**Community Focus**

**Kaye Fraser**

Kaye Fraser loves her job: she teaches children how to play the piano.

‘Every child has a unique way of playing’ says Kaye. ‘Some take to the piano like a duck to water, whilst others may need extra help.’

Teaching children how to play the piano differs significantly from teaching adults, according to Kaye. ‘Children have a limited vocabulary. Generally, the younger they are, the smaller their vocabulary. This means that they are learning more than just musical terminology. They are also learning other new words every day.’

‘As a result, I make an effort to use words that children are most likely to understand’ explains Kaye. ‘This ensures the child’s focus remains on learning the piano and not learning new words.’

Kaye’s unusual approach sparked from a very typical situation.

‘I was teaching a seven year old boy how to play a piece of music that required both hands on the keyboard. He knew how to play the beginning, but failed to play through the middle section’ says Kaye.

When Kaye asked the student to play from the fifth bar, he started to play the wrong part.

After further investigation, Kaye realised that the student was unable to differentiate between a bar and a line on the sheet music.

‘The poor kid was having a difficult enough time trying to learn how to play the piece without me testing his musical vocabulary!’ laughs Kaye.

‘Once I changed my style of communication, he knew what I wanted and his musical progression was impressive to say the least.’

Kaye started observing some of her other young students and found that the same issues were occurring.

Her solution was two-fold. Firstly, Kaye changed her language so that it was more descriptive. ‘This provides hints to help my students understand what I want them to do.’

Secondly, the students undergo a quick vocabulary “warm-up” before each session. ‘It’s a fun way for the kids to learn what they need to know musically’ explains Kaye.

When Kaye is confident that a student has mastered a musical term, the word is removed from the “warm-up” and a new, more challenging word takes its place.

For Kaye, the process provides additional rewards.

‘My students have the advantage over other music students when it comes to theory exams’ she says.

‘They have internalised some of the theory through the “warm-ups”, leaving them more time to concentrate on the harder aspects of theory. My students receive higher marks than the average student, and I’m sure it’s through the vocabulary system I have developed for them.’

Here at SoftKeys, we’re not convinced: we think Kaye’s ability to teach is her best quality. Her methods of teaching both the piano and music theory simply re-inforce this fact.

Kaye is a member of the National Music Teachers Association and works from her city office.

She specialises in teaching children how to play the piano, but tries to fit in as many adults as possible as well. If you would like further information, contact Mark Ryan at SoftKeys.