

The optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span: an instrumental case study

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DECLARATION REGARDING LANGUAGE EDITING

To Whom It May Concern:

I hereby declare that I have done the language editing for Ms Nadine Pretorius on her Master's thesis titled "The attention span of young piano beginners: An instrumental case study".

DATE: 5 November 2016

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Msmit". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

(Dr) MARIA SMIT

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I would also like to thank the seven piano teachers who agreed to share their knowledge and methods regarding the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. Their passionate participation and input made it possible for me to do a thorough data analysis which empowered me to develop a conceptual framework.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to my parents and friends for providing me with support and encouragement throughout the duration of my study. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the challenges I experienced with regard to my young piano beginners' attention span as a first time piano teacher. The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to develop a conceptual framework that would explain how the attention span of young piano beginners can be optimally utilised. For this study the young piano beginner can be defined as a Foundation Phase learner who has just commenced with individual piano lessons for the first time. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with seven experienced piano teachers who teach young beginners in Johannesburg. Data also included the piano teachers' reflections on short tasks they had to implement in their individual teaching. The interview transcripts and reflections on the short tasks were analysed in ATLAS.ti 7, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software programme. During analysis, themes emerged which allowed me to interpret and present my findings narratively. The findings revealed the challenges piano teachers experience with regard to young piano beginners' attention span as well as methods and suggestions to optimise these young piano beginners' attention span. The methods and suggestions were employed to develop a conceptual framework from the data related to the existing literature that could stimulate, regain and maintain the interest of young piano beginners. On the basis of the research findings related to the existing literature, it can be concluded that the conceptual framework will be able to optimally utilise young piano beginners' attention span, as it is flexible and includes a wide spectrum of musical activities, games, methods and suggestions to cater for a variety of young beginners.

Keywords: Attention span, piano, young beginner, early childhood, music education, piano pedagogy, piano teacher

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie is gemotiveer deur die uitdagings wat ek as 'n beginner-klavieronderwyser ervaar het met betrekking tot my jong klavierbeginners se aandagspan. Die doel van hierdie kwalitatiewe instrumentale gevallestudie was om 'n konseptuele raamwerk te ontwikkel wat sal verduidelik hoe die aandagspan van jong klavierbeginners optimaal benut kan word. Vir hierdie studie word die jong klavierbeginner gedefinieer as 'n Grondslagfase-leerder wat pas met individuele klavierlesse begin het. Data is ingesamel deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met sewe ervare klavieronderwysers wat klavieronderrig aan jong beginners in Johannesburg gee. Data sluit ook die klavieronderwysers se nadenke oor kort take wat hulle in hulle individuele onderrig moes toepas, in. Die transkripsies van onderhoude en nadenke oor die kort take is met behulp van ATLAS.ti 7, rekenaarprogrammatuur vir kwalitatiewe data-analise, gekategoriseer en geanaliseer. Na afloop van die kategorisering en analisering het temas na vore gekom, wat my toegelaat het om die bevindinge te interpreteer en narratief aan te bied. Die bevindinge staaf die uitdagings wat klavieronderwysers met betrekking tot jong klavierbeginners se aandagspan ervaar, asook metodes en voorstelle om jong klavierbeginners se aandagspan te optimaliseer. Hierdie metodes en voorstelle is gebruik om 'n konseptuele raamwerk te ontwikkel wat jong klavierbeginners se belangstelling stimuleer, herwin en onderhou. Op grond van die navorsingsbevindinge met betrekking tot die bestaande literatuur kan daar afgelei word dat die konseptuele raamwerk jong klavierbeginners se aandagspan optimaal kan benut, omdat dit buigsaam is en 'n verskeidenheid musikale aktiwiteite, speletjies, metodes en voorstelle insluit om vir alle jong beginners voorsiening te maak.

Sleuteltermes: Aandagspan, klavier, jong beginner, vroeë kinderjare, musiekopvoeding, klavierpedagogie, klavieronderwyser

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a first-time piano teacher, directly appointed after a 4-year BMus degree, it soon struck me that the attention span of the young piano beginner¹ was a significant hurdle in the successful planning, structuring and execution of lessons. Miller (2013:1) confirms that every music teacher has students who struggle to remain focused, and too often teachers feel that they have to reteach the same concepts every week. It is a challenge to keep young piano beginners focused on learning and playing piano for the full duration of a thirty-minute lesson. If a young piano beginner has a short attention span, this does not mean that the learner is not ready to commence piano lessons, but rather that a different approach should be used in order for lessons to be productive (Miller, 2013:1). Exploring ways of utilising the attention span of young piano beginners optimally will equip piano teachers with tools to ensure musical achievement for both teacher and learner. Problems identified in the literature on the young piano beginner include the following:

- **A lack of concentration**

Shaffer and Kipp (2010:311) assert that young children cannot concentrate on a single activity for a long period, and therefore teachers should alternate activities every 15 to 20 minutes.

- **Easily distracted**

Young children struggle to concentrate because they become easily distracted by other noises in the environment, feeling hungry, or wanting to go to the bathroom (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:311).

- **An inability to remain seated**

Learners between the ages of five to seven years struggle to remain seated during a music lesson while concentrating on technical exercises, learning a piece, or counting (Millares, 2012:20).

- **A wandering mind**

According to Macklem (2015:31), learners' minds tend to wander as a result of boredom when the task at hand does not demand sufficient attention.

¹ The attention span of the young beginner can be defined as the length of time that a learner can concentrate effectively on a particular task or activity without becoming distracted (Bjorklund & Blasi, 2012:315).

By studying the relevant literature, I explored and recommend different methods that have proven to be effective in the optimal utilisation of the limited attention span of young piano beginners, while remaining aware of different learning styles². These learning styles categorise learners as visual learners (seeing, reading, observing, viewing and watching), auditory learners (listening, discussing, verbalising and explaining) and tactile-kinaesthetic learners (doing, moving and touching) (Rief, 2005:183,192). It is therefore important to remember when teaching young children that they have their own preferred learning style in order to concentrate on, process and internalise new information effectively. This will ensure more productive lessons which integrate each individual's various strengths (Rief, 2005:182), and will ultimately have a positive influence on the optimal utilisation of learners' attention span. Rief (2005:185,186) identified five aspects which will play a role in a learner's preferred learning style:

- Environmental elements such as sound in the learning environment;
- Emotional elements such as the level or type of motivation for learning;
- Sociological elements, for example, working in groups or alone;
- Physiological elements during a learning activity such as food/drink intake, time preferences and moving around;
- Psychological elements such as rubrics or forms to guide learners during self-evaluation and self-reflection.

In the literature, aspects that could have a positive influence on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span include:

- The elimination of physical distractions, utilising a child's imagination, switching activities frequently, being thorough and patient, being able to laugh, and communicating with parents regularly (Miller, 2013:1);
- Variety in the piano lesson by incorporating rhythmic games and relaxing exercises to prevent learners from becoming distracted and losing interest during the lesson (Mattern, 1940:23);
- Positive interactions and reinforcement between teacher and learners (Kostka, 1984:114);

² See chapter two (2.1.2 – Learning styles).

- A child-centred approach where young piano beginners can initiate and choose their own activities and not be confronted with too many choices (Hauser-Cram, 1998:70);
- Learning something new instead of learning what is right or wrong (Hauser-Cram, 1998:70);
- The opportunity to explore by themselves (Millares, 2012:21);
- Opportunities to develop resources to solve problems (Finnerty, 2005:11) through trial and error (Hauser-Cram, 1998:70);
- Tools that parents and teachers can use to encourage young piano beginner's excitement and curiosity (Finnerty, 2005:11);
- Advice to parents that will ensure that the young piano beginner's creativity and motivation will not be lost whilst parents direct their activities without restricting their choices (Finnerty, 2005:11);
- Expressing creativity through play, ensuring a more positive attitude towards learning through self-motivation (Finnerty, 2005:11);
- Playful teaching whereby the role of the teacher is to ensure that the learning activity is also an enjoyable experience (Andrews, 2012:156).
Different types of play include:
 - Physical play – helps with the development of muscular control and strength used in piano playing;
 - Intellectual play – helps with cognitive development in learning to play piano;
 - Creative play – helps with creating new ideas when playing music;
 - Emotional play – helps with the expression of emotions through music;
 - Exploratory play – helps to discover possibilities of the piano (Andrews, 2012:31-32).

There is a limited amount of literature that specifically addresses the teaching of young piano beginners with reference to their short attention span. The article most closely related to my study is by Owens (1958:56), who emphasises that a six-year-old learner has a short attention span even when playing games; it will therefore be more difficult to keep a young learner's attention where hard work is involved. Many learners are interested in learning to play a new musical

instrument at this age, but private music schools are reluctant to enrol five- to seven-year-old children because of their short attention span (Owens, 1958:58). Music teachers should be equipped with tools and skills to prepare an age-appropriate programme for young piano beginners (Owens, 1958:58). McPherson (2006:331) supports this statement by emphasising the importance of starting piano lessons at an early age within the framework of informal play activities. Barry (2007:64) agrees: “It is never too early to experience music, but exposure to formal music lessons can put a child off for life.” Formal music lessons involve hard work and discipline which could lead to failure and result in disheartened young piano beginners who ultimately become indifferent towards piano lessons.

In view of the above, I recognised a possible gap that I wished to fill by developing a new conceptual framework based on the existing literature, and by collecting and analysing data from interviews with teachers who teach piano to young beginners, in order to optimally utilise the attention span of young piano beginners. In this case study I explored approaches that could ensure a more relaxed and enjoyable music lesson which would motivate and strengthen the young beginner’s focus when playing the piano. The aims of this conceptual framework are:

- To structure piano lessons that will optimally utilise the attention span of young beginners;
- To provide teachers with effective tools for goal setting and assessment;
- To include a variety of musical activities, methods and suggestions to optimally utilise the young piano beginner’s attention span;
- To use a holistic approach (Chappell, 1999:253) whereby one uses their whole brain for learning. By using all the functions of the brain, skills such as improvisation, internalisation and memorisation will develop which could promote the creativity and imagination of the young learner.

1.1 Purpose statement

The purpose of this instrumental case study is to generate a conceptual framework, from the literature reviewed and the data collected, which explains

how teachers optimise young piano beginners' attention span. At this stage in the research the young piano beginner is defined as a Foundation Phase learner who has just started learning to play the piano with no previous experience in this skill or activity.

1.2 Research questions

1.2.1 Main question

What conceptual framework, generated from the literature and the data, would explain how the attention span of young piano beginners can be optimally utilised?

1.2.2 Sub questions

What theoretical framework, emerging from the literature, would explain how piano teachers could support young beginners' attention span?

What themes, emerging from the data, account for the way that seven piano teachers in Johannesburg optimise young piano beginners' attention span?

1.3 Delimitations and limitations

This study was conducted in Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province in South Africa and focused only on teaching the piano and not on any other instrument. It was only applied to piano beginners in the Foundation Phase. Although Intermediate Phase piano beginners could also benefit from my study, not all the aspects of this study will be applicable to their age groups. This study is not generalizable but the reader can decide to what extent the results are transferrable to his/her context.

1.4 Research design

As I gathered, organised and interpreted information on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span, the most expedient research design would be a qualitative one. I obtained my information from various sources such

as books, articles and journals from academic databases and search engines, namely EBSCOhost, ProQuest, JSTOR and the internet (Google Scholar) as well as through my own interviews and the piano teachers' reflections on short tasks they had to complete with their young piano beginners.

1.4.1 Research approach and method

“Case study research involves an in-depth understanding of a case within a real-life setting” (Creswell, 2013:97). My research would best be described as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995:3), focusing on learning and understanding the different methods which piano teachers apply to achieve the optimal utilisation of the attention span in young piano beginners. In instrumental case studies, the case serves as an aid towards understanding the salient phenomena or the relationships within it (Stake, 1995:77). I subsequently developed a new conceptual framework to encompass a spectrum of musical activities, with the aim of optimising the attention span of the young beginner during a piano lesson. The research method for this qualitative case study includes data collection, organising data into themes, data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014:16).

1.4.2 The participants

For this instrumental case study I interviewed seven piano teachers who teach young beginners with great success in Johannesburg. Five of my participants are female and two are male. The five female participants who participated in my study are Teacher A, who has a BMus Ed degree and 32 years of teaching experience in piano and recorder; Teacher C who has a BMus degree and a Unisa teaching licentiate and 46 years of teaching experience in piano, organ, singing and recorder; Teacher D who has a BMus Honours degree and 18 years of teaching experience in piano and singing; Teacher E who has a PGCE and BMus degree and three years of teaching experience in piano, recorder and flute; and Teacher F who has a BMus Ed, BMus Honours and MMus degree and thirty years of teaching experience in piano. The two male participants who will

participate in my study are Teacher B who has a BMus performing arts degree and a Unisa performance licentiate and 18 years of teaching experience in piano and clarinet, and Teacher G who has a MMus degree and 15 years of teaching experience in piano. I chose these piano teachers because all of them teach young piano beginners. I also chose them because their teaching experience ranges from a minimum of 3 years up to a maximum of 46 years. Therefore I was able to gain a wide variety of viewpoints on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span.

1.4.3 The role of the researcher

My role as researcher was to collect data from piano teachers both in private practice and from institutions in Johannesburg through interviews and their own reflections on short tasks they had to complete with their young piano beginners. The data gathered was instrumental in the development of a new conceptual framework primarily for utilising the attention span of young piano beginners optimally.

1.4.4 Data collection

I collected my data by means of interviews and reflections on short tasks in order to expand my knowledge and to explore my research questions. My interviews with the piano teachers were conducted telephonically and face-to-face and I used an interview protocol³ as a guideline during my interviews. In order to facilitate the formulation and development of my conceptual framework, interview questions were open-ended (Creswell, 2014:191). The reflections on short tasks involved that I gave the piano teachers a list of short tasks to complete with their young piano beginners. They then had to reflect on the information they gathered and had to give me feedback during an interview.

³ See Annexure Q.

1.4.5 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the data gathered (Creswell 2014:195). I analysed the data that I collected through my interviews with piano teachers who teach young beginners, as well as the data collected through the piano teachers' reflections on the short tasks I gave them to complete with their young piano beginners. Data collection and data analysis are a series of actions that must happen concurrently (Creswell, 2014:209). In order for my data analysis to be successful, I had to take the following steps in the process of analysis: data was firstly organised through ATLAS.ti 7, a qualitative data analysis computer programme that aids in organising data systematically. "It is therefore a tool that supports the process of data analysis" (Friese, 2012:1). ATLAS.ti 7 allowed me to modify code words and code segments, retrieve data based on various criteria, search for words, integrate material in one place and attach notes and find them again (Friese, 2012:1). While sifting through the data I made use of coding. Coding is a method of exploratory problem solving that does not follow any specific formulas (Saldaña, 2009:8). Coding is a process which allowed me to connect the data to a formulated thought regarding the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span (Saldaña, 2009:8). Once all the codes were organised, I categorised emerging themes and endeavoured to find theme connections. The final step in data analysis was to interpret the results and to represent the data visually and in a narrative (Creswell, 2014:200).

1.5 Validity

According to Creswell (2014:201), multiple strategies will improve the researcher's ability to determine whether or not his or her findings are accurate and convincing. I validated my data through adequate engagement in data collection (Merriam, 2009:219), which involved gaining the trust of my participants and making decisions on what is important and appropriate for my study (Creswell, 2013:251). I also used member checking to validate my data. Through member checking, I was able to determine whether my interpretations of the piano teachers' reality are correct. In order to avoid any

misunderstandings, I asked the piano teachers to repeat themselves to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2014:210). Crystallisation was also used to validate my data. The aim of crystallisation is to produce knowledge on a specific phenomenon that provides an in-depth, complex interpretation. Crystallisation provides a different path to achieving depth through compiling many details, as well as representing, organising and analysing the details in various forms (Ellingson, 2009:11). Finally my data was validated through a peer review validation strategy. The peer reviewer did an external check in respect of my method, meanings and interpretations to ensure that my data are authentic and reliable (Creswell, 2013:251).

1.6 Ethics

As the researcher, I had to protect and respect the piano teachers' needs, rights, values and desires, and develop a relationship of trust with them (Creswell, 2013:208). The integrity of the research had to be supported by substantive explanations, and I guarded against unethical behaviour that could form a negative impression of the piano teachers' teaching methods (Creswell, 2014:92). The piano teachers who served as respondents gave written consent⁴ to take part in the study. The piano teachers' identities were protected; therefore they remain anonymous as well as the institutions where they work (Creswell, 2013:60). They would be informed on how the data was collected, and their rights and wishes would be considered when reporting the data (Creswell, 2013:209). The findings and conclusions were reported honestly (Creswell, 2014:94).

1.7 Significance of the study

The emergent conceptual framework after the synthesis of the literature and data can be used as a tool by all piano teachers who teach Foundation Phase piano beginners. This could ensure that all the aspects involved in piano lessons are taught more creatively, effectively and in an enjoyable manner. I also believe that

⁴ See Annexure A.

researchers in music education can use this study as reference material when they need literature on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. This study emphasises the importance of motivation; therefore piano teachers and parents can use the motivational strategies stipulated in the conceptual framework to ensure that the young beginners stay interested in piano lessons. Even though the conceptual framework was designed to optimise young piano beginners' attention span, music educators who teach other instruments can also incorporate these methods in their individual teaching. The Department of Education can also benefit from this study by including the conceptual framework in their in-service training workshops for teachers in the music field.

1.8 Chapter division

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. This first chapter is an introduction of my research study. Chapter Two provides literature on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. Chapter Three discusses the research design for this study. Chapter Four states the findings and Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter I review literature to answer the first sub question of the research, namely, “What theoretical framework, emerging from the literature, would explain how piano teachers could support young beginners’ attention span?” In order to identify a theoretical framework that would explain how piano teachers could support young piano beginners’ attention span, I explore the following two topics: young piano beginners and teachers of young piano beginners.

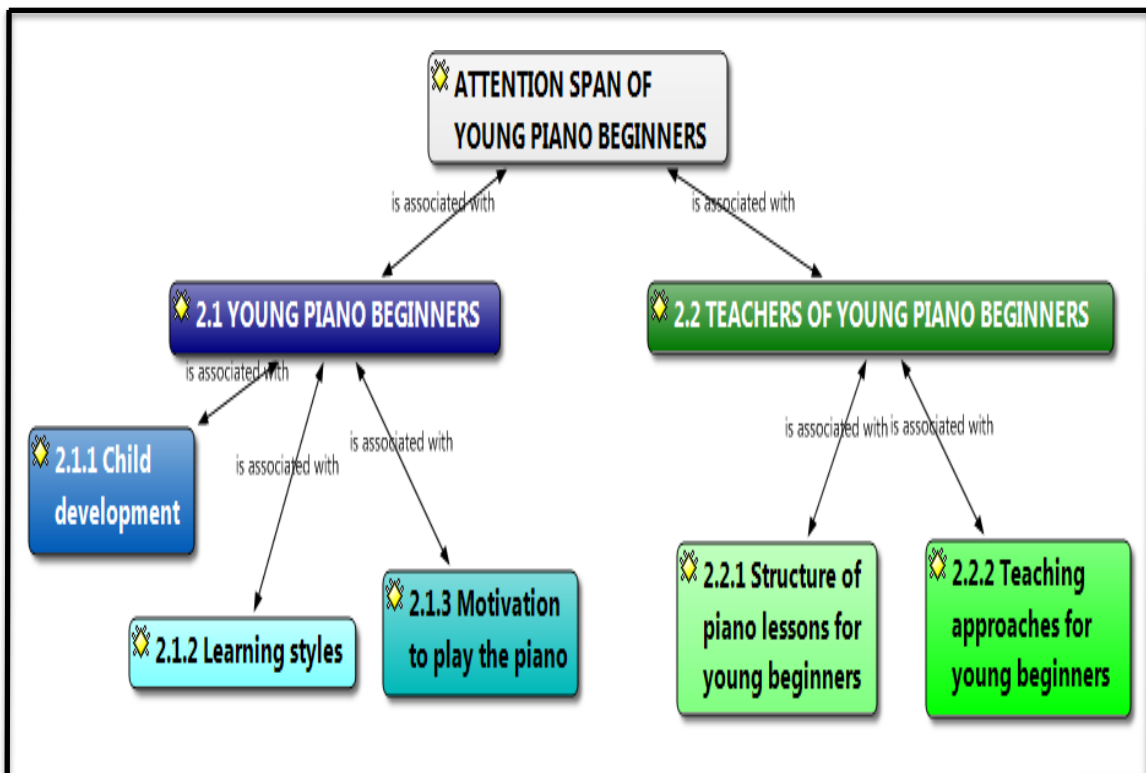


Figure 1: Literature Framework

The literature provides a background to the young beginner’s emotional, social, physical and cognitive development with reference to his/her attention span. It gives information on the different learning styles that teachers can apply in a piano lesson as well as motivational techniques that teachers could use to optimise the attention span of young piano beginners. The theoretical framework also explores the structure of a piano lesson and a variety of teaching approaches applicable to this study.

2.1 YOUNG PIANO BEGINNERS

The young piano beginners for this study are six- and seven-year-old Foundation Phase learners. If the attention curve in *Figure 2* could be applied to young piano beginners' attention span, the young piano beginners will be most attentive at the beginning of a thirty-minute piano lesson and slowly become inattentive towards the end of the piano lesson. It is therefore important to understand the six- and seven-year-old young piano beginners in terms of their development, their preferred learning styles and what motivates them to play piano in order for their attention span to be optimally utilised.

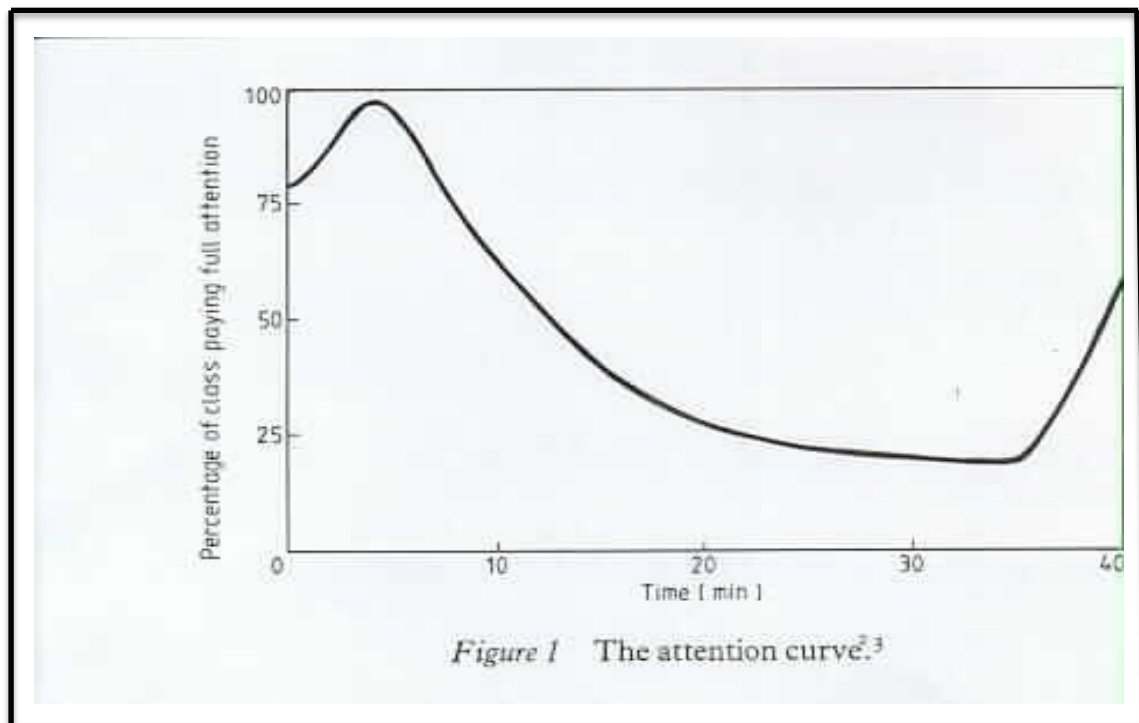


Figure 2: The attention curve applied to young piano beginners (Mills, 1977).

Figure 3 displays the categories and subcategories of the first topic of my literature review – “Young piano beginners”. The first category is child development. It is important that piano teachers understand the physical, emotional, cognitive and social development of the young piano beginners in order for piano lessons to be productive. The second category is learning styles. Each young piano beginner has a preferred learning style that also needs to be considered when teaching musical concepts. The third category is the young

piano beginner’s motivation to play piano. Piano teachers should motivate their young piano beginners to stay attentive during a piano lesson and to continue with piano lessons.

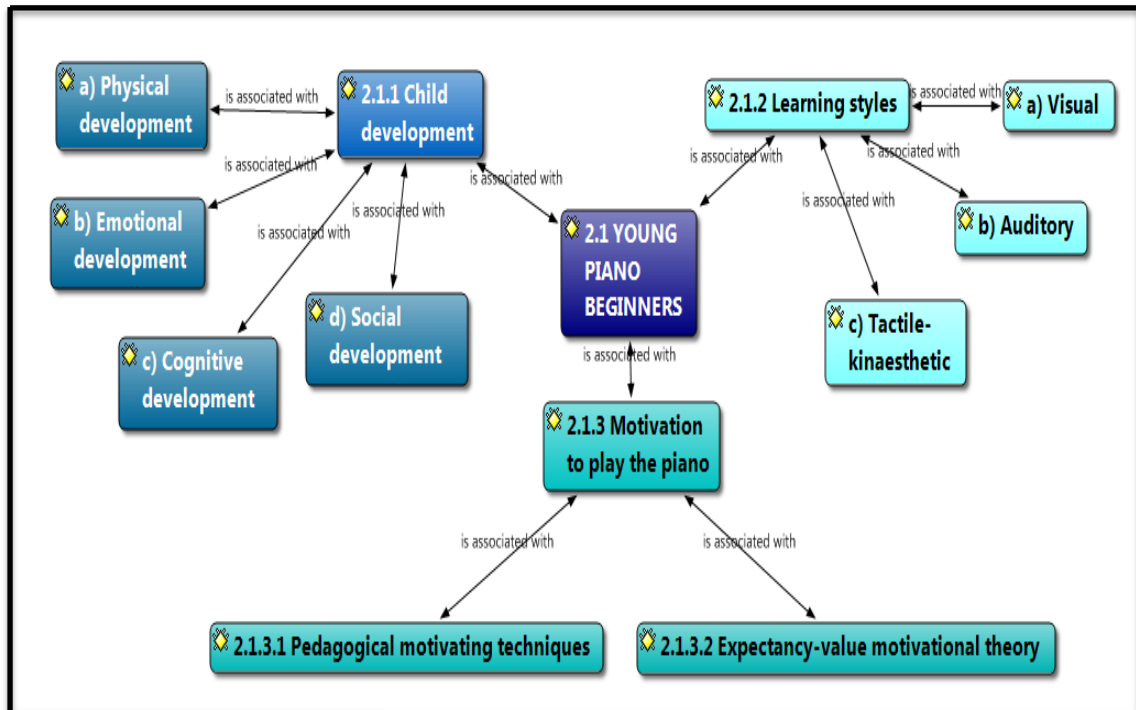


Figure 3: Young piano beginners

2.1.1 Child development

For this study the development of the six- and seven-year-old young piano beginner will be explained. According to De Witt (2009:4), six- and seven-year-old children form part of the middle childhood phase (6-11 years). The average six-year-old tends to show interest in an activity, but can just as easily lose interest or refuse to continue with the activity. They get tired frequently and should therefore be allowed to take regular breaks, or the teacher should vary musical exercises regularly. The six-year-old enjoys performing and likes to entertain an audience. They can keep rhythm, follow musical patterns and are also good at creating their own patterns (Lyke *et al.*, 1996:10). As they get closer to the age of seven, their thought processes become more significant. The piano teacher will need to encourage them, because their emotional feelings can now affect their frame of mind. When a piano teacher neglects to do so, the young piano beginner will lose confidence and ultimately interest (Lyke *et al.*, 1996:10).

This study considers different areas of development, keeping in mind that each area of development forms an integral part of the child as a whole (De Witt, 2009:5). The areas of development are categorised as physical development, emotional development, cognitive development and social development. Each area of development will now be discussed individually.

a) Physical development

The notable physical change for six- and seven-year-olds would be the development of the muscles (Heiberg & Steyn, 1982:12). According to De Witt (2009:13), hand-operated skills, for example playing piano, develop rapidly in six- and seven-year-old children. In a piano lesson, the fine and gross motor control will improve through movement and will therefore promote the physical development of the child (Tarnowski, 1999:28). The fine motor muscles are now much more differentiated and the child would therefore be in control of his/her hand and finger movements when playing the piano (Heiberg & Steyn, 1982:12). The child's eye-hand coordination is not yet perfect (Heiberg & Steyn, 1982:12), but it is exercised in a piano lesson (Tarnowski, 1999:28).

b) Emotional development

The six- and seven-year-old child displays significant emotional changes. The child becomes emotionally independent, has a more realistic view of the world and depends less on his/her family's protection than before (Kapp, 1990:190). Reward systems will have an influence on the child's emotional development (De Witt, 2009:21); for example, stickers, candy, certificates and trophies. Teachers should therefore acknowledge children's efforts and achievements in a piano lesson. At this age children become more responsible and they are extremely curious (De Witt, 2009:29). Their mood swings regarding hate and love change quickly and frequently. They can sometimes be aggressive, rebellious and self-centred, but at the same time friendly, cooperative, loving and enthusiastic. Their mood will therefore play a role in how attentive and cooperative they will be in a piano lesson. At this age they do not cope well with failure and frustration (De Witt, 2009:29). By playing the piano, young piano beginners can express their feelings and also learn how to cope with them;

therefore emotional development could be enhanced in a piano lesson (Tarnowski, 1999:28).

c) Cognitive development

Cognitive changes include enhanced thought processes and improved concentration (Kapp, 1990:190). The six- and seven-year-old child is able to have thought processes that are changeable, provided they relate to actual things (De Witt, 2009:20). According to Kapp (1990:190), language and grammar are more fluent and correct at this age and the child uses intrinsic thinking for problem solving (De Witt, 2009:20). The child will therefore be able to understand musical concepts, note names and note values. Six- and seven-year-old children can also tell the difference between their left and right hand (De Witt, 2009:13); therefore they will be able to understand the concept of the right hand that plays the notes in the G clef and the left hand that plays the notes in the F clef. The child can deal with the concept of conservation at this age (De Witt, 2009:20). They will therefore be able to see that four crotchets in one measure equal eight quavers, two minims or one semibreve in a piano lesson. Cognitive development is enhanced when young piano beginners explore many ways to solve a problem regarding their piano piece until they find the one that will always give a positive result. Once they have reached that point, they are ready to move on to a new piano piece (Tarnowski, 1999:28).

d) Social development

Social development refers to the young child's behaviours, values and social roles in his/her environment (De Witt, 2009:27). There are now more opportunities for the six- and seven-year-old child to socialise (Heiberg & Steyn, 1982:15). Young children develop socially when they are in contact with other people; therefore they want to start interacting with their peers (De Witt, 2009:27). Through socialising with peers, children will develop the skills to compete, cooperate and compromise (De Witt, 2009:30). Social development will promote children's confidence to participate in piano competitions and eisteddfods and to play in ensembles with peers. Differences in personalities between children are also noticeable due to newly acquired habits (Heiberg & Steyn, 1982:15).

2.1.2 Learning styles

All children approach learning in different ways; therefore teachers should be aware of each child's individual learning style so that piano lessons will be successful and productive. According to Lemmer *et al.* (2012:89), there are two general learning style categories, namely field-dependent learners and field-independent learners. Field-dependent learners prefer learning to be holistic, relational and global. These learners are motivated when they receive social rewards from their teachers, for example, praise and positive encouragement. Their learning will improve if a teacher guides them during the piano lesson and if musical concepts or activities are demonstrated or explained. Field-independent learners prefer learning to be sequential, analytic and verbal. These learners work towards non-social rewards, for instance, exceptional results or feelings of self-accomplishment and their learning will improve if they can try out new musical activities or piano pieces without help from the teacher (Lemmer *et al.*, 2012:89). Learners depend on their senses when they learn. Learning will be successful if each learner makes use of the sense that will interpret and process information the best (Lemmer *et al.*, 2012:88). The senses learners depend on when they learn can either be through seeing (visual), hearing (auditory) or touching/moving/doing (tactile-kinaesthetic). It is important that piano teachers acknowledge the young piano beginners' preferred learning styles. Therefore, visual learners, auditory learners and tactile-kinaesthetic learners will now be discussed.

a) Visual learners

Visual learners will easily remember information when they see the musical content (Beheshti, 2009: 109). These learners will be inspired to learn when they watch professionally performed videos of their piano pieces. The teacher should also record the learners when they play their piano pieces. In this way the learner can compare the picture of their own recording to the picture of the professional performance, to improve their piano playing (Beheshti, 2009: 109). New musical concepts and techniques should be demonstrated by the teacher in order for learning to be effective. Visual learners are normally good sight-readers and tend to read ahead in their piano books (Beheshti, 2009: 109). The overall

form of the piano piece is also remembered through reading (Schoeman & Potgieter, 2006:8). When they memorise a piano piece they always know where they are on the page (Beheshti, 2009: 109) because they can visualise the piano piece in detail and they think through images (Schoeman & Potgieter, 2006:8).

b) Auditory learners

Auditory learners process and understand information best through sound; therefore a page full of notes will discourage them. Piano teachers can help them to overcome this by implementing dynamics, tone production and colour changes into the piano piece (Beheshti, 2009: 110). These learners can analyse sound in detail and they have good hearing skills. Details of the piano piece such as tone, tempo and pitch are remembered through listening to the piece repeatedly (Schoeman & Potgieter, 2006:8). Auditory learners can normally produce beautiful tone colours on the piano, because they are sensitive to sonorities and sounds (Beheshti, 2009: 110). A piano piece with minimal fingering, dynamics and articulation markings will be easier to play for these learners, because they can apply their own musical nuances. Auditory learners usually like to play piano pieces from different genres so that they can experience and play a variety of techniques on the piano. These learners can easily memorise a piano piece by constantly listening to it (Beheshti, 2009: 110).

c) Tactile-kinaesthetic

Tactile-kinaesthetic learners want to learn music through touching, doing and moving or actively exploring musical elements (Beheshti, 2009: 111). These learners will remember a piano piece by playing it regularly (Schoeman & Potgieter, 2006:8). They struggle to concentrate on auditory or visual presentations (Schoeman & Potgieter, 2006:8); therefore teachers should keep explanations short (Beheshti, 2009: 111). The piano piece should be taught by incorporating techniques like posture, finger or arm angles and range of swing motions to ensure that the learner remains attentive. These learners are always aware of what they are doing; therefore they normally have a strong technical foundation. They tend to be good performers because they are comfortable at the piano (Beheshti, 2009: 111). These learners find it hard to give a musical interpretation of a piano piece; therefore they avoid playing slow pieces. They

enjoy playing piano pieces that require technical work; for example, fast finger passages, varying speeds and changing rhythms (Beheshti, 2009: 111).

2.1.3 Motivation to play the piano

Children can become motivated to start with piano lessons for a few reasons. One of the reasons might be that they admire a certain famous musician and they also want to play piano the way that musician does. More common reasons why they want to start with piano lessons may be because their friends play piano or a family member encourages them to start with piano lessons (McPherson, 2006:333). Another reason can purely be that they think piano lessons will be enjoyable, exciting and fun (McPherson, 2006:334). According to Callison (2004:61), learners' attention span can be optimised when parents become more involved, ask questions and make suggestions. Parents can motivate their children to play piano by creating "a home environment that is conducive for learning to play the piano" (Powell, 1988:7) by making time to practise with them and by exposing them to musical opportunities such as concerts (Margiotta, 2011:16). Through constant reminders, positive encouragement and praise from the parent, the child will also be more inclined to continue with piano lessons, be motivated and enjoy music (McPherson, 2006:345). Both parental support and teacher involvement will enhance a child's motivation, enjoyment and self-esteem when playing piano; therefore teachers should also motivate the young piano beginners in their piano lessons (Margiotta, 2011:17). Pedagogical motivational techniques that teachers can use in their piano lessons with young piano beginners will now be discussed, as well as the expectations and values young piano beginners have in a piano lesson.

2.1.3.1 Pedagogical motivating techniques

When children are motivated to start with piano lessons their attention will initially be captured. For their attention to remain captured, however, teachers should explore pedagogical motivational techniques that will influence young piano beginners to continue with piano lessons and to stay attentive during a piano lesson. The pedagogical motivational techniques that can influence a young piano beginner's motivation to continue with piano lessons and stay

attentive during a piano lesson are: encouragement (Dresskell, 1955; Lau, 2007; Morgan, 2007), to make piano lessons enjoyable (Dresskell, 1955; Lau, 2007), to inspire young piano beginners (Dresskell, 1955; Lau, 2007; Morgan, 2007), to provide musical enrichment (Dresskell, 1955; Lau, 2007), and acknowledgement (Burden, 2000; Lau, 2007; Morgan, 2007).

a) Encouragement

According to Morgan (2007:23), teachers should encourage their young piano beginners to play duets with friends. Teachers should also create opportunities for the young piano beginners to play piano in front of family or friends and encourage them to enter for examinations or competitions (Lau, 2007:39). In this way, the young piano beginner's self-confidence will be enhanced and he/she could be motivated to continue with piano lessons. This will also develop a feeling of importance and accomplishment for the young piano beginner. It is also important that young piano beginners develop the skill of improvisation so that they can become comfortable with the piano keys and enhance their creativity. Piano teachers should therefore encourage their young beginners to try to play popular tunes they hear on the radio or television (Dresskell, 1955:18).

b) Make piano lessons enjoyable

As soon as practising piano becomes an enjoyable leisure activity, the young piano beginner will be motivated to practise regularly (Dresskell, 1955:22). The homework should not be so challenging that a learner wants to stop practising (Dresskell, 1955:4). The young piano beginners will also enjoy the lessons if the piano teacher uses technology creatively; therefore Lau (2007:37) proposes that piano lessons should include CDs with backtracks of the different piano pieces, or teachers can record/videotape the learners with their mobile phones while playing piano. If the young piano beginner enjoys playing piano, he/she will automatically pay more attention. Emotions and tension can also be released while playing piano (Dresskell, 1955:4). This will ensure that the young piano beginner is relaxed while playing the piano and this will therefore have a positive influence on his/her attention span.

c) Inspire young piano beginners

Teachers should inspire their young piano beginners to practise piano (Dresskell, 1955:4). According to Morgan (2007:21), young piano beginners will be inspired if piano teachers show them videos of piano performances. It might motivate the young piano beginners to become just as good one day (Morgan, 2007:21). Lau (2007:37) states that piano teachers should find piano pieces that will motivate their young piano beginners to practise piano. Piano teachers should therefore give their young beginners the opportunity to choose their own piano pieces from a selected repertoire. The young piano beginners will be inspired if they appreciate the piano pieces they practise. Piano teachers should consequently develop the young piano beginners technically and aesthetically by introducing piano techniques and all the beautiful tone colours of the piano to them (Dresskell, 1955:20). In this way, the young piano beginner can cherish all the different musical experiences that life offers him/her (Dresskell, 1955:4). As soon as the young piano beginners are inspired, they will be more motivated to practise piano and to pay attention in the piano lesson.

d) Provide musical enrichment

A piano teacher should regularly introduce new musical concepts or musical activities to keep the young piano beginner's interest (Dresskell, 1955:22). The young piano beginners must therefore know the different musical terms and meanings in order to express themselves in a musical manner (Dresskell, 1955:4). Music theory should also be taught to the young piano beginner; otherwise he/she will not understand what is printed on the sheet music (Dresskell, 1955:20). It is important for teachers to help the young piano beginners to reach new objectives on a regular basis, so that musical growth and skills can develop (Dresskell, 1955:21). Piano teachers can further provide musical enrichment by teaching the piano pieces in such a way that the young piano beginners' imagination is activated while playing piano. The young piano beginners' imagination could be activated if a piano teacher explains the title of the piano piece by showing them a picture that illustrates it; for example, an illustration of farm animals for "Old Macdonald had a farm" (Lau, 2007:39).

e) Acknowledgement

Young piano beginners will be motivated to continue with piano lessons if teachers are enthusiastic, and acknowledge and praise them when they show progress and succeed in their efforts (Morgan, 2007:23). Teachers can also acknowledge their young piano beginners' progression and success by giving them rewards (Lau, 2007:39). Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards will encourage the young piano beginner to practise piano and stay attentive during a piano lesson. Intrinsic rewards derive from within the young piano beginner. It is a self-imposed need to learn to play the piano. It can either be because the young piano beginner is curious, wanting to expand his/her musical knowledge or to be competent in playing the piano (Burden, 2000:3). Extrinsic rewards will motivate young piano beginners who have the need to receive an external reward for successfully completing a piano piece or accomplishing a musical activity. Extrinsic rewards can include praise from the piano teacher, an outstanding report or a trophy or certificate at prize-giving (Burden, 2000:3).

2.1.3.2 Expectancy-value motivational theory

It is important for teachers to comprehend what young beginners expect and value in a piano lesson. Children long for musical activities that they believe they can succeed in. They will therefore place a high value on such activities, because they have the expectation that these learning activities will have a positive result (McPherson, 2006:335). According to McPherson (2006:335) the following aspects of the expectancy-value motivational theory have an influence on the young piano beginner's personal beliefs about learning to play the piano:

Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•The learner must be interested in the repertoire and he/she must gain satisfaction when playing piano alone or with others.
Importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Learning to play the piano will become important to the learner if his/her personal goals in terms of what he/she wants to achieve with the piano pieces are reached.
Usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Piano lessons will become useful to the learner if the learning process is aimed at the child's desires and expectations for now and in the future.
Difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•If the learning process is too difficult, the learner will not be motivated to play the piano, therefore obstacles should be avoided.
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•The learner will be motivated to play the piano if he/she is successful when playing or performing.
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•If the learner develops skills on the piano and masters music pieces, he/she will feel empowered and gain confidence.

Figure 4: Expectancy-value motivational theory (McPherson, 2006:335).

2.2 TEACHERS OF YOUNG PIANO BEGINNERS

Applying the attention curve⁵ mentioned in the first section of this chapter to a piano lesson, piano teachers should preferably start their piano lessons with musical concepts which require focused concentration in order for learning to be successful. *Figure 5* is a framework which demonstrates the categories and subcategories of the second topic of this chapter – “Teachers of young piano beginners”. The first category explores the structure of a piano lesson. It is important that piano teachers are familiar with theories of musical instruction to guide them when structuring their piano lessons with their young piano beginners. The piano teachers must also provide their young piano beginners with an appropriate method book that will optimise their attention span. As soon as the young piano beginner’s attention span decreases, a piano teacher can adapt his/her piano lesson structure with musical play activities. The second category is “teaching approaches”. Piano teachers should apply the best suitable teaching approach to suit each young piano beginner, whether it is relevant to note reading, holistic approaches, non-musical approaches or a combination of all three approaches.

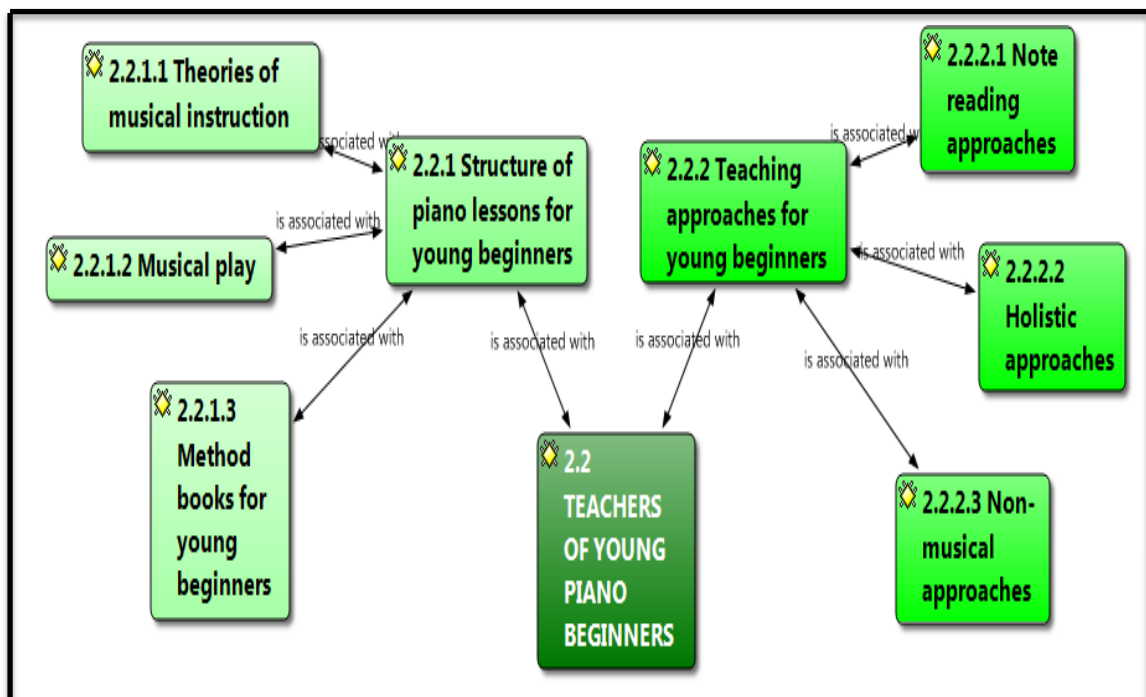


Figure 5: Teachers of young piano beginners

⁵ See 2.1 – Young piano beginners.

2.2.1 Structure of a piano lesson for young beginners

According to Snyder (1998:37), in order to structure a piano lesson for young beginners, a piano teacher should create a positive learning environment where instruction and learning takes place. The teacher should therefore ensure that young piano beginners are engaged in the learning activities, and simultaneously be aware of the factors that compete for student attention (Snyder, 1998:37). Physical elements and intangible elements will affect the young piano beginner's focus and achievement in the piano classroom. Physical elements may include the arrangement of the piano classroom, wall posters and resources (Hannah, 2013:1). It is essential that the piano teacher therefore arrange his/her piano classroom in an organised and structured manner and that he/she designs colourful wall posters and make use of resources that explain musical concepts. Intangible elements refer to the atmosphere or energy in the classroom (Hannah, 2013:1); for example, a lively atmosphere will inspire young piano beginners to concentrate and stay focused whereas a dreary atmosphere might discourage the young piano beginners to stay attentive.

Once a positive learning environment is created, the piano teacher can structure his/her piano lesson. According to Ruddock (2000:15), piano lessons should comprise of sight-reading, rhythmic work, aural development and book work. Rhythmic work includes clapping or playing rhythms on the piano, aural development involves recognising rhythms, pitches or articulation on the piano, and book work consists of piano pieces from piano books or technical exercises from technique books. Collins (1985:16) states that piano teachers should switch these activities frequently in a piano lesson to prevent mind-wandering. In order to structure a piano lesson, piano teachers should firstly explore theories of musical instruction. Secondly, piano teachers should consider the importance of musical play in a piano lesson. Finally, when structuring a piano lesson, piano teachers must be familiar with the available method books for young piano beginners and how they could add to the optimal utilisation of their attention span.

2.2.1.1 Theories of musical instruction

David Ausubel (2012), Jerome Bruner (1966), Edwin E. Gordon (1998) and Robert Gagné (2013) developed theories of musical instruction for children which could be applied to the young piano beginner. These theories can give insight to piano teachers on the structuring of a piano lesson.

a) David P. Ausubel

According to Ausubel's *Theory of Meaningful Reception*, the teacher is the giver of new information and the learner is the receiver (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:34). Meaningful reception is possible by making use of an advance organiser. The advance organiser is a strategy to direct the young piano beginner's attention by introducing the subject matter before the lessons begin and setting the learning material in a context to which the young piano beginner can relate (Brain, 2002:99). For meaningful reception to take place, sound knowledge must be provided by the teacher for new information to be applied. The young piano beginners should listen attentively and endeavour to reorganise this information while considering the teacher's ideas and ultimately making their own discoveries (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:34). In a piano lesson, the teacher will therefore introduce new musical concepts by playing it to the young piano beginner on the piano. This will help the young piano beginner to see the relationship between the new musical concepts and his/her current knowledge of musical concepts. This knowledge can further be enhanced through continual revision, reinforcement and repetition of musical concepts on the piano (Brain, 2002:99).

b) Jerome S. Bruner

Learning is an information processing activity whereby the learner tries to understand his/her environment (Smitha, 2012:27). Bruner's *Discovery Learning Theory* states that "learners construct new ideas by selecting and transforming ideas, considering tentative views and by taking ownership of the learning process and outcomes" (Smitha, 2012:27). An example of *discovery learning* is when the child can think while listening, composing or performing during a piano lesson (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:34).

Bruner's spiral curriculum (see *Figure 6*) suggests that music can be taught to children of any age as long as the child's age and intellectual ability are taken into account (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:35). The new information regarding the music can be processed in three stages. Firstly, through acting it out; for example, moving your body to different musical metres. Secondly, by using an image to demonstrate different musical metres and finally by explaining the actual music notation of the different metres (Hamann & Shelley, 2016:176).

According to Bruner's spiral curriculum, the young piano beginners will apply their musical knowledge to understand new musical knowledge. In other words, they will use what is familiar to them to understand the unfamiliar as they organise their learning. Bruner's spiral curriculum therefore indicates that as the young piano beginners move upwards in the spiral, the knowledge base becomes stronger and allows for additional learning (Hamann & Shelley, 2016:176).

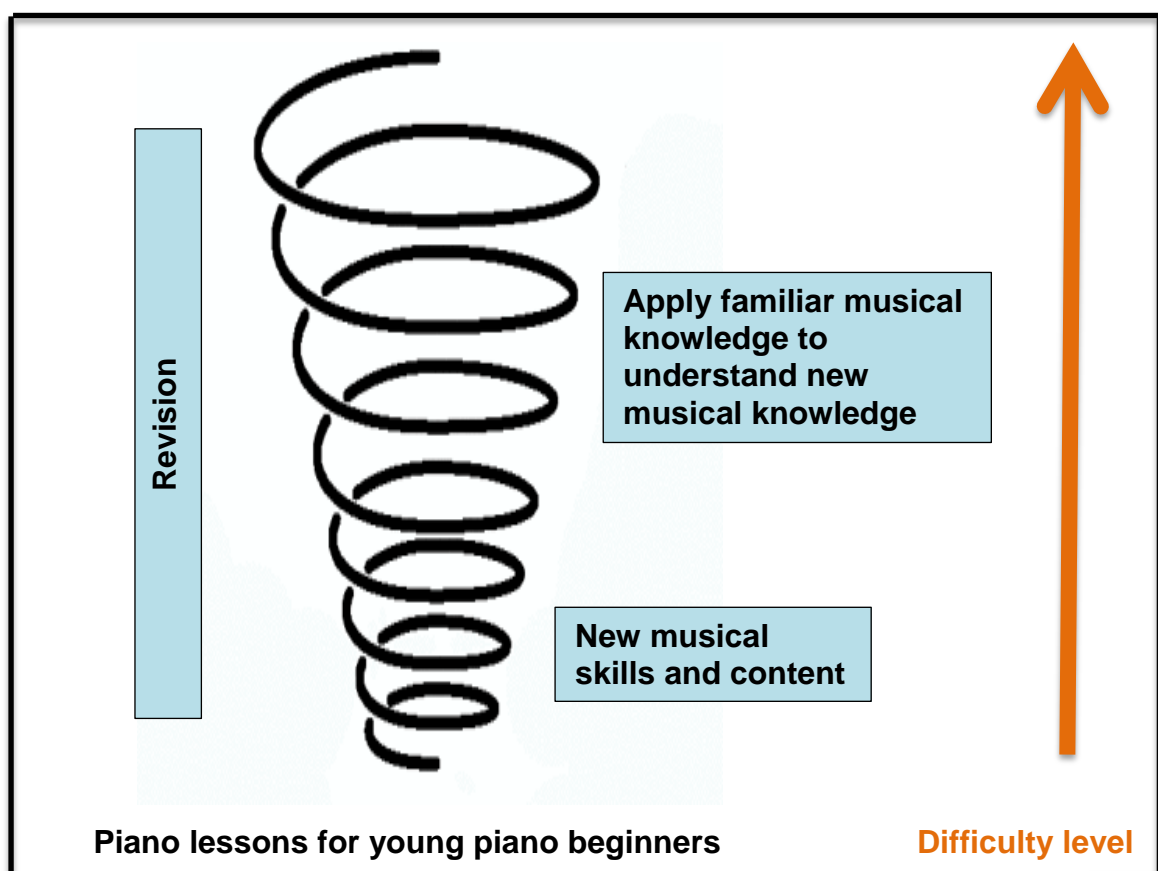


Figure 6: Bruner's Spiral curriculum applied to young piano beginners (Hamann & Shelley, 2016:176).

c) Edwin E. Gordon

Gordon's *Music Learning Theory* is a comprehensive model of skill development founded on the basis of listening to music with understanding (Gordon, 2007:4). It follows a recommended sequence of skills learning, rhythmic content learning and tonal content learning (Gordon, 2003:34). Gordon (2007:13) believes that when learners have the ability to listen with understanding, they will be able to create and improvise, read and write, and play duets with teachers or peers.

According to Gordon (2007:97) learning occurs through discrimination learning and inference learning. Discrimination learning is rote learning. Rote learning encourages ear-training and does not involve method books or material in the beginning. The young beginner must use his/her ear to figure out the melody by trying out different keys (Burrows, 2015:1). This prepares the learner for inference learning which involves learning unknown material by making associations from what he/she already knows (Gordon, 2007:98). Gordon (2003:34) compares the learning of music with the learning of a spoken language, moving forward through five levels of discrimination learning (Steps One to Five) and three levels of inference learning (Steps Six to Eight).

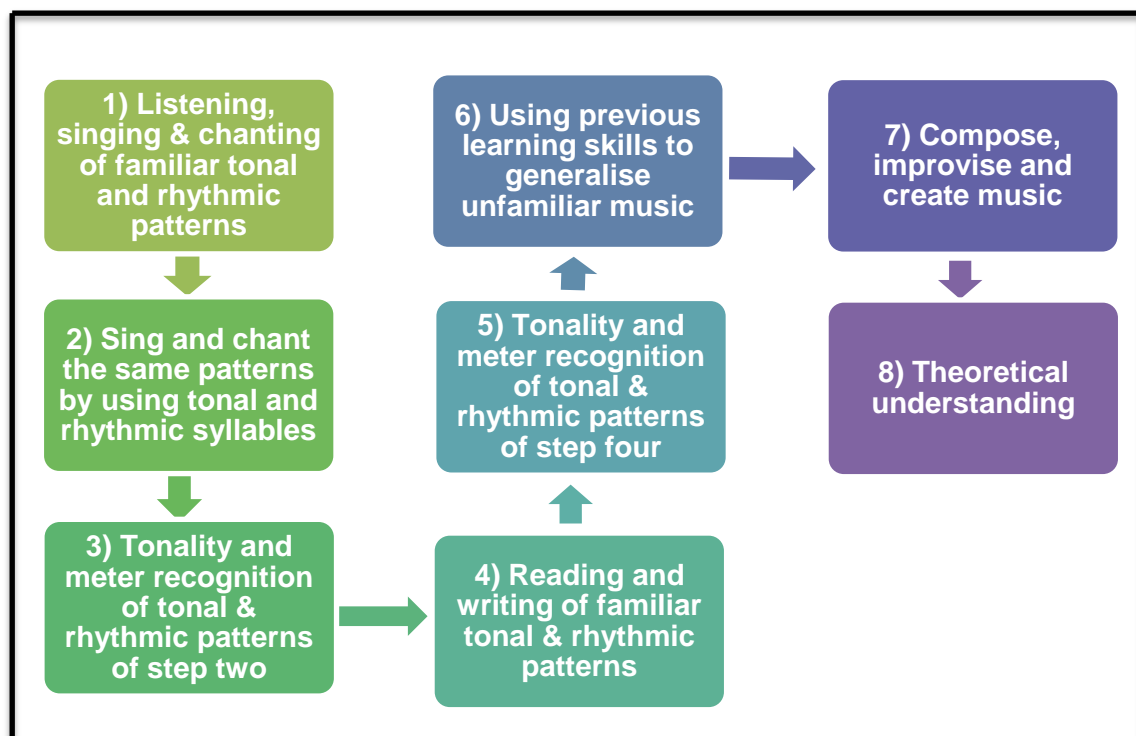


Figure 7: Gordon's skills learning sequence (Gordon, 2003:35).

In a piano lesson, young piano beginners will build their musical vocabulary by listening, singing and chanting familiar tonal and rhythmic patterns (Gordon, 2003:34). Thereafter they should sing or chant the same patterns by using tonal and rhythmic syllables. As soon as the young piano beginners are comfortable with the tonal and rhythmic patterns, the teacher can incorporate these patterns in a listening activity. The young beginners must listen to the different patterns played on the piano by the teacher, and see if they can recognise the tonality and metre of the familiar patterns (Gordon, 2003:35). Subsequently, the young piano beginner is expected to read and write familiar tonal and rhythmic patterns. Because some young piano beginners might struggle with writing tonal and rhythmic patterns, flashcards can be used to help them identify the written patterns. Once the young piano beginners have mastered the reading, writing or identification of familiar tonal and rhythmic patterns, the piano teacher should guide them in naming the tonality of metre of the patterns (Gordon, 2003:35).

When unfamiliar music is introduced, the young piano beginner should make a generalisation based on previous learning. He/she should therefore exercise sight-reading of new musical patterns (Gordon, 2003:35). The young piano beginner should also be allowed to experiment and explore his/her own creativity by playing his/her own patterns on the piano (Gordon, 2003:35). Finally, the young piano beginners should have a theoretical understanding of music (Gordon, 2003:35). Beginner music theory books, for example *Faber and Faber's Primer Theory Book* (Faber & Faber: 1996) will give the young piano beginners a better understanding of all the musical concepts and how they fit together (Gordon, 2003:35).

d) Robert M. Gagné

Gagné developed *nine steps of instruction* (Reiser & Gagné, 1983:41):

1. Gain attention
2. Identify an objective
3. Recall prior learning
4. Introduce the new material
5. Provide learning guidance
6. Evoke the performance

7. Provide immediate feedback
8. Performance assessment
9. Improve retention and transfer of knowledge.

Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2014:35) only mention *eight steps of instruction*. Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2014:35) applied Reiser and Gagné's (1983:41) nine steps by combining the second and third step into one step. Campbell and Scott-Kassner's (2014:35) *eight steps of instruction* are more relevant to this study because they involve the teaching of music and can therefore be applied to teaching piano for young beginners. These eight steps are applicable to a single activity within a piano lesson, or to a complete piano lesson (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:35).

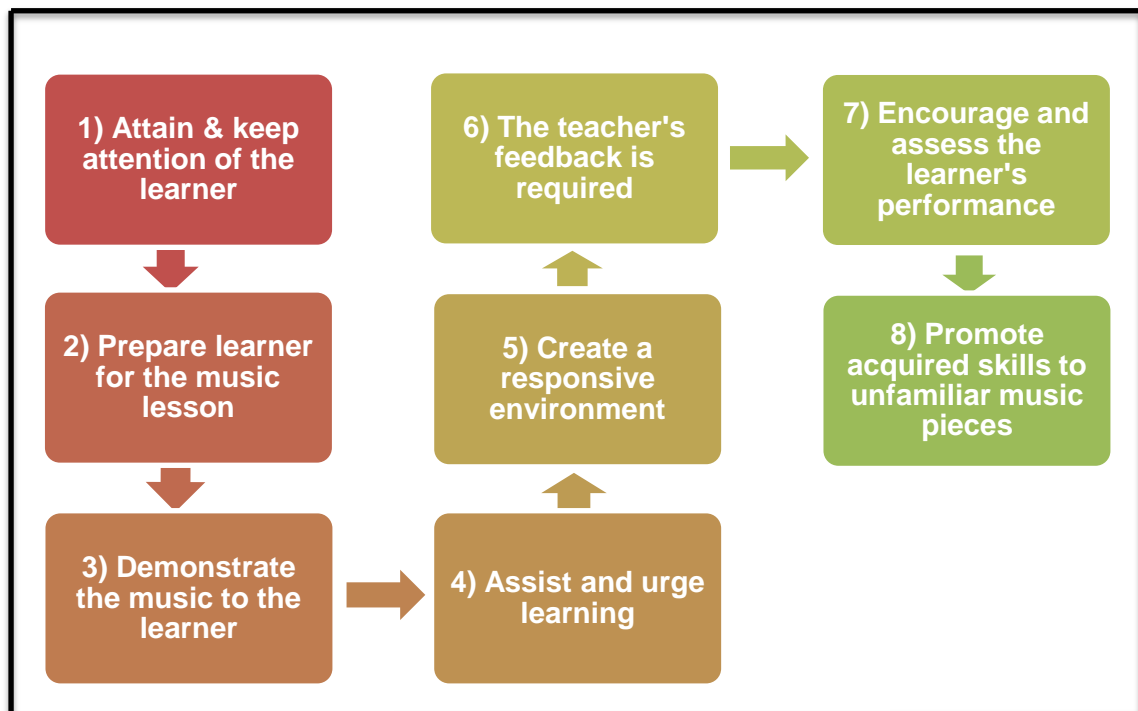


Figure 8: Gagné's applied steps of instruction (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:36).

At the onset of a piano lesson, the young piano beginner's attention should be gained; therefore the teacher should encourage the young piano beginners to participate. For example, they can clap a rhythm and ask the learner to imitate that same rhythm. It is important that the rhythm which they clapped at the onset

of the lesson is relevant to the piano piece that they are going to learn. The teacher should now introduce the piano piece to the young piano beginner by playing it to them. This will help them to hear and comprehend the new piano piece. The teacher can assist learning by dividing the piano piece into smaller sections and highlighting repeated patterns. By doing this, the teacher can focus the young piano beginner's attention on difficult melodic and rhythmic sections (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:36). The young piano beginners should now sight-sing the melodic patterns and clap the rhythmic patterns of the piano piece and finally attempt to play it on the piano. The piano teacher should also assess the young piano beginner's performance and let him/her do self-reflection. The young piano beginner should finally be encouraged to improvise on the piano piece. This will help them to reinforce the musical concepts and skills and help them to apply these concepts and skills to new musical concepts (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014:36).

2.2.1.2 Musical play

According to Goldstein (2012:11), strong learning foundations are developed through play. Therefore children will learn and remember concepts more effectively through play. This will optimise the young piano beginner's attention span, because piano lessons will be taught in a pleasant and enjoyable manner and the young piano beginners will often grasp musical concepts easier. It is important to frequently switch play activities in a piano lesson in order to develop and strengthen neural pathways in the brain and to ensure that creativity and imagination are enhanced (Goldstein, 2012:9). Music plays an important part in young children's play; for example, they enjoy performing songs they have created or songs others have taught them (McDowall, 2008:31). When structured piano lessons are alternated with intervals of free play where the young piano beginners are allowed to create music that is significant to them, the young piano beginners' learning ability will increase (Stevens, 2003:44). This will keep the young piano beginner's interest and could optimise their attention span. Optimal music learning can be created in a musical free-play environment. The role of the teacher will be to support the learners in an environment where

the child has the right to choose how, when and how long he/she wants to play piano (Stevens, 2003:45).

According to Tarnowski (1999:27), musical play includes activities where children can create sound, improvise and explore on the piano. The exploration and production of vocal, instrumental and environmental sounds form part of functional musical play. Musical play becomes constructive through patterns of melody, rhythm, dynamics, tempo and tone colour created on the piano. When songs or instruments become part of a musical theme, play changes to dramatic musical play (Tarnowski, 1999:28).

Musical play also includes musical games. The word “game” is the key to capture a child’s attention (Paterson, 2014:18). Musical awareness can be enhanced through musical games. Musical games can be either played in the beginning of the piano lesson or at the end of the piano lesson (McNally, 2006:28). If the young piano beginner’s attention drifts, the piano teacher can also play a musical game with them during the piano lesson to regain their attention. Three-minute motivators can also be used to regain attention as it is fun and involve play and games (Paterson, 2014:11). A three-minute motivator is a three minute break that diverts the child’s energy so that the piano teacher can refocus their attention and return to the lesson quickly (Paterson, 2014:11). If a piano teacher enjoys the musical games, it will be progressive and fun for the young piano beginners (McNally, 2006:28). A wide variety of musical concepts and skills can be learned by playing musical games. This will give the young piano beginner the confidence to apply the musical concepts and skills when they play piano; for example, playing high or low, slow or fast and loud or soft (Storms, 1995:2). Musical games will also give young piano beginners the chance to think and express themselves creatively. Developing the skill to think creatively will help the young piano beginner to learn and understand new musical concepts better (Storms, 1995:6). Effective listening and increased concentration will also improve through playing musical games (Storms, 1995:3) as it is exciting and young piano beginners will need to listen carefully and pay attention to the instructions of musical games. The number of existing musical

games is uncountable; therefore I only discuss a few musical games⁶ which teachers can use to optimise the young piano beginner's attention span in a piano lesson.

2.2.1.3 Method books for beginners

Piano teachers who teach young beginners should carefully choose their teaching material in order for learning to be successful. It is important that the book will keep the learner's interest and will progress systematically (Krevit, 1953:8). If the young piano beginner is interested in the learning material, his/her attention span will naturally be optimised. The book should therefore look attractive and colourful, have big note notation and not be crowded with too much printing (Krevit, 1953:8). Collins (1985:14) agrees with Krevit (1953:8) about the large and uncluttered visual presentation of notation as well as the systematic progression. The book should also include a variety of skills and styles and should cater for each child's learning style⁷ (Lau, 2007:38). According to Collins (1985:14), the physical demands such as articulation should not be too difficult for the child; otherwise he/she will become frustrated.

Collins (1985:14) emphasises that staff reading should be a gradual process; therefore teachers should give learners enough time to understand and practise one group of notes before they can continue to new notes. In order to prevent rhythmic errors and to keep the music flowing, method books should include lyrics so that the learners can sing while playing on the piano. Singing will develop the young piano beginner's inner hearing. The pieces should be short and the lyrical phrases and melodic phrases should repeat so that the children can process the pieces quickly. Finally, the method books should include activities for theory, rhythmic movement and ear-training (Collins, 1985:14). There is a wide variety of method books which piano teachers can use in their piano lessons with their young piano beginners. I only discuss five method books, namely *Alfred's Basic Piano Library* (Palmer *et al.*, 2002), the *Bastien Piano Library* (Bastien, 1985), *Faber and Faber My First Piano Adventure* (Faber

⁶ See Annexure B.

⁷ See 2.1.2 – Learning styles.

& Faber, 2007), the *John Thompson Piano Course* (Thompson, 2011) and Clark *et al.*'s method book, *The Music Tree Time to Begin* (Clark *et al.*, 1999). The reason I chose these methods books is because they are in my frame of reference and I believe they could add to the optimal utilisation of the young beginners' attention span.

a) Alfred's Basic Piano Library

Alfred's Basic Piano Library series for young beginners consists of a *Lesson book*, *Technic book* and *Recital book*. *Alfred's Basic Piano Library Lesson Book level 1 A*⁸ (Palmer *et al.*, 2002:1) includes colourful illustrations with big note notation; therefore it is easy to read the music and it will keep the young beginners' interest and help them remain attentive. A description accompanies the music pieces describing what one is going to play and how one needs to play it. The book starts by teaching the topography of the keyboard. The treble and bass clef as well as the lines and spaces of the grand staff are introduced after pre-staff reading is accomplished. The book also introduces white key names in relation to black keys and includes a CD for the young beginners to play with the piano. *Alfred's Basic Piano Library Technic Book 1 A*⁹ (Palmer *et al.*, 1984:1) includes exercises that will improve reading and rhythmic skills as well as the development of coordination between the hands. *Alfred's Basic Piano Library Recital Book 1 A*¹⁰ (Palmer *et al.*, 1981:1) provides repertoire based on the concepts and skills that the young beginners have learned in the lesson book.

b) The Bastien Piano Library

The Bastien Piano Library Primer Level consists of a *Piano book* (Bastien, 1985), *Theory book* (Bastien, 1991a), *Technic book* (Bastien, 1986), and *Performance book* (Bastien, 1991b). The *Primer Piano book*¹¹ is colourful and creative because the picture resembles the name of the music piece. Therefore it will keep the young piano beginner's attention. The book starts off with an

⁸ See Annexure C for a sample page.

⁹ See Annexure D for a sample page.

¹⁰ See Annexure E for a sample page.

¹¹ See Annexure F for a sample page.

exposition of what the piano looks like and dots are displayed on the specific notes and chords of the piano. This book also starts with pre-staff notation before introducing the grand staff. Note reading involves steps, skips and repeated notes (Bastien, 1985:1). The *Primer Theory* book¹² is colourful and includes puzzles, games and written work as well as short pieces to revise and reinforce the concepts from the piano book (Bastien, 1991a:1). The *Primer Technic* book¹³ aims to develop technique through warm-up exercises, technical drills and exercises that will improve hand and finger coordination (Bastien, 1986:1). The *Primer Performance* book¹⁴ is based on concepts learned in the piano book and includes original works, folk songs and pop songs (Bastien, 1991b:1).

c) Faber & Faber – Piano Adventures

Faber and Faber – Piano Adventures Primer Level consists of a *Lesson* book (Faber & Faber, 2007), *Theory* book (Faber & Faber, 1996a), *Technique & Artistry* book (Faber & Faber, 1995) and *Performance* book (Faber & Faber, 1996b). The *Primer Lesson* book¹⁵ is colourful and includes lyrics. Note-values, rhythms, clef names as well as steps and skips between notes are taught in this lesson book. The book offers continual reinforcement; therefore, once new units are introduced, previous skills and concepts are revised and reinforced. This will ensure that the young piano beginners will not get frustrated and lose interest. This book also includes a CD which will guide the young piano beginners in their practise sessions at home. The CD will create variety in the piano lesson and keep the lesson interesting, because young piano beginners can listen, sing, tap or play along with the CD (Faber & Faber, 2007:1). The *Primer Theory* book¹⁶ allows the young beginner to apply basic theory concepts in a creative way; for example, note-naming exercises with story rhymes, eye and ear-training activities and improvisation (Faber & Faber, 1996a:1). The *Primer Technique*

¹² See Annexure G for a sample page.

¹³ See Annexure H for a sample page.

¹⁴ See Annexure I for a sample page.

¹⁵ See Annexure J for a sample page.

¹⁶ See Annexure K for a sample page.

and Artistry book¹⁷ develops technical skills and gives the young piano beginner the opportunity to play piano in an expressive and artistic way (Faber & Faber, 1995:1). The *Primer Performance* book¹⁸ once again reinforces concepts from the lesson book and it includes duets that the young piano beginners can play with their teachers (Faber & Faber, 1996b:1).

d) John Thompson – Piano Course

The *John Thompson Method Book*¹⁹ (Thompson, 2011) includes pieces mainly written for the five-finger hand position. The note range in this book is 5 notes up from middle C and 5 notes down from middle C. This method book is progressive and will not overwhelm the child. The pieces are child-centred and lyrical and include accompaniments for the teacher. The young piano beginners' attention span will be optimised when the teacher sits next to them at the bench and accompanies them, because the wider range of tone colours produced by the teacher will inspire them to play just as good one day. The method book contains sight-reading drills and writing exercises to create variety in the piano lesson. If the young piano beginner's attention drifts, the teacher can give him/her a sight-reading drill or writing exercise to regain his/her attention again. The book also includes a certificate that the child will receive after completing all the pieces in the book (Thompson, 2011:1).

e) Frances Clark – The Music Tree Time to Begin

The Music Tree Time to Begin (Clark *et al.*, 1999) series consists of two books, namely a student's book and activities book. The student's book explains specific musical concepts in nine units. Each unit starts with a new musical concept which is displayed in a melody. It also incorporates the concepts which were learnt in previous units. There is also teacher accompaniment included with the melodies. At the end of each unit are warm-up exercises for fingers, improvisation, written work and rhythm practise. The *Music Tree* series teaches the beginner to learn music by recognising intervals and direction. They learn to read music in steps and intervals and not by memorising the lines and spaces of

¹⁷ See Annexure L for a sample page.

¹⁸ See Annexure M for a sample page.

¹⁹ See Annexure N for a sample page.

the G clef and F clef. From the beginning they become familiar with the octave and learn to find the notes through intervals and steps. They will only learn the G clef, F clef, ledger lines and grand staff once they reach unit nine (Clark *et al.*, 1999). The activities book is colourful and joyful. It strengthens music reading, theory and rhythm. At least one game activity is included in each unit. A combination of note names, intervals and direction is included as they get closer to learning the grand staff (Clark *et al.*, 2000). I would not recommend this method book to optimise the attention span, as it is repetitive and slow paced. This might have the consequence that the young beginners become bored and stop paying attention.

2.2.2 Teaching approaches for young piano beginners

The relationship between the teaching material and teaching approaches should also be considered. For each teaching approach there is a suitable teaching method book. If a young piano beginner learns best through the Middle C approach, the John Thompson method book would be the best option. The choice of the appropriate teaching approach will determine how easily the young beginner will move through the beginning stages. It will also lay a strong foundation for the young beginner's future piano studies (Jacobson *et al.*, 2015:35). In order to choose an approach that will optimally utilise each young piano beginner's attention span, the piano teacher should explore note-reading approaches, holistic approaches and non-musical approaches.

2.2.2.1 Note-reading approaches

The note-reading approaches applicable to this study can be categorized as Middle C, Multi-key, Intervallic and Eclectic approaches (Jacobson *et al.*, 2015:35). The strengths and weaknesses related to these note-reading approaches will now be discussed as well as the way in which they can add to the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span.

a) Middle C approach

This approach starts off by playing the Middle C with the thumbs of both hands, thereby sharing the Middle C key. Middle C, being a ledger-line note situated between the two staves, is easily recognisable and therefore memorised so that the notes that are written on the staff lines can be easily placed in relation to the Middle C. The Middle C approach focuses on individual note recognition instead of groupings of notes or note patterns. Although the learners can memorise the notes on the staff and names of the piano keys with ease, they are not able to see the relation between the piano keys and notes on the staff. Another drawback is finger numbering which results in some learners reading by numbers instead of note placement on the staff. The Middle C approach limits the learner to a small area of the piano. Most Middle C approach pieces are based on a pattern that has a familiar sound, regular metres and ordinary phrases. The result is that the pieces sound the same and leave no room for imagination (Jacobson *et al.*, 2015:36). This approach will not be overwhelming for young piano beginners, and they will easily learn notation, but it would not necessarily optimise their attention span. The John Thompson method book (Thompson, 2011) can be used when teaching this note-reading approach.

b) Multi-key approach

The multi-key approach teaches the learner to play five finger patterns in all major keys in a short space of time. Note reading is easy as long as the learner's hand stays in the five-finger position. Changing to patterns that do not use the same hand shapes can be difficult for some young beginners. The benefit of the multi-key approach is seen in the introduction of the full keyboard. This helps the young beginner to become comfortable in all the keys, allowing them to improvise and transpose melodies and harmonise melodies. Because of the early introduction of rhythmic concepts, piano teachers have to pass on information earlier, thereby restricting the young beginners from discovering rhythmic concepts themselves. Chords contribute to a fuller sound but are also physically demanding to play (Jacobson *et al.*, 2015:37). Even though this approach has a few weaknesses, it includes more reading elements and learning skills on the piano, such as improvising, transposing and harmonising. Therefore, the piano teacher has more reading elements and learning skills from

which to choose in order to keep the young piano beginner's interest. The Bastien Piano Library method books (Bastien, 1985) can be used when teaching this note-reading approach.

c) Intervallic approach

The intervallic approach will help young piano beginners to see the intervallic relationship between notes. This approach begins with the introduction of one line of the staff at a time, thereby focusing on only one interval. By only focussing on one line of the staff learners can concentrate on counting, technique and sound production. Concepts will be reinforced in a variety of ways before moving on to new ideas. By experiencing musical concepts in so many different ways, the young piano beginner's attention will not easily be lost. Because this approach gradually presents reading concepts, familiar tunes are not played and therefore the pieces played might not be appealing to the learner (Jacobson *et al.*, 2015:38). The *Music Tree* method books (Clark *et al.*, 1999) can be used when teaching this note-reading approach.

d) Eclectic approach

This approach is a combination of reading elements from the Middle C, Multi-key and Intervallic teaching approaches (Jacobson *et al.*, 2015:38). By exploring the Middle C, Multi-key and Intervallic approaches' strengths and weaknesses, an Eclectic approach will be most appropriate to optimise a young beginner's attention span. By incorporating the reading elements from the Middle C, Multi-key and Intervallic approaches in piano lessons, there will be a wider variety of skills to be taught, and therefore the young piano beginner will not lose interest and become inattentive. The *Alfred's Basic Piano Library* method books (Palmer *et al.*, 2002:1) and *Faber and Faber Piano Adventures* method books (Faber & Faber, 2007) can be used when teaching this note-reading approach.

2.2.2.2 Holistic approaches

Chappell (1999:255) suggests that teachers should not only focus on note-reading approaches, but also on a whole-brain approach to piano teaching. A whole-brain approach will develop skills such as improvisation, internalisation

and memorisation to promote the creativity, musicianship and imagination of the young piano beginner (Chappell, 1999:255). A holistic approach involves teaching sound before symbols. For example, the young piano beginner must first be able to sing the sounds before notation can be introduced. It is important that the piano teacher teaches the sounds which are related to the symbols that will eventually be taught (Bartholomew, 1995:3). The symbols will have significance if the young beginner first learns the sounds (Bartholomew, 1995:4). The sounds will also develop musical receptiveness and thought as well as an inner sense to feel the motion of the music and being aware of the different sound combinations (Bartholomew, 1995:7). Holistic approaches relevant to this study are the Dalcroze, Kodály, Orff and Suzuki approaches.

a) Dalcroze approach

Émile Jaques Dalcroze (1865-1950) was a Swiss-born musician. His appointment as an educator at the Geneva Conservatory made him realise that his students were not extremely expressive, although their technical abilities were excellent. He wanted to teach his students to perform with greater sensitivity and to respond completely to rhythm (Crease, 2006:35). This led to the Dalcroze approach which includes Eurhythmics, “the expression of musical concepts through body movements” (Randel, 2003:234), Solfège, which refers to the singing of scales, melodic exercises and intervals to conventional syllables namely, *doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, and ti* instead of letter names (Randel, 2003:793), and Improvisation (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:27).

Dalcroze aims to convert attention to concentration through eurhythmics (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:35). The incorporation of Dalcroze exercises in piano lessons could therefore add to optimal utilisation of young piano beginners’ attention span. According to Choksy *et al.* (1986:40), rhythm is more than just timing. It changes constantly, which makes music interesting, colourful and exciting. The Dalcroze approach emphasises the importance of movement and rhythm as the primary elements in music. Rhythm can be seen in all the different movements the body makes (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:27). If young piano beginners first experience and learn rhythm and sound through body movement, they will have a better understanding of the music as it will develop muscular control and

improve coordination of the body, mind and ear (Johnson, 1993:43). When the young piano beginner finally returns to the piano, he/she will possibly feel more secure and his/her skills and techniques will probably have improved on the piano. As soon as the young piano beginner experiences progress and success, he/she will be motivated to learn more and therefore not lose attention in a piano lesson.

Solfège involves sight-singing and ear-training and includes exercises to develop perfect pitch and accurate hearing. It also includes exercises that will improve concentration, mental and musical awareness and memory. Skills such as breathing, posture and muscular relaxation are also developed through solfège exercises. These skills will promote good singing (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:52). If these skills are well developed through the solfège exercises, it will add to the optimal utilisation of the young piano beginner's attention span when they play piano. Improvisation may include movement, percussion, piano, strings, winds, songs, stories or speech or all of the above combined. The goal of improvisation is to create music, using rhythmic and sound materials in an imaginative, expressive and spontaneous way (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:61). It will excite the young piano beginners to express their creativity when improvising on the piano and will therefore have a positive influence on their attention span.

b) Kodály Approach

The well-known Hungarian composer, musician and educator, Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) became involved in music education in 1907 when he started lecturing at the Budapest Hungarian Royal Academy of Music (Liu, 2008:98). He noticed a lack of music literacy amongst the Hungarian children and decided to devote more of his time to the education of Hungarian school children. This ensured the inclusion of music education in the school curriculum (Liu, 2008:100). International musicologists and pedagogues noticed Kodály's scholarly works and compositions in the Hungarian music education system and decided to name it the Kodály Approach (Liu, 2008:107).

The Kodály Approach aims to improve singing and rhythmic skills and develops music literacy such as reading and writing of music. It also improves perceptual functioning, which promotes intellectual development (DeVries, 2001:25). The Kodály Approach is structured and systematic. It includes three-note songs and chants which are mainly based on major seconds, minor thirds and perfect fourths, for example “Ring around the Rosy”.²⁰ The rhythmic movements include walking, running, swaying, skipping and bouncing on simple duple and quadruple as well as compound duple time. The tools that are used in the Kodály Approach are tonic sol-fa, hand signs and rhythm duration symbols. Tonic sol-fa consists of *doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, doh* where the *doh* is seen as the tonal centre of the major keys and *la* the tonal centre of the minor keys (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:73). Hand signs combined with tonic sol-fa improve tonal memory and make it more secure (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:74). Rhythm duration symbols are a way to voice-rhythm patterns. Only after children can read rhythm duration symbols, note value names such as quarter note (crotchet) and half note (minim) are introduced. An example of a rhythm duration symbol used in the Kodály Approach is “ta” for quarter notes (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:75). Although Kodály’s focus was music education through singing, he acknowledged the importance of instrumental musical training in schools (Liu, 2008:105).

Teachers can use the Kodály piano curriculum, *With Music in Mind: Kodály Principles of Music Education Applied to Beginners at the Piano* (Earl, 1987) in their piano lessons with young piano beginners. This book aims to teach young piano beginners the language of music; therefore, they must first read and understand the piano pieces before they can try to play it. The voice is the main instrument in teaching Kodály. Thus teachers should encourage the young piano beginners to sing the piano pieces. Once they have mastered the piano pieces through singing, they will be ready to play it on the piano (Earl, 1987:1).

c) Orff approach

The Orff approach was created by the German composer Carl Orff (1895-1982) and his partner Gunild Keetman (1904-1990) (Harris, 2009:42). Carl Orff

²⁰ See Annexure T for a sample page.

composed five volumes of *Music for Children* (Orff *et al.*, 1957). He made use of xylophones, metallophones and a few other percussion instruments for these compositions (Randel, 2003:600). Carl Orff described the Orff approach as “an idea for integrating the performing arts – music and movement specifically, but also speech and drama” (Shamrock, 1986:41). Therefore, the Orff approach includes singing, dancing and the playing of instruments as well as improvisation and creating new forms of the above-mentioned elements. The main goal of the Orff approach is to develop musical learning, but it also focuses on cultural and social learning (Shamrock, 1986:41). It is important that the material used in the singing, dancing and playing of instruments is basic and part of the child’s frame of reference (Shamrock, 1986:42). The Orff approach is used to guide children through four phases of musical development, namely exploration, imitation, improvisation and creation.

- Exploration is when children discover the different possibilities of movement and sound (Shamrock, 1986:43). For example, the young piano beginners should be given the opportunity to explore the different sounds and tone colours that the piano can produce.
- Imitation helps with the development of rhythmic speech and body percussion, such as finger snapping, clapping, slapping of thighs or foot stomping. It also develops singing and playing of instruments (Shamrock, 1986:43). For instance, a teacher can start by clapping a rhythm, and then the young piano beginner must copy that rhythm by playing it on the piano. The teacher can make it interesting by asking them to play the rhythm high or low or staccato or legato. The teacher can then take it another step further by asking them to add a melody to the rhythm. This will improve creativity and keep them interested.
- Improvisation develops the skill to create new patterns (Shamrock, 1986:43). For example, a teacher can play a melody on the piano. The young piano beginner must then play that same melody and improvise by playing it to a different rhythm or adding a few extra notes, with guidance from the piano teacher. The piano teacher should first teach them the notes of the melody; subsequently the teacher can introduce different

rhythms to them through clapping, and finally ask them to play the melody to one of the rhythms on the piano.

- Creation is when the child combines material from the previous phases into new forms (Shamrock, 1986:43). In other words, the young piano beginner must create his/her own melody and rhythm on the piano.

d) Suzuki approach

Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998) was born in Japan. Suzuki taught himself to play the violin by listening to recorded classical music (Harris, 2009:42). In 1940, Suzuki began to develop his teaching approach to the violin (Shepherd, 2012:13). He was of the opinion that a child could learn to play a musical instrument in the same way that language is learned for the first time (Harris, 2009:42). By the mid-1970s, the Suzuki approach of teaching the violin was well-known worldwide. Today, the Suzuki approach of teaching is adapted for the piano, violin, viola, cello, bass, guitar, flute, harp, recorder, organ and the voice (Pagliaro, 2015:199). The Suzuki approach is based on sound before symbol. Therefore, young beginners will develop an aural perception through repetition, demonstration and imitation (Mark, 2007:12). It is presumed that a child's learning abilities are very strong up to the age of seven through hearing; therefore a child should start with music lessons at a young age (Powell, 1988:6). Aural skills are neglected in piano lessons and usually left for the last minute. If aural skills are well developed, intonation, reading and communication skills will improve (McNally, 2006:28). The following paragraph will give insight into the Suzuki approach applied to piano lessons.

When at home, the young piano beginner has to listen repeatedly to the music pieces they have learnt. In addition, it is also important that the piano pieces are demonstrated, because children learn through example. Although music reading is not taught at the very beginning of the Suzuki approach, it is only delayed until the young piano beginner is at ease with the piano and his aural skills are better developed (Powell, 1988:7). When the young piano beginner finally starts with note reading, he/she will be able to understand the topography of the keyboard and he/she will be able to associate notes and note names with the keys. The

young piano beginner will also learn a piano piece easily because he/she already has an aural image of the notation (Mark, 2007:13).

The focus is on positive reinforcement rather than on negative input. Positive reinforcement will encourage a young piano beginner to stay focused; therefore he/she will not become inattentive. Suzuki believed that learning should take place one step at a time and the step at hand must be fully mastered before moving forward. Once the young piano beginner mastered a piano piece, he/she has to continue playing it in order to strengthen the skills learnt (Powell, 1988:7). Teachers of young piano beginners can use the *Suzuki Piano School, Vol. 1* method book²¹ (Suzuki, 2008) in their piano lessons to optimise the young piano beginner's attention span. The book includes a variety of folk songs and contemporary songs as well as a CD. The pages in this method book are uncluttered and spacious, with minimal technical instructions (Suzuki, 2008:1).

2.2.2.3 Non-musical approaches

Apart from note-reading approaches and holistic approaches, teachers should also consider non-musical approaches to help the young piano beginners concentrate more effectively on all the elements involved in the piano lesson. *Brain Gym* exercises (Dennison & Dennison, 1986) and *Mind Move* exercises (De Jager, 2016) could be applied in piano lessons to optimise a young piano beginner's attention span. These exercises should take place at the beginning of the piano lesson so that the young piano beginner can immediately focus. If a young piano beginner's attention drifts half way through the piano lesson, the piano teacher can vary the musical activities with a few *Brain Gym* or *Mind Move* exercises to recapture their attention.

a) Brain Gym

Brain Gym is a succession of movements designed to enhance the Educational Kinesiology approach to teaching (Miller, 2008:22). Paul E. Dennison created the term *Brain Gym* to explain the movement activities which he and his wife

²¹ See Annexure O for a sample page.

Gail Dennison developed in 1981 (Miller, 2008:23). This approach is a tool which can be used by the young piano beginner to prepare him/her physically and mentally for new musical content (Miller, 2008:22). In recent years, it has become clear that both brain hemispheres are equally important (Miller, 2008:26). Even though one side of the brain is dominant, both sides are important for the understanding of musical content. Therefore, the whole brain can be integrated through exercises whereby the young piano beginners can benefit (Miller, 2008:27).

Brain Gym consists of exercises which could improve a young piano beginner's reading skills, eye-sight, creativity, communication skills and decision-making. It will also help the young piano beginner to deal better with disappointment and rejection and it will boost their self-esteem (Alexander, 2011:1). *Brain Gym* activities which can be used in a piano lesson to optimise a young piano beginner's attention span include belly breathing, brain buttons, cross-crawl, the energy yawn, lazy eights, the rocker, space buttons and the thinking cap (see Annexure P).

b) Mind Moves

Dr. Melodie De Jager was the founder of *Mind Moves* in 2007. *Mind Moves* comprises of exercises with specific outcomes which will improve the young piano beginner's core muscle control, listening, language, visual, concentration, fine motor and thinking skills. *Mind Move* exercises ensure that learners' brains are prepared for learning and that they will be focused (De Jager, 2016:1). *Mind Move* exercises could therefore guarantee that piano teachers will not have to continuously repeat the musical content before the young piano beginners understand it.

If a learner's core muscles are underdeveloped, he/she will easily get tired and will not be able to concentrate effectively in class, because the brain will rather focus on holding the body upright than paying attention to learning (De Jager, 2016:2). It is therefore important that a piano teacher incorporate exercises in a piano lesson to develop a young piano beginner's core muscles. Well-developed

core muscles will hold the young piano beginner's body upright when he/she sits in front of the piano and will allow the young piano beginner's brain to focus on the musical content in a piano lesson instead of holding the body upright.

Mind Move exercises also aim to improve listening skills. This will help learners to pay attention when the teacher gives instructions and enable them to understand and add meaning to what is said (De Jager, 2016:3). Piano teachers should therefore include listening exercises in piano lessons to improve the young piano beginner's auditory skills. The young piano beginners will also be able to focus better on the different sounds in the piano lesson; for example, the difference between *piano* and *forte*, high and low, or *legato* and *staccato*.

Learners' speech and language skills will also improve through *Mind Move* exercises. Therefore, teachers should spend time on speech and language exercises. These will assist the learner in communicating with the teacher and in understanding what the teacher communicates to them (De Jager, 2016:4). Music can also be seen as language with its own terminology and reading and writing skills which have to be learned and understood. The piano teacher should therefore develop these skills by teaching them the musical terms in a creative and pleasant way with illustrations. For example, a picture of a bomb exploding resembles *forte*. The piano teacher should also assist them with reading and writing music notation.

Teachers could apply visual *Mind Move* exercises to develop a learner's visual perception accurately and to ensure that he/she understands what he/she sees (De Jager, 2016:5). Visual material should be presented clearly and creatively in a piano lesson. This could include the method book that the young piano beginners use as well as the wall posters in the piano classroom. If the young piano beginner understands the visual material of the method book or wall posters, he/she will be able to associate new visual material with what he/she already knows.

Learners will be able to concentrate if they can focus their attention on one concept at a time, for a long enough period so that the concept is understood. In order to concentrate effectively, the learner's visual, auditory and tactile/kinaesthetic senses should be alert and the whole brain should be stimulated (De Jager, 2016:6). Piano teachers should therefore include activities in the piano lesson where all the senses are involved and the piano teacher should allow time for improvisation, internalisation and memorisation to activate the whole brain.

Teachers should give learners *Mind Move* exercises which will develop their fine motor skills; for example, holding a pencil, drawing, cutting and writing (De Jager, 2016:7). Technical exercises and finger exercises can be used to develop the young piano beginner's fine motor skills. Well-developed fine motor skills will help the young piano beginner to play piano with the correct technique. If the young piano beginner's fine motor skills are underdeveloped, he/she will not be able to maintain the correct hand position and keep his/her finger curved while playing piano. This will have a negative effect on the young piano beginner's piano playing in the future.

Creative problem-solving *Mind Move* exercises will develop learners' thinking skills. If learners can think creatively, they will be able to more easily organise what they see and hear (De Jager, 2016:9). Piano teachers can, for example, give the young piano beginner a new piano piece and allow him/her to explore the musical content by searching for new notes, articulation or dynamic symbols. Piano teachers should encourage young beginners to ask questions regarding the piano piece while they explore the musical content; for example, when they see a new musical term such as *mezzo forte*. After the piano piece is explored, the piano teacher should play the piece so that the young piano beginner can listen whether he/she can hear the different dynamic and articulation changes.

2.3 Conclusion

A deductive approach (Willig, 2013:60) was used to write this literature review as the theoretical framework derived from the literature allowed me to examine all the available sources and identify literature relevant to the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. The purpose of this literature review was to understand the influence of a young piano beginner's developmental stage on his/her attention span, as well as appropriate learning styles and motivational strategies which could add to the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. Through this review, I also gained insight on how to structure a piano lesson for young beginners to promote learning and retain attention. It also offers a variety of teaching approaches which could be applied in a young beginner's piano lesson to optimise the attention span. An inductive approach (Willig, 2013:60) will enable me to use the theoretical framework in addition to the results of my data analysis to develop a conceptual framework for the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter gives an in-depth description of the qualitative research design and instrumental case study approach as research approach for this study. It provides information on my participants: seven piano teachers who teach young beginners. My role as researcher as well as the data collection and data analysis procedures applicable to this study are also discussed. I collected data through interviews with piano teachers and through the piano teachers' reflections on short tasks they had to complete with their young piano beginners, and then carefully analysed the data in ATLAS.ti 7, a qualitative data analysis computer programme (Friese, 2012:1). I finally inform the readers about the ethical and validation issues that had to be considered for this study.

3.1 Research design

Qualitative research was an appropriate research design because an interpretive/constructivist perspective was used to investigate how piano teachers optimise their young piano beginner's attention span (Creswell, 2014:8). According to Merriam (2009:5) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3), qualitative researchers endeavour to make sense of how people organise their lives, interpret their experiences and how much value they ascribe to these experiences. As qualitative researcher, my aim was to understand the views that piano teachers have of the world in which they work (Creswell, 2014:8) – in this case, teaching piano to young piano beginners. In order to gain a better understanding, I firstly explored the literature to generate a theoretical framework and subsequently analysed the data collected from the piano teachers. This allowed me to develop a holistic picture of the methods piano teachers use to optimise their young piano beginners' attention span (Creswell, 2014:186). A holistic picture can be established through a visual display of the piano teachers' perspectives regarding the problems they experience with young piano beginners' attention span and the methods they use and recommend for

solving these problems (Creswell, 2014:186). I therefore developed a conceptual framework from the literature and data collected which explains how piano teachers optimally utilise their young piano beginners' attention span.

3.2 Research approach: Instrumental case study

According to Yin (2009:18) and Merriam (2009:40), a case study is an in-depth investigation of a current phenomenon within its actual context, particularly when there are no clear boundaries between the phenomenon and context. I did an in-depth investigation of the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. Yin (2009:18) further states that a case study should involve data collection and data analysis, because the phenomenon (optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span) and its actual context (thirty-minute individual piano lesson) are not always apparent in real-life situations. For this study, the primary sources of data collection included interviews with piano teachers who teach young beginners (Merriam, 2009:88) and the piano teachers' reflections of short tasks I gave them to complete with their young piano beginners.

Case studies are bounded by time, place and activity (Creswell, 2013:97; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:40). It is bounded by time, because all the data was collected within the two-year duration of the study. It is bounded by place, as all the piano teachers teach piano to young beginners in Johannesburg. It is bounded by activity, as each piano teacher had to answer the same interview questions and received the same list of short tasks to complete with their young piano beginners and reflect on these. One of the primary advantages of qualitative research is that it is thorough and looks at the case in its entirety (Mustafa, 2008:17). Merriam (2009:54) adds that case study research is specific, descriptive and heuristic,²² therefore I used this approach to inform the readers about the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span.

²² "Heuristic" can be defined as the meaning and understanding that case studies offer about the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009:44).

Qualitative case studies have disadvantages which one should also consider. With case studies, there are limited instructions on how to assemble the final report. Therefore, I mostly had to depend on my own intuition and skills (Merriam, 2009:52). Another disadvantage is that this case study is not generalizable, but it will give the reader the opportunity to compare it with similar cases in order to see the transferability of the case results (Mills *et al.*, 2010:474).

As a researcher, it is important that I identify a suitable type of case study for the overall study purposes. Creswell (2013:99) and Merriam (2009:48) distinguish between intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. This study is an instrumental case study because as the researcher I identified a problem regarding the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span and selected one bounded case to exemplify and provide insight into this problem (Creswell, 2013:99; Merriam, 2009:48). This Instrumental case study aims to facilitate the readers' understanding of the methods which piano teachers use to optimise their young piano beginners' attention span (Trainor & Graue, 2013:56; Stake, 1995:77). Instrumental case studies have an influence on many people in many places (Trainor & Graue, 2013:56). In this case, it will affect piano teachers from many institutions or private practices who teach young beginners.

3.3 Participants

According to Hesse-Biber (2010:53), the minimum number of participants for a qualitative case study is three to five. I chose more than five participants in order to gain a broader spectrum of knowledge on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. For this instrumental case study, I purposefully selected (Creswell, 2014:189) five experienced female piano teachers and two experienced male piano teachers who teach young piano beginners in Johannesburg, South Africa. As the researcher I did purposeful sampling²³ to ensure that the piano teachers I chose will give me the opportunity to gather an adequate amount of information on the problems that they experience with their

²³ Purposeful sampling is when the researcher selects participants and sites for a study in order to purposefully shape an understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2013:156).

young piano beginners' attention span, as well as the methods they successfully applied to optimise their young beginners' attention span (Creswell, 2013:102).

3.4 Role of the researcher

According to Trainor and Graue (2013:62), case study researchers should be specific about the roles they play while doing research, as well as about the methods they use. As qualitative researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument for this case study (Creswell, 2014:207). I collected data through semi-structured interviews with seven piano teachers and through the piano teachers' reflections on the short tasks I gave them to complete with their young piano beginners. Creswell (2014:187) also states that a qualitative researcher should take on an interpretive role. Being an interpreter as researcher, I had to make an interpretation of the methods piano teachers apply in their piano lessons with young beginners to optimise their attention span. According to Trainor and Graue (2013:62), the researcher's personal viewpoints should also be included in the interpretation. These interpretations took place at the beginning of the research project, at the mid-point, and at the end of the research project.

Even though I did not see all the participants every day, I communicated with them regularly in order to develop a personal relationship with them. For this instrumental case study, research was done thoroughly (Trainor & Graue, 2013:62) in order to give an accurate and comprehensive report of the methods which piano teachers use to optimise their young piano beginners' attention span (Willig, 2013:111). Apart from the piano teachers' own methods, I also gave detailed descriptions of the information which the piano teachers gathered through reflecting on the short tasks that they had to complete with their young piano beginners.

3.5 Data collection

As the researcher, I was already conscious of the problem regarding the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span, and therefore I selected seven experienced piano teachers from whom to collect data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:197). Data collection for this study involved semi-structured interviews and reflections on short tasks (Merriam, 2009:88). According to Rule and John (2011:64), interviews can be seen as a guided conversation between the researcher and participants, where the researcher collects data from the participants by asking questions associated with the research study (Merriam, 2009:87). The questions I asked during the interviews were open-ended and semi-structured (Merriam, 2009:90). Broader, open-ended questions enabled me to gain better insight and allowed me to really listen what the piano teachers wanted to share (Merriam, 2009:104). I therefore avoided asking leading questions and questions which required yes-and-no answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:121-122).

a) Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews involve a list preconceived questions which direct the conversation between the researcher and the participants. These preconceived questions can be referred to as an "interview protocol" (Creswell, 2014:194). My interview protocol (see Annexure Q) started with general questions (Willig, 2013:30) regarding the piano teachers' piano lesson structure and their teaching methods. I then moved towards more specific questions (Merriam, 2009:103) which focused on the research problem – the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and were recorded, which ensured that everything that was said during the interviews was preserved for analysis through the transcription of these interviews (Merriam, 2009:109). One of the advantages of face-to-face semi-structured interviews is that rapport was established between the researcher and participants (Willig, 2013:30).

Semi-structured interview questions are flexible, which gives the researcher the opportunity to ask further questions which might arise during the interview (Rule & John, 2011:65). It is essential for the researcher to find the correct balance between steering the interview and allowing the participant to think about the question and to answer in detail without interruptions (Willig, 2013:29). It is therefore important that the researcher must be a good listener (Creswell, 2013:166). As the researcher, I respected my participants and I was sensitive when asking the questions (Merriam, 2009:109). The interviews also took place in an environment that was free from distractions (Creswell, 2013:165).

According to Merriam (2009:96) it is important to ask relevant questions during an interview. I focused on experience and behaviour questions. This type of questions aims to understand how the piano teachers experience their piano lessons with their young beginners and how they behave in their lessons with young piano beginners (Merriam, 2009:96). I also asked opinion questions. This helped me to gather information on the methods which the piano teachers recommend and suggest, in order to optimise the young piano beginners' attention span (Merriam, 2009:96). Lastly, I concentrated on knowledge questions, which also enabled me to gain insight on the piano teachers' knowledge about the methods and techniques they use to optimise the young piano beginners' attention span (Merriam, 2009:96). I also made use of probes when I needed more information, or to ensure that I understood clearly what the piano teacher meant (Merriam, 2009:101).

I conducted the first face-to-face semi-structured interviews before embarking on my literature review. In hindsight, it would have been more appropriate to conduct interviews after the literature review had been completed, because a literature review is the foundation for what follows in the rest of the study. A literature review also assisted me as a researcher to see how the current study progresses, and improves and revises that which is already known (Merriam, 2009:72). Because I did not have a literature review to guide me when structuring my interview questions, I realised that I might struggle to integrate the data from the literature and the data from interviews in my discussion. Therefore, after developing a theoretical framework from the literature, I designed a list of

short tasks with reference to the literature review that the piano teachers had to complete with their young piano beginners, and on which they had to reflect. These reflections were then discussed during interviews with the piano teachers.

b) Reflections on short tasks

Interviews alone did not give me enough detailed data. Therefore, the piano teachers' reflections on short tasks enhanced the depth of the information collected from them. These reflections also helped me to produce a more thorough analysis of the data (King & Horrocks, 2010:183). The list of short tasks was based on the structure of my literature review. I gave the piano teachers these short tasks to apply in their piano lessons with their young piano beginners, and asked them to reflect on the information they gathered. There were nine short tasks which the piano teachers had to complete over a period of six weeks. They had to do Tasks One and Two in the first week, Task Three in the second week, Task Four in the third week, Tasks Five and Six in the fourth week, Tasks Seven and Eight in the fifth week and Task Nine in the sixth week.

The first task required the piano teachers to verify their answers from the first interview and add additional information where needed. For the second task, the piano teachers had to determine where their young piano beginners' attention is at its highest and lowest by drawing attention curves.²⁴ For the third task, the piano teachers had to apply Campbell and Scott-Kassner's adaptation of Gagné's steps of musical instruction²⁵ in their piano lessons to establish whether the young piano beginners' attention span was optimally utilised. The fourth task required that the piano teachers must play the musical game "Echoes"²⁶ with their young piano beginners and reflect on how the game affected their attention span. For the fifth task, the piano teachers had to apply the Dalcroze approach²⁷ in their piano lessons with young beginners and reflect on how it affected their attention span. The Dalcroze approach involved that the piano teacher had to

²⁴ See Annexure S.

²⁵ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 3).

²⁶ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 4).

²⁷ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 5).

play a piece consisting of crotchets and quavers on the piano. The young beginners then had to walk when they hear crotchets and triple when they hear quavers. For the sixth task, the piano teachers had to implement the Kodály Approach²⁸ in their piano lessons with young beginners and reflect on how it affected their attention span. The young piano beginners had to sing the tonic sol-fa²⁹ scale to refocus their attention on the piano lesson. The seventh task involved playing on percussion instruments.³⁰ The piano teachers had to reflect on whether their young piano beginners' attention span was optimised when they were given the opportunity to improvise rhythms on either the triangle or tambourine to suit the tempo and character of the piano piece. For the eighth task, the piano teachers had to implement the Suzuki approach³¹ in their piano lessons with young beginners. The Suzuki approach involved teaching piano pieces through sound before symbol. The piano teachers had to reflect on how effectively the attention span was optimised by first teaching the young beginners the sound of the piece, then allowing them to search for the correct notes on the piano, and finally by giving them the sheet music. The ninth task required the piano teachers to incorporate *Brain Gym* exercises³² in their piano lessons with young beginners and to reflect on how they affected their attention span.

I gave the piano teachers a data collection schedule³³ so that they could stay on track with the deadlines. Besides giving them a data collection schedule, I reminded them weekly through texting or telephone calls to complete the tasks. The data collection schedule also included detailed descriptions of the tasks that the piano teachers had to do with their young piano beginners, as well as guidelines on how to do these. At the end of the six weeks, I arranged an interview with the piano teachers, where they gave me feedback on their reflections regarding the tasks they had done with the young piano beginners. After the completion of the reflections on the short tasks, I still had not reached

²⁸ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 6).

²⁹ See Chapter Two – 2.2.2.2 b (Kodály approach).

³⁰ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 7).

³¹ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 8).

³² See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 9).

³³ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule.

data saturation;³⁴ therefore I conducted follow-up interviews on the initial interviews as well as reflections (Merriam, 2009:267).

3.6 Data analysis

Data collection, data analysis and report-writing is a process which happens simultaneously in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013:182). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016:197), this process will give insight to the problem; in this case, the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. Data analysis was an inductive and comparative process which allowed for patterns, categories and themes to emerge (Merriam, 2009:269). The purpose of data analysis is to explore answers to one's research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:203). These answers cannot be predicted, nor can one know what the outcome of the final analysis will be (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:197). There are various data analysis processes which researchers can use to analyse their data (Creswell, 2013:180). I followed an interactive model by Miles *et al.* (2014:14) which contains components of data analysis to guide my analysis process (see *Figure 9*).

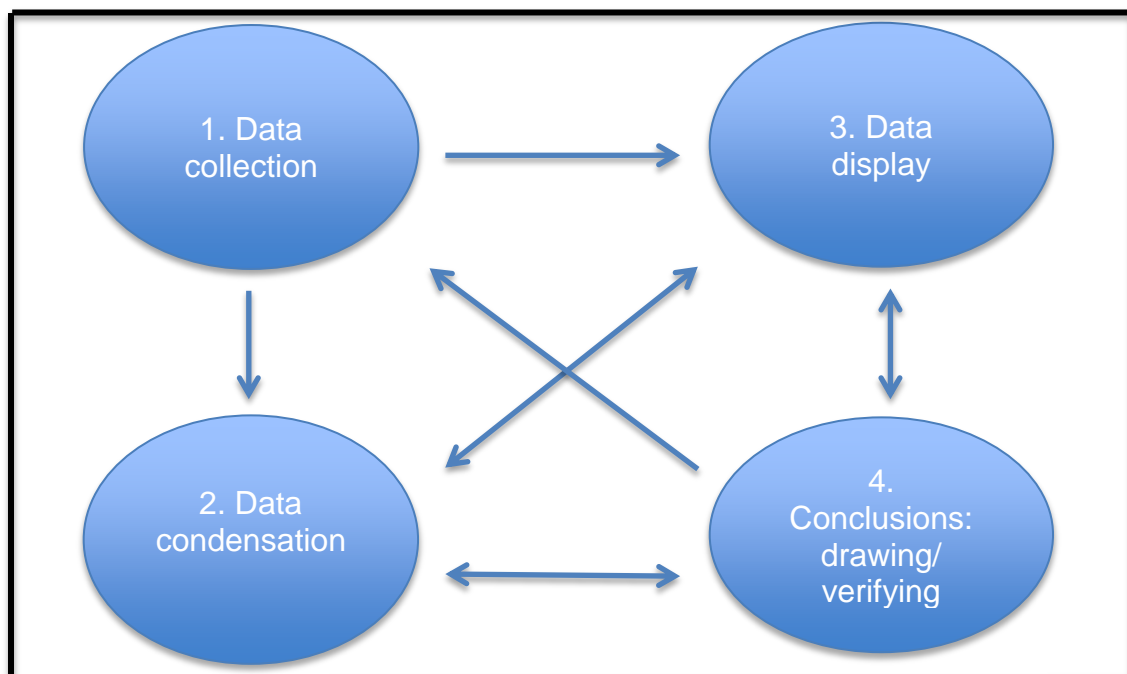


Figure 9: Components of data analysis: Interactive model (Miles *et al.*, 2014:14).

³⁴ Data saturation is the stage beyond which no more new insights come forth during data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:101).

Miles *et al.* (2014:12) define data analysis as the simultaneous flow of data collection, data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification. Even prior to data collection, I already determined the research questions and the data collection methods to use (Miles *et al.*, 2014:12). During data collection, I made use of a process called “data condensation”. Data condensation is a continual process from the beginning to the end of a qualitative research project. Data condensation is a way of organising the data in order to make the final conclusions so that they can be verified (Miles *et al.*, 2014:12). I organised my interview transcripts and the piano teachers’ reflections on the short tasks into separate computer files. All the data that surfaced during the follow-up interviews was included in one Word document, as there was not enough information to create separate Word documents. The seven interview transcripts, the piano teachers’ reflections on the short tasks and the follow-up interviews were then included in one hermeneutic unit in ATLAS.ti 7 (Friese, 2012:10). I then started reading through the data and made memos. Creswell (2013:183) advises that data should be studied in its entirety more than once, in order to get a global picture. After a global picture was formed, I divided the data into sections and started writing notes. I made memos when I worked through the interview transcripts, the piano teachers’ reflections on the short tasks and follow-up interviews, which helped with the preliminary process of exploring the data (Creswell, 2013:183).

The next step was to start interpreting the data; therefore I had to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013:187). From the very beginning of data collection, I tried to make sense of the data collected (Miles *et al.*, 2014:13). By making sense of the data, I had to describe and classify the data into codes that became themes (Creswell, 2013:184). According to Creswell (2013:184), describing the data plays a significant role in case study research. I described the data by making use of a process called “coding”.³⁵ I read through the interview transcripts, the piano teachers’ reflections on the short tasks and follow-up interviews, and assigned codes to text segments that captured my attention (Creswell, 2013:184). After the coding process was completed, I merged codes which had

³⁵ See Chapter One – 1.4.5 (Data analysis).

similar meanings and started searching for connections between the codes in order to reduce and combine the codes into categories and themes (Creswell, 2013:186). Creswell (2013:184) suggests that one should not develop more than twenty-five to thirty categories, because it will then be too difficult to reduce the number of categories. Classifying the data involves that the researcher should reduce and combine the categories into five to seven themes (Creswell, 2013:186). Themes can be seen as large sections of information which comprise of numerous codes to form a general idea. Data displays also helped with interpreting the data. According to Miles *et al.* (2014:13), data display is an advisable tool to use in qualitative analysis. The data displays that I used in my study are graphs, charts and network views. Data display compiles the data in a concise and easily accessible form that can be used to draw conclusions and proceed with the analysis.

As the researcher, I used the themes to represent the data visually and write the final narrative (Creswell, 2013:187). Final conclusions were only evident on the completion of data collection, coding, storage, retrieval methods and any other deadlines. Conclusions were verified and the meanings that transpired were validated (Miles *et al.*, 2014:13). I verified the answers from the interviews and reflections on short tasks before, during and after the analysis process, either through a short thought process or a lengthy discussion with the piano teachers (Miles *et al.*, 2014:13).

3.7 Ethics

Before I started collecting data for my research project, my research proposal was approved by the ethics committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus. An ethics number (NWU-00159-16-A7) was allocated to me to confirm that my study was approved. As a researcher, I approached seven experienced piano teachers and asked them if they would like to participate in my study. I explained the purpose of the study to them and made it clear that their participation is voluntary, and that there are no risks associated with this study (Creswell, 2013:57). I gave them a written consent form to

participate in the study but did not pressurise them into signing the form immediately (Creswell, 2013:58). All seven piano teachers agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent form in their own time. I protected the piano teachers' identity; therefore, they remained anonymous in the study. I referred to the piano teachers as teacher A, B, C, D, E, F and G. The institutions where the piano teachers work were also not revealed (Creswell, 2013:60).

The piano teachers were informed on how the data will be collected. During the interviews, the piano teachers were treated with respect (Merriam, 2009:231) and I aimed to build a relationship of trust with them (Creswell, 2013:59). The semi-structured interview questions were designed so that the piano teachers' privacy was not invaded (Merriam, 2009:231) and I avoided asking leading questions (Creswell, 2013:58). When I analysed the data I did not side with the piano teachers on issues and I avoided revealing only positive results. This ensured that I was able to present multiple perspectives when writing the final report (Creswell, 2013:60). When reporting the data, I did not make any information known that would harm the piano teachers and the findings and conclusions were reported honourably (Creswell, 2013:59).

3.8 Validity

According to Creswell (2013:249), validation can be seen as an attempt to evaluate how accurately the findings were recorded and described by the researcher. It therefore portrays the researcher's representation of the findings (Creswell, 2013:250). The close relationship with my participants and the comprehensive description of the data contributed to the accuracy of my study (Creswell, 2013:250). Creswell (2013:250) and Merriam (2009:215) suggest that researchers should employ multiple validation strategies to ensure that the findings are accurate. I used adequate engagement in data collection, member checking, rich, thick descriptions, crystallisation and peer reviewing as validation strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Merriam, 2009:229).

The purpose of adequate engagement in data collection was to build a close relationship with the piano teachers in order to understand the methods they use to optimise the young piano beginners' attention span (Merriam, 2009:219). The adequate amount of time I spent on collecting data was determined by the saturation point; in other words, the point where no new information emerged (Merriam, 2009:219). Member checking also aided in the validation process. Member checking involved me giving the interview transcripts, reflections on the short tasks, and follow-up interviews with the piano teachers so that they could verify the correctness of my interpretations (Creswell, 2013:252; Merriam, 2009:217).

According to Merriam (2009:216), crystallisation is a better validation strategy to use than triangulation because we approach this world in more than just three viewpoints. Through crystallisation, I was able to provide thick, rich, in-depth descriptions of the data. This enables the reader to understand the information in multiple ways. It also gave me as a researcher greater insight to the research problem (Ellingson, 2014:444). I also used a peer reviewer to examine my research methods, meanings and interpretations to guarantee that the raw data and findings are valid and reliable (Creswell, 2013:251; Merriam, 2009:229).

3.9 Conclusion

Instrumental case study research was the most appropriate research approach, as it enabled me to gather detailed information to enlighten and facilitate the readers' understanding about the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. When collecting and analysing the data, I was able to make accurate interpretations, as the piano teachers validated the findings throughout the duration of the study. This study also presents in-depth interpretations of the findings, as I gathered a wide spectrum of information through interviews, reflections on short tasks and follow-up interviews. Instrumental case study research therefore requires commitment from the researcher and participants before, during and after the data collection and data analysis processes, up to the presentation of the findings. In Chapter Four I discuss the findings from this qualitative research study in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I answer my second sub question of this research: “What themes, emerging from the data, account for the way that seven piano teachers in Johannesburg optimise young piano beginners’ attention span?” This question will be explored by discussing the findings from the analysis of the seven initial interviews, the piano teachers’ reflections on the seven different short tasks they had to implement in their individual teaching as well as follow-up interviews on their answers from the first interview and reflections. The piano teachers had to reflect on whether the short tasks they had to implement in their individual teaching were beneficial to optimise the young piano beginners’ attention span. These reflections were discussed during a second round of interviews. As the researcher, I had to ensure that I have reached a point of data saturation in order to make thorough interpretations of the data. Therefore, I did follow-up interviews on the initial interviews and the reflections on short tasks.

I have identified four themes, namely *creating variety*, *stimulating interest*, *avoiding detrimental activities* and *challenges related to attention span*, which I placed in a family in ATLAS.ti 7 labelled as “themes”. I designed a comprehensive network view which explains how piano teachers in Johannesburg optimise young piano beginners’ attention span as well as separate network views to help me in the discussion and presentation of the findings in a narrative style. Three of the themes, namely *creating variety*, *stimulating interest* and *avoiding detrimental activities* will add to the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners’ attention span and the fourth theme sheds light on the challenges piano teachers experience with regard to young piano beginners’ attention span. I refer to the piano teachers as teacher A, B, C, D, E, F and G in order to protect their identities (Creswell, 2013:60).

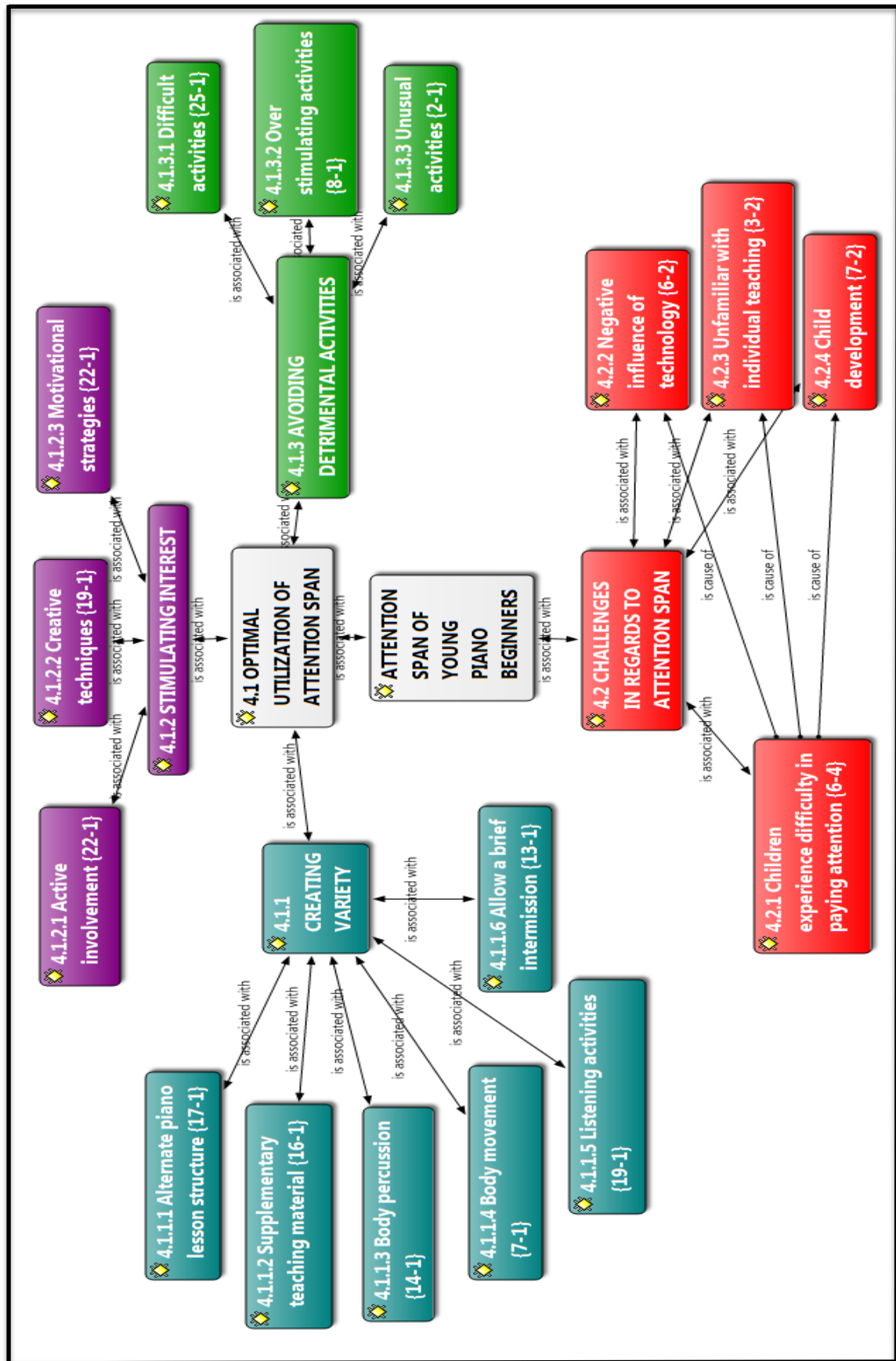


Figure 10: How piano teachers in Johannesburg optimise young piano beginners' attention span

4.1 OPTIMAL UTILISATION OF ATTENTION SPAN

Paying attention is fundamental when learning to play the piano and requires the child to concentrate on a great number of aspects – physically, mentally and musically. This encouraged me to gather information from the piano teachers who participated in my study about their strategies, techniques and suggestions for the optimal utilisation of attention span. According to the data, young piano beginners' attention span could be optimally utilised if piano teachers create variety in their piano lessons, stimulate the young piano beginners' interest and avoid detrimental activities.

4.1.1 CREATING VARIETY

The piano teachers created variety in their lessons with young beginners to optimise their attention span by alternating the musical components (finger exercises, piano pieces, music theory and aural exercises) of their piano lesson structure. Variety was further created by using supplementary teaching materials, incorporating body percussion, body movement, listening activities and finally by allowing a brief intermission.

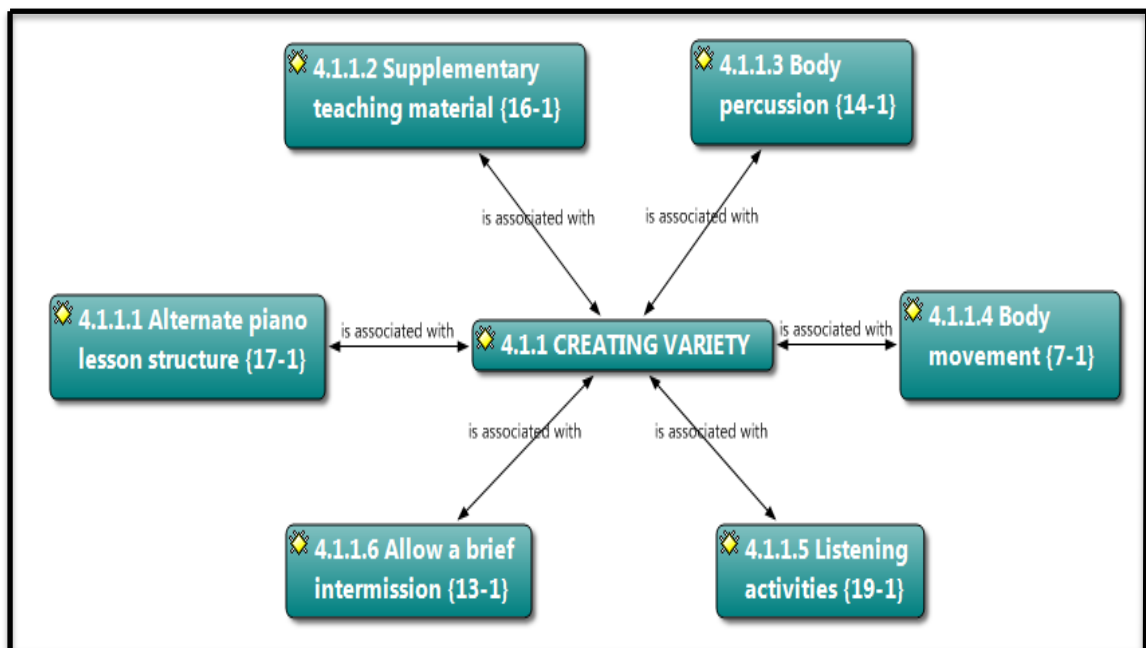


Figure 11: Creating variety

4.1.1.1 Alternate piano lesson structure

The way in which piano teachers structure their piano lessons plays an important role in optimising the attention span. All the piano teachers agreed that the attention span can be optimised by frequently switching the musical components in their piano lessons. Teacher E would only work on the mistakes her young beginners made in their piano piece and help them to correct it, instead of asking them to play the piece repeatedly until it is perfect (8:51).³⁶ This could ensure that they do not get frustrated and lose interest. She would also capture her young piano beginners' attention when it starts wandering by shifting their focus to another component of the piano lesson. For example, she would say, "(q)uickly look at your hand, is it still in the correct position?" (8:38). Taking their focus away for that split second helped them to refocus on the piano again. Furthermore she would leave the music theory until the end of a lesson to have their full attention while doing work at the piano (8:34). Teacher A (1:30) and Teacher C (3:27) would start their piano lessons with the pieces which the young piano beginners had to prepare in their piano books, and then alternate between music theory and aural exercises as soon as their minds start to wander.

It is also important for Teacher D to switch components frequently to gain attention, but she would use a variety of activities and teaching materials such as shakers, body percussion, percussion instruments and the piano to explain and master the same concept (4:26). Teacher B believes that one must alternate a child's focus in order for them to concentrate throughout a piano lesson. By continuously repeating the same piece would never work (2:35). He would switch his components by letting them play piano; then they would learn note names by using flashcards;³⁷ then they must search for certain notes on the piano (2:30). Teacher B added that, apart from switching components, one could also alternate acquired skills and concepts with new skills and concepts. He

³⁶ For the purpose of this study, these numbers refer to direct quotations in Atlas.ti. The numbers between the brackets refer to the quote in the interview transcripts. The first number refers to the primary document and the second number indicates where the quote was created (Friese, 2013:167).

³⁷ See Annexure B – Flashcards.

feels that one should not restrict a piano lesson by teaching young piano beginners the same skills and concepts each week. One should teach them new skills and concepts in order for them to grow musically (11:10). Teacher G applies a large amount of detail in one piano lesson to ensure consolidation of skills. He would constantly ask the young beginners if their hand position is still correct, if their fingers are curved and if they are counting correctly. Therefore, they have no other option than to stay focused (7:33). When one demands a young beginner to be aware of the aspects involved in a piano lesson, it prohibits him/her from becoming distracted.

Teacher F would cover a spectrum of components in one lesson to optimise her young piano beginners' attention span. Therefore, before their minds start to drift, they are already busy with the next activity (9:29). She would, for instance, start with relaxation exercises by asking them to stand up, relax the shoulders and swing the arms, then she would use flashcards to revise the note names, then they would work on technical exercises, then they would play their piano pieces and lastly she would test their aural skills by asking them if the notes are high or low and loud or soft (9:30). She would not necessarily do these activities in the same order each week, as she feels that young piano beginners should not know what they are going to do next in a piano lesson. This would keep the lessons interesting and could therefore optimise the attention span. Teacher G contradicted this statement, as he found that young piano beginners concentrate better when there is a routine in a piano lesson. Therefore, he would keep the order of the components in his piano lessons the same each week. He found that when one does something out of the ordinary and out of routine, it distracts the young piano beginners more (16:37). Teacher F would also sometimes give her young piano beginners the opportunity to choose the order of the components. This could positively contribute to the optimal utilisation of the attention span, because the young piano beginners might feel important for being included in the decision-making process (17:7).

4.1.1.2 Supplementary teaching material

Teaching material is an important part of piano lessons. Variety was created in piano lessons by using supplementary teaching materials. This kept piano lessons interesting and ultimately optimised the young piano beginners' attention span, because musical concepts were taught creatively through visual material and additional resources. Teacher A (1:6), Teacher B (2:28) and teacher F (9:25) use flashcards to learn note names as supplementary teaching material, and teacher E uses her wall posters³⁸ to explain musical concepts. Teacher E uses her wall posters to teach her young piano beginners the G clef and F clef, the lines and spaces of the staff and note names (18:1). She would also use her wall posters to give background information on different composers, other instruments and the orchestra, to change their focus and regain attention (18:2). Teacher D would incorporate shakers or percussion instruments in her piano lessons with young beginners to teach rhythmic work in an exciting way (4:6). She would, for example, play a rhythm on the piano and ask them to imitate that rhythm on the percussion instruments (18:3), or she would ask them to play a "walking" or "running" rhythm on the percussion instruments to teach the difference between fast and slow (18:4).

When Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher E, Teacher F and Teacher G's young piano beginners were given the opportunity to improvise rhythms on percussion instruments,³⁹ their attention was captured immediately. According to Teacher A (10:32), Teacher E (14:23), Teacher F (15:36) and Teacher G (16:28), attention was enhanced because the young beginners experienced excitement. The young piano beginners were excited because they were allowed to create their own rhythms on the triangle and tambourine while their piano teacher played either a slow, sad melody or fast, lively melody on the piano. Teacher B emphasised that the incorporation of percussion instruments was excellent to optimise his young piano beginners' attention, because they had to listen carefully and focus on improvising an appropriate character and tempo on the

³⁸ See Annexure V for examples of her wall posters.

³⁹ See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 7).

triangle and tambourine (11:27). Teacher G agreed that attention was optimised because the young piano beginners had to listen and focus intensely on improvising a suitable tempo and character on the triangle and tambourine (16:28). Teacher F added that taking her young beginners away from the piano for a few minutes to play on the triangle and tambourine helped them to regain focus (15:25).

4.1.1.3 Body percussion

Body percussion exercises were used as a tool to create variety in piano lessons. Body percussion can either be used to master difficult rhythms or to change a child's focus from the piano to clapping a quick rhythm. By changing a child's focus, one could be able to regain attention. Teacher D (4:6) and Teacher E (8:28) use body percussion to practise a difficult rhythm. Teacher F recommended that one should ask the young piano beginner to add a rhyme to a rhythm while they clap. This would promote the creativity of the young piano beginner and keep him/her interested in the piano lesson, as he/she is the one who created the rhyme (17:8). Teacher F would also incorporate body percussion when she teaches young piano beginners time signatures by associating 3/4 time with a waltz. She would ask her young piano beginners to "feel" the beat by clapping their upper legs on the first beat, shoulders on the second beat and hands together on the third beat (17:9). She would tell them that the first beat is the "down beat" because it is the strongest beat and should therefore be emphasised.

Teacher D would practise coordination between the young piano beginners' right and left hand by asking them to clap the notes in the treble clef with their right hand on their right knee and the notes in the bass clef with their left hand on their left knee (17:12). In this way, they would master the rhythm for both hands quicker and would not find it so difficult to play it on the piano. This would prevent them from easily becoming disheartened and inattentive in the piano lesson (17:10). Practising coordination between the hands through body percussion is also an excellent way to extend young piano beginners' attention,

because they have to focus intensely on clapping the correct rhythm with the right and left hand simultaneously. Teacher D added that by taking a break from the piano to clap a rhythm will give the young piano beginner's brain a chance to process what he/she has just learned (17:13). In this way, it should be easier for them to return to the piano and continue with the piano piece.

The musical game, "Echoes",⁴⁰ is a familiar rhythm clapping game where the teacher claps a rhythm and the young piano beginner has to repeat that same rhythm. According to Teacher D (13:35), Teacher F (15:15) and Teacher G (16:15), this game was effective in optimising attention, because it is straightforward and short. Piano teachers might lose the young piano beginners' attention even more when games or activities are drawn-out and require long explanations. Teacher B emphasised that the "Echoes" game was "excellent to gain attention because you immediately force them to listen to the rhythm they need to clap and then they focus" (11:16). Teacher C agreed and emphasised that by focussing their attention on clapping a rhythm, one immediately captures their attention again (12:16). Teacher A adapted the "Echoes" game by using the rhythm of her young piano beginners' piano pieces. She found that by echoing the rhythm of their piano pieces helped them to focus on the piano lesson that followed, because the rhythm was related to the piano piece (10:43).

4.1.1.4 Body movement

The piano teachers alternated the musical components in their piano lessons with body movement to optimise their young piano beginners' attention span. Teacher A (10:25), Teacher D (13:38), Teacher E (14:19), Teacher F (15:18) and Teacher G's (16:18) young piano beginners' attention was captured when they were given the opportunity to stand up and walk or skip on the different time values. The fact that they had so much fun encouraged them to stay focused and kept them attentive for the piano lesson that followed. Teacher G explained that children have very busy schedules. They normally travel from one extra mural activity to another, which makes it difficult for them to focus and remain

⁴⁰ See Annexure B – "Echoes".

seated as soon as they arrive at a piano lesson. Therefore, by starting a piano lesson with a musical activity where young piano beginners need to move on different time values would assist them to focus on music and help them to get ready for their piano lesson. They would then be able to remain seated afterwards and play their piano pieces (16:19).

4.1.1.5 Listening activities

Listening activities are excellent to focus a child's attention because listening requires concentration, which results in paying attention. The piano teachers incorporated listening activities in their piano lessons to create variety, to develop their young piano beginners' hearing and to teach piano pieces through "sound before symbol". Teaching piano pieces through sound before symbol required that the piano teachers had to play a melody which consists of four to eight bars in order for their young beginners to develop an aural perception of the piece. Subsequently the piano teacher had to demonstrate the piano piece to the young beginners and allowed them to explore on the piano to find the correct notes. Only after these steps were completed, the young piano beginners were allowed to see the sheet music. According to Teacher B, Teacher F and Teacher G, teaching piano pieces through sound before symbol⁴¹ had a positive influence on their young piano beginners' attention span. Teacher B said that this teaching approach immediately grasped his young piano beginners' attention, "because they had to focus so intensely on remembering what the piece sounds like in order to go and find the notes on the piano" (11:39). Teacher F (15:27) and Teacher G (16:32) agreed with Teacher B that the young piano beginners' attention was captured because they had to listen carefully and attentively for steps and skips between the notes.

Teacher A, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E and Teacher F would do aural training with their young piano beginners when their attention starts to deviate. Teacher A (18:5), Teacher D (18:6), Teacher C (3:22), Teacher E (18:7) and Teacher F (18:8) would associate high notes with birds and low notes with

⁴¹ See Chapter Two - 2.2.2.2 (Holistic approaches).

elephants in order for the pupils to differentiate more easily between high and low sounds. Teacher E added that she also asks her young piano beginners to differentiate between fast and slow melodies (17:20). Teacher A (17:15) and Teacher F (17:22) would ask their young piano beginners to listen whether a melody goes up or down. Another listening activity that Teacher F recommended was to play CDs with classical music, jazz or pieces from musicals to her young piano beginners (18:9). By changing their focus to something as trouble-free as listening to music, their attention could be optimised. This could also encourage them to focus on the piano lesson afterwards, as they might feel motivated to play piano as beautiful as the recording on the CD (17:23).

Teacher D would press a few notes on the piano and ask her young piano beginners to sing them in order to interfere with their wandering thoughts and regain attention (17:18). Teacher A suggested that piano teachers could play different note values on the piano and ask the young piano beginners to write the notes down. If the young piano beginners struggle with writing, one could always design flash cards for them to choose from when one plays notes with different values. This listening activity involves more than just listening, as the young piano beginners need to use their hands to either write notes or pick out flash cards. This could add to the optimal utilisation of the attention span, because the young piano beginners would be actively busy with their ears and hands – an activity which requires concentration (17:16).

4.1.1.6 Allow a brief intermission

The piano teachers allow their young piano beginners a brief intermission to regain attention. Teacher E allows her young beginners to tell a story during lesson time so that they can take a break and regain focus (8:31), or she would ask them questions about their day to take a break from the piano lesson (8:33). When Teacher A (1:26) and Teacher C's (3:26) young beginners become inattentive they would talk about something other than the piano lesson to take a break and then return to the piano. Teacher B would give them a break by talking to them or asking them about their day and their interests (2:32). Teacher

F would ask general questions when her young piano beginners' minds start to wander, such as: "How was your day/week?" (9:31). Teacher D uses humour to optimise her young piano beginners' attention span. If Teacher D's young piano beginners' attention drifts, she would surprise them by telling a joke in order to interrupt their wandering thoughts so that they can concentrate on the lesson again (4:25). An example of one of her jokes is: "Why does the man want to climb over the glass wall? To see what is on the other side." (18:10).

As part of the young piano beginners' brief intermission, piano teachers could also incorporate *Brain Gym*⁴² exercises to regain attention. Teacher A (10:38), Teacher B (11:35), Teacher D (13:33) and Teacher F (15:31) all agreed that *Brain Gym* exercises helped their young piano beginners to focus and relax. According to Teacher F, "young beginners tend to play piano with very tense arm, hand and finger muscles" (15:31), because they spend most of their time in front of the television and not enough time outside exercising their muscles (18:11). Piano playing puts a lot of strain on the young piano beginners' fine motor muscles, which has the result that they get tired easily. Teacher F found that the *Brain Gym* exercises helped them to relax, which gave the muscles time to rest and focused their minds (15:31). Teacher A added that her young beginners' "minds are so busy with the place they are coming from, that the *Brain Gym* exercises really helped them to relax and focus" (10:38).

⁴² See Annexure P.

4.1.2 STIMULATING INTEREST

As a researcher, I wanted to gather information on how piano teachers stimulate their young piano beginners' interest. The piano teachers involved their young piano beginners actively in piano lessons to stimulate their interest. They also applied creative techniques and motivational strategies to ensure that their young piano beginners stay interested in learning to play the piano.

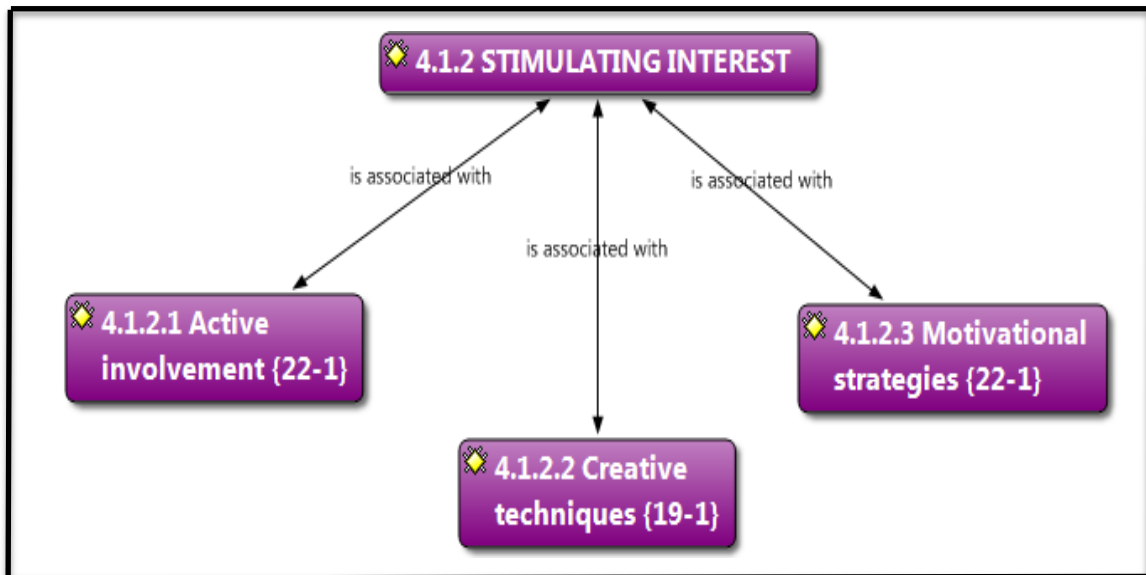


Figure 12: Stimulating interest

4.1.2.1 Active involvement

The young piano beginners' interest was stimulated when they were actively involved in the piano lesson. Piano teachers should therefore steer away from only explaining the features of the piano, musical concepts and aspects involved in a piano lesson, but they should rather allow young piano beginners to be actively involved in the learning process. All the piano teachers would start their initial lessons off with an introduction of the piano and keys. By opening the piano and showing their young piano beginners how the hammers and strings work they already capture the attention of the young beginner. Young children are inquisitive by nature. Therefore, when you show them something new they will pay attention. Their next step is to show the young beginners that the black keys consist of groups of two black keys and groups of three black keys.

Subsequently the teachers would give the young beginners the opportunity to play the different groups, first with the right hand and then with the left hand, from the one end of the piano to the other end of the piano.

Teacher A found that young piano beginners struggle to differentiate between high and low sounds. Therefore she would ask them to play the groups of two black keys and groups of three black keys in high and low ranges (1:15). Teacher E also teaches her young piano beginners the concept of high and low sounds (8:22). Once Teacher E's young piano beginners are aware of the arrangement of the black keys, she would proceed with the explanation of the white keys and involve the children actively by asking them to play the highest A, lowest G, middle C, and so forth (8:22). Teacher E would further involve her young piano beginners actively by testing their knowledge on musical concepts throughout the piano lesson. Her young piano beginners will therefore have to pay attention in order to answer the questions regarding note names and musical terms and signs (17:24). Teacher C would involve her young beginners actively by playing the white notes and asking them to name them (3:17).

Teacher A revises finger numbers, note names and high and low sounds by asking her young beginners to play a high E with the third finger of their right hand or a low F with the second finger of their left hand. By involving them actively in the learning process of note names, they are required to concentrate while searching for the notes which add to the optimal utilisation of their attention span (17:26). Teacher A (1:18) and Teacher F (9:46) would teach finger numbers by tracing the young piano beginners' hands on a piece of paper and filling in the finger numbers. By doing this, the young piano beginners are actively involved in the learning process of finger numbers. This could keep their interest and optimise the attention span better than by just telling them which number belongs to which finger.

Teacher E and Teacher F would involve their young piano beginners actively when explaining to them the relaxed position in front of the piano. Teacher E would ask her young piano beginners to lift their arms above their heads and

then ask them to drop it on the keys, completely limp in order to minimise muscle tension and maximise relaxation (17:25). Teacher F would do a similar gravity drop, but she would make it interesting to her young piano beginners by asking them to hold her arm in order for them to feel the difference between a stiff arm and a relaxed arm. She would then do the same exercise with them by asking them to relax their arm so that all the weight is in her hand and when she removes her hand, their arm should drop down on to the keys and not stay in the air (17:27). This exercise would keep the young piano beginners attentive, as they are physically busy with something and they need to concentrate on how to relax. Just by telling the young piano beginners to relax without the demonstration will not have the same effect.

4.1.2.2 Creative techniques

The piano teachers employ creative techniques to teach musical concepts and aspects in piano lessons. They explain musical concepts creatively, make associations, use illustrations or implement creative exercises in their lessons with young piano beginners to ensure that their interest will be stimulated and the attention span will be optimised.

a) Creative explanations

Teacher A (1:32), Teacher C (3:30), Teacher D (4:30) and Teacher E (8:50) would explain the note D creatively. They refer to the note D as “donkey D” because the two black notes beside D looks like a donkey’s ears. Teacher G would explain a sharp sign by saying: “When you wake up in the morning, you feel sharp, so then you get up,” and then he would show his young beginners that the black key on the right side of the white note is a semi-tone up. He would explain a flat sign by saying: “When your bicycle’s wheels go flat, it goes down” and then he would show his young beginner that the black key on the left side of the white key is a semi-tone down (7:15). Teacher F would draw smiley faces on her young piano beginners’ fingertips to make them aware that they must play the piano with your fingertips (9:45). She would also explain hand position creatively to her young piano beginners by telling them that one should not lift

the wrist too high when playing piano because that might result in an aeroplane crashing into a mountain. The wrist should also not be held too low because that might result in a train crash (17:29).

b) Make associations

Teacher B would make associations to which his young piano beginners can relate. He would refer to the right hand as the writing hand for right-handed people when he talks to the young beginners and refer to a crotchet as a 1-count note, and a minim as a 2-count in order for them to understand the concept better (2:34). Teacher F would also teach her young piano beginners the white note names by telling them a story about a small house (C D E) and a big house (F G A B) and the people who live there. In this way, the young beginners could associate the note names with the people who live in the houses, which would help them to remember the note names better (9:17). Teacher C would compare low notes with elephants and high notes with birds (3:31) and she would teach tonic sol-fa to her young piano beginners by making associations with the tonic sol-fa names (12:23). She would replace *doh re mi* with words for example “ons (doh) gaan (re) op (mi)” “ons (mi) gaan (re) af (doh)”.⁴³ Once they are comfortable with *doh re mi*, she will add *fa* and *so*. Then she would replace *doh re mi fa so* with “ons (doh) gaan (re) op (mi) van (fa) dag (so)” “mô (so) re (fa) gaan (mi) ons (re) af (doh)”.⁴⁴ She would also encourage her young piano beginners to make up their own words in order for them to remember the tonic sol-fa names better (12:23).

c) Use illustrations

Teacher A would use an illustration of macaroni to teach her young piano beginners how to hold their fingers when playing piano. She would tell them that when you play piano you should not play with uncooked macaroni fingers and also not with overcooked macaroni fingers (17:28). Teacher F would use an illustration of an apple tree and ask the young beginners to pick an apple. The

⁴³ English translation: *doh, re, me* will be replaced with the words: “we are going up” and *me, re, doh* will be replaced with: “we are going down”.

⁴⁴ English translation: *doh, re, me, fa, so* will be replaced with the words: “we are going up today” and *so, fa, me, re, doh* will be replaced with; “tomorrow we are going down”.

shape of a hand picking an apple would be the shape of the correct hand position on the piano (9:44). Teacher E would teach her young piano beginners the correct hand position by using an illustration of a bird in a cage or giving them a ball to hold in their hands (8:47). The illustration of the bird's feet around the perch in the bird cage gives the young piano beginners an idea of the correct hand position. The illustration of an apple or a ball will foster an image of something that is round and therefore the young beginners will also keep their hands in a round position when playing piano.

d) Creative exercises

Teacher E would reinforce finger numbers by asking her young piano beginners to make a dome with their hands, where their right and left hand fingertips touch each other, and then she would ask them to wiggle the second fingers, then the third, fourth, fifth, first, and so forth (8:15). She would also make sure that they maintain the correct hand position by placing an eraser on top of their hand, just above the knuckles, and then tell them that the eraser is not allowed to fall off when they play the piano (8:45). Another creative technique Teacher E would use is to give her young piano beginners an exercise to strengthen their finger muscles with a peg (8:52). A creative exercise Teacher D would employ is to ask her young beginners to close their eyes and find different notes on the piano (4:18).

4.1.2.3 Motivational strategies

Piano teachers could have the best piano lesson structure with a variety excellent teaching methods, creative techniques and teaching material, but if they do not motivate their young piano beginners, they will lose interest and become inattentive. If a child is motivated to play piano, he/she would more easily pay attention and not lose interest. By applying motivational strategies, the young piano beginners can become intrinsically motivated, which stimulates interest and eagerness to learn. The motivational strategies that the piano teachers apply to optimise the attention span are: positive encouragement,

positive reinforcement, encouragement to perform, rewards and to treat children as individuals.

a) Positive reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is one of the strategies that Teacher E (8:49) uses to motivate her young beginners. Through positive reinforcement, young piano beginners will be motivated to improve their piano pieces and they will be focused when learning new concepts and skills. She said that one should not focus on the mistakes that the young beginners make, but rather reinforce their successes (8:49). In this way, the young piano beginners would not feel like failures, but they would rather feel proud of their achievements. This could keep them interested and attentive when playing piano.

b) Praise young piano beginners

Teacher C (3:11) and Teacher G (7:34) feel that it is important to praise young piano beginners when they play the correct notes and to show them how proud one is of them when they succeed. In this way, the young piano beginners will be motivated to impress their piano teachers on a regular basis, which will require them to pay attention.

c) Encourage performing

According to Teacher A (1:29), Teacher B (2:11), Teacher F (9:34) and Teacher G (7:35), young piano beginners love to perform, because it gives them a feeling of accomplishment. Therefore, they would encourage their young beginners to play at their music schools' annual solo/ensemble concerts. Teacher B (2:11) and Teacher F (9:34) also found that their young piano beginners become more motivated when they play duets and take part in the eisteddfod. Young piano beginners will be motivated and attentive when playing duets with teachers or friends, because they do not want to let their duet partner down. When they do well in the eisteddfod, they will be motivated to practise more often and pay attention in their lessons.

d) Reward system

When young piano beginners receive a reward for playing a piano piece successfully, they will be motivated to receive rewards regularly. They will therefore be more attentive in their lessons to ensure that they understand what is required from them to succeed. Teacher D uses a reward system to motivate young piano beginners (4:11). Teacher D (18:13) and Teacher F (18:15) give their young piano beginners stickers when they play their pieces correctly, and after ten stickers they will receive a chocolate. Teacher F would involve her young piano beginners' parents as well, by asking them to reward their children when they receive fifteen stickers (18:15). Teacher A would reward her young piano beginners by allowing them to play their piano pieces with the CD from the *Alfred Basic Piano Library*⁴⁵ method book (18:12). Teacher E would reward her young piano beginners by telling them that they do not have to play scales if they play their pieces correct (18:14).

e) Familiar repertoire

Young piano beginners enjoy playing familiar piano pieces. When young beginners enjoy the piano piece they have to play, they will be motivated to learn the piece successfully and they will therefore be attentive while doing this. Teacher F extracts material from other piano books with a familiar tune; for example, Christmas songs such as *Jingle Bells*,⁴⁶ to motivate her young piano beginners (9:33). Teacher A, Teacher D and Teacher E would also allow their young piano beginners to play familiar piano pieces to ensure that they enjoy practising. Teacher A (18:16) and Teacher D (18:17) found that their young piano beginners enjoy playing sacred songs, for example "Loof Hom met die tromme"⁴⁷ or "Here Jesus, ek is klein".⁴⁸ Teacher E's young piano beginners enjoy playing nursery rhymes, for example "Mary had a little lamb"⁴⁹ (18:18).

⁴⁵ See Chapter Two – 2.2.1.3 a.

⁴⁶ See Annexure W for examples of familiar repertoire for young beginners.

⁴⁷ See Annexure W for examples of familiar repertoire for young beginners.

⁴⁸ See Annexure W for examples of familiar repertoire for young beginners.

⁴⁹ See Annexure W for examples of familiar repertoire for young beginners.

f) Acknowledge young piano beginners as individuals

Acknowledging young piano beginners' individuality is another motivational strategy that Teacher A, Teacher C, Teacher E and Teacher G use. Each child is unique with regard to their personality, physical and cognitive abilities. Therefore, Teacher A, Teacher C, Teacher E and Teacher G adapt their teaching methods in order to motivate their young piano beginners. Both Teachers E and A would take their young piano beginners' preferred learning style into account. Teacher E highlights the repeated parts for visual learners, and for tactile-kinaesthetic learners she would teach the rhythm through body movement (14:31). For tactile-kinaesthetic learners, Teacher A would "choose pieces that acquire more movement, for example, where they press their entire arm on the piano keys" (10:42). Teacher C treats each child differently. She said that when teaching piano to young beginners one realises after a while what works best for each child. Therefore she would adapt her teaching methods to each child (12:10). Teacher G also adapts his teaching methods to each child's individual needs and preferred learning style. He would therefore apply the methods which make them concentrate best (16:36).

4.1.3 AVOIDING DETRIMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Detrimental activities will have a negative influence on young piano beginners' attention span. Detrimental activities for this study can be classified as difficult, over-stimulating and unusual activities.

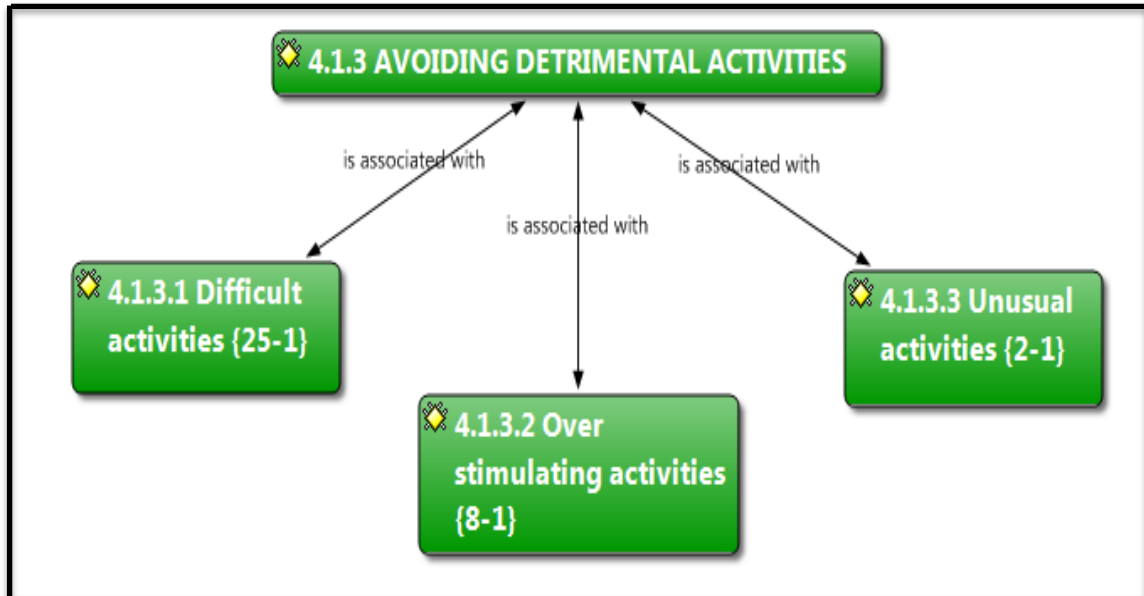


Figure 13: Avoiding detrimental activities

4.1.3.1 Difficult activities

All the piano teachers agreed that sight-singing and improvisation were challenging for their young piano beginners. Musical concepts such as steps, skips and note values for sight-singing as well as melody, harmony and rhythm for improvisation are not yet fully established so that young piano beginners can react quickly and positively to new exercises. Quick and easy exercises will capture an attention that has drifted. The piano teachers therefore recommended that one should not spend more than a few minutes on exercises to regain attention otherwise it will intervene with the flow of the lesson plan. Sight-singing and improvisation were not appropriate exercises to regain attention, because they were unfamiliar and the time available for the young beginners to complete the exercises was not enough to succeed. Once a young beginner struggles too much with an exercise, they become disinterested and inattentive for the rest of the piano lesson. When incorporating body percussion

exercises, Teacher F recommended that the length of the rhythms should be short⁵⁰ in order for the young beginners to succeed. If the rhythms are too long, there is a strong possibility that they will get them wrong and become disheartened and inattentive (15:16). According to Teacher A (10:27), Teacher B (11:40), Teacher C (12:22), Teacher D (13:36), Teacher E (14:21) and Teacher F (15:21), their young piano beginners struggled to sing the tone degrees of the tonic sol-fa⁵¹ scale, because they were unfamiliar and their voices are not yet fully developed for them to sing a whole scale on pitch. The fact that they struggled so much dampened their spirit and led to a decrease in their attention span. The young piano beginners of Teacher A also became tired after trying to sing the tonic sol-fa scale, which added to their inattentiveness (10:28).

Teacher F said: “You should never give a young piano beginner an exercise that makes them feel like a failure. This will demotivate them for the rest of the lesson and result that their attention deviates” (15:22). Teacher A agreed and emphasised that the implementation of difficult activities will result that young piano beginners lose interest and become inattentive. It is therefore important to remember that one should rather incorporate exercises which young piano beginners will enjoy and can complete successfully (10:30). Teacher E found that teaching piano pieces through sound before symbol⁵² was difficult for her young piano beginners, because it involved so much concentration. This resulted in tired young beginners who were unable to focus on the rest of the piano lesson (14:27).

4.1.3.2 Over-stimulating activities

When one implements activities away from the piano to gain attention it should not over stimulate a young piano beginner, because then they might struggle to return their focus to the piano. Teacher B found that body movement exercises, for example, to walk and run on the beat of the music over-stimulates young piano beginners. He said, “when children are too active, they might struggle to

⁵⁰ See Annexure U for examples of short rhythms.

⁵¹ See Chapter Two – 2.2.2.2 b (Kodály approach).

⁵² See Annexure R – Data collection schedule (Task 8).

return the piano where they need to stay seated” (11:19). Teacher C (12:20), Teacher F (15:19) and Teacher G (16:20) agreed with Teacher B, and suggested that when piano teachers use body movement activities, they should keep the length of the activity short, otherwise the young beginners might struggle to focus on the rest of the piano lesson.

Teacher A (10:33), Teacher C (12:26) and Teacher G (16:29) recommended that when the young piano beginners are given the opportunity to play on percussion instruments to regain attention, piano teachers should limit their time to play on the instruments to ensure that they will be able to return to the piano and refocus. Teacher D agreed and added that her young beginners “kept on asking if they can play on the triangle and tambourine again”. Her young piano beginners therefore struggled to focus on the actual piano lesson that followed because they enjoyed playing on the percussion instruments too much (13:25).

4.1.3.3 Unusual activities

A young piano beginners’ attention would not necessarily be captured when piano teachers do something out of the ordinary in piano lessons; sometimes this could distract them even more. Teacher E did the “thinking cap”⁵³ *Brain Gym* exercise with her young beginners. In this exercise, the young piano beginners had to rub the outer edges of both their ears from top to bottom simultaneously and repeat this three times. Teacher E’s young piano beginners kept on asking why they needed to rub their ears instead of paying attention (14:29). Teacher E simply replied: “We are quickly taking a break from the piano”, because a long explanation of why they need to rub their ears will take up too much time of the lesson. According to Teacher G, the thinking cap, the energy yawn and belly breathing *Brain Gym* exercises were unusual for his young piano beginners and “nothing was accomplished other than exciting the young beginners and distracting them from learning productively” (16:34).

⁵³ See Annexure P – “The Thinking Cap”.

4.2 CHALLENGES RELATED TO ATTENTION SPAN

The prominent problem regarding attention that emerged from the data was that young piano beginners experience difficulty in paying attention. The attention curves (see Annexure S) which the piano teachers had to draw confirmed that young piano beginners struggle to pay attention. The negative influence of technology, the fact that young piano beginners are unfamiliar with individual teaching and their physical and cognitive development affect their attention span.

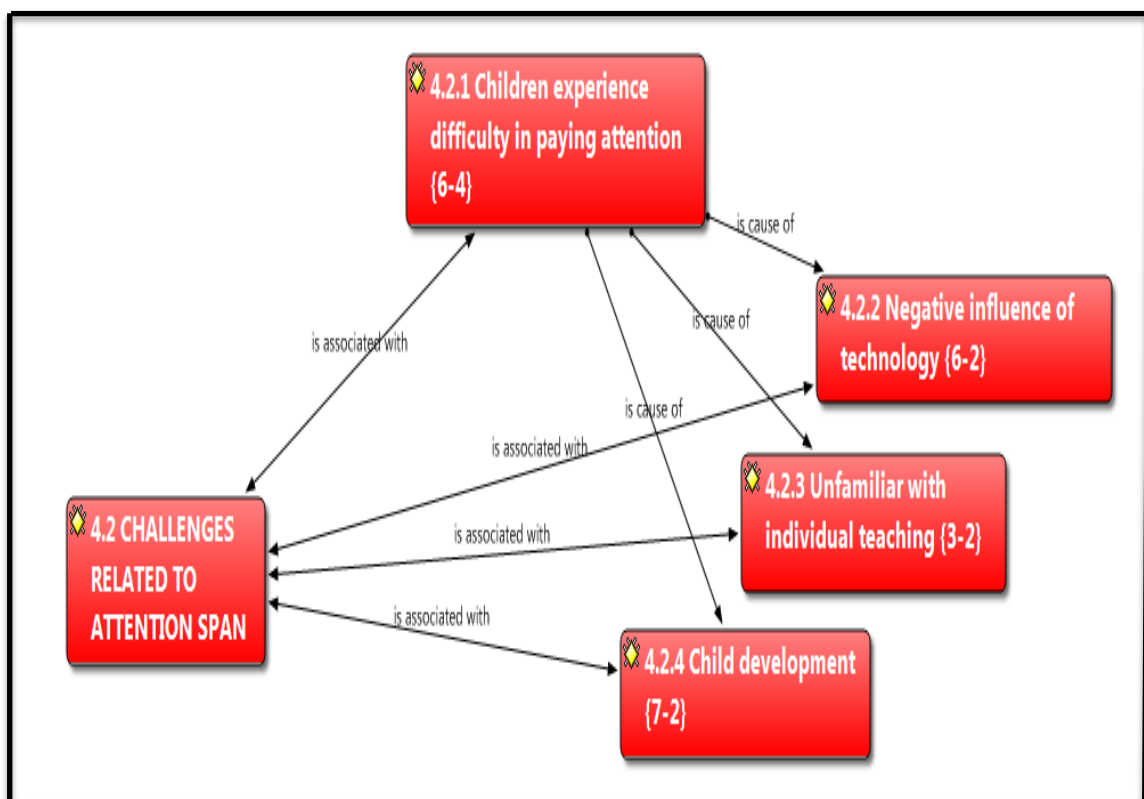


Figure 14: Challenges related to attention span

4.2.1 Children experience difficulty in paying attention

During the first interview with the piano teachers, they all agreed that their young piano beginners experience difficulty in paying attention for the duration of a thirty-minute piano lesson. Teacher E added that sometimes they cannot even concentrate at all during the piano lesson (8:41). I asked the piano teachers to determine where their young piano beginners' attention is at its highest and

lowest by drawing an attention curve (see Annexure S). Analysing the different attention curves was done manually and not with ATLAS.ti 7. Teacher A, Teacher C and Teacher F drew one curve for all their young piano beginners, as their attention span was similar. Teacher A, Teacher C and Teacher F's curves showed that the attention span was at its highest in the beginning of the lesson and gradually declined towards the end of the lesson. One of Teacher E's young beginners' attention span was also at its highest in the beginning of the lesson and declined gradually towards the end of the lesson. Three of Teacher B's young beginners as well as one of Teachers E and G's young beginners' attention span stayed high with some fluctuation during the lesson. One of Teacher B, Teacher E and Teacher G's curves showed that the attention span was higher in the middle of the lesson. Two of Teacher G's curves also showed that the attention span gradually increased towards the end of the lesson. Teacher D and Teacher G had a curve that went up and down right through the lesson. Teacher E had one curve that did not fluctuate at all, with the attention span at 50%. It is therefore clear that there is not a fixed pattern, nor can one specify precisely when the attention of young piano beginners will be at its highest or lowest; but that young piano beginners get distracted easily was, however, evident.

4.2.2 Negative influence of technology

Teacher A feels that the latest technology that is loud, colourful and fast has a negative influence on the young piano beginners' attention span (17:1). They spend a large portion of the day in front of the television, a smartphone, computer/laptop and other high-speed digital devices which do not require a lot of attention. The difficulty with which she is faced is that young piano beginners have an ingrained belief that learning to play the piano will be just as quick and easy as mastering the latest technologies. As soon as her young piano beginners realise that it is not so quick and easy to play their piano pieces musically and technically correct, they become disheartened, lose interest and cease to pay attention (1:7). As a remedy, she encourages her young piano beginners to spend considerable amounts of time reading storybooks, because they are slow-paced and require sustained attention (1:8).

Teacher E holds a similar opinion in the sense that online video games, for example, “Pokémon Go”, a new smartphone application, can lead to the young piano beginner becoming inattentive in the piano lesson. “Pokémon Go” is an active game which allows the player to find and catch “Pokémon” in the real world by throwing a “Pokéball” by touching your smartphone screen. Teacher E found that her young piano beginners become impatient because of their eagerness for the piano lesson to come to an end so that they can get back to playing the game (17:2). Teacher D added that when young piano beginners have an urgency to get through the piano lesson in order to go and play games at home, they are not intrinsically motivated to play the piano (17:5). She feels that when young piano beginners want to play the piano, they will practise at home and will therefore pay attention in the piano lesson (17:6). She found that young beginners who play the piano to please their parents will most likely become inattentive, because of their wandering thoughts and that the fact that they are not interested in the piano (17:6).

4.2.3 Unfamiliar with individual teaching

From the time children enter school, whether it is a playschool, preschool or primary school, they become part of a group and are taught within a group setting. Individual piano lessons are therefore unfamiliar to the child. Teacher G believes that young beginners struggle to concentrate for a long period of time, because they are not familiar with individual teaching (7:40). He added that they are used to a school setting where they play with many friends (7:40). According to Teacher E, young piano beginners find it difficult to stay focused, because they are not accustomed to an individual classroom setting which involves sitting in front of a piano for thirty minutes (8:30). They are used to a group setting at school where they play with friends, move around and participate in group activities. Now that they are in an individual teaching situation where they need to stay seated, and they become restless and inattentive (17:3).

4.2.4 Child development

Children become despondent as soon as they start to struggle with literacy (letters and numbers) and physical (wrist, hand and finger muscles) inabilities, which ultimately leads to losing interest and result in decreased attention. The piano teachers therefore all agreed that it will be advantageous if the young piano beginners' fine motor skills such as wrist, hand and finger muscles are well-developed for the correct hand position to be maintained throughout an exercise. The coordination between their hands will also influence their ability to master the piano and should therefore be well developed. They should also be number and letter literate in order to recognise the different note values and note names.

4.3 Conclusion

The data analysis made it clear that young piano beginners experience difficulty in paying attention for the full duration of a thirty-minute piano lesson. The piano teachers who participated in my study shared valuable information about their own methods and made suggestions for the optimal utilisation of attention by answering the interview questions and reflecting on the short tasks they had to implement in their individual teaching. Their methods and suggestions focused on creating variety in piano lessons, stimulating young piano beginners' interest and avoiding detrimental activities. The implementation of the short tasks inspired the piano teachers to structure their future piano lessons more creatively to ensure that piano lessons are interesting and the attention span can be optimally utilised. The findings of this study will now be presented in a conceptual framework which aims to explain how to optimally utilise young piano beginners' attention span and they will also be put into context by connecting the data with the existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I answer my main research question: “What conceptual framework, generated from the literature and the data, would explain how the attention span of young piano beginners can be optimally utilised?” Conducting this study was a stimulating experience, as I gathered a wide spectrum of information through an in-depth study of the available literature and interviews with piano teachers to develop a conceptual framework which could explain the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners’ attention span. According to Silverman (2013:377), data without literature says nothing; therefore I will discuss the aspects from the data in the conceptual framework associated with the existing literature. I will also address the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future studies.

A conceptual framework is defined by Maxwell (2013:41) as something that the researcher develops, not something that already exists. It can either be a visual or written form of concepts, key points, beliefs and suggestions that enlightens and supports the findings of one’s study (Maxwell, 2013:39). My conceptual framework structures my findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008:553) and is a critical examination of the research findings, existing literature and the relationship among them (Maxwell, 2013:41). My conceptual framework has a well-defined practice outcome (Sinclair, 2007:39) to ensure that it can be applied in piano lessons with young beginners. I therefore considered the outcomes of my literature study and data analysis to develop new knowledge that could add to the practice (Sinclair, 2007:39); in this case, to optimise young piano beginners’ attention span.

A discussion of my conceptual framework will follow the illustration (*Figure 15*). I firstly give a brief overview of the components involved in the conceptual framework as well as the relationship among them. Then I describe and examine each component critically and in detail with reference to the existing literature, to support my findings.

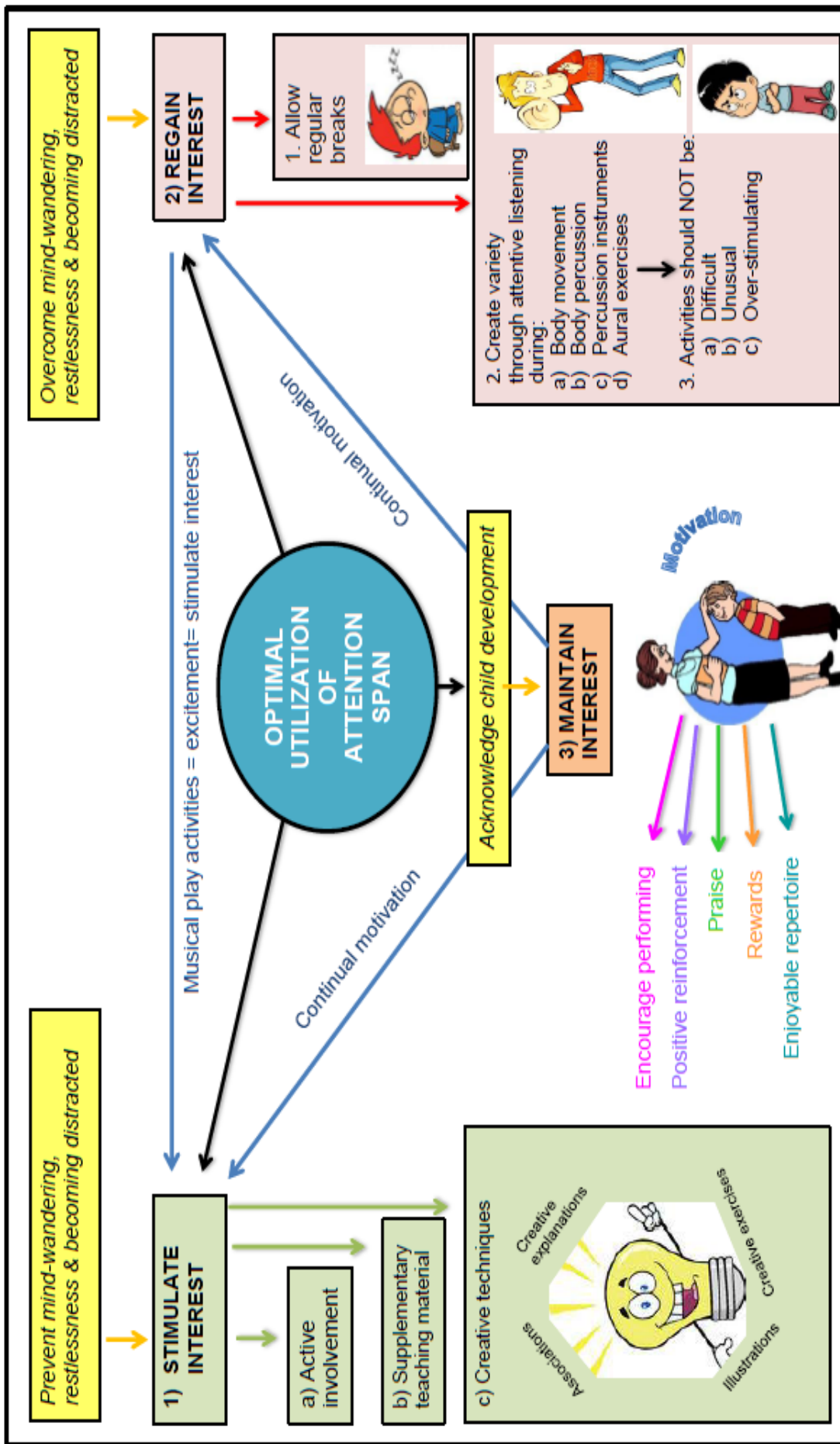


Figure 15: Conceptual framework for the optimal utilization of young piano beginners' attention span

By exploring the four themes⁵⁴ from the data – create variety, stimulate interest, avoid detrimental activities and challenges related to attention span – in relation to the existing literature, it became evident that the main challenge that piano teachers experience with regard to attention span was that young piano beginners struggle to pay attention for a long period of time during the piano lesson. Piano teachers tend to reteach the same musical concepts each week, because their young piano beginners struggle to remain focused (Miller, 2013:1). According to my findings, the young beginners find it difficult to stay attentive because:

- a) they easily become distracted;
- b) they struggle to remain seated when hard work is involved;
- c) their minds tend to wander;
- d) they experience failure leading to unproductive lessons.

Solutions for these challenges include methods and suggestions to *stimulate* a young piano beginner's interest, *regain* their interest and *maintain* their interest. This could optimise the utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span and ensure that they stay interested in piano lessons. The conceptual framework for the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span displays the relationship between *stimulating* interest, *regaining* interest and *maintaining* interest. The main method to maintain a young piano beginners' interest is through continual motivation. Continual motivation is required from piano teachers when they stimulate and regain interest in the teaching of piano pieces, musical concepts and musical play activities. There is also a link between stimulating interest and regaining interest. When one regains a young beginner's interest through musical play activities, one excites them and automatically stimulates their interest again. Detailed descriptions and critical examinations of each component of my conceptual framework will now follow.

⁵⁴ See Chapter Four – *Figure 10*.

5.1 Stimulate interest

One of the reasons why young piano beginners become inattentive during a piano lesson is because their minds start wandering due to boredom, or because the task at hand does not require adequate attention (Macklem, 2015:31). The main cause for mind-wandering that surfaced in my findings was the negative influence of the latest technology.⁵⁵ Young learners also have a tendency to easily become distracted (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:311) and they struggle to remain seated when hard work is involved, as they are used to an environment where they play with friends and participate in group activities, with freedom to move around (Millares, 2012:20). When a young learner arrives at his/her piano lesson, it is therefore essential that piano teachers stimulate their interest from the very first second. The piano piece and musical concepts required for the lesson should be taught through active involvement. Young children learn and understand concepts better when demonstration and participation are involved. When musical concepts require explanations, piano teachers could use supplementary teaching material or creative techniques to stimulate the young piano beginners' interest. This could prevent mind-wandering, restlessness and becoming distracted and ultimately add to the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span, as they will actively participate in the learning process and learn musical concepts in an exciting manner.

5.1.1 Active involvement

The piano teachers who participated in my study stimulated their young piano beginners' interest by steering away from long-winded explanations of musical concepts, features of the piano and aspects involved in the piano lesson, and rather actively⁵⁶ involved them in the learning process. Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1999:38) underline that piano teachers should use as little verbalisation as possible, because young children understand concepts better when these are

⁵⁵ See 4.2.2 - Negative influence of technology.

⁵⁶ See 4.1.2.1 - Active involvement.

shown to them instead of explained. Children easily lose interest when there is too much talk and too little demonstration (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1999:38).

5.1.2 Supplementary teaching material

Supplementary teaching material, such as colourful wall posters and resources to explain musical concepts will influence the young beginner's concentration and achievements in the lesson (Hannah, 2013:1). Supplementary teaching material keeps piano lessons interesting; for example, percussion instruments for rhythmic work, wall posters to explain musical concepts and flash cards⁵⁷ to learn notes. In my opinion, supplementary teaching material will facilitate the learning of musical concepts and make the learning process interesting for young beginners. As soon as the young beginners enjoy and understand that which is taught to them, they will find it easier to pay more attention.

5.1.3 Creative techniques

Young piano beginners will learn and understand new musical concepts more effectively when they develop creative thinking skills (Storms, 1995:6). By using a child's imagination, his/her attention span will be optimised (Miller, 2013:1). Piano teachers used creative techniques such as creative explanations, associations, illustrations or creative exercises in their lessons to stimulate their young beginners' interest. By making associations and using illustrations to explain musical concepts, young piano beginners will be able to think creatively, because they will use their imagination to make connections between a musical concept and the association or illustration. The incorporation of creative techniques will add to the optimal utilisation of the attention span, because young learners will enjoy the lesson and understand the musical concepts better.

⁵⁷ See Annexure B – Flash cards.

5.2 Regain interest

When stimulating a young piano beginners' interest, they should be able to concentrate better and pay more attention even though their attention will sometimes still deviate during the lesson. Young children easily get distracted because of other noises in the environment; thus, when they hear other noises outside the music classroom while preoccupied with a piano lesson, they will become distracted and their attention will deviate (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:311). Young piano beginners are unfamiliar with individual teaching and used to a noisy environment at preschool or primary school. When young learners become anxious to return to their video games or when they realise that learning to play the notes on a piano are not as simple and exciting as mastering the latest technologies, their minds tend to wander. When this happens, a piano teacher can regain their interest by changing their focus. This can either be done by allowing them a brief intermission or creating variety through body movement, body percussion, playing percussion instruments or aural exercises. Through the data analysis and an examination of the literature study, it became evident that these methods will help young beginners to refocus so that they can pay attention for the remainder of the piano lesson.

5.2.1 Allow regular breaks

Regular breaks between concentrated cognitive activities will improve performance and learning in the classroom (Brown & Patte, 2013:49). A quick breather during lesson time regains attention; for example, when piano teachers ask their young beginners questions about their day/week or allow them to tell a story, they shift their attention away from the piano so that they can refocus and concentrate again. The incorporation of relaxation exercises as a brief intermission will also ensure that young piano beginners stay attentive for a longer period of time (Mattern, 1940:23). Relaxation exercises applicable to this study involved *Brain Gym* exercises⁵⁸ with the ability to improve focus and concentration (Cook *et al.*, 2016:113). My findings showed that the

⁵⁸ See 2.2.2.3 – a (*Brain Gym*) and Annexure P.

implementation of *Brain Gym* exercises in piano lessons helped a few young beginners to focus and relax, which optimised their attention span. According to Miller (2008:22), *Brain Gym* exercises prepare learners physically and mentally for new musical content. Evans and Sims (2016:98) add that short activity breaks such as “brain breaks” in the classroom can enhance learners’ concentration. “Brain breaks” are closely related to *Brain Gym*. “Brain breaks” are physical and mental exercises set out to provide the teacher with tools to keep a child responsive during the lessons and to direct his/her attention (Weslake & Christian, 2015:39). This could also be applicable to piano lessons for young beginners. Therefore, by taking a quick break from the piano and doing a *Brain Gym* or “Brain break” exercise, the young piano beginners will be able to concentrate better, as their minds will be cleared and their brains refreshed in order to learn new musical content. McNeil (2009:71) confirms these findings and suggests that teachers should incorporate “brain breaks” in their piano lessons for oxygen to rejuvenate the young beginners’ brains and bodies.

5.2.2 Creating variety through musical play

An average six-year-old child tends to lose interest in an activity easily (Lyke *et al.*, 1996:10). Musical activities in a piano lesson should therefore be varied to prevent mind-wandering (Collins, 1985:16; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:311). Piano teachers should vary the musical components of their piano lessons frequently to ensure that their young piano beginners remain attentive. Variety can be created when piano teachers vary their piano lesson structure with musical play activities and games (Goldstein, 2012:11). Musical play includes activities where children can explore on the piano, improvise and create sound (Tarnowski, 1999:27). The musical play activities which the piano teachers implemented in their individual teaching to regain interest were to incorporate body movement, body percussion, percussion instruments and aural exercises. These activities will optimise young piano beginners’ attention span, because they have to listen carefully and attentively to complete these activities successfully.

5.2.2.1 Body movement

A normal day at a preschool consists of outdoor play and indoor activities, with the freedom to move around. Because young children enjoy moving around, it is an adjustment for them to remain seated for the full duration of a piano lesson. This could result in them becoming distracted and inattentive. Because six- and seven-year-old children have an inability to remain seated for a long period while concentrating on all the components of a piano lesson (Millares, 2012:20), quick reaction exercises can be used to regain attention (Boyarsky, 2009:15). Quick reaction exercises are one of the aspects used in Dalcroze Eurhythmics (Boyarsky, 2009:15), which involves learning music through body movement. An example of a quick reaction exercises involves the teacher playing music with different note values with each note value having a specific locomotor movement; for instance, a minim is a giant step, crotchets indicate a march, and quavers involve tip-toeing (Boyarsky, 2009:16). Quick reaction exercises improve listening and focus and they teach children to respond quickly to sound which connects mind, body and ear (Boyarsky, 2009:15, 18). By allowing young piano beginners to get out of the piano chair and to move on different note values can regain deviated attention. This will refocus their attention, because in order to move to the beat they need to listen. I consider activities which require attentive listening to be an important strategy for regaining attention. The Dalcroze approach values body movement and rhythm as the most important component of music, and aspires to improve concentration and enhance the attention span in a piano lesson (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:27,35).

Piano teachers should include learning activities which involve play to ensure that young piano beginners enjoy the lesson (Andrews, 2012:156). These activities will help the young beginners to understand musical concepts more easily (Goldstein, 2012:11). By learning the sound and rhythm of a piano piece through body movement before playing it on the piano, a young piano beginner is allowed to make enjoyable connections which could give them a better understanding of the music (Johnson, 1993:43). Body movement in piano lessons could thus facilitate the learning of piano pieces and at the same time ensure an enjoyable experience for the young beginners. According to the piano

teachers who took part in this study, body movement definitely had a positive influence on their young piano beginners' attention span, as they enjoyed standing up and moving around on the different time values.

5.2.2.2 Body percussion

Creating variety through rhythmic games is essential to prevent young piano beginners from losing interest and becoming distracted in piano lessons (Mattern, 1940:23). The piano teachers who participated in my study incorporated a rhythm clapping game, "Echoes",⁵⁹ in their piano lessons. The reason why I chose this game is because it is straightforward and short. I believe that in order to capture attention that has drifted, one needs a quick and simple but effective exercise. The attention span was optimised because the "Echoes" game was uncomplicated and to the point. In my own individual teaching, I found that as soon as I explained something to a child that seemed drawn-out and challenging to them, their thoughts started to wander. Musical games also ensure effective listening and increased concentration (Storms, 1995:3). I believe that the moment one changes a child's focus through activities which call for attentive listening, one will be able to refocus their attention. This also appears to be true for some of the piano teachers' young beginners.

5.2.2.3 Percussion instruments

Improvisation on percussion instruments involves young piano beginners to use rhythmic and sound materials freely to create music in a resourceful and significant way (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:61). The young piano beginners were excited and attentive when they expressed their creativity on percussion instruments. When young piano beginners are allowed to create new rhythms and patterns (Andrews, 2012:156) they will develop a more positive attitude towards learning (Finnerty, 2005:11). This adds to the optimal utilisation of their attention span. My findings also indicate that the attention span was optimally

⁵⁹ See Annexure R – Task 4 ("Echoes").

utilised because the young beginners had to listen carefully to improvise suitable rhythms on percussion instruments.

5.2.2.4 Aural exercises

According to Rowe *et al.* (2015:114), piano lessons today are mostly notation-based, with little acknowledgement to the importance of aural development. Therefore, piano teachers have to implement sound before symbol in their lessons with young beginners. Sound before symbol in instrumental lessons was a popular method in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rowe *et al.*, 2015:114) and is also used in the Suzuki approach.⁶⁰ The implementation of sound before symbol in piano lessons optimised the young piano beginners' attention span, because they had to listen attentively to remember the melody in order for them to explore on the piano to find the correct notes. Exploratory learning enables young beginners to learn by themselves, which gives rise to feelings of accomplishment (Siddiqui, 2008:21) and ultimately optimises the attention span (Millares, 2012:21).

5.2.3 Avoid detrimental activities

When piano teachers incorporate body movement, body percussion, percussion instruments or aural exercises to regain attention, they must ensure that the exercises are not difficult, unusual or over stimulating. When children are confronted with difficult and unusual exercises they might become disheartened and stop paying attention. Over-stimulating exercise could create too much excitement, which could make it difficult for the young beginner to focus on the actual piano lesson again.

Bigler and Lloyd-Watts (1999:40) state that when a task is too difficult for children and they have a feeling that they might be unsuccessful, they will become frustrated and lose interest. The incorporation of sight-singing and improvisation had a negative effect on all the young piano beginners' attention

⁶⁰ See Chapter Two – 2.2.2.2 (Holistic approaches) and 2.2.2.2 d (Suzuki approach).

span. The fact that the young beginners struggled with sight-singing and improvisation dampened their spirits and made them disinterested and inattentive towards the piano lesson. In my opinion, improvisation and sight-singing should not be disregarded completely, but should rather be simplified as a step-by-step process from the very first lesson. For example, when the young piano beginner learns the notes C and D on the piano, piano teachers should teach them to sing the interval from C to D. In this way, the process of sight-singing will not be overwhelming and unfamiliar. Sight-singing can improve young piano beginners' rhythmic and intervallic reading abilities on the piano and it can provide them with tools to reinforce motivation, learning and musical understanding (Rowe *et al.*, 2015:115), which could therefore enhance the attention span. As soon as young beginners can play C, D, E, F and G comfortably on the piano, I suggest that piano teachers encourage them to improvise a melody within the range of C to G. The more opportunities young piano beginners are given to improvise on the piano, the more confident they will become. Improvisation allows children to explore their own ideas on the piano, which will improve their imagination and eagerness to make music (Rowe *et al.*, 2015:115). This will therefore create excitement for young beginners and encourage them to stay attentive in the piano lesson.

Another activity that young piano beginners found difficult was to sing the tonic sol-fa scale,⁶¹ which resulted in them becoming disheartened and ultimately inattentive. The tonic sol-fa scale⁶² consists of *doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, doh* and it is one of the tools used in the Kodály Approach (Choksy *et al.*, 1986:73). The findings also showed that some of the young beginners became tired when they struggled to sing the tonic sol-fa scale. When children get tired because of constant failure they will also stop paying attention. As children use the pitches of the tonic sol-fa scale naturally when they start to sing, I recommend that the tonic sol-fa scale should be taught step by step through nursery rhymes and songs that are familiar to them in order to avoid failure. Children can also become apprehensive when confronted with unexpected activities (Bigler &

⁶¹ See Chapter Four – 4.1.3.1 (Difficult activities).

⁶² See Chapter Two – 2.2.2.2 b (Kodály Approach).

Lloyd-Watts, 1999: 47). Some of the teachers therefore suggested that one should not give a young piano beginner an unusual activity, as it might distract them even more from learning productively. In view of this study, the *Brain Gym* exercises were unusual for some of the young beginners, which resulted in them becoming inattentive.

When implementing musical play activities in piano lessons, the outcome should be to capture the young piano beginners' attention, so that they can return to the actual piano lesson afterwards. When a piano teacher spends too much time on musical play activities, he/she might over-stimulate the young beginners, which could have the consequence that they struggle to return to the piano and pay attention. Therefore, I propose that piano teachers incorporate three-minute motivators.⁶³ Three-minute motivators are effective when children become tired or if there is a lack of interest. It could also refocus waning attention or when a child shows signs of lethargy (Paterson, 2014:11). Playful activities should be controlled, purposeful and bounded by time, because too much play can distract children from the lesson (Bigler & Lloyd-Watts, 1999:41).

5.3 Maintain interest

The piano teachers in my study emphasised that young piano beginners should have well-developed cognitive and physical abilities to stay attentive in the piano lesson. The young piano beginners became miserable and inattentive when they struggled with physical and intellectual challenges in the piano lesson. It is therefore important that piano teachers maintain the young beginners' interest and enhance their eagerness to learn through encouragement and continual motivation (Lyke *et al.*, 1996:10). Children have the need to be acknowledged by their piano teacher when they make an effort and achieve something physically or intellectually during a piano lesson (De Witt, 2009:29). The piano teachers praised their young beginners, reinforced their successes and gave them rewards when they grasped a musical concept and completed their piano pieces successfully.

⁶³ See Chapter Two – 2.2.1.2 (Musical play).

The piano teachers also maintain their young beginners' interest in the long term by creating opportunities for them to perform in front of friends or family and to enter for examinations or competitions (Lau, 2007:39; Morgan, 2007:23). In my opinion, performing will encourage young piano beginners to stay attentive, because good results will give them a feeling of accomplishment. They will therefore be motivated to practise regularly and concentrate in the lesson in order to acquire more achievements. Enjoyable repertoire also maintained the young piano beginners' interest. Young piano beginners will be motivated and attentive when they enjoy their piano pieces; therefore, piano teachers should select pieces which will motivate the young piano beginners; for example, Christmas songs or popular songs with which they are familiar (Lau, 2007:37).

5.4.1 Limitations

After completing my interpretations of the findings I realised that a few of my interview questions were not specific to the problem under study. Although it was relevant to a piano lesson in general, it was irrelevant to the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. A second limitation was that I did not supplement my interviews with observations. Although the interviews yielded very valuable and useful information, the participants found it difficult to remember every detail of a piano lesson relating to the optimal utilisation of their young beginners' attention span, for the simple reason that it very often happens within the moment. After teaching for so many years, teaching becomes second nature, and therefore the piano teachers do not always think about all the methods and strategies that they employ in their lessons with young beginners if they are not reminded to reflect on a regular basis.

5.4.2 Recommendations for future research

Future research into child psychology should give better insight on the young piano beginners' attention span. Therefore, I recommend that future studies on young piano beginners' attention span should include collaborative research between piano teachers and child psychologists. In this way, new methods and

strategies for the optimal utilisation of the attention span might emerge, as piano teachers do not have the specialised knowledge on child psychology that child psychologists have. As it was my goal to develop a conceptual framework for the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span, I suggest for future research that this conceptual framework should be applied in the field. I recommend that this conceptual framework should be applied in piano lessons for young beginners in order to determine how effective the young piano beginners' attention span could be utilised optimally.

5.5 Conclusion

This instrumental case study enabled me to gain “in-depth information” (Creswell, 2013:97) on the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. It allowed me to identify similarities and differences regarding the methods piano teachers use and value for the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span. In this instrumental case study, I found that there are a number of challenges that piano teachers face with regard to young piano beginners' attention span. It is difficult to compete with the latest technology, and therefore piano teachers will have to think creatively and adapt their piano lessons to ensure that the young piano beginners' interest is stimulated. Piano teachers should also acknowledge young piano beginners' cognitive and physical development and be aware that they are unfamiliar with individual teaching. Therefore, piano teachers will have to create variety and allow regular breaks in their piano lessons to prevent mind-wandering. Young piano beginners will also need a lot of motivation from their piano teachers so that they can develop feelings of self-worth, importance and accomplishment. It is therefore very important that piano teachers incorporate musical activities in which young beginners will succeed. Detrimental activities should consequently be avoided to ensure that young piano beginners never feel like a failure.

Even though all four themes were equally discussed, I value active involvement and activities that require attentive listening as the two techniques that will best optimise the attention span. In my opinion, young piano beginners definitely pay better attention when something is demonstrated to them and when they are

given the opportunity to participate in the learning process. In my own lessons with young piano beginners, it also became evident that the minute I focus their attention to a musical activity that requires listening, they immediately pay attention. This proves to be true, according to Luey and Saperstein (2016:11), as they emphasise that the most important skill piano lessons teach children is the skill of active listening. When the skill of active listening is well developed, young piano beginners will become sensitive to all the sounds in the piano lesson. They will be able to identify incorrect notes, and they will develop the skill to compare their piano playing with their piano teacher's performance. This will ensure more enjoyable lessons for both learner and teacher and add to the child's success, which could ultimately optimise the attention span (Luey & Saperstein, 2016:11).

A child's attention span will never be the same in each lesson, as there are many factors that will influence how well they concentrate. Death in a family, problems at home and illness could affect how well young piano beginners concentrate. It is therefore important for piano teachers to have a good relationship with their young beginners so that they can be aware of their troubling thoughts and factors that might intervene with the piano lesson. My conceptual framework offers a variety of methods and suggestions that could be used to optimise the attention span of young piano beginners. It is structured and sequential but at the same time flexible so that it can be adapted to each child's individual needs and preferences. Not all children enjoy the same activities; therefore, if an activity does not require sufficient excitement, it might lead to a further decrease in their attention span. I therefore believe that all young piano beginners can benefit from this conceptual framework for the optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span, as it includes a spectrum of musical activities, games, methods and age-appropriate suggestions. It also provides piano teachers with tools to create their own musical activities and games to ensure that each child enjoys the piano lesson while his/her attention span can be optimally utilised.

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Annexure A



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12 July 2016

To whom it may concern

**Letter of consent:
“The optimal utilisation of young piano beginners’ attention span:
an instrumental case study”**

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher, or the North- West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

The purpose of this instrumental case study is to generate a conceptual framework from the literature reviewed and the data collected that explains how teachers optimise young piano beginners’ attention span. At this stage in the research, attention span can generally be defined as the length of time that a young learner can concentrate effectively on a particular task or activity, without becoming distracted.

For this study, the young piano beginner can be defined as a Foundation Phase learner who has just started learning to play the piano with no previous experience in this skill or activity.

Data will be collected in three stages:

1. At the beginning of the research project.
2. Midway through the research project

3. At the end of the research project.

Data collection will involve interviews between the researcher and piano teachers as well as the piano teachers' reflections on short tasks they had to implement in their individual teaching. Individuals involved in the data collection will be the researcher and piano teachers who teach young beginners.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. You will remain anonymous in this study. There are no known risks to you and/or discomforts associated with this study.

The expected benefits associated with your participation are the findings about young piano beginners' attention span and the opportunity to participate in a qualitative research study.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Kind regards,

Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher) Date 12 July 2016

Mignon van Vreden (study leader)  Date 12 July 2016

Signature of participant Date

Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher A)		Date 12 July 2016
Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher B)		Date 12 July 2016
Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher C)		Date 12/7/2016
Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher D)		Date 12 July 2016
Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher E)		Date 12 July 2016
Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher F)		Date 12 July 2016
Nadine Pretorius (primary researcher)		Date 12 July 2016
Mignon van Vreden (study leader)		Date 12 July 2016
Signature of participant (Teacher G)		Date 12 July 2016

Annexure B

Musical games

The shopping game

This game develops musical memory and pitch. The teacher starts by singing: “I went to the shops today and I bought...” on a melody that is familiar to the teacher and learner and then it is the learner’s turn. Every new item receives a new note; therefore one should remember the pitch as well as the item (McNally, 2006:28).

Scale game

This game improves a learner’s aural skills. The piano teacher gives a keynote and a chord, after which the learner and teacher will take turns to sing a degree of the scale. One can also play this game by singing the scale in thirds, in other words, the teacher starts singing the scale and the learner starts singing on the tonic two notes later (McNally, 2006:28).

Singing games

The teacher sings a melody and the learner must improvise an ending with his/her voice. This game promotes creativity (McNally, 2006:28).

Echoes

Pulse and rhythm are one of the most important skills to develop in music. Rhythmic skills can improve through rhythmic games. “Echoes” is a simple game where the teacher claps a rhythm and the learner must clap the rhythm back (McNally, 2006:28).

Clapping rhymes

The teacher must clap the rhythm of a nursery rhyme and the learner must guess what nursery rhyme it is. The teacher can challenge the learner by only clapping one line of the nursery rhyme and then the learner must clap or sing the ending as an answer (McNally, 2006:28).

Understanding note values

For this game the teacher asks the learner to clap a pattern of different note values. The learner must, for instance, switch from crotchets to quavers to minims on the cue of the teacher (McNally, 2006:28).

Musical spelling

It is important that learners should be able to recognise notes on the piano and in theory and also have well-developed reading skills. For this game, the teacher must spell words like, DEAD, BAD or DAD on the staff. The learner must then play the word on the piano or say the name out loud (McNally, 2006:29).

Spider fingers

This game will help learners to memorise their finger numbers and to read fingering in a music piece more easily. The learner must put their hands on a table in the correct hand position for piano playing; the teacher then calls out a finger number, and the learner must lift up that specific finger (McNally, 2006:29).

Musical Magical hoops

This game will improve a child's memory, help him/her to recognise colours, enhance their listening skills, help them to differentiate between sound and silence and develop their reflexes. The teacher must select a specific motor skill for each colour hoop; for example, standing on one leg, placing one's hands on one's head or sitting on the ground. When the music starts, the child must move through the classroom on the rhythm of the music. As soon as the music stops, the child must jump into the nearest hoop and then perform the specific motor skills allocated to that hoop (Pica, 2006:27).

Duct Tape Note Twister

This game will help children to learn note names. The teacher must design a grand staff by using duct tape. The teacher must lay the duct tape down on the entire length of the floor. The Twister party game is combined with this musical game. The teacher must then call out different note names in different clefs that learners

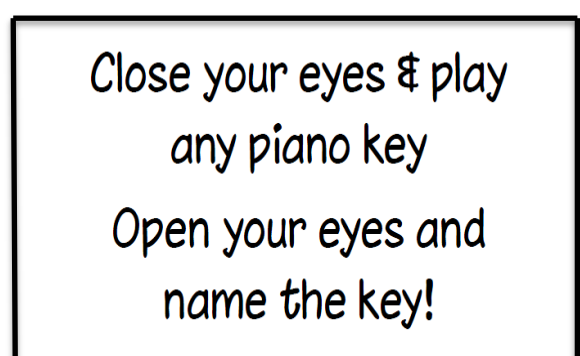
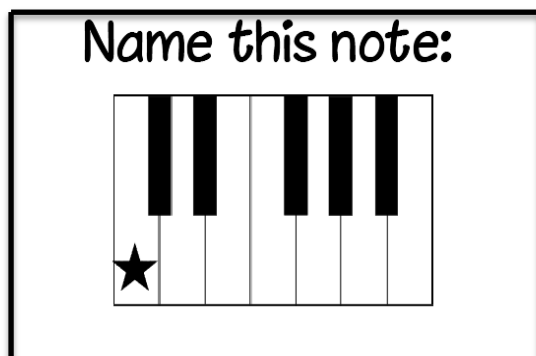
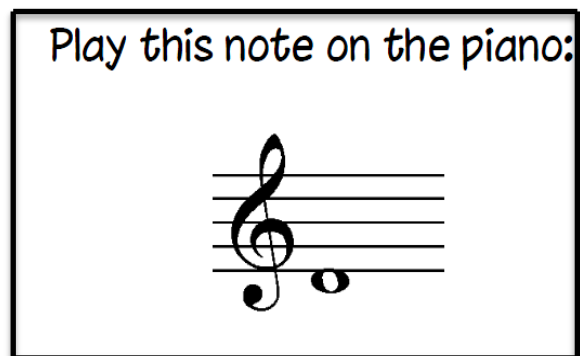
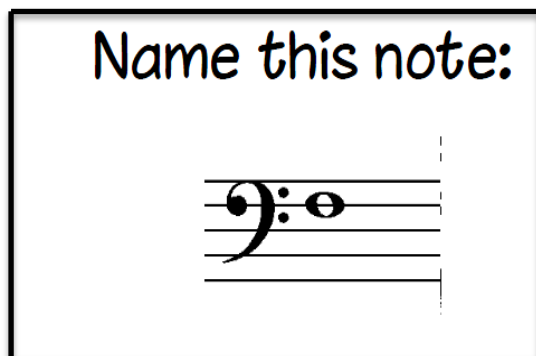
have to respond to, for example, “put your left foot on B in the treble clef” (McHenry, 2008:26).

Build a measure rhythm cards

This game will improve the learner’s knowledge on note values. The teacher must design cards with different note values. The teacher can start by creating part of a measure and then ask the learner to complete the measure by using one card, or the teacher can create a measure with too many note values and ask the learner to remove the correct card (Fink, 2016:1).

Flash Cards

Flash cards can be used to teach any kind of musical concept and teachers can design them themselves. Fink (2016:1) designed various flash cards to improve naming of notes, playing of notes, naming and playing the keys and to differentiate between skips and steps.



Play these 2 notes on the piano:

C + a skip up

Play 3
B keys
on the piano



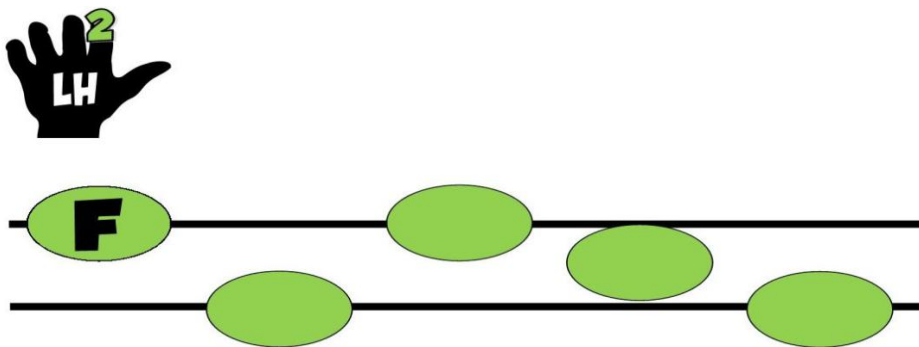
Keyboard Puzzles

Tidd (2013:1) uses keyboard puzzles to teach young piano beginners the arrangement of the keys. She will scramble the different keys and ask the young beginners to put them in the correct order and name the keys.



Steps and skips game

This game is also designed by Fink (2016). She designed a set of cards with either the right or the left hand on the card. A specific finger number is highlighted on the hand. One will see a pattern on the card that is made up of steps, skips or steps and skips combined. Once the learner receives a card, he/she must hold up the hand that matches the card and wiggle the matching finger. Then he/she must say the first note name of the pattern out loud. He/she must then play the pattern on the piano and finally say the last note name of the pattern out loud as well.



Small and big house game

Maggie Swanepoel's (1987:2) *Kleuterklawers* method book consists of creative piano games that could optimise young learners' attention span. The small and big house game is applicable to this study; as piano teachers normally show their young beginners the groups of two black keys and groups of three black keys in their initial piano lesson.

Swanepoel (1987:2) designed a game to teach young children the concept of high and low sounds on the piano. Piano teachers must ask their young beginners to play a group of two black keys (small house) or group three black keys (big house) in the high, middle and low registers of the piano. For example, when they play the small or big house in the high register they must squeak like a mouse and when they play the small or big house in the low register they must growl like a lion.

Listening game

Fink (2016:1) designed flashcards that will improve listening skills. The learner will receive a set of cards where he/she must differentiate between high and low sounds, happy and sad sounds, legato and staccato sounds and loud (*forte*) and soft (*piano*) sounds. The teacher will play these musical touches, dynamics and articulation on the piano.



Annexure C

Alfred's Basic Piano Library Lesson Book, level 1 A (Palmer *et al.*, 2002:37).

Balloons

TIED NOTES

When notes on the SAME LINE or SPACE are joined by a curved line, we call them TIED NOTES.

The key is held down for the COMBINED VALUES OF BOTH NOTES.



COUNT: "1 - 2 - 3, 1 - 2 - 3"

Moderately slow

1. Soar - ing so soft - ly they smooth - ly sail by,
 2. Glid - ing so gent - ly they glim - mer on high,

p

2 (TIED NOTES)

p

Float - ing like clouds as they fly,
 Bright - ning the blue sum - mer sky.



DUET PART (Student plays 1 octave higher.)

RH
 LH *p*

Annexure D

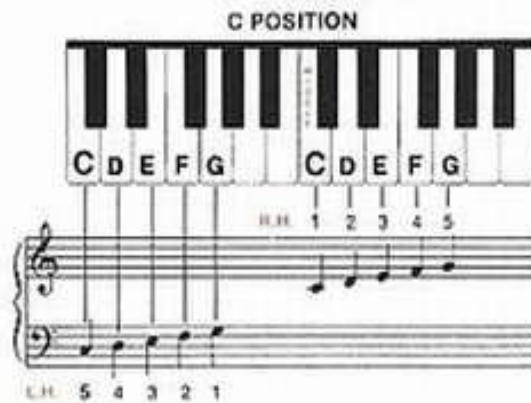
Alfred's Basic Piano Library Technic Book, level 1 A (Palmer *et al.*, 1984:4).

Group 2

Begin GROUP 2 EXERCISE with C POSITION ON THE GRAND STAFF (page 33).
Practice each exercise with HANDS SEPARATE until learned well, then with HANDS TOGETHER.

A. Double Plays

Keep the finger in contact with the key you are repeating.



Slow

1

mf

B. Triple Plays



Slow

1

p

Annexure E

Alfred's Basic Piano Library Recital Book, level 1 A (Palmer *et al.*, 1981:13).

Use after A HAPPY SONG (page 94).

Christopher Columbus



C POSITION

Moderately fast

1

1. Back in four - teen nine ty two,
2. Brave - ly he sailed on and on,
3. That great voy - age brought him fame,
Chris - to - pher Co lum - bust

mf 1

3

He sailed o'er the o cean blue.
Though his food was near ly gone.
Still we cel - e - brate his name.
Chris - to - pher Co - lum - bust

mf 1

5 2

With the Ni - na and the Pin - ts and the St. Mer - i - u, too;

1

Repeat the 1st 2 lines (3rd verse)

DUET PART: (Student plays 1 octave higher.)

2 R.H. 2 2

L.H. *f* *f* *mf* *D.C. al Fine*

Fine

Annexure F

Bastien Piano Library - Primer Piano Book (Bastien, 1985:43).



Love Somebody
「我喜愛了一個人」

Happily

1

1. Love some - bod - y, 'deed I do! Love some - bod - y, yes I do!
2. Who's the one that I like best? Some - one ver - y near to me.

1

1


Love some - bod - y, 'deed I do! I won't tell, I won't say what
I might tell who it may be. You're the one, oh can't you see!


Annexure G


Bastien Piano Library - Primer Theory Book (Bastien, 1991a:18).

18



How Notes Move on the Staff

Step 

Skip 

Repeat 

C Position (R.H.)


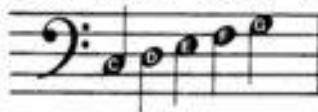
55. Write how these notes move on the staff. Write *step*, *skip*, or *repeat*. Play and name these notes.



Notes **on or above** the middle line have **down stems**. Notes **below** the middle line have **up stems**.



C Position (L.H.)

56. Write how these notes move on the staff. Write *step*, *skip*, or *repeat*. Play and name these notes.



WP205 Use with pages 26-29 of *Piano, Primer Level*.

Annexure H

Bastien Piano Library - Primer Technic Book (Bastien, 1986:11).

Copyrighted Material

11

Observe the ties.
Lift your hand at the end
of each slur on count 4.

Tied Score




Observe the ties.
Lift your hands at the end
of each slur on count 3.

All Tied Up!

Use with page 35 of Piano, Primer Level. WP215

Annexure I

Bastien Piano Library - Primer Performance Book (Bastien, 1991b:13).



Teeter-Totter

Smoothly

p Tee - ter, tot - ter, up and down we go.

Tee - ter, tot - ter, we'll have fun you know.

f Tee - ter, tot - ter, push with all your might.

Tee - ter, tot - ter, hang on ver - y tight!

Use with page 31 of Piano, Primer Level. WP210

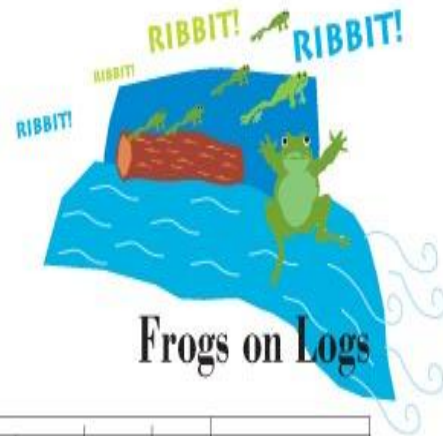
Annexure J

Faber and Faber – Piano Adventures Primer level, Lesson book (Faber & Faber, 2007:50).

Hopping Hand Position:

This piece uses a **hand shift** to “hop up” the keys.
Hint: A circled finger number will help you see a hand shift.

To prepare: Play C with R.H. finger 2. Hop to D with finger 2.
Hop to E with finger 2.



Frogs on Logs

Cheerfully

② on C 3 2 hop ② to D

mf Four - teen lit - tle frogs sat up - on a log.

(prepare L.H.)

5

hop ② to E 4 1

One by one they jumped in - to the lit - tle wa - ter - fall!

1 on _?



CREATIVE Play this piece with your L.H. in your lap.
For the **final bar**, do a L.H. “bullfrog leap” and play a VERY LOW C as a surprise.



Teacher Duet: (Student plays as written)

R.H.

L.H. *mp*

5

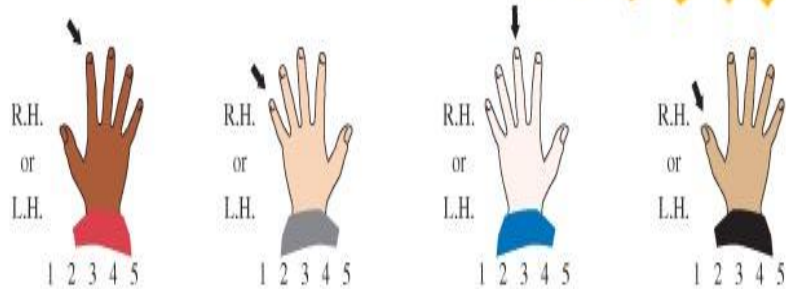
Annexure K

Faber and Faber – Piano Adventures Primer level, Theory book (Faber & Faber, 1996a:32).

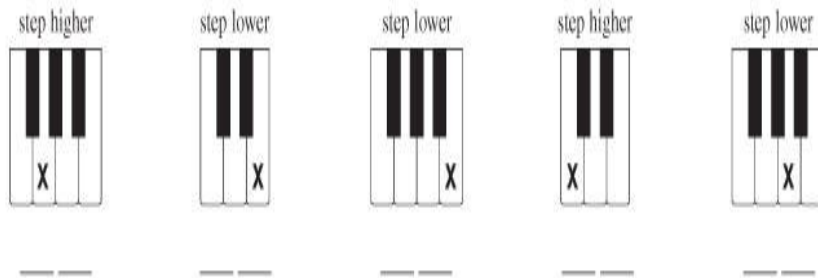
THEORY

Review (Units 1-3)

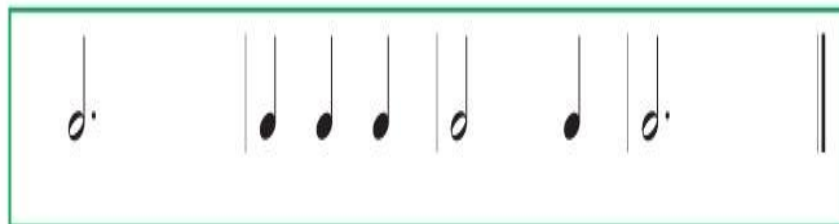
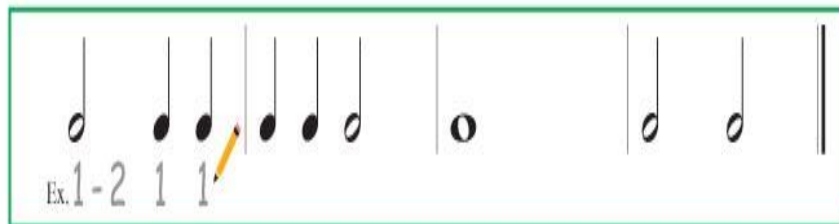
1. Circle the correct hand and finger number.



2. Shade the white key a **step higher** or **lower** than the key with an X. Then name both notes in the blanks.



3. Write the counts under each note for the rhythms below. Then tap and count.



Annexure L

Faber and Faber – Piano Adventures Primer level, Technique and Artistry book (Faber & Faber, 1995:11).

ETUDE

Legato Etude

- Play hands separately. Watch for **steps** and **skips**.
- Play hands together. Listen for a smooth *legato*.



Carl Czerny
(1791-1857, Austria)
Op. 599

Slowly, smoothly

Legato/Staccato Etude

- Listen for a smooth *legato* and crisp *staccatos*.



Ferdinand Beyer
(1803-1863, Germany)
Op. 101

Moderately

Annexure M

Faber and Faber – Piano Adventures Primer level, Performance book (Faber & Faber, 1996b:40).



Dancing with Frankenstein

Dancing merrily
 INTRO $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{1}$ *Play 4 times!* 5

p Frank - en - stein, Frank - en - stein, he's in a trance, (2 - 3)

2 on __?

9 $\frac{3}{1}$

Whirl - ing and twirl - ing his strange mon - ster dance. (2 - 3)

2

Teacher Duet: (Student plays 1 octave higher)

INTRO

R.H. $\frac{3}{4}$ 5 13

L.H. *pp* *cresc.* *mp*



Annexure N

John Thompson Method Book, Part 1 (Thompson, 2011:11).

Middle C in Crotchets

Four counts to each bar.



A CROTCHET looks like this ( or ) and gets one count.

Moccasin Dance

Count: One Two Three Four

Accompaniment



Annexure O

Suzuki Piano School, Vol 1 Method Book (Suzuki, 2008:9).

9

1

“Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” Variations

Variations sur « Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman »
Variationen über „Leuchte, Leuchte kleiner Stern“
Variaciones de “Estrellita”

Variation A

Shinichi Suzuki
(1898–1998)



Right hand



Musical notation for Variation A, measures 1-2. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature. It features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 1, 4, 5, and 4.

3 *simile*



Musical notation for Variation A, measures 3-4. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature. It features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 3, 2, 1, and 1. A large watermark "boosey.com/shop" is overlaid on the page.

5



Musical notation for Variation A, measures 5-6. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature. It features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 4, 3, 2, and 1.

7



Musical notation for Variation A, measures 7-8. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature. It features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 4, 3, 2, and 1.

9



Musical notation for Variation A, measures 9-10. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature. It features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 1, 4, 5, and 4.

11



Musical notation for Variation A, measures 11-12. The notation is in treble clef with a common time signature. It features a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 3, 2, 1, and 1.

Annexure P

Brain Gym exercises

Belly Breathing

Learners must place their hands on their abdomen and blow the air out of their mouths through short puffs, until their lungs feel empty. They must then inhale deeply, so that their tummies are swollen like a balloon, and then slowly exhale again. Learners must repeat this three times. This exercise will provide oxygen to the learner's whole body and relax their central nervous system. Their reading and speaking skills will also improve (Alexander, 2011:1). In a piano lesson, it will help the young piano beginners to read the notes of the piano pieces better and more effectively.

Brain Buttons

Leaners must place one hand on his/her navel and the thumb and fingers of the other hand on the two hollow parts under their collarbone. They must rub those parts for thirty seconds to one minute while they look from right to left. This exercise will improve reading, writing, and speaking skills and it will help the learners to follow directions (Alexander, 2011:1). In a piano lesson, it will improve the young beginner's sight reading and help him/her to complete music theory exercises successfully. It will also help the young piano beginner to communicate with the piano teacher and follow directions regarding the piano lesson.

Cross-Crawl

Learners must march in one place while each hand touches the opposite knee. While they are doing this, they must take four to eight relaxed breaths. These exercises will co-ordinate the whole brain and improve listening, reading, writing and memory skills (Alexander, 2011:1). In a piano lesson, it will enable the young beginners to read the notes of their piano piece better and it will allow them listen carefully for instructions regarding their piano piece. It could also help the young beginner to memorise his/her piano piece.

The Energy Yawn

While the learners yawn, they must place the fingertips of each hand on the parts of their cheeks where they feel tension. They must now make a relaxed, deep yawning sound while they stroke the tension away in order for the jaw and eyes to relax (Alexander, 2011:1). This exercise will ensure that young piano beginners are more relaxed when playing piano.

Lazy Eights

Learners must elevate their one arm with their thumb pointing upwards. They must now draw a figure eight on its side in the air. They must first draw the 8 at eye level, then more to the left, then back to the centre and then all the way to the right. The learner must repeat this exercise three times, first with the one hand and then with the other hand and finally with both hands clasped together. This exercise will improve their visual abilities as well as their balance and coordination (Alexander, 2011:1). This exercise will especially help the young piano beginners when they have to play piano pieces with both hands.

The Rocker

Alexander (2011:1) explains this exercise as a young learner sitting on a soft surface on the floor. The learner must bend his/her knees and place his/her feet together in front of him/her. The learner must now lean back so that the weight is on his/her hands and hips, and start rocking back and forth or in circles. This exercise will help the learner to focus, concentrate and understand concepts better (Alexander, 2011:1). Young piano beginners will therefore be able to understand musical concepts more easily and concentrate on all aspects involved in a piano lesson more effectively.

Space Buttons

Learners must place two fingers above their upper lip and their other hand on their lower back pointing downward, so that the finger tips touch their tailbone. They must then breathe deeply while they gradually look up to the ceiling and then down the floor. They must repeat this three times. This exercise will improve the learner's focus and it will motivate him/her in making decisions (Alexander, 2011:1). In a

piano lesson, this exercise could ensure that the young piano beginner stay focused for the duration of the lesson.

The Thinking Cap

The learner must rub the outer edges of both his/her ears from top to bottom simultaneously and repeat it three times. This exercise will help them to block out distractions and it will improve their listening skills, short term memory and abstract thinking abilities (Alexander, 2011:1). This exercise could prevent young piano beginners from becoming distracted during a piano lesson and help them to listen attentively while playing piano.

Annexure Q

Interview Protocol

Title: The optimal utilisation of young piano beginners' attention span: an instrumental case study

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee (s):

Description of project

Includes: Researcher's aim; purpose of study; protection of participants which includes confidentiality, willingness to continue as participant, use of data, access to final report, and permission to record interviews.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What age is most suitable to start with piano lessons?

A) Probes: Why would you say so?

2. Give an explanation of your first lesson with a young piano beginner?

A) Probes:

- Will you please give more detail on how you structure your first piano lessons?
- Please elaborate on your teaching approaches and techniques?

3. Give an explanation of the successive lessons?

A) Probes:

- Will you please give more detail on how you structure your

successive piano lessons?

- Please elaborate on your teaching approaches and techniques?

4. Which piano beginner books would you consider being the most suitable for young beginners?

A) Probes: Why would you say so?

5. Do you make use of any other teaching material during the course of your lesson?

6. What problems do you experience in respect of the young beginner's concentration during the piano lesson?

A) Probes: What else can you remember regarding their concentration?

7. What methods do you use to optimally utilise the young piano beginner's attention span?

A) Probes: Will you please elaborate on the strategies you use when the young piano beginner's attention deviate?

8. In your opinion, what motivates children to start with piano lessons?

9. Which techniques/strategies do you use to keep the young piano beginners motivated?

Thank you statement

I'd like to thank you as participant for your time and sharing your knowledge and opinions with me.

Annexure R

Data collection schedule

	Date	Activity
Week 1	2 May – 6 May 2016	1. Feedback on first interview 2. Attention curve task
Week 2	9 May – 13 May 2016	3. Campbell and Scott-Kassner's adaptation of Gagné's theory to musical instruction task
Week 3	16 May – 20 May 2016	4. Musical play task
Week 4	23 May – 27 May 2016	5. Kodály task 6. Dalcroze task
Week 5	30 May – 3 June 2016	7. Orff task 8. Suzuki task
Week 6	6 June – 10 June 2016	9. Brain Gym task

It is required from you as participant to be done with Task:

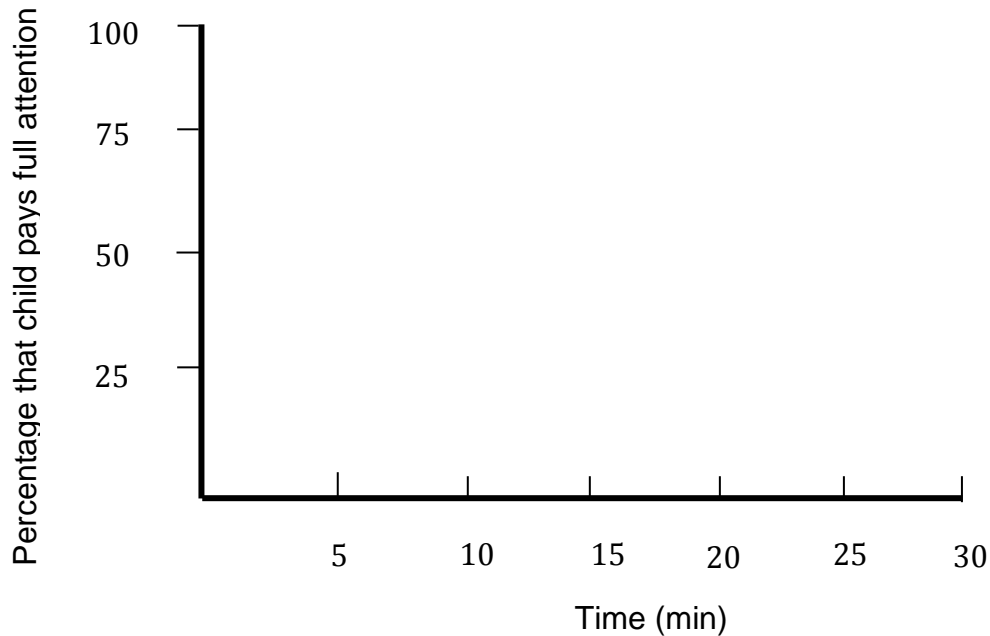
- One and Two on the 6th of May
- Three on the 13th of May
- Four on the 20th of May
- Five and Six of the 27th of May
- Seven and Eight on the 3rd of June
- Nine on the 10th of June

Task 1

Verify your answers from the first interview and add additional information where needed.

Task 2

In your thirty-minute lessons with young piano beginners, determine where their attention is at its highest and lowest by drawing an attention curve on the graph below.



Task 3

Apply Campbell and Scott-Kassner's adaptation of Gagné's nine steps of instruction in your piano lessons with young piano beginners. Reflect on how the young piano beginners experienced the piano lesson and how these steps affected their attention span.

Detailed description of Campbell and Scott-Kassner's adaptation of Gagné's nine steps

- **Steps 1 and 2:** At the onset of the piano lesson, the young piano beginner's attention should be gained; therefore the teacher should encourage the young piano beginners to participate. For example, the teacher claps a rhythm and asks the learner to imitate that same rhythm. It is important that the rhythm they clapped at the onset of the lesson is relevant to the piano piece they are going to learn.

- **Step 3:** The teacher should now introduce the new piano piece to the young piano beginner by playing it to them. This will help them to hear and comprehend the new piano piece.
- **Step 4:** The teacher can assist learning by dividing the piano piece into smaller sections and highlighting repeated patterns. By doing this the teacher can focus the young piano beginner's attention on difficult melodic and rhythmic sections.
- **Step 5:** The young piano beginners should now sight-sing the melodic patterns and clap the rhythmic patterns of the piano piece and finally attempt to play it on the piano.
- **Step 6:** The piano teacher must now give feedback.
- **Step 7:** The piano teacher must assess the young piano beginner's performance and let him/her do self-evaluation.
- **Step 8:** The young piano beginner should finally be encouraged to improvise on the piano piece. This will help them to reinforce the musical concepts and skills and help them to apply these concepts and skills to new musical concepts.

Task 4

Play the musical game "Echoes" with your young piano beginners. Reflect on how they experienced the game and how it affected their attention span.

Echoes

Pulse and rhythm is one of the most important skills to develop in music. Musical rhythm improves and becomes more clearly through rhythmic games. This is a simple game where the teacher claps a rhythm and the learner must clap it back.

Task 5

The Dalcroze approach emphasises the importance of movement and rhythm as the primary elements in music.

- Explain to your young piano beginner that crotchets (quarter notes) are walking notes and quavers (eighth notes) are running notes.

- Start the exercise by playing a melody that consists of quarter notes and ask the young piano beginner to walk on each quarter note.
- Next you must play a melody that consist of eighth notes and ask the young piano beginner to tripple on their toes on the eighth notes.
- As soon as the young piano beginners are comfortable with the two exercises, you can challenge them by playing a melody where you vary between quarter notes and eighth notes. The young piano beginner must then walk when they hear quarter notes and tripple on their toes when they hear the eighth notes.

Reflect on how they experienced the activity and how it affected their attention span.

Task 6

The voice is the main instrument in teaching the Kodály Approach. Tonic sol-fa is one of the tools used in the Kodály Approach. Tonic sol-fa consists of *doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, doh* where the *doh* is seen as the tonal centre of the major keys.

- Ask the young piano beginners to sing *doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, doh* to a few major scales.

Reflect on how they experienced the activity and how it affected their attention span.

Task 7

The Orff approach is used to guide children through four phases of musical development namely exploration, imitation, improvisation and creation.

This activity will involve the improvisation phase:

Play two melodies on the piano. The first melody must have a slow tempo and a sad melody and the second melody must have a fast tempo and a lively melody. You can use “Happy birthday” for the lively melody and “Wiegenlied” for the sad melody, or you can improvise your own melodies on the piano.

Happy Birthday

trad.



Wiegenlied

Calm



mp



decresc. -

Ask the young beginner to choose a percussion instrument that suits the tempo and character of the melody (for example, a triangle for a sad, slow melody and a tambourine for a lively, fast melody) and give them the opportunity to improvise a rhythm on those percussion instruments while you play the two melodies on the piano.

Reflect on how they experienced the activity and how it affected their attention span.

Task 8

The Suzuki approach is based on sound before symbol, therefore young beginners will develop an aural perception through repetition, demonstration and imitation.

- Choose a new piano piece that consists of eight bars and play the piece to the young piano beginner. They are not allowed to see the notes, therefore ask them to turn around while you play it. Repeat the piece a few times until the young beginner has the melody in his/her ear.
- The next step is to demonstrate the piece to the young beginner. Then the young beginner must be given the opportunity to explore on the piano to find the correct notes. If eight bars are too long to remember, the piano teacher must simplify the exercise by only playing the first four bars.
- The final step is to show them the notes. The young beginner must now play the piece again, but while reading the notes. This should help him/her to learn the piano piece easily, because he/she already has an aural image of the notation.

Reflect on how they experienced the activity and how it affected their attention span.

Task 9

Do one or more of the following four *Brain Gym* exercises with your young piano beginners. Stipulate which exercise(s) you chose and reflect on how they experienced them and how these exercise(s) affected their attention span.

- **Cross-Crawl**

Learners must march in one place while each hand touches the opposite knee. While they are doing this, they must take four to eight relaxed breaths. These exercises will coordinate the whole brain and improve listening, reading, writing and memory skills (Alexander, 2011:1). In a piano lesson, it will enable the young beginners to read the notes of their piano piece better and it will allow them listen carefully for instructions regarding their piano piece. It could also help the young beginner to memorise his/her piano piece.

- **The Energy Yawn**

While the learners yawn, they must place their fingertips of each hand on the parts of their cheeks where they feel tension. They must now make a relaxed, deep yawning sound while they stroke the tension away in order for the jaw and eyes to relax (Alexander, 2011:1). This exercise will ensure that young piano beginners are more relaxed when playing piano.

- **The Thinking Cap**

The learner must rub the outer edges of both his/her ears from top to bottom simultaneously and repeat it three times. This exercise will help them to block out distractions and it will improve their listening skills, short-term memory and abstract thinking abilities (Alexander, 2011:1). This exercise could prevent young piano beginners from becoming distracted during a piano lesson and could help them to listen attentively while playing piano.

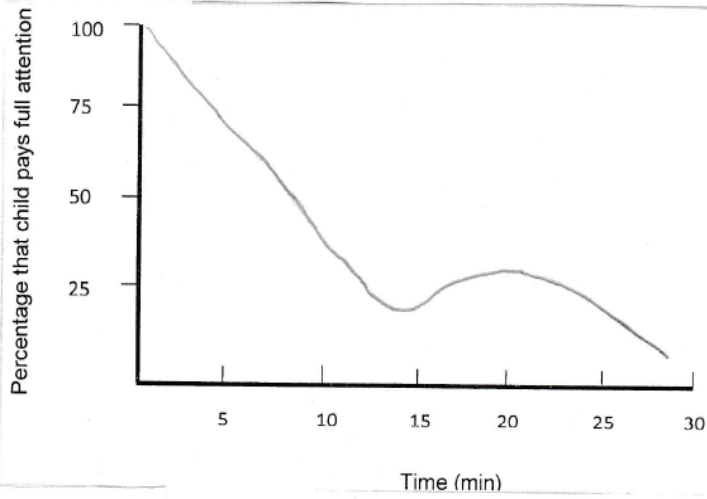
- **Belly Breathing**

Learners must place their hands on their abdomen and blow the air out of their mouths through short puffs, until their lungs feel empty. They must then inhale deeply, so that their tummies are swollen like a balloon, and then slowly exhale again. Learners must repeat this three times. This exercise will provide oxygen to the learner's whole body and relax their central nervous system. Their reading and speaking skills will also improve (Alexander, 2011:1). In a piano lesson, it will help the young piano beginners to read the notes of the piano pieces better and more effectively.

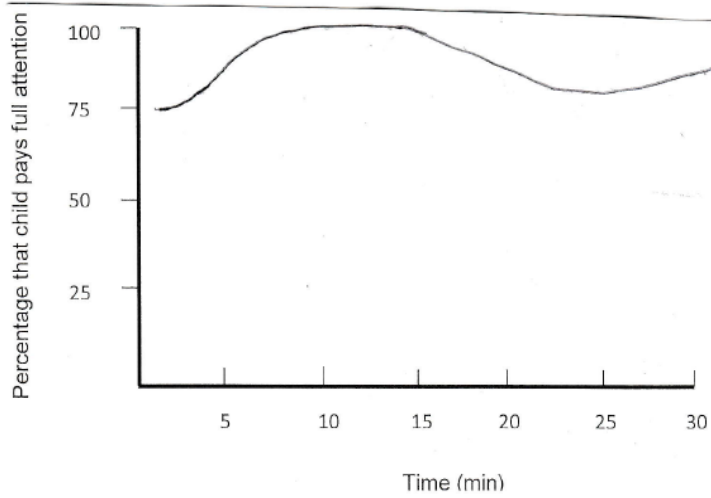
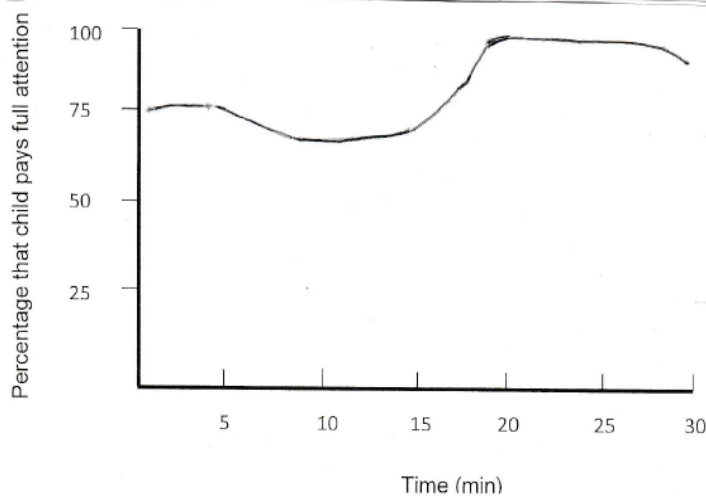
Annexure S

Attention curves

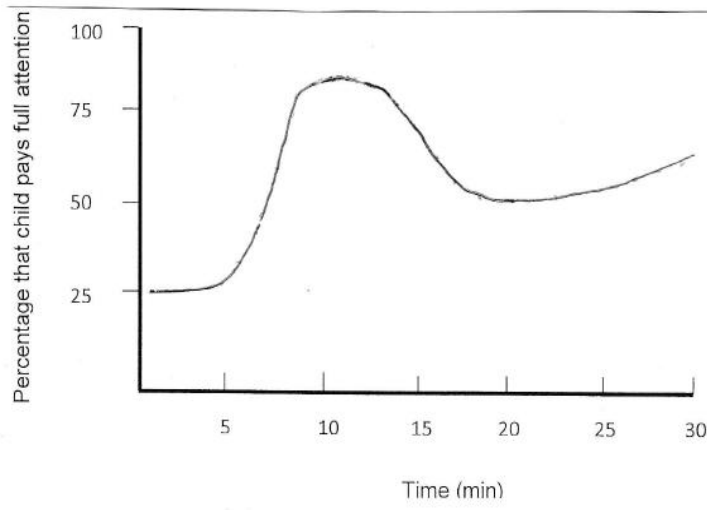
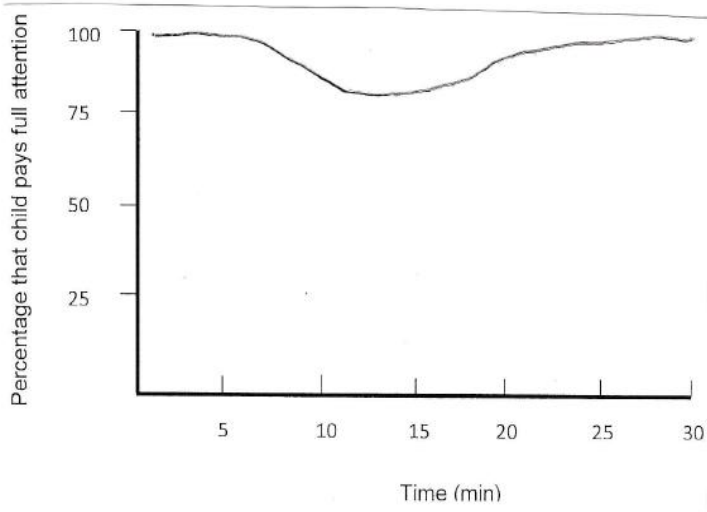
Teacher A



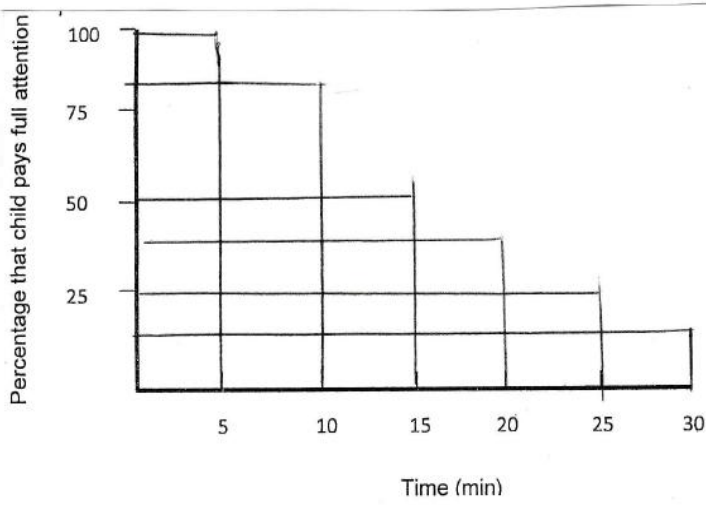
Teacher B



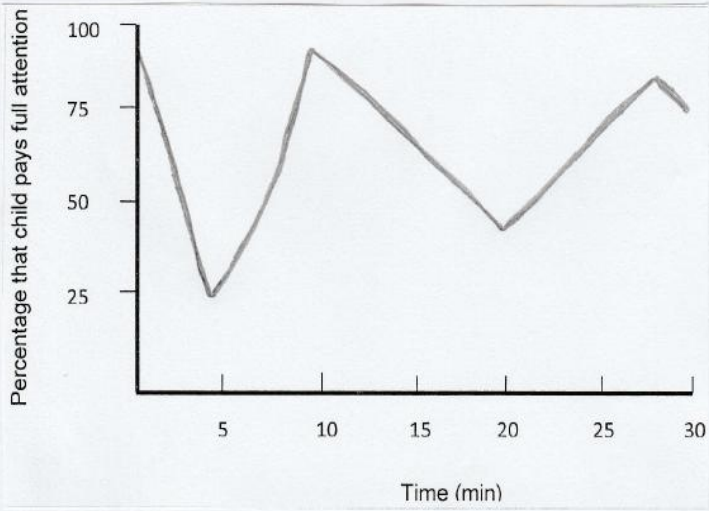
Teacher B



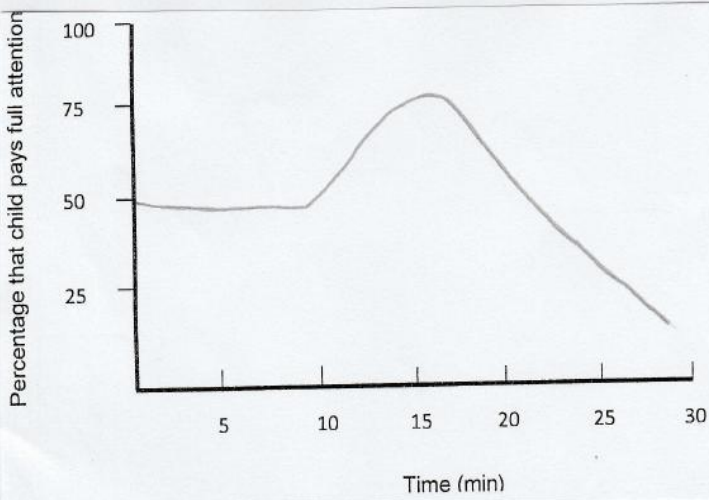
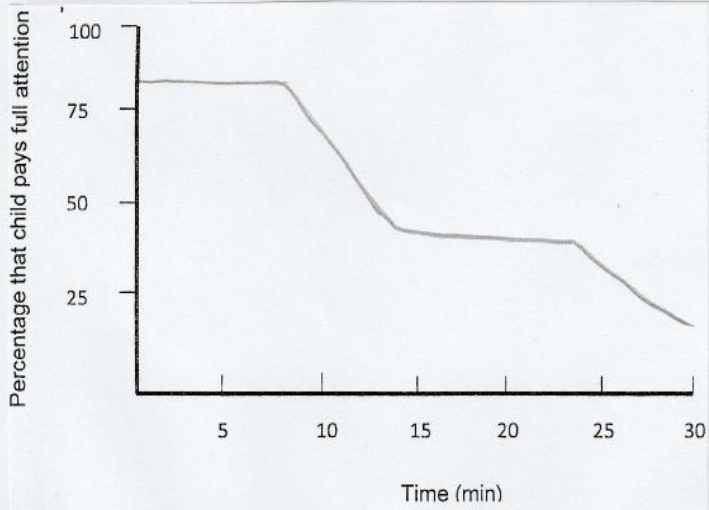
Teacher C



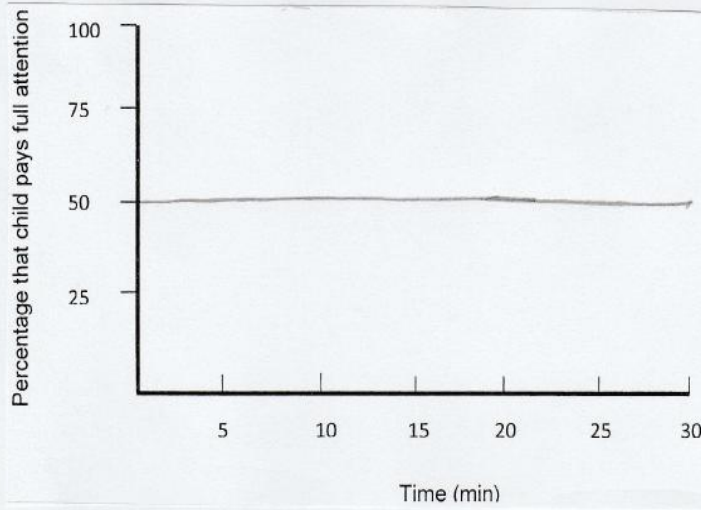
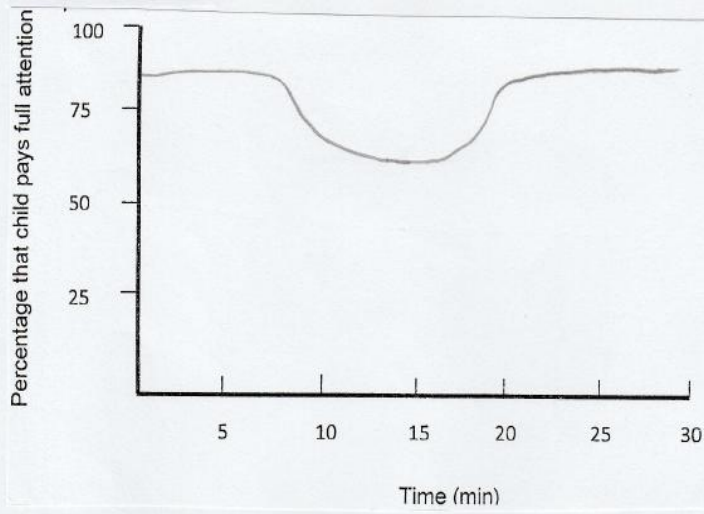
Teacher D



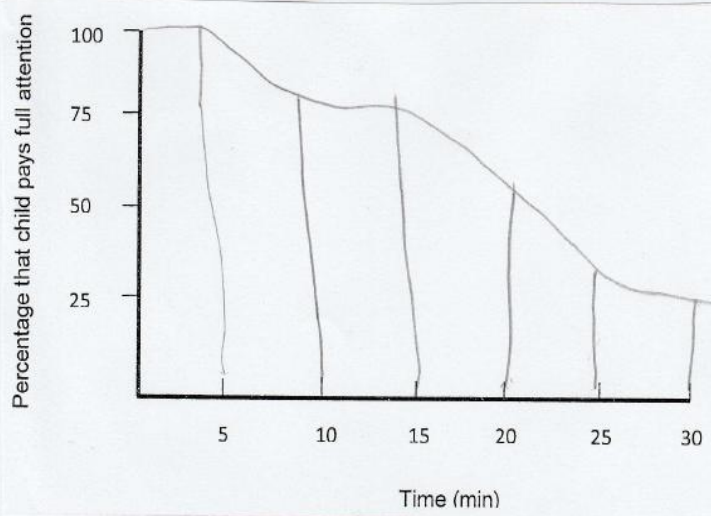
Teacher E

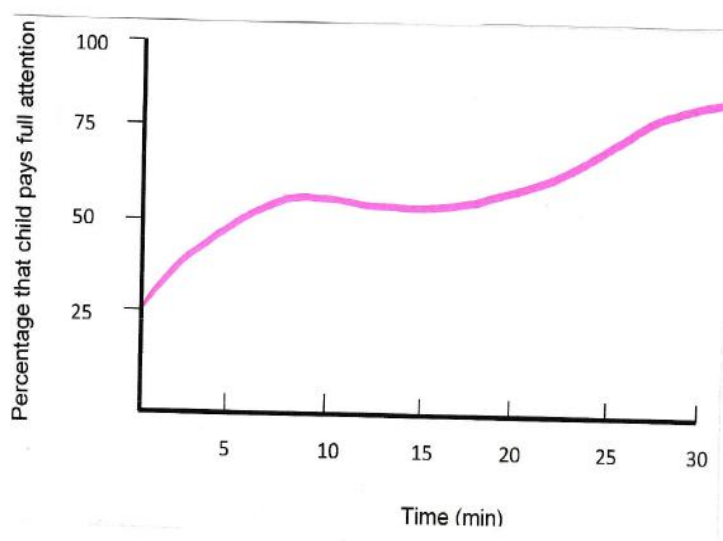
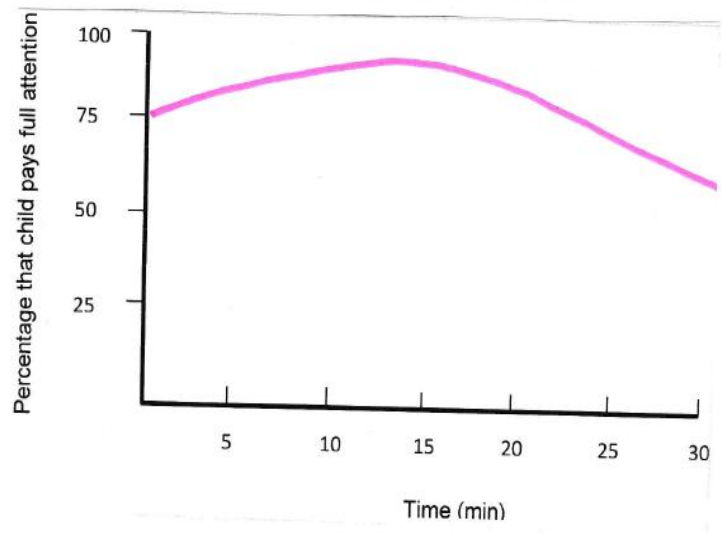
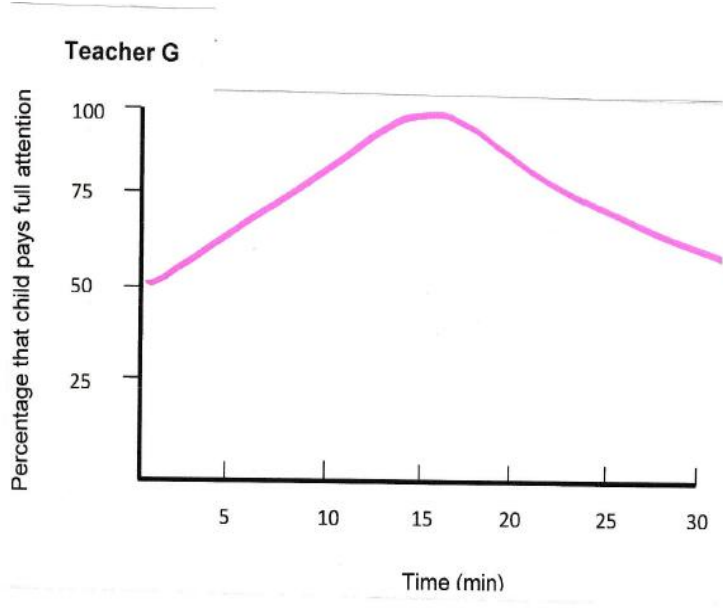


Teacher E

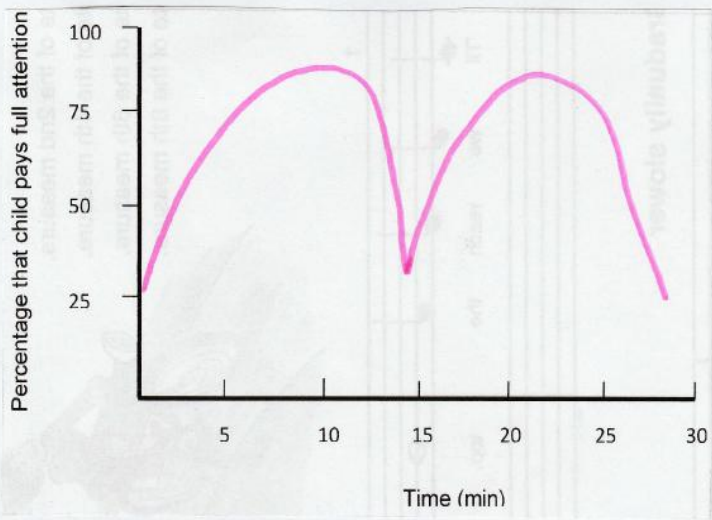
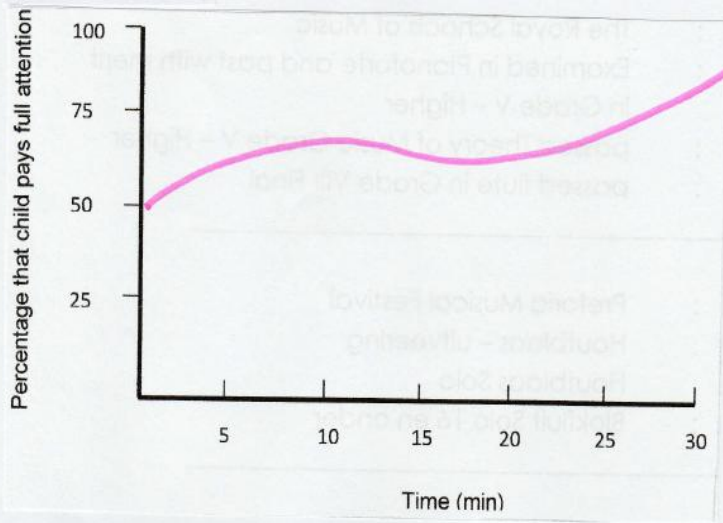


Teacher F





Teacher G



Annexure T

Ring-a-ring-a-rosies (Van Sittert & Steenkamp, 2004:11).

II. Ring-a-Ring-a-Rosies

Tradisioneel

Musical score for 'Ring-a-Ring-a-Rosies' in 4/4 time. The score is written for piano and voice. The melody is in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The lyrics are: Ring - a - ring - a ro - sies, po - cket full of po - sies. Hush, hush, all fall down!

The score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 1-3, and the second system covers measures 4-7. The melody is marked with a '3' above the first measure of each system, indicating a triplet. The accompaniment is marked with a '3' below the first measure of the first system and a '4' above the first measure of the second system, indicating a triplet and a four-measure phrase respectively.

Annexure U

Examples of short rhythms to capture young piano beginners' attention

Five examples of short rhythms in 4/4 time, each on a single treble clef staff. The rhythms are:

- Example 1: A quarter note followed by two eighth notes.
- Example 2: A quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note.
- Example 3: A quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note.
- Example 4: A quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note.
- Example 5: A quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note.

Annexure V







Annexure W

Familiar repertoire for young piano beginners

Jingle Bells (Van Sittert & Steenkamp, 2004:19).

19. Jingle bells

Tradisioneel

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four systems of music. Each system has a treble clef staff with a vocal line and a bass clef staff with a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. The first system starts at measure 3 and ends at measure 4. The second system starts at measure 5 and ends at measure 8. The third system starts at measure 9 and ends at measure 12. The fourth system starts at measure 13 and ends at measure 16. The piano accompaniment consists of a simple bass line with quarter notes and half notes. The vocal line consists of quarter notes and half notes, with a slur over the first three notes of each system.

3
Jing - le bells, jing - le bells, jing - le all the way.

5
Oh what fun it is to ride on (a) one horse o - pen slay hey!

9
Jing - le bells, jing - le bells, jing - le all the way.

13
Oh what fun it is to ride on (a) one horse o - pen slay.

Loof Hom met die tromme (Van Sittert & Steenkamp, 1999:10).



Loof Hom met die tromme

Tradisioneel



Here Jesus, ek is klein (Van Sittert & Steenkamp, 2004:26).

26. Here Jesus, ek is klein

W. Bradbury
Teks: Attie van der Colf

He - re - Je - sus - ek is klein, maak U self my le - we rein.

Laat ek al - tyd van U leer, laat ek groot word tot U eer.

O Je - sus neem my, O Je - sus lei my,


O Je - sus sterk my, en vorm my tot U eer.

The musical score is written in 4/4 time. It consists of four systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The lyrics are in Afrikaans. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Slurs are used to group notes across measures. The piano accompaniment consists of a simple bass line with quarter and eighth notes.




Mary had a little lamb (Thompson, 2011:18).

18

Read Aloud



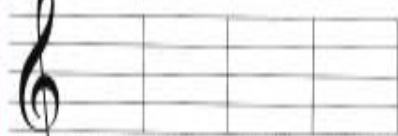
Mary Had a Little Lamb



Accompaniment



Write the new note **E** below.



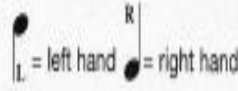
● Semibreve Minim Dotted Crotchet
Minim

Annexure X

Frances Clark – The Music Tree, Student’s book: Time to Begin (Clark *et al.*, 1999:4).

UNIT ONE
DISCOVERIES

Play all pieces in this unit on groups of 2 black keys. Use your pointer fingers.


 = left hand = right hand

In *Take Off* there are:


4 groups of notes

4 notes in each group

Each group begins with



All groups are alike except each group **looks**



 LOWER HIGHER

each group **sounds**


LOWER HIGHER

4

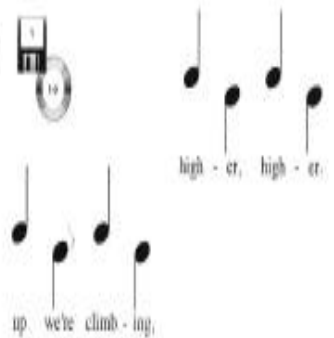
1. Learning about Higher

When notes LOOK higher, they SOUND higher, and you PLAY up the keyboard, to the right.



Take Off




high - er, high - er.

up - we're climb - ing,

big air - lin - er,

Get a - board the



Annexure Y

PD-Filter: All

HU: Attention span of young piano beginners
File: [C:\Users\Nadine Pretorius\Desktop\Meesters research\Attention span of young piano beginners.hpr7]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 2016-11-07 14:10:22

- P 1: teacher A interview 1.docx {32} [Managed in My Library -> F:\teacher A interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P 2: teacher B interview 1.docx {35} [Managed in My Library -> F:\teacher B interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P 3: teacher C interview 1.docx {31} [Managed in My Library -> F:\teacher C interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P 4: teacher D interview 1.docx {30} [Managed in My Library -> F:\teacher D interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P 7: teacher G interview 1.docx {37} [Managed in My Library -> F:\teacher G interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P 8: teacher E interview 1.docx {52} [Managed in My Library -> E:\teacher E interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P 9: teacher F interview 1.docx {46} [Managed in My Library -> E:\teacher F interview 1.docx] text/rtf**
- P10: Teacher A interview 2.docx {43} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher A interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P11: Teacher B interview 2.docx {40} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher B interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P12: Teacher C interview 2.docx {35} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher C interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P13: Teacher D interview 2.docx {38} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher D interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P14: Teacher E interview 2.docx {31} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher E interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P15: Teacher F interview 2.docx {36} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher F interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P16: Teacher G interview 2.docx {37} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Teacher G interview 2.docx] text/rtf**
- P17: Follow up interviews.docx {29} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Follow up interviews.docx] text/rtf**
- P18: Follow up interviews 2.docx {18} [Managed in My Library -> E:\Follow up interviews 2.docx] text/rtf**

Code-Filter: All

HU: Attention span of young piano beginners

File: [C:\Users\Nadine Pretorius\Desktop\Meesters research\Attention span of young piano beginners.hpr7]

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4.1 OPTIMAL UTILIZATION OF ATTENTION SPAN

4.1.1 CREATING VARIETY

4.1.1.1 Alternate piano lesson structure

4.1.1.2 Supplementary teaching material

4.1.1.3 Body percussion

4.1.1.4 Body movement

4.1.1.5 Listening activities

4.1.1.6 Allow a brief intermission

4.1.2 STIMULATING INTEREST

4.1.2.1 Active involvement

4.1.2.2 Creative techniques

4.1.2.3 Motivational strategies

4.1.3 AVOIDING DETRIMENTAL ACTIVITIES

4.1.3.1 Difficult activities

4.1.3.2 Over stimulating activities

4.1.3.3 Unusual activities

4.2 CHALLENGES RELATED TO ATTENTION SPAN

4.2.1 Children experience difficulty in paying attention

4.2.2 Negative influence of technology

4.2.3 Unfamiliar with individual teaching

4.2.4 Child development