

It's ^{all} ~~None~~ of Your Business

A New Calendar, A New Paradigm

It is 20 degrees and snow is still on the ground here in the Midwest; what better time to think summer, or better yet, *re-think* summer. The superintendent of my state's largest school district, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), met last November with hundreds of out-of-school-time providers (such as YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, afterschool enrichment programs, church groups) and challenged them to re-think summer as "out-of-school-time" programming. IPS is championing a new "balanced" calendar that reduces the current summer break from 10 weeks to five weeks, adds three-week breaks in the fall and spring, and increases winter break to four weeks. A primary reason for this proposal is to counter the documented "summer learning loss" of children who are away from a structured school routine for two to three months. I can almost hear music teachers cheering! Our profession has long advocated that taking the summer off from music study results in skill and learning loss and the need to catch up in the fall.

Summer As We Know It

Traditionally, independent teachers have taken one of several approaches to summer lessons and income:

- Charge for a full year of lessons, with an option for x lessons to be missed for vacations and so on. Essentially, there is no summer hiatus; parents pay a full-year fee, usually in monthly payments, and students study year-round.
- Charge for the academic year, with a mandatory summer session. The teacher may offer one or more ways to fulfill the summer session requirement—private lessons, group lessons, camps or a combination.
- Charge for the academic year, with an optional summer session(s). The summer session may be a regular calendar of private/group lessons, or the teacher may offer the option of x number of lessons to be scheduled at mutually convenient times. Some teachers charge a holding fee for those who take the summer off but plan to return in the fall.

Summer income for independent teachers is a challenging issue. Students want a break from practicing and parents want a break from paying. Everyone wants to relax and enjoy a different pace and new activities.

A New Look At Summer

Now back to the IPS proposal. During the three-week fall and spring breaks (or "intersessions"), IPS is encouraging us to re-think when and how we offer music study (and other afterschool activities). Parents will be looking for activities that can fill a half or full day. Imagine a mini-camp or week-long intensive that provides group interaction, especially for students usually in private lessons. Such a camp or group class would provide an opportunity to focus comprehensively on a particular topic, or to work intensively on specific skills or to undertake a community service project. As schools shift to balanced or year-round

calendars, there are new business opportunities for independent teachers to create new products for non-summer months.

Who says camps can only occur in the summer? Why save the adventures and "fun" topics for summer? IPS is challenging us to fill ALL breaks with structured activities. A colleague in southern Indiana holds a Christmas mini-camp on a Saturday in December; students rehearse Christmas ensembles, make Christmas cards, then visit a retirement home where they perform Christmas music and distribute the cards.

A project-based camp might focus on composition, where everyone participates in improvisation activities, chooses an idea on which to build a composition and works with *Finale* to notate the composition. Add some art activities to create a cover and the student has an attractive original composition to share.

Music teachers don't have to create an entire camp from scratch in order to create music activities for campers. There are many out-of-school providers, such as YMCA, Girls and Boys Club, community centers and churches, who welcome the idea of adding music classes to their afterschool program or camp. Financially, these partnership ventures take many forms. Some pass the cost directly to the parent. Some cover the cost through grants or donations. True, most expect that you will charge a reduced rate since the families involved are usually lower income, but with group classes, a teacher can make more per hour than with private lessons (and each family pays less for the group class than for private lessons). An advantage is the teacher doesn't have to find the children to participate—they

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are ready and waiting at the after-school venue.

Collaborating with other teachers (piano or other instruments or even other disciplines such as dance, art or theater) can be an efficient and effective means of creating camps or group events. Workload and expenses are shared, and the creative collaboration process is stimulating and refreshing. There's an excellent chapter on creating and organizing music camps in *The Independent Piano Teacher's Studio Handbook*.

Another idea for summer breaks, or breaks at any time of year, is an introductory class. "An introduction to piano" for kindergarten children, over a five-day or five-week period, will create excitement about music making and show parents what piano study involves. It's also a great way to develop a pipeline of future private students. The most successful class that my Community Arts School launched last year was for beginning adults. We offered a lunchtime option and piloted the class during the summer. The response was immediate, and we filled two classes within days of sending out e-mail announcements to current parents, neighbors and friends. Some participants faded once the school year began, but others have continued and word-of-mouth filled the next session.

So even if your school district observes a traditional lengthy summer break, think about year-round programming for your studio that will attract and engage new audiences or re-invigorate existing students. Re-think what you can provide musically to your community. Re-think what summer teaching is or, better yet, what it *could* be if not constrained to traditional summer months. Take advantage of these dark winter days and start planning. "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." (Will Rodgers)

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