Effective Visual Communication in Piano Lessons

By João Paulo Casarotti

João Paulo Casarotti teaching remotely his students Ryan Alexander and Sonya Brown at the Southern University Online Piano Studio, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

During the pandemic, most of us were challenged to communicate effectively with our students through the new medium of the computer screen. This unfamiliar environment made immediately clear the fact that we must employ a variety of resources to address the varied learning styles of our individual students. This principle applies equally to both online and in-person instruction.

According to Jeanine Jacobson (2015, 37), we can associate learning modes in terms of senses: some students learn best through seeing (visual learning), others learn best through hearing (aural learning), while others may learn best through feeling and doing (kinesthetic learning). We can also identify a fourth category, reading-writing learning, a more analytical approach, connecting the subject to a larger context and associated to language-based learning.

During the unprecedented COVID pandemic, music instructors were faced with the challenge of adapting to a new reality of teaching online. We learned many ways of communicating virtually with our students and familiarized ourselves with new technological gadgets, platforms to communicate and software that enabled us to operate during this challenging time. Although virtual teaching has many constraints, several of these can be overcome with the creative use of software and apps, which will allow us to teach to our students' learning modes and enhance their online learning.

One of the advantages of online instruction is the ability to engage students visually on the same screen by modeling from many different angles. The visual aspect when playing the piano is associated with the score, the keyboard and the body.

In addition, since playing the piano is a task directly associated with movement, coordination and alignment, it is essential for us to take advantage of the many angle possibilities available with online instruction to model

desired movements and accomplish greater results with our students.

Remarkably, by using visual resources effectively, you can show certain aspects of performance better than you can in person. For example, you can clearly show what the hands and feet are doing simultaneously.

The purpose of this article is to offer some ideas and tools to enable you to communicate visually in different ways with your students for synchronous, asynchronous or hybrid instruction.

Taking Your Visual Communication to the Next Level

A virtual webcam is a software application that allows users to display their computers' resources during a video call instead of displaying a live webcam exclusively. This can offer a more professional experience and provide many more options of visual communication, since users can place images, videos and computer windows as well as share screens (tablets and cell phones) and other

Right side*+ top: Recommended for showing right hand close up and movements such as up and down, circular, and forearm rotation and in and out movement demonstrations. * Note. It is recommended that both right and left main cameras be placed between the height of the keyboard and the pianist's head in order to show both hands.

Classroom Maestro + top: Recommended for engaging with the visualization of the keys being played as well as analysis (intervals, scales or chords).

sources as their primary output during a video call. Among some of these popular software applications are the ManyCam (paid) and OBS (Open Broadcaster Software) Studio (free software).

I have been a major advocate for the use of OBS Studio since the beginning of the pandemic. I use this amazing, user-friendly software not only as a virtual webcam for my Zoom online piano lessons, but also to record tutorials and instructional videos for my piano and pedagogy students. OBS Studio (www.obsproject.com) is available for Windows, Mac and Linux. The virtual webcam works with all major video conferencing and streaming platforms.

Building Scenes

Users of OBS Studio can build unlimited scenes from multiple sources including window captures, images, text, browser windows, webcams, capture cards and more. Teachers can seamlessly switch between these scenes via custom transitions that will definitely enhance visual communication with their students. It offers high-performance, real-time video/audio capturing and mixing.

Important Tip: I strongly recommend that instructors include a face camera with all scenes they build for their students to offer a feeling of eye contact.

In addition to using multiple cameras, I use the application Reflector (https://www.air-squirrels.com/reflector) to mirror the screen of my iPad and iPhone with the score and important apps for theory and sight reading. I also use scenes with the Classroom Maestro software to help demonstrate the keys being played. Classroom Maestro is an intelligent electronic blackboard for classroom and private music studio instruction that instantly illustrates musical concepts from your MIDI keyboard: single notes, intervals, chords, chord progressions, scales and keyboard hand positions.

Important Tip: When adding a window source into a scene in OBS Studio, make sure to have the desired window open on the background of the computer, otherwise it will not be displayed as an available window to share.

For more information about how to build scenes, how to record tutorial videos and how to use the virtual camera feature in OBS Studio, visit the *Effective Visual*

Communication in Piano Lessons YouTube playlist at

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSXoaL_YRB3Oc0YfnzDQr5g8PcI9YQngb

■

Reference

Jacobson, Jeanine. 2015. *Professional Piano Teaching Volume 2: A Comprehensive Piano Pedagogy* Textbook. Edited by E. L. Lancaster and Albert Mendoza, Van Nuys: Alfred Music.

João Paulo Casarotti is an assistant professor of piano and piano pedagogy and coordinator of keyboard studies at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Casarotti is one of the world pioneers of online piano instruction and maintains an active schedule as a technology consultant, performer, clinician and researcher.