

Parents as Partners 2012

2/6/12 James Hutchins – The Sequel to More Progress during Practice (from 2011)

1. Stop calling it “Practice”. Kids like to play instruments. “Let’s go perform and do what you do well.”
2. Read to kids at the end of practice and give them quality time as a reward.
3. Practice for the same length of time as they do something they really want to do like Play Station.
4. Practice in the dark with a flashlight. People listen better in the dark. Use a flashlight to check posture, bow hold etc.
5. Connect practice to games like Clue, Chess, Concentration and think about what comes next in the game and in practice.
6. Make a chart, any kind of chart, with 10, 50, 100 spaces. Check things off and see your progress.
7. Tell a joke before, during, after practice to get more relaxed.
8. Use a metronome. Set the metronome at an easy speed for each section. It can be a different speed for each section. Work the section up in speed. The whole piece doesn’t have to be the same speed for practice.
9. Plan, Prepare, Perform: Plan for a performance. Play for relatives on Skype, or for group class, or for stuffed animals.
10. Practice in the car: You can do bow holds, name that tune and composer, flash cards for learning notes, sing the pieces, match pitches. Talk through the piece thinking of expression, dynamics, tone, how much bow. You can practice fingering the piece with one hand. You can clap rhythms.
11. Ownership - Ask questions to let child think for himself. “What can you do to make this piece better?” Give the child a part in practice.
12. When all else fails, follow the directions. Do it the way the teacher asks you to do it.
13. When you have many repeated eighth notes or 16th notes, use different bowing styles (such as staccato or marcato), play in different rhythms (such as Twinkle rhythms), or long-short or short-long rhythms.

2/6/12 Lucy Shaw – Are We Having Fun Yet? Part 2 (sequel to 2011)

Make repetitions fun and effective. Build skills by playing with high quality.

There are two parts to practice: First, acquiring skill and, second, make the skill yours. You really start to practice after you have acquired the skill. Keep it simple by trying these tricks:

1. Count repetitions with unifix cubes. These are available in education stores. Build towers of various heights or lengths.
2. Use a bag of small pom poms. A stuffed animal can give the child a pom pom if the repetition is good. If it is not good, the animal can take it back.
3. Deck of cards:
 - a. Lay Down – Lay down a card for every good repetition. Count how many were good at the end (eg. 17 or 24)
 - b. Sections game: If there are 4 parts us A – 4 and shuffle the cards. Play that spot (1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th part)
 - c. Endings – If there are 2 endings, use A and 2 to say which ending to play.
 - d. Runs and scales – If there are 10 notes in the run, pull out a card eg. 3 Play the run or scale to the 3rd note. As a variation, you can play the notes up to the 3rd note silently and then play the 3rd note out loud.
 - e. Interval Practice – Ace is an octave. The black 2 is a minor 2nd. The red 2 is a major 2nd. Sing the intervals.
 - f. Dynamics – Use cards 1 – 10. 1 is soft and 10 is loud. Use bow speed, weight, and proximity to the bridge to create all 10 dynamics levels.
 - g. Use a black card or a red card to determine 2 skills to be played such as staccato and legato, or where the head is placed.
4. Use non-verbal cue cards for a reminder for a fingering (such as a card with a 4 on it, if the students needs to remember 4th finger) or a card with pictures of the kind of vibrato needed. Use a red circle for “stop” and a green circle for “go”. Use story cards to tell a story about parts of a piece. Use tone cards to show different qualities of tone like a pumpkin tone, a sneaky tone or a happy tone. (You decide what these mean). Map the dynamics of a piece such as mf, mp, p.
5. Use cards that ask questions such as “How was my tone?”, “Was my bow speed even ?”.
6. Bingo – Put activities on 25 squares and make practice fun by covering the squares as they are each finished.

2/20/2012 Susan Reed - the Teen Beat

This family has a family chamber group. Kate, 14, plays the cello. Alison, 13, plays violin like their mother. They like to have Jam parties at someone's house. They get starter tunes from the teacher. Their repertoire is 2 or 3 songs below their study piece.

They also like to pick tunes from the radio. They put the tune on an ipod and figure out how to play the melody, bass part, and harmony. They take turns playing the different parts. They have learned to improvise.

2/20/2012 Ann Montzka-Smetser : Trusting Your Teacher – Northern Illinois University teacher trainer and mother of 2 Suzuki teens.

Trust is the cornerstone of the Suzuki triangle. If you don't trust the principles, there is a breakdown.

1. Begin by understanding the Suzuki philosophy. What is your vision in studying this instrument? Read Nurtured by Love, and Ability Development for Age Zero by Suzuki. Also, To Learn with Love (Wm Starr), Teaching from the Balance Point (Ed Kreitman), Helping Parents Practice (Ed Sprunger), Expanding Horizons (Mark Bjork).
2. Trust your teacher's pacing. Suzuki says, "Never hurry, Never Stop." Examples of not trusting your teacher's pacing are "When will we get the real violin, or the next size", "My son is getting bored with this piece", "We didn't do much tonalization this week, but my child learned 3 new pieces". You don't want to live in a house not built on a solid foundation.
3. Trust the teacher's voice at the lesson. Too many voices confuse the child. Parents sometimes translate what the teacher is saying, and this is unnecessary. Parents sometimes interrupt with additional suggestions. Save questions for after the final bow. You can video tape the lesson, or parts of the lesson. Don't sigh if the note is out of tune. Let the teacher decide what should be worked on at this point. Maybe something else is more important.
4. Trust your teacher's agenda and vision for the child. The parent should take notes and make videos.
5. Some common reason practices are not effective:
 - a. Leave practice to the non-attending parent
 - b. Only halfway listen to the practice
 - c. Leave out tonalization or review.
 - d. Overschedule the child
 - e. Practice a different way than the teacher is asking.
 - f. Lower your expectations to get the practice done.

g. Count quantity of repetitions, not quality.

h. Move on to the next piece.

2/20/2012 Joann Martin - Why Delayed Reading is so Important

We learn language by listening. Young children learn principally through their ears. They learn to interpret by imitating and by listening. Music is another form of language.

Children can learn by listening to CD's, concerts, other people playing. They learn to recognize melody, harmony, tone, musicianship.

The skills of playing the instrument are learned one at a time. Each skill builds on the next. The more the child reviews, the easier the technique becomes. They learn to produce the melody, beautiful tone, phrasing until these become internal.

The child who learns to read and play at the same time focuses on the notes and it all becomes too much. They choose the notes from outside themselves. Learning to read first is a roadblock, not a shortcut.

The child is ready to read when they

1. Have a stable playing position
2. Can read sentences and keep their eyes on a line of print
3. Can multitask ie. the brain is free to do two things at once
4. Can play a piece by ear in Book 2 or 3
5. They are 6 or 7 years old and have permanent teeth (there is a correlation)
6. For older beginners, it is still important to postpone reading until the position is established.

The four Stages of reading:

1. Pre-reading – Play games with note cards and rhythm. Learn to recognize symbols. Sing the tunes.
2. Reading is separate from the Suzuki repertoire
3. Reading skills are starting to catch up. The student can follow the music with the eyes to connect what is on the page with what they hear.
4. Child can pick up a piece of music and read it. They have a wonderful ear and the world of reading is open to them.

2/27/12 – Robert Richardson – Creative Review

Why review? We review to master the material. We continue reviewing to develop technique, musicianship, articulation, dynamics, phrasing, color changes, style, expression. It helps develop ability and confidence. Dr .Suzuki says, “Raise your ability with a piece you already know”. He also says, “Knowledge and 10,000 times = ability”. Points for parents to ponder:

1. Your attitude and approach to review will be the same as you child's. Devote your full attention to the child during review. Be thoughtful and playful.
2. Children thrive on repetition. Don' use the “R” word but say “”Let's play, share, or perform”.
3. Play pieces you already know first: 1/3 of the time is for review. 1/3 of the time is for technique. 1/3 of the time is spent on the new piece. Book 1 – 3 = 15 - 20 minutes for review. Books 4 – 6 = 25 minutes for review. Book 7 + = 30 minutes.
4. Pick the time of day for best focus. Early practice is best for review.
5. On days where there is no time to practice, only review.
6. Have teens plan their own review time.
7. After review, praise what was accomplished.

Ideas Robert Richardson has tried or gleaned from other teachers:

1. Play in a different place: Play on a pretend stage for Teddy Bears. Move around to various places. Try the kitchen while mom cooks, the office while she works, outside, by the pool, on the treadmill (for violinists), on a balance ball. Put on a concert for a Retirement Home. Hire Suzuki teens to babysit and practice.
2. Techniques to focus on for review: Specific goals set by the teacher. Other things to try are to work on posture, bow holds, articulation, dynamics, tone color, vibrato speed, long phrases, double stops, composers, musical terms (like the Italian words), minuets, gavottes, ABA form, keys, all A parts of pieces, or all B or C parts. You can use a backwards bow, use a metronome (may be very slow or very fast or change halfway through), play up an octave or down a octave, replace c# with c natural, pizz, play with open strings or no open strings, play with the CD, change the emotion or energy.
3. Games, charts, stuff about review: Mark your progress by making a chart; use a coloring book and color a section after a certain number of repetitions; collect stickers; get a penny for each piece; collect a certain amount of money for 100 repetitions; put names of pieces on popsicle sticks and move these from 1 jar to the other; silly cards for how to play pieces (stick out your tongue, close your eyes); use a board game and replace the squares with skills to be practiced; ask students questions as they play (increase the difficulty as the pieces get easier: use math or spelling questions); make a video to send to the teacher; invite friends over for a concert.

3/5/12 – Lauren Baker – Sharing the Vision of Excellence: Components that Guarantee Success

1. Understand the Suzuki Philosophy. Read Nurtured by Love. Both parents should read it. Know that “Every Child Can”. Remember the quotes from Dr. Suzuki: “Man is the son of his environment,” and “Where Love is deep, much can be accomplished”.
- 2. Approach the lessons: Follow the teacher’s instructions. Concentrate on the main teaching points for the week. Be certain you understand the new skill or technique so you don’t practice it incorrectly. Use a camera to record the new skill at the lesson. Don’t try to remember everything at the lesson. Take notes and write it down. Avoid instructing the child at the lesson. The student can only pay attention to one teacher at a time. Tell the teacher if there is stress in your child’s life.**
3. How to practice at home: Avoid interruptions. Look forward to practice and stay calm. Have a predetermined plan for practice with the materials out and ready. Ask questions instead of giving orders to the student (this helps the student to become an independent thinker). Smile and laugh a lot. Be whimsical. Be aware of your body language and facial expressions. The number of repetitions is determined by the number of times that are needed to make the skill easy. Be sure there is enough time in the schedule to get practice done. Control extra-curricular activities. Practice every day, especially on the new skills. Strive for posture excellence every time you practice. The goal is not a piece, but new techniques that are learned. Skills that are not mastered bring frustration.
4. Be sure the instrument is the right size so tension doesn’t build up.
5. Allow time for listening. The student should listen to the new piece 10 times a day.
6. Go to group lessons. This builds team spirit.

If you strive for excellence, so will your child.

Kathleen Spring – Denver Violin Teacher - How You Can Be Helpful & Supportive to Your Teacher:

1. Teachers love music and teaching. They believe that “Every Child Can” learn to play the instrument. They want parents to be as committed as they are.
2. Parents are the “Co-practicers”. They need to be enthusiastic about the process of learning to play an instrument.
3. Parents should keep communication open. They need to talk to the teacher about how things are going at home. Teachers don’t want the parents to lose the dream along the way.
4. Just do all the stuff the teachers ask you to do such as going to group lessons, participating in recitals, helping with recital logistics, going to concerts, attending workshops and institutes, and taking part in parent education sessions. Stay active in the summer.
5. There are many ways of bringing joy to others such as in group lessons, and playing for other people at retirement homes or other places.

6. Make music important at home. Listen to music together. Arrange for the students to perform for the family. Have performances and parties to celebrate milestones. Celebrate when the student knows the “Twinkles” or has completed a book.
7. Be present in the moment at lessons. Take notes and videos so you can remember how to practice correctly at home. Let the teacher do the talking in the lesson. Don’t talk or instruct your child unless so directed by the teacher. The child can listen to only one teacher at a time in the lesson. Divided attention for parents or students doesn’t work. Come to the lesson on time and unhurried. Turn off cell phones. Trust the teacher’s pace.
8. At home, be the teacher. Practice regularly using notes and video from the studio lesson. Remember the details. Review as directed. Find ways to keep the practice enjoyable.
9. Be enthusiastic. Communicate with your student and your teacher.