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Communities of Musical Practice:
a space of connection, collaboration and well-being

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Communities of Musical Practice: a space for connection, collaboration and well-being

When I embarked on my teaching career over twenty-five years ago, I was overwhelmed by the many facets of running my own business as an independent piano teacher. I quickly realized that piano teaching required far more than a music degree. In order to achieve success as a teacher and business owner, I took charge of my own professional development to bridge the gap between known and unknown. This involved reading many pedagogical texts and attending various workshops and conferences. When gaps in my knowledge remained, I turned to my colleagues for their guidance and expertise. I am sure many piano teachers can relate to this ad hoc training model upon entering the business of independent piano teaching.

Surprisingly, no standardized education for piano teachers in Canada exists even though piano teachers have taught in some form for over 200 years. Indeed, the piano teaching profession has endured a tradition of informality with no expectation of higher education, and the occupation was perceived more as a hobby rather than a vocation. Only in recent years has piano teaching come to be recognized as a serious career path with the field encouraging higher education and formal pedagogy training. Despite this, there are still no mandatory educational requirements currently established for individuals to teach piano. Piano pedagogy texts serve as valuable resources for educators and dedicate many pages to topics related to operating a piano studio from business considerations to pedagogical concerns. While these texts impart important practical knowledge, their usefulness is inherently limited, as they cannot fully anticipate or address every teaching situation, challenge, or complexity that may arise throughout the course of a teacher's career. In these situations, teachers often reach out to their fellow colleagues for advice and assistance and benefit greatly from participating in

discourse among one another. In my experience, whenever I engage with a group of piano teachers the conversation inevitably drifts towards our shared practice. The outcome of these discussions typically yields many creative teaching ideas and new perspectives. Participation in group settings like this offer a viable space for learning to take place especially when they operate as a Community of Practice (Lave, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Engaging with fellow educators exposes teachers to new ideas, teaching strategies, and perspectives that strengthen their teaching practice where professional development becomes a collaborative process, rooted in dialogue and shared experience. Equally significant is the role these communities play in fostering personal well-being. Teaching is professionally rewarding but can be demanding and isolating. Meaningful connections with peers in a Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) setting provides encouragement, support and a sense of belonging that can increase job satisfaction. However, in the realm of piano teaching, independent piano teachers rarely utilize the CoMP model nor is it promoted in the field of piano pedagogy. This limits access to a legitimate space in which CoMP could offer teachers opportunities for learning, collaboration and well-being.

I was fortunate to teach the Music for Young Children® (MYC®) program for twenty-five years. This group piano program includes weekly one-hour lessons for beginner students (ages three to nine) accompanied by their parents. Upon completion of MYC® training, new teachers are assigned to a “nest”, a group of other MYC® teachers local to one’s teaching location. The nest connects new teachers with other MYC® teachers who have varying levels of experience and provides an MYC® community to which teachers may turn to for guidance and assistance. Through my local nest, I gained substantial knowledge and developed increased confidence in

teaching the program, as well as in my general teaching practice. As a novice teacher at the time, the encouragement and guidance I received were invaluable. This CoMP enabled me to hone my teaching skills, cultivate professional friendships, and acquire effective teaching strategies. Independent piano teachers can certainly profit from this type of collaborative learning environment. This essay will demonstrate how CoMP emerge as a viable space for teacher connection, collaboration and well-being. First, I will discuss the origins of Communities of Practice (CoP) and describe its three essential elements; *domain*, *community*, and *practice*, to establish a clear understanding of how these components function within this social learning theory. Next, a review of scholarly research will demonstrate the application of these principles within Communities of Musical Practice (CoMP). The essay will then examine interview findings that reflect the lived experiences of Music for Young Children® (MYC®) teachers within a CoMP, highlighting both the professional and personal value of such participation. Finally, it will outline practical steps that educators may take to establish a CoMP within their own communities.

Social group learning has existed in human society as a knowledge-based social structure since “we lived in caves and gathered around the fire to discuss strategies for cornering prey, the shape of arrowheads, or which roots were edible” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002, p. 5). Indeed, the idea of people working together to solve problems and share knowledge has existed throughout human history and can be found in the form of corporations of metalworkers, potters and masons in ancient Greece, guilds during the Middle Ages, and through apprenticeships which still endure today (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). These types of learning situations, centred around social groups identify as Communities of Practice (CoP),

groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something and interact regularly to learn and improve (Wenger, 2011). Etienne Wenger, an educational theorist, and Jean Lave, a social anthropologist developed the concept of CoP in the early 1990s. Lave's work studying apprenticeships of various groups such as Yucatec Mayan midwives and Alcoholics Anonymous, led her to interpret learning "not as a process of socially shared cognition that results in the end in the internalization of knowledge by individuals, but as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice" (Lave, 1991, p.65). Along with her student Wenger, they developed the theory of Situated Learning described as the process and development of learning where individuals have the opportunity to participate in a Community of Practice (Herrera, 2020). As Wenger explains:

Collective learning results in practices that reflects both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities, *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998, p.45).

Within a CoP, people may connect formally or informally through shared expertise and passion, sharing knowledge, creating new understanding, and solving problems through community interaction (Brown & Duguid, 1991). CoP can be found in all aspects of everyday life permeated by all types of people potentially belonging to several CoP. Formal and informal clubs, learning networks, and even street gangs illustrate examples of CoP along with structured and unstructured groups in the business world (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Despite the differences in their size, function, and membership, CoP all share three basic fundamental elements: "a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a *community* of people who care about this domain; and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be

effective in their domain” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.27). The *domain* is the identity of the CoP. This shared interest legitimizes the community and gives the community purpose and value: “the domain inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.28). Without a domain, you have simply a group of like-minded individuals. The domain provides the reason for the community, guides their learning, and creates a sense of accountability to the body of knowledge created by the community (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The element of *community* fosters relationships among the members. A successful community allows the sharing of ideas, discussion among members, building of relationships, and the ability to help one another (Wenger, 2011). For a community to be considered a CoP, there must be interaction and learning among members. Wenger provides an example from the art world: “the Impressionists used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were essential to making them a community of practice even though they often painted alone” (Wenger, 2011, p. 2). To build a CoP, members must meet or interact on a regular basis to allow for the development of a shared understanding of the domain, approach to their practice, and over time create a common history and identity (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The *practice* consists of “a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.28). The practice refers to the specific knowledge created, shared and maintained by the community. Members should have a baseline of common knowledge but within the community individual members may have different areas of expertise and strengths. In general, a CoP will have a defined way of doing

things, a set of common approaches, and shared standards (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Wenger emphasizes the importance of developing these three elements of a CoP in parallel and that these elements will be constantly changing and evolving over time (Wenger, 2011).

CoP can take many forms and can go by various names or be nameless. According to Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002), a CoP can vary in size from a few people to hundreds with very large communities generally subdivided by geographic region. A CoP can also vary in life span where some have existed for many years, centuries even, while other being short-lived. As Wenger explains, “a community of practice’s life cycle is determined by the value it provides to its members, not by an institutional schedule” (Wenger, 2008, p. 4). Since CoP depend on regular interaction, many communities have members living in the same city or work in the same building, but communities can be successful with members spread across a large geographic region or meet entirely online with members from around the globe. CoP can also be composed of people from the same discipline (most common) or have people with diverse backgrounds. Some communities will begin unintentionally brought together by a common problem or need, while others can be intentionally created to solve a problem or share knowledge. CoP do not work as a “team” or functional business unit in that members have no assigned roles; there is no project leader, and no responsibilities are required of each participant (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). CoP show greater flexibility and gain definition from shared knowledge rather than by tasks, existing because they provide value to their members (Wenger, 1998). For example, at Siemens (a technology company focused on industry, infrastructure, transport, and healthcare), engineers from different units exchange technical

knowledge on how to build improved automotive systems (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). At a Hill's Pet Nutrition facility in the US, line technicians formed a CoP, which meets weekly to discuss recent successes, frustrations and upcoming challenges (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). In a business context, CoP can assist in fostering an environment of sharing knowledge among different departments, be an arena for innovation, and allow ease of learning for new employees (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). These communities also generate a shared repertoire of ideas, develop resources such as tools, documents, routines, and vocabulary that carry the accumulated knowledge of the community (Smith, 2003). CoP function as self-organizing systems, which help to facilitate relationships and trust among its members through cooperation and knowledge sharing (Smith, 2003).

In the CoP model, novices join the community and learn at the periphery. As they become more competent, they move to the centre of the community as masters or experts (Smith, 2003). Of course, learning in a CoP happens for everyone, not only novices, with all members contributing to the sharing of knowledge. Learning in a CoP involves social participation rather than the simple acquisition of knowledge. This way of learning differs from experiential learning in that it involves people "being full participants in the world and in generating meaning...For newcomers, the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 108-109). However, power dynamics in this type of model can potentially be problematic. CoP will have members of varying experience, expertise, age, personality, and authority in the community and power may be evident in terms of degree of participation (Roberts, 2006). Power yielded by those with full participation in the

community may prevent peripheral members becoming full community members or create an environment where peripheral members have a reluctance to share knowledge (Roberts, 2006). Therefore, for CoP to be successful in fostering a positive experience for newcomers, they must create an environment of trust, familiarity and mutual understanding to facilitate effective transfer of knowledge (Roberts, 2006).

The concept of CoP continues to evolve and faces criticism since some communities have limitations and suffer failure. A CoP may become static and resistant to change such that knowledge which challenges the current identity and practice is dismissed (Roberts, 2006). At times, a community may become entrenched in its routines, making it difficult to change or innovate; in these instances, it becomes easier to create a new CoP rather than work with the existing community (Roberts, 2006). A CoP might fail due to the absence of a committed, core group of members, weak relationships among members, rigidity of competences, lack of a strong identity, or the use of inappropriate tools, such as documentation or visual support to illustrate their practices (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). In addition, arrogance of viewing oneself as the expert in a domain can lead a community to claim ownership of that knowledge so the community does not share the knowledge with other CoP or with other organizational members (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Furthermore, a CoP with very strong relationships between its members may prevent members from critiquing one another, stifling creativity and improvement of practices and creating a barrier for entry for new members (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

From a musical perspective, CoMP offer an educational and meaningful space for musicians to learn and perform together. Research in this area typically investigate the

performer experience and illuminate how these communities benefit musicians through shared performance practices along with personal and professional support. An example is Kenny (2012) who examined a jazz ensemble from Limerick, Ireland while it formed a CoMP over nine months. Her study demonstrated that the CoMP allowed all the members to participate equally in the music making and in the creation of performance traditions within their ensemble while building relationships with one another through their shared practice. Godwin (2015) examined the CoMP of an all-ages fiddle group in Scotland which revealed that participation in a CoMP positively enhanced the group experience and enjoyment of group performance while also fostering a lifelong interest in music-making. A study focused on conservatory students in Finland by Virkkula (2015) also displayed similar outcomes. Students involved in ongoing performance workshops between professional musicians and music students demonstrated greater motivation to attain their goals, greater responsibility and initiative, and greater overall development of their musical skills. The students also expressed feelings of belonging and increased belief in their abilities. CoMP can also be used to nurture the traditional music of a particular country or community as demonstrated by Westvall & Aragão (2019) who examined the CoMP of a large community music school in Rio de Janeiro, *Escola Portátil*. The CoMP fostered pride in the participants Brazilian heritage and promoted the continuance of a musical tradition from one generation to the next.

Studies in CoMP involving the perspectives of music teacher experiences remain limited but still demonstrate the value and need for teacher centered research. For example, in a study by Bernard et al. (2018), classroom music educators participated in a CoMP through a Facebook group. Bernard concludes that the online CoMP was successful in providing professional

development growth for teachers allowing for different avenues of sharing to emerge compared to a traditional in-person professional development experience. Educators of all ages, experience, musical backgrounds, and location participated equally which proved to be a positive outcome. She also notes that the CoMP provided an ongoing space for teachers to interact, where they “have the opportunity to take interest in and participate with one another’s concerns, ideas, triumphs, and stumbles” (Bernard, 2018, p.91) which adds additional layers of interaction not possible in a traditional professional development format. In another study with elementary classroom music teachers, Blair (2008) concludes that belonging to a CoMP provides novice teachers a safe environment to discuss their concerns and struggles. Blair observes that novice teachers experience feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and being overwhelmed by their various duties, which affects their professional self-confidence and can also lead to low professional self-esteem. Blair argues that a CoMP containing novice and experienced teachers allows for more “collaborative growth and mutual engagement than a traditional mentorship can offer” while also providing support in an emotional and professional capacity.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the role that CoMP play in the professional and personal lives of piano teachers, I interviewed five MYC® teachers (three teachers from Ontario and two from Saskatchewan) and invited them to discuss their experiences belonging to a MYC® nest . The interviews reveal how the nests provide ongoing support, mentorship, and collaboration, and serve as a clear and practical example of a CoMP in action. As previously outlined, CoP are characterized by three core elements: the domain, the community, and the practice. Within the MYC® context, the *domain* is the shared commitment to teaching the

MYC® curriculum. The *community* consists of local groups of teachers residing in the same city or in nearby regions who meet two or more times per year, typically in a teacher's home or other informal community setting. The shared *practice* is cultivated through these meetings, during which teachers exchange information related to teaching the MYC® program, beginner piano pedagogy, student and parent management, lesson planning, and the operational aspects of running a piano teaching business. Analysis of the MYC® interviews highlights several advantages of belonging to a CoMP for both novice and experienced teachers that emphasize the supportive, collaborative, and beneficial nature of the CoMP structure.

Teacher support provided by their local CoMP emerged as the central theme across the interviews. All participating teachers expressed, in various ways, that belonging to the CoMP was a positive and supportive experience. One teacher described her local group as “open to new things,” while another noted that “it doesn’t ever feel competitive or judge-y.” A sentiment shared widely among participants was that the CoMP helped alleviate feelings of isolation or overwhelm, particularly for new teachers. As one teacher explained:

Teaching piano can be a really lonely job, right? You’re not going into the office with other people. You’re on your own most of the time as a teacher. So having that community is, was a really crucial part for me.

This same teacher reflected on the challenges of her first year:

When I was a first year teacher, I thought I was going to die. Like I remember going to my husband and crying, like, what was I thinking? I can’t do this. To have, you know, somebody that you could call every other day is huge.

Belonging to a CoMP reduced these feelings of isolation by providing access to more experienced teachers who were willing to offer guidance and support. As one participant stated, it “is so valuable to have somebody in your corner who knows you and is willing to help

out in a specific time.” Another emphasized the importance of collective expertise: “Getting input from other teachers is so valuable. Especially teachers that have been doing it a while and they have more wisdom and experience. It’s so valuable.”

Blair (2008) similarly asserts that a CoMP “focused specifically on the teaching of music is critical to the success of novice music teachers, because the particular demands and contexts of their jobs tend to promote professional isolation.” Some teachers also noted that the CoMP provided support beyond pedagogical matters. One teacher with a young family described how, after having a baby, a colleague “actually stepped in for me when I had a baby and taught my classes to the end of the year, which was like so incredible. I don’t know what I would have done without that.” Another highlighted the group’s collaborative ethos, remarking on their willingness to assist one another not only in teaching but also in business practices: “Our community of teachers, just being willing to help each other, being willing to do some advertising together, being willing to get together as musicians, but we don’t always have to talk about music, like, what’s going on in your life.” Taken together, these statements illustrate that the support provided by the CoMP is vital to teachers’ success from both personal and professional standpoints. Belonging to a nest enables new teachers to build confidence in teaching the program, access the expertise of more experienced colleagues, and participate in an environment where mutual reliance and shared business practices foster a sense of security and collaboration. The supportive nature of the CoMP not only enhances teacher well-being but also contributes to increased motivation and creativity within their teaching practice.

Teachers reported that the CoMP provided a safe and open environment in which to discuss and exchange ideas. Members of their local groups described one another as “open to

new things,” “open to sharing new ideas and giving new ideas,” and “the most creative people I have ever met in my life.” Reliance on the CoMP for teaching ideas and professional motivation was mentioned frequently. As one veteran teacher observed, “...when I have been teaching this long, I need fresh ideas... We can get stuck in ruts.” Participants noted that their local CoMP offered essential inspiration, describing meetings as opportunities that “keep teachers motivated and excited” or as experiences where “you’re engaged and it’s uplifting then it just makes all the difference.” Belonging to a nest enabled both new and experienced teachers to brainstorm collectively, motivating and inspiring one another through discussions about music reading, instructional strategies, parent and student management, and various aspects of operating a music studio.

With respect to piano teaching, one teacher emphasized the value of diverse perspectives: “The group is so helpful to get all sorts of different ideas because you always have to be trying whatever is going to work for that child and it’s not straightforward.” The presence of teachers with varying levels of experience was viewed as essential to the success of the CoMP. This aligns with Wenger’s framework, which emphasizes that CoP thrive when members at all experience levels can participate meaningfully. As one teacher with more than twenty years of teaching experience aptly noted:

And I think it’s important to remember that it is kind of a journey. We’ve never arrived, none of us. There’s always new challenges and “Hmm, how am I going to deal with that kind of behaviour, how am I going to deal with that struggling class or that kind of thing?” And then to watch them lightbulb and get it or watch a parent, you know, play an exam because they learned along with them and wanted to do it. Just those things. It’s so rewarding.

An interesting theme that emerged from the discussions was the value teachers placed on meeting colleagues in person rather than relying primarily on online sources for information

or support. One teacher acknowledged that although MYC® provides a social media platform for teacher interaction, she found it difficult to make time to engage with it regularly. She remarked:

I have a hard time focusing my attention for very long. So I yeah, prefer to actually meet in person, and, you know, go for a coffee or go for a walk, or whatever and talk. Yeah, I mean, sometimes there's definitely some neat YouTube things and I do always think I'll bookmark them and think, "oh this is great, I need to come back and watch this", and then I don't generally.

Another teacher expressed similar sentiments, noting, "I like the in-person meetings. I feel like we have a lot of personality traits in common... it is fun to socialize." One participant reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the CoMP, stating, "I was just thinking that even though I did enjoy going to the meetings and all of that, I didn't realize how much I needed that until COVID came and then we did all the online stuff." Another teacher echoed this feeling of loss during the period without in-person gatherings: "The creativity is just unbelievable and I've missed that because we haven't had that in a couple of years... When we didn't meet, I remember saying to [name], I need to get together with people because I need to feel excited again, and that's what I always find I get from the get-togethers." These reflections highlight the essential social support that a CoMP can provide for piano teachers, who often work in isolation. While online communities may offer access to teaching advice, they do not necessarily foster the same sense of belonging, trust, and companionship that emerges from in-person engagement within a CoMP.

This examination of CoMP within the MYC® program underscores the significant role these communities play in supporting piano teachers across all stages of their professional development. The findings demonstrate that MYC® nests function effectively as CoMP, aligning

closely with Wenger's framework through a clearly defined domain, a strong sense of community, and shared pedagogical practices. Participation in the CoMP mitigates the professional isolation commonly experienced by piano teachers, particularly those entering the profession. Teachers consistently identified pedagogical, practical, and emotional support as essential benefits of belonging to their nest. The nest also emerged as a vital space for sustaining teacher motivation and creativity, offering a forum for exchanging teaching ideas, problem-solving, and generating innovative approaches. The presence of teachers with varying levels of experience enriched the learning environment and reinforced the understanding of professional growth as an ongoing, collaborative process. In this study, the in-person nature of nest meetings further emphasized the community's capacity to foster belonging, trust, and creative collaboration, qualities that were perceived as less readily cultivated through online interaction. Overall, the interviews affirm that CoMP constitute an important pedagogical component of the MYC® program, contributing meaningfully to teacher development, professional resilience, and instructional effectiveness.

The path of the independent piano teacher is demanding, requiring substantial self-education and ongoing professional development in order to remain aligned with contemporary pedagogical practices, yet alas, many teachers must navigate this path with little guidance or support. Inspired by research on CoMP, a colleague and I established a local CoMP composed of both independent and MYC® piano teachers, which we refer to as Monday Musical Musings (3M). We meet several times a year in teachers' homes or local coffee shops to discuss a wide range of topics related to piano teaching, including challenging students, instructional strategies, and business practices. The teachers of my CoMP expressed sentiments

similar to those shared by the MYC® teacher interviews, particularly regarding the personal and professional support afforded through membership in a CoMP.

When I asked the 3M members why they attend our meetings, they offered the following comments:

I attend 3M for multiple reasons. Being a private studio teacher, I do not have a "staff" and therefore have no one to bounce ideas off, or learn from, or commiserate with! 3M has no agenda, no rules & regulations, no purpose other than supporting each other in our shared passion. I like the ease of it and the building of community.

I attended because I liked the idea of an open forum setting as opposed to a structured one. There was no agenda and participants were invited to bring along their personal questions or concerns. It was a wonderful morning of sharing ideas and everyone was quick to pass along their personal insights...3M invites participants to come and relax over a cup of coffee and simply discuss whatever is happening in their studios. It's a great format in my opinion.

I like meeting with other teachers in person, to discuss teaching ideas, to commiserate and get advice about student difficulties, to find out what resources other teachers love to use, and to share resources that I love, to make connections with other teachers for when we need to pass students on to other teachers, and to hear about musical opportunities locally.

I also asked the members of my group to describe the ways in which participation in the CoMP was beneficial to them:

This group is full of teachers in different seasons of their career and with different focuses and skill sets. I have benefitted by learning different ways to handle a situation (with parents or children), gaining insight into new books or a different series/method book than what I use, or being introduced to fresh ideas that others are trying/have done for years in their studios. I always leave a gathering with something to try or think about...and often a follow-up email with links or documents to make those new ideas become reality!

It is good for my well-being to be able to talk to other teachers, as music teaching is not the most social profession. It energizes my teaching, as talking about what works in your studio makes you excited to teach it, and hearing ideas from other teachers gives you motivation to try something new and exciting.

The findings from the CoMP interviews make clear that this form of social learning provides meaningful support to teachers across all aspects of their work, including professional development and personal well-being.

For teachers who may feel professionally isolated, disconnected from their peers, or are in search of like-minded colleagues, establishing a CoMP can provide valuable support and connection, foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, and provide a sense of belonging that can enrich the lives of piano teachers. Creating a CoMP is simple and begins with a willingness to reach out to others who share a similar enthusiasm for teaching. It is highly likely that many fellow teachers are seeking the same opportunities for connection and mutual growth. The following steps offer practical guidance for initiating and developing a successful CoMP:

- Identify fellow teachers within your geographical region who share similar educational philosophies, demonstrate a comparable passion for teaching, or work with the same curriculum.
- A successful CoMP does not require a large number of participants. A smaller group can allow meaningful dialogue and stronger mutual support. Small group settings often allow for greater engagement, ensuring that each member's voice is heard and valued.
- It is helpful to have one or two individuals assume the role of primary organizers. Designated members can manage communication, distribute information, and facilitate decisions regarding meeting times and locations.
- Establish a regular meeting schedule by selecting a day and time that is convenient for the majority of group members. While it may not always be possible for every participant to attend each session, consistency is more important than perfect attendance. As long as several members are present, the meeting can remain productive and worthwhile.
- The meeting environment should be comfortable, accessible, and conducive to meaningful discussion. A relatively quiet setting allows participants to engage fully in conversation and ensures that ideas can be shared effectively. Consideration should also be given to the diverse personal circumstances of group members. For example, creating a welcoming atmosphere for educators with young children by accommodating their presence can foster inclusivity and encourage broader participation.

- Foster a positive and encouraging atmosphere for all teachers in attendance. Every contribution should be acknowledged with respect, and all questions should be regarded as valuable opportunities for discussion and learning. By cultivating a supportive and nurturing environment, the community becomes a space in which new, less experienced, or more reserved educators feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and participating actively.
- Demonstrate generosity in the sharing of ideas, strategies, and resources. A community thrives when its members participate with a genuine commitment to collective learning and the open exchange of knowledge.
- Maintain an awareness of power dynamics within the group to ensure that all members feel equally valued and respected. Care should be taken to prevent any one individual from dominating discussions or presenting their approach as the “correct” method. A healthy community depends upon open dialogue in which teachers can participate without fear of judgment or criticism.
- An agenda is not necessary. Teachers often arrive with questions or ideas they wish to discuss. Allowing conversations to develop organically can lead to equally valuable exchanges. However, when participants are less familiar with one another, introducing a general topic of discussion can provide an effective starting point and encourage conversation.
- A CoMP is built not only on professional exchange, but also on the relationships that develop through shared experiences. Creating space for humour, camaraderie, and mutual appreciation strengthens the sense of belonging within the group and contributes to a positive and nurturing atmosphere.

Through my research, I have come to understand that participation in social learning settings provided by CoMP is essential for ongoing professional development and well-being for independent piano teachers. Regular gatherings of piano teachers, whether in person or online, create meaningful opportunities to discuss effective teaching practices, exchange ideas, and share practical tools. Such collaboration is particularly valuable for independent piano teachers who often work in relative isolation from colleagues. Beyond professional development, CoMP offer mentorship and guidance for newer teachers who may feel uncertain or overwhelmed.

They also provide a sense of connection and encouragement for educators navigating personal, family, or professional challenges. Therefore, CoMP serve not only as spaces for learning, but also as sources of well-being and support. By engaging members in professional development through knowledge sharing, collaboration, problem solving, and reflective practice, CoMP inspire innovation, creativity, and motivation through the teaching year. CoMP not only enhances the teaching practice of the individual teacher but raises the teaching standards across their community. Teachers at all stages of their careers can benefit from these social learning environments, as they offer an ideal forum for expanding knowledge, refining practice, and creating meaningful professional relationships. When a CoMP maintains the balance between domain, community, and practice, it will grow and thrive over time. This essay demonstrates the significant value of CoMP for piano teachers and for the broader field of piano pedagogy, both of which stand to benefit greatly from this model of social learning.

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