

MUSIC TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM – TEACHING MUSIC TO ELDERS

Pui Kei Lau

Moon Chun Memorial College, University of Macau (Macau)

Abstract

This paper explores the teaching of piano to retired elders in the community by non-music major undergraduate students. It evaluates the effectiveness of the program on students' personal development and their awareness of community service through reflections and self-evaluations from both students and elders. From recruitment, training and implementation, a group of students from different background participated in the volunteer service pilot program providing piano lessons to elders. Using music as a common language, they established a town-and-gown connectivity through the black and white keys.

Keywords: *Music teaching and learning community service, teaching music to elders, student affairs, pedagogy.*

1. Background

Music education is the field of study that explores the role of music in various educational settings. It includes both the teaching and learning of music theory, history, culture, performance, and composition, as well as the development of musical skills, creativity, and appreciation. Music education also aims to foster personal, social, emotional, and cognitive benefits of music for individuals and groups of diverse backgrounds, ages, and abilities.

Service-learning is a teaching and learning methodology which fosters civic responsibility and applies classroom learning through meaningful service to the community. The strongest service-learning experiences occur when the service is meaningfully immersed into ongoing learning and becomes a natural part of the curriculum that extends into the community ("Service-Learning Definition and Philosophy", 2023).

1.1. Design

The University of Macau (UM) adopts a holistic education system based on the residential college (RC) system. Using RCs as a platform for integrating whole-person education through the systematic planning of experiential learning program, UM strives to nurture students in seven areas: Responsible Citizenship, Global Competitiveness, Knowledge Integration, Teamwork and Collaboration, Service and Leadership, Cultural Engagement, and Healthy Lifestyle ("Residential College System", 2023).

According to research conducted in the United States, participation in music ensembles can yield several benefits for students, such as the formation of meaningful social connections, a sense of community, stress reduction, enhanced self-esteem, improved musicianship, and greater group cohesion (Gouzouasis & Henderson, 2012; Stamer, 2004). However, in Macau, not all individuals have had access to musical instruction during their formative years. As a result, a Music Teaching and Learning program was devised, with the goal of encouraging college students to give back to the community by serving as piano instructors.

Started in 2021, the program started training non-music major students as student teachers to teach their peers, with each student teacher undergoing training to teach a particular music concept in a group setting, followed by individual piano lessons. After four weeks of learning fundamentals in a group setting, each teacher pairs up with a student to provide one-to-one coaching, doing simple solo and duet pieces for another six weeks.

As the program matured, it began serving local elders (aged 60-75 years old) in a 10-week piano program in 2023. The program aims to engage students in meaningful service activities that benefit the community and promote personal growth.

1.2. Method

To record students’ personal development during the 10-week program, students fill out pre- and post-program assessments and engage in weekly peer observations and self-reflections. Additionally, feedback from participating elders is documented through a questionnaire at the end.

1.3. Need and objectives

Education is a right since human life begins, but music education is often neglected because it is not viewed as a skill that can provide a living and it bears a relatively high cost. In Macau, music education focuses a lot on teaching children of different age groups and children with special needs, but there is no one working on teaching music to elders. This is the reason the author initiated a music teaching and learning program for elders.

Music, as an international language connects people, there is a need to pay more attention to the research and practice in music education for elders. Through this program, it is hoped that the educational purposes of self-development, and giving and serving can be cultivated in students while drawing more attention to music education for elders.

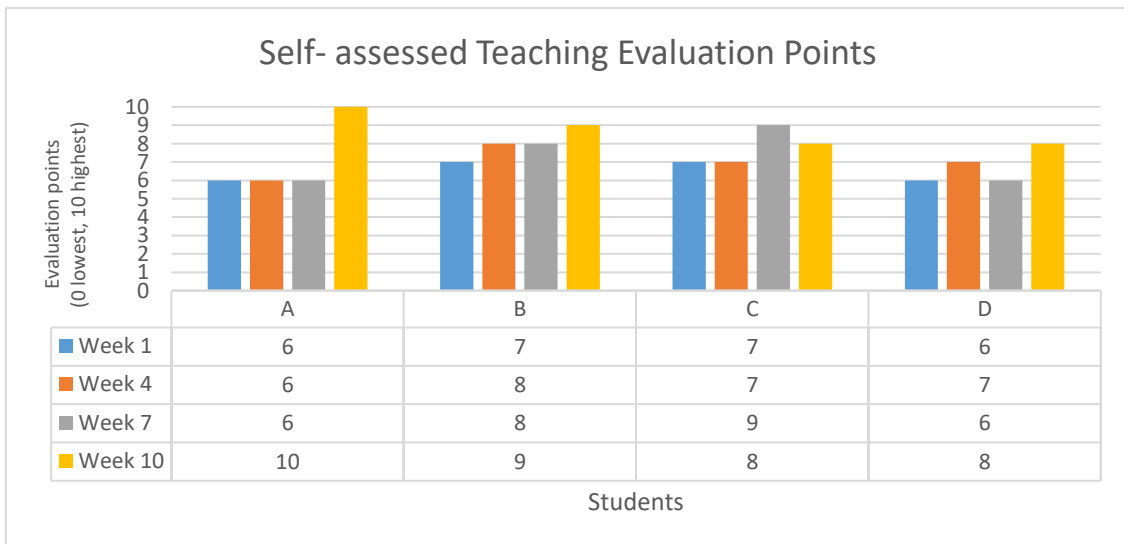
2. Music teaching and learning community service program

The Music Teaching and Learning Program connects university students with older adults through live and interactive piano lessons designed to engage seniors and introduce them to fundamental piano playing techniques. The program is designed to last for ten weeks, during which four university students (aged 18-20 years old) are selected through interviews and training to participate as piano teachers. They each teach one of four retired elders, with documented reflections each week evaluating their teaching performance through peer evaluations and self-reflections. At the end of the 10-week program, the elders also complete a questionnaire about their thoughts on the program and the teachers.

2.1. Discussion

Before beginning the program, all students fill out a pre-program survey. Piano proficiency of the selected students before the program vary from 6-14 years. Among them, three have no experience of any form of teaching before. The data collected from weekly self-reflections and pre- and post-program surveys are compared and presented below.

Figure 1. Self-assessed teaching evaluation points.

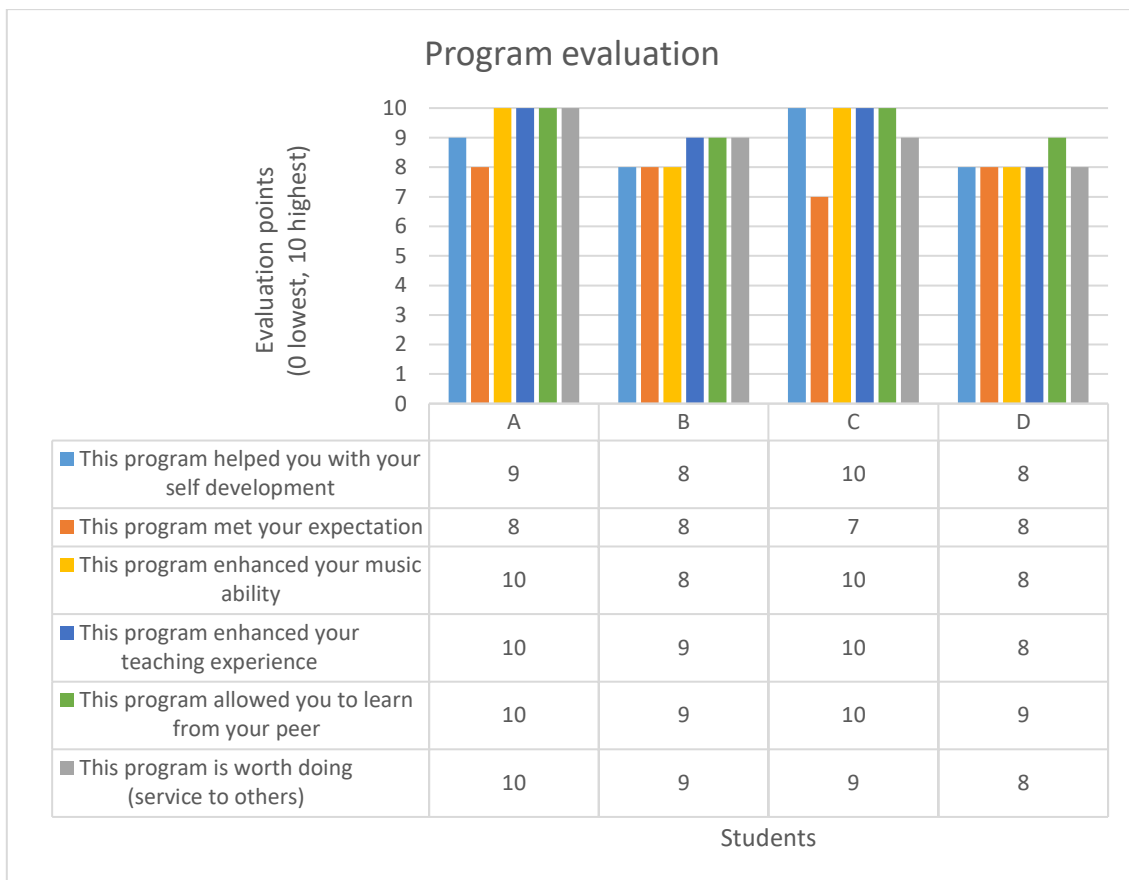


When comparing the self-assessment points given by students about their weekly teaching, not much difference is shown in the first six weeks. However, according to the weekly lesson survey, students expressed some common difficulties when teaching piano to elders, including communication and presentation skills, eye-hand coordination issues, and teaching effectiveness. All of them expressed a need to change their speaking speed and pattern when teaching elders. With the lack of practice by the elders after class, low attendance rates, and coordination issues, all student teachers expressed frustration between weeks 3-6 as they saw no improvement between lessons and did not feel that their teaching was effective (as shown in their self-assessment in Figure 1).

Recognizing that students had not yet found a way to improve the situation, the supervisor called the group for a brainstorming session after the week 6 lesson. During this session, students focused on researching and customizing various teaching methods and games suitable for elders to improve their understanding of the material. The group came up with four different ideas and agreed to try each one on their respective elder students in class. After teaching the week 7 peer-observed lesson, the group compared notes and found the most effective method for working with elders, and began adjusting their teaching plans for the upcoming weeks accordingly. As Student C's idea was the most effective, she gave herself the highest self-assessed points in week 7, while others gave themselves relatively the same points.

Reading the reflections from week 7, all students agreed that they had found a strategic way forward and that their remaining teaching sessions were rewarding and satisfying, as shown in week 10 in Figure 1. As the goals of the Music Teaching and Learning program are to engage students in meaningful service activities that benefit the community and promote personal growth, Figure 2 shows the effectiveness of self-development (self-development, learning expectations, music ability, and teaching experience), peer learning, and the enhancement of social responsibility through service to others.

Figure 2. Self-development assessment.



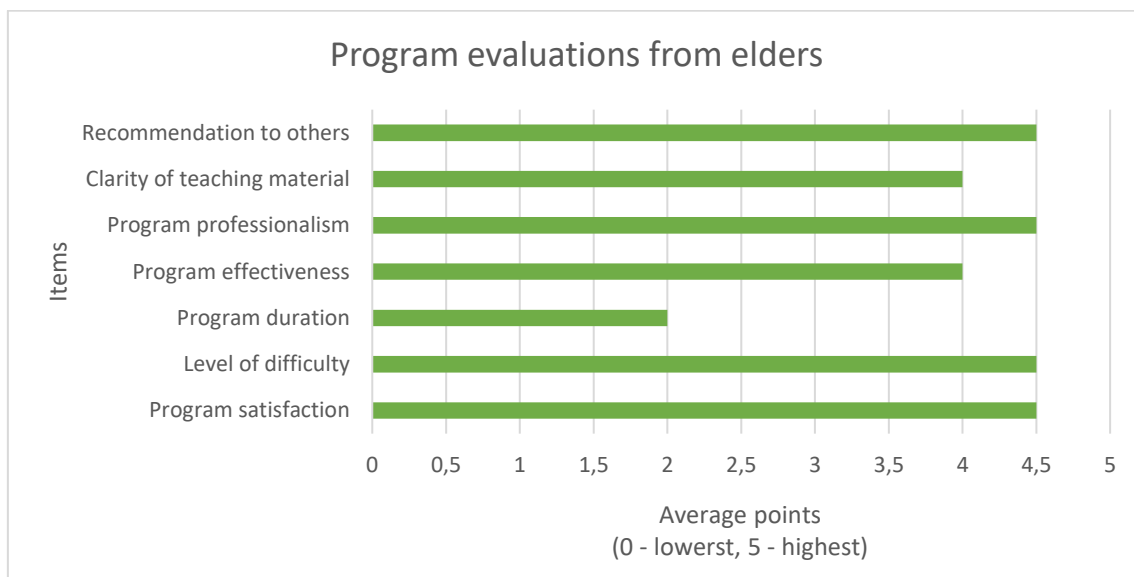
According to Figure 2, all students expressed positive feedback for the program’s impact on self-development, peer learning and enhancement of social responsibility. Among them, learning from peer received the most positive feedback, with a total of 38 points. Enhancement of teaching experience received 37 points, while both enhancement of social responsibility and music ability received 36 points. Self-development received 35 points, and learning expectation received the lowest score of 31 points among the six categories. As learning expectation receives the lowest point among the six categories, the data collected is compared in table 1.

Table 1. Pre- and pro- program comparison table.

Students	Learning expectations (pre)	Learning outcomes (post)
A	Enhance piano skills, to provide love and care to elders through art and music.	Increased affection to music, dealing with different teaching situations, improved communication skills.
B	Learn about piano pedagogy, integrate into future teaching, get teaching experience.	Enhanced musical knowledge, gained practical music teaching experience, apply to future teaching, improved music theory knowledge.
C	Learn about different teaching methods, want to learn and apply music teaching skills.	Acquired knowledge in working with elders and piano teaching skills.
D	Get teaching experience especially with elders, personal growth and satisfaction, spread music to more people.	Cultivated teaching responsibility, improved teaching methods.

When comparing learning expectations and learning outcomes in the pre- and post- program surveys, it actually matches with little deviation. Therefore, I deduced that the reason why learning expectation received the lowest score in the feedback survey is that the students had a different expectation to the learning behavior of elders. They did not expect that the elders, like teenagers themselves, would also skip classes and not complete their assignments.

Figure 3. Program evaluations from elders.



A questionnaire is given to the elders after completing the 10-week Music Teaching and Learning program to seek their opinion. The results, presented in Figure 3, indicated that the elders enjoyed the program immensely and acknowledged the professionalism of the student instructors. In the comments section, they also expressed a desire for the program to continue.

2.2. Limitations

The Music Teaching and Learning Program was launched with the support of a local non-profit organization, but there was one restriction: only four pianos were available for the 10-week program. As a result, only four students were recruited to teach four elders. To enable more students and elders to participate in music and community service, the program will be adjusted in the upcoming year to focus on associating music and movement with elders instead of instrumental playing.

Another limitation is that there was only one supervisor available to lead the students in all lesson planning, teaching, and reflection activities, so manpower and time were limited. It is hoped that in the next academic year, student teachers who have gained experience from this trial run can continue to serve by guiding and advising new recruits, allowing the program to grow and have a greater impact.

3. Conclusion

Through the Music Teaching and Learning community service program, elders can learn piano without any charge while participating students gain hands-on experience in teaching. The program received positive evaluations from the participants for fostering students' personal growth, collaborative learning and social responsibility. They expressed that the project was worthwhile and beneficial, despite the increased workload. Students also improved their music pedagogy skills, learned diverse teaching strategies from their supervisor and peers, and deepened their understanding of the philosophy of music education. Moreover, they experienced a sense of fulfilment and joy from serving the elderly.

The project enabled students to transform from learners to teachers, and also strengthened their awareness of service to others and intergenerational communication skills. Although the project involved only four students and four elders, it is hoped that it can raise more awareness in Macau society about the lack of music education services for elders at this stage and contribute to enriching the society through music.

References

- Gouzouasis, P., & Henderson, A. (2012). Secondary student perspectives on musical and educational outcomes from participation in band festivals. *Music Education Research, 14*(4), 479–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2012.714361>
- Residential College System. (2023). Retrieved March 23, 2023, from [https://rc.um.edu.mo/Service-Learning Definition and Philosophy](https://rc.um.edu.mo/Service-Learning%20Definition%20and%20Philosophy). (2023). Retrieved March 23, 2023, from <https://dpi.wi.gov/service-learning/about#:~:text=What%20is%20Service%2DLearning%3F,meaningful%20service%20to%20the%20community>
- Stamer, R. A. (2004). Choral student perceptions of the music contest experience. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education, 22*(2), 5–12.