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Practice: Specific Routines and Suggestions 7/07

Learn to enjoy the process of repetition and review by drawing on your creativity during daily lessons. You can use the activities listed here, but you the parent are the expert on your child, and you can create the ideal motivators suited to your own child's interest and sense of fun. Constantly ask yourself, "How can we make this fun?". Enjoy listening to your child's review pieces - find the good and praise it!

From the SAA Journal "Dear Verna" column, Vol.14 No.5 (July/August 1987).

Dear Verna: How much should my child be reviewing? (M.A., New York).

Dear M.A.: There's a true story about a 7 year old boy from Japan playing in the 7th Suzuki violin book. While visiting the U.S., his mother was asked how long he practiced every day. Although hard to believe, the answer was 5 minutes.

"Impossible", everyone thought, "a real Suzuki miracle. Please explain what he did in the five minutes."

"Oh, he practices the one small point that Dr. Suzuki asked him to do. He repeats it correctly over and over and over for about 5 minutes. Then he plays all his songs - Book 6, Book 5, Book 4, Book 3, Book 2, and Book 1. But that is fun for him, we don't think of it as practice", the mother answered.

REVIEW ORGANIZERS

Even/Odd - refer to the contents page and do the even numbered songs on the even dates, the odd numbered songs on the odd dates.

Fishbowl Game - Use a magic marker to write on 3 by 5 cards all of the activities and information the student needs to be practicing. One activity or piece of information per card. The cards are kept in a small box which can be decorated by the student. The student closes his eyes and gets to pick a card. Use a single simple short word, in lower case, that the student will easily learn to recognize and read for himself. This is a great way to organize practice - if a practice session ends before all of the cards are played, pick up at the next session where you left off. Short, frequent sessions can be encouraged: "Lets just do 5 cards". As the number of cards increases, specific cards can be "retired" and kept separately for once/week practice. As the student increases his abilities, there can be a few activities that are practiced at the beginning of every practice session, with the rest of the lesson taken up with the card game. A favorite variation of this game is "skip it": the student practices as many cards as he can do by memory, and then does the "fishbowl game". When he gets to a card he has already done, he tosses it aside and says "skip it!".

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GENERAL MOTIVATORS

Burn a candle while you practice -when it is burns down, go get an ice-cream cone. Use emergency candles available at department stores. They come usually in packages of 4, 3/4 inches diameter X 5 inches length. They will burn approx. 3 - 6 hours each (you may have to cut the candles in half).

Play in strange places in the house. Practice outside. Practice in the bathroom where the acoustics are great! Have a "darkness concert", either in a dark room or with eyes closed.

Split responsibilities for practice between 2 parents - have the less involved parent be in charge of something like flash cards (note reading).

Decide beforehand on something fun to do after the practice session is successfully completed. Reserve a specific activity only for after practice.

The Name Game (Home Dots and Lesson Stickers)

Adapted from Michiko Yurko's "Home Dots - Lesson Dots"

(parents keep this sheet at home for reference)

Setting up the game:

Start with a large piece of poster board. Trace the student's name, in very light pencil, on the board. Book I has 21 pieces, so select 21 points on the student's name and draw small circles at these spots (as large as the large, round adhesive white stickers from office supply stores). Number the circles. The parent and child need their own blank white round stickers ("Canvases").

Name Game Rules:

At Home: Canvas - We learn the notes, fingerings, rhythms, repeats, and some of the phrasings of our pieces at home. After 25 correct repetitions (they need not be consecutive) the student gets to place a white dot on the circle with the number of that piece. "Correct" repetitions means done correctly without help from the parent (including little whispers!). We won't be concerned with performance tempo, dynamics, and refined expression at this point - we can even use "stop, prepare, play" in these repetitions if necessary. Michiko: "It is their choice (parent and student) as to how long this takes, but I recommend it be within one week and no days skipped (unless for illness or trips away from home) or the counting may have to return to zero. These decisions are left to the discretion of the student and parent". What kind of celebration have you planned for accomplishing a canvas?

At the lesson: Finished Sticker - Students can "try" for a finished sticker at the lesson after the dot is earned at home. A finished sticker is awarded for a fine performance - a performance at tempo, and with refined expression. Place the lesson sticker on top of the canvas. The finished sticker is not the end, however -

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just the beginning of a process of continued refinement. From an interview with Itzhak Perlman: "Yes, that piece still feels so new to me. I've only been performing it for 10 years". If you really want to learn and polish your pieces quickly, practice them slowly!

When a canvas and finished sticker is earned for the next piece, the portion of the name between these stickers is colored in. The object of the game is to color the entire name in. Celebrations can be planned for the completion of each letter of the name, and when the name is completed (i.e., all of Book I is secure), a special celebration can be planned.

REPETITION GAMES

Make a Snake - start with putting an adhesive dot on a plain sheet of paper to represent one execution of a spot, piece, or technical exercise. Add a dot, putting them next to each other in a line, for each repetition. Label the sheet for what is being practiced. Watch the path snake all over the page.

Dominoes - the teacher sets up one or more dominoes for each song or skill successfully practiced. At the end of the session, let the student tip them

Read a Book - get one of the students favorite books, or a new book, and after each repetition or each song, read a page from the book.

Make a Meal - with modeling clay, during each repetition, make "something to eat" - end up with a meal on the table.

Direct the Artist - during each repetition, color a portion of a page from a coloring book with a color chosen by the student.

Five Times - for five repetitions, pull up one of the teacher's fisted "reluctant" fingers for each correct repetition. Make it a wrestling match! Variation - for each incorrect repetition the teacher "gets a point" and gets to lower a finger - the object for the student is to get all five fingers up

Puzzle - one puzzle piece for each repetition.

Make a Chain - cut colored strips of paper, tape into a loop, and create a chain - one loop for each day of successful practice. This is especially useful during the Christmas season - make a chain to be hung on the wall or on the tree

Building Blocks - one block for each repetition. At the end of the session, the blocks come tumbling down. Or - make a castle with the blocks, and with each repetition, toss a "bullet" (domino) at the castle and see how long it takes to knock it down.

Ball Bounce - after each repetition, stand up and bounce a beach ball back and forth at least 4 times without dropping it. What is your record number of bounces?

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Match Game - lay out many pairs of cards, face down, and start with one card face up. After each repetition, both parent and student get to turn over one card. After you turn the card over, leave it face up. If you can make a pair, then you get to turn one more over. Who is going to get the most pairs? (If it happens that mom starts to get too far ahead, she can fail to notice a pair that she turns up. When the student notices this, he jumps up and claims the pair as his own, as well as receives another opportunity to turn a card over). The game called "Memory" is good for this game. Can be ordered from Piatnik 800 962-3468

Matchstick Castle - glue matchsticks for repetitions and put together a Medieval Castle. Definitely a long term project!

Snowflakes - When the weather turns cold hand out pieces of colored paper. During the week the goal is to practice each review song 10 (?) times. When the student reaches 10 repetitions of a song, fold up the colored paper and cut out a snowflake. Or start out with a folded paper, and with each repetition, cut a wedge out of the folded paper. At 10 repetitions you unfold the paper and see what kind of snowflake you have. At the end of the week bring the snowflakes to the teacher and decorate the teacher's studio.

Pennies - start out with two stacks of pennies, marbles, buttons, etc., students stack and teachers stack. Pick a technical point to work on. After each execution, if the students remembered to watch what they were supposed to watch for, they announce "I remembered" and take a penny from the teachers stack. If during a repetition the student doesn't pay attention and lapses into incorrect playing, the teacher announces "I remembered" and takes one of the students pennies. Object is for the student to get all of the pennies.

Popcorn - Assignment during group class: "let's pick something to do 100 times this week". Assign a particular practice point for each student. Student gets one unpopped popcorn kernel for each correct repetition. 15 repetitions per day will yield 100 popcorn kernels at the end of the week. "Bring your popcorn kernels to group class next week and we will see who has

the most." Special recognition to the student with the most popcorn - then cook and eat the popcorn at the end of the group class.

Smiley Face Game - teacher has a list and student has a list - after each repetition, either the student or the teacher gets a smiley face. Who ever gets 5 first wins. Be creative with the artwork!

Time It - time a passage, and lets say it takes 3 seconds . "Do it 100 times -it will only take 300 seconds - that's 5 minutes!

Multiple challenges: do it ponticello, tasto, looking at the picture challenge, eyes closed challenge, one foot raised challenge, etc