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The Perceptions of Adult Students and Collegiate Teachers in an Adult Group Piano Class: A Case Study

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**The Perceptions of Adult Students and Collegiate Teachers in an Adult Group Piano Class:
A Case Study**

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Abstract

This intrinsic case study examined the perceptions of adult students and collegiate student teachers in a university-sponsored adult group piano class. Common themes related to the collegiate teachers' pedagogical development and the adult students' progress specific to this learning setting were identified. Additionally, recommendations were provided for classes with similar settings, helping to continue the discussion about pedagogical implications related to instruction for older adult students.

This learning environment was a hybrid of the group and traditional private lesson settings. A lead collegiate teacher provided instruction to the whole class while additional collegiate teachers rotated throughout the piano lab providing specialized instruction to individual adult students. The adult students were drawn to this particular music learning setting because of the social nature of the class. They were motivated to practice regularly and appreciated the enthusiasm of the younger teachers.

The collegiate teachers were drawn to volunteer for this class in order to gain experience teaching in a non-threatening environment and learn more about the field of recreational music making. They all discovered that the goals of this particular student population were not the same

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as their own or others that they teach and they anticipated and observed the physical challenges that the adult students faced in this class. This analysis can help to maintain the discussion of how piano pedagogy plays a role in serving aging adult populations. It furthers the dialogue of assessing piano instruction formats, enhancing and expanding the options available to adult students. Finally, it addresses the development of social interactions among individuals of varying generations and how music lessons can enhance those connections.

Keywords: group piano, adult learners, piano pedagogy, teacher training, intergenerational learning, lifelong learning

Introduction

At the age of 85 years, Peter was flipping through a university's community outreach pamphlet and came across a notice about a group piano class.² He had taken a few saxophone lessons many decades ago but other than that had no formal musical training. Nevertheless, he always had an ear for music and playing the piano intrigued him. Prior to retirement, his wife was a music teacher and they always had a piano in the house. She jumped at the chance to join the piano class to help revitalize her playing skills and she urged Peter to join her. He was hesitant at first since he could not read music notation and had very little experience playing an instrument. After some cajoling, Peter's wife convinced him it would be a good experience for the two of them. He attended the class regularly and while he faced some frustrations, he also gained a lot of satisfaction from the class and his progress.

The aging population is a phenomenon experienced in all regions of the world. As life expectancy increases, individuals look for meaningful activities to explore and improve their well-being (Fung & Lehmborg, 2016). The field of piano pedagogy recognizes this growing need. In his well-received textbook about teaching piano in groups, Fisher (2010) noted that the those above age 50 might currently be the fastest-growing group of music students. Many teachers specialize in offering private piano lessons to adult students, particularly senior citizens (Fisher, 2010; Pike, 2017). These adult students receive undivided attention, and lessons are customized according to their needs and learning styles. In the United States, there is also a strong tradition of group piano lessons where one skilled teacher simultaneously instructs several adult students, providing increased socialization and motivation for the participants (Fisher, 2010; Pike, 2017). This group setting is increasingly being seen as a viable option for providing

² The name "Peter" is a pseudonym for this particular adult student in the class.

high-quality, enjoyable piano instruction to older learners (Fisher, 2010; Haddon, 2017; Pike, 2017; Wristen, 2006). As with any other defined student population (e. g., young children, teenagers, students with special needs), teachers encounter pedagogical issues and challenges specific to older learners in the group setting. Pedagogy courses and degrees often provide burgeoning teachers with opportunities for experiential learning in a wide variety of settings and address teaching topics that are characteristic of each student population (Cheng, 2016). Since adult piano classes are becoming more prevalent, it is important to expose pre-service piano teachers to this learning environment in order to enhance their preparation for their future careers.

Researchers have examined some of these group piano-learning settings for the older population. Wristen (2006), Taylor (2011) and Bugos (2014) all focused their investigations on the reactions and opinions of the adult students in the group setting. In her study of a semi-formal performance class for amateur adult learners, Haddon (2017) shed some light on how the class leader developed pedagogical strategies as well as findings related to the adult students' musical development. Studies have also examined older learners who engaged in private piano instruction (Adamyán, 2018; Coutts, 2018; Jutras, 2006). Additionally, there has been some research conducted regarding the perspectives of the facilitators and class leaders of other music settings (Hallam, Creech, McQueen, Varvarigou, & Gaunt, 2016; Villar, Celdrán, Pinazo, & Triadó, 2010). What has not been considered are the perspectives of pre-service teachers who provide instruction for piano classes geared towards senior citizens. Together with the viewpoint of their adult students, those involved in teacher training may gain insight regarding how our profession can best prepare the piano instructors of the future. Therefore, the purpose of this

study was to examine the perceptions of both the adult students and their pre-service collegiate teachers in a group piano class setting and track emergent themes related to teacher training.

Literature Review

Research surrounding the effects of music-learning and music-making settings involving older adults has gained traction in recent years. The results of these studies can provide us insight regarding common practices used when working with older learners. In particular, the following four topics relate directly to the current study and will be explored: motivating factors for older adult music students, the perspectives of the facilitators/instructors, intergenerational experiences, and adult students studying the piano.

Motivating Factors of Older Adult Music Students

Within the framework of this topic, it is helpful to understand what motivates senior citizens to engage in music instruction at this stage in their lives. Music is important to many older adults. Any music lessons and experiences they may have had earlier in life do have an impact on them in later years and may contribute to their motivation for resuming music study (Taylor, 2010). Many mature learners are also motivated to start music lessons due to the perceived benefits. Participation in musical activities has been linked to the health and wellbeing of senior citizens (Coffman, 2002; MacDonald, 2013). In their book, *Music for Life*, Fung and Lehmborg (2016) compared two of their case studies involving a church choir and a blue grass group. Participants in both studies identified that improvement to their quality of life was a crucial factor for continuing their participation in these activities. They enjoyed the friendships and connections they made during their rehearsals. Another study noted that older people experienced cognitive, social, emotional and mental health benefits from their participation in group music-making activities (Varvarigou, Creech, Hallam, & McQueen, 2012). These benefits

included improved concentration and memory, a sense of belonging, structure to life, improved confidence, and protection against stress and depression. Bugos (2010) compared the effect of active music instruction in piano versus music listening instruction on the executive functions of older adults. No significant difference was found between the instruction settings (both types increased the participants' scores of executive functions). However, those who participated in active piano music instruction did experience a significant positive effect on their enhanced processing speed, verbal fluency and cognitive control. A case study in China (Li & Southcott 2015) noted that older individuals involved in piano study experienced improvements in their emotional and physical well-being.

Myers, Bowles and Dabback (2013) identified motivating factors and instructional strategies that help older adult music students progress in their studies. They suggested that facilitators and instructors should encourage this population to self-define their needs, goals and motivations, engage in problem-solving applications, nurture self-directed learning, acknowledge cognitive and physical changes and draw from their own life experience and background. The authors also noted that older learners want to feel they will be competent at the task at hand and be autonomous. They observed that this population enjoys developing camaraderie with facilitators and fellow students and having external forms of motivation.

The Facilitators'/Instructors' Perspectives

Overwhelmingly, instructors and facilitators of older learner settings have expressed a positive attitude towards working with an older population. A case study in Spain focusing on a non-music educational setting found that teachers gained fulfillment working with older adult students since the older adult students were perceived as having more intrinsic motivation than younger adult students (Villar, Celdrán, Pinazo, & Triadó, 2010). The instructors felt that their

efforts had an immediate return in terms of activity, participation, and interest in the classroom. They also felt they received more appreciation and gratitude from older adult students. Another study examined the reflections of conservatoire students involved in a 10-week program teaching older adults in private lesson settings (Perkins, Aufegger & Williamon, 2015). The experience gave the instructors a chance to learn about teaching through practical experience and broadened their existing instructional skills.

In her article, “Geragogy! The Joys of Teaching Older Adults”, Schoen (2018) defined the geragogical model as a partnership. She identified physical (eyesight, hearing, memory, psychomotor skills, other health issues) and emotional (insecurity, performance anxiety) considerations that piano teachers should keep in mind when working with older adult students. She also described the positive aspects regarding teaching this population (self-motivation, more time to practice, interesting and fun people).

Researchers explored the benefits and challenges identified by those facilitating music-making experiences for older people (Hallam, Creech, McQueen, Varvarigou, & Gaunt, 2016). Several common factors were expressed by those in facilitator roles. For example, the facilitators agreed that it was rewarding for them to see others develop skills and enjoy the music-making process. They also spoke about a sense of personal fulfillment and the role that the experience had in their own professional development. These same facilitators identified a number of challenges they encountered in their roles. They sometimes struggled adapting to a diverse range of adult students and also found that some older participants were stuck in their ways, making it difficult to help the older adults try new things. Furthermore, ensuring a quality experience for the older learners required significant preparation and time finding the necessary resources.

Facilitators also noted there was a lack of staff support to assist with classes and there were minimal training opportunities.

Intergenerational Experiences

Since most individuals are formally educated during their formative years, many are accustomed to the traditional learning setting where the instructor is the older individual (often perceived as wiser) passing down information and facilitating the education. However, with older adult students, the roles of this conventional arrangement have often been reversed (the older individual has been the student). Bringing together individuals from different generations in various learning settings where the younger individuals were assisting the learning of their elders has proven to have an impact on all participants involved. Dow, Joosten, Biggs and Kimberley (2016) found that while their study's participants were aware of the negative perceptions associated with the other generation in their group, they viewed these perceptions as stereotypes and stated that they did not have an impact on their own experiences with the other generation. In this study, the participants felt there was a lack of engagement between generations outside the family setting. They regretted that they had not had more opportunities for intergenerational exchange outside their families. Additionally, Beynon and Alfano (2013) highlighted two case studies of two ensembles made up of participants from multiple generations and explored the dynamics of intergenerational music learning in both community and school environments. A number of advantages were identified in these settings. Both young and older participants learned from each other; they developed relationships and a deep respect for one another. They also found that learning became less intimidating, and a unique synergy emerged from the arrangement. They learned how to interact with one another inside and outside the musical setting. Other studies involving participants from different generations noted similar

positive outcomes for all those involved. The older learners expressed a desire for additional opportunities involving the same interaction. Younger learners felt the experience changed the way they viewed the aging process (Borrero 2015; deVries, 2012).

Adult Learners and the Piano

The piano is often identified as an instrument many adults would like to learn how to play (Murphy & Flowers, 2001; Taylor, 2010). Several studies have looked at the different perspectives related to private lessons for this student population. Jutras (2006) identified the importance of 31 potential benefits associated with adult piano study. The benefits were categorized into three groups: personal, social/cultural, and skill-based. The researcher suggested that adult students were more interested in skill-based benefits (such as development of technique) rather than the social advantages. However, they still strongly valued personal benefits such as fulfilling a life-long dream. Adamyan (2018) identified some of the challenges adult beginners encountered when they learned more advanced repertoire. They included: reading two staves at a time, memorizing music, maintaining extended technical practice, learning large-scale works, and performance anxiety. She provided recommendations to help make their practice time more productive and address these challenges. Coutts (2018) highlighted the pedagogical thought process she experienced during repertoire selection. When she started teaching adult students, she would choose repertoire that would be easy for them to learn as well as selections that she was familiar with, however, the students lacked motivation to practice. She soon discovered that she needed to look past her usual approach, listen to her adult students, and align repertoire selections more with their interests. As a result, she chose more challenging repertoire along with pieces that were new to her.

As alluded to earlier, there has also been some research related to adult piano students in the group setting. Wristen (2006) examined an adult piano class and found the group setting to be a positive experience. She reemphasized the importance of teacher support. In his textbook regarding group piano teaching, Fisher (2010) dedicated an entire chapter to teaching mature adult students who enjoy piano-playing as a hobby. His suggestions for instructors working with this age group included adopting a flexible, self-directed approach, helping older learners to feel successful early on in their studies, establishing and maintaining practical expectations, and using verbally-oriented approaches with lots of analogies. In addition, Bugos (2014) highlighted that although older learners can self-regulate to help achieve their goals, they still need encouragement, knowledge, and patience from their instructors. Half of the participants in her study preferred group over private instruction.

Researchers have demonstrated that adult learners were motivated to study music based on many factors related to their quality of life, health, and camaraderie. Their facilitators/instructors feel a sense of personal fulfillment working with them, and those that interact with younger instructors enjoy the intergenerational interaction. Finally, the piano has often been a preferred instrument for adult learners and recommendations have been made to enhance their progress in this discipline. However, no study has focused on how these four themes could be blended within the setting of a group piano class and what the implications might be if pre-service teachers were involved.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and activities of both the adult students and their collegiate teachers in a university-sponsored adult group piano class. A secondary purpose was to determine themes that emerged from the adult students' and

collegiate teachers' perceptions of the class. The themes will assist the researcher and others in structuring similar piano-pedagogy experiences. In particular, the researcher wanted to gain insight regarding the following research questions:

- 1) What motivated the collegiate teachers to volunteer as teachers for the class and the adult students to join the class?
- 2) What were the expectations of the collegiate teachers and adults students prior to the start of the class?
- 3) How did the collegiate teachers structure the class, especially since the adult students were of differing levels? What types of activities were used as part of the curriculum?
- 4) Was there anything about the class structure and curriculum that the collegiate teachers and adult students did not find particularly advantageous?
- 5) After this class experience, would the adult students prefer the private or group setting for piano instruction?
- 6) How would the collegiate students react to teaching students who were older than them?
- 7) How would the adult students react to being taught by individuals younger than them?
- 8) What would the adult students and collegiate teachers identify as benefits and challenges for participating in this type of class?

Method

This intrinsic case study examined the activities of an adult group piano class offered by graduate and undergraduate piano pedagogy students at a university in the Southeast region of the United States. This particular setting was unique. One lead collegiate teacher provided instruction to the whole class while one or two assistant collegiate teachers rotated throughout the piano lab providing specialized instruction to individual adult students. This arrangement

allowed older learners to benefit from the interaction of the group setting and the individualized instruction of a private lesson. All collegiate teachers were volunteers and did not receive any financial remuneration for their services.

This adult group class was held in a typical piano lab. Digital keyboards were connected to one console at the front of the room with the teacher's keyboard. Adult students listened to their own playing through headphones. Therefore, they could all concurrently practice individually or listen to each other in different configurations. Classes lasted for 50 minutes in length and were held on a weekly basis.

A narrative analysis approach was chosen for this intrinsic case study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This particular case study was chosen because it involved a group piano class for older adults, collegiate teachers served as instructors, and the adult students had the benefit of learning in the group setting as well as receiving individualized instruction. It was important to gain a full understanding of the interactions between the adult students and collegiate teachers over the course of one semester of classes. In addition to identifying the perceptions of the adult learners, the current study also addressed the viewpoints of the collegiate teachers. A single case study was chosen for this analysis to gain a deeper understanding of this particular teaching and learning environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The perceptions and activities of the group class were tracked through observations and interviews during one semester that lasted four months. All collegiate teachers and adult students were interviewed twice during this period. Interviews were conducted in private and in conversational style, and were guided by four short questions (see appendix) (Roulston, 2014). The use of interviews and observations for data collection mirror the ethnographic approach found in studies examining musical learning experiences involving senior citizens (Fung &

Lehmberg, 2016; Varvarigou, Creech, Hallam, & McQueen, 2012; Villar, Celdrán, Pinazo, & Triadó, 2010). It was the researcher's goal to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics and culture of this group piano class (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Table 1. Data collection.

Data Collection Type	Details
Observations by researcher	8 in-class observations 3 video recordings of classes
Interviews by researcher	Collegiate teachers interviewed: 1) prior to start of classes 2) during the 6 th or 7 th week of classes. Adult students interviewed: 1) prior to start of classes 2) during weeks 5, 6 or 7 of classes.

During the in-class and video recording observations, the researcher took copious field notes to illustrate the dynamics of the class and provide suggestions for the lead teacher to improve instruction. Schmidt (2014) stated that it is important to use concrete, descriptive terms when recording observations. Acquiring information through multiple sources (live observations, video observations, and interviews) allowed for the triangulation of data, which illuminated common themes and validated assertions. The data were organized and categorized according to the research questions. Then the researcher identified commonalities amongst the responses to determine the prevalent themes related to each research question. The multiple sources of data regarding the same class setting allowed the researcher to see if there were any conflicting opinions between the participant groups or between the information collected during interviews versus the observations made by the researcher.

To clarify any potential researcher bias, it was also important to note that I, the researcher, was the main pedagogy instructor of the collegiate teachers. Therefore, I was

observing their involvement in this class through the lens of their pedagogical development. As Schmidt (2014) noted, it was important to identify the benefits and limitations of the researcher's subjectivity. I was not involved with actually providing instruction for this group piano class. However, I provided feedback to the lead teacher so that she could gain constructive advice from this formative teaching experience. The methodology was approved by the institutional review board of the researcher's home institution. Upon completion of the observations, interviews and review of the video recordings, data were examined through narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Internal validation was upheld through participant checks, triangulation, long-term observation and noting any bias by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Profile of Participants

The following table contains a summary of the backgrounds of the collegiate teachers.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants.

Table 2. Collegiate teacher profiles.

Name	Level of Study	Prior Teaching Experience	Age Range
Melanie	Master's degree	Maintained a small studio of 3 to 6 students during undergraduate degree. Taught one adult student privately for a short period of time. Holds an assistantship teaching group piano for music majors	Mid 20s
Sarah	Master's degree	Taught kids from church during high school years – "Didn't know what I was doing!" Provided piano, voice and theory instruction in a music store during her last year of high school. During this time, she taught 2 adult students for one semester each.	Early 20s
Eleanor	Bachelor's degree	No prior teaching experience	Early 20s

Mia	Bachelor's degree	No prior teaching experience	Early 20s
Walter	Bachelor's degree	No prior teaching experience	Early 20s
Karen	Master's degree	Some private teaching experience	Early 20s

The following table contains a summary of the backgrounds of the adult students. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants.

Table 3. Adult student profiles.

Name	Past Musical Experience	Age Range
Caroline	Completed an undergraduate degree in Clarinet	80s
James	Took 2 years of piano lessons but mostly self-taught; already an advanced player; sang in the high school choir	Late 60s
Edward	Played in band in high school; started playing the banjo in his 30s; Mother played piano	60s
Tina	Completed undergraduate and graduate degrees in Clarinet; took piano lessons for 2 years as a child and another 2 years of group piano during undergraduate degree	Late 70s
Laura	Played flute since grade 4; plays in a community band; sings in a community chorus	Preferred not to give age
Peter	Only took a few saxophone lessons in 1940	Late 80s

Results

As a result of the interviews with the participants and observations of the classes, responses to the research questions were identified. Common themes were pinpointed and specific quotations from participants illuminated their opinions and attitudes regarding this class setting.

Research question #1: What motivated the collegiate teachers to volunteer as teachers for the class and the adult students to join the class?

All collegiate teachers had varying but related motivating factors for serving as teachers in this class. The collegiate teachers completing graduate degrees wanted to gain more

teaching experience in the group setting while working with a different population of adult students. Sarah expressed specific interest in learning more about the recreational music-making setting. She also noted that she was willing to volunteer her time because she enjoyed teaching those who are motivated to learn how to play the piano. Melanie mentioned that she has a natural affinity for working with older adults as she enjoys their company. She attributed this to the fact that she had a special relationship with her grandfather. The researcher took note that Melanie would always stay after class to converse with some of the adult students who wanted to chat. She easily carried a conversation with them and her interest in them was genuine. Karen had a simple but honest response regarding why she joined the class. She said, “I feel good that I’m helping other people.”

All the undergraduate collegiate teachers wanted to gain some experience teaching in a friendly environment. They also wanted to observe how a group class functioned since they were only familiar with private one-on-one lessons. When asked why they continued to volunteer even in the midst of a busy semester, they provided the following responses:

Mia: It’s rewarding! I feel nice and happy after the class, especially because it’s in the middle of the week. It’s a stress reliever.

Walter: It’s a relaxed way to ease yourself into teaching. To be honest, I didn’t expect it to be this much fun! Before this class, I was not thinking about teaching for my future career but now I realize that teaching is enjoyable!

Eleanor: It’s a new experience for everything! I wanted to jump right in.

Research question #2: What were the expectations of the collegiate teachers and adults students prior to the start of the class?

The graduate collegiate teachers anticipated that although the adult students would quickly understand skills and material from a conceptual standpoint, they expected that the older learners may encounter some physical coordination challenges. Sarah anticipated that “they may have trouble trying new things and may get frustrated sooner since they understand things faster.” They also predicted that it would be difficult teaching one class with individuals of varying levels.

The undergraduate collegiate teachers did not go into the class with many expectations. Eleanor knew she would be engaging with “sweet people” who would be motivated to learn. Other than that, they did not know what to expect. Mia did not even realize that a group piano class for older adults was “a thing” and Walter started volunteering with an open mind to “see what happens.”

Some of the adult students expressed specific expectations for the class. Edward wanted to entertain himself and learn to play, “House of the Rising Sun” and Peter was interested in learning how to play some pieces by Scott Joplin. Laura expected that she would figure out how to coordinate her hands so she could play them together and also improve her reading in the bass clef. Tina wanted to regain skills she had during her undergraduate years and Caroline would be “just glad to play anything.” As the most advanced student entering the class, James said he expected to get through more repertoire and have the opportunity to rehearse accompaniments for choral repertoire.

Research question #3: How did the collegiate teachers structure the class, especially since the adult students were of differing levels? What types of activities were used as part of the curriculum?

As the researcher, I was able to observe that the collegiate teachers engaged the adult students through a number of different activities in each class. They included ensemble playing, singing and rote learning, listening activities, sight-reading, chord structure/harmonization, personal practice time, smaller group work, playing pieces by ear, and repertoire sharing sessions. Approximately one-third of the class time was reserved for personal practice so that adult students could pursue individual interests and the teachers could provide individual attention. During the course of each session, the lead teacher provided the main source of instruction for the adult students as a whole. The assistant teachers checked on the adult students and provided help when needed without disrupting the flow of the class. An example of a lesson plan from week 3 at the beginning of the semester can be found in figure 4.

Objectives: Introduction to the grand staff, C and G chords, listening activity	
5 min	Introduction
5 min	Two-handed rhythms Hands separate/hands together; advanced adult students tap with a specific rhythm
5-10 min	Introduce grand staff Highlight middle C, guide notes treble G and bass F Find 2 nd and 3 rd intervals above and below the three notes listed above and reinforce with flashcards.
10 min	C and G chords Review 5-finger position in C and create C chord Teach G7 chord by rote Go through several examples in the book and explain how chords match up with melodies. Adult students play along.
5-10 min	Listening – Chopin’s Prelude in E minor Listen, class reactions, talk about harmony, find a volunteer to present a piece for next week.
15-20 min	Individual practice time

Figure 4: Sample lesson plan for the third class

Within the first four weeks of classes, most of the adult students were able to play simple single-line melodies, including those students who had a limited musical background. As a result, the collegiate teachers could engage in group activities where everyone participated at their own level. These activities developed ensemble and harmonization skills and helped the adult students to acquire facility with chord progressions. Since the adult students were working at vastly different levels, ensemble arrangements helped to demonstrate how everyone could be engaged at the same time. Those who were more advanced were asked to improvise on an accompaniment based on the harmonization outlined for the adult students. Those who were at the earlier stages of learning the piano played the single melody line. The collegiate teachers guided them to find patterns that suited their individual levels. Playing together helped to foster the skills of collaboration, maintaining a steady pulse, listening, improvising and gaining familiarity with basic chord progressions. The group effort was most certainly motivating and helped keep everyone focused.

Once the adult students had an understanding of how chords or triads were formed at the piano, they were introduced to common chord progressions often found in popular songs. For example, in one class, the lead teacher guided the adult students to play the common chord progression C major, G major, A minor, F major. Prior to this segment, she had shown the class how to create each chord at the keyboard. Visually, it was an easy progression for the adult students to quickly acquire since no black keys were involved. Once the adult students were able to find the chords, they proceeded to sing several popular songs as a class that were all based on this same chord progression. This activity encouraged repetition so that the adult students developed the muscle memory to move from one chord to the next. Also, for those able to

progress faster, they had the option to play the chords in different figurations for an additional challenge. From this one chord progression, they played and sang melodies from the following popular songs: *Time to Say Goodbye*, *Don't Stop Believing*, *Can You Feel the Love Tonight*, *Country Roads*.

The class also had a “repertoire sharing session” at the end of the semester, rather than a recital. The adult students remained at their keyboards and played at the instruments they were used to working on in class. This was a very jovial event. The adult students shared their solo pieces they had been practicing throughout the semester. The group also enjoyed playing their ensemble pieces together.

Research question #4: Was there anything about the class structure and curriculum that the collegiate teachers and adult students did not find particularly advantageous?

Both the collegiate teachers and adult students overwhelmingly had positive comments regarding the class structure and curriculum. However, Melanie noted that inconsistent attendance amongst the adult students did affect lesson planning. She was not expecting this and had to be flexible when preparing for each class due to one adult student's illness and another adult student's work schedule. In order to maintain the relaxed nature of the class, attendance was not mandatory for the participants with the understanding that sometimes they needed to attend to other matters in their lives. The adult students only commented on two minor logistical issues. James commented that parking could sometimes be difficult and Edward preferred a slightly later class time due to his schedule. Caroline mentioned that her only disappointment was that she had to miss some classes due to health issues.

Research question #5: After this class experience, would the adult students prefer the private or group setting for piano instruction?

At the end of the semester of classes, the adult students were asked whether they preferred individual or group instruction. Nearly all adult students preferred the group setting because it was less intimidating and more relaxing. In particular, James enjoyed the social interaction and felt that the group setting offered less pressure than private lessons. Edward acknowledged that he would have preferred individual instruction as it would have allowed him to progress a little faster. However, he said that group instruction was better than no instruction.

Research question #6: How would the collegiate students react to teaching students who were older than them?

When asked what it was like to teach adult students that were from a much older generation (in contrast to their typical students who are younger than them), the collegiate teachers used the word “respect” in their responses. They were mindful of the fact that the adult students had a significant amount of experience and knowledge they could share.

Melanie: It is different. You still want to show them respect because they have all this life experience...not that I don't respect the younger ones. There are many things these students know that we (the young teachers) don't know. I have learned to be happy with any progress.

Sarah: It's fun! I learn from them too. They feel like they can tell me things. There is a lot to learn from their life experience. It takes a different type of respect to work with them. I respect younger students too but this is a different situation. We relate about different things.

Others said it was important to figure out the student's priority and to match his/her expectations. They said that sometimes it was challenging to figure out what type of help the adult students required and if they indeed wanted the assistance. They were learning when to

help adult students versus when to let them solve problems independently. This clearly demonstrated that the collegiate teachers were learning to facilitate and assist their adult students with their musical journeys rather than direct their studies. Karen said that some adult students were more tentative when the class started and did not always speak up when they were confused. This was different from her experience teaching younger students who may have fewer inhibitions. Walter saw how both adult students and children exhibited the same passion for music. All collegiate teachers said they sincerely looked forward to this class every week and considered it a highlight of their schedule. Eleanor said it was “Very rewarding to see their progress and see when the light bulb switched on.” She went on to say, “It was great to see them enjoy themselves and laugh together.”

Research question #7: How would the adult students react to being taught by individuals younger than them?

Working with younger teachers did not seem to be an issue for the adult students. Most noted that they did not even think about the age difference. James remarked, “I know they know more than I do, so what does it matter how old they are?” Laura said she liked the younger teachers as they still have patience and passion. Edward stated, “I have no feeling either way about being taught by someone younger and kind of expect it in this setting and at my age. I imagine younger instructors would have access to newer techniques.”

During my observations, the respect that both the adult students and collegiate teachers had for one another was palpable in the room. With a slight tilt of the head or glance in the direction of a collegiate teacher, the adult students knew that they could rely on the lead teacher and assistants when they needed help. Meanwhile, as the adult students worked on their individual and group activities, the collegiate teachers kept a close eye on the class, carefully

observing the progress of the adult students. They learned to know which adult students were likely to call on them for help and which ones would likely need more independent time.

Instruction looked more like conversation and I saw and heard lots of laughter, saw lots of smiles and witnessed many meaningful interactions.

Research question #8: What would the adult students and collegiate teachers identify as the main benefits and challenges for participating in this type of class?

All teachers identified a number of benefits associated with their participation. Sarah found the adult students to be motivating for her, particularly as she was learning to balance the performance and academic demands of graduate school. She said, “They remind me of why I’m a teacher and musician. They remind me of the joy of simple music.” She went on to say, “They enjoy whatever skill they have. That’s inspiring for me because I can get caught up in all the details of playing and teaching.” Although the experience of instructing this age group was new to her, she was already thinking about how she could start something similar after graduation. Through this hands-on experience, she learned how to help with physical coordination for this age group.

Melanie identified some administrative skills she acquired as a part of this experience. She learned how to advertise, recruit participants and organize this type of class setup. She also addressed the fact that she learned she needed to spend more time creating lesson plans and refining her organizational skills to help all adult students be engaged. She discovered that she constantly needed to remind herself that it was a fun class; the adult students were learning the piano as a hobby. She had to reconsider the way she presented material so that it was always appealing to the adult students. Melanie went on to say that she was still learning to adjust to teaching for this population. She realized that everyone in the class needed patience. Both

collegiate teachers and adult students needed to set realistic expectations and she felt she always needed to remind the adult students to enjoy the journey. She noticed that the adult students could easily get frustrated. Since they already had sophisticated tastes, they could be disheartened if not satisfied with the product of their efforts. Melanie learned that she had to teach the adult students to be patient with themselves.

The undergraduates also identified a number of benefits they experienced as a result of helping with this class. Their reflections included:

Eleanor: It's really neat that I'm getting to know them by teaching them.

Mia: I'm forced to think about things related to piano that I haven't thought about in a while. It is eye-opening. I'm learning how to communicate and find different ways to explain the same thing.

Walter: I'm figuring out the process of learning things and what are the basic fundamentals of playing the piano.

Karen: It's an easier way to start teaching because the participants really want to be there.

The undergraduate assistant teachers also learned how to predict which tasks might be more challenging for some of the adult students.

Although this was overwhelmingly a positive experience for the collegiate teachers, they did identify some specific challenges. Walter said that it was a bit hard to interact with them during the initial classes since they were strangers. Karen mentioned that it was difficult to figure out what type of help the adult students needed or wanted and what each individual's priority was for their piano study.

Many of the adult students identified a number of benefits associated with participating in this class. They emphasized that they liked the social aspect of the class and noted that the teachers' enthusiasm was a significant positive attribute of the experience. They looked forward to being with a group of people who enjoyed music. Laura mentioned that having the class every week motivated her to practice regularly. A number of the adult students noted that the class gave them the opportunity to take piano lessons without making a large financial investment. The adult students felt that generally, the teachers introduced concepts in a well-paced manner, allowing them to catch on or catch up even if they entered the class later in the semester or were absent for some classes. All adult students were motivated to practice and would make time for the piano every day ranging from as little as 15 minutes a day to as much as an hour.

The main challenge identified by the adult students was the pace of the class. Since James was more advanced than the others, he sometimes struggled with holding back and staying with the general pace of the class. Edward acknowledged that it must be hard for the lead teachers to adapt to everyone's levels. There was also a husband-wife team in the class and Tina noted that the most challenging part of the class for her was keeping her husband, Peter on track!

Discussion

A number of benefits related to recreational music making and teacher training can be gleaned from this music class setup and relate to many of the findings cited in the recent literature. Upon analysis of the data, common themes were highlighted and have led to the following assertions. Connections with other recent literature will be referred to when appropriate for each assertion.

Advantages for the Adult Students

For adult students who would not otherwise have the opportunity or motivation to take up piano studies, this group piano class setting provided the incentive to try out something new or fulfill a lifelong passion. The group setting helped to make piano lessons more appealing to this particular set of individuals. It was less intimidating, and even though there were varying levels in this particular class, the collegiate teachers planned carefully and the adult students could still advance at their own pace. The chance to interact with others in the same social group was most appealing and this aspect significantly heightened their enjoyment of the class. The social aspect was clearly a motivating factor for many of the adult students to join the group and reflected the responses of the participants in the case studies by Fung & Lehmberg (2016). This was in contrast to the study by Jutras (2006) which found that older learners were more interested in developing technique rather than the social benefits of pursuing piano study. The difference of these results could be related to two issues: a) the current study involved a much smaller population and the adult students were drawn from an already established social group; or (b) many of the adult students in Jutras' study may have been involved in private piano lessons and so the social benefits were not readily obvious. In the current study, many of the adult students were already friends outside of the class and the chance to spend time together in a laid-back and enjoyable setting could have influenced their decision to join the class. The adult students in the present study were able to positively contribute to the class and the overall group dynamic.

Benefits for the Collegiate Teachers

This class offered collegiate teachers another type of pedagogical experience in a specific setting for a particular population. Several of the collegiate teachers who volunteered for this class noted that after this experience, they would like to start similar programs in the future. Although they experienced the challenge of adapting to adult students of varying levels who had

different learning needs than other students they had encountered, the experience was fulfilling for them. These positive attitudes towards working with older adults echo the findings of previous studies (Borrero, 2015; Hallam, Creech, McQueen, Varvarigou, & Gaunt, 2016; Perkins, Aufegger & Williamon, 2015; deVries, 2012.) They found it to be a non-intimidating and enjoyable way to start gaining experience in teaching since the adults were self-motivated and wanted to be learning the piano. This opinion expressed by the teachers concurs with Villar, Celdrán, Pinazo and Triadó (2010) and Hallam, Creech, McQueen, Varvarigou and Gaunt (2016).

The collegiate teachers learned that this class setting was unique and that these adult students deserved a different type of respect than what was typical with their other students. The intergenerational blend really helped to foster an amicable learning environment. The comments about respect reflected the findings of Beynon and Alfano (2013) as they looked at the interactions of an intergenerational setting. The enthusiasm and musical expertise of the young teachers combined with the wisdom of the older adult students created a class that was nurturing, supportive and inviting. The experiences observed in this class and reported by the participants paralleled those found in previous studies (Dow, Joosten, Biggs & Kimberley, 2016; Beynon & Alfano, 2013).

The collegiate teachers learned how to facilitate physical coordination with adult students at the piano. They learned that the most important strategy for this was patience and managing expectations based on the adult students' goals and interests. They also found this experience to be a healthy reminder about the purpose and joy of music. Many of the collegiate teachers, especially those who had little pedagogical experience, found this setting to be an excellent way to ease into teaching and develop some ways of communicating basic pianistic fundamentals to

other individuals. Walter's response was particularly telling when he stated, "...now I know that teaching is enjoyable!" For some like Walter, this was their first time teaching anyone and since the adult students were self-motivated and eager to learn from them, it was a positive experience. Therefore, the chances of the collegiate teachers seeking out other pedagogical opportunities would be highly likely. This teaching experience may have been the perfect setting to whet the pedagogical appetites of developing musicians.

Recommendations for Future Classes

A number of recommendations can be gleaned from the study of this class setting, particularly for those interested in setting up a similar class in the context of teacher training. If there are varying levels of adult students, it is especially essential to have one or two assistant teachers. This makes this class arrangement an ideal setup for those with little teaching experience and looking to increase their confidence as they explain concepts to others. It is a low risk, non-threatening environment for teachers in training to help develop their verbal pedagogical explanations. The assistant teachers can gradually start to build their pedagogical confidence, knowing a more experienced lead teacher is in the room if questions arise. Also, if a more advanced student-teacher will be leading the class, it is advisable to choose an adult method publication. This will provide some structure as the classes are planned.

Teachers should be chosen carefully. Those leading the class should definitely have pleasing, non-threatening personalities to help make the experience enjoyable for everyone. Instructors and facilitators with open minds will develop flexibility and respect when working with adult students. Teachers need to understand that this pedagogical environment is very much a collaborative one where the teacher acts as facilitator rather than instructor. Adult students are self-regulated and much more independent than students who are children, teenagers, or young

adults (Myers, Bowles, & Dabback, 2013). Additionally, collegiate teachers will not necessarily be able to apply the same approaches their own teachers use with them. Adult students appreciate a relaxed and non-intimidating environment, since most of these individuals are pursuing piano studies for recreational purposes.

The social nature of a group class can be very appealing to adults. Those adult students who seek out a group class may be searching for an interactive opportunity. Therefore, it is important to highlight the collective nature of the class through the use of ensemble repertoire, listening activities and “repertoire sharing sessions.” Rather than recitals, repertoire sharing sessions can often be less intimidating for adult students and they can help maintain the relaxed atmosphere of the class (Schoen, 2018). In this way, adult students can play from their individual digital instruments rather than being singled out on a stage.

It would be ideal for the coordinating teacher to incorporate a variety of activities in each class. Introducing musical notation, playing by ear, ensemble repertoire, playing chord progressions, harmonizing melodies, and listening to recordings are just some of the ways teachers can help adult students achieve satisfaction at an early stage in their piano studies (Fisher, 2010). The group setting can be particularly useful for developing these skills since participants can bounce ideas off one another and be motivated by the teamwork. The listening activities can serve as great opportunities for participants to take a break in the middle of the class and reflect on chosen repertoire. This is also a chance to broaden their horizons about music with which they might not otherwise be familiar.

Finally, personal practice time is crucial for a group class, especially if students are of varying levels. Adult students will need the chance to synthesize the information sink, which can be accomplished during personal practice time with a teacher nearby to answer questions. Also,

for those who are more advanced, they can have the chance to work on other repertoire and get some individualized feedback.

This particular class setting has the potential to make a sizeable positive impact in the lives of older learners and burgeoning piano teachers. It promotes music learning in a social setting and encourages individuals of varying generations to mingle and learn from one another. New teachers can develop their pedagogical abilities with adult students who are motivated and eager to learn a new skill. If future investigations involve a number of classes encompassing a larger number of participants, researchers could explore ways to optimize the learning possibilities for individuals in this class setting of varying levels. Additionally, it would be useful to quantify the benefits of this type of intergenerational interaction from a sociological and psychological perspective.

Let us think back to Peter, the octogenarian we were introduced to at the beginning of this paper. At the final session, the collegiate teachers organized a repertoire-sharing session for the adult students. The adult students played solos and ensemble pieces they had been working on throughout the semester. Peter chose to play the English folk song "Lavender Blue." It consisted of a melody in the right hand with a chord-based accompaniment in the left hand. All the adult students and collegiate teachers were really captivated by his musical performance of this melody with a simple texture. Towards the end of the piece, he made a slight stumble at the final cadence. However, he took that opportunity to improvise a new ending, bringing a smile and laugh to everyone's face. This ability to adjust and communicate something with music reinforced that this type of group piano class can indeed accommodate the adult students' goals, enhance their quality of life and bring joy to all those involved including the teachers.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

These questions were used as a way to get the conversation flowing with the interviewees. Free responses were encouraged so as to glean as much detail as possible from the participants. The researcher chose 3 or 4 questions to guide the conversation with each participant.

Questions for adult students prior to the first class:

- 1) What is your approximate age range?
- 2) What is/what was your job?
- 3) Do you have any musical training?
- 4) What is your motivation for joining the UMA class?
- 5) What are your expectations for participation?
- 6) Is there a specific reason why you joined the UMA class rather than taking lessons elsewhere?

Questions for adult students during the course of the semester:

- 1) What do you enjoy the most about the class?
- 2) What do you enjoy the least?
- 3) What is the most challenging part of the class?
- 4) What is the least challenging part of the class?
- 5) Are you able to practice at home? How much?
- 6) If given a choice, would you prefer individual or group instruction? Please explain why you feel either the individual or group format would work the best for you.
- 7) What is it like being taught by people younger than you? Do you feel there is a difference when you are being taught by someone older than you?

Questions for teachers prior to the first class:

- 1) What is your age range and educational background?
- 2) Describe your teaching experience. Do you have any experience teaching adult students?
- 3) What is your motivation for participating in the UMA class as a teacher?
- 4) What are your expectations? What do you think will be the adult students' learning needs? What challenges do you anticipate?
- 5) What benefits do you perceive to come from this experience?

Questions for the teachers during the course of the semester:

- 1) What are the benefits of this experience? What are the benefits working with this population?
- 2) What are the challenges that you are facing?
- 3) What skills are you developing that can help assist with your teaching career?
- 4) What is it like teaching people that are older than you? Is it different than teaching those younger or around the same age as you?