

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Revamp Your Piano Lessons

Piano is one of the most popular instruments for music lessons. Even though it is very popular, piano can also have one of the lowest retention rate for students. Why is this, and what can we do to increase our success in the area of piano lessons? First off all, piano lessons may have the largest age range of students. Students can range in age from preschool through retirees. Other music lessons for instruments such as band and orchestral ages are influenced more by school programs that generally start in the fifth or sixth grade. This wide age range causes “how to teach” a student to be a more challenging proposition compared to other lessons.



Combined with this, the piano has an extremely wide range of musical styles a student may want to pursue. Complicating all of this is what I call the “conservatory approach” to teaching piano that is prevalent in the world of piano lessons; basically teaching piano the way it’s been taught for 100 years.

Your goal with your music lessons at your store is to create more music makers. So, here are some ideas on how to “stop the drop” on your piano lessons:

EMPLOY FUN TEACHERS. Can the teacher make learning fun? What’s the teacher’s “fun factor”? Fun Factor means on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest), where does that teacher reside? This is something you need to know.

Another key to retention is how fast the teacher can get the student playing songs. Unfortunately, most piano teachers have the fear of, “If we start with fun stuff like chords and songs, the student will never learn the ‘correct way’ to play the piano.”

HIRE ‘HORIZONTAL TEACHERS.’ While Bach and Beethoven are nice, they’re not for everyone. You need teachers that are into what the student musically wants to play. Most piano teachers are what I call “vertical teachers” — they use the same series of method and technical books for every student and keep moving up that ladder of books. These teachers do not break out of this approach to meet the students’ needs and goals. You need “horizontal teachers” that look at other musical possibilities, in addition to a method book that will enhance the lesson experience for the student.

SEEK UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS. Piano might not be the only focus in the students day-to-day life. Your teachers need to understand this and realize that 99 % of the students are not going to pursue a music degree in college.

FIND THE RIGHT FIT. If you have a teacher who is fantastic with preschool-age students, make sure that teacher gets those students. This same method applies to teens, senior citizens and other specific ages of students. The same goes for music styles. If someone wants to learn to play in the school jazz band, partner them with the teacher that can get them there. Recognize that one size does not fit all students. Get the right teacher for that student, and the success rate and retention rate will increase with your lesson program.

LOOK BEYOND THE ACOUSTIC PIANO. Many students don’t play the piano, they play the keyboard. Yet, we teach them only how to play the piano. We don’t show them how to play the instrument they own. We never say, “Let’s play this song on strings, and this one on the organ.” Or, “Here’s the drum machine you can play to, which is way more fun than a metronome!” Let them enjoy learning how to play what they own. Along with a piano, include an electric portable keyboard in your lesson rooms. Let’s face it, out of all the instruments we teach, the portable keyboard is the only instrument that is ready for today’s digital technology world of music. Do we even utilize this when we teach? Probably not!

I hope these ideas will help you increase your success with piano lessons and ultimately create more music makers. **MI**

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Hiring “horizontal teachers” is one way of improving retention rates