

# It's Not My Fault!

## *Piano Teachers' Perceptions Regarding The Factors That Contribute To The Inclusion Of Children With Disabilities In The Piano Studio*

The field of piano pedagogy is filled with teachers who represent an array of competencies and teaching styles. Despite these variations, it is widely believed that children who enroll in piano lessons accrue tremendous benefits. These benefits include physical coordination, cognitive development, academic achievement and social skills,<sup>1</sup> as well as increased self-esteem and emotional expression.<sup>2</sup> However, there is a large population of children who, for a variety of reasons, are not given the opportunity to develop these skills at the piano.

Analysis of American piano students reveals students who take piano lessons come from a very narrow demographic. Most American piano students are Caucasian females from upper-middle class suburban homes; they consider themselves to be smart, hard-working, over-achieving and are exceptionally social and outgoing.<sup>3</sup> This demographic profile leaves out many students, including those with disabilities. Despite the fact that children with disabilities are capable of benefitting from private piano instruction, these children are often not included in

private studios, and the bulk of their musical experiences are limited to either general music in the classroom setting or music therapy.<sup>4</sup>

The exact reasons for this exclusion remain unknown. Though one can hypothesize possible factors, ranging from limited teacher education and experience related to students with disabilities to economic resources and external support, it is difficult to pinpoint precise cause as there is currently a scarcity in research directly related to this topic. Additionally, there is very little published research regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in the field of music education as a whole, including private instruction.<sup>5</sup> Most literature that involves music and children with disabilities is limited to the field of music therapy, where the focus is on therapeutic services, not aesthetic or pedagogical goals.<sup>6</sup>

The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), and its subsequent amendments, which renamed the act to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandate the inclusion of students with disabilities in

general education settings and has challenged the exclusion of children with disabilities from music education. As a result, there has been significant movement in music education toward the emergence of disability studies in the field.<sup>7</sup> Studies investigating educators' perceptions of the inclusion of children with disabilities in the music education classroom have revealed a direct correlation between these educators' perceptions of inclusion and student success.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, these studies have revealed educators' negative attitudes toward these students are mostly grounded in lack of training in working with children with disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

Other studies assessing general educators' perceptions of inclusion have yielded similar results in that the primary factor associated with negative perception is lack of pre-service or in-service training specific to the disabilities of students being taught in the classroom.<sup>10</sup> Additional factors that influence an educator's perception of inclusion are understanding of the definition and purpose of inclusion,<sup>11</sup> the amount of experience working with children with different types of disabilities,<sup>12</sup> the degree of appropriate supports,<sup>13</sup> the clarity of expectations<sup>14</sup> and the nature, severity, prevalence and educational needs of the disabilities being included.<sup>15</sup> Although studies of this nature have yet to permeate the walls of piano pedagogy, both as a field and a practice, it is possible that the perceptions piano teachers have about inclusion will be impacted by similar factors.

Applying the results of research related to general educators' and music educators' perceptions of inclusion leads to the supposition that the inclusion and exclusion of children with disabilities in the piano studio is, in part, related to similar perceptions of the piano teachers who are operating these studios. However, the perceptions of classroom educators may be different from the perceptions of piano teachers because the scenario in which the private studio instructor works is drastically different from that of classroom teachers. For starters,

private teachers are not legally mandated to include students with disabilities. As a result, any decisions made toward or away from inclusion are not based on requirements of legislation, be it Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). Additionally, unlike the classroom teacher, the private piano instructor works almost solely on a one-to-one basis with each child. This factor alone eliminates several barriers to inclusion as perceived by classroom educators, including struggles with classroom management,<sup>16</sup> lack of appropriate classroom support<sup>17</sup> and decreased educational opportunities for non-disabled peers.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these setting differences, unlike the classroom music educator, the private instructor is not legally required to hold any specialized training or certification to teach, which inevitably expands the range of the quality of piano instruction in studios across the United States. This lack of professional training required of piano teachers, as well as the inapplicability of legislation requiring inclusion in the private music studio, have strong implications for the importance of piano teachers' perceptions of inclusion.

When it comes to which children are included in the piano studio, the private instructor can be as selective as he/she chooses, and the majority of teachers have expressed more enthusiasm for teaching highly skilled students than for those who are less advanced.<sup>19</sup> No legal ramifications or guidelines may indicate a high correlation between the demographics of piano studios across the country, educator perceptions and educator choices. Thus, it becomes necessary to examine the field of piano pedagogy separately from that of music education, particularly when it comes to the topic of inclusion, as the differences inherent in both fields may be enough to vary the results of any research findings between the two fields.

The purpose of this study was to examine piano teachers' perceptions of the inclusion

of children with disabilities in the studio. Specifically, factors that contribute to the inclusion and exclusion of children with disabilities were examined. The following research question guided the study: What affects piano teachers' willingness to work with children with disabilities in their piano studios? Eight piano teachers were interviewed. At the time of the interviews, all participants were active as teachers and their experiences including children with disabilities fell on a spectrum that ranged from many to none.

### Research Design

The factors that affect piano teachers' willingness to include children with disabilities in their studios were studied using postmodernist theory. Qualitative methodology was used; we hoped to develop rich description by using a variety of data collection methods, including observations, field notes and interviews to discover new insights into piano teachers' perceptions. Semi-structured interviews allowed for comparisons across interviewees, providing the opportunity to find common themes across settings/teachers.

### Participants

The participants were limited to piano teachers who were currently active as studio piano instructors, regardless of whether they currently had students with disabilities in their studios. Eight participants were selected from a small geographical area in a Midwestern state using a purposive sampling procedure. Two contact people were called upon to begin recruiting participants from the two organizations of piano teachers who meet regularly in these regions. These groups became the sources for all participants. The final sample consisted of eight piano teachers who maintained studios within their homes. As can be seen in Table 1, the age and years of experience of these participants varied, as did their educational backgrounds and the extent to which they included students with disabilities in their studios.

### Data Collection

The main source of data collection was two in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the piano teachers. Prior to the onset of the interviews, teaching observations were conducted in each teacher's studio during lessons, which provided contextual data from which to ground the data collected in the interviews. Initial interview questions were developed to focus on studio demographics, educational background and experience, and perceptions of inclusion (See Appendix A). Upon completion of each initial semi-structured interview, verbatim transcripts were analyzed to create a set of second interview questions (See Appendix B). This allowed us to increase the likelihood of capturing their perspectives as accurately as possible.<sup>20</sup>

### Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures were embedded into the data collection process. Constant comparison method, which requires the ongoing and continuous comparison of data being collected from observations, interviews and field notes, was used to help identify emerging patterns that needed further explanation or that began to reflect common themes.<sup>21</sup> As a result of this ongoing analysis, categories of themes that captured recurring patterns of perceptions emerged from the data. These emerging patterns and themes were described in memos, along with an explanation of the rationale for the ongoing analytic decisions that were made and identification of any follow up activities or questions needed to further explore, confirm or disconfirm our thinking.

### Trustworthiness And Accuracy

Several methods of gathering information were used in this study, resulting in what some researchers refer to as triangulation.<sup>22</sup> Field notes from observations and interviews, in addition to interview transcripts provided opportunities for comparison among participants' perceptions while strengthening reliability and internal validity of the data collected from the various procedures.<sup>23</sup>

Description of Piano Teachers				
Teacher	Education	Years of Experience	Total # of Students	Students with Special Needs
Emily	BM Piano Performance & Pedagogy	6	32	1 (ADHD)
Susan	BA Business MTNA Certification	15	30	2 (Tourettes, ADHD)
Cathy	Piano Pedagogy Cert.	30	38	1 (ADHD)
Beverly	BA Choral MuEd MA Education	40	33	1 (Down Syndrome)
Deb	MM Piano Performance	35	30	0 Presently (1 past with Autism)
Michelle	BA Music	10	28	0 Presently (1 past with ADHD)
Kate	BA English MA Education	14	25	4 (3 Autism, 1 Learning Disability)
Karen	Piano Pedagogy Cert.	15	19	0 Presently (1 past with ADHD)

Table 1

### Results And Discussion

Piano teachers who chose to include or exclude children with disabilities in their private studios may do so for several reasons. This was seen in the stories of the participants, each of whom expressed a belief that children with disabilities should be provided access to piano instruction, but many of who did not want to be the person responsible for teaching these students. While none stated they would ever deny a child on the basis of his or her disability, there are a number of indirect factors that may negatively affect their willingness to do so in the future. These factors were strong enough to overcome several teachers' concerns that turning down a student with a disability could mean the student may not find a teacher who is willing to work with her or him. In contrast, the teachers who have had positive experiences teaching children with disabilities noted a number of factors that contribute to their success, ultimately increasing their willingness to include these children in the future.

### Education And Support

Analysis revealed overarching feelings of insecurity and isolation that envelop teachers' experiences related to including children with disabilities in their studios. Most of these feelings seemed to stem from an overall lack of education, training and experience working with these children. In general, they believed including children with disabilities requires a specific type of education the majority of them did not have. While participants believed acquiring this level of education and training would help them feel more qualified, the majority stated they did not have time in their current schedules to devote to such training. As Emily explained, "I think children with disabilities should be included, I just don't feel like the one qualified to do it. I'm so busy that the idea of getting to a place where I could do that proficiently is just so far out of the realm of what I would be able to manage to do." Other participants stated they would seek out additional training only if they were approached to teach a student who has a type of disability with

which they have no experience, and they do not feel qualified to teach that student.

Inquiries about the support teachers believed they would need to include children with disabilities in their studios revealed a high demand for educational resources in the form of academic courses and workshops. However, several participants expressed a reluctance to pursue these educational resources even if they were made available due to lack of time in their own schedules to devote to this aspect of teaching. The teachers also mentioned the need for a reference list of current reading materials on teaching piano to children with disabilities, as well as a strong need for a support network that would be easier to access and use than academic coursework. Ideally, this support network would include collaboration with other teachers, particularly those who have experience teaching children with disabilities in their studios.

### Business

The belief that including children with disabilities requires a specific type of training, and the subsequent decision to seek out additional training only when there is a need influences the type of student a teacher targets in her marketing materials. Only one participant has advertised for students with disabilities, and the majority of teachers maintain a resistance to doing so in the future. This is because they do not feel qualified to teach these students and view including them in their marketing materials as false advertisement. As Susan stated: "I would only advertise if I had done training specifically for that so that if something really difficult did come through the door, I would be able to handle it because I wouldn't want people to think that I know stuff I don't know."

In essence, this becomes a catch-22 as teachers do not want to include children with disabilities in their marketing materials because they believe they lack the necessary qualifications to teach them, but they are

reluctant to pursue training they believe is necessary unless approached to teach a student with a disability. Unfortunately, if children with disabilities are not included in teachers' marketing materials, their chance of being approached to teach a student with a disability is greatly diminished.

In addition to marketing influences, other business factors that impact a piano teachers' willingness to include children with disabilities involve studio size. The more vacancies a teacher has in her studio, the more open she is to include any student, regardless of the level of ability, disability and other potential challenges the student may face, to remain financially stable. Susan explained "I wanted to be more choosy, but at the moment with the economy, I'll take pretty much anyone who signs up and then I'll deal with the problems as they arise... I can't be quite as picky as I used to be."

In contrast, teachers who have maintained enrollments and those who are in high demand are able to be more selective about the students they admit in their studios. This is especially true for teachers who have attained a higher level of performance as pianists and, as a result, have geared their instruction toward advanced students who are seeking preparation for college. These types of teachers are fewer in number and higher in demand. They are able to be more selective and still maintain financial stability and, as a result, they are less likely to include children with disabilities. Deb is one of these teachers. She explained, "I've got such a waiting list, and sometimes I think I would be more valuable here than I would there. So, sometimes I go where I would be most valuable."

### Fear Factor

Even in a perfect world where the right combination of educational resources are available to teachers who have an unlimited amount of time in their days to pursue them, for some of the teachers in this study there exists a fear that may become too big

of a hurdle to jump over in their teaching careers. The fear can be divided into two subcategories: the fear of disability and the fear of teaching children with disabilities. This is similar to Sandie Wong and Tamara Cumming's results,<sup>24</sup> which revealed that a caregiver's fears of inclusion were twofold: the fear of being seen as a bad "carer," especially when the child showed atypical behavior and fear about their capacity to include children with disabilities and the responsibility that comes with this inclusion.

In this study, piano teachers' fears of disability stemmed from either inexperience or negative experiences with individuals with disabilities in their personal lives or in their teaching careers. During our first interview, Emily opened up about her childhood experiences visiting her grandfather, who was institutionalized because of severe mental illness. She described the trauma she experienced during these visits and the subsequent discomfort and fear of people with disabilities she continues to have in her adult life:

It sounds terribly crude and unfeeling to say, but I'm scared away by it. I've always been scared by any kind of disability or handicap, since I was really little... When I see someone in a wheelchair, I don't know how to interact with that person. I know they're just a normal person, but I would rather just go out of my way to avoid it. So, as far as disabilities with my students go, I think that part of my personality carries over, and I would be really skittish of doing anything with a student that has any kind of disability, mental or physical. There's just a part of me that's repelled by that.

The fear of teaching children with disabilities is a result of fearing the failure that may be caused by stepping outside one's comfort zone with traditional students, that is, those without special needs, into a world where standard assessment tools, goal

setting and expectations are flipped upside down. Stepping outside of one's comfort zone, with typical students where they know how to achieve success, and entering the unknown realm of disability created a fear of failure, both on the part of the teacher and of the student. Working with students with disabilities may mean that previously developed teaching methods may not be successful, making experimentation a priority and the subsequent fear of failure valid. It should be noted the teachers who had a stronger willingness to include children with disabilities appeared to have a lower level of fear, and those who had a higher level of fear were less willing to include these children in their studios.

### Modifications And Perceived Benefits

Adjusting teaching, assessment, structure and goal setting for students with disabilities can be daunting for many teachers because it requires the development of a whole new set of teaching tools, as well as the ability to make adjustments to preconceived standards, priorities and goals for themselves as teachers and for their students. While some of the teachers welcomed this challenge and maintained a positive outlook on teaching children with disabilities, others were frustrated with the process of restructuring their lessons to include these children. Teachers who had experience making modifications to include children with disabilities found the additional time required to prepare for these weekly lessons made them reluctant to include children with disabilities in the future. Additionally, these teachers found lessons with these students can be physically, mentally and emotionally draining. Managing challenging behavior, staying one step ahead of students with attention problems and having to make constant adaptations within the lesson itself was identified as a hindrance for teachers who had already exerted extra time and energy preparing for these lessons. Deb explained, "I've let go of a student for the sake

of my other students because it was zapping too much energy out of me, and then I wasn't doing well with my next kid."

In many cases, as teachers made accommodations for their students with special needs, their goals for these students shifted from musical to non-musical in nature. Additionally, adaptations teachers made to goal setting and how they defined progress resulted in a discrepancy between the perceived benefits of piano lessons for children with disabilities and for children without disabilities. The majority of participants believe the benefits for children without disabilities range from academic to personal and emotional. These include enhanced problem solving, brain processing, math and reading skills; increased opportunities for emotional expression; enhanced socialization, confidence and independence; and ability to appreciate music and experience the joys that come from playing music. However, the same participants believe the benefits for children with disabilities are less academic and cognitive, and more personal and emotional. For these children, benefits include opportunities for social development, self-regulation, an increased ability to develop and maintain focus for students with ADHD and opportunities for self-expression. This finding is supported by previous studies that revealed music teachers' priorities shifted from improvement of musical abilities toward more non-musical goals for their students with disabilities.<sup>25</sup> As the level of disability increased and the student's musical ability decreased, the music educators' focus shifted from improved academic skills and aesthetic instruction to non-music goals including social and behavioral.

### Experience

The positive and negative experiences participants had with children with disabilities had a direct impact on the positive and negative perceptions they held regarding inclusion in studios at the time of the study.

This was also true for teachers who expressed a willingness to work with students with certain disabilities, while maintaining a resistance to working with others. Teachers who had already established a reputation for working with students with different types of disabilities explained once they found success with one student with a particular disability, their level of willingness to work with other students with the same disability increased. For some, this resulted in a higher incidence of that disability in their studios. The opposite was true for teachers who had negative experiences teaching children with disabilities and who subsequently made efforts to avoid including children with disabilities. When Emily discussed her experience with a student with ADHD, she explained:

I think there would be some elements that would be easier, but at the same time, having had this experience and seeing how it is kind of frustrating to me, I don't think I would be as eager to take on another student like it because it is still a frustration. As much as I don't dread this half hour of failure every week anymore, it's still not the same as teaching a six year old who's adding mordents to her Telemann *Gigue*, which is fun!

Although all participants stated they would never deny a student based on his or her disability, most participants expressed hesitations about including children with certain types of disabilities, regardless of whether they have had exposure to children with those disabilities in the past. For some, this was a result of misperceptions that were formed from indirect sources of information, not what they had directly experienced. For others, it was a product of positive and negative experiences they had with children or adults with different disabilities that left them more willing to include children with certain disabilities and avoid working with others. In the end, it comes down to value. Teachers who found success in working with

persons with certain disabilities expressed a willingness to include children with these same disabilities in the future because they believed there is value in piano lessons for these children. In contrast, teachers who had negative experiences with persons with certain disabilities questioned the value piano lessons had for those students and, as a result, were more likely to exclude students with these same disabilities in the future.

### Disability Type And Manifestations

Overall, teachers who have little experience working with different types of disabilities are less willing to include students with disabilities that impact their hearing and visual senses, as well as student's abilities to verbally communicate. This is because the teachers believed they do not have the skills needed to adapt their instruction to accommodate these impairments. Cathy explained, "I'm not sure if I could handle someone who couldn't communicate because then it's like a real guessing game... I mean, that would be hardest for me. Someone who couldn't say, 'Because I really like it' when my students come in here and say, 'Well I really liked this one.'" In some cases, the reluctance to include children with certain disabilities was based on misperceptions because teachers had no solid experience to ground or validate their perceptions. Additionally, all teachers who have had experience working with students with ADHD expressed they would avoid working with students with ADHD in the future. In contrast, teachers were more open to working with students with physical disabilities, regardless of whether the disability impacts the arms, hands or fingers, which all play a critical role in the physical execution of playing a keyboard instrument. This willingness was despite the fact that none of the participants had teaching studios that were accessible to a student who has a mobility impairment.

### Parents

Most participants described their expectations for a role change for the parents when including children with disabilities in their studios. This shift moved the parents from being a source of outside support for the child to being a teacher for the child during home practice sessions. Parents also become a collaborator with the instructor during the lessons. In studios where children with disabilities had been included, parents of these children helped with setting goals and expectations, developing teaching techniques in the lessons and working as facilitators for continued learning at home. In this way, parents of children with disabilities became the driving force behind their child's learning. Teachers of children with disabilities who were most successful in their studios believed high levels of parental support was responsible for their success. Additionally, most teachers were reluctant to include children with disabilities if parental collaboration and support was not an option. As Emily explained:

I have students [without disabilities] that their parents are very not involved, and it's hard, and it's slow, but it works. I can't see that as even being an option with this student [with ADHD] if I were on my own without parental help. It would be too much of a frustration. I think she would get frustrated, and I would be frustrated and so while it's helpful in both cases, I think it's essential in her case.

Emily's position and the position of other teachers related to parental involvement for students without disabilities is in concert with results from Jenny Macmillan's study. These results showed that piano teachers encourage parental involvement (with students without disabilities) as a way of ensuring success in their studios, but parental involvement is more indirect and outside the studio.<sup>26</sup>

The current study's teachers also believed parents can negatively affect whether students with disabilities take piano lessons. This is because guardians are responsible for pursuing teachers for their children, paying for lessons and providing transportation to these lessons. Most participants believed the low numbers of students with disabilities in piano studios can be attributed to parents not seeking out lessons for their children and that reasons for not seeking lessons ranged from lack of resources to a lack of prioritization. In a moment of reflection, Kate stated: "I wonder how much parents think it would be worthwhile... piano lessons sound like such a privilege when they're just trying to learn how to do their speech therapy and their whatever therapy."

In contrast, some of the participants indicated they believe parents are not always forthcoming about their children's disabilities, pointing to the fact that they believed they were working with students who have a disability, but the parents had not communicated their diagnoses. In these situations, the teacher was likely to make assumptions about the disability and respond accordingly. Most teachers made a decision not to discuss their suspicions with the parents. Some participants viewed confronting the parents as a form of conflict they would prefer to avoid. In other cases, teachers chose to avoid having this discussion out of respect for the family's or because manifestations of the suspected disability are not disruptive enough in the lessons to warrant pursuing this type of information. Michelle provided an example of this type of situation in her first interview: "I had one student who I was pretty certain had OCD... I didn't ever confront the parents because I didn't know how to approach them... It never really manifested itself in a way that interrupted our lesson."

### It's Not My Fault

Inquiries regarding why such a low number of students with disabilities are

taught in their piano studios revealed the majority of participants not only believed the parents of these children are the most influential factor, they also believe the low number of individuals with disabilities in their communities is a factor as well. They assumed the ratio of children with disabilities in their studios to those without disability is the same proportion as their presence in the local communities.

At the time of the interviews, Beverly had a total of 33 students in her studio: 32 without disabilities and one student with Down Syndrome. This student represented approximately 3 percent of her studio population. She believed the primary factor that contributed to the low ratio of students with disabilities in her studio was the lower number of children with disabilities in her community. She stated,

Well, my first thought that comes to mind is proportion-wise in the population. There are fewer, I mean, they're not equal... I'm just thinking that ratio-wise, whether you're in a small community or a big community that the ratio is probably similar, but I don't know, I would think. Um, just from what, from my understanding.

However, statistical data regarding the students in the schools in her community reported that 16 percent of the students in area's public schools have identified special needs,<sup>27</sup> negating Beverly's claims. Other participants from this same geographical location reported one in 38 (approximately 2.5 percent) and one in 32 (approximately 3 percent) students in their studios had special needs. Clearly, the claim of low prevalence does not explain the low numbers of children with disabilities in the teachers' studios.

### Pleasant Surprises: Personal Empathy And Intrinsic Rewards

All participants who expressed a strong willingness to teach students with disabilities in their studios also revealed a personal empathy for these children at some point

in their interviews. These participants told the stories of different life experiences that contributed to their empathic responses to children who are either unaccepted socially or who struggle in life and at the piano. For some, this empathy comes from having disabilities themselves. For others, it is a product of inner feelings of inadequacy or difference. In her first interview, Beverly described the feelings of inferiority she had when she was younger and how this is connected to her empathy for children who struggle now:

When I was young, I would say I had an inferiority complex and everyone else could always, in my mind, do things better than me. Things would always be my fault if something went wrong...I think I have an empathy for shy children, I have an empathy if I sense someone feels like I did when I was young. I think I can empathize with that and encourage them. I think I've been sensitive to people who have problems, who have needs. It's just part of who I am.

Participants who had this type of empathic response to children with disabilities mentioned intrinsic rewards they attained when watching these children succeed in their lessons. This was because the challenges of adapting their lessons to meet the needs of these children in their studios were validated when the student achieved a level of success that initially was not deemed attainable. Susan described her inner experience when students who struggled in her studio achieved success:

A student who's struggling is more exciting to me, and a better challenge for me than a student who comes in and is so talented that they're just flying really fast, because I'm more like the first...and while working with talented kids is great and no doubt about it can be a super high, I get really excited when a student who's had a hard time is not anymore.

The positive impact intrinsic rewards can have on piano teachers is especially true in situations where the student surprised the teacher by exceeding the teacher's initial expectations, ultimately revealing abilities that were assumed to be either nonexistent or masked by the manifestations of the child's disability. While it is true that positive experiences working with children with special needs leads to positive perceptions of inclusion of children with the same disability in the future, none of these positive experiences would be possible if the student had not either met the standards set for them, or exceeded the instructor's initial expectation.

### Spiritual Beliefs

Spiritual beliefs became a topic of discussion for many participants who believed God and religion play a significant role in their lives and careers as piano teachers. The influence these spiritual beliefs had on their teaching ranged from decision making in the lessons to the ways they strove to impact their student's lives outside their studios. Some participants expressed that teaching is how they showed their love and respect for God and humanity. Their spirituality is what guided them to be open to including all children, especially those with disabilities. For other participants, a major goal for themselves as teachers is to be a spiritual blessing for their students, and they made efforts to be a blessing in all of their lessons. Additionally, some teachers encouraged their students to get involved in their church communities through music and the piano.

Beverly believes her teaching is an act of love. As a result, she maintained a willingness to teach all children in her studio, including those with disabilities. Her spirituality contributed to her belief that all children have equal value and deserve the opportunity to be loved through music regardless of their level of ability or disability:

I see everyone as a child of God, and I do believe that we all have some kind of disability and some people need

more help than other people. But they are as valuable as the brightest people walking around. I mean, their value is not lessened because they have a disability; they're still very valuable people. And everyone needs love and they need love and if that's one way, that's one way to do it.

### Conclusion

Careful consideration was given during the overall design of this study in an attempt to address and avoid all known limitations. However, it was impossible to anticipate control of all aspects of this study and, as a result, there are limitations. The results of this research reflect the perspectives of only female participants who mostly fall within the middle-age range. As a result, the study is limited by the lack of representation from male voices, younger voices, older voices and participants from other parts of the country. Other limitations include ones that are due to the natural and anticipated product of qualitative research, as well as limitations related to the background of the researcher, the location of the study and the lack of previous research related to the inclusion of children with disabilities in piano studios. In an effort to combat this, we employed a variety of methods intended to enhance the accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness of the study, minimizing the influence of the researchers' views and beliefs. In this study, multiple participants, triangulation, methodological field notes and memos, and debriefing sessions were used to decrease the influence of the researcher in the participants' stories.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that affect piano teachers' willingness to work with children with disabilities in their piano studios. The private piano teachers in this study varied in their willingness to include students with disabilities in their studios. Few teachers set out to intentionally include these children, but all had at least one experience in working

with a child with a disability. The success of these experiences along with a variety of teacher, parent and studio-related factors affected the possibility that these teachers would include other children with disabilities in their studios.

None of the teachers in this study have any training or professional support on which to base their work with children with disabilities. This frequently led to feelings of fear, insecurity and isolation when working with these children. Some teachers found success in working with parents to fill in their knowledge and support gaps, others experimented, and still others used past experiences to guide how they adapted their curriculum, materials and lessons. In all of these instances, teachers reported that making these accommodations to include children with disabilities in their studios required additional time spent self-educating and preparing, as well as extra energy spent staying ahead of these students during the lessons.

These experiences with time and energy consumption made some participants reluctant to include children with disabilities in their studios. In some cases, teachers remained open to working with children with some disabilities and developed a reluctance to work with children with other disabilities. This was especially true in situations where the teacher had to prepare multiple activities prior to the onset of the lesson and/or manage challenging behaviors during the lesson. Often these challenges came hand-in-hand with the switch in priorities from musical to non-musical goals. As a result, teachers tended to view the benefits for children without disabilities as more academic and musical than students without disabilities.

Perhaps most enlightening was the level of responsibility teachers felt for the inclusion in their studios. The majority of teachers was reluctant to pursue additional training in order to include children with disabilities and, as a result, will continue to avoid reaching out to the parents of these children in their

marketing materials. However, when asked to account for the low levels of children with disabilities in their studios, teachers explained that the major contributing factors were the parents and low incidence of disability in their communities. Teachers gave no indication they believed they had the power to increase the level of inclusion in their studios by making different choices themselves (despite recognition of their refusal to do so).

### Implications For Practice

At present, there is minimal research related to the inclusion of children with disabilities in piano studios and no published research that specifically examines the perceptions piano teachers have regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in the piano studio. As a result, this study provides an initial look at factors that could affect the inclusion or exclusion of students with disabilities in private piano studios. Further exploring these factors and using these factors to create inclusion opportunities may result in children with disabilities being provided the same opportunities to experience the benefits and joy that come from studying music.

Understanding the factors that lead to the exclusion of children with disabilities from the field of piano pedagogy will assist scholars, researchers and educators in developing tools and methods for teaching these children, each taking critical steps toward building bridges to lead to greater inclusion of children with disabilities in the future. However, the results of this study are only useful if piano teachers are provided opportunities to utilize them. There appears to be a need for more pedagogical resources designed for the teacher seeking to include children with special needs. Piano teacher associations and groups should consider offering professional development opportunities for private studio teachers to learn about accommodation, planning and adaptations that would assist them in including students with disabilities. Additionally, piano teachers interested in including students with disabilities should

create support networks that would provide them with a forum to discuss what works and what does not work, where to get assistance, where to find resource ideas and the like. This network could be virtual and/or a part of their existing piano teacher associations and groups.

If all of these resources were readily available, teachers may be more inclined to reach out to parents of children with disabilities in their marketing materials. Parents of children with disabilities should be provided with a list of teachers who are able and willing to work with their children. Also, parents should be provided with information about the benefits of piano lessons for their children with disabilities and how their willingness to get involved in their children lessons may help them find a studio for their children. Until then, it is likely the ratio of children with disabilities to those without disabilities in piano studios will remain significantly low. The lack of legal requirements for piano teachers to attain certification and/or include children with disabilities validates the reality of this scenario. This is unfortunate given the abundance of previously discussed research that supports the multitude of benefits all children can accrue from studying piano.

Despite the fact that more research is needed in this area, it is clear that anything that serves as a barrier to the inclusion of children with disabilities in piano studios also serves as a barrier toward their opportunities to experience equality in music study and the benefits allotted to children without disabilities when they study music. This study serves as a starting point to bridge the gap between piano pedagogy and special education. Given the scarce amount of research that exists to connect these two fields, it will likely serve as a small step. It is undeniable in the future that research is needed to address some of the other barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities in the piano studio and find ways to begin to address and possibly eliminate many of these barriers.



## Appendix A

### Initial Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

#### Studio Demographics

1. Tell me about the students you have in your piano studio.
  - How many piano students do you currently have in your studio?
  - What ages are these students?
  - What do you look for in a new piano student?
  - What is your selection criteria for students?
  - Why do you have these criteria?
  - Have you ever had/do you currently have any students with disabilities in your studio?

#### Background Questions

1. Tell me a little about your background
  - How long have you been teaching?
  - What is your educational background?
  - What type of training have you had in Piano Pedagogy?
2. Tell me what you believe the benefits are for students who receive piano instruction.
  - How do characteristics of the student influence the type or amount of benefit derived?

#### Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

1. What do you know about children with disabilities?
2. Would you consider including students with disabilities in your studio, why or why not?
3. What do you consider to be challenges of including children with disabilities in your studio?
4. Would the type of disability affect whether or not you would include a student with a disability?
5. Do you believe children with disabilities can benefit from private piano lessons, why or why not?
6. Tell me how you think you could include students with disabilities in your piano studio.
  - What would you need to include students with disabilities in your studio?
  - Do you think you would need additional training or other resources?

## Appendix B

### Follow Up Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions

1. What are the overall goals for your lessons?
2. What do you perceive to be the challenges to learning the piano?
3. How do you define success?
  - What do you consider success for your students without disabilities?
  - What do you consider success for your students with disabilities?
4. When you are contributing to the success of a student, what are you doing?
  - Are you doing the same thing for students with and without disabilities?
5. How do lessons for students with disabilities differ from those without disabilities?
6. If you could access any supports for your work with students with disabilities, what would those supports be?
7. Do you believe parental involvement can be attributed to success of students with disabilities in your studio? Is this different than your students without?
8. Do you see a difference between Music Therapy and teaching kids with special needs?
9. Do you believe piano is more accessible than other instruments?
10. Factors that make a good teacher or how do you define yourself as a teacher?
11. What factors do you believe contribute to the low ratio of students with disabilities in your studio versus the high ratio of those without?

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