



Anja's thoughts on Musikgarten's Piano Group classes:

Here are some of my thoughts about what makes Musikgarten's approach to learning the piano different to the traditional method. It may be more than you really want to know, but I am very passionate about what I do.

I believe that all children are musical, and music is for all children. All children have the potential to sing on pitch, to keep a steady beat, to learn an instrument, and to develop an appreciation of music. The potential is there inside for all, but most children need time to awaken and develop their innate potential.

If we were to make a list of the best qualities of the most gifted musicians, the list might include such abilities as:

1. Ability to improvise
2. Ability to sight-sing
3. Ability to read music
4. Ability to play by ear
5. Ability to play with a natural technique
6. Ability to play with a solid sense of rhythm
7. Ability to play musically, not just technically skilled
8. Ability to look at a piece of music and hear what it sounds

like in one's head, rather than having to go to an instrument to

"hear" what it sounds like

9. Ability to sing what one is playing

10. Ability to compose

11. Ability to recognize, understand and hear harmony

Unfortunately, current methods of teaching music over the last 40 years have produced musicians who are rarely able to do more than a few elements from the above list. When they try to teach, they can only teach what they know how to do.

Compounding the issue is the fact that most children begin instrumental study without the necessary experiences and preparation to truly learn the instrument. Most lack the listening skills, fine and gross motor skills, motor flow ability, steady beat, and ability to match pitches necessary to learn with ease and success.

The unfortunate result is that success in learning to play an instrument is now almost exclusively for the students who are gifted enough to "get it" in spite of the type of lessons and curriculum. Because of this, the retention rate for children to continue past the first year of piano and other instruments lessons is at an all-time low.

A few years ago the National Association of Music Merchants published the disturbing statistic that only 18% out of children in traditional first year piano methods continued to the 2nd year.

These figures are very different with Musikgarten's Piano Group curriculum. Their sales records show that for all teachers teaching the curriculum in North America, the retention rate is 65%.

My retention rate is consistently over 95%, year after year after year. Part of this is the unique approach of the curriculum, part of this is how I teach, and part of it is because children this age are group-oriented.

They LOVE learning with their peers and developing relationships from one year to the next. And they LEARN from watching their peers study and play piano.

The Musikgarten curriculum is truly ground breaking in its ability to develop children who have the abilities to succeed and to LOVE what they are doing with music. Children who have been in Musikgarten classes for many years are certainly at an advantage, but all children can experience musical growth, regardless of what their previous musical background has been.

Private instructors as well as band, orchestral and choral teachers love to have the graduates of Musikgarten classes because the children come to them as developing musicians, they can learn 2 or 3 times more quickly, they can learn with ease rather than struggling, and they play much more musically.

I believe that children somewhere around age 6 or 7 are much more likely to be successful at mastering an instrument. Here are some reasons why:

1. Younger children need to purposefully move and develop musicianship in the whole body before sitting at a piano and trying to develop musicianship just in the fingers.
2. Most young children don't have the fine motor skills to play with a proper technique. If children begin their study without developed fine motor skills, it's usually very difficult to correct a poor technique later.
3. Most parents are unwilling to have their child continue rote playing for very long (playing without the complexity of music reading), and thus there is the temptation to jump into symbolic notation far before the child is ready cognitively and developmentally.
4. Very young piano students need constant parental supervision - especially until they begin to read words fluently and become responsible for their own assignments.
5. Most early piano students are like many children who are taught to read words at an early age. By the time everyone is in 3rd or 4th grade, both early and late readers are reading at basically the same level.

6. In our culture, most children who begin piano at a very young age tend to burn out quickly.
7. I believe that most young children need to be in an experiential, process-based curriculum, without the added stress of performance.

Thank you for reading this,

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