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# Demographics and Motivation of Adult Group Piano Students

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## Demographics and Motivation of Adult Group Piano Students

### *Abstract*

As people are living longer and enjoying better quality of life, there has been a corresponding increase in interest in recreational music making by adults. This study examined the demographics and motivations of students enrolled in the Community Piano Experience hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music. Twenty-six participants completed Survey A before beginning the program, while 20 participants completed Survey B at the culmination of their instruction. Interpretation of both surveys demonstrated that these adult piano students were clear about their goals (anticipated rewards) from the outset of piano study. While unsure about the appropriateness of the group instructional environment at the outset of study, the participants were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the group environment by the end of the program. Participants were specific regarding what qualities they were seeking in a piano instructor, with certain qualities such as patience, positive demeanor, and knowledge/passion for music frequently cited in both surveys.

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### *Biographical Details:*

Dr. Brenda Wristen is Assistant Professor of Piano Pedagogy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she directs the piano pedagogy and keyboard skills programs. Additionally, she is founder and director of the Community Piano Experience, an outreach program that offers beginning and intermediate class piano instruction for adults and other non-traditional piano students. Prevention of piano-related overuse injuries and biomechanical approaches to piano technique represents Dr. Wristen's primary research focus. As a recognized expert in this field, she has presented her research regarding prevention of music-related injuries at numerous meetings of national, state, and local associations, including Music Teachers National Association, the College Music Society, and the Performing Arts Medicine Association (in conjunction with the Aspen Music Festival), the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, and the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society. Dr. Wristen has authored articles for *American Music Teacher*, *Clavier*, *Keyboard Companion*, *Piano Pedagogy Forum*, *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, and *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*. She is currently chair of the Pianists and Wellness Committee for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, and serves on the pedagogy committee of Music Teachers National Association. In addition to her teaching and research activities, Dr. Wristen is an active clinician, adjudicator, and performer.

As human longevity has increased, there has been a widespread societal change in perception regarding the retirement years. The notion that learning can continue over a lifetime has resulted in increased interest in adult education, reflected in larger numbers of nontraditional students enrolled in colleges and universities, and rising popularity of educational programs targeted toward adults, such as Elderhostel programs, continuing education programs at community colleges, community centers, parks and recreation departments and similar organizations. A 1998 report from the U.S. Department of Education showed that 40% of American adults were participating in some type of adult education service, representing a 32% increase from a similar study conducted in 1991.

While music therapy has been an accepted aid in recovery from disease or trauma for many years, widespread interest in recreational music-making for adult learners is a more recent development. The number of adults who are actively participating in music study has steadily risen over the past 30 years. A survey done by the National Research Center of the Arts in 1975 and repeated in 1980 showed performance participation, performance attendance, and music listening all rose significantly nationwide in the years between surveys (National Research Center of the Arts, 1975, 1981). NAMM, the International Music Products Association, commissioned a Gallup Survey in 2003 that found that 27% of American adults aged 18-34, 22% of adults aged 35-49, and 20% of adults over age 50 play a musical instrument.

Along with this trend toward increasing music education for adults, there is an associated increase in awareness and interest in funding piano programs for senior citizens. Gibbons (1979) found that older adults have a capacity for musical skill development and enjoyment and that aging does not decrease music-making ability. Of course, sometimes instructional adaptations must be made to address the physical, mental, and social problems of the elderly (Davidson

1980). Music programs for the elderly are proving increasingly popular, spurred on by growing evidence that stimulating the mind actually prevents or retards the loss of brain function often associated with aging (Ernst & Emmons, 1992). More adults are studying music than ever before to enhance the quality of their lives (Boswell, 1992; Myers, 1990; Patchen, 1984).

Tims (1999) studied quality of life in senior citizens enrolled in keyboard lessons. A control group, who did not receive lessons, was also monitored during this same time period for the same measures. Subjects completed a wellness inventory test to determine general health and self-perceived mental states. During Phase I of this study (January 1996- September 1997), data was collected over 50 weeks, with students completing a self-psychological assessment every 10 weeks. Questions included on this measure related to general health, sense of control, stress, depression, loneliness, coping mechanisms, and social support (Koga & Tims, 2001). Blood samples were collected periodically from both the test and control groups to measure human growth hormone (hGH), which has a positive impact on energy levels, wrinkling, osteoporosis, sexual function, and muscle mass. Human growth hormone normally decreases markedly as one grows older. Notably, the levels of hGH were significantly higher in the test group in comparison with those participants who did not receive lessons. Subjective reports from the test group demonstrated decreased anxiety after 10 weeks of instruction, and anxiety levels remained low for up to 20 weeks after the end of lessons. Decreased anxiety was correlated with improvement in cognition, decision-making, and feelings of well-being. Phase II of the study took place from Oct. 1997 to Sept 1998 and examined a larger subject population (n=100). Subjects who took keyboard lessons had a 90% increase in hGH as measured by blood sampling. The control group again showed little change in their hGH levels. This study underscores the potential health and wellness benefits for older adults who study music in group settings.

Band and choir programs for older adults began to be established about twenty years ago, and that trend continues today (Salamony, 1982; Coffman, 1996; Ernst and Emmons, 1992; Wizenried, 1999). Group music programs fulfill a very real need among older adults for identity, participation, and partnership in the learning process (Boswell, 1992). In fact, in describing an adult piano class in Ohio, Conda (1997) identified being part of a group as a major motivating factor. While class piano programs are relative newcomers to the scene of adult education, there is no reason that they cannot prove as successful and fulfilling for their participants as other group music programs such as band and choir.

### *Motivating Factors*

Adults are typically highly motivated students. Retired adults, in particular, have the time to pursue interests purely for self-fulfillment and pleasure. They may have studied music earlier as a child or adolescent, or they may be approaching music study for the first time. Adult recreational musicians recognize the intrinsic value of learning to make music and find the process itself pleasurable (Boswell, 1992; Ernst & Emmons, 1992). Although adults enjoy recreational group music experiences, as noted above, they also demonstrate high drop-out rates (Boswell 1992; Marciano 1990) that may result from a combination of overscheduling and unforeseen but imminent circumstances, such as the need to care for an elderly parent.

While adult piano students tend to be highly motivated at the outset of instruction, there is also a huge potential for discouragement and drop out as students find that playing the piano is more difficult than anticipated. Adults are easily frustrated by cognitive-motor skill disconnect. The adult's brain knows what it wants to accomplish musically, but the fingers are frustratingly slow to respond. Adults may also be more susceptible to frustration than children. After all, adults have become accustomed to success at their chosen professions, hobbies, and interests,

while children often fail repeatedly at various tasks as they go about finding what they are “good” at in life. In a questionnaire-based study, Marciano (1990) identified some of the potential interferences with adult piano student motivation. He points to adult learners’ typically unrealistic expectations for progress. Holding unduly high expectations for their playing, adults are often embarrassed to risk “losing face” by playing for anyone, especially a trained teacher. Adults may be reluctant to place themselves in unfamiliar situations where they perceive their pride or self-image to be at risk (Maris, 2000).

Adult students reasonably expect enjoyable recreational experiences. Specific teaching strategies have been identified for teaching adults that have proven effective in avoiding possible discouragement and an ensuing loss in motivation. Humans become progressively more verbal in their learning styles as they ages. Adult students often prefer verbal means of understanding new materials, including analogies and comparisons (Maris, 2000). Adults also tend to be more analytical and reflective in their learning processes than are children (Myers, 1992).

However, just because they have more advanced cognitive abilities than children does not mean that adults do not need hands-on, active learning opportunities as much as children do (Myers, 1992). Even though adults tend to rely heavily upon verbal instruction, they can still benefit from discovery learning (Maris, 2000). As a case in point, New Horizons community band program at the Eastman School of music broke basic music reading instruction into phases that allowed students to experience making music before they tried to read it. The prenotational phase (4 weeks) emphasized singing, rhythmic movement, performance fundamentals, basic instrumental technique, playing by ear, improvisation, and composition of original music. Notation was not introduced until students had the fundamentals of instrumental technique in place. Moreover, teachers introduced music reading by presenting students with notated songs

they could already play. Teaching reading thus proceeded from the known to the unknown (Ernst & Emmons, 1992). In order to facilitate this type of learning, teachers can emphasize listening, developing basic technique, problem-solving, reflective thinking, collaborative goal setting and decision making. Teachers also need to listen carefully to questions asked by the students to determine the adult's current level of understanding and present him/her with open-ended problem-solving tasks that they can participate in actively. Adult students enjoy incorporating their personal experiences into new learning (Myers, 1992). Thus, the teacher should encourage associations of musical concepts or physical movements necessary to play the piano with work or other life experiences. The teacher needs to adapt fundamental musical concepts and techniques to characteristics of learners (Myers, 1992) while avoiding any hint of patronizing the adult student.

Instructional pacing is another area where the teacher can promote motivation among adult music students. Many adult learners prefer to set their own pace of learning. An overly fast sequence of instruction dictated by the teacher can result in increased anxiety (Maris, 2000). Instead of exclusively directing the learning pace, the teacher should make an effort to promote self-learning. Self-direction increases independence and self-confidence (Myers, 1992). The teacher needs to provide for the adult student's need for self-direction without completely removing him/herself from the process. Too much freedom can be stressful—adult students need parameters for making judgments about lesson content and direction. The teacher needs to strike a balance between providing opportunities for self-direction and providing structure and guidance (Johnson, 1996). One concrete way to address this issue is to allow adult students to actively participate in selecting music and materials. Teachers need to provide enough time to assimilate new concepts and motor skills (Myers, 1992), and frequently revisit previously

learned pieces. Since adults often become discouraged at what they perceive to be slow progress, once adults master a motor skill or concept, it can be encouraging for the teacher to emphasize that once new learning is ingrained, adults strongly retain it over time (Maris, 2000).

Johnson (1996) recommends several teaching strategies to help maintain motivation among adult piano students. First, teachers can help students learn to enjoy the process of learning and practicing. Since adults are harsh critics of their own efforts, a very important role of the teacher is to help instill realistic expectations. This observation is echoed by Maris (2000). Some additional causes of frustration cited by Maris among her many adult students include: not understanding something, not having skills necessary to attain a goal with ease, not having enough time to accomplish their goals in music study, and not getting enough in return for the work they have invested in music learning. The teacher can help mitigate these potential discouragements by offering clear and concise instruction, taking frequent breaks during instruction, changing tasks frequently, giving frequent and honest feedback, and offering frequent reassurance about the learner's progress (Myers, 1992). Revisiting previously learned pieces can also help in this regard, as the adult student will likely find the piece easier the second time around. This helps underscore the progress that the student has made and helps him/her refocus on the process of learning rather than evaluating progress solely on the basis of the musical product.

Music-making in a group environment provides stimulation in and of itself for many adult learners. Boswell (1992) has postulated that participating in intergenerational ensembles might be particularly rewarding for adults. Teaching piano in a group setting also provides an opportunity to integrate motivating technologies. Surprisingly, instead of avoiding music technology many adult learners find it attractive (Boswell, 1992). Hall conducted a study of an



adult group piano class in 2001 in which participants used self-paced computer-aided instruction in order to reduce pressure to keep up with other members of the class. Among total respondents, 89% percent of the group found CAI “fun.” Participants identified independent learning, opportunities for teacher help, the software itself, and personal progress as their favorite parts of the group instruction. Hall concluded that while the use of CAI in piano classes did not improve the students’ perceptions of how “well” they were doing in the course, the participants did consider the course to be a positive learning experience. Cooper (1996) sent questionnaires to 747 members of the Alumni Association at Baylor University inquiring about their former and current piano study. While respondents in this study were studying in individual settings rather than in groups, Cooper found that half of all respondents reported participation in choir as adults. This finding underscores the potentially strong motivating factors of group participation and providing a social aspect in music participation. In fact, the majority of Cooper’s respondents expressed their preference for leisure activities that are carried out in social settings. Participating in group music-making also apparently influences the desire to pursue further musical instruction as an adult. Bowles (1991) found that prospective adult music participants had typically had some type of prior musical instruction, most often piano lessons and had also generally participated in a group music-making activity, most frequently choir membership during the high school years.

Adults studying piano in groups enjoy several benefits in comparison with peers pursuing lessons individually with a teacher. Myers (1990) reported that students’ assessments of their musical skill level improved significantly as a result of their study in a skills-based class setting. Stronger students serve to motivate the rest of the group. There’s an excitement that builds from a class in which all participants are engaged. Students are willing to go beyond their comfort

zones and try something if all other members of the group will do it with them. Playing with the group also reinforces a sense of rhythmic pulse (Bissell, 1984). Additional benefits from group piano participation include developing the ability to play with others and learning to overcome “nerves” when playing in front of the group. (Devereux, 1986, Walmsley, 2002). Of course, group study also has potential limitations, including lack of time for individual assistance and instruction and adequately addressing the needs of students with special needs, such as impaired vision or hearing.

### *Description Of Community Piano Experience Program*

The Community Piano Experience program is a self-supporting class piano program that meets on campus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music. Both a beginning and an intermediate class are offered, with a maximum of 15 seats available per class. Students play on Roland digital pianos networked to a central teacher unit. The texts chosen for these classes were the Alfred Piano 101 (Lancaster & Renfrow, 1999) books I and II, along with MIDI disk accompaniment, which provides an orchestral background for the students to play along with. The texts emphasize traditional piano skills, but were written expressly for group piano instruction. The progression of skills moves from recognition and playing of black-key groups at the piano, to 5-finger position-based reading (C major, then G, then F in book one, with a minor, d minor, D Major, B-flat Major, and g minor added in book 2), to interval recognition stressed in addition to position-based piano playing. Basic theory emphasized includes rhythmic values beginning with quarter note pulse, key signatures, accidentals, scales, chords, and chord progressions. Throughout, the text includes music that is likely to appeal to adult students, such as an adapted version of “Für Elise” by Beethoven. One of the primary reasons this particular text was selected for the course is its inclusion of both ensemble pieces, which stimulate students

to play collaboratively, and lead sheets, which allow students to apply theoretical knowledge of chords gained throughout the course to harmonize a melody. Vignettes scattered throughout the textbooks offer performance practice or composer background information, often provoking discussions about music history.

The participants for the present study were enrolled in the program in Fall 2004. Each class met one evening per week, from 5:15 to 7:15 pm, over a period of eleven weeks. Breaks were taken during each class session to ensure that students did not become fatigued or lose interest. The beginning class serves as a lab teaching experience for upperclassmen and graduate students enrolled in piano pedagogy courses at the University of Nebraska; in the term of this investigation, all but one of these instructors were graduate students. Thus, this class was team taught by a number of instructors. The investigator also taught periodically and attended every class meeting to observe student instructor teaching. The intermediate level course was taught by a graduate student majoring in piano with a pedagogy emphasis. Though every intern teacher had his/her own teaching style and persona, emphasis was placed on heuristic, problem-solving approaches. Instruction was designed to be student centered and supportive, with ample direction provided by both the intern teachers and the director of the Community Piano Experience. An example of how this approach was applied in the class can be illustrated by the manner in which students learned about tonality. The intern teacher asked the students place their right hand thumb on C and told them to “put one finger over the next four white keys up from C,” resulting in the students building a 5-finger pattern. After the students had their hands in position, they were prompted to “discover” the pattern of half and whole steps comprising the 5-finger position. After this information was secure, students located the left hand in C position. Once students had begun to feel comfortable within the C Major 5-finger position, they were

asked to relocate their hands over a G. They then played a simple melody that they had learned in C position. This process was repeated in several other positions until students “discovered” that, even though there might be black keys involved, as long as they maintained the proper relationship of half and whole steps within their hand position, they could play in any key.

The basic instructional approach used during class was fairly consistent, although communication styles varied widely. Some of the students in the course, for example, expressed their concern on the survey regarding the “understandability” of a foreign graduate student. However, the director of the Community Piano Experience (this investigator) was present during every class and was able to intervene and clarify or improve instructional delivery as necessary. Moreover, each intern teacher received specific instruction in the pedagogy class in which they were concurrently enrolled as to how to communicate effectively without patronizing students, how to structure and execute a lesson plan, how to elicit continuous student involvement, and how to integrate the use of MIDI disk technology into the class. After each class session, intern teachers received formal observation comments from the director of the program as to how to improve their future teaching.

Since adults commonly express a dislike of formal performances (Cooper 1996), perhaps related to fear of failure in performance, at the culmination of this course, the students participated in a closure “piano party.” This was a social occasion with food, conversation, and, of course, piano performances by members of the classes that provided students with a performance goal and an opportunity to demonstrate what they learned throughout the semester in a low-pressure environment.

## *Methodology*

The purpose of this study was to examine the goals, attitudes, and motivations of a particular group of adult learners studying piano in the Community Piano Experience program during Fall 2004. Students from both the beginning and the intermediate level piano classes were invited to participate. After informed consent was obtained consistent with institutional review procedures, Survey A (Figure 1) was administered at the first class meeting before any instruction had taken place. Some students were unable to attend the first class and thus missed the opportunity to take Survey A, while others opted out of the study altogether. After instruction was complete, participants completed Survey B (Figure 2) at the closure party. All participants were assigned numbers to maintain anonymity in their responses. The number of participants completing Survey A was 26 (n=26) and 20 completed Survey B (n=20). Thus, the rate for participants completing both surveys was 72.9%. Participants were not required to commit to completing the course, or finishing a certain number of hours before completing the post-survey. Though 10 participants did not respond to the first question on the survey asking them to identify their class level, possibly due to poor visual placement of this question on the survey instrument, the investigator was able to identify 7 of these participants as beginning students through comparison of participant numbers on Surveys A and B.

**Participant Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Class level (circle one):** **Beginning**

**Intermediate**

**Survey A: Pre-Class Experience Survey**

1. What age are you (select one)
  - 19-29
  - 30-39
  - 40-49
  - 50-59
  - 60-69
  - 70-79
  - 80 or older
2. How did you learn about this class
  - a. newspaper
  - b. television
  - c. word-of-mouth
  - d. other (please explain)
3. What is your work situation?
  - a. Work full time outside the home
  - b. Work part time outside the home
  - c. Work from my home
  - d. Retired
  - e. Other
4. What are your goals for piano study?
5. Why did you decide to take this class as opposed to private lessons?
6. Do you have any physical difficulties that may impact your piano study? Please describe them below.
7. Describe your previous piano playing experience.
8. What do you anticipate will be most rewarding about piano study?
9. What do you anticipate that you will find frustrating?
10. What qualities are you looking for in a piano teacher?
11. Do you think that taking piano lessons in a group, versus taking individual lessons, will help or hinder your learning? Why do you feel this way?
12. Describe how you tend to learn best.

*Figure 1: Survey A, administered prior to class piano instruction.*

Participant Number \_\_\_\_\_

Class level (circle one): **Beginning**

**Intermediate**

**Survey B: Post-Class Experience Survey**

1. Age group  
19-29  
30-39  
40-49  
50-59  
60-69  
70-79  
80 or older
2. Did you meet your initial goals for piano study?
3. Did the instructors help you address and/or overcome any physical difficulties that may have that interfered with your piano study?
4. What did you find rewarding and/or enjoyable about your piano study experience?
5. Did you find any parts of the class or your own individual practice experience to be frustrating? Please explain.
6. What did you feel was the most beneficial part of this class?
7. What did you feel was the *least* beneficial part of this class?
8. What qualities did you most value in the instructors? What qualities did you find less appealing in the instructors?
9. Did you feel that you were able to learn from class instruction given your individual learning style?
10. Given your own experience, what would be your advice to other adults who wish to take this piano class?
11. What suggestions, if any, would you offer for improving this piano class?

*Figure 2: Survey B, administered after class piano instruction.*

While some of the questions on the surveys were designed to measure changes in participants' attitudes and motivation over the course of instruction, these surveys were not designed as pre- and post-surveys in that they were not parallel. There were, however, several paired questions on Survey A and Survey B since a secondary research question was whether participants' goals or motivations would shift during the course of piano instruction. For example, Survey A contained a question regarding anticipated frustrations while Survey B inquired about *actual* frustrations of students during the course of instruction. While some of the questions on both Survey A and Survey B were objective, asking participants to identify

themselves within an age category, for example, other questions on both surveys were intentionally designed to be open-ended, inviting subjective responses. This study was not designed to yield empirical results. Subjective questions did not provide pre-designated options or Likert scales for participant response. Rather, the questionnaires were developed to allow participants to express themselves in their own words. The goal in examining the responses in this matter is to give teachers of adult piano students immediately applicable, meaningful feedback regarding some characteristics of adult learners. Some of the participants indicated multiples responses for a question. For example, for Survey A question 3 relating to work situation, s/he selected both “retired” AND “work part time outside the home.” In a case such as this, both responses have been included in the reported results below.

The open-ended questions elicited multiple responses. The raw data was not qualitatively coded since questions contained on the instrument were highly specific and participant responses were extremely direct and concise; responses rarely exceeded two sentences per question. Since participants offered far too many responses to address individually in the ensuing results section, the investigator grouped responses according to theme. For example, question 4 of Survey A asked participants to identify goals for piano study. While one participant wrote “get reacquainted with playing piano,” another responded “to learn how to make music with my own hands,” and yet another responded “to learn to read music and keep time.” The investigator combined these similar responses into the descriptor “increase or gain skill.” As another example, in response to question 4 on Survey B regarding what participants found rewarding about the class, one participant responded that working with “others in the same boat” was enjoyable, while another participant wrote that “keeping up with others” was rewarding. Since both of these responses related to group interaction, they were combined them into a larger



category designated as “group environment.” In cases where a single outlying participant response did not fit within a larger category or did not answer the question posed, it was excluded.

### *Results*

For the purposes of interpreting the results of this study, the questions on both the pre-survey and the post-survey were divided into three large categories: Demographics, Group Environment, and Motivation of Adult Piano Students. The latter category includes intrinsic motivational factors, anticipated benefits and frustrations, participant comments regarding qualities of the instructors, and advice participants would offer to other prospective adult piano students. Questions from both Survey A and Survey B are itemized beside their respective categories, identifying the questions from which the participant information was derived.

#### *Demographics (Survey A: Q1, 2, 3, 6, 7; Survey B: Q1, 3)*

The ages of the participants in the class can be represented as a normally distributed curve, with the peak being comprised of the age group 50-59 (**Figure 3**). Several of the participants had previous piano experience. Half of the participants (13 of 26) on Survey A indicated that they had taken piano lessons as a child or adolescent and had enrolled in the course to “reacquaint” themselves with the piano. Five of 26 participants indicated that they were self-taught or played by ear. The three respondents who indicated that they had previous class piano experience were students in the intermediate level course who had completed the beginning level of the Community Piano Experience in a prior semester. Finally, 7 participants indicated that they had no previous piano experience. This question was admittedly a limitation of this study, as the question was phrased to elicit previous *piano* experience. One wonders if students who have studied any musical instrument (not piano) previously might have some additional

advantages to bring to piano study. It would be interesting to see if there is a correlation between prior musical study of any kind and musical success at the piano. Additionally, investigation of the relationship of prior musical study to perceptions of self-efficacy and practice habits might prove illustrative. Information regarding gender or socioeconomic status was not collected as it was not deemed relevant to the present study since the research population was confined to small numbers of subjects within the community of Lincoln, Nebraska. The class was extremely reasonably priced at \$175 for 22 hours of instruction and all course materials, including the textbook, so as not to be cost prohibitive. However, information regarding these demographic variables would likely prove illustrative in a study of adult piano students employing a larger research population, and might be helpful to individuals planning new recreational piano programs in terms of marketing and curricular development.

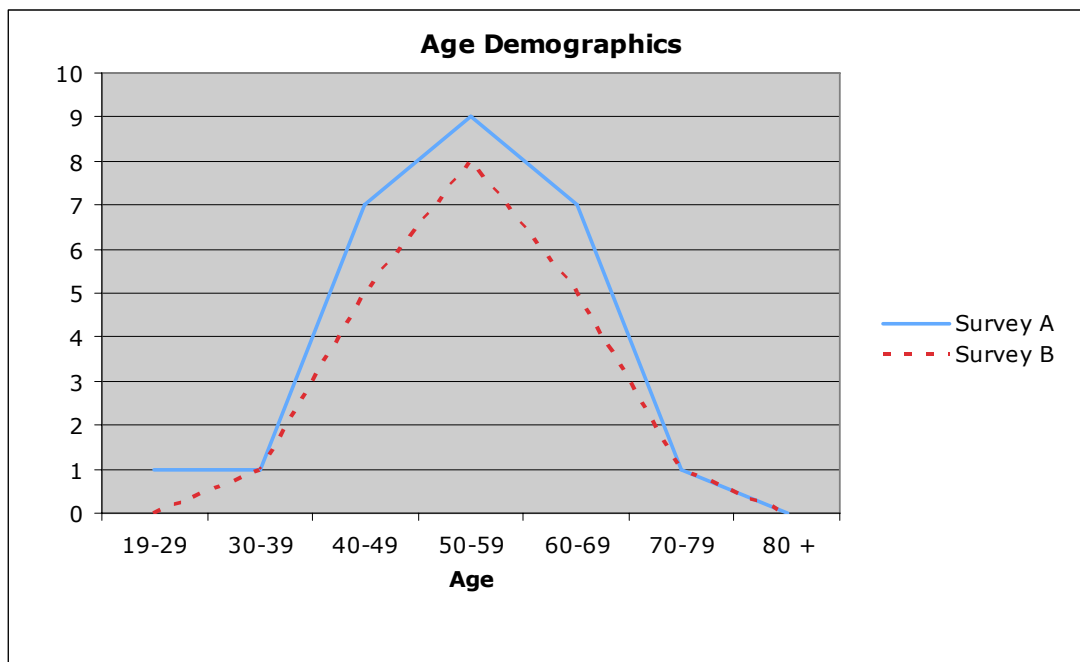
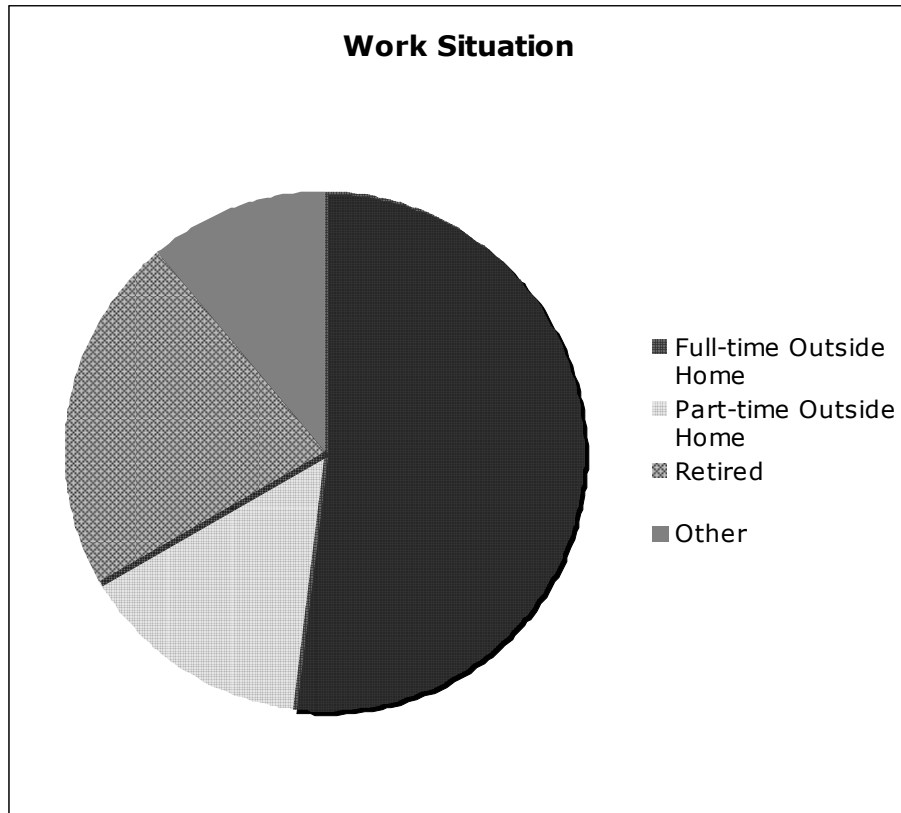


Figure 3: Breakdown of Participant Age Groups

When asked an open-ended question about any physical difficulties that might impact their piano study, 17 of 26 participants indicated on Survey A that they had no such difficulties. Three participants cited “normal old age stuff” including arthritis in the hands or fingers and 2 indicated that they wore glasses. In actuality, many class participants wore glasses, but did not identify that as a physical difficulty on Survey A. One class participant indicated that she suffered from a dystonia in the neck that also affected her right arm and shoulder. When asked on Survey B whether instructors helped the participants overcome any physical difficulties they might have encountered during the course, 12 out of 20 participants responded “yes,” while 9 participants found the question “not applicable” to their class piano experience. Two participants noted that they observed such assistance being provided to other students. No participants responded “no” to this question regarding physical assistance from instructors.

While gender, socioeconomic status, and impact of previous instrumental study were not addressed in the present study, age and work situation were examined in order to determine whether curricular and scheduling adjustments might be needed in future semesters. In terms of their work situations, 14 of 26 participants completing Survey A indicated that they worked full-time outside the home; 6 indicated that they were retired; 4 worked part-time outside the home; and 3 identified their work situation as “other” (Figure 4). As mentioned earlier, some participants gave more than one response to this question. Of the choices given regarding marketing strategies (Survey A), newspaper advertising was by far the most effective, having recruited 18 of the members of the class. Word-of-mouth was the second most effective marketing strategy, with 4 participants learning of the class in this manner. Four participants learned of the course through other means of advertising, or were contacted by the CPE program from a waiting list maintained from prior semesters.



*Figure 4: Work Situation of Participants*

Over the course of the semester, several participants stopped coming to the classes. From the age group 19-29, a single participant did not complete the term; two participants from the age group 40-49 discontinued; one participant from age group 50-59 discontinued; and, two participants discontinued from the 60-69 group. Though there was not a question on the survey instrument to solicit reasons for discontinuation of study, reasons volunteered for not completing the piano course included work schedule conflicts (in some cases, a change of job), and lack of time due to family obligations. This attrition reinforces earlier published observations regarding reasons adult students “drop out” of music study (Marciano, 1990; Boswell, 1992).

*Group Environment (Survey A: Q5, 11; Survey B: Q 7, 9)*

As identified by Survey A, a large majority of the participants in this course (19 of 26) felt that taking piano lessons in a group, rather than in a private setting, would help their learning, while 5 indicated that they “didn’t know.” One participant expressed that s/he didn’t know, but felt optimistic that group piano would be a stimulating learning environment, and another acknowledged that the success of learning in a group “depends on yourself.” Those who anticipated that group piano would be helpful in comparison to private lessons frequently cited the element of learning with “others in the same boat” as a benefit. They also felt that the group environment would be supportive and allow them to learn from others while placing “less focus” on them individually. They felt less likely to be embarrassed by mistakes and more likely to find the course relaxing, motivating and less demanding. Cited motivational factors cited for taking this group piano class rather than seeking out private piano instruction included “not [being] ready for” private lessons or not knowing any piano teachers (11 of 26), the appeal of the group setting (10), appealing time and/or location (8), and economic value (4). After the course, students overwhelmingly indicated in 17 out of 20 responses that they found the group learning environment helpful, even considering their individual learning styles. The reasons cited for enjoyment of the group environment included “filling in the basics,” the self-paced nature of the course, the higher comfort level in comparison with individual lessons, and the “hands-on” learning experience. Three out of 20 participants felt the group environment was “somewhat” helpful to learning given their individual learning styles, with comments including “[I] did not leave with enthusiasm,” and “[I] needed more challenging pieces.” Similarly, on question 7 of Survey B, 3 of 20 respondents indicated that they found certain qualities of the group setting and/or the size of the group one of the least beneficial aspects of the piano course. For example, one participant noted “not all students were attentive to the instructor.”

### *Motivation*

*Goals Of Learners (Pre-survey: Q4, 8, 12; Post-survey: Q2, 4, 5, 10).* Stated goals for the adult participants in this study are comparable to those identified by Cooper (1996), including skill development, personal pleasure/enjoyment, self-expression, and love of the instrument. On Survey A, taken prior to instruction, the most frequently stated goal (15 occurrences among 26 respondents) for pursuing piano study was to increase or gain skill (Figure 5), followed closely by the desire to pursue a hobby that would be enjoyable and relaxing (11 responses). Other stated goals were to play with or for family members, particularly children or grandchildren, and personal growth/ challenge. It bears repeating that many participants offered multiple responses to this question. At the conclusion of the study (Survey B), 17 of 20 respondents indicated that they had attained their previously stated goals for piano study. Two of 20 participants indicated that they did not meet their goals, citing missed classes and lack of practice as reasons. One participant did not respond to the question.

*Perceived Rewards of Study (Survey A: Q4; Survey B: Q8).* Participants in Cooper's 1996 study perceived rewards of piano study to be happiness, relaxation, developing discipline, personal pleasure, improving concentration, developing the ability to express oneself, and increased feelings of self-esteem. Similarly, in assessing 711 adult piano students from 24 states spread throughout the U.S., Jutras (2003) found that the most agreed upon rewards valued by adult piano students were dream fulfillment, skill and technique improvement, musical knowledge, enjoyment, improved feelings of self-efficacy, building piano technique, escaping from routine, and personal growth. While the participants in the present study used slightly different vocabulary, in content perceived rewards expressed in this study echo the

aforementioned studies. In terms of rewards they projected they would receive from the piano course on Survey A, respondents overwhelmingly identified gaining skill or knowledge (Figure 5). Other projected rewards included enjoyment/relaxation, qualities of the music itself, playing with others, and personal growth. In terms of perceived rewards at the conclusion of the study, participants confirmed that learning or increasing musical skill was the greatest benefit of the class, with one participant noting that s/he “far exceeded [his/her] expectations.” Other rewarding experiences cited were the group environment and playing/practicing music. One student noted that s/he enjoyed practicing because it enabled him/her to “forget about everything else.” Other participants commented on the concentration and focus developed by piano practice. These perceived rewards of piano study support those identified in other studies of adult piano students (Cooper, 1996; Conda, 1997). Though her participants were studying in one-on-one settings with a teacher rather than in groups, the adults in the Cooper study reported a high level of enjoyment for the process of music making itself, including practice.

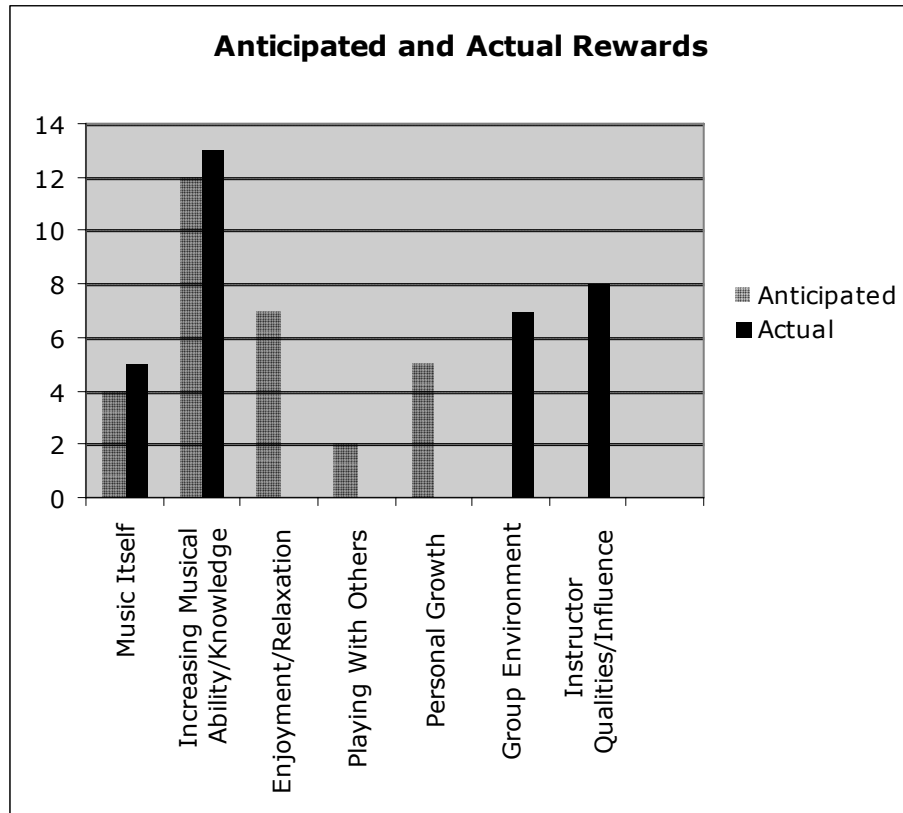


Figure 5: Anticipated (Survey A) and actual (Survey B) rewards as cited by participants.

*Anticipated and Actual Benefits and Frustrations.* (Survey A: Q 8, 9; Survey B: Q 6, 7, 11) In regard to the question regarding “benefits” of participation in this course, the three main categories cited were course materials, skills, and assignments (15 of 20 responses), instructors and instructional delivery (7), and the group environment (4). Surprisingly, a relatively large number of respondents in the present study (8 of 20), also indicated that encounters with the instructors were a *reward* of the class, underscoring the valuable role of the teacher in how adult students perceive the value of piano study (Figure 5). Participants were also invited to comment on aspects of the piano class and instruction that they found *least* beneficial. A majority of respondents (11 of 20) either left the item blank on Survey B or indicated that all of the



instruction was beneficial. Four participants cited differences in the teaching abilities of the various student instructors or instructional delivery as less beneficial. Finally, two participants cited logistical issues such as scheduling and lack of easily accessible parking as the least beneficial aspects of the course. When offered the opportunity to offer suggestions for improving the course, 8 of 20 respondents responded with “none.” Suggestions for improvement included offering the class at a different time of day and/or offering more class sessions (4 of 20), offering an additional intermediate level class as a continuation course (4), and giving students more individual help and feedback (3).

Participants were fairly realistic when queried on Survey A about frustrations they expected to encounter (Figure 6). Of 26 respondents, 8 indicated that reading/locating chords and notes might prove frustrating. Other anticipated frustrations included coordinating the hands and fingers (4), and the slow process of learning (4). Nine participants listed miscellaneous potential frustrations, including not having enough time to practice or improve, not being able to keep up with class work, “not learning as much as [s/he] wants,” and logistical issues. Five participants indicated they anticipated no or unknown frustrations. When followed up on Survey B about their actual frustrations during the course, 7 of the 20 respondents indicated that they found course materials or skills (such as note reading, finding chords, or understanding theory concepts) to be frustrating. Other frustrations noted included the pace of instruction being too slow or too fast for individual preference (6), not having enough time to practice or play (4), and several other miscellaneous comments (3). Several respondents commented that the instructors were sensitive to factors participants found frustrating and offered assistance when needed. Five of the 20 participants indicated that they found nothing about the course frustrating. Participants in this particular piano class were evidently not deterred by frustrations

encountered during the course of study. When asked on Survey B what their advice would be to other adults considering taking the piano class, 18 of 20 respondents strongly indicated that they would recommend the course. Other comments offered were that the class was a good introduction to playing piano (3), and that the group environment was helpful (3).

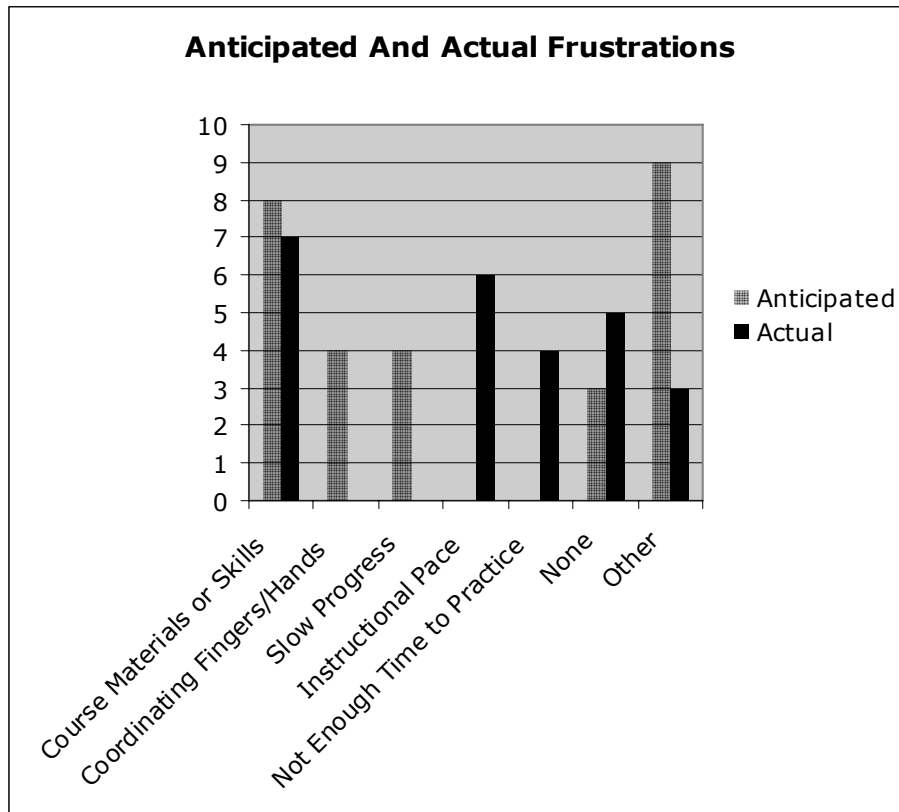


Figure 6: Anticipated (Survey A) and actual (Survey B) frustrations as cited by participants.

*Qualities Of Instructor (Survey A: Q10; Survey B: Q 8).* Participants on both questionnaires offered a multiplicity of responses when asked about what qualities they valued in a piano instructor. Prior to instruction, the most sought-after quality in a piano instructor was patience and/or understanding (16 of 26 respondents), closely followed by a positive, encouraging demeanor (13). Other instructor attributes sought included knowledge and passion

for music (8), a sense of humor (4), the ability to make class fun (4), ability to provide clear and concise instructional delivery (3), ability to give constructive feedback (3), and professionalism/consistency (2). After the course was over, the responses on Survey B were much narrower in focus with regard to qualities valued in the instructors. Eight of 20 respondents valued the enthusiasm/energy of the instructors highly, and another 8 commented on the personable/encouraging demeanor of the instructors. Other qualities cited as valuable in the instructors included knowledge of music and the ability to communicate (4) and patience (2). Qualities respondents found less appealing in the instructors fell into a single category: instructional delivery, which 6 of 20 respondents cited. Comments in this area included that the student instructors “sometimes talked too fast,” “could have explained more clearly,” sometimes “needed to be better prepared,” and similar observations.

### *Discussion*

The attrition rate demonstrated in this study may be lower than it appears. Participants filled out Survey B at the closure party at the end of the term. Those who were not able to attend the party for various reasons missed the opportunity to do the survey. Though there was not an item included on either Survey A or Survey B regarding attrition, reasons given to the investigator for discontinuation of the Community Piano Experience were lack of time due to the necessity to pursue other tasks. These reasons correspond with reasons given by adults for discontinuing music lessons in Marciano’s (1990) investigation, which additionally cited being frustrated by slow progress at the piano (including discouragement over coordination or physical problems at the piano), and realizing that “piano playing is not as easy as it looks.” Cooper (1996) documented similar reasons for discontinuation of piano study, and additionally cited

“boring lessons,” dislike of practice, and perceived lack of skill as reasons for quitting. None of these latter factors applied as reasons for discontinuation of lessons in the present study.

Participants were able to clearly state their goals (anticipated rewards) for undertaking piano study from the outset of the course. While sometimes the goals themselves changed throughout the course of the study, as demonstrated by participants’ responses to the question regarding rewards/benefits of study on Survey B, students clearly came into the course with pre-conceived notions regarding what would represent appropriate achievement in the class.

The group environment was overwhelmingly deemed to be a positive experience by participants. Survey A demonstrated that at least some participants were unsure about whether the group environment would be beneficial to them prior to any instructional experience. After having participated in the group classes, those participants who completed Survey B clearly indicated that the group environment had been helpful. Of the 20 participants who completed Survey B, 17 were enthusiastically positive about the group environment, while 3 found the group environment “somewhat” helpful. No participants felt the group environment was detrimental to their learning. Though participants did not cite group participant as an anticipated reward (Survey A), 7 of 20 respondents listed the group experience itself on Survey B as a reward/benefit of piano study. This observation reinforces Conda’s findings regarding group piano experience as a motivational factor in and of itself and also underscores studies noted earlier regarding choir, band, and other group musical experiences.

Both this study and previous studies support the notion of a link between teacher traits and behaviors and adult piano student motivation. The Cooper study (1996) surveyed adults who had studied piano as children, adults who studied piano both as a child and adult, adults who studied piano only as adults, and adults who never studied piano. She concluded that teacher

support/encouragement was likely a strong motivating element in piano study among all respondents, not only adult beginners. This finding reinforces the quality most sought by participants in this study prior to instruction, as measured on Survey A. Teacher characteristics particularly noted as positive by the Cooper study include teachers who encourage active participation from students, offer frequent and specific praise, and focus the lesson on music content. These characteristics are echoed in the findings from the present study, in which participants cited patience/understanding, a positive/encouraging demeanor, knowledge and ability to communicate, humor/fun, good instructional delivery, and professionalism as desirable attributes in the piano instructors. It should be noted that the observations suggesting instructional improvement related solely to instructional delivery. This observation was expected given the nature of the Community Piano Experience where the instructors are themselves pedagogy students. It is, rather, surprising that so few participants noted areas in which instruction could be improved. The majority were overwhelmingly positive in their comments, particularly with regard to instructor qualities and perceived benefits received from the class.

### *Conclusion*

Adults are continuing to pursue a greater number and variety of educational opportunities. As evidenced by this study, adults typically have compelling goals from the outset of piano study and maintain clear expectations regarding instruction. Participants in this study found the group environment helpful, underscoring findings from aforementioned studies regarding the success of choir, band, and other group musical activities for adults. More research concerning the social motivation of group music participation is warranted. Further investigation into what factors motivate adults to seek out and continue to pursue music study would help

teachers better address the needs and concerns of adult learners. Likewise, since teacher qualities are such strongly motivating factors among all students, continued applied research in this area would be helpful. Delineation of effective teaching behaviors and strategies for adult learners and describing how these may be aptly applied to the group piano instructional setting while taking into account individual learning styles will likely help teachers promote motivation among adult students. If we expect to retain adults in group piano settings, we must be sure to address their goals through appropriate teaching strategies. Music instructors should strive to exude traits and behaviors—such as patience, enthusiasm, knowledge and passion for music, and age-appropriate instructional delivery—that adults find attractive and beneficial to their learning process.

Providing music education to adult students is a worthy goal, not only because of the benefits that accrue directly to these adults, but because immersing adults in music has implications for future generations. Bowles (1991) found that children of adults who were involved in music performance and attending concerts were much more likely to become involved in music themselves, and remain interested in music through their adulthood. The more successive generations of families are actively involved in music-making, the more secure the future of music as an art is likely to be.

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