

The End of the 30-Minute Lesson

By Nikki Loney

If you have been teaching private voice lessons for a while, you might have started with the 30-minute music lesson format. In my early years of teaching, that 30 minutes felt like a 24-hour marathon with some of my younger students. Back then, I struggled to keep students engaged. I can look back now and say that I was in survival mode in the early years of private teaching, and my teaching “toolbox” was relatively small.

As I grew as a teacher, connecting with other independent teachers and continuing my education, I applied new teaching strategies, repertoire, and performance opportunities for my students. The 30-minute lesson seemed a good fit for most young singers (albeit a tad rushed).

When I discovered that many of my young singers were interested in glee clubs, choirs, songwriting, musical theatre auditions, voice examinations and festivals, and preparing for post-secondary music programs, it became apparent to me that they needed some help with more than just technical exercises and repertoire development. They desperately needed instructions in:

- Music Theory
- Ear Training
- Sight Singing
- Audition Preparation
- Performance Opportunities

“I made this change over a decade ago and will never return to the 30-minute lesson.”

The 30-minute lesson was now a stressful rush for my students and me. It was misery when they were a few minutes late. I struggled at recital time. I gave away my time for free with group lessons and endless make-up lessons. I didn’t have a family back then, and I hadn’t made peace with my business self either. I was exhausted at the end of my teaching day.



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Although I had much more to offer my students, I hesitated to move away from the 30-minute lesson format. It was a successful colleague who finally talked sense to me, and I made the scary policy change and informed my employer, students, and families that I would be moving to a 45-minute lesson for ALL MY students, including the littles ages 6 and up. The transition went smoother than expected, and I only lost a couple of students who were not willing to meet the commitment level I felt was required for successful music lessons. Everyone settled in and enjoyed the longer lesson format.

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If you are on the fence about making a change like this in your studio, I appreciate the apprehension. However, the benefits are overwhelming. Here are the most apparent reasons for ditching the 30-minute private lesson. FOREVER!

Quality not quantity Find your People

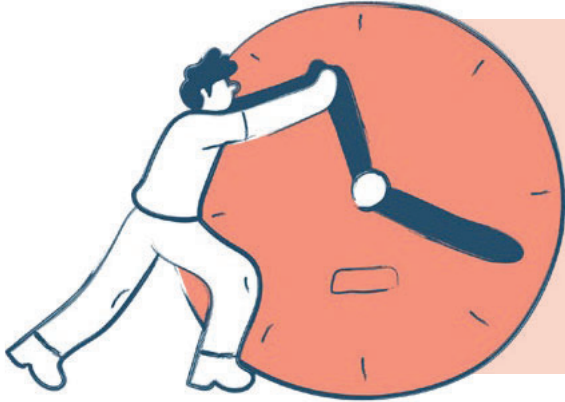
Only offering longer lessons deterred the students/families who weren’t interested in a serious commitment.

Less teacher burnout

For those of you who are screaming for a better life/work balance, teaching fewer students can save you time and energy in many, many ways. You can work with fewer students in a day. I could have up to 14 students in my early teaching days in a workday. Now my max is FIVE. I have streamlined my business hours and am more energized than in the past.

Fewer administrative tasks

That means fewer repertoire dilemmas, emails, texts, phone calls, and follow-ups with mom and dad. Also more time for my own family.



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Shorter, more enjoyable recitals

Recitals are a lot of work. The more students you have, the longer the concert will be and the more unpaid prep work and worry for the teacher.

Inspired music lessons

Comprehensive music lessons include so much more than warm-ups and repertoire development. (Our piano colleagues get this! They offer fun games and “off the bench” activities to keep students engaged and learning!) In a longer lesson, you now have time to:

- properly warm up the voice
- incorporate multi-sensory activities (writing, listening, moving)
- teach to the needs of EVERY student
- solidify necessary music skills for all students
- review old repertoire (so important!)
- thoroughly introduce new songs (which facilitates better/more successful practicing at home)
- dive into character development/acting
- incorporate fun games and activities (to keep them learning and smiling!)
- answer more questions
- explore more of the student’s interests (and yours)
- have more fun!

How to make this change?

As with any policy change, you must give your families a timely “heads up.” This studio improvement isn’t just a time change but a financial one, so let families know with plenty of notice. You may have to explain or even “sell” the idea to some of your

students who have become accustomed to a time and price point. They may need some time to ponder all the excellent reasons you give them! As with any change, be prepared to lose a student or two. It is always sad when they go, but you will find someone even more excited to take their place!

If you are concerned about losing long time students, you might choose to allow legacy students to keep their 30-minute lesson for a semester or period of time, and encourage them to move to the 45-minute classes in the future.

One last thought

As a parent with a young son involved in many different activities — none of his activities are only 30 minutes. The minimum time is usually 45 to 60 minutes. I am thankful for this as he has more time to enjoy the training, and I can take that time to enjoy a coffee and think about exciting new studio resources. Switching to a longer lesson format was one of my top five game-changers in my teaching career. Not long ago, it was standard practice to teach short half-hour lessons. Times have changed. (See what I did there?)

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Nikki Loney, voice teacher and content creator, challenges teachers to redefine what a singing lesson looks like for a child. Founder and CEO of FULL VOICE Music, she works with music education specialists, children’s composers, and musicians to create music education resources for the young vocal student. She is an active member of NATS, and The FULL VOICE Podcast (part of the NATSCast Network), serves the independent voice teacher and has a global audience.