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The topic of piano pedagogy is broad, multi-faceted, and intriguing. Scholars agree that the primary concern of piano teachers is fostering an appreciation of music by demonstrating the many roles it can play in students' lives. An integral part of effective piano teaching is understanding how to motivate students in the initial stages of music learning. Working with students to set and achieve specific goals may be the key to effective motivation. This research seeks to answer the question, "How do experienced piano teachers provide well-rounded, quality instruction while catering to individual goals of students?"

THE ESSENTIAL ROLES OF GOALS AND MOTIVATION  
IN SUCCESSFUL PIANO PEDAGOGY

by

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Approved by:

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April 29, 2020

This certifies that Alana Cross, having been admitted to candidacy for the degree Master of Arts in Music, has successfully completed graduate oral examinations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Piano lessons have long been a common extracurricular activity for young children. Each year countless elementary-age students excitedly begin lessons, but many will lose interest after a few years. In today's culture of instant gratification and heavily produced popular music, studying an acoustic instrument is becoming less appealing. Rather than placing the blame on the short attention span of today's youth, one should sooner turn attention to the potentially outdated teaching methods of seasoned piano pedagogues. Today's teachers are tasked with presenting students with the varied, exciting, relevant applications of keyboard literacy. In order to bring piano lessons into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers must present students with effective motivational techniques, and aid students in setting goals for relevant potential applications of keyboard literacy.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis was to explore research in the area of piano pedagogy. Discovering potential areas of improvement for piano teaching will support the effort to keep music education relevant and bring piano pedagogy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The primary interest of the researcher was understanding how students' individual goals shape instruction with a specific interest in reflective pedagogy. The researcher synthesized current and existing research to form a well-rounded methodology for piano instruction. The researcher sought to explore the areas of goals and motivation and how they are interrelated. Additionally, the researcher sought to discern how piano teachers can effectively incorporate them into lessons to revitalize student interest in music education.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studying piano gives students an excellent foundational approach to music. The linear layout and visual simplicity of the keyboard makes it an accessible instrument for young students. After basic concepts have been mastered, the piano is a diverse instrument that can be utilized for solo works, accompaniment, improvisation and more.<sup>1</sup> Certain principles have been maintained since the advent of piano instruction. The need for technical proficiency, attention to musicality, and a keen memory are all necessary to the success of a young pianist. Effective teachers should take the time to get to know their students' personality and learning style. Individualized instruction and thoughtful motivational techniques are more likely to inspire students.<sup>2</sup> Capturing the attention of adolescents in today's busy world requires a keen knowledge of contemporary trends in education, the music industry, careful incorporation of technology, and a passion for the subject matter being taught.

"Every piano teacher... should know the aesthetic values of music, the reasons for education in music, the special values of performing, and the reasoning for the choice of piano as the first instrument for study."<sup>3</sup> This assertion by Helene Robinson provides a bold challenge to music educators. The inherent value of music is widely agreed upon, but the quality and content of music that is taught is still debated by experts. Many teachers defend the integrity of classical music and insist on teaching only standard piano repertoire. Other teachers have embraced modern music and utilize lead sheets, chord charts, and MIDI

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<sup>1</sup> Baker-Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy* 243-244

<sup>2</sup> Hallam, *Musical Motivation: Towards a model synthesising the research*, 225-244.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson and Jarvis, *Teaching Piano in Classroom and Studio*, 1.

accompaniment in lessons.<sup>4</sup> The struggle of the modern piano teacher is finding a balance between classical and modern approaches. The task of the teacher is to impart an appreciation for the diverse history of music while preparing a student to engage in the ongoing growth of performance opportunities.

Methodologically, a piano teacher should remember student-first learning, with subject matter as a secondary consideration. Helene Robinson asserts that “Only when the teacher approaches the student in a realistic way, as a person, will the student become willing to cooperate and put in the necessary effort.”<sup>5</sup> While there are standards and benchmarks each student should reach, the process by which they are achieved will vary from student to student. The beauty of music is the creativity and freedom of expression it fosters. Piano teachers should be sensitive to the individual learning styles of their students and be prepared to adapt instruction to those needs. When a student feels comfortable with the atmosphere of a lesson, they will be much more motivated and willing to learn.<sup>6</sup>

Proper sequencing is a key aspect of motivation. Piano teachers are tasked with introducing many musical skills to students. Inner hearing, inner pulse, harmonic consciousness, and sense of phrasing are just a few. More technical skills such as sight reading, proper technique, improvisation, and collaboration must also be considered.<sup>7</sup> Pedagogues agree that the fundamentals of music should be taught first. The concept of beat or pulse should be internalized and understood early in the lesson process. Second, concept of pitch – high and low musical sounds – should be introduced.<sup>8</sup> The sooner students can make

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<sup>4</sup> Holland, “Technology in Your Studio.” In *Practical Piano Pedagogy* by Martha Baker-Jordan, pp. 207–240

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, *Teaching Piano in Classroom and Studio*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Hallam, S. (2002). *Musical Motivation*, 225-244.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon, *Etudes for Piano Teachers*, 31-50.

<sup>8</sup> Bastien, James W. *How to Teach Piano Successfully*.



sophisticated, mature sounds, the better. Modern methods infuse articulation and musicality from the very first lesson which is beneficial for developing well-rounded musicians and keeping students engaged and excited about music.

Richard Chronister<sup>9</sup> stresses the importance of ensuring that students have a variety of musical experiences before they are taught to read music. Activities such as listening, moving to music, and even playing basic patterns on piano are all excellent precursors to formal teaching.<sup>10</sup> Music pedagogues like Edwin Gordon, Shinichi Suzuki, and Zoltán Kodály advocate for a sound-before-sight approach to music learning, which can be quite effective in teaching piano.<sup>11</sup> When a student is ready to read, black keys are a good place to start. Concepts of high and low, loud and soft, and even legato and non-legato touch can be taught from basic black key songs. Black keys are also easily recognizable and provide visual reinforcement for music learning. Chronister suggests that two or three note songs can be taught by rote, then with basic notation. He recommends a non-legato touch to start, as this is easier and more immediately rewarding for a young student.

When discussing development of music literacy, Richard Chronister stresses that note naming is not reading. “At the piano, note reading is the ability to see any note on the staff and *simultaneously* play its corresponding key on the keyboard.”<sup>12</sup> Students must be able to identify the names of notes, but more importantly they must understand how notes move to create a melody. “It is not until the pitches are named, or the relationships are defined and perceived as scales or chords, that intellectual skills are involved.”<sup>13</sup> Teaching steps and skips, ascending

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<sup>9</sup> Chronister, “Naming Notes is Not Reading” in *Creative Piano Teaching*. Pp 55-68.

<sup>10</sup> Microtone Music International, Inc. About Kindermusik.

<sup>11</sup> “About the Suzuki Method.” Suzuki Association of the Americas; “The Kodály Concept.” Organization of American Kodály Educators.

<sup>12</sup> Chronister in *Creative Piano Teaching*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 245.

and descending intervals, patterns, sequences, and chords is essential. Students learn how to read music when they have made the necessary connections between visual, kinesthetic, and aural cues and the actions they represent at the piano. For this reason, stressing the importance of musicality, articulation and pattern recognition is the most effective way to produce musically literate students.<sup>14</sup>

Good musicianship requires drawing appropriate connections between rhythm, pitch, articulation, dynamics, and phrasing. Students must relate the notation on the page to the combination of physical actions required to play. The nature of the keyboard aids in this learning process because students can easily see how motion on the page matches motion on the piano. Piano is an excellent instrument for rhythm learning because of the percussive, immediate response of hammers on strings. Developing articulation, dynamics and phrasing is a complex, multi-step process. There are over a dozen individual processes that occur each time a student plays a simple, five-finger scale. Marianne Uszler asserts that teaching students a new motor skill can be loosely broken down into five stages: instruction and demonstration, experimentation, internalization, practice, and achievement.<sup>15</sup> In the early stages, the teacher must demonstrate effectively and use clear, relatable language to present the concept to the student. Second, the student tries out the activity as the teacher guides and provides feedback. As the student practices and begins to internalize, the teacher should ask appropriate questions to ensure that the student is learning effectively. Finally, the student reaches the achievement stage when they can perform the task without the teacher's input, and no longer thinks of each step in the

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<sup>14</sup> Information in this paragraph synthesized from Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*; Lyke, *Creative Piano Teaching*, and Uszler, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*.

process individually. This process will be repeated countless times throughout the first years of piano lessons.<sup>16</sup>

Developing proper technique requires an understanding of the mechanics of the instrument one is playing and the physical actions required to manipulate the instrument. Pedagogues have debated how to develop the fingers, hands, wrists and arms of students properly. Early practice emphasized finger movement; students were encouraged to lift fingers high and worked to develop independence among the fingers. As keyboard instruments developed over time, so did understanding of the anatomy. Pianists began to incorporate wrists and arms into their playing, using them as a unit. Modern performers and pedagogues stress the importance of arm weight and wrist rotation in proper playing. The fingers are thought of as a connection between the wrist and the keyboard; most of playing comes from the arm and wrist rather than individual fingers.<sup>17</sup>

There are many exercises that aid in learning proper technique and tone production. Non-legato touch is a natural beginning point for young students. Vivid imagery can be used to aid in staccato articulation, such as chickens pecking or popcorn popping. Legato touch through wrist rotation is easily applied to arpeggiated triads and other five-finger patterns. Introducing wrist and forearm rotation “adds power and speed to fingers and helps to maintain a balanced hand.”<sup>18</sup> At early stages, teachers may teach forearm rotation through ascending thirds. Wrist ‘rolls’ can be practiced to refine legato touch; the student makes small circles with the wrist, under and over, as they play a five-finger legato

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<sup>17</sup> Fielden, "The History of the Evolution of Pianoforte Technique." 35-59.

<sup>18</sup> Lyke, et al. *Creative Piano Teaching*, 111

passage.<sup>19</sup> When the time comes to introduce scales, students must be able to execute legato touch.

After developing a solid understanding of proper mechanics, pianists must develop healthy practice habits. Teaching a student how to practice effectively is equally as important to teaching them good technique. Frank Potamkin states “There can be no effect without cause. Education should link cause and effect together.”<sup>20</sup> Lessons should be structured to equip students with numerous tools for solving problems as they encounter them. Ensuring that students can reproduce at home what they do in lessons is essential. Students need to understand how to play without the teacher’s input. Teachers should help students set small goals in lessons that are achievable in a single practice session. “Practice *goals* are some of the most important elements of a good practice plan. They focus the student’s attention and effort, thereby increasing the effectiveness of his practice.”<sup>21</sup>

The first thing to consider when imparting good practice technique is assigning appropriate repertoire. Christos Tsitsaros<sup>22</sup> draws a strong connection between motivation, repertoire selection, and student progress. Repertoire that is just challenging enough to be engaging but not completely out of reach will help students grow most effectively. For the elementary student, pieces should be achievable in one to two weeks. Any longer than a few weeks spent on a song will be frustrating to the young student; it is very important at the early stages to maintain enthusiasm and consistent, measurable progress. Along with being an appropriate level of difficulty, pieces should be interesting

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<sup>19</sup> Lyke, et al. *Creative Piano Teaching*, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Potamkin, *Modern Piano Pedagogy*, 75.

<sup>21</sup> Baker-Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, 115.

<sup>22</sup> Lyke, et al. *Creative Piano Teaching*, 129-134.

and engaging to student that inspires vivid imagery and musicality. Young students need to enjoy the music they are expected to play and maintain a desire to put in the work required to play it. This begins with the teacher's presentation of a piece.

The presentation phase of a piano lesson is undoubtedly the most important with regard to capturing the student's interest and excitement, and in turn leading him to practice. It is during this initial stage that lies the teachers' responsibility to ignite the spark within the student... most important of all is the enthusiasm shown by the teacher.<sup>23</sup>

Students develop a musical vocabulary by listening and observing as the teacher demonstrates. Relating music to things the students can picture - animals, scenes of nature, and personification of musical phrases may also be helpful to young students. Students will be motivated to play pieces that they are intrigued by and to which they can relate. Adequate motivation and appropriate level of difficulty are the two most important factors of repertoire for elementary students.

In the early stages of piano practice, students must understand how to break down a piece of music. In lessons, it may be helpful to discuss the overall 'feeling' or 'mood' of a song. This can easily be followed by sight reading short passages with appropriate articulation and dynamics - ensuring that the 'feeling' is captured even in the early stages of learning. If a piece is appropriate, students should be able to read a good portion of the piece without much difficulty.<sup>24</sup> Teachers should help identify difficult measures or passages that need more careful practice. Difficult passages may be marked with a pencil or sticky note, and the teacher should demonstrate a few ways to master the passage. Demonstrations can include working beat by beat, repetition of a measure/section,

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<sup>23</sup> Christos Tsitsaros in *Creative Piano Teaching*, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

clapping/singing, and more. Ensuring that the student understands the purpose and execution of each approach is imperative. Mindless repetition is the enemy of progress; teachers should give explicit instructions and demonstrations to students.<sup>25</sup> Concepts that may seem obvious to the teacher will be completely foreign to students. Developing a musical 'sense' takes careful practice over many years, but this development begins with early piano lessons. Everything a student does in practice should first be presented in lessons. Elementary students should not be expected to decode new pieces entirely on their own, this should be reserved for more experienced students.<sup>26</sup>

When a student is working on a piece, slow practice is a good first step. Most piano pedagogues agree as long as musicality is maintained, slow practice is not detrimental to the final product. Due to the fact students are translating visual information – sheet music – to a physical action, slow playing is often best at the early stages. Students should ensure that even in the sight-reading stage, proper articulation and dynamics are executed, which is almost as important as playing correct notes and rhythms. Students should play hands together as early as possible, allowing the ear and muscles to internalize the music. If a student practices often with separate hands, they will inevitably struggle when the time comes to put both hands together. Potamkin states that “Separate-hand work very often causes false associations to be formed, which later have to be broken down when two-hand associations are being formed.”<sup>27</sup> Passages with intricate counterpoint or virtuosic passages may need work with individual hands to commit to muscle memory, but a passage is not truly learned until it can be played with both hands fluently. Encouraging students to

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<sup>25</sup> Suzuki and Honda, *The Suzuki Method*.

<sup>26</sup> Cervino, *The Practice of Practicing*.

<sup>27</sup> Potamkin, *Modern Piano Pedagogy*, 155.

learn pieces hands together at a slightly slower tempo has proven to be the most effective approach to learning and memorizing new pieces.<sup>28</sup>

Teaching adolescent students provides a unique set of challenges. Students between the ages of nine and fourteen are often involved in many extracurricular activities. Along with schoolwork and activities, students are beginning to navigate the tricky world of social interaction and identity.<sup>29</sup> Intermediate students often have intellectual potential without the emotional maturity to harness it. This is important to understand when setting goals and imparting practice techniques. Students may aspire to play pieces far beyond their ability, or hold on to simple, achievable pieces of their beginner methods. Teachers should work with students to find achievable pieces that are inspiring and relatable. Specific short-term and long-term goals should be set and tracked. Discussing the role music plays in students' lives will enrich their experience in piano lessons. Are they involved in band or chorus at school? Are there opportunities for them to perform at church or in other public settings? How does music make them feel, and how can they use it to express and channel emotions? Guiding students toward opportunities for engagement with music in their community in the intermediate stage will encourage positive feelings toward future musical studies.<sup>30</sup>

Classical repertoire should be implemented as soon as students have developed fundamental literacy on the piano. Supplementing method books with more advanced repertoire prevents students from relying on the scaffolded design of method books.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cervino, *The Practice of Practising*.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Teaching Adolescents: Educational Psychology As a Science of Signs*.

<sup>30</sup> Uszler, "Teaching the Intermediate Student" in *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, pp. 81-88.

<sup>31</sup> Uszler, "The Elementary-Age Student" in *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, pp. 19-34.

When selecting quality repertoire for intermediate students, teachers are tasked with finding a balance between audience appeal and educational content. Quality repertoire that encourages creativity, provides a musical or technical challenge, and is enjoyable to play is ideal. At this stage, students should be ready for a wider variety of styles. Beginner jazz pieces with swung rhythms and jazz harmonies are fun and effective for developing literacy. Chord structure and lead sheets may also be introduced at this stage. Students will be excited to play and sing popular songs, while teachers will be thrilled to incorporate theory and develop harmonic understanding.<sup>32</sup> Along with providing varied repertoire, intermediate students should discuss goals with their teacher. Specializing in a particular style is not necessary at this stage, but students should begin to think about what they wish to achieve in lessons.

Zijia Cheng states that “teachers have to know exactly what their goals for their students are, and their duty is to encourage them to set goals for themselves. Setting goals by and for oneself can lead to greater satisfaction.”<sup>33</sup> Students must have an idea of what they hope to achieve in lessons. Progress for the sake of progress is not enough; specific goals regarding performance, literacy, and creative growth should be maintained. Presenting students with possible ways music can be involved in their lives is an important task for teachers. Perhaps students wish to play in church or accompany a choir. Students might enjoy working collaboratively with singers or other instrumentalists. Learning keyboard for the sake of playing in a band or recording contemporary music is a popular option. Teachers should present all these

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<sup>32</sup> Lyke, “Keyboard Theory for the Elementary Student” in *Creative Piano Teaching*, pp. 68-84.

<sup>33</sup> Cheng and Southcott, “Improving students' intrinsic motivation in piano learning” 48-57.



possibilities and more, as students may not understand the advantages of being proficient at piano. Goal-directed instruction is an important factor in maintaining a successful piano studio.<sup>34</sup>

Goals can be divided into two categories: mastery and performance. These categories describe the thought process involved in achieving a goal as well as the nature of the goal itself. Mastery goals focus on the value of learning and discipline. The attainment of mastery is dependent on effort. A student who has mastery goals will be just as concerned with the practice and steps required to achieve goal as they are with the result. Performance goals are largely focused on product over process. A student with performance goals is most concerned with how they will be judged on their performance, and less concerned with how the performance was made possible.<sup>35</sup> These two categories can be loosely defined as subjective and objective approaches to goal achievement. Part of setting reachable goals involves breaking down long-term goals into more easily achieved sub-goals. Setting smaller goals that can be achieved quickly fosters motivation and helps students see progress.<sup>36</sup>

Goals and motivation are inextricably linked. Students need to see regular, measurable progress towards a desirable end goal in order to continually put forth effort. David Cook and Anthony Artino define motivation as “the process whereby goal-directed activities are initiated and sustained.”<sup>37</sup> Motivation is driven by the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. In the context of piano lessons, competence is satisfied by becoming a proficient performer, developing the ability to interact confidently with the instrument through masterful technique. Relatedness refers to one’s ability to relate piano to other interests and abilities. Students must see how piano fits into their world, seeing it as relevant and enjoyable. Finally, autonomy is

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<sup>34</sup> Brandstrom, “Self-Formulated Goals and Self-Evaluation in Music Education.” 16–21.

<sup>35</sup> Ames and Archer, “Achievement goals in the classroom”

<sup>36</sup> Razvan and Andra, “Goals and motivation in piano playing”

<sup>37</sup> Cook and Artino, “Motivation to learn: an overview of contemporary theories” 997-1014.

achieved when students self-direct as opposed to obeying parents and teachers exclusively. This final step allows students to take ownership over their interactions with the piano, solidifying the achievement of goals. If these three needs are satisfied during piano learning, students may be more intrinsically motivated to continue.<sup>38</sup>

An awareness of students' developmental stage will help teachers provide effective instruction and motivation. Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development give an excellent outline of these stages.<sup>39</sup> In each stage, the person experiences a psychosocial crisis which could have a positive or negative outcome for personality development. Understanding what internal 'crisis' they are facing should inform how teachers communicate with their students. Beginner piano students from ages 5-8 are in the initiative vs. guilt stage and are largely driven by making discoveries about the functioning world around them. In terms of piano instruction, this means that these students will be concerned with rules, constants, and easily measurable goals. This is an excellent stage to begin music learning, as these students are intensely curious and love looking for patterns and rules. Teachers of these young students should encourage curiosity and natural exploration through games and movement activities. In this stage, students should grasp universal concepts of music, note reading, and technique.

Students between ages 9-12 are faced with industry vs. inferiority. They begin to measure themselves against their peers and are very concerned with achievement. This is matched with a longer attention span and the ability to carry out tasks to completion. Students in this phase can begin to work on longer pieces of music and more advanced concepts. Feedback from teachers is especially important at this phase, as students are very concerned with precision and completing tasks properly. Teachers should be honest and objective with feedback, always ensuring that

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<sup>38</sup> Macintyre, Schnare, and Ross, "Self-determination theory and motivation for music" 46

<sup>39</sup> Evans, *Dialogue with Erik Erikson*.

positive feedback is more frequent than negative. Students in this stage are particularly concerned with feeling respected and challenged. Self-evaluation is highly effective at this stage of development. Adolescent students from ages 12-19 are faced with the existential question “Who am I and what can I be?” This is a critical stage of music learning and is often when students choose to quit music lessons. Students are beginning to think about their identity in terms of their future, career, and their developing personhood. If they cannot see music fitting into this plan, or do not feel that they are ‘good enough’ to make it into a career, music often falls to the back burner. Students who do continue lessons in this stage are capable of abstract thought and very high-level conceptual thinking. They are ready to work on advanced pieces of music, including month or semester-long projects. Students should be comfortably musically literate and prepared to analyze music by identifying complex patterns and forms. Teachers of adolescent students should begin having conversations with them about what music is to them, including their personal goals and aspirations. Teachers should present students with ideas on how music can be a part of their future in various capacities. At this stage, students should certainly be presented with a wide variety of repertoire that is interesting to them and relevant to their lives.<sup>40</sup>

Technology has been a standard part of the average piano studio for decades. Today’s youth are fluently familiar with technology, so educators are wise to embrace it as well. “In a technology-rich studio, the teacher comes to be valued more intensely as the students explore the technology.”<sup>41</sup> Teachers who are well-rounded in their knowledge must be fluent in traditional practices and new trends in music technology. In today’s world children are often exposed to technology before they enter grade school. Most grade school age children have access to a computer, tablet, or other device. Middle and high school aged students make frequent use of the

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<sup>40</sup> Evans, *Dialogue with Erik Erikson*.

<sup>41</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride-Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 198.

internet and are fluent and familiar with other devices. Teachers can choose to ignore or embrace this reality, understanding that students' resources are not limited to materials and instruction given by the teacher. A student's love for music may have been sparked by movie scores, video game music, or pop songs heard on the radio. Encouraging this inspiration and helping students draw connections with the music they hear every day is important. Video sharing sites such as YouTube have countless tutorials, instructional videos, and quality recordings of piano music. Students who are interested in piano or are taking lessons are likely to utilize YouTube tutorials for popular songs. These tutorials can be useful in fostering interest and helping students draw connections between popular music and the instrument they are studying. Caution should be used because of the varying quality of YouTube instruction. Students can easily develop bad habits when only learning from videos that encourage learning by rote or by ear. However, with the guidance of a teacher in regular face-to-face lessons, encouraging students to explore the world of piano online can be exciting.<sup>42</sup>

Intermediate and advanced students may be interested in composing and arranging. Fostering an interest in composing and arranging is valuable and can be nurtured in various ways. Purchasing a sophisticated notation software like *Finale* or *Sibelius*<sup>43</sup> is beneficial for teachers and students alike. Teachers can use notation software to encourage students to create and arrange and teach concepts of music theory as they input music into the software. Older students can arrange mixed-difficulty duets to play with younger students or create pianistic arrangements of their favorite songs to share with friends. Teachers can also compose short pieces, finger exercises, scale sheets, or other resources and easily share them with students. Teachers can record, celebrate and share improvisations of young students. The basics of chord

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<sup>42</sup> Schachter, *The use of new technology for piano instruction in a structured learning environment*.

<sup>43</sup> Makemusic inc. Eden Prairie, MN, 2007; Avid inc. Burlington MA 2010.

progressions and harmonic analysis can be explored through unique compositions created by teachers and students.

Music technology can be very useful in the piano studio, but caution should be used about total reliance on this teaching tool. As the world of music develops and changes, traditional teachers may fear that students will no longer have the patience required to hone technical skills. Practicing scales and exploring the variety of articulations and tone colors of the acoustic piano may be pushed to the wayside in favor of digitally enhanced sound. Scholars have addressed this subject; most insist that traditional, acoustic music will never cease to exist. “No amount of technology can make poor music better. Beautiful music and the aesthetic experience that surrounds it can only be enhanced with technological assistance.”<sup>44</sup> The role of the teacher is to ensure that students have a solid foundation of technical skills and understand how technology interacts with live performance.

A review of literature in the area of piano pedagogy reveals that substantial research has been done in the areas of repertoire and technique, but the concept of exploring student-held goals and personal aspirations needs more investigation. Responsive teaching requires two things: a well-rounded knowledge of pedagogical techniques and a passion for inspiring students to set personal goals for piano lessons.

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<sup>44</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride-Smith, *The Well-Tempered Piano Teacher*, 201.

### III. PROCEDURES

This research was conducted through a combination of surveys and person-to-person phone interviews. The researcher found survey participants through the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) database, all of whom hold a National Association of Teachers of Music (NATM) certification. Teachers certified by MTNA are highly regarded due to the rigorous application process which involves submission of a teaching philosophy, demonstration of success in individual instruction, and a deep working knowledge of business ethics and studio policies.<sup>45</sup> The researcher sent initial contact letters to 100 participants across the United States of America and 27 responses were received. Participants were given the choice of a written survey or a phone interview.

The survey included a mix of multiple choice and free response questions. Questions were categorized into four main areas: motivation, goals, pedagogy, and repertoire. When constructing interview questions the researcher sought to solicit specific answers concerning teaching strategy. Under the category of motivation, the questions were designed to learn how teachers motivate students in the early, often challenging, stage of piano lessons. Questions regarding student goals were designed to gauge how much freedom teachers give students in terms of lesson content. Did the teachers hold similar expectations for all students? Do teachers structure all lessons rigidly or do they seek to meet individual goals and structure lessons according to individual student learning styles? In terms of repertoire selection, questions were focused on the involvement of students in selection of music. Choosing repertoire shapes the direction of lessons and is closely tied with goals and motivation. Finally, questions regarding pedagogical practice were included. Questions were composed regarding how teachers check

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<sup>45</sup> Information in this paragraph found at [https://certification.mtna.org/Certification/Get\\_Certified/TPP/Piano\\_Overview.aspx](https://certification.mtna.org/Certification/Get_Certified/TPP/Piano_Overview.aspx)

student understanding and individualize instruction to accommodate different learning styles. Another asked how teachers ensure that students are progressing effectively in all areas of musicianship. The researcher hoped to discern how teachers practically implement good pedagogical practice.

Upon reviewing early interview and survey responses a second research question emerged: “How many piano teachers are conscious of pedagogy, and how many are simply using an unchanging methodology without discerning its effectiveness?” The researcher found that many teachers possessed a limited scope of goals for students and followed the progression of method books strictly.

Based on the secondary research question regarding pedagogy, several questions were added to the survey: How do teachers check understanding; what strategies do teachers have for catering to individual learning styles; how do teachers ensure that students are progressing effectively in all areas of musicianship; finally, how do teachers approach sequencing of curriculum? Each of these questions is designed to evaluate the pedagogical practice of teachers in relevant areas of teaching practice. Due to the fact these questions were added after several survey results were received, only 20 respondents answered the complete set of questions regarding pedagogy. The complete set of research questions were designed to address three interrelated areas: student motivation, student goals, and pedagogical practice. Research from this study hoped to support the notion that when each of these areas are combined effectively, the result is practical and well-rounded piano teaching.

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

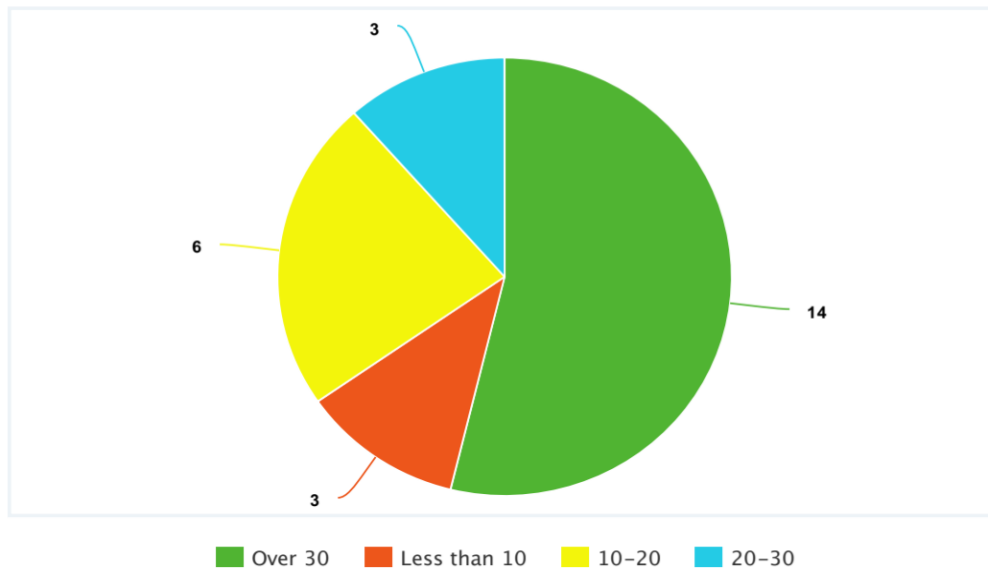
The researcher received 27 total responses. Of these responses, five were phone interviews and 22 were written surveys through Google forms. The researcher has numbered participants in the order responses were received. Phone interview participants will be referred to as P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>, P<sub>3</sub>, etc. Respondents through Google forms will be referred to as F<sub>1</sub>, F<sub>2</sub>, F<sub>3</sub>, etc. The researcher was inspired by answers of early respondents which gave insight into their pedagogical ideas. Intrigued by the new concepts in these early survey responses, three questions regarding pedagogy were added after the first eleven participants responded to the survey. Thus, these teachers did not respond to the three additional survey questions. The responses of the first eleven participants, while incomplete, provided usable data for this research.

##### Biographical Information

From the 27 total responses received, 14 different states of residence were represented. When asked to describe their studio setting, 21 respondents indicated they taught in a private studio. Five taught primarily in a public or private school; one had equal experience in studio and school settings. This high preponderance of private studio instruction indicates the preference on individual instruction for piano lessons. Over 75% of survey respondents have more than ten years of teaching experience, and over half have upwards of 30 years (see Figure 1). The fact that most respondents had greater than 30 years teaching experience may lend strong support to the credibility of survey responses.

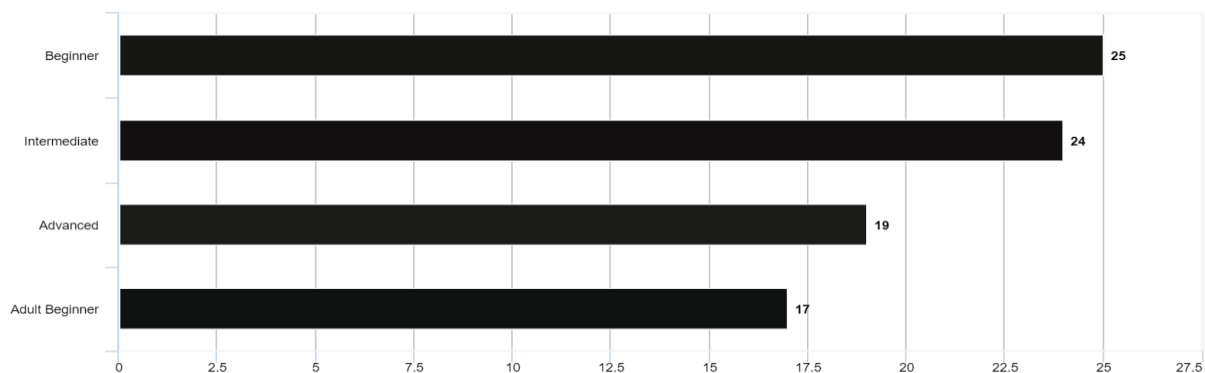


Figure 1: Length of teaching experience in years



Among survey participants the most common levels of instruction offered were beginner and intermediate (See Figure 2). Data shows that beginner lessons represent the largest population, with intermediate close behind. There is a larger gap between intermediate and advanced, and a steady decline overall from beginner to advanced. This data indicates a lack of retention beyond the beginner level. This lack of retention may be related to poor motivational techniques and failure to identify student goals.

Figure 2: Level of instruction offered



## Motivation

Motivation plays a large factor in music learning. A 2002 study by Hallam<sup>46</sup> sought to discern the extent that intrinsic motivation played in students' long-term continuation of piano study. One cannot assume that the act of music-making is itself a reward; students will soon lose interest if this is the only motivating factor.<sup>47</sup> Music learning, when presented properly, engages many areas of the creative and analytical mind. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are equally necessary to achieve progress. Survey responses of the present study provided a multitude of ideas regarding motivation.

Many survey respondents listed parental or outside support as a crucial part of motivation (see Figure 3). Especially for young students, having a parent closely involved in music learning can be very beneficial. Young students will likely struggle to focus the proper time and attention on practicing and be frustrated with the resulting lack of progress. Teachers should involve parents in lessons and present clear expectations and goals.<sup>48</sup> Creating detailed, clear lesson sheets with practice instructions will aid parents in helping students' practice. Young students will take cues from both the teacher and parents about how to approach piano practice. If the teacher presents an enthusiastic, engaging lesson and outlines specific practice procedures and goals, students will be likely to succeed.

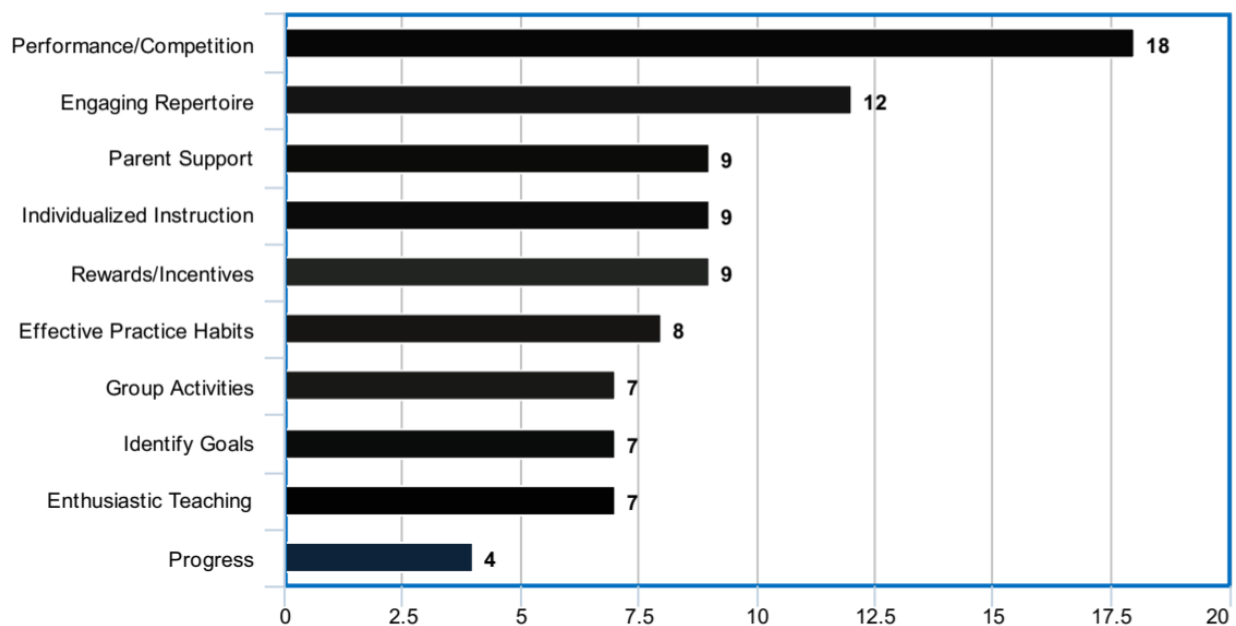
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<sup>46</sup> Hallam, "Musical Motivation: Towards a model synthesising the research."

<sup>47</sup> Cheng and Southcott, "Improving students' intrinsic motivation in piano learning" 48-57

<sup>48</sup> Lyke, et al. *Creative Piano Teaching*, 47.

Figure 3: Motivational Techniques



Keeping parents involved in their children's lessons involves helping them understand the structure and expected outcome of lessons. Survey respondent F<sub>15</sub> stressed the importance of making parents aware of what goes on in lessons.<sup>49</sup> The teacher's role is to hold a detailed understanding of sequencing, teaching technique, and providing appropriate repertoire to help their students grow. Parents will likely be excited to hear their child perform in recitals but may not be aware of the work required to get to the finished product. Both parents and students will benefit from the teacher's frequent communication and explanations of assigned exercises. Parents, teachers, and students must work together to provide and direct instruction and practice.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1c

<sup>50</sup> This statement was sourced from respondents F<sub>12</sub>, F<sub>13</sub>, and P<sub>3</sub>,

Several survey respondents suggested holding an interview with students and parents prior to the start of lessons.<sup>51</sup> Doing so sets the tone of lessons and allows the teacher to communicate procedures and expectations. Respondent F<sub>3</sub> described their initial interview as an assessment of the students' readiness or, if they have taken some lessons, skill level; as well as an opportunity to discuss why students are interested in piano and identify goals the student may have.<sup>52</sup> Teachers can connect with parents during this time and outline studio policies, practice expectations, recital procedure, and other logistical considerations. A successful entrance interview can establish a healthy relationship between parent, student, and teacher.<sup>53</sup>

Practice technique is listed by Martha Baker-Jordan in *Practical Piano Pedagogy* as a key aspect of motivation.<sup>54</sup> The assumption that beginner students know how to practice effectively is false. In lessons, the teacher should use clear language and reinforce good practice habits. Respondent F<sub>8</sub> observed that, "Traditionally, many teachers would listen to a student play a piece, then pick it apart with a list of corrections to be made. It is much more effective to focus on what a student does well. Never assume they realize what they have accomplished."<sup>55</sup> Positive reinforcement in lessons will aid students in private practice. Students will likely remember praise they have been given in the past and seek to recreate the quality work for which they were praised. Respondent F<sub>22</sub> cited "the joy of rapid achievement through engaging, reachable pieces"<sup>56</sup> as an effective motivator. This draws an appropriate connection between repertoire selection and student interest.

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<sup>51</sup> Respondents F<sub>13</sub>, F<sub>22</sub>, P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>4</sub>

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1a.

<sup>53</sup> Lyke, et al. *Creative Piano Teaching*, 19-21.

<sup>54</sup> Baker-Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, 115.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1c

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1a

Establishing a routine for approaching new songs will equip students for effective independent practice. Students should not be expected to decode a new piece independently until they have demonstrated proficiency in doing so.<sup>57</sup> Teachers should enforce this by approaching each new piece with a logical pattern. Identifying key signature, time signature, and starting hand position are necessary first steps. Next, students should be able to identify steps and skips, chord shapes, and any patterns or repeated sections. This conceptual approach to sight reading includes tools and ideas that will help students decode any piece of music, with the goal of complete independence in sight reading. Respondent F<sub>15</sub> stressed the importance of having students demonstrate mastery of each new concept before leaving lessons, which reduces the likelihood of a student developing poor habits.<sup>58</sup>

Along with modeling good practice technique, rudimental exercises like scales should be presented in an engaging way.<sup>59</sup> Rigid repetition of scales is possibly one of the least enjoyable parts of learning an instrument. However, if scales are presented as a game or challenge, students will be more receptive. Respondent F<sub>22</sub> stated that they create songs out of scale patterns which they pair with words and personifications.<sup>60</sup> Breaking down scales into workable chunks, such as isolating the thumb-crossing motion in both hands, makes scales approachable and holds attention better than simple repetition.

Some survey respondents recommended constructing a journal, checklist, or some other written log for tracking practice.<sup>61</sup> Respondent P<sub>3</sub> suggests creating a checklist with reminders for each song or task, which can be placed throughout the lesson book. Other respondents

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<sup>57</sup> Baker-Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, 119.

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4a

<sup>59</sup> Respondents F<sub>20</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix A, Question 2b

<sup>61</sup> Respondents F<sub>1</sub>, F<sub>9</sub>, F<sub>13</sub>, F<sub>19</sub>

indicated that they ask students to make practice videos or perform for parents to check progress. Students should have established checkpoints for practicing. Telling them to ‘learn’ a new song is not enough; instructions to write in fingerings or speak note names or learn 4 measures with right hand only are much more effective.<sup>62</sup> Depending on the learning style of the student, more specific instructions may be necessary. Students should have clear enough goals that they can self-assess at home and walk away from each practice session having accomplished something.<sup>63</sup>

Repertoire selection is vitally important to the experience of piano lessons. Uszler supports the notion that students must enjoy the songs they are playing, or they will quickly become disinterested.<sup>64</sup> Choosing engaging repertoire was cited by 44% of survey respondents as a key aspect of motivation students (see Figure 3). Respondent F<sub>20</sub> tries to find repertoire that matches the personality of students. This sentiment is echoed by respondent F<sub>13</sub> who finds that “Finding fun and motivating repertoire that makes them feel accomplished and good at what they do and frees them to be expressive is also key.”<sup>65</sup> The goal of the teacher when selecting repertoire is to find balance between educational value and interest of students.

Survey results found that 94% of teachers find most beginner repertoire in method books, supplementing when appropriate with outside pieces. This ‘turn-the-page’ style of teaching is efficient and convenient; method books take care of sequencing and introduction of new concepts and provide a few songs that reinforce each new concept. Respondent F<sub>3</sub> ensures that students have a “fun piece” outside of the method book to motivate practice.<sup>66</sup> Provided that

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<sup>62</sup> Baker-Jordan, Martha. *Practical Piano Pedagogy* 113-121

<sup>63</sup> Brandstrom, “Self-Formulated Goals and Self-Evaluation in Music Education.”

<sup>64</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride-Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*.

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1c

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1b

students adequately demonstrate understanding of each new concept, method books are an effective choice for beginner students when supplemented appropriately with additional repertoire.

When asked about repertoire selection for intermediate students, 81% of respondents indicated that they provide students with options, allowing them to choose their favorite. Based on this data, students who have progressed beyond the beginner level are ready to make more decisions in lessons.<sup>67</sup> Beyond mastering the fundamental concepts of technique and decoding music, students should be engaged in the repertoire they study. In today's world there are thousands of musical styles, many of which relate well to the piano. Respondent P<sub>3</sub> allows students to bring lead sheets of contemporary pop songs to lessons, citing the importance of meeting students where they are in their musical experience. The timeless quality of Romantic and Classical era piano music should not be underestimated. Students are endlessly intuitive and creative; an analysis of the emotional meaning of a piece, or a vivid visual image that perfectly captures the mood of a piece, will make any song relevant and engaging to any student.<sup>68</sup>

Performances, including recitals and competitions, were the most referenced form of motivation by survey respondents (see Figure 3). Scheduling regular performances, both formal and informal, is an excellent way to encourage progress in students. Respondent F<sub>12</sub> holds studio masterclasses, group classes, and piano parties, providing frequent informal performance opportunities.<sup>69</sup> Encouraging students to play often for their peers supports idea of performance need not always be formal. Students will benefit from learning how to give and receive

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<sup>67</sup> See Appendix A, Question 2c

<sup>68</sup> Uszler, Marianne, "Repertoire" in *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, pp. 151-162.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1c

constructive feedback about each other's playing. In *The Dynamic Studio*, Philip Johnson lists dozens of possible studio-wide events that provide engaging, interactive learning opportunities.<sup>70</sup> These events include performances and other interactive activities, including duets. Respondent F22 encourages duets as a facilitator of collaboration which challenge students' musicianship skills. Along with all the aforementioned ideas, traditional recitals are an excellent way for students to demonstrate their progress and celebrate each other's achievements.

Many students enjoy the reward of festivals and competitions, which provide opportunity for growth through unique feedback from adjudicators. Becoming a member of local and state music associations allows teachers access to competitions and other enriching musical events. Success in performances and festivals is especially beneficial to advanced students who may wish to study music in college.<sup>71</sup> For students who are not interested in competing, performing for friends and family in regular studio recitals is a perfect chance to share the results of their hard work.

Young students can be motivated by rewards and incentive programs (see Figure 3). Survey respondents found that when used appropriately, sticker charts, trophies, and other prizes will encourage hard work. Several teachers in this survey suggest studio-wide practice challenges or competitions as good motivational tools.<sup>72</sup> Whether students track practice time, completion of method book levels, or learning new scales, healthy peer competition can be beneficial.

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<sup>70</sup> Johnston, P. (2012). *The dynamic studio*. InsideMusicTeaching.com.

<sup>71</sup> Rollin, Catherine, "Preparing Students for Competitions and Fostering a Lifelong Passion for Music" in *Creative Piano Teaching*, Pp. 121-128.

<sup>72</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1c.



Helping students find intrinsic motivation is crucial. Survey respondent F<sub>2</sub> encourages “Original student compositions, improvisation, and rote pieces” in their teaching.<sup>73</sup> These ideas are an excellent way to promote creativity and encourage students to take ownership over their playing. Fostering natural curiosity through improvisation is quite effective for young students; respondents F<sub>13</sub>, F<sub>17</sub>, and P<sub>5</sub> said they introduce the concept in the very first lesson, noting that many concepts can be taught effectively through improvisation; articulation, dynamics, and basic chords are easily understood through rote learning. When approaching improvisation, black keys and open fifths are an easy place to start. Students will bloom when given images or descriptive words to imitate in their playing.<sup>74</sup>

Discovery learning is another important aspect of early piano lessons. Several teachers in this study find that playing off students’ natural curiosity yields good results.<sup>75</sup> This sentiment is supported directly by Marianne Uszler in *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*. Because much of music is formulaic and follows rules, students can easily draw conclusions and identify patterns in the music they are learning. This idea can begin with exploration of the keyboard itself when identifying the repeating pattern of black and white keys. Teachers should embrace the fact that students are new to the piano; sometimes stepping back and allowing students to explore and discover new concepts on their own is best. This discovery learning creates lasting connections that students will continue to build on in future lessons.

Distinguishing between performance repertoire and sight reading or learning material is important. Christos Tsitsaros asserts that the assumption that students should perform everything they work on, or conversely that students should dedicate the most time to performance pieces, is

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<sup>73</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1a

<sup>74</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride-Smith, *Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Respondents F<sub>5</sub>, F<sub>15</sub>, F<sub>17</sub>

false.<sup>76</sup> Maintaining a healthy balance between practice and performance is ideal; materials that students are working on should represent a variety of difficulty levels. If students only work on concert pieces and make seemingly slow progress, they will lose interest. The opposite is also true; if students are only presented with short songs that only take a week or so to work on, they will lack a sense of achievement and ownership over their work. Young students may have a shorter attention span on both macro and micro levels. This means they will move through songs faster, and songs will be shorter and easier to master. According to survey respondents, enthusiastic teaching is a key aspect of motivation (see Figure 3). Repetition without redundancy is key, and the attitude of the teacher can be the deciding factor in this area.

Yet another form of effective motivation listed by survey respondents was encouraging students to set personal goals. Whether these goals involve performance, mastery of a new skill, or learning to play specific repertoire or genre, students must have a purpose and direction for lessons.

## **Goals**

Several scholars referenced in the literature review portion of this study support the importance of goal-directed instruction. This research found that 81% of teachers ask students about personal goals and expectations for lessons.<sup>77</sup> These goals may align with teacher's expectations or may be totally unique. Either way, including students in the goal-setting process gives teachers an insight into how students view lessons. Encouraging students to set measurable goals establishes a positive lesson environment to which the student is an important contributing member.

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<sup>76</sup>Christos Tsitsaros in *Creative Piano Teaching*, 130-131

<sup>77</sup> See Appendix A, Question 3c

Every teacher has an idea of what students should accomplish in lessons, along with a general sequence and timeline of how students should progress. The most cited goal held by teachers in this study was developing music literacy (see Figure 4). The ability to independently decode musical signs and symbols is an essential aspect of musicianship. Bastien, Baker-Jordan, Chronister, and Uszler all devoted large portions of their texts to teaching literacy.<sup>78</sup> Well-rounded music literacy includes the ability to read chord charts and lead sheets along with standard sheet music. Over half of survey respondents enthusiastically agreed that lead sheets should be included in piano instruction.<sup>79</sup> Quality piano lessons will provide students with well-rounded musical literacy.

Many survey responses indicated a system for inspiring student-held goals.<sup>80</sup> Respondent P<sub>4</sub> holds studio-wide goal writing sessions where students can share their aspirations and be inspired by the goals of their peers.<sup>81</sup> Once goals have been discerned, they can be displayed on a ‘vision board’ or other visual representation. When tracking and accomplishing goals it is vital that the student takes ownership over their work. The student must have a personal reason for working towards a goal and be able to see the value and benefits achieving that goal awards.<sup>82</sup>

Developing musicianship skills was another common goal cited by survey participants.<sup>83</sup> Teachers hope to help their students engage creativity and play with expression. While sophisticated musicianship implies a certain level of literacy, musicality can and should be encouraged at any skill level. Martha Baker-Jordan agrees that teaching students to play expressively from the very beginning of lessons will benefit them in their future interactions with

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<sup>78</sup> Bastien, *How to Teach Piano Successfully*; Baker-Jordan, Martha, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, Lyke, et al *Creative Piano Teaching*, Uszler, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*.

<sup>79</sup> See Appendix A, Question 2c

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix A, Question 3b

<sup>81</sup> See Appendix A, Question 3b

<sup>82</sup> Macintyre, et al. “Self-determination theory and motivation for music.”

<sup>83</sup> See Appendix A, Question

music.<sup>84</sup> Demonstrating pieces with appropriate dynamics, articulation, and phrasing is a good starting place to teaching expression. Such demonstration gives students a model to emulate in their own playing.

Survey respondents offered several strategies for ensuring steady progress in all areas of musicianship. Respondent F<sub>19</sub> says “A well rounded, carefully thought out curriculum that includes regular assessments and great record keeping to keep track of areas of improvement or areas that need improvement” is sure to provide success.<sup>85</sup> Having a wide variety of materials on hand is another way to help students develop musicianship. F<sub>16</sub> notes the excitement students show when presented with a new song from the Disney shelf.<sup>86</sup> Exposure to a multitude of styles and composers, even at beginner level, gives students freedom to explore and express varied musical ideas.

A goal listed by over half of survey respondents was helping students develop a lifelong love of music (see Figure 4). Regardless of how long students take lessons, teachers hope that they will keep music as a part of their lives. Respondent F<sub>3</sub> notes that understanding piano may be a hobby is important; not every student wishes to study music at an advanced level. Several respondents stated the goal of students developing the necessary skills to read music independent of teacher involvement.<sup>87</sup> Piano lessons should provide students with a solid foundation on the instrument and demonstrate how music can continue to provide joy in their lives.

The goal of progress was listed by several survey respondents (see Figure 4). This goal can be interpreted as encouraging students to constantly continue improving their skills.

Teaching students to play a piece to the best of their ability both aids in achieving goals and

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<sup>84</sup> Baker-Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, 145.

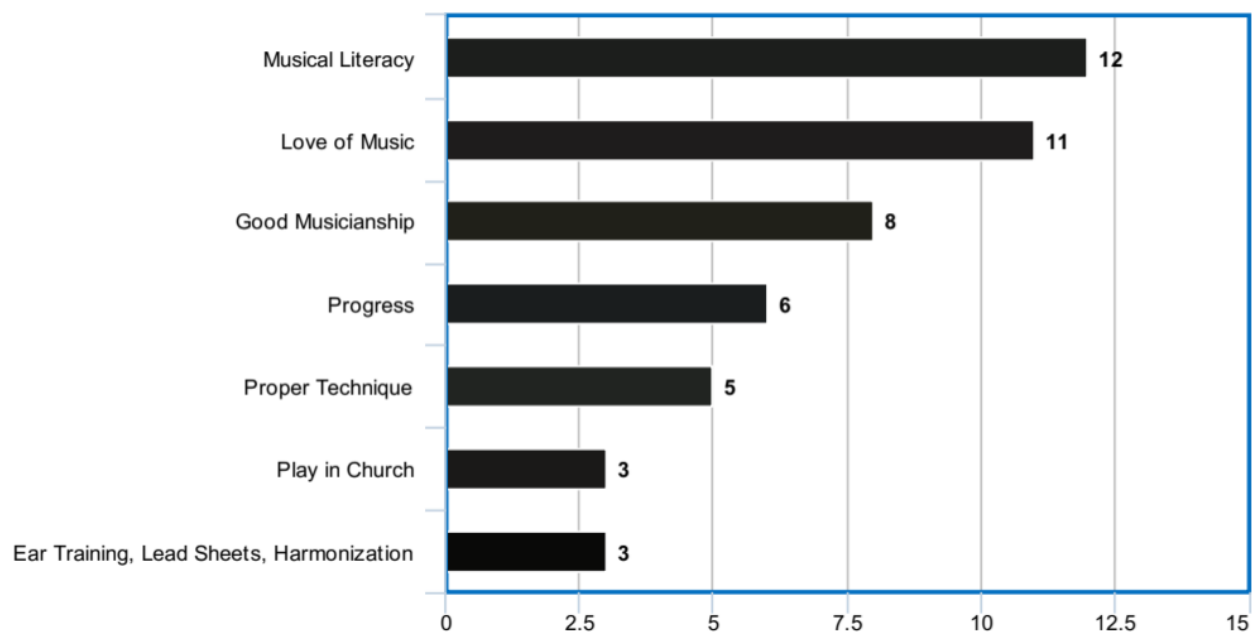
<sup>85</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4b

<sup>86</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4c

<sup>87</sup> Respondents F<sub>4</sub>, F<sub>10</sub>, F<sub>13</sub>, F<sub>20</sub>.

gives them the reward of a job well done. Never settle for only correct notes and rhythms; require that a student plays a piece with all the notated articulations, dynamics, and expressive markings. Encourage students to analyze and describe the form and function of the piece. Help students relate emotions and ascribe descriptive language to the mood each piece evokes. This in-depth approach to music learning teaches students to engage deeply with music and ensures fruitful progress.<sup>88</sup>

Figure 4: Goals held by teachers



## Pedagogy

The areas of goals, motivation, literacy, and repertoire selection are all facets of pedagogy. Successful implementation of each of these areas requires metacognition on behalf of the teacher; one must look beyond *what* they are teaching and understand *why* they use each

<sup>88</sup> Coutts, “Selecting Motivating Repertoire for Adult Piano Students: A Transformative Pedagogical Approach.” 285–99.

teaching method. Frequent reflection on the level of success of lessons and adaptation of teaching methods are signs of a good pedagogical process.

An important aspect of pedagogy is how teachers check students' understanding of new concepts. Because of the scaffolded nature of learning a musical instrument, progressing without proper understanding of each concept will lead to frustration. Survey respondents listed several options for checking understanding that are easily adapted to different learning styles. Respondent F<sub>12</sub> often encourages students to “be the teacher” and demonstrate each concept from their own perspective.<sup>89</sup> Respondent F<sub>15</sub> ensures that students to demonstrate what they have learned before they leave each lesson.<sup>90</sup> These methods align with Jerome Bruner's behaviorist theories, which encourage verbal processing and student demonstration.<sup>91</sup> Respondent F<sub>13</sub> asks “discovery questions” that allow students to verbally reinforce their understanding of each concept.<sup>92</sup> This method of encouraging students to draw conclusions based on their own understanding aligns with cognitive learning theories.<sup>93</sup> Other facets of this theory are demonstrated by respondent F<sub>20</sub>, who asks students to discuss the mood or feeling of each piece to facilitate creative expression.<sup>94</sup>

The second question regarding pedagogy in this survey asked, “How do teachers ensure that students are progressing effectively in all areas of musicianship?” In response to this question, four respondents said they rely on their method book to cover all concepts.<sup>95</sup> Respondent F<sub>20</sub> breaks their school year into four-week units, each focusing on a different area of

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<sup>89</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4a.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride-Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 230-231.

<sup>92</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4a

<sup>93</sup> Uszler, Gordon, and McBride-Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 231.

<sup>94</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4.

<sup>95</sup> Respondents F<sub>14</sub>, F<sub>15</sub>, F<sub>19</sub>, and F<sub>21</sub>

musicianship.<sup>96</sup> Respondent F<sub>17</sub> notes that some students will master certain concepts easier than others, so regular assessments will indicate which areas need extra attention. Respondent F<sub>15</sub> noted that using consistent language, and properly defining all terms, aids students in drawing connections between theory and application.<sup>97</sup> In *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, Martha Baker-Jordan evaluates several method book series based on their thoroughness and coverage of materials.<sup>98</sup>

Understanding and identifying students' unique learning styles is essential in piano instruction. Uszler, Baker-Jordan, and Chronister agree that providing individualized instruction is one of the most effective ways to promote student success.<sup>99</sup> This research identified some of the strategies teachers have for individualizing instruction. In regard to identifying student learning styles, respondent F<sub>19</sub> has students participate in a "learning inventories questionnaire" during their initial interview. Other respondents rely on careful observation and "following the student" to guide teaching style.<sup>100</sup> Respondent F<sub>21</sub> stresses the importance of being specific with assignments and consciously choosing repertoire and materials that will benefit each student. This focus on student learning styles leads to a positive student-teacher relationship and will likely produce steady, enjoyable progress.

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<sup>96</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4b.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Baker-Jordan, *Practical Piano Pedagogy*, 167-206.

<sup>100</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4c.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

If the goal of piano lessons is to create lifelong lovers of music with diverse aspirations and rich, varied repertoire lists, then a diversified, open-minded teaching style is required. Responsive, pedagogically sound teaching requires constant reflection and metacognition. Experts have extensively explored the proper approaches to teaching technique, sight reading, and other rudimentary concepts, but few have addressed the ongoing issue of student retention and modernizing lessons to appeal to students with a shrinking attention span. Existing and present research indicates that measurable progress, individualized lesson format, and helping students identify realistic goals are key factors in student interest.

Data in this study found that the majority of teachers are intentional about helping student identify individual goals. These goals, when combined with universal goals held by the teacher, create a dynamic, engaging lesson format. Identifying both short-and-long-term goals has been proven to increase motivation. Other effective motivation tools like frequent performances and engaging repertoire have proven successful. Modernizing lessons to include contemporary songs, lead sheets, and applicable technology solidifies the continuing relevance of music education.

#### **Implications for Further Research**

Piano lessons are just a small corner of the wide world of music. This research has explored the specific areas of goals and motivation, two very important aspects of piano pedagogy. This research can easily be applied to music education as a whole; this student-focused ideology is relevant to all good pedagogical practice.

Further research is necessary on how to incorporate technology into music lessons. Knowledge of acoustic and digital recording, sound mixing, and operational understanding of keyboard synthesizers are quickly becoming necessary skills for musicians. The distinction



between 'keyboard' and 'piano' is an important one, but teachers should be ready to embrace the roles of both in the music industry.

An additional area of interest for this researcher is how to best serve students with attention deficit issues. Music provides a uniquely hands-on experience that can offer these students with an invaluable creative outlet. The areas of motivation and retention of information are a unique challenge when teaching students with attention impairment. One-on-one instruction may be a great advantage to these students, as teachers can adapt instruction to create the best possible lesson environment.

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## APPENDIX A: LIST OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

### Biographical Information

- a. What state do you teach in?
- b. Describe your studio setting.
- c. What age group do you teach?
- d. How long have you been teaching piano?

### 1. Motivation

- a. What methods have you found successful for motivating students and achieving success?
- b. What strategies do you use to make piano a priority for students in today's busy world?
- c. How do you help students find intrinsic motivation even at early stages of learning an instrument?

### 2. Repertoire

- a. Do you teach students to improvise, play by ear, and harmonize?
- b. What resources do you use for technique/finger exercises?
- c. How do you approach repertoire selection for beginner students? For intermediate/advanced?
- d. Do you allow students to bring in lead sheets or contemporary pieces?

### 3. Goals

- a. What goals and expectations do you hold for **all** students?
- b. How do you work to meet these goals?
- c. Do you ask students about personal goals or expectations for lessons?

### 4. Pedagogy

- a. What approach do you use for checking students' understanding of material?
- b. There are many facets to music learning. How should a piano teacher ensure that students are progressing effectively in all areas of musicianship?
- c. What strategies have you found useful for individualising instruction to accommodate different learning styles?
- d. What performance requirements/opportunities do you afford your students?

**APPENDIX B: INITIAL CONTACT LETTER FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**

Dear (Insert Name),

I am seeking to interview MTNA certified piano teachers for my master's thesis which focuses on effectively identifying and achieving goals of young piano students. At the recommendation of my professors, I found your information through the MTNA database and I am hopeful that you would share your expertise with me through your choice of a short phone interview or written survey. Your participation would be vital to my research in music education which focuses on piano pedagogy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions please feel free to drop me a note at [alana.cross18@houghton.edu](mailto:alana.cross18@houghton.edu). If you prefer to complete a survey in lieu of a phone interview, you may find the survey [here](#).

Sincerely,

Alana Cross  
Master's Candidate  
Houghton College  
Greatbach School of Music