

Peaceful Practice:
***Helping Children Realize All They Truly Have is Time and Love
and Using Piano to Teach This***

by
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1. Saying “almost” and “not yet” vs. “no” and “wrong” implies there is time to learn this still.
2. Realizing that “hard” means you think it should be happening easily, already or in fewer times than you are having to do it. It is based on a thought about the past:
“I tried it and now it feels like it’s taking too long or I am frustrated because my mind thinks it should be easier based on my past experiences. Remind them that they only have this moment and ask them what they would like to do with it. Give them responsibility for their practice. Would they like to enjoy piano more by getting better at it and playing their choice of songs? Anything is possible!
3. Part of what I think is cultural for children of this generation that contributes to the fear of failure or lack of tolerance for failure is that children don’t get to see us, their parents, try something and fail, or try anything repeatedly and see the struggle that occurs. Most of us have desk related jobs that may not translate to a physical effort like piano.

Perhaps sports are the closest metaphor, but the fact that kids are in a group softens the emotional impact of doing something called “practice” together so I don’t think it translates exactly. It might help to try to do a garden or indoor repair project with the kids/in front of the kids and hopefully, it won’t all go easily or there will be visible repeated effort involved (such as digging a compost hole) and they can be a sacred witness to that!
4. If a child can be given the “image of a magic eraser that wipes out the past,” then every time she or he tries something out, it’s the first time. If you also wipe out the future, then the child doesn’t have any expectations (future based thought, and it becomes magically fine whenever the skill is mastered. It is an opportunity for mindful meditation in an applied way.
5. Boring means hard to many children; if you say, let’s try it anyway, you might see they couldn’t tolerate the frustration and you’ll want to break it down.
6. Easy can also mean “It’s so easy I don’t need to try it” and that can be a cover up of one’s pride. It can cover up something that ends up either being more challenging than one wanted to admit that it was....or...it shows where the

- concentration isn't holding and mistakes are made where there were easy tasks. It is a good way to learn the discipline of awareness of even the importance/presence of simple tasks.
7. Take a mistake and look at it as your best teacher. "Kiss it" or clap and applaud it and paint it gold. Encourage them to say "hooray" each time they make a mistake to keep their brain from shutting down due to frustration or anger.
 8. Find how the child learns best and use that to the fullest:
 - A. Color vs shape and then go and color sections of the piece.
 - B. Right hand vs. left hand being dominant: switch hands by crossing arms and tricking your brain into thinking the left hand is the right hand. (taking away the bias against the left hand subconsciously)
 - C. Visual vs tactile or tactile predominantly. Have the child touch the keys where the letter names go, where the "two window house that has c, d and e in it, pneumonics (sound)
 - D. For visual, use animal names to remember things and use stickers or pictures near the keys of animals
 - E. Silly and emotionally engaged explanations like "fart line" for the f-line on the bass clef. (whatever it takes, right?)
 - F. Vestibular help such as standing, doing a little at a time,
 - G. Using games for repetition: pencil game where you have to move a pencil over for each correct trial. If you make a mistake on the second try, you have to move both pencils back and start again.
 - H. Varying the sound/timbre such as using funny descriptions of sounds (play like a frog jumping on the keys like in Carnival of the Animals), places on the piano that sound silly because they are very low or high. Fast, heavy, qualities of sound: sad, happy, bored, dramatic.
 - I. Closing your eyes helps put you out of your mind and into your body. It helps identify where you need to work on a piece.
 - J. Use humor to diffuse tension. It's "Left Hand Appreciation Day" every day...Rather than "scold the left hand" for not doing as well (as some children will do), the adult can talk directly to the hand, too, and show compassion.
 - K. Let there be tears if necessary, but not in blame of you, just with the feeling. It can ultimately reduce the tension around the piano when your child sits down and happens to associate it with stress.
 - L. Celebrate the drama queen/king: do shows for stuffed animals, for you in the evenings, for grandma or grandpa on the phone, video your family or child making music on YouTube and send it to the family....
 - M. Don't forget children will be inspired if they see you enjoying making music rather than listening to it only. See if you can make a few minutes a week to take out that old guitar, recorder or play a song on the piano. If you don't know how, let them teach you!

Children have learned from their culture, immediate sometimes, afar sometimes, to sense a scarcity of time. In reality, all we have is time. It is

real and measurable. We learn scarcity when things are overscheduled and/or projects aren't allowed to continue to another time and one sense's he has to finish things right then and then can't start it up again later on.

This may affect the child's ability to delay gratification. Instead, when children feel relaxed about time, they will realize that a piece of a song to practice is just between 1 and 3 minutes long in general.... much shorter than what is perceived. It may help to have a timer around and show children all the little spaces they have to play piano in and how long they are....

Talk about when one is "in the flow" and as soon as that happens you go out of the place in your mind where you sense time and it feels fine to be there as long as you want. I think they call it the "alpha state" that is achieved through meditation and/or being in your creative, passionate space, or calm space.

Try sensory help: chewing gum (mint flavor kept me alert the other day), special bumpy seat found at gyms and OT centers/catalogues; stretchy band around base of seat to push against with feet (this is great for kids who rock their chairs), a nice smell and/or reduce visual stimuli around piano.

See what inspires the child: Ask: Does original music inspire you (a composer's approach) vs playing what the teacher chooses.

Best is a mix of original, theory, practicing technique and picking a piece by someone else. There is an entire book about practice. I will send you a bibliography too.

Spaghetti and M&M game:

Take out the spaghetti or chopsticks and m&m's and put the candies in the places where the line notes go. Then try them where the spaces go. Then take them out and mix them up and try to find their places again. Try it yourself and let them teach you by making mistakes. Use red for C, G for green and the rest are up for grabs.

Reward: eating the m&m's!

Drawing with Magic Markers on the Bathroom Mirror or Shower Wall

Drawing the notes on the staff on your bathroom mirror while you brush your teeth will help reinforce the notes. See if you can erase the notes after you know them and then feel the great achievement of having a clear mirror by the end of the week.

Enjoy,

Chaia

Great Book by Suzuki Teachers on Practicing: Nurturing With Love...