



INVESTING IN EDUCATION

by Peter Fritz Walter

When I was choosing to complete my formation in jurisprudence (law) with a doctorate in international law from Geneva University's Law Faculty, it was with the idea of **investing in my education**. While for others it was not immediately obvious what the benefit of the doctoral title in my career as a lawyer would be like, there were other benefits/advantages of the doctorate that most people tend to overlook.

First off, I learnt to research in a legal environment which was different from my own (Continental Legal System versus Anglo-American Legal System); to acquire that expertise was involving a steep learning curve.

Second, I had to research in languages other than my mother tongue (German), in this case, English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. I also had to research legal systems entirely different from what I had known at the time, that is, the legal system of Pakistan, for example, which is similar to the legal system of India, or the legal systems of South Africa and Singapore which are based upon the British legal system.

Third, I had to write the doctoral thesis in French language while all the literature and jurisprudence on the subject matter were in English. That was an enormous hurdle; it was the reason that my first *soutenance de thèse* failed. My doctoral advisor in Geneva, Professor Christian Dominicé, said I would have to somehow upgrade my French for subsequently resubmitting the written work again. That was easier said than done and it was at this point that I needed to start working as a private tutor and language teacher, for my scholarship for the doctorate had ex-

pired. I was accepted in a reputed private language school in Geneva as a German teacher, and discovered that I had a certain amount of talent for the job of a private tutor.

I somehow had to be encouraged to use **all my inner resources**, also in terms of outgoingness and boldness: what I did was to redraft the entire thesis paper intuitively, without asking others for help, as I had done before. I would put myself in a sort of light trance or self-induced relaxation, and would read a page and then speak it in my own words, in French—and then write it down.

The result was unheard of: the original 450 pages book was coming out as a reasonably short paper of 150 pages! And when I had finished the job, I presented my thesis advisor the new text. He called me up the next morning already and was in a light and joyful mood: he said he could not believe it but the work was very well done, the text was ‘presentable’ now for the *soutenance*, and we could schedule it. He emphasized again that he could not believe how I had done that, without paying thousands for the job of a professional translation service!

I had learnt two things down the road: first, **languages can be learnt intuitively**, and second, I have

a knack for private tutoring! Subsequently, I would use my language talent for tutoring not only German to adults and children, but also English and French, and last not least, my other passion, musical ability and piano technique!

From that time I became interested to teach prodigy children who are early starters at the piano, but are often subjected to a harsh regime of ‘total discipline’ that overlooks the fact that humans can achieve all in life, *but only when they are motivated to do so. And all the art of the great teacher is to find the triggers for that motivation!* Pressure is certainly not one of those triggers, nor is punishment, nor is severely restricting the child’s social life and relationships!

Yet I have seen all around me that these are exactly the ways gifted children are subjected to discipline in order to learn a brilliant piano technique.

To be explicit about it all, I do not agree with these ways of practicing piano teaching for highly talented children! Those practices are not only inhuman, they are also practically very ineffective! The human nature does not perform at its highest level under constraints that severely impair the social ability of the person. Go to the extreme and you could as well put

the child in jail to still perform better ... would he or she?

I think it suffices to drive the imagination to that level in order to wake up from the ‘performance neurosis’ that is unfortunately still very much the daily reality of child prodigies wherever in the world! The answer is of course clearly **no** as to such severe impairments of the total human in the learning process. The answer is to drive up not the mechanistic routines of the playing apparatus, but to develop the human being behind the pianist! That means to **use empowerment techniques and adaptive coaching that bring out in the child other, similarly brilliant, talents and human skills.** The results will be nothing short of phenomenal, for the child’s ‘total system’ will respond to the challenge, then, not only the person in the child who is musically gifted!

Over the years, and because I changed my professional career from law to education, I have seen to what extent the success of private tutoring depends on using an approach to teaching that combines the mere teaching of ‘stuff’ with *empowering* the student, using a mixture of coaching and counseling techniques.

That means in practice that a part of the time available for the course will be spent in ways that do not immediately involve the piano, and that are not related to any mechanical exercises for improving piano technique. In other words, there are skills other than those related to what the fingers produce at the piano that are ultimately to be accounted for when we look at an accomplished pianist and musician: there are qualities such as **charisma**, think only of the late [Arthur Rubinstein](#), there are qualities such as **endurance**, or **persistence**, there are qualities such as **high memory** and **self-confidence**, and finally there are qualities such as **personal charm**, and a **positive attitude** toward life and one's professional career that are really crucial to the success of a young pianist in a time that never knew a higher amount of competition in the musical marketplace, worldwide!

All these qualities, are they inborn? No, in most cases they are not but can well be trained, and that is in itself a **revolution in education** as in former epochs this was not believed to be true and possible!

And if this is true for such a highly stressful and demanding job like a pianist, it is equally true for lesser exposed work environments such as **being in-**

volved with a foreign language, for example as a sales representative being placed abroad on a mission for promoting his or her company's products or services by using the language of the place instead of just reading from translated brochures. And it is equally true for modern jobs like **designing web pages and online presentations, as well as the design of professional-looking stationary used for company promotions.**

In these modern-day jobs, good team work and social behaviors are namely needed alongside the mere technical design skills, or the mastery of a top-notch computer OS like the macOS Big Sur that comes with a special focus on facilitating graphical, pictorial and design work.

Hence to finalize this already lengthy presentation, let me affirm that my conceptual grasp of private tutoring is cutting-edge and adapted to the challenges of our time!

—Peter Fritz Walter