Tracking a Transformative Experience: Impressions of Students and Teachers in an Adult Group Piano Class

By Diana Dumlavwalla, D.M.A.
MTNA National Conference, March 2018
Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort

From recent studies, we have learned...

Characteristics of Older Adult Music Learners
• They benefit from:
  o Defining their own needs, goals and motivations
  o Engaging in problem-solving applications
  o Self-directed learning
  o Being aware of cognitive and physical changes
  o Drawing from their own life experiences and backgrounds
• They want to know they will be competent at the task at hand
• They value being autonomous
• They want to develop camaraderie and have external forms of motivation

Working with Older Learners in Community Music Making
• It’s a rewarding endeavour
• Facilitators gain personal fulfillment
• Facilitators may also encounter challenges such as:
  o Adapting to a diverse range of students
  o Helping participants to try new things
  o Engaging in significant preparation
  o Finding others to help with classes
  o Dealing with lack of training opportunities

Intergenerational Music Learning in Community and Schools
• Younger and older participants learn from each other
• Learning becomes less intimidating in these settings
• Individuals from different generations learn to interact with each other

Older Learners and the Piano
• Adult students are more interested in skill-based improvements rather than social benefits
• They still strongly value personal benefits
Purpose of FSU’s University Musical Associates Adult Group Piano Class

1) A way for our students to show gratitude to those who support the College of Music
2) A form of community engagement
3) A venue for pre-service teachers to gain pedagogical skills

Benefits of an Adult Group Piano Class – Connections to Recreational Music Making, Community Music and Piano Pedagogy

1) Provides a new and unique opportunity for older adults to take up piano studies
2) Group environment can be more appealing and less intimidating
3) Social interaction
4) Students feel that they can contribute to the class
5) Provides a new experience for student teachers where they can also learn how to approach facilitating physical coordination
6) Student teachers learn to develop administrative skills
7) Serves as a reminder about the purpose and joy of music
8) Helps all parties to set realistic expectations
9) Teachers learn from students
10) The intergenerational blend fosters an amicable learning environment

Recommendations for Starting an Adult Group Piano Class within the College Learning Environment

• use the set up of a lead teacher with 1 or 2 assistants. This is ideal especially if there are varying levels in the class
• help inexperienced student teachers gain confidence
• incorporate repertoire sharing sessions (less intimidating than a recital)
• choose an adult method to help give students teachers structure
• ensure there is a lot of variety
• encourage student teachers to incorporate listening activities
• choose the lead teacher for this setup carefully
• search for students:
  o donors – turn this into a way for students to say, “Thank you!”
  o Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)
  o local assisted living center
Selected Bibliography


Contact Information

Diana Dumlavwalla, D.M.A.
Assistant Professor of Piano Pedagogy
Florida State University, College of Music
Tel: 850.644.4299
ddumlavwalla@fsu.edu