



simply music gateway



Simply Music Gateway: Program Overview

The New Path to Fine Motor Development
& Musical Self-expression

Karen Nisenson, MM, MA, BCMT

1. What is the Simply Music Gateway Program?

The Simply Music Gateway program (SMG) is a playing-based piano method designed for those with profound special needs and learning differences, including those on the Autism spectrum, as well as those with learning disabilities, neurological dysfunction, developmental delays, and ADHD. It provides a new means of self-expression through music, and gives all students the opportunity and ability to play the piano and experience music making without the need to acquire the technical, theoretical and physical skills and attributes typically associated with traditional methods of piano learning.

For many of those with complex learning differences there is difficulty in sequencing, outlining or comprehending the steps needed to learn and assimilate information. SMG addresses these challenges in a step-by-step approach that is easily understood. The SMG curriculum is structured so that it can unfold over a 12-month period, however,

a student may take longer or shorter than that, depending on their skills, level of capability and other factors. After completing the first level of the SMG Program, some students will be happy to continue on with the program and its specialized approach, whereas others may be ready to transition over to the Simply Music Piano program and continue on their journey towards more advanced musicianship.

2. How does it work?

This program is able to isolate the different sensory stimuli within the lessons. Visual processing, fine motor development and auditory processing are separated within the steps, and only combined when the student becomes comfortable and familiar with each track. Beginning with improvisation makes it possible to immediately experience musicianship and discover new capabilities without having to learn any theoretical, technical or mathematical content. The experience of playing music without the burden of cognitive information makes learning fun and motivates the student to move forward.

3. How does it impact fine motor development?

Fine Motor (small muscles in the hand) forms the basis for how children will develop, interact and explore their world as they move through childhood. Those who show difficulty coordinating their fingers, exhibit overly sensitive palms or fingertips, or demonstrate problems with eye-hand coordination, may avoid participating in everyday tasks due to frustration, fatigue or fear of failure. Their withdrawal can affect self-esteem and daily functioning.

The unique and innovative SMG method offers a wonderful alternative to the various activities and other programs presently used for fine motor development. Learning piano has always been thought of as just that – learning the instrument for the sake of musical enjoyment. However, the skills needed to play the piano are the same skills needed to perform daily tasks, such as dressing oneself, eating with a spoon or fork, manipulating tools, using a computer, drawing, writing, or cutting with scissors. For those who have fine motor difficulties, piano (or learning any instrument) has not previously been a viable option in their young lives. We at Simply Music are committed to changing that!

The Simply Music Gateway Program is designed to incorporate key strategies for improving:

- Fine motor strength
- Pincer grasp (opposing thumb and index finger)
- Hand Arches (enabling the hand to grasp objects of different sizes and shapes)
- In-Hand Manipulation (the ability to move and position objects within one hand)
- Thumb Opposition (touching each finger with the thumb)
- Finger Isolation (moving fingers one at a time)
- Bilateral Coordination (Right and Left hands doing different tasks at the same time)
- Crossing Midline (the ability to reach across the middle of the body)
- Eye-Hand Coordination (the ability to track hand movements with the eyes)

The way the program works is that it begins with improvisational activities. Through this fun, musical interaction, students will feel like they're playing the piano without having to "learn" anything first. With appropriate, set accompaniment, students can use specific finger tasks that target the different skills necessary for fine motor development. For instance, using the pointer finger at the very beginning to play every key of the piano from low to high crosses the midline naturally, while forming a hand position with the pointer as the lead finger. Many students use the third finger as the lead finger, which throws off the balance in the hand. SMG's exercises are designed to work on specific skills while improvising within a given structure. Numbering fingers, or playing each finger within this musical framework, becomes enjoyable while working on the "holding down activity", "finger skipping, walking, jumping, running, marching", "white note activity", "black note activity", "black and white activity". These are visual structures on the piano that can be used to assign specific fine motor tasks. And since the music is improvised the student can focus on playing, while fine motor skills are being developed as a direct result.

Eventually, the activities become less improvised and more structured. Once a child knows the letters on the keyboard, learning songs becomes the way to practice new fine motor skills. Tracking the note names while playing naturally strengthens eye-hand coordination. Playing with both hands, even with the simplest parts, makes a huge difference in Bilateral Coordination.

Another issue, the sensitivity in student's fingertips, creates difficulty in holding or manipulating objects. Through the SMG path, fingertips are desensitized and small muscles begin to come alive. When students discover their ability to push piano keys down it motivates them even further and playing improves. Hand arches become a natural position when fingertips are developed, which then translates into improved function in daily life.

Once the student establishes more freedom through enhanced fine motor development they are ready to go forward and participate in the next steps of the program. The SMG approach is playing-based and multi-sensory, and creates an environment for "relaxed alertness". (Caine and Caine: Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain 1991).

We are excited to offer this program to all who can benefit from the enjoyment of making music while developing important fine motor skills, and share the experience with a parent, professional or caregiver.

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