

from **P**assion to **P**rofession

lifting the lid on piano teacher identity

Roberta Wolff

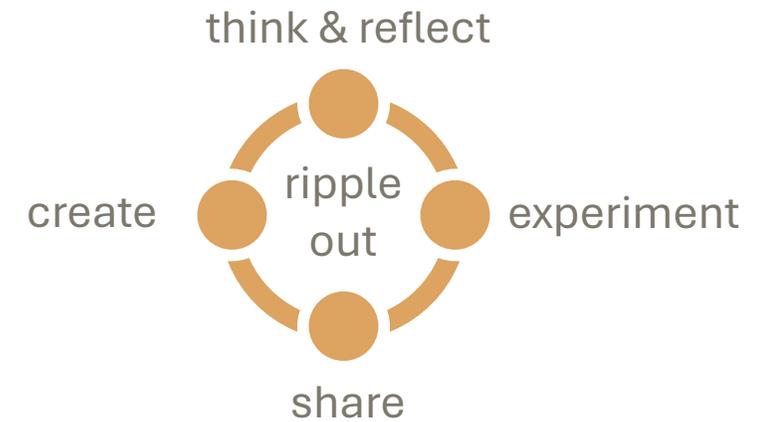
how we'll work together

- **curious exploration** – there is always something to learn
- **inclusive space** – we value all perspectives and embrace a view of professional achievement as diverse and self-defined based on internal drivers and values
- **openness** – ‘what insight will serve me and my goals today?’



by the end...

- describe professional identity and why it matters
- use the VOICE framework
- formulate one action to nourish your professional identity



stand up if you ever...

stand up if you've ever been given the impression your job isn't viewed as serious work

stand up if you've felt the weight of doing deeply skilled work - then realised some parts of society still see it as a hobby job

stand up if you've ever spent extra time crafting a message to a parent to get the tone just right

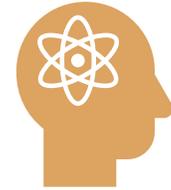
stand up if you've ever experienced imposter syndrome

...where it began



defining professional identity

- your **self-concept** in a working context
- **co-constructed** through interactions with colleagues
- it **evolves** over time as you grow professionally and personally



internally informed

whole self

Personality, likes, beliefs
values around living and teaching
early experiences as a child
learning (especially your
instruments) & personal narratives



work self

self efficacy in work, self esteem as
professional, expectation vs. reality of
job, how you believe others see you,
PI fluid and must be maintained
throughout training and careers



wider context

work context



community interactions

Tell you about how others see you /
your role
Professional bodies, social
networks, unions, news, ministers,
other teachers



work interactions

tell you about how others
view you and your work
(parents, students, co-
workers, head teachers)

community informed

the performing arts

- teaching skill ~~≠~~ performing skill
- portfolio careers can cause tension where dominant roles or income do not align with professional identity
- teachers with a positive **PI demonstrate increased well-being, agency and self-efficacy, better student outcomes and positive impact on colleagues, institutions, and society**

first reflection

- list some of your professional strengths
- now consider: is there anything you'd like to grow or evolve—about how you see yourself as a teacher

professional identity

...not another thing to
do, the first thing to
do!

VOICE — a studio framework for everyday use

View the situation

Observe your reaction

Inspect your assumptions

Connect to your purpose

Express, educate, empathise

V
O
I
C
E

‘how long until my child starts their grade 1? Their friend is the same age and has already finished grade 1’

Step	Prompt	Example Reflection
V – View the situation	sit with the details	
O – Observe your reaction	process a reaction before turning to a response	
I – Inspect your assumptions	draw several different perspectives into a single situation	
C – Connect to your purpose	look inside to connect to your professional identity	
E – Express educate empathise	bring the language of value-led learning into your studio	

discussion

1. work with a partner – one brings a studio issue, the other helps walk through the VOICE stages
2. VOICE is just for you and your thinking, no need to clean up language for parents just yet, that comes next
3. please feel free to opt out or work individually if that serves you best today



note to questioner:

ask:

‘what else?’

‘what more?’

second reflection

- what did you notice about the process of using voice?
- what part of the model felt most valuable for you?
- what is useful to share now?



building VOICE into a response

5 key
steps

- warm connection
- affirm the value of the topic
- share your position (grounded in VOICE)
- offer a constructive pathway
- close with care



Dear [Parent's Name]

Thanks so much for your message—I really appreciate how engaged you are with [*]'s progress, and I'm also really enjoying watching their reading confidence grow.

Exams are such a recognisable milestone, and it's completely natural to start thinking ahead.

In my professional opinion, [*] will benefit most from spending a little more time building fluency, and technical control before we step into Grade 1 prep. I've found that this approach not only leads to better results but makes the whole exam journey feel far more positive and empowering for students.

I do have Grade 1 in my plans for [*], based on current progress, I anticipate we will be able to begin the syllabus in October 2025. If you feel that there is more time in the week to devote to piano, I will be very happy to set some scaffolded goals each session to support [*] faster progress. I realise everything is a balance, so let me know what fits for your schedule. In the meantime, my end of term concert is perfect for developing performance poise, the piece we have for this is [title]. This steady approach to skill building will really consolidate learning and support all aspects of the grade 1 exam. Please do let me know how this sounds to you.

Thanks again for raising this—it's a joy to work with engaged parents.

Warmly
[Your Name]

warm connection

- builds rapport
- lowers defensiveness
- reaffirms teacher-parent-student relationship

affirms value of topic

- builds trust by assuming positive intent
- signals you are listening
- keeps conversation collaborative

shares your position

- confident, professional judgement
- builds trust by being transparent
- affirms decisions are based on experience

offers a constructive pathway

- keeps the door open
- reinforces you as a facilitator of growth
- offers clear ways the parents can support

close with care

- ends on warmth
- reinforces professionalism and partnership
- leaves the relationship stronger



the environment model for sustaining and shaping professional identity:

what to pay attention to when nurturing your professional identity over time

(Wolff, 2023)

- To what extent am I currently engaging with this area in my professional life?
- Which area do I feel drawn to strengthen or explore more right now?
- What is one small action I will take - in the next month - to support that intention? You may want to return to your first reflection on areas to grow or evolve

summary

- professional identity evolves and nurturing it offers us greater well-being, agency, and impact
- responding to day-to-day challenges by connecting to our PI empowers us in our work (VOICE)
- you are leaving with some tools, an action to nourish your PI and some new ways of talking about professional identity and spotting how it can work for you

© Roberta Wolff, 2025 | Please do not reproduce or distribute without permission – contact me for further information or to work with me



roberta@robertawolff.co.uk



www.robertawolff.co.uk



professional coaching
free 30-minute discovery call
07887 946 754



www.linkedin.com/in/roberta-wolff-b3bb27124

Roberta Wolff

from **P**assion  **P**rofession:
lifting the lid on piano teacher identity

Roberta Wolff