a piece is important to address unrealistic expectations and to set realistic expectations of what is involved moving forwards. Once desired outcomes are achieved, Wulf and Lewthwaite (2009) advise that caution is required when praising students’ outcomes. Teachers should eschew implying inherent ability, even when there is success. Feedback might instead focus on improvements or effort invested, keeping the focus on mastery orientation as opposed to performative outcomes. This, they note, results in further increased improvements through continued focus on strategies used.
As students need to manage and plan their own practice in a self-directed way (McPherson and Renwick, 2001) asking questions cannot just be the teacher’s responsibility. Teachers can encourage students to ask their own meaningful questions that are probing and appropriate to the learning situation, thereby giving them more conscious control over their thinking (Bathgate et al., 2012). While in some cases this might then filter through to home practice, teachers can implement further strategies to support students with this endeavour.

2.2.5 Facilitating deliberate practice at home.

Deliberate practice, taken synonymously with self-direction, is the most important indicator of musical growth when learning an instrument (Cremaschi, 2012; Duke, Simmons & Cash, 2009; Weaver, 2005). As piano students generally have one lesson per week, leaving six days between lessons where the student must practice independently, deliberate practice is arguably ‘the most important skill that can be taught by an instrumental music teacher’ (Zhukov, 2009, p. 5). Despite this, it has been identified as one of the areas most neglected by piano teachers in lessons (Barry & McArthur, 1994; Duke et al., 2009; Kostka, 2002). Teachers tend to focus on what to practice, as opposed to how to practice (Bugos & High, 2009), or the amount of time students spend practising (Lehmann et al., 2007). Duke et al. (2009) comment, ‘making practice assignments in terms of time practiced instead of goals accomplished remains one of the most curious and stubbornly persistent traditions in music pedagogy’ (p. 311). They explain that teachers commonly assign what to practice and how long, ‘with little attention given to specific proximal goals to be accomplished each day’ (Duke et al., 2009, p. 311). This is troubling because without guidance, practice is usually substandard, affecting its ability to result in sustained progress at the piano. Given lack of ability is a reason adults cease lessons, if home practice can include effective strategies that help a student to progress, this perceived lack of ability might be mitigated.

Much novice practice time at the piano is haphazard and aimless (Lehmann et al., 2007), consisting of ineffective strategies, such as simply playing pieces through in their entirety, leaving errors uncorrected (Hallam, 1997). Deliberate practice, while leading to sustained progress, is not inherently enjoyable (Bonneville-Roussy & Bouffard, 2015) and requires high levels of effort and concentration that not all students are willing to exert (Zimmerman, 1995). Lehmann et al. (2007) explain that there tends to be a negative correlation between the amount of effort needed in
practice and the amount of enjoyment students feel while practising. There are several further hurdles to employing the metacognitive thinking involved in deliberate practice. These include lack of training, lack of information and time constraints (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Another challenge is that it goes against our natural inclinations to take the path of least resistance (Gelder, 2005; Maclellan & Soden, 2012; Snyder & Snyder, 2008).

Bugos and High (2009) acknowledge the haphazard nature of many novices’ practice. They also note, however, that studies that reach this conclusion focus predominantly on young novices as opposed to adult novices. With the assumption that adults are more mature, self-motivated, and critically thinking than their younger counterparts, Bugos and High hypothesised that providing adult novices with detailed descriptions of practice strategies would result in more deliberate practice at home. They found, however, that this was not the case. In their study, Bugos and High provided adult students with an outline of 19 practice strategies for use at home, five of which are listed as examples in Table 2.1.

Table 2.2

*Examples of Bugos and High’s (2009) Practice Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count rhythmic passages</td>
<td>Rhythmic</td>
<td>Counting rhythms aloud can assist with rhythmic accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform passages slowly</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Practice each section slowly until you can play it perfectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice with hands separate</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Practicing with hands separate prior to hands together will allow time for your fingers to learn the technique and prepare you for coordinated movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clap or tap rhythmic pattern</td>
<td>Rhythmic</td>
<td>Clapping or tapping the rhythm in isolation can help with rhythmic accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging passages first</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Always address challenging passages first in the piece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, participants failed to implement these practice strategies. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that adults are not innately self-directed. This is
evident in Bugos and High’s (2009) study. Bugos and High conceded that having 19 strategies may have been too many, and also posited that more training regarding their use would have been beneficial. Having good strategies to use, however, is only part of the picture. Keeping the experiential learning cycle in mind, practice guides such as the above are only able to produce positive results if the student is not only aware of the outcomes of their practice trials but also knows how to interpret them to inform future actions and corrections. As mentioned previously, self-efficacy, epistemic beliefs and goal orientations also play an important role in a student choosing to implement strategies and paying attention to the outcomes.

Further complicating the effectiveness of practice, Lehmann et al. (2007) argue that even when students have good practice advice and follow through with executing them, it cannot be guaranteed that the observable behaviour is accompanied by correct thoughts. They explain that factors affecting this are wide, including failing to keep goals in mind, failing to listen to musical output of practice and to evaluate effectively, not knowing how to approach trouble spots, and psychophysiological states such as fatigue and hunger. This means that apparent lack of progress can occur despite observable good practice behaviours. Despite these vast potential barriers to deliberate practice that extends beyond choosing good strategies, Zhukov (2009) argues, ‘clear instructions on what and how to practice can save time and minimise frustration’ (p. 10). She also notes, however, that focusing attention on outcomes and adjusting choices accordingly are key to independent learning, such as occurs during home practice.

Unlike Bugos and High’s (2009) study, Cremaschi’s (2012) study with college music majors shows a practice checklist’s potential for improved practice. The predominant difference is that the checklist included those strategies relevant to pieces being learned, and also included self-monitoring of the week’s practice. Cremaschi tested the efficacy of a weekly practice checklist on self-reported strategies, self-efficacy beliefs and exam grades. The weekly checklist aimed to maximise the effectiveness of practice by encouraging self-directed learning and good strategy adoption. He concluded that while experts tend to use more effective strategies than inexperienced students, a weekly checklist can help to engage students in their practice choices and increase metacognitive self-observation and self-reflection. Metacognitive engagement was evidenced through self-monitoring and students adjusting their approach accordingly, managing time and environment,
managing cognitive and affective states, including attention and concentration. Cremaschi (2012) found that self-efficacy significantly correlated to achievement and that ‘students confident in their abilities generally reported being more likely to use Practice strategies and Meta-cognitive self-regulation, and to manage resources such as their time, effort, and practice environment more efficiently’ (p. 231).

This highlights the importance of metacognition and mental alertness in deliberate practice. Thus, it would appear that students need to learn to reflect on their practice choices and the resultant outcomes and to adapt their approaches accordingly. Having strategies to employ is not the only factor determining effectiveness of practice. It is also necessary for students to know how to set manageable and appropriate goals and to monitor the progress made towards them (Duke et al., 2009; McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002).

Practice journals are one such tool for guiding goal setting and strategy choice for home practice. While practice journals are a widely used resource in piano studios, in many cases they consist of teachers writing practice notes for students to consult through the week. Such journals, however, have the potential to go beyond the standard written accounts of teachers’ advice, and can be used to monitor and evaluate students’ practice habits (McPherson & Renwick, 2001; McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002; Zhukov, 2009). Zhukov (2009) explains that if students use journals to record actual practice done, including the strategies used, this gives the teacher and student an opportunity to read the entries together in lessons and for the teacher to guide the student on further improving strategy choices. Kim’s (2008) study supports this claim. Kim implemented a semi-structured practice diary over four weeks with college strings majors. She found that this made students more aware of how they learned, aided practice efficiency, and helped them to achieve their goals.

Weaver’s (2005) study investigated the influence of practice strategies on young novice piano students’ motivation to practice. Students were assigned three types of assignments for home: a No-goal piece, a Goal piece and a Practice Step piece. The piece with practice steps was practised more, showing an increase in motivation for that task, and was unsurprisingly also most successful in terms of playing ability. Furthermore, time in lessons was predominantly spent with the teacher guiding the rehearsal of the practice steps, demonstrating a potential link between lesson activities, motivation in home practice, and musical growth.
Practice has been found to be more effective when organised by the teacher, and also when accompanied with a routine (Barry & Hallam, 2002). Likewise, Jutras (2006) argues that helping adult piano students to structure and organise their practice activities and learning goals may help promote the self-discipline required to practice efficiently.

2.3 Chapter Summary

After noting the need for piano teachers to cultivate self-direction as a way to engage adult novice piano students in Chapter 1, this chapter discussed the processes and mindsets involved in this endeavour. It highlighted the importance of students’ reflective practice whereby they choose and implement appropriate practice strategies and reflect on their outcomes to adjust future actions accordingly, moving deliberately towards their goals. It discussed the role of mindsets involved in these processes, including motivation, self-efficacy, self-theories and attributions, in shaping adult learners’ focus and intention within the learning environment, as well as their ability to be transformed through critical reflection on their underlying assumptions. With these insights in mind, this chapter explored strategies associated with transformative pedagogy, which has at its core the aim of fostering students’ deep and active engagement with their learning. These strategies have the potential to cultivate mindsets conducive to such learning, and to facilitate the growth of the skills associated with self-direction.

Transformative pedagogy is arguably not complete without a teacher’s willingness to reflect on their practice. The implications of such an approach are inspiring. Biggs and Tang (2011) offer this analogy:

When you stand in front of a mirror what you see is your reflection, what you are. Transformative reflection is rather like the mirror in Snow White: it tells you what you might be. This mirror uses theory to enable the transformation from the unsatisfactory what-is to the more effective what-might-be. (p. 43)

Inspired by the strategies of transformative pedagogy explored herein and their potential for engaging my adult students with their learning, and noting the importance of reflecting on practice for developing my teaching and thus students’ learning outcomes, the following chapter describes the pedagogical framework, methodology and study design used in my practitioner-based study.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Study Design

I arrived at this study with the desire to learn how to actively engage my adult piano students and to foster mindsets conducive to this. Specifically, I wished to uncover the role of mindsets in adult students’ engagement with their learning, the pedagogical approaches that can foster the skill-sets and mindsets required for self-direction, and to understand how to effectively examine my teaching and the impact of my pedagogical decisions on students’ learning.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: Firstly, to create a pedagogical framework from the principles and concepts explored in Chapter 2 in order to better facilitate learning with adult learners and cultivate self-direction, and secondly to implement these strategies within the context of my own teaching and to critically examine their implementation and share the experiences and lessons learned throughout the process. This chapter first describes the pedagogical framework created from the literature. It then discusses the study’s methodology and design. As my methodological choice of teacher-as-researcher is scarce within piano pedagogy, I include a brief overview of the literature supporting this choice before discussing my research design, data collection and analysis processes.

3.1 Pedagogical Framework for this Study

There are three broad areas of learning the piano, which I addressed when designing the pedagogical framework for my study. These are content and repertoire learned, the teaching and learning strategies and interactions within lessons aimed at developing the skills of deliberate practice, and encouraging and facilitating the use of deliberate practice strategies during home practice so that learning could continue between lessons.

3.1.1 Content and repertoire.

Relevance is an important concept of adult learning theories, which argue that the learning content needs to be relevant to an adult learner’s goals and reasons for learning (Jarvis, 2010; Jutras, 2006; Knowles et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is important to involve learners in planning the structure of their content and the direction of the learning in order to increase autonomy and ownership of learning
(McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002; A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008). Strategies in this area include:

- Uncovering students’ musical tastes and goals
- Aligning content learned with students’ tastes and goals
- Involving students in sourcing and choosing repertoire that align with tastes and goals
- Encouraging autonomous search for sources

### 3.1.2 Lesson strategies and interactions.

It is important to remember that adult learners bring a wealth of prior knowledge and experience, perspectives and expectations to their learning journeys, which inform how they interact with their learning (Knowles et al., 2011; Mezirow, 2003; E. W. Taylor, 2008). These frames of reference should be understood and honoured, while also encouraging critical examination and transformation of those mindsets not conducive to deep learning. Strategies around frames of reference include:

- Creating a nurturing and safe learning environment
- Discussions to understand the learning experiences as they unfold
- Questioning to encourage different ways of perceiving challenges
- Interacting empathetically and encouragingly

As discussed in Chapter 2, teaching strategies that actively involve students in the learning process are facilitative rather than didactic (Carey et al., 2013; E. W. Taylor, 2008). Strategies involved in this transformative pedagogical approach include allowing for guided discovery (Mayer, 2004), promoting metacognitive thinking (Bathgate et al., 2012; Mezirow, 2000; Paul & Elder, 2009), and the use of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Specifically, critical intention, action and reflection are required for deep learning. Teachers can foster these approaches in students through questioning (Burwell, 2005; Snyder & Snyder, 2008), providing opportunities for success, and increasing autonomy and self-direction (Bomia et al., 1997). Strategies I incorporated to achieve such aims include:

- Guided discovery: Asking questions to draw students’ awareness to specific stimulus to facilitate discovery and learn new concepts and skills
- Guided feedback: Asking questions so that feedback can come from the students, rather than being given by the teacher
• Guided problem solving: Modelling and asking questions around the problem-solving process
• Encouraging reflective observations by asking critical questions before and after playing, directing students’ focus to relevant musical concepts and actions

3.1.3 Encouraging strategy use and reflections during home practice.

Home practice is an area that arguably requires much self-direction from the adult learner. Without guidance, however, much home practice can be haphazard and aimless (Bugos & High, 2009; Lehmann et al., 2007). Strategies to encourage deliberate practice include planning, goal setting and the use of a practice journal as a tool for reflection (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002), essentially encouraging the use of the experiential learning cycle at home. Strategies I included for this study are:

• Facilitated weekly goal setting
• Planning strategy use and focus for home practice sessions
• Encouraging reflection on practice through written questions
• Creating a home practice journal to house these steps

In order to achieve the aim of the study and to explore the implementation of these strategies within the context of my teaching, I chose a methodology that allowed me to be fully present in the research as both the researcher and the researched. My methodological choice and decisions, along with the assumptions of my chosen approach and my epistemological and ideological positions are discussed below.

3.2 Research on Teaching

Up to the early 1990s, research on teaching placed teachers as the researched rather than the researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). This approach, whereby the researcher is separate to the context being studied, functions through two different paradigms. The first is the process-product paradigm, which aims to correlate teacher actions with learning outcomes: If the teacher does this, the student learns that. This is said to be of little value to teachers as it fails to capture the complexity of the teaching context (Sandretto, 2009) and ‘divides knowledge generation from knowledge application’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a, p. 263).

Researchers who wish to acknowledge the contextual nature of teaching have taken an interpretivist approach. Central to this ‘classroom ecology’ paradigm
(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) is the belief that teaching is highly complex, context-
specific and interactive. While research under this paradigm is still conducted by
‘outsiders’, much of this research is undertaken collaboratively with teachers in order
to uncover the emic perspectives of the teachers. A limitation of collaborative
research is that the researcher constructs and predetermines the role of the teacher.
This means that while the teacher may offer emic perspectives on how they construct
their reality, this is reconstructed through the perspectives of the researcher
(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; V. Richardson, 1994). This constrains the teacher’s
role in generating knowledge about teaching and learning.

Studying others’ teaching contexts can be a powerful springboard for
professional development, but in order for insights offered to be useful to other
teaching contexts and to help improve practice, teachers need to deconstruct and
reconstruct meaning for their own purposes. Some piano pedagogy studies have
investigated other piano teachers’ practices and given recommendations accordingly
(see Chmurzynska, 2012; Montemayor, 2008; Siebenaler, 1997), but little
investigation has been conducted into the implementation of such recommendations.
This raises several questions: What does the implementation of strategies look like in
the context of my own teaching? What does the deconstruction and reconstruction
process entail? And specifically, how is advice offered within other studies relevant
to my teaching practice? Furthermore, experience has taught me that the situational
nature of teaching is not just represented by the individual teacher, but also by each
individual student. This means that implementation of strategies with one student
may not unfold in the same manner with another student. How do I, as a teacher,
adapt my approach to suit the individual student while maintaining and upholding the
pedagogical and theoretical framework within which I choose to work?

Given these questions and the limitations of the above approaches in
providing answers, I chose a teacher research methodology, as opposed to research
on teaching, that enabled me to study the context of my own teaching practice
independent of outside collaboration. This approach is arguably most suited to my
study as my research questions were borne out of the challenges I faced within my
own teaching practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999b) and is more useful to my aim
of improving my practice than research conducted by outsiders on my teaching
context (L. Richardson, 2003) or studying others’ practices, placing myself as an
 outsider to their teaching context. As such, exploring methodologies that would allow me to study my own teaching was imperative to my research aims.

3.3 Teacher-as-Researcher Methodology

My pedagogical ideology, as expressed through the literature explored in Chapter 2, is transformative learning, which emphasises that knowledge is subjective and constructed by individuals through their unique frames of reference and reflections on their experiences. Furthermore, frames of reference used to construct interpretations of events and personal realities can be transformed when critically examined (Mezirow, 2003). This aligns with ‘constructive alternativism’, which assumes that it is possible to revise and replace interpretations of past experiences, as opposed to being bound by predetermined events (Kelly, 1963, as cited in Zuber-Skerritt, 1993). As such, I was drawn to qualitative paradigms that share this relativist ontology. Subjectivity here is restored as ‘a serious attitude, a basis for gaining knowledge and evaluating it, a ground for making decisions and taking action’ (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982, p. 7). Knowing I wished to be not only the researcher, but also part of the researched within the context of my studio teaching, I explored options within teacher research paradigms.

An epistemological assumption of teacher research is that procedural and conceptual knowledge are not necessarily or automatically aligned. Professional actions are based on implicit ‘theories in use’, which often differ from the ‘espoused theories’ used to explain or justify them (Argyris & Schön, 1974, as cited in Eraut, 1994). Schmidt (2005) explains, ‘since its beginnings, research and practice, theory and action have been dissociated in music education’ (p. 3). This explains why my research endeavours prior to this study, as described in Chapter 1, which sought to understand theories rather than critically examine my application of them in my own practice, did not help to address my challenges with retaining adult students.

As Usher et al. (1997) explain, teaching does not convey a practitioner’s knowledge; rather, their knowledge is constructed through their teaching. At the heart of teacher research then is critical, informed and systematic inquiry (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Leiper, 2012; Loughran & Berry, 2005), which aims to arrive at insight into the relationship between knowing and doing in such a way that improves one’s practice. (Usher et al., 1997). There are two paradigms of teacher research, which, while sharing the above assumptions, deviate in a way that is important for

3.3.1 Knowledge-in-practice.

The knowledge-in-practice paradigm ‘hinges on enhancing teachers’ understandings of their own action’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a, p. 267) through teacher reflections on practice, practice inquiries and/or narrative accounts. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999a) explain that this paradigm assumes that improving teaching requires ‘opportunities to enhance, make explicit, and articulate the tacit knowledge embedded in experience’ (pp. 262–263). A teacher’s knowledge is seen as tacit and experiential. The methodology that aligns with this paradigm is action research, as it shares a focus on action learning and experiential learning.

Zuber-Skerritt (1993) describes action learning as ‘learning from concrete experience and critical reflection on that experience, through group discussion, trial and error, discovery and learning from one another’ (p. 45). Action research then uses action learning in a deliberate, systematic and rigorous manner that is made public (Zuber-Skerritt, 1993). This is achieved through the use of a process akin to the experiential learning cycle discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to adult learning, following the same four stages of plan, act, observe and reflect. Reflections are used to revise the plan and inform future actions. This model is depicted in Figure 3.1.

![Diagram of the action research spiral](image)

**Figure 3.1.** The action research spiral.


While the results and insights gained from the research are said to have ‘theoretical importance to the advancement of knowledge in the field’ (Zuber-Skerritt, 1993, p. 47) there is a lack of focus on how existing theories posited within the field might influence actions within the classroom. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) argue that teacher research does not have to consist solely of empirical study of
classrooms and that ‘teachers may learn much of value for informing and guiding their current practice by investigating historical, anthropological, sociological or psychological studies and theoretical work conducted in other places and/or at other times’ (p. 1). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999a) label this paradigm knowledge-of-practice.

3.3.2 Knowledge-of-practice.

Knowledge-of-practice is based on a fundamentally different idea to other teacher research conceptions. It recognises that translation of learning theory into action is a highly subjective process (Cleaver & Ballantyne, 2014) and places more emphasis on the role of theory informing practice than action research. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999a) explain:

That practice is more than practical, that inquiry is more than an artful rendering of teachers’ practical knowledge, and that understanding the knowledge needs of teaching means transcending the idea that the formal-practical distinction captures the universe of knowledge types. (p. 274)

In this way, knowledge-of-practice is ‘something situated between academia-led theoretical pursuits and research-informed practice’ (Furlong & Oancea, 2005). A focal aim of this approach is to bridge the gap between theory and practice by looking both ways, straddling both the practice-led research approach of action research and the theory-led approach of research on teaching.

The knowledge-of-practice paradigm has similarities with knowledge-in-practice: They are characterised by a teacher posing authentic questions of her practice, and they provide an opportunity for professional development. Furthermore, knowledge-of-practice can include teacher reflections and use of the experiential learning cycle to implement strategies aimed at addressing the researcher’s challenges. Where they deviate is their level of emphasis on pre-existing theories and contexts outside of the classroom. Knowledge-of-practice is not strictly bound by the classroom but can also include a study of the literature and theories that inform actions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). The methodology most suited to knowledge-of-practice, therefore, is teacher-as-researcher, which does not confine the teacher-researcher’s role to investigating the context of their classroom alone. It also allows for inquiry into existing theories and literature beyond the classroom. This provides teacher-researchers the opportunity to
explore their implications for teaching, and to investigate the evolving understanding of both theory and action and the relationship between them.

3.4 Study Design

A study using the teacher-as-researcher methodology, as a branch of qualitative research, cannot be fully planned from the start. As such, my research design was flexible (Snape & Spencer, 2003) and evolved alongside my teaching and data collection processes.

3.4.1 Teaching and learning contexts.

There are three contexts involved in understanding the influences upon, and outcomes of, the implementation of teaching and learning strategies within lessons: The lesson environment and student-teacher interactions within that space and time; student learning and environmental factors outside of the lesson environment, such as home practice and other experiences and influences—both musical and non-musical—that shape the unique frames of reference and perspectives that students bring to lessons; and my reflections on the lessons and interactions with students, reflections on my own frames of reference, and my interpretations of the literature and theories I deemed relevant to exploring those frames of reference and experiences at any one time. How these three contexts interact is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

![Figure 3.2. Contexts involved in the study.](image)

3.4.2 Length of study.

The transformation of frames of reference, and learning skills of deliberate practice, critical action and critical reflection take time. I needed enough time in the study to allow for this development. In deciding upon the length of time my study
should take, I also had to consider the imposition on my participants, the amount of data that would be collected over a long time period, and what could be achieved in different time frames. I chose nine months, as it would allow for exploration of the evolution of learning and teaching over an adequate time frame, as well as different stages of strategy adoption so as not to overwhelm myself or my participants. It also appeared manageable from a data collection perspective. Most participants had been learning from me for over one year, demonstrating their commitment to their musical journeys. I felt confident that this length of time would be of most benefit to them as I learned to adapt my teaching to their learning needs.

3.4.3 Participant selection.

When selecting the participants for my study it was important to ensure that a range of student demographics a teacher might typically have in their studio was represented. Criteria considered included age, gender, musical interests, education level, job status, length and frequency of lessons, and prior piano experience. After an initial study information sheet was sent to the adult piano students within my studio (see Appendix A), these selection criteria were framed as an initial survey (see Appendix B for participant selection survey). While the response rate of eight out of 17 allowed me to accept all participants, I checked their responses to ensure a wide range of students were represented. Two participants ceased learning the piano early in the study and opted out of being included in the data. This left six participants. This small sample size allowed for a more in-depth investigation (Silverman, 2001) of students’ learning journeys than would be possible with a larger participant pool. This proved beneficial to achieving the aims of this study, as greater attention could be placed on the individual needs and experiences of each student. Participants’ demographics and musical interests are outlined in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1

*Student Participant Background*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First name</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Time learning with me at the start of this study</th>
<th>Length and frequency of lessons</th>
<th>Musical tastes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>45–49</td>
<td>Engineer, project manager</td>
<td>12–15 months</td>
<td>45 minutes weekly</td>
<td>Classical, Jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina</td>
<td>35–39</td>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td>15–18 months</td>
<td>60 minutes weekly</td>
<td>Classical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>70–74</td>
<td>Retired teacher aide (special needs)</td>
<td>15–18 months</td>
<td>30 minutes fortnightly</td>
<td>Classical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>75–79</td>
<td>Retired farmer</td>
<td>12–15 months</td>
<td>60 minutes weekly</td>
<td>Jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>65–69</td>
<td>Semi-retired orthopaedic surgeon</td>
<td>1–3 months</td>
<td>60 minutes weekly</td>
<td>Classical, Popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>15–18 months</td>
<td>60 minutes weekly</td>
<td>Classical, Contemporary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the individuals who chose to participate are representative of the typical diversity found within a piano studio, with a mix of ages, genders, musical tastes and experiences, it is important to remember that each student is also unique. Thus, the strategies used and the way learning unfolds would be different for any adult learner. It is interesting to note that five of the participants had already been learning with me for over a year, indicating they already had a level of commitment to their piano study and thus also had a good rapport with me as their teacher. The fact that two students chose to cease lessons within the first three months of the study reflects that at that stage in my teaching journey, I was still having trouble retaining adult students.
3.4.4 Ethics.

I followed standard procedures of obtaining ethical clearance through the Human Ethics Committee and received approval prior to commencing this study (see Appendix C). My adult student participants (from this point referred to simply as students) were sent an informed consent package (see Appendix D) following their interest in participating in this study. They were given opportunities to member check both their interviews throughout the study and to read this thesis prior to submission to ensure that they felt fairly represented and portrayed throughout. I was also mindful of the power dynamics that teacher-student relationships, as well as researcher-participant relationships, can create. I addressed these by having a valid research design based on openness and respectfulness, avoiding coercion or manipulation (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) explain that reciprocity can help build ‘a sense of mutual identification’ (p. 112), honours the contribution of participants, and actively seeks to give something back in return. As a thank you for participating in the study, participants were offered a discount on their tuition fees during the length of the study. This was deemed appropriate by the ethics board. One student chose not to accept this, as he reasoned that he was receiving quality tuition throughout the study, just as he had prior to the study. Another student chose an extended lesson each week instead, making her lessons an hour long for the duration of the study instead of 45 minutes. Finally, I ensured confidentiality for my students by offering them the choice of a pseudonym. Not wanting to take away their ownership of their musical journeys, I also gave them the option of being identifiable by their first name only. Each student chose the second option, and are thus identified in the study by their first name.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The methods I chose were not only key to generating and collecting data to be analysed, but were also pedagogical strategies themselves, designed to facilitate the achievement of my goals through the strategies outlined in Section 3.1. These methods are outlined in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2

Outline of Data Collection Time Frames and their Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview 1</td>
<td>Uncover relevant frames of reference, musical tastes and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2013–February 2014</td>
<td>Video-assisted teaching journal</td>
<td>Document the implementation of strategies in the pedagogical framework, relevant discussions within lessons, evidence of participants’ frames of reference in relation to their learning journeys, and my frames of reference that had an impact on strategy use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2013–February 2014</td>
<td>Home practice journal</td>
<td>Facilitate home practice and capture participants’ experiences and perspectives in written form on a weekly basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February–March 2014</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview 2</td>
<td>Uncover participants’ perspectives and experiences with the home practice journal and their lesson experiences throughout the study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5.1 Uncovering frames of reference through semi-structured interviews.

My ontological position places people’s knowledge, perspectives, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions as meaningful contributions to the research questions of my study (Mason, 2002; Roth, 2005; Silverman, 2001). This position aligns itself with one of the fundamental principles of adult learning—that adult learners bring with them a whole history, including experiences, beliefs, attitudes and perspectives, which can both inform the direction of their learning and shape the way they interact with that learning (Mezirow, 2003). Understanding someone’s history allows us to start to understand the knowledge and perceptions that the person brings to the context being studied (Roth, 2005; Silverman, 2001).

Bresler (1995) argues that ‘teaching requires a phenomenological sensitivity to students’ realities and their life worlds’ (p. 16), which helps teachers to see the pedagogical significance of situations and interactions. While much of this
sensitivity can be acquired through the lesson interactions themselves, I wished to delve more deeply and specifically into areas of my participants’ histories and approaches to their piano study than my then-current lesson environment would normally allow for. As such, I chose to interview participants early in the study using semi-structured interviews. These interviews are better viewed as ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Mason, 2002, p. 62) that minimise researcher control of participants’ responses (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). I had predesigned questions, but the discussions that ensued between them were organic (Mason, 2002) and the order in which topics were explored was flexible. Questions were purposely open-ended and fell into two categories that related to two different themes: past experiences and expectations, and musical tastes and goals.

The first group of questions allowed me to uncover past experiences, expectations and frames of reference that could shed light on learning behaviours in lessons and around home practice. Questions addressed the following themes:

- Musical background;
- Educational background;
- Work background;
- Reasons for commencing lessons;
- Frustrations and successes of learning piano to date;
- Expectations before commencing lessons;
- How the learning journey has met or deviated from those expectations; and
- Perceived learning styles.

This information helped me to understand and interpret the behaviours observed in lessons. It also helped to inform my interactional choices in lessons and the direction of discussions around the learning process.

The second group of questions was designed to uncover information relevant to the students’ immediate musical needs. Themes explored included:

- Musical tastes;
- Musical goals; and
- Habits, routines, and approaches and strategies used in home practice.

This information helped me to brainstorm lesson content and approaches to repertoire selection that were most relevant to each participant, and to understand their current home practice approaches. As I was aiming to develop participants’
metacognitive awareness in order to foster critical engagement with home practice, it was important to understand their approaches and identify their learning needs in the beginning of the study. While the types of information given were different for each set of themes—one stretching backwards and one focusing on the present—both were used to inform the shared interactions within the lesson environment moving forwards in the study.

One of the pedagogical goals of these interviews was to place more power of learning into the hands of participants and to indicate that their experiences, perspectives and goals mattered. Rather than being a closed experience, these interviews informed my teaching choices and responses to learning situations in lessons, and elements of my teaching reflections at a later time. They advanced conversations from past lessons and opened up conversations that would continue in subsequent lessons.

Our pre-existing rapport and shared lessons prior to the study meant that I already knew some of the information that was discussed in the interviews. It also meant I potentially came into the study with biases and interpretations that could place the validity of this knowledge at risk. Therefore, it was important to make what I thought I knew explicit for research purposes and to give participants the opportunity to frame answers in their own words. By drawing on shared experiences and conversations from past lessons, I sought deeper clarification of their intentions and perspectives, ensuring each student was given a voice within the research.

While a potential limitation of this data collection method is that the researcher only knows what the participant chooses to share in the interview, Silverman (2001) argues that responses are not designed to be true or false, but a representation of the perspectives that are displayed within the interview at that time. He explains that this allows for the investigation of these issues. When working with students in a lesson environment, teachers are also only aware of the information students choose to share. Thus, this potential gap is also authentic to teaching and did not have a negative impact on the lesson interactions that ensued.

The interview location was chosen by each participant to ensure they felt comfortable in the environment. Five of the six participants opted to have their interviews in my teaching studio, which was the environment in which this atmosphere would continue to be nurtured. One participant chose to have her interview conducted at home for convenience, a location that also allowed for
comfort and rapport. While interviews are a form of contrived research, occurring outside of the lesson context, the home practice journal created for this study related directly to, and was used within, the learning contexts of lessons and home practice.

3.5.2 Student home practice journal.

One of the goals of this study was to explore how to encourage and facilitate the use of deliberate practice strategies during home practice. As having a journal can help with this endeavour (E. W. Taylor, 2008), I designed a home practice journal that could be used for this purpose. The function of this journal was three-fold: to facilitate participants’ involvement in planning their practice for the upcoming week during their lessons; to facilitate and encourage reflection on their home practice and goals; and to capture their experiences with home practice as a readily available data source. The first two purposes are pedagogical, with the journal serving as a learning aid and a tool that could facilitate and encourage active engagement with learning, while the third was purely research oriented.

A home practice journal or blank notebook is a common tool for piano students. While it can help to direct students at home, my experience and informal conversations with other piano teachers over the years has shown me that lesson notes written by the teacher are often ignored, or, at best, followed blindly without critical engagement and a focus on outcomes. I wished to adapt this tool by applying the principles of experiential learning in order to make it more engaging for my participants. With this goal in mind, I created a practice journal with the following three sections, influenced by the planning and reflecting stages of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984): lesson notes, weekly goals and self-reflection. The introduction page of the journal outlined its purposes to the participants as follows:

Many of you already use a notebook in your lesson to guide your practice at home. This journal serves as a notebook for this purpose, as well for some reflection on your practice each week.

Feel free to use this journal to document what is relevant or important to you. The reflection sheets are designed to be short and simple. If there are discoveries, issues or breakthroughs you would like to share beyond this, there is space at the back for you to do so and I welcome any thoughts you would like to share.

These journals are here to help you document your learning journey at the
piano. They can also act as a communication between us and for you to make note of any successes or struggles through the week.

There were two pages of the journal each week: One for lesson notes and one for weekly goals and reflections.

3.5.2.1 Lesson notes.

Prior to the study, some participants had already brought notebooks to their lessons and I would write their lesson notes for them. These notes included pieces to practice, practice strategies to use and technique reminders. Other participants started the study without any background in using a practice journal. Regardless of their prior experiences with journalling, for the purposes of the study, participants were required to write their own notes. There are many benefits to students writing their own practice notes. The act of writing requires skills that are related to deep learning, including:

- Reflection-on-action;
- Synthesis of new knowledge and old; and
- Synthesis of context and content.

The lesson notes section of the journal included the following subheadings:

- Lesson date
- Pieces
- Technical
- Other

This layout offered structure to the note-taking process. Participants’ use of this section of the journal contributes to the aims of this study by:

- Reinforcing learning through note-taking within lessons;
- Guiding focus and encouraging good strategy adoption in home practice;
- Facilitating the student-led environment and encouraging participants to take ownership of their learning; and
- Stimulating discussions around the learning process.

3.5.2.2 Goal setting.

The next section of the journal pertained to weekly goal setting, which is an important element of planning, designed to focus a student’s attention towards tasks that will move them towards their longer-term goals. Creating this focus can help
students to structure practice sessions accordingly while also offering the opportunity to regularly celebrate small successes and increasing accountability of learning. This task aimed to encourage self-directed practice during the week by making the aims of the practice sessions explicit. It was hoped that this would influence strategy choice, encouraging the consultation and implementation of the strategies noted in the first section of the journal. I included space for three achievable goals each week. This was an opportunity to take the lesson notes and turn them into measurable and achievable goals.

3.5.2.3 Self-reflective questions.

The final section of the journal was dedicated to self-reflective questions designed to encourage students to reflect on their week’s practice, including:

- How did you feel about your practice this week? (1 not so great, 5 fabulous)
  1  2  3  4  5
- What were your practice goals this week?
- Did you achieve them? Yes  No
- What went well?
- What needs more work?
- Did any questions come out of your practice?

The questions were kept purposely simple. As critical thinking and self-reflection are skills that develop over time and need to be learned, I wanted to ensure that all participants would feel able to answer questions easily without too much intrusion on their time. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it cannot be taken for granted that adults possess the skills required for deep critical reflection. Such questions can, however, encourage self-reflection (Mitchell & Coltrinari, 2001; E. W. Taylor, 2008; Willink & Jacobs, 2011), which may develop in critical content over time.

The journals were given to participants after their initial interviews had been conducted and I had been recording lessons for 12 weeks. I waited until part way into the study for two reasons: First, this would stop me being overwhelmed by implementing too many new teaching strategies at once; and second, I wanted the design of the student journal to evolve from my initial understanding of how the lesson strategies worked so that they could complement one another and best serve the goals of this study.
3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews, round 2.

At the conclusion of the nine months of recording lessons, I conducted another round of semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to uncover any changes in participants’ goals, expectations and practice habits, and to learn about their experiences with the home practice journal. Specifically, I wished to uncover:

- How they would describe their musical journey over the study;
- Their experiences with the home practice journal;
- Their perspectives on the repertoire learned;
- Their perceived progress;
- Their current practice routines and strategies;
- Their expectations of themselves and their learning journeys;
- Successes and frustrations encountered throughout the study; and
- Future directions.

While there were common questions around these specific themes, albeit in a flexible order and leading to further questions and discussions around the answers, I also had questions that were specific to the individual participant, which aimed to:

- Clarify specific comments in their journals;
- Enquire into specific experiences in their lessons; and
- Clarify my interpretations of events throughout the study as needed.

This not only served as a form of member checking, giving participants an opportunity to further comment on previous intentions and information shared, but also gave them agency and ensured I had not misinterpreted or misrepresented these intentions. This instilled more confidence that I could represent my participants’ perspectives fairly and accurately.

While discussions in the lesson environment evolve naturally, I found that for some participants, the atypical setting of the second interview led to some guarded responses, more so than the first interview. This may be because while the first interview was created in a ‘getting to know you better’ vein, the second interview was more involved with specific experiences that were being ‘studied’. Once again, there was the risk of the student-teacher relationship influencing the candour of responses, with participants potentially telling me what they thought was ‘right’ or what I wanted to hear. Reflecting on our interviews and reading the transcriptions,
this does not appear to have been a significant factor. This could be because the participants and I shared the same lessons and because I had their practice journals that also played a role in our weekly interactions.

The three data collection methods discussed thus far have focused on data collected from my participants. Throughout the nine-month study, I also videoed lessons and kept a teaching journal.

3.5.4 Capturing lesson interactions through video recording lessons.

In determining what type of data video recordings of lessons could contribute to my study, I considered several approaches. Some piano pedagogy studies have transcribed videos for detailed analysis (Carey et al., 2013; Daniel, 2006). I questioned whether this would produce data relevant to my research objectives. After becoming aware of the ‘Herculean task’ (Ratcliff, 2003, p. 117) of exhaustive video analysis and the time and cost involved in producing event logs, I decided that it was not suitable (Derry, 2007). Having video transcriptions does not fit with my theoretical framework, which places more emphasis on the frames of reference and underlying influences of behaviours than the event logs that transcriptions result in, and therefore was not the best use of my time. As such, I chose to use the videos to prompt reflections, captured in the form of a teaching journal.

Video is a recommended tool for self-reflection (Derry, 2007; Hollingsworth, 2005; Mackworth-Young, 1990), which is more effective than journalling alone (McAllister, 2008) and is arguably ‘revolutionizing the practices of educational practitioners’ (Derry, 2007, p. 1). It allows teachers to view lessons afterwards and direct their observations and reflections accordingly, with multiple viewings of the educational setting from the perspectives of both the teacher and the student (Derry, 2007, p. 25; Hollingsworth, 2005, p. 148). In a summary of 57 studies that used video to promote teacher reflections of their teaching, T. Tripp and Rich (2012) found that they all reported positive teacher changes or improvement to practice. This offered great encouragement for my decision to take this approach. Recording lessons offered the following benefits for my study (Hollingsworth, 2005):

- The ability to preserve activity to enable detailed examination from multiple perspectives;
- The ability to reveal alternatives through comparative analysis; and
- Stimulation of discussions about choices related to teaching and learning.
As memory is notoriously unreliable, video serves as ‘an enormous prosthetic extension of memory, inference, and analytic imagination’ (Derry, 2007, p. 5). This lends a level of reliability to the study and the analysis process, as it could be revisited to check for representations, multiple perspectives and other ways to interpret the lesson interactions.

I recorded participants’ weekly or fortnightly lessons in their entirety from the third week of June 2013 to the final week in February 2014. With such a long time frame, the Hawthorne effect (Daniel, 2006), by which participants change their behaviour due to an awareness of being recorded, was minimal or completely absent. I did not notice a change in behaviour from before recording started, and participants commented that they had forgotten they were being recorded. I used my Samsung Galaxy Smartphone for recording, as it is an unobtrusive, everyday object that participants were already accustomed to seeing. The camera and sound specifications are of high quality, optimising the viewing experience. I set the camera up on a windowsill to the right of the piano prior to lessons. As students did not see me start or conclude recording each lesson, even less focus was drawn to it.

The data that resulted from viewing the lesson recordings were my self-reflections, observations and perspectives on the lessons after the event, and my interpretations, forward planning and preliminary analyses of the outcomes of strategies used. These were housed in my teaching journal.

3.5.5 Learning to be critically reflective and reflexive through my journal.

Positioning the teacher as both the researched and the researcher makes the act of teaching both a methodological vehicle and an outcome of the research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999b). Rather than being a recipient and consumer of research and practice, the teacher is seen as ‘the one who mediates ideas, and constructs meaning and knowledge and acts upon them’ (V. Richardson, 1994, p. 6). Loughran and Berry (2005) believe ‘that the ability to be explicit about what one is doing and why is enhanced through systematically inquiring into learning through experience (self-study) so that the relationship between knowing and doing might be more accessible’ (p. 194). These tasks were contained within my teaching journal, which was the storehouse of my thoughts, reflections, conceptual understandings, frames of reference and interpretations of events, concepts and behaviours throughout the study. The conceptual framework in Figure 3.3 highlights the multidirectional influence of my journal on lessons, literature and my frames of reference.
Each week there were six participant lessons to reflect on. I used the videos to aid my memory and prompt critically reflective thoughts as I wrote. I made time each week to reflect for each participant, keeping a separate document for each and marking the lesson date and reflection date for each entry. Four days of each week I would be teaching some lessons and reflecting on others.

The use of critical incidents to direct reflections is common practice in teacher research. The term ‘critical incidents’ is problematic, however, as there is no shared definition in the literature. Some interpret them to be ‘any unplanned event that occurs during class’ (Farrell, 2008), focusing on events that are dramatic, disturbing or significant in some way, but most critical incidents are arguably routine and typical (Boulton, 2010; D. Tripp, 2012). It is their process (Boulton, 2010) and analysis (D. Tripp, 2012) that is critical. Critical reflection on events is the approach used in my journal. Rather than directing my focus to isolated incidents, I wrote about each lesson at length in order to identify relationships between my approach to strategy implementation and discussions, and learning behaviours and outcomes.

Reflecting critically is a process of making underlying assumptions and values explicit and open to analysis and investigation (Farrell, 2008; Leiper, 2012;
Mezirow, 1991). It is this reflection that allows teachers to ‘consider the effect of their pedagogical decision on their situated practice’ (T. Tripp & Rich, 2012). By ‘honestly exploring alternative perceptions of the relationship between what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learnt through shared experiences’ (Loughran & Berry, 2005, p. 202), new meaning can result, which can inform future teaching decisions. Critical reflection is closely related to reflexivity, which ‘involves a commitment to both attending to what we believe and examining how we came to hold those beliefs while we are engaged in trying to make sense of another’ (Qualley, 1997, p. 5, emphasis in original). Boulton (2010) describes reflexivity as realising that we are active in shaping our environments and critically examining circumstances and relationships instead of reacting to them so that they can be reviewed and revised. He adds:

Reflexivity involves coming as close as possible to an awareness of the way I am experienced and perceived by others. It is being able to stay with personal uncertainty, critically informed curiosity as to how other perceive things as well as how I do, and flexibly to consider changing deeply held ways of being. (Boulton, 2010, p. 14)

Thus, I aimed to incorporate both critical reflection and reflexivity into my journalling approach.

My ability to reflect in a critical manner, and the level of reflexivity evident in my journal evolved over the course of the study. The three stages of my journalling are explored below. It is important to share this process, as its effect on my teaching choices and thus the strategies and outcomes pertaining to the research aims also evolved through the study, as discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

3.5.5.1 Stage one: 1 July to 17 August 2013.

In the first six weeks of journalling I did not prescribe to a systematic set of procedures as T. Tripp and Rich (2012) suggest, as I did not want to influence my focus prematurely. I had developed a set of questions prior to commencing journalling, but I did not structure my writing explicitly through questions as I wrote. Reflective questions that I explored through my journal at this time included:

- What strategies were used?
- What worked?
- What did not work?
• Why was this the case?
• What interactions and conversations around learning took place?
• Did I become aware of any of the goals of my student?
• What did I learn about my student?
• Were there any breakthroughs/struggles by my student?
• Were there any breakthroughs/struggles in my teaching?
• What do I need to work on?
• What do I need to prepare for next week?

As stated in Chapter 2, human beings are naturally inclined to seek affirmation of beliefs and perspectives and to ignore those that oppose our views. Due to the insider status of a teacher researcher, this raises the issue of verification bias, which can ‘blinker a researcher’s observations’ (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 225). This can be avoided through critical reflection and using multiple data sources (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Firstly, however, it is important to become aware of these frames of reference, making them explicit before we are able to suspend them. In this initial stage of journalling, my writing was full of bias and unconscious frames of reference that I operated through. There was a focus on judging student responses to strategies and the effects on learning than critically assessing my use of the strategies I was attempting to adopt. Silverman (2001) advises caution ‘regarding the imposition of prior and possibly inappropriate frames of reference on the people they [researchers] study’ (p. 46). Making these assumptions known was an important step in removing them and avoiding conceptual blindness (Roth, 2005).

Biggs and Tang (2011) explain, ‘all teachers have some theory of what teaching is, even if they are not explicitly aware of that theory’ (p. 17). Argyris and Schön (1974, as cited in Eraut, 1994, p. 43) explain that professional actions are based on implicit ‘theories in use’, which differ from the ‘espoused theories’ used to explain them. They note the importance of reflecting critically in order to make these theories explicit and open to criticism, rather than using self-commentary intending to justify actions. This, they claim, is the key to professional learning; thus it was an explicit goal of my journalling moving into stage two.

3.5.5.2 Stage two: 21 August to 7 September 2013.

The catalyst for changing my approach to journalling was a three-week break from teaching, nine weeks into the study. I had started to feel frustrated with the outcomes of the study thus far, as I felt the strategies were not leading to the changes
I was expecting. I started to question my teaching abilities, feeling exposed and vulnerable. It is through this ‘inherent uncertainty’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 29) that new perspectives start to emerge, leading to new investigations and insights into challenges faced (Sandretto, 2009).

I returned to the literature on adult learning theories and, specifically, critical engagement and critical reflection to look for new strategies and new ways of interacting with and questioning my participants. In this time, I came to understand, in the embodied sense of knowing, that my espoused theories were at odds with the implicit theories I had been operating through. I realised that the difference between conceptual and procedural understanding applied not only to my participants, but also to myself. My goal at this time was to consider and reconsider my knowledge and beliefs at this time, and to examine and reinvent ways of teaching that would be consistent with my espoused theories.

With this new insight and goal in mind, I returned to the last few weeks of lesson videos to journal with an expanded interpretive framework (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). I highlighted the difference between my actions and my intentions (Loughran & Berry, 2005), bringing this discrepancy into my conscious focus. I sought to find new ways of teaching, not from the literature but through understanding my implementation of the strategies. I became aware of some hidden assumptions that had been impacting my teaching choices and had led to frustrations. I asked questions about why those assumptions were there and other assumptions I could replace them with that would change my ways of teaching.

As I was not teaching at this stage of journalling, I had time and space to explore these new frames of reference without fear of acting through habits when exposed to stimulus in the studio context. I also spent more time in the planning stage—not just planning materials, but planning responses to the types of actions and conversations I could expect from participants based on the videos I had been viewing. How was I going to respond differently? By asking more questions about why participants were responding in certain ways, thinking back to their interviews and other histories and experiences I knew through our time together in lessons, I developed more empathy for their needs. Perhaps what I thought they needed was not what they thought they needed. This discrepancy in perceptions was potentially creating a communication gap where nobody’s needs were adequately being met. I sought to continue reflecting critically as I returned to teaching after my break.
3.5.5.3 Stage three: 10 September 2013 to 28 February 2014.

Following my break from teaching, I returned to journalling in the same week as participants’ lessons and continued to do so until the end of the study on 28 February 2013. There was a two-week break over the Christmas period, but I also had a break from journalling.

I noticed through this period that there was a difference in my perspectives and focus when I journalled either the day after the participant’s lesson, as I had been doing in the early stages of the study, and when I left it until the day before the next lesson. The closer my journalling was to the lesson, the more I seemed to relive the emotions or intentions I had in the lesson. It was like I was operating through the same frames of reference as I was when I was teaching. One week I happened to get behind in my journal by a few days and started journalling before the lesson, giving me a space of six days from the lesson. Knowing I was teaching those participants the next day, my journalling took on more of a planning feel based on what I perceived to be happening that was able to feed more readily into my teaching. This resulted in stronger insights that could inform my teaching, and thus was more helpful in terms of the aims of this study. It enabled me to set aside my emotions and approach the task more analytically and purposefully, with future actions in mind, as opposed to focussing retrospectively. This created a shift in my focus, and thus my mindset. I continued to improve my reflexive writing skills and to question my observations and feelings critically. I also spent more time looking from the perspectives of my participants and through their frames of reference that I was aware of to better understand the interactions and learning outcomes that were taking place.

3.5.5.4 Stage four: 1 March 2014 to 7 March 2014

As I returned to my journal entries at the conclusion of the study, I noted the implicit questions embedded in them and the questions I had failed to ask at various times throughout my journal. So many implicitly outward questions and biases became explicitly visible. I was both fascinated at what time and space can do for altering perspectives and worried that I had wasted an opportunity to journal effectively on my teaching. I started re-journalling, once more asking new questions of myself, my students, our interactions and new ways of understanding. After a few days of this, I realised three things: Firstly, I did not have the time to spend re-journalling on nine months’ worth of lessons; secondly, I could get caught in this
cycle forever, as reflection is context renewing and in a constant state of flux; and thirdly, the way in which I used the journal was important in and of itself, as my teaching evolved along with it. I decided to move on to coding and analysing my entries, finding major themes in strategy use and learning behaviours. My attention could then be directed back to the relevant videos for further clarification and analysis. While hindsight allows for old experiences to be interpreted through new lenses, adapted through the experiences and reflections that followed it, this became part of my analysis process rather than a tool for collecting more data that would overwhelm and confuse the events throughout the study.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

I chose the thematic analysis method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within my study, as it is flexible, allowing for both deductive and inductive processes to coding data, and it is compatible with humanist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) identify the phases of this approach as familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for, reviewing, and naming themes, selecting compelling extracts, relating the analysis to research questions and literature, and producing a scholarly output of the analysis. While these are presented linearly, the analysis process was both iterative and reflexive (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The analysis process starts as soon as the researcher starts to notice and look for patterns of meaning within the data, often occurring concurrently with the collection of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For me, this started with the second stage of my teaching journal and transcribing the first participant interviews, occurring in August 2013, within the first two months of the study.

Taking a thematic approach to analysis complemented my research questions and study design, as it allowed analysis to start from a template of broad themes based on the purpose of the study (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I used my pedagogical framework and the strategies I was aiming to implement as a starting point for my analysis. From here, themes became apparent from the data based on how strategies were employed, participants’ reactions to strategies, discussions and unfolding events in lessons around the learning process and participants’ experiences. Analysis resulted in over 100 specific codes, which were then categorised into three large themes: relevance and repertoire; lesson interactions; and
home practice. Themes and examples of relevant codes to which they pertain are presented in Table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance and repertoire</th>
<th>Lesson interactions</th>
<th>Home practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musical tastes</td>
<td>Early pedagogical strategies used in lessons</td>
<td>Students’ feelings towards their practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External musical goals</td>
<td>Transforming pedagogical strategies</td>
<td>Achieving weekly practice goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal musical goals</td>
<td>Structure of lessons and its evolution throughout the study</td>
<td>Internal influences on home practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for learning</td>
<td>Types of questions I asked students and subsequent interactions with students</td>
<td>External influences on home practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repertoire learned throughout the study</td>
<td>Types of modelling I used in lessons and subsequent interactions with students</td>
<td>Student expectations in relation to home practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My pedagogical strategies in relation to repertoire selection</td>
<td>Types of feedback used in lessons and subsequent interactions with students</td>
<td>Student reflections on home practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-teacher collaboration in relation to repertoire selection</td>
<td>Student-teacher collaboration in relation to shaping lesson interactions</td>
<td>Quantity of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ perceptions of their needs</td>
<td>Teacher control in lessons</td>
<td>Quality of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My perceptions of students’ needs</td>
<td>Student autonomy in lessons</td>
<td>Avoidance of practice strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ feelings towards repertoire learned</td>
<td>Student questions</td>
<td>Student perspectives on the home practice journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My expectations towards students’ repertoire</td>
<td>Student reflections</td>
<td>Playing versus practising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ autonomous</td>
<td>Student engagement with</td>
<td>Autonomous consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>search for repertoire</td>
<td>musical strategies</td>
<td>of resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student expectations towards their repertoire</td>
<td>Learning from my students</td>
<td>Students’ perspectives on their musical progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indications of self-efficacy levels of students</td>
<td>Indications of self-efficacy levels of students</td>
<td>Indications of self-efficacy levels of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indications of epistemological orientations (avoid/embrace challenges, orientation to effort, product/process orientation) in relation to repertoire</td>
<td>Indications of epistemological orientations (avoid/embrace challenges, orientation to effort, critical reflections/judgemental comments, product/process orientation) evident in lesson interactions</td>
<td>Indications of epistemological orientations (avoid/embrace challenges, orientation to effort, critical reflections/judgemental comments, product/process orientation) evident in discussions around home practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-teacher collaboration</td>
<td>Weekly goal setting with students in lessons</td>
<td>Problem solving independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher transformation through the repertoire selection process</td>
<td>Use of the forward planning page of the home practice journal in lessons</td>
<td>Reliance on teacher for problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes through the repertoire selection process</td>
<td>Student/teacher expectations towards progress</td>
<td>Student responses to reflective questions in the home practice journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ prior experiences and knowledge informing repertoire selection</td>
<td>Students’ prior experiences and knowledge informing student engagement</td>
<td>Student experiences with using the home practice journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I triangulated data from student interviews, student journals, and my teaching journal in relation to these codes and their related theme in order to arrive at in-depth
understanding of the learning and teaching processes and experiences throughout the study.

I am conscious that there is some imbalance in the data used pertaining to each student. Some students highlighted a range of issues to explore, while others were less pertinent. As I have taken a thematic approach to the analysis and structure of the findings, as opposed to in-depth case studies per student, this does not have an adverse impact on the findings.

3.7 Generalisability

Generalisation refers to ‘extending research results, conclusions, or other accounts that are based on a study of particular individuals, settings, times, or institutions to other individuals, settings, times, or institutions than those directly studied’ (Maxwell, 2013, p. 136). This is problematic for post-positivist, situational researchers. As Guba (1980) argues, ‘it is virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour which is not mediated by the context in which it occurs’ (as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 15). Thus, qualitative researchers argue that positivistic definitions of generalisability cannot, and need not, apply to research focused on contextual settings, as it is not the aim of such research (Maxwell, 2013).

Specific to teacher research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that ‘rather than laws about what works generically in classrooms, we need insight into the particulars of how and why something works and for whom it works within the contexts of particular classrooms’ (p. 15). In light of this, I recognise that my study is situational and as such, make no normative claims or generalisations of my findings (Cranton, 1996). This is not to say that generalisability is obsolete in qualitative approaches to research (Maxwell, 2013). As K. Green (1999) states, ‘it is the understandings of the complexities of the particular situation and the recognition of the different ways in which the familiar can be interpreted that is the aspect that is so readily transferable to other situations’ (p. 107). It is widely accepted within the educational community that teachers can learn much from the unique experiences of individuals (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2006; L. Richardson, 2003). It is therefore up to the reader to deconstruct and reconstruct (Roth, 2005) the strategies and processes used and the outcomes of those strategies and processes and to ascertain their relevance to his or her own unique situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
The pedagogical strategies and data collection methods used within this study are transferable, but the processes and outcomes of their use are not. It is hoped that through my use of thick and rich descriptions, the reader will be able to empathise with the contexts and relationships I describe (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and to draw correlations to their own teaching practice. In this way, I hope to contribute to the professional development of other piano teachers, and to encourage them to critically reflect on their pedagogical choices and the impact of their teaching behaviours on their students’ learning.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Through a review of the literature on teacher research, it is evident that a teacher-as-researcher methodology best suits the aim of this study. Adopting this approach allowed me to extract and develop teaching strategies from the learning theories and pedagogy literature, as described in Section 3.1, and to design a study to apply them within the context of my own studio teaching. The study design and thematic analysis approach outlined in this chapter enabled me to deeply explore both the students’ experiences and my own. This is important, as there are many complexities involved in the teaching and learning contexts that would not have been possible to thoroughly investigate otherwise. The following chapter investigates the first of three major themes explored in this study: relevance and repertoire selection.
Chapter 4: Relevance and Repertoire Selection

A key aspect of adult learning theories that aligns with transformative pedagogy is that of relevance, whereby learning context and content need to be in line with the aims and interests of students (Abrahams, 2005; Bomia et al., 1997; Keller, 2009; Knowles, 1991; Maehr et al., 2002; Wiezbicki-Stevens, 2009; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012). Piano pedagogues equally advocate for relevance and encourage teachers to align repertoire with adult students’ musical tastes, interests and goals (Cooper, 2001; Jutras, 2006; Uszler & Upitis, 2000; Wristen, 2006). In the context of one-to-one piano lessons, teachers have the ability to accommodate, adapt and change lesson plans to suit the individual student without fear of disadvantaging others, or managing several students’ needs at once. This context lends itself to catering to the individual needs and goals of each student. It is not without its challenges, however. Many piano teachers feel ill prepared to accommodate the self-defined and specific goals of individual adult students, and feel frustrated at the need for flexible learning plans (Bowles, 2010).

This chapter discusses my experiences with aligning repertoire choices with students’ goals and musical tastes, with the aim of increasing relevance for my students. Relevance is multifaceted, however. It not only relates to goals and musical tastes, which are easily made explicit, but, as described in Chapter 2, also depends on a student’s internal processes and perceptions such as self-efficacy and the importance an individual places on certain benefits and values (Keller, 2009; Vancouver, More & Yoder, 2008; Weiner, 2010). As such, relevance in terms of students’ repertoire selection in this study includes aligning content learned with their tastes and goals, maximising the perceived value of materials learned and balancing this with their perceptions of their ability to succeed at tasks.

The first section of this chapter outlines the pedagogical framework I used to select repertoire prior to the study. This serves to contextualise the discrepancies between old and new methods of teaching, the challenges I faced in honouring both frameworks and the shifts I made in my approach to accommodate the perceived needs of my students. Expanding on the discussion on motivation in Chapter 2, I describe the discontinuous model of motivation, which offers insights into the role of
value and self-efficacy in motivation. I then discuss the levels of involvement students had in planning and choosing their repertoire and the resultant challenges of pedagogical appropriateness. I explore my teaching choices and how these were influenced by discussions with, and the actions of, my students. In doing so, I discuss the factors that both positively and adversely affected students’ motivation towards their pieces, including their levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of benefits associated with their repertoire. Finally, I offer students’ own feedback responses in relation to the pieces they learned and how my experiences with repertoire selection throughout the study expanded and altered my pedagogical framework.

4.1 My Original Pedagogical Framework for Repertoire Selection

Prior to this study, I thought it was a teacher’s job to ensure all students, regardless of age, were exposed to, and learned, a broad spectrum of musical styles. I believed that this resulted in a well-rounded music education. What I found, however, was that my adult students would inevitably practice the pieces they liked and already knew the sound of, and they would make excuses for not practicing the pieces that sounded less familiar. Leading up to this study, I wondered whether I was giving my adult students what they wanted out of lessons, or whether I was focused on what I thought they should gain. I chose to abandon this quest to foster diverse musical tastes at the outset of this study. I replaced this with the notion that if adults have specific musical tastes and goals that motivate them to learn, these should be honoured (Bowles, 2010; Wristen, 2006). The table below offers details of each students’ musical level, musical tastes and musical aspirations:
### Students’ Musical Backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First name</th>
<th>Musical level</th>
<th>Musical tastes</th>
<th>Musical aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Approximately grade 4</td>
<td>Enjoys Romantic music, such as the music of Chopin and Listz, and Baroque music, with a specific interest in the music of Bach</td>
<td>To play the sophisticated and advanced repertoire that inspires her to what she deems as a musically gratifying standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina</td>
<td>Working towards AMEB Grade 1 exam</td>
<td>Enjoys classical music of all genres Does not enjoy contemporary, popular or jazz genres</td>
<td>To complete all classical AMEB practical examinations on piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Approximately grade 3</td>
<td>Enjoys Classical music, specifically that of Haydn and Mozart, and also the music of Bach</td>
<td>To play advanced pieces from the composers she enjoys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>Very passionate about jazz music, specifically the jazz standards of the 1920s to 1950s</td>
<td>To play to the highest standard that is possible for him to reach To emulate the ‘Greats’ (the pianists of the 1920s to 1950s that he admires)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>Beginner, working towards AMEB Preliminary exam</td>
<td>Enjoys all music. He does not discriminate and enjoys all genres and styles</td>
<td>To complete all classical AMEB practical examinations on piano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As evidenced in this table, there is a range of playing abilities, musical tastes and aspirations amongst the students. There are two notable similarities, however. Firstly, they each wished to work towards advanced repertoire or a high level of competency at the piano. Secondly, their aspirations for the future of their playing aligned with their current musical tastes. This strengthens the argument for not insisting on incorporating different genres of music into the repertoire they learn.

With the style of the piece of music now obsolete, I felt that other criteria I looked for were still important to successful learning and aligned with good teaching strategies. The predominant learning objectives I supported include:

- Is the piece at an appropriate level in relation to the student’s current skill level?
- Does the piece focus on one specific musical concept or skill to be learned?
- Does the piece provide opportunities to consolidate prior knowledge and skills as needed?
- Does the piece build on prior knowledge and skills and provide opportunities for scaffolding?

These objectives reflect my focus on scaffolding in order to build on information already known to students, but also my perceptions of students’ needs rather than their own perceptions. Finding repertoire that adhered to these pedagogical principles, while also matching students’ goals and perceived needs, was challenging. Furthermore, it is important to me as a teacher to ensure all musical concepts and details of rhythm, notes, articulation, phrasing and expression are taught, albeit in an additive capacity, as opposed to all at once; once familiarity of
rhythm and notes reaches a certain level, more focus can be placed on other musical elements. In this way, the limited capacity of working memory will not be overloaded with too many simultaneous concepts that are yet to be assimilated into long-term memory (Kirschner et al., 2006). This does not mean that all pieces need to be completed to ‘performance’ standard, but I believe it does ensure a well-rounded musical awareness.

4.2 Understanding the Role of Self-Efficacy and Values in Choosing Repertoire

In Chapter 2, I discussed the internal processes that motivation involves: self-efficacy levels, perceived benefits and values and whether effort to reap benefits is worth it. These factors combine to determine the level of motivation a student has to set a goal and systematically expend effort to achieve that goal. The discontinuous model of motivation serves as an appropriate model from which to interpret the events with my students, as it focuses on the value of goals and self-efficacy beliefs as main determinants of behaviour (Vancouver et al., 2008). This is consistent with the mindsets explored in Chapter 2 (see Figure 4.1).

![Discontinuous model of motivation](image)

*Figure 4.1. Discontinuous model of motivation.*

Source: Amin (2014)

From a musical perspective, MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell (2012) argue that the expectancy-value theory is the most well-established and useful theoretical approach from which to examine motivation. This model encompasses a range of assumptions regarding the relationships between self-efficacy and value that provide
insights into students’ musical motivations and behaviours in relation to their repertoire:

- The greater the difficulty, the greater the reward
- The greater the reward, the greater the level of effort required to obtain that reward
- The greater the reward, the greater the desire to put in the effort to obtain that reward
- These factors have a limit: if success is felt to be unachievable, one will not try (Vancouver et al., 2008)

Theorists (Bomia et al., 1997; Keller, 2009) offer pedagogical principles based on these assumptions that expanded my current pedagogical framework outlined in Section 4.1. These are:

- Increase students’ involvement in repertoire selection through choice and growing autonomy
- Provide opportunities for success to build self-efficacy
- Discuss benefits of repertoire to increase value
- Stay flexible in my approach and use feedback from students to inform further recommendations and guidance

These recommendations were most easily integrated when there was an external standard to judge the appropriateness of the repertoire selected.

4.3 Relevance Determined by External Goals

During the study, Ross and Georgina were working towards sitting preliminary and grade one Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) exams respectively. They had both expressed exams as a goal they wished to work towards, revelling in the challenge and the symbol of progress that moving through the grades represents. As this is an external goal, the framework with regards to skills to develop and pieces of suitable level to do so are predetermined. This meant that the appropriateness of the materials to their goals was unquestioned. Everything we worked on built their skills and knowledge and was leading to proficiency to sit an exam. Choosing learning materials was a straightforward task, as there are repertoire books designed with this goal in mind. As Ross and Georgina both enjoy a range of classical music, I recommended the AMEB piano series grade book and the corresponding book from the Getting To Grade... series (Milne, 2010). There was no
need for further discussion of resources, as these were pedagogically appropriate for their goals and gave a broad range of repertoire to choose from. Enjoying the sound of pieces was important but not difficult to address. Regardless of this, there were still opportunities to involve these students in choice and to discuss the value of certain choices over others in relation to their progress.

There are a variety of pieces in these books that address the same concepts. Therefore, if the sound of a piece did not appeal, we simply passed it by. I would find a couple of pieces that I felt were appropriate for the musical concepts we were exploring at the time, and ask them to choose the one they preferred. I aimed to encourage repertoire that provided a scaffold from which to build musical concepts and skills. This is not always in the order presented in the book, depending on the individual strengths and weaknesses of a student at any given time. In the early stages of learning, when fundamental concepts were still being learned and reinforced, I offered guidance and suggestions rather than leaving them to choose freely from a broad range of pieces.

Ross initially seemed uncomfortable with learning pieces in a different order to how the book presented them. He said he liked all the pieces, and while this was so, sometimes the order of the book was not as pedagogically sound for Ross’s learning needs than if they were rearranged. He originally placed a lot of trust in the materials than in my suggestions for their use. This was also evident in his resistance to my alterations of fingering in his music. Explaining that different hand sizes and shapes suit different fingering, and explaining the reasons for the editor’s choices, did little to dissuade Ross at first and he deferred to the original fingering. Over the course of the study, as I asked Ross to try alternatives so he could experience the difference at the piano, he started to feel more comfortable with changes. Six months into the study, Ross started to be happy for changes to be made to the score, and was also happy to consider my recommendations in relation to selecting pieces that would address his needs. If I gave him choice, Ross asked my opinion, saying that he did not mind and reiterating that he liked all pieces. While this indicates that I maintained the majority of control in relation to the repertoire Ross learned throughout the study, this aligns with the need for students in the earlier stages of their learning journeys to have more guidance and support, and to be exposed vicariously to decision-making processes before feeling equipped to make them independently (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002).
Any time there was a decision to be made in relation to repertoire, I was sure to explain my thought processes, the benefits and focal points of each piece, the skill-sets they developed and how they served to help him with his goal of excelling in his exam. In this way, I was modelling the thought processes and factors to consider when choosing appropriate repertoire (Paul & Elder, 2009), as opposed to excluding him and maintaining the separation between teaching and learning that is common in teacher-centred approaches. Even though at this stage he did not desire or need to be involved, I set him up for future discussions around repertoire choice when he might feel more equipped to take ownership of his repertoire choices.

When Ross first started lessons three months prior to the study, he completed pieces quickly and received several small pieces each week. This was in part because I was discovering his capabilities in relation to how many pieces and at what level he could handle. I also felt that this was conducive to offering opportunities for success that could build confidence and thus fuel motivation (A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008). Unfortunately, this inadvertently gave Ross a false sense of security, which resulted in shock at what is involved in learning to play as we moved on to slightly more challenging pieces. Unbeknownst to me, Ross had started lessons expecting playing to be easy. I only became aware of this through the study, as Ross and I built rapport and had conversations around his expectations. His early experiences had strengthened this perception. While I took his early successes as an opportunity to provide greater challenges and for him to be ready to start preparing for his first exam, he saw challenge as a sign of weakness and was taken aback at how difficult he found it (discussed further in Chapter 5). As Bohlin et al. (1993) suggest, requirements for success need to be clear to the student, along with relevance to the student’s goals and the benefits of pieces learned. Thus, we had discussions around his readiness for exam preparation, and the time frames to be expected for learning these more challenging pieces. I continued to offer smaller supplementary pieces that could help to reinforce concepts in more comfortable pieces, but Ross neglected these in favour of the exam pieces. This highlights that repertoire that appeared more relevant to his goals were more enticing, despite their comparative difficulty.

Unlike Ross, Georgina’s musical taste is more specific; she does not like the sound of contemporary or ‘jazzy’ pieces but enjoys all classical styles. Consequently, she was more vocal in her opinion of the choices offered and we skipped over many pieces in her book. I was surprised, therefore, when Georgina asked to hear what one
of the contemporary pieces in her book sounded like (lesson interactions, week 32). I played it for her and she said she would like to learn it. We covered the rhythms and hand positions together in the lesson, but despite being set up to practice it at home, she avoided doing so. We reinforced these concepts together in the following lesson, but once more Georgina neglected to practice it at home. I asked if she was intimidated by the new rhythms in it, and she said she was a little, but followed with, ‘I don’t want to hear it… I was trying to branch out into new music, but it’s not working for me’ (lesson interactions, week 34). This example highlights how motivation can lower if a piece is not aurally pleasing for the student (Cooper, 2001). In this instance, we simply changed the piece for something else and moved on.

Offering a choice between pieces was sufficient involvement in repertoire selection for Georgina and Ross, as their goal of sitting exams gave us a predetermined framework from which to work. For other students, this external structure did not exist. This allowed students greater freedom to be involved in the process of sourcing and selecting repertoire. While some pedagogues claim that selecting repertoire is one of the most important tasks a teacher has (McAllister, 2008; Uszler & Upitis, 2000), others posit that allowing students to choose their own repertoire would provide added motivation to practice (Lehmann et al., 2007) and contribute to their sense of self-fulfilment (A. Taylor & Hallam, 2008). Increasing autonomy, however, presented the challenge of ensuring repertoire was pedagogically appropriate for students’ current ability level.

4.4 Creating Our Own Framework

One challenge for repertoire selection with students without an external structure or goal is that their musical tastes tend to lean towards music that is much more sophisticated and advanced than their current skills and experience allow. I would normally use the same process as with Ross and Georgina, selecting repertoire on their behalf and giving choice between two or three pieces, in order to maintain control of what I deemed pedagogically appropriate. Through this study, however, I endeavoured to increase the amount of ownership students had over the repertoire selection process. Discussions around their musical tastes in the initial interview and early lessons in the study quickly led to placing the responsibility for sourcing repertoire in their hands. The pieces students found, however, were inevitably too advanced for their current skill levels. As a learner’s perceived and actual needs may not be congruent (Keller, 2009), it is important for the teacher to consider the
difficulty level of repertoire learned in order to avoid frustration and adversely affecting the learner’s confidence (Jutras, 2006).

In these instances, I recommended similar styles of music of lesser levels to allow for achievability while growing the skills necessary for progress towards the pieces that inspired the students. This, I thought, would provide the opportunities for success that have the potential to increase self-efficacy (Bomia et al., 1997; Keller, 2009). This had a variety of responses from Allison, Jenny and Sean, depending on their unique perceptions in relation to their learning.

4.4.1 Perceptions of ease.

Allison had learned piano as a child and came to lessons with me with some musical skills already. She has highly formed musical tastes, specifically enjoying Romantic pieces of Chopin and Liszt and Baroque music such as Bach’s preludes and inventions. She came with a strong desire to focus on technical skill and mastery in order to play the pieces that inspire her. Given her strong intrinsic motivation, the fact that she was not a beginner, and her already present autonomy and responsibility for her learning (which becomes more evident in the following chapters), she had a lot of freedom in relation to her repertoire choices. While for Georgina and Ross either/or choice was sufficient to their learning contexts, I gave Allison listening lists from the syllabus and asked her to listen, mark ones that she liked, explore other pieces, and make suggestions to me so that we could discuss their relevance to her learning needs at the time. While Allison’s tastes led her to more advanced repertoire, I encouraged a focus on some of the smaller pieces. For example, rather than Chopin’s nocturnes, I encouraged some of his preludes as a starting point. Allison understood the benefits of working on smaller pieces, commenting in her initial interview:

A little piece is nice because I can then at least get it in my head and have the whole thing there and can then work on the overall feelings of the piece without having to worry about the notes being wrong.

In practice, however, Allison’s motivation to focus on these pieces was low. In her interview, I reminded Allison of a conversation in our lesson together two weeks prior, where she had said, ‘I know I need time on it to do it, but if I put the time in, I know I’ll be able to do it, so I don’t bother’ (lesson conversation, month two). This highlights how perceptions of ease can adversely affect motivation, as there is no value in the task (Schunk, 2012; Vancouver et al., 2008).
Allison also provided an alternate perspective in her interview:

But it’s interesting, because with—maybe I’m not that confident that I can get piano to where I want it to be yet. Like, I’m never really happy with a piece and not necessarily confident that I can get it to where I think it should be.

This fear of disappointing herself was an authentic concern for Allison, and a sign of potentially having low self-efficacy in relation to achieving standards with which she could feel satisfied. Interestingly, it was also in direct contrast to her perceptions of ease. This highlights the power of expectations. Allison expected that if she tried, she would be able to play the piece. Fear that she would not live up to those expectations stopped her from trying. If she expected her effort would result in disappointment, there was no point in expending this energy. This demonstrates how perceptions of difficulty of achieving satisfaction results in low motivation. It is interesting to note that both perceptions Allison shared—that if she tried she knew she would be able to, or fear of trying and not being satisfied—resulted in low motivation to commit to the tasks necessary to complete pieces.

Allison felt that her technical ability at the piano was not at a level that would allow her to feel happy with her aural output. So, rather than focusing on completing pieces, Allison’s focus was on what she perceived necessary to get to a stage where she could be happy with the aural output of her playing, that of technique. This highlights Allison’s mastery orientation (Dweck, 2000), as she believes that focusing her effort on technique will result in skill development and increased ability to play musically in line with her goals. Despite this, Allison’s resistance to completing pieces led to a challenge of consistency in relation to her repertoire. This was compounded by the freedom I granted in relation to repertoire selection.

4.4.2 Lack of commitment and structure.

Increasing a students’ responsibility in relation to choosing learning material can increase a student’s sense of ownership of learning, thus increasing motivation (Keller, 1979, as cited in Bomia et al., 1997). In Allison’s case, however, this freedom also led to a lack of commitment to her pieces and resulted in a lack of consistency. For the first four months of the study, more often than not, Allison would bring different pieces to her lesson that we had worked on the week prior. This meant it might be two or three weeks before we had the opportunity to revisit a piece together. I worried about how many pieces Allison had on the go at once, our
lack of structure, and the subsequent lack of completion. Allison’s lessons, however, were not adversely affected by this at all. Allison came to lessons with explanations of what she had attempted and achieved through the week and questions relating to issues she faced. While we would set specific goals each week (see Chapter 5), I understood the need to be flexible in lesson plans for adult students (Uszler & Upitis, 2000). I hold the view that when teaching adults, the lesson is a chance to pick up wherever they are in their practice at that point in time and to work through together to problem solve and discover things for the next week, as opposed to having a set lesson plan to follow regardless of home practice. Inwardly, I hoped for Allison to see pieces through to completion, and to commit to her weekly goals. Outwardly, I encouraged this, but I learned not to let my agenda drive the lesson, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

At her interview following the conclusion of the study, Allison elaborated about what drives her decision to move on from a piece before completing it:

I’m a horror for getting to the stage of thinking, ‘Okay, I’ve learned, I’ve got that, I don’t necessarily need to finish or do it again. Probably because I have that drive to keep learning, keep getting better—whereas now, I think I’m almost at a level where there’s lots of repertoire out there that I’m going to enjoy playing…. At that lower level, there just weren’t that many pieces that inspired me.

Enjoying the musical output and feeling inspired to learn pieces that resonated with her was important to Allison. This was not just with regards to style, but also sophistication of the music.

**4.4.3 Inspiring aural output increases motivation to commit.**

Four months into the study, Allison was suggesting some more advanced repertoire that she had been listening to and was inspired to learn. Knowing how well Allison broke down technical elements and that my wish for her to complete pieces was not going to influence this to happen, we chose a Chopin nocturne approximately two grades higher than her current skill level. Allison worked consistently on this piece for the rest of the study. This supports the theory that an increase in difficulty can increase the value for the student in such a way that increases the drive to sustain focus and effort (Schunk, 2012). The piece not only satisfied her need for a sense of challenge and progress, but was also at a level where
she did not have preconceived expectations of ‘ease’ that could inadvertently affect her motivation.

Allison was not the only student who placed more value on challenge than on completing pieces. Jenny also valued challenge, but her perceptions of her difficulties and low self-efficacy affected her repertoire choices in a different way.

**4.4.4 Perceptions of difficulty, progress and challenge.**

Jenny loves the music of Mozart and Haydn. She was surprised when she first started lessons with me, 18 months prior to the study, that we jumped straight into learning small compositions of theirs, expecting to have to learn ‘boring scales and studies’ (initial interview) before being musically gratified. A challenge of Jenny’s, however, was that she focused predominantly on learning the notes and rhythm of her pieces without placing great emphasis on details of articulation and expression, despite her expressed desire to sound as ‘fluid and beautiful’ as me and to command the piano with my apparent ease. This meant that she felt ready to move to new repertoire before her current piece was within her comfort zone enough to develop her expressive skills at the piano. She explained, ‘I love working out a new piece. As soon as you give me a new piece, I end up focusing on that’ (lesson conversation, week 34). This gave Jenny more satisfaction and enjoyment than working towards her peripheral goal of achieving fluency and expression.

During the third and fourth months of the study, Jenny explained that she felt her pieces did not make her think enough, and that she needed bigger challenges in order to keep her mind active. I was conflicted, as more challenging pieces would only exacerbate her inability to focus on musical elements beyond notes and rhythm. I suggested several smaller pieces, such as those in the *Getting to Grade Three* and *Getting to Grade Four* (Milne, 2010) book, thinking that she would learn them quicker and have more opportunities to learn new notes. I emailed her links to YouTube videos to this effect to listen to but none appealed. I felt that repertoire for Jenny should not be so difficult to find. She, like me, loved classical music, and I was experienced in teaching pieces in a way that built on skills progressively. But my pedagogical framework was at odds with Jenny’s desire for difficult notes.

One of the reasons for Jenny’s resistance to spending time on less demanding pieces and focusing on technical skills was her fear that being in her seventies meant that her fingers were too old to develop beyond their current level. She explained in her initial interview, ‘I sometimes think my fingers aren’t quick enough to go past
where they’re at’. I asked if she thought they would continue to develop as she continued lessons. She responded:

They’re… being old, I wonder about that. You know, I just think my golf is slowly going down the tube and I think, you know, you’re really not as good physically as you get older. I used to be able to hit the ball a lot further. And that’s much the same thing. And I think, well, I hope I can get my fingers working. (Jenny, initial interview)

While technical facility at the piano is potentially hindered by such ailments as arthritis for older adults (Wristen, 2006), Jenny does not suffer from such conditions. Attribution to age, which was both out of her control and a stable condition that is not going to change, adversely affected her self-efficacy (Jones, 2009; Weiner, 2010) and created a lack of desire to focus on expressive details. Being mentally active into old age was a high priority for Jenny, which she attributed to learning new and challenging notes. Unlike her age, Jenny perceived this to be something that she had control over and was unstable, meaning it was able to develop.

In order to help Jenny shift her unhelpful association with age, I made sure to link musical expression to learned technical skills and effort, assuring her that we could break those down into manageable and controllable strategies (Jones, 2009; Keller, 2009; Weiner, 2010). Jenny’s perceptions of age as a barrier were still present at the end of the study. She commented, ‘I know there’s lots of things where I’m going to be a long time off because my hands don’t work like I’d prefer them to’.

When asked what she thought was required for them to work as she wished them to, she responded, ‘No age!’ I asked whether she still felt she had reached the ceiling of her ability, and she responded, ‘But then you gave me strategies, didn’t you? In how to move my hands. So I started practicing those and I can see the ceiling moving a little bit further up’. With discussions, strategies, and relating materials and exercises to her perceived challenges, Jenny’s negative frames of reference started to shift, illustrating their ability to be transformed over the learning journey (MacDonald et al., 2012; Mezirow, 1991). These discussions alone, however, did not result in a shift in Jenny’s desire for more difficult notes. When a student’s musical tastes are beyond their playing ability, Maris (2000) explains that compromise is needed, which requires both teacher and student to work together to find a suitable piece that fulfils
the student’s desire for pleasurable pieces, and the teacher’s desire for pedagogical appropriateness.

I created an opportunity to receive more feedback from Jenny in month five when I emailed her a list of pieces to listen to on YouTube and asked her to let me know what she liked and what types of sounds appealed. I also gave Jenny freedom to make further suggestions herself. From then, Jenny started to email through other pieces she found and liked the sound of. These pieces were inevitably much more advanced than she was prepared for. I was aware that for some adults, having a large piece outside of their comfort zone could work to fuel motivation, as highlighted by the example above with Allison. As Jenny had not liked any of my suggestions, I chose the least complex of the pieces she had sent and gave her the freedom to learn it. In her following lesson, Jenny said she realised it was too complex. We spent most of the lesson exploring options together for repertoire that would be both challenging and achievable, while also giving us an opportunity to incorporate concepts of phrasing. This use of time in lessons was difficult for me initially, as I felt that lessons should be a time for learning repertoire and musical skills, not deciding what to learn. Seeing Jenny’s enthusiasm for doing this together in lessons, however, made me realise that she saw value in this interaction. Doing so allowed us to discuss goals, values and what we were both looking for in a piece, revealing our inconsistent perspectives.

Jenny’s situation made me realise that I would have to let go of some of my desire for musical details and to fuel Jenny’s motivation by moving on to larger works. Jenny had enjoyed learning sonatinas in the past, and so we progressed to some sonatas. Jenny sourced the second and third movements for herself, which gave us a plan moving forwards. While she did not have the technical facility to learn these to speed or with great flow or ease, they fulfilled her desire for challenge and were a style that she loved. In her final interview, Jenny commented on the satisfaction she felt in relation to her repertoire: ‘I really love doing the Mozart sonata. I adore practising it; I really enjoy it. And this last little section, as much as it’s driving me nuts, I’m going to get it!’ This sign of determination to work through the challenges illustrates her sustained motivation to finish the piece, despite its challenges.

In the case of both Allison and Jenny, increasing the difficulty of the pieces they learned increased the task’s perceived value and thus increased their motivation.
to expend the effort required to learn them (Vancouver et al., 2008). As they regarded their pieces as challenging and requiring effort, self-efficacy regarding unrealistic expectations lessened, allowing them to commit to these pieces for longer than they had with smaller pieces. In order for me to find peace with working outside their comfort zones, I had to let go of the idea that opportunities for success meant completing pieces to certain external standards, which is an extrinsic determinant of success. Success to Allison was growing technical facility, and success to Jenny was being mentally stimulated and feeling that she was being challenged and thus staying mentally young. These examples of seeking to obtain intrinsic values (Renwick & Reeve, 2012) show that success on a broader level means to simply reap the benefits the student is seeking. They need not be the attainment of certain levels of achievement such as those I was encouraging, but might simply be successfully obtaining these intrinsic values. These, as explained in Chapter 2, are the predominant benefits adult learners seek when learning piano (Jutras, 2006).

While perceived difficulty in relation to taking on a challenge can increase value and thus the motivation to put in the necessary effort, as illustrated in these examples, there is a limit to the discrepancy between current abilities and perceived difficulty of a task, regardless of how valuable the outcome or benefit. This is illustrated through examining another student’s ultimate goal of playing themes from the computer games he played.

4.4.5 When hard is too hard.

There is a point in the discontinuous model of motivation where motivation drops significantly. This point can be reached in a number of ways. In the example with Allison, it was due to her belief that her attempts at expressive playing would not live up to her expectations. This meant that any degree of effort would not lead to musical satisfaction and pride in her playing; thus, she avoided polishing pieces. For Jenny, this was related to barriers to achieving musical expression and her attributions to age. Both of these scenarios highlight the danger of faulty perceptions or unrealistic expectations. For Sean, the edge of the cliff was due to a perceived lack of skill to accomplish tasks associated with his dream pieces. This was a realistic perception because the level of these pieces was too high for his current abilities.

Sean’s ultimate goal for starting piano lessons was to play the themes from computer games such as Final Fantasy and Kingdom Hearts. In Sean’s first interview, I was reminded of our journey to date when he explained, ‘Originally I
went to you wanting to play one particular piece—*Memory of Lightwaves*, a *Final Fantasy* piece… We’ve attempted it, but we moved on’. This music was incredibly sophisticated. We had attempted a couple of gaming pieces prior to the study, but with Sean’s instigation, moved on without making much headway. Despite this music holding high value for Sean, the amount of effort required to learn it at this stage meant his self-efficacy was low, and it was far beyond the two grades above his level, which had worked well for both Allison and Jenny. I had looked for simplified versions of the gaming music without success, and so we had stuck to the popular classical pieces such as *Für Elise* and *Moonlight Sonata* that Sean also enjoyed. Prior to the study he had learned simplified arrangements of these.

Coming into the study, Sean was working on classical pieces at a grade two standard. In keeping with my comfort zone, I used the AMEB syllabus and supplementary materials to find pedagogically appropriate pieces and gave Sean options between a few pieces. As with Ross, Sean trusted me to guide him on the right path and would ask for my recommendation. In this instance, Sean did not trust his own judgement, as the music he found most inspiring was inappropriate. This did not deter Sean from still listening to and sourcing scores for the music he aspired to play. During his lesson in week 19 of the study, Sean asked if he could show me a piano piece on YouTube that he had the sheet music for at home and felt might be more achievable. It was another complex gaming theme piece and was approximately five grades higher in difficulty than his current ability. Sean perceived its length—just two and a half pages—as a sign of simplicity. Not wanting to dissuade him, I suggested we work on the first section of it and treat that as a piece in itself, but Sean’s confidence was shaken. He asked if it was possible to put a lot of energy into learning a ‘crazy hard’ piece and I said yes, but some learning might be rote rather than learning from the score, and that it might not help to transfer skills to other pieces as easily as others. I was not sure of my answer, but did not feel capable of breaking such a piece down adequately to suit his current skill level.

Sean decided not to learn any of this piece and instead we chose a smaller classical piece from the options I suggested. Compared to the piece we had just listened to, this seemed inadequate, but Sean engaged with the piece and I was happy in the knowledge that it was pedagogically sound. As I failed to meet his musical tastes in relation to genre, I was excited in the eighth month of the study to find a series of books aimed at developing improvisation. In his first interview, Sean had
expressed a desire to be able to compose one day and I felt that this material could be a starting point for working on that goal. This, however, was not a goal so much as a wish for the future. Once more, self-efficacy and value illustrate the reasons this venture did not inspire Sean or motivate him to follow this path.

**4.4.6 When future goals are not relevant to the present.**

In Sean’s lesson at the end of the eighth month, I described the improvisation books I had found and Sean seemed to look forward to the books arriving. In the following lesson, we played the duet at the start of the book together and I noted in my journal that Sean seemed very receptive to it. I sent him a link to a website where he could purchase a copy for himself. The next week, however, Sean’s excitement had dissipated. He said that he had tried a little at home but was extremely resistant to attempting any in the lesson. He commented, ‘If that’s homework, I’ll do it’. In this instance, I used my position as his teacher to say yes, it was, thinking that if he tried, he would see the benefits. In his next lesson, however, he was still resisting. I recognised part of myself in Sean; his analytical nature meant there was no joy in what appeared to be ad hoc improvisation without the theoretical understanding to go with it. We abandoned this idea and returned to maintaining focus on the classical repertoire we had been working on.

I asked Sean in his final interview to reflect on his experiences with improvising. He explained, ‘At the moment I don’t find it particularly enjoyable because I don’t think I’m at that level where I can play something that’s that original’. I asked if it was still a goal for the future. Sean responded, ‘Yeah, once I’m familiar with chords and moving hands. Yeah’. He did not see these improvisation exercises as a way to become more familiar with chords and the geography of the piano as I had hoped. Prior to this I had only taught very rudimental improvisation with children. I did not know other ways to honour this goal of Sean’s apart from breaking down theory using his current pieces, which we did throughout the study with great enthusiasm from Sean.

Despite attempts to honour Sean’s musical tastes and goals throughout the study, we relied on my pedagogical framework without finding a way to incorporate his long-term goals directly. The opposite is the case for John, where I abandoned my comfort zone completely and worked with John to find a new structure to honour his musical tastes and goals.
4.5 Collaboration and Relying on a Student’s Prior Knowledge

John’s love of 1920s to 1950s jazz is so different to my classical music background that when he first came to me in 2011, I used the fact that he was a novice to choose pieces that I was familiar with. I remember thinking, *Surely any music is good for him to learn the foundations of technique and reading?* John obligingly agreed with my decisions, acknowledging that they were all helping to develop his reading and playing skills. This is similar to Sean’s perceived value in materials that were deemed stepping stones to greater goals, described above. As time went on, however, my repertoire choices started to play on my mind as John frequently told me about the music he loved so much. I thought to myself, *I wish I knew how to find repertoire he would actually enjoy. I don’t know anything about teaching jazz.*

As John’s ability increased over our first two years together, we moved from adult method books and books that I was familiar with to popular pieces from books with dubious titles such as *Easy Piano—50 Best Songs of All Time.* While he was at least learning pieces that he was familiar with and enjoyed, my unease continued to grow: *This book isn’t pedagogically sound. Where is this leading? I’m not sure I’m up to this.* I attempted to expand my knowledge of available jazz repertoire, introducing pieces from Microjazz and composers such as Christopher Norton. John was happy to learn whatever I gave him, but commented that these modern jazz pieces were far from the styles that he loved so dearly. At the end of 2012, I put aside my affections for our lessons together and suggested that John have a lesson with the jazz teacher who worked for me at the time. John returned the next week, feeling that he and I had a good rapport and that he was happier to stay with me.

Through conversations with John leading up to the study, I became aware that John owned a wealth of music books full of the songs he loved. John brought some of his home library to his first lesson of the study as a springboard for creating a plan. These books were arranged for piano, voice and guitar, and were too advanced for John’s current ability. As with Sean’s love of gaming music, one of the challenges I faced was that there are not necessarily method books or pedagogically sound repertoire books that meet the specific tastes of each adult student. This was also the case for John’s love of the stride and walking bass arrangements of jazz standards. Chronister (as cited in Darling, 2005) explains that the inexperienced teacher needs pedagogically sound material from which to work, while experienced
teachers are able to teach what is not on the page. In order to fully commit to sharing
John’s desired path with him, I decided this meant manipulating the materials we had
for our needs.

As well as advanced arrangements, John also had folders full of lead sheets. I
wondered whether creating our own arrangements would be a feasible strategy. At
this point, John already had a fundamental understanding of chords and the
compositional techniques used in these pieces, which we could use to our advantage.
This did, however, lead to some challenges.

4.5.1 Unrealistic comparisons.

Initially John’s arrangements were complex and busy. He had been arranging
his music in the typesetting program Finale, away from the piano. The fact that he
owned and was familiar with Finale was a huge advantage. It was also problematic,
however, because when at the piano John could not handle the arrangements he had
created. In our lessons, he frequently explained how his idols played and how he was
trying to emulate them. We had discussions about the tool kit of skills they had built
over time, and how we would need to start simply, adding one arrangement and
playing skill at a time. I started to give John rules to use for his arrangements. We
started simply, choosing octaves for the left hand, keeping the melody in the right
hand.

It seemed that with every new arrangement we worked to simplify more and
more, rather than to build skills up. As we did this, John’s playing skills increased
steadily. There were many conversations about his idols, and I worried that he
compared his current ability with his lofty ambitions of emulating ‘The Greats’ too
regularly. In his initial interview, John commented:

I suppose in your heart of hearts you still aspire to be up amongst those greats
really. That’s—you know, we’ve all got goals, and sometimes they’re very
utopian…. The hard thing is always that the stepping stones are sometimes
somewhat minor and that’s how it has to be. And you’ve got to accept that or
come to terms with it…. What makes me more fearful, rather than looking
back and thinking how well or not so well I’ve done, is the challenges that
still lie ahead really. Trying to master what’s coming. And that is somewhat a
frightening prospect really…. Wondering whether I have the ability to make
that really happen.
His large ambitions, plus the acknowledgement of small progress and the fear that he may never achieve his goals, highlight an internal conflict that was evident in his lessons. His arrangements continued to be overly complex for the first few months. By the sixth month of the study, we were using lessons to do more arranging together, rather than leaving him to do them unassisted at home. Experiencing how to simplify with my guidance enabled John to understand how to work to his current level rather than using his idols as benchmarks for his current arrangements.

Through the following months, as he sourced and arranged more of his repertoire, John would speak of ways in which his idols improvised, asking questions about how that related to his arranging choices. Originally, just like Sean, John saw improvisation as a goal for the future, when he was more versed at commanding the piano. I really wanted to find a way to build this skill-set for John, as his comments and questions about improvisation were increasing each lesson. I spent time researching books that could progressively build this skill-set. At the start of the eighth month, I found several books and John ordered them. When they arrived two weeks later, I was pleased to see they were exactly what we were after as they were designed in lesson format and complemented the work we had been doing with arranging. I was relieved that this part of the learning material had an external structure that could support our own. It gave me confidence that I had taken an appropriate approach with John thus far.

By the end of the study, John’s practice for the week generally consisted of stride and walking bass versions of jazz standards and old popular pieces that he had sourced the lead sheets for and a small improvisation exercise from his improvisation book. This is an example of how the wealth of knowledge adults bring to their lessons can be a powerful resource to draw on in their learning (Knowles et al., 2011). It also illustrates that a student’s and teacher’s musical backgrounds and tastes do not necessarily have to be aligned in order for the student to learn music that is meaningful to him or her. I needed to rely on John’s prior knowledge to lead the way with regards to sourcing repertoire and a general plan for how to use them. I could then combine this with my pedagogical knowledge to create a more specific plan that was educationally sound. I grew greatly as a teacher through this process, developing skills of teaching beyond the page (Darling, 2005) and learning the true meaning of collaboration and interpersonal influence with regard to learning material.
4.6 Students’ Perceptions of Their Repertoire

In their interviews following the study, Ross and Georgina commented that they enjoyed all the pieces they had learned and the exam process. This illustrates that for both, having external goals and appropriate materials led to unquestioned enjoyment. Allison felt that her pieces contributed to her technical growth, which had been her focus throughout the study. I asked if she was happy continuing to source her pieces. She explained that she does like choice, so long as she knows the pieces are helping with her goals. She also said that she is happy to take on other pieces that I think will be good for her, but may not work on them to completion. She elaborated:

I think I’ve been very focused on the technical. Which I’m good with because I sort of now think I’ve got to the point where okay, that’s always going to be building. But I just think I’ve got my foundation there now and maybe I’m ready to start focusing more on repertoire, if that makes sense. I think I’ve done what I needed to do to now start concentrating on that…. I feel like I haven’t got a lot of new repertoire, but I feel like my technique’s done this (gestures upwards). And I’m not upset that I haven’t done a lot of pieces, but I think now I want to…. I think I’m almost at a level where there’s lots of repertoire out there that I’m going to enjoy playing…. I just think my technique was a long way behind where it needed to be for the pieces that were going to give me that enjoyment.

Here, Allison described her need to fill a gap in her ability, as a precursor to playing repertoire that is musically gratifying. She saw this period during the study as a stepping stone to this future goal, and thus was committed to that endeavour.

Like Allison, Sean also commented that he felt his pieces were taking him closer to his goals. I had been worried throughout the study that I had not been able to find enjoyable repertoire for Sean in line with his ultimate goal of playing themes from his computer games, but his response in his interview regarding repertoire learned were positive:

I did actually like these, I suppose, challenging myself gradually with these smaller pieces. Really, great pieces. Because I could easily just remember those harder pieces that I like the sound of, but then I wouldn’t actually become musical or anything. One-trick pony.
Sean also described another perspective that deterred him from focusing on becoming a ‘one-trick pony’, instead focusing on skill development:

Well, we’re all going to get old, right? We lose certain things. We lose looks and fitness levels and all that. But I think musical ability carries through to your old age. So if I do become quite old, I want to be able to do that.

In both Allison’s and Sean’s cases, perceived benefits encompassed more than the musical output of the pieces to include that of skill development and personal growth, common motivators for adult piano students (Jutras, 2006).

When asked about their feelings towards their repertoire, John and Jenny highlighted the importance of the student-teacher relationship and of the teacher being open to a student’s tastes and goals:

I feel as though we have a very good relationship, you and I, about the sort of music that I want to do. At no stage have you ever tried to sway me away from the sort of music that I like. You’ve fit hand in glove with what I’m wishing to do. (John, final interview)

You’ve listened to what I’ve liked and led me through everything that I’ve liked…. They were all pieces of music that I enjoyed. (Jenny, final interview)

Receiving feedback from students, involving students or leaving repertoire choice in their hands—each worked to ensure repertoire was aligned with their goals and musical tastes. In adapting to each student, I changed my expectations around suitable repertoire and expanded my pedagogical framework to allow for their increased involvement.

4.7 Building on My Pedagogical Framework

My initial pedagogical framework, as outlined at the start of this chapter, relied heavily on my perceptions of students’ needs and current skill level. I also believed that pieces should be learned to completion and that all relevant musical concepts should be addressed before moving to more complex pieces. The fact that this did not always honour my students’ perceived needs led to some discomfort. Throughout the study, I frequently commented in my journal that I wished some pieces to be learned in their entirety, with more emphasis placed on musical flow and expression. I did not reconcile this completely within the time of the study, but becoming aware of the discrepancies between my old frames of reference and my new goals helped me to set aside my discomfort (E. W. Taylor, 2008). I started
placing more importance on the fact that students were motivated and satisfied with their repertoire than on my desire for completion. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the level of completion is obviously also dependent on how students engage with their learning and use their practice time, but this chapter illustrates that decisions made in relation to leaving pieces before completion were not due to a dislike of the pieces they chose to focus on.

One of the requirements of transformative pedagogy is to place the student at the centre of learning, rather than the content to be learned (E. W. Taylor, 2008). Jutras (2006) suggests teachers take the time to get to know students’ goals and to plan material, repertoire and activities accordingly. In relation to deciding upon the content to be learned, this means an increase in discussions with students around repertoire choice and musical goals and tastes, and an increase in the time spent discovering options together and discussing different pieces’ merits. Doing this in my study had several benefits. Firstly, it increased my rapport with each student. This allowed me to better understand their frames of reference and perceived needs and to ensure my choices aligned with them. In doing so, I learned to set aside my old teaching patterns, to find new ways of approaching repertoire selections and to fulfil my goal of putting students at the centre of their learning. It also enabled me to uncover any unrealistic expectations or faulty perceptions students held, and to discuss other perspectives. This provided opportunities to encourage students to critically reflect and reassess their perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). These were key in arriving at repertoire that students found musically satisfying and of value.

Another element of transformative pedagogy is that the teacher critically reflects on teaching choices made, to ensure that they align with their intentions (Mezirow, 2000; E. W. Taylor, 2008). Questions I learned to ask myself from my experiences throughout this study include:

- Have I discussed the skills and concepts involved and made it relevant to the greater goals of the student?
- Is the student curious and inspired to devote the necessary effort to learning the piece?
- Does the student like the piece? Are they motivated to practice it? If not, why not, and how can that reason contribute to finding more motivating repertoire? Are discussions around their expectations and preconceived ideas required?
• If the piece is too difficult but of high value, can I supplement the gaps in knowledge to make it achievable? If not, what choices can I give in a similar style that can lead to it?

In keeping with the nature of student individuality (Jutras, 2006), my ability to align repertoire and the level of ownership of the process with students’ needs varied. Sourcing and discussing repertoire options was straightforward for Ross and Georgina, who had external goals of exams. These students were also the most beginner-level students of the study, and they trusted in my guidance and the appropriateness of the materials I recommended. For others, discussions took more time in lessons. I learned the value of this endeavour throughout the study, as students appeared to enjoy the time taken, and valued the interest I showed in their opinions. Collaboration, through questioning, discussing, discovering and receiving feedback from students, was an important factor in ensuring that pieces not only were pedagogically appropriate by my standards, but also met their needs. This does not mean that teachers relinquish all planning, as adult students’ repertoire goals may be pedagogically inappropriate to their current level, or self-efficacy beliefs may be unrealistic or unhelpful to their progress (Maris, 2000). Rather, teachers can work with the student to address problematic perspectives associated with self-efficacy and discuss suitable repertoire, outlining their benefits and the focus and effort required to reap those benefits. They can use the student’s feedback to collaborate and decide on appropriate repertoire that is musically pleasing and sufficiently challenging.

Ensuring that content is aligned with students’ goals, values and tastes is only one element of motivation that leads to musical progress at the piano. Engaging in the tasks and strategies necessary to learn the repertoire is also paramount to learning. The following chapter discusses the second main theme of this study: lesson interactions. I discuss the strategies I incorporated into lessons with the aim of increasing student engagement, focusing on active learning and developing the skills of critical action and reflection so necessary to self-direction in home practice.
Chapter 5: Lesson Interactions

Effective learning, as outlined in Chapter 2, occurs when students are oriented towards mastery, with a focus on the processes involved in learning as opposed to being focused on the end goal (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Master, 2012). Being self-directed in this way involves following the stages of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), whereby students plan, act and reflect on their outcomes deliberately, and adjust their approaches accordingly (Knowles et al., 2011). As adult piano students are not innately self-directed (H. Chen, 1996), it is arguably the teacher’s role to cultivate the skills required and to help students to address any mindsets that may interfere with this endeavour (Mezirow, 2001; E. W. Taylor, 2008). In this way, the teacher’s role is that of facilitator (Jarvis, 2010; Knowles et al., 2011), collaborating with students and guiding their discovery of new knowledge and understanding through questions and active dialogue (Mayer, 2004; Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Acknowledging students’ experiences and emotions while helping them to transform any problematic perspectives that might be inhibiting their learning is also part of this process (Mezirow, 2003; E. W. Taylor, 2008).

This chapter explores the evolution of my teaching throughout the study as I endeavoured to cultivate self-direction in my students by engaging them in problem solving, critical thinking and reflective skills. This was not as straightforward as simply implementing the strategies I had uncovered in the literature. I needed to not only become aware of my habitual teaching choices, but also question the assumptions and underlying reasons behind those decisions. As my awareness increased, new changes in my teaching occurred and I came to understand the practical implications of facilitating rather than instructing. In this chapter, I describe the catalysts for the new insights I gained throughout this study, along with the resultant changes in my teaching strategies and students’ behaviours. It is not possible to share every experience, interaction and reflection that contributed to this journey. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I selected those that best highlight the challenges and lessons I learned along the way.
5.1 My Original Teaching Style

Prior to this study, if anyone had asked me to describe my teaching style, I would have said it was student-centred and focused on the needs of each individual student. Much like Siebenaler (1997), I thought an effective lesson pattern was one in which the teacher modelled how to simplify challenges and had the student repeat sub-skills for mastery before putting them into the context of the piece. I built on prior knowledge through scaffolding and moved away from the score for technical development and conceptual understanding. I also treated lessons like a shared practice session, breaking down challenges into manageable chunks, isolating passages where required, verbalising rhythms and coordinations, and encouraging slow and deliberate playing. Unpacking common interactions in lessons was revealing, however, as I came to realise that my teaching was actually music-focused and teacher-led, rather than student-centred. This inadvertently gave me control of students’ learning, as seen in this example from a lesson interaction in the first month of the study:

‘How’s this piece going?’

‘Okay...’ I sit back and let her play through, noting in my mind the sections to come back to. Her hands shake as she plays and I simultaneously empathise with her and wish she would realise I’m not there to judge.

‘Great, that’s improved a lot from last week. Can you replay the second line?’

She plays again with the same error I had mentally noted the first play-through.

‘See that finger number there?’ I ask, drawing a circle around the number ‘2’ in her music.

‘Oh, I didn’t see that.’

‘This will put you in a much better position because you’ll be prepared for the shift that follows. Try that line again and see if that helps.’

This type of interaction was common. The lesson would start with a performance episode, a run-through of a piece without an expressed purpose, focus, or intention. The implicit purpose was to expose areas that required work. I would follow up with feedback and explanations as to what went well and what needed more attention and why. The next event would have an explicit purpose—to put my suggestions into action—making it a practice episode rather than a performance
episode. This pattern fits with the stages of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle, but I, rather than my students, was in control of the process (Figure 5.1).

![Diagram of the experiential learning cycle]

**Figure 5.1.** Example 1 of teacher control of the experiential learning process.

Requesting students to play for me in this way was often met with nervousness, as evidenced through students’ reluctance to play, shaking hands or fingers, or precursory excuses as to why they did not achieve as much as they had hoped through the week. These responses indicate a potential fear of inadequacy, low self-confidence (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002), and perceptions of low ability, which can be personally devastating for students (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2012). As discussed by Dweck (2000), this promotes feelings of helplessness. When they played, these students’ focus was often on the fact that I was listening, rather than on what they were doing. Inevitably, this adversely affected the quality of their playing. Common cries from my students following insecure performance episodes would be ‘But I could do it at home’, ‘I can play it better than that’, or ‘Your piano is so different to mine!’

Looking back, I can see how performance episodes followed by praise or constructive criticism might reinforce their perspective that my role as a teacher was to judge. Admittedly, however, this cycle of ‘play and receive feedback’ was common in my teaching prior to and during the initial stage of my study. This was due to a lack of experience with alternate teaching strategies. Much of my own experiences as a student had followed this pattern. And even though I, like some of my students, suffered much angst in my lessons, I thought this was a symptom of my perfectionism, rather than anything my teachers did. Therefore, at the time I did not realise that these teaching choices actually exacerbated any pressure felt in lessons to do well.
Modelling, where I demonstrated and explained actions at the piano before asking the student to imitate, was also a regular occurrence in lessons. While modelling is a strategy advocated for in the piano studio (Lehmann et al., 2007; McAllister, 2008), there are many different forms this can take, as discussed throughout this chapter. Early in my teaching, I chose this strategy to demonstrate the desired output for students to try to replicate when performance episodes highlighted challenges of coordination, expression or technique (Speer, 1994). Below is an excerpt from my teaching journal (week 7) exploring this strategy:

Sean’s tone production was weak today, so we focused on involving his arm more when he plays. I decided to move away from the score so Sean could experience the movements without having to focus reading the score as well. I demonstrated, explaining how I was moving as I did so. Sean played with me before trying on his own. It was very collaborative.

This highlights the misconception that shared participation in an activity is synonymous with collaboration. After layering this interaction onto the experiential cycle, it is clear that I was still dictating the learning process (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2.** Example 2 of teacher control of the experiential learning process.

Modelling in this way and correcting errors for students rely on students following instructions. For the most part, students were engaged behaviourally when I modelled and offered them advice on correcting errors and developing their pieces further. One of the issues with this approach, however, is that it does not require great amounts of cognitive or metacognitive engagement (Mayer, 2004). Thus, it is not conducive to developing the skills of self-direction that could be utilised during home practice.
When students followed my lead in lessons without question, it was difficult for me to see a problem with my approach. When a student did not follow instructions readily, I felt lost as to how I could do things differently. An example of this can be seen in my lesson with Ross in week 3 of the study. Following this lesson, I wrote in my teaching journal:

*I’m not sure how to keep Ross on task. Every time I ask him to try a strategy and isolate a section that needs work he talks over the top of me, declaring how ‘hard’ it is. He shares stories about how capable he is in other areas of his life, and how coming to the piano he finds it ‘devastatingly slow’ and that he’s amazed he simply ‘can’t do it’. I struggle with his tendency to dwell in the past. He speaks so negatively and authoritatively that I don’t know how to respond.*

*Today, it took over nine minutes to get Ross to isolate a passage that needed attention. In the one minute and seven seconds that followed, we removed two large pauses and the passage flowed beautifully. Ross exclaimed, ‘It’s a miracle!’ I really don’t know how to make him see that the ‘miracle’ is down to good strategies and focus. I’m hopeful that with a few more lessons breaking it down together he will correlate strategy use with progress.*

This illustrates the lack of focus that mindsets can create in piano lessons, as Ross initially avoided effort in order to protect his self-worth (Maehr et al., 2002). Ross had been learning piano for just four months at this stage, and was struggling with how difficult he found it. As a successful surgeon who had achieved top marks throughout high school and medical school with little effort, and who had chosen surgery due to his ‘natural talent’ for it (lesson interaction, week 6), Ross had never before attempted an activity that he did not simply excel at without effort. Thus, his self-esteem and confidence were knocked when he could not play with ease as was expected. This supports the claim that those with an affinity towards a fixed mindset have lower self-efficacy levels when faced with challenges (Chaffin & Lemieux, 2004). Furthermore, his claim of a ‘miracle’, while perhaps tongue in cheek, demonstrates how epistemic beliefs affects a student’s ability to connect outcomes with strategies used (Schunk, 2012).

The journal entry above also illustrates my inability at the time to help Ross manage his expectations. I simply wished him to see what I saw and do as I said, highlighting my own expectations. The actual practice strategies I advocate, such as
repeated small sections, slow and purposeful playing, and isolating musical concepts such as rhythm, coordination or technique were not the problem; I noted frequently in my journal about their success in fixing errors, ironing out pauses and adding musical expression to students’ playing. I just wished Ross would engage with them and be able to progress in the way he desired. One of the fundamental principles of experiential learning is active involvement in the learning process (Kolb, 1984), not just behaviourally but also on a metacognitive level (Abrahams, 2005). I needed to create opportunities in which this could occur within lessons.

5.2 Guided Discovery

One of the first teaching approaches I incorporated into lessons was guided discovery (Mayer, 2004). As Mayer (2004) describes, this involves encouraging students to learn through ‘thinking’ rather than ‘doing’, engaging them in the process of forming new understanding. In order to do this, I had to become aware of opportunities to ask questions that required students to analyse, synthesise and evaluate information relevant to the problem-solving process (Snyder & Snyder, 2008, p. 91).

I first started asking questions in relation to information and concepts relevant to addressing errors and increasing musical awareness and interpretation of the score. In this way, I was drawing students to information that would help them to become aware of their challenges and make appropriate choices in future. Moments when I would normally explain what was required for improvements became opportunities to ask questions, giving students the chance to uncover information for themselves. In the first two months of the study, the ways I did this included:

- Playing a passage two different ways and asking comparative questions to draw attention to movements and corresponding aural outputs
- Asking what fingering choice they could use in relevant phrases of the music and comparing that to their previous choice
- Asking what certain musical symbols meant in the score
- Asking what they noticed in the score at certain points

From here, I would initially revert to explaining why this awareness was important and what it meant for their next practice episode, before instructing them to try once more either in the context of the piece or away from the score. I also noted that I was disguising my feedback as questions, such as ‘Do you notice how
much more balanced the sound is now?’ (teaching journal, week 7). While this is a rhetorical question, and so arguably not a question at all (Burwell, 2005), by framing it as a question, it can still have positive effects on a student’s awareness by drawing their focus to relevant feedback (B. Green, 1986).

I noted frequently in my journal during this period that for the most part, questioning seemed to engage some students in the concepts being learned. I also knew, however, that modelling resulted in active participation to the same extent. Using content-specific questions to direct focus was not involving students’ metacognitive awareness of the processes involved in deciding which content was relevant at any one time and what that meant for strategy adoption. As Burwell (2005) argues, ‘mere quizzes are not enough to cultivate genuine independence in the student musician’ (p. 213). Therefore, the students continued to be reliant on me to lead the problem-solving process.

When I first began using guided discovery, some students would not know how to answer questions, looking confused, avoiding answering and instead offering judgemental comments about their current playing ability. Others would simply explain they did not know how to answer a question. These are signs that this way of thinking was new for these students, and unexpected in the lesson context that they had been used to up to that point. Three months into the study, I felt frustrated that I did not notice an increase in critical engagement. I felt that the frequency of comments involving ‘should’ and ‘can’t’, students playing unfocused, and avoidance of using strategies were all evident to the same extent as prior to the study. I thought new interactions would shortcut the process, creating new experiences for students to draw on during home practice. This exposes some of my own unrealistic expectations of both the effectiveness of my teaching and the speed to which I expected it to develop students’ metacognitive skills. Reflecting on the study lessons to date, I wrote, These strategies are meant to work! If this isn’t the answer to engaging students, what is? (teaching journal, week 11). Knowing that this ‘inherent uncertainty’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 29) is common in practitioner-based research was cold comfort, and I started to doubt my ability as a teacher. True to the reflective and iterative nature of this line of enquiry, however, it led to uncovering new perspectives from which to examine my challenges (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).
5.3 Reassessing My Approach

From weeks 12 to 14 of the study, I had a three-week break from teaching. During this period I explored different critical thinking and reflection literature in the hope of finding new ways to communicate with my students. I noticed that many reflective questions explored in the literature pertained to my journalling approach and my own reflections as much as to interactions within lessons. Thus far I had predominantly used my teaching journal to note my students’ behaviours and how engaged I felt we both were. I realised this was actually judging how well they complied with the strategies I implemented. I returned to the past fortnight’s videos to journal with a newfound ‘intellectual humility’ (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 41), which enabled me to view events from different perspectives (Hollingsworth, 2005).

Investigating moments where engagement was lacking, I realised how much I was leading the process. I changed from blaming the strategies to blaming myself. Nowhere at this stage did I question the students’ role in their learning, instead feeling that I could engage them more deeply through making different teaching choices. This highlights the level of responsibility I felt for my students’ learning. While there had to be a point where they took responsibility and agency for their learning, I felt that my current teaching strategies potentially stunted their ability to do so.

I noticed in the videos that when questioning failed to work—either resulting in avoidance through off-task or judgemental comments, or a student not knowing how to answer a question—I would revert to explaining, essentially answering the question for the student and directing them to the next practice episode. Burwell (2005) notes that asking and then answering your own question is surprisingly common of teachers and negates the need for students to engage themselves. I was reminded each time I witnessed this in the lesson recordings that answering for them did not lead students to understand how to answer similar questions in other contexts. This meant that deep learning was not taking place.

Inspired by Leiper’s (2012) exercise of thinking like her student, I decided to explore what a question such as ‘What do you notice here?’ might mean to Ross, the student I had the most difficulty engaging at the piano:

*Surely I should just be able to play it. What am I meant to notice? If I could read the notes it would be easy. It looks like a foreign language. I don’t speak*
This exercise was revealing to me. These statements were ones that Ross had made in the past, so I knew they were authentic to his line of thinking. The question that came up in my reflection, however, of what I should notice, revealed the potential implicit meaning of his statements. If the intention behind my questions was unclear, no wonder some students failed to answer them (Elder & Paul, 2010). I had taken for granted some of the problem-solving steps, subconsciously assuming that students would make the same connections as me. I needed to scrutinise my inherent knowledge and consciously reflect on each step of the process. In doing so, I could break questions into layers, modelling how to deconstruct the problem into manageable steps that would arrive at the intended answer (Elder & Paul, 2010).

5.3.1 Breaking questions into layers.

Planning for the return to lessons in week 15, I brainstormed how to replace vague questions such as ‘What do you notice?’ with clear and explicit questions. An example of this is when I wished students to identify patterns in the music such as a sequence, where all musical elements except pitch remain constant:

- What do you notice about the direction of the notes in the middle two lines—are they the same or different?
- What about the rhythm? Same or different?
- The finger numbers?
- And the actual notes?

This sets an explicit expectation of how to answer the questions, removing thoughts that it is simply too hard. In my teaching, I often found that it took more effort for students to avoid answering such questions than engaging with the task, and so some students engaged more readily than they had previously (teaching journal, week 16). I also needed to expand my lines of questions beyond those pertaining to content to include guided feedback and guided problem solving that would involve metacognitive thought. The catalyst for understanding how this might look came from a seemingly unrelated source.

During my time off teaching, I read a blog written by Tim Topham (2013) about making scales practice interesting for boys, which included a video of his teaching. While my old experiences, predominantly with teachers in studio settings much like my own, were teacher-led and based on performance, instruction and error
correction, seeing Tim’s teaching in month five led to an ‘aha’ moment for me, as his teaching incorporated questions in a way that I had yet to do. Tim uses a lot of questions and guided discovery in the video, and it was the first time I had seen this in action. This practical example gave me a new understanding of how this type of interaction could unfold in a lesson and I felt more confident that I could do this more with my students.

5.3.2 Guided feedback and problem solving.

One of the main premises of experiential learning is that it is not experience that leads to learning, but reflection on experience (Akella, 2010; Kolb, 1984). Much of the feedback within lessons, however, often comes from the teacher, as noted in my own teaching to this point. It has been suggested that adult piano students like frequent and honest teacher feedback (Wristen, 2006) and frequent teacher praise (Cooper, 2001), with the effectiveness of such comments being dependent on specificity, contingency, credibility and variety (Siebenaler, 1997). Compared to the aims of this study, however, this might be interpreted as preserving a reliance on the teacher.

Uszler and Upitis (2000) explain that the teacher needs to provide plenty of opportunities for the adult student to rehearse new motor patterns in order to begin to establish an internal feedback system. This system will only prove useful, however, if students are reflecting critically on their motor outputs and adjusting their actions accordingly (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002). As much of the students’ inherent feedback within lessons to this point lacked this insight, I endeavoured to facilitate this process through guided feedback. After understanding how to layer questions, I felt better equipped to do this as I progressed in the study. There was another habit I became aware of during this break that I would also have to change in order to do this: my predilection for giving too much information to students.

5.3.3 Over-explaining.

As I became aware of how little I had used questioning in the first few months of the study, I also noticed how much I talked in lessons. I not only frequently explained and instructed, but also shared more information than was relevant to the task at hand. For example, in the second and third month of the study, while working with Georgina on music theory concepts relevant to learning scales, I also explained chord relationships and analysis that was far too complex for her current ability. I was pleased that Georgina’s thought processes through these
activities were transparent as she answered questions and followed the steps I offered to find the chord relationships. I also noted, however, that this took a long time in lessons, that each week her understanding was not building, and that what was obvious to me was not obvious to Georgina. Questioning why I was in such a hurry for her to understand everything that she was playing from a theoretical perspective (teaching journal, week 13), I realised I was attempting to build awareness of music as a language. I had thought that this was part of metacognitive musical thinking and would help Georgina’s fluency in reading music. What I had failed to take into account was her current ability and the relevance of this level of depth for her learning at this stage. After realising this, I aimed to slow down, focusing on her deep understanding rather than the breadth of information covered in lessons.

I also had a propensity to over-explain if I failed to engage students in musical activities. It was as if I was trying to appeal to their rational sides, expecting this would lead to them to set aside their emotive responses to challenge and engage with the task at hand. Viewing lessons, I saw that over-explaining actually robbed time from practice episodes and often resulted in blank or confused looks (teaching journal, week 13).

I also reverted to explaining in order to save the little time I had with students. Towards the end of a lesson, if we had not quite covered something I had been hoping to, I explained quickly in my quest to fit everything in. This was most pronounced with Jenny, who only had a 30-minute lesson every fortnight. I realised, however, that I was repeating myself each lesson. Explaining, especially without the time to then spend applying information at the piano, was not a good use of time. Furthermore, my actions here were at direct odds with my pedagogical and philosophical stance. I commented in my teaching journal (week 14):

*I’m reminded of the adage that telling isn’t teaching. I’ve known this for a long time, but here I am doing it constantly. It confirms this message though—being told that telling isn’t teaching has not resulted in me actively understanding the alternatives. Now that I have a bit more insight into practical applications of questioning, I hope I will be able to exchange explanations for new types of questions.*

The reflective insights I had throughout my break from teaching highlight the benefits of reflecting with some distance from the actual event, to uncover assumptions in current teaching and to problem solve ways forward. In doing so, I
used the exact skills I wished to cultivate in my students for myself. Moving into the fifth month, my intentions were to:

• Slow down, simplify and talk less
• Recognise more opportunities to ask questions for conceptual recognition
• Model the metacognitive process involved in the thought processes through layering and discussions of problem-solving processes
• Ask questions to guide inherent feedback on performance and practice episodes rather than relying purely on instructional feedback

I also had a new plan for my journal. Rather than using the journalling process to take retrospective field notes while watching the recorded lessons, I continued to question my teaching choices and to brainstorm alternatives when they appeared at odds with transformative pedagogy and my goal of empowering students to take ownership of their learning (Carey et al., 2013). I listed questions to ask myself, adapted from Paul and Elder (2009). These included:

• Why did I choose this action?
• What beliefs or frames of reference are at play?
• Did the action achieve the goal?
• What types of reactions did it result in?
• Are there alternate options that could result in better outcomes?

The following section explores some of the trends I noticed within lessons as I sought to ask different types of questions, and new insights that led to further breakthroughs in the study.

5.4 Returning to Teaching

Throughout the first week back, armed with an action plan and renewed energy, I noticed an increase in my ability to ask questions effectively. Despite this, I was still acutely aware of signs of nervousness, expectations and worry over being judged from my students in the lessons. Critically examining potential causes for this led me to scrutinise my use of performance episodes as a means to determine consequent lesson activities. The catalyst for this reflection occurred during Jenny’s first lesson after the break from teaching. Following her lesson, I noted:

Jenny struggled to play in her lesson today. The more she tried to show me what she could do, the more mistakes she made. Her hands were trembling as
she played and my heart really went out to her. She seemed to be so worried about showing me she could play the piece, and it all unravelled on her because she wasn’t focusing on the music at all.

I stopped Jenny mid-struggle and she commented on the need to focus on something musical instead of the fact that I’m listening. I need to stop setting her up to feel that she’s performing for me to judge her. Perhaps if she wasn’t expecting to play a whole piece, or even start from the beginning, it would remove this perception. (teaching journal, week 16)

Jenny was not the only student who exhibited nervous behaviours and shied away from performance episodes; I struggled to recall a time that performance episodes appeared to be enjoyable experiences for my students (teaching journal, week 16). If playing for me encouraged a focus on the end product and created a feeling of being judged, ultimately affecting their ability to focus on the task at hand (Dweck, 2000), I wondered why I insisted on starting lessons this way. Firstly, I thought that improvements exhibited through playing were indicative of learning; secondly, it would highlight areas that needed attention during the lesson. I also believed that it was important to not interrupt a student until they had finished playing, out of fear of disempowering them or negatively affecting their self-esteem or intrinsic motivation (teaching journal, week 18). Siebenaler (1997), however, argues that expert piano teachers do not allow students to struggle for long periods of time unassisted.

I realised that performance episodes actually disempowered students unless the expressed goal was to perform a piece that was at a comfortable level of familiarity (teaching journal, week 18). I still believed playing ability in lessons exhibited signs of learning and growth: If you want to learn to play the piano, then surely how well you play demonstrates how much you have learned? (teaching journal, week 18). I did, however, want to eliminate the stress associated with expectations to perform. I started to ask students how much of a piece they would like to start with (teaching journal, week 18). This gave them a chance to choose to play parts they knew well, or to work up to a trouble spot and stop so that we could do isolated work on it together. This was arguably one of the most well-received lines of questioning for most students, with the reprieve from struggling through parts that were not yet performance-ready visibly evident in their demeanour. For Sean, it also resulted in an immediate change in behaviour from that lesson. His
reliance on me for structuring the lesson led to his habitual question of ‘What shall I start with?’ before he answered his own question (lesson video with Sean, week 19). From this point on, Sean readily chose which sections of his music to focus on.

This approach was not so conducive for those who expected deliberate practice to be unnecessary. For example, when I asked Ross how much of a piece he would like to start with, he replied, ‘All of it!’ (teaching journal, week 28). When I persisted, asking if he would like to break it into sections, he responded, ‘You know I like to make it hard for myself. I’ll play it through’. I chose to interrupt him at moments of uncertainty to guide him to work on challenges as required, maintaining control of the learning process. As Ross’s process was not conducive to effective learning, I did not know how else to handle the situation.

With choice of performance episodes now in the hands of students, I wished to also guide them to take more control of the problem-solving processes involved in deliberate practice, focusing on developing their metacognitive involvement (Wizbicki-Stevens, 2009). There are two types of reflective insights involved in metacognitive thinking: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. These are discussed in turn below.

5.4.1 Reflection-on-action.

Reflection-on-action refers to thinking about what happened after a practice episode and what that means for future practice episodes, reaching both forwards and backwards (Hartman, 2010). With the desire to facilitate this skill in my students, I started guiding the process with questions and active discussions around output of practice episodes, problem-solving strategies pertaining to the exposed challenges, and choosing focal points of the next practice episode prior to playing.

5.4.1.1 Guided feedback.

Between months four and six of the study, I continued to give students feedback following their playing. This was despite my intention to foster the ability for students to provide their own feedback. This indicates that letting go of control was difficult for me, and that I continued to react to their playing habitually. I would start with positive feedback before drawing the student’s attention to places that required attention. The purpose was to not make feedback purely about error correction, but also draw their attention to improvements made in the hope of
positively affecting their self-efficacy levels. For some, this was not always well received.

Ross, given his expectations of ease and talent, would counter my praise. If I said something was going well, he would respond, ‘No it isn’t’, or ‘No, that was just terrible!’ In these instances I was once more left feeling at a loss as to how to proceed. Jenny also doubted my positive feedback. Rather than disagreeing, however, she would seek confirmation, asking, ‘Is it?’ or ‘Really?’ We had a discussion in week 18 that uncovers how her background led her to doubt the authenticity of positive feedback. Jenny is a retired special needs teacher aide. In her job, she would be working with children who she said ‘would never be brilliant’. She explained that she would praise the effort they put in, ‘Even if they just drew an F, you know? It didn’t matter, you say “oh good, look, you drew an F, good for trying, that’s great!”’ Knowing this praise was not an indication of ‘massive things’, she worried that my praise was coming from the same place, and that she was not actually achieving much. We discussed the progress she was making and the improvements I noticed, and she seemed more able to accept my positive feedback.

Unprompted inherent student feedback was often uncritical in nature. Examples of this include:

- dwelling on the past: ‘I could do it at home’ (most students at some stage, some more often than others);
- dwelling on the future: ‘I should be able to do this’ (Jenny);
- judgemental: ‘that was terrible’ (Ross); or
- justifying why certain things were not addressed: ‘I’m flying by the seat of my pants to get the notes’ (John).

These types of comments are not useful without further insights as to how they focused at home (often unknown); what is needed to be able to do this; what was terrible and how to address it; and consciously deciding to address areas that have been ignored. There is, however, a difference between knowing that something does not sound right and knowing why and how to address it. Thus, discussions, guided discovery and modelling were necessary in order to bridge this gap.

With my ability to now layer questions in relation to guide discovery, I found it relatively straightforward to use the same principles to guide students’ feedback regarding subsequent modelling and practice episodes. Discussions in lessons were
starting to actively involve students’ metacognitive thinking by encouraging enquiry, the synthesis of ideas, and an exploration of alternatives (W. Chen, 2001, p. 367; Snyder & Snyder 2008, p. 91). I not only asked comparative questions for discovery, but also which way the student preferred and why. Probing for deeper understanding, and bridging to guided problem solving, I asked which way they thought the composer intended and what clues there were in the score.

With hobby adult students, it is not necessary to always stay true to the score (Uszler & Upitis, 2000). As long as their playing choices were conscious, I would happily make changes to the score in regards to dynamics, pedalling or articulation. More often than not, however, their chosen ways were subconscious, and they often preferred the way intended in the score. Technical decisions involving hand positions and finger numbers were often made explicit through this process. When prompted, students were able to call on technical reasons behind choices and utilise them as needed. Exploring multiple options for interpretation and technical facility opened up discussions beyond the duality of a ‘right’ way and a ‘wrong’ way to play. Students appeared engaged in these activities as evidenced by their answers to questions and resultant discussions, with feedback being directly related to the problem-solving activities required for learning their pieces.

Guided feedback was most successful in engaging students when activities did not involve the written score. In these instances, rapid sequences of discussions, modelling, copying and experimenting negated any perceptions of performance or of needing to ‘get it right’. When in the context of the piece of music as a whole, this engagement was far more challenging. As soon as we returned to the score, some students seemed to revert to premature ‘performance mode’, losing focus on the strategies to employ and instead simply trying to play. Other times, students would be so focused on the demands of playing that they would be deaf to the resultant aural outputs. Georgina (week 15) commented that she could hear the difference when I played, but not when she played. This was common among students throughout the study because their attention was focused on the demands of playing rather than the aural output. I attempted to record practice episodes on their phones and to play them back to draw their attention to specific outcomes of their episodes. As Zimmerman and Schunk (2012) explain, self-recording can increase greatly the proximity, informativeness and accuracy of feedback, which could prove help students to reflect on their outputs. I was met with resistance or non-critical
responses to this activity, however. Students struggled to focus their attention on a specific aspect of their playing, instead comparing it to the desired finished product (teaching journal, week 18). The level of distaste for their playing meant this activity did more damage to their self-confidence than it did to increase constructive awareness. This does not mean that signs of critical engagement were absent. Students started accompanying their practice episodes with commentary, giving themselves feedback as they played. For example, Sean said, ‘Oh, I was meant to hold that down longer… I forgot dynamics there…’ (lesson interaction, week 22). This steadily increased through the study as I learned to give students the space to do so, no longer jumping in quickly with my own feedback.

Asking questions was also conducive to exposing gaps in learning that I had initially taken for granted as being understood. For example, in her lesson in week 14, Georgina consistently played an incorrect rhythm in one of her pieces. Rather than modelling the counting, I asked how she would count the bar in question. I thought this would be enough to create the awareness needed to fix the counting. Instead, Georgina’s reply of ‘I don’t know’ meant I had an opportunity to use layering and see where her gap in understanding lay. The interaction (week 14) that followed was:

Which is the shortest note in that bar? (Georgina points to a note in the music)
Yes. What’s that called? (quavers)
How many beats are quavers worth? (Half)
Yes. How do you count halves? (Georgina pauses for a few seconds and looks confused)
I modelled the counting while I played and Georgina followed along in the music before trying on her own. She was able to self-correct as she went, and demonstrated a new understanding of the rhythm.

I was pleased this line of enquiry worked, but wondered whether this experience would be enough for her to be able to apply such rhythmic problem solving to other contexts. I wondered how many times in the past I have counted for students and incorrectly assumed that it meant they understood enough to implement it independently at home. I also worried about how much time this detailed
interaction took up in lessons. Proof that it worked longer term, however, was also evident with Georgina.

Georgina and I had been working for months on familiarity with key recognition and awareness of the altered notes required without continuously marking them in the score. Prior to my break, I had explained and used guided discovery, but took theoretical concepts too far for Georgina’s ability and needs. This would result in confusion and wasted lesson time. Within two weeks of slowing down the learning pace, layering questions and upholding my ‘need-to-know’ rule of communication, Georgina’s understanding increased noticeably. From week 15, she could answer questions regarding key changes in her pieces without confusion.

5.4.1.2 Feeding forward.

Knowing the importance of focus and setting an explicit intention immediately prior to a practice episode, I regularly called on my teaching mantra of ‘If you can say it, you can play it’. Verbalising works well in making intention explicit and drawing focus to where it is required most. Feed forward questions I used include:

- What change did we make?
- What are you aiming for this time?
- What do you need to remember here?
- What positions do you use here?
- How do you need to move in this section?
- What beats do your hands play together?
- Where do you need to lift?
- What change is coming up?
- What key are you in?

This was not always successful. In Ross’s lesson in week 18, while pausing to figure out the notes, I asked Ross what intervals he had in each hand. He responded, ‘It’s not that I don’t know what the note is. It’s that I’m not reading far enough ahead’. Following this lesson, I noted, I wish he would take the time to understand why knowing the intervals coming up is part of reading ahead (teaching journal, week 18). While lack of engagement is evident here, so too is my assumption that Ross should share my perceptions and comply by answering my
questions. I was yet to learn a more effective way to interact with Ross, as we appeared to be competing with each other for control.

I perceived harsh self-judgement to be a large barrier to Ross’s critical engagement. From month five, I started to spend more time asking questions prior to playing new pieces or sections of pieces. We also spent more time on coordination activities away from the score before I introduced how they were used in the piece. I found that it was easier to engage Ross in these activities than those that were already a work-in-progress. They appeared to bypass preconceived judgements that would otherwise interfere with the task at hand and gave a point of reference from which to feed forward into practice episodes utilising the score.

There were times that Ross offered insightful comments and displayed good problem-solving skills. These moments were not necessarily on track with my intended activity, however. This illustrates that a lack of cooperation does not imply a lack of ability to engage critically; rather, a student’s own perceived challenges draw attention to what they deem relevant. An example of this is highlighted below:

Ross can be very insightful. I was busy modelling for him to pay attention to the coordination between the hands, but Ross commented on the placement of my hands on the keys. There were some uncomfortable intervals and he realised after watching me play that his hands are too far back on the keys. We did some work on hand placement and movements to different intervals, and he didn’t seem in a hurry to get back to the music as he usually would be. I combined this experience with the coordination required for the piece. He was really focused on the techniques being used and wrote a reminder on a post-it note for himself unprompted. (teaching journal, week 20)

This example of me being led by a student’s perceived needs rather than my own reminded me that how my students and I interpret challenges are not necessarily congruent. This is the first time I journalled on Ross’s ability to share his challenges in a critical manner and on how that meant his reflections could be used constructively within the lesson.

It was not until six months into the study that I thought to also ask students questions on strategy choice. For example, I started asking, ‘How would you approach this?’ or ‘What strategy will you use?’ Inevitably, early attempts at asking these questions would result in answers that were general or vague, such as:
• ‘I’ll just repeat it over and over’ (Ross, lesson interaction, week 24);
• ‘I’ve just got to force myself to do it’ (Ross, lesson interaction, week 24);
• ‘I’ll practice it more’ (Sean, lesson interaction, week 27);
• ‘I don’t know’ (Georgina, lesson interaction, week 26; Jenny, lesson interaction, week 24);
• ‘With great difficulty’ (John, lesson interaction, week 24).

Viewing responses and corresponding body language, I sensed that this sometimes reflected a lack of confidence, avoidance of using strategies and investing the intense amount of focus required, and genuine confusion. Most students had been learning piano with me for nearly two years at this point, so I thought that asking their opinions on useful practice strategies pertaining to their challenges would elicit straightforward responses based on our previous interactions in similar contexts. I was fascinated, and at the time admittedly a little surprised and deflated, by how little some would be able to engage in answering questions to this effect (teaching journal, week 24).

The inability for most students to answer questions pertaining to strategy choice illustrates that while they could follow directions and answer questions relating to content when prompted, they were reliant on me to prompt such thoughts. This indicates that at this stage, these students were unaware of the processes behind the questions I asked. Rather than switching to instructing, I asked questions to prompt for more detail, such as ‘Repeat it how?’ or encouraged them to draw on past experiences to help to interpret the needs of the current context. Such questions included, ‘How did we approach it last week?’ or ‘Do you remember what we did in [the other piece that required a similar strategy]?’ These questions would sometimes result in deeper insights, or would result in me modelling the thought processes by asking and answering the questions. In this way, modelling was not just in relation to playing output, but also the decision-making and problem-solving process (Elder & Paul, 2010).

Part of the goal of feeding forward is to facilitate the focus required during the practice episode. Due to the limited capacity of working memory to address the cognitive demands associated with reading and interpreting the score (Kirschner et al., 2006), we would often use the forward-planning process to annotate the score with cues regarding technique, meaning of concepts and terms, and coordination. Some examples of students’ scores are presented in Figure 5.3.
While reflection-on-action helps with focus and awareness following and preceding practice episodes, the metacognitive thought processes used during practice episodes also play a vital role in procedural learning. The next section looks at reflection-in-action and the challenges associated with this in the lessons.

5.4.2 Reflection-in-action.

Reflection-in-action is ‘thinking on your feet’ while engaged in the activity (Hartman, 2010). Schön (1987) explains that reflection-in-action involves rapid cues that have the critical function of questioning the tacit knowledge that occurs when we are on ‘automatic pilot’ mode. It differs from other types of reflection through its immediate significance for current action. Wiezbički-Stevens (2009) explains that it occurs as a reaction to a surprise challenge that occurs in the context of one’s work. This challenge is regarded as an opportunity to conduct an ‘on-the-spot experiment’ (Schön, 1987, p. 28).

As practice episodes require a continuous stream of cognitive processes— including deciding what to focus on at any one moment, knowing and being prepared for what is coming up, deciding how to interpret the score, and making technical decisions—reflection-in-action is paramount to deliberate practice.
I found encouraging reflection-in-action to be the most challenging aspect of lessons for all students. Regardless of the speed at which I modelled, Ross, Jenny, and Allison would copy my movements hurriedly, not allowing themselves time to process how they were moving. Their rushed playing meant that the point of the practice episode was often not embodied, making this a much less productive activity than it could be. I wondered about the cause of this typical response to practice episodes and what I could do to address it:

*Are students in a hurry to get back to the score? Do they feel that slow practice is unnecessary? Are they distracted by wanting to simply play or wishing to impress me? Or do they not have the desire or ability to focus at such a micro level? I know Allison does, as our conversations are always very focused, but it can be just as difficult to slow her down. Jenny often feels nervous in lessons and Ross expects to simply be able to play without much effort. Mental energy is definitely focused elsewhere, regardless of the reason.* (teaching journal, week 18)

I found a solution after more experience with guided reflection-on-action, which was increasingly resulting in active discussions:

*Engagement with questions occurs more when the intention behind the question is explicit. Perhaps when it comes to practice episodes, the focal point needs to be made more explicit. I need to guide the reflection-in-action process more.* (teaching journal, week 20)

From the second half of month five, I started to ask students about how they were moving, such as ‘Are your hands lifting together, or at different times?’ or ‘How does your arm move in comparison to mine?’ (lesson interactions, week 21). In order to answer these questions, students would need to slow down and think about their playing. They often required several repetitions to slow down their playing enough to be able to reflect and to answer questions. Over time, I developed the patience to give them the space to do so without interfering.

When playing from the score, my requests for small sections, hands separate to focus on a technical requirement, or playing slowly and deliberately would often be ignored, as students would once again be in a rush to play through the piece. This bypassed the opportunity to convert working memory to long-term memory. It also increased the likelihood of cognitive overload occurring, as information was not retained long enough to synthesise it into long-term memory (Price, 2010). This
explains the frequency with which any errors or incorrect technical movements were repeated during subsequent practice episodes. It also explains why I often found it necessary to repeat explanations, lines of questions, and examples modelled week to week.

During month five, I started playing in unison with students in a bid to slow them down, or placed post-it notes at the end of the section I had asked for as a visual block to continuing. I hoped these actions continued to reinforce the idea that a lesson is not a performance and that learning requires repetition and focus. Without these external restrictions, however, students often failed to implement the strategies discussed, indicating self-direction was not yet forming. I also encouraged verbalising while playing to help with coordination or counting/verbalising rhythms, and for slowing students down, as they had to think about what they were doing.

‘If you can say it, you can play it’ does not just apply to articulating focal points prior to practice episodes, as discussed in relation to reflection-on-action previously, but also relates to verbalising while playing to ensure reflection-in-action is taking place. Once more, if we had set the practice episode intention to verbalise while playing, some students would often fail to do so, even though it was seconds ago that we had discussed it. According to Most (2005), the most influential factor affecting a student’s ability to notice stimuli is their own attentional goals. As soon as the piece of music was in front of them, it appeared that any goal beyond getting the right notes vanished.

Unless students were verbalising while playing, there was no way for me to know the thought processes happening during the episode without asking for feedback after the event. Attempting this with Ross in relation to hand coordinations for his scales once again failed to elicit critical reflection. I asked what he was telling himself while he was playing. He responded, ‘I don’t tell myself anything, I’ve just got to do it’ (lesson interactions, week 24). I inevitably resorted to instructing through the required movements for him, not knowing how to set him up to do this for himself. Simultaneously, I internally reprimanded myself for reverting to old teaching strategies that I was trying to avoid.

The written annotations that were made on the score while reflecting-on-action were often disregarded while playing. Even when the phrasing was highlighted and given up arrows to indicate breaking the sound, Jenny would be surprised when I reminded her to lift, commenting ‘Oh, do I need to lift there?’
(lesson interaction, week 27). With Jenny’s desire for right notes, her inattentional blindness (Most, 2005) inhibited her from seeing the annotations and recalling their function. I wondered whether my focus on phrasing with Jenny was my agenda and not hers. But Jenny often commented that she wanted to sound as expressive as I did and to sound beautiful when playing, and so I persevered in drawing her attention to articulation and phrasing.

Throughout the first five months of the study, my implementation of these strategies was often sporadic and lessons were littered with many instances of modelling, explaining, and instructing. There was an emerging trend in my teaching that the less critically engaged the student, the more I explained and instructed, as I did not know any alternatives. While choice of the first performance episode was now in the hands of the students, as noted above, the following decisions in the lesson still fell in my hands, regardless of how disguised they were by questions. I wondered whether this was part of the problem (teaching journal, week 23).

5.5 Learning from Allison

I learned a lot about how to relinquish control of lessons to students from Allison. Allison started lessons with me just over a year prior to the study. As Allison had learned previously as a child, and as a result could read music fluently, our discussions could also focus on the subtleties of refining technique and realising musical expression within her playing. This was further made possible by the fact that Allison is a deep and critical thinker, developed in part through her academic background and experience as an engineer. From the start, she had approached lessons methodically with an inquisitive attitude and a desire to address challenges of technique and musical expression. Her thirst for conceptual understanding as well as procedural execution meant our lessons together were exploratory and rich in discussions.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Allison had many pieces in progress at once. This meant that our focus pieces one lesson were not guaranteed to be the same the following week. While this made me uneasy, the quality of Allison’s lessons was never affected by her constant flux in repertoire choice. I recognised that any unrest I felt was caused by the discrepancy with my personal agenda for her to finish pieces (teaching journal, week 20) and her perceived needs. Allison had displayed signs of critical engagement since prior to the study, arriving at lessons with questions pertaining to musical challenges and sharing reflections and insights on the week’s
practice unprompted. As such, it was easy to discard this feeling of unrest during lessons and meet Allison from her perceived needs. Our lessons together effortlessly took on the ‘culture of inquiry’ (Snyder & Snyder, 2008) environment that I sought with all students. Our interactions were full of discussions around deliberate practice, technique and resultant aural outputs. Initial discussions in Allison’s lessons were investigative and insightful, illustrating Allison’s desire for deep learning. This exposed me to how transformative pedagogy can unfold in my teaching (Carey et al., 2013).

Viewing the common interactions surrounding practice episodes with Allison highlights how this unfolded in our one-on-one piano lessons together:

1. Allison reflects on her week’s practice and/or asks questions
2. I respond and we discuss
3. I ask her to play something relevant to her reflections/questions
4. Practice episode
5. Questions for feedback—both of us answering and asking questions and offering our thoughts freely
6. Teacher modelling with Allison copying and reflecting and/or asking questions on techniques, strategies and musical output

From here, the rest of our time on a piece would cycle through steps 2 to 5 above. When we changed focus to another piece, I asked what she would like to focus on next, and the steps began at number one again.

In relation to the experiential learning cycle, Allison’s lessons began with stage two: what happened? These reflections-on-action extended beyond practice episodes in lessons to the week’s home practice. For other students, while I had endeavoured to give them ownership of lesson structure, thus far it had started with stage four: now what? The difference between the two is that Allison’s first episode at the piano was a practice episode and the others were still performance episodes. As I wondered about the reasons behind my decisions, I noticed my interpretation of the literature had played a role. Wiezbicki-Stevens (2009) states, ‘in Kolb’s (1984) model, learning occurs by beginning with a concrete experience to facilitate a prompting of attention, followed by reflection, generalization, and ending with application’ (p. 34). I had assumed that the concrete experience had to take place in the lesson prior to reflections, but as Akella (2010) argues, the cycle can begin at any
stage. As I uncovered here, it can also span a range of different time frames, from the immediate experience in lessons to experiences in home practice.

Knowing Allison’s shared reflections were the catalyst to engagement in lesson activities; in the following months I endeavoured to elicit more reflections from other students from the beginning of their lessons. In month six, I adapted questions to go beyond merely asking, ‘What would you like to start with?’ to include those relating to challenges and reflections on the week. Types of questions this included are:

- Were there any trouble spots this week?
- What were you aiming for with this piece?
- How did you go with [specific point of focus]?
- How did you approach this section?
- Do you just want to play, or would you like to break it up?
- Were there any questions from your practice this week?

In this way, just as with Allison, the lesson began with reflections on home practice that could guide the first practice episode of the lesson. Some took to this role more readily than others, willingly highlighting challenges and asking questions around their difficulties. I noted that Sean often guided me to what he needed in each piece without the need for many prompts (teaching journal, week 36).

The main difference this approach creates is that an explicit intention comes from the student before playing commences. It also allows students to express difficulties and ask questions prior to playing, removing the perception that they need to ‘perform and be judged’. It also makes practice episodes and activities explored relevant to the student’s expressed needs. From my experiences in the study, it became evident that starting with students’ reflections and insights from the week was much more conducive to actively engaging them in lessons than starting with playing. Another strategy that has the potential to address students’ perceived needs is modelling.

### 5.5.1 When is modelling and explaining okay?

While Allison appeared critically involved in lessons, I noticed that I tended to model and explain a lot in her lessons. I grappled with whether this was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ throughout the study, as I was unsure whether this counted as instructing as opposed to collaborating. In Chapter 2, I described the different types of modelling
that can be used in lessons. I noted that modelling can be a form of ‘cognitive apprenticeship’ (Ley & Young, 2001) if it includes strategy evaluations (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002) and modelling of thought processes used in problem solving (Elder & Paul, 2010). My challenges stemmed from the realisation that I was the one who chose when modelling was appropriate for my students, rather than them actively seeking an explanation or demonstration themselves. This still put me in control of the lesson structure. I decided to assess the different contexts in which I chose to model. This led to new insights as to this strategy’s potential for ensuring critical engagement and active learning. Below is the sequence of my perspective shifts regarding modelling and giving explanations:

Modelling doesn’t NOT work. But just because they can follow in lessons does not mean they’ll replicate the process themselves at home. I know I’m trying to model home practice, but students don’t need to think for themselves. (teaching journal, week 8)

Of all my students, I feel I teach Allison the best. I don’t need to give many instructions because she leads the way herself. While I do still model frequently, it feels different with Allison. She asks questions about what I’m modelling, illustrating that she has a vested interested in understanding. We both ask questions, comment, and explain our thoughts and reflections. In this way it becomes a conversation. How can I create this type of interaction with others? (teaching journal, week 20)

I have realised that modelling needs to be sandwiched between student reflections or questions so the student guides me on when modelling is helpful. If my modelling fits their expressed needs, it seems to be more effective for retention of learning and they are more able to transfer learned experiences to other musical contexts. (teaching journal, week 28)

This means that when modelling and explanations follow a student’s question, the student has already expressed an intention to understand. Therefore, engagement does not need to be created or instigated by me. With the desire to know implicit in the student, discussions, demonstrations and attempts to replicate my actions were more meaningful and relevant to the student, resulting in deep active engagement with the tasks.
5.6 Acknowledging Students’ Experiences and Emotions

Once I realised I needed to begin from home practice, I also realised that I needed to give students space to share their experiences, voice their expectations—whether unrealistic or not—and to vent their frustrations and challenges. From month seven, I started instigating more discussions with students around their learning experiences. This had started to occur earlier in isolation, but now I spent time at the beginning of the lesson to simply ask students how their weeks had gone, and to actually listen and encourage them to share their experiences. Previously, my perfunctory, ‘How’s your week been?’ really did not need any more reply than, ‘good thanks’.

I learned to really listen to my students in the final few months of the study, and to not interject with my opinions of their experiences. My old comments tended to inadvertently undermine the feelings of the student in a rush to get to the musical point of the lesson. If students came in saying they ‘should be able to play this’, I would say, ‘No you shouldn’t, you’re still learning’, ‘It’s only been a week [or two]’, ‘Remember you’re learning’, or even comments in jest, such as ‘If you could already play, I’d be out of a job’. But now I asked different questions, such as ‘Why do you think you should be able to play it already?’, or ‘That must be frustrating… is there anything specific that affected your practice?’

I would remind them of the progress they have made, and ask them to also share any positive thoughts from their week. If they struggled to find any, again, I would ask why, and if there is something we could do in lessons to help solve their challenges at home.

Initially I used to see this as a poor use of lesson time. I felt the purpose of a lesson is to focus on the music and the strategies needed to progress. What I learned, however, was that by allowing them the space and freedom to talk, students were more willing to set aside their self-judgements and engage at the piano. Allison once explained that by getting everything out in the open, she was managing my expectations of her. This was a powerful statement, and I realised that this is what other students needed to do, too. I noticed a remarkable difference in those who at times had struggled to engage in lessons. For example, after giving Ross the space to acknowledge his self-judgements and criticisms of himself, it appeared he then felt safe to set that aside and commit to the activities in the lessons. Nervous behaviour also drastically decreased in lessons in the final couple of months of the study,
especially for Jenny, who seemed to suffer the worst with anxiety in lessons. When I asked her what had changed this, she responded, ‘I think we’re focusing on the music more rather than me playing for you. I think that’s important’ (lesson interaction, week 33). Like Ross, it had been easier to engage Jenny in new concepts, activities, and pieces or sections of music rather than to correct or improve previously practiced pieces.

This also led to opportunities to discuss frames of reference, prior experiences, expectations and alternative perspectives on how to view their challenges, and gave me insight into the experiences that had shaped their views. Through this, our rapport grew substantially, and I got to know my students on a much deeper level than I previously had. I learned that lesson time was students’ time to use as they needed. It appeared that this first was to explain their week’s emotions and improvements, or perceived lack of improvements, depending on the week’s practice. Then, I asked them what specific musical challenges we could explore together in lessons, or where they thought it was best to start, before approaching tasks from a problem-solving perspective rather than a performance perspective. Through the seventh month of the study, lessons started to follow the outline of Allison’s I described in the previous section.

5.7 Consolidating Teaching Strategies

Returning to teaching after the Christmas break, I felt more relaxed about my teaching. I trusted in my ability to ask questions and guide rather than instruct, and in my students’ abilities to share their experiences, improvements and challenges. My agenda moving into this final stage of the study was to care more about my students’ learning experiences and reflections than what I thought they needed to learn. This resulted in a drastic reduction in my monologues when compared to the start of the study. I took lessons at a slower pace, allowing more time for discussions and repetition of activities. This space afforded students the chance to ask more questions. This has been noted by H. Chen (1996) as a sign of self-direction within the piano studio, which was lacking in the piano lessons his study evaluated. Questions display a move away from dependence and waiting to be led, towards a deeper engagement with lesson activities and seeking deeper understanding. Types and frequency of questions and reflections offered by students varied. Jenny and Ross, the two students most focused on the end product, asked much fewer questions about the content or concepts being learned, sharing more concerns about the nature
of their progress. Allison and Sean, who displayed analytical natures from prior to the study, asked questions relating to the tasks at hand readily. This led to a new issue of too much emphasis being placed on conceptual understanding, and not enough on the procedural realisation of that understanding.

With permission and encouragement to reflect, Sean and Allison both resisted playing without first having full conceptual understanding of the actions, strategies and process being used. Prior to playing, they would ask lots of questions regarding the inner workings of the musical concepts and techniques, seemingly lacking trust in procedural memory and their internal motor feedback. While this is a sign of engagement and a desire for deep conceptual learning, I worried about the amount of discussion taking place versus the amount of time spent playing. I was also aware that procedural knowledge is not the same as conceptual understanding, and that discussion alone would not improve their playing abilities (Maris, 2000).

Allison slowed down and engaged with practice episodes away from the score with relative ease through the study. Despite this, she was hesitant to allow these to lead to practice episodes with the score or a piece at large if it involved her playing the piece or section as written. As she was so critically involved otherwise, and appeared to apply our conversations to home practice well, I was comfortable with spending more time exploring concepts and ensured we had plenty of practice episodes during our discussions.

Sean played slowly and carefully from the outset. From month five, when I was deliberately asking questions for reflection-on-action, Sean would audibly reflect-in-action without the need for further prompts, commenting on his movements and his understanding of the score. I first noticed this during his lesson in week 22. I had been asking guided discovery questions regarding intervals and what they meant for his fingering choices. During his next practice episode, he commented on his hand movements when changing his mind about fingering choices: ‘Because we’re here and we’re moving down’. I modelled technique as required, and Sean commented on why that was important, again reflecting on what my demonstration meant for his playing. This hybrid of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, while an important element of deliberate practice, also highlights Sean’s cautious nature at the piano. Each week, performance trials were preceded by, ‘I’ll play it slowly’, granting himself permission to take his time. While this appeared to remove any pressure Sean might have felt otherwise, it also stunted his ability to trust what
Procedural knowledge was secure and to play more fluently and expressively. He thought meticulously about each movement he made, not trusting when procedural knowledge had become automated.

While questioning Sean and Allison led to over-analysis and emphasis on conceptual understanding, other students started to display more frequent signs of engagement. There was an increase in questions from students in relation to both conceptual and technical understanding. After practice episodes, Georgina, John and Jenny also started asking if they could repeat sections, or if they had played correctly. This was in stark contrast to prior months where they would wait to be told what to do or what needed more focus.

Ross, while previously labelling pieces ‘the devil’s piece’ (lesson interaction, week 5), started to reflect more specifically, with comments such as ‘This is the challenging section’ (week 28) illustrating a shift in language and perspective. When I probed for deeper insight, asking, ‘What makes it challenging?’, Ross responded, ‘Well, the rest is just easy, isn’t it?’ It was a step in the right direction, but did not extend to critical awareness or reflection that could feed into his practice decisions. As he could draw my attention to specific areas of trouble, however, we could isolate sections more successfully together in lessons than we had previously.

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the evolution of my teaching strategies and lesson interactions with students as a result of my critical reflection between lessons, adapting strategies based on new insights into their needs and increasing collaboration with students. Another factor that influenced my ability to engage students with their learning was introducing a home practice journal, specifically designed for this study. This journal became a springboard for me to learn to collaborate with students more effectively.

5.8 Introducing the Home Practice Journal

At the beginning of the fourth month, I presented each student with a home practice journal. The journal was divided into two sections: one for use in lessons, which could be consulted during home practice; and one for completion at home after the week’s practice. This section describes the use of the weekly forward-planning page of the journal in the lessons and the resultant changes I perceived in student behaviours. As with my questioning abilities to date, use of these journals within lessons evolved over the course of the study.
The forward-planning portion of the journal was a page with three lined sections in which to write notes, including ‘pieces’, ‘technical’ and ‘other/creative’. Before this stage of the study, four students chose to bring a blank exercise book to lessons to assist with home practice. After we had worked through a strategy or technique together, I would instruct them to try it a few times while I wrote notes in their exercise book to the same effect. An example of my notes is provided in Figure 5.4.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 5.4. Example of teacher-written practice notes for a student’s home practice.*

At the time I thought that by writing while they played I was capitalising on precious lesson time. I came to recognise this as taking ownership of learning from students and making decisions about home practice on their behalf, the exact opposite of my intentions. For the purposes of my study, it was important for students to take over the role of writing notes. I expected this would actively engage them in their learning, create a sense of accountability for their practice choices, and strengthen learning and retention of activities explored. Having a physical tool proved to be a powerful learning aid for me as I continued on my quest to increase students’ skills of self-direction and pass ownership of learning to them. Below is a timeline of adaptations to my communication choices around this activity, and the types of interactions they resulted in.

**5.8.1 Month four.**

I used the couple of weeks of lessons following my three-week break in teaching as an opportunity for students to get used to writing notes for themselves despite the fact that I was yet to distribute the journals. I found myself dictating to them, much as if I was the one writing. When I handed out the new journals, I set an explicit intention to modify this to guided reflection.
5.8.2 Month five.

After we had worked through a piece or task together, I prompted students to write in their journals. I asked questions to jog their memories of specific aspects to focus on, such as:

- How would you describe the technique we used here?
- What do you need to be mindful of there?
- How did we break down this section?

Initially, I found it challenging to give students the required space to think and write. I worried about being perceived as lazy or not giving them value for money (teaching journal, week 20). To compensate, I found myself talking while they wrote, justifying and over-explaining the strategies’ function to satiate my need for involvement. If I was silent, I was often thinking several steps ahead of my student and felt impatient and ready to move on with the lesson.

Watching lesson videos from week 20, I noticed looks of concentration and reflection on students’ faces as they thought about what to write. I realised how distracting my comments were to the task at hand (teaching journal, week 20). I then made a conscious effort to quieten my mind and started to imagine myself as the student. Mentally going through their thought processes helped to keep me present and stopped me from getting too mentally far ahead of my students.

5.8.3 Month six.

As with broadening out questions during practice episode cycles, I tried to remove students’ dependence on me, using general prompts such as ‘Make some notes for yourself’, or ‘Write the main points down’ to encourage independent reflection. Initially some students would look at me expectantly, waiting to be guided through the exercise, or they would ask me to remind them of key points. This potentially signifies a lack of ability or desire to reflect independently. Other times, students would verbalise their thoughts before writing in order to seek clarification that they were writing the correct things. These are signs that they potentially did not yet trust their ability to reflect and recall adequately or accurately, or that they preferred to be guided through the task.

5.8.4 Month seven.

Rather than waiting until the end of the piece to recap the main points, in month seven, Georgina, Ross and Sean started to write notes during our practice
episode cycles, pre-empting this activity with comments such as, ‘Let me write that down’ (Georgina, lesson interaction week 28). This highlights two potential levels of self-directed behaviour: On one hand, it could be interpreted as students taking ownership of their learning, deciding independently whether something was important enough to their home practice to write down, thus indicating a growth in self-directed behaviour. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as shortcutting the process and avoiding the need to reflect on a larger level, whereby they would have to recall more points at once. In this way, it could illustrate a resistance to reflection and self-directed behaviour. Either way, a familiarity with the note-taking process is evident by the absence of my prompts, depicting a growing independence or understanding of the journalling process.

5.8.5 Moving forwards in the study.

While the months indicate the first time I made deliberate choices regarding my actions surrounding the task of note-taking, they were cumulative in their use; sometimes students would write unassisted, sometimes I would prompt, sometimes they would ask, and occasionally I would dictate something they had missed. After viewing the interactions surrounding the use of the home practice journal, a pattern became evident that is by no means surprising: The more students were engaged in practice episode activities—both answering and asking questions, and offering their feedback—the more confidently they wrote their notes unassisted.

One of the benefits of students taking notes is that it gives them the opportunity to describe strategies and focal points in their own words. This appeared to deepen students’ understanding, as they were required to make sense of information for themselves. It also proved effective for exposing any misunderstandings. On a number of occasions, two students were confused by their notes, explaining that they did not understand what they had written. This occurred more frequently when I had dictated their notes to them or given them my wording to write if they were struggling to think of a way themselves.

Misunderstandings lessened throughout the study as students relied more on their own interpretations and learned through experience what types of notes were useful for them. From month eight, I started asking them to read their notes and recap everything once more at the end of the lesson to clarify that they understood what they had written and knew what they would do during home practice.
5.8.6 Students’ engagement with the home journal in lessons.

While I could encourage the use of note taking in lessons, it was ultimately up to each student as to whether or not they brought their journal to lessons. Interestingly, Allison and Ross, the two students who had not used an exercise book prior to the journal, chose not to bring their journal to lessons. Ross chose to write on post-it notes and stick them to the relevant pieces of music. This served the same purpose as the home practice journal and our interactions around this followed the same sequence as described above. Allison did not write notes. She explained that while she likes the idea of structure, she is not a structured person and feels the need for freedom (final interview). Her willingness to reflect openly regarding activities and strategies, however, gave her the same opportunities to paraphrase and recall the main points covered in the lesson, albeit without a way to consult notes in the future.

Despite my desire for students to write their lesson notes, Jenny asked me to keep writing notes for her, explaining, ‘You do a better job than me’ (lesson interaction, week 20). This highlights a potential lack of trust in herself and that she perceived this as part of my role as teacher. I continued to try to involve her in the process, asking what I should write. The first time I did this, she commented, ‘That’s a good way of testing me’ (lesson interaction, week 21). As I did this more often, a further resistance to reflect presented itself. Throughout activities such as modelling Jenny would ask, ‘Will you write that down for me, or I’ll forget’ (lesson interaction, week 26). This short cut the process of using the journal as a tool for reflection and consolidating learning.

Having students reflect upon the lesson, write notes and/or verbalise their thoughts gave them ownership of planning in preparation for home practice. I further encouraged planning through weekly goal setting.

5.9 Weekly Goal Setting

One of the components of self-direction is the ability to set realistic goals (Knowles et al., 2011). Training students in relation to goal setting and strategy choice has been found to increase effectiveness of practice, as well as self-reflection, causal attributions, self-efficacy and intrinsic interest (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002). As such, it was important for students to learn to set intentions and have goals for the week that would contribute to achieving their long-term goals. Without guidance, novices typically set outcome goals and lack defined strategies.
McPherson and Zimmerman (2002) explain that this can contribute to attributing outcomes to ability and reacting defensively rather than adaptively. Alternatively, weekly goals can assist students by focusing practice sessions, teaching discipline, serving as a source of motivation, keeping students accountable, and relating smaller practice outcomes to larger goals.

I included space for up to three achievable goals per week in students’ home practice journals. While the outcomes of setting goals are explored in Chapter 6, this section discusses how goals were chosen. Initially, I intended the listing of goals to be done retrospectively, as part of weekly reflections. This is because I felt that the lesson notes page already covered what was required during practice. From the introduction of the journal, students asked me what their goals should be. Realising this activity required guidance, this became a forward-looking task that we did together at the end of lessons. Goal setting was a good way to summarise the lesson, to review lesson notes and choose the focus points for the week. Much of the time, goals were simply reworded from the notes on the first page, providing a further opportunity for consolidating learning. Typical types of goals set included not just what to practice, such as the piece, a section of music or technical exercise, but also how to practice, including strategies and techniques to implement.

Left to their own devices, students tended to write their goals in the negative, focusing on what to avoid, rather than what to aim for. This is often counter-intuitive, instead drawing their attention to the exact thing they wished to avoid. Students also tended to make goals vague, affecting the ability of their goals to be achievable on a weekly basis. Below are some examples of students’ goals and how we changed the wording to make them positive and achievable:

- **Before**—Vague: Achieve more flow
  
  **After**—Specific: Isolate pauses in the first section and practice slowly. Build up speed consistently focusing on an even beat.

- **Before**—Negative: Don’t drop wrists when playing
  
  **After**—Positive: Be aware of wrist height when playing. Aim to feel more on top of keys.

Goals were predominantly designed to encourage students to select and implement appropriate strategies at the piano, much as we did in lessons. For those without a good practice habit, we chose to also include goals around time or frequency of practice, to help with accountability.
5.10 Teacher as Facilitator: Key Insights and Embodied Understandings from My Experiences

Throughout this chapter, I have described the significant changes in my teaching throughout the study. I learned that an optimal lesson environment is collaborative and full of discussions, and I learned how that could unfold practically within my own teaching studio. Early in the study, when I was focused on simply changing instructions to questions, I often missed this vital element and thought that asking questions would be sufficient to engage students in their learning. I initially believed that the focus in lessons should be on playing, and I used to worry that discussions took up too much valuable lesson time with students. Through the latter part of the study, however, I realised the importance of discussions in fostering mindsets conducive to students engaging with subsequent learning activities. McPherson and Zimmerman (2002) explain that developing students’ metacognitive reasoning depends on ‘the teacher’s willingness to have the students describe what goes on in their minds as they think’ (p. 336). This certainly appeared to be true in relation to my students. By acknowledging and exploring students’ perspectives towards their progress, and their challenges and frustrations at the start of their lessons, students were more able to set their negative emotions aside and engage in learning activities in their lessons. This also set the climate for the lesson to be non-judgemental and exploratory. Students’ self-confidence towards their ability to apply themselves to lesson activities increased, especially as activities were no longer designed to expose their ability to perform in their lessons.

Further contributing to this collaborative environment was the significant change in the structure of the lesson. By starting with discussions around home practice, lessons could straight away create the ‘culture of inquiry’ that placed students’ experiences and perceived challenges at the heart of the lesson. Through these changes, my pedagogical agility (Carey et al., 2013) increased as I became flexible in my teaching approach (Bohlin et al., 1993) and I felt comfortable allowing students to control the shape of the lesson. I learned to start from their perceived needs rather than my own. The introduction of the home practice journal contributed to this shift, as students’ reflections on the week took precedence over my old teaching strategies of having a student play a piece to expose areas that needed work. In this way, I realised that the experiential learning cycle begins with reflections from the student, rather than new actions as dictated by me in the lesson, and that the
experiential learning cycle can unfold over larger time frames than just immediate experiences.

To teach in this way was more challenging with some students than with others. Students who were willing to share their experiences, to participate in lessons fully and to focus on the tasks at hand made collaboration easy. This did not automatically mean that students took full ownership and responsibility of their learning without support and guidance. Nor did teaching through guided discovery and asking questions automatically translate to students asking themselves similar questions when unassisted. However, as I gained experience in new ways of teaching, and students gained experience and new insights into how to approach lessons and their learning, positive shifts occurred through the latter half of the study.

Apart from Allison, who came to me already highly self-directed and insightful in relation to her piano journey, students needed my guidance, support and suggestions in order to reflect on their learning. This supports Wristen’s (2006) and Dabback’s (2003) suggestion that teachers need to guide the self-direction process. While Wristen and Dabback (2003) explain that freedom and guidance require careful balance, I found that freedom and guidance are not mutually exclusive. Freedom itself can be directed, and this is most conducive to critical insights. If mindset challenges stemmed from low self-confidence, discussions and support were enough to bolster their self-confidence and engage them in activities behaviourally.

Ross was the most challenging student to help set aside his judgements and expectations. The predominant difference between him and the other students who participated in this study is that he came to lessons most explicitly with a belief in talent and an expectation that he should simply be able to play. Despite my own belief that I could help him to shift this problematic mindset, this was not the case if he was not willing to acknowledge there might be another way to progress with his learning. Bruning, Schraw and Ronning (1999) explain that a student is unlikely to learn effectively without choosing to monitor and control their cognitive processes. This reminds me that a teacher can only do so much to facilitate metacognitive growth at the instrument. There needs to be a point that the student chooses to open their mind to other possibilities. In some lessons, we found a mutual place from which to explore strategies and music, but in others we did not. Each lesson began with negative self-talk from Ross. It was clear that his self-confidence had taken a hit through his experiences. But towards the end of the study, Ross would finish lessons
with positive comments, such as ‘I’ll get there’, or ‘I’ve just got to keep going’. Despite his frustrations, there was no sign of him ceasing lessons and he always left lessons feeling more positive than when he walked in.

Through the lessons, students gained several insights and tools to help with home practice. These include experiences with practice strategies and processes to use at home, visual cues on the music that students had annotated themselves, weekly goals and lesson notes within their home practice journal. This, I felt, meant students had everything they needed to plan, focus and reflect-in/on-action, critically engaging with deliberate practice at home. A one-hour weekly lesson, however, can only go so far. The next chapter discusses students’ home practice throughout the study and the myriad of influences outside of lessons that can have an impact on a student’s ability to engage in deliberate practice.
Chapter 6: Home Practice

While repertoire selection and shared interactions in lessons provide opportunities for student-teacher collaboration with hands-on support and guidance from the teacher, home practice is a solitary activity. As such, it relies on a student’s ability to direct their focus, choose and implement relevant practice strategies and monitor their musical outputs independently. In the previous chapter I discussed how lessons were used to plan the week’s practice and to create weekly practice goals. Ultimately, however, it was up to the student to choose to implement these strategies and work towards their goals at home.

This chapter explores students’ experiences with home practice throughout the study, including their feelings towards their weekly practice and achieving their goals, the quantity and quality of practice undertaken, their experiences with the home practice journal and their overall feelings of progress throughout the nine-month study. Drawing on discussions in lessons, answers to the reflective questions in students’ home practice journals, and interviews with students following the study, I uncover signs of, and barriers to, deliberate practice. As emotions have an impact on adults’ ability to learn (Barer-Stein & Kompf, 2001), and creating awareness of emotions is a key factor in addressing them (Willink & Jacobs, 2011), I first examine students’ feelings towards their practice each week and whether they felt they achieved their short-term goals between lessons.

6.1 Feelings Towards Practice and Achieving Goals

In the fourth month of the study, each student received a practice journal in which to take notes during the lesson to guide practice. The first part of the journal was used for lesson notes and setting goals together in lessons, as discussed in Chapter 5. The second part of this journal was designed for use at home and included reflective questions on the week’s practice. The first reflective task students were given each week was to rate their feelings towards their practice on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant ‘not so great’ and 5 meant ‘fabulous’. They were also asked to circle ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for whether or not they achieved their weekly goals. Guiding the reflective process through questions is said to help students develop their metacognitive skills in relation to their learning (Wiezbicki-Stevens, 2009). As these
skills are part of self-direction (Knowles et al., 2011), they were integral to the journal I developed for students. I hypothesised that having such reflective tasks would encourage students to choose strategies conducive to achieving their goals, as I expected them to want to respond to the questions positively. I also thought this would encourage them to make appropriate matches between the goals set and the strategies needed to reach them, especially as we focused on this in lessons. In this way, I expected reflective activities to encourage deliberate practice. Given the attention given to planning home practice in lessons, including discussing and implementing practice strategies in lessons, and the fact that they also had written lesson notes in their journals to guide home practice, I felt that students were set up well for deliberate practice. Responses given in their journals, however, painted a different picture.

6.1.1 Feelings towards practice.

The first reflective question on page two of the home practice journal pertained to students’ feelings towards their practice. Students’ responses varied greatly from week to week, corresponding with the amount of time students said they managed through the week, the level of improvement they felt they achieved, and their emotional response to the week’s practice. Overall, the extremes of 1/5 and 5/5 were the least frequent responses, with the most frequent responses ranging from 2/5 to 4/5. Ross had the most frequent low ratings of his practice, including two 1/5s. When asked further about this exercise in our interview following the study, he commented:

[My reflections were] often disappointing…. I always think I achieve more than I did. And then looking back and you think I was going to do this, and I was going to do that. But I never got past this—I realised I couldn’t do it.

This discrepancy between perceptions of practice and actual practice is similar to Bugos and High’s (2009) finding that older adult students tend to overestimate the quality of their practice. The reflective task for my study, however, led Ross to uncover this discrepancy and to feel disappointed.

Ross was not the only student who articulated feelings of disappointment or a hesitancy to rate their practice highly. In her final interview, Allison commented:

Maybe at the beginning of the week I would have one or two good days, because it’s the weekend. But then by the end of the week, when I would be
rating that, I always felt a bit—I always do feel let down in the week… By the end of the week, you just haven’t gotten to where you think you should have.

For Allison, comparisons to what she thought she should have achieved is evident, showing potential unrealistic comparisons and expectations (Uszler & Upitis, 2000; Wristen, 2006). This also led her to leave her ratings blank throughout the study. She explained that she did consider her rating each week, but chose not to share it in her journal. She expanded:

Because I was always—yeah, no I’m really not happy. Three? And maybe that’s part of—and then I thought maybe you’d be disappointed if I put a three. (Allison, final interview)

Sullivan, McDonough and Prain (2005) explain that pleasing the teacher is an important feature of success for some students. This can be seen in Allison’s comment above. Jenny also chose not to complete the ratings each week, but could not articulate a reason for this. This illustrates either an inability or unwillingness to share reflective insights.

In Chapter 5, it was evident that Allison and Ross exhibit very different behaviours in lessons. Allison displays high critical reflection skills, while Ross struggles with his expectations and epistemic beliefs surrounding talent and how ‘easy’ playing the piano should be. Regardless of differing epistemic beliefs and reflective abilities, they both shared disappointments in their weekly progress. This illustrates that epistemic orientation is separate from issues of confidence or a sense of achievement (Sullivan et al., 2005).

Not every student attached their feelings about practice to their sense of progress. John, who had the most consistent ratings throughout the study, with 10 responses of 4/5 and two responses of 5/5, explained:

Really, to an extent I don’t—this might sound silly—but I don’t consider myself a raw beginner, in a sense. And ones and twos would just seem totally silly and impractical really. I should be expecting to be from three to five I think. Where I am in my musical journey, really (John, final interview).

This does not mean that John was exempt from comparisons to ideals and future selves:

I find it hard to get away from the fact that [my progress is] never fast
enough. But I guess that’s probably pretty commonplace with people. (John, final interview)

We spoke about the nature of skill development frequently in lessons, especially as John wished to emulate the ‘greats’ he so admired. While he could lament his slow progress, John did not express disappointment in his playing. He appeared to take a more pragmatic approach to his learning than some others, which developed through our discussions together in lessons.

In contrast to John’s experiences, where pragmatism grew through the study, Georgina started this study with realistic perceptions of the journey, commenting in her initial interview, ‘You can’t be too hard on yourself. You’re not in it for the short term’. Despite this perspective, she too was disappointed in herself when reflecting on a weekly basis:

I was amazed at how little I thought of myself and my practice…. I never gave myself a five. I was always in the middle. Even though some weeks I would have said yeah, pretty good—just not five, you know. Not that good.

It appears that overall, this exercise was successful in encouraging students to reflect on their practice, but did not necessarily cultivate critical reflection that could then influence decisions around practice choices prior to these reflections. If this exercise did influence practice choices, we would expect an increase in students feeling good about their practice as they honed their practice choices, or consistently high ratings, as they would have chosen strategies that addressed their learning needs and gave them a sense of progress.

Another disconnect between deliberate action and reflections became apparent when I asked students how they chose their ratings. Most students completed the ratings using ‘gut instinct’, and by simply asking themselves how they felt about the week. This illustrates that critical thought processes were not involved in most of their response. Responses were also compartmentalised from week to week as opposed to reaching forwards or backwards on a longer trajectory, with no mention from any student of comparisons to previous weeks or of changing their approach if they had had a bad week previously. Sean was the only one to explain he based his rating on specific criteria. He took a practical and rational approach, basing his rating on whether or not he achieved his goals. I was interested to see if there was a correlation between feelings towards practice and goals achieved for other students.
as well, as it makes sense that achieving goals would result in positive feelings about the week’s practice.

6.1.2 Students’ ratings of practice in relation to their goal achievements.

Potential answers outlined in the journal to the question regarding whether goals were achieved or not were ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Often students would place a mark somewhere between the two. This was partly because there were up to three goals for the week, and while some may have been achieved, others may not have been. Another reason for partial achievement of goals was that students hesitated to say they completed their goals when they felt that there was still a long way to go before they were satisfied. Figure 6.1 illustrates the placement of the circled responses students gave. This allowed me to rate them from 1=No to 5=Yes, to compare responses to feelings about practice each week.

![Figure 6.1. Placements of circled responses to goal achievements.](image)

Table 6.1 outlines the responses given in students’ home practice journals (G = goal rating, F = feelings rating). This table depicts the large degree of variation in responses for most students over the course of the study, as well as Allison and Jenny’s choice to not engage with the task. It also shows the lack of correlation between goal attainment and feeling towards the week’s practice, even for Sean, who stated that his ratings were goal-dependent.
Table 6.1

Students’ Ratings for Goal Attainment and Feelings towards the Week’s Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal entry number</th>
<th>John</th>
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Notes. (G=goal achievement, F=feelings towards practice)

In several instances, it can be seen that feelings were rated lower than goal ratings. One explanation for this could be the affective comparisons between perceived current ability and desired ability, as indicated by students frequently in conversations during lessons. Conversely, there are also instances where goals were not achieved but feelings were rated highly. It is possible for satisfaction and enjoyment to be achieved while working towards, but not fully achieving, goals, or when engaged in activities that are not related to goals. Some pedagogues emphasise that the majority of adult learners are activity- or process-oriented as opposed to goal-oriented (Swenson, 2006). This may also explain why some students rated their feelings highly even when goals were not achieved.

6.1.3 Discussion of goal achievements.

After noticing John’s reluctance to say ‘yes’ to achieving his goals in the first two weeks of the journal, we had a conversation in his lesson in week 21 about what
achieving his goals would involve. He explained that while he achieved his goals to some extent, there is always more progress to be had, so he placed a mark between ‘yes’ and ‘no’. We changed the language used in John’s goals, as described in Chapter 5, making them more specific and achievable. The following week, John marked that he had achieved his goals. He explained, ‘I thought it would be a good idea to be more positive than negative in mindset, but it’s easy to see that I’m a long way off Chopin, or whoever you want to mention’. From that week on, he marked ‘yes’ for achieving his goals right through to the final week of the study, which he marked very close to yes.

Sean was the only other student to mark ‘yes’ more frequently than ‘no’ or partially, in relation to achieving his goals (9/14). Georgina did not achieve her goals for the first three weeks, and then most frequently only partially. Ross also frequently only partially completed his goals, but marked ‘no’ for half of his entries. While discussions in lessons led to what we deemed realistic goals at the time, this was evidently not the case when compared to the time or effort some students could realistically give to their practice. In other instances it appeared that students’ judgements of whether they achieved their goals were harsh and compared to unrealistic standards. This means that the goals themselves were not necessarily the challenge, but rather the criteria on some students judged their completion. While the purpose of having weekly goals was to structure and focus practice and to foster a sense of progress and accomplishment, it is clear that these objectives were not fully realised throughout the study.

Comments on the other reflective questions in the home practice journal, such as ‘What went well?’ or ‘What needs work?’ often specifically addressed the goals. This means that this exercise helped to focus the reflections (discussed in more depth later in this chapter) but not necessarily to plan practice accordingly. From my perspective, I felt that the goals we set together were achievable if practice correlated with the approaches we discussed in lessons and was frequent and consistent. For all students, when asked in their final interviews what was needed to improve their ratings or achieve their goals, the unanimous answer given was ‘more time’. This mirrors the findings in Lehmann and Papousek’s (2003) study of adults’ approaches to practice. The following section explores this response in more detail.
6.2 Quantity of Practice

Throughout the study, lifestyle factors such as work and family commitments disrupted all students’ practice routines except John’s, and had an impact on time spent at the piano. Sean and Ross frequently commented on busyness in their journals, and along with Jenny, Allison and Georgina, also commented to this effect in their lessons. These instances often corresponded with low feelings towards the week’s practice. Lehmann and Papousek (2003) argue that quantity of practice is one area that is affected by self-efficacy levels, with the other being quality of practice (see Section 6.3). The reason low self-efficacy is said to result in a decrease in practice time is likely due to its link with decreased motivation and less attention on the task at hand (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 1998). There are several contributing factors to self-efficacy in relation to home practice, which become apparent when examining the specific factors that had an impact on students’ practice time.

In their final interviews, Sean, Allison and Georgina described their difficulties with practice through the week in comparison to the weekend, when they would be able to achieve multiple practice sessions through the day. Working through the week did not only drain the time available to these students, but also expended their ability to focus. Allison commented, ‘It’s that whole thing of being able to concentrate and focus. So trying to do that in the evenings is pretty difficult’. Georgina also explained that she was unable to concentrate adequately after work, while Sean stated, ‘In the evenings I just fall flat on my face’. Being tired and unable to concentrate does not set students up for effective practice (Lehmann et al., 2007) so it is understandable that this would have a negative impact on their time spent at the piano.

Despite the demands of the week, Allison found time to practice before work. She explained, ‘I’ve started trying to do maybe just 20 minutes in the morning when I’m actually awake’. Not everyone is a morning person, however. Sean commented, ‘I wake up at 5:45 so I’m not very switched on then. And I couldn’t see myself getting up any earlier to practice’. While Georgina often enjoyed sitting to play before work, she explained that she was usually running late and thus missed the opportunity. Each of these students expressed the desire to spend more time at the piano, but it is apparent that three factors had an impact on their ability to do so to their desired level: competing commitments from work, the need to be able to focus adequately, and the ability to manage their time effectively. Of the three, Allison
displayed the desire and ability to negate her challenges as well as possible and find a solution.

Sean’s biggest barrier to having focus for piano practice was the amount of overtime he had at work. As soon as this settled down, he returned to regular time at the piano. He explained:

So, when I normally have free time—under normal circumstances I should say, I do fit in at least—I try to fit in half hour of practice a day. It’s mainly—well, if it’s less than that, rather than try to go for length, I try to go for frequency. (final interview)

This highlights that as soon as external pressures allowed for more focus, Sean was motivated to direct it towards his piano practice.

As well as immediate situational influences, the decision to practice or not was also influenced by general self-image, causal attributions and expectations. On several occasions Jenny mentioned her concern regarding her age and whether she had the ability to progress. This lack of confidence in her abilities is a sign of low self-efficacy and could be a contributing factor to her ongoing lack of motivation to commit to regular practice. As this attribution to age is stable, internal and out of Jenny’s control (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), it adversely affected her motivation to expend effort. In Chapter 4, I explained that while Jenny could see that new strategies could allow her technical proficiency to grow, she still saw her age as a limiting factor at the end of the study. While these new attributions to strategies gave Jenny control over her learning (Lehmann et al., 2007), they did not automatically result in increased practice behaviours. As Mezirow (1991) explains, unless premise reflections, whereby perspectives are interrogated to allow for new understandings and insights to be reached, result in new action, transformation has not taken place. There were other reasons for this, which were attached to Jenny’s perceptions of her efforts.

Jenny frequently commented in lessons that she ‘should be able to do it’, that she practiced over and over without seeing improvements, and that if she did improve, she did not retain it over to the next practice session. Not surprisingly, these comparisons to her desired self and negative perceptions of her practice appeared to lower her motivation. If effort did not result in retention or allow her to be able to play with ease, what was the point? Lehmann et al. (2007) explain, ‘a student’s apparent lack of progress in spite of reported adequate amounts of practice might
actually be related to suboptimal conditions during their practice’ (p. 9), as opposed to the amount of practice completed. Winnie (2011) explains that when students repeat tasks straight away, it creates a false sense of familiarity, but this immediate fluency does not equate to deeper understanding. He explains that misperceiving familiarity for comprehension leads to insufficient cognitive processing that adversely impacts retention. This could explain what was occurring for Jenny. I knew if Jenny was breaking down sections as she reported, it was not necessarily the strategies that were the problem; rather, she may not have the metacognitive awareness on her own for how to monitor her outcomes and adapt her strategies during practice. The issue was not avoiding practice in the first place, but the lack of progress and dissatisfaction with the results when she did.

Jenny frequently expressed her desire to do more practice, and her realisation that this was necessary to increase her playing abilities. We had discussed creating a practice habit several times over the weeks, and brainstormed how she could best create a routine for herself. In her lesson in week 21, Jenny asked how much practice she should be doing each week. After I explained that ‘little and often is best’, she responded, ‘I thought if I can regiment myself to the most optimal amount of hours, then I can just knock it off as I go’. While not related to specific practice strategies to employ, having time goals can help to create a practice habit. I explained that for her level, half an hour per day is standard so she could maybe aim for three hours per week. Jenny responded, ‘Okay, so three hours—Wait a minute, three hours per week, not per fortnight? I don’t do anywhere near that!’ Worried that I had inadvertently increased Jenny’s insecurities, I backtracked and suggested she aim for touching the piano five days per week. I drew boxes in her journal for her goals, so she could tick off her practice sessions as she went, offering accountability and what I hoped would be a sense of accomplishment. These boxes worked well for Jenny, but she commented on not achieving ‘great things’ in that time. She seemed to question the merit of such little practice. When asked, she said she practiced for 10 minutes, and while she felt she could do more, she stopped after 10 minutes. Jenny lacked intrinsic motivation to spend any time practising beyond the minimum prescribed by me in lessons. Duke et al. (2009) explain that goals that focus on time spent practicing are not always enough to sustain motivation if the perceived accomplishment is not worth the time invested. This may have been the case here with Jenny.
Another frame of reference that impacts on motivation to act is attitude, including work ethic, grit and determination. While discussions around work ethic and grit are currently absent in the adult education literature, conversations among academics around its influence on motivation and adult learning behaviours have started to occur in conference settings (Olson, 2015). Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) define grit as ‘perseverance and passion for long-term goals… working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress’ (p. 1087). Olson (2015) argues that work ethic ‘may be connected to the aspect of grit that promotes “working strenuously towards challenges”’ (p. 406) and is thus a factor in adult learners achieving their goals.

Work ethic translates well into the context of piano practice. How it interacts with other frames of reference can be seen through examining the discrepancies between Ross’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours regarding quantity of practice. In his lessons, Ross frequently declared his beliefs regarding talent and how playing ‘should be easy’ and ‘if he was a pianist, then he’d be able to play’. In Chapter 5, I shared some of Ross’s frames of reference and past experiences that contribute to his perspectives and expectations towards his piano journey, and discussed how unhelpful these comments were to the learning activities at hand. Given Ross displays signs of entity theory, one might expect that he did not give piano practice much attention. Interestingly, Ross did not let his ‘lack of talent’ affect his motivation to put in the hours.

As well as his harsh self-judgments and unrealistic expectations, Ross assured himself and me on several occasions at the end of his lessons that he will ‘get there’ and that giving up is not in his nature. Displaying ‘grittiness’ may certainly counter the premature quitting associated with unrealistic expectations and unhelpful mindsets and ensure a commitment to practice, but it does not mean that such learners will work towards their goals in effective ways and choose helpful strategies.

This section has highlighted that students’ quantity of home practice was influenced not by epistemic beliefs, but by self-efficacy levels in two ways: circumstance and environmental/lifestyle factors that had an impact on feeling adequately able to focus, and displaying signs of grit and determination. These two factors combine to create either optimal or suboptimal conditions for motivation that
led to time spent at the piano. Quantity of practice, however, is only one determinant of progress. Perhaps more important is the quality of practice and how practice time is spent. As McPherson and Zimmerman (2002) argue:

Although a student may decide to practice his trumpet over playing soccer with his friends (choice), may continue to practice for an extended period of time (persistence), and may exhibit focused engagement throughout (intensity), the benefits of this extended and intense practice may not be realized if an effective practice strategy is not used. (p. 349)

Students’ practice choices and behaviours at home are discussed in the following section.

6.3 Quality of Practice

In a perfect world, students’ piano practice would be focused and planned, and use inherent feedback to critique practice episodes. The experiential learning cycle represents this ultimate self-directed ideal, whereby students plan their practice, implement effective strategies and reflect on the outcomes, adjusting their focus accordingly as they go. In reality, much of adults’ time at the piano is haphazard and aimless (Bugos & High, 2009; Lehmann et al., 2007). One challenge with deliberate practice is that there is a negative correlation between the amount of effort required and the levels of enjoyment students feel during practice (Lehmann et al., 2007). This means that motivation is required to follow through with deliberate practice, even if it is not necessarily enjoyable. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many mindset challenges that interfere with such motivation, such as self-efficacy, attributions and epistemic beliefs. This section discusses the quality of students’ home piano practice as evidenced by their home practice journals, discussions in their piano lessons, and their responses to questions in their interviews.

6.3.1 Avoidance of practice strategies.

One of the most common challenges faced during home practice was a student following through with the use of the deliberate practice strategies we had explored together during lessons. In Chapter 5, I discussed how I struggled with attempts to slow the tempo down, or to have a student focus on a small section of music or details of articulation or rhythm. If they found it difficult to do so in lessons when I was there to guide, assist and hold them accountable, it is not surprising that students might avoid the use of such strategies at home.
For the most part, it was difficult to ascertain what Ross’s practice actually entailed. When asked in lessons, his responses would include: ‘I just practiced over and over until the blood spots came on my forehead’ (lesson interaction week 7), or ‘I’ve just forced myself’ (lesson interaction, week 18). Asking for more detail only resulted in a similar statement to the first. This displays defensive responses without critical insights. This could have been due to not wishing to expose weaknesses, in line with entity theory (Dweck, 2007), or not having the critical reflection skills necessary to share more detailed responses. Either way, his responses indicated that he was not ready to explore his frames of reference with me, removing the ability for premise reflections and transformation to occur (Mezirow, 1997). Based on his answers and his lack of engagement with strategies in lessons and his reinforced pauses and missed details, as discussed in Chapter 5, I imagined his practice might have reflected his outcome orientation, focusing on the end product rather than the process. Ross’s determination to not be beaten may have resulted in a good amount of time spent at the piano, but it did not appear to extend to making wise choices during practice.

One aspect of Ross’s playing I needed to address frequently in lessons was his rhythm. While Ross understood the timing of different rhythms conceptually, when playing, he would ignore the rhythm in favour of finding the notes. In his week 15 lesson, Ross explained that he is happy to ignore rhythm if it still sounds good to him, but he also acknowledged that this was not the right way to think about it. As Ross was preparing for an exam, he could not afford to take such liberties. I also knew that as his pieces incrementally increased in skill level, he would struggle more and more if we did not lay good foundations now.

We spent some time in lessons counting and verbalising rhythms out loud. Despite this working well in lessons, Ross avoided practicing in this way at home for six weeks. He said that even though he writes ‘count out loud’ on top of the page, he forgets to read it (lesson interaction, week 15). This is an example of inattentiveness blindness (Most, 2005), whereby Ross was so focused on the musical notes that he failed to see, read and heed his notes that were in plain line of sight. This also illustrates an absence of intention to spend a moment to plan his practice before playing. Ross’s journal shows that he would reflect on not counting and forcibly remind himself to do so, with capital letters and underlines, but this would not result
in new practice choices and behaviours the next time. Some extracts from his journal are below:

The Entertainer—COUNT—I am just guessing because I know the tune LOVE to be able to play it well! (week 20)

Elegy—NOT COUNTING
The Entertainer—not COUNTING
Need to count, not rely on own sense of rhythm (week 21)

Still FLAW IN COUNTING in Elegy (and The Entertainer)
NOTES ARE A LOT EASIER TO LEARN THAN RHYTHM COUNT (week 22)

Ross was going through part of the experiential learning cycle, reflecting and assessing his playing, but this did not extend to completion of the cycle whereby Ross would have used his awareness of strategies required to implement them into his next practice episodes. This linear process, as opposed to cyclic process, is depicted in Figure 6.2.

![Figure 6.2. Linear process of reflecting.](image)

There were also moments where Ross would decide to critically engage and problem solve independently. In week 20, Ross explained that he had been counting away from the piano with his music. I was pleased that he had thought to isolate the rhythm as an exercise away from the piano. He admitted, however, that when he sat at the piano, he went back to fixating on correct notes alone, at the expense of the rhythm. He likened this to his experiences as a surgeon and ‘being sure before you cut’ and wishing to avoid wrong notes (lesson interaction, week 17).
Ross also acknowledged that he was trying to find shortcuts: ‘I’m avoiding having to follow the music. And I’m avoiding knowing where I am on the keyboard…. I just find shortcuts but I don’t think they’re good for my piano’ (final interview). This is an example of a desire for quick progress, and its resultant avoidance of deep focus in favour of surface-level learning (Dahl et al., 2005). This avoidance not only meant that Ross did not address issues of rhythm when at the piano, but also that he did not repeat small sections adequately enough to increase familiarity of notes to make it possible for other musical elements to be addressed. It is interesting that Ross was aware of his tendencies, but his epistemic beliefs interfered with him having the self-directed capacity to address them and make better choices for himself (Zimmerman, 1995).

Repetition is an essential element of learning complex motor skills owing to the nature of skill acquisition and functions of memory. The three stages of skill acquisition are illustrated in Figure 6.3.

**Figure 6.3. Stages of skill acquisition.**

Source: Adapted from Lehmann et al. (2007, p. 79).

Bugos and High (2009) argue that piano novices spend much of their time in the earlier stages, where effort is high, but also acknowledge that that this is not always done effectively, supporting the experiences with my students. Furthermore, there is a resistance to spending time here. As demonstrated by Ross, the unrealistic expectations of ease that adult learners often hold for their musical journeys (A. Taylor, 2011) often means that inadequate time is spent in the first two stages, resulting in frustration when progress is not evident (Wristen, 2006).
Compounding the problem of skipping the focused and repetitive stages of skill acquisition and simply attempting to play through pieces is the function of working memory. Working memory is extremely limited in duration and capacity (Kirschner et al., 2006). It holds up to only seven chunks of information at any one time, and if the skill or information is not rehearsed within 30 seconds, it is forgotten. Once the autonomous stage has been reached, however, skill and information can be recalled with little effort. It is this stage that product-oriented students seek to reach without the necessary effort to get there, but without progressing through the stages, autonomy is not possible.

This understanding of skill acquisition highlights the importance of deliberate practice strategies such as repeating small sections. This was, however, challenging for many of my students. John often explained that he struggled to stop himself at the end of a small section and that he also struggled with the boredom he felt with repetition. This boredom is a sign that he was not critically engaged in assessing his practice outcomes and attempting to make improvements accordingly, as the curiosity required to do so would eliminate boredom. I explained that small sections meant John could focus on how he was moving to notes just as much as on which notes he was playing, as repetition would increase his familiarity of the music and free up attention for other musical elements beyond the notes. John understood this intellectually, but his association with boredom and not being ready to deepen his attention to detail meant this awareness did not influence his practice choices within the study.

Knowing part of the challenge with small sections is setting an intention to stop at a specific place and address specific elements, in week 18, I gave John two post-it notes to place on his music. I explained that before he played, he needed to make a decision about how much he was going to play and to place the post-it notes on his music as roadblocks to the rest of the music. In this way, the first step would be to deliberately plan his practice, and the post-it notes would ensure he followed through with the strategy when playing. An example of how this looks is provided in Figure 6.4.
The following week John explained that he focused on the technique of one small section and that he was aware that the rest of the piece was made of the same patterns. He said he now felt he could apply that to the rest of the piece. This was good insight from John, with the connection being made between strategy adoption (small section), deliberate practice (technique and patterns for achieving flow) and progress (feeling ready to apply this to the rest of the piece). While post-it notes worked well for John, without a reminder from me to use them, he abandoned small section practice. In week 24, John commented, ‘I’m terrible with tending to play the whole piece through. I do play sections more than I used to, but it’s still a struggle’.

Often, students would wait for lessons to address challenges rather than attempt solutions on their own. While I know it takes time and a certain level of musical progress to learn to use effective strategies, I did feel that in an increasing number of cases, students could have started problem solving for themselves more readily.

Often, especially towards the end of the study when we were all more familiar with my new lines of questions, I would ask a question regarding musical concepts such as timing, patterns, fingering, intervals or what strategies they could try. Students would answer and work through the challenge, while I did little more than direct their focus. Being the final two months of the study, these questions were no longer new and strange for students to answer. But without my prompts, it seemed that if they were stuck at home, they did not ask themselves the same questions. Georgina, Ross and Jenny all mentioned in their final interviews that they felt they could not problem solve as easily at home as when I was there to guide them in lessons:

I just look at the piece and I don’t even know what this is, I can’t work it out. It’s easier with you… I guess I lack confidence. (Georgina, final interview)
Occasionally it takes me a long time trying to work out a little section… If I bring the problem to you then you sort it out in two seconds. (Jenny, final interview)

I’m not all that good at solving something where I can’t find the next note. There’s often a simple solution, but I don’t get that myself. I’m still relying on you to say ‘Well, why don’t you…’ (Ross, final interview)

Factors that affected students’ ability to solve problems independently include a lack of know-how, lack of confidence, and a lack of desire to expend the amount of focus and time required. From my perspective as a teacher, not knowing how to do something or how to figure out how to do something is the most authentic reason for waiting until the lesson; the other two seem like excuses. However, remembering that learning the piano is a hobby for these students, their perceptions of my role as their teacher included offering solutions to their challenges so that they did not have to ‘go it alone’. For Allison and Sean, the two students who displayed strong analytical skills, solving problems was all part of their approach.

6.3.2 Problem solving independently.

In Chapter 5, I explained the depth of Allison’s reflections in lessons and how evident it was that her home practice was deliberate in nature. She focused on technical requirements, chose helpful strategies and assessed how her practice episodes sounded and felt on each repetition. Allison also sought external resources that could help her to solve problems rather than waiting for me to guide her. In the fourth month of the study, she started learning the first movement of Moonlight Sonata and found one of the large intervals a challenge to play comfortably. During home practice, she decided to view some videos to see how other players dealt with this section. In her week 18 lesson, she shared a solution: ‘I found one guy who uses his left hand to cross here’. She demonstrated with a newfound ease.

This was not the only time Allison consulted recordings. She often compared several performances of the same piece to examine pedalling and expression options and to determine how she wanted the piece to sound when she played. If she compared her ability levels with those of the professional performers she viewed, they came across as problems to solve rather than a personal attack on her current ability. For example, in her lesson in week 35 Allison commented that she wished her trills would be as fluent as those on recordings. Rather than this adversely affecting her motivation, she used this gap in her ability to seek new understanding.
of technical requirements to produce physically effortless trills. This included finding blogs online and trialling different techniques with me in her lessons.

Allison often sought blogs on technique and discussed these openly with me in lessons. I asked about her motivation to do so in her final interview:

I guess I’m always looking for shortcuts…. You know, if I can’t—rather than my trying 100 different ways, or what is a way I should try—someone’s obviously done this before.

Seeking shortcuts, unlike Ross, helped Allison’s ability to problem solve and practice efficiently and highlights the self-directed approach Allison used towards her practice. Chaffin and Lemieux (2004) liken effective strategies to shortcuts, reducing the quantity of practice needed to see improvements, resulting in ‘faster and better learning’ (p. 23). This is evident with much of Allison’s strategy choices, which through our lesson discussions appeared to be deliberate and focused. It is interesting that unlike the other students, Allison did not take for granted that I, as the teacher, knew best. In her interview, Allison also commented, ‘I think I question and challenge you. And I really want to make sure that I actually understand’. This thirst for deeper understanding is the motivating force that separates Allison from some other students.

Similarly to Allison, Sean approached his practice pragmatically, focusing on strategy and skill development. He chose to approach reading the score much like a puzzle, giving himself many directions to follow on the score. An example of his annotations is in Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5. Sean’s annotations demonstrating his problem-solving process.
This example illustrates that Sean planned his actions at the piano meticulously. His thought processes and problem-solving strategies are all evident here, with technical reminders such as balance and opening from his thumb, directions such as finding a particular finger, reminders of staccatos, and how he should move his hand. It is evident that Sean asked himself many questions on patterns, movements and interpretations of the score, much like the questions I asked in lessons.

While Sean’s depth of thought displays advanced critical thinking and micro planning in relation to his practice, I worried that Sean would be so busy reading his annotations that it would hinder his ability to read the music fluently. Sean assured me in his final interview that once he is familiar with the score he no longer reads his notes, but focuses on the music. It appears that his annotations gave him confidence and security.

Both Allison and Sean’s motivation to understand drove their practice choices and allowed them to focus on details necessary for deliberate practice. In Allison’s case, this included searching for solutions to her challenges through external resources. Other students also consulted external resources for inspiration. Their use of these, however, was not always helpful to their learning.

6.3.3 Autonomous consultation of resources.

Autonomy is an element of self-direction, whereby students act independently to address their perceived learning needs and/or uncover resources to help them do so. The reverse is not inherently true; it is possible to make autonomous choices without the presence of self-directed—i.e. critical—thought, reflection and action. This becomes apparent when examining students’ autonomous choices to consult external resources, such as audio recordings and YouTube videos of pieces being learned, to help with their practice. The examples below illustrate the various motivations behind such actions, the resultant practice strategies employed, and the associated learning outcomes.

Recordings of performances, while useful for students to familiarise themselves with the music and to make informed choices regarding expression and technical facility, can be a double-edged sword. Jenny initially used recordings to prematurely replicate the performed speed of her pieces. When I was trying to slow Jenny down in her week 18 lesson, she commented, ‘I’ve been listening to the YouTube clip that I like and trying to play like that’. Over the coming weeks, I made
reference to interviews with pianists who advocated very slow and deliberate practice regardless of their level of skill, exposing Jenny to new information that might challenge her current perceptions (Mezirow, 1997). Jenny seemed to let go of her need for speed the more we discussed this in lessons, and in week 26, Jenny shared with me a discovery she had made at home. She had found another YouTube video of the piece she was learning, but this one was a tutorial-style video that featured a pianist playing very slowly so that students could play along. This example highlights how video recordings were a source of motivation for Jenny. With extra understanding of the importance of slow practice, and that it is not a sign of insufficient ability but a strategy that even professionals use, Jenny autonomously sought external resources that would fulfil her need for support at home. This indicated a growth in self-direction as a result of critical discourse (Mezirow, 2003).

Knowing the ability of external resources to confirm strategy choices and serve as motivation for Jenny, I shared some of the blogs that Allison had shared with me regarding highlighting motifs in Bach inventions, and the importance of sectional practice. She said that she found the marking of the score useful, and I commended her on following through with the strategy. She responded, ‘You see, you told me to do that’. This accountability to an ‘authority figure’ seemed important to Jenny. In week 21, she came into her lesson explaining that she needs me to tell her to do scales every day. I asked her which scales she would like to do, and she said c# minor because that is the key of the piece she is learning. If she knew what she wanted to do, and how often she wanted to do it, I asked why she needed me to tell her to do so. She responded, ‘It’s not written in my book’. I asked if she could write it in for herself. She responded, ‘Ooh no. If you don’t tell me to, I can’t do it’. While this illustrates a growing knowledge of good practice choices, it also shows a lack of motivation to implement them without external accountability.

While Jenny was open to adapting her speed choices and resources that she consulted in order to progress her playing, Ross was not so willing to admit that slow practice was necessary. For example, in week 18, Ross said he had been trying to speed up his pieces. Knowing how much was yet to be done on them, I asked how he had approached it. He explained that he had been listening to a recording and trying to match that speed: ‘I just forced myself. If that’s how fast they play it, that’s how fast I should play it. If they can do it, I can do it’. This displays his high self-efficacy in terms of believing he was capable, but also how his problematic epistemic beliefs
around talent and quick learning meant he was unwilling to engage in the middle steps that would lead to this performance speed. This is further compounded by his unfair comparisons and self-judgements against professionals: ‘How bad I am—I can’t believe I’m this bad. I go to YouTube and I think, ‘I can’t do that!’’ (lesson interaction, week 22).

There is a discrepancy between Ross’s self-assuredness, which has come from a lifetime of seemingly little effort in his academic and professional life in order to achieve great results, and his experiences with learning to play the piano. As his high self-efficacy is underpinned by quick epistemic learning beliefs, Ross experienced much cognitive dissonance and struggled to accept the effort and detailed focus on strategies that learning piano requires. While Mezirow (2003) explains that cognitive dissonance can be the catalyst for transformation of mindsets, this did not occur for Ross and his approach remained mostly unchanged through the study.

Comparisons to polished performances can prove useful for uncovering gaps in understanding. In week 34, Georgina and I were working on ironing out pauses in her playing. She commented, ‘It doesn’t sound like anything. When I hear it on YouTube it sounds great!’ What is notable is that Georgina had judged her output, not herself, indicating a lack of unhelpful judgements that were evident with Jenny and Ross. As with Jenny and Ross, Georgina thought the answer lay with ‘speed’, but there was an element that she had missed. I slowly demonstrated two different ways and Georgina exclaimed, ‘Ah, the lifts!’ Experiencing the difference this made to her playing encouraged Georgina, as she agreed that it could be both slow and musical. Georgina’s focus in her practice moving forwards was on using the phrasing to move well at the piano and she progressed well in the coming weeks.

Consulting external resources does not need to be piece-specific to be useful to musical progress and motivation. While John’s practice equated to roughly one to three hours per day, John explained, ‘I’m a beggar to fool around’, and that in reality, only one hour would be good practice. Being retired, John was afforded the luxury of time that other students were not, and explained, ‘I will put in some time in the morning, and some time in the afternoon. I’ll be doing it twice a day nearly infallibly’. But John worried occasionally that he spent too much time doing other musical activities. He devoted two to three hours a day to listening to music and following along in scores, creating arrangements in Finale typesetting program, and
researching background to the styles he loved and the composers and performers that he admired. For John’s level, one hour per day of practice was ample, and his other activities confirmed his love of his craft. John’s strong passion for jazz music from the 1920s to 1950s was not only what brought him to pursue the piano in the first place, but also a great source of continuing motivation for all of his musical endeavours.

The above examples serve to illustrate that autonomous choices may or may not stem from critical insight into learning needs or result in critical reflection and action regarding practice behaviours. While consulting external sources can motivate and inform a student’s practice, they can be detrimental when driven by unhelpful epistemic beliefs or low self-efficacy. In these instances, external sources can be a catalyst for unfair comparisons, self-judgment and choosing unhelpful practice strategies in a bid to prematurely replicate the finished performance. A context in which a student can potentially enjoy simply playing is with pieces that they have already learned to play. This, however, was not often taken advantage of by students.

6.3.4 Playing versus practising.

As well as practising, playing old pieces is something I regularly encourage my students to do. After all, this is where the fruits of their labour can be enjoyed. Lehmann et al. (2007) explain that this type of non-deliberate practice may not build skill, but can increase motivation through self-expression and relaxation. Students’ opinions and experiences indicate that this is perhaps not always the case.

In Jenny’s lesson in week 11, I asked her if she ever plays for enjoyment rather than feeling like she always needs to be practicing when she sits at the piano. Jenny asked what the good of that was. I explained that it does ‘wonders for the soul’, but Jenny looked dubious. Upon returning to a piece from a couple of months earlier, it quickly became evident that she had forgotten a lot of what was involved in its execution. Rather than giving an opportunity for self-expression, it had resulted in a lack of confidence in her ability.

Playing finished pieces regularly is important for consolidating and retaining skills learned. This is especially so for novices who might not have practiced in the most conducive way to foster long-term memory and automation of pieces learned. Ross, the only student to enjoy playing finished pieces, commented in his interview that he was ‘surprised and shocked’ at how quickly he forgets them if he does not go
back and play them regularly. Doing so seemed important to Ross, as it was a chance for him to build his self-esteem in relation to his playing. Specifically, there were three pieces that Ross continued to return to each week throughout the study, as well as the most immediate two pieces that he had completed.

When I asked other students to revisit a finished piece as part of their practice, this was often avoided. Sean especially cited limited time as a reason for neglecting to do so, or being too focused on new tasks. Allison and Jenny, when they did return to old pieces, realised how dissatisfied they were with their playing and returned to practice mode. Likewise, John commented in his interview:

It would be wrong for me to say that I can sit down and play a piece and feel comfortable about it, or getting a great kick out of it. I’m not at that stage. I’m not free enough at the piano to really experience that, I think.

If I offered smaller pieces of a lesser level so that students could achieve this freedom, they did not see the value in it (see Chapter 4). They placed more value in improving their skill levels, which equated to playing harder pieces or learning new notes. Students did not view playing simple pieces well as part of the equation for progress.

Interestingly, when it came to practising their current pieces, most students spent more time replaying the sections they had learned first and were comfortable with than with newer sections or addressing specific challenges. Students seemed to avoid playing old pieces then, not because of the lack of value that students placed on enjoying playing, but because recalling how to play them was actually more involved than simply sitting and playing.

Approaching practice is as much about attitude and mindset as it is about implementing good strategies; the two appear to be inextricably linked. Furthermore, if a student chooses effective practice strategies, but fails to listen critically to the outcomes (Lehmann et al. 2007), the effectiveness of the strategy diminishes. Likewise, autonomous problem solving or consulting external resources to address their learning needs is only as effective as the level of critical problem-solving skills the student possesses. This is also something that increases with skill level over time, through exposure, guidance in lessons and experience with practice, and as confidence builds. What is evident from the explorations throughout this section on quality of practice is that each student was motivated by the notion of skill
development and what they thought that looked like in terms of practice choices at the time.

Upon designing the home practice journal, I had hoped that the reflective questions on page two would prompt students to critically examine their practice choices and that subsequent insights would inform future practice decisions. As discussed in section 6.1.1, this was not necessarily the case. The use of the journal, however, offered insight into students’ practice that might not have been uncovered otherwise.

6.4 Use of the Home Practice Journal

As well as rating feelings and goal achievement, students were also asked to respond to three reflective questions within their journal:

- What went well?
- What needs more work?
- Did any questions could out of your practice?

While I could ask more specific questions in lessons, it was a limitation of the journal structure that questions were general in nature. This was to avoid burdening students with a large volume of extra work in their already limited practice time. It was up to students how they responded to these questions. I chose not to micro manage their use or suggest what they should be sharing unless they asked for guidance in lessons. Jenny chose not to engage with these reflective questions, Allison sporadically made comments, and the other four students completed the activity each week. This section discusses types of responses given and insights they reveal regarding students’ practice and their perceptions of completing this task.

6.4.1 Types of responses to the reflective questions.

Responses to the reflective questions, when not referring to lifestyle interferences and practice time, fall into three categories: general, specific and emotive/judgemental. Students, whether deliberately or coincidentally, referred to activities, strategies or feedback on their progress in relation to the items listed in their goals, highlighting that setting weekly goals helped to focus their reflections.

John’s responses in the first month of journaling consisted of general remarks of progress, such as ‘I believe both my goals were a bit better than they have been’ (journal entry, week 20). There was one moment of deeper insight regarding
strategies and approaches that worked well for John, such as ‘chords better once I put key signature to them. Lulu counting the green passages helped’ (journal entry, week 22), but the rest of his entries on what went well consisted of titles of the pieces he was working on. This is not to say that John did not continue to implement strategies, but illustrates that he potentially did not think to share them in his journal.

Like John, Sean celebrated improvement of pieces, but included more detail, such as ‘managed to play Menuet fairly fluently’ (journal entry, week 19). His responses to what needs more work also consisted of specific feedback from his practice trials. For example, ‘Sonatina = need to be fluid with both hands, also keep proper pacing’ (Sean, journal entry, week 23). On two occasions, Sean’s journal entries illustrates the depth of his critical analysis:

Trying to think of the best way to make both hands work well—relative patterns? e.g. play LH at the highest RH note on 4th line, 1st page (week 23)

I discovered patterns in the piece which helped with smooth playing (e.g. mirror image of left and right hands on p. 2, top line) (week 31).

His questions were always related to the aim of fluidity and moving comfortably while playing, indicating that he was task-oriented and focused on understanding what was needed to improve. These types of reflections proved useful for directing me to his perceived learning needs in lessons.

Georgina was also task-focused, primarily commenting on strategies used under the ‘what went well’ section, such as ‘practising smaller sections to iron out pauses’ (journal entry, week 37), and for what needed work, outlining specific challenges to overcome, such as ‘fingering is off in some places’ (journal entry, week 28).

Unlike John and Sean, there is also a clear example of Georgina’s insights regarding her learning needs, and how responding to them through goal setting with her in lessons influenced her learning outcomes. For the first two months of journalling, Georgina consistently cited ‘scales’ as needing more work, and in lessons admitted to avoiding practising them. In week 24, Georgina clarified her struggle in her journal as needing to get ‘knowledge of sharps for scales’. This was useful feedback and came at a time that I was becoming aware of my predilection for moving too quickly through concepts and covering too much with Georgina in her lessons, as discussed in Chapter 5. In the following weeks, we reduced focus to one
scale per week. In week 28, in response to ‘what went well’, Georgina commented, ‘only working on one scale—less stress’.

Georgina’s journal also illustrates that one of the causes of her lack of confidence stems from her inability to retain information from lessons. On four occasions, Georgina noted questions about, or commented on, forgetting things covered in lessons. An example can be seen in week 20, when Georgina explained in her journal that she ‘forgot timing for cannon’ and asked, ‘What was the technical hint about?’ This confirms that teaching does not equal learning. It was difficult for me to realise this at the time in lessons, as Georgina followed along with activities and answered questions readily. I had thus assumed that learning was taking place. Her difficulty in recalling and making sense of what was covered, however, illustrates that this is not always the case.

Georgina’s self-doubt is also evident in her comments such as ‘possibly forgetting flats and sharps … Possibly I have the wrong rhythm’ (journal entry, week 32). If Georgina was not aware whether she was playing correctly or not, she was not able to give herself the necessary feedback to address or fix aspects of her playing that were incorrect, or to comfortably consolidate aspects that were correct. This explains why Georgina found it easier to wait and receive assistance in lessons.

In all of the examples above, Georgina made judgements of progress in pieces or activities chosen. This is not the case for Ross, whose journal depicts him passing judgement based on ideal standards and the difficulty of pieces. Some examples are offered below:

- Hush Song and Play Party close to acceptable—Elegy not so good (week 14)
- Every new piece seems to have some skill the lack of which stops me just getting in and playing it. (week 27)
- Minuet not too difficult (week 33)
- Mill—a difficult piece (week 33)
- Barcarolle—started to realise how difficult it is (week 39)
- Really difficult—basically spent all my practice trying to play this piece (week 39)

Ross also used the first page retrospectively rather than for forward-looking notes. The first example below shows that he sometimes chose counter-intuitive
strategies, but along with the second example, was also aware of the challenges that needed addressing.

   Little Hush Song—been practising faster to force myself to be ready for the next bar and not pause (week 18)
   Elegy—B section problem with not learning full beat at start of bar and instead leaving a full beat at the end before the beginning the next (week 18)
   Little Hush Song—still not getting the rests (both hands)—take a look at the keyboard to stop the uncertainty (week 20)

   Despite his awareness, much of Ross’s comments were unhelpful judgements of his abilities, such as:
   Sight reading—tutor thinks I am better than I do (week 21)
   Poor performance—will have to READ THE MUSIC and get my speed sorted NOT TOO FAST AS I AM NOT THAT GOOD (week 24)

   His emotive experiences with practice and learning to play the piano in general are evident here. Insights into strategies that he utilised and found useful were absent, despite his awareness of what was needed. It is clear that Ross was reflecting, albeit in a judgemental rather than critical way.

   For the students who regularly completed the reflective questions in the journal, types of responses were consistent throughout the study. This means that the journal was not a tool that fostered a change in reflection styles or the focus of their reflections: Those who thought critically, reflected critically, and those who thought emotively, reflected emotively.

   6.4.2 Experiences and perspectives on the home practice journal.

   During the students’ final interviews, I asked about their experiences with the journal and their thoughts on its usefulness. As I had collected the journals two weeks prior to these interviews, students had returned to a blank exercise book to write lesson notes in if they so chose, and reflective questions were no longer given in written form.

   No one found reflecting difficult. Georgina explained that reflections did not take her long to complete and that she would usually fill them out just prior to her lesson. This potentially indicates that she was completing the exercise out of obligation rather than out of perceiving any personal benefit. Allison and Ross
explained that they already reflected without the need to write their thoughts down. Allison shared her reflections in lessons, as discussed in Chapter 5, which related to her approach to challenges and strategies she had employed and thoughts on what she required assistance with. Ross’s non-written reflections were in relation to what he had practiced and what he should try to achieve leading up to his next lesson. He explained that he would think about the week’s practice the day before his next lesson:

I’d try to go through what we’d done at the lesson last week and what I’d managed to achieve and work out whether I wanted to try to cover [tasks] that I hadn’t paid any attention to at all, or just ignore it and try to do the piece I’d been concentrating on a bit better. That’s always the decision to make. (final interview)

Ross also explained that prior to the study, he kept a record of how much time he spent practicing. This new type of journal exposed to him the futility of this task: ‘That doesn’t mean anything if you’re not achieving!’

John and Sean both commented on needing to think through their responses depending on what had unfolded in their practice that week:

In periods when I did nothing [reflecting] was very easy (laughs). But yeah, when I did get things accomplished, I had to think about what to write. Because there is a fair bit I could write. (Sean, final interview)

It depended on what I was playing, what I’d had difficulties with and so on. If it had been an easier week, obviously the queries and questions weren’t so penetrating. Whereas if I was having difficulties, it led to more between you and I in the following lesson to a degree. (John, final interview)

John was the only student to mention that reflecting was useful for the direction of his next lesson. The planning phase of the journal, however, received much more positive feedback. Georgina explained, ‘It was the goals that were better than the reflections’. She continued to describe the difference the journal made to her practice:

When I had that little journal, I was more focused on getting outcomes to write in the book. Because there was more of a focus on having goals, thinking about what I wanted to achieve…. It was more orderly. I like to see things organised like that. Just—I guess always having in my mind that I
knew what I wanted to achieve with each piece. And it just seemed clearer. Without it I feel all over the place, like what am I trying to achieve?

Allison also commented on the benefits of planning for the week: ‘It’s a fantastic idea. There was a lot of benefit in taking that five minutes out’. When I asked about her limited use of the journal, she explained, ‘I appreciate the value of structure. Doesn’t mean I enjoy it…. It’s a necessary evil’ (final interview). The study inspired Allison to want to go out and get another journal so she could continue to plan her practice.

Sean and John both had positive learning experiences with writing their notes during lessons, explaining that it made them think about what they were doing more and helped their notes to be more memorable. Conversely, Georgina faced a challenge with this:

I don’t like writing my own notes…. My handwriting is really messy and it’s like I don’t want to go back and look at my own handwriting, you know? My mess.

Despite Georgina’s opinion of her writing, she did write her own notes and, as stated previously, found them useful in structuring and focusing her practice. Jenny, as discussed in Chapter 5, also struggled with this task and asked me to continue writing notes for her. Jenny, John and Sean also commented that the notes in their journals helped to structure their practice, explaining that they consulted their notes through the week as needed and chose their practice tasks accordingly.

As a teacher, it was encouraging to hear that students consulted their lesson notes and attempted to implement the strategies written and to work towards their goals. Given the avoidance and lack of awareness of outcomes of practice trials and details that required work, it is evident that this is not necessarily enough to ensure practice is deliberate. Unless the intention to act, as seen through reading notes to choose practice focus, results in both deliberate action and reflection on that action, outcomes will not be as fruitful as they could otherwise be. These two steps in the experiential learning cycle are key elements of deliberate practice and take a great deal of discipline, focus and curiosity as opposed to going through the motions. They appear to be the biggest challenges that students faced. In relation to lesson interactions and discussions around practice, as discussed in Chapter 5, lessons certainly helped to expose students to strategies and guide them through the processes involved. Resistance to replicating strategies used in lessons at home
varied between students, but there was an evident trend through discussion in lessons that the use of good practice strategies was increasing.

Despite most students facing barriers to deliberate practice, it was clear in lessons that students were still progressing, regardless of how slowly they were doing so. Perhaps more important to their longevity as students than my perspectives on their progress, however, is their perceptions of progress.

6.5 Students’ Overall Feelings of Progress

As stated in Chapter 1, one of the most common reasons adults cease piano lessons is a perceived lack of skill (Cooper, 2001; Wristen, 2006). It is thus important as a teacher for me to understand students’ perceptions of their skill development and musical progress. If they felt they were progressing and achieving their aims, then the likelihood of enjoying the process and continuing with their musical journeys would increase.

In their interviews following the study, I asked students how they would describe their learning journeys over the last nine months, and also what successes they had experienced in that time. Their comments highlight elements of progress that were most meaningful to each student. Some of their responses are below:

It’s been a rocky ride. Sometimes you do get lapses in motivation. But then there are times when I’m really gung ho about it. I guess I get—I’m pretty productive…. It’s been enlightening as well—in knowing how to approach pieces…. Instead of just looking at a piece and just picking out each note, actually thinking about the techniques that you can use to connect the notes and make it sound like a professional piece. Yeah, a lot of those techniques I didn’t know before. (Sean, final interview)

I think I’ve come a long way. And I think you lead me very well through things that I actually want to do. So I’ve enjoyed it too. (Jenny, final interview)

Having done—only been doing this for two and a half years and already at level one [completed the grade one exam]…. I think it’s [progress is] big. (Georgina, final interview)

I think, in all honesty, quite a bit of progress…. I think I feel more comfortable at the piano—finding notes, reading music, the whole gamut of it is more comfortable in a sense, yes. (John, final interview)
When viewing their progress over the course of the study, students were able to see that their skills were developing. This is in contrast to students’ weekly ratings of their practice where they would often feel disappointed about their progress. Allison and Ross, while also recognising their progress over the course of the study, articulated their discomfort with it not being as readily perceivable or as quick as they would like. In her final interview, Allison described the impact that lifestyle factors had on her progress:

Getting the time to actually practice and be able to concentrate and not be tired. And not letting potentially the lack of progress in that situation stress me out. Because I do. Occasionally I go this is just—disappointment.

Overall, she still saw a growth in her technical facility at the piano:

I think I’ve been very focused on the technical. Which I’m good with because I sort of now think I’ve got to the point where okay, that’s always going to be building. (Allison, final interview)

She also commented that looking back she felt that she had progressed a lot since the start of the study. I reminded her that in month six, she had commented in one of her lessons that her progress was ‘frustratingly slow’. I asked whether this was still the case, and she responded:

No, I think I’ve had a couple of good—no. Just the last—everything’s been a bit easier. My hands just feel better…. It motivates me because I think, finally, I’m getting to where I can see the outcomes. (Allison, final interview)

Ross’s comments regarding progress highlight the conflict he felt between his expectations of immediate tangible progress and an overall sense of progress over time:

I thought I’d be able to look at the music and say, ‘that’s that, and that’s that’, but I can’t…. I’m still rocked by how difficult it is…. I’m getting better slowly. I’m just—I’m just stunned at how much there is in it.

I think I’m progressing reasonably well. Because I get a bit better each time. I was just looking for that rush, but it’s not there…. I have to be satisfied with what I’ve done. (Ross, final interview)
Ross was the only student to also make general comments regarding progress in his journal. These further highlight his conflicting perspectives regarding progress, his commitment to learning, and a belief in innate talent:

I still only improve slowly with practice, but I do improve (week 28)

Keep going—one day I will find it easier (I hope) (week 32)

Still struggling with neglecting music (playing, at any rate) for 68 years. Like an old man going to live in a new country, great difficulty learning this new language. I spent all weekend (from Thursday midday) trying to put Barcarolle together as a piece. At that rate, I would take a lifetime to learn Chopin’s Polonaise (The Heroic)! Either I am going to have to find some hidden talent, or I am in for a difficult time! (week 39)

In his final interview, Ross offered insight into the underlying factor influencing his attitude:

I understand why so many adults don’t do it. The story that everybody says is that you’ll really struggle because you learn so much better when you’re young. I don’t know that that’s true. The thing you haven’t got when you’re young, you haven’t got that big chip on your shoulder that you’re good. And you hate being seen in a humiliating, incompetent light…. I just have to get used to it. I just have to swallow it. There’s no way around it because I’m just not brilliant. I haven’t picked it up like I almost half thought I would.

Ross was the only student in the first round of interviews to mention expectations of quick and easy progress. At that stage, Ross had only been learning for three months. Despite his awareness that his initial experiences were far from his expectations, he was unwilling to change his expectations at that time. His comments illustrate a new understanding of the difference between his expectations, his perceived reality, and the emotions involved in his learning journey.

Jenny, Allison, and Sean each cited pieces that they had learned as perceived successes. When asked about frustrations, as well as slow progress (John) and ageing hands not functioning well (Jenny), John and Jenny both mentioned being dissatisfied with their playing:

I’m still not satisfied…. Yes [I can see myself being satisfied]. You gave me some good tips [in my lesson] today. I’ll get there. (Jenny, final interview)
Satisfied is a word I shouldn’t use at all, because you know, my goals are so much higher than it … Because obviously the people I admire very much about playing the piano, they’re so much above me that to be satisfied with my own playing just is not true. (John, final interview)

Dissatisfaction with current ability can in itself be a motivator to continue to seek to improve. As mentioned previously, despite these feelings of unrest, John and Jenny, along with all students, could still see progress overall.

6.6 Key Insights into Students’ Home Practice

The issues impacting deliberate and self-directed home practice are multifaceted. Home practice is not only affected by mood and external factors such as competing commitments of work and family, but also by confidence and trust in one’s ability, and expectations for success versus perceptions of experiences.

While the planning page of the journal was well received and described as useful by my students, the reflections page did not receive the same positive feedback and was not seen as useful to their practice. Written reflective responses in the home practice journal were often judgemental or descriptive, as opposed to offering critical insight into learning. Completing this task often led to feelings of disappointment or dissatisfaction with progress made on a weekly basis. This was most likely due to the weekly nature of the reflections task and the fact that it was removed from actual practice sessions. As such, I feel that the questions given were too general to yield useful insights and were not linked strongly enough to the strategies chosen, the practice plan on the first page, and their actual practice sessions. I also did not offer extra training on how to reflect critically on their practice for fear of placing further burden on their already limited practice time, and because I felt that this was being covered in our lesson interactions together. Despite this, reflections on the week’s practice did open up conversations in lessons that could elicit deeper insights that could inform relevant interactions within lessons, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Irrespective of the quantity and quality of home practice reported, and the level of critical engagement evident, and despite frustrations and disappointments felt along the way, upon completion of the study, each student commented on seeing musical progress over the course of the study. They also shared their successes and achievements, such as the pieces they had played and feeling more confident at the
piano, or more comfortable with certain musical techniques. Each student also spoke of future goals and the fact that they could not see a reason they would stop their musical journeys. The following chapter addresses the research questions posed in Chapter 1, and discusses the overall outcomes of this study.
Chapter 7: Final Reflections

As I arrive at the end of this study and reflect on what I have learned, I am reminded of the broad range of emotions I felt throughout this study. It was at times confusing, stressful and unnerving. There were also times of clarity, inspiration and insight, most often as a result of the discomforts I experienced. The study began with an intention to focus on my students’ learning. It quickly became about my own learning just as much as theirs. From the outset, I was not prepared for the extent to which I would need to address my own frames of reference and uncover my subconscious assumptions, which, by definition, I was unaware of until then. It became clear, however, that this was unavoidable if I seriously wished to better facilitate learning in my students.

The primary aim of this study was to understand how I could better facilitate my adult piano students’ learning. In Chapter 1, I highlighted the emphasis on self-direction for adult students and the internal challenges of frustrations and unrealistic expectations that adult piano students face. It was important for me to not just conceptually understand the implications of these for teaching, but to also examine my use of strategies and the outcomes on my students’ learning. This would allow me to fully understand their implications for my teaching. As such, my research was driven by three key questions:

1. What role do mindsets play in adult students’ engagement with their learning?
2. What pedagogical approach can foster the skill-sets and mindsets required for self-direction?
3. How do I effectively examine my teaching and the impact of my pedagogical decisions on my students’ learning to ensure I am meeting their needs?

Using insights from the literature in relation to self-direction, mindsets and transformative pedagogy investigated in Chapter 2, I arrived at a pedagogical framework in Chapter 3. Using a suite of qualitative research methods, I implemented this framework with six of my adult piano students over nine months and captured my experiences as a teacher and my students’ experiences with their learning journeys. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I explored three main themes relevant to
piano study: content and repertoire, lesson interactions, and home practice. Within each of these three chapters, I discussed the implementation of teaching and learning strategies from my pedagogical framework, and offered an interpretation of teaching and learning behaviours and outcomes as they pertained to the insights identified within the literature.

This chapter responds to my research questions. It provides pedagogical insights in relation to facilitating deep learning in adult piano students, and the insights gained from taking a teacher-as-researcher study design. It also offers implications for future research, including potential improvements to data collection methods, a call for more teacher-as-researcher study designs and implementation and investigation of my pedagogical framework. The first research question pertained to the impact of adult students’ mindsets on their learning.

7.1 What Role Do Mindsets Play in Adult Students’ Engagement with Their Learning?

In Chapter 2, I discussed the different facets of mindsets that influence a student’s ability to focus and engage effectively with their learning. These include motivation, as determined through perceived values and self-efficacy levels, epistemic beliefs, goal orientations, and attributions of outcomes. Each of these, as discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, had varying degrees of impact on students’ learning choices and level of engagement with strategies.

I initially expected that focusing on developing the skills of critical thinking, acting and reflecting associated with deliberate practice and self-direction would in turn create new learning behaviours in students. What arose was the understanding that mindsets, such as self-efficacy and epistemic beliefs, are a powerful precursor to learning behaviours. Focusing on developing the skill sets involved in deliberate practice without first understanding or addressing problematic mindsets is not in itself a successful way to increase active engagement in learning.

The individual histories, educational backgrounds, musical backgrounds, professional backgrounds, expectations, critical reflection skills, communication styles and immediate environmental and internal conditions each impacted on lesson interactions and home practice choices. Each of these contributed to a student’s mindset at any given moment.
Despite the uniqueness of the above factors and their combination at any given moment, there were two mindsets that presented themselves in students across all findings that had impact on their ability to engage fully with their learning: low self-efficacy, and in the case of one student, a firm belief in talent. My findings support Jones’ (2009) claim that self-efficacy is the most important determinant for knowledge and skill to result in action. They also support Wiezbicki-Stevens’ (2009) assertion that emotions, such as low self-confidence, fear of judgement, and fear of not living up to their or the teacher’s perceived expectations, which contribute to low self-efficacy, play a large role in determining a student’s metacognitive ability. Furthermore, in the case of one student, his epistemic beliefs of talent adversely affected his recognition of the need for deliberate strategies, as well as his ability to focus on constructive feedback and make deliberate choices around his approach to learning, supporting the literature on mindsets in Chapter 2 (e.g. Dweck, 2000; Thompson & Musket, 2005). This appears to have stemmed from his experiences with success in his career and other hobbies earlier in life, illustrating how prior experiences shape future expectations and epistemic beliefs. This in turn adversely affected his self-image and self-esteem in relation to his playing, as he struggled to reconcile his expectations and his experiences.

Self-efficacy was much easier to address with students than epistemic beliefs. While students’ low self-efficacy had many contributing factors, including perceptions of difficulty, mood—both emotional and physiological—environmental factors and expectations of a successful outcome, these are all less stable than epistemic beliefs and were thus more malleable through interactions with students. After recognising that my old pedagogical framework involved a focus on the musical needs of the student as perceived by me, I realised the importance of starting with the person, rather than the music. To teach the person first, the music second, and the instrument third is something I have been aware of and have conceptually agreed with since first hearing it in a pedagogy lecture in 2009. However, it was not until I realised my actions were at odds with this that changes in my teaching started to occur.

7.2 What Pedagogical Approach Can Foster the Skill-Sets and Mindsets Required for Self-Direction?

The starting point of my pedagogical design for this study was transformative pedagogy, as its focus on deep learning and student-teacher collaboration (Carey et
al., 2013) aligned with the aim of developing the reflective and purposeful decisions and skills required for self-direction (Knowles et al., 2011). Intending to create the ‘culture of inquiry’ (Snyder & Snyder, 2008) that would promote the curiosity and engagement required for deep learning and deliberate practice, I developed a pedagogical framework that aimed to involve students in all aspects of their learning. This included involving students in repertoire selection, actively engaging them in lessons through collaboration, guided discovery and problem solving, and asking reflective questions. It also included using lessons to plan home practice and encouraging students to reflect on their learning independently between lessons. This was facilitated by the introduction of the home practice journal.

Implementing the initial pedagogical framework created for this study and reflecting on the resultant learning outcomes in my students resulted in many new insights in relation to teaching in a transformative way. Once I realised that my initial approach to lessons was at odds with my pedagogical intention of putting the student at the centre of lessons, my teaching strategies evolved. I started to value students’ input more and learned to listen as much as I talked. Allowing students space to talk created a safe and supportive environment, deepened rapport with students and removed the performative expectations that used to be associated with lessons. We found repertoire that most suited each individual student’s goals and values through this process. I learned that it was more important to align repertoire selection with the benefits students sought rather than the external performative standards by which I was accustomed to measuring student learning.

A large factor in fostering mindsets conducive to engaging students with their learning was the shift in who controlled the direction of the lesson. Using feedback from students around their home practice and perceived challenges, as well as around their repertoire preferences, proved useful in two ways. Firstly, it shifted the emphasis to the student’s experiences and desires, and interpretations of their learning. I learned to spend more time in discussions with students around the factors that impact self-efficacy, and to acknowledge and explore their feelings in relation to learning experiences. This helped to increase self-efficacy and motivation, and thus the ability to engage. Secondly, it helped to foster the collaborative and reciprocal approach to lessons that is advocated for in transformative pedagogy (Carey et al., 2013), whereby interdependence and connectivity is key (Merriam et al., 2012). Rather than expecting the students to simply heed my feedback and guidance in
relation to their playing, I now relied on students to guide me to their perceived needs, challenges, values and goals. This increase in rapport created a nurturing lesson environment in which students felt safer and more willing to engage without fear of judgement. This increased their confidence in engaging with learning tasks and decreased the nervousness and fear of disappointment that can adversely affect engagement in lessons.

Transformative pedagogy is a recent concept and one that is yet to be used widely within the context of one-to-one piano studio teaching. The fundamental value underpinning a transformative pedagogical approach is the desire to create a reciprocal and interdependent relationship where the student is involved in all choices relating to their learning. This is certainly not new advice, and mirrors the fundamental principle of transformative learning and self-direction outlined in Chapter 2. In specific relation to adult piano students, however, I found that a greater emphasis on the role of discussions, rapport building, and acknowledging and supporting students’ experiences and emotions in relation to their learning was needed before engaged learning could ensue. The outline below details the approach I developed through this study for adopting a transformative pedagogical learning path for teaching adult piano students, and the perceived benefits of each strategy. Specifically, I learned to:

• Spend time becoming familiar with students’ micro and macro goals, musical tastes and reasons behind learning piano. This was invaluable to understanding each student and catering to their individuality. It also helped to create rapport, align a student’s repertoire with their values and to foster the sense that their thoughts and opinions are important;

• Set an intention prior to lessons to place the student’s needs at the centre of lessons and to stay curious about their perceptions, interpretations and needs. This helped me to stay present and set aside my preconceived expectations and agenda;

• Start lessons with discussions around the student’s feelings about the week’s practice, any motivation challenges they experienced, environmental factors that impacted on their learning – both positive and negative. This set the stage for receiving feedback that could direct the course of the lesson. It also helped to identify unstable
frames of reference that can adversely impact self-efficacy levels and mindsets conducive to learning in lessons, which could then be adapted through discussions;

- Understand that if more challenging and stable frames of reference and unrealistic expectations are uncovered, acknowledging their presence and empathising with the student can help them to set them aside for the duration of an activity;

- Balance explaining with questioning and modelling. This can increase engagement when the student expresses a desire to understand. Specifically, questioning helped students to develop an awareness of the metacognitive processes involved in deliberate practice, and as a form of discovery learning, enabled students to uncover information for themselves. Further:
  - Questioning in relation to deliberate practice and metacognitive awareness worked well when a level of engagement was present, when the student understood why a question was being asked, after the student felt heard and had shared their experiences, emotions and thought processes, and when questions posed were at an appropriate level for the student;
  - I also learned to layer questions, to use them to encourage reflection-in-action and to meet students at their current level of awareness and to promote deeper engagement;

- Encourage the use of a home practice journal and weekly goal setting to plan home practice. This was effective in increasing student awareness of what is involved in deliberate practice. Having students take their own notes, or explaining what notes would be useful, exposed any gaps in their understanding and helped me to understand the learning that was taking place;

- Encourage students to consult and source external resources to complement their lessons, such as recordings, scores or blogs. This led to further discussions in lessons with regards to practice strategies.
and repertoire learned. This allowed the student to further inform and shape their learning journey.

This is just one approach to transformative pedagogy, and one that evolved over the nine months of the study. There are likely many ways that transformative pedagogy could unfold within a one-to-one piano lesson, and many variations on how the aims of this approach might be realised. Taking a transformative approach, in whatever form, is something that requires multiple ways of working, including trial and error, planning the types of responses to use and types of interactions within lessons, honouring the individuality of each student, and staying flexible within lessons to allow the student to direct the focus. It is important to remember that it is not possible to be 100% prepared for situations that arise in lessons, as it is impossible to know students’ reactions, actions, comments, and questions, and also their experiences during home practice. There is much reflection-in-action, or ‘thinking on your feet’ in lessons, as teachers respond to unique situations moment to moment. It is the reflection-on-action, after the fact, that allows for better reflection-in-action and decision-making processes in lessons.

One tool that was implemented to encourage ownership of learning and to facilitate deliberate practice was a home practice journal. The fact that each student utilised the journal differently, as discussed in Chapter 6, again highlights the individuality of each student. It also illustrates that adult students are motivated to adopt strategies, such as journaling, in a way that they deem appropriate and relevant to their needs. As a teacher, I respected these differences while also encouraging its use. The inclusion of pre-designed reflective questions, while being the least successful component of the journal, was highly successful as a springboard for discussions that could help to develop students’ self-reflective skills and pass ownership of the lesson structure to them.

At the outset of this study, each student had a different level of resistance to the changes in my teaching or the level of detail in the deliberate practice strategies I advocated for. Reasons behind their resistance differed for each student, from fear of not living up to expectations or disappointing herself or me (Allison), lack of comprehension of questions (Georgina), not seeing this level of involvement as necessary due to conflicting view about talent (Ross), lack of confidence (Jenny) and comparisons to accomplished pianists and being in a hurry to get there (John). Open discussions and removing expectations and the preconception that lessons were a
place to perform and be judged did much to remove this resistance. I learned what
students needed from me in order for them to be able to engage – whether it was
simply practising together, layering questions and broadening questions to include
feedback from students, approaching tasks from their perceived needs or simply
listening empathetically to their challenges before asking where they would like to
start. There appeared to be a direct correlation between students’ engagement in
lessons and the increase in my ability to implement transformative pedagogical
strategies and to approach lessons with the explicit intention of passing ownership of
lesson structure to the students. The more I could empathise, approach lessons
inquisitively and from the perspective of wishing to learn about their needs and
experiences, the more students could share and take ownership of the lessons and
their learning.

Conceptually, this pedagogical approach is deceptively simple. The process I
went through to implement it, as outlined in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, required much
critical self-reflection and several stages of adapting my approach. I found that a
transformative pedagogical approach that aims to cultivate students’ capacities for
self-direction also relies on a teacher continuously reflecting on their practice,
questioning their pedagogical decisions and resultant outcomes, and examining the
underlying assumptions and frames of reference that shaped those decisions. This
leads to the third research question, which centred on examining the impact of my
teaching on students’ learning.

7.3 How Do I Effectively Examine My Teaching and the Impact of
My Pedagogical Decisions on My Students’ Learning?

In Chapter 3, I explained that procedural and conceptual knowledge are not
automatically aligned, and that professional actions are based on implicit theories-in-
action that often misalign with espoused theories or the conceptual knowledge that a
teacher supports (Argyris & Schön, 1974, as cited in Eraut, 1994). I also discussed
the self-reflective process I underwent to bridge the gap between my conceptual
understanding of theories and my subsequent teaching strategies and actions. The
resultant evolution of my teaching was described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The process I underwent was akin to the process that I was aiming to pass on
to my students in relation to their playing. Essentially, I too became an adult learner.
I used the same principles that I endeavoured to facilitate in my students: I
questioned my actions, intentions and frames of reference, I journalled to reflect and
plan, and I based these reflections on outcomes of previous decisions and actions, and vice versa. This highlights the importance of experiential learning and critical reflection, not just for piano students, but also for teachers wishing to develop their teaching practice. As the experiential learning process applies to teachers’ development as well as students’ learning, so too do the challenges. These include the need for the teacher to adopt a mindset conducive to critical engagement and to be willing to embrace the discomfort associated with misaligned beliefs and actions.

Working to reconcile my actions and intentions through self-reflection was disconcerting and uncomfortable. In sharing this discomfort throughout Chapters 4 and 5, I am aware that I have shown a lot of vulnerability. I initially experienced interference from faulty expectations, resulting in conceptual blindness (Roth, 2005). I experienced conceptual-procedural disconnect and the associated frustrations. I feel this is important to highlight, as it is integral to self-development and the process I went through. It is important to acknowledge these challenges to avoid romanticising the transformational process.

Videoing was paramount to the success of my reflections, as was asking pressing questions to make my subconscious frames of reference conscious. This critical assessment of my frames of reference was the springboard to the evolution of my teaching and to the ability to approach lessons in the transformative way. It enabled me to bridge the theory-practice divide, to become aware of which actions were misaligned with my intentions and to make different choices moving forwards. It enabled me to move from implicit actions to purposeful action in order to better facilitate my students’ learning.

As noted in Chapter 3, two months into the study I took a three week break from teaching and ongoing reflections. While this break was not initially planned for research purposes, it proved beneficial for increasing my critical reflection skills in a way that could develop and inform my future teaching. This was because it afforded me time and space that could result in fresh eyes and new perspectives. Factoring such breaks in to other practitioner-based research may be of benefit to others who are self-reflecting at such constant intervals throughout their project.

Informal discussions with teachers at conferences have exposed the degree of resistance many feel towards self-reflection. Many teachers do not enjoy watching themselves on video, and thus avoid doing so. A concern of mine is that this discomfort will deter other piano teachers from critically reflecting on their teaching.
This would result in them potentially missing the opportunity to grow professionally and to address challenges that would in turn also help their students to grow. I hope that in sharing the process, including the discomforts and the successes, I have led by example, preparing other teachers for the discomfort and breakthroughs that this approach can lead to.

7.4 Achieving the Aim of this Study

The overall aim of this study was to learn to better facilitate learning in my adult students. While subjective, there is evidence that this goal has been realised throughout this study. As discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, critical engagement and signs of deliberate practice increased throughout the study. This is evident in the changes in language used, the increase in students’ questions, sharing experiences and emotions, repertoire, videos and blogs they had found, as well as the increased use of deliberate practice strategies in lessons and at home, such as counting, playing small sections, and slowing down to pay attention to details. The use of deliberate practice strategies was facilitated by support and guidance in lessons and through the use of the home practice journal. Students’ self-appraisals of enjoyment and growth, despite immediate frustrations and lamentations of slowness, are indicative of their longevity as students. Each student commented that they enjoyed their pieces and felt that they were progressing – albeit slowly – at the piano, and could not foresee ceasing learning in the future. This in itself is a key indicator that students’ values and needs were met through the pedagogical changes I made throughout the study.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, prior to this study one of my challenges has been to retain adult learners long term. A major indication that my aim of better facilitating learning in my adult students was achieved is that all participants, apart from one who moved interstate for work (but was motivated to find another teacher once settled), still learn the piano with me, and some are now in their fifth year of learning. Furthermore, I now have a total of 14 adult piano students who have been with me for over three years and show no signs of ceasing learning. This is the greatest retention of adult piano students I have experienced in my teaching career to date. It could therefore be argued that the results of my professional development have extended beyond the study itself to the benefit of each of my adult students.

While several scholars claim not everyone is mature enough for self-direction and the reflective insights required (H. Chen, 1996; Dabback, 2003; Merriam et al.,
2007), I question this notion. This might be the case at any one given moment, but it does not mean that mindsets conducive to self-direction and the associated skill-sets cannot develop over time. Some of my students may not have arrived at high levels of critical engagement and mindsets most conducive to deep learning within the study’s time frame, but as the study progressed, there were certainly positive shifts, albeit at varying speeds. There is no reason to believe that this would not continue to develop over longer time frames, as experience, guidance in lessons, and development of skill-sets would continue to grow. I believe it also depends on the teacher’s ability to manage their own expectations, to show empathy, kindness, patience and support, and to remove their own preconceived expectations of their students. My previous methods of teaching certainly did not do this, and also appeared to lower students’ self-efficacy, as seen in the early stages of Chapter 5. This illustrates that it is dependent on the reciprocal relationships and collaborations fostered between the teacher and the student.

In summary, transformative pedagogical strategies proved effective in engaging my adult students in their learning. Most importantly, there is a need for greater emphasis on the role of discussions in cultivating rapport and mindsets conducive to learning, in creating safe and nurturing learning environments, and in fostering collaborative student-teacher partnerships to shape students’ learning journeys. There is also a need to emphasise self-reflective teaching, not just as a research vehicle but also as a pedagogical strategy. Without teachers critically assessing and reflecting on their teaching, alignment between a transformative pedagogical design and teaching actions cannot be guaranteed.

7.5 Implications for Future Research

There are three aspects of my study that can inform future research: my data collection methods, methodology and pedagogical framework. These are discussed in turn below.

7.5.1 Improvements to data collection methods.

T. Tripp and Rich (2012) advise the use of structured questions to guide the journalling process. While I used this approach for my students, I chose not to journal in this way for myself, as I did not want to place limitations on my observation and reflection process for fear of missing key insights. In hindsight, structure would have helped to manage my data. The challenge with this, however,
was that I did not know the best questions to ask at the start. I was also fearful that it could handicap the evolutionary process of reflecting. Perhaps a pilot period would have been beneficial to refine the reflective process.

Limiting the frequency of my journalling would have also helped with data management, but this would have lessened my opportunities to explicitly reflect and plan. Given the challenges with data management, there is a need for future research to investigate different journalling styles, analysis approaches, and their usefulness to teachers. This may help to find a way to make this approach to reflection manageable and useful to teachers and researchers alike.

Another tool that requires refinement and further research is the student home practice journal. While the planning page was well received and described as useful by my students, the reflections page did not receive the same positive feedback and was not seen as useful to their practice. This was most likely due to the weekly nature of the reflections task and the fact that it was removed from actual practice sessions. I also did not offer extra training on how to reflect critically on their practice for fear of placing a further burden on their already limited practice time. As such, I feel that the questions given were too general to yield useful insights and were not linked strongly enough to the strategies and plan on the first page of the journal or to their actual practice sessions. It would be interesting to implement a more developed journal, perhaps with a planning and reflection task for each practice session, drawing more attention to the link between the goal of the session, subsequent strategy choices and outcomes.

One of the many lessons I learned through this study and beyond is that developing the skills and mindsets associated with self-direction take time. This study, while substantial in its time frame, was not long enough to capture great amounts of change within student behaviours. While my transformation was sped up through the explicit intention to transform, it too is just a glimpse into the changes that have been made possible by continuing to involve my students in all areas of their learning and reflecting on my teaching practice. There is room for further research examining the continued change beyond this study and for future studies in this vein to be longer. Linking to my suggestions in relation to journalling style and data management, data collection periods could be intermittent throughout a longer time frame, allowing for changes to evolve in a more natural way as well as through periods of explicit reflection.
7.5.2 Methodology.

On a more general note, the teacher-researcher methodology may be of interest to other private studio teachers as a way to understand and address their perceived challenges. A body of teacher-as-researcher projects could then be analysed. This would result in a broader understanding of the challenges that teachers face in relation to their practice and approaches taken to address them. This could lead to further insights into the uniqueness of frames of reference and their impact on teaching choices, students’ learning behaviours, and the interactions of teachers and students. These need not remain within the context of the private piano studio. While technical and coordination challenges may be instrument-specific, deliberate practice strategies and the extra-musical skills discussed throughout this thesis are shared among any instrument and, indeed, any activity involving procedural skill development.

The perspectives of my students and their learning journeys were equally as important to this study as my own. Just as I highlighted the challenge of outsider researchers reinterpreting teacher perspectives through their own agendas in Chapter 3, I am aware that this is what I have done in relation to my students. As the insider perspective of the teacher sheds light on the intricacies of the student-teacher relationship, it would be fascinating for insider research to be conducted by some adult students. No doubt their research questions would reveal much about their perceived challenges and experiences. Of course, the nature of a hobby is that it is usually removed from such formal enquiries. It would be revealing, nonetheless.

7.5.3 Pedagogical approach.

Finally, the usefulness of my pedagogical approach for other teachers warrants further exploration to see whether or not the strategies used here unfold in a similar manner in different teaching studios. Despite the deeply contextual nature of this study and my teaching practice, the applicability of the pedagogical framework used within this study to other teachers’ practices should not be discounted. As this work is disseminated among other teachers, its relevance, its use and the refinements necessary will become evident. This could be of further benefit to other teachers who wish to investigate their use.

While this study has focused on one-to-one piano lessons with adult students, the teaching of other skills that combine conceptual understanding and procedural
skill development may also benefit from the theories and pedagogical strategies used. There is room for these to be applied to other skill-sets to determine their relevance.

7.6 Final Reflections

I started this study wishing to change my students’ behaviours. I arrived at the end having changed my own. Transformative pedagogy is not simply about implementing strategies; it involves a new perspective towards students, the role of the teacher, and expectations for students’ learning. I have transformed as a teacher as a result of my experiences throughout this study and beyond. I have a deeper empathy and understanding, not just of my students, but also of myself. Students are having breakthroughs in their own time, leading me more than the other way around, and offering deeper reflective insights all the time. It is a process that does not have an end point for them or me, just like learning to play the instrument.

Throughout this journey I have positioned myself not just as a teacher and researcher, but also as an adult learner myself. This paradigm shift has been paramount to understanding my actions and intentions, creating a pedagogical framework and working to align my actions with it. Without this curious mindset, I would be unable to expand my analytical framework and unwilling to try new approaches. Overall, I hope to inspire other teachers to focus on how and why they adopt certain teaching strategies and to embrace the discomfort of unearthing discrepancies between their actions and intentions. The more this can be incorporated into future research and practice, the greater the understanding between teaching choices and engagement in students will be.

I also encourage other teachers to take the time to create a pedagogical framework and to learn the intentions behind its contents. This was extremely useful as a springboard to formulating and understanding my teaching values. It also created a platform for making concerted efforts to uphold those values through my actions. As a precursor to this, I needed to articulate the challenges I faced and hoped to address, giving the framework a purpose. This framework then also helped with the self-reflection process, providing points on which to reflect. These processes can be implemented within any teaching context and I would posit that any teacher could benefit from implementing them.

Finally, the danger is that upon reading my journey and the perhaps seemingly simple realisations through the study, the reader dismisses them as
obvious, especially if their espoused theories already align with my discoveries. I encourage teachers to expand their action awareness of their own practices to ensure their actions align with their pedagogical philosophies, to understand the complexity behind my realisations and to have their own.
Appendix A: Study Information Sheet for Students

“Why can't I play already?” Approaching adult piano students' learning through frames of reference and experiential learning strategies

QUESTIONNAIRE COVERSHEET

Who is conducting the research

Senior Investigator  | Senior Investigator  | Student Investigator
--- | --- | ---
Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet  | Dr Gemma Carey  | Leah Coutts
Queensland Conservatorium  | Queensland Conservatorium  | Queensland Conservatorium
Griffith University  | Griffith University  | Griffith University
07 3735 6249  | 07 3735 6339  | 0425 124 618

Why is the research being conducted?

As you are aware, I returned to the Queensland Conservatorium late last year to undertake a PhD. My research is focused on adult piano students. I have been teaching adult students at the piano for ten years now and I have a desire to understand my students in order to facilitate learning most effectively and create a positive and engaging learning environment.

The purpose of this research project is to understand the different experiences that adults bring with them to their piano lessons that shape the way they learn. It explores a learning strategy called experiential learning, and the potential of this strategy to facilitate learning in adult students and to create positive learning experiences.

Lesson structure will not change substantially. It is more about documenting the teaching/learning journey in parallel.

The expected benefits of the research

Understanding the uniqueness of each adult student allows for greater personalised teaching from the teacher. It also allows for teaching strategies that are best suited to individual learning styles and musical goals of students. As research shows that personalised teaching maximises learning
potential you may benefit directly as a result of your participation.

The professional development this project will give me will refine my teaching and allow me to become a more proficient teacher to my students. The teaching and learning strategies that I already employ will also have the opportunity to be refined. Through documenting teaching and learning experiences other piano teachers may have the opportunity to learn from and relate to my experiences and this may contribute to their own professional development journeys.

**What you will be asked to do**

As part of the research, a link to an online questionnaire is being distributed to all of my adult students. Stage one of participation will include filling in this questionnaire, which will take approximately 15 minutes. You have the option to remain anonymous or to include your name at the end. Your identity is necessary if you are willing to be considered as a participant for stage two of the study.

Stage two of the study will consist of several methods of data collection. By volunteering to be considered you are consenting to:

*An initial interview*

This will be conducted at a time and place that is to be arranged between us and will take approximately 30 minutes. Questions will be regarding musical experiences and educational background, musical goals, and expectations of the piano learning journey. These will be transcribed and you will be given the opportunity to read the transcription to ensure you are happy with the answers you gave. You are able to alter your answers if you choose.

*Videoed piano lessons*

Piano lessons will be videoed over a six-month period. This is purely so that I can observe my teaching and the strategy use in lessons.

*Use of a practice journal*

Studies have shown the effectiveness of journaling when learning a new skill. Within this study a journal will be in the form of answering a few questions regarding your piano practice through each week. This will only add between 10-20 minutes to your practice time per week, will help to structure your practice, and will allow me to document the learning journey.

*A concluding interview*

At the end of the six months, a concluding interview will be conducted in order to understand your growth, any change in musical goals, and your experiences with the practice journal.

If you have any questions regarding the research being conducted, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors on the emails/phone numbers above.
Participation and confidentiality

Your completion of this questionnaire and is voluntary. Please note that inclusion of your name is not mandatory unless you wish to be considered for further participation. There is no guarantee that you will be chosen, as only a select few case studies are being conducted.

Those chosen for the case studies will be given a 50% discount on lessons throughout the six-month study period as a thank you for your participation.

Case study participants have the option to be de-identified in any papers that result from this study through the use of a pseudonym. You may also choose to remain identifiable. Transcriptions of interviews, journal entries and video footage are held securely throughout the study and are accessible only to myself.

You have the option to consent to video footage being used for the purposes of presentations relating to the study.

Upon conclusion of the research, gathered data will be stored securely at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre for a period of five years before being destroyed.

You are free to choose not to answer any of the questions contained in the questionnaire unless you wish to do so. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without comment or penalty, and withdrawal will not have any impact on your piano lessons.

The ethical conduct of this research

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 4855 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Feedback to you

Upon conclusion of my research, the statistics of results from the questionnaires will be summarised and emailed to you. A summary of the case studies that resulted from a selection of the questionnaires will be included, as well as the resulting benefits that the research has reaped.

Expressing consent

Please note that the completion and return of the questionnaire expresses that you have consented to participate in stage one of the research. Please keep a copy of this cover letter for your future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Leah.
Appendix B: Participant Selection Survey

Piano Student Background Questionnaire

Demographics

Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

How old are you?

--- 3 ---

What is your occupation?


Are you a university/tafe student?

- Yes
- No

What are you studying?


Are you retired?

- Yes
- No

What was your occupation?


Piano Tuition Background

Have you learned piano prior to having lessons with Leah?

- Yes
- No

Did you learn as a child?

- Yes
- No

How long did you learn for as a child?


Why did you stop lessons as a child?


How long was it between ceasing lessons as a child and starting up as an adult?


Have you learned as an adult prior to learning with Leah?

- Yes
- No

Why did you stop lessons prior to starting lessons with Leah?


How long did you learn for as an adult prior to lessons with Leah?


Piano Interests

What musical styles are you interested in?

☐ Classical
☐ Jazz
☐ Contemporary
☐ Popular
☐ Musical theatre
☐ Other

Please specify

Reasons for learning piano

Musical goals

Do you have a time-frame to achieve your goals by?

☐ Yes
☐ No

When would you like to achieve them by?

Do you have an interest in sitting exams?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Do you have an interest in small group performances?

☐ Yes
☐ No
Do you have an interest in performing in larger studio concerts?
- Yes
- No

Do you have an interest in learning music theory at the piano?
- Yes
- No

Other musical interests

Have you learned other musical instruments in the past?
- Yes
- No

Which instruments?

Do you still have lessons?
- Yes
- No

Do you still play?
- Yes
- No
Further participation

You have the option below of remaining anonymous or including your name.

If you choose to be identified you also have the option of being considered for stage two of my research, which includes an interview and some weekly written answers to some questions that help to direct your practice time.

Would you like to be identifiable?

☐ Yes
☐ No

First name: ______________________ Last name: ______________________

Would you like to be considered for stage two of the study?

☐ Yes
☐ No
Appendix C: Ethical Clearance

GRiffith University human research ethics committee

12-Jun-2013

Dear Dr Gemma

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the conditional approval
granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "NR: "Why can't I play
already?" Approaching adult piano students' learning through frames of reference and
experiential learning strategies." (GU Ref No: QCM/07/13/HREC).

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments
to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorised to immediately
commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this
protocol continue to apply.

Regards
Ms Kristie Westerlaken
Policy Officer
Office for Research
Bray Centre, Nathan Campus
Griffith University
ph: +61 (0)7 373 58043
fax: +61 (07) 373 57994
Appendix D: Informed Consent Package for Students

Dear Student,

Thank you for your completion of the online questionnaire and expressed consent to be considered for the next stage of research. I am pleased to inform you that I would like to offer you the opportunity to be a case study participant.

The following information outlines what the study entails should you choose to participate and includes a consent form at the bottom.

**What you will be asked to do – Stage Two**

*An initial interview*

This will be conducted at a time and place that is to be arranged between us and will take approximately 30 minutes. Questions will be regarding musical experiences and educational background, musical goals, and expectations of the piano learning journey. These will be transcribed and you will be given the opportunity to read the transcription to ensure you are happy with the answers you gave. You are able to alter your answers if you choose.

*Videoed piano lessons*

Piano lessons will be videoed over a six-month period.

*Use of a practice journal*

Studies have shown the effectiveness of journaling when learning a new skill. Within this study a journal will be in the form of answering a few questions regarding your piano practice through each week. This will only add between 10-20 minutes to your practice time per week, will help to structure your practice, and will allow me to document the learning journey.

*A concluding interview*

At the end of the six months, a concluding interview will be conducted in order to understand your growth, any change in musical goals, and your experiences with the practice journal.
If you have any questions regarding the research being conducted, please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors on the emails/phone numbers above.

**Participation and confidentiality**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without comment or penalty, and withdrawal will not have any impact on your piano lessons.

You will be given a 50% discount throughout your participation as a thank you for your contribution to the study.

You have the option to be de-identified in any papers that result from this study through the use of a pseudonym. You may also choose to remain identifiable. Transcriptions of interviews, journal entries and video footage are held securely throughout the study and are accessible only to myself.

You have the option to consent to video footage being used for the purposes of presentations relating to the study. This would be to demonstrate strategy use in lessons. Sometimes it is a lot easier to show a 20 second clip than to describe something.

Upon conclusion of the research, gathered data will be stored securely at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre for a period of five years before being destroyed.

**The ethical conduct of this research**

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 4855 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

**The consent form is on the next page**
Expressing consent

I ______________________ consent to participating in this study. I agree to (please tick the boxes):

☐ An interview at the start and conclusion of the study (audio recorded) ☐ Answering questions in a journal as part of my practice ☐ My lessons being video recorded

Please indicate how you wish to be identified:

☐ Anonymously through a pseudonym ☐ By use of my full name ☐ By use of my first name only

I ______________________ consent to video footage and interview audio being used for research presentation purposes (university and conference presentations)

☐ Yes ☐ Through editing to de-identify me only ☐ No

Signed ____________________________________

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding the study.

Leah. 0425 124 618 leah.coutts@griffithuni.edu.au
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