

The Intergenerational Group Piano Classroom: An analysis of social and learning interactions between adult learners

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The intergenerational learning classroom provides opportunities for different aged cohorts to engage in learning partnerships and to collaborate in their efforts toward skill acquisition. Intergenerational learning has been implemented in choir, band, drumming circles, general music classes, ukulele classes, and music therapy. Intergenerational music programs have been designed to link older adults with infants, kindergarteners, elementary school students, adolescents, and college students.

For this study, two intergenerational group piano classes were structured to examine the social and learning interactions between college-aged young adults (ages 18-30) and older adults (ages 50+). The pilot study consisted of an eight-session course for learners with prior piano playing experience and the principal study involved a semester-long collegiate level course for music majors.

Data analyses for the pilot study included frequency and type of social interactions, perception of music making and learning interactions with learning partners, and change in cross-age attitudes over time. Post-session questionnaires revealed high instances of music-related social interactions and benefits related to demonstration or clarification of concepts within partner work. The positive trends in cross-age attitudes reported by the participants in the pilot study align with results of previous research on intergenerational music programs. The principal study further examined the social and learning interactions of participants by having

learning partners schedule three 30-minute practice sessions across the semester. Observation of the practice session videos revealed intergenerational interactions involving learning interactions led by the college student or older adult, instances of dyads learning together, and social interactions involving music and non-music related topics. The college students also completed journal prompts regarding their perception toward adult learners and intergenerational learning environments.

University music education programs have expanded ‘downward’ to include early childhood education, but expansion of music education courses ‘upward’ to include adult learners has been minimal. Educating music teachers to work with learners of all ages is imperative toward supporting lifelong learning and community music programs. College students’ journal prompt responses and practice session videos revealed an increase in comfort interacting with older adult learners, an increase in willingness to teach adult learners, and a belief that both young adults and older adults can be successful in intergenerational learning environments.

The two studies presented here are a continuation of research related to the field of intergenerational programs. The experiences gained from both intergenerational classes contribute to curricular development of intergenerational music programs as well as teacher preparation programs in higher education.